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The Lenin Cult

ONE OF THE MOST PERPLEXING MOMENTS IN SOVIET HISTORY WAS THE DECISION to have Lenin's body immortalised in a public mausoleum for all to see. In retrospect, one cannot help but view this as deeply antithetical to the radically materialist and atheist political culture of the Bolsheviks, whose scientific outlook was bound up with a sharp critique of superstitions and religious practices. The transformation of Lenin as a sacred idol entombed within a majestic temple-like structure cannot help but recall the Orthodox saints of Russia's past or Egyptian Pharaohs of another era. Indeed, this criticism was not lost on many Bolsheviks. Trotsky and Bukharin sharply critiqued the preservation of Lenin's corpse as a form of religious relic worship, and Lenin's widow Krupskaya privately objected and never visited the mausoleum.

Yet, the Bolsheviks who spearheaded this morbid initiative vehemently rejected any connections between Lenin's preservation and traditional religious practice; Enukidze had defensively noted that "it is obvious that neither we nor our comrades wanted to make out of the remains of Vladimir Ilich any kind of 'relic,'" insisting that the embalming was intended to preserve Lenin's features in perpetuity so future generations could witness the great Soviet hero. A closer look at the history of Lenin's "immortalisation" reveals that this process was shaped by ideological currents in utopian Bolshevik thinking, particularly Russian Cosmism and God-Building. In this way, Lenin's preservation marked a significant departure from other historical instances of mummification, as it was never treated by the leadership as being connected to an afterlife, but was instead related to techno-futurist themes of scientific mastery over nature and biological renewal. At the same time, the emerging Lenin cult absorbed symbolic and emotional functions typically associated with spiritual devotion, and the mausoleum became a natural expression for this. In this connection anthropologist Alexei Yurchak writes:

While the politburo was isolating the living Lenin from the political world, it was simultaneously engaged in canonising Lenin's public image. "It was at that time, [from 1922 and] until Lenin's death in January 1924, that most mythological images and institutions that were formed around Lenin's cult were created. A precondition for this was the loss by Lenin at that time of his unmatched personal aura." More than a year prior to Lenin's death, and in spite of his active protestations, the party leadership introduced the term "Leninism" into public circulation.

However, Leninism assumed a flexible form, its emphasis shifting depending on how it could be politically instrumentalised by those seeking to brandish their communist credentials and affirm their fidelity to what was presented as the one true Leninism. Just as American political actors continually reinterpret the Constitution to legitimise competing visions of governance, Soviet leaders treated Lenin as a foundational text; his personhood was dissolved into the Party's abstract, total authority and Leninism then became inseparable from the foundational central institutions that constituted the Soviet state.

Lenin was the central symbolic object of Soviet communism. Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev each represented their governance as a break from that of their predecessor, and each, in different ways, appealed to a return to Lenin, presenting themselves as orthodox interpreters of the USSR's foundational figure. Lenin's status as the greatest Bolshevik was an ironclad consensus formed in the early history of the Soviet Union. Trotsky had written that "Marx was a prophet with Mosaic tablets and Lenin is the greatest executor of the testaments." Similarly, Zinoviev referred to Lenin as "a god-sent leader, one of those who is born to mankind once in a thousand years." The Old Bolshevik Bonch-Bruевич praised Lenin as a "prophet of the proletariat." The decision to preserve Lenin for eternity can only be understood within this context of quasi-religious devotion in which, surprisingly, uncompromising Bolshevik atheists drew on the imagery and rhetoric of the Christian Bible to express the extent of their adoration of Lenin. ■■■

[The Stalin Era]

REVISITING AN OLD DEBATE

The 150th Anniversary of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*

Marcello Musto

2025 IS A SIGNIFICANT date: the 150th anniversary of one of his most important political writings of Karl Marx. In 1875, the General German Workers' Association, founded by Ferdinand Lassalle, and the Workers' Social Democratic Party, associated with Marx, united into a single political force: the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany. Marx and Engels were not consulted about this, and as a demonstration of how marginal their influence was on the concrete decisions of the German social democracy, they received the draft of the political programme—based on Lassallean state socialism—only after the decision had been made. Marx, therefore, felt compelled to write a lengthy critique in which he harshly condemned the political document that was the basis of the reunification congress held in the city of Gotha.

The text was sent by letter to the social democratic leader Wilhelm Bracke, circulated only within the circle of militants closest to Marx and Engels, and remained unpublished. In this context, Engels wrote to August Bebel (one of the main figures of German social democracy of the time) that he could not “forgive his not having told us a single word about the whole business”; and he warned that he and Marx could “never give [their] allegiance to a new party” set up on the basis of Lassallean state socialism. Despite this sharp dec-

laration, the leaders who had been active in building what would become the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD) did not change their positions.

Marx therefore felt obliged to write a long critique of the draft programme for the unification congress to be held on 22 May 1875 in the city of Gotha. In the letter accompanying his text, he recognised that “every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes”. But in the case of “programmes of principles”, they had to be written with great care, since they set “benchmarks for all the world to ... gauge how far the party [has] progressed”. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx inveighed against the numerous imprecisions and mistakes in the new manifesto drafted in Germany. For example, in criticising the concept of “fair distribution”, he asked polemically: “Do not the bourgeois assert that present-day distribution is “fair”? And is it not, in fact, the only “fair” distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production?” In his view, the political demand to be inserted into the programme was not Lassalle’s “undiminished proceeds of labour” for every worker, but the transformation of the mode of production. Marx explained, with his customary rigour, that Lassalle “did not know what wages were”. Following bourgeois economists, he

“took the appearance for the essence of the matter”. Marx explained that “wages are not what they appear to be, namely the value, or price, of labour, but only a masked form for the value, or price, of labour power. Thereby the whole bourgeois conception of wages hitherto, as well as all the criticism hitherto directed against this conception, was thrown overboard once for all and it was made clear that the wage-worker has permission to work for his own subsistence, that is, to live only insofar as he works for a certain time gratis for the capitalist (and hence also for the latter’s co-consumers of surplus value)”.

Another controversial point concerned the role of the state. Marx maintained that capitalism could be overthrown only through the “revolutionary transformation of society”. The Lassalleans held that “socialist organisation of the total labour arises from the state aid that the state gives to the producers’ co-operative societies which the state, not the worker, calls into being.” For Marx, however, “co-operative societies [were] of value only insofar as they [were] the independent creations of the workers and not protégés either of governments or of the bourgeois”; the idea “that with state loans one can build a new society just as well as a new railway” was typical of Lassalle’s theoretical ambiguities.

All in all, Marx observed that the political manifesto for the fusion congress showed that socialist ideas were having a hard time penetrating the German workers’ organisations. In keeping with his early convictions

“that in true democracy the state is annihilated”, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he emphasised that it was wrong on their part to treat “the state as an independent entity that possesses its own intellectual, ethical and libertarian bases”, instead of “treating existing society as ... the basis of the existing state”. By contrast, Wilhelm Liebknecht and other German socialist leaders defended their tactical deci-

sion to compromise on programme, on the grounds that this was necessary to achieve a unified party. Once again, Marx had to face up to the great distance between choices made in Berlin and in London (where he lived since 1849).

The text was published by Engel only after Marx's death, in 1891, the year of approval of the Erfurt Programme, which was much closer to Marx's po-

litical ideas. It was printed in *Die Neue Zeit*, the main theoretical journal of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, with some passages softened and with a brief introduction by Engels explaining the genesis of the text. It must be considered as one of the main political writings of Marx and worth to re-read to understand what does it really mean to practise an anti-capitalist politics. ■■■

BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAS ESSENTIALLY A PEASANT REBELLION

‘Peasants’ in East Pakistan in the Midst of Heightened Bengali Nationalism: An Argument against the Dominant Discourse

Neshat Quaiser

[Preliminary Remarks: This essay deals with the agrarian collective action in the East Pakistan/Bangladesh during the period between 1958 and 1971 which witnessed the heightened ‘Bengali Nationalism’ against what was described as the multiple exploitation and domination of the region by the West Pakistani ruling elite. The essay draws on author’s doctoral dissertation.]

Politically, the region that constituted East Pakistan/Bangladesh had a distinct character, as it was not the Indian National Congress but the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League, which set the terms for politico-ideological discourse. The author has called this region as the ‘peripheral Muslim Bengal’. Historically, with the defeat of the Sirajuddaulah, the then Nawab of Bengal in 1756 and the acquisition of Diwani Rights in 1765 by the British, the Muslim landed and bureaucratic elites lost political power that heralded a new chapter in the history of Bengal. However, it was the introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 that changed the whole complexion of the Indian sub-continental history paving the way for British rule. The Permanent Settlement Act created a class of new Zamindars (mostly Hindus) in place of old Muslim Zamindars and aristocrats. Permanent Settlement produced such conditions with far reaching implications changing social, economic, political and cultural complexion of the Indian sub-continent.¹ Since mid-18th century, the Indian sub-continent witnessed various forms and intensity the British political and administrative control culminating in formal British imperial rule in 1857 that continued till 1947 when British transferred political power to Indians with partition of India into two independent countries India and Pakistan. In 1971 Eastern part of Pakistan became an independent country—Bangladesh.

It is important to note that the Pakistan central governments kept changing in quick succession in whole of 1950s and political and constitutional crisis persisted leading to the imposition of Martial Law in the whole of Pakistan on 7th October 1958, and on the 27th October 1958 Ayub Khan, the Army Chief, became the President. All power went to the hands of the military.]

IN THE REGION THAT constituted East Pakistan/Bangladesh, the land system before the advent of the British involved three interested

parties—the cultivators, the Zamindars (revenue collecting agents) and the state or the political authority having the power to coerce and impose its

will on others whether it be the individual or the semi-independent feudal authority. The Floud Commission of 1940, officially known as the Bengal Land Revenue Commission, noted that by the time of the Mughal conquest the old state right or zamindari had been magnified into a general superior ownership of the entire domain.² Superior ownership led to the reinforcement of the notion of superiority of the owners/nobles/chiefs etc and reinforcement of the superior caste/class/race ideology.

With the partition of the sub-continent and the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, the Hindu zamindars and Hindu big landlords who concentrated in East Bengal, began to migrate to India. So, the Zamindari Abolition Act was enacted by the then East Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1950 without much difficulty. The Act of 1950 was considered by many to be a major land reform. This Act sought to abolish the

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Permanent Settlement Act by implementing direct payment of land revenue by the actual owners and tillers of the soil and eliminating all intermediary rent receiving interests.

However, Umar³ notes: This Act did not really benefit the peasant because (a) the distributed land that went to each peasant was very small in size and sharecropping continued, (b) the zamindar was now replaced by the repressive state which collected as much tax and sent its officials to harass the peasants, (c) the system became more mechanised, (d) corruption in the form of bribes etc set in the rural areas and (e) money lending continued because of the continuing impoverishment (also see: Jehangir: 1982: and Joshi 1972: 66-67 and 69-70)⁴.

'PEASANT' RESISTANCE: 1948-1951

In the 1946 general elections, the Muslim League won the majority of the seats (i.e., 113 out of 119) in Bengal. In this election, the Communist Party of India (CPI) contested 13 seats from Bengal: 7 from West Bengal and 6 from East Bengal. After the War and general elections, the CPI decided to launch a vigorous anti-British movement. Towards the end of 1946, the provincial leadership of Krishak Samiti gave a call to the peasants to launch a movement against the half share (*Adhi Barga*) resulting in *Tebhaga movement* where peasants demanded that (a) the sharecropper get 2/3 of the produce and the landowner 1/3, (b) the land right of the sharecroppers be recognised; against *Tonko* systems under which the peasant was obliged to give a

fixed amount of paddy to the landlord irrespective of the produce; and against the *Nankar* system under which peasants of Sylhet district were allotted a dwarf plot each to feed their families. In return, they had to perform unpaid services on the landlord's private land.

However, owing to the rise of Bengali Nationalism in the wake of *Bhasha Andolan* of 1948-1952; all-pervasive Bengali nationalist opposition to the economic and political exploitation and domination concealing internal class-caste divisions; Hindu-Muslim clashes even in villages after the partition; suppression of Krishak Samiti by the Muslim League government; migration of almost all the Hindu communist peasant leaders and activists to India; the landed gentry made use of caste connections to influence the villagers, as a result, most of the Muslim peasants abandoned the movement;⁵ and later imposition of Martial law, the first phase of peasant uprisings of 1948-51 were significantly diminished and were no more visible.

As a result, after the first phase of peasant uprisings of 1948-51, the period between 1951-71 was a period of 'national' struggle. During this period peasants were mobilised largely as part of autonomy struggle and later national liberation struggle, i.e., against the external enemy (West Pakistan ruling elites) and not solely for their own demands, i.e., against the internal enemy (the local internal agrarian exploiters and oppressors). There were no peasant 'movement' in the strict sense of the term though, it may

be argued, that contrary to the popular view, language/autonomy/national movements were not completely devoid of peasant question, as the anti-feudal struggle was the primary motive force for peasants' participation in these movements.

PEASANTS IN THE MIDST OF HEIGHTENED NATIONALISM-1958-1971

The period between 1958 and 1971 was marked by three significant features: (a) introduction of the system of **Basic Democracy** to create an organised social base for the state's sustenance in the face of growing agrarian unrest and the challenges thrown by the rising Bengali bourgeoisie and middle classes against the central ruling elites of West Pakistan who practised the politics of discrimination against East Pakistan; (b) communists remained dormant as far as the anti-feudal struggle was concerned; and (c) the rise of 'Bengali nationalism' (which was initially articulated by the *Bhasha Andolan* (Language movement) of 1952) and the emergence of the Awami League as the principal negotiator.

However, of these three, Bengali nationalism was the single most important feature that dominated almost whole of the visible social and political space particularly since 1966. This all-encompassing Bengali Nationalism emerged as the argument of the day, the dominant discourse. Everything else seemed to have had been rendered invisible or assigned a peripheral role particularly the anti-feudal agrarian resistance.

However, this was not the reality. In the following what is presented is *the active 'peasant'*

(predominantly the immediate producer), who carried out the struggles against agrarian relations of domination, directed against landlords, money lenders, feudal values of oppression and the state, in the face of all pervasive nationalism. The *peasants* treated the feudal oppression and exploitation in much the same fashion as the 'nationalism' of yester years had treated this question during the colonial period. The peasant was not against nationalism, but he knew well the meaning of this nationalism. Incidents and happenings taking place far away from the centre and which were rendered *small* and *insignificant* in the face of all-encompassing nationalistic wave, have become constitutive elements in the construction of what follows.

**BHASHANI-THE RED MAULANA
AND THE AWAMI LEAGUE:
POLITICAL CONTOURS AND
THE AGRARIAN QUESTION**

In East Pakistan the Awami League founded in 1949 was struggling hard to occupy all the available political spaces and emerge as sole negotiator with West Pakistan ruling elite. However, there were other significant players too such as The National Awami Party (NAP). The National Awami Party (NAP Bhashani), led by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani—the Red Maulana—and the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujeebur Rahman, were distinct political entities in East Pakistan with differing ideologies and approaches to politics. The Awami League, while also advocating for Bengali nationalism and autonomy, was more moderate and focused on parliamen-

tary politics, while Bhashani's NAP was more radical and emphasised mass mobilisation and socialist ideals.

Bhashani and communists left the Awami League Council and on 25th July 1957, and the National Awami Party (NAP) was formed under the leadership of Bhashani. NAP advocated the line of two self-governed units in Pakistan under a federal structure, and opposed any cultural domination. The seizing of zamindari without compensation; distribution of excess land to peasants particularly to landless and poor peasants; reform of sharecropping system; to waive peasants' loans were points in its 56-point Programme. The Programme also included the demands such as rehabilitation of zamindars, Talukdars, and others whose property have been seized; remunerative price for jute, sugar cane, tobacco and other cash crops.⁶

With the formation of the NAP, Bhashani formed a Krishak Samiti also in 1957 and the communists decided to work in it. Badruddin Umar, a communist leader and author, observed: "that till the mid-sixties, peasant movements were not organised significantly, however, there were sporadic movements against landlords. When after the elections under the system of **Basic Democracy** the Martial Law was lifted in 1962, the Krishak Samiti held its conference at Raipura. The Raipura conference was mobilised on the issue of corruption in government, in other words not the class line, but the community line was privileged, i.e., the Krishak Samiti spoke for all peasants. It was

obvious because the Krishak Samiti no longer remained a class organisation though the communists worked in it (personal communication—1987).

In 1960s, the Krishak Samiti under the NAP was the only national peasant organisation with Communist Party activists in it. However, in 1967 NAP split into pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions, and pro-Peking communists remained with Bhashani. Pro-Peking leftists maintained their importance in it but it was never well organised though there was a general influence in villages and Bhashani's personal popularity had an effect.⁷ Bhashani talked of worsening condition of peasants at all levels. According to him, Ayub government is the representative of the US aided big bourgeoisie and feudal classes.⁸ Bhashani converted the Awami League led urban based 1968 anti-Ayub movement into a political movement of rural poor.⁹ Bhashani realised that unless you eliminate the Jotedars, Mahajans and their touts in the rural areas, the peasants cannot be liberated. Bhashani's Gheralo Andolan continued in 1969 facing state repression including deaths in police firing.

Meanwhile, a Democratic Action Committee (DAC) was formed with eight parties for federal character, parliamentary government, lifting of emergency, universal voting right, release of political prisoners etc. It included Awami League, Pro-Moscow NAP (Wali) and Jamiat-ulemai-Islam. Bhashani put the condition that unless demands for abolishing feudalism, capitalism and imperialism are included in DAC

programme, the NAP will not join it. Along with students' movement Bhashani's 'Jalao Porao-Gherao' (set on fire-burn-encircle) movement continued.

In March 1969 Ayub Khan called a Round Table Conference (RTC) which was held at Rawalpindi between Ayub and DAC leaders to solve political crisis. Bhashani boycotted the Conference and asked others also to do so. But in spite of opposition from Bhashani Sheikh Mujeebur Rahman of Awami League attended RTC. RTC could achieve only the right for universal voting and federal parliamentary government. According to Bhashani, RTC was hopelessly inadequate to promote the interests of working class and peasantry. NAP (Bhashani) had put eight more conditions for attending RTC in addition to eleven points of Student Action Committee (SAC) of East Pakistan Students Union (EPSU). SAC demands included exemption of taxes for those who owned up to five acres of land in East Pakistan and 12 acres in West Pakistan, peasants' due tax be written off, recovery of loans from peasants be postponed etc. East Pakistan Students League (EPSL) threatened to stop paying taxes if eleven-point programme was not accepted.

On 28th February 1969, Krishak Samiti organised a public meeting in Chiwara of Comilla district. Bhashani declared his resolve to take the movement for eleven-point programme to every village and every hamlet. He declared that RTCs are meant for compromises, which benefit the rulers that is why instead of going to

Rawalpindi I am going to remote corners of rural Bengal to become a part of the combined peasants workers movement.¹⁰

On 24th March 1969 Ayub invited General Yahya Khan to protect the country from imminent split. On 25th March 1969, Yahya declared Martial Law. Constitution and national and provincial assemblies were dissolved. And the same month the Bangladesh Liberation movement intensified culminating in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in December 1971.

'HEIGHTENED NATIONALISM' AND THE PARALLEL STREAM OF PEASANT RESISTANCE

Contrary to the popular view, peasants at various levels had been stirred and mobilised into the Nationalist movement including in anti-Ayub movement of 1968-'69. Although it was a part of Nationalist movement of various ideological shades, and the peasants were not in the leadership at all levels and although the movement was not for the specific demands of the peasants alone, the large-scale participation of peasantry in the movement, which finally led to the second national liberation movement in March 1969, was a definite indicator in the peasant politics of East Pakistan. Thus, it is evident that there was a parallel stream with peasants and peasant question in the centre. Nationalism was perceived by the peasant from this perspective. It was a two-pronged struggle, i.e., against the external enemy as well as against the internal enemy. However, the anti-feudal struggle was not always visible, as has been noted earlier. Peasants participated in

these movements once again with certain hope as they had done in 1946-'47 and again during 1948-'50.

AND THEY SEIZED SPONTANEITY

Spontaneous necessarily is not unorganised. Acting spontaneously does not necessarily mean acting on unphilosophical impulses. Spontaneously also means seizing spontaneity. Both individuals and organisations can act spontaneously. Spontaneous acts, especially in the present context, means cumulative expression of accumulated experiences in this case of the relations of domination. It becomes a spontaneous response to a call. Establishing a dialogue system of this type becomes a necessity.

Hence, parallel to organised collective response of peasants in the form of Jagatpur struggle, one finds independent spontaneous rebellion of peasants during this Period. During 1968-'69 (December-March) there were widespread mass movements in East Pakistan. Actually the spontaneous killing of Jotedars, Mahajans and Union Council Chairmen and members had started since 1966. But these killings "were not a part of any organisation" (Umar, 1985: 19-20). The 1968-'69 movement against Ayub regime was yet another instance of the rebellious character of the Bengali Muslim peasantry. There was practically no official government. The people organised themselves into committees and performed summary justice. They burnt the cattle lifters and other criminals alive, killed the local oppressors in broad day-light, with great relish looted, fined or otherwise

chastised Ayub Khan's Basic Democrats—the new vested interest created by the great Khan on the analogy of Lord Cornwallis' zamindars to work as the social base of his regime.¹¹ During this period the incidents of annihilation increased in certain areas such as Chandpur, Jamalpur, Tangail, Manikganj etc. This had created panic.¹²

Detailed accounts of these spontaneous movements are not adequately recorded. Here are some parts of a novel written in the background of 1968-'69 anti-Ayub movement. This account brings sharply the peasant responses to the events and situation prevailing at that time with respect to the anti-Ayub movement, but more importantly class relations in rural Bangladesh and peasant response to the exploitative and oppressive structures there even in the height of 'national, upsurge. These autonomous peasant mobilisations outside the formal structure of many peasant organisations speak a lot and constitute an important part of peasant collective action. Though these movements cannot totally be divested of larger peasant mobilisation, they establish their autonomy in a specific sense. Accounts of Spontaneous peasant resistance by the Bhashani's Krishak Samiti during this period have been portrayed by the celebrated Bengali novelist Akhtaruzzaman Ilyas in his well-known novel *Chilakotai Sipai*,¹³ where the Goru Chori (Cattle lifting) phenomenon prominently figured, and assumed greater symbolic significance revealing the dynamics of domination and dissent.

In Akhtaruzzaman Ilyas' ac-

count 'Party' and Anwar (Party cadre) have figured time and again. But their role has been marginal.

Similarly, during this period spontaneous movement against Goru Chors (cow lifters) once again gathered momentum. Peasants caught hold of cattle lifters and burnt them alive. According to Umar, the peasant movements got momentum since 1967. However, according to him many of the post-1967 peasant movements were spontaneous. For example, the 'Goru Chor movement' (movement against the cattle lifters). Landlords with the help of their musclemen stole cows of peasants and kept them on the pretext that the cows have damaged their crops. So in order to get back the cows, the peasants were forced to pay money to landlords. Against this 'Goru Chori', Umar said, peasants spontaneously got organised and started killing landlords indicating that the peasants could take independent actions which show their organisability and that even in the height of nationalist movement, peasants could display their class consciousness and unexpected collective actions.¹⁴

Umar (1985: 20) observed that in the 1968-'69 anti-Ayub movement, the Krishak Samiti had no significant role to play.¹⁵ Shamsuddin observed: "The 1968-'69 movement was a revolt and only due to absence of organised leadership it failed to become a revolution".¹⁶ Thus seizing the spontaneity became a metaphor for human celebration.

THE EXPERIENCE OF JAGATPUR

The struggle of the peasants of Jagatpur during the anti-Ayub

movement was an example of overt expression of the unexpected collective action and that a parallel anti-feudal stream existed in the midst of heightened nationalism.

The village Jagatpur is in the Narail subdivision of Jessore district, which had a long history of peasant uprisings and protests. In 1963, emboldened by the countrywide demonstrations—*Gherao* and *Jalao* (to encircle and to set fire to)—the peasants of Jagatpur once again demanded a better deal from the owners of the land they cultivated. When negotiations failed, they (15 Muslims and 10 Hindus) collectively refused to carry the landowners' share of the produce from the field to the latter's house. But with the spontaneous participation of peasants and workers the anti-Ayub movement not only spread all over the country, but also radical demands and militant forms of struggle started to surface¹⁷ (Siddiqui, 1987: 363-4). This obviously frightened the rising Bengali rural and urban propertied classes. They were in the movement only to obtain the maximum concessions for themselves from the Pakistan ruling class and soon came to an understanding with the establishment. Since the left was in disarray it could not shape the discontent of the rural masses into revolutionary channels, so the 1968's promise for the countryside was brief and receded into the background with the clamping down of Martial Law for the second time—March 1969.¹⁸ Thus the sharecroppers in Jagatpur failed to take off. The landowners in their turn retaliated by

employing sharecroppers from the neighbouring villages and withdrawing land from the defiant ones. As a result they were forced to compromise with the landlords. In the words of one of the land-owners, "we had to retaliate in order to teach them a proper lesson". The left dominated peasant mobilisation in the meantime oriented towards an extreme line, which included among others withdrawal from mass political actions in favour of physical elimination of perceived class enemies. But there were serious gaps in perception between party workers and masses and the party methods were often not appreciated. In 1971, the retreat of the Awami League cadres to India and the movement of Pakistan armies to the cities the leftists obtained the strongest ever position in the village in 1971. With the return of the *Muktibahini*, however, the leftists were subjected to systematic repression and lost their dominance in the villages.¹⁹ Though peasants ostensibly failed, in essence the struggle was a celebration of peasants' class consciousness. It did confirm the existence of an ideology of possibilities.

THE RADICALS, THE MAULANA, RELIGION AND THE PEASANTS

Bhahani's role in peasant resistance also indicated his view that religion could be employed as a force to mobilise peasants for anti-feudal struggles. The anti-Ayub movement led by Bhashani and the Krishak Samiti with the active participation of the Marxist-Leninists, assumed greater importance as until 1967, the Communist Party did not take any step to raise class conscious-

ness among peasants. The East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP) had a "policy to give preference to build citizens' movement".²⁰ The EPCP (ML), which was founded in 1967 after a split in the Communist Party of East Pakistan, had tried to reorganise the peasant movement, though it was not very successful, Maulana Bhashani was as vocal about the peasants' rights and problems but did not have the perception to organise peasants towards class struggle. The people who worked with Bhashani came from small, middle or large Jotedar background.²¹ The EPCP split further and in 1968, Purbo Bangla Communist Party (PBCP) was formed and Bhashani took up a "clear cut programme against Ayub". His 'Jalao-Gherao' movement has to be seen against this background. A Lal Tupi (Red Cap) Bahini (Peasant Volunteer) was formed by the PBCP. The first conference of the Bahini was held in Shahpur where one-lakh peasant volunteers came wearing red caps, and holding sticks. Two more conferences were held in Mahipur and Santosh.²² However, according to a then Marxist student leader: "when the Martial Law was imposed and any mobilisation of the peasants was almost impossible, it was Bhashani who organised peasant volunteers called Lal Tupi Bahini and appealed the peasants to join the anti-Yahya movement. He used religious symbols to mobilise Muslim peasants. Bhashani gave directives that each and every peasant should carry a stick as high as it should reach the level of one's ear, as the Prophet also

carried a similar stick. He called it "*SunnatiLaathi*" (Stick or a staff in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad). The first conference of the Lal Tupi Bahini was held in Shahpur in Pabna district in 1969 successfully in spite of Martial Law".²³

The Shahpur Conference gave the Krishak Samiti a new militant character but by then the communists had ideologically divided. Allauddin Ahmed the then organising secretary of the Krishak Samiti and secretary of reception committee of the Conference, in his report called 'Mukti Dak' stated:

"Shapur Sammelan (Conference) will occupy a prominent place in the history of peasants' liberation struggle as well as in the national liberation struggle. The militant character of peasants had got subdued since the conspiracy of election oriented vested interest clique since 1954. This Conference has brought out the lost militancy. Pro-Government reactionary political parties, Jotedar-Mahajan, mill owners and fake progressives, all of them made an all-out effort to sabotage it. Thousands of peasants congratulated the Maulana for organising this Conference. Maulana toured North Bengal and went to Taingail to hold Urs²⁴ and activists' meeting. Efforts were made by the 'the pro-worker-peasant leaders' and the government to stop the Conference. In a month's time a few thousand meetings of activists were held all over the province and 1.5 lakh propaganda leaflets were distrib-

uted. After the imposition of Martial Law the parliamentary politicians were lying low but the peasant leaders had kept up their work".²⁵

In continuation of his view of employing religion to mobilise peasants, towards June 1969, Bhashani talked on Islamic Cultural Revolution in the specific contexts of East Bengal. His communist associates felt uncomfortable and some of them openly criticised him.²⁶ Bhashani demanded reservation of seats in Assembly for peasants and workers in the coming general elections.

Meanwhile serious differences emerged within the pro-Peking NAP (B) after the imposition of Martial Law in March 1969 mainly over the question of participation in the ensuing first general elections in December 1970. The faction led by Abdul Matin opposed the participation in the election and advocated armed revolution. However, in a meeting of the Krishak Samiti held in Dhaka on 5-6 October 1969, Bhashani, the President, and the pro Peking communist leader Md Toha, the Secretary of the NAP(B) rejected this view. But after a peasant rally held at Santosh in January 1970, Toha reversed his earlier position by rejecting bourgeois democracy. He criticised Bhashani's concept of "Islamic Socialism" and "Islamic Cultural Revolution". The pro-election faction of the NAP(B) remained with Bhashani. However, in December 1970 general elections, the NAP(B) suffered serious setback.

With Yahya in power, Bhashani and the Muslim League drifted apart and the

Muslim League established contacts with the Communist Party of India [Marxist Leninist] (CPI-ML) and EPCP (ML) accepted annihilation as the only character of guerrilla warfare. So in mid-1970s the politics of annihilation gradually expanded and by 1971 not only the EPCP (ML) but also all the other pro-Peking groups started practising the annihilation line. As a result, all the mass organisations such as Krishak Samiti, Shramik Federation, student union etc were abandoned and, directly under the party, peasants and workers were organised as Charu Mazumdar had advocated.²⁷ On the other hand, Bhashani in the same period was also organising the peasants on an altogether different pattern.

When the open revolt against West Pakistan started in March 1971, the EPCP (ML) came out with the thesis that the conflict between Yahya Khan and Bhutto on the one hand, and Mujeeb and his lieutenants on the other, was a struggle between the two bootlicking dogs of the American imperialists to protect monopoly comprador capitalists, landlords and Jagirdars of West Pakistan, while Mujeeb represented rising Bengali classes and wanted to gain supremacy similarly under US protection. Thus, the Party gave a call for liberation war against both the Pakistan army and the Awami League cadres.

With the new onslaught by Yahya, the army spread to the whole of rural area and started indiscriminate killing, loot, rape etc. Against this, the EPCP (ML) and other Marxist Leninist groups got organised which

brought to them the active support of rural poor in the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Pabna, Rajshahi, Noakhali etc.²⁸ Mohd. Toha, the EPCP (ML) leader had collected about 10,000 red guerrillas in Ranagati of Noakhali district.²⁹ In order to fight the counter-revolutionary forces of both the Awami League and Pakistan they killed land holders and money lenders. But this could not continue for long as China came in support of Yahya Khan in the name of protecting national sovereignty of Pakistan creating a great deal of confusion. Since March 1969, anti-Pakistan movement led by the Awami League had been continuously gaining momentum and by 1970-'71, this movement had wholly become a national liberation movement. It was not possible for Marxist-Leninists to keep themselves aloof from the national movement and involve only in anti-feudal struggles. Thus the new line to fight both the Awami League and Pakistan. Since April 1971, Marxist-Leninists started "a three pronged attacks against (a) Pakistan army, (b) Mukti Bahini and (c) Jotedar, Mahajans etc."³⁰ as Mukti Bahini and the Awami League were seen, as puppets in the hands of Indian expansionists and acting at the behest of the Soviet social imperialism. At the same time Pakistan army also was to be fought out as it perpetrated repression on masses and represented the repressive state apparatuses of Pakistan government. Several armed clashes took place between Naxalites (as Marxist Leninists in East Pakistan came to be known) and Mukti Bahini. How-

ever, in the process, the movement against Pakistani forces lost its edge and "when the peasants saw communists fighting Mukti Bahini and annihilated even small Jotedars, they started withdrawing their support. This helped the Awami League a lot, which had feared that leadership might go into the hands of communists.³¹ However, communists in 1971 were able to distribute some land of Jotedars to poor and landless peasants in Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia etc. However, peasants could not retain this land for long. They killed thousands of what they claimed class enemies. The number of annihilation itself shows what types of land-owners were killed, although 5-6 big landowners were also killed. People went against them.³² However, Umar's view suffers from serious theoretical astigmatism. He does not go into the underlying causal factor. He locates the cause of such opposition to Marxist-Leninists by peasants in their desire for 'national' liberation struggle. It is true that peasants wanted national liberation but not for the same reasons as of its leaders, but liberation as hope, as possibility to get their conditions mitigated. Hence, 'opposition' or 'support' in such a situation acquire a specific metaphorical connotation.

However, the activities of various Marxist-Leninist groups "created the impression in India and abroad that the Bangladesh liberation war would ultimately lead to the emergence of radical leadership in Bangladesh".³³ However, this was not to happen, as the events suggest. But the indirect influence of the communist revolutionaries was substantial.

The Awami League and Mujib feared that the Mukti Bahini guerrillas might join the leftists, thus they indulged in revolutionary phrase mongering by marshalling words such as 'nationalism', 'democracy', 'socialism' as the guiding principles of the new state of Bangladesh. □□□

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- 23 As told to this author in a personal communication in 1987.
- 24 *The death anniversary of a Sufi saint*, usually held at the saint's dargaah (shrine or tomb).
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"ONE MAN'S TERRORIST IS ANOTHER MAN'S FREEDOM FIGHTER"

Who is a Terrorist?

Abhijit Guha¹

A RECENT CONTRO-
versy arose over the use
of the term "terrorist" to
refer to the militant freedom
fighters of Bengal in the under-
graduate history honours ques-
tion paper in Vidyasagar Uni-
versity. According to a report
published in the print media the
Vice-Chancellor of the univer-
sity Professor Dipak Kar made
a public apology by saying: "The
word 'terrorist' was the result of
a mistranslation. The original
English text had the term 'mili-
tant nationalism,' which was
wrongly translated into Bengali
as "Santrasbadi" (terrorist). It
was a typographical mistake,
combined with an individual's
lapse in judgement" (*The States-
man* 11 July 2025, p.4). Profes-
sors responsible for drafting the
aforesaid questions were sus-
pended and the student unions
protested in the university cam-
pus and local historians and civil
rights groups have also joined to
condemn the lapse on the part
of the Vidyasagar University au-
thorities. Meanwhile, a former
Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar
University, Professor Ranjan
Chakrabarti, himself a historian
has written a post-editorial ar-
ticle in a Bengali daily in which
he recommended the use of the
phrase "Revolutionary national-
ist movement" or "Armed Revo-
lutionary nationalist movement"
and opined that one should avoid
using the term "Revolutionary
terrorist" owing to its colonial
historical legacy (*The Ei Samay*
16 July 2025, p.8).

LEXICON & ENCYCLOPEDIA

Under the above background,
this writer would look into the
issue of terrorism and terrorist
from a much wider perspective.
The Webster's New World Dic-
tionary of American English de-
fined the word 'terror' as 'in-
tense fear', and 'terrorism' as
the 'act of terrorizing', 'use of
force or threats to demoralise,
intimidate, and subjugate, esp.
such use as a political weapon
or policy' (Webster's New World
Dictionary of American English,
1988, p. 1382). In the Oxford
Learner's English Dictionary ter-
rorism is defined as 'the use of
violent action in order to achieve
political aims or to force a gov-
ernment to act'.

Encyclopedia Britannica
elaborated the nature of terror-
ism outlining the history of the
use of the term and its relativ-
ity. Britannica succinctly noted:

It was first coined in the
1790s to refer to the terror
used during the French Revo-
lution by the revolutionaries
against their opponents. ...Al-
though terrorism in this us-
age implies an act of violence
by a state against its domes-
tic enemies, since the 20th
century the term has been
applied most frequently to
violence aimed, either directly
or indirectly, at governments
in an effort to influence policy
or topple an existing regime
(*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Interestingly, under changing in-
ternational and national sce-
narios in the post-colonial era

countries were found to be en-
gaged in international terrorism
and justified the acts under the
pretext of supporting national
liberation (Ibid). So, it was no
more individuals, groups and po-
litical parties but countries were
also found to be involved in pro-
moting and supporting terror-
ism. For example, Alexander L
George who was a Graham H
Stuart Professor of Political Sci-
ence Emeritus at Stanford Uni-
versity in his edited book *West-
ern State Terrorism* (1991) pro-
vided an overview of US terror-
ist activities in the Middle East
and Central America.²

All these bring people to a
typology of terrorism. One popu-
lar typology identified three
broad classes of terrorism (i)
revolutionary, (ii) sub-revolution-
ary, and (iii) establishment. Al-
though this typology has been
criticised as inexhaustive, it pro-
vided a useful framework for un-
derstanding and evaluating ter-
rorist activities. Interestingly,
while revolutionary and sub-
revolutionary terrorisms were
open to declare their objectives,
for example, communist libera-
tion war in Vietnam and activi-
ties of the African National Con-
gress to end apartheid in South
Africa. But the establishment
terrorism is more difficult to
identify because of its secrecy
and clandestine nature. The ex-
amples are: the alleged engage-
ment of the Soviet Union and its
allies in widespread support of
international terrorism during
the Cold War; in the 1980s the
United States supported rebel
groups in Africa that allegedly
engaged in acts of terrorism, and
various Muslim countries (e.g.,
Iran and Syria) purportedly pro-

vided logistical and financial aid to Islamic revolutionary groups engaged in campaigns against Israel, the United States, and some Muslim countries in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (*Encyclopedia Britannica*.) Joshua Wright, an undergraduate student at Birmingham City University, UK in his article perceptively noted:

It was argued by some academics that in certain circumstances state terrorism is necessary. The example provided was that of the UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, who then sell them onto terrorists. This could be considered a form of state terrorism... Furthermore this provides economic benefits, as it allows for the sustaining of jobs in the U.K... The U.K.'s arms trade with Saudi Arabia may be controversial, but, according to one academic interviewed, secures the state economy and maintains the jobs of UK citizens (Wright, 2019-20:204-2014).

The tentacles of state terrorism are not only confined to the country of its origin but spread over other countries and have become a global affair.

RELATIVITY

The famous quote "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" is not only thought-provoking but it also needs to be placed in its proper context and history. The quote originated in 1976 from the book "*Harry's Game*". It was written by Gerald Seymour, a British author known for his thriller novels. The quote simply revealed the relativity of the term terrorism. Individuals, groups or countries

engaged in violent acts can be perceived differently depending on one's perspective or political beliefs. Thus, in the Middle East the response against Israel as an aggressor and Palestinians as the victims despite the involvement of Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation continues. Today Western governments regard al-Qaeda as terrorists, but to al-Qaeda the terrorists are America and Britain (Jeff Aronson, clinical pharmacologist, Oxford quoted in an article in the *British Medical Journal*, vol.324, 9 February 2002, p.355).

By and large, studies on terrorism have been criticised for not being able to develop an acceptable definition of the term and for its 'poor research methods and procedures, in particular, its over-reliance on secondary information and general failure to undertake primary research' (Jackson, Gunning and Smyth, 2007).

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The allurements of relativity and failure to develop at least a working definition of terrorism often has an obfuscating effect to arrive at an objective assessment of terrorism. In this case the studies by anthropologists may sometime become more illuminating than the political scientists. Because, anthropological studies are *empirical* and basically oriented from an *emic* perspective. Most of the studies done by political scientists on terrorism have been done without understanding the views of the terrorists themselves and based mainly on secondary and archival data. For one thing the views of actors and stakeholders other than the terrorists

are not important nor is it necessary to say that secondary or archival data has no importance in the study of terrorism. In fact, important secondary information on the increase of the proportion of civilian deaths during armed conflicts was collected from secondary sources. In this respect the study of one anthropologist on terrorism may be mentioned. The name of the anthropologist is Jeffrey Sluka who had done first hand research with people defined as 'terrorists' in their natural setting in Ireland [Sluka, J., 1995. Domination, resistance, and political culture in Northern Ireland's Catholic-Nationalist ghettos. *Critique of Anthropology*, 15(1), 71-102]. Sluka maintained that anthropology can make a major contribution to terrorism studies by being empirical and listening to the voices of the terrorists themselves. Sluka concluded in a paper published in 2008:

We have broken the taboo of 'never talking to terrorists', and by presenting their perspectives and experiences have tended strongly to humanise rather than dehumanise them. In anti-terrorism propaganda, 'terrorists' are presented as evil cowards motivated by hatred, but the research we have done with militants refutes this. Thus, anthropologists have made, and continue to make, a major contribution by exposing the concept of terrorism to critical scrutiny and by demonstrating the many political, social, and cultural complexities underlying what is often simply telescoped by state authorities and the

media into faceless, evil, irrational 'terrorism' (Sluka, 2008: 167-183).

Suffice it to say that there will be few takers in the governmental and policy making circles who would be ready to digest the true anthropological approach and spirit to the study of terrorism. □

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Former Professor in Anthropology, Vidyasagar University.
- 2 Noam Chomsky's article 'International Terrorism: Image and Reality' began with a story as told by St. Augustine. The story was about a pirate captured by Alexander the Great who asked him "how he dares molest the sea". "How dare you molest the whole world?" The pirate replied. "Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor" (Chomsky, 1987: 172-200).
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VIOLATION OF LAWS—THEN AND NOW

Civil Disobedience in Today's India

Sumanta Banerjee

GANDHIJI LAUNCHED the civil disobedience movement in 1930, urging people to violate the repressive laws enacted by the British colonial rulers. Today India is witnessing another type of civil disobedience, this time spontaneous violation of progressive laws by its people.

To go back to history of enactment of progressive laws in post-Independence India, successive generations of different ruling parties, irrespective of their political hues, whether at the Centre or state capitals, had banned certain social practices which violate not only the basic principles of the Constitution, but also universal human rights. Laws enacted by the government promise to ensure protection to the victims of such obscurantist beliefs and practices. Yet, judging by news reports from almost

every corner of India, these laws that bring about social reforms are being violated every day by common Indian citizens, both in vast parts of rural India, as well in certain parts of urban India, particularly in what are known as the heartland. These people appear to prefer traditional conservative customs, usually patriarchal which are directed against women, and discriminatory which are directed against the under-privileged Dalits and Adivasis.

It is better to stop valourising the Indian masses (the usual tactics adopted by all political parties in their poll campaigns), and instead one should start demystifying the mob psychology that prevails among the majority Hindu community, the minority Muslim community, as well as among the Dalits and Adivasis (many among whom fol-

low obscurantist practices that violate human rights). The tactics of valourisation of the masses is a double-edged sword. At times, it suits the secular and socialist forces when the masses get allured by their electoral promises of economic and social benefits. At times, the same masses from among the Hindu community get allured by communal parties which rouse them to indulge in deadly riots against Muslim minorities. Similarly, some members of the Muslim minority community often get swayed by divisive messages propagated by fanatical religious preachers, and resort to terrorist acts. Apart from indulging in these inter-religious acts of violence, these masses from the dominant majority communities also target the underprivileged sections amidst their own respective societies. Thus, members of the upper caste masses in Hindu society persecute the Dalits and Adivasis who occupy the lowest steps in the hierarchical ladder of that society.

Similarly, in Muslim society the rich and privileged Ashrafs (who claim their descent from the Prophet) look down upon and exploit the *Pasmanda Muslims*, who are mainly artisans and craftsmen.

COLLECTIVE VIOLATION OF PROGRESSIVE LAWS

Such acts by the masses, usually encouraged by political leaders to further their interests, but quite often spontaneous, violate the basic premise of the Constitution, which under Article 15 prohibits “discrimination on grounds of religion, race-caste, sex or place of birth”. They also violate progressive laws of social reform. Important among these laws are: (i) Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961; (ii) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; (iii) Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006; (iv) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989; (v) Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, among others. It is necessary to recall that some of the social reforms envisaged by the enactment of these present laws, were attempted long before Independence by a handful of brave Indian social reformers like Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar in nineteenth century Bengal, and the Arya Samajist leaders in north India and later Periyar in the south and the Phule couple in Maharashtra. They were followed by new legislations of social reform introduced by successive governments in post-Independence India, since the days of the first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Yet, after 78

years of Independence one finds their implementation is being hampered and obstructed by two impediments - (i) conservative political leaders who oppose those reforms and laws; and (ii) stumbling officials who under pressure from these leaders hesitate to take action against those who violate those laws.

But beneath the surface of these two overt factors there lies a vast social territory of covert factors which provides the soil that nourishes conservatism and orthodoxy. As pointed out earlier, it is the vast mass of these common people who follow the most orthodox social customs at their ground level and who resist the implementation of these progressive laws. During elections they are allured by parties, irrespective of their political hues, which defend their rights to follow these feudal discriminatory patriarchal customs at the village level in their panchayats.

Here are a few cases: *The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961* criminalises the social evil, protects married women from domestic harassment and violence, and provides punishment for those violating it. Yet, the practice continues, with both the bridegroom’s and the bride’s families collaborating in conforming to the illegal custom by haggling over the amount of money to be paid during the wedding. The quarrel continues even after the payment is made, as the bridegroom and his family demand more, and take it out on the wife blaming her parents for refusing to oblige them. It is the wives who suffer. They are either killed by the in-laws,

or are driven to commit suicide. The number of dowry-related deaths of women was over 6000 in 2023. It is significant that most of these deaths occur in urban middle and upper middle class families, who are well-educated, and well-established in their professions and careers. During the 2017-2022 period, thirty percent of all the dowry deaths occurred in the nation’s capital New Delhi, according to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau), followed by Kanpur with thirteen percent. Even when the cases came up before the courts, only a few resulted in conviction, with the presiding judges acquitting the accused on flimsy grounds like lack of evidence—as if the husbands and in-laws were expected to provide evidence by voluntarily acknowledging their complicity in the crime!

The reluctance of the judges to punish those accused of violating the *The Dowry Prohibition Act*, and further those guilty of dowry-related killings which come under the jurisdiction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Act, once again exposes the patriarchal mindset of large sections of the judiciary right from the lower courts in the districts up to the apex court. On an average, of the 6,500 dowry related cases sent for trial every year during the 2017-2022 period, only around 100 resulted in convictions. (Re: THE HINDU. July 15, 2025). This trend of judicial passivity encourages people to violate the law with impunity.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was enacted in 2006. The Supreme Court issued comprehensive guidelines for prohi-

bition of child marriage and effective implementation of the Act. Yet the practice of marrying of girls before they reach the age of 18 continues in our society. According to the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB), the number of cases registered for violation of that Act increased from 395 in 2017 to 1050 in 2021. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) in its report in 2024, reveals that while carrying out interviews with married women it found that some 23% of them were married off by their parents before they were eighteen. The usual reasons offered by their parents were: (i) adherence to the socially prevalent patriarchal norm of marrying off girls before they reach the age when they are mature enough to make choices on their own; (ii) the financial burden of bringing up a girl which involves the responsibility of providing health care and education for her. So, the sooner she is disposed off, the better. Here again, it is the ground level popular beliefs and customs that sabotage progressive laws which seek to emancipate women from patriarchal bondage.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was enacted in 2005, which was mainly intended to save wives from harassment by their husbands and in-laws. Some fourteen years later, the NCRB (National Crimes Record Bureau) found that of the total cases of crimes against women recorded in 2019, at least thirty percent related to domestic violence. The usual forms of abuse were sexual assaults, murders, female infanticide, harassing by in-laws, and

acid throwing. Here again, it is the common people (ranging from the urban middle class to the rural agricultural families amidst whom these cases occur) who are the main perpetrators of such violence against their own women folks. Incidentally, it is not only men who indulge in such abuses. Among these culprits there are women like mothers-in-law who perpetrate the worst form of harassing of the brides of their sons. How can one explain their psyche? It could be a pervert way of seeking revenge for their own sufferings at the hands of their in-laws in the past by re-enacting the same modes of oppression against the newly-arrived brides. It could also be a mode of keeping them under control so that they didn't deviate from the conservative family rules and join their husbands in sharing an independent life-style.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was passed in 1989. Today, when India is about to complete four decades of that law, it may not be out of place to examine how far it is observed by the common people at the ground level. It bans untouchability (which is outlawed under the Indian Constitution also). Here are a few recent instances of how it is being mocked at by these people. In Panjankulam in the Tenkasi district of Tamilnadu, in September 2022, a shopkeeper refused to sell snacks to scheduled caste children. In Jalore district in Rajasthan, on August 14, 2024 a Dalit boy, Indra Meghawal was lynched by the common villagers (who consisted not only of the

upper caste Brahmins and Kayasths but also of the OBC community), just because he touched a drinking pot of water in a school that was reserved only for his upper caste teachers.

These are not isolated cases. They reflect the general mentality of discrimination against the Dalits and Adivasis that is shared by all sections of the Hindu society, including the lower classes. The latter, despite their oppression by the upper castes, still nurture prejudices against the lower castes and tribals among their own classes - agricultural labourers in villages and scavengers in cities. The upper caste and upper class sections flaunt their power over these under-privileged people, under the patronage of the current regime, and the lower classes usually follow the same practices. This submission is due not only to their sheer need for survival, but also to their age-old beliefs and customs which reinforce superstitions beliefs.

To take another issue of popular violation of progressive laws, let us examine how far the *Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act* which was enacted in 2013 is being implemented. It defined a manual scavenger as a "person engaged or employed ...for manually clearing, carrying, disposing off, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta." Even eight years after its enactment, a Union Minister told Parliament in 2021 that there were 58,098 manual scavengers across the country. According to the Safai Karmachari Andolan, (agitating for the elimination of

manual scavenging, the number was more than 770,000).

What is worse is that it is the urban middle class people who had been patronising this illegal heinous practice, just to serve their selfish public and domestic needs. In the public sphere, it is these middle class dominated municipalities which employ these manual scavengers to clean public sewers in roads, requiring their entry into the underground holes, which often lead to their deaths. In the domestic sphere, these middle class families employ them to clean their septic tanks. Here also, the manual scavengers face risks. In 2023, eight labourers in Uttar Pradesh and four in the national

capital New Delhi, lost their lives while cleaning septic tanks in private residences. In May that year in Noida (which is on the edge of the capital), two daily wage labourers, Khokon Mandal (40) and Noomi Mandal (36) died while cleaning a septic tank at a private residence. The owner of the house who employed them, initially offered their families a compensation of Rs 8 lakhs, but later withdrew the offer. What needs to be emphasised in these cases is that it is the members of the Indian public, ranging from the well-educated and well-heeled upper and middle class sections to the lower class slum-dwellers in the cities, who continue to sanction such illegal

practices both in public spaces and their private houses.

REGRESSIVE PRACTICES WITHIN ADIVASI COMMUNITIES

When one moves from these middle class urban localities to the other end of the socio-economic sphere—the interior adivasi and Dalit villages - one finds yet another type of popular violation of progressive laws. It relates to cases of widespread witch hunting by the common villagers who are mainly poor agricultural labourers in these areas. Whenever there is a crop failure, or an accidental death occurs, these people, out of their traditional superstitious belief system, tend to blame an elderly woman or a single woman

a **frontier** publication

WITHOUT PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Thinking Rationally

By Ashok Nag

Price: Rs 300

This book of essays is a collection of articles that the author had written for his blog. The thread that binds these disparate articles written over a decade can be found in the book's title. Rationality is a big claim. But the author has tried his best to remain unbiased, subject to the boundaries defined by his own intellectual capability and knowledge.

The first article was written in the centenary year of Bolshevik revolution. The article digs into the Marxist concepts of "class" and "class struggle" which formed the ideological underpinning of that revolution. The author argues that even Marx himself could not explain the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in terms of his own concept of "class struggle".

In a one-page article written in the wake of so-called "Arab Spring" uprising in the Arab world, the author rightly identified that movement as a reflection of crumbling of the world order with USA as its hegemonic power.

The articles on technology has one common underlying theme- innovations driven by research can only bring about sustained economic growth and transition from a state of poverty to prosperity for any nation. At the same time, the author had warned in 2017 itself that Bitcoin is nothing but an abuse of technology, a Ponzi game to the boot.

On policy issues, the article on the recent changes in Farm laws shows that any distortion in Indian agricultural market cannot be remedied by a mechanical application of market fundamentalism.

Finally, two poems at the end are pure labour of love.

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in their neighbourhood (whom they may be disliking for various reasons), and label them as witches and kill them. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, from 2000 to 2021, more than 3077 women were killed by common villagers who branded them as witches.

Although there is no central law specifically banning witch hunting, six states—Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Orissa and Assam—have passed laws punishing witch-hunters in their respective territories. Despite stringent measures provided by these laws, villagers continue to violate them with impunity, as evident from a recent report emanating from Bihar. Three women members of a family of five were burnt alive in a village in Purnia on July 6, by their neighbours who suspected them of being witches. Three days ago, a child had died in the village. Soon after, the village head had called a meeting which was attended by about 200 people. They accused the three women of performing witchcraft, and unanimously decided to kill them.

When it comes to inter-personal relationships, these tribal villagers again impose penalties on couples whom they consider violating their traditional conservative norms. In July this year again, in Kangaramjodi village in Rayagada they accused a man and a woman of engaging in a relationship deemed taboo, and forced them to plough a field by tying a yoke around their shoulders. They were beaten with sticks and expelled from the village. In the same Rayagada district, recently

around forty members of a tribal family were compelled by members of their community to tonsure their heads after a girl from their family married a man from a different caste. (Re: *The Hindu*, July 12, 2025). It is necessary to stress that all these tribal families come from poor agricultural background—a fact once again confirming that the downtrodden classes need not always be progressive and ready for a revolutionary change in their socio-economic status. Their behaviour is quite often deeply rooted in primordial beliefs and orthodox religious practices, from which their emancipation is going to be a long and arduous haul.

MASS PARTICIPATION IN INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

Moving from these caste and tribal-specific cases to the wider horizon of inter-religious conflicts in India, the picture becomes more horrendous. It is the common people again from the majority Hindu community who participate in communal riots, killing Muslims, burning their homes and looting their shops. It is again the common youth from among the Muslim community who are often lured by Islamist fundamentalist forces to join the ranks of terrorists in places like Kashmir, where in Pahalgam the recent killings took place. While visiting Gujarat as a part of a fact-finding group to investigate the anti-Muslim pogrom that occurred there in the wake of the Godhra train incident, this writer found that along with the poor Hindu lower caste people, members of the tribal Dang community, who were even poorer than the Dalits, also joined the killing and looting sprees. It was sheer

selfishness, devoid of any humanitarian concerns that motivated these downtrodden people.

ARE THE INDIAN MASSES 'NOBLE SAVAGES' OR 'USEFUL IDIOTS'?

Given the long record of popular complicity in violation of progressive laws, as described above, how do we evaluate our people? We cannot also deny the fact that sections of these same people quite often take progressive steps - like the recent farmers movement in north India. But barring such exceptions, the recent history of collective activities or mass interventions in India show alarming signs of wide spread popular hostility against religious minorities and Dalits and Adivasis. There is a rise in cases of mob lynching of cattle traders (who are mainly Muslims), and also of assaults on men and women who enter into inter-faith and inter-caste marriages. In the popular psyche today, there seems to be a reversal from its earlier acceptance of progressive laws and social reforms to a retreat to regressive customs that reinforce orthodox beliefs.

So does one define common people as “noble savages” (the term supposedly invented by the eighteenth century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau), or as “useful idiots” (the term usually attributed to Lenin who claimed success in the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia with the help of these people whom he mobilised, or ‘used’ to capture power). According to him, they were the vast segments of the people who served the interests of the Bolsheviks without sharing their ideology, but purely from self-interest.

To get back to Rousseau's definition, one finds that in the Indian popular psyche, most of the time it is the 'savage' that overpowers the 'noble,' as evident from the rising incidents of communal riots and mob lynching. To turn to Lenin's definition, one again finds that the Indian people are inclined to be

'useful idiots' willing to be manipulated by vested interests both in their social life and the political sphere.

When will the Indian people free themselves from these shackles of 'savagery' and 'idiotcy,' and become 'noble' in their behaviour and be 'useful' to society by helping the implementa-

tion of progressive laws of social reforms? There is a need to launch a new civil disobedience movement in social sphere to disobey the old orthodox religious laws that reinforce superstitious beliefs and practices, and discriminate against women and Dalits and Adivasis.

□□□

FROM THE ATLANTIC AXIS TO CHINA

Crisis of Capitalism, Tariff-War, Inter-Imperialist Contradictions And the Global South

Sunil Ray*

THE CRISIS OF CAPITALISM (capital system) that stems from its deeper internal contradictions is essentially the crisis of profitability rooted in its development. No doubt capital system, historically speaking, is crisis prone. But it is equally true that it could open up route to escape from it. It then goes on to repair its system that stopped meeting the conditions for its further expansion. A new development narrative surfaces to legitimise the function of the system through the institutions it built over the years. In all these actions of revival of the system, which must not go unnoticed is that the development parameters remain unchanged, central to which is profitability. It is an uncompromising truth beyond which capitalism ceases to function. What it means is that profitability must not go down beyond a level that instantaneously invites stagnation and perpetual decline of the capital system and eventually facilitates it to get trapped by the crisis from which the system fail to rescue itself.

It could rescue only with the help of external intervention as that of the state. While the global capitalism witnessed several such crises in the past and the one which is going on, the immediate factor that could be counted as responsible for it, is declining profitability.

While cyclical crisis which is said to be periodic downturns occurring once in almost every ten years such as 1980, the early 1990 and at the turn of the century, structural crisis that took place in 1830, followed by the great depression of the late 1870, then early 1890 and then the great depression of the 1930. (Robinson, 2025). The crisis that global capitalism witnessed in 1970 called for restructuring the global economy through globalisation while Keynesian benevolence (welfare state through state intervention etc) was dismissed. However, state intervention of Keynesian variety demonstrated enough of its indispensability for the global capital system to be rescued from falling into perpetual decline when it was stuck with financial crisis in 2008.

Globalisation of the world economy was chosen as rescuer after 1970 crisis by global capital system led by the transnational capital. No country was left to have been integrated with the global capitalism. The paradigm of free flow of capital and goods, but not human beings (labour) ignited hope of the capital system of being repulsive against declining profitability gained political legitimacy of all nation states. No doubt, it succeeded remarkably well but the global economy was left with an unprecedented concentration of capital at the hands of a few. Just 17 global financial conglomerates controlled \$49.0 trillion wealth more than half the entire global economy (Robinson, 2025). Besides, this is for the first time in the history of global capitalism that saw a massive rise in economic inequality in the world. The top 20% controlled 95% of world's wealth while 80% of the humanity had to manage with just 5% of the world's wealth (Robinson, 2025). This is accompanied by uninterrupted growth of unemployment or surplus labour. Is it the growing unemployment in US the reason why liberalism or the idea of liberal economy is losing its relevance to the US-led global capitalism that opted for 'economic nationalism'?

While one is yet to see the logical end of the transition from liberal economics, its configuration has been garnering remarkable momentum for the new global order to emerge leading the imperialist powers of the globe to sharpen their contradictions further.

THE DEEPENING CRISIS

It is the story of how one type of crisis is leading to another, from structural crisis of 1970s to financial crisis of 2008 and, now, it is spiraling into systemic crisis suggesting exhaustion of the all escape routes within the system (Robinson, 2025). Hence, seeking for its resolution outside the system is the only option left to global capitalism. How this could finally materialise is a matter of investigation based on the forces that may lead to the emergence of the new global order. However, before examining it, let us know why globalisation of the world economy boomeranged against the capital system which, instead of rescuing, has pushed it into profitability crisis again.

The global economy that remained under globalisation for almost three decades is now left with three sets of structural crisis. Although capital system is attempting to rescue itself from these crises through reorganising its 'tech-finance oligarchy', providing fiscal stimulus (especially after financial crisis of 2008), free flow of finance capital to the developing countries of the south, etc., it is yet to succeed, and, hence, remain far away from resolving it. What is conspicuous in it is that global capital system had to land up in an economic terrain where it breeds several antagonistic fea-

tures that are detrimental to its prospects.

They include (1) over accumulation of capital and chronic stagnation (2) unprecedented earnings of profit by the leading transnational corporations and financial conglomerates (3) Intense financial speculation and growth of speculative market (4) shifting of the location of the global production to the low wage countries of the south based on what is known as 'global labour arbitrage' (5) unprecedented concentration of capital (6) boosting up of the primitive accumulation of capital in the global south uprooting millions of people who are finally thrown into the global labour market as surplus labour (8) inequality of an highest order that the world ever witnessed before (9) migration, social misery accompanied by accelerating militarisation and rivalry between imperialist powers, civilisational crisis due to ecological disaster (10) genocidal war against Gaza, war between Ukraine and Russia and between Iran and Israel involving great powers directly and indirectly with the potential to spread to other countries (11) emergence of global product network and introduction of global value chain, etc. (Smith, 2015).

Full legitimacy that was accorded to capital accumulation under globalisation in order to trigger growth and development is responsible for the crisis of global capitalism in the first place. While this may be the root cause, many of those that are highlighted here are fall-out of it and finally reinforced each other only to aggravate the crisis further. The paradoxical

truth is that it was globalisation that provided the escape route to the capital system to get out of the crisis of 1970. But, now it is globalisation that has pushed the same system to encounter the crisis that has deepened over time. How did it happen?

RELOCATION OF PRODUCTION BASES

In order to tide over the crisis of 1970, global capital under globalisation has been desperately relocating production bases in the global south to take advantage of the benefit of global labour arbitrage. Primitive accumulation of capital uprooting millions of people to join the labour market push the wage earnings of the workers in the global south further down. It is a case of wage deflation within capitalism, which is a sole form of income deflation that boosts up profitability (Patnaik, 2015). This in turn was expected to rescue global capitalism from its crisis. The national governments of the global South found relocating the production bases of the global capital in their respective countries as the means to resolve their growing unemployment problem. It is a sort of 'win-win' situation for both, hence, it gained political legitimacy. For instance, as Patnaik observes, "neo-liberal policies were sold to countries like India precisely on the promise that employment in their economies would increase through the relocation of activities for the global north if all barriers to the movement of capital were removed. Trump wants to put an end to this." (Patnaik, 2025).

Trump wants to put an end to it for he found that the US economy is deprived of employ-

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ment opportunities for its people due to relocating production bases in the global south having been facilitated by the capital export from US to the latter in addition to have been incurring trade deficit that ballooned to \$918.4 billion in 2024 which is cited as a broken system (Sethi, 2025), indebtedness both at home and abroad etc. Other factors as derivative of free trade did not work as cost efficient leading to result in steep decline of GDP of the economy. Its global share in GDP (PPP) has fallen from 27% in 1950 to 15 % until present, while share of the global south including China account for 65% of the world GDP (The growth rate of US GDP has fallen to around 2 % per year) (Tricontinental Institute of Social Research, 2023) . This is lower than that of the countries who are now challenging US hegemony in the global economy indicating a shift of the centre of the world economy. Hence, development of global product network and promotion of global value chain (GVC) that encouraged relocating production bases in the global south appears to have contributed to the crisis of US capital a great deal, reasonable enough for it to seek for its resolution through imposing tariff on the imported goods and services into this country.

“From Bush to Obama to Biden, politicians on both sides of the partisan divide have for almost two decades devoted themselves to trying to save the system from its contradiction” (Atkinson, 2025). Although they achieved short term stability through Keynesian intervention some time, the long term profit-

ability crisis of US capitalism remained far away from being resolved (Atkinson, 2025). In other words, the restructuring of the capital system through relocation of production bases in the global south to take advantage of global labour arbitrage to produce at low cost for the world market through its global products networks and global value chains (GVC) failed to resolve profitability crisis of US capitalism.

However, it worked well for China that has gained unprecedented economic ascendancy in the global economic order as a result of globalisation and capable enough to challenge US hegemony. It is here that one may wonder how imposition of tariff on its imports is going to work in favour of US capital to recover from its profitability crisis particularly when it is already interwoven with the global product network and Global Value Chain (GVC) which is widely implemented as a means of restructuring the global capitalism under globalisation. Is it not contrary to the interest of the Transnational Corporation Class (TCC) that has opposed ‘economic nationalism’ of Trump variety (not an old infant industry argument) and expressed their opposition to return to the confines of the nation-state? USA may be the country of origin of TCCS like TESLA, BMW, but they operate through vast global production and distribution chains like the host of Chinese firms (Robinson, 2025).

This has led to the emergence of a new contradiction which is internal to the capital system. While one may not rule out cri-

sis of profitability of the US capitalism that corresponds to the global crisis of capitalism which is called ‘global turbulence’, its deeper impact at the global level will be felt severely once “Tariff War” begins to direct global trade and commerce due to the imposition of retaliatory tariff against US tariff by other countries. The reason is higher tariff will raise the commodity prices relative to wages paid to the workers leading to fall in the consumption capacity for it (Patnaik, 2025). As such, consumption capacity of the workers for commodities produced in the GVC regime was not significant enough due to overproduction. On the top of it, one can well imagine how worse it could be for the entire capitalist world once it undergoes tariff war. The “Realisation crisis” as shown by Karl Marx more than a century ago is going to set in, leading to result in recession or even depression with a massive fall in investment and employment world over. Predictably, another spell of crisis appears to be looming large over global capitalism under US imperialism, whose hegemony is, of course, now challenged by other imperialist powers. While contradictions between them are increasingly sharpening, the instrumental role of GVC to wriggle out global capitalism from its crisis is yet to decline.

INTER-IMPERIALIST CONTRADICTIONS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Imperialism in the 21st century is different from what traditional Marxists understand. It is more of intensifying global value chains and expanding global product networks in which export of capi-

tal and technology is embedded that are now major sources of imperialism to exploit resources and market of global south. Even without directly exporting capital GVCs are now able to generate value. During 2013 as the data from UNCTD reveals more than 80% of the trade conducted worldwide was organised through GVC. (Economic and Political Weekly Engage).

China, contrary to the USA, that has risen to economic superpower to challenge US hegemony presents a classic case of benefiting from Intensification of GVC and expansion of its global product network. It shows how it turned to global south due to some unforeseen problems and overcame the crisis of profitability that it faced after the financial crisis of 2008. True, it could resolve the financial crisis but it had to encounter two problems. The first one is technological innovation that created the need for expanding the supply chain for more raw materials to produce varieties of key components. The second problem was over accumulation leading to contract domestic job market. These two together drove the government, state owned enterprises (SOEs) and private corporations to look for opportunities abroad (Davis, 2024). This was possible by means of boosting up GVC. David Harvey observes "The Chinese state, SOEs, and the private capital needed a "special fix" expanding in order to address the perennial results of capitalism's insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring (Davis, 2024). According to some,

Chinese imperialism is born out of this need for new markets. It embarked on exploiting natural resources of the recipient countries through intensive extractive operations along with super exploitation of the low skilled labour and opening up the route to make profit from the recipient countries through *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) linked development projects and FDI by the state owned companies that create short term profit for the Chinese corporations.

One may argue that the Chinese FDI flow to the Global south is predatory in nature, but, the Chinese investment is perceived more positively than US-based investment in the global South. (Davis, 2024). A recently conducted study reveals that the popularity of China is growing in Africa in contrast to the declining popularity of the US (Vigers, 2024) threatening hegemony of the US imperialism. Another study reveals that the approach of the Chinese government to supporting capital investment projects and the creation of infrastructure in the global south offers a powerful alternative to the conditionality offered by the US dominated organisations like IMF, World Bank etc. (Davis, 2024) All these forces together lent incredible support to the Chinese economy for its ascendancy as an economic superpower to weaken US hegemony under global capitalism. The crisis of US hegemony has accelerated since the late 1990s, with the intensification of the strategy of China for a new world order with multipolar characteristics (Tricontinental, 2022). Under such evolving

multi-polarity imperialist powers compete with each other for resources particularly natural resources and, market. They also compete with each other to expand their sphere of influence.

The sphere of influence assumes extraordinary importance to the respective imperialist power, as a source through which the latter dominates the countries that are under its influence, economically, politically and of course militarily. One can see its relevance to the perspective of the world system theory of Wallenstein. It is mainly the developing countries (peripheral) of the south who are the victim of dominance (influence) of the core countries. The core countries, by and, large are the imperialist powers that are mainly from north within the global capital system. The sphere of influence backs up expansion of global product networks through intensification of global value chains originated in the core countries that are imperialist powers, the global north. It is here that one can see how the sphere of influence with higher potency invites competition between the core or imperialist powers for market and resources of the peripheral countries. It is a case of inter-imperialist rivalry in that each imperialist power or 'core' aims at expanding its sphere of influence over the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries of the global south in order to minimise its crisis of profitability. This leads to sharpen contradictions between them further. Its snowballing effect on the imperialist hierarchical system of global capitalism seems to be manifesting in

its transition to multipolar global geopolitical order. In other words, core of the global capitalism is shifting from the Atlantic axis between USA and Europe to China.

The question, therefore, is: If contradiction between the imperialist powers for expanding the sphere of influence sharpens further, will it lead to result in another wave of crisis of the global capitalism? Yes, it is quite likely to be so. The reason is simple. Expanding capitalist network for surplus generation through expanding market and exploiting both natural and human resources is the fundamental law of capitalism. It is here that the sphere of influence particularly over the peripheral countries makes tremendous difference to the imperialist powers that intend to exercise its power including economic, political, technological and military to dominate the former. While the final objective of each one is same, not to be endangered by being trapped by the profitability crisis, the constant drive to expand the sphere of influence sharpens their contradictions leading to result in geopolitical crisis. The most tragic manifestation of this crisis is genocidal war against GAZA to which are added around 56 wars across the planet" (Pastor, 2024). A new configuration of the global geo-political order is emerging in that US hegemony is now antagonised by other super powers such as China and Russia. In other words, it is rivalry between imperialist powers in west (US, Western Europe and Japan) and East (China and Russia).

One may argue if this rivalry is antagonistic cooperation in which terms of competition between them is mediated by the mutual interest. Hence, despite crisis tendency towards cooperation between them prevail maintaining stability of the capital system. However, such an analytical view seems to have lost its grip over the reality that sufficiently indicates a long term declining trend of the global capital system which constantly unleashes processes accelerating contradictions that are only antagonistic. Hence, 'shared interdependence' does not have much of significance to suggest that antagonism between the imperialist powers as antagonistic cooperation. For, as Bukharin once pointed out, interdependence not only deepens economic links but also accelerates rivalry (Probsting, 2025). It is not so long ago that China and USA used to be most preferred trading partners. It is now a history. The same is the case between China and EU, where the latter has imposed substantial tariff on Chinese imports. It means that the Imperialism is not a system characterised by antagonistic cooperation, rather it is antagonistic contradiction. Trading relations between super powers being part of global imperialist system speaks more of antagonistic contradiction than cooperation leading to end up with retaliatory trade practices between them. And, nobody knows where it finally leads as the contradictions sharpen further leaving the global capitalism in deeper crisis. Does it necessarily mean that 'interdependence' even between the countries in

the global south, majority of which are peripheral, may cause such an economic battle that could sabotage their mutual interest leading them fall into economic crisis? It is here that one can learn a few lessons from BRICS+ which was formed in the recent past.

BRICS AND IMPERIALISM

BRICS, for instance, is the one which is formed in the recent past and most of which are members from the peripheral countries of the global south. The purpose is to meet their mutual economic interest through interdependence between them. Of course, the basic idea is to get relieved from the exploitative hierarchical system of global imperialism under US dominated financial system. They have explored a new payment platform by establishing New Development Bank (NDB) with no stringent conditionality as compared to the IMF and World Bank. Financial support is also provided through the formulation of Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). One has reasons to hope that this alternative financial institution will facilitate south-south cooperation to intensify trade, investment, technology transfer etc. This appears to hold considerable promise when attempts are underway to reduce dependence on dollar by way of preferring local currency for payments.

BRICS, which was initially formed by five countries including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is now opening its membership to many other countries from the global south who are willing to join. It appears to be a historic break-

through when one looks at it in its totality in view of the steps taken. However, it may not be so easy going when one weighs asymmetry that exists across the countries of the global south in terms of economic priorities, political system and geographical stances and diverse interest. Be that as it may. For, these differences may not come on the way when exchange is mutually inclusive in terms of achieving equitable growth in a non-exploitative framework. However, the question is: can “Interdependence” paradigm present a ‘win-win’ situation for all countries in the global south even when capitalist exchange relations rules the roost? It may be possible only if there is no core country to exercise its sphere of influence on the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. However, such a possibility may dry up if one counts the domineering role of the Chinese and Russian imperialism that seem to have been gradually positioning themselves as the core countries.

Under the pretext of promoting interdependence, same exploitative mechanism may be in place to go against mutual interest. Since their economic principles are fundamentally tied to the law of capitalist development which is primarily surplus generation to be appropriated by the owners of capital, they need constantly expanding market. Hence, surplus transfer from the periphery to the core countries may continue even here also with a competitive drive to expand the sphere of influence over the peripheral countries while keeping the operation of GVC intact. To go a step forward,

BRICS+ may turn out to be more useful for China and Russia as an alternative mechanism to transfer their respective development cost/ profitability crisis to the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries under their influence. Hence, antagonistic contradiction between the superpowers is inescapable here also, that may finally dismantle the objectives with which BRICS has come into existence. The question, therefore, is under what conditions peripheral countries of the global south cease to function as pawns at the hands of any imperialist power?

COHESIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD

Unless countered by cooperation between the peripheral countries of the global south and instituting progressive economic alternative, peripheral and semi-peripheral countries of the global south are likely to be pushed to a new era of economic disorder. They will continue to be used as pawns by the imperialist forces to sink in their profitability crisis as and when they run into it. “The challenge, therefore, is how to reconstruct antagonistic forces against imperialism based on solidarism that is not subordinated to one or another great power or regional capitalist block” (Pastor, 2024). One may see such a possibility only when interdependence between the nations is not defined in terms of relations that exist between core and periphery. However, if it is otherwise, the competitive drive between the imperialists for expanding the sphere of influence over the countries will automatically lose its steam. Solidarism between the periph-

eral and semi-peripheral countries of the global south may then put an end to the process of their victimisation perpetrated by the imperialist powers through unequal exchange.

Solidarism, instead of alliance that BRICS+ is founded upon, must be chosen to define the terms of interdependence between the countries of the global south. It creates conditions for bringing nations together to counter such regressive forces and defines interdependence in terms of mutual respect, fair exchange and equitable growth. It gives a sense of unity, cohesion and mutual support to each other to see that none gains at the cost of others. It may be possible to achieve within the framework of what I call ‘cohesive development’ (Ray, 2024). The primary condition for cohesive development is cohesion among the countries with a sense of commitment to the common objective based on collective understanding and shared consciousness. It is the common objective that binds these countries together despite differences that might exist between them.

The unifying element of all the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries who develop a shared consciousness is exclusion from various forms of power that subordinate them to the dominant powers. It offers an alternative development paradigm that replaces the logic of capital as it works in the capital system with the new one that seeks to establish radically different social metabolic order based on the principles of solidarity between humans on the one hand and human and na-

ture on the other. It does not allow the natural resources, the very base of the productive forces of the economy, to be exhausted beyond the limit where co-evolution of both human and nature stops. While holding the countries together based on reciprocal altruism, it seeks to achieve a common objective, a common world view based on the collective understanding with substantive freedom or actual freedom. It is a new kind of interdependence and group mindedness, a collective intentionality indicating new organisational form. Its acceptability as an organising principle for the exchange of the peripheral countries of the global south to take place in all spheres of all economic activities including trade, investment, technology transfer etc may shield them from the ill effects of the crisis of the global capitalism, hegemonic control of the imperialist powers and their

growing contradictions. The 'economic nationalism' will then have a different connotation in respect of the peripheral countries of the global south from that of tariff protection, tariff war etc to sustain equitable growth with no unequal exchange. □□□

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MUKTI SANGHARSH MOVEMENT

Towards a New Egalitarian, Non-Exploitative, Sustainable Agro-Industrial Society

Bharat Patankar

K J Joy¹

CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL problems and contradictions have become visible in the capitalist as well as in the statist socialist societies. The last decade or so has also seen various ways and approaches to solve these problems mainly by the capitalist system, statist socialist systems, green and ecology movements, traditional communists/socialists, etc.

Though we are also part of the broad left traditions, we do not agree with the traditional left's understanding of class as the only basis of exploitation. Exploitation also takes place on the basis of caste, gender, region (cities dominating the country-side, developed regions dominating the backward regions—regional imbalances), etc. The exploitation of adivasis as a community also has to be seen in the same context. We feel that all these are also important questions which have to be addressed to in the process of revolutionary social transformation and social change. One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the traditional left today is its inability to integrate these issues in its conceptual framework and bring them together into a cohesive political agenda.

The consumerist, high energy input based, fossil material and energy based, centralised components of the western developmental model (which has risen

from monopoly capital) have been adopted uncritically by the left. With this developmental model it is not possible to abolish exploitative relationships mentioned above.

Price rise, unemployment, etc are some of the issues faced directly by the toiling masses in their day-to-day life. Though struggles are also being organised on these issues by the traditional left, they have been more against these symptoms per se and very often these struggles have been short-lived and sterile. The other approach could be, while organising these struggles, to question the developmental model and evolve alternatives. Our perspective as well as programmes, as reflected in *Mukti Sangharsh Movement*, have been mainly characterised by this approach. That is why *Mukti Sangharsh Movement* did not remain a 'trade union' of agricultural labourers and Employment Guarantee Scheme workers, not merely demanding distributive justice from the existing developmental model, but took the form of an integrated movement of the various toiling sections of the rural society searching for an alternative development path. The traditional left has never taken seriously the issues arising out of human to nature relationship (ecological issues, etc). We are of the opinion that human to nature

relationship also affects human to human relationship in many ways.

However, we also have fundamental differences with those environmentalists who do not take social relations of production seriously and who do not take an anti-capitalist and pro-labour position or who do not integrate it into their overall perspective. Very often 'nature' per se is their central concern and humans (or human to human relationship) are pushed to the periphery of their thinking. There is also an 'enlightened capitalist class' which is trying to find solutions to some of the problems within the system. These solutions are also primarily dictated by capital. We take a break from this type of 'elite environmentalism'.

CRITIQUE OF THE EXISTING DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

Developmental model in the capitalist societies and statist socialist societies, for the purpose of this note, is looked at in terms of 1) the particular type (nature) of exploitation, and, 2) the production process (in terms of nature of production; natural resource base of production; conditions of production; and science and technology).

NATURE OF EXPLOITATION

In the advanced form of capitalism, exploitation is carried out by both the state (in terms of taxes, the industries run by the state, bureaucracy, etc) and the private/individual capitalists. Under this system, reification of the exploitative relationships occurs, illusions of various types are created, the system tries to

renew and reproduce itself, and a representative form of democracy exists. Though people never rule or the people do not have any real control over their political life an illusion is created at the social level to the contrary. There is political domination and exploitation at the social organisational levels through hierarchy. However, people can exercise certain limited choices between various contending interests/groups/parties though they function within the overall capitalist framework. The contradictions and conflicts within the ruling classes take place in front of the people and people can exercise their choice through elections or express their dissatisfactions. Even this limited choice is not there for the people under the statist socialist systems.

As capitalism advances, more and more people get thrown out of agriculture. Yet, agriculture has to produce enough surpluses to sustain the growing industrial society and this has to be done with less number of people involved in agriculture. Majority of the people who get thrown out of agriculture join the industrial working class, white collared jobs, service sector, unorganised sector, etc.

Apart from this general process which takes place, the impact of the advancement of capitalism on women, artisans (*baluthedars*), Dalits, adivasis, etc have to be seen separately in terms of specific forms of exploitation.

Women have been exploited at least since stable/ploughed agriculture began. However, with the advent of capitalism non-

wage exploitative labour (in terms of domestic labour) has remained the general character of women's exploitation. In other words, non-wage labour exploitation is a common factor in the case of all toiling women—whether they work as peasants, as agriculture labourers, or in the industrial (unorganised) sector, service sector, etc—besides the specific forms of exploitation that they have to undergo because of the type of role they play in the production system.

Along with this, with the advent of capitalist, external inputs based, mono-cultural cash crop agriculture women have been marginalised and de-skilled. As capitalism and mechanisation progressed, in other spheres too, women have been increasingly deprived of their traditional occupations and been pushed into low paid jobs, unorganised sectors, and occupations based on gender segregation.

In countries like ours, artisan/*baluthedars* have been mainly pushed into agriculture labourer class because their position in the production system has been taken over by industries without their being integrated in the new production system. One of the consequences of this has been that the number of people dependent on agriculture increased and as a result the pressure on land has also increased. This has not only led to a change in the form of their exploitation but also to greater impoverishment.

Dalits mostly became agricultural labourers and industrial workers. The Class IV jobs (like sweepers, toilet cleaning, waste

collection/disposal, etc) in cities and towns are mainly with the Dalits.

The subsistence base of the adivasis has been destroyed by snatching away their rights over forests and natural resources and by the systematic control of the forests for commercial and industrial purposes. As a result they became agricultural (landless) labourers, migrant labourers, unskilled labourers in mines, etc. Large scale displacement of these people continue to take place because of the constructions of large dams and other large projects without any share in the benefits.

The absence of a living wage, lack of job security, unhealthy working and living conditions, occupational hazards, industrial accidents, pollution, problems of transportation (in terms of time and energy) because of the long distances between the place of work and place of living, etc have resulted in reduction in the productive years and also reduction in the life expectancy for vast sections of the working class in the cities.

The overall feature/character of the exploitative system has been: 1) the extraction of surplus value from the wage workers in the production process; 2) extraction of surplus from the toiling peasants through market mechanism; 3) extraction of surplus from women's production, including women's domestic work; and 4) exploitation by the state through the maintenance of the bureaucracy and the public sector wage exploitation.

NATURE OF PRODUCTION

Conversion of agriculture from mainly use-value production

(use-value production to satisfy various needs and enrich human life) to mono-cultural, high external input based, cash crop production. Because of this, even to meet subsistence needs people have to go through commodity market system.

Agriculture comes to depend on infrastructure developed by and the inputs coming from industry. This is reflected in the dependence of agriculture on machinery, energy (electricity, etc), seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation, etc.

Distancing of processing of agricultural produce from the place of production and destruction of artisan-based production system at the village level.

The tendency to reduce variable capital (cost on labour) by various means such as increase in workload, reduction in real wages, modernisation/automation, etc for the extraction of more and more surplus value.

NATURAL RESOURCE BASE OF PRODUCTION

Production is based (both industrial and agricultural) on non-renewable, fossil-based materials and energy sources.

This type of a production system increasingly necessitates a centralised resource control and hierarchical organisational structure and authority.

CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION

Commodification and commercialisation of natural and common resources take place.

The nature of production is such that production itself degrades the necessary conditions of production.

Resources like forest, land, water, etc are seen only in terms of their extractive uses and not

as healthy conditions of production which are necessary for the sustenance of life itself and the sustainability of production in general. This results in large scale droughts, desertification, floods, water logging and salinisation, decrease in the primary productivity of land and erosion of the subsistence base of vast sections of people.

TO QUOTE MARX:

“Capitalist production, by collecting the population in great centres, and causing an ever-increasing preponderance of town population, on the one hand concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the circulation of matter between man and soil, i.e., prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil. By this action it destroys at the same time the health of the town labourer and the intellectual life of the rural labourer. But while upsetting the naturally grown conditions for the maintenance of that circulation of matter, it imperiously calls for its restoration as a system, as a regulating law of social production, and under a form appropriate to the full development of the human race...

Moreover, all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards

ruining the lasting sources for that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the labourer”.

[*Capital*, Volume I, “Modern Industry and Agriculture”]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science has sufficiently brought forward that nature is not a passive substance and that the universe is a single, active, inter-related system in which humans have to co-habit with nature. However, the full implications of this have not even been absorbed by the scientific community and it has had very little impact on the social outlook towards nature.

The social outlook towards nature still sees nature as a passive substance to be acted upon and sees the role of science and technology as one of making it easier for the humans to control, conquer and shape nature according to their whims and fancies. With this outlook it is difficult to make use of science to develop a healthy co-habitation of humans and nature.

Creative production should ensure healthy co-habitation of humans and nature and take humans beyond the realm of mere necessity. If science and technology are to solve the problems faced during this process, they have to develop through an

interactive process between abstract thinking and experience and knowledge acquired through production. If such an interaction does not take place then abstract thinking remains alienated from the problems faced in production and like most of science and technology it gets associated with exploitative production. On the other hand, the potential for the development of knowledge that exists in the actual production gets stifled and it remains localised, individual experience.

STATIST SOCIALISM

Under statist socialism, the means of production are owned by the state and state carries out overall planning. There is a controlled commodity market and certain social securities are provided by the state.

Initially with the expropriation of capitalist and landlord classes, there was a rapid growth and progress in the field of industry, agriculture, education, health, social security, technology, etc as compared to backward capitalist societies, like Italy.

However, stagnation and crisis overtook the system because of 1) direct producers did not

have control over the means of production and production process; 2) no creative participation of the producers in production with the freedom to enrich the collective life; 3) virtual absence of political democracy; 4) adoption of an unsustainable development model based on the use of fossil-based materials and energy, consumerism, centralisation, bureaucratisation, domination of industry over agriculture, unequal relationship between humans and nature, etc.; and 5) the absence of factors which compel the continuous renewal of productive forces under capitalism.

THE ALTERNATIVE

Thus, it is clear that in both systems it has not been possible to achieve 1) liberation from exploitation based on class, caste, gender, race, nationalities, etc; 2) creative participation in production and direct, participatory democracy; and 3) sustainable production based on equal and healthy co-habitation between humans and nature. Thus, there is the need to search for an alternative.

The aim of this alternative would be: 1) liberation from all forms (as mentioned above) of exploitation; 2) to create a society, rich, both in material and socio-cultural aspects (increasing freedom of human beings from compulsive, monotonous, back-breaking and prolonged toil and a creative and productive life with increasing participation in creative arts, science and all other activities which enrich human life; 3) creative participation in production and direct, participatory democracy; and 4) sustainable production based on

equal and healthy cohabitation between humans and nature.

It is necessary to have a material base suitable and conducive for the fulfilment of the above mentioned aims. Right from its initiation the alternative strategy for transformation should have all these aspects, in however embryonic a form, and the activities and programmes at different stages should be able to develop them further.

PRODUCTION STRATEGY

Even under the existing system it is becoming increasingly difficult to continue production along the same lines because of problems like global warming, pollution, exhaustion of fossil-based materials and energy sources, etc. Hence there are attempts to find solutions to these problems within the framework of the system. However, these solutions are again centralised and directed by capital. On the other hand, since these are also problems faced by the society at large, there are also efforts from various sections of the society like the environment movements, peasants, workers, women, green movements, and the scientific-technological community to find solutions for these problems. Hence the starting point for our alternative strategy should be based on the problems thrown up by the present system and the various efforts that are being made to find solutions by various sections in the society.

If we have to usher in a society based on the above mentioned principles, then, we have to start from the renewable resources which are still there like forest, agriculture, fishery, etc.

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Hence, the starting point should be primary production.

Unless the primary production can produce enough to meet the subsistence needs of all, it would be difficult to move to secondary production as part of an integrated alternative. Primary production should produce surplus even to support those who would be involved in the secondary production.

Many of the sectors of today's secondary production are organised in a way that is harmful in terms of sustainability and the other principles of the alternative. So today's secondary production, in its present form, would not be useful for the development of an integrated alternative, though some of the elements can be used in the alternative strategy. New kind of secondary production has to be developed based on the renewable resources created through primary production.

There are two basic components to the production system that is envisaged under this integrated alternative.

The first component is the biomass production. Limited, but assured and strategically utilised water to meet sustainable livelihood needs (food security along with drinking water, fuel and fodder requirements) would be the starting point. The agricultural production also should be able to generate some cash income, over and above the needs met in kind, to meet the cash requirements. Equitable water distribution; access to land in some form or the other; steady biomass inputs to the agricultural area; integration of agricultural and non-agricultural

portions; increase in the primary productivity of land; water balance, nutrient balance and energy balance; etc are all important aspects of the primary production.

The second component is the transition from primary production to biomass-based industrial production. This involves development of renewable energy sources; various aspects of energy efficient, local resource and renewable energy (and materials) based technology for infrastructural development like manufacturing of construction components from biomass produced on degraded, waste lands; use of these components like small dimension timber, etc in the construction of houses, schools, dispensaries, community halls, etc; bio-derived products like non-woven fabric and bamboo to be used in the construction of roads, water holding and storage structures and water delivery systems; use of waste materials like stone powder and industrial waste materials like fly-ash; minor minerals like sand; or waste materials like rice husk, sugarcane bagasse, etc which contain colloidal silica for manufacturing various construction, building components like high quality bricks, ferro-cement sheets, etc.

Another aspect of this sub-system is processing, storage and marketing. This is important from various angles like the perishable nature of a significant portion of primary production; market fluctuations; avenues for value adding and employment generation; etc.

The above mentioned descriptions of the two sub-systems in-

dicate the possibilities that exist to evolve a sustainable production system. These two sub-systems are in no way autonomous. Both of them subsist or are parts of one, integrated production system and as such they are inter-dependent and also inter-linked.

The technology that is utilised must be such as to reverse the current trend of environmental degradation and conserve and build up primary productivity; to provide avenues of skill improvement necessary for a transition to modern production methods. It should also be decentralised, developed through a participatory process and renewable energy and materials based.

Today's rural society is a class divided society. Since the process of transformation would start in the area of primary production, then, we also have to fight against the industrial capitalists whose interests today dictate the primary production on one hand and on the other the interests of the capitalist farmers who control resources like land, water, etc. Hence, land and water management and use with emphasis on equitable water distribution leading to land re-distribution could be a weapon in the class struggle.

This type of a primary production implies biomass-based agriculture and for this renewable energy sources like solar, wind, biomass, etc and inputs like compost, earth worm, nurseries, seeds, etc. should be developed under the control and leadership of collective producers comprising of poor peasant labourers, landless labourers, women, Dalits, artisan castes

and certain sections of today's industrial working class. At the same time these sections would form the nucleus who would develop and control the new type of secondary production.

Today there is already a working class in the existing secondary production areas. The nature of this secondary production is such that some of the production sectors need to be radically reorganised because in their present form they are either harmful or unnecessary in the context of the integrated alternative. Majority of the pharmaceutical combinations and formulations, pesticides, some of the chemical fertilisers, etc fall in this category. As the social base of production shifts to renewable energy sources and materials the relative importance of fossil fuel and mineral based sectors would gradually decrease. On this background there

are certain basic issues regarding the role of the existing working class and the nature of its struggles. The working class needs to widen its struggles to include issues like pollution, healthy living and working conditions, civic amenities, public distribution system, occupational hazards, problems arising out of long distances between place of living and place of work, work load, collective control over production process, and the struggle to reorganise production along alternative lines. At present these aspects of working class struggle are weak, and a collective search for solutions, alternatives and their implementation is needed before we can say how the working class would get gradually assimilated into the integrated alternative.

We have no illusions that the integrated alternative can be generalised within the present

system. Today our aim is to popularise alternative demands and the alternative developmental paradigm among the masses through their struggles and involving them in the alternative production processes. This would help the masses to get out of their cynicism and then 'there is no alternative' (TINA) syndrome. These movements could catalyse new political movements leading to the expropriation of the capitalist class and other bases of exploitation, to establish direct, collective control of political power by the people and lay the foundations of a new, egalitarian, non-exploitative, sustainable agro-industrial society. ■■■

FOOTNOTES

- 1 We are thankful to Anant Phadke, Suhas Paranjpe & K R Datye for their help (in terms of critical comments and suggestions) in the preparation of this note.

FIFTY YEARS LATER

Emergency, Sanghparibar and the 'Organiser'

Asok Chattopadhyay

INDIRA GANDHI DESTROYED the country's democracy by imposing the Emergency in 1975. The entire *Sangh Paribar* joins the campaign on June 25 every year with this statement. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Emergency. Fifty years of those notorious black days. All the leaders of the *Sangh Paribar*, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have become gibberish and have started selling their age-old and much used propaganda blitz on the streets. But they want to deny the truth re-

peatedly and consider it a lie. And they want to prove the lies as truth by repeatedly propagating it. This is the age-old policy of fascism. They continue to renew that policy again and again, tirelessly.

In May 1977, Samar Sen, the renowned poet and editor, *Frontier*, wrote an article under the caption '*The role of the intellectual during emergency*' where he divulged the information of the meeting of almost 200 intellectuals just two weeks ahead of proclamation of emergency in June 1975. The intellectuals published

an *anti-fascist* statement. They counted Indira Gandhi progressive and branded the movement launched by Jayprakash Narayan to be a fascist one. And interestingly enough, Indira Gandhi reiterated the statement issued by the intellectuals, hopefully to justify her action. And these intellectuals greeted the emergency whole-heartedly. And almost all of these intellectuals belonged to the then CPI and supporters of the Soviet Russia.¹

By imposing the Emergency, Indira Gandhi banned the RSS, Jana Sangh, Ananda Marg, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Naxalites or the CPI (ML). On the one hand, she arrested and imprisoned her political opponents on a large scale, and on

the other hand, she took away the fundamental rights of the people of the country, including freedom of the press, and unleashed a flood of atrocities in the country. Later, the Shah Commission report revealed that 1,20,000 people were arrested across the country during the Emergency. Of these, 34,988 and 75,818 were arrested under the infamous MISA and DISIR Acts, respectively. Of those arrested during this time were: Vijayaraje Scindia, Jayaprakash Narayan, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Raj Narain, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, George Fernandes, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Arun Jaitley etc. CPIM leaders like Jyotirmoy Basu and V S Achuthanandan were also arrested. Samar Sen noted that in West Bengal, Dipankar Chakraborty, editor of *Aneek*, a Bengali monthly journal, Gourkishore Ghosh, an anti-communist writer, were also arrested. Even Jyotirmoy Dutta, editor of *Kolkata* could not avoid police handcuff.²

But what was the role of the RSS leadership during this time? Today, they are not talking about it. They supported Indira Gandhi's imposition of the Emergency. They appealed to Indira Gandhi for the release of the arrested RSS workers, and even agreed to give a bond for their release. Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself was free on parole outside the jail for most of his imprisonment after consulting and negotiating with Indira Gandhi. These are things that the BJP and Sangh leaders are trying to suppress surreptitiously. And at the same time, just not unlike a thief who is caught shouts at

others and escapes, confusing others, in the same way, the BJP-RSS people are trying to hide their real nature and role they played then by campaigning loudly against Indira Gandhi, Congress and the Emergency.

On July 7, Prafulla Ketkar, in the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, wrote in the beginning of the 'editorial' entitled *Spirit of the Constitution: Real Enemies Versus True Saviours*, continuing the old sayings: Fifty years have passed since the dark days of the Emergency. The central government (BJP) is now observing this infamous day (June 25) as *Samvidhan Hatya Diwas—the day of the murderous onslaught on the Constitution*. By imposing this Emergency, Indira Gandhi, as an ambitious leader, wanted to suppress the *selfless leader* like JP (Jayprakash Narayan) and *nationalist organisation* like RSS.

Nowhere in the piece did the scribe mention the active political opposition of the RSS lodged at the time. In this process, the leaders of the Sangh family want to hide their true nature by using old, monotonous and over-used phrases to conceal the truth and mislead the people of the country. To turn the issue around, the scribe then brought up the topic of *communists* in this editorial and wrote that Jayprakash Narayan and the RSS were continuously fighting against the Emergency and the communists had distanced themselves from the fight against this Emergency.³ Here, by communists, the RSS people meant the CPIM.⁴ Without going into the debate about whether the CPIM was in the forefront of the fight at that time, one can ask how the

RSS workers, who were in jail and released on bail by the mercy of Indira Gandhi, were fighting against the Emergency outside.

In an article published on June 25, 2023 in the *Janata Weekly* Shivasundar wrote:

It is true that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Jana Sangh, and their affiliate organisations have indeed played a role in the political protests that led to the declaration of a state of Emergency. But it also has to be acknowledged that once it was imposed; leaders of the RSS and the Jana Sangh made secret agreements supporting the Emergency with the very same Indira Gandhi, whom they called a dictator.

The BJP and the Sangh-paribar have been continually attempting to hide the pages of this very embarrassing history, and their opportunistic anti-people activities of the time.

It may be recalled that on August 22, 1975, RSS chief Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras wrote a letter to Indira Gandhi, requesting her to put an end to all misunderstandings about the RSS and to assure her that the RSS was working only for the betterment of *Hindus* and was not at all opposed to the Indira-led government. In November 1976, thirty RSS leaders including Madhavrao Mule, Dattapanth Thengari, Moropant Pingle and others wrote a letter to Indira Gandhi stating that if she released all the arrested RSS workers, they would support the Emergency she had declared. This letter they wrote was called the 'Documents of Surrender'.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself had also instructed the ABVP leaders to beg for an unconditional pardon from Indira Gandhi!⁵

The gist of the prop and cry staged by the RSS: They were the only ones who fought to protect the country's constitution at that time, which is completely inconsistent with historical facts. RSS leader Dattatreya Hosable said that Indira Gandhi herself exposed her hypocrisy by adding the words *secularism* and *socialism* to the constitution during the emergency! Not only that, this scribe also writes that in 1949, while presenting the *final draft* of the constitution, Baba Saheb Ambedkar *correctly* identified the communists as *enemies* of the constitution!⁶ Ambedkar said without hesitation that he did not believe in communism. He even called the Russian communists 'frauds'! However, it is not clear whether he really called the contemporary undivided communists as enemies of the constitution. But what Dr Ambedkar said is quote worthy:

*The condemnation of the Constitution largely comes from two-quarters, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Why do they condemn the Constitution? Is it because it is really a bad Constitution? I venture to say 'no'. The Communist Party want a Constitution based upon the principle of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They condemn the Constitution because it is based upon parliamentary democracy.*⁷

This editorial report of the *Organiser* has already been spread across the internet for the widest possible publicity. A

report based on this editorial has also been published with great importance in an all-India English newspaper. This statement of the RSS has concealed their real role during the Emergency and disguised their real position by inventing various rainbow-coloured words.

The dichotomy between the face and the real-show of the BJP and RSS comes quite open when one is informed that Atal Bihari Vajpayee, BJP higher-up and RSS origin, described Indira Gandhi as *Ma Durga* after India won Pakistan war in 1971. Even, on December 22, 1971, 'the then RSS boss, M S Golwalkar, wrote a congratulatory letter to the Prime Minister reeking of fulsome praise. *The biggest measure of credit for this achievement goes to you*'.⁸

It is very important to expose this cunning trick of the *Sangh Paribar*. They often hide what they really want and talk about practising some public-interest projects. Then at the right time, the bottle is broken and the *bottle monster* comes out.

Political science teacher Subhash Palsikar writes in his thought-provoking article entitled *The Hindi in Hindutva*:

Debates over Hindutva have often remained confined to the question of religion. But *Hindutva as an ideology and politics should be understood not mere in terms of the Hindu-Muslim question*. True, the practical politics of Hindutva obsessively revolves around, and is based on, deep Islamophobia, coupled *with anti-minority sentiments and Hindu supremacy*. But at the root of it is a more general

imagination that democracy means a free play for the majority community. *In the case of the language question, too, it would be a mistake to ignore this foundational belief that has shaped Hindutva.*⁹ (*Bold types ours-AC*).

And the recent examples of the authoritarian practice of Hindutva state power in different parts of the country regarding language are not to be ignored at all. In the meantime, the black snakes of Hindutva fascism are slithering.

Unaware of the depth and true nature of the present day crisis created, nourished and patronised by the fascist rulers of the BJP government at the behest of the RSS, at this moment, if people are not able to bring forward the struggle of the open road in a united manner, they will have to face a terrible experience in near future. □□□

July 18-21, 2025

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- 1 Samar Sen: *Babu Brittanta*, Dey's Publishing. Calcutta, 1991 ed. p. 87.
- 2 Samar Sen: *Babu Brittanta*, Dey's Publishing. Calcutta, 1991 ed. p. 88
- 3 Samar Sen wrote of the role of CPIM opposing Indira Gandhi in the year 1971-1972: And what about the CPM's role in the extennation of the Naxalites in 1970-71? It is no use turning out the forgotten cupboards. But a word would not be out of place on the CPM's instant somersault when India's armed forces intervened in the Mujib episode. Anti-Indira at home, but support of the national government in times of conflict with other countries—the CPM has always more or less maintained this Second International stance.

—*Babu's Tale*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1991, ed. p. 83.

- 4 Samar Sen wrote: Before emergency, Jyoti Basu, famous leader of CPIM, in a mass-assembly held at the Kolkata Maidan shared the dias with Jayprakash Narayan and oathed that his party would support Jayprakash when the people's rights would be at bay. But during emergency and at the time of the numbers of political leaders' being arrested

and when the people were devoid of any democratic right, his partymen were unfound in the streets in any protest movement.—Samar Sen: *Babu Brittanta*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1991 ed. p.88.

- 5 Sivasundar: The Emergency and the Sangh Parivar's Tacit Support to Indira Gandhi. *Janata Weekly*, June 29, 2025.
6 The scribe has written : Dr Ambedkar was unmistakable when he called out communists

as the enemies of the Constitution while dedicating the final draft to the nation in 1949. Various outfits with allegiance to communism have.

—*Organizer*, July 7, 2025.

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POLITICS OF DIPLOMACY

How “Diplomatic” is “Diplomatic” Communication?

Nilofar Suhrawardy

DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATION exercised by India—following the four-day war with Pakistan—has, ironically, raised several questions, which still remain largely unanswered. This primarily also refers to delegations sent by India to more than 30 countries after a ceasefire, described by India as “pause” in the war. Seven delegations were sent to convince other countries about “terrorist” designs of Pakistan. The world is well aware that India and Pakistan are “permanent enemies.” This also suggests that no country expects either India or Pakistan to speak well about each other. On its part, India tried exercising a smart diplomatic strategy. But its credibility and its reach were limited. Undeniably, these delegations received substantial media coverage. This was however largely limited to India. There is yet another angle regarding nature of these delegations which cannot be missed. Members of these delegations were not con-

fined to ruling coalition (Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] and its allies), but each included members from opposition parties. Besides, each included at least one member from the minority community. One cannot but deliberate on what was the primary reason behind this. Maybe, India desired to present its image as a “united,” “secular” country.

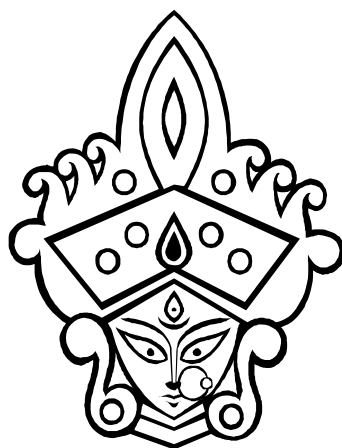
Several views have circulated regarding inclusion of opposition members. It may be noted, members selected from opposition parties have great personalities and most are well known as good speakers, particularly in English. Of course, BJP is not devoid of such members. It is also possible; an aim of BJP may have been to attract these members to its party. However, it cannot be ignored that most of these opposition members have a strong base in their respective parties and a few have their own parties. Besides, they have strongly spoken against BJP in the Parliament on several issues. Includ-

ing them was perhaps of BJP's plan to gain greater publicity for this diplomatic drive. It did for a while, but now it seems, it bears little relevance as it hardly is talked about.

The preceding point suggests that it would be probably erroneous to regard the diplomatic communication engaged in by sending delegations to various countries as a “success.” In addition, given that the same countries have their embassies in India, instead of sending delegations there, interaction with their envoys here itself could have been attempted to “convince” them about New Delhi's stand. In addition, India has its envoys posted in the same countries that probably have played their respective diplomatic parts on this front. It is amazing, within just a day or two of their visits to selected countries, delegations were expected to do more than what envoys have attempted.

Besides, it is difficult to accept, that a brief interaction with Indian delegation was expected to succeed in making leaders of other countries accept and believe what India desired. India, it must be accepted is not a superpower. And Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi does

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not have the same stature as that of United States' President Donald Trump. Nowadays, quite a few countries find it difficult to believe and accept credibility of even what Trump says. Against this backdrop, one is compelled to question the strategic credibility of diplomatic communication indulged in by India by sending delegations. They were not invited. India sent them out of its own choice and decision. It may be viewed as one-sided diplomatic communication indulged in by India. From this angle, it is possible; the greater motive was this strategy's "appeal" for people within India. This was viewed politically important in view of forthcoming assembly elections.

Clearly, it is apparent, that it is difficult to view "diplomatic communication" engaged in by India following the four-day Indo-Pak war as diplomatic. Nor can the communication-strategy exercised be regarded as effective. In essence, diplomatic strategy on convincing other countries' leaders is developed gradually over a period of time through exercise of various communication tools. Considering that India appears to have been "forced" or perhaps "forced" itself to exercise it in this manner only suggests that it has probably not given it much importance for quite some time. Besides, with international media having kept a close eye on India-Pakistan tension and leaders of a few countries having interacted with leaders of both countries while the war lasted, they certainly were not oblivious of what the sub-continent had been through. Certainly, communica-

tion strategies can be exercised and manipulated as desired by those in power in the domestic terrain but the same cannot be done in foreign land. Besides, it is important to keep in mind, Modi is an Indian ruler and as mentioned earlier, India is not a superpower. Even at home, at present, his party is in power because of support offered by its allies as it failed to win majority in 2024 parliamentary elections. Even if diplomatic cards are used to the utmost, their success is dependent on whether communication strategy exercised can be really be viewed as diplomatic or not.

Ironically, diplomatic communication exercised by other countries, including United States, has faced too many tests in recent past raising questions about its credibility. One is compelled to question intentions of those engaged in this exercise and more. There is no doubt that as United States is a superpower, its diplomacy is given substantial importance globally. In other words, there is little doubt, that its diplomacy cannot be ignored. President Trump appears to have no qualms about throwing his diplomatic weight around and attracting the maximum attention possible. In essence, he appears to be extra-concerned about gaining maximum possible media coverage too. It isn't surprising that to a degree, sections of American media are viewed as probably controlled. Where US diplomacy is concerned, it would be perhaps erroneous to view that pursued by Trump along party lines that is Republican. This may be illustrated by their being practically no difference,

till date, in policies of US Presidents- whether Republican or Democratic- towards Russia, United Kingdom, Israel and other countries. The difference lies in manner of their pursuing the same. As for instance, many chose to pursue these silently, while Trump does the same loudly and openly, together with taking the credit for it.

His predecessor, Joe Biden's stand towards Ukraine was reflected by United States' arm supplies for Ukraine. Biden barely gave any diplomatic importance to considering any ceasefire and end the conflict. It was and is apparent that Ukraine-crisis is viewed by Washington as "war" between USA and Russia. Undeniably, at a point—that is initially, Trump did make noise about bringing all conflicts to a halt. This included his stand regarding Ukraine-crisis also. His recent comments (July 15, 2025), clearly indicated that there seems no change in his approach towards Ukraine from what was displayed by Biden. Regarding his talk about "ceasefire," Trump has indulged in it on various other fronts too without much consistency. This only suggests that his diplomatic approach towards "ceasefire" cannot be dependent on for too long. This is fairly evident in his diplomatic approach regarding Gaza-ceasefire as well as that deliberated on the Iran front, prior to 12-day Iran-Israel war.

There is no denying, Trump's "stand" on ceasefires has earned him media coverage and also enhanced the importance of his diplomatic role on certain issues. However, this is one side of the

diplomatic picture. It would have had some “diplomatic” significance if ceasefire was actually pursued. This is hardly suggested by continuity of Israeli strikes against Palestinians, Gaza-genocide, their being moved towards “concentration camps” with the real aim probably being “ethnic cleansing.” The immediate question is naturally when and how was “ceasefire” even considered, if not seriously than at least minimally? But, yes, certainly “diplomatic” importance as well as abundant media coverage has been accorded to whatever has been voiced by Trump along these lines. What does this really imply? What can one say about hype raised about “ceasefire” as well as it being considered along “conditional” lines? It seems, irrespective of limited, minimal and/or no element of ceasefire’s implementation, it did bear some importance for Trump. Notwithstanding the fact that it invited criticism also, what probably pleased Trump was his being in the limelight? Simply speaking, its primary significance was apparently that of Trump’s “diplomatic” approach—regarding ceasefire gaining global attention along with media coverage.

In the name of ceasefire, whether diplomacy may be viewed as having failed, succeeded or having had limited impact, what carries relevance here is its contribution to gaining substantial coverage as well as attention. Paradoxically, this clearly points to a strange linkage of the manner in which diplomatic communication seems to be exercised nowadays. Diplo-

matically, success or failure on certain issues bears little importance if the same succeeds in helping master strategists gain the required global attention, including media coverage. Undeniably, required tools of communication help their stand gain limelight. Clearly, media coverage as well as other tools of communication, including official press releases, diplomatic interaction help key players propagate their stand, irrespective of the fact that little importance is held by the same diplomatically. It may be noted, effective impact of diplomatic communication, that is its success, seems to hold little relevance. Continuation of war, without any ceasefire, even though latter is talked about can hardly be viewed as diplomacy being actually practised. But that “diplomatic” communication in this direction plays its role cannot be ignored. Its role as pointed out is that of propagating “diplomatic rhetoric” for the sake of gaining attention and not actually its implementation. This clearly stands out in “diplomatic” communication by US and to a degree by its allies about “ceasefire” in several areas.

The new importance being gained by “diplomatic” communication, ironically, seems hardly directed towards actual diplomatic pursuits. This issue, that is “diplomatic” communication, may not have demanded attention if in recent days, it was hardly marked by any diplomatic purpose. Nowadays, it seems to be given greater importance by certain powers with little concern for diplomatic success, with focus on dialogue replacing con-

flict. That is, it is not playing the role it is actually supposed to, diplomatically. Paradoxically, not too long ago, US seemed to be giving some importance to talks with Iran. Certainly, these had apparently been initiated with several rounds having been held regarding Iran’s nuclear programme. But soon it became difficult to accept that the real intention behind their being initiated was really diplomatic. Nevertheless, it is possible, Israel was not pleased by prospects of its key supporter considering “diplomatic” ties with its enemy—Iran. Israel has never kept its animosity with Iran a secret. Nor it ever had two opinions about striking at Iran. What matters here in context of United States’ communication diplomacy is timing of Israel having initiated the strikes. It is well known that Israel banks immensely on support from US. Without support from US, it has been said, Israel’s war against Iran would not have lasted 12 days. This war had no winner or loser, to end which, US had to adopt a tough stand following Iran’s strikes against its base in Qatar and as Israel couldn’t afford to continue, it yielded.

The 12-day war may be viewed as a strong test of United States’ diplomatic communication. When Israel launched preemptive strikes against Iran, United States’ approach regarding its talks with Iran was certainly put to a strong test. United States’ diplomatic communication had little relevance while the war lasted. The same lost its credibility when US chose to actually get openly involved in the war.

The height reached by various tools of communication have certainly enhanced their importance as important means of diplomacy also, that is diplomatic communication. The hard truth is that the same loses its credibility when it is not genuinely practised to pursue diplomacy but is accompanied by war-oriented moves. Paradoxically, undue importance is accorded to communication, the nature of which is hardly genuine. It is clearly largely biased – based on manufactured news - leading to communication gaps, communication lapses, misunderstandings, communication errors and so forth. This marks indulgence in “diplomatic” rhetoric or communication with hardly any con-

cern for peace and/or diplomacy. Given that it is primarily motivated towards promoting a particular image in addition to war-oriented moves, viewing the same as diplomatic communication would probably be erroneous.

If communication at various levels and in different parts of world was controlled only by one party/country or primarily by those favouring it, it would not have been easy to raise questions about its nature. Since it is not, it is not difficult for recipients of “news” to comprehend when it is genuine/real and when it is not. In this context, manipulated diplomatic communication does succeed in promoting images and also flattering egos but its diplomatic credibility isn't easily ac-

ceptable and it faces strong criticism. Not surprisingly, the amazing degree to which manipulated diplomatic communication has begun being exercised is posing a strong test for diplomacy, communication and also quite a few nations' foreign policies, including that of United States! □□□

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COLLAPSE OF CAPITALISM

A Glimmer of Hope

T Vijayendra

THE WORLD HAS SUDDENLY turned toxic in the last few years! People are seeing atrocities like Gaza for the first time. Black clouds signalling and impending World War III are hovering on the horizon. Things have taken such a dark turn even the most optimistic souls in the world are losing hope and the end of the human story appears imminent.

In the 20th century, progressives would always give the example of Cuba as a source of hope. This writer personally thinks Cuba is still a source of hope. But now there is another source, at least in India—it's called COVID!

On the evening of 24th March 2020, the Government of India

ordered a nationwide lock-down for 21 days, limiting the movement of the entire 1.38 billion (138 crore) population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22nd March, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in COVID-19 affected countries. The lock down was put in place when the number of confirmed positive corona-virus cases in India was approximately 500. Upon its announcement, a mass movement of people across the country took place, described as the largest since the partition of India in 1947. According to observers, the lock-down had helped slow down the growth

rate of the pandemic by 6th April to a rate of doubling every six days, and by 18th April, to a rate of doubling every eight days. As the end of the first lock-down period approached, state governments and other advisory committees recommended extending the lock-down. The governments of Odisha and Punjab extended the state lock-downs to 1st May. Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Telangana followed suit. On 14th April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the nationwide lockdown until 3rd May, on the written recommendation of governors and lieutenant governors of all the states, with conditional relaxations after 20th April for those regions where the spread had been contained or was minimal.

On 1st May, the Government of India extended the nationwide lock-down by a further two weeks until 17th May. The Gov-

ernment divided all the districts into three zones based on the spread of the virus—green, red, and orange—with relaxations applied accordingly.

On 17th May, the lock-down was further extended until 31st May by the National Disaster Management Authority.

The lock-downs helped release a tremendous amount of anti-development creativity among the Indian masses—such as has never been seen in the World! The response from Nature was even more amazing! What was the reason behind this? In truth it was the centuries of repression as well as people's movements against development that led to it. Now the million dollar question is whether the lock-down conditions can be repeated? If yes, there is a glimmer of hope!

So what were the lock down conditions? The answer in one sentence: ***The Complete Collapse of Capitalism!***

Now are there reasons to hope for this collapse to happen again? There are good reasons to hope for a permanent collapse or implosion of capitalism.

RESOURCE DEPLETION

Human society uses natural resources for its survival and reproduction. Other living beings depend directly or indirectly on plant resources which are renewable. In addition to these, human beings also use non-renewable resources including minerals such as coal and petroleum and metals such as gold, silver, copper and iron. They are considered non-renewable because their quantity is fixed and the more people use them the less is left of them, to use.

For industrial societies, petroleum and coal are the basic sources of energy and their depletion can spell doom for their way of life.

Now, there is a law of extraction of these non-renewable resources. It was first discovered in the case of oil by M King Hubbert and is called, 'Peak Oil'. It says that when half the resources are extracted (taken out), then the production will start falling. That is, the peak of production occurs when half the oil is taken out. It applies to a particular well, to a region, to a country, and to the whole world. Today, everybody knows that it applies not just to oil but to all mineral resources. Scientists have calculated the peak year for almost all the important minerals. And, the overwhelming majority of them will peak before 2030, starting with oil! The data is almost accurate and might differ only by a few percentage points, but the fact remains that the years of industrial society as it exists are numbered and the end will come in a decade or so. The collapse of industrial society will be a 'never before' event because that will be the end of the historical process of ever-increasing wealth that human society has seen in the last few thousand years.

The champions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution such as the World Economic Forum say that the sun is a never exhausting resource and that solar energy and wind can easily replace fossil fuels. The record so far is dismal because the dependence on fossil fuels has not decreased. This year USA, UK, and Germany are bringing back coal plants due to a sharp reduction in energy sup-

plies, particularly natural gas, following the Ukraine war. Both solar and hydro power too need a lot of metals. Solar needs copper and some rare earths all of which are in short supply and will be increasingly so.

In addition, solar power requires vast amount of vacant land surface to capture sunlight. Already humans are using more than 90% of earth's resources, stealing them from other species. This will further erode the share of other species. Similarly, wind energy takes up a lot of air space, endangering birds. And this is leaving aside the massive waste disposal problem posed by renewable energy, which has already begun to show.

There is a theoretical argument also. It essentially says that these alternative energy sources—solar, wind, nuclear, Hydrogen etc all are meant to produce electricity. But the infrastructure needed to produce them and use them (transmission and distribution) are all based on fossil fuel and other metals that are peaking. In other words, while the alternative energy sources are 'feasible' they are not 'viable'!

In the short term, even renewable resources cannot help people because industrial capitalist society has used them at a rate higher than the rate of their natural reproduction. That is, it has cut more trees than the number of new ones that are growing; it has used more water than is being replenished naturally, and so on. Water tables all over the world are falling. It will take decades to drastically reduced extraction for these resources to get back to the status

of 'renewable'. In fact, the capitalist system has mined them in the same way that it has mined non-renewable resources.

While there is a window of a few years before resource depletion triggers a collapse, global warming does not give the society any window!

GLOBAL WARMING

This has received maximum attention in the media due to the recent IPCC report which has drawn everyone's attention to the gravity of the situation. "If we are to stay below 1.5°C global warming, emissions have to peak no later than 2020. Emissions must also be cut by half by 2030, and to net zero by 2040. We need an immediate emergency response by policymakers, businesses, and civil society, aimed at an unprecedented transformation of all sectors of society. It's time to act!" Well, the world has passed that deadline of 2020.

The levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are the main drivers of climate change. They are measured in 'parts per million (ppm)' and the safe levels are considered to be a maximum of 350, ideally less. They have hit a new record high, the UN said, warning "The window of opportunity for action is al-

most closed." Today (May 2023) it is 424 ppm! It is probably more correct to say that the window of opportunity for action is closed. No government is actually prepared to reduce emissions. In fact, this year they have been busy with wars which only increase emissions. A group of scientists have claimed that people are moving towards a temperature increase of 3.2 degrees centigrade and have asked the scientific community to launch global civil disobedience!

ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION

The year 2022 saw some of the worst effects of ecological degradation due to climate change. Europe has seen the worst drought in 500 years. Both the USA and China too are facing drought in large areas. Now these are huge areas and include most of the 'developed countries' as well as some of the 'food baskets' of the world. Pakistan has faced huge floods involving 30 million people. In India too, large parts of the country have faced floods.

GROWING INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL UNREST

The Annual Oxfam report points at growing inequality in the world. These inequalities continue to create protest movements all over the world. These movements are against the livelihoods crisis and the steep rise in the price of essentials brought on initially by the Covid-19 pandemic and the crippling lockdowns that followed, and exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. Global warming, coupled with resource depletion, ecological disaster, growing people's movement, and wars among capitalist nations

can together trigger a collapse of the entire global system.

Already Sri Lanka and 27 other small countries are going through a process of collapse. In 2023, people are witnessing huge strikes in UK, France and Netherlands against inflation and for higher wages. In coming years many other small and medium sized countries will follow suit, and then the bigger countries too may fall down like Humpty Dumpty. The recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank shows that the collapse has begun. It is logical to conclude that capitalism can neither solve these problems nor can it outlive them. People need to work towards alternatives without delay.

Chomsky once said that that for too long the indigenous people have borne the burden of saving the Earth. It is time that other people shared it. Well for the last few years a lot of evidence is coming that other people are indeed joining them!

In true anarchist fashion, many people are ignoring capitalism and the state and have taken to 'off grid living', rebuilding their lives on their own, particularly in rural areas.

So is there a hope?

Yes. Capitalism is tirelessly searching for a source of energy which will last forever. But this is a hopeless enterprise. On the other hand, many ordinary people are getting back to the land, and reviving the health of renewable resources. If the rest of the world joins them in minimising economic activity like during the lock-down period—except, this time voluntarily—then humanity has a fighting chance at survival. ■■■ July 4, 2025

For **Frontier** Contact

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CAPITALISM AND HINDU NATIONALISM

Tracing the Genealogy of a 'Brand New Nation'

Arup Kumar Sen

THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED book, bearing the title *'Brand New Nation: Capitalist Dreams and Nationalist Designs in Twenty-First-Century India'* (Stanford University Press, 2020; Indian Edition, Harper Business, 2021) authored by Ravinder Kaur is a seminal one. It has explored in the context of India, the emerging organic connection between capitalism and Hindu nationalism in the 21st century in imaginative ways.

In the very beginning of her discourse, the author has clarified the central theme explored in the book: "...internalisation of the market logic reconfiguring the nation-state into an enclosed commercial-cultural zone is what I call the *brand new nation*: the nation revitalised and renewed as a profitable business enterprise with claims to ownership over cultural property within its territory... Thus, twentieth-century *nation building* is increasingly being replaced by twentieth-first-century *nation branding*." (pp. 8,10). How the process of *nation branding* is organically connected with capitalist transformation has also been clarified: "I propose that the brand new nation—recrafted and repackaged as a branded enclosure for capital in the twenty-first century—has emerged from within the structures of unbridled free markets and centralised state governance and of the spectacular imagination

of utopian dream-worlds in capitalist design." (p.13)

What is the political outcome of branding the nation? To put it in the words of the author: "The capitalisation of the nation as a branded investment destination is an opportunity to at once *add value* to the nation by generating capital and, in doing so, gain prestige and influence in the world. The global celebration of the nation brand is even taken as an expression of national pride, fuelling hyper-nationalist movements in many parts of the postcolonial world." (p.18)

The author has argued that the 'brand new nation' emerged in a specific historical juncture: "The project of branding national territories as investment destinations began evolving into a governmental practice in the 1990s on the premise that companies and nations share similar corporate features and can be imagined, branded, and capitalised likewise." (p.21)

In the context of India, the author has narrated the mode of corporatisation of governance over time: "In Delhi and Davos, I was often introduced, with a hint of admiration, to government officials—politicians or bureaucrats—as CEOs, especially the ones seen as key players in the India growth story...This informal practice of addressing political executives as CEOs gained currency with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, considered the main architect of India's

economic reforms, a mantle that the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, has enthusiastically assumed." (p.36)

In the chapter titled 'Economy of Hope', the author has deconstructed the coinage 'India Shining': "In early 2004, the Indian Ministry of Finance commissioned an advertisement to invite investors worldwide to consider investment opportunities in 'India Shining'—an allusion to a resource-rich India that had regained its golden shine after a long spell of colonial darkness." (p.54)

'Incredible India' is another marketing campaign deconstructed in the book. In doing so, the author has made a significant observation: "...what has not been easily absorbed is India's Muslim past in Incredible India. The catalogue of images that constitutes Incredible India is a pointer in this direction. The sole exception to this rule is the presence of the Taj Mahal—now pitched as the ultimate sign of consumption and pleasure. The monument is presented in global publicity as a priceless and unattainable commodity that consumers can only dream and aspire to." (pp. 118-19)

'India Adda' at Davos, being promoted to draw the attention of global capital, has been interrogated in the book: "India Adda at Davos...was the new initiative that would finally showcase the magical effect of the fabled India story on a global scale...The first disclosure the India Adda offers concerns the power play, negotiations, and even compromises that constitute the free market. It reveals the ways in which state power

and capital cohabit and even shape the contours of the fully opened-up Indian market enclave.”(pp. 161, 191)

The final chapter of the book titled ‘Uncommon Futures’ begins with a seminal observation: “On January 23, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the world’s billionaires, the celebrated captains of industry, and world leaders assembled at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The address was a highly anticipated event—it was the first time in twenty years that

an Indian prime minister was present in Davos.”(p. 243) In this chapter, the author has located the genealogy of a major transformation in the socio-political history of postcolonial India: “The alliance between Hindu cultural nationalism and market liberalisation began taking shape in the aftermath of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat during Narendra Modi’s tenure as the state’s chief minister... It also produced Brand Modi: a key feature in the life of the brand new nation. Brand Modi is an embodiment of the entangle-

ments between the imperatives of capitalist growth and the cultural nationalism that shapes twenty-first-century politics.”(pp. 247-48)

Ravinder Kaur’s book has other important chapters. How the ‘brand new nation’ is visually represented in the media, has been brilliantly explored in the book. The author has enlightened the readers about the economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions of the ‘brand new India’ unfolding in the 21st century.

□□□

‘AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH’

American Politics and Climate Change Denial

Pradip Datta

IN THE PAST SIXTY years, the United States has made the most significant contributions to the advancement of climate science. American scientist Charles David Keeling demonstrated, through his measurements at Mauna Loa in Hawaii, that carbon dioxide levels were steadily rising. Researchers from NASA’s GISS and NOAA’s Physical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory conducted field studies in the Arctic, Antarctic, and across every continent, confirming the increase in emissions. And yet, the United States has also been the epicentre of the greatest amount of scepticism and conspiracy surrounding global warming.

Many even claimed that the rise in carbon dioxide levels was something to celebrate, arguing it would bring numerous benefits. The Greening Earth Society, created under the initiative of the Western Fuels Association, stated that the carbon di-

oxide emissions resulting from burning fossil fuels were beneficial to life on Earth. They claimed there was no reason to worry even if atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reached 750 ppm—almost three times the pre-industrial level—because plants need a great deal of carbon dioxide for photosynthesis.

Although such views were widely disseminated without regard for scientific evidence, not a single scientific paper was published refuting the idea that human activity is driving global warming. In the early 2000s, Professor Naomi Oreskes conducted a study to understand the level of consensus among scientists on emissions. She surveyed 928 peer-reviewed scientific articles published between 1993 and 2003 on climate change. She selected 10% of those papers as a random sample and found that 75% of them stated human activity was responsible for warming. The re-

maining 25% raised questions about methodological challenges or the history of the climate. None of them argued against the idea that global warming is caused by human actions.

In March 2001, the Bush administration declared that climate science was too uncertain to justify adopting the Kyoto Protocol—a treaty among various nations, negotiated in Kyoto, Japan, to control emissions. They argued that accepting the protocol would hinder economic growth and harm the United States. When the US withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol initiative, the entire effort nearly collapsed. Among the countries listed in Annex I of the Protocol, the US alone was responsible for 34% of emissions. For the protocol to be enforced, the participating countries had to account for at least 55% of global emissions collectively. Most participant nations viewed the Kyoto Protocol as an important first step. Even though the protocol was set to expire in 2012, global emissions would not stabilise without long-term ac-

tion. Even if all developed countries, including the US, adhered to it, carbon dioxide emissions were still projected to surpass 500 ppm within a few centuries. Moreover, without the participation of countries like China and India, emission reductions would not be effective. But when the US itself showed no urgency, countries like China and India had little incentive to bear the costs and responsibilities of emission reduction. Thus, it's fair to say that the US undermined the Kyoto Protocol from the start. Everyone understood that unless the US signed an international agreement, reducing emissions would be impossible—which is exactly what Bush wanted.

That same year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Third Assessment Report. It stated:

'Since the beginning of global temperature measurements 135 years ago, the 1990s had been the warmest decade. Between 1901 and 2000, global temperatures had increased by 0.6°C. Sea levels had risen; ice sheets and snow-covered regions had decreased. Crop yields in tropical areas would decline, water scarcity would become severe, and the number of people affected by vector-borne and waterborne diseases like malaria and cholera would increase. Rising sea levels and sediment buildup in rivers would worsen flooding'.

While the IPCC's statement shook the world, the Bush administration remained unmoved. The White House under Bush was the central hub for spreading the false narrative that glo-

bal warming wasn't happening. Scientists like James Hansen, who had long been warning the public about this grave threat, found their voices suppressed rather than heard. In 2001, Bush appointed his favourite oil industry insider, Philip Cooney, to oversee environmental policy at the White House. Prior to that, Cooney had spent six years at the American Petroleum Institute. His job was to ensure that no international consensus formed against global warming. He was instrumental in spreading doubt about the carbon emissions from oil and coal.

GOVERNMENT SUPPRESSION OF SCIENCE

In 2002, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a 263-page document titled *Report on the Environment*. The report stated that due to steadily increasing greenhouse gas emissions, America's temperature could rise by 1.7 to 5 degrees Celsius during the 21st century. President George W Bush dismissed the findings of this years-long research in one stroke, calling it mere bureaucratic opinion.

In 2003, the EPA published another summary of climate science in its *Report on the Environment*. The White House tried to alter the "Global Warming" chapter of this report. They inserted parts of a study funded by the American Petroleum Institute into the document. An internal EPA memo noted that after interference by Philip Cooney, the EPA report "no longer accurately represents scientific consensus."

When the draft report was released to the public, it was found that the section on global

warming caused by greenhouse gases had been removed entirely.

On June 8, 2005, *The New York Times* reported that Philip Cooney had repeatedly edited the EPA report—removing and adding words and lines at his discretion, despite not being a scientist. Yet he had the authority to revise and edit the EPA's findings. When internal White House documents were published by *The New York Times*, it was revealed that Cooney had deleted entire sections of the EPA report that described how global warming could pose severe risks to American citizens. As a result of the scandal, Cooney was forced to resign.

Within two days, it was reported that Cooney had joined the oil giant ExxonMobil in a senior position. This illustrates the deep ties between the fossil fuel industry and opposition to climate action.

It is worth noting here that the American tobacco company Brown & Williamson had previously engaged in similar misinformation campaigns in defence of tobacco. It came to light during a 1960s court case that the company knew millions of people were dying from smoking. An internal memorandum from the company stated: "Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the body of fact that exists in the mind of the general public."

Under President George W Bush, the US administration repeatedly ignored impartial scientific advice, prioritising the interests of powerful lobbies over public welfare. On February 18, 2004, a statement was released bearing the signatures of 60 leading scientists, including 20

Nobel laureates, accusing the Bush administration of deliberately disregarding scientific counsel and making biased policy decisions that undermined the public good.

Frustration within the American scientific community against Bush was mounting. On June 21 of the same year, 48 American Nobel Prize-winning scientists issued a public appeal to vote for Senator John Kerry in the presidential election, emphasising the need for science and technology to be used responsibly in service of the public interest. Of these 48, 19 were Nobel laureates in physics, 12 in chemistry, and 17 in medicine.

Meanwhile, a Pentagon report that same year warned that rising temperatures could lead to conflicts over natural resources, potentially resulting in the loss of control over nuclear weapons. It predicted large-scale unrest and conflict, posing severe threats to US national security. Additionally, experts warned that climate change could displace millions of people, sparking violent clashes over vital resources like water between individuals and groups.

During the 2000 election campaign, George W Bush had promised to reduce carbon emissions. This pledge was shaped into the "Climate Stewardship Act" by Senator John McCain. The Act aimed to reduce emissions to the levels of the year 2000 by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2016. However, the White House vehemently opposed the bill and on both occasions it was introduced in the Senate. It was defeated in 2003 by a vote of 55-43 and again in 2005 by 60-38.

In December 2004, a report by the US National Commission on Energy Policy expressed concern over greenhouse gas emissions and discussed technologies for capturing carbon dioxide from coal-fired power plants. That same month, at an international conference in Buenos Aires, representatives from various countries convened to discuss steps for reducing emissions beyond the Kyoto Protocol. However, the US delegation obstructed the discussions to such an extent that they were formally asked to clarify what kind of meeting formats would be acceptable to them. In response, the Americans submitted a half-page list of restrictive conditions. These included that each session be held for only one day, conducted only once, limited solely to the exchange of existing national policy information, and, "if there were to discuss the future, the future would have to be barred from discussion."

The American memo left other delegates stunned. That same year, at the G8 summit, French President Jacques Chirac remarked:

"It is as clear as daylight that global warming has begun. We must take responsible action. If we do nothing, we will have to bear the consequences. I had the opportunity to discuss this with the President of the United States. You can imagine, if I say I was able to convince him that would be a complete exaggeration."

In 2005, the following year, the G8 summit was chaired by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Months ahead of the summit, Blair had been trying to persuade President Bush that im-

mediate action was necessary. A few weeks before the summit, the science academies of the G8 nations, along with those of China, India, and Brazil, issued a joint statement declaring that the evidence for climate change was clear and growing.

Despite all this, President Bush gave no positive response. James Connaughton, head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, stated at a discussion in London: "We are still working on the issue of causation—the extent to which humans are a factor." The administration officials were attempting to weaken any proposals for joint action with other countries.

At the same time—in 2005—the United States was emitting nearly twice as much accumulated carbon dioxide as China, four times as much as Russia, six times as much as India, and five times as much as Japan.

In February 2005, James Inhofe, the Republican Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, gave a speech titled "*An Update on the Science of Climate Change*." According to Inhofe, global warming was the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people, because many people believed in the concept of man-made warming with religious conviction. Inhofe repeatedly cited American fiction author Michael Crichton in support of his opinion.

During the 1980s, various regions in the southeastern United States experienced acid rain. The government responded by implementing a cap-and-trade system for sulfur dioxide (SO₂), making it financially punitive for those

who emitted more and financially beneficial for those who emitted less. A similar system could have been applied to carbon dioxide emissions. The European Union had already begun implementing such a policy, but the US Congress never approved it. Bill Clinton tried to introduce it during his presidency, and Barack Obama attempted to do so later.

In 2006, after gaining a majority in the Senate, the Democrats informed Congress that the United States' energy policy would be changed. Despite President Bush's reluctance, they pledged to tackle climate change and reduce oil imports. While no significant new measures to reduce carbon emissions were introduced, an energy bill was passed that helped reduce gasoline consumption in the US. However, the main reason the bill passed was that many mem-

bers of Congress supported ethanol production—because they had business interests tied to it. The bill mandated that, by 2022, gasoline retailers would have to sell seven times more ethanol than before. Both major parties—Republicans and Democrats—supported this policy. When the bill passed in the Senate in June 2006, it also proposed increasing the average fuel mileage of vehicles from 25 miles per gallon (1 gallon=3.785 litres, and 1 mile=1.609 kilometres) to 35 miles per gallon in phases. Although the government heavily subsidised ethanol made from crops, the actual reduction in emissions would be minimal.

Meanwhile, without any initiative from the federal administration, the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX) was launched with support from several American and Brazilian companies. CCX members voluntarily

formed a coalition to reduce emissions of six greenhouse gases. Participating institutions and companies that exceeded their emission-reduction targets could earn financial benefits by selling carbon credits. Those that failed to meet their targets would have to buy carbon credits from others. This system not only encouraged emission reductions but also provided financial incentives. Major corporations like Ford, Rolls Royce, IBM, and Motorola participated in this pilot programme. The business community, too, was increasingly concerned about global warming. Many believed that if mandatory carbon emission reductions were implemented in the near future, being technologically prepared in advance would give them a competitive edge.

Several US states also implemented similar mandatory carbon trading systems. In the

সাংস্কৃতিক সমসময়

১৪৯তম সংখ্যা

অক্টোবর ২০২৫

এই সংখ্যার বিষয়সূচী

প্রবন্ধ : শুভাশিস মুখোপাধ্যায় জয়ন্তকুমার ঘোষাল অশোক চট্টোপাধ্যায় সুশান্ত চট্টোপাধ্যায় নোটন কর

প্রীতিলতা বিশ্বাস অমিত বিশ্বাস নন্দিনী ধর বহিঃহোত্রী সুরত রায়

কবিতা : সব্যসাচী দেব জলধি হালদার অজয় নাগ জিএম আনসার স্বপন চক্রবর্তী অরুণশংকর দাশ

মিলিন্দ ভাওয়ার গুলফিসা ফাতিমা প্রমুখ

গল্প : সুশোভন মুখোপাধ্যায় অমিতাভ সরকার বাপ্পাদিত্য জানা দীপক গুহ ব্রতী মুখোপাধ্যায়

দেবাশিস চক্রবর্তী রাজেশকুমার গুলজার ও আরও অনেকে

এছাড়াও আছে ধারাবাহিক বইপত্র ইত্যাদি

প্রকাশিত হবে সেপ্টেম্বর ২০২৫-এর প্রথম সপ্তাহে

যোগাযোগ : ৯৪৩৩৫৮৮৬৩২/৮২৭৪৮২৬৬৩০

সম্ভাব্য মূল্য : ১৫০ টাকা

Northeast, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative was established. Many large companies improved energy efficiency and reduced emissions in their production processes. Numerous universities, schools, municipalities, and non-profit organisations also joined the CCX initiative.

On the other hand, some old friends, several members of the Republican Party, and international leaders like Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Tony Blair tried to persuade President Bush to take action. Still, Bush refrained from taking any steps that would discourage power generation from coal and oil or promote renewable energy. Finally, when he was on the verge of losing power, he mentioned greenhouse gas emissions as the cause of climate change in his 2008 State of the Union address.

In 2006, the Oscar-winning film *An Inconvenient Truth* by former US Vice President Al Gore warned the world that cities like New York and Miami could be submerged under 20 feet of water in the future. The following year, in 2007, global political leaders began taking the issue of global warming much more seriously. So much so that German journalists nicknamed Chancellor Angela Merkel the "Climate Chancellor." Merkel announced that Europe would reduce its carbon emissions by 20% by the year 2020. British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that the UK would reduce emissions by 60% by 2050. Making climate change a central political issue, Kevin Rudd was elected Prime Minister of Australia in December that year—

marking the first time the world had a "green" prime minister. At that time, the politics of global warming was at its peak.

In the same year, 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Fourth Assessment Report. The report stated:

"Warming of the climate system is unequivocal. It is very likely—more than 90% certainty—that the increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is due to the rise in greenhouse gas concentrations. The rise in average air and ocean temperatures and the widespread melting of snow and ice make this abundantly clear. From 1961 to 2003, sea levels rose at an average rate of 1.8 mms per year, and from 1993 to 2003, the rate increased to 3.1 mms per year.

Over the past 100 years, the average global temperature has risen by 0.74°C. Since 1961, it has been observed that over 80% of the additional heat has been absorbed by ocean water, warming to depths of at least 3,000 metres. Between 1993 and 2003, melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica also contributed to sea-level rise. In the last 100 years, the average temperature in the Arctic has increased at twice the global average. Arctic sea ice has decreased by 8%. During summer, this reduction reaches 22%.

Since the 1970s, the intensity of North Atlantic hurricanes has increased, correlating with warmer sea surface temperatures. While similar trends have been observed in other regions, the data there is less reliable. It is very likely

that the intensity of hurricanes will continue to increase in the 21st century. Wind patterns are changing. Precipitation patterns are also shifting—with more rainfall in higher latitudes and less in lower latitudes. The frequency and severity of droughts are increasing. Nights are becoming warmer. Since the 1990s, glaciers have been retreating. Rainfall patterns and wind currents are shifting in the Arctic. Tropical cyclone activity is projected to increase. From 1995 to 2006, 11 out of 12 years were the warmest on record."

Even if one assumes that the concentration of greenhouse gases and airborne particulate matter remains the same as it was in 2000, the temperature is still expected to rise by at least 0.1 degrees Celsius per decade. Due to global warming, the increase in atmospheric water vapour has led to more incidents of intense rainfall in many areas. Over the last fifty years, winters have shortened and summers have lengthened. Heat waves are occurring more frequently. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached 379 ppm, the highest level in the last 650,000 years.

Even after the publication of the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, the Bush administration did not take significant action on climate change. However, it began to show some encouragement for wind and solar energy production.

After Barack Obama assumed office for his first term in 2008, he was unable to establish a comprehensive national climate policy through Congress. Never-

theless, he succeeded in doubling fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks. Additionally, energy efficiency standards were raised for everyday household appliances such as dishwashers, refrigerators, and HVAC systems. Renewable energy projects with a combined capacity of 10,000 megawatts were approved for development on federal lands. In 2009, a landmark clean energy bill triggered what was effectively a small-scale energy revolution. A total of \$90 billion was invested in research and development across multiple areas: wind, solar, geothermal electricity, advanced bio-fuels, electric vehicles, smart grids, clean coal, and low-emission technologies.

Under Obama's first term, various federal agencies collectively reduced emissions by 15%, equivalent to the emissions of approximately 1.5 million cars. Although combating climate change had long been one of Obama's declared goals, his efforts were constrained during his first term due to a major overhaul of the US healthcare system and, in 2010, the Democratic Party's loss of control in the House of Representatives, which limited further progress on climate policy.

According to the US Department of Energy (DOE), the country's energy infrastructure is becoming increasingly vulnerable due to climate change. Weather-related problems are worsening. The disruptions to the power supply in New York and New Jersey during Hurricane Sandy at the end of 2012 were seen as a warning of future catastrophes. Every part of the American energy system—oil

wells, hydroelectric dams, nuclear reactors—is expected to come under increasing strain in the future due to stronger storms, higher temperatures, more frequent droughts, and rising sea levels.

These effects are already becoming visible. During droughts, nuclear and thermal power plants are being forced to shut down or reduce output. Low water levels are delaying coal and oil transport via waterways. Floods and storms are submerging ports, refineries, pipelines, and rail yards. Severe storms and wildfires are damaging transformers and power distribution lines.

In the US, July 2012 was recorded as the hottest month up to that point. Alongside extreme temperatures came a record-breaking drought, severely impacting the southwestern part of the country. Water shortages affected both nuclear and thermal power plants. Hydropower output also declined during the heat. Alarming, about 60% of the nation's thermal power plants are located in regions that are expected to face water scarcity due to climate change.

In September 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). The report unequivocally stated:

Warming of the atmosphere and oceans is evident. Between 1880 and 2012, the average global temperature increased by 0.85 degrees Celsius. The period from 1983 to 2013 was the warmest in the last 1,400 years. Since the 1950s, the rate of sea level rise has been unprecedented.

Between 1901 and 2010, the sea level rose by approximately 19 centimetres. Since the mid-19th century, the average rise in sea level has significantly exceeded the two-thousand-year average. From 1971 to 2010, the upper ocean—up to a depth of 700 metres—warmed rapidly. During this period, the average temperature of the top 75 metres of the ocean increased at a rate of 0.11 degrees Celsius per decade.

The concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, particularly carbon dioxide, has risen to levels unmatched in the last 800,000 years. About 30% of atmospheric carbon dioxide has been absorbed by the oceans, resulting in increased ocean acidity. Glaciers are melting at an accelerated pace. It is stated with high confidence that the mass of the ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica has been continuously decreasing over the past two decades. Springtime snow cover in the Arctic and the Northern Hemisphere is also steadily shrinking. The oceans will continue to warm, and this heat will spread into the deep sea, affecting ocean currents. The current rate of sea level rise is likely to increase even further.

Climate change will also lead to increased carbon dioxide production, and as oceans absorb more of it, acidity will continue to rise. The global water cycle will change. Seasonal disparities will increase in both rainy and arid regions, although some regional variations may occur.

The future temperature of the Earth depends on the cumulative concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and oceans. This means that even if

emissions stop, climate change will continue. If the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide doubles, the temperature is projected to rise by a minimum of 1.5°C and a maximum of 4.5°C. In the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report, the lower bound of this estimate was 2°C.

At the start of his second term in January 2013, in his State of the Union address, President Obama said:

“If Congress does not act swiftly to protect future generations, I will. I will direct my Cabinet to implement whatever steps we can take, now and in the future, to reduce pollution. I will push our society to better prepare for the impacts of climate change and to accelerate the transition toward sustainable energy. In moving away from heavily polluting energy sources, America will increasingly rely on gas as a relatively cleaner fuel.”

In the first week of June 2013, President Obama directed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set carbon emission limits for all new thermal power plants starting that year and for all existing thermal power plants by 2014. At that time, thermal power plants were responsible for 40% of America's carbon emissions. Obama announced that all subsidies for fossil fuels would be discontinued. He also declared that government funding for alternative energy production would be increased so that wind and solar power generation would double by 2020. It was revealed that the federal government aimed to raise the share of renewable energy use from the existing 7.5% to 20% by 2020.

Additionally, the government would launch a Quadrennial Energy Review and a climate data initiative, to collect and publicly disseminate information related to climate and energy.

According to Obama: ‘after scientific analysis, the application of chemistry and physics, and billions of measurements, the question is no longer whether we need to act. The real question is whether we have the courage to act before it's too late’.

He stated that if it was found that the oil stored in Canada's tar sands—intended to be transported to America's Gulf Coast through the controversial Keystone pipeline—would significantly increase emissions, and then he would direct the State Department not to approve it.

The experience of Britain with gas use, starting from the end phase of this plan, was not very pleasant. The country discovered large natural gas reserves in the North Sea. The government found it both economically and politically attractive. At that time, the miners' strike against the Margaret Thatcher government was at its peak. The government and industrial sectors began using gas as an alternative to coal. As a result, the importance of the coal industry declined rapidly. Numerous gas-fired power plants were set up across the country.

However, there's a difference between what nature provides and how much can be extracted. Eventually, a shortage of gas extraction arose. Because of the country's overwhelming dependence on gas for electricity production, Britain had to start importing gas and became vulner-

able to fluctuations in gas prices. Once it was commonly said that Britain had ample gas, but now the country is concerned about energy security.

Therefore, it also took time to ensure that the same kind of risk would not arise in America in the future. However, if the goal of reducing emissions by 80% by 2050, as stated by Obama and other leaders, is to be met, America will also have to reduce its reliance on gas in the future.

Experts believed that with this changed approach by the US, emissions in 2020 would be 17% lower than in 2005. But then Republican Donald Trump became President after Obama. That not only set America back but caused serious harm to the world's climate.

Historically, there has always been a pendulum swing between Democratic and Republican administrations. Four years after Donald Trump came to power; Democratic President Joseph R Biden Jr spent the next four years trying to reverse his predecessor's systematic dismantling of environmental policies. However, the damage caused by the removal or weakening of more than 100 environmental regulations related to air and water pollution could not be fully undone. While emissions controls can help restore air quality and water clarity, greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere, meaning that such corrective measures do not bring proportional benefits to the climate. The greenhouse gases released during Trump's term will trap heat for decades. We lost several crucial years in the fight against climate change.

The world continues to pay the price for America's four-year disregard for climate policy. In 2016, the year Trump was elected, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were at 400 parts per million. Scientists had warned that surpassing the 400 ppm threshold would make it extremely difficult to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius. Yet Trump prioritised economic growth over emission targets, arguing that climate and other environmental regulations harmed job creation. However, his retreat from climate action did not strengthen the economy. Since early 2019, jobs in the auto sector declined, even though vehicle emissions standards were rolled back. Domestic coal production in 2019 was the lowest since 1978. In September 2020, the French government blocked a \$7 billion deal to purchase American natural gas, citing that methane-rich gas produced without regulatory control was extremely harmful to the climate.

Though Biden has rejoined the Paris Agreement and is attempting to establish new climate regulations for the United States, he has not returned to the stricter reforms of the Obama era. Trump not only dismantled US climate policy within four years but also inspired other countries to do the same. The authority of federal agencies to regulate industries was eroded. It became difficult for Biden to implement strong climate rules through executive power, especially because the newly composed Supreme Court with its 6-3 conservative majority-made it even harder to enforce climate policy compared to four years earlier.

America's influence over global climate discussions also diminished due to Trump's harmful policies and the withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement. This slowed down global efforts to reduce emissions and encouraged other governments to weaken their own environmental regulations by following the U.S. example. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, for instance, styled himself after Trump when it came to climate policy. Australia's Scott Morrison, too, promoted coal usage and denied the link between climate change and wildfires, much like Trump. Still, several major countries moved forward with emissions reduction plans without waiting for the United States. China, the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060. Japan made a similar pledge for 2050.

The United Nations' latest annual Emissions Gap Report—which evaluates global pledges against the actions needed to combat climate change—warns that without more aggressive efforts from governments worldwide to reduce emissions, global temperatures could rise by 3.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the year 2100.

In 2023, the United States produced a record amount of oil. Despite a temporary pause on new permits for gas export terminals, the US has become the world's leading exporter of natural gas. Projects already approved and under construction are set to nearly double the country's export capacity by 2027.

The election of Republican Donald Trump as President in

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November 2024 now poses a renewed threat to global climate initiatives that had begun to gain momentum. Just ahead of the US election, in October, Trump hosted a dinner with over 20 top oil and gas company executives, seeking support for his campaign. He reportedly told them that they should contribute \$1 billion to his campaign because, if elected, he would lift the restrictions placed during President Biden's term on oil and gas drilling and exports. He also promised to permit expanded exploration of fossil fuels on federal lands and to roll back newly enacted vehicle emission rules aimed at reducing pollution.

Trump had been publicly opposing Biden's energy and environmental policies for months. During his first term in office, he had repealed or weakened numerous emissions regulations, which Biden later sought to restore and strengthen. Trump is dismantling those rules once more.

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump officially signed an executive order withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement once again.

He has also issued an executive order to halt or delay funding distribution under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which was intended to support electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure development. This move includes scrapping EV-related mandates and eliminating California-specific emission standards.

For decades, California has enjoyed an exemption under the Clean Air Act, allowing it to enforce stricter environmental laws than federal standards. Manufacturers and industries

operating in California must comply with these tougher regulations.

However, not all components of the IRA may be overturned, since major portions of the IRA benefit Republican senators, and their states have been reaping economic advantages from those investments.

With Trump's return to power, the door has opened for rolling back tax credits for EVs. Even before the election, he had declared his intention to end benefits for electric cars. As a result, EV production in the US is expected to decline. Chinese competitors will likely be kept out of the US market due to potential tariffs on EVs. Both China and Europe are facing increasing tariffs on EV exports.

The Trump administration aims to eliminate greenhouse gas emission standards for vehicles. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had established in 2009 that greenhouse gas emissions endanger human health—a legal foundation for regulating emissions under the Clean Air Act. The current EPA has proposed repealing this endangerment finding, arguing that the law does not mandate such regulation. Experts believe that changes to emission policies, vehicle standards, and the rollback of IRA funding could face legal challenges.

The Trump administration has already dismantled several climate-focused institutions created during Biden's term, including the White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy, the Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and the National Climate Task Force.

It has reversed the policy of reducing fees for clean energy projects on federal land by 80% and accelerated permits for oil and gas expansion on those lands—effectively trying to limit the growth of renewable energy.

Through executive orders and EPA directives, Trump's administration has reopened coal mining leases, sought to increase coal-fired power plants, and fast-tracked oil and gas approvals. The Trump administration has proposed repealing Biden-era strict emission standards for coal and natural gas power plants.

During his previous presidency, Trump had also cut green subsidies and increased fossil fuel subsidies. Even if he cuts green subsidies again, countries like Europe, China, and India are unlikely to reduce their investments in renewable energy—as such investments have proven economically beneficial and aligned with national development goals.

The agenda for Trump's second term is to systematically repeal climate regulations from the Biden era via executive orders—removing incentives for EVs and renewable energy, altering emission standards and climate justice programmes, and promoting fossil fuel expansion.

By prioritising fossil fuels over green energy, it aims to reduce incentives for clean energy and is undoing environmental regulations from Biden's time. This is likely to increase emissions in the US and slow down the growth of renewable energy capacity.

As before, Trump's return may encourage other countries to follow his lead. As a result,

the goal of achieving a carbon-free US electricity grid by 2035 is now likely to remain out of reach. □□□

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CARMICHAEL COAL MINING PROJECT

Adani's Opposition to an Activist in Australia Appears to be on a Weak Wicket

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta

TWO DECEASED WAR veterans were named as alleged co-conspirators in a recent submission by a company in the Adani Group in a court in Australia. The somewhat bizarre filing was part of a legal battle that has been going on now for more than four and a half years between the group's mining company on the one hand and an environmental activist Benjamin Pennings, on the other.

The latest court filing indicates the extent to which the wealthy Adani Group will go against an individual, Pennings, who, together with many others, has been opposing the establishment of what was once described as the "world's biggest greenfield coal mine" project located in the Carmichael region of the Galilee

Basin of Queensland in north-east Australia.

The Adani conglomerate is headed by Gautam Adani—one of India's and one of the world's richest businessmen. He is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Pennings grew up in the working-class suburbs of Adelaide and Sydney and now lives with his family in Brisbane. He actively participated in campaigns to stop the coal mine from coming up.

The coal mine project, which includes a railroad and a sea-port at Abbot Point, has been opposed not just by environmental activists like Pennings but also by groups representing the Wangan and Jagalingou aboriginals. They have argued that the

coal mine, the railroad and the port would damage the fragile ecology of the area near the Great Barrier Reef, a "world heritage site" declared by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation).

Global financial institutions from across the world withdrew from funding the mining project as a result of which it had to be scaled down to less than a quarter of what had been originally envisaged. India's biggest public sector bank, the State Bank of India, had planned an investment of one billion US dollars in the project but that too did not materialise.

In the legal battle between Pennings and Adani, the former has been accused by the latter of trying to disrupt mining operations by conducting protests against the Adani company's suppliers and contractors.

On 6 December 2024, the Supreme Court of Queensland in

Brisbane, Australia, dismissed significant portions of a legal case instituted by Adani Mining against 52-year-old Pennings. Presiding over the court, Justice Susan Brown labelled some of the company's claims as "confused and embarrassing."

More than four years earlier, on 11 September 2020, the same court had imposed an injunction on Pennings to stop him from using "confidential material" and ordered he had to take down social media posts and stop campaigning against the coal mine.

Ten days later, on 21 September 2020, Pennings told this writer how his wife and children were being followed and that his home had been raided twice by "detectives" engaged by the Adani Group. This, he argued, was not merely against his right to privacy but illegal at the same time.

Pennings acknowledges that he and others who campaigned against the setting up of the coal mining project were not entirely successful, although the size of the project was drastically reduced.

The Adani project has received the support of politicians in Queensland cutting across party lines on the ground that many jobs have been created. The first consignment of coal was shipped from the Abbot Point to India in December 2021.

In 2023, Adani dropped the part of its claim that Pennings had unlawfully accessed secret information. In her 63-page judgement, Justice Brown threw out allegations that Pennings had caused two contractors to withdraw from the Carmichael coal mining project, calling them "embarrassing" and "inconsistent".

Adani Mining appealed the judgement and made fresh pleas. In March, a different judge, Justice Paul Freeburn published an interlocutory judgement establishing a timeline for Pennings to file an amended defence. He said the case appeared to be "making no real progress towards a trial," according to an exclusive report by Ben Smee published in *The Guardian Australia* on 9 April.

The report quoted Justice Freeburn saying: "And so, some four-and-a-half years into the litigation, the plaintiffs have recently filed and served their fourth version of the statement of claim and now expect, by their proposed directions, a further amended defence, a reply and a regime for particulars and disclosure... This is in respect of events that occurred between 2015 and 2020—that is, between five and 10 years ago."

As mentioned, Adani Mining has named two dead Australian war veterans in court documents alleging they were part of the conspiracy against the coal mining company to disrupt its operations. These veterans are Bill Ryan who passed away in 2019 and Mike Fitzsimon who fought in the Vietnam war and died in 2022.

Two other alleged co-conspirators have been mentioned in the court submission by Adani. However, their names have been misspelt, according to *The Guardian Australia*. The publication interviewed the sons of Ryan and Fitzsimon who used very harsh language against Adani.

Pennings was quoted saying the two war veterans "heroes, dedicating their final years to

protect us from climate breakdown." He added: "I'm not sure what's happened that's led Adani to pick them out now, years after they have passed away. It is just another twist and turn in this harrowing five-year saga."

Adani Mining put out a statement that its legal proceedings were "solely against Mr Pennings" and that other alleged co-conspirators were "simply named in our evidence of Mr Pennings' activities." The statement went on: "Any attempt by Mr Pennings or Mr Ryan's family to suggest otherwise is incorrect and speaks to the way Mr Pennings has conducted himself throughout this case... We make no apologies for protecting our rights and the rights of hard-working Queenslanders to go about their legal and legitimate work."

Justice Freeburn reportedly said: "The proceeding has not languished through a lack of resources. The judgement of Brown J in December 2024 explains that a costs statement prepared by the plaintiffs, in respect of some costs orders in favour of the plaintiff, claimed (Australian dollars) \$1.1 (million)... That was described by Her Honour as a 'startling amount' given the applications occupied less than two days [of] hearing time, albeit with some level of complexity... On any view, the litigation has consumed large slabs of the parties' resources and the court's resources. It is hard to escape an overall impression that the parties are mired in the trenches of interlocutory warfare."

Adani claimed Pennings had "spent years trying to delay these

civil legal proceedings from going to trial.”

However, what seems apparent to this correspondent is that—in Australia, India or elsewhere—financial resources matter a lot in “lawfare.”

This writer had produced a 25-minute documentary film titled “An Activist versus Adani:

Ben Pennings takes on a mighty conglomerate, and wins—A story from Australia, India and Bangladesh” on 7 January 2025. The full film can be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZCpdYpNVs8&t=376s> and its trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Eoc3cnMZgg> □□□

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DREAMS WORK IN STRANGE WAYS

Elements of Urban Time

Ranabir Samaddar

THE IDEA OF “HUMANITY’S urban future” evokes a seamless imagination. Yet no future is made without a process of making and unmaking—in this case, urban future without the making and unmaking of cities. The violent process of restructuring of cities strangely but not unexpectedly generates a desire for a clean and better urban future. Cities are desiring machines. The fault lines of the past, also of present time, prompt people to address the cleavages whenever they think of the future of cities.

This is not to say that everyone must become historian of cities, or all should be futurists. Moreover, there are cities and cities—metropolises, megalopolises, small towns, colonial cities, port cities, railway towns, trading towns, immigrant cities, walled cities of the past, and finally, cities existing as ruins or conversely, in the form of futuristic smart cities. Prosperous cities and ghost townships with their contrast haunt people’s imagination of a possible urban future. If one visits the UNESCO heritage site and the architectural wonder, *Taj Mahal* in the

bustling city of Agra, the mediaeval capital of the Mughal Empire, one will hear of a nearby ghost city, only thirty-five kilometres away, *Fatehpur Sikri*, an earlier capital of the Empire, abandoned due to water scarcity in the year 1610 and now a settlement lying in ruins. Fatehpur Sikri’s magnificent urban design of centuries back make one wonder the circumstances that led to its decay and its forlorn state now. Or, coming to present time, two hundred kilometres away near the bustling metropolis of Kolkata lie the ghost towns in the coalfields of Asansol-Raniganj-Durgapur belt.

Yet this contrast is perhaps the cue to imagining a desirable urban future, in which temporality plays a big role. The making/unmaking dialectic works though time—often linear, but one should remember, also in the form of, to use Walter Benjamin’s famous phrase, “homogenous empty time”, and a diachronic time, where another time is speeding up changes within the great time towards an unknown future. Time makes people aware of the fault lines in social and economic practices,

including the making of cities. It points to heterogeneous future-making practices. Indeed, the heterogeneous time of cities tells the plurality of urban future.

The variety of urban forms mentioned a little earlier and the heterogeneous time of the city make any standardised imagination of an urban future impossible. Yet, and this is one more paradox: it is precisely this heterogeneity of form and time that provokes the idea of a desirable urban future. Ideas of a habitable city life, a collective but not homogenous existence, urban justice based on a “right to the city”, spaces of negotiation over incipient conflicts, a dialogic urban order, a range of public institutions including those of health, education, transportation, and housing of which the inhabitants of the city are proud, and a work regime that reaches out to the migrants whose relation to the city will be mostly one of “practical intimacy”—an ambiguity to be appreciated and valued, and not hunted down and destroyed by bourgeois strategies of assimilation—these all spring from experiences of recent and distant past. These also speak people’s desire for an urban public power that is built on a combination of vertical and horizontal mobilisations—a power that is dialogic, yet orderly, and compassionate.

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II

The making/unmaking dynamics can be seen most in port cities, likewise in cities buffeted and soaked by winds of climate change bringing in devastating cyclones or stilted by murderous heat, or cities impoverished or enriched by flights of capital and whims of technology, such as containerisation of port traffic or periods of deindustrialisation. Again, colonial cities were made and unmade through bloody processes of mutiny, riots, punitive campaigns, and forcible induction of labour to make a city work. Similarly, industrial cities went through restructuration processes. Equally importantly, but neglected, is the epidemiological transformation of a city. Think of the city of Mumbai marshalling its labour force through plague. The epidemic peaked in early 1897 with a mortality rate of 75-85 percent. Labour fled the city. Business and commerce stopped. The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, was enacted to tackle the bubonic plague. Law was meant to control epidemics by providing special powers to the State required for the implementation of containment measures to check the spread of the disease. As the disease appeared in Pune and colonial controls became severe, the Chapekar Brothers, early modern Indian revolutionaries, assassinated W C Rand; the British Plague Commissioner of the city on 22 June 1897, after Pune's public was frustrated with the vandalism by the officers and soldiers appointed by him. Plague influenced the making of the working class in Mumbai for the next twenty years. There is a substantial amount of discussion

and controversy as to how the plague created lasting opportunities for labour who wrested concessions from mill-owners in the ensuing period (1898-1918) of crisis in the labour market and unprecedented industrial strife.

Time creates in unanticipated ways structures of relations that last for long. Subaltern urban population desperately defends gains which are products of sudden exigencies.

Public health infrastructure, cordoning techniques, emergence of care givers on a mass scale, policing of "unsafe" quarters, and most significant, governmental attempts at large scale behavioural modification of people—these are parts of the said epidemiological transformation of a city. Add to these the issue of a city's access to resources like water, air, and hinterland. All these are features of the making and unmaking of a city. These shape urban demography. These also produce "urban space." These also pilot the eternal quest for the combination of a "right size," a "right kind" of territory, and "right kind of people" for a perfect city. Illusion drives the neoliberal dream of a contradiction-less urban future. It is a phantasmagoria that erases the faultlines.

Of course, the biggest divide in the city is between the official city and city underground. One may extend a likely analogy between the 19th century story of the Underground Railroad in North America transporting fugitive slaves to safety in the North, and the 21st century cities of the South including cities of Southern Europe crisscrossed by routes and trails of migrant

passages. Mexico, Johannesburg, Marseille, Naples, Athens, Cairo, Beirut, Karachi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangkok... all these places house huge underground cities. Violent and harsh local border regimes exist in these cities, yet these borders are negotiated on daily basis by migrants, illegal dwellers, criminals, petty traders, sex workers, also workers engaged in waste processing and different informal sectors. Focus on these contested situations; one may be able to reverse the image of a dangerous border into one of a space negotiated by routes, passages, and people. These are "non-spaces" of the formal city. Yet these non-spaces characterised by disorder and resilient life are marked by not only practices of survival, but efforts at creating a better future marked by new interface, exchanges, and dialogues. They are not only the "cities of refuge," they are the birthplaces of new words and lexicons, flags of new "cosmopolitanism"—an ideal towards which cities strive.

Nonetheless, these contests, fault lines, and borders make urban life precarious, life of those who must live "dangerously." The knowledge of the dynamics of making/unmaking must make people aware of the intensely biopolitical nature of the task of city making as this involves the making/unmaking of life. The regime of bio-power controlling the city cannot be wished away. The urban turn in people's thinking has been naturalised and people tend to miss the life question.

III

This brings one to the fundamental question of the political

ecology of a city. There is no suitable alternative to the idea of “political ecology” that can make sense of the myriads of phenomena marking urban present, propelling with breath-taking speed “Southern urbanism” as the motor of global urban growth towards an uncertain future.

Two events are driving changes in the cities of the South: (a) New technologies have arrived in the South as an event in urban life driving transformation of Southern cities, particularly through changes in land-use pattern and labour forms, construction of smart cities, introduction of just-in-time technology, proliferation of smaller production units run with informal labour, and finally massive expansion of extractive activities and reprocessing units; as a consequence of all these, rent (interest too suspiciously appearing like rent) becoming the main form of urban wealth and basis of capital formation. At the same time the city needs migrant labour to keep this urban regime of capital formation functioning. (b) Climate change as a part of major ecological and environmental disasters is making Southern cities less and less habitable. With environmental refugees pouring in ever more numbers, the incessant growth of cities of the South is by itself one of the pronounced events on a global scale in the twenty-first century. But, note, these two processes do not come singly, their operations as two distinct processes cannot be identified as such beyond an extent. They form a complex leading to a characteristic urban ecology of the South.

Port cities of the South are a

classic case of the making/un-making conundrum. Containerisation may have increased port revenue. But old warehouses lie derelict and depleted. Narrow streets of yesteryears are unfit for land-based container traffic, and creating an efficient inter-modal system is a nightmare. Land in the vicinity is now the prime spot for high tourism and commercial and entertainment activities. It is a distinct process of what is called “recycling of land.” The city indeed expands not around the port, but as if in a disconnected manner, where the port is one face of the city, whose other face is its expansion elsewhere—as in Kolkata where the port is in the west, and the city expands in the east—where a smart city comes up—by gobbling up wetlands causing immense harm to city’s ecology. In an ever-expanding mode, the city destroys hinterlands. Urban corridor takes new form with new technologies—with digital connectivity, highways, long-distance metros, oblivious of the dead settlements lying here and there.

In this situation, politics of the city is governed by either of the two ways: (a) Urban politics is refashioned around the issue of security, and consequently the city is run by super cops like Julias Ribeiro (Mumbai) or K P S Gill (Punjab) and tough mayors like Rudi Giuliani (New York) whose methods are backed by hard right-wing administrations. (b) Or, there is a dialogic way of running the city practised by several Leftist and populist mayors. Populist forces run the administration, as in Kolkata, in many other Indian cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, or Delhi,

where administration represents the will of the popular classes consisting mostly of people working in informal economy, living in slums, shanty settlements, and irregular, insecure places of the city. These populist administrations have the stupendous task of managing the city in a new way. They try to turn the police into a “civil force” to be accepted by the lower classes, become accountable to the demands of the inhabitants of the “inner city,” transform the intolerable lives of the precariously surviving people into tolerable ones, indeed improve them, reach the lower classes access to education and public health, and make co-existence of the lower and middle classes possible in an urban form that will tolerate pluralities of urban life. It is easier said than done. Dreams in such situation compete in a combustible milieu; the city is often delirious. The administration must calm the frayed nerves, rising temper, and moderate class hatred that at times threatens to break apart the fragile existence called the “city.” It is doubly difficult because popular classes exist on the margins of legality. A substantial part of their survival practices consists of what a philosopher of the last century termed as “popular illegality.” Populist government tolerates such “illegality.” In a sense, the lives of the popular classes are marked by counter-conduct, counter to the prescribed norm of urban existence. The experiences of “new municipalism” provide a rich repertoire of a possible new urban ecology.

This is the nature of urban biopolitics today. In this

biopolitical situation, an acknowledgement of the various claims to the city and a dialogic order are the two pre-requisites towards working for an urban future, at whose heart will be the presence of the popular classes. This, the least one can say, is one of the possibilities of the making/unmaking dialectic of urban life. Behind this there is a new idea of urban power.

IV

The modern city, people know did not emerge as merely a head-quarter of administration and a seat of royal power. It came into existence at the early modern age, around the seventeenth century, as an outcome of a conjuncture of three developments: the need to secure life of the subjects from crime and diseases, the transformation of the subjects into a governable population, and a definite territory fit for commerce, production, transportation, and movement of labour.

Urban transformation is discontinuous. Often cities are devastated by wars. The heterogeneous time of the cities points to a bigger reality—that of crisis, conjuncture, and rupture. Slum-dwellers, unorganised and informal workers, militant women from the lower classes of society, subaltern political entrepreneurs, and activists of informal settlements do not take initiative to change life conditions as consequence of slow, gradual, pedagogic training. Even if determined political movements are there, autonomous initiatives appear usually in the wake of crises, more importantly in a situation of conjuncture of circumstances, when the outcome is uncertain, and a rupture becomes

a possibility. That is the occasion for the lower classes to take initiative to change their conditions of life. Like the consequences of the outbreak of bubonic plague in Bombay-Pune in 1896-97, or the malaria-cholera epidemic in Kolkata in the 1950s, or the massive popular struggles for food and work in the last decades of the last century (1960s in West Bengal and Bihar in India), there are sudden unanticipated moments of conjuncture when the situation opens to possibilities of social transformation. Thus, for instance, even though infant deaths in India still happen in public hospitals due to sudden oxygen crisis, life conditions in many cities of the South have improved; with Leftist and populist mayors in charge, subaltern life is not “nasty, brutish, and short”. The lower classes wait for the next opportunity to press further their claims.

The neoliberal transformation of cities faces stiff challenge in these southern urban conditions. Neoliberal mode of power wants to utilise the fragmentary urban condition in the South to make the entire society a market (think of the regenerative scheme for Dharavi slum in Mumbai), where everyone is a producer and an actor in the market. At this point, one wonders what smart cities and infrastructures mean for informal populations who are avid users of mobile platforms, even if largely for entertainment and communication. There are two elements at play here: first, the points of intersection of the formal and informal—these might include the domains of bourgeois production, such as food, housing, or transport, as well as vari-

ous forms of low wage production—probably not present very much in high value sectors such as finance, trade, and digital production, but certainly in construction, waste reprocessing, etc.—which become more vulnerable to change and struggle; and second, the desiring city - the subaltern desire to be visible joined by the State’s desire to know the life details of the people (Aadhaar in India is the exemplar). It is a deeply unstable dialectic. Migrants to the city embody the connections of the city and the rural hinterland, whose existence the big cities refuse to acknowledge. These vectors are responsible for changes that take time to manifest, but surely, they offer a cosmopolitan standpoint at odds with everyday oppressions.

On the other hand, populist-Leftist urban leaders of these Southern cities try to turn the same conditions for greater security of life—with creating more avenues for education, greater access to healthcare, work opportunity, housing, more opportunities for small and medium entrepreneurship, facilities of recreation, and most importantly, greater mobility.

The contest between the two strategies takes the form of a social war echoes of which reach people as soon as they put their ears close to the ground. People must allow then the factor of chaos, conjuncture, instability, and suddenness—elements of a war—in understanding of urban time. Urban time, in this age of artificial intelligence, surprisingly is still event-centric.

An amusing instance by way of ending this note: Last October (2024) during the annual

autumn festival in Bengal when giant marquees are set up with idols of goddesses inside, this writer heard a commotion one evening. People, mostly festival goers from suburbs and villages were rushing towards a large pavilion. The loudspeaker was blaring: after fifty years Kolkata would look like this, there will be helicopters on the rooftop of large public hospital buildings to ferry patients in emergency condition from their houses to

the hospitals. At the sprawling lawn where the marquees had been set up, people were watching a helicopter atop a tall structure. Then all on a sudden, the humming sound of a possible drone nearby was heard. Then a large number of watchers around a cordoned area. Inside, a drone was flying up, roaming above the cordoned field for a while and then coming down to the ground. The announcement was going on: Fifty years later drones

would watch the city and conduct surveillance, lest any inhabitant should pollute the city by throwing plastic bags and other material on the streets. The drone would identify the house number and the resident would be duly summoned and penalised. Kolkata would be clean of plastics.

Dreams work in strange ways. The future is here, materialising in the desires exhibited in the carnivals. ■■■

PEOPLE AND POPULISM

The Rise of Hindutva

Pranab Kanti Basu

ALL MAJORITARIAN populisms are based on claims of ethnic purity and the 'true people' of a nation. Hindutva, the Indian variant, is based on a constructed religious identity that claims Aryan purity (contradicting all genetic profiling) and exclusive right to the entire land of this country. Its bible is *Essentials of Hindutva* by Savarkar, which is replete with fantastic history, original linguistic theories, and statements of political purpose in a strange mishmash. But it gives a pithy, answer to the question of 'who is a Hindu?' which was later officially approved by the RSS: one to whom "this Bharata bhumi... is at once... fatherland and holy land". The othering is very significant: through clever categorising the Muslims (and the Christians, Jews, etc) are marked as *The Other*. Savarkar's definition is a handy tool for coopting the SCs and STs into the Hindutva fold, though *Essentials* as well as the writings of Golwalkar, Hedgewar

and other leaders of RSS are full of praises for the caste system and derogation of the Sudras and outcastes.

Hindutva did not gain traction during the independence struggle for two reasons. First the communal organisations, like Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League were busy currying favour with the British masters, to extract better deals for their respective communities. Secondly, as clearly expressed by Golwalkar in *Bunch of Thoughts*, the nationalist struggle was deemed detrimental to the cause of Hindutva as instead of the 'other' of the 'Hindus' it posed the Britishers as *the enemy*. Hindutva did not get any leverage in the independence struggle, defeated by a more potent populism—Gandhism—and also, since the 1920s, by the grassroots organisation of the Congress, which attracted some peasant base through its anti-rent stirs. (Though these were never accorded recognition by the party high command, they

did serve to gain the sympathy of segments of the peasants.) (Sanyal, Hitesh Ranjan)

Gandhi's pervasive popularity flowed largely from his enigmatic image and his astuteness as an organiser. His mendicant's attire, his frequent fasts, his prayer meetings all combined to spread an image of a messiah as Chatterjee (2004) illustrates from a passage *Dhorai Charit Manas* by Satinath Bhaduri. In fact it was the undefined character of Gandhi that attracted people from various stations. As an organiser he had no parallel in the Congress. He was reaching out to the people even before Congress had decided on mass mobilisations. He astutely lent support to the Khilafat movement to win over even those who accepted foreign spiritual leadership. He chose, quite brazenly, to support movements that had potential for mass mobilisation, even when they clashed with his much-vaunted idealism. In reply to Tagore's criticism that his politics was deviating from his philosophy he replied that the poet lived for a beautiful future but he has seen that singing Kabir bhajans to a sick man does not ameliorate

his suffering. (Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 1997/2001).

Gandhi and Gandhism became a vaguely defined anchor to all the multifarious movements bringing together many varied, often opposed, interests. The continuous mass movement strategy that Gandhi adopted (anti-Rowlatt movement, 1919, movement for swaraj in 1920, the boycott movement, etc.) all built up a frenzy of anti-British mass action. This created a nebulous idea of nationalism that was defined as the negative of British rule. It did not have the positive content of, say, Hindutva's nationalism. Paradoxically, that was the source of its vast popularity.

POST INDEPENDENCE

The independence movement succeeded in driving out the British, but a nation as an identity of the population was not born. The population was held together both through persuasion and coercion by the state. This narrative is based on a critical reading of the theories presented by Partha Chatterjee, Kalyan Sanyal and Ajit Chowdhury. The population can be segmented into three parts: centre, margin and margin of margin. Those belonging to the centre or capitalist sector are conditioned to the mores of bourgeois civil society and are obedient citizens of the state. Those belonging to the margins, dwellers of shanties besides the railways, bustling urban bustees, for example, are not conditioned to accept civil society rights and duties, simply because the capitalist economy does not sustain their lives. To persuade these marginal people to maintain or-

der, the state has to stretch or even break their own laws to ensure their livelihood. Capitalist expansion cannot accommodate the marginal people, termed 'surplus population' as workers and so they have to be allowed survival in the unorganised, self-employed sector as hawkers, artisan producers, rickshaw pullers, etc, or as casual employees in the service sector. Both their dwellings as well as their means of livelihood frequently violate laws and are the subject of political negotiation between their community leaders and the state. That is why Chatterjee refers to this space as political society. Beyond this, there is an outer circle, inhabited mainly by tribals, whose traditional community rights continue to frustrate the drive of the mining lobby to extract ores and minerals, apart from thwarting the logging mafia. A large segment of this population has already been displaced by the Mega development projects of modernising India, like dams, highways, thermal power projects and mines. Some idea of the extent of such displacement can be formed from the writings of Walter Fernandez and others. These outcasts of the modern state cannot be accommodated through persuasion. To these are added ethnic and religious minorities. Brutal state violence is unleashed on these populations whenever they protest the discriminatory treatment meted out to them. The colonial laws were applied in deeply unequal manner and this has been retained and further strengthened by the independent state. Acts, suspending normal

democratic rights and judicial procedures, like the AFSPA, UAPA, TADA and the formation of more than a dozen paramilitary forces testifies to the reliance of the state on violence.

The pervasive state was tolerated by the ruling classes because it suited their interests. The industrial bourgeoisie did not possess sufficient private funds to finance mega projects like power, transport network, steel plants. There was also a very meagre supply of engineering and managerial staff. They, therefore, welcomed a Planning Commission that would rationally plan investments in infrastructure and heavy and basic industries. The state sector also funded higher education and set up the IITs and IIMs to provide technically skilled personnel at subsidised rates to the private sector. The middle classes, born of the colonial urban pen-pushers and government job holders, welcomed the expansion of the state sector as it provided secure jobs to their progeny. The farm sector, which had not undergone a transition to large capitalist farming because the weak state, in its endeavour to balance the support of the powerful classes, could not undertake drastic land reforms and agriculture lacked structural intention and capital to modernise. This ultimately led to a food crisis in the mid-sixties. USA bailed India out of this crisis on condition that the government pushed the Green Revolution strategy. This was a package consisting of HYV seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, mechanisation and controlled water supply the year round, to

facilitate multiple cropping. To promote this strategy the state had to provide huge subsidies for seeds, fertilisers, chemicals and farm equipment. American interest lay in marketing inputs. Productivity did increase till the mid-seventies, though unevenly in terms of crops and regions. A class of rich farmers was born that was increasingly dependent on state subsidies because of declining soil fertility.

The 'integrated state' that was deeply involved in economic activities that are the preserve of private capitalists in developed capitalist countries was accepted as a kind of disinterested mediator between the powerful classes. This statist model was largely successful till the end of the 'Nehru era', that ended with the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964. The balance of economic power had been shifting towards the monopoly industrial capitalists, while the rich farmers' dependence on the state increased. Monopoly capital, whose growth had been facilitated by the integral state, now started resenting the overbearing presence of the state in the economic sector. The state's credibility as an arbiter declined. This was correlated with the political crisis within the Congress. When Indira Gandhi assumed the reigns of the party, her insecurity induced her to do away with internal democracy within the party and introduce the principle of central nomination of every tier of leaders. This reduced the rural popularity of the party, which was mainly based on the acceptance of local leaders. The political and economic crisis that was

brewing came to a boil with the imposition of internal emergency in 1975.

Meanwhile, the Hindutva brigade, that had been forced to keep a low profile, following the largely perceived role of the RSS in Gandhi's murder, had been spreading its message through its large network of educational institutions. These were based mainly in tribal areas that were neglected by government schooling network, guided by the RSS and funded frequently by NRIs. Apart from standard schooling these hosted weekly religious meetings where all locals were welcome. Its political wing, first the Jana Sangh and later the Bharatiya Janata Party were gradually emerging from the shadows as mainstream parties. They could finally shed their outcaste status when they were welcomed into the coalition of parties opposing the emergency.

The economic policy changes that had been brewing culminated in the adoption of the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) package in 1991. Though this was adopted by the Congress government under Narasimha Rao, its aggressive implementation had to await the installation of the brazenly *Hindutvavadi* government of Modi in 2014. The Congress party and government were not in sync on this issue. A large state sector and control over 'the commanding heights' was necessary to implement economic policies that would suit the party's support base. Neither could the non-Congress governments before Modi afford to implement LPG unequivocally. But the aggressive

Hindutva of the current regime does not rely on economic success or amelioration of poverty for its support base. The populism of Gandhi that fostered the support base of the Congress at the time of independence has long eroded. Populism has now taken the form of Hindu nationalism reified in the body of the macho male image of Modi and periodically expressed in mass frenzy of mosque demolition, rioting and killing, brutal torture of minorities and Dalits by non-state forces like Ram Sene or Bajrang Dal, with the tacit consent of the state. The victims of rising inequality and poverty, among the Hindus, probably find

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a release from the mundane through identification with the violent Hindutva brigades. It is this support base, divorced from economic performance that allows the present regime to go all out to implement pro- big capital measures that the Congress hesitated over—labour codes, relaxation of restrictions on acquisition of land for mining, accelerating privatisation, etc.

There is also a reverse causality from neoliberalism to neo-conservatism. The burgeoning

corruption starting from the closing years of the integral state and the aggressive pro-corporate measures of the current regime have eroded the sense of democratic values of modernisation. Like in many Western democracies, this has given way to a narrow nationalism based on majoritarian religious community solidarity as the new morality of the country. ■■■

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A MEANINGLESS DEBATE

Working Hours

Asis Ranjan Sengupta

SLAVERY WAS THE norm for feudal lords in exploitation of majority for accumulation of wealth for a handful few. Among other modes of exploitation was the long, long stretch of working hours that too in the days when all types of work that added value to the bounty of nature were mostly manual. All early literatures graphically describe the woes of malnourished slaves, toiling hard without rest or entertainment, deprived of family lives.

The Bourgeois Democratic Revolution of 18th century, ushered in Europe, the cradle of Industrial revolution, only changed the mode of exploitation. The manual labour was replaced by production with the aid of machines, for the accumulation of Capital for the new and emerging Capitalist class. But though the mode of production changed in society, the exploitation of labour, remained the

same, of course, in a different way. The new slavery only changed the mode, not the basic norm of long stretching working hours, no rest, no entertainment, no social life, nothing. In this context, the historic Hay Market revolt at Chicago, USA (May1886), marked the protest against the *unlimited working hours*. At the cost of sweat and blood of workers, the famous 8-hour working day with 48 hours a week, was framed, and implemented. This much history is known to all.

Not that, this new law and practice was followed everywhere, but the guiding principle came into existence from that victory. During First and Second World Wars, the rise and founding of Communist nations like Russia and China, sent shockwaves through the spines of Capitalist world. Then the theory of welfare state gained momentum. According to the new concept, the role of State is

to be that of a welfare mechanism, not a tool of exploitation in the hands of Capitalists. Thus Capitalism wore the mask of benefactor. Among those shows of philanthropy were limited working hours, provision for rest, leisure, entertainment, family and social life, medical assistance, retirement benefits etc.

But from the '80s, the communist and socialist world started showing cracks, decay, bankruptcy, the Soviet Russia dissolved, and China adopted the capitalist path of 'socialism'. From this stage, the capitalist world shed the mask of welfare state, and in the name of privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation spree, welfare norms for workforce were relaxed for the benefit of giant global corporate houses. More production, more GDP envisage more exploitation of workforce, for usurping the surplus value produced. This background must be kept in mind while discussing the working- hour debate which is attracting wide attention at present across the globe.

With the fall of Soviet Russia and switch over of Communist

China to capitalist road, the labour-capital relations became complex. China opened up doors to the European and American capitalist giants, and invited them to invest in China, with an active assurance of all out cooperation and so-called 'ease of doing business' without any trade union or labour welfare hassles, and minimum wages with maximum skill. The communist government realised that it was not possible for them to create capital or market for the produce, as China was still a poor country. So they very intelligently, invited global capital in order to catch global market, and to become a parallel capitalist growth centre, based on Dollar currency. And their trick clicked. Soon the Multi-National Corporates, took advantage of the globalisation wave, and shifted their labour intensive, hazardous and pollutant industries to China, to avoid and overcome all operational difficulties, achieve low cost of production, and maximisation of profits. China, by now an authoritarian state created huge labour market, educated their workforce to generate mammoth value addition to products, without any rights of working hours, leisure. But the aspect of social welfare was assuredly taken care of by the government, in their way. By the new law of free investment, China created massive infrastructural developments to dazzle the gaze of citizens as well as global population to create an aura of growth. But the story behind this show of development is again shady and shabby.

China first introduced the concept of 996 working hours. Now what is this 996? It is 9 am

to 9 pm, 6 days, which means, $12 \times 6 = 72$ working hours a week. But this is official schedule; beyond this is also the practice of over working hours, as per need of the employer. China is an authoritarian state, wearing the cloak of communism, with little scope for protest or agitation. Moreover, the Chinese people in general are hard working and disciplined. So, this model soon caught the fascination of capitalists, and they started demanding Chinese model of working hours, all over the third world (now known as global south, a new coinage), countries, who aspire to grow in Chinese model of global exploitation of workers.

It is necessary to understand the recent working hour debate raised by certain Indian corporate giants like Infosys or Larsen & Tubro, in this historic and contemporary perspective. In a sense, this debate is meaningless in India, as according to official data, the unorganised sector comprises nearly 44 crore workers, which is 90% of total workforce. And for them, there is no labour law as such. The working hour rules apply to the organised sector only and that too, for office employees. In factories, gone are the days of restricted working hours, as barring a few big Public Sector and big private industries, most of the shop floor jobs have been outsourced to external agencies, and contractual workers hired through agencies, only to be fired at the mercy of recruiters. In service sector industries like Banks or Insurance companies, all of which are now totally computerised, all key jobs are as-

signed to software firms who again engage contract workers through agencies. In big industries too, it is the same story of all the works being automated and robotised, leaving only hazardous manual jobs to workers hired through agencies, and at the mercy of hirers lest they should be fired any moment.

The Medium and Small Manufacturing Enterprises (MSME) are manned by a limited number of workers. So, the owners who always struggle for survival, refuse to grant any welfare benefits or adhere to working hour schedule. Previously, units employing 100 workers had no problem in free hiring, firing, granting wages, or fixing working hours, no obligation of PF, Gratuity or medical aids, but the labour code bill, passed by the Modi government, raises this free ceiling to 300 workers per unit. The reality is very few small units today employ 300 workers, in present day ambience of mechanisation, automation etc. As for working hours, the same labour code bill raised the 8 working hours a day to 12. With that overtime payment calculations have been fixed from first half an hour to 15 minutes and total working hours in a week, has been fixed to 48 hours in total. The last two amendments are meaningless, as poorly paid workers are not going to fight for 15 minutes or 48 hours a week. Organisation or Union activities are totally forbidden in this

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unorganised sector, as the new Trade Union laws under Modi's new Labour codes, have been made harsher, and even registration of a new Union is next to impossible now by complying with new provisions. Medical care left to Employees State Insurance (ESI) and social or retirement benefits to PF or NPS (National Pension Scheme). In case of ESI or PF, employers often default in mandatory deposit of sums deducted or their own contribution to concerned authorities. To run NPS, is not possible for low paid workers, which is only for white collar employees.

Let alone unorganised workers, even in organised sectors, like Railways, where historic Strike took place in 1974, the situation at present is dismal. All the jobs from maintenance to running, are now given to hired workers through contract firms, which are owned by political leaders or their connections. The running staff are lured by overtime payments, and forced, in other way, to work beyond hours, for the sake of job security or victimisation. This results in highly irregular running, lack of passenger amenities, and frequent accidents, without any accountability. Even in sensitive sectors like Army, the temporary recruitment of *Agniveers* on temporary basis, engagement, at the risk of safety or security, and in this sector there was no right, now it has been added with no liability.

In big corporate sectors also, be private or public, the current trend is to recruit officers and executives more than workers. These so-called executives, are performing the jobs of clerks or

labourers, but being so called 'executives' or say 'managers', they are denied all the minimum rights of workers, and compelled to work beyond duty hours as also on holidays. Another dangerous thing has started which is hiring of fixed period apprentices. Previously Apprenticeship Act imposed obligation on recruiters to absorb after period of apprenticeship. But now there is no such rule. So these apprentices are extorted, forced to work unlimited hours and also on holidays, to remain in good book of management, for future permanent absorption, which is also uncertain.

A new sector of unorganised sector employment is the Gig workers, meaning the 'Delivery Partners', 'Business Associates', 'operators' etc, engaged in Home Delivery of daily needs, Foods, and Cab or Bike Taxi operators. All these are multinational corporates, having entities almost all over the globe. But they operate only through outsourced call centres, and workmen engaged on contract through agencies, and delivery persons or cab/taxi drivers are at liberty to choose working hours, whenever they log in through internet module, they are working, and as they log out or leave, they are not working. Choice is theirs but in this hard days of price rise and family maintenance, obviously, they work from dawn to dusk, or from dusk to dawn to make both ends meet. This liberty of working hour choice is thus another hoax.

In this discussion, the traditionally exploiting sectors like Brick Clins, Agriculture, Jute Mills, illegal Mining, Sugar Cane

industry labourers, Domestic helps, house maids, where they never heard any concept of working hour, are excluded. So, by far the majority of work force, are in unorganised sector, and for them mostly, any time is working time (like the old Tea Ad : any time is Tea time), and all hour is or can be working hour. In truth this working hour debate is mostly meaningless in India.

The working hour debate was raised by big software and construction giants, deliberately, to create turmoil, to deny the meagre existing rights of a diminishing regular workforce. In the Health care or Hospitality sector, the working hours are already eight hours and six days, the hired qualified personnel can be fired any moment, in the excuse of business state, loss or less profit.

On 9th July last, a nationwide general strike was called by official Trade Unions, in protest against the new Labour Codes, which have been legislated, like Farmers Bill, without consulting or taking into consideration, the stake holders, by brute majority of the ruling party in parliament. Farm Bill could be forced to roll back, in the face of tough resistance by a section of North Indian Farmers, but in case of Labour codes, due to limitations of objective reality, the resistance is yet to take concrete and stiff resistance nationwide. For one thing Manufacturing Industry in India, is now in a very bad shape. All indigenous industry, barring a handful few, have downed shutters, and Industry in India, now means, assembly and packaging of components, imported from

outside. As these industries, big or small, are highly dependent on market demands in a toughly competitive environment, the fates of both organisations and their workers, are ever volatile. The much hyped, startups, though coming up with expectations, are shutting down with more disappointments. The popular concept of 'work from Home'; today, is nothing but a tactics to evade all law, and exploit with limitless working hours, when, even during 'logged off sessions, employees have to

be on tip and toe for receiving and attending E-mails, notifications and Whatsapp chats.

So, to conclude, this working hour controversy has no relevance to the employment market or employees, in these hard days of pervading unemployment, uncertainties. It may be a tool for asserting rights of a few white collar, Govt or semi-govt, office workers in organised sectors.

For others, the huge majority, the work place realities, are very much like the classic movie by all-time great Charlie

Chaplin, "Modern Times", where workers are machines by practice, and when work place bosses want to encroach on the Toilet or lunch hours too, lest working hours are lost, and production hampered, and profit lost. But every dark cloud has silver lining, and globalised, privatised capital giants, vastly dependent on technology, are now in a state of market challenge, as they are now in the trap of what Marx analysed as 'over production and diminishing or stagnant market condition'. □□□

BACK FROM THE STONE AGE

Vietnam 1975

Madhu Bhaduri

IN JANUARY 1975, I received an order posting me as First Secretary to the Embassy in Hanoi, North Vietnam. My father was distraught upon hearing this news. 'It is raining bombs there, why do you want to be posted to Vietnam?' he said. Vietnam had been the focus of world attention. That tiny underdeveloped ('developing', in today's parlance) country had been fighting, in succession, first Japan, then France, and was now at war with America, the world's number one superpower. Vietnam was fighting to unite the divided North with the South. America, as usual, was fighting for freedom and democracy, as it continued to do in many parts of the world, recently in West Asia. In universities and information media within America, critical voices had become louder and fiercer against America's war in Vietnam. The carpet bombings and chemical warfare in Central

and South Vietnam were being deplored. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called for an end to the bombing of Vietnam. This was an act of courage because during this time, India was critically dependent on shipments of wheat under American Public Law 480. In Asia, or for that matter all over the world, there was no non-communist country which dared to raise its voice. My departure to Hanoi was postponed because Prabhakar Menon, whom I was to replace, could not leave Hanoi before the new ambassador had taken over. In the meantime, on 30 April, American forces withdrew from Saigon, leaving behind them a legacy of devastation and a large cache of arms and ammunition after their defeat at the hands of a small country which had no air or naval power. On the evening of 30 April 1975, the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) reverberated with slogans of 'Long live, Viet-

nam!' Vietnamese students sang patriotic songs in a charged atmosphere at an open-air gathering. We used to live on the campus because Amit was a professor there.

I travelled to Hanoi by air up to Hong Kong, and then proceeded by train to Canton. The last leg of the journey, from Nanning to Hanoi, was concluded by a short flight on a Chinese aircraft. The Haiphong harbour was yet to be cleared of mines, so my heavy baggage travelled from Delhi to Hanoi via Moscow. This might appear funny today, but the fact that politics takes over geography is something I have experienced very closely.

There were at the time very few diplomatic missions in Hanoi. And with few exceptions like the Indian and French Embassies, the rest were accommodated in a hotel built in the early twentieth century during French rule. Because India had been Chairman of the Peace Commission for Indo-China, we were allotted three villas for the Embassy and also had the best

interpreter, who was intelligent as well as a fine person. The hotel accommodation of other diplomatic missions was limited. The Ambassadors of Australia and Japan were among them, and had to convert their bedrooms into offices during the day. They had attached bathrooms, but common toilet facilities. The bathrooms also doubled as kitchens to cater to parties, which were regularly held in the most undiplomatic traditions. I must admit that these were among the most enjoyable parties because they were improvised in imaginative ways, and were not the usual representational functions which diplomats around the world are obliged to suffer. Since the Indian Embassy had villas, the backyard of one of them (where I lived) was converted into a proper badminton court. Almost all diplomats in Hanoi learnt to play badminton; those who did not, came on their bicycles to watch and chat. Hanoi provided little by way of entertainment. Before leaving for Hanoi, I was advised to carry all my requirements, from toothpaste, washing powder and soap, to milk powder, with me. Nothing more than the food items needed for daily consumption were available in the markets. On my arrival, I used some of my saris to make curtains for the windows. A Vietnamese citizen was provided with five metres of cloth every year, along with food, soap, and everything else s/he needed. Everyone had a bicycle, just as everyone had a roof. I had also acquired a bicycle. Diplomatic missions had a car each, but almost every diplomat rode a bicycle. I was pro-

vided a cook and a maid to care for my house and kitchen. Ain Thai was a good cook. I taught him to cook some Indian dishes, and showed him how to make yoghurt with the milk powder I had brought along with me from Hong Kong. He had a quick grasp over things and made good yoghurt for about ten days. Then he politely asked me, 'Are you sick?' I was puzzled. Pointing at the small bowl of yoghurt, he said, 'Then why do you eat this?' It struck me suddenly that my eating yoghurt made from animal milk must have nauseated him. In China and Vietnam, milk is regarded as essential only for new-born babies. Otherwise, it is treated as an animal discharge, like urine, sweat, etc. It was unfair of me to have made him handle milk powder. I told him not to make yoghurt for me and that I would make it myself. Soya milk and cheese were easily available, and I learnt to enjoy them also. I wondered how my mother, who was a vegetarian, would view this. Like most, if not all Indians, she considered milk and its products the best for health and the ideal food for the gods. To think that somewhere in the world God's food was nauseating would have shocked her. She would have been equally shocked to see that except for cats; almost all other animals were eaten with relish. The adage 'One man's meat is another man's poison' is literally true. The second lesson I learnt was something like this. The Canadian Ambassador in China had come for a visit to Hanoi just around the time that I went there. He asked me if in India, too, people did not

apologise. In China, there was no equivalent to 'I am sorry'. Was this a tradition all over Asia? I told him that it was not so in India, and I began noticing how the people in Vietnam said sorry. The matter was handled quite differently there. Instead of waiting for someone to apologise, the person is offered an opportunity to save face. If I am late in arriving, I will immediately be handed an excuse: the road is bad, or a family member is ill, etc. If it is a deeper matter, then the offender gives an explanation called 'self-criticism'. I found the offer to save face quite comfortable and more generous than waiting for 'I am sorry'.

Initially, while I was in Hanoi, Amit was in Bangkok planning to fly to Hanoi via Vientiane (Laos). I was suddenly told by a Vietnamese friend that the situation in Laos was such that flights between Vientiane and Bangkok would come to a halt after two days. I requested David Wilson, the Australian Ambassador who was flying to Bangkok via Hong Kong that day, to pass this information on to Amit. David Wilson took my concerns seriously. He met Amit and put him on the last flight leaving Bangkok for Vientiane. I was to meet Amit in Vientiane, but that became impossible. Just then, the communist revolution arrived in Laos. Amit found himself in a city where everything had come to a sudden standstill. Markets were shut down and, worse, banks were closed for four days. He was stuck in a totally unknown place in the midst of a change of system. He later wrote

an account in Bangla about the unnerving, and sometimes comical, experience of his stay in Vientiane during that period. What created problems for us was the fact that Vietnam was not connected by telephone or even telegraphic links with most parts of the world. It was not a member of the International Postal System. Today, this might sound like a joke, but the reality of the time was such that my letters to Amit left every fortnight by diplomatic bag via a courier, who went to Hong Kong. From there, they went by Air India to Delhi. The letters were posted in Delhi for Bangkok. It took more than a month for my letters to reach, and it took almost two months for his to reach me by the same reverse route. In today's world of instant communication, it sounds almost prehistoric. It certainly was not easy. Finally, Amit arrived in Hanoi. By this time winter had also arrived, but we had no warm clothes because our heavy baggage was still stuck in Moscow. I turned to Mr Glasnost, my counterpart in the Soviet Embassy, for his help. A few days later, I saw him coming to my office, taking two steps at a time in a state of excitement. 'Your baggage has come!' he said, and drove me to the tiny rickety airport where a Russian cargo plane was opening its underbelly, from which came gushing out potatoes. Among them, I spotted a few boxes of my books and warm clothes tumbling out. At the time of my posting to Hanoi, and because I had volunteered for this hard posting, *The Times of India* had carried a report on it. If I remember right,

it had even called me 'courageous'. This might have been the reason why I was given a somewhat favourable, if not special, treatment by the Vietnamese government. For instance, I got my driving licence at the first test, whereas the British Ambassador had taken the test several times but failed to make it. The application of my boss, the Indian Ambassador, appeared to have been lost because he was not called for the test at all. When I asked a friend why the British Ambassador could not qualify when he had several more years of driving experience than I and was a pilot as well, the answer was that the British did not blink when Vietnam was being destroyed. One evening, I was invited to dinner by the Information Ministry. After a banquet-like meal and several toasts raised to India-Vietnam friendship, a personal request was made to me. Vietnam was going to enter, for the first time, a film at an international film festival. They needed help in dubbing the film into English. Could I help them? I told them that I had no experience in this field. Besides, English was not my mother tongue. I suggested that the British Ambassador's wife might be much better suited for this. This suggestion was met with the polite reply that my Vietnamese friends preferred my English. I remember that when I told my Ambassador about this request, he asked me, 'How will they return your favour?' This had not occurred to me. I accepted the request. Every afternoon, a car came to fetch me and drove to a point at one of the largest and quietest lakes of

Hanoi, from where a boat took us to a small island on the lake. A sound studio had been made at this very tranquil place with East German help. The walls and roof were stuffed with cloth to make it soundproof. There, I embarked on my first and last venture in dubbing. I liked the film (the name of which I cannot recall), which was on the unpredictable nature of life in wartime. Nothing was how it should have been. Emotional stress and strain were reflected in the stormy winds which blew everything away. There was a note of understatement running through the story, which was moving. After an hour and a half of work, we would normally take a break outside the studio where delicious cut fruit was offered as refreshment. I wondered why our cook Ain Thai could not buy such papayas and pineapples. When I asked him, his answer was that he could have had access to the best quality of everything if he were a member of the government, but alas, he was only a nobody.

One afternoon, just as the dubbing was proceeding with concentration, a sudden loud sound brought everything to a halt. It turned out that the sound had been made by a very large lizard. I have never before, nor since, seen such a large and dominating animal of this kind. We had probably disturbed it

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during its afternoon siesta. I was terrified. The others just laughed it off. Work was resumed. At my request, Amit and I had been provided with a teacher from whom we were learning Vietnamese. He was a good teacher, but we were not half as good as students and the language is very tough, so progress was slow. One of my most memorable experiences in Hanoi was the celebration of victory in the Vietnam War in September 1975. The entire population of the town and the villages surrounding it came to the central lake of Hanoi on their bicycles and watched a magnificent display of fireworks. Chinese fireworks are renowned. They were all the more imposing because the brilliant flares of colours leaping up to touch the evening sky were reflected in the still clear waters of the lake below. It was a befitting celebration to mark the end of a long and devastating war. There were no speeches, no patriotic songs. It was just a bewitching spectacle, one not easy to forget. At the end of it, people gradually moved away and rode back home on their bicycles. There were no police in uniform. There was no one to supervise the people who had assembled and no one to 'control' an 'unruly' crowd in a hurry. No one was in a hurry. I had noticed this at the railway station as well. No one was in a hurry. People were confident that they would get their turn to carry their bicycles into the empty train carriages. It struck me that a nation which had fought an unequal war was less violent than Indians committed to 'nonviolence'. Perhaps we needed a lesson in nonvio-

lence more than other societies. I requested the Vietnamese Foreign Office to be allowed to visit Saigon and other areas in South Vietnam, which had been especially targeted for carpet-bombing and chemical weapons. North and South Vietnam were still to be united. The South was under the Provisional Revolutionary Government, whose chief was Madame Binh. Saigon was yet to be named Ho Chi Minh City. No diplomat in Hanoi had made this journey, not even Russian and Chinese diplomats. Central Vietnam was cut off because most of its towns were uninhabited ruins. Amit and I had visited Vinh in Central Vietnam, which had only one small brick house left standing, surrounded by ruins. There was no connectivity between the North and the South except through small government airplanes since Central Vietnam had been completely ravaged by bombing. My request to visit Saigon and Cu Chi was accepted and arrangements were made to take me there. I travelled in a small Soviet-made aircraft along with eight other dong chis (comrades). One of them was a woman who spent the entire journey knitting. She seemed to me to be a nurse. The seats were in the shape of overturned buckets. The scene at the airport in Saigon took me by surprise. There were unending lines of American air force fighter planes that had been left behind by the defeated army. I recalled a conversation between the Foreign Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Co Thaic, and the Indian Ambassador a few evenings ago. Our Ambassador, Chinmay Gharekhan, had said

that the Southeast Asian neighbours of Vietnam were apprehensive that the latter might use the sophisticated weaponry left behind by the Americans to export revolution to their countries. The Foreign Minister had laughingly replied that if technologically superior weaponry could win wars, then America would not have lost to Vietnam. He assured Ambassador Gharekhan that Vietnam's neighbours had no reason to be apprehensive. I was put up in a hotel close to river Saigon, the walls of which still had holes made by gunshots. Buildings still looked devastated, but life in the city appeared to be moving normally. Unlike in Hanoi, where markets were limited to selling only food items, here they were selling every conceivable item. Young women beautifully dressed in their traditional áo dài (a long split tunic dress worn over trousers) were on bicycles and the city restaurants were doing good business. Saigon had been called the Paris of the East. It was still very attractive, even chic. In this environment, the very young Viet Cong soldiers known as Bodoi, from the villages, were misfits. They looked lost. Outside a large department store, one of them asked me if he could go in. I assured him that it was his city and he should not hesitate. Later, I heard many jokes about the innocence of the Bodois, which supposedly bordered on stupidity; such was the way they were viewed in Saigon. Arrangements had been made for me to leave for Cu Chi in a jeep along with a dong chi very early in the morning. As we drove out of the city at dawn,

the landscape gradually began transforming into larger and larger bomb craters on all sides, till finally, as far as the eye could see, there was no sign of life. Not even a blade of grass. It could have been a landscape on the moon. Cu Chi was the forested area, once thickly covered with rubber trees and tall bamboos, under which the Viet Cong had dug deep tunnels and created a fighting base complete with hospitals, kitchens, and living quarters for the soldiers. This is why it was made the target of the worst bombings. Anything that was left intact was burnt with Agent Orange, a deadly chemical. By afternoon, we had reached a small hamlet of bamboo mud huts. Except for a young pregnant woman, all the inhabitants had gone out to level the ground, I was told. Since I had stepped out of a government vehicle, the young woman asked me if I was a Russian. I told her that I was not a '*Lin So*' (Russian) but an '*An Do*' (Indian). She had no idea what an '*An Do*' or Indian was, just as she had no idea what a Russian looked like.

A little further, a team was working to level the ground. They had only shovels and bamboo baskets to fill a large bomb crater with mud. I wondered how long it would take to fill those innumerable and unending holes. It seemed to me to be an impossible task. Finally, we arrived at the administrative centre. I was greeted by the dong chi in charge of the centre which, like the huts we had seen, was also made of bamboo and mud. I was offered a cup of hot water which did not have the usual

green tea leaves. 'Things are bleak now, but on your next visit I will offer you a cup of fragrant tea,' he said. He was reassuring and answered all my questions, although I was not convinced when he said that they had a bulldozer. I did not see one and could hardly believe that even if there was one, it would have the fuel it needed to run in this desolate place. That visit to Cu Chi was disturbing. It seemed to me that winning a war against a powerful adversary is a big achievement, but reconstructing on the destruction left behind is an equally challenging task. When I was leaving, my host said to me very sincerely, 'When you come next, we will share with you a meal of rice grown here.'

In Saigon, there was a small population of people of Indian origin. The French administration had shipped Tamil labour from Pondicherry (now renamed Puducherry) to work in Vietnam, just like the British had taken shiploads of Biharis to far-off places like Trinidad. The Tamil labourers had married Vietnamese women. Their children had no connection with India. They spoke Vietnamese, and some of them spoke French or English, but no one spoke any Indian language. Among them, there were some who had become businessmen and traders. I met some of them who had been serving long jail terms in prison on charges of tax evasion. Soon after the sudden withdrawal of American forces on 30 April 1975, when the prison gates were opened, these convicts, among others, also got their freedom. They were, of course, fearful of

the imminent move towards socialism and saw no future for themselves in Vietnam. They appealed for help to the Indian government to leave Vietnam. This was the time when many Vietnamese in the South were fleeing from communism in rickety boats on the high seas. There were daily reports of these boats sinking, or their passengers being saved by commercial ships.

Some of the Indian businessmen were very well-to-do. But they were determined not to buy their way on commercial airlines to leave Vietnam. I informed them that Air France was still running its flights from Saigon to Paris for a few more days, and that it would be wise to avail of this opportunity before it ceased. They were adamant that the Government of India should provide them with free air transport to leave Saigon. Finally, an Air India plane transported them free of cost to Madras, from where they made their way to France or America. Many of their children visit a completely transformed Vietnam for vacations these days.

In September 2015, Amit and I also travelled to Vietnam after forty years. We had been hearing from friends who had been there that things had changed, yet I was taken aback by what I saw. Those tiny bamboo huts with thatched roofs had disappeared. Their place was taken by colourful brick houses, two or three stories high. These thin and tall red, blue, green, and yellow structures were strange and yet attractive. Those wide avenues around the many lakes of Hanoi, which had exclusively bicycle traffic then, were now

crowded with buzzing motorcycles. The few bicycles one saw were being pedalled by children. What had remained unchanged was the sight of women tending their farms on the outskirts of the city, wearing the same large cone-shaped palm-leaf hats which protect them from sun and rain.

Like Bangalore, Hanoi is a city of many large and small lakes. But unlike Bangalore, Hanoi's lakes are clean and clear. In the race towards development, they have not been used for sewage disposal like the lakes and rivers of India. The markets of downtown Hanoi are no less crowded and bustling with activity than our markets. But they are clean, again unlike our markets. We stayed at a small hotel in what used to be and is still called the 'Old Quarter'. Forty years ago, the Old Quarter was a run-down part of the town with rickety wooden huts. Only the courageous among the small diplomatic community then dared to go there.

The Old Quarter today has a bustling market for almost everything one might like to buy. It also has the best eateries in town, which come alive as the evening progresses. Wooden benches and tables take over the narrow streets, where young couples enjoy local beer and sea food. One wonders if Delhi's Chandni Chowk will ever turn into a lively meeting place like this. Not in our lifetime.

We left Hanoi for Hue on our way to Ho Chi Minh City. Hue, situated halfway between the North and the South of the country, used to be the capital once, from where the king used to

rule. The town was totally destroyed during American bombing. Only those inhabitants who could run away in time were saved. In short, the entire city of Hue has been reconstructed after the war. Some ruins of the old capital have been restored. So has an old monastery, which is situated at a height overlooking a bend in the river Perfume. It is a most beautiful sight where monks, including women monks, reside. It has a history of playing a leading role in the country's struggle for reunification.

In the evenings, the river, which is the pride of the city, comes alive when large, illuminated boats offer music concerts along with a ride. We enjoyed this outing and found ourselves the only foreign tourists among the audience, who were nostalgic for Vietnamese songs as they played in a boat made to invite the evening breeze.

The sea around Hue is a hub of the fishing industry. Basa fish has a growing export market, including India and America. The population of Vietnam, which was forty-five million forty years ago, has doubled to ninety million now. The per capita income has far overtaken that of India. The country has full literacy and a healthcare system which covers all its villages, towns, and cities.

Saigon, which is now Ho Chi Minh City, has many attractions. The one which is a must for any visitor is the War Remnants Museum. Museums can be interesting, but this one is moving. It has a collection of articles and photographs by journalists from France, England, Germany, Italy, and America, who had

documented the war in Vietnam from dangerously close quarters. Some of them lost their lives in the process, but have left behind live accounts. The Viet Cong had no cameras, nor the time for journalism. Outside the museum, one can see the fighter jets which had rained bombs during the war. The then American General, Westmoreland, had boasted that Vietnam would be bombed back to the Stone Age. Forty years ago, I had personally seen the Stone Age in Cu Chi.

I was eager to revisit Cu Chi after four decades. Fortunately, we found a good guide to take us there. The young man was fluent in English and knowledgeable in history, and not just the history of Vietnam. As we approached Cu Chi from the city, both sides of the road were covered with tall bamboo and green trees. I asked our guide if they were rubber trees. He smiled and nodded. In between, there were fields and nurseries of orchids. Vietnam is one of the leading suppliers of these exotic flowers to Japan.

Our young guide was the son of a farmer who had a small piece of land on which he grew black pepper. Our guide and his brother spent three months of the year helping their parents on the farm. Vietnam is overtaking India as the leading exporter of black pepper.

Could this green environment possibly be the Cu Chi of dust and large craters of forty years earlier? Groups of young European and Australian tourists were making their way to recreated tunnels which had once been the military base of the

Viet Cong. They saw the hospitals and kitchens, and the individual underground facilities in which the Viet Cong had operated during the war, all of which had been recreated for public viewing. What they did not see and could not have imagined was the complete devastation of Cu Chi, which was ingrained in my memory from my visit there im-

mediately after the war. The delta of the Mekong, one of the longest rivers of Asia, has turned into a large producer of rice, which is not only the staple food of Vietnam, but also one of its biggest exports. This nation, which had defeated a superpower and its sophisticated war technology on the strength of its bicycles and its determination,

has with the same determination been providing welfare to its people. Salaam Vietnam! □□□ [Excerpted from 'Lived Stories' by Madhu Bhaduri under permission from Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd].

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A BURNING PROBLEM

Refugees in India

Pranjali Bandhu

REFUGEES ARE people forcibly displaced from their homes and who are, therefore, compelled to seek shelter elsewhere. There are many reasons for the displacement: wars including civil wars, border clashes, inter-ethnic conflict, gross violations of human rights, communal riots, environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters, climate change, epidemics and pandemics, development projects, and so on. The displacement could be internal or across national borders.

Officially, there are about **2.5 lakh** documented refugees living in the country; the unofficial estimate is around **4.5 lakh**. Internally displaced people are estimated to number over **5 million**. To begin with, a chronological overview of the different categories of refugees is presented, starting from the pre Second World War period when the phenomenon of modern day refugees began to make itself felt on the Indian sub-continent.

In the mid-1930s some 5000 Jews from Central Europe

(mainly Germany and Austria) sought asylum in British India. Jews from these countries had started applying for asylum to the British Indian authorities in the 1930s after Hitler came to power in Germany. Not all such applications were accepted because the British rulers were wary of Nazi spies and, in fact, in 1939 interred all Germans in the country considering them 'enemy aliens.' Indian industrialists and politicians like Nehru lobbied for visas for Jewish refugees out of humanitarian considerations, and also because they realised their skills would aid India's development.

Those who applied for and obtained visas were majorly highly qualified people in the sciences, arts, architecture, medicine, etc. They were employed as consultants or given responsible positions by the various Maharajas, like of Baroda, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Mysore and Patiala and after independence by the Government of India. One of them, Alex Aronson, was given refuge in Tagore's Santiniketan and made useful contributions as author

and educator. Another well known composer and ethnomusicologist, Walter Kaufmann, spent some time in Bombay and is well known for his composition of the signature tune for AIR (All India Radio). However, despite their interest in Eastern/Indian cultures, after World War-II ended they settled in Israel/Palestine or the USA.

During the War some Polish refugees (including Polish Jews) found shelter in India. Under the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 the Soviet Union annexed a part of Eastern Poland into Ukraine and Belarus. A good number of Poles were deported to Soviet labour camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan. When the Soviet Union became part of the Allied Forces after being attacked by Germany it released Poles from its prisons and labour camps so that they could join in the war effort. In 1942, the Maharaja of Nawanagar in the Kutch region of Gujarat (present-day Jamnagar) accepted 500 orphan Polish children into his territories. By March 1943 the Valivade Camp in Maharashtra's Kolhapur, then a Princely State, was set up. It soon became a small Polish settlement with 5000 refugees having a church, schools, hospital, post office,

shops, gardens, fire brigade and even a tent cinema theatre.

Another camp for them was set up in Karachi in 1946. The expenses for these settlements were borne by the Polish government-in-exile, which had negotiated with the British government to get these deportees out from the Soviet Union. After they left in 1948, the Valivade Camp was used for housing Sindhi refugees who came to India post-Partition. During World War-II many refugees from Eastern Europe were settled in Asia and Africa by the colonial administrations, an instance of the colonial/neo-colonial world being used to bear the 'burden' of a war fought solely in their interests.

During the Second World War, after the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1941, when Burmese nationalists teamed up with the Japanese against the British rulers, who initially beat a retreat, there was an exodus of around 5 lakh Indians and some Euro-Burmese to India under very difficult conditions and with very little help from the colonial rulers who had encouraged their immigration to Burma in various capacities. Indians had faced riots in the 1930s and they feared the worst. Those who survived the difficult trek home (1 to 1.5 lakh) were able to resettle themselves fairly well in their home country.

The Partition of India in 1947 was marked by very large refugee outflows and inflows accomplished by horrific violence to give birth to the two new nation states of India and Pakistan—a religion-based division of the subcontinent. In terms of the

numbers and savagery involved, it was a cataclysmic event. Its ramifications are being felt till date and refugees continue to cross the borders created at that time and after the secession of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) from West Pakistan in 1971.

After the incorporation of East Turkestan as the Uyghur Autonomous Region by Communist China about 1000 Uighurs who had come in 1949 to India, were allowed to stay only for a few years. In 1954, under Chinese governmental pressure, they were made to leave for other countries. There is still a small number of Uighurs living in Kashmir and Ladakh (in Srinagar, Leh, and Kargil). They are the descendants of Silk route traders who were in this region at the time of Chinese communist occupation. Deciding to remain here they married locally and settled down in this country.

In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet along with many Tibetans, many of them belonging to the feudal elite, after Chinese communist occupation of Tibet. Among the refugees from Tibet are Tibetan Muslims from Lhasa who were allowed to leave by the Chinese government, if they wished. After diplomatic negotiations with the Indian government they resettled in Kashmir because they are originally traders from Kashmir, who had settled in Lhasa centuries back, married local women and had formed a distinct community there.

Tribal communities of Buddhist Chakmas and Hindu Hajongs from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of then East Pakistan came as development

refugees to India in the 1960s. The building of the Kaptai Dam on the Karnaphuli River by the Pakistan government with the help of USAID and World Bank had displaced them and they also suffered from communal animosity. Against their will the CHT had been included in Pakistan. They were settled in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), present day Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of Assam and Tripura, by the GOI. During and after the formation of Bangladesh, some of them cooperated with the West Pakistan government in fighting against the national liberation struggle of the East Bengalis, despite overtures from Mujibur Rahman, because of the fear of domination by the majority community. After the formation of Bangladesh they resisted their inclusion and subordinate status in the country and demanded self-determination rights. The resultant conflict situation and the settling of Bengalis in their habitation areas have added to the refugee outflow. After the overthrow of the Sheikh Hasina government in 2024 there has been some refugee outflow of mainly Hindus from Bangladesh into India.

Between 1962-64 more than 3 lakh Indians and 2 lakh Nepalis were forced out of Myanmar by the General Ne Win regime. Their property and businesses were nationalised and wealth confiscated. Some people of Indian and Nepali origin including Gurkhas still live in Burma and are integrated into Burmese society. Various minority ethnic groups from Myanmar have been migrating to India due to clashes with the military

government since the 1970s, and it is continuing. These are mainly Chins, but also include Karens and Kachins. They live mainly in Mizoram and to a lesser extent in Manipur, Assam, and New Delhi. The Rohingya refugees being rendered into a stateless people having been denied Burmese citizenship form a special case among them.

Some of the Ugandan Indians who were ousted by Idi Amin in 1972 came back to India as refugees. Many of them settled in the UK and Canada, some went to Kenya and others to Pakistan and elsewhere. Afghans started coming in as refugees from the time of Russian occupation in 1979 as part of *The Great Game* between imperialist powers, and their influx continues. These include Hindu and Sikh Afghans. 60,000 Afghans came to India during the decade 1979-89. They are one of the big refugee groups of the world. Thousands of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the country do not have any legal status.

A few lakh (3,04,269) Sri Lankan Tamils entered India during the various Eelam Wars starting in the early 1980s, a fairly good number of whom were repatriated after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991. Nepalis from Bhutan had to leave the country due to its "one nation, one people" policy introduced in the late 1980s. By the end of 1992 more than one lakh had fled or been forced out of this Himalayan country. They settled in North-East India, in Darjeeling in North West Bengal, in Sikkim and Assam, though most went back to Nepal. During the decade-long Maoist

people's war in Nepal from 1996-2006 displaced Nepalis came to live in India.

Small groups (few hundreds, sometimes less than a hundred) of Iranians (among them Christian converts from Islam), Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians, Somalis, Sudanese, Congolese, Eritreans and Ethiopians are here escaping from the problems in their home countries due to ethnicity- and/or religion-based clashes, and issues of political control. There are some Balochs who have come to India because of their struggle against the exploitation by the Pakistani state.

INTERNAL REFUGEES

There are a large number of development refugees, many of them Adivasis, who have been forcibly displaced due to developmental activity like dams, SEZs, infrastructure building, etc. Then there is large-scale rural to urban migration; but post the first nationwide sudden lockdown of about two months in 2020 due to Covid-19 there was a forced reverse flow, in the course of which they suffered great deprivations and many died. There are others who flee from life-threatening situations created by natural disasters (floods, tsunamis, cyclones, landslides, earthquakes). The ramifications intensify due to unscientific development policies and climate change. Coastal erosion in the Sundarbans Delta, Majuli Island in Assam, and coastal Odisha has led to displacement.

Communal violence is another cause for displacement. This includes the Kashmiri Pandits/Brahmins, who were forced to leave the Valley in the 1990s (350,000 according to some

estimates, with 1 lakh living in Delhi and the rest in Jammu). Many Sikhs left Delhi (at least temporarily) after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The pogrom in Gujarat in 2002 led to displacement and ghettoisation of 100,000 Muslims there; clashes between Jat and Muslim communities in Muzaffarnagar district in UP left more than 50,000 Muslims displaced in 2013; the Bhagalpur riots in 1989 in Bihar had also displaced many Muslims. It is a continuing phenomenon where the 'nation' is turning against its own people, not to speak of outsiders. Muslims, who no less belong here, are being threatened with genocide and are in great danger. Christians too are increasingly under attack.

URGENT APPEAL

This unique world law fortnightly—perhaps the only law journal in India which regularly publishes important foreign and international courts' decisions—as also provides copious information regarding the socio-economic/political conditions of various countries the world over and invites/publishes thought provoking articles on the pressing problems and crises faced by the people of the world in various spheres—is running on heavy losses and is IN DANGER OF BEING CLOSED DOWN SOON unless subscribers, admirers/well-wishers rise to the occasion and render crucial help in the form of causing many more subscriptions, advertisements (Rs 15,000 or more) and donations at the earliest and regularly. Hope and request all such sympathetic persons/institutions would chip in with their precious aid.

—Publisher, Editor, LAW

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The North-East is a major arena of displacement of various ethnic groups due to multiple reasons. Here are of them here: The Assam movement against 'foreigners'—Bengali Muslims and Hindus, people from Bihar and UP—led to and is continuing to lead to forcible displacement of some of these people. Nagas from Imphal Valley in Manipur have been forced to flee to the State of Nagaland. Insurgency and counter-insurgency operations by security forces in the North-East also create displacement: for example, Hmar and Paite ethnic groups have been displaced in Manipur from areas bordering Myanmar, and have had to live under deplorable conditions.

The Bodo and Santhal conflict in Assam led to displacement of the latter as well as those who had come and settled from other States like Bihar and UP. 250,000 people had to live in refugee camps. They became landless and destitute because the government stopped aid after some time. Nepalis have been ousted from North-Eastern States. They have had to leave Assam, Manipur (1980) and Meghalaya (1987). Most resettled in the Nepal Terai; some in North Bengal. Intra and inter group clashes among the 30-40 rebel groups in the North East are there. This also leads to displacements. Internally displaced Chakmas from Mizoram live in camps in Tripura due to their conflict with Mizos. 31,000 Bru (Reang) were displaced from Mizoram after fleeing ethnic fighting with Mizos in 1997 and live in camps in northern Tripura. There are about 50,000

internally displaced people in Manipur due to the inter-ethnic conflict between the Meiti and Kuki communities.

People along the border with Bangladesh—70,000 in Tripura alone without compensation from the central government and along the LOC with Pakistan have been displaced. Villagers in border areas in J&K and Punjab are often disturbed by cross-border firings. Displacement and rehabilitation also takes place because the fields are mined and become toxic, infertile and useless for agriculture. During the 1999 Kargil War 1.57 lakh people were temporarily displaced from the border belt. Naxalite insurgency and state counter-insurgency in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha has also led to many villagers getting displaced and living in camps.

There are also asylum seekers and refugees from India: Khalistanis, Kashmiri militants, militants belonging to various ethnic groups in the North-East have since long sought shelter across the border, in neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, or even in the US, Canada or UK. People left out in the course of the NRC exercise in Assam, many of who are in detention camps, become stateless and can add to the number of refugees and asylum seekers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The India government, while not acceding to international conventions on this issue, has also not passed any national refugee law uniformly applicable to all refugees or stateless persons, which

would properly document them and ensure their access to basic necessities, their right to education and work, freedom of association and other basic human rights, like freedom of movement. Neither does it have a national policy for the internally displaced peoples. The discriminatory Citizenship (amendment) Act of 2019 needs a review. Considering the number and variety of refugees and now deportees in the sub-continent and their steady exponential growth worldwide India needs more Migration and Refugee Studies Centres at universities offering academic programmes on this topic and solutions to the issues involved.

Having a South Asian, rather than a narrow, chauvinistic or communal 'national' perspective on this issue is important. Without giving priority to our South Asian identity we will not be able to resolve the refugee problem that is an outcome of our collective skewed approach to political, economic and social issues on the subcontinent and an inherited colonial legacy. Prior to the establishment of the British colonial Empire in this region we did not seem to have any notion of "foreigner." The region was characterised by pluralism and diversity, a basic spirit of adjustment and accommodation. Foreigners, outsiders, have been made welcome and given a space; examples abound in this regard. The spirit is that of *Atithi Devo Bhava*, of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). Swami Vivekanand in his address at the First Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 had extolled this country for sheltering the persecuted and

the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. The motto of the Rabindranath Thakur founded university, Visva-Bharati, is “Where the world meets in one nest,” eschewing national chauvinism and narrow patriotism of any hue in favour of internationalism while rejecting imperialism, domination of and by others.

New economic theories and models away from the perpetual economic growth model have been and are being proposed by various thinkers, such as the Economy of Permanence by the

late Gandhian ecological economist, Dr J C Kumarappa. These are the economics of austerity, degrowth model, post-development theory, economics of ecosystems and biodiversity, steady state economics, open system economics, economics of happiness, and well-being, transition economics and so on, which need to be further explored, discussed, debated and experimented with in right earnest against the current predatory and rapacious world economic system ruinous to planet earth. Electoral autocracies, fascist and military dic-

tatorships that sustain the world imperialist order have to be discarded. Only in this way can people overcome the current conflicts arising from considering as ‘trespassers,’ ‘infiltrators,’ ‘termites,’ ‘criminals,’ etc. those people crossing lines drawn on maps, hard borders that have often been artificially imposed along narrowly defined nations/nationalities or by breaking up fluid economically and culturally contiguous areas, and take the road to a democratic borderless world where the mind is without fear. □□□

RECALLING ZHANG CHUNQIAO

Political Economy of Socialism

Harsh Thakor

VETERAN CHINESE communist Zhang Chunqiao died of throat cancer on April 21, 2005, at the age of 88. Thus, communists across the world commemorated his 20th death anniversary in April. Marxists also commemorate the 50th anniversary of his historic document ‘On Exercising the All-Around Dictatorship of the Proletariat,’ written in January 1975 and publishing of the Shanghai textbook of political economy, also published in 1975.

Despite Zhang’s distinguished career as a communist theoretician and organiser, his death was given no official fanfare in China. He was in prison from 1976 to 1998, and lived his final years in obscurity.

Zhang Chun Qiao’s life is an example of a relentless Communist revolutionary who could withstand the most perilous conditions, handling the most complex of situations. Till the last

drop of his blood he waved the banner of Maoism in waging a revolutionary struggle within a Socialist state, devising a perfect blending of polemical mastery with revolutionary creativity.

Zhang was a Shanghai journalist who had joined the party in the late 1930s. He fought as a guerrilla fighter behind the enemy lines in the war against the Japanese occupation.

In November 1965, one of the publications that Zhang edited published an essay by Yao Wenyan criticising a play that had been published four years earlier. The critique of the play was to politically counterpose elements within the Communist Party that advocated using elements of capitalism—for example, private ownership of land—to develop the economy.

The essay was the precursor in triggering an intense struggle against who were termed as “capitalist roaders” within the

CCP. Those in the party who believed in the socialist road of the Chinese revolution—Mao included—launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a means of bringing the masses into the fold of what had been up to that point an inner-party struggle.

Zhang traversed different phases and circumstances when providing leadership to the complex battles that kept the capitalist-roaders at bay while working to eradicate the social remnants inherent from the old society.

Zhang played a key role in this struggle as one of the key members of the Group in Charge of the Cultural Revolution. The GCCR was formally responsible to the CCP’s Central Committee, charged in August 1966 with carrying out the party’s “Sixteen Point Decision.”

Based in Shanghai, Zhang Chunqiao played an integral role in expanding the base of the Cultural Revolution from a student-based movement to the working class.

In late 1966, Zhang was de-

puted with task of setting up the “Shanghai Commune,” modelled after the Paris Commune of 1871. The Paris Commune had been recognised as a new form of state by revolutionary leaders Karl Marx and V I Lenin.

The students and workers who had mobilised to push forward the Chinese revolution were to be the base of a new type of government. No longer would bureaucratic elements administer the party and state from behind closed doors, separate from the masses.

Zhang embarked on work in Shanghai organising the Workers Headquarters, bringing factory committees into the forefront of the Cultural Revolution mobilisation.

In 1967, as the Cultural Revolution progressed, he led an ground shaking event known as the **January Storm**. After months of intense *débâte* to resolve the issues, rebels from Shanghai’s factories, as well as the neighbourhoods and schools, toppled the old city administration, a stronghold of the capitalist-roaders. Led by revolutionary party members, at first they tried to establish the Shanghai Commune. This was based on the model of the 1871 Paris Commune, the first, short-lived working class revolution, where there was no professional army and all officials were elected and subject to immediate recall at any time.

In 1975, as the struggle was blossoming at a new height, Zhang published ‘On Exercising the All-Around Dictatorship of the Proletariat’, a short but dense text that had an explosive political effect.

It explored the contradictory

nature of socialism, the manner it investigated by the contention of elements of the old society and the new. Zhang diagnosed Mao’s understanding of socialism as a *society in transition*.

It made a most comprehensive analysis of the prevailing conditions and the root cause of revisionism and explained Mao’s concept of continuing the dictatorship of the Proletariat was an extension of Leninism. It explored and diagnosed most intensively the roots of the ideology of both Marx and Lenin of combating the bourgeoisie within the party and morally supported a cultural revolution.

First of all, he wrote, socialist ownership had not been completely established, especially in the countryside, and it could be easily lost. Secondly, the relations between people in production also had to continuously change, with working people having to be increasingly drawn into the management of production and, the administration of the entire society. Further, the relations of distribution also had to change, so that in stages society could begin to leave behind the principle of paying people according to their work.

It analysed how in the absence of persistent struggle to advance in all the relations between people and not just ownership, and struggle in the sphere of culture and ideas against the outlook and habits inherited from the old society, socialist ownership would be overturned and the old relationships, instead of being gradually wiped out, would be restored with vengeance.

It investigated how the most vital contradiction in socialist

society was within the party itself, between those patronising ideas and policies representing the interests of a new bourgeoisie, and the representatives of the proletariat, the working class that cannot emancipate itself without revolutionising all relations among people throughout the globe. This manifests itself in a struggle between two ideological and political currents that would drive society in opposite directions.

For one thing Zhang was unable to properly establish a united front to combat the capitalist roaders, with powerful left sectarian tendencies surfacing. Insufficient focus was placed on establishing or correcting errors in practising Massline.

No effective fortified infrastructure was built to insulate the movement and replenish forces.

Broad based mobilisation of the working class was ineffective in the struggles and for a considerable period the revolutionary Committees were defunct. Influence of rightist forces in the Army was not repealed. Excesses were not checked.

Maoist Economics and the Revolutionary Road to Communism: The Shanghai Textbook on Socialist Political Economy written in 1975 is one of the most comprehensive explorations by the Maoist revolutionaries of their views on the nature and functioning of the socialist alternative to capitalism. It makes a path-breaking contribution to socialist economic theory. In the current world climate, the book assumes heightened importance—because the claim is made that there is in fact no alternative to capitalism,

relegating Socialism, to be doomed.

It was Zhang who had formulated the initial plans for the **Political Economy of Socialism**. He had issued directives about its contents, had led several important discussion meetings concerned with the text, and had, reviewed final drafts.

The book was a testament that society be organised eradicating exploitation, competition, and private gain. Alienation, social fragmentation, and bureaucratic domination have their roots in economic and technological development. What heights were scaled in revolutionary China between 1949 and 1976 were truly path-breaking.

The book showcased Maoist Economics and the Future of Socialism in building a breeding ground towards creating a new socialist society as a transition to full communist society, in which men and women would consciously and voluntarily, and through great struggles, transform and govern the world by themselves. At the same time, while imbibing the positive experiences of the first efforts to build a socialist economy in the Soviet Union, Mao dialectically reformulated the prevailing model of a planned socialist economy that became institutionalised under Stalin.

The book reflects how Mao was conceptualising and implementing a set of solutions to the real problems of developing a planned socialist economy that is not based on bureaucratised regulation or reproduce oppressive capitalist relations.

The book reveals how the Chinese revolutionaries were

preparing for battle, how they were training people to identify the structures and mechanisms within socialist society that had to be transformed and to understand what was ultimately at stake—to continue the revolution or witness it overturned.

The book explored how Maoist model also represents a complete anti-thesis of the orthodox Western approach to “underdevelopment,” which perceives underdevelopment as nothing more than delayed development that can only be escalated and promoted through absorption of foreign capital and participation in the international division of labour. Revolutionary China, by contrast, cut off from the world imperialist system. It formulated and implemented a developmental strategy based on giving priority to agriculture, utilising simple and intermediate technologies that could be spread and adopted throughout the economy while seeking to develop and apply advanced technology in a way that would promote self-reliance, and, above all, unleashing people.

Without doubt there were problems and mistakes. The economy had certain weak points; the new social institutions certainly had some flaws; and in the booming of mass struggle, errors were rampant—sometimes due to people getting carried away in their drive to change things, other times due to dogma.

What is at issue here is the feasibility of revolutionary communism—whether or not it is possible to end oppression and class distinctions on the basis of the voluntary and collective efforts of millions.

The **Shanghai Textbook** is a concoction of synthesis and originality, conceptualises socialism as three interrelated things. First, it is a form of class rule through which the proletariat (in alliance with other popular strata, most especially the poor peasantry in the oppressed Third World nations) rules over old and newly-engendered bourgeois and exploiting forces. Second, it is a mode of production in which social ownership replaces private ownership of the means of production and social need replaces private profit as the purpose and measure of social production. Third, it is a period of transition characterised by intense class struggle and penetrative transformation, the aim of which is to eradicate classes and class dis-

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tinctions on a world scale and as part of a worldwide process of revolution.

The authors of the Shanghai Textbook endorse the view of the Narodniks that without the development of agriculture the development of the national economy is not possible, and therefore they conclude that the development of the national economy is determined by the development of agriculture. The growth of capitalism during its early stages of development took place despite a shrinkage of the peasant market because of the expansion of the market of the means of production. Under so-

cialism, the large masses of individual producers do not disappear under the pressure of the development of capitalism in the countryside, nor does the peasant's market shrink in favour of the development of industry, as happens under capitalism. Much to the contrary, in the transitional economy the expansion of the forces of production in agriculture is mainly driven by heavy industry. To endorse that the development of agriculture in a relatively backward country like China can take place on the basis of simple cooperation without the assistance of the state in the form of a solid heavy indus-

try is a reflection of a weak comprehension of the basics of Marxist political economy. The economic history of the construction of socialism has shown that failure to understand and implement this in economic practice ultimately leads to the development of capitalism in the countryside. The authors of the Shanghai Textbook contradict this thesis. They arrive at the same conclusions as the Narodniks when they even questioned the feasibility of the development of capitalism in Russia. □□□

[Harsh Thakor is a freelance journalist. Thanks information from Raymond Lotta 'and Rafael Martinez in Revolutionary Democracy.]

SMART CITIES, BROKEN SELVES

Displacement, Aspiration and the Contradiction of Capitalism

Dhiraj Kumar
Keyoor Pathak

WE RECENTLY READ one piece in *The Indian Express*, titled "Smart cities, broken communities: From New Delhi to Varanasi, what we lose when urban planning is not inclusive." This descriptive writing issued a subtle invitation in a form of provocation to deliberate the phenomenon sociologically. We try to discuss what lies behind the shiny portico of smartness? What does the loss of community, shops or any space refer. Any form of displacement, or the loss of community desire or aspiration in the name of the modernity make us aware about the way we organise space, society and subjectivity. This piece of writing engages with a discussion of displacement which

refers that it is not just a policy outcome but a psychic and moral burden mainly structured by the aspiration and weird by the contradiction. This contradiction is embedded with the concept and planning of smart cities. David Sandel aptly argued that 'Smart Cities are ninety percent Sociology and ten percent Infrastructure'. It demands how to look this contradiction sociologically.

Smart cities, as proposed and imagined by policymakers and development planners, and promoted by politicians, have emerged from the logic of late capitalism, where the transformation of space serves capital accumulation. This transformation occurs only after the commodification of space and the restructuring of identities into

fragmented selves. This process of capital accumulation not only changed the infrastructure but also facilitated unpredictability. This kind of unpredictability renders capitalism always flourish in form of instability through the production of space and spatiality.

If we examine the concept of spatial fix, we can find that slums are razed, skylines apartment built, and infrastructure modernised and all these happened in the name of progress. Here we want to make a point, smart city is not only associated with the discourse of developmental projects but smart city is a desire driven machine. The ideology of developmentalism as a process and activity served as a signifier but also it operates not by deception but by the organising our desire. We want to make an argument that by organising the desires, the poor and the masses whose settlement are not just displaced but also renounced. This renounce-

ment is a necessary by-product of developmental projects carries the burden of late modernity. The smartness of the city depends on the ideological fantasy which talked about the technological advancement and beautification equated to the idea of justice and inclusion. It also accelerates the accumulation and facilitates the tragedy of late capitalism. We all are the carrier of this late modernity and this tragedy is doubled by the fact that displacement and making of smart cities often rides on the back of aspiration. No one denies that even a marginalised desires better infrastructure, more livable house, and having the aspiration to achieve the fantasy which capitalism generates. Our selves are gripped in the chain of aspiration generated by capitalism. Here is the psycho-analytic twist, the poor or the excluded or the displaced are made to aspire the system that structurally excluded him. The displacement of individual, collective masses, spaces as a fragmented subject of capitalism wanting inclusion but their inclusion can be only happened on the cost of erosion of their history and spatial memory. Such erosion is not just a material loss; it can be termed as a symbolic violence where the individual or the community itself is a reason of their violence due to their aspiration. If we exclude their uninvited role in the making of the broken selves no one can deny that this loss can be a narrative discontinuity of the identity associated with the place. It is the demand to forget who you were in order to become who the developers or the

planners want or allow to be. The theorisation suggests that the subject is caught between the imaginary (fantasies of development), the symbolic (state planning and the legal frameworks) and the real who have the unassimilable trauma of eviction.

This piece of writing deals with two parallax perspective, we are forced to confront two seemingly irreconcilable truths: that smart cities may be necessary to address infrastructural decay, and that they simultaneously operate through structural exclusion. *The Indian Express* article mourns the loss of community, and rightly so, but we want to tell that we don't need to fall into a nostalgic idealisation of the past. The displacement was never utopia. But the dream of its erasure reveals the moral blindness at the heart of developmental ideology.

We must stay with the contradiction. Now the city is being turned into the spectacles of smartness. Planning in the cities is not technocratic but theatrical. The making of master plans, its visualisation, creates an aesthetic of rationality. Legibility, the idea of James Scott is instructive here, which refers that development planners want space readable, and governable through efficient manners while erasing the informality, local and unpredictable. To demand inclusive development while recognising that inclusion, under capitalism, often means being included into dispossession. The ethical act, then, is not to resolve the contradiction but to hold it open, to resist the fantasy that displacement can be

“managed” without confronting the deeper symbolic and psychic wounds it creates.

Our writing is not just a moment for reflection but it is a call to rethink the very language of the grammar of development induced displacement. What if inclusion isn't simply about extending the benefits of the city to those on the margins, but about radically reimagining what the city could be? Not a sophisticated engine of growth built for accumulation of capital, but a shared ethical space rooted in care, memory, and justice. As Zizek reminds us, truly political acts don't always come with clear solutions. It consists aesthetic lie. Often, their power lies in the contradiction and the unsettlement we've come to accept as normal. So perhaps the most radical response to the “smart city” fantasy isn't to reject development altogether, but to ask: what would a smart city look like. This is the moral and political parallax we live within—the uncomfortable space between past and future, between what we hope for and what we inherit, between technical planning and human need. But maybe sitting with that discomfort—without rushing to fix it—is where a more truthful, more grounded sociology begins. ■■■

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LIVING IN THE PAST

Naxalite Movement—an Aberration in Transition?

Manas Bakshi

IT WAS IN MAY 1967 THAT the peasant uprising in Naxalbari took shape. It included two other areas—Kharibari and Phansidewa of the same Terai region. It infuriated the stormy clouds of a militant communist movement to cast a spillover effect in several other parts of the country. While the movement opened up new vistas before a new progeny, some people claimed afterwards that it was an indelibly dauntless and eventful episode at the turning point of history. But its line of action not fructifying, some others still cavil at it as an aberration in transition.

The point needs explication because, in the backdrop, divergent thoughts on national and international issues apart, some of the ultra-left forces were misled due to alleged lack of foresight in leadership as also improper guidance from outside sources. Together with this, some so-called ‘comrades’ betrayed compromising with the power against which they screamed a tirade of anti-establishment protest. In effect, the movement that rose to a climax in the socio-political history of West Bengal at a point of time with unwavering commitment to social justice and a positive stance against the longstanding socio-economic repression on the meek and weak failed to usher in a new era of radical change—let alone a revolutionary change.

To many people it created a spur which culminated in a momentum though remained confined to a limited sphere and, admittedly, could not retain the spirit and fervour it was started with to goad the movement long along the right track. But the historical truth of the upsurge cannot be denied, and the factors that ignited an impregnable impetus among the peasantry, a sizeable section of workers and the budding community has still remained relevant to the socio-economic context of the country. And perhaps will so remain in so far as economic inequality, evils of caste system, politics of religion and the iron grip of the bourgeois-capitalist forces will stay well entrenched in the democratic framework.

None can deny that pitted against the background of growth of capitalism not conforming to the cherished path of a socialistic pattern of society, the new generation outlook and thoughts were largely moulded by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, and they thought it could be easily directed towards effecting a revolutionary change with an ideologically developed mindset which emerged as one of the reasons for the Naxal movement. But unfortunately, the middle class ennui about their armed struggle against the state machinery was poignantly manifest in the failure of the movement to build up a support

base of the people at large. Because there was enormous brain drain on the one hand and miserable death of numerous bright students, on the other. It created a vacuum in the academic and administrative fields affecting largely the Bengali middle class—usually fond of a mediocre but taciturn way of living though aspirant for a better tomorrow.

It was also evident that there was an orchestrated attack to crush the movement by generalising their image of being believers in the policy of backstabbing their “petty-bourgeois class enemies”. But it was only a section which could be blurred with that stigma. Again, it was a fact that differences of ideology and opinion cropped up with regard to which path to follow—towards an organised revolutionary movement to bring about a total change or to introduce and implement some radical reforms remaining as an integral part of the existing system called parliamentary democracy?

Whatever be the ultimate outcome, the movement did lend a voice to the toiling masses especially in the rural sector though to a limited extent. And they came to realise that their fate would not change unless there was a sea-change in the socio-political set-up and lopsided economic system. But this realisation was not without the sacrifice of thousands of brilliant students and youths who had to pay for their mission or mistake whatever one may opine.

Undoubtedly, over the years, assessment and analysis from several viewpoints have been made to find out whether it was justified to opt for an action plan

to bring out a revolutionary change in the entire existing system where people have the glorious legacy of thousands of freedom fighters and, at the same time, the black-spot of betrayal of some Mirzafar-Umichand like elements of the pre-independence period. The politically ignited spate of consciousness that sparked off the Naxalite movement and swept parts of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and some other states did not last long but left a lasting impact on the mind of the suffering people everywhere in the country.

Despite plethora of write-ups on the issue, it still remains to be explored how far and to what extent the struggle against poverty and starvation—especially in the rural sector, social evils and political corruption had cast its effect and has remained relevant to today's perspective. So much so that its aftermath transpired in poems, stories, novels, dramas and films when the upsurge of the rebels paled into silence but not irrelevance. Several authentic books on the Naxalite movement have dwelt on the issue from different dimensions.

Literary sensibility that the tumultuous days of Naxalite movement stirred up is embodied in several novels as well.

The turbulent days of the sev-

enties have been well encapsulated in a number of films directed by the doyens of Indian cinema: the trilogy *Pratidwandi-Simabaddha-Jana Aranya* by Satyajit Ray, *Kolkata 71* by Mrinal Sen, *Jukti Takko Aar Goppo* by Ritwik Ghatak and *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* by Govind Nihalni. Equally memorable are the films by some avant-garde directors like *Kalbela* by Gautam Ghosh, *Dour* by Sankar Bhattacharya, *Griha Yudh* by Buddhadeb Dasgupta, *Naxal* by Debaditya Bandopadhyaya and some others.

Now, if one compares the reality of the late sixties and early seventies of the previous century with today's perspective, it is crystal clear how far and to what extent the entire technological ambience and socio-economic situations have changed. With IT developing immensely to provide scope for career building before the new generation, education too has become as much professional as job-oriented. The beckoning from the outer world for a cosy placement in the establishments befitting the global market of demand and supply of talent has also become a formidable factor. And the AI syndrome has accentuated it further. Mechanisation has squeezed job opportunities for the common people. Labour intensive indus-

tries are on the decline posing a severe threat to the plenty of human resources in a country as India. Simultaneously, population explosion with poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and unemployment seems to be heading towards catastrophe.

Needless to add, government efforts are afoot now to persuade a handful of Naxals still in existence to shun the path of militancy in politics provoking disruptive activities, and merge with the mainstream of public life with a package with some doles/benefits for a better living. But, with crisis in many a front and indifferent attitude to struggle having become a sine qua non at present, the people seem to have lost faith in political ideology; but, at the same time, have learnt the art of living a lackadaisical life encouraging next generation to be either quick bucks in whatever capacity possible or pawns in the hands of opportunist political leaders. □□□

[**Manas Bakshi**, author of two empirical works—*From Feudalism to Capitalism* (Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd.) and *Land Reforms in Left Regime* (Allied Publishes Pvt. Ltd.)—is recipient of the prestigious Naji Naaman award, 2024 from Lebanon for his creative works as an Indo-English poet and scribe.]

ETHNIC CAULDRON

Contemporary Conflict in Manipur

Himanshu Roy*

TO FULLY COMPRE-
hend the roots of the
ongoing conflict in
Manipur, it is essential to re-
visit the region's political his-

tory. The historical experience
of Manipur has created a dis-
tinctive socio-political conscious-
ness, which often finds itself at
odds with national narratives.

For centuries, Manipur func-
tioned as a sovereign kingdom
with its own administrative and
cultural institutions. The Brit-
ish intervention, and later the
merger with India, significantly
altered its political trajectory.

The circumstances surround-
ing the 1949 merger are often

described as coercive. The then Maharaja, Bodhachandra Singh, was summoned to Shillong where he signed the Merger Agreement, reportedly under pressure. This undermined the democratic mandate of the people of Manipur, as the existing elected legislative assembly was neither consulted nor allowed to function. The subsequent reduction of Manipur to a centrally administered Part C state not only diluted its autonomy but also instilled a lasting sense of political grievance among its people.

Adding to these tensions was the imposition of AFSPA in 1958, which granted sweeping powers to the armed forces. While the intention was to curb insurgency, the act led to widespread allegations of human rights violations, particularly extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and sexual violence. The infamous case of Thangjam Manorama and the resulting protests led by Meira Paibis (women torch-bearers) brought international attention to the plight of Manipuris under AFSPA. Yet, despite recommendations from national human rights bodies, the Act continues to be enforced in parts of the state, deepening the trust deficit.

Unlike other princely states, Manipur had a democratically elected assembly under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. The sudden dissolution of this assembly and the imposition of a centrally administered regime without broad consultation sowed seeds of resentment. The denial of full statehood until 1972 and the continued deployment of special laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers)

Act (AFSPA) have only reinforced the sense of alienation.

Insurgency became a natural fallout of this alienation. Various groups, including the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), emerged with secessionist demands. These insurgent groups found fertile ground among the youth, who were disillusioned by unemployment, corruption, and perceived neglect by the central and state governments. While counter-insurgency operations have reduced their influence, the insurgency-homeland politics nexus remains potent.

Homeland politics, particularly among the Nagas and Kukis, continues to destabilise the region. The Naga demand for Greater Nagalim and the Kuki aspiration for a separate administrative unit often clash with Meitei concerns about territorial integrity. These demands are not just political; they are deeply rooted in cultural memory and ethno-historical narratives. The overlapping territorial claims of Nagas and Kukis in the hills further complicate negotiations and peace processes.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The contemporary ethnic conflict is a legacy of the past that has been festering for the past half-century. The judgement of the High Court of Manipur in 2023 just blew up the latent fire. The three main social groups—ethnic and non-ethnic—**Meitei**, **Kuki** and the **Naga** have their distinctive cultural identities and topographical locations. While the Meiteis are mostly located in the valley, the hills are occupied by the Kukis and the Nagas with their ethnic linkages in Myanmar. The common border

which runs along for 398 km is porous and thickly forested. Only a stretch of approximately 15 km is fenced near the Moreh border gate on both the sides of the entrance gate to Myanmar. The citizens of both the countries can enter into each other's territories up to approximately 15 km. The valley in Manipur comprises approximately 10 per cent of the state's territory divided into six districts with approximately 60 per cent of the population. The hills comprise 90 per cent of the territory with 10 districts and 41 per cent of the ethnic population. It has 78 per cent of the forest cover. Its density is 44 persons per sq km while that of the valley is 631 persons per square km. The valley has a mixed population of all the ethnic and non-ethnic groups but is majorly dominated by the Meiteis. The density is largely due to better weather conditions and fertile flat irrigable land that sustains the livelihood. Hills, in contrast, have inhospitable weather with low-yielding terrace cultivation that makes residents' lives tough. This natural distinction impacts the social groups in their culture and psyche, and brings in latent differences in their perceptions towards reservations and new opportunities in contemporary changing times. The growth of poppy—the lucrative item—cultivation in the hills and in the Myanmarese territories, added fire to the local aspirations among the Manipuris, both in terms of desire for better livelihood and opportunities for upward social mobility through instant ill-gotten narcotic wealth.

The porous 398-kilometre bor-

der with Myanmar further complicates the situation. Only a small stretch near the Moreh border gate is fenced, allowing for unchecked movement of people, goods, and illegal substances. This region has become a hotbed for narcotics trafficking, particularly poppy cultivation, which has replaced traditional farming in several Kuki and Naga-dominated areas. The “War on Drugs” campaign launched by the Manipur government has faced stiff resistance in these regions, where the drug economy has created a new elite class that exerts both economic and political influence.

The uneven application of land ownership laws and the distinction between Scheduled Tribes and non-Scheduled Tribes have further deepened mistrust. While STs, including Kukis and Nagas, can own land anywhere in the state, including in the valley, Meiteis are restricted from owning land in the hill areas. This legal asymmetry has led to accusations of encroachment, demographic manipulation, and ethnic marginalisation.

Education and health infrastructure also remain highly uneven. While Imphal boasts of universities, colleges, and hospitals, most hill districts suffer from inadequate facilities. This disparity reinforces feelings of marginalisation and pushes the youth toward radical ideologies or out-migration. A more equitable allocation of resources and decentralised governance through empowered autonomous district councils is needed to address this imbalance.

The demand for Scheduled Tribe status by Meiteis also de-

serves a nuanced discussion. While Meiteis argue that it would ensure constitutional safeguards and access to opportunities, hill communities fear it would dilute their rights and lead to further encroachment. A transparent dialogue, perhaps mediated by a neutral central committee, is essential to evaluate the demand on merit and in the context of historical injustices.

REGIONAL DISPARITIES

The state’s geography (See Map) has played a key role in shaping its social dynamics. The valley¹, which constitutes only about 10 percent of the land area, houses nearly 60 percent of the population, mostly the Meiteis. In contrast, the surrounding hills cover 90 percent of the area but are

sparsely populated and primarily inhabited by the Kukis and Nagas, many of whom share ethnic ties with groups across the border in Myanmar. The demographic concentration in the valley is driven by its fertile lands and more hospitable climate, making it the socio-economic hub of the state.

On the other hand, the hills are marked by underdevelopment, poor infrastructure, and reliance on shifting cultivation. The disparity in development and resources has translated into differences in political aspirations and economic priorities. While the Meiteis dominate the state’s political landscape and aspire for greater representation in national politics, the hill tribes continue to assert their demand



for autonomy and protection of their land and identity.

Economic development in Manipur has been heavily skewed. While the valley region, particularly Imphal, has benefited from relatively better infrastructure, education, and healthcare services, the hills continue to lag behind. This disparity fuels perceptions of exclusion and neglect, making the hill communities more receptive to secessionist narratives and demands for separate administration.

Agriculture remains the primary livelihood in both regions, but farming in the hills is constrained by terrain, climate, and lack of irrigation. The government's efforts to transition from *jhum* (shifting) cultivation to settled farming have seen limited success. Meanwhile, the lack of industrial investment, high unemployment among youth, and poor connectivity deter long-term development. The state's economic isolation, compounded by its geographical remoteness, calls for special policy attention that transcends tokenism.

In the Kukis and Nagas areas, and in the adjoining Myanmar, poppy cultivation has gradually replaced their traditional cultivation. The new wealth has created a seminary elite which is changing their lifestyle and spatial and social mobility. One of the spin-offs of it is the purchase of properties by the Kukis and the Nagas in the Meitei-dominated valley. Their scheduled tribe status ensures better opportunities for jobs and property. In contrast, the Meiteis cannot purchase properties in their (Nagas and

Kukis) areas as these are scheduled territories; they have neither the benefit of the quota in the government jobs. This dichotomy in everyday social life has bred latent frustration and cumulative anger. The judgement of the Manipur High Court in 2023 to consider recommending Meitei for reservation in government jobs was a ray of hope for them.

CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL REALIGNMENT

Since 2015, there has been a renewed demand from various Kuki groups for a separate administration (State/Union Territory), as observed by M Amarjeet Singh,² consequent to the three bills, namely the protection of Manipur peoples (PMB, 2015), the Manipur Land Revenues and Land Reforms (MLR&LR) (7th Amendment) 2015, and the Manipur Shops and establishment (MS&E) (Second Amendment) Bill 2015 passed by the state legislative assembly in August 2015. As a result, violent protests erupted in Churachandpur, a Kuki-inhabited town leading to the death of 9 protesters. Many hill-based groups had labelled the bills anti-tribal. But, there was no opposition from the valley-based groups. The demand of some Meiteis groups for the recognition of Meiteis as the Scheduled tribes was opposed by several groups including the Kukis. The state government has neither supported nor opposed the demand. In March 2023, the Manipur High Court directed the state government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community into the scheduled tribe list within a period of four weeks

(the directive has now been revoked). The directive further escalated the tense situation.

The 2023 High Court directive to consider ST status for the Meiteis was seen by them as a long-overdue correction of historical injustice. For the hill communities, however, it was perceived as a threat to their constitutional protections, triggering widespread protests and violence. The resulting clashes displaced tens of thousands of people and led to the destruction of homes and infrastructure, particularly in mixed-population areas.

The situation is exacerbated by the failure of governance. Successive governments have been unable to implement inclusive policies that address the developmental needs of both valley and hill areas. Although schemes like "Go to Hills" and the creation of tribal museums and medical colleges in hill districts are commendable, they have not fundamentally altered the perception of bias and neglect. Allegations of corruption, nepotism, and selective implementation of welfare schemes continue to plague public trust.

The electoral politics of Manipur have also mirrored national trends, with the ruling party at the Centre often forming the government in the state. The Congress ruled the state for decades, but since 2017, the BJP has gained prominence. While the BJP-led government has initiated several development projects, its inability to quell ethnic violence and address the demands of all communities equitably has raised questions about its governance model.

Civil society, traditionally a strong force in the northeast, has struggled to play a mediatory role in the current conflict. The polarisation is so intense that even peace initiatives are viewed through the lens of ethnic allegiance. Churches, student unions, and local NGOs have been active in providing relief but have found it difficult to bridge the trust deficit between the communities.

Despite the proliferation of regional parties and increased political awareness, Manipur continues to suffer from a crisis of representation. Political loyalties frequently shift with changing tides at the Centre. Many political leaders have changed parties multiple times, driven more by personal gain than ideology. As a result, policy continuity suffers, and public trust in democratic processes erodes.

The Scheduled Tribe demand by the Meitei community has emerged in this political backdrop. While proponents highlight historical discrimination and the need for affirmative action, opponents see it as a ploy for economic advantage and territorial expansion into hill areas. This demand, therefore, has not only legal implications but also emotional and existential ones for the hill communities.

CROSS-BORDER DYNAMICS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

A significant concern is the changing demography due to cross-border migration from Myanmar. Following the military coup in Myanmar, a large number of Chin refugees have entered Manipur. While the Kukis view them as ethnic kin, other

groups see them as illegal migrants altering the demographic balance. This perception has fuelled support for a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Manipur, similar to the one in Assam. The proposed fencing of the entire India-Myanmar border and the suspension of the Free Movement Regime are steps in this direction but are opposed by hill communities who have familial ties across the border.

The poppy economy deserves special attention. Beyond being a law-and-order issue, it is a symptom of deeper economic malaise. The lack of viable livelihoods in the hills has made poppy cultivation an attractive alternative. Without a sustainable economic development plan, any crackdown is likely to be met with resistance. The creation of alternative income-generating opportunities, such as horticulture, tourism, and agro-based industries, is essential.

Manipur's location at the edge of India's northeastern frontier, sharing borders with Myanmar, makes it strategically significant. However, the porous border is a double-edged sword. While it allows cultural continuity and economic exchange, it also enables transnational crimes like drug smuggling, arms trafficking, and the movement of insurgents.

The Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allowed unrestricted movement across a 16-kilometre border zone, was designed to preserve traditional ties. However, misuse by criminal and militant elements has compelled the government to reconsider it. The ongoing fencing of the Indo-Myanmar border

and the introduction of stricter protocols reflect this shift. But these measures have also alienated border communities that have familial and cultural ties across the border, especially among Kukis and Nagas.

CONCLUSION

Manipur's future lies not in fragmentation but in inclusive federalism. A genuine peace framework must be participatory, involving all stakeholders including tribal councils, civil society, women's groups, youth organisations, and faith-based institutions. Economic development plans must be context-specific and culturally sensitive, focusing on infrastructure, education, and livelihood generation. Conflict resolution in Manipur cannot be achieved through security measures alone. It requires a multi-pronged approach involving political dialogue, economic development, cultural recognition, and institutional reform. The state must recognise the multiplicity of identities and aspirations within its borders and craft policies that are inclusive, participatory, and just. The central government has a critical role to play in this process. It must act not as a partisan actor but as a constitutional guardian ensuring justice, equality, and peace. The deployment of additional security forces can only buy time; the real solution lies in addressing the root causes of conflict.

Moreover, institutions of justice must be made accessible and accountable. The slow pace of judicial review, lack of local participation in policy-making, and absence of grievance redressal mechanisms have contributed to

the current impasse. Strengthening local governance, ensuring representation of all communities, and reforming the criminal justice system are imperative. There is also a pressing need for institutional reforms. Autonomous District Councils must be empowered not just on paper but through real financial devolution and capacity building. Electoral reforms that discourage defections and strengthen local governance would also help in stabilising the political landscape. Above all, the people of Manipur deserve justice, dignity, and peace. Achieving this will require not

just administrative will but moral courage—from both state and society. Only then can Manipur fulfil its potential as a vibrant, pluralistic, and peaceful frontier of India.

Finally, the media and academia must play a constructive role in shaping narratives. Sensationalism and bias in reporting have often inflamed tensions. Instead, there is a need for informed, empathetic, and balanced discourse that acknowledges historical grievances while promoting reconciliation.

In conclusion, Manipur stands at a crossroads. Its rich cultural mosaic, strategic loca-

tion, and resilient people offer immense potential. But to harness this potential, the state must rise above its divisions and embrace a future founded on justice, equity, and mutual respect. The journey will be arduous, but it is the only path to lasting peace and prosperity. ■■■

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PANIC IN THE 'HEAVEN'

Zionism, Hindutva and the Capitalist Class Target Mamdani in New York

Vinod Mubayi

IT IS A REVEALING BUT hardly unexpected development that Zionists and the Hindutva crowd would gang up to oppose the candidacy and campaign of Zohran Mamdani, the candidate of the Democratic Party for Mayor of New York City. Revealing because it shows clearly what Zionists and Hindutva supporters are—ethnonationalist fascists with a fanatical hatred of Muslims.

Mamdani is the son of Prof Mahmood Mamdani, a noted academic at Columbia University, who is of Gujarati Muslim origin born in Uganda. His mother is the well-known filmmaker Mira Nair, who is of Punjabi Hindu origin. Zohran himself was born in Uganda but moved to the US along with his parents at a young age. Zohran is a member of DSA

(Democratic Socialists of America), who currently represents a district in Queens in the New York State Assembly. He was a relatively unknown political figure, polling in the 1 per cent range last February when he began his campaign for mayor as a candidate in the Democratic Party primary election. His decisive victory in this election over older, better-known, and vastly better funded political opponents such as former NY governor Andrew Cuomo stunned the ruling establishment of the Democratic Party that has yet to recover from this result.

Mamdani's victory is based squarely on the progressive pro-working people policies he promoted: a rent-freeze on the apartments under rent control, free public buses, non-profit city

owned groceries, and free childcare for poor families paid for by a tax on millionaires. This platform, immensely popular with the city's working-class majority, naturally elicited howls of protest from Wall St and the business community. New York City after all is the nerve centre of global capitalism, home to many of the world's largest capitalist enterprises. Some commentators noted that Mamdani's platform would have been relatively commonplace for many in the Democratic Party in many major cities decades ago. As Ross Barkan wrote in a recent op-ed in the *New York Times*:

"Mr Mamdani's leftist agenda is far more rooted in the American tradition than his fiercest critics would ever admit. The democratic socialism he embraces is not so different from the "sewer socialism" that found success in American cities a century ago, especially in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee socialists built a

world-class parks system, added drinking-water fountains, went after restaurant owners for serving contaminated food and forced factory owners to install heating systems and toilets. Just as important, they were never embroiled in corruption scandals. This should ultimately be Mr Mamdani's goal: to manage the city competently and fairly and to introduce beneficial public goods."

Another example from New York City itself is the American Labour Party politician Vito Marcantonio who represented New York's East Harlem constituency in the US House of Representatives for three terms from 1939-51, considered himself a staunch socialist, and advocated for the rights of the working class, the poor and the marginalised like the black Americans, victims of the widespread racism of that era. Much of Mamdani's platform and programme follows in that tradition. It is a striking testament to the success of neoliberal capitalism in shifting US politics so much to the right that the history of this pro-working class and pro-poor democratic socialist tradition in urban America has been largely forgotten by the mainstream media and socialism itself has become just a word of cheap abuse.

However, while the hostility of capitalists and business groups to DSA member Mamdani can be taken as a given, the extreme opposition of the Zionists and Hindutva's supporters needs to be explained beyond their hatred of Mamdani's Muslim faith. From

his early student days, Mamdani has been a steadfast supporter of Palestinian rights and a vocal critic of Israel's denial of those rights; the genocide being currently perpetrated in Gaza has naturally intensified Mamdani's criticism of the Israeli government. New York City is a town that has the largest Jewish population in the world apart from Tel Aviv and its support for Israel has until now been regarded as automatic. But this could now be changing within the Jewish community in New York. In a news conference during the primary campaign, Mamdani reminded the audience that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had been designated as a war criminal by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and that if he (Mamdani) was elected Mayor he would order Netanyahu's arrest in compliance with ICC's instructions if and when the Israeli leader visited New York. This naturally led to howls of protest in the rightwing media and among US politicians in thrall to the notorious AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), that has not only funded (bribed may be a more accurate description) US politicians for many decades but also intervened to destroy the careers of progressive politicians like Representatives Jamaal Bowman or Cori Bush who dared to question the divine right of Israel to unlimited and eternal financial and military support from the United States of America to impose its will in the Middle East region. This kowtowing to Zionist rightwing ideology now seems to have diminished somewhat among US Jews

in the wake of Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labour in the Clinton Administration, who is himself Jewish, stated he was "deeply anti-Netanyahu and his government," called Netanyahu a "war criminal" and Israel's actions in Gaza a war crime and genocide. The presence of a significant number of young advisers of Jewish ancestry on Mamdani's team also points to the decline in support for right-wing Zionism among the US Jewish population.

Meanwhile, at a town hall meeting for candidates ahead of the Democratic Party mayoral primary, Mamdani, asked if he would meet with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as New York Mayor said he would not, and labelled Modi a "war criminal" for his role in the Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 where well over a thousand Gujarati Muslims were brutally massacred when Modi was Gujarat Chief Minister. (It is useful to recall that Modi was denied a US visa for almost a decade on the grounds of severe violations of religious freedom for his role in the pogrom and the ban was lifted only when Modi became Prime Minister). This remark appears to have served as a red rag to the Hindutva right-wing who began a systematic assault on Mamdani, both in the US and in India. In the US, this has taken the form of personal attacks on Mamdani's faith and politics by groups like the Hindu American Foundation and support for his possible opponents in the forthcoming elections while in India he was smeared as a "jihadi" on

pro-BJP news channels and attacked by some BJP politicians as “sounding more Pakistani than Indian.” The Indian state under the Modi regime is obviously complicit in these attacks. Mamdani’s consistent denunciation of Israel for its actions in Gaza is another factor in Hindutva’s opposition to him. As right-wing ethnonationalists Zionism and Hindutva share a common bond that finds expression on multiple levels, whether in critiquing Mamdani or in India opposing any open critique of Israel; a demonstration in New Delhi against Israeli genocide in Gaza was viciously attacked by a pro-BJP mob while the police in Mumbai denied a permit for a similar demo there. While the Hindutva groups have tried to play up “Hindu” opposition to Mamdani among the South Asian community, it appears this is restricted to some upper income groups as his campaign evinced a lot of support from

working-class Indians, Nepalis, Bangladeshis, and other south Asians of all faiths. The New York Taxi Workers Alliance and the group DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving) were among the progressive groups supporting him and he gained a large number of votes in areas in New York that have a significant South Asian population.

In a city where the Democratic Party holds a 6 to 1 edge in voter registration, the Democratic candidate Mamdani would normally be expected to win. While some unions in New York like the health care workers and the teachers have announced their support for Mamdani, key national Democratic Party leaders, like Senate minority leader Schumer and House minority leader Jeffries have remained on the sidelines likely afraid of reprisals from AIPAC or their financial backers. But the business community has threatened to mobilise many millions of dollars for his likely oppo-

nents like the former New York governor Cuomo, who was defeated in the Democratic primary, and the current Mayor, Adams, who is running as an independent, as well as the Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa, a former member of a vigilante group Guardian Angels. President Donald Trump, moreover, weighed in with his usual abusive gibberish against Mamdani, posting the following on his website: “Zohran Mamdani, a 100% Communist Lunatic, has just won the Dem Primary, and is on his way to becoming Mayor. We’ve had Radical Leftists before, but this is getting a little ridiculous.” Trump also made some vague threats about a Federal Government takeover of New York, although their substance was quite unclear. In any case, one has to wait until the November election to find out if Mamdani was able to triumph over the opposition of the Zionists, the Hindutva crowd, Trump, and New York’s capitalist class. □

WORLD POPULATION REPORT 2025

From ‘Population Explosion’ to ‘Population Collapse’

Aloke Mukherjee

RECENTLY THE UNFPA has published the State of World Population report for 2025. It has revealed a ‘real fertility crisis’. For a long time the establishments all over the world had been propagating over population increase as the source of all problems of the people. From the inception of the UNFPA in 1969 the principal aim of it was to relate population control and family planning as solution to all problems of developing nations. The argument was that

the developing countries are poor because of their uncontrolled population. They argued that every new child means an extra mouth to feed. There was a counter argument from the representatives of the people of the economically backward countries that the new born baby doesn’t come to earth with only a mouth to feed but also with two hands to work. That was a period when in the third world countries most of the people were engaged in agricultural work.

Worldwide a propaganda went on about population explosion. This was consciously carried out as an easy means of population control by creating fear psychosis instead of scientific measures of controlling population. At the same time such propaganda has a class nature that the development of the society is impeded not because of lopsided policy of the ruling elite and exploitation by the imperialists to bleed the masses of the colonial and semi-colonial countries but because of the higher fertility rate among the toiling people. For some time a section of ruling class in India tried to advance their communal agenda by propagating that population is exploding because of the

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Muslims, since Islam permits them more than one marriage. That argument fell flat when it was pointed out that population increase does not depend on number of wives but the average fertility rate of women of that community. The recent report has shown futility of that argument, average fertility among women of the Muslims is steadily coming down and is not much different from that among the Hindus. Among Hindus it declined from 3'3 in 1992 to 1'9 in 2019, while for the Muslim it declined from 4'4 to 2'4 during the same period, meaning rate of decline of Total Fertility Rate among Muslims is more than the Hindus.

But with time concepts also changed. UNFPA report of 1991 was part of UNDP report. According to that report, fertility rate (meaning average number of births per woman), was showing a tendency to decline. In the developing world the fertility rate had come down to 3'8 from 6 during 1965-70 period. The target was to bring the rate down to the benchmark used by demographers around 2'1 children per woman to maintain a stable population. Above this would create undesired levels of population increase, and below this is also unwanted since it may cause imbalance, and if the trend of decline continues below the benchmark level danger of extinction may come.

The report had also highlighted that "the governmental and nongovernmental organisations that make or support population and family planning programmes to reinforce their support to these programmes and reorient their strategies, because population and family planning have arrived at a turning point.

It was the time neoliberalism and globalisation had started creating an imbalance causing economic as well as political crisis. This has taken the old world away from all working people of both developed and developing countries. Situation now forces them to consider a number of factors before giving birth to a child. That has been reflected in the UNFPA Report 2025 on state of the world population. As a result from the old alarm of "population explosion" has now shifted to a new alarm "population collapse." The report has given a superficial analysis of the phenomenon.

Now they say, it is not the so-called 'family planning' that has brought down the average fertility to a crisis level. It becomes clear that the real crisis lies not in the fertility rate but the reasons that cause decline in fertility rate to a crisis point. Because persons in the child bearing age in all countries in general are not feeling that they can afford giving birth to a child and rear it properly. Answer lies in concrete analysis of the problem.

The fact is that according to UN data world population has tripled from 1950. Again over the same period average rate of fertility per woman has declined from 5 to 2'25. It is expected that by 2050 it will reach 2'1, the benchmark or so-called "replacement rate".

But these are dry statistics, reality is that in many countries the average fertility rate has already been below 2'1. For example, in South Korea it is as low as 0'78; though in European Union it is 1'38, in Italy it is only 1'18 in 2025. Here are the fertility rates of few other countries:

United States-1'70 (2024-2025), France-1'66 (2023), Germany-1'39 (2023)

As of 2023-2024 in the sub-continent the rates are: India-2'0; Pakistan-3'6; Bangladesh-2'2 and Nepal-2.

Figures of some other Muslim countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq are as follows :

UAE-1'2 per woman in 2023; Iran-1'7 in 2022; Saudi Arabia-1'92 In 2023; Iraq-3'65 in 2023.

This means decline has occurred not only in the developed countries but also in developing countries as well.

As for the real fertility crisis "Dr Natalia Kanem, the Executive Officer, UNFPA writes,

"Policies should respond directly to these concerns. This includes ensuring full range of reproductive health and rights for all people; providing consistent, long term support to parents and families, and ending gender-based violence and gender discriminatory norms that undermine people's fertility ambitions." [State of the World Population 2025, The Real Fertility Crisis, Page 5].

This is a very intelligent way to sidetrack what she said in just the earlier paragraph of her Foreword, like a successful bureaucrat of any UN institution.

She earlier said: "Reproductive agency is more than just freedom from coercion or improved access to services, it is the full range of conditions that enable people to exercise their reproductive rights and ensure true choice, including gender equality, economic stability, decent health and confidence in future". [ibid, p8]

In her final prescription economic stability and confidence in future has been ignored as also the talk about decent health.

One important question is that

many of the countries claim they have developed a lot. But fifty years earlier poor toiling people wanted to have children because they did not feel insecure. They lived in a world they could feed so long they had two hands they can work. But now they cannot feel the same. What are the differences that have brought the change of mindset or taken away their confidence in future? Definitely gender inequality had been there and it still persists. Gender based violence and discriminatory norms had also been present earlier. The point to note is that these same gender based inequalities had earlier been the cause behind higher rate of fertility among women. What is/are new factor/factors that attributed to the change that led to the fertility crisis today?

The common factors behind the crisis are financial limitations, housing limitations (e.g. lack of space, high house prices/rent costs), lack of sufficient/qual-

ity childcare options and unemployment/job insecurity particularly after 1991. In truth these factors have influenced whole of the world irrespective of their level of development, religious beliefs, languages and cultures. The globalisation has brought everywhere a new crisis and neoliberalism enhanced it to a higher level. In the name of development the twin monsters wreaked havoc. Manufacturing industries have fallen headlong, services have kept the economy running but crisis has engulfed that sectors also. And agriculture is also in deep crisis. At the same time because of sudden growth of services like highways, ports, airports, tourism, private educational institutions, private health services as well as IT and ITES etc. land and housing have become expensive. At the same time to satisfy the big capitalist sharks labour laws have been changed forcing the workers to work more for less pay. Unem-

ployment has increased and there is no job security in the present world. Neoliberalism has stopped government expenditures for people and employment has become rare. Healthcare and education have become costly almost everywhere.

Under such a situation only one option left to the hands of the parents is to have fewer or no children at all.

Like all other fields, neoliberalism is the root cause of this fertility crisis. But the imperialists all over the world are dependent on these policies in the hope of getting out of their crises by transferring the burdens on the shoulders of the working masses and the economically weak countries. Real remedy is to get radical treatment for the evils of imperialism and its cohorts. Without getting to the actual source any other remedial option will not work and crisis will go deeper. □□□

RANAJIT GUHA'S 'VERNACULAR LENS'

The Ideas of Selfhood in Ranajit Guha's reading of Bangla Poetics¹

Arjab Roy

[Ranajit Guha, a pivotal figure in the Subaltern Studies Collective, is famous for his pioneering work challenging conventional elite historiographies of Indian nationalism, written from colonialist and nationalist perspectives. While his English-language scholarship has received considerable critical attention, his later turn towards writing in Bangla, though currently underexplored, offers valuable insights into his intellectual projects. This vernacular turn culminated in the publication of his Bangla writings—many previously published in various forms—in the two-volume *Rachanasangraha* (Trans. *Collected Essays*) (2022). Volume one compiles essays and articles on historical, sociological, and political topics. In contrast, volume two reveals Guha's profound engagement with Bangla literature and philosophy, particularly concerning selfhood, subjectivity, and the dynamic interplay between individual and collective consciousness.]

GUHA'S "DEEPLY theoretical and rigorous" (Chaudhuri 2022, n.p.) engagement with Bangla literature, particularly poetry, represents both a con-

tinuation and a significant departure from his earlier intellectual focus. While his historical works primarily analysed the political and economic structures of colonial oppression and their

perpetuation in postcolonial India, his Bangla writings explored the realm of individual and collective consciousness. He examined how poetry, as a source of knowledge, reflected and refracted the experiences of individual poets, as well as the broader experiences embedded within their poetic worlds. Guha's close readings of poets such as Samar Sen, Jibanananda Das, and Sankha Ghosh demonstrate a profound sensitivity to linguistic, grammatical, emotional, and psychological nuance. Through these literary explorations, Guha offered an alternative form of historical narrative that foregrounded subjective socio-cultural experiences within the concept of selfhood and its

formation through interactions with the external “other”. As Sukanta Chaudhuri explains, Guha perceived the construction of selfhood and identity as a relational process unfolding through an individual’s interaction with the external world—individuals, communities, nature, and the cosmos:

“An individual establishes [a] relationship with the world... first through senses to cognise and understand the outside world; second, expanding the individual’s ‘self’ by assembling components from outside within the self; and third, symbiotically enriching both the self and the other by adding new dimensions to them during their interaction” (Chaudhuri 2022, n.p.).

Guha’s decision to write in Bangla can be interpreted as a deliberate intervention, challenging the dominance of English-language scholarship and reclaiming the importance of vernacular traditions in shaping intellectual and political discourse. This “vernacular lens” offered Guha a unique perspective on the complexities of selfhood and subjectivity, enabling him to transcend the limitations of conventional historical methodologies and engage with subaltern experiences on their terms.

THE DIALECTICS OF SELFHOOD AND SUBJECTIVITY

The concept of self is inherently linked to subjectivity, encompassing both the state of “being a subject” and “being subjected to”, and thus acted upon by various forces in everyday life. Nick Mansfield’s *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to*

Haraway (2000) initiates his discussion of self and subjectivity by exploring the implications of the subjective meanings conveyed by “I” (Mansfield 2000, 1). Mansfield posits four types of subjects: the grammatical subject—the subject and its predicate within sentence structures (Mansfield 2000, 3); the politico-legal subject—acted upon and governed by ideological, political, and legal-bureaucratic forces through manufactured consent, achieved through strategic persuasion and/or coercion (Mansfield 2000, 4); the philosophical subject, who deliberates upon consciousness and thought to discern the meaning, relevance, and significance of self in the world (Mansfield 2000, 4); and the subject as a human person, who acts and behaves in various capacities within private and public spheres (Mansfield 2000, 4). Guha’s perspectives on selfhood in historical contexts can be situated within Mansfield’s theoretical framework. Guha’s historical writings engage with all four subject types Mansfield discusses—grammatical, politico-legal, philosophical, and personal. His emphasis on the dialectical relationship between the self and the other resonates with Mansfield’s view of subjectivity as a dynamic process shaped by experience governed and determined by historicity rather than a fixed entity.

Rachanasangraha Vol. II (2022) reveals Ranajit Guha’s profound engagement with Bangla poetry, marked by a uniquely illuminating approach transcending conventional literary criticism. As Sukanta

Chaudhuri observes in the volume’s introduction, Guha’s critical lens refracts through a prism of diverse philosophical and linguistic traditions, weaving together insights from Indian thinkers such as Bhartrihari, Anandavardhan, and Abhinavagupta with those of European philosophers such as Vico, Humboldt, Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, and Derrida. This cosmopolitan intellectual inheritance allows Guha to situate his readings of Bangla literature within a broader intellectual history, exploring how individual and collective experiences are shaped by language, culture, and the ongoing dialectic between tradition and modernity. His approach is not one of detached aesthetic contemplation but rather a deeply engaged exploration of how literature reflects and shapes the consciousness of its time, particularly during radical social and political transformation.

Central to Guha’s literary analysis is the dialectic of the self and the other, a concept rooted in his Marxist orientation but enriched by his engagement with post-structuralism. Guha examines how individuals construct selfhood through continuous interaction with the external world, encompassing not only other individuals but also social collectives, the natural environment, and even the cosmos. This relational understanding of the self, challenges essentialist notions of identity, emphasising subjectivity’s dynamic and fluid nature as historical, social, and cultural forces shape it. For Guha, the self is not a pre-given entity but an ongoing process of

becoming a site of continuous negotiation and contestation.

**SAMAR SEN, JIBANANANDA DAS
AND SANKHA GHOSH**

Guha's exploration of this dynamic is vividly illustrated through his readings of Samar Sen, Jibanananda Das, and Sankha Ghosh. In Sen's poetry, lines like "I belong to the darkness of my being / Like an uninhabited island, Desolate" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 26) reveal a profound sense of alienation, a struggle to find language adequate to the experience of a fragmented world. Guha interprets Sen's poetic self as an isolated island, adrift in darkness, searching for connection and meaning (Guha 2022, 26). Sen's poignant inquiry, "*Why do you step out on still nights / Leaving me alone? / Why do you stare blankly language-less, / With stony silence?*" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 27), further emphasises this struggle. Guha argues that Sen's acute awareness of language's limitations, his sense of being trapped within words inadequate to capture the complexities of lived experience, reflects the broader challenge of articulating a self, situated within the matrix of subjective cultural experience. Guha analyses this "perceptive lack" as a deficiency of meaningful companionship, insufficient vocabulary, and an unfamiliarity with a self-shrouded in darkness, hindering articulation of this alienated, othered self (Guha 2022, 27). In Sen's early poetry, Guha identifies a triangular relational formation of space, desert, and death, generating visual representations of symbolic death and absence that echo the poet's in-

ner turmoil, albeit with a detachment bordering on nonchalance (Guha 2022, 27). Sen's poetic evolution during the 1930s reveals an oscillation between social realism and individual idealism, ideological escapism, and poetic fervour. This oscillation exposes internal tensions and anxieties, requiring reconciliation between his creative impulses and external realities. Guha interprets this as a paradoxical attempt at escape—the failure to fully achieve ideological or poetic transcendence roots the poet in the ethical and moral fabric of lived reality. This tension, Guha argues, fuels the reconciliation between Sen's poetic and individual selves. The perceived "failure" of the poetic narrative becomes a form of resolution; the oscillation transforms from weakness into a defining characteristic of Sen's mature poetic voice, yearning for a "storm" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 36) to disrupt the prevailing inertia of his socio-cultural landscape. Sen prophetically suggests that socio-economic realities preclude lasting peace and social order: "classical peace is not for us" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 37).

In Guha's reading, Jibanananda Das's poetry embodies the anxieties of postcolonial modernity, oscillating between the promise of progress and the allure of oblivion. Das's poetic landscape is characterised by stark contrasts, juxtaposing images of bright sunlight—ironically perceived as threatening—with a nihilistic desire to escape into "deep dark slumber" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 41). Guha highlights Das's articulated "fear" (Guha 2022, 41) of the sun,

which compels the poet to confront the earthly world. This contrasting imagery, Guha argues, signifies the constant vacillation within Das's subjective being. Guha identifies a profound ambivalence toward the modern world in Das's work, a sense of being caught between the allure of progress and the fear of losing something essential. This ambivalence, he suggests, reflects broader societal anxieties in post-independence India, grappling with the challenges of nation-building and the legacy of colonial rule. Guha associates the sun with capital-induced light, growth, and development—"it is certainly the sun of the rich [sic] and mercantile civilisation" (Guha 2022, 46)—and notes Das's metaphorical use of the solar system to represent the capitalist system. Guha interprets Das's poetry as expressing scepticism and resistance towards the globally emerging centrality of capitalism and its potential impact on newly independent India (Guha 2022, 47). Das's remark that "Time like an insect gnaws our nation" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 48) underscores this anxiety. Guha's reading reveals the afflictions of a selfhood rendered doubtful and sceptical by the temporal, economic, and ideological forces of a future threatening to transform the world Das preferred.

The conflicts arising within the individuated selves of these poets and their articulation through poetic personae are ultimately contained within the boundaries of selfhood. The efforts to reconcile opposing mental signals, behavioural tendencies, imagery, and thoughts

achieve a degree of unification within the self, reflected in the poetic voice. As India entered its second decade of independence, a deep-seated crisis emerged, stemming from the attempt to forge a modern developmental trajectory while grappling with a feudal, traditional social fabric. Cross-border tensions, wars, economic meltdown, rising prices, and acute food shortages left many Indians feeling helpless and destitute. Guha situates Sankha Ghosh's poetry against this backdrop, exploring its potential influence. He notes an "inherent painful sufferance" (Guha 2022, 349) in Ghosh's poetry, a predominantly inward focus reflecting an introspective nature. Guha detects a persistent romantic strain, similar to Sunil Ganguly and other poets of the *Krittibas* group (Guha 2022, 349). However, Ghosh's poetry is unique in its fusion of inward-focused romantic pain with an outwardly directed rebellious potential, suggesting a sense of belonging in multiple realms and a desperate search for a place in the world. Ghosh's prominent presence in West Bengal's academic, literary, artistic, cultural, and civil society spheres underscores this multifaceted engagement. Guha investigates Ghosh's stylistic and expressive techniques, focusing on the poet's characteristic politeness, courtesy, and introversion (Guha 2022, 350–353). He observes that Ghosh's prose and poetry resonate with a "strong historical consciousness that comes from the passage of time and [the] collection of life experiences" (Guha 2022, 353), which nevertheless does not diminish

the introspective pull of his work. Guha identifies several stages in Ghosh's poetry: first, a desire to transcend interiority and connect with the external world, which initially fails, leading to a return to the inner self—"Vaster than my life / Expand the world through resolute clouds grasses sun... / Free the world from my embrace" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 355); second, a recognition of the external world, but one that appears asymmetrical and unattainable, like a "wild forest populated by the wrong people"—"On the darkness cast over white walls three black faces / Drop down slowly-gradually" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 358); and third, a resolution of this conflict through the acceptance of these opposing forces as a defining characteristic of his poetry (Guha 2022, 354–362). This results in a poetic voice simultaneously modern and traditional, lyrical and prosaic, romantic and cynical, public and personal, confident and hesitant. Ghosh declares, "Those snails you all had left / None bore a deep conch-shell" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 362), acknowledging the confusion arising from selfhood constituted by both inward and outward vectors (Guha 2022, 362). This unified, yet paradoxical, selfhood perceives the doubts of others: "Why is he both at the same time?" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 362).

Guha's comprehensive reading of Ghosh's work traces the poet's inner struggles and their connection to the historical consciousness reflected in his response to the radical politics of the 1960s and 70s, notably the Naxalbari Movement. Ghosh's poetry captures the internal con-

flicts of a generation caught between tradition and the call for revolution, grappling with guilt, complicity, and personal responsibility amidst rapid social change. Similar to the society around him, Ghosh's poetic self becomes increasingly fractured, torn between the allure of radical change and the constraints of his social position. Recurring memories of students who sacrificed their lives haunt the poet, reminders of collective dreams constituting a historical narrative (Guha 2022, 381). Ghosh recalls a female student urging him to "Come along, step out, on the road". However, his doubts, scepticism, and hesitation make her feel insulted, recognising the futility of expected solidarity, and ultimately "bid[ding] farewell to sing a song" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 382). Ghosh reflects that he could only "witness the loss of those dreamy bewildered eyes" (qtd. in Guha 2022, 382). Guha's sensitive reading demonstrates possibly a deep empathy for Ghosh's struggles, suggesting a shared understanding of the challenges of selfhood during radical transformation. He highlights Ghosh's increasing alienation, growing awareness of his limitations, and renewed yearning for anonymity (Guha 2022, 383). Following the Naxalbari Movement, Guha observes that Ghosh's poetry incorporates satire, sarcasm, and ridicule not previously present (Guha 2022, 382).

Beyond a historicist perspective, Guha emphasises the relevance of these poems for disciplinary scholarship. He argues that despite its temporal markers, Ghosh's poetry of the 1970s effectively conveys universal

human emotions, particularly compassion and mercy. Furthermore, Guha suggests that the poetics of these works hold crucial implications for the discipline of history, opening it to diverse intellectual sources, facilitating informational and emotional exchange, and liberating it from the constraints of data and fact. He envisions history moving beyond a fact-centric, universalist narrative paradigm towards an experiential, philosophical understanding of human truth in a microcosmic world (Guha 2022, 381).

Guha's engagement with these poets reveals his nuanced understanding of memory's role in shaping individual and collective identities. He views memory not as a static repository but as a dynamic process of construction and reconstruction, constantly reshaped by the present. In Sen's poetry, memory is a source of solace and pain, a reminder of lost connections, and an ongoing struggle to integrate the past into the present (Guha 2022, 31–32). Das's fragmented memories reflect historical discontinuities, the sense of being caught between a fading past and an uncertain future. Guha notes, "Das' perception of time is multi-dimensional with rough fragments, and most importantly non-linear and hence complex" (Guha 2022, 43). Ghosh's poetry, conversely, explores the burden of collective memory, the weight of the past on the present. Guha's analysis highlights how memory introduces narrative turns and registers through individual and collective associations, becoming a site of contestation, a battleground for com-

peting narratives of the past.

Beyond these prominent figures, Guha's reflections in both volumes of *Rachanasangraha* (2022) engage with the broader landscape of Bangla literature, exploring themes of everyday life, social relations, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. He examines how literary texts reflect and shape cultural values and social norms, highlighting the complex interplay of literature, culture, and politics. His readings are informed by a deep understanding of Bangla literary traditions and his broader intellectual engagement with history, philosophy, and social theory. This multidisciplinary approach allows him to offer a rich and nuanced perspective on Bengal's cultural and intellectual landscape, exploring how literature reflects and shapes the consciousness of its time.

CONCLUSION

The theme of selfhood and subjectivity, central to Guha's engagement with Bangla poetics, also permeates his historical writings, albeit with a shift in focus from the socio-cultural to the political. While his literary criticism explores the nuances of individual consciousness shaped by social, cultural, and historical forces, his English-language historical scholarship, particularly *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), examines the formation of collective consciousness among subaltern groups, especially the peasantry. Guha further develops the theme of selfhood and subjectivity in "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" (1983), continuing his explora-

tion of peasant insurgency. Guha's focus on constructing subaltern consciousness is central to the *Subaltern Studies* project he co-founded in the early 1980s.

From 2002–2003, Ranajit Guha focused primarily on language sciences, grammar, literature, religion, spirituality, and philosophy. From his youth, he was well-versed in Sanskrit Paninian grammar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's writings, and Rabindranath Tagore's poetry (Chatterjee 2023, *The Wire*). In Guha's final interview, published in *Sahityer Satya* (2023), Partha Chatterjee attempted to delineate distinctions between Guha's English and Bangla writings, periodising his work and identifying thematic shifts. However, Guha resisted such categorisation, stating that literature remained a primary source shaping his thought (Chaudhuri 2023, *Scroll.in*). He deeply admired Tagore, whose *Sanchayita* became a constant companion (qtd. in Acharya 2023, 28). Guha declared he felt most at home, discovering himself "in literature alone" (Chaudhuri 2023, *Scroll.in*). Alongside Tagore, Karl Marx

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remained a key influence (Acharya 2023, 30). Tagore's transcendentalist ideas significantly impacted Guha, enabling him to perceive and transcend the various limitations encountered in life—ideological, epistemological, experiential, intellectual, philosophical, and practical. Guha's long life, rich experiences, and vast knowledge have

left a substantial legacy for scholars to explore. □□□

REFERENCE

- 1 This is a shorter version of a paper titled "Ranajit Guha's Vernacular Turn: Selfhood, History, and the Naxalbari Movement" which has appeared in the special issue 'Ranajit Guha and the Global South' of *Kairos: A Journal*

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BENGAL'S REVERSE TRANSFORMATION

Treadmill Economics and 'Stockholm Syndrome'

Pradosh Nath

THERE HAS BEEN A MAJOR shift in the definition of wealth of a nation from pre-classical to classical scholarship in Economics. In pre-classical understanding the wealth of nation was the wealth of the King; the geographical jurisdiction of the Kingdom, and the nature's bounty in it. In Classical definition it is produced wealth that is considered as the wealth of Nation. Distinctive difference lies in the extent of value addition. A mediaeval economy evolves as an industrial economy through a complex transformation process of extensive and intensive value addition. Is it possible to reverse the process? That is transforming back an industrial economy to a mediaeval one. What seems impossible has been achieved in West Bengal over last 4/5 decades. Once a vibrant industrial economy is in the process of reverse transformation. How this incredible yet unenviable feat has been achieved?

The answer lies in the extent of enfeeblement of the governance that becomes subservient

to party hierarchy from the administrative head quarters to the level of gram Panchayat. In this Mikail Hussain's article is interesting, 'Gamble with Islamist Extremism' (*Frontier*, Vol. 58, No. 2, July 6-12, 2025) insightful in the context of the politics of this sub-continent. The essence of this gamble is creating an eerie political milieu made of 'Stockholm Syndrome'- ensuring loyalty by instilling fear. The parallel in the West Bengal politics is not difficult to decipher.

In West Bengal an ensemble of left parties could manage to activate the syndrome over 34 years. This was the time when the political project of the then ruling dispensation was to organise 'proletariats' that would ensure onset of revolution, and golden days afterwards. They would vouch for golden days in the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and a fraction of Mao. The hap for the hapless will come through a revolution that this ensemble promised, sighting examples of fairy tales of revolutions that created So-

viet Union, socialist countries in East Europe, Mao's China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam; while carefully hiding how those same countries, over a few decades turned out to be an autocratic uglier face of capitalism.

The main problem towards revolution faced by the left ensemble has been the inadequate number of dedicated and committed proletariats. Text book formula for creating Proletariats has been to organise protests (sometimes violent) in the organised sectors of industries and plantations with the expectations that such sparks would lead to wild fire of revolution across the country. The formula did not work. There was violent trade unionism across the country led by different political outfits of conflicting ideologies and followers. So the project failed to create proletariats in good enough numbers and commitments to make the 'revolution' happen. Instead, the revolutionary verbose drove industries *enmasse* away from the chaos for more conducive space; created a huge army of jobless surplus workforce across the skill sets.

The clarion call for 'revolution' had dosage of militancy associated with it. That made the inroads for local strongmen

(may call them ruffians), who turned out to be the face of the party and also 'revolution'. This is nothing new in Indian politics, rather prevalent across the political parties, states and over decades. The left politics gave in to the same dubious practice. The side effect has been much more insidious. To make room for the ruffians, maintaining the extra-social elements as extra-political outfit as essential for revolution, extra institutional provisioning has been necessary. This was how people saw the rise of what is now known as 'Syndicate Raj'.

This is the time when Singur happened. The ruling left ensemble was desperately looking around and soliciting industrial capital with assurance of favours. That is how TATA has been lured to set up Nano car factory in Singur, not very far from Kolkata, with the assurance of land and associated infrastructure. The petty landholders were not sure of the future livelihood implications after handing over the land for the proposed factory. Future, being non-existent, the hapless population left with no option but to cling on to whatever asset they had. Mamata Banerjee emerged as the messiah of the apprehensive and suspicious petty landholders. Her flamboyant no hold bar rhetoric could successfully agitate the otherwise docile middle class Bengali population throwing the government clueless for counter strategies. TATAs were compelled to withdraw from Singur; and shifted to Gujarat. The whole episode along with police atrocities at Nandigram emerged as the Wa-

terloo for the 'left' in West Bengal as reflected in subsequent assembly elections reducing left's seat share to unenviable and unbelievable 'zero'.

TMC, the new political entity, took a few lessons from the practices of the three and half decades of the left rule. Foremost among those is the need of a strong party network connecting the headquarters with the village level units. Opened the TMC doors for local strongmen from all other political parties. Panchayat, and other local level elected bodies were the readily available structure for that. Once occupied, with the blessings of the supreme leader, '*partycracy*' ruled, and the bureaucracy became subservient to party network – power to the ruffians disguised as power to the people. So much so that local leaders (*strongmen*) will keep the government officers on their toes, make them obey the diktats, threatening of consequences if not obeyed. Law and order in the state, therefore, made subservient to party satraps.

Once created the sustainability of this network was also to be ensured. This has been achieved in two ingenious ways. There was a great realisation that post-left rule, the people at the margin, whose number has grown over decades, do not live by dreams any more, instead they live counting days, or months. The new narrative had all the left ingredients, sans revolution, with a few more added, targeting all possible social anomalies – the poor, marginal section of the population, OBCs, minorities, women, girl child, senior citizen and what

not. To allow them to live, government exchequer has been opened wide for plethora of 'Shree' programmes. Executed through the panchayat, these programmes helped establishing fear laden loyalty to the party and respect to the Supremo. It also opened the flood gate of the practice of 'cut money' in every sphere of spending by government departments. Soon intelligent government officials and ministers also found great opportunities of making fortunes in this practice, and ensured a full-proof network.

The party also has to win elections, and for that it has to count votes and voters. While the 'Shree' programme could buy loyalty, polling booths and casting of votes could be managed with the fear laden loyalty established through party network. The strategy also has been used to create and ensure vote bank. Facing BJP's Hindutwa politics the best bet has been to indulge and nurture Muslim votes, which is about 30% of the total voters. Doles for minorities delivered through local strongmen coated with the blessings from the party supremo, along with indulgence towards *fundamentalist tantrums* helped securing large chunk of Muslim following; ensuring solid vote bank.

The overall politico-economic scenario that was taking shape could be described with the following subtexts. Industrial capital running away, economy fell upon the already overburdened agriculture of tiny landholdings and huge disguised unemployment. The whole process transformed the state of West Bengal to a state of increasing volume of

surplus labour. Skilled manpower ran away toeing the new destinations of the capital. Unskilled manpower in search of livelihood started migrating in different parts of the country, especially in metropolis as seasonal labourers. The head count of unemployed, thus, for the comfort of the government, reduced by that many heads. Rest of the job seekers have been advised to be self-employed trying own business ventures, like opening roadside tea stalls selling popular deep fried snacks (local name *tele bhaja*) that would require very little investment, and the whole family may get engaged. This employment creating advice has been supplemented by generous doles from government exchequer as aids to economic distress due to social anomalies. 'Shree'

schemes also partially ensured sustenance of the party network as a supplement to other avenues opened through (un)authorised coal and sand mining, encroaching govt land for private real estate ventures, admissions to colleges, universities, Adhaar Card, voter card and wherever government scrutiny is involved, or approval is needed.

Jewel of all these economic endeavours, innovative income generating initiatives is the government and local ruffian's nexus in cash for jobs in government departments and schools. When exposed govt was all out with all its wherewithal to save the cash at the cost of loss of jobs of 26000 teachers. In truth a few thousand more teachers are waiting to face the similar fate.

This background takes one to

the beginning. The back-of-the-hand treadmill economics takes the credit for bringing the state economy to the present shape-value addition through '*tele bhaja*', illegal mining of sand and coal, business of real estate encroaching government land and water bodies. Government largesse in the form of 'Shree', religious celebrations of various types, groups, and practices, construction of massive competitive religious complex. Such activities push money circulation with little value addition that will have any meaningful cascading effects on the economy. And given the state of docile government administration hijacked by partyocracy expenditure on largesse and dubious value added, end up as cash haul along the line of hierarchy. Reverse Transformation, therefore, is complete. ■■■

MIDDLE CLASS NATIONALISM

Imperialism and Left Politics in Assam

Arup Baisya

THE PRACTICE OF revolutionary politics aimed at social change often faces the challenge of integrating individual components with the overall system. Understanding the dynamics between these components and the whole is crucial, as the properties of the whole cannot be accurately predicted by examining the interactions among its parts alone. In hierarchical structures, wholes are made up of parts, and those parts can also serve as wholes at a lower level of organisation. The dynamics between parts and wholes can be analysed across different scales, from microscopic to macroscopic levels. The relationships between

parts and wholes may vary depending on the scale of observation. A part-whole schema is a cognitive framework that facilitates the understanding and representation of this relationship.

In a system, the properties of the whole cannot be predicted merely by understanding the interactions between its parts. The parts of a system are often interdependent, meaning that changes in one part can affect other parts and the overall system.

In academia, this topic has been explored through various theoretical analyses and mathematical models. However, in the context of revolutionary politics, it becomes a practical question. For instance, the Bolsheviks con-

sidered the interconnection between developed capitalist nations and underdeveloped ones in the context of uneven and combined development when addressing the Russian Revolution.

In Marxism and among later Marxists, financial Capital is viewed as a consequence of the centralisation of Capital, driven by the growing role of banks and financial institutions. Financialisation, on the other hand, arises from a crisis of production within capitalism, characterised by overproduction, under-consumption, and disproportionality. Since 1945, there have been ongoing conflicts in attempts to fulfil the dollar's role in the global economy and support US national interests. Despite continuous efforts, the US government has struggled to resolve this con-

tradition, which has been further complicated by the dynamics of the Cold War and military Keynesianism, ultimately leading to the closure of the gold window in 1971. The subsequent emergence of the decades of US and dollar-centered financialisation that began in 1973, highlighted the ongoing conflict between increased international dollar liquidity and domestic economic governance in the US. It is important to note that it was central banks and governments that played crucial roles in supporting the dollar, rather than private holders, thus emphasising the significance of nation-states in sustaining the dollar's value. (*Globalisation or Imperialism?* Nov. 2002)

Imperialism involves a collaboration between imperial powers and the ruling classes of various nation-states. It also leads to increased competition among relatively powerful countries, resulting in a multi-polar world. However, this concept of imperialism, while fostering multipolarity, does not imply a compromise between Capital and labour, as was seen during the New Deal. Instead, it represents a new form of multi-polarity that signifies a temporary truce among diverse ruling classes amid the ongoing financialisation stemming from the crisis in capitalism. This situation implies that financial globalisation functions as a cohesive system, negotiating among its components to avert systemic collapse, particularly in the absence of a viable solution for capitalist expansion. The primary force shaping the dynamics of both the entire system and its compo-

nents is the working class, serving as the countervailing force to capitalism.

In this global context of negotiating a compromise between the imperialists as a whole and the competing nation-states as parts, this article addresses the question of nationality-class in terms of whole and parts within a specific context.

The Indian revolutionary movement, following the Naxalbari uprising, asserts that the bourgeois solution to the national question no longer exists in the era of imperialism, the idea imbibed from the Chinese revolution. Consequently, the struggle for national development is primarily a democratic movement that must be addressed from the outset by working-class politics.

This idea needs to be re-articulated within the context of imperialism. Although Marx did not explicitly discuss imperialism, he and Engels came close to the concept in the *Communist Manifesto*, where they refer to the expanding international market: "It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (Marx and Engels, 1958, p. 37). Lenin, influenced by the English liberal J A Hobson, shared a classical Marxist understanding of imperialism with Rudolf Hilferding and Nikolai Bukharin. This perspective emphasised the merging of industrial and bank Capital into finance capital. Hobson focused on domestic under-consumption, Hilferding examined financial Capital, and Bukharin addressed the monopolies of banks and corporations. In contrast, Lenin developed a

theory of imperialism that posited monopoly as the highest stage of capitalism. Imperialism was thus framed as a denunciation of capitalist domination of less developed regions by more advanced nations.

In summary, imperialism involves the domination and exploitation by imperial states. Multinational corporations and banks exert control over the capitalist market. The flow of international Capital leads to regional, national, and class inequalities. These unidirectional capital flows concentrate investment, income, and profits in specific areas.

After World War II, many colonies in Africa and Asia gained independence through revolutions or the collapse of empires. In response to the internal realities of these ex-colonial states, various theories emerged that focused on issues such as economic surplus and backwardness, the capitalist development of underdevelopment, new dependency, sub-imperialism, and dependent capitalism. These theories replaced older ones.

Dependency theory posits that less developed regions (the periphery) depend on advanced capitalist nations (the core). The relationship between the state and both domestic and foreign Capital contributes to underdevelopment. International capital flows create internal structural differentiations. However, state control over investment, income, and profit offers the possibility of overcoming dependency.

The rise of globalisation theory has obscured these earlier theories. Proponents of globalisation describe it as an

ideological project that can be viewed as imperialist. Globalisation theory as a bourgeois project is based on the idea that interdependence ensures shared benefits and equal exchanges among all nations. The diffusion of Capital and technology is believed to facilitate growth and development everywhere. Ideally, international Capital flows lead to a more balanced and equitable distribution of profits and income.

Nationalism in China encompassed three interrelated concepts. First, it involved opposing and combating imperialism. Second, it called for the establishment of a strong, modern, and centralised nation-state that would not only resist imperialism but also advance the country's political, social, economic, and cultural aspirations. Third, nationalism aimed at overthrowing the Manchu (Ch'ing) dynasty. Among these aspects, anti-imperialism was the most prominent feature. When the pursuit of a nation-state becomes central to a revolutionary movement, the petit-bourgeois class often takes the lead in that revolution. This dynamic influenced the revolutionary strategies and tactics of Indian revolutionaries in the 1970s, particularly in less developed states like Assam.

This petit bourgeois phenomenon occurred because imperialism was understood within a specific context of fixed spatial and temporal coordinates. The part dominated the whole, or the whole was seen as the sum of its parts.

The imperialism inherent in the dynamics of Capital, as de-

scribed by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, is driven by the Marxist principles of the law of the organic composition of Capital and competition, which are fundamental characteristics of capitalism. However, imperialism assumes distinct forms and characteristics during different historical periods and phases. For instance, the conditions in backward regions, such as Assam, during the post-Naxalbari uprising of the 1970s were somewhat akin to those in pre-revolutionary China. This similarity is why the national struggle became central to revolutionary practice; it was viewed as a struggle for democracy that inherently had an anti-imperialist dimension. Moreover, the concept of dependent capitalism and the centre-periphery relationship, which emerged as key characteristics in the post-World War II period for developing theories of imperialism, also influenced domestic struggles against imperialism. This is because the imperialist global order is mirrored within the domestic power structure.

The relationship between the central and state governments, which aligned with the existing imperialist structure, played a role in the revolutionary struggles. These struggles were fundamentally tied to *regional and petit bourgeois classes, which represented linguistic identity*. As a result, regional nationalism served as the overarching framework under which peasant-revolutionary movements could unite. Both the individual parts and the whole were understood as interconnected components that reflected one another.

The dynamics of imperialism are fundamentally based on the principles outlined by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*. These dynamics encompass various characteristic traits that have become dominant features in the development of diverse theories of imperialism over time. All of these phenomena are interconnected and interact along a time-axis of change. Neoliberal globalisation, viewed as a form of imperialism, was also intertwined with the realities faced by less developed nations in the 1970s. Different theorists, such as David Harvey, who discusses accumulation through displacement, and Prabhat Pattanaik, who focuses on income deflation in developing countries as a means of transferring value to developed nations, have proposed new theories of imperialism. However, neoliberal globalisation, which is presently taking a new turn, highlights emerging characteristics of imperialism, including state control over finance, military Keynesianism, market welfarism, and a new form of multi-polarity. For a revolutionary strategy to effectively address these dynamics, it is crucial to articulate the interaction between the internal class hierarchy and the expansion and diffusion of Capital. This connection has been overlooked in revolutionary practices in Assam since the 1970s.

What is the political role of the Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim communities in Assam, especially considering the post-independence political landscape? It is important to note that Assam's political spectrum—

encompassing the Right, the Left, and even self-proclaimed progressives—has consistently highlighted the existential anxieties of marginalised ethno-linguistic nationalisms. This focus has become a central concern in the region's politics. Consequently, the question of reaching a “permanent resolution” to the so-called foreigner and outsider issue has, in practice, been integrated into this political agenda. The various legal and political discussions surrounding “solutions” often represent either a strategic manoeuvre by the Right to prolong the issue indefinitely or, in the case of the Left, a futile pursuit of an unattainable political ideal. Exhausted from being outpaced in this prolonged struggle, the weakened Left now hesitates to explore alternative paths.

On the other hand, with the issue of foreigners and outsiders indefinitely suspended in limbo and both Left and Right frameworks having failed, the Bengali Hindu and Muslim communities have developed their self-defensive mechanisms in an effort to survive. These mechanisms are not static; they change and adapt according to the prevailing nature of the state's regime. In their desire to appear acceptable to those in power, these communities are engaged in a relentless competition with one another. This competitive dynamic reveals the structural and characteristic differences embedded within the internal social composition of each community.

Among the Bengali Hindus of the Brahmaputra Valley, the educated middle class has distanced itself from its community

in two notable ways: first, by migrating beyond the state's borders; and second, by finding a semblance of stability through lower-level positions within the ruling order. As a result, the ordinary Bengali Hindu population left behind, at the lower rungs of society, has internalised a prolonged sense of historical defeat, living in a kind of cultural twilight. They gradually forget the shame of that defeat and instead pursue a constructed sense of dignity under the shadow of the state. This fabricated dignity conceals a latent psychology that transforms them into the foot soldiers of the ruling elite, manifested through Islamophobia, the denial of real class subjugation, and the transformation of collective memories of conflict into disdain. This situation represents a peculiar neuro-chemical alchemy of primitivism. The primary responsibility lies with the failed left-progressive politics, as this community once gravitated toward the Left in large numbers at a pivotal moment in the subcontinent's history.

The Bengali Muslim societies of Assam and East Bengal have historically consisted mainly of peasants and the working class. Before 1971, their limited ownership of land did not lead to any unified political strength. The Muslim masses were actively involved in class struggles, not only against absentee Hindu landlords but also in addressing class conflicts within their community. This internal contradiction within the Muslim political landscape was evident even in the Muslim League, particularly in the conflict between the

zamindar interests represented by Saadulah and the interests of the peasants championed by Maulana Bhashani.

After the Partition and the creation of Bangladesh, the influential segment of Assam's Muslim society diminished significantly. Mosque-centric politics became a tool in the complex interplay of linguistic, ethnic, and communal dynamics. The real tension arose when a small but emerging educated middle class among the Bengali Muslims in Assam began to gain prominence. Although they were numerically limited and lacked a strong foundation within the broader Muslim community to rally support for their leadership, this fragile middle class sought social acknowledgment and status. This conflicting desire ultimately drove them into the sphere of state support. Regardless of who was in power, aligning themselves as minor collaborators seemed to be the safest option, allowing them to secure symbolic prestige and minor benefits from the ruling authorities.

Within both the Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim communities of Assam, a division emerged—one that had the potential to foster a shared vision rooted in working-class perspectives, thereby broadening the democratic and left-progressive landscape of Assam. If this foundation had been established, a genuine path to the development of nationality could have emerged; however, the trajectory diverged in the opposite direction. The emancipatory and creative energies of the people, along with their potential for progressive community and na-

tionality aspirations, were suppressed. This suppression marked the decline of workers' rights, creating an environment in which the forces of Hindutva seized power.

The root of the crisis lies in the Left-progressive camp's unusual adoption of a specific strain of nationalist theory. This theory emphasised the emotional anxiety surrounding the fear of national extinction, rather than focusing on a materialist analysis of linguistic and ethnic identities. Instead of addressing the tangible realities of linguistic and national issues, political energy was redirected toward creating a project aimed at alleviating subjective insecurities. As a result, specific anxieties became dominant while others were overlooked. The persistent vulnerability experienced by Muslims, who are often marginalised from state power, remained largely unaddressed in official political discourse, leading to an inevitable silence within this framework.

In politics, anxiety can play a significant role, particularly when a competitive identity emerges under the leadership of the middle class in opposition to others. The Partition, the reorganisation of states along linguistic lines, and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh collectively contributed to the lack of a middle class among the two communities in Assam. This absence diminished the possibility of any counter-hegemonic nationality challenge. During the pre-independence phase, there was at least a slight presence of such a challenge, albeit with the support of British conspiratorial

involvement. However, when that anxiety could no longer be accommodated within a rational political framework, an alternative was introduced: a strategy based on demographics that instilled fear.

How can two socially fragile, influential class-abandoned communities—possessing little more than numerical strength—construct a viable oppositional nationality project within the framework of a linguistically defined state? By peddling conspiratorial theories about neighbouring countries and states—a narrative that is, in essence, nothing more than a ruling-class stratagem for mutual destruction. When the ruling project itself is tied to the destructive undercurrents of national and global geopolitics, engaging with it on its terms becomes an exercise in juvenile political fantasy.

For the ordinary people of these two communities in Assam, the everyday demands of development are largely disconnected from the concepts of language, nation, or culture. As social classes, their potential for mobility and advancement could have led them towards various paths of nationality-building. However, they were suddenly hindered by a heightened sense of nationalist paranoia. This paranoia was deliberately created and imposed by the ruling class with the strategic aim of keeping Assam in a state of constant dependence on the central government. Language and ethnicity served merely as instruments—tools in a broader agenda.

At its core, the material logic

of wielding this instrument lay in the politics of property.

Until the 1980s, the politics of property in Assam primarily focused on land—specifically its ownership, control, and distribution. Ethnic animosity was deliberately stoked by enticing agrarian communities with the promise of seizing others' land, using the desperation for land to undermine peasant solidarity. This led to the fragmentation of the Left-led peasant movement, prompting the Left to manage the consequences through various political strategies aimed at alleviating nationality concerns. A significant approach was to emphasise citizenship and cultural-linguistic safeguards. It is now clear that this political strategy ultimately faced significant defeat; it was in the decline of this progressive politics that Hindutva began to rise decisively.

Alternative trajectories certainly existed. Even if one were to exclude the tea plantation workers, the number of organised workers and salaried employees in Assam was significant. However, the intellectual labour class of these workers, particularly those of Bengali and Assamese origin, fell victim to the ideological division of regional nationalism. They abandoned the internationalist teachings of the Left and instead embraced a state-sanctioned politics of fear and identity. Misguidedly, they believed they could outmanoeuvre the ruling order from within its ideological framework.

Ironically, the communities affected by this politics of fear were so internally divided by

class that they lacked a unified identity based on language or ethnicity. From a working-class perspective, a counter-hegemonic approach that opposed their subordination to the centre could have not only emerged but also legitimised their claims to an “Assamese” identity. This would have fostered a natural alliance with the Assamese middle class, considering the significant role that class actors play in regional movements.

For the dispossessed toiling masses of Bengali (a local dialect)-speaking Hindus and Muslims, the decision to identify as Assamese or continue as Bengali was not about ethnic victory or defeat. There was no underlying sociology suggesting a threat to the survival of nationality. Instead, what is at stake is the establishment of a strong and healthy democracy.

The core issue is this: the politics surrounding ethnonational anxiety and the fear of imagined extinction does not align with Assam’s natural path toward bourgeois development; therefore, it lacks any democratic essence. In fact, this type of politics distorts the realities of “combined and uneven” development, opting for a route of total dependency that undermines the internal forces necessary for the advancement of the Assamese nationality. Consequently, issues related to citizenship and land ownership have resurfaced in altered forms, disturbing the very fabric of Assam’s social life.

Concerns about demographic trends no longer stir the collective social imagination as they once did. Additionally, the appeal of agricultural land has di-

minished. Rural Assam has essentially transformed into a landscape where subsistence living is the only viable option, and most of its population is merely nominal beneficiaries. The agrarian economy is in such distress that the rural community has become emotionally and materially disconnected from the idea of land as a source of livelihood or legacy.

However, why do questions of citizenship and eviction continue to dominate Assam’s electoral politics?

The discourse surrounding citizenship that once formed the foundation of Assam’s nationality politics has now resurfaced as a pervasive and oppressive mechanism within the Indian fascist agenda, affecting all segments of the population indiscriminately. Similarly, the agrarian land issue, which was once used as a compelling tool to mobilise peasants on the nationality question, has now transformed into a means of actual dispossession, serving the interests of unchecked corporate exploitation. This exploitation requires prime land and subsoil resources, making displacement a necessary consequence. Land and natural resources are seized under the pretext of attracting corporate investment, which predictably fails to provide adequate rehabilitation for those displaced. Consequently, this leads to an increasing reserve army of unemployed labour, ensuring a supply of cheap labour.

However, even the ruling establishment is aware that such a predatory model of governance is unsustainable. The nationalist card cannot be played indefi-

nately in a game of systemic devastation.

An elaborate and calculated eviction is being staged under the pretext of protecting forestland and government land (khas land). It is widely known that, over the decades, millions of people displaced by river erosion sought refuge on such lands. The overwhelming majority of these settlers are Muslim cultivators. Successive governments have actively encouraged these inhabitants with the promise of land titles (*patta*).

Corporate greed is now attempting to turn these lands into areas for extraction and speculation during a time of widespread economic distress and public discontent. As this happens, the bulldozers of eviction are being skilfully redirected. The goal is to present these forced displacements as anti-Muslim operations, ensuring the smooth continuation of the fascist-communal agenda without causing ideological conflict or public backlash.

One of the key factors driving the consolidation of fascist rule is the severe intensification of exploitation faced by the working class. This situation deepens a systemic crisis of demand throughout the entire economic system. In Assam, a development model heavily reliant on corporate investment and foreign debt has not alleviated this crisis; instead, it has worsened it. As a consequence, the question of citizenship has been transformed through a distorted logic of governance. Rather than defining the relationship between the state and its citizens in democratic terms, the state now imposes a

regime of absolute control, subsuming all aspects of social life under its coercive apparatus. This shift has effectively reduced even the average Assamese citizen to a second-class status within the Indian Union.

However, the fascist agenda conceals this truth by presenting it in a religious and communal context, portraying Muslims as the primary targets and sacrificial others. This strategy serves as the BJP's key advantage.

The first groups to be attracted to this strategy are often the very communities whose fragile social foundation has been neglected by their middle classes. These communities lack any alternative Left vision based on a working-class perspective. After experiencing a long period of dispossession and impoverishment, they seek a fleeting sense of identity and self-worth through the patronage of the state, especially when that state seems to support them in criticising, dehumanising, or symbolically disempowering others.

This desire to control a perceived weak adversary arises under the protective influence of the sovereign, creating an illusion of power and dignity drawn from the state's support. The regime, fully aware of this psychological and political dynamic, is strategically shaping the discourse around eviction and citizenship. It aims to include Bengali Hindus, certain marginalised tribal groups, and tea garden "Adivasis" in an Anti-Muslim consensus. If this manufactured tension escalates into open conflict, the state hopes to redirect public anger in its favour and shift the political

landscape back toward the BJP.

Sections of the Assamese middle class recognise the manipulation at play. However, they have become alienated from the masses due to the isolating and dead-end nature of years of politics of nationality. As a result, they lack the conviction to change direction and create an alternative political vision. Ironically, those who are quickest to seek refuge in the regime's communal strategy are often the very communities that could have laid the groundwork for a progressive alternative. However, the Left-progressive forces have failed them, leaving a void where political courage and class consciousness should have thrived.

There is still time to act. The trade unions that were once affiliated with the Congress in the tea plantations and are still nominally active must be transformed into genuine workers' unions that genuinely represent the demands of the labouring class. The concerns of Muslim peasants and wage workers today are not fundamentally different from those of Assamese or Bengali Hindu labourers. *Therefore, the possibility of achieving unity through a class-based perspective is not only feasible but also urgent.*

For the indigenous communities of Assam, questions of identity are now deeply intertwined with corporate exploitation and the distortions of predatory capitalist "development". In the current situation, it is entirely possible to engage in a political struggle aimed at expelling the imaginary enemy from the collective mindset. The state's focus on citizenship and eviction, framed

through the lens of land ownership, has no real connection to the preservation of Assamese identity. Recognising this truth is essential. Additionally, the concept of "Bangaliana" (Bengali cultural nationalism) has become entirely reliant on state support and is disconnected from the actual people. It holds little real significance in Assam, serving primarily as a rhetorical flourish.

No community's identity is threatened by its population size or the presence of neighbouring states or nations. What truly puts people at risk is the weakening of their internal class power. The rise of pan-Indian fascism has demonstrated that no community in this region has a strong and independent bourgeois class. The organic development of any nationality is impossible without the guiding perspective of the working class.

Therefore, any durable resolution to the crisis of citizenship and eviction must include two key demands: (1) The 2014 voter rolls that had been revised based on 1971 as the base year must be frozen and considered the legitimate document for preparing the citizens' register. (2) Prohibition of land acquisition without the explicit approval of Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, where an overwhelming majority of voters give their consent.

This approach will not change the linguistic character of the state; instead, it will establish a political foundation rooted in genuine social empowerment. Since gaining independence, the region has been hindered by fragmented and narrow nationalist politics, which have led to the current state of political pa-

ralysis and disempowerment.

West Bengal's Bengali population, too, has found itself in a similarly precarious position, differing only in degree, not in kind. Now is the time to turn the tide.

The question arises: why did the left and progressive movements become so focused on concepts like sub-nationality, little-nationality, and ethnonationality, ultimately leading to the erosion of their support base? In Assam, the left movement's support was primarily rooted in the peasant masses in rural areas. This support was a crucial part that needed to be integrated into a larger framework to create a comprehensive left-revolutionary project. Such integration was attempted through a nationalistic programme, although the focus was mainly on regional development that opposed central power.

As a result, when the AASU's nationalism was transformed into an anti-Bengali and anti-Muslim movement through the political manipulation of the ruling class through the central power and the Sangh's social machinations, they were able to easily entice the Asomiya peasant masses with the promise of acquiring land abandoned by

displaced Hindu Bengali and Muslim peasants. The leftist peasant movement had no alternative strategy to counter this transformation of nationalism into a reactionary agenda. This was a critical error on the part of the left and revolutionary factions, rooted in the belief that, since the resolution of the nationality question was no longer in the hands of the bourgeois class in the era of imperialism, petit-bourgeois nationalism would support democratic nationalism or align itself with working-class leadership. The developments following the 1917 Russian Revolution and the 1949 Chinese Revolution contributed to a mechanistic understanding of imperialism. However, the political reality in Assam has subsequently proven this assumption to be incorrect. While Assamese middle-class nationalism has merged with centrist Hindutva nationalism, Bodo ethno-nationalism, led by the middle class, has carved out space within the power structure to accommodate its sectarian class interests. In both instances, the middle class has secured political space that aligns with the shifting global dynamics of imperialism. Ini-

tially, in the context of globalisation, the middle class was co-opted into a system that marginalised the working class as a whole.

There was a general acceptance of middle-class nationalism not only in Assam but everywhere due to a flawed theoretical idea. This idea is based on the premise that middle-class nationalism will lead to democratic struggle or be guided by working-class leadership, even though there is no bourgeois solution to the national question in the era of imperialism.

The theoretical position presented is flawed because the middle class has developed its own form of nationalism that conflicts with the interests of the working class. The question of nationality must be addressed in a post-revolutionary society from the perspective of the working class. One cannot expect to find a solution unless the working class is in charge or its party is in power. This underscores the need to redefine imperialism as a complex and dynamic phenomenon, one with inherent characteristics that evolve over time. Imperialism needs to be understood in its motion along the time axis. □□□

'COMPRADOR, FEUDAL, STATE-MONOPOLY CAPITALISM'

The Rise of Bureaucrat Capitalism in India

K Murali (ajith)

THE 1969 POLITICAL resolution of the CPI(M-L) had noted that, along with feudalism, comprador-bureaucrat capitalism is "one of the two main props" of imperialism. The ruling classes were analysed as the "big comprador-bureau-

crat bourgeoisie and big landlords". The public sector was analysed as "state monopoly capitalism, i.e., bureaucrat capitalism". The fostering of the growth of comprador-bureaucrat capitalism by imperialism and social imperialism was directly related

to their interest in continuing the "unbridled exploitation" of the Indian people.

"This clarity on the character of the big bourgeoisie and the nature of the capitalism underlying it, fostered by and serving the interests of imperialism, was a decisive rupture from the confusion created by various brands of revisionists. It was guided by the breakthrough achieved by Mao Zedong, through his class

analysis of China, in understanding the nature of the bourgeoisie in oppressed countries. These positions are commonly accepted by the Marxist-Leninist movement. Yet the understanding is not identical. For example, some consider comprador and bureaucrat bourgeoisie as factions of a single class. Some others view them as separate classes. It is also argued that this form of capitalism applies only to the state sector, the public sector. There is further the question of applying the Maoist concept of bureaucrat capitalism in analysing and understanding the nature of on-going transformations taking place in rural India.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to deal with the concept of "distorted capitalism". It is often used, mistakenly, as a synonym of bureaucrat capitalism. The qualifier—"distorted"—is believed to sufficiently clarify that this is a particular type of capitalism, one which is not independent. But, merely recording that the capitalist relations being fostered here are distorted, that they are qualitatively different from those in the capitalist (imperialist) countries, is of little use. The issue to be explained is the nature of the "distortion". That these relations serve imperialism is only one aspect of the matter, only one of the manifestations of "distortion". As defined by Mao, it is also "closely tied up with... the domestic landlord class and the old-type rich peasants". Bureaucrat capitalism is, in Mao's formulation, "comprador, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism". The links with imperialism, feudalism and the state, all three, must be kept in mind. The formulation "distorted capitalism" conceals the essence of the

matter. Similarly, the term "crony capitalism" is also insufficient since it addresses only the aspect of the close relation of this capital with political lobbies. The waxing and waning of the fortunes of different comprador groups in direct relation to their proximity to political centres is no doubt an important characteristic of the capitalism seen here. But all the same it is still only one aspect. Therefore neither of these terms can replace the comprehensive, scientific rigour provided by Mao's formulation "bureaucrat capitalism" and its definition. This needs to be reasserted. The nature of capitalism in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country like India is comprador as well as bureaucratic. It is comprador because it serves the interest of imperialism and develops under its tutelage. It is bureaucratic because it survives and develops on the basis of state patronage.

Here attention must be drawn to the contribution of chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP). He reiterated the centrality of Mao Tsetung's concept of bureaucrat capitalism in analysing oppressed countries. He applied and developed this concept. It was specified "...bureaucratic capitalism is the capitalism that imperialism generates in the backward countries, which is linked to a decrepit feudalism and in submission to imperialism which is the last phase of capitalism. This system does not serve the majority of the people but rather the imperialists, the big bourgeoisie, and the landowners." Further, "...bureaucrat capitalism is no more than the path of imperialism in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country and without semi-feudal and

semi-colonial conditions there would be no bureaucrat capitalism." This clarifies that the deepening penetration of imperialism in the villages is the development of bureaucrat capitalism and that it will never lead to the elimination of feudalism. Feudalism will be retained in one form or other. Bureaucrat capitalism is not just a matter of imperialism and the big bourgeoisie; it also serves the big landlords.

In a speech Gonzalo had pointed out, "Bureaucratic capitalism develops three lines within its process: a landlord line in the countryside, a bureaucratic one in industry, and a third, also bureaucratic, in the ideological sphere. He added, "This is without pretending that these are the only ones." (*The National Question*, 1974) Bureaucrat capitalism is promoted by imperialism through the transformation of feudalism. In the post-1947 period, under neo-colonialism, this has been mainly done through the comprador-bureaucratic bourgeoisie. This transformation is not a supersession of feudalism by capitalism. It is an intermeshing of both. This is the particularity of this form of capitalism. Therefore, similar to the marking of semi-feudal relations by bureaucrat capitalism, bureaucrat capitalism is also marked by feudalism, in India's situation caste-feudalism. This is true of both industry and the ideological sphere. Furthermore it is important to keep this in mind while examining the question of the superstructure, including political power.

The growth process of bureaucrat capitalism begins with colonialism. Once colonial domination was consolidated, the old caste-feudalism no longer remained the

same. It was subordinated and enmeshed in the worldwide imperialist web. A share of the surplus of kings and landlords, though extracted through the old caste-feudal methods of exploitation, was now channelled into the formation of bureaucrat capital. Often they themselves were directly involved in setting up industries, railways and plantations. When modern big industries were being set up in Keralam in the late 1940s, the Thiruvithamkoor monarchy invested Rs 11.44 crore as capital and loans in 16 big enterprises, collaborating with imperialist capital from the US, Britain, Canada, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. Caste-feudalism was made into the social base of imperialism precisely through such transformations, which were simultaneously the process of growth of bureaucrat capitalism.

"The comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie had the leading role in the ruling classes' alliance to which British colonialism transferred power in 1947. It was consolidated during the 1960s-70s spurts in the growth of bureaucrat capitalism. This leading role is an attribute of its origin rooted in the growth of bureaucrat capitalism, namely its emergence under conditions of subservience to imperialism and along with the imperialist transformation of feudalism. This leading role was not gained on its own strength vis a vis caste-feudalism. It is not at all a matter of capitalism displacing or subordinating caste-feudalism. Caste-feudalism lost its leading role through the consolidation of colonialism. It is dominated primarily by imperialism, not bureaucrat capitalism. Being a distinct class the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie has its distinct interests.

While this at times may give rise to contradictions with some or the other imperialist power, it can never act independent from imperialism as a whole. The leading role of the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie does not give it unfettered rights or privileges within the ruling classes' alliance or in deciding policies. Ultimately it is imperialism that matters and imperialism needs both feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism as its main props. Therefore every step taken by the state in the direction of furthering bureaucrat capitalism also recreates room for some caste-feudal elements and relations transformed according to the needs of imperialism, even while certain other elements and relations get eliminated or suppressed." This lengthy quote, from a paper presented by Porattom (Keralam) in a symposium organised by Struggle India at Kolkata in 2011, gives a concise summary of the topic dealt with in this paper.

The thesis of bureaucrat capitalism and the characterisation of the Indian big bourgeoisie as comprador-bureaucrat has been under attack from various hues of revisionism. The CPM argued that this class can't be termed comprador since it had taken up industrial production during the colonial period itself. According to it, that term can only be applied to a trading class. This argument is being repeated by some who wish to present themselves as adherents of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Instead of 'seeking truth from facts', they have sought to back up their views with a selective choice of quotes from Mao Tsetung. The claim is made that Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) were "...unequivocal in charac-

terising the *comprador* bourgeoisie as a commercial-bureaucratic bourgeoisie."¹

Going through Mao's writings, one sees a steady deepening in his understanding. In 1947, he puts forward the following definition: "During their twenty-year rule, the four big families, Chiang, Soong, Kung and Chen, have piled up enormous fortunes valued at ten to twenty thousand million US dollars and monopolised the economic lifelines of the whole country. This monopoly capital, combined with state power, has become state-monopoly capitalism. This monopoly capitalism, closely tied up with foreign imperialism, the domestic landlord class and the old-type rich peasants, has become comprador, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism."² Evidently, he is not talking about a commercial class. Yet, in the view of the ideologues of the Revolutionary Workers Party of India (RWPI), "...comprador bourgeoisie is always, without exception, commercial and bureaucratic.... the industrial capitalist class can never be comprador..."³

Mao's definition was a synthesis of the studies carried out by the CPC. One of them was authored by Chen Po-ta. Titled 'China's Four Big Families', it gave an account of the various sectors of the economy they were controlling. This included banking, power plants, heavy and light industry, chemicals, textiles, iron and steel. After the defeat of Japanese imperialism, these four families expanded their control. They took over its factories and other assets and entered into collaborative arrangements with US corporations. The four big banks of that time, owned by these families, had total control over the

whole economy. Such are the facts.

Coming to India, Suniti Kumar Ghosh, in his path breaking work *'The Indian Big Bourgeoisie'*, had demonstrated how the comprador bourgeoisie transitioned from trade to industry. He wrote, "Industrial capitalism did not develop in India independently on autonomous lines. It is not the class contradictions and class struggle within the Indian society that lead to the emergence and growth of industrial capitalism. On the contrary, it was capitalism, which had developed elsewhere, that urged by the laws of its own development promoted the growth of some industrial enclaves, dependent on it, in the midst of the vast semi-feudal economy in this subcontinent."⁴ He also established that they continued to be tied to imperialist capital. Their contradictions with the colonial power were acknowledged and examined. It was shown that they remained non-antagonistic. The contradiction in a section of them had over textile imports and tariffs has always been trumpeted by the CPM to deny their comprador character. The RWPI parrots this. Contradicting such superficial views, Ghosh explained how this also involved the contradictions between different sections of the British bourgeois elites. It did not indicate any 'national' character on the part of the Indian mill owners.⁵

Several studies published since then confirm the analysis made by Suniti Kumar Ghosh about the origins of the comprador industrialists and the nature of their contradictions with British colonialism. Chandravarkar notes, "The inception of the cotton-textile in-

dustry was neither the result of a structural transformation in the Indian economy nor the outcome of a logical progression from trade to industry. Rather, as we have seen, merchants who had been subordinated in the export trade in raw cotton sought an outlet in spinning and weaving to hedge against its fluctuations. This pattern of diversification to spread their risks and protect their capital was to characterise the subsequent development of the industry."⁶ Tyabji wrote, "Industrial enterprises arose only in fields which had the fortuitous leeway created by the exigencies of the overall colonial balance of payments system, made evident by the growth of cotton and jute textiles and the subsequent concession to sugar manufacture."⁷ "This system of tariffs mainly aimed to protect British capital in the inter-war period and maintain 'stability' in the British empire but it also provided limited concessions and protection to Indian capital as a result of the imperative on the colonial state to accommodate basic demands from Indian capital and maintain it as an ally in the face of a rise in labour militancy since the 1920s. The concessions to Indian capital, however, were arbitrary, discriminatory and often short-lived."⁸ was how Das Gupta explained 'unity and struggle' of Indian compradors and British imperialism.

Suniti Kumar Gosh's work was an outstanding example of meticulous analysis, drawing on available sources. Instead of debating it with the rigour it demands, the RWPI satisfies itself with rhetorical flourishes. It ends up with this formulation "...a bourgeoisie that is neither national (because it does not share any interest with the

Indian people), nor comprador (because it is not politically dependent...) and even less, an imperialist bourgeoisie (because the import of capital ... is much more than its export of capital...)... In our opinion, the Indian bourgeoisie can be characterised as the Junior Partner of Imperialism..."⁹ The question was the character of the Indian big bourgeoisie. The answer is something reminding one of the Vedic chant, 'not that, not that, not that...' The RWPI derides the scholarship of Suniti Kumar Ghosh as subjective, while resting smug with its vague determination of class character, employing formulations like 'interests'. A strange amalgam of the CPM and the SUCI (Communist).

The transition of a section of compradors to industry was also a process of the growth and deepening of bureaucrat capitalism. Shoots of proto-capitalism had already emerged in various regions of the sub-continent well before the entry of colonial powers. The growth of colonial trade initially gave a boost to it. So much so that "By the late seventeenth century for some rulers revenues from the trade stimulated by cloth manufacturing had become essential for state finances."¹⁰ But once colonial power began to be established and consolidated, all further growth gradually became subordinated to its needs and dictates. Trade, local manufacture and cropping patterns shaped and directed by the colonialists took hold. This was how bureaucrat capitalism emerged. However, it must be noted that this was not simply an import of colonialism. The emergence and growth of bureaucrat capitalism was also a process of drawing in and trans-

forming existing relations. Local manufacture and trade had already led to the spread of monetary transactions to such an extent that it became a topic of cultural discourse.¹¹ If one sees the changes in the relations of production in the state of Mysore that developed independently for 40 years even after the British aggression in 1757, one can see that there was a possibility for the emergence of capitalism in India. In this state the hegemony of landlords (*palegars*) was ended and a strong modern centralised state was established. There were nearly one lakh permanent employees and other one lakh part-time employees in the government administration. This apart there was a regular army of one and a half lakh soldiers and another one and a half militia called *kandacharas*. The land of landlords, waste land and lands not cultivated for more than ten years were distributed to poor peasants and Dalits on the basis of land only to the tiller irrespective of caste and religion. Irrigation facilities were expanded in a large way. One-third, i.e. 38 percent of the total cultivable land was brought under irrigation. This resulted not only in the growth of per capita productivity of land but a considerable growth in the production of ordinary goods. Commodity-money relations expanded. Manufacture also developed, mainly in textiles and armaments.¹²

Once colonial power was established its surplus extraction through trade and land revenue demands further accelerated and promoted the monetisation of local economies. Caste-feudalism was transformed into semi-feudalism.¹³ This transformation had a dual nature. While many

of its earlier features were eroded or even eliminated, some of them were strengthened. New ones emerged. This was accompanied most often by the demise of the old landlords and emergence of new ones. Similarly, the earlier traders were displaced by a new crop, wholly dependent on the colonialist power. Throughout all of this, caste remained as a decisive socio-economic-cultural determinant. Hence, Brahmanism, adapted to new circumstances, was at the core of the world outlook of the emergent comprador class from its very beginnings.

In present context, the inter-twinning with feudalism seen in bureaucrat capitalism was manifested in several ways. One of them was the role played by caste in capital formation, its reproduction and in the constitution and control of the labour force exploited by it. Then there was the investment of feudal surplus in comprador enterprise. Feudal landlords and royalty also entered industry directly, collaborating with imperialist monopolies. The Hyderabad Allwyn Limited was an example. It was started as a joint venture of the Nizam of Hyderabad and Allwyn. This sort of inter-twinning is commonly seen in all the oppressed countries, though they will display variations in their concrete forms. One sees this for example in 21st century Thailand, where the Crown Property Bureau is the biggest landholder in the country and has investments in many significant economic sectors such as resource-based industries, iron and steel, battery, plywood, sanitary-ware, petrochemicals and many more.¹⁴ In India too, the feudal wealth of erstwhile royalty and its landed property continue as active par-

ticipants in comprador-bureaucrat industry, plantations and service enterprises. The plantations of the erstwhile Kochi and Travancore royalty are one example.

The deepening of bureaucrat capitalism also means the continuing transformation of caste-feudalism. Here is a broad overview:

“The fortunes of bureaucrat capitalism being directly related to impulses from imperialism and mediated through the active role of the state, this is equally true of its emergence and spread in the rural sector. The bourgeois state has always played an active role in the capitalist transformation of feudalism. England’s enclosure laws were an example. But, the role of the state in promoting bureaucrat capitalism in the agrarian sector of an oppressed country is qualitatively different. In the former case, the state’s role was limited to creating favourable conditions, through regulations and laws, for the growth of agrarian capitalism. In the latter, the colonial state directly implanted and grew bureaucrat capitalist relations, transforming feudalism into semi-feudalism. The neocolonial state continues to play this role through direct and indirect means.

“The canal systems built by the British Raj in pre-partition West Punjab and in the Godavari, Krishna deltas were of this nature. Increased productivity led to greater class differentiation of the peasantry and the growth and strengthening of the rich peasantry along with the landlords. They received a further push through the ‘Green Revolution’. State intervention was not limited to infrastructural development. It encompassed inputs as well as

capital, advanced as credit, to enable implementation of this package. In some cases minimal land reforms were also carried out. What is notable of these developments is the secondary role of internal agency. Its impetus was, and continues to be, overwhelmingly external. Not only from outside the rural sector, but more essentially, from outside the country. Quite naturally enough, the rural classes that benefited the most, even entrepreneurs who have emerged, are of a hybrid type. Their existence is bound up with bureaucrat capitalism and imperialism through heavy dependence on them for finances, resources and markets. It is also tied up with persisting caste-feudal relations and values. This is seen in their economic activities, whether in agriculture, industry or services. Caste and Brahmanism remain key media of their sustenance and reproduction. Such is the inevitable outcome of the growth of bureaucrat capitalism.

"The emergence and development of capitalism, whether through a radical revolution or gradual evolution, was always accompanied by a fundamental and comprehensive transformation of existent value systems, culture, and social norms, of the whole ideological realm. Unlike this, the persisting, living presence of the old in the new, distinguishes bureaucrat capitalism. This is not a matter of comparing it with some generic type and identifying where it lacks. Western capitalism's claim to be 'the universal model' rightly stands debunked today. But that does not mean that the distinguishing features of bureaucrat capitalism can be reduced to the inevitable uniqueness of every particular process of historical evolution.

The fact that those features are common to all oppressed countries, even if modulated by country-specific features, drives in the point that they are something more. This is capitalism of a different type."¹⁵

This 'persisting presence of the old in the new' can be seen in all the policies formulated by the state to promote the deepening and spread of bureaucrat capitalism. Take the case of the broadening of institutional credit to rural areas. This was part of the 'Green Revolution' package and meant to facilitate the market for new inputs like hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and so on. The need to expand institutional credit and reduce dependence on informal money-lending was presented as a crucial component of rural development from the early days of the Five Year Plans itself. Current data leads some to the conclusion that this has been achieved in the main. Well, that is true, in figures. Institutional credit is now dominant in rural credit. But if one goes beyond appearances a different reality would emerge. As such, official data readily accepts that the great majority of the peasantry—marginal, small landowners and landless tenants—depend on private sources for their credit needs. Even in Punjab, supposed to be an example of the development of capitalism in agriculture, their credit source is quite often the local landlord. That is not all. A good chunk of institutional credit, from banks and co-operative societies, ends up as usurious capital deployed at atrocious rates by moneylenders, landlords, commission agents or rich peasants. Studies on rural credit note that the promotion of commercialisation of agriculture has not only encour-

aged the rise of the trader but also his associated lending activities.¹⁶ In Punjab this has led to a situation of peasants getting alienated from their land and ending up as tenants of commission agents.

The Punjab government had carried out a survey of rural debt in 1997. While the growth rate of agricultural production was 5.05 percent between 1960-61 and 1990-91, the annual rate of increase of cost of production per acre was 11.2 percent in paddy, 9 percent in wheat and 9.80 percent in cotton. This forced the peasants into indebtedness. 81.61 percent of short term loans had been advanced by the commission agents who bought up produce from the peasants and sold them seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and other inputs. 70 percent of the credit needs of small and medium peasants (land size up till 10 acres) were met by these commission agents. 40 percent of the peasants who had short term loans were indebted to them. A peasant who is unable to pay up the loan or the annual interest mortgages his land to the commission agent. 13.6 percent of the peasants had already done this. Though they continue to labour on that land, in effect they have become tenants on their own land. They must pay a share of the annual surplus as rent to the agent, now in the form of the annual interest on their loan. Rent is paid from the sale of produce to the commission agent, not handed over as a share as it used to be done in the past. Even then, it is not a capitalist transaction, measured and administered in purely monetary terms. Its essential nature is that of a dependent, forced transaction, a concrete manifestation of persist-

ing semi-feudalism. If the peasants are unable to pay up and close their loan within a few years they will have to sell the land to the commission agent. In an issue taken up by the *Bharathiya Kisan Union (Ekta)* it was discovered that a commission agent had grabbed 56 acres from 19 families and converted another 54 acres into leased land. He had paid 50,000 Rupees per acre when the going rate was ranging around one and a half lakh Rupees.

Commission agents have near complete domination in the rural areas of Punjab. Seeds and fertilisers are sold at prices they fix. Many a time goods sold are fake. At harvest time they force the peasants to sell off their produce at low prices. Acting as middlemen in the government's grain procurement they collude with officials and loot the peasants. Being dependent on them the peasants usually don't challenge such acts. They are forced to bear with the arrogant attitudes and usurious exploitation of the commission agents. Such instances vividly show how economic compulsions give birth to non-economic coercion and dependence, and how feudal relations are recreated as a natural offshoot of neo-colonial agrarian transformation, of the growth of bureaucratic capitalism.

Is the continuation of private money lending an aberration? No. It was, and continues to be, a component of state policies. After noting that it accounts for 70 % of rural credit and calling for the promotion of institutional credit to replace it, an RBI report of 1954 went on to record, "... any realistic system of rural credit should seek to incorporate him (the moneylender-KM) in

itself rather than compete with him or wishfully expect to eliminate him."¹⁷ In the years that followed there was a steady expansion of the banking system in rural area, with a forceful push in the 1970s and '80s. Yet, after all that, a Technical Group of the RBI, submitting its report in 2007, cites 'expert opinion' proposing a comprehensive financial system based on 'bank-moneylender linkages', and calling for recognising moneylenders as 'legitimate agents of economic activity'.¹⁸ Feudal forms of exploitation like usurious moneylending were not to be eliminated. They were to be modified and incorporated. That is precisely how bureaucrat capitalism operates and grows. One must go beyond appearances to get to its essence.

To go deeper into the character of tenant farming seen today, here is a quote from the author's study on agrarian relations in Keralam, considered as a State where semi-feudalism has been ended through land reforms:

"Tenant farming can be grouped into four types, the form of rent payment being the criterion. They are—a fixed amount of money or share of crops being paid as rent, share cropping, paying rent through doing free labour for the land owner. All four of them exist in Keralam. Labour rent exists in the form of doing free labour to tend coconut saplings, or planting and tending rubber saplings for the first three or four years, and being allowed to do intercropping in the remaining land. Share cropping is commonly seen in paddy cultivation. Sometimes a share of the agricultural cost is borne by the land owner. A variant, where the land owner bears the whole cost

and the tenant pays it back by giving an extra share of the crop along with that fixed as rent, also exists. In such cases, the price of the product given as repayment is calculated at half the market rate. This difference approximately works out to an annual rate of interest of 200 percent. Share cropping with the land owner advancing only the seeds or his drought animals too can be seen. In the latter case the tenant has to bear its cost by doing some free labour for the land owner. Quite often, nearly two thirds of the share cropper's product share has to be sold to meet production costs. Rent is actually a share of the surplus remaining after deducting costs. Therefore, even when the product is shared equally, the rent will be above 50 percent.

"Rent in the form of a fixed share of product or amount of money exists across all crops. The practice of fixing rent through auction is also prevalent here. While the land owner, enjoying the status of 'farmer' gets all sorts of subsidies, nothing of this is given to the real cultivator. Both co-operative capital and usury capital participate in the exploitation carried out through lease farming by becoming the source of credit to the tenant.

"Though the rent in paddy cultivation is less than that in commercial crops, the share of rent and of other forms of exploitation like interest in the surplus is higher on the average... The rate of exploitation... in general... is above 50 percent, with the highest being 75 percent. Most of the cultivators covered in the investigation were either landless or poor peasants. The surplus they gained ranged from 1,105 to 18,360 Rupees. Hence, even the

highest surplus would amount to a monthly income of barely 1,500 Rupees. Let alone accumulation, this would not even suffice for bare existence. This is representative of the lease farming done by the poor in rural Keralam. It isn't their regular occupation, it provides a subsidiary income. The surplus gained through lease farming is used for house repairs, buying clothes or gold. Those doing paddy cultivation too usually sell their share of the crop. A few years back, before the pressure for leased land had gone up, a few among them could gain a better share of the surplus, accumulate it and buy small plots of paddy land. Since then the rent rate has gone up and this opportunity has disappeared. In general the fall in employment opportunities has given rise to the tendency of storing up the paddy share rather than selling it, in order to ensure food security.

"There is yet another category of lease farmers who invest capital on a large scale and employ labour. More seen in commercial crops like banana, pineapple and ginger, it also exists in paddy cultivation. In some cases they too pay rent exceeding 50 percent... A report in the 'Kerala Kaumudi' newspaper (February 17, 1999) carried a report on a farmer doing lease farming in 20 acres of paddy land in Kuttanad. The cost of production per acre was given as 7000 Rupees. It is expected that he would obtain 8000 Rupees worth of paddy per acre (19 *meni*—19 times the sown seed) at 725 Rupees per quintal. The rent is not mentioned. (Most probably it has been included in the cost, as is usually done by lease farmers.) It is also not clear whether cultivation was done in one or sev-

eral places. However, it is evident that cultivation on such a large scale demands the employment of a lot of agricultural labourers and that the farmer is a person capable of investing one and a half lakh Rupees. If we take that the actual cost of *punja* cultivation to be 4000 Rupees, rent will come to 3000 Rupees, roughly 70 percent of the surplus. It is said that 500 Rupees worth of hay can be obtained per acre. If this is added to income, rent will be 67 percent of surplus. This example shows us how the existing land relations obstruct even large scale cultivation."

"It would be idiotic to presume feudalism as soon as one hears of rent. But it would be even more ridiculous to conclude that all that appears as rent is capitalist ground rent because a feudal tenancy system has been formally ended; particularly in a society like ours. The matter can only be settled through concrete analysis of really existent tenancy. The examples we have discussed and studies on the tenancy seen in Kuttanad clearly show that the rent paid by peasants is not some surplus-profit exceeding an average profit. It has often grabbed even a share from the deferred wages of the tenants' own labour. Lease farming can only be a subsidiary occupation for them because the surplus remaining after paying rent doesn't suffice for a living. Even if one were to stick to the written word of the 'Capital', it must be admitted that these instances correspond more to the pre-capitalist rent mentioned by Marx.

"Once the payment of rent with money becomes common, its capitalised value too will begin to emerge. Land transactions will increase. These are

indices of transformation of the feudal mode of production and rent. They had already started appearing in caste-feudal Keralam, well before the colonial period. Under colonialism it became widespread, now influenced by new factors. In common with other regions of the sub-continent, money relations and the land market grew up and spread out in Keralam during the modern period, mainly under this influence of the global imperialist system. Along with that, a market in agricultural crops and new variations in rent and tenancy, at once subject to the pulls and pushes of the imperialist market and the pressures of semi-feudalism, also took form.¹⁹ At a basic level, these tendencies continue to govern this sector in Keralam. Once the 1970 Land Reform formally ended the existent tenancy system and gave legal sanction to land ownership of those who are not dependent on agriculture, the consequent growth in agricultural commodity production and new markets, and the acceleration of speculation in land have added more features to these tendencies. Forms of rent similar to capitalist ground rent and differential rent can now be seen in Keralam. For example, in the pineapple farming seen in Ernakulam district, wet land rent was above that of garden land, even though the cost of production was higher. The reason for this was the greater productivity of the former type of land. It can also be observed that rent rates go down as one moves further away from the main market. Such variations in rent are similar to differential rent. Its basis lies in conditions of commodity production in leased land and the emergence of a more or less perma-

ment market for this particular crop (pineapple) in this area (a 200 tonne processing plant has been established here with foreign aid). Even though such forms of differential rent are possible in social conditions where a general market price is yet to develop, and the average market price of agricultural produce is still not controlled by an average profit rate, they still don't separate out from semi-feudal rent. Rather, such local specificities indicate the opposite.

"A look at factors influencing rent rate in different areas gives further confirmation. In most of the crops, the rate of rent was decided by the local demand for leased land and its availability, rather than productivity of land and market proximity. Since most of the tenant farmers are landless and poor peasants, and this is a subsidiary occupation, demand for lease land is determined by the conditions of their livelihood, the prospects of their main occupation. Supply is governed by the willingness of land owners who are not dependent on agrarian income or are unable to cultivate it due to various reasons. A common lease market hasn't yet taken form. This localism offers yet another proof of the semi-feudal nature of lease forms seen in Kerala. In Kuttanad paddy cultivation... the lowest rent is seen in the region of higher productivity. A similar situation was observed in banana cultivation. The rent for one banana sprout was 5 Rupees in the better irrigated Madikai area of Kasargod, while it was 7 Rupees in the less endowed Ambalathara. The surplus-profit in Madikai went to the tenant, not to the land owner. One of the reasons for the rent not going up in Madikai

was the balance between demand and supply of lease land. Meanwhile, higher demand was not the sole reason underlying the higher rent seen in Ambalathara. The limitations of subsistence farmers, lacking in economic and social mobility prevents them from going to Madikai. That too has to be factored in. They were governed, in their demand for leased land and in its limitations, by the pressures of livelihood. It was not a case of capital roaming around in search of profit.

"Exceptions are of course seen. In an example seen in the mid-lands of Kerala, a family that owned only one and a half acres could buy up 4 acres with the surplus accumulated in pineapple lease farming, supported with a loan. They later went on to take 5 acres of land on lease and did ginger cultivation, employing 20 workers. The newspapers have at times carried reports of instances where land was being bought in sizeable acreages from the surplus gained in lease farming. It is noteworthy that such examples of lease farming too are not free from the localism of the rent market.

"Earlier we had referred to the role played by the willingness of land owners who don't need to cultivate their lands in deciding the availability of leased-out land. This is a major factor impeding an accurate estimation of the informal leasing that came into existence after 1970 and its rent rates. There is no economic basis by which one can calculate this willingness. Unlike the old landlords, they don't face the economic necessity to lease out their lands. The concern that leasing out land might lead to loosing it also goes to hinder

the stabilisation of lease farming. Trust, local acquaintance, previous relations and similar non-economic impulses guide the decision of whether their land should be leased out and to whom. One also comes across land owners who hand over their land for vegetable or tapioca farming for free. Though written agreements are becoming common, the rent market is still governed by indeterminacy. Its negative fall out is borne by subsistence peasants. There is no guarantee that they can continue with lease farming. If the same plot of paddy land is not available beyond a year, the *varambu* work (side banks of fields), necessarily done in paddy cultivation, is lost. Therefore, a number of lessees do it partially or even avoid it. This affects productivity and, consequently, a loss in income."²⁰

The rural investigations underlying these observations were carried out in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. A quarter century has passed. What is the present situation? In Kuttanad, one of the major paddy cultivation regions of Kerala, the rent per acre has gone up to 30,000 Rs. Going by the opinion of a young farmer, engaged in paddy cultivation on leased-in land for several years in Kuttanad; one would need at least 50 acres to get a surplus sufficient to maintain middle class life standards. Almost all of his agricultural operations are mechanised and he gets an assured price since the output is purchased by a government agency. Yet, even at that acreage, this does not allow accumulation. It is still subsistence farming. Since the past one and a half decades or so, the government has been subsidising paddy cultivation in a noticeable manner. This even includes the pay-

ment of a fixed amount per hectare to the landowner, over and above what he or she gets as rent from the tenant. Out of the subsidy of Rs 30,000 per hectare given to those willing to cultivate fallow lands, Rs 5,000 is for the owner of the land. Thus, bureaucrat capital sustains and facilitates unproductive ownership of land and its tool as a means of exploitation. It also opens up a profitable avenue for its own investment through institutional credit to the tenant. While the price offered by its agencies is better than that given by private paddy mill owners, it is still less than what is needed to allow accumulation. Another person, who does farming on 10 acres of lease land as a side-occupation, pointed to a telling facet of tenant farming—it gives one prestige in society and acts as a reference for getting loans. It may be noted that it is not the value of collateral that counts. Rather, it is the 'social value' of being engaged in farming that matters. Investment of capital (quite often institutional credit), wage labour, modern inputs, mechanised operations, sale of produce—all the ingredients of capitalist agriculture can be ticked off. Yet, it would need extreme empiricism to declare this seeking of 'social value' as capitalist!

Co-operative societies are an important convergence site of bureaucrat capitalism and semi-feudalism. They are funded, and re-capitalised, through the Central government's NABARD, in its turn initially seeded by the World Bank. They also garner a good share of the surpluses of local exploiters, mainly landlords. Co-operative capital is thus a mix of imperialist, bureaucrat capitalist capitals and local, semi-feudal,

surpluses. Controlled by factional coalitions of the local exploiters through elected party panels, they are not just a source of easy credit for them. It is a recorded fact that this credit is also deployed as usurious capital. These institutions are a potent means of exercising power. By ways of the right to grant or deny loans, insist on mortgage recovery or postpone it, the landlords and other local exploiters are able to impose relations of patronage, a prominent aspect of 'naattupramaanitham' (local hegemony) on the poor and middle peasants. This is also done through other types of co-operatives, such as industrial ones. There, the promise or denial of employment is deployed as means of control. Panchayats, which now have budgets running into crores with Central-State funding, are also means of dispensing patronage.

The employment of the co-operative form in bureaucrat capitalism's transformation/restoration of caste-feudalism can be seen in the following example. 1756 acres, were seized as surplus land from a landlord as part of the land reforms in Kerala. It was distributed among 1600 poor and landless peasant families. This was done on condition that they would all become members of a collective farm to be tasked with cultivating that land. In effect their landownership became a formal affair. It was more like a share in the collective farm. The very structure of the collective was such that they were bound to it in perpetuity. They didn't have the right to dispose of their land or utilise it according to their choice. They couldn't even identify their 'own' piece of land since such marking

out became 'unnecessary' with the formation of the collective. Other than possession of a piece of paper that recorded their 'ownership' they had nothing new. In all senses they were made dependent on the director board. The board not only exercised control, it became the de facto owner. What passed as collective land ownership was in fact corporate land ownership of the board members. They acquired this position through the backing of the government and its capital investment. In other words, this was another form of bureaucrat capitalist ownership—the corporate form of bureaucrat capitalist landlordism. In the production relation that contained this new form of ownership, the de facto owners put on airs of *savarna* landlordism, used the levers of patronage and lorded over the real toilers. The peasants remained trapped in ties of dependence, a status having more in common with their earlier one under the old landlord, than their new one as 'owners'. Meanwhile one of the director board members came to 'possess' 50 acres, and another 26 acres, individually! The corporate form of bureaucrat capitalism thus spawned new additions to the private form of landlordism.²¹

The entry of the compradors into industry and the emergence of a bureaucrat faction, the means and forms of the transformation of feudal relations—all of this varies from country to country. In India the emergence of a bureaucrat faction can be traced to the entry of the royalty of native States into modern sectors of the colonial economy. The initial surplus they invested as capital came from feudal revenues. But, through these investments, they

also became participants in the growth of bureaucrat capitalism. They used the governmental power they had, within the limits set by the British, to facilitate it and favour one or the other section among the compradors. They themselves entered comprador trade and also became bureaucrat capitalists through setting up plantations or factories.

The State is both a facilitator and site of capital accumulation in oppressed countries. In many of these countries, government owned industrial and service concerns, financial institutions and savings aggregators like insurance companies and large trading companies exist along with private corporates. The entry of the Indian State in a big way into industry and trade through State-owned companies since the transfer of power in 1947 led to the swelling of the bureaucrat faction.²² It is now mainly composed of the topmost echelons in the public sector; executives of government companies in industry, finance and trade. For a long period they were the main, or even sole, players in some sectors of the economy. The bureaucrat faction is just as much comprador as the chieftains of the private sector concerns. Being a distinct faction it has its specific interests, different from those of the private comprador faction. However, the relation between both the factions has always been complementary. Both, the public and the private complement each other, even while pursuing their specific interests and having non-antagonistic contradictions with each other. They form two factions of a single class, the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie.

The borderline between these

factions is by no means rigid. Political leaders, members of the higher bureaucracy, upper echelons of the armed forces and others from the top levels of the state machinery amass wealth by appropriating public funds or getting bribes for favouring one or the other foreign or local corporate. Employing this as capital through close relatives or benamies they themselves become comprador corporates. In recent years, owners of big private concerns have directly joined the political class as parliament members or ministers. The private monopolies needed the growth of the public sector as a condition for their own growth. Over the years, the line of differentiation between these factions has steadily blurred.

Following the compulsions of the turn of the imperialist system to neo-liberalism, the political representatives of the Indian ruling classes (from left to right) have promoted privatisation of public assets. Policies favouring private corporates have been adopted. Even then it is noted that the "... the State remains an important actor in the economic arena and decisions of state or quasi state institutions play an important role in determining the quantum and distribution of economic benefits. The State's role: in granting property rights in land and for the exploitation of natural resources; in influencing the development of infrastructure and its pricing; in influencing the value of property; its power to grant tax benefits; the awarding of government contracts, etc.—all creates opportunities for granting favours of tremendously large economic value."²³

Bureaucrat capitalism re-

mains as Mao Zedong wrote, 'comprador, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism'. □□□

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Anvil, September 7, 2024.
- 2 The Present Situation and Our Tasks, Selected Works, Vol. 4.
- 3 Disha Sandhan, No: 6.
- 4 The Indian Big Bourgeoisie, Suniti Kumar Gosh, *Subarnarekha*, 1985.
- 5 "It would be wrong to achieve that Lancashire represented the interest of British capital as a whole... Mathew. J. Kust writes, "Lancashire resisted its development (that of the cotton textile industry in India) but the British textile machinery manufacturers favoured it as it served to promote their exports. Hence they gave the Indian textile industry technical assistance, supplier's credit and other help while Lancashire agitated at the same time for economic policy to dissuade its growth.", *ibid*.
"In 1865 cotton still accounted for 40% of Britain's domestic exports. By the late 1930s it represented only 10%... Before the First World War cotton gave way to coal and engineering as the largest employers of labour in Britain. Other growing industries had equal claims to consideration in the formulation of inter-war commercial policy. The new Midland industries... favoured imperial preference rather than free trade (preferred by Lancashire-km)." — The End of the Imperialism of Free Trade, Clive Dewey in The Imperial impact, edited by Clive Dewey et. al, University of London, 1978.
- 6 The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, Cambridge University Press 1994.
- 7 Forging Capitalism in Nehru's India, Nasir Tyabji, Oxford University Press, 2015.
- 8 State and Capital in Independent India, Chirashree Das Gupta, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

- 9 Subversive Interventions, Abhinav Sinha, Rahul Foundation, 2019.
- 10 The Transition to a Colonial Economy-Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720–1800, Prasanna Parthasarathi, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- 11 “It can turn enemy into friend, friend into servant, and servant into loyal son – Wondrous are the ways of money! From even the worst of perils, it can lead a king to safety: Sowing dissension in the enemy’s camp.” from ‘Rayavacakamu’, a Telugu text produced in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Quoted in *ibid*.
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[This paper on Bureaucrat Capitalism was presented in a seminar on mode of production organised by Nutana Kerala Collective at Vijayawada in August 2025]

NO MINIMUM WAGES

Unorganised Forever

Nityananda Ghosh

LABOUR MOVEMENT even in industrially advanced regions in the country has been defensive since the 1990s. And with the promulgation of four labour codes in place of old labour laws by the Modi government labour organising, more precisely Trade Union organising now seems more difficult than ever before. Already, eleven states, including some states run by opposition parties have accepted and implemented the notorious labour codes that are out and out anti-labour and more are likely to

follow suit. The state of West Bengal ruled by opposition party TMC, a partner of ‘India’ bloc, is yet to officially announce its acceptance, not to speak of its implementation, but that doesn’t mean Bengal workers enjoy rights guaranteed under old Acts. It is a matter of time that they too will fall in line and implement anti-labour labour codes introduced by the NDA government.

TU movement has virtually been reduced to some ritualistic exercises without any sustained action programme to organise the

unorganised mainly in the informal sector. This year all the central trade unions, barring BJP-controlled Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and TMC-led labour unions in Bengal, observed a day’s token strike on July 9 to demand repeal of labour codes and implementation of some long-standing demands for minimum wages and social security. That’s all! Perhaps they will again give a call of nation-wide token strike next year. The strike was partially successful because the BJP-led NDA governments in different states actively opposed it. And the ruling TMC in Bengal too opposed the strike.

Production relations have undergone massive changes over the years, creating a new

workforce and changed industrial relations. They are gig workers, platform workers, Ola, Uber drivers, employees of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), care-giving workers like ASHA, Anganwadi workers, domestic workers, construction workers etc. This is India's burgeoning informal sector. They are all unorganised and they constitute more than 90 percent of total workforce. The Economic Survey of 2021-22 shows out of a total of 53.53 crore labourers, 43.99 crore are working in the unorganised sector, having no guarantee of minimum wages and social security.

Most of the jobs offered during the last few years in the private sector are not conventional manufacturing jobs, but gig jobs—the jobs for which workers are paid for each individual gig (piece of work) they do, instead of fixed salary (i.e. monthly wage/daily wage/hourly wage—like drivers for Ola and Uber, delivery boys for Amazon, Swiggy and Zomato). One gig worker works nearly 14 hours a day. Then they have no personal life and they earn on an average Rs 15,000 per month.

Today Gig workers have generated an economy of \$20 billion (i.e. 1,70,000 crore in Indian currency) and it is growing. It's now common in urban and semi-urban areas how a gig worker moves from one place to another on motor bike with a big shopper on his shoulder. According to Niti Ayog's estimate some 7.7 million workers [2.6 percent of non-agricultural workers or 1.5 percent of workforce] were engaged in gig service in India by 2020-22. The number is likely to reach 23.5 million (6.7 percent of non-

agricultural and 7 percent of total workforce) by 2029-30.

A recently published ILO report depicts how digitalisation and introduction of new technology are changing the structure of industrial employment. Gig economy is expanding very fast. But gig workers are like bonded labourers. They are not covered by any labour law. Barring a state or two the persons in power do hardly bother about the necessity to regularise gig work system.

For one thing old style bonded labour system continues to prevail in some parts of Uttar Pradesh, and elsewhere, notwithstanding Bonded Labour Abolition Act. Then the condition of domestic workers are no better than that of bonded labourers.

According to Swapna Tripathy of West Bengal Domestic Workers' Association [*Paschim Banga Griha Paricharika Samiti*] 2.2 million domestic workers have been registered so far in the e-Shram portal. These domestic workers have no fixed salary, they do not get maternity benefits, paid leaves—above all they have no dignity in this job. As they don't have any written contract with employers they are no in position to raise the issue legally. What is more agonising is these poor workers are denied access to toilets at the houses where they work. But domestic work in India constitutes one of the largest feminised segments of the informal economy.

In Bengaluru and Ahmedabad domestic workers are somewhat organised under trade unions but in the rest of the country they are as vulnerable as before. In these mega cities, as domestic workers are hired through agen-

cies, their wage rates are better but no job security. They are frequently fired on flimsy charges.

Recently West Bengal government has announced minimum wages in 80 unorganised sectors. Surprisingly domestic workers have been kept outside the ambit of minimum wages notification. Established trade unions don't show any interest in organising poor workers. Then all central trade unions are controlled by major political parties. Unless these parties decide to organise the unorganised in their millions nothing will move. Also, trade union bureaucracy, rather labour aristocracy, is also a factor, to ignore the huge army of hapless workers.

In Bengal bidi workers form a substantial number of rural workforces, concentrated mainly in south Bengal districts. They are supposed to get Rs 257 for rolling 1000 sticks as per Minimum Wages Notification, but they are paid anything between Rs 120 and Rs 130. It's a kind of wage theft by employers. According to Naba Dutta, this wage theft in bidi industry by employers, amounts to a staggering sum of Rs 10,000 crore annually, if not more. The deprivation of workers in most labour intensive tea and jute sectors defies description. Tripartite mechanism in wage dispute resolution in age-old plantation and jute industries is no longer in practice. Then owners are deliberately making these labour-intensive industries sick to get rid of statutory liabilities.

In the absence of manufacturing industry low-paid services sector is emerging as the only source of livelihood for millions of young people who are entering the job market every year. ■■■

WHEN LANGUAGE IS A PROXY FOR CITIZENSHIP

Linguistic Identity and National Belonging

Sohini Sengupta

FEW REMAIN UNAWARE today of the recent controversy that has been sparked around a certain FIR registered by the Delhi police that came to light in August of this year, where Inspector Amit Dutt of the Delhi police dubbed the language of certain documents found in the possession of an immigrant—requiring translation to English and Hindi, he mentioned—as ‘Bangladeshi’. This comes in the wake of a series of crackdowns against Bengali-speaking migrants in BJP-ruled states of India; many report experiences of humiliation, expulsion and physical violence under suspicion of being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.

The naming of Bengali with “Bangladeshi” in official discourse has ignited fierce backlash in West Bengal; West Bengal’s CM Mamata Banerjee has rallied against the slip of language terms, and accused the central government of deliberately marginalising Bengali speakers under the guise of anti-infiltration measures. In a statement made on X, Banerjee called the incident “scandalous, insulting, anti-national and unconstitutional.”¹ A similar wave of outrage has spread in the public discourse, evoking articulations of ethnic and linguistic pride and fraternity. In response, Amit Malviya, the national convener of BJP’s IT cell, has attempted to excuse the term used by Dutt as a “shorthand for the linguistic markers used to profile illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.” Malviya’s statement tries to

deconstruct the matter by arguing that “no language called “Bengali” ...neatly covers all [its] variants... “Bengali” denotes ethnicity, not linguistic uniformity... For context, Ananda Math was written in Bangla of the era, against the backdrop of the Sanyasi Rebellion. The iconic Vande Mataram was composed separately, in Sanskrit, and later grafted into the novel. Jana Gana Mana, originally composed and sung as a Brahmo hymn, was written in Sanskritised Bangla.”²

The BJP’s linguistic nationalism prioritises Hindi as a unifying “national” language, with slow but definitely visible efforts of linguistic intervention in non-Hindi-speaking states—whether through billboards and advertisements, public announcements and information, corporate norms, or education in CBSE schools. This is in tandem with their politics of religious-ethnic totalitarianism, with rampant attempts to identify “outsiders” and weed them out. Over decades, migrations—especially of Muslim workers—have been weaponised in political rhetoric, with Bengali-speaking Muslims often stereotyped as “infiltrators” and Hindu Bengalis framed as “refugees”. The BJP’s emphasis on the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has further polarised the issue, disproportionately targeting Bengali Muslims while offering fast-track citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from neighbouring countries.

In this climate, language has become a proxy for citizenship. The Delhi Police’s casual labeling of Bengali as “Bangladeshi”

reflects a dangerous slippage between linguistic identity and national belonging. Such rhetoric evokes memories of past violence, and controversies over linguistic belonging and standardisation. After all, the present of Bengal and Bengali’s relation with Hindi and central power is not an isolated, present event only. The glorification of Bengal and Bengali that has been so vocally made by cultural figures hides an undercurrent of xenophobia within itself, occluding Islamic, Perso-Arabic and migrant presences in the historical growth of Bengali. The discourse of both sides has ended up promoting an erasure of the polyvocal, multicultural roots of Bengali, and the erasure of migrant voices, languages and plights. Malviya’s poorly crafted excuse attempts to mollify with the claim that the terminology used applies for “[the language of] immigrants from Bangladesh—not a commentary on Bengali as spoken in *West Bengal*”³ (emphasis added). The fact that such a statement can be used—to whatever extent of success—to pacify the people of West Bengal and elsewhere, only signals blatant lack of sympathy for migrant lives, livelihoods, and language.

Even as, with the rule of the BJP, the rhetoric of ‘Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan’ makes a violent comeback, it is a timely moment to look at the past of Bengali, where familiar conflicts of sanskritisation, standardisation, xenophobia and ethnic nationalism may have something to teach and warn us about the present.

BENGALI AND

THE HINDI-URDU CONTROVERSY

Bengal has been quite (in) famous for its resistance to Hindi

imperialism. By the 1980s, Calcutta, Bengal's urban centre, was being perceived as hostile and defiant to mainstream Hindi literary traditions. As literary critic and linguist Namvar Singh provocatively stated: "The atmosphere in Calcutta was like a dangerous parasite, which would bring litterateurs under its control and compel them to act according to its will; 'Nirala', 'Ugra' etc. all came from here, ruined."⁴ Nevertheless, since the invention of modern Hindi, Bengalis, and Calcutta have had a conflicted and bifurcated relationship with Hindi. Bengalis had played a notable part in the Hindi-Urdu language debate—a debate which, beginning from the North Western Provinces, evolved into a pan-Indian issue in the context of producing national and official languages of the Indian nation. Besides also heatedly arguing for a linguistic nationalism of their own, Bengalis during the nineteenth and early twentieth century remained invested in promoting, to various extents, the cause of Hindi and Nagari. As prominent mobilisers in different parts of the country—whether for nationalism or for local welfare of caste-Hindus in the North Western Provinces—Bengalis turned to Hindi as a means to produce a broader transregional network. At the centre of this, however, was a sense of sanctified home—that is, a preserved Bengali identity characterised by a protected, standardised Bengali language.

This 'protected, standardised Bengali language' was visibly one that moved towards Sanskritisation, and the exclusion of Perso-Arabic and Urdu loanwords. Bengalis' bias against Urdu, or Perso-arabic scripts, emerged

from an understanding of the language as foreign, which, again, came from the deep-seated sense of Bengali-ness being equated with caste-Hindu identities and the otherisation of Bengali Muslims, a problem that persists even in present times. The development of a modern, Sanskritised Bengali or *sadhu bhasha* presents both a contrast to the production of Sanskritised Hindi—as Alok Rai has argued⁵—and a template for the growth of sentiments of Bengali intelligentsia towards Hindi. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar famously advocated for the removal of Perso-Arabic words from Bengali and for the shift towards a more Sanskritised Bengali.⁶

Perso-Arabic words were often deemed as 'vulgar' elements in Bengali; there was a marked distinction between the Bengali of educated Brahmins and those of the populace. As early as the eighteenth century, the Bengali poet Bharatchandra complained about Persianised Bengali as impure ("*jabani misal*").⁷ In the preface to *Grammar of Bengal Language*, Nathaniel Halhed stated that the use of Arabic and Persian in Bengali lent it to the danger of becoming "unintelligible", and located the "genuine simplicity" of the Bengali unburdened by these additives. Halhed stated that Bengalis have been forced to destroy the purity of their language due to the state system imposed by Islamic invaders who ruled over them. For Halhed,

[w]hat the pure Hindostanic is to upper India, the language which I have here endeavoured to explain is to Bengal, intimately related to the Sanskrit both in expressions, construction and character.⁸

In the case of Bengali Muslims, there had historically been ten-

sions on whether to use Bengali or Urdu for secular and literary work. In the mid-nineteenth century, further pressures began to appear on this front with the rise of English and Hindi in the realm of public affairs. The first Bengali periodical run by Muslims was published in 1831, and was called *Samachar Sabharajendra*; it was a Bengali-Persian bilingual paper. However, its linguistic dimensions soon saw a vast transition. Fifteen years later, its page layouts consisted of five columns, quite tellingly organised in terms of centrality: English at the centre, flanked by Hindi and Persian, with Bengali and Urdu on either edge. Swapan Chakravorty notes how "[t]his illustrates the curious co-existence of inter-lingual translations, a rare typographic image and also bears witness to the unstable identity of Muslims in Bengal under Hindu cultural dominance and British political rule".⁹ Therefore, by the mid-nineteenth century, one sees—from a tentatively multilingual literary production in the intellectual sphere—a definite bias of upper-caste Hindu Bengalis towards Hindi-Nagari as a language they saw as carrying originary affinity with Bengali, and beneficial for cross-provincial transmission of ideas. Bengali Muslims, on the other hand, faced cultural instability as the structure of a caste Hindu-dominated print market and intellectual world, and the British separatist policy of Hindi-Urdu forced them to negotiate between cultural and identitarian strategies.

Thus one sees a factionalising impulse that considered Sanskrit, and by extensions Hindustani (in Nagari script), to be of close affinity to Bengali, and that attrib-

uted foreignness to Arabic-Persian vocabulary and script, appearing early in Bengal. A secularising impulse came from Vidyasagar and Rammohan Roy, the former of whom wrote in several registers of Bengali, while the latter produced writing and translations in numerous languages—including Hindustani or Hindi. Roy wrote three books in the language: *Vedantagrantha* (1815), *Vedantasara* (1815) and *Subrahmanya Sashtrî ke Sahit Vichar* (1820).¹⁰ A letter by Roy—written in Hindustani in the Persian script—was among the 21 collected in the appendix of J Garcin de Tassy's *Rudimens de la Langue Hindoustani*.¹¹ Rammohan Roy's promotion of multilingualism can be largely connected to his role as a founding figure of the Brahmo Samaj, and consequently, to Hindu revivalism in Bengal at the time. The Brahmo Samaj had a major role in the promotion of Hindi. Considering the wider reach that Brahmo religious and cultural discourse would find through multilingual preaching and translation of texts, reformers like Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and Debendranath Tagore found themselves directly and indirectly promoting Hindi. Debendranath Tagore invited Arya Samaj leader Dayanand Saraswati in 1872, and for four months, the close contact of Dayanand with Brahmo leaders like Tagore and Sen influenced him to turn from Sanskrit to Hindi as the language of preaching. The influence of Brahmo reformers like Sen would thus transform the ascent of Hindi as the *lingua franca* of India, as the Arya Samaj played a seminal role in the Hindi-Nagari movement. Even during the mobilisation for Hindi-

Nagari, the Arya Samaj received support from Brahmo leaders.¹²

The push against Urdu was an almost pan-Indian occurrence, again one in which prominent Bengali intellectuals played a role. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827-1894), who served as the Inspector of Schools in the later half of his life, argued that Hindi carried a greater degree of national quality (*deshiya bhav*). Mukhopadhyay submitted his appeal to Eden, arguing that Hindu boys of Bengal should study Bengali, English and Sanskrit, and Muslim boys Bengali, English and Arabic. Mukhopadhyay declared that Persian was a foreign language imported by Muslim rulers which distorted the purity of languages such as Hindi or Bengali. Mukhopadhyay (and his biographer and son Kumardeb Mukhopadhyay) believed that Bengali Muslims—or all Muslims—should leave behind “*Musalmani Bangala*” and Urdu in favour of Sanskritised Bengali and Hindi respectively, in order to promote national unity.¹³ here is a shift in Bengali intellectuals towards rallying for ‘one language/script’ in uniting communities. One of the remarkable steps in this direction led by Bengalis was the foundation of the ‘*Ek Lipi Vistar Parishad*’ (Society for the Promotion of One Script) in 1905 by Justice Sarada Charan Mitra. This anti-colonial organisation was created to promote the Devanagari script as the common script for all Indians. That being said, the responses from Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims were quite different in terms of their support of Hindi and Urdu. While, as can be seen so far, many Bengalis were more than amenable to the establishment of Hindi as the

lingua franca of the modern nation, the idea of Urdu as the *lingua franca* of Muslim India was opposed by delegates from Bengal in the 1937 Lucknow session of the Muslim League.¹⁴

The undercurrent of Islamophobia tied to perceptions of Urdu continued even when the dream of Hindi as a harmonious *lingua franca* had transformed to the threat of Hindi imperialism for Bengali intellectuals. To take a look at an essay titled “*Bangalir Hindicharcha*” (1959) by scholar and lexicographer Rajsekhar Basu—this essay is aimed at placating Bengalis agitated at the promotion of Hindi, and attempts to explain that there has historically been an organic connection between Hindi and Bengali. Basu argued in favour of the practical benefits of learning Hindi as a professional language—all the while cajoling the reading by stating that Hindi as a language does not have a richness that can compete with Bengali, and thus destabilise its position in the minds of the Bengali speaker as mother-tongue. What is particularly worth noting in the Basu's essay is the following:

By a stroke of luck, Hindustani or Urdu has not been elected as the official language (*rashtra-bhasha*). In the Constituent Assembly, those that fought for Hindi are now enthusiastically attempting to establish a ‘pure Hindi’ or Sanskritised Hindi. Sanskrit vocabulary is the thread connecting the primary languages of India. If the number of Arabic and Persian words ... are reduced and the number of Sanskrit words increased, then even at the cost of 2-3 crore Urdu speakers, the much larger majority ... will be benefited. ... it would be easier for the understanding of all—Bengalis, Assamese, Oriya, Gujarati, Marathi and South Indians.¹⁵

Basu's argument makes an exact repetition of the logic inherent in even the earliest appeals for Sanskritised Hindi, which began over a century before the publication of his essay. Thus, even post-independence and partition, when the space of Urdu had become negligible in the official language system of India, Urdu still haunted language debates in Bengal as a phantasmic other.

SECRET FASCISMS

In thinking about migrants' crises of today, one is brought back to the lives of Bengali migrants in North India, who wrote extensively, hoping to prove their worth as natural and well-meaning residents and not encroachers. They were torn between their own language and the demands made by the evolving language of the land they occupied. For instance, in his testimony as a migrant Bengali in the NWP, the author Satischandra Banerjee argued that the primary responsibility of the migrant Bengalis should be to maintain their identity and culture as Bengalis, and only then, alongside, work for the cause of Hindi.¹⁶

The migrant exists in a liminal space—unmoored from the land that once anchored their identity, yet perpetually othered in the places they seek refuge. For Bengali-speaking migrants of today, particularly those targeted as “infiltrators” in the current political climate, as with their (perhaps more elite) counterparts in the twentieth century, language becomes the last vestige of belonging. It is not merely a tool of communication but a repository of memory, culture, and resistance. Yet, the very language that should unite them is weaponised, its nuances flattened into markers of suspicion.

The Delhi Police's reduction of Bengali to “Bangladeshi” is not just a bureaucratic slip; it is an erasure of history, a denial of the migrant's right to claim their voice as their own.

Bengali, with its rich tapestry of Perso-Arabic, Sanskrit, and indigenous influences, has long been a battleground for competing visions of purity and power. The caste-Hindu-led standardisation of the language, which sought to align Bengali with Hindi-Nagari as a strategic move for national relevance, now haunts its speakers. This exclusionary project—rooted in the erasure of Muslim contributions and the marginalisation of dialects deemed “impure”—has unwittingly paved the way for Bengali's assimilation into the rhetoric of pan-Indian Hindu nationalism. The same Sanskritised *sâdhu bhâcâ* that once elevated Bengali as a “respectable” language now renders it vulnerable to the homogenising forces of Hindutva, which sees linguistic diversity as a threat to its monolithic vision of nationhood.

The irony is bitter: a language that resisted Hindi imperialism in the 20th century now risks being subsumed by it, precisely because its defenders have too often internalised the logic of exclusion. The Bengali pride invoked by today's public intellectuals, while necessary as a bulwark against centralising forces, falters when it fails to acknowledge the polyvocal roots of the language. To celebrate Bengali only as a Hindu, Sanskritised entity is to replicate the very fascism it claims to resist. It is to forget the “Musalmâni Bangla”, or the “Khamar Bangla”, the syncretic folk traditions, and the layered histories of migration that

shaped the language's evolution.

The migrant's Bengali—inflected with the cadences of their village, the idioms of their displacement, the borrowed words of their survival—is a testament to this multiplicity. Yet, in the eyes of the state, it is reduced to evidence of illegitimacy. The BJP's linguistic nationalism, which conflates Hindi with patriotism and regional languages with parochialism, thrives on such reductions. It is a politics that demands not just territorial borders but borders around identity itself, severing language from its lived complexities. When Amit Malviya dismisses the outcry over “Bangladeshi” as a mere matter of profiling, he exposes the chilling calculus of this regime: to speak is to be suspect, to belong is to be branded.

But the migrant's voice cannot be so easily silenced. Their language, fractured and adaptive, carries the echoes of a past that refuses to be standardised. It is in the colloquial Bengali of the domestic worker in Delhi, the hybrid slang of the undocumented labourer in Assam, the defiant verses of the refugee poet in Kolkata. To hear these voices is to confront the truth that Bengali is not a static artifact but a living, contested thing, that it too has its demons of exclusionary politics that it must now recognise. Its survival depends not on purist gate-keeping but on embracing its contradictions. Bengali pride, if it is to mean anything, must be a pride that refuses to forget. It must reckon with the casteism and Islamophobia that have shaped its standardisation, and resist the allure of a homogenised past. Otherwise, it will succumb to its own secret fascism—a fascism

that, in its quest for purity, betrays the very people who have kept the language alive. The migrant's belonging lies not in the soil they are denied, but in the syllables they refuse to surrender. To honour that is to fight for a Bengali that is as unmoored, as resilient, and as boundless as they are. ■■■

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A FORGOTTEN CHAPTER OF ROYAL INDIAN NAVY

The Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Strike, February 1946

Arun Kumar Sinha

"And a last word to our people. Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our nation. For the first time the blood of the men in services and the people flowed together in a common cause. We in the services will never forget this. We also know that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people. Jai Hind." [The Last Statement, 23 February 1946, the Naval Central Strike Committee]

INDIANS SUFFER FROM many collective amnesia,—the forgotten history of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) naval ratings' strike is one of them. The colonial historian's mindset had only one label to designate any collective disobedience among the people whom they armed for their own protection and the label was 'mutiny'. Be it the rebellion of the native *sepoys* in the heartland of the peninsula in May 1857, or the

uprising of naval 'ratings' in February 1946 they mobilised during the Second World War (WW-II), the rulers suffered from a fear psychosis, be it in Delhi or in London, the seats of imperial power. It was the fear that the rifles and the cannons they supplied to the native population may turn against their own chest and their own Flag. This fear triggered labeling a strike of the naval 'ratings' to be a 'mutiny'! It is a historical fact that

Clement Atlee, the British prime minister at the end of WWII confided to P B Chakrabarty, the former Chief Justice of Calcutta and the acting Governor of West Bengal in Calcutta, 1956 the real reason behind His Majesty's (HM) government's haste in relinquishing British rule in the *Hindustani peninsula*. Chakrabarty wrote, "When I was the acting Governor, Lord Atlee, who had given us independence by withdrawing the British rule from India, spent two days in the Governor's palace at Calcutta during his tour of India. At that time I had a prolonged discussion with him regarding the real factors that had led the British to quit India. My direct question to him was that since Gandhi's "Quit India" movement had tapered off quite some time ago and in 1947 no such new compelling situation

had arisen that would necessitate a hasty British departure, why did they have to leave? In his reply Atlee cited several reasons, the principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army and navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji.....⁽¹⁾

This fear psychosis percolated among the descendants of the colonial masters in the *Hindustani peninsula* so that there is a collective oblivion to the most striking example of secular unity among the working people of the *peninsula* apart from the Indian National Army (INA) during the transfer of power in 1946-1947. As historian Vinay Lal commented at the end of his *Article* in this forum, "It is a pity that this act of insurrection, coming at the tail end of the long struggle for freedom, has remained hidden from history considering that in its course and outcome it has something in it for nearly everyone, not least for those who think that it hastened the end of the British Raj."⁽²⁾ Even after 75 years of the uprising, there is not even a postage stamp to commemorate Balai Chandra Dutta (B C Dutta) in independent India. Dutta was a trained senior telegraph operator in HMIS *Talwar* who spearheaded the strike in the naval telegraph station there in Bombay. Similar fate of ungratefulness was earmarked in independent Pakistan for Mohammad Shuaib Khan (M S Khan), the leading signal man of RIN hailing from Sialkot. Khan was elected unanimously the president of the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) in HMIS *Talwar* by the ratings involved in the strike, he was only twenty three at that time. MS Khan simply vanished into the blue after he migrated to his homeland being deported from Bombay after the unconditional surrender of the strike committee. At last on December 4, 2001, the Naval Mutiny Memorial

was inaugurated at Cooperage ground in Colaba, Mumbai. It took 75 years after independence for the Mumbai-based Western Naval Command of India's 'independent' navy to host and organise on March 23, 2022 an official event to commemorate the 'RIN mutiny'.

Apart from the disgraceful indifference from the government circles, there is another important aspect of this selective amnesia among the 'Left circles' regarding the 'RIN mutiny'. BC Dutta in his memoir lamented much later in 1971, "...we the ratings of the Royal Indian Naval mutiny had become an inconvenient national memory."⁽³⁾ This remark also includes the apathy of the 'Left circles' in the *Hindustani Peninsula*. The solidarity of the commoners, the urban plebeians with the naval uprisings were most evident in Bombay, Karachi, and also in Madras, the three most industrialised cities of the *Peninsula* apart from Calcutta and Kanpur. The 'last statement' quoted in the beginning of this piece acknowledges the sacrifice of hundreds of lives on the streets of Bombay and the solidarity on the shores of Karachi, Madras during the 'ratings' strike and uprising. This was much before the lives and living of the 'subalterns' among the pre-capitalist societies became a subject of animated discussion in the 'Left circles'. However such 'subaltern studies' never took the Bombay *Hartaal* (total strike) as the subject of investigation as if the subalterns matter only in pre-capitalist societies. Recently the CPI(M) mouthpiece *Peoples' Democracy* comments at the end in a piece to commemorate the role of the Communist Party in solidarity with the RIN strikers on April 12, 2020, "The Communist Party regretted that the Party was not strong enough to rally the stronger parties—Congress and Muslim League—in its attempts to save the

striking ratings, prevent their surrender and victimisation. In spite of this, the Communist Party can rightly claim that it had put all its "strength behind our brothers of the RIN, thus helping to prevent their annihilation."⁽⁴⁾ The claim is questionable as it is not known how many times the Communist MPS have introduced even private bills in the Parliament to demand rehabilitation of the 'ratings' involved in the uprising dismissed summarily without even their legitimate dues being compensated by the British authorities. The recent research work in an authoritative Ph.D Thesis from Calicut University Kerala reports, "A large number of *Malayalees* were dismissed from the navy for their participation in the mutiny. Their participation in the revolt was not mentioned in their discharge certificates. ...It is interesting to note that after their discharge from the navy, the ratings returned home in a condition of uncertainty. Most of them recollected with grief that none of the politicians recognised or identified their participation in the mutiny."⁽⁵⁾ Many of the communist stalwarts originating from erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Malabar were occupants of the seats of government power multiple times in Kerala. Yet they did nothing while in power of the state government.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF

REMEMBERING THE RIN STRIKE

There is a keen interest in the RIN 'ratings' (a modification of the term 'retinue'. This is the way the naval recruits other than officers were called) uprising in February 1946 only in the twenty-first century. The uprising lasted only five days, from 18-23 February, yet its lighting spread and intense involvement of the ratings sent tremors among the British establishment in London in 1946. Prime Minister Atlee announced in the House of Commons on 19 February 1946

the Cabinet Mission for negotiating the terms of transfer of power within two days of the RIN strike. The Cabinet Mission included Sir Stafford Cripps (President of the Board of Trade), Lord Pethick-Lawrence (Secretary of State for India) and A V Alexander (First Lord of the Admiralty) as members along with Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy of India. The uprising affected almost all the naval bases in the *Hindustani peninsula* and even in Eden and Indonesian seashore. Such swift spread of agitation became possible as the epicentre of the revolt was HMIS *Talwar*, the Bombay telecommunication centre. Situated at Wodehouse Road, Colaba, it was the second largest communication base among British imperial naval bases. There are NOW numerous books, research articles in peer reviewed journals, You Tube videos, blogs, etc. reminiscing, analysing the heroic valour displayed by the ratings, all were in their twenties. Such documentation and dissemination of information definitely is encouraging for fresh interpretation and evaluation of the strike. However, there is a visible twist in the tale of this new vigour in reflecting upon the uprising after 75 years have been spent in the slumber of oblivion. There is a mischievous and vile interest in the strike by the present rulers in Delhi as they continue to label as 'mutiny'. This story of the naval uprising is always a back hand service to show the Congress party in poor light that indeed was so. The then political leadership of undivided India played a very unfortunate indiscrete role in practically toeing the British version (including M K Gandhi and his trusted lieutenant Ballavbhai Patel). However, this sly attempt to resurrect the memory of the strike *so as* to defame the current dispensation of the Congress party falls flat on their cunning faces. The merits and

salient features of the strike that we want to enumerate and discuss here are a loud embarrassment to such cunningness in rewriting history.

THE DISTINCTLY SECULAR CHARACTER OF THE STRIKE OF THE RATINGS AND THE UPRISING THAT FOLLOWED

The quality of Food served during the period of the War among the Indian ratings was an issue that initiated the hunger strike by the ratings on 18 February 1946 in HMIS *Talwar*. The call of the hunger strike was 'No food, No work'. Not only was the inhospitable quality of food that united the ratings, their sense of brotherhood was borne out of the humiliation they received uniformly and daily from their British Commanding Officers (CO). The indignation in receiving very poor quality of food compared to the British and European naval persons bonded them into the act of defiance irrespective of their religious beliefs. Everywhere the anguish and resentment was so intense, every naval rating and later the petty officers all rallied in support of the strike at HMIS *Talwar*. BC Dutt wrote about the experience of the first meal he shared with his companions on board a ship, "My first meal in the RIN was a new experience. With unwashed hands, body soaked in perspiration, all of us ate from the same plate, tearing bits of *chappati* and dipping it into the *daal*. This was my first communal meal. Our batch had representatives from all the communities and the major language groups in the country. The cook lent us an aluminium mug from which all of us drank water. The first meal removed at one stroke the barriers from which the society we came from suffers. I thought it was something really novel to write home about."⁽³⁾

The wall writings that were plastered in HMIS *Talwar* before the Navy day function on Decem-

ber 1, 1946 were prominent enough to dare the British navy authorities with this secular spirit of disobedience. The ship that actually fought the battle with the British forces on the shores of Karachi port was HMIS *Hindustan*. Ironically the sloop was shared with the newly formed Pakistan navy after partition. Pakistan navy could hardly utilise the sloop as it was severely damaged in the gun battle during the uprising. The ratings plastered the slogans like "This is not Mutiny, but unity, Quit India, We are Indian National Navy, Jai Hind" etc., on the walls of the inland establishment HMIS *Chamak* at Manora island, Karachi. The flags that were hoisted in all the rebel ships and bases after pulling down the Union Jack were of Congress party and of Muslim League, and in some ships such as HMIS *Akbar* the red flag of the communist party was also hoisted. The secretary of the communist party branch in Karachi was AK Hangal who was interned along with other leaders for calling a *Hartaa* in support of the ratings of HMIS *Hindustan*. If one reads out the names of the members of the NCSC one readily finds presence of men of every major creed of religious belief among the members. Two junior petty officers of HMIS *Bahadur*, Abdul Baqi from Ajmer and Mubaraq Ahmed from Jamnagar were sent for court martial on sedition charges. They could not be tried as they were underage. However, before being released from jail in Karachi these two young petty officers had searching questions for Sir Ghulam Hidayatullah, the Muslim League chief minister of Sindh province. They asked, "What the Muslim League has done to the Muslim masses and especially to the Muslim ratings of the Navy? What consideration has the League Ministry in Sind has shown to the ratings (many of them Muslims), kept

behind the bars under its Raj?”⁽⁶⁾

The HMIS *Hindustan*, docked in Karachi, had an intense exchange of artillery fire, which resulted in the heaviest casualties on any ship during the mutiny.⁽⁷⁾

These few incidents during the uprising are cited to demonstrate the secular credentials of the uprising. Men of distinctly separate religious beliefs and customs could mingle among each other and did not hesitate to accept the call for martyrdom. The leaders of the strike approached with equanimity the national leaders of Congress and Muslim league hoping they will support the strike and will work for mitigating their genuine grievances over service conditions and daily life.

The secular fabric among the plebeian masses of Bombay who came out in thousands in support of the appeal of the NCSC is definitely something to remember and highlight. Kamal Dhonde, the communist activist from Parel and treasurer of Parel *Mahila Sangh* died in police firing during *Hartaal* in Bombay on 22-23 February. Among the hundreds who died out of this indiscriminate firing by British military personnel, at least thirty seven persons who could later be identified were Muslims.⁽⁸⁾ The senior most among them were Pyare Khuda Baksh born 1876 and Mohammad Vazir born 1891, and the youngest ones were only 12-13 years old, Ismail Ashgar born 1934 and Fidya Ali, Kayam Ali, both born in 1933. Anwar Hossain, a student of Lahore College hoisted the flags of revolt in Karachi, and died with flags in hand on 23 February 1946 during police firing there. Gandhiji could notice this secular unity among the masses with the RIN ratings in both Bombay and Karachi. However, for some strange reason he found this jointness a threat to his plan of *Ahimsa* and harnessing independence under leadership of Con-

gress. Gandhiji released a press statement on 3 March 1946 where he stated, “I have followed the events now happening in India with painful interest. This mutiny in the Navy and what is following is not, in any sense of the term, non-violent, action... Why should they continue to serve if service is humiliating for them or India? Action like this I have called non-violent non-co-operation. As it is, they are setting a bad and unbecoming example for India. A combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and probably is a preparation for mutual violence—bad for India and the world”.⁽⁹⁾

Unfortunately communal violence spread and engulfed most sensitive parts of the *Hindustani peninsula* in return for a partitioned transfer of power and a ‘fractured freedom’. This was within a few months after the strike was called off and the ratings surrendered unconditionally to the British navy authorities. The great Calcutta killings on 16-19 August 1946 and the Noakhali riots in in October 1946 caught Gandhiji completely on the wrong foot of assessment about the naval ratings’ uprising. His press statement will always be remembered as a complete misunderstanding of the nationalist natural brotherhood displayed in the spontaneous revolt of the people under the yoke of colonial power. The naval ratings’ strike and consequent uprising was in search of a genuine secular freedom of the Nation of toilers that was at variance with the machinations and cold calculations of the ‘power brokers’ with communal passion. The objective of these plebeian masses was completely nullified and vilified in such partitioned ‘freedom’ brokered on communal grounds whose bitterest fruits of poison we are now consuming.

THE BRITISH POLICY OF ACUTE DISPARITY IN PAY AND SERVICE CONDITIONS, DEMOBILISATION AND THE RACIAL SLUR AND DISCRIMINATION

The outburst of disobedience and consequent uprising had these three major reasons behind the phenomenon. Although the February 1946 strike at HMIS *Talwar* was the most determined effort of expressing disobedience and disloyalty, it was not the first one. A group of victimised ratings published the first account of “The RIN Strike” in 1954 through the People’s Publishing House in Delhi. The very first pages accounted for the reasons of the strike, “Between March 1942 and April 1945 there were nineteen mutinies in the RIN alone. They related to grievances regarding inadequate pay, bad food, uncomfortable accommodation, menial duties and racial discrimination”.⁽¹⁰⁾ The strength of Indian servicemen in RIN grew by six times between 1939 and 1944. The strength of native naval servicemen in 1944 was around twenty thousand ratings, most of whom joined the rebellion in February 1946. In search of manpower for the ensuing war the British authorities lured the young natives in the *Hindustani peninsula* with attractive pay package and secured life after service. In fact, navy and airforce required educated persons to operate communication and radar equipment and therefore tried to enlist educated young people in the services. One poster for recruitment in RIN read as, “Are you young and smart? If you are young and smart and between 17½ and 24 years of age and have studied up to matriculation there are good opportunities and prospects for you in the RIN. Your job will be interesting....”⁽¹¹⁾ All these recruitment propaganda were myths and were far from reality. As of September 1943 the monthly wage for merchant navy ranks of sailors such as ‘Able seaman’, ‘Leading

seaman', etc. were higher than the pay of RIN ratings. The disparity in pay structure between merchant navy and the RIN was admitted by Admiral John Henry Godfrey, Flag Officer Commanding (FOCRIN), the highest ranking British navy officer in the *Hindustani* waters as a major issue for desertion and disaffection among the ranks of RIN ratings. Even the Indian officers recruited during the war found acute discrimination in pay and promotion compared to their British and European counterparts. An Indian Lieutenant used to get three hundred and fifty rupees only as monthly salary during the war whereas his British counterpart drew double that amount.⁽¹²⁾ The Ph.D thesis mentioned above narrates, "Evidence shows that the RINVR (RIN voluntary reserve) were distressed by the proclamation which stated that only 66 out of 1500 RINVR would be given permanent commissions in the RIN after the war".⁽⁵⁾

The immediate future of large scale demobilisation stared before these recruits in all the services after the war. The British colonial administration faced huge financial crunch to maintain these large manpower and their reserves after the war. So far as the financial planning of the British administration is concerned, "The Financial Advisor dealt another blow by reporting that the price index in the immediate post-war years was likely to be 50 to 100 percent higher than the pre-war period by leaving only Rs 700 to Rs 750 million for the armed forces. In the light of this financial forecast, General Auchinleck realized that despite these plans, the services would have to be soon slashed to the minimum".⁽¹¹⁾ The RIN had very little planning in demobilisation of the ratings. As late as November 1945 the settlement procedures were not complete for a large number of decommissioned ratings,

their kits were seized and they were asked to sign blank receipts instead of being paid. Persons recruited for short term service were discharged even without rail travel fare and the cost of the kits was reclaimed from them.

The most flagrant violation of the conditions of service was the continuous racial discrimination. The undue and unjust preferential treatment of the British officers in matters of services was mentioned by the Indian National Army (INA) in their publications, This rebel army of *Hindustani* sepoys and officers was constituted by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the freedom fighter Rashbehari Bose in Singapore after the surrender of the British command in the hands of Japan on 15 February 1942. The Directorate of the Military Bureau of INA in a publication issued in 1943 stated the condition of native military officers as, "differential treatment in the matters of their pay, allowances, clothing, rations, accommodations, service conditions, social privileges, etc., not only in India but in every theatre of war to which they had the misfortune to be posted... In addition, the British officer gets various unofficial privileges such as, choice of stations, choice of job, etc."⁽¹²⁾ The racial discrimination in the RIN was all too evident in the routine life of the ratings. M S Khan, the leading telegraphist in HMIS *Talwar* and later the president of the NCSC recounted, "Eighty per cent of the Indian ratings got no cots to sleep on... Ratings sleep on the floor and everywhere. No arrangements were made, no cots provided..." He added: "The ships were meant for 100 or 120 people but in wartime or peacetime they (Indian ratings) were crowded to 200 or 220 people. Half of them had to sleep on the upper deck, half on the mess deck and when it rained, boys had no place to sleep. They had to shrink

themselves and sit down all night".⁽⁷⁾ The overcrowding of the vessels with the ratings and the pathetic food they were served, the complete unhygienic condition of the toilets, etc. all these have been vividly described by B C Dutt and Biswanath Bose in their memoirs of the rebellion.

The posting of Commander Arthur King as CO of HMIS *Talwar* in January 1946 was the point of ignition of the ratings' grievances. He was posted there to intimidate the ratings by invoking racial slurs such as 'Get up you sons of coolies, sons of bloody jungles, you sons of bitches'. etc. The ratings lodged formal written complaint about the filthy language and verbal abuse by the CO to the higher authorities, but that is of no avail. The first person who went in open revolt was RK Singh, a rating in his twenties. On 1st February 1946, he took off the cap and kicked it on the ground in front of the CO and shouted the unthinkable, that he is resigning from the RIN. He was imprisoned in Arthur Jail, Bombay and was put up with hardened criminals. Pramod Kapoor writes, "This act of bravery sparked off cries for rebellion as news of his deliberate act of insubordination spread like wildfire through the barracks".⁽⁷⁾ One of the demands that the NCSC put later before rear admiral Arthur Rattray the Flag Officer Commanding (FOC) Bombay was the unconditional release of RK Singh from Arthur Jail.

THE SPONTANEITY AND NOBLENESSE OF THE RATINGS IN THEIR SELFLESS INITIATIVE TO BRING DOWN UNION JACK OF THE COLONIAL RULE:

The rebellion of the RIN ratings and its spread took the British authorities and the 'political' leaders in the *Hindustani peninsulaliterally* off their guard. The following Table shows the widespread nature of involvement

of the ratings responding to the appeal of NCSC in HMIS *Talwar*.⁽¹¹⁾

Place	Ships	Establishments
Bombay	60	11
Karachi	03	04
Madras	01	01
(HMIS Adyar, inland establishment)		
Calcutta	01	01
Cochin	02	01
Visakhapattanam	04	01
Mandapam	01	00
Andamans	07	00
Delhi	00	01
Aden	00	01

[*It is a correction in the Table⁽¹¹⁾ taking help from the Ph.D. Thesis⁽⁵⁾]

It is evident from the Table that the strike caught the imagination of the ratings throughout most of the naval bases in *Hindustani peninsula* (except Ceylon) and its appeal sent ripples even to Eden in West Asia. This was possible because the telegraph operators, the most trained technical staff of naval radio communication were the prime movers of the strike. However, this fact alone is NOT sufficient to explain the outrage and spontaneity of the involvement. There was a new *josh* (enthusiasm) among them, the leaders called themselves '*Azad Hindi*' and marked their salute as *Jai Hind* taking cue from the sacrifice of the INA. The court martial trial of the three senior officers of INA, Colonel Prem Sahgal, Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, and Major General Shah Nawaz Khan at the Red Fort, Delhi in November 1945 worked as catalyst for the ratings in HMIS *Talwar* and elsewhere as the nationalist newspapers made a wide publicity of the defence of the officers of INA. In fact, the wide publicity of the INA trials among the ranks of RIN and Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) was conceded as the major reason behind the British authorities' decision to nip the strike of the RIN and RAIF in the bud. The ratings after their surrender were

interned in the ghettos of Mulund, Bombay and were dismissed from service with a tag 'Disgracefully discharged from His Majesty's service'. They were not even allowed to retain their rating's kit. The British navy did not take any chance of trial of the rebellious ratings; they simply dismissed them from service. They became faceless, anonymous, unrecognized number for the independent Indian and Pakistan navy after the transfer of power.

If one looks at the composition of the NCSC, one is amazed to find the ingenuity and self-initiative of organisation among the rebellious ratings who were mostly in their twenties. One such member was petty officer telegraphist Madan Singh, the vice-president of NCSC, a tall Sikh by belief hailing from undivided Punjab. He gave a detailed interview many years after to one blogger stating, "After the outbreak of the mutiny, the first thing that we did was to free B C Dutt. Then we took possession of Bucher Island (where the entire ammunition meant for Bombay Presidency was stocked) and telephone and wireless equipment, including transmitters at Kirki near Pune. Our quick actions ensured that all naval ships were fully under our command".⁽¹³⁾ Similar stories of self-initiatives can be chronicled for the ratings of HMIS *Hindustan* and their comrades in the inland establishments such as HMIS *Bahadur*, HMIS *Chamak* in Manora island, Karachi. We quote here from the *Article* by an Indian author in the scholarly Pakistan journal, *Pakistan Perspectives* published in 2010 about the rebellion in Karachi naval establishments.

"On 20th ratings of Hindustan had driven away all the officers both British and Indian from their ship and had taken full control of the ship themselves. Thus Hindustan ship heralded the revolt in Karachi... They dragged

down the British flag and burnt it to ashes. They headed towards Hindustan. The English officers showered bullets on them and one of the ratings became a martyr. Instead of Congress or Muslim League flag, the ratings unanimously chose the blood-soaked shirt of their deceased comrade as their flag and by sound of cannons paid their homage to this flag... They were joined by the inhabitants of Manora. When the ratings moved in boats towards the ship, Hindustan, the General of the Army sent two platoons of Baluch soldiers to suppress the revolt. When the Baluch refused to fire upon their brothers, the Punjab Regiment, the Sikh Regiment, the Maratha Regiment and even the Gurkha Regiment which were stationed in Karachi followed the example set by the Baluch. This fearless expression of solidarity with the revolting Navymen frightened the British authorities. Then white troops were summoned and Hindustan was surrounded from all sides. The British troops started the attack. The ratings on Hindustan retaliated. The firing and attacks and the counter attacks continued for four hours. Six of the ratings were killed and about thirty wounded".⁽¹⁴⁾

THE MERGER OF THE REBELLION AMONG THE RIN RATINGS AND THE PROLETARIAN POPULATION OF BOMBAY, KARACHI, MADRAS

The solidarity of native army platoons with their brothers in blue and white berets is a significant pointer to the history of Bombay and Karachi *Hartaal*. The only time in the history of the city of Bombay the army tanks were rolled out was during 21-23 February 1946 when the southern command Chief from Pune General Rob Lockhart was given charge of military control of Bombay city. The Maratha light infantry refused to fire upon the ratings in Castle Barrack. The pamphlet from the group of rat-

ings reported the exchange of fire in Castle Barrack between British military and the ratings on 21-22 February, "By this time the military officers had realised that Maratha troops could not be used. Actually they had refused to fire against their own brothers in the Navy. British troops were brought over to replace them. They began to fire at the men guarding the gates... By this time a large number of British troops had gathered round Castle Barracks. They were making preparations to attack from all sides and force an entry.... A couple of hand grenades flung at the groups of white soldiers who had gathered there was enough to clear the whole area in a few minutes.... Godfrey had decided to begin an all-out offensive. All Indian troops were removed. British troops swarmed the area of Castle Barracks. The Town Hall became their operations headquarters. By midday there were at least 17 trucks and armoured cars packed with troops armed with light machine-guns, rifles and other weapons held at the ready".⁽¹⁰⁾

Not only the native soldiers came in solidarity with the ratings of RIN, the RAIF pilots stationed in Bombay also refused to fly sorties over the ships in the harbour. According to a recent report, "Over a thousand men in the Royal Indian Air Force camps in Bombay came out in support of the revolt. Ground crews mutinied in Madras, Karachi, Poona, Allahabad and Delhi".⁽¹⁵⁾ There was a huge unprecedented expression of solidarity from the workers of the cotton mills of Bombay and the proletarian population in the chawls of Bombay apart from the fraternity and support the RIN ratings received from their brethren in uniform. It is estimated more than three lakhs of protesters were on the streets and lanes of Bombay facing bullets from the British troops. The official figure of deaths

in the two days was 187 and unofficially the figure was around 270.⁽¹²⁾

In Bombay the solidarity of the civilian population was most evident in the Fort area, near Gateway of India where crowds gathered to fraternise with the rebel ratings. According to an eyewitness statement, "It was a colourful sight. Everywhere, from all sides they came with baskets of food in their hands. There was everything one could ask for- fruits, milk, bread, vegetables and what not. They were the rations of the poor workers, the struggling poor middle class families, even of well-to-do Indians. The British wanted to starve their heroic brothers in the navy into submission. Motor boats came from the ships and were filled with baskets of food; the ratings were greeted by the people with revolutionary slogans. They were embraced by the crowds. The Hindu, Muslim and Irani shopkeepers took the navy boys into their shops and asked them to take what they wanted. The crowd was delighted to see the rebel ships defiantly flying the Congress, League and Red flags".⁽⁵⁾

In spite of the leaders of the Communist Party being thrown in jail the *Hartaal* was total in the industrial city and port of Sindh province, Karachi on 23rd February. The workers ignored the appeals of the Congress and Muslim League leaders and even the stern warning of the Governor Hidaytullah was rejected by the masses. The industrial workers and other sections of people all thronged the Idgah Maidan in the afternoon and held the protest meeting against the firing by British troops on HMIS *Hindustan*. Police fired to disperse the crowds injuring thirty persons in the assembly.

Although the participation of the workers in Karachi and Bombay are well recorded in the literature, the solidarity of the

workers in Madras is not much mentioned. There was a widespread *Hartaal* in Madras on 25 February when workers of various mills and factories came out on the streets, "For the first time in the history of the Great Indian Peninsular (GIP) railways, the administrative staff also struck work in sympathy with RIN ratings. The strike originated in the Chief Accountant's Office and spread to all other departments. More than 3000 clerks participated in the strike".⁽⁵⁾ The strike had such an impact among the population that the "...crowd of about 10,000 stopped the Indo-Ceylone Express between Saidapet and Mambalam by throwing stones at the train. The police opened fire to disperse the crowd, resulting in severe injuries to three people".⁽⁵⁾

By all accounts of the strike and later researches, the RIN ratings' strike crossed several milestones in self-initiative of the workers and the men in uniform in the *Hindustani Peninsula*. Be it instantaneous and spontaneous in action, of nobleness in bringing a larger picture of self-sacrifice, of integrity and allegiance towards the brotherhood of toilers, the history of the five days of rebellion is unique in the annals of the modern history of rebellion. All the people involved in the strike and *Hartaal* had an intense desire towards the end of colonial rule that they and their forefathers passed through enormous insult and ignominy. Although Jawaharlal Nehru had a very dubious role during the strike and after as the first prime Minister of independent India, one cannot but agree with his statement, "The RIN episode has opened an altogether new chapter in the history of the armed forces of India". The pamphlet by 'A group of victimised RIN ratings' keeps this statement as the masthead of the Introduction of their pamphlet. The most significant feature that is of-

ten been in oblivion is that the uprising of the population was entirely an urban affair, an affair of the plebeian societies of metropolitan cities that were crucibles of amalgamation of people from various languages, culture, religious beliefs and taboos, of commodities and merchandise, and so on. When they rose as a people the momentum generated was a matter of fear and horror to the rulers, their political and state establishments. In this sense, the RIN strike bore resemblance to the Russian revolution in Moscow and Petrograd in July-December of 1917, or the workers' and the sailors' councils in Germany in November-December Germany of 1918. In fact, some British eyewitness reports are there contemplating "Soviets" in Bombay seeing the incidents on 21-23 February.

VIOLENCE AND ITS INTERPRETATION FROM THE VICTOR'S SIDE

Any upsurge of the people against the ruling establishment is bound to confront violent response of the rulers, this has happened always in history. Particularly in the modern history of rebellion of workers, be it in Petrograd in November 1917, in Munich in November 1918 during the 100 days of Bavarian workers' republic, in Budapest during Hungarian uprising of workers in October 1956, the workers' resistance in Prague against the advance of soviet tanks in August 1968, such examples galore in the modern history of workers' rebellion or resistance. The workers' solidarity with the RIN ratings in Bombay, Karachi, Madras, Calcutta in February 1946 were no exception to this general trend of history. The workers found the confluence of expression and desire of revolt among the ratings' demand for better service conditions, better pay, parity in recognition of rights alongwith their British brethren. The ratings' strike was non-violent hunger strike in

nature and they repeatedly appealed for non-violent expressions for protest. However, they had armoury and ammunition in possession, and moreover their rebellion was the spark that ignited the imagination of all native men in uniform alongside the example of INA's sacrifice for a just, egalitarian national liberation from colonialism. If protests from armed services go beyond the control of the rulers, their response is bound to be violent and aggressive that they will always justify in the name of restoring 'order', preserving their 'rule'.

The problematic is whose 'rule' is to be justified and whose 'order' is to be preserved? In a recent compilation of essays justifying the existence of violence among the tribal movements of central India, it is written in the Introduction, "Violence is an everyday reality for many who fall through the cracks of restless growth stories across the globe, and they might believe that violence alone makes them heard. Much of the ongoing political battle in Central India is one such story. Tribals who are recklessly displaced and forcefully impoverished through an ongoing process of 'primitive accumulation' cannot but resort to more violent forms of protest because they are seen to be dispensable and without stakes of any kind in the new urbanised development model pursued by all of the 'mainstream' political parties and ideologies (Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey 2013)".⁽¹⁵⁾ In an essay from Ireland in 2006 on a similar topic, the authors recognise the role of violence in the protests as, "While theorists like Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon gave violence a defining role in revolution, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had regarded it as incidental. Violence, according to their metaphor, was a midwife whose interventions may (or may not) be required during the

birth of a new society out of the womb of the old".⁽¹⁶⁾

While such treatise do conjecture over the existence of the doctrine of violence among the oppressed and exploited people, particularly the subalterns, they seldom dwell on the urban milieu of violence by the rulers, the establishments either by the force of arms or otherwise. They seldom bring to the table the principal reasons of revolt of the urban masses, the plebeians and the fallout of their revolts among the 'political' circles particularly their interpretation of violence as the reprisal of the urbane disobedience to the 'rulebook'. It is in this context the RIN strike and the workers' solidarity and sacrifice is important and relevant to focus the discussion on urban rebellion and transcendence of the 'rule' and 'order' of the existing regimes over the urban plebeian masses. □□□

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DEBATING INEQUALITIES

Inequality in India: Some Observations

Maitreesh Ghatak

THE PERIODIC DEBATES and discussions on inequality in India in the public domain have started this year with a brief World Bank report (Poverty and Equity Brief: India, The World Bank, April 2025) that shows that inequality in India has gone down, apparently making it one of the least unequal countries in the world. This stands in stark contrast with reports from other sources, such as the World Inequality Database (WID) developed by Thomas Piketty and his colleagues, where India appears to have growing inequality and is one of the most unequal countries in the world. If we look at the share of the top 10% of income earners in overall national income, among the major economies, India is just below South Africa and Brazil, and well above the world average.

The puzzle can be resolved if one looks at the fine print. The World Bank report looks at consumer expenditure surveys, which were not being published in India since 2011-12 and have

started being released under a new methodology recently and we have two rounds of data on that – for 2022-23 and 2023-24. The WID looks at income inequality and since there is no direct way to measure income for the whole population, they combine the consumer expenditure surveys with tax data, with some adjustments for the fact that a very small fraction of the population pays income taxes. Also, it is well-known that consumer expenditure surveys do not catch the relatively well to do. This provides the first clue as to why these two sources throw up a different picture—the consumer expenditure surveys miss out the top end of the distribution and to the extent inequality is rising as reflected in India's presence in the list of the world's richest, the World Bank numbers would underestimate inequality by missing out the range of income in which inequality is most likely to manifest itself. The second important point to note in this regard is the fact that in any country in-

equality of consumption expenditure tends to be less than that of inequality of income, which in turn tends to be less than that of inequality of wealth. Wealth reflects savings, returns from investments that accumulate over time as well as inheritance and so the long-run cumulative aspect of wealth accumulation makes wealth inequality greater than income inequality, reflecting current circumstances. Also, while consumption increases with income, the rate at which it increases tends to diminish as income grows, resulting in the well-known stylised fact that the savings rates of the rich tend to be higher than the poor—and this factor tends to make inequality in consumption typically less than inequality in income. Moreover, to the extent that income flows tend to vary, individuals typically try to maintain their consumption levels, and this too tends to make inequality in consumption expenditure less than that of income.

The main reaction of those on the right of the political spectrum in terms of their economic ideology is that economic growth necessarily leads to an increase in inequality as the wealthier

classes are better able to take advantage of the expansion of economic opportunities that growth creates, but poverty also goes down. The reason for this, according to this view, is that growth also leads to an expansion of economic opportunities for all groups, which increases wages and incomes in the labour market and thereby the size of government coffers, which, in turn, raises the ability to spend on welfare policies. Therefore, according to this view, focusing on inequality is misleading at best, and counterproductive at worst.

The validity of this argument depends on whether the benefits of the growth process are indeed spreading to all classes of people. Are the incomes of the poorer classes rising at a sufficient rate despite inequality? Are employment and wages increasing at a sufficient rate in the labour market? Is the tax system progressive and public investment in areas where the poor benefit the most from is increasing? Let's turn to evidence.

Research shows that the incomes of the top 1% and 10% income groups have grown at a higher-than-average rate of growth in the post-liberalisation era. Not only that, the growth rates of income of the bottom 50% and the middle 40% were both below the average growth rate. If the process of growth was inclusive, we should expect a higher rate of growth for those with lower incomes since by the laws of arithmetic, the lower the base, the easier it is to increase something by a certain percentage.

Given the incomes of the rich have been growing at a higher rate than the average, inequality—now at a historically high

level—will continue to increase over time. Is this a problem that is inevitable in the era of globalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and not exclusive to India? That happens not to be the case. For example, in China, the income growth rates of the top 1% and 10% groups have been broadly similar to that of India since the early 1980s, even though more recently, it has been higher for India. But the income growth rates of the middle 40% and bottom 50% have been much higher in China than in India over the last 30 years.

Turning to the labour market, recent research shows that compared to the overall income growth of the country, the labour market fails to show signs of dynamism in terms of the quality of job creation and wage growth. Self-employed workers who do not employ any workers, casual workers, and workers engaged in unpaid family labour constitute three-fourths of the country's total working population and their proportion has increased over the past decade. In terms of wages, the growth rate of the average real income of the working class is negligible compared to the overall income growth of the country. Thus, the picture emerging from the labour market, as to whether the poorer classes are benefiting substantially from the growth process, does not look positive.

If we look at the tax system, 27% of central government tax revenue comes from Goods and Services Tax (GST), a little above 30% from income tax, and around 25% from corporation tax (the rest comes from customs,

union excise duties, and service tax). However, the burden of GST falls proportionately more on the poor. There are several reasons for it. First, it is a consumption tax, and the poor spend a higher fraction of their income than the rich. Second, barring a few food items, others are not tax free. Third, many essential items like mobile recharge, transport, and cooking gas are taxable. Income tax kicks in only for annual income above 2.5 lakhs. Also, wealth tax has been abolished since 2016. In a country like India, where more than 90% of the population is outside the income tax net, the process of tax collection is not easy, but still, the picture of the tax system that emerges cannot be called progressive in any way.

Finally, let's look at the pattern of allocation of government expenditure on areas that would directly benefit the poor. Since 2014, the share of social sector spending as a fraction of total government expenditure have been falling in 2014-15 it was 22%, and in 2024-25 it stands at 19%. The two years that does not fit this trend is the pandemic one (2020-21) and the year after. Within the category of social sector expenditure, spending on education as a proportion of total social sector spending has been consistently declining over the last decade. The corresponding proportion for health increased slightly from 2014-15 to 2017-18 but since then, that too has been stagnant, and currently, stands slightly higher than the 2014 level (11% from 9%). Food subsidies and civil supplies as a fraction of social sector expenditure experienced

a big bump up during the pandemic year but otherwise displays a downward trend. The fraction rural development expenditure, which includes the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in social sector expenditure has been largely stagnant since 2014-15 around one-fifth. Once again, the

overall picture that is emerging is not promising.

Finally, let's not forget that the economy and politics are closely interrelated. There are other costs of inequality. The super-rich don't just benefit because the tax system isn't progressive enough. As the debate over electoral bonds suggests, they are politically active and, clearly, campaign con-

tributions have economic leverage in terms of buying influence over government policy and decisions. So, if the "don't worry about inequality, growth will take care of everything" narrative never sounded very convincing, it certainly does not do so right now. □

[This essay partly draws on an early essay titled "Debating inequalities in the backdrop of elections", *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2024.]

"THE CULTURE, SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES"

Science Matters, Ideology Matters More

Sumit Bhaduri

WHETHER OR NOT the laws of nature matter to human beings is a philosophical question with a long history that goes back to before the time of Galileo Galilei, the astronomer and the father of physics, or even the origins of the words science and scientists. Individuals who discovered such laws, or developed the impractical applications to change the world, would have been known as natural philosophers in their time, their fields of enquiry as natural philosophy. William Whe-well, a polymath, whose expertise ranged from poetry to mathematics, coined the term "scientist" less than 200 years ago in 1833.

Today, the same question may be rephrased as "Does science matter". This indeed is the first part of the title of a book published 35 years ago in America. The title, "Science matters: achieving scientific literacy" (SM) spelt out what the authors, two university professors, wanted. They were motivated to publish the book because according to them this was a time (1990) when "More than ever

before, scientific and technological issues dominate, from global climate change, to the teaching of evolution, to the perceived gradual decline of American competitiveness".

Addressing high school and college students they further said such issues "directly affect your life—issues about which you, as a citizen, will have to form an opinion if you are to take part in our country's *political* discourse" (*italics added*). This, however, was not the first time that scientific literacy became a hot topic to advocate in America.

The status of and unhappiness with science education in America came to a head with the Soviet launch of Sputnik in October 1957. Paul DeHart Hurd, an educationist published an influential essay "Science Literacy: Its Meaning for American Schools". He called for a new, more general kind of science education for all students.

The background of Hurd's essay was the Cold War. The race for supremacy between the USA and USSR in rocket science and ever more powerful nuclear weapons was at its peak. It was also a

race for supremacy in ideological debates about the relative merits and demerits of socialism and capitalism, the role of the state in a planned versus market economy, etc. Such debates, discussions, and propaganda were aimed at moulding, what could be broadly called culture.

It has been thirty-five years since SM was first published, but the issues mentioned by the authors in it are still there. Alarmingly quite a few new and serious ones such as another possible pandemic, abuse and misuse of artificial intelligence, environmental pollution by micro-plastics and "forever chemicals" have been added to the list. If what they said was a correct assessment in the USA at that time, it is more so for the whole world today. The importance and relevance of science in today's globalised world is not limited to one single country or the American society.

In a plenary lecture at a literary festival this year, Venki Rama-krisnan, an Indian origin Nobel laureate scientist made this point. He advocated what he called *broad literacy*. According to him, broad literacy will act as a bridge between two cultures, the cultures of science and humanities. It will stop the

spread of “misinformation, disinformation, prejudice and conspiracy theories” which has made the worldwide rise of “populist movements” possible. It will enable citizens to take scientific evidence seriously and not be deceived by the lies and propaganda of “demagogues”.²

Unfortunately, no literacy, broad or otherwise will work unless that literacy addresses the role of ideology in moulding culture. An ideology basically stabilises and perpetuates *cultural* dominance through masking and illusion. The science and Technology (S&T) related issues mentioned above are complex, and to succeed any implementable solution must have societal acceptability. They will need S&T driven innovations where delivering societal well being and not quick profit is the main objective. This in turn will require an understanding of what innovation meant in the past and what it has come to mean now.

Innovation in essence means new products or new ways of doing things that lifts the economy to a higher level. Big innovations in most cases depend critically on earlier and incremental innovations. They all disturb power balances between social groups, institutions, and nations but also deliver benefits to humanity as a whole. Profits generated by industry through successful small or incremental innovations are, supposed to be rewards sanctioned by society to the entrepreneurs for their successful efforts in delivering societal benefits.

The creation of “more massive and more colossal productive forces” that Marx had talked

about more than 150 years ago, was the essence of a series of innovations that were based on machine manufacturing, followed by the use of steam engine as a general purpose technology. In Marx’s words those innovations enabled capitalism to put an end to “The feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry”. In the early days of the industrial revolution, the French revolution of 1789 did disturb the social equilibrium massively. The word “ideology” was invented around that time by the French aristocrat Antoine Destutt de Tracy.

In the first half of the 20th century, the political economist Joseph Schumpeter contextualised the innovations of the late 19th and early 20th century as “creative destruction”. Schumpeter was not a Marxist and had views on democracy that would probably be considered as elitist today. He did not think that capitalism can survive its criticism by the intellectual class. On capitalism’s possible future he said “Can capitalism survive? No, I do not think it can”.

It would appear that Schumpeter and Marx might have underestimated capitalism’s longevity and seductive hold over culture. In the 1980s, Reganomics and Thatcherism in the USA and Britain respectively, were made respectable by economists such as Milton Friedman, and Friedrich Hayek. Whether or not the “Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel” added to their academic reputation or the ideology that they represented is a mute question.

The disintegration of the former USSR that started in the 1990 contributed enormously to boost the myth of an all knowing, self-correcting market that thrives on innovations. It was around that time, that “innovation” became a fashionable word among management gurus, politicians, and bureaucrats. An ideological perspective of where anything went in the name of “innovation” and success was measured by solely short term profit, was aggressively promoted.

The lessons from great innovations, such as batteries, birth control pills, DNA forensics, penicillin, MRI scan, computers etc., all of which originated in non-market laboratories, were conveniently forgotten. As were the facts that converting science into safe technology takes time, and therefore genuine innovations must have a longer term horizon were forgotten. The critical roles of the entrepreneurial state, and the academic or non-profit laboratories in the innovation process, were totally ignored.

The fact that nobody owned the web or the internet was ignored. Even today, the fact that the much-touted mRNA based vaccine against COVID, and artificial intelligence both originated in State-sponsored laboratories as parts of government funded projects are rarely mentioned. While mind-boggling profits have been made from these innovations, very little if anything has come back to the State as a part of the reward.

The “catastrophic market failure” of 2008 should have been but was not an eye opener. The “self-correcting” market turned

out to be a myth, and the “innovative” products of the financial world, derivatives etc. fictitious, if not downright fraud. Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve of the USA from 1987 to 2006, was asked why he failed to regulate the market. His answer was “you need an ideology... the structure that defines how the world works... free... markets are... the way to organise economies”. He “found a flaw in the... structure” only after the event.

What he left unsaid is obvious, ideology determines the contours of economic as well as political power in a society. “Does innovation breed innovation”, is a question that was posed just before the market crash in an economics text called “The free-

market innovation machine: analysing the growth miracle of capitalism”. After the crash it could be answered unequivocally: only in a market where the society has a major say in its affairs but not in one where it is disembodied from society.

Soon after the “great recession”, it came to light that to maximise profit large multinationals that boast of innovations, had in fact manipulated, fabricated and suppressed scientific data and evidences. Such corporates were spread across all major industries: oil, automotive, pharmaceutical, finance etc. They all got away by paying paltry fines².

In the last century a market disembodied from the society triggered the two world wars, the

rise of fascism, and the revolutions in Russia and China. Today as the world lurches from one crisis to another, the ideology of “quick profit” remains unchallenged. Restoring the cultural authorities of science and humanities in such a world will only be possible if there is a change in ideology.³ Scientific or broad literacy will be effective only when the existing ideological limitations are clearly acknowledged and rectified. □□□

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THE MUSEUM OF NURTURE

Writing War in Literature

Sumit Chakrabarti

[War resists telling, yet demands to be written. Literature becomes the imperfect vessel—preserving trauma while acknowledging all it cannot hold. Between memory and gaps, words perform their necessary failure. —Ed]

IS IT NOT IMPERATIVE that a professor of literature must talk about war? Both the imperative and the inevitability would provoke a revisiting of the canon which we have been taught, and which one carries as a continuous disturbing memory of the violent in literature. Some of the earliest epics and lyrics from Old English, let alone the literatures of the Greeks and the Romans—*Beowulf*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, or epics from our own lands—*The Mahabharata* or *The Ramayana* are narratives of war, dissent, loss and revenge. It is possible, I contend, to think of

literature as an expression of a psychopathology of loss, an economy of anxiety that is born of a dysfunction that is historically embedded within the mind as a continuous reminder of that which cannot not be forgotten. War remains as a testimony of violation that the subject of war has to write in order to forget that which is difficult to remember and cannot *not be remembered* at the same instant. Writing becomes the sane other of war. Writing is creative unforgetting—an objective distillation of the moment that needs closure without erasure. Literature must *write* war, because

the memory of war cannot go anywhere else. Literature is what I call a museum of nurture and a site of unforgetting—a testimonial to the abstraction of human grief.

LITERATURE AND TESTIMONY

In one of his deeply philosophical essays, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, Jacques Derrida deliberates on the question of testimony and fiction. Interestingly, the reader will notice how at one point in the essay Derrida talks of literature through the metaphor of war. He writes how “literature can say anything, accept anything, receive anything, suffer anything, and simulate everything; it can even feign a trap, the way modern armies know how to set false traps”. It is not difficult to see what Derrida is trying to do here. The metaphor of the army is a deliberate act of unforgetting whereby the

simulacrum itself is a reminder of the deceit or the betrayal or the unuttered violence of the moment of war. The 'false trap', almost a tautology, rattles the reader into a realisation of the deceitfulness of submitting to literature, a realisation which is private, secret, and unutterable. At the same moment, the complete contingency of the moment of submission—that it can say, accept, receive or suffer anything—makes literature the necessary simulacrum that guards the private, secret, and unutterable. The paradoxical is therefore the crux of literature—making it both testimony and fiction, investing the word 'literature' with an unforeseen and unforeseeable contingency, both expressing and keeping the secret at the same time, and releasing the subject of immediate responsibility for that which is said, or that which has been left unsaid. This momentary freedom from claiming memory both as 'truth' and as one's own, that literature makes possible, is why I have called it the museum of nurture.

Testimony remains one of the crucial limbs through which the act of war is memorialised. The juridical trope embedded in the idea of the testimony invests it with an insurmountable secrecy, a contract that is ethically impossible to violate. It is a contract bound, sealed, and signed by law—and hence, by its very nature, inviolable. As Derrida notes, "...all testimony essentially appeals to a certain system of belief, to faith without proof, to the act of faith summoned by a kind of transcendental oath...". This suspension of disbelief is a given both because of the cata-

strophic nature of the event and the catatonic predicament of its singular subject who testifies. The one who testifies, the one who replays memory, the one who recounts is also, simultaneously, uttering the autobiographical. Testimony is therefore also inevitably anecdotal, subject to elision, forgetting as much as unforgetting, deferred and contingent. The moment of testimonial therefore demands expression of traumatic experience, but that experience in itself inevitably drives the suppression of it. It is also a moment of rhetorical anxiety, characterised by the use of 'language', whose contingent nature makes the narrative of testimony continuously vacillate between autobiography and fiction. Derrida writes, "...there is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury—that is to say, the possibility of literature." Literature, therefore, becomes the refuge, and the testifying subject, the refugee. The word 'refugee', unerringly invested with a symptom of abandonment, homelessness, or precarity, is refracted through the lens of literature, into one of agency and power through the abstraction of the body (literature) that holds it, withstands it, suffers it, or accepts it. There is no need for a cosmopolitan hospitality in this refuge, as the refuge itself, the body that accepts, nurtures, withholds, is itself invested with a contingency that contains all symptoms of an event.

EVENT AND SINGULARITY

Let us begin with a question: "What does the author or the

poet do in a time of war?" As one begins to answer this apparently simple question, the entire genre of war literatures appears to the reader as manuscripts in archives, or bound volumes in libraries or personal possessions, or for the students of literature—the poems, perhaps, in their syllabus, that they have to read and answer questions on. The simple answer to the question is, "They write". The implicit homogeneity of the phrase 'war literature', however, is immediately compromised as we begin to sift through the texts in our archives: Anne Frank writes a diary; Winston Churchill writes history and fiction; Primo Levi writes a memoir; Wilfred Owen writes war poems; Paul Celan also writes war poems, but of a very different kind. We will all agree however, that in spite of the commonality of experiences (war, for example) and the differences of form or genre, each one has their singular place as an event, or as Terry Eagleton might put it, "an endlessly repeatable encounter". But whereas it is easy to contemplate on the encounter between the text and the reader, it is more crucial, perhaps, to deliberate on the encounter of the author (as both the subject and object of war) and their testimony—the work that is produced.

Derek Attridge, in his book *The Singularity of Literature*, examines the literary work as an event that is both 'performative' and 'ethical' and resists the symptomatic notion of reading the literary work as a piece within a larger discursive network. He resists the idea of treating the literary text "as a

means to a predetermined end: coming to the object with the hope or the assumption that it can be instrumental in furthering an existing project, and responding to it in such a way as to test, or even produce, that usefulness. The project in question may be political, moral, historical, biographical, psychological, cognitive, or linguistic." By divesting the literary text of its symptomatic instrumentalism, Attridge foregrounds the performative or the ethical as a form of radical alterity that invests the literary text with an unforeseen singularity. As I try to read the relationship between literature and war, I find Attridge's formula of singularity as an ally to unlearn the repeatability of metaphors in the classroom and submit to the performative at the moment of the testimony. The rhetorical anxiety I have mentioned earlier invests the language of the performance with its uniqueness, with its sense of the singularity of the experience—an experience that is mine and none others, an experience that I cannot express in words, an experience that I cannot not forget. Yet the moment of articulation of that experience is one of radical alterity where the inexpressible is expressed, the unsayable is said, and through the medium of language the 'other' of the subject is born. There is no escape from language in expression, and thus the moment of the testimony (or literature, as one may choose to see it), is also the moment of the birth of the other.

Derrida says something on these lines in the beginning of his slim volume titled

Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin. The essay dallies with a fascinating notion of alterity intrinsic to the use of language:

...anyone should be able to declare under oath: I have only one language and it is not mine; my "own" language is, for me, a language that cannot be assimilated. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other.

In the context of the ownership of language, and nation, and identity, Derrida refers to a cultural colloquium being held in the USA that discusses war across the world and particularly in the Middle East. And he refers to his good friend Abdelkebir Khatibi, who identifies himself as a Franco-Maghrebian. Derrida raises the important question of language, of how identity is continuously being negotiated through language, particularly in war-torn states, and asks, "What is the nature of that hyphen? What does it want? What is Franco-Maghrebian? Who is a "Franco-Maghrebian"?" He goes on to deliberate how these questions would reach their culmination in such articulations as "what is it to be Franco-Maghrebian?" or "who is the most Franco-Maghrebian?" Derrida reads the hyphen as an act of silencing through language, of a promise that will never be fulfilled, and even if it is, it would not affect in any way the singularity of the suffering:

The silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture. It will never silence their memory. It could

even worsen the terror, the lesions, and the wounds. A hyphen is never enough to conceal the protests, cries of anger or suffering, the noise of weapons, airplanes, and bombs.

The radical otherness of language is emphasised, and, at the same time, language as promise, language as politics, language as polemic is undermined. The language of literature, however, is the one that remains with its contingent alterity, as the paradox of the said/unsaid. Literature and testimony address the affective in language to elicit a confession that is memory and fiction at the same moment of enunciation. The completely contingent moment of the saying of that which cannot not be said, and once said, cannot be unsaid at the same time creates the necessary paradox in literature (as well as in testimony) at the moment of enunciation. Derrida returns to this problem or contradiction of the language of confession in *Monolingualism of the Other*:

The performative gesture of the enunciation would in the act prove the opposite of what the testimony claims to declare, namely a certain truth...The one who speaks, the subject of the enunciation, yourself, oh yes...is understood as doing the opposite of what he says. It is as if, in one and the same breath, you were lying by confessing the lie. A lie from then on incredible that ruins the credit of your rhetoric. The lie believes itself by virtue of the deed it does, by the act of language. Thus, it proves, practically, the opposite of what your speech intends to assert, prove, and give to be verified. People

will not stop denouncing your absurdity.

As one would notice, the moment of enunciation is a supreme act of lie or perjury, where the subject, in a gesture of supreme sacrifice, gives up experience to literature, and at the same time, eliciting from literature the vow of absolute secrecy. Here is the moment of radical awareness.

In order to elaborate further on this, I will use an example, one of the foundational voices on thinking about war and literature from the twentieth century—the poet Paul Celan. In 1960, Celan gives a speech at the German Academy of Language and Poetry, on the occasion of his receiving the Georg Buchner Prize for literature. This speech is famously called *The Meridian*. In this speech Celan speaks of the idea of the ‘encounter’ of experience with poetry. He says that “the poem has always hoped...to speak...*on behalf of the other*, who knows, perhaps of an *altogether other*.” He argues that the poem heads straight for this otherness so that “it can reach and be free”. While calling this inevitable reaching out to the other the ‘mystery of encounter’, Celan contends, “The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it.” One notices how the phrase ‘bespeaks it’ transforms the testimony completely to the experience of the other, thereby creating the deliberate falsity, the perjury, the act of violation that Derrida talks about. The philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe takes up for analysis this Meridian speech by Celan in his slim volume titled

Poetry as Experience. Lacoue-Labarthe takes up for analysis one single sentence from Celan’s speech: “The poem is alone”. I would like to quote at length what he writes on this sentence:

“Alone” is a word that says singularity—or at least, it makes no sense here except in reference to singularity, to the singular experience. “The poem is alone” means a poem is only *effectively* a poem insofar as it is absolutely singular. This is undoubtedly a definition of poetry’s essence: there is no poetry, poetry does not occur or take place, and is therefore not repeatedly questioned, except as the event of singularity.

It is fascinating to notice how the moment of the writing of poetry is described as a singular event, an encounter, an enunciation of otherness, a radical alterity by many philosophers, poets and theorists—in the case of this paper, by the likes of Derrida, Attridge, Celan or Lacoue-Labarthe.

THE POETRY OF WAR

What is it like, then, to write the poetry of war? What is, then, the relationship between literature and war? Earlier, I have referred to literature as a ‘museum of nurture’. Nurture presumes an intimacy, and museum as a distant register of memory. The testimony or confession that is at the heart of the poetry of war, or the literature of war, is essentially a polychrome of distant intimacy. There is an oxymoron at the heart of the phrase ‘museum of nurture’. As Lacoue-Labarthe also points out in terms of the intimacy of literature or art, “...we must think, in art’s greatest intimacy and as this intimacy itself, of a sort of spacing or hia-

tus. A secret gaping”. This space, or hiatus, or fissure, is the moment of enunciation where the contingency of meaning transfers memory to literature, or transforms testimony to poetry. Lacoue-Labarthe says, “...poetry, if it ever occurs, occurs as the brutal revelation of the abyss that contains art (language) and nevertheless constitutes it, as such, in its strangeness... The place of poetry, the place where poetry takes place, every time, is the place without place of the intimate gaping...”. Poetry happens at the instant of the defamiliarisation of memory—and it is no surprise that Lacoue-Labarthe uses both the words ‘unheimliche’ and ‘augenblick’ to describe this moment—the process of defamiliarisation that happens at the wink of an eye.

On a similar note of defamiliarisation, but investing it with a political intent, I will briefly refer now to the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti’s memoir *I Saw Ramallah* where he recounts coming back to his own city after thirty years of exile. As he stands in front of the Allenby Bridge he realises that his only constant companion in all these years has been his writing. He writes:

Writing is a displacement, a displacement from the normal social contract. A displacement from the habitual, the pattern, and the ready form. A displacement from the common roads of love and the common roads of enmity. A displacement from the believing nature of the political party. A displacement from the idea of unconditional support. The poet strives to escape from the dominant used language, to a language that

speaks itself for the first time. He strives to escape from the chains of the tribe, from its approvals and its taboos. If he succeeds in escaping and becomes free, he becomes a stranger at the same time. It is as though the poet is a stranger in the same degree as he is free. If a person is touched by poetry or art or literature in general, his soul throngs with these displacements and cannot be cured by anything, not even the homeland. He clings to his own way of receiving the world and his own way of transmitting it.

The displacement that Barghouti categorically emphasises is the continuous desire for the place without place, the fissure of intimate gaping. The very act of writing, to desire the possibility of writing in the middle of war, is the *unheimliche*—both the uncanny and the unhomely—that makes the poet a stranger and sets him or her free.

To end my essay, I'll try to relate this idea of the *unheimliche* and the *augenblick* taken together as the moment of writing under duress to an idea that Maurice Blanchot puts forward in his very short piece titled *The Instant of my Death* and which Derrida takes up for a lengthy discussion in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*. Blanchot elaborates on the idea where someone is "prevented from dying by death itself." Blanchot relates an incident taking place in a remote village in France towards the end of the Second World War. The

Germans were fast losing ground by then, but this news had not yet reached this remote corner of France. A Nazi lieutenant and his soldiers surrounded a house and ordered all the inhabitants to come out. As they were about to shoot the young man who had opened the door for them, the man requested that he be shot away from the eyesight of the other family members: his aunt, his mother, his sister, and his sister-in-law. In this moment he was not dead, but never more sure that he was about to die. Blanchot writes:

I know—do I know it—that the one at whom the Germans were already aiming, awaiting but the final order, experienced then a feeling of extraordinary lightness, a sort of beatitude (nothing happy, however)—sovereign elation? The encounter of death with death?... Henceforth, he was bound to death by a surreptitious friendship.

This young man was saved by providence or chance, and later in Paris met the author Malraux. Malraux narrated to him how, when he was escaping, he had lost a manuscript that could not be revived. And this is how Malraux narrated the event of the loss:

What does it matter? All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance.

The moment of the testimony (or literature, as one would put it) is always, inevitably, also the instant of death, of giving oneself or one's experience up to rhetoric and expression and metaphor at this instant of performance. The literary, or what

we have named 'literature' is born at this instant of 'death henceforth always in abeyance', where the subject would confess, but the confession is always, inevitably, false, a perjury, a lie in language. As Derrida says, people will not stop denouncing your absurdity. Literature thus remains both as the inevitability of the artist's expression, and as its limit, something that one cannot not do, and yet is always fiction and never confession. Writing about war carries this vulnerability to its extreme length, to the instant of its death, to the moment of writing that which the subject wants to unforget by forgetting it in the absurdity of expression. □□□

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For Frontier Contact

DHYANBINDU
COLLEGE SQUARE

A LIFELESS ECONOMY

The Indian Economy: Growth, Investment and Stagnation

Sushil Khanna
Mritiunjoy Mohanty

EVER SINCE NDA-II came to power in 2014 under the leadership of Narendra Modi on the so-called development plank and with a promise to put an end to the apparent policy paralysis blamed on the Manmohan Singh led UPA-II government, a comparative analysis of Indian economic performance has faced many challenges.

First the new series of National Accounts (2011-12 base year) has made a direct comparison with UPA era of high growth difficult. Second, the NDA-II era the Indian economy faced two major policy induced shocks—demonetisation of the currency and flawed implementation of the GST. Finally, the unanticipated Covid shock which was exacerbated by Government of India imposing the world's most draconian lockdown.

Therefore, rather than a full blown comparative analysis, in this short note we analyse the performance of the Indian economy from 2011-12 to 2024-25, using the latest release of new series of National Accounts data (30th May 2025). For the purposes of exposition and delineating different growth phases, we have divided the period from 2011-12 to 2024-25 into four sub-periods: Period I -2011-12 to 2015-16—in response to significant inflationary pressures, the period of tight monetary

policy and disinflation (it also covers the last two years of UPA-II and the first two years of NDA-II); Period II -2016-17 to 2019-20—is the period of monetary easing and policy shocks—demonetisation and GST implementation; Period III—2020-21 to 2024-25—is the Covid pandemic and its aftermath which includes both the year of the Covid shock as well as the sharp rebound; and finally, Period IIIa—2022-23 to 2024-25—a sub-period of Period III, is the post-Covid-rebound growth performance.

For any economy, from the demand side there are three main sources of growth: consumption, investment and net exports. Consumption demand is normally the largest—in India's case, ranging between 60-65% of GDP in the recent past; followed by investment demand, between 25-40% in India's case; and finally net exports (exports-imports) which in India's case range between -2 and -5%. Consumption therefore is an important direct driver of GDP growth. Investment drives GDP growth by expanding supply (assuming there is sufficient demand) and/or productivity-driven wage growth (which in turn drives consumption). Exports are a source of external demand, though one has to take into account imports to get a sense of the net effect.

For all the brouhaha about becoming the 4th largest

economy in the world as well as the fastest-growing, the Indian economy is not in good shape at all and is structurally damaged. One of the defining aspects of India's recent growth experience has been its inability to sustain a high-growth path, i.e., it sees repeated episodes of growth deceleration. Whereas, as we will see below, weakness in consumption growth is a contributing factor, what is truly unusual is that the GDP growth does not sustain despite the recovery of investment growth in the post-Covid period. It is this unusual aspect and its ramifications that we explore in some detail below.

GDP growth trends: Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Table 1 (as well as the associated Graph 1) is the difference in growth performance in terms of current and constant prices. GDP growth at constant prices measures growth stripped of inflation. For example, if current price GDP grows at 5% and inflation (GDP deflator) is running at 5%, then constant price GDP will grow at 0% or in other words it will not have not grown at all. Constant price GDP growth is important for standard of living whereas current price GDP growth has an important bearing on profit and tax-revenue growth, both nominal categories.

Therefore, when current and constant price growth performance move in tandem (for example, they accelerate or decelerate broadly together) the two measures do not yield conflicting signals. Whereas, when the fall in inflation (disinflation) is really sharp, bordering on defla-

tion, current price GDP growth might decelerate while constant price GDP growth accelerates. Deflationary tendencies then adversely affect expectation of profit growth, and therefore future investment, making the constant price GDP growth acceleration difficult to sustain.

As the Graph 1 makes clear, in Period I (2011-12 to 2015-16) GDP growth in current prices decelerates (from 13.8% in 2011-12 to 10.5% in 2015-16), whereas in constant prices accelerates (from 5.5 to 8%), the result of sharp disinflation during Period I. The differences between constant and current growth performance is also brought by the fact that whereas Period IIIa is fastest growing period in terms of constant prices, Period I (tight monetary policy and disinflation) is the fastest growing in terms of current prices. However, as we have already noted, in the face of divergence between current and constant price GDP

growth in Period I, acceleration in the latter is difficult to sustain in Period II (2016-17 to 2019-20).

Therefore, in Period II both decelerate—current price GDP growth from 11.8 to 6.4% and constant price GDP growth from 8.3 to 3.4%. Hence Period II growth averages for both constant and current prices are lower than Period I's, (see Table 1). It will be remembered that Period II is characterized by two major policy shocks- demonetization and flawed implementation of GST. The sharp deceleration in current and constant price GDP growth in Period II tell us that even before the Covid shock of 2020-21, the economy was in a very parlous state.

Perhaps equally importantly, in Period IIIa, the averages for the GDP growth at current (11.9%) and constant (7.8%) prices noted in Table 1, obscure the decelerating trend in both. In 2021-22 GDP at current prices

grew at 18.9%; by 2024-25, it had secularly declined to 9.8%, a fall of almost 50%. Similarly, over the same period, GDP growth at constant prices fell, though not secularly, from 9.7 to 6.5%, decline of 33%. Again that current price GDP falls so much more than constant price GDP suggests that disinflationary forces are at play. Both the RBI and IMF forecast for 2025-26 suggest that growth is stuck in the 6.4-6.5% range.

Our central conclusion from this review of the Indian economy's recent growth performance is that, despite being the fastest growing economy in the world, a combination of policy shocks and sustained disinflationary pressures has meant that it has found it very difficult to sustain a high growth momentum necessary for transitioning to a developed economy, and therefore repeatedly decelerates. That the economy is unable to sustain a high-growth momentum and is decelerating in current (nominal) prices as well has implications not only for government's tax revenue collections, but more importantly, dampens expectations of profitability which are an important driver of private corporate investment growth.

Consumption growth:

Table 1 also tells us that the deceleration in GDP growth is not uniform across demand categories—consumption and investment exhibit very different growth tendencies. Private final consumption (PFCE) growth at constant prices is mostly flat, exhibiting a mild deceleration from Period I to IIIa. In Period IIIa it clearly grows slower than

Table1: Demand Aggregates Growth Rates (at 2011-12 constant prices)

Item	2011-12 to 2015-16 (Period I)	2016-17 to 2019-20 (Period II)	2020-21 to 2024-25 (Period III)	2022-23 to 2024-25 (Period IIIa)
GDP	6.8	6.3	5.4	7.8
PFCE (private consumption)	6.8	6.7	5.3	6.7
GFCE (Govt consumption)	4.1	7.2	2.8	4.9
C (PFCE+GFCE)	6.3	6.7	4.9	6.5
GCF (gross investment)	3.7	6.1	6.4	5.4
GFCF (gross fixed investment)	3.9	7.2	6.9	8.1
Exports	2.7	4.5	8.3	6.3
Demand Aggregates Growth Rates (at current prices)				
GDP	12.1	9.9	10.7	11.9
C (PFCE+GFCE)	12.9	10.9	10.5	11.9
PFCE	13.4	10.8	10.8	12.2
GCF	6.9	8.7	12.7	11.3
GFCF	7.2	9.7	12.2	12.4

Source: on the basis of data from NAS, Statement 1.1:
Key Aggregates of National Accounts, 30th May 2025

GDP. Total consumption (PFCE+GFCE) at constant prices decelerates from Period II to IIIa. In Period IIIa it grows slower than both GDP and PFCE. At current prices the behaviour of consumption is slightly different. In general, both total consumption and PFCE has grown faster than GDP. However Period IIIa consumption growth is clearly slower than Period I (disinflation period). It is also worth pointing out that the weakness in consumption growth has different across periods.

Period II (2016-17 to 2019-20) is characterised by weakness in rural consumption growth, largely driven by the nature of policy shocks and their asymmetric impact across rural and urban geographies. Period III on the other hand is characterised by weakness of urban consumption growth (CII President Rajiv Memani “Urban consumption is not growing as anticipated, Business Standard, 7th July 2025), reflecting stagnant wage growth in the urban economy. Therefore, there is a persistent weakness in consumption growth, driven by different geographical drivers over time, complicating the policy response. And that perhaps is the reason for India’s growth stagnation. We hope to return to this important topic in another piece. Finally, it is also worth noting, as Table 1 makes clear, that at constant prices, exports (goods+services) have grown slower than GDP in Periods I, II and IIIa, i.e., external demand has not been an important driver of overall demand growth.

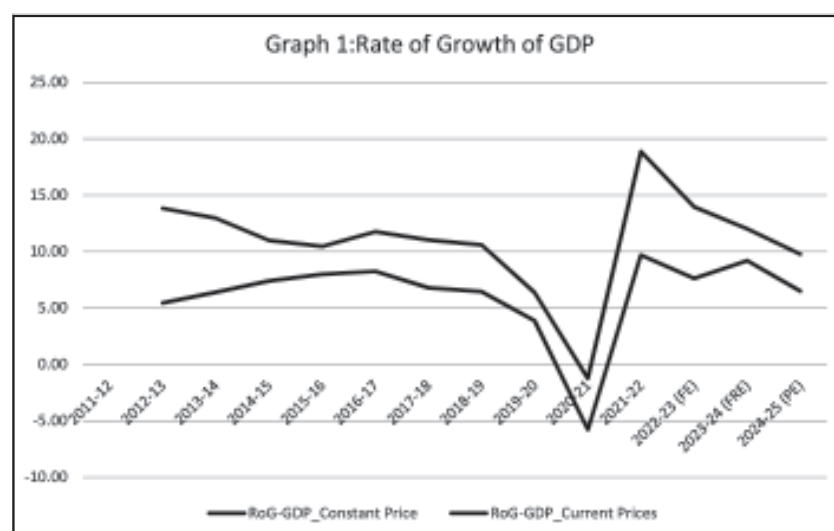
Investment growth: On the

other hand, investment growth, both gross as well as fixed capital formation, actually accelerates from Period I, where it grows significantly slower than GDP, through to both Periods II, III and IIIa where in constant terms it grows faster than GDP. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that GDP growth deceleration in Period III particularly is despite an acceleration in gross and fixed investment growth. This is a completely novel state of affairs for the Indian economy.

In Period I the brunt of disinflation is borne by a sharp slowdown in investment growth—at constant prices, fixed investment grows at 3.9% while GDP grew at 6.8%; at current prices it grew at 7.2 and 12.1% respectively. After Period I however, as Table 1 makes clear, in every subsequent period, at constant prices fixed investment has grown faster than GDP. In Period II, at current prices, the trend is not as clear cut as at constant prices, even though there is an appreciable increase in investment growth, indicat-

ing the persistence of deflationary tendencies in investment behaviour. However, even at current prices, in Period III as well as IIIa, fixed investment grows faster than GDP. As a result of the above, at constant prices, the fixed investment ratio (and as Graph 2 indicates) first falls from 34.3 in 2011-12 to a low of 30.8 in 2016-17 and then climbs back to 33.7% in 2024-25. Between 2021-22 to 2024-25 the ratio has been stable, rising slightly from 33.4 to 33.7%, not too far from the peak achieved in 2011-12.

In Period II (2016-17 to 2019-20), hammered by continuing deflationary tendencies particularly in investment as well as policy shocks of demonetisation as well as a flawed GST implementation, the economy grows the slowest of all four periods under consideration—6.3 and 9.9% at constant and current prices respectively (see Table 1). In Period IIIa (2022-23 to 2024-25) average growth recovers to 7.8 and 11.9% respectively at constant and current prices. How-



Source: on the basis of data from NAS, Statement
1.1: Key Aggregates of National Accounts, 30th May 2025

ever, as we have already noted even in Period IIIa the economy is unable to sustain the growth momentum and decelerates significantly.

Drivers of investment growth: Given the acceleration of investment as well as the slowdown in consumption noted above, the drivers of growth in these three phases are very different. In Period I (2011-12 to 2015-16), the phase of inflation stabilisation where the brunt of the adjustment is borne by investment, private consumption, at 56%, is the main driver of growth with fixed investment contributing only 19%. In Period II, the phase of the growth slowdown, even though the contribution of fixed investment increases to 35%, that of private consumption also rises to 59%. In Period IIIa, the phase of growth recovery, the contribution of consumption falls to 55% and that of fixed investment increases further to 41%. Clearly then, Phase IIIa growth is investment driven. Unprecedentedly, despite this investment driven growth, the economy decelerated in this phase too.

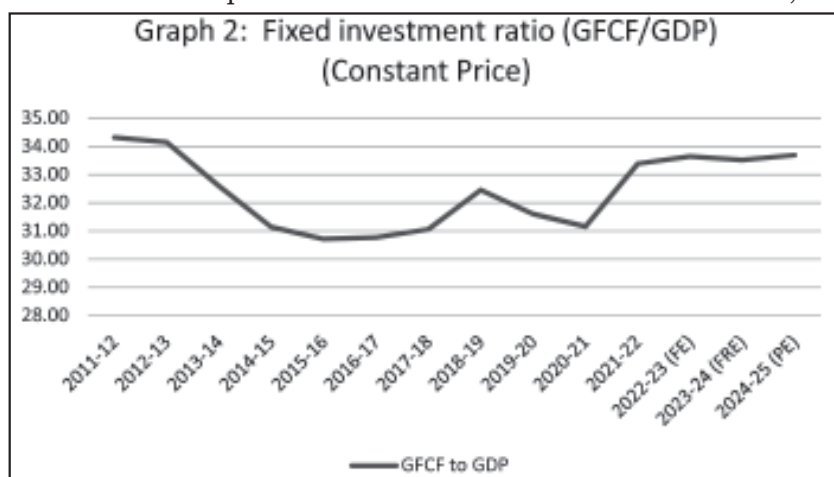
Institutional drivers: At constant prices, more than 70% of fixed investment in Indian economy is done by the private sector, comprising households and small unincorporated enterprises (HH) on the one hand and the large private corporate sector (PCORP) on the other. The two taken together accounted for 77.9% of fixed investment in 2011-12. By 2023-24 this had declined to 74%. Public investment, comprising PSU and Government investment, taken together accounted 21.2% of fixed investment in 2011-12. By 2023-24, their share had risen to 24.8%. On the face of it this suggests that over the period 2011-12 to 2023-24 the share of private investment has declined somewhat and that of public investment has risen.

There is however more to it than meets the eye. The brunt of the investment slowdown in Period I (2011-12 to 2015-16) is borne by the HH sector. Therefore, its share falls from 45.9% of fixed investment in 2011-12 to 32.7% in 2015-16. Over the same period, PCORP, PSU and Govt shares rise from 32, 11

and 10.2% to 40.3, 12.8 and 12.8%, respectively. From 2015-16 however there is another turnaround. By 2023-24, the share of the HH sector had recovered to 40.5%. The share of PCORP had declined to 33.6, the share of PSUs to 11.9 whereas that of the Govt had increased marginally to 12.9%. All this to say that the investment growth recovery in Period IIIa was driven largely by the HH sector followed by Govt. investment. PCORP and PSUs, relatively speaking, sat on the side lines.

Composition of fixed investment: Besides a change in institutional drivers there has also been a change in composition of fixed investment at constant prices. In 2011-12, 58% of fixed investment comprised dwellings and other buildings. Machinery and equipment accounted for 35%. By 2015-16, dwellings and other buildings had fallen to 53% and machinery and equipment risen marginally to 36%. By 2019-20 (end of Period II) share of dwellings and other buildings fell further to 51% and machinery and equipment had risen to 38%. By 2023-24, the share of dwelling and other building had recovered to 55% and that of machinery and equipment had declined to 35%. That fixed-investment growth is not driven by machinery and equipment will surely have adverse implications for labour productivity growth.

When we put together the changes in institutional drivers and composition of fixed investment the following pattern emerges: the investment-driven growth recovery of Period IIIa (2022-23 to 2024-25) is, at the



Source: on the basis of data from NAS, Statement 1.1:
Key Aggregates of National Accounts, 30th May 2025

margin, fuelled by HH sector on the one hand and Government investment on the other and was driven by investment in 'dwellings and other buildings' rather than 'plant and machinery'. The PCORP sector, and to a lesser extent PSUs, did not participate in the fixed investment surge in Period IIIa. The deceleration in current price GDP growth rates and its impact on expectation of profitability, discussed at some length above, had come home to roost and explains at least to some extent the hesitation of domestic PCORP investment.

This hesitation is in stark contrast to Indian corporate outward FDI. As TCA Sharad Raghavan using RBI data re-

ports in the *Hindu* (22nd June 2025, *Outward Investment Boom amid external enthusiasm amid internal caution in Indian industry*), outward FDI increased from \$4 billion in 2014-15 to \$29 billion in 2024-25, almost 625%! It is also perhaps useful to remember in this context that during the investment-driven boom from 2004-05 to 2011-12 (during UPA I and II) when the fixed-investment ratio hovered around 32-34%, for 7-8 years, at the margin, investment was driven by private corporate capital on the one hand and machinery and equipment on the other. Little wonder then that the economy has not been able to sustain a growth momentum.

We close this essay with an observation on the efficiency of capital use or to put it simply, a measure of how well we use the capital we build and create by investing as an economy. One such measure is ICOR (incremental-capital-output-ratio). In 2021-22 the ICOR stood at 4.8. By 2024-25 this had marginally, but secularly, worsened to 5.3. That is say that our efficiency of using of capital we have created in the last few years by investing has worsened. If in an economy, despite demand growth being investment driven, consumption does not grow and capital is wasted, wouldn't it be fair to say that it is stagnant and lifeless? □□□

RUSSIA IS WINNING

NATO's Ukraine War: A Look Back

Farooque Chowdhury

[The following article, "Behind the thick cloud over Ukraine", by Farooque Chowdhury is a reprint. It was first published on 12/03/2022 in Countercurrents. The article, published more than three years ago, made a number of observations. To have an appraisal of situation Frontier's Autumn Number 2025 reprints it.

The observations made in the article included: [1] the work of redrawing the map of hegemony by the world imperialists has begun; [2] Russia will make gains in a number of terms; [3] compromises will follow; and [4] the dominating part of the world capitalist system has to give away a certain space to Russia.

It should be mentioned that at that time—2022—the NATO camp was cheerfully hoping: [1] Russia would experience a humiliating defeat; [2] consequently, the country would collapse; [3] Russia's military power could stand a short period; [4] war for a longer period would be advantageous for the NATO camp as it could bleed Russia white; and [5] Russia can't withstand economic and financial sanctions the NATO camp imposed on Moscow, which would cripple down Russia's economy. But opposites happened. NATO's political and military leaders, and a group of "Left" pundits in countries miscalculated. Months later, a few Western experts began telling: Wars end in compromises. But, at the beginning of the war, none found the word "compromise".

NATO's Ukraine War is one of major signals of significant shifts in the existing imperialist world order. The shifts are visible not only in a single country or a single continent, but in countries and continents; and the shifts will continue strongly favouring the Global South. Putin-Trump Alaska summit is a part of this shift. The summit ended without any deal. In other words there is no ceasefire at the moment. They agreed not to disagree on holding another summit, hopefully in Moscow—Fr]

A THICK CLOUD IS NOW shrouding Ukraine, once a part of the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Sufferings of about two million people from Ukraine are now overwhelming all around the

world, as sufferings of refugees in many parts of the globe always pain humanity. There's the dark cloud of a confrontation over the land. The darkness of imperialist intrigues and intervention covers everything in and around Ukraine.

Two million people have been made homeless. They are fleeing away from their abodes, but they don't know their destiny, and address of a peaceful life. There's cold, there's hunger and there's fear haunting them all the time. The old, the infirm, the persons unable to walk don't know the path to survival and shelter. The children, walking along parents or being carried by parents, don't understand the intricacies behind their suffering, background of the burning buildings they are leaving behind.

The confrontation has brought in the sufferings of not only of the two million, but the entire population in the land—Ukraine. The confrontation is not without root, not without cause. There come the imperialist intrigue and intervention, which were going on for years. The confrontation's taking center stage of today's geopolitics is a last few weeks' development.

The confrontation was hatched up over years, proxies were mobilised, arms and ammunitions were deployed massively. The proxies included extreme right wingers,

Nazis. The politics was of spreading hatred. A Nazi collaborator of the World War II-days was eulogised and worshipped. Marches were organised in the name of that Nazi collaborator.

Bombardments on the Donbass region, and consequently thousands of deaths and injuries were a regular incident for the last few years. The dignified, truth-seeking MSM, the mainstream media, missed that incident. Thus, those deaths and sufferings went unreported. That was a near-total silent-reality. Was that silence justified? The MSM always claiming to be a truth-seeker know the answer.

There're reports of bio-weapon labs in the land, which is not investigated, but denied. Who operated and who collaborated in that venture with death?

Today's Ukraine follows a long trail of developments. It goes to the days the USSR was dismantled. The USSR-dismantling leaders were given words—NATO, the leading military alliance in the world, won't expand eastward—towards the lame, infirm post-USSR-Russia. Russian leaders of those days, they were great enough according to lackeys' standard, made them content with those verbal promises. The promise—no eastward expansion of the military alliance—went void. Then, it was denied—"no such promise was made". But, recent exposures show the promise, now being denied, was made to Russia.

Now, Russia, rising up from those days of sale-out and capitulation, makes claim to the lords—don't forget the promise, ensure my security. Russia drew a red line—ensure self-security. The red line widened—stop patronising neo-Nazi forces in Ukraine, ensure safety and rights of the minority section of the population in Ukraine, peacefully resolve the claim of the autonomy-seeking regions, stand by the agreement already concluded instead of ignoring that for years.

With this background, Russia had to stand by the red line it announced much earlier as that was its last stand. No country, other than countries led by lackeys of the lords of the world, shall deny standing for its sovereignty and security. No state, other than states led by lackeys of those lords, shall accept non-implementation of agreement concluded. Russia had to select its position—capitulate or question.

The confrontation began as correspondence—letters exchanged between the US, NATO and Russia—came to a halt, as Russia's red line was crossed, and Russia found options other than military have been exhausted.

One of the following developments includes sufferings rained on millions of people in Ukraine. Life is now dislodged there in the war-ravaged land—dislocated, scared, hungry, suffering millions.

The land has been pushed into a power game of capitals manifested mainly in military moves and diplomatic bargains. Consequently, the land is now a staging ground of the world imperialist system. Parts of the world capitalist system have unleashed an economic-financial war against another part, once a peer.

The enigma, or limitation, of this power show, essentially an economic war, by the part itself getting hurt with its moves, financial and economic, as it tries to hurt its opposition with the moves. This is one of the limitations of this economic-financial war against Russia—one of the entanglements the world capitalist system finds itself in its intricately interconnected and interdependent capitals. It's one of the characteristics of imperialist capital.

The cost-benefit ratio or the opportunity cost of this war is yet to be calculated. The cost or benefit is to be calculated in terms of capitals' direct gain or loss, and in terms of cost the citizens, taxpay-

ers, reproductive power and capacity, and labour under control of the concerned capitals is making, and will make in total. There'll be ultimate calculation at the end of this war: How much cost Russia paid and how much Russia's opponents?

Capitals are to reconcile this economy of war; and this has to be done in comparison to the geo-strategy and geo-tactics the capitals are driving to win and secure turf.

The immediate gain is being made by the capital in the war industry and its accessories including a part of banking, finance and mining. But, a part of banking, finance and mining is also making a payment for this war. Ultimately, this cost will be socialised—transferred to the wider society, and to the source that produces profit, the labour. Thus, to the capitals waging this war, this war is ultimately profitable.

But, no incertitude that taxpayers in countries have already begun to pay for the war the capitals are waging in the name of punishing Russia. This amount of payment by the taxpayers will increase not only in countries directly waging the war, but also in countries not at all involved with this war. In some countries, the political turf for governance will turn hot for the present faction of the ruling capital—a part of arithmetic of this war.

Whatever the last calculation of gain and loss, the work of redrawing the map of hegemony by the world imperialists has begun as Russia will make a gain in a number of terms. At the end of this part of fire spewing war, as compromises will follow, the dominating part of the world capitalist system has to give away a certain amount of space to Russia—a net gain that will be made by Moscow. Now, that, extent and form of space, is being ascertained in capital cities and cities including Versailles in formal and informal meetings.

Ukraine has been made a pawn

in this years-long war. The land now shrouded with sadness has been pushed forward as a proxy. The war alliance NATO has said unequivocally—fuel for war will be supplied, but no direct stepping in the line of fire, to face the line of fire, it's Ukraine. So, the people in Ukraine are paying the price as the leadership there has yet to reject the imperialist game plan.

Ukraine is exhibiting without any screen of fog the increasing contradiction on the world stage of capitals. It will increase further in the coming days as capitals have no other way than engaging into heightened conflict. Its major indicator is the world markets of ma-

nor/strategic commodities and finance following the Ukraine conflict. The world markets of these commodities have turned out as a major war front since ensuing of the conflict.

This increasing contradiction is a major threat to peoples in countries and to world peace, which finds no alternative other than people's movement against imperialist war, and its source—private capital. Flight path of capitals' contradiction is unknown even to the capitals involved in the contradiction/competition. Today's Europe is the evidence. None assumed such a bloody conflict in the metropolis of the world capitalist system. This

was shown years ago, by turning Yugoslavia one of imperialism's battle grounds. Dismantling of the USSR has not spared Europe, especially NATO from conflict, although the capitalist system dreamed for peaceful market days since it found its enemy—USSR—in vanquished condition. This is one of the "mysteries" of capital. The Ukraine conflict has once again shown this "mystery". Capital can't escape this "mystery". Coming days, after this thick cloud over Ukraine subsides, will show some more similar "mysteries" in different forms; and that's the reason for organising anti-imperialist people's movement. □□□

ADIVASIS OF DANDAKARANYA

Crying in the Forest!

Ranganayakamma

IN THE DANDAKARANYA region, where Adivasis live, during the combing and firing by government armed forces (on April 16, 2024), 29 Adivasi men and women were killed, according to newspaper reports! Among those who were shot, the newspapers showed the faces of 27 people! Almost all their faces were drenched in blood!

As far as the Telugu states are concerned, since 1969 till now, there have been about "more than 3,000" encounters, according to one count. Rights organisations have confirmed that all these encounters did not occur because police and Naxalites really faced each other in battle; in fact, very few were genuine encounters. In such thousands of encounters, the one that happened on April 16 is neither new nor the last! Even just yesterday or the day before, encounters took place. On May 11, twelve were shot dead, and on May 13, eleven were killed. However, the new thing is this: in the past, that is, about 30 to 40 years ago, when encounters happened, at least in some places, people held protest demonstrations. Nowadays,

such protests are not visible at all! Among the people of the plains, there is not even a minimal reaction, which is **inhuman!**

Someone may ask: "Are only the lives of tribals and Maoists valuable? What else can the police do except follow the government's orders and perform their duty? If Maoists kill such police, is that justified?" The answer is: Maoists see the exploitative government as their enemy, but not the police! Maoists know that the police, too, belong to poor working families, that they do not have higher education or big jobs, and that they took up jobs to suppress revolutionaries only because the government ordered them. Therefore, they are not enemies. When the government orders the killing of Adivasis who live in forests, and the Maoists who unite them into struggles, revolutionaries have no choice but to confront the police in self-defence, do they?

Adivasis are labourers who live in forests in poverty. The forests they inhabit are being handed over by the government to corporate companies for mining and for set-

ting up various industries! Why did the Maoists take the path of the forests? To unite the tribals, to awaken class consciousness in them, and to fight on their behalf! Not at all because the Maoists sought a livelihood for themselves. They came for an ideal! Even if there are mistakes in their thoughts, actions, or strategies, their main goal is to fight for the tribals! If one understands what that ideal is, would the police be able to remain in jobs where they fire upon such idealists and the innocent tribals?

The Maoists must self-examine one issue. "Why are the working-class people of the plains not responding to the deaths of the tribals, and to the deaths of those who lead them?" It is not enough to say something casually as self-criticism! For example, is the reason that youth are not joining movements as in the past simply because, due to globalisation, young men and women are rushing toward high-tech jobs and big salaries? But in the past, didn't doctors, engineers, lawyers, and teachers also join revolutionary movements? Did not many people support as activists or sympathisers? Is it correct to say now that because of fear of government repression, the people of the

plains are unable to express their protests? “Repression” has existed ever since “governments” themselves came into existence. Marxism says: ‘The state machinery is a tool created by the ruling class to suppress the ruled class!’ That exploitative state apparatus serves the ruling classes twenty-four hours a day, without pause. Whether elections are held, or heads of state die, or rains come, or summers scorch, or snow falls—this machinery continues its work.

There is an argument: “Governments are using advanced technology to track down and crush activists. That is why people cannot protest!” But if one looks at the history of the Vietnam revolution,

for example, did Vietnamese people not defeat America, which used the most advanced technology of the time and rained bombs upon them?

Where lies the real problem? It lies in mechanically believing that “revolution means a few conscious people fighting on behalf of the masses.” Among the working people, there are many different sections, and they must be united in mass organisations and class organisations. Their initiative must be enhanced. Those organisations should not be run as the party’s pocket organisations. Revolutionaries seem to have had little realisation of this from the beginning. Another notion exists—that “squad actions are the armed struggle.” Even youths with no basic understanding of communist ideology have been taken into the party under the name of “militancy,” simply on the basis of their individual courage. Among such entrants, some have turned into traitors who kill party leaders in their sleep and then disappear. How much have they understood the importance of learning revolutionary theory from Marx’s fundamental work, “Capital,” and moving forward with its essence?

If they have declared that they will overthrow the government with arms, then discussions with that government are futile. But discussions must be held with fellow revolutionary groups, to the extent that unity can be built with them. If someone says this, they are told, “You have no knowledge of history.” Should they not correct many misunderstandings and start afresh from the beginning? Let us recall the words of Engels that guide activists in uniting working-class people.

Engels: ‘The time has passed when a handful of conscious individuals could lead sudden attacks and revolutionary struggles on behalf of the unconscious masses. When the question is of transforming the social system completely, the working people themselves

must participate in class struggle! They must already understand what the problem is and what they are fighting for! For the people to understand what must be done, prolonged and continuous work is necessary.’

If such work does not happen even now, the people will sink into despair. It will not be only the Adivasis, but for all the people, it will remain nothing but the cry of the forests.

(Andhra Jyothi, 16-5-2024.

Translation: B R Bapuji)

II

CAPITALIST CURSES MUST END!

After reading the article “*Revolution... Must End*” by V V Subrahmanyam (Andhra Jyothi, August 16), which hurled curses against *Marxism*, this author felt compelled to respond.

First, listen to the curses that the author hurled against *Marxism*:

(1) Marxism is “a medicine more harmful than the disease!” “A poisonous drug!” In any industry, under any owner, the profit extracted in the form of money, without any labour of his own, from the value of the workers’ labour—this exploitation of labour is the ‘disease!’ Marx’s teaching is that people must understand this exploitation, oppose it, and free themselves entirely from it. But the author brands this teaching as a ‘harmful medicine’—and yet, in his entire article, he never once utters the phrase ‘exploitation of labour’. (2) Marxism is “a perverse doctrine!” (3) Marxism’s path is “a highway to downfall!” (4) Marxism is “a political theory of deceptive logic!”

Thus runs the list of curses against *Marxism*, which demands the abolition of capitalist exploitation of labour.

In the past, there have been other Subrahmanyams abroad who cursed *Marxism* in the same way. For example: (1) Raymond Aron, a Subrahmanyam of France, wrote a book against *Marxism*, calling it “*The Opium of the Intellectuals*.” (2)

আক্ষরিক প্রকাশিত
মানস ভট্টাচার্য লিখিত
“নায়ারদার কথা”

মানস ভট্টাচার্য

(কাম
বিজ্ঞান
নায়ারের
সঙ্গে
তিন দশক
সহ)

বইটি পাওয়া যায়
কলেজ স্ট্রিটের
দে বুক স্টোর, লালন ও
ধ্যানবিন্দু-তে।
কোনও অসুবিধা হলে এই নম্বরে
(ফোন হো.অ্যাপ) যোগাযোগ করতে
পারেন : ৯৪৩২০১৫৫০১

Gaetano Mosca, another Subrahmanyam from Italy, in his book *"The Ruling Class"* (page 518), accused Marx of spreading "destructive hatred between classes on every page of *Capital*."

Four years ago, this writer wrote a small book titled *"Answers to Criticisms against Marxism"* about such attacks by Subrahmanyams of other countries. Now, briefly, here are the answers to Subrahmanyam of Rajahmundry:

1. The critic says, "No revolution ever happened in the way Marx predicted." But was it carried out the way Marx advised? If it wasn't, how can one say his teaching failed? The revolutions in Russia and China were merely the first few steps in that direction. The main problem was that the Communists there did not grasp Marxism deeply enough, nor spread it widely enough among the working people. That is not a flaw in Marxism itself.
2. The critic makes a baseless argument that in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx said that revolution would come automatically, as if by itself. But what did Marx and Engels actually
3. The critic laments: "Perhaps Marx hated no one as much as he hated capitalists!" But should one worship, or hate, a class that survives only by exploiting labour?
4. The critic praises "the method of bringing in capital, creating wealth, and achieving development." But who creates wealth? Workers! And who receives it in the form of profit? The capitalist class!
5. Finally, the critic offers what he thinks is wise advice: "Since both capitalists and workers are necessary for social progress, we should avoid injustice between them, but it is foolish to think of eliminating any one class." Do capitalists gain from

write in the *Manifesto*? "The workers must form themselves into a class! They must overthrow bourgeois rule! They must seize political power! The first step in the workers' revolution is for the working class to become the ruling class, and to expropriate all capital—all means of production—from the bourgeoisie!" Where then did they ever say, as the critic distorts, that "revolution will come by itself"?

the workers or face injustice? Do workers get justice or injustice from the capitalists? Capitalists and workers are not the same. Capitalists do not labour. They live by robbing the labour of workers in the name of 'profit.'

The path that Marxism shows to solve the problem of exploitation of labour is: in society, all people must perform all kinds of labour according to their ability, and use the products according to their needs. Then there will be no division into 'capitalists' and 'workers'; there will be no classes at all. All will become "Associated (collective, cooperative) producers".

Finally, using the same adjectives employed by the critic, Marxism gives the wise advice to the critic: cut off at once the 'harmful, poisonous, perverse, and deceptive bond's that capitalism tied around your neck like a '*mangalsutra*'!

The critic concludes, "Revolution must end!" But what must really end are not revolutionary efforts, but capitalist curses! To borrow a Telugu saying, 'curses by the capitalist cat cannot break the milk pot sling of Marxism, hung above!' [Translation from Telugu by BR Bapuji]

NOT AN ACT OF GOD

The 2024 Mundakkai Landslide Disaster

Sagar Dhara¹

NATURAL CALAMITIES have plagued Kerala in the recent past. The August 2018 extreme rainfall event that caused landslides in Idukki District and floods in the coastal regions that killed about 500 persons and displaced a million people was similar to the Mundakkai disaster. The 2018 extreme weather event triggered a red alert in all 14 of Kerala's districts, affecting one-sixth of the state's population.

These Kerala events stand in

continuation of previous such extreme weather events that occurred earlier in Mumbai, Chennai, and other places. With an increase in warming, such events are predicted to increase in future. In its AR6 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had warned that the frequency of extreme events will increase. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, in its 2020 "Assessment of Climate Change Over India" report, states that there would be "a higher

increase in 1-day flood events is projected."

The risk of landslides occurring is the greatest during extreme rainfall events, particularly in areas with steep slopes and that have been disturbed by developmental projects. Wayanad District bears these characteristics.

Based on past data, several government documents and research papers categorise Wayanad District as a landslide-prone area. The Landslide Atlas of India indicates that Wayanad is a landslide-prone district. The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority identifies Wayanad as being highly sus-

ceptible to landslides due to heavy rainfall, steep slopes, and deforestation.

The landslide zonation map of Wayanad District provided by The Land Slide Susceptibility Study Report of Wayanad/2023, published in 2023, indicates that the Mundakkai-Choorlamala area, where the 2024 Wayanad landslide Disaster happened, falls in the Kottapadi (Meppadi) Panchayat that is located due south of Kalpetta, is categorised as a "Very High Risk Zone."

The Government of India invoked the legal doctrine, *parens patriae*, i.e., acting as a guardian for people, to seek compensation for the Bhopal gas tragedy victims when it enacted the Bhopal Gas Act in 1985. Despite recognising this role, the union and state governments have consistently failed to be the people's guardian and save their lives in natural and man-made hazard strikes, as risk mitigation has been given low priority in government policy. There are numerous examples of the government's failure to act as a guardian that have led to colossal loss of life in natural and manmade disasters.

For over three years before the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the Union Carbide Bhopal plant had several accidents that killed several plant workers. Rajkumar Keshwani, a journalist, wrote several articles warning of the safety lapses at the Carbide plant and of the possibility of a catastrophic accident in the plant. Regulatory authorities and Carbide's management ignored these warnings; consequently 25,000 people died when 42 tonnes of toxic methyl isocyanate leaked from the plant on a cold December night.

A glaring example of the

government's failure to save lives was in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The tsunami, which originated in Sumatra, hit the Andaman Islands at about 6.30 am. The Government of India was informed of it immediately. Yet, no action was taken to evacuate fishermen from India's east coast, which was hit 2 hours later by the tsunami. This resulted in the death of 10,000 fishermen who lived on the Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh coasts.

For four days before the Ersama super cyclone hit the Odisha coast, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) put out satellite pictures warning the Odisha Government of cyclone intensity, landfall location and time. Yet, the Odisha Government took virtually no action, and that resulted in the death of 50,000 persons.

Bhuj is a categorised Seismic Zone 5 area, i.e., a maximum earthquake risk-prone area. Bureau of Indian Standards codes for engineered and non-engineered structures (low-cost housing and slums) have existed before the 2001 Bhuj earthquake. Yet, few buildings were built using these codes. The 7.5 intensity (Richter scale) Bhuj earthquake collapsed buildings in Bhuj, Ahmedabad and other cities like a pack of cards, killing 25,000 persons. In a quake of similar magnitude that shook Seattle soon after the Bhuj quake happened, only 3 people died as structures in that city conformed to building standards for earthquakes.

The Western Ghats are an ecologically sensitive area and are at risk of landslides and rock fall in extreme weather events. Several reports have warned of this, but the union and state governments have not taken ad-

equated measures to minimise such risk. Indiscriminate development activities that are part of the reason for the tragic loss of life in the 2018 and 2024 landslide disasters in Kerala continue to be encouraged by the government and private sectors.

It is time that state and union governments are made to realise that one of their primary duties as *parens patriae* is to protect people from harm during natural and manmade hazard strikes. Public pressure must be exerted on governments to make risk minimisation an important public policy priority.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES FOR THE MUNDAKKAI DISASTER: REGIONAL CONTEXT

Wayanad district, situated in the northern part of Kerala along the crest of the Western Ghats, is a landscape of high ecological value and complex terrain. Bordered by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the district is characterised by steep slopes, deep valleys, and a network of rivers and streams that drain toward the west coast.

Its location in the path of the southwest monsoon makes it one of Kerala's most rainfall-rich regions. This combination of high relief and heavy precipitation creates conditions inherently favourable to landslides and floods.

However, natural vulnerability has been compounded over decades by human intervention. Since colonial times, the original evergreen forests have been extensively cleared for tea, coffee, cardamom, and rubber plantations. Logging, selective bamboo harvesting, conversion of forest land to agriculture, and tourism development have reduced the stability of slopes and altered hydrological systems.

Between 1950 and 2018,

Wayanad lost more than 60% of its natural forest cover, while plantation areas increased by 1,800%. The expansion of settlements, roads, and quarrying operations has further disrupted the delicate balance between geology, vegetation, and water flow.

RAINFALL TRENDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In recent decades, climate change has altered the character of Kerala's monsoon rainfall. While the total seasonal rainfall during the southwest monsoon has remained broadly similar, the number of rainy days has declined. The rainfall that does occur is increasingly concentrated into short, intense spells.

These high-intensity events exceed the soil's infiltration capacity and the drainage systems' carrying capacity, producing rapid runoff, soil erosion, and nutrient leaching. The Western Ghats' orographic barrier forces moist southwest winds from the Arabian Sea to rise and cool, generating deep cumulonimbus clouds, sometimes up to 15 kilometres high, capable of delivering "mini cloudburst" events – intense bursts of rainfall over small areas.

Kerala has experienced several such events in quick succession in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2024. With rising sea surface temperatures and more atmospheric moisture, the frequency and intensity of these extreme rainfall events are projected to increase, heightening the likelihood of floods, landslides, and debris flows.

GEOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Many areas in Wayanad contain kaolinite-rich clay layers, which are prone to saturation and loss of cohesion during intense rainfall. The district's topography is

dominated by steep hill slopes, escarpments, and concave slope curvatures that concentrate water flow. Parallel joint systems within the rock mass act as conduits for groundwater movement, allowing rainwater to penetrate and weaken potential slip surfaces.

In many parts of the district, poor surface drainage and elevated groundwater tables make slopes more susceptible to failure. The combination of geological weakness, steep relief, and intense seasonal rainfall creates an inherently unstable natural environment—one whose resilience has been reduced by human land use changes.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LANDSLIDES IN WAYANAD

Landslides are not new to Wayanad District. Historical records from 1848 to 1961 document numerous natural disasters, including cyclones, floods, and earthquakes. The 1900 Thamarassery Ghat landslide, possibly triggered by a water-spout, caused extensive damage. The 1923 and 1924 monsoons brought unprecedented rainfall, leading to widespread slope failures and flooding. In 1961, the Chembra slope failure killed several plantation workers.

However, for much of the 20th century, these events were infrequent. The last two decades have broken this pattern, with an upsurge in both the number and severity of landslides, reflecting the combined influence of climate change, land use modification, and population pressure on unstable terrain.

THE 2024 MUNDAKKAI LANDSLIDE DISASTER

The 30 July 2024 Mundakkai disaster was the worst landslide in Kerala's modern history. Occurring in two phases, it began around 1:00 AM when the upper

slope collapsed, blocking the Iruvazhinji Puzha River and forming a temporary dam. About three hours later, a much larger collapse breached the blockage, sending a high-energy debris flow 8 kilometres downstream through Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and Punchirimattam.

The slope had been destabilised by the 2020 landslide, which left deep cracks that widened in subsequent monsoons. In the two days before the event, 572 mm of rain fell on already saturated terrain, lifting groundwater to the slip plane. The geology—weathered charnockite with kaolinite clay – trapped water and further reduced cohesion. This combination of antecedent slope damage, intense rainfall, and geological susceptibility produced a catastrophic deep-seated failure.

Two hundred and ninety-eight people died, with a few still missing. The event affected nearly 200 hectares, destroying homes, plantations, and infrastructure.

HUMAN-INDUCED DRIVERS OF RISK

Decades of deforestation, forest-to-plantation conversion, and unregulated slope development have eroded Wayanad's natural defences against landslides. Population growth has pushed settlements onto steep slopes; while roads, resorts, and other infrastructure have been built without adequate hazard assessment. Quarrying in nearby panchayats has altered hydrology and weakened slope stability, with stream losses reducing aquifer recharge and lineament damage affecting groundwater flow. Plantation practices, such as rain pits, have increased infiltration into already unstable slopes.

The cumulative effect of these activities is a significant reduc-

tion in slope stability and resilience to heavy rainfall.

GOVERNANCE AND PREPAREDNESS FAILURES

The 2009 Expert Committee identified Meppadi Panchayat, where Mundakkai lies, as highly vulnerable to deep-seated landslides due to poor drainage and unregulated slope use. Its recommendations for drainage improvements, slope regulation, and hazard zoning were not implemented.

On 29 July 2024, the Hume Centre issued a rainfall-based landslide alert 16 hours before the first landslide occurred, but this was ignored by the Wayanad District administration.

The district authorities underestimated landslide risk even though many landslides had occurred in the district recently, and outside designated hazard zones. Early warning systems, but for the one that the Hume Centre had developed, were non-existent. Actionable landslide emergency response plans and evacuation protocols had not been developed, leaving communities unprepared when the landslides occurred.

SOCIOECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Most victims were plantation workers, small farmers, and marginalised communities living in hazard-prone areas. The disaster's toll went beyond the immediate loss of life and, for most of the evacuees, permanent displacements from their homes. Their livelihoods, which were tied to tea, coffee, and spice cultivation, were destroyed. Agricultural land was lost to debris, fertile soils were eroded, and the destruction of streams and aquifer recharge zones reduced long-term water security.

Infrastructure, including

roads, bridges, and community facilities, was swept away. The loss of forest patches, plantation crops, and riparian vegetation degraded biodiversity and habitat connectivity. For affected communities, the disaster also severed deep cultural and historical ties to the land.

INCONVENIENT QUESTION

The main issue in the 2024 Mundakkai Disaster is not how and why the landslide happened. Landslides in Kerala have been studied extensively, and the how and why they happen is understood. The main issue is that despite extensive knowledge about landslide-prone areas being available, why did the Kerala Government not enact land use laws to ensure that homes and workspaces were not located in landslide pathways, and why did the Wayanad District administration failed to take steps to minimise the loss of life in Mundakkai.

NEGLIGENCE IN UPHOLDING ART. 21 OF THE CONSTITUTION

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the fundamental right to life and personal liberty, has been interpreted by the Indian judiciary to include the right to a healthy environment. A healthy environment means an environment where the risk of morbidity and mortality due to environmental causes is minimised.

The Kerala Government has been negligent in upholding Article 21 of the Constitution, as it did not take the steps necessary to minimise landslide risk despite adequate information being available about such risks well before the 2024 Mundakkai Disaster.

Moreover, the Kerala Government failed to act as the guardian of the Mundakkai people. The

1985 Bhopal Gas Act, based on the legal doctrine of *parens patriae*, confers the state with the power to act as the guardian of those who cannot care for themselves.

The state's basic duty is to look after the welfare of all its citizens, and public health is central to this duty. If the state is negligent in performing its duty, it must compensate for injury and death.

BACKGROUND CAUSES FOR THE 2024 MUNDAKKAI DISASTER

The gap between actual and perceived risk makes risk mitigation difficult.

Human perception of risk is how we assess the probability of a hazardous event happening and what impact it may have. Risk perception is usually at variance with actual risk, i.e., the probability of the event happening. Human response to risk is driven by the human perception of risk, and not the actual risk.

To mitigate risk, the gap between actual and perceived risk is material, and not which of them is greater at a given point in time. The wider the gap, the more difficult it is to alter human behaviour to mitigate risk. Attempts to reduce risk through rules, laws, legislation, curfews, fines, campaigns, and other administrative methods do little to alter human behaviour to risk unless accompanied by programmes geared to alter risk perception.

The Wayanad District administration did not take note of the extremely heavy rainfall that occurred on 28-29 July or act on the Hume Centre's landslide warning, as they underestimated the risk of a landslide occurring. The lack of a Mundakkai-specific landslide emergency response plan is due to the same reason.

PRICE AND VALUE OF LIFE

Human life can have a price and a value. The price of human life is measured like a commodity in monetary terms and is determined by market forces. The value of life is the extent to which a society nurtures and supports the life of every individual in that society, without exception. High value of life societies invest in people because they are humans and attempt to minimise all risks they face—from disease, human violence, pestilence, natural and man-made hazards, hunger, etc.

A high life price does not automatically imply that it is a high value of life, and vice versa. There are high price and value of life societies, eg, Sweden; high price but low value of life societies, eg, USA; low price but high value of life societies, eg, Cuba; and low price and low value of life societies, eg, India.

India will invest in risk minimisation and take care of its citizens' welfare better when it starts transitioning from a low to a high-value-of-life country. But that road may have to be taken by raising the price of life, as has been done in the USA and Europe.

The transition from high price to high value of life can be completed only when society moves from a "Gain maximisation for a few" outlook to a "Risk minimisation for all" one.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MUNDAKKAI DISASTER VICTIMS

The victims of the 2024 Mundakkai Landslide Disaster should ask the Union and Kerala governments to take the following measures. These measures involve public participation of the local community to the maximum extent possible to make Mundakkai-Choorlamala a safer

place. It is only through such people's participation in risk reduction programmes can public risk behaviour can change.

GENERAL

- **Implement Kerala Government Expert Committee recommendations:** Implement the recommendations made by the Expert Committee constituted by the Kerala Government to study the 2024 Mundakkai Choorla-mala Landslide (see Annexe 6 in Chapter titled, "The Mundakkai Disaster: Not an Act of God"). And if some provisions are not implemented, the government should offer a public explanation for it.
- **Implement WGEEP, SESA and KESA report recommendations:** Implement the recommendations made by the Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel and the recommendations made by the Sahyadri Ecologically Sensitive Area Report, and the Kodachadri Sensitive Area Report. And if some provisions are not implemented, the government should offer a public explanation for it.
- **Meppadi Panchayat to do implementation:** The implementation of the recommendations made by the Kerala Government Expert Panel, WGEEP, SESA and KESA reports should, to the maximum extent possible, be done by the Meppadi Panchayat.
- **Remove people from landslide pathways:** Enact land use laws to remove people from the landslide pathways.
- **Copy Hume Centre's data collection and landslide warning method:** Emulate the Hume Centre's experiment with People's Science in setting up a system of basic meteorological stations in the villages that are at risk in Meppadi Panchayat to monitor rainfall and temperature. Train the Panchayat to

work on models that correlate rainfall with the probability of landslides and floods. Give due recognition to the Hume Centre's work on landslide disasters.

- **Meppadi Panchayat to do Landslide Emergency Response Plan:** Train members of Meppadi Panchayat to write site-specific Landslide Emergency Response Plans that includes: Criteria for sounding a landslide alert, a system for issuing a landslide warning that reaches all those at risk, a plan and an organisation for rescue, evacuation, relief and rehabilitation of people and domestic animals, transport, medical aid plans, vulnerable population identification, list of individuals and organizations that can assist during emergencies, evacuation camps, response organization structure and details of its specific responsibilities, control centre and its working, list of emergency equipment and location of various useful machinery, emergency management of relief camps, declaring emergency authority, mobilizing human and material resources, medical aid, ending emergency, rehabilitation, etc.
- **Support Karunya's work:** The work of community-based organisations such as Karunya should be recognised, encouraged, supported and emulated.
- **Meppadi to do development planning:** Meppadi Panchayat should be given the authority to determine the extent of development—land use change, extent of plantations and development that should be permitted, i.e., building new roads, extent of quarrying and tourism to be permitted, etc. The extent of development that is sustainable should be debated in the Meppadi Panchayat. Criteria for determining sustainable development are fuzzy, and therefore, they must be debated ex-

tensively in public forums in Meppadi Panchayat.

- **Meppadi Panchayat to give project consent:** In keeping in line with the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution, new development projects must necessarily have the consent of Meppadi Panchayat. Criteria for acceptable/unacceptable impact of projects must be established. Such criteria have been developed for India, but have not been implemented.
- **Compensate Mundakkai deaths @15 crores/death:** It is difficult to raise the value of life when the dominant global outlook is “Gain maximisation for a few”. Life will truly be valued when the global outlook changes to “Risk minimisation for all”, which will take time. The route to increasing the value of life is by first increasing the price of life so that it is cheaper to prevent loss of life than to pay compensation. A compensation of 15 crores per death should be paid if it is due to proven negligence of the government or any of its arms.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- **Sustainability:** Kerala Government must pledge to fully decarbonise Kerala State by 2045-50. Decarbonisation must focus primarily on:
 - a) **Mitigation** focused on the reduction of consumption levels and on supply-side management.
 - b) **Sequestration** focused on Nature-based Solutions that centre climate and social justice. In addition, decarbonisation strategies must eschew failed, untested, hypothetical market-based solutions and techno-fixes. Through these means, gross consumption should be reduced to sustainable levels, the measure for which should be a quantifiable justice-centric sustainability index.
- **Environmental justice:** Kerala Government should request the Union Government to lobby in COP meetings for environmental justice to become a central guiding principle for tackling the climate crisis, where environmental justice means:
 - a) **Responsibility for loss & damage:** Nations/regions take responsibility for climate change

impacts attributable to them—displacement, property loss, etc—in proportion to their cumulative emissions (emissions from 1750 to date);

- b) **Sharing benefits and risks equitably:** Engineering and administrative controls should be put into place (e.g., global warming mitigative and adaptive measures, facilitating population migration where risk becomes high) such that all people of the world face about the same degree of risk from the impacts of GHG emissions; and the wealth created by the use of fossil fuels are distributed equally to all people of the world.
- **Equity:** The ratio of the maximum to minimum income in Kerala should be less than 5.
- **Decentralisation, democratic, transparent governance:** Governance should be decentralised and democratic; all governance information should be in the public domain.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Member, Most ferocious predator that ever stalked Earth—humans; College-educated; Male; Upper caste and class; City slicker. Email: sagdhara@gmail.com

WIFE OF A MISSING POW SPEAKS

What happened to the “Missing 54”?

I Mallikarjuna Sharma

[54 Indian POWs in Pakistan languishing or died in prison since 1971! India released 93,000 Pakistani POWs but could not get released its mere 54]

PEOPLE KNOW THAT SO far India and Pakistan in the Indian subcontinent have fought 4 major wars and several other battles so far—mostly on the issue of Kashmir—but the third war in 1971 was fought mainly on the issue of genocidal violence on the East Pakistanis (East Bengalis) and it ended in complete victory for India in the eastern sector with considerable gains in the western sector too—most important, it has led to the liberation of East Pakistan from the yoke of Punjabi-dominated West Pakistanis and creation of an independent re-

public of Bangladesh. Unlike the wars in 1948, the issue of the 54 Indian prisoners of war (POWs) believed to be held in Pakistan since the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War remains a deeply emotional and unresolved matter. Here's what is known based on available information from various internet sources/channels like GROK, Deep Seek etc.

The 1971 Indo-Pakistani War resulted in the repatriation of most prisoners of war under the Simla Agreement of 1972, but 54 Indian defence personnel were declared *missing in action* and are believed by

the Indian government and families to have been secretly held in Pakistan, despite denials from Pakistani authorities. The 2007 film **1971**, directed by Amrit Sagar and a winner of the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi, was inspired by the real events surrounding these POWs, depicting a fictionalised account of six Indian soldiers attempting to escape from a Pakistani POW camp. Below is the complete list of the 54 individuals, including ranks where available (service numbers and units are noted only where specified in sources). The list comprises 22 from the Indian Army, 30 from the Indian Air Force, 1 from the Indian Navy, and 1 whose branch is unspecified.

1. Major SPS Waraich, 2. Major Kanwaljit Singh, 3. Major Jaskiran Singh Malik, 4. Captain Kalyan Singh Rathod, 5. Captain

Giriraj Singh, 6. Lt Sudhir Mohan Sabharwal, 7. Captain Kamal Bakshi, 8. Lt Paras Ram Sharma, 9. Major S.C. Gulari, 10. Major A.K. Ghosh, 11. Major A.K. Suri, 12. Sq. Ldr Mohinder Kumar Jain, 13. Flt Lt Sudhir Kumar Goswami, 14. Lt Cdr Ashok Roy, 15. Flt Lt Harvinder Singh, 16. Fg Officer Sudhir Tyagi, 17. Flt Lt Vijay Vasant Tambay, 18. Flt Lt Ilyoo Moses Sassoon, 19. Flt Lt Ram Metharam Advani, 20. Flt Lt Nagaswami Shanker, 21. Flt Lt Suresh Chander Sandal, 22. Flt Lt Kushalpal Singh Nanda, 23. Wg. Cdr Horsern Singh Gill, 24. Flt Lt Tanmaya Singh Dandass, 25. Captain Ravindra Kaura, 26. Sq Ldr Jal Miniksha Mistry, 27. Flt Lt Ramesh Gulabrao Kadam, 28. Flg Officer Krishan Lakima J Malkani, 29. Flt Lt Babul Guha, 30. L/Naik Hazoor Singh, 31. Sq Ldr Jatinder Das Kumar, 32. Flt Lt Gurdev Singh Rai, 33. Flt Lt Ashok Balwant Dhawale, 34. Flt Lt Shrikant Chandrakant Mahajan, 35. Flt Lt Kottiezath Puthiyavettill Murlidharan, 36. Captain Vashist Nath, 37. L/Nk Jagdish Raj, 38. Sep Madan Mohan, 39. Sep Pal Singh, 40. Sep Daler Singh, 41. Lt Vijay Kumar Azad, 42. Sujan Singh, 43. Gunner Shyam Singh, 44. Sep Gian Chand, 45. Sep Jagir Singh, 46. Subedar Kali Das, 47. Flt Lt Manohar Purohit, 48. Pilot Officer Tejinder Singh Sethi, 49. L/Naik Balbir Singh, 50. Sqn Ldr Devaprashad Chatterjee, 51. L/Hav Krishan Lal Sharma, 52. Sub Assa Singh, 53. Capt OP Dalal, 54. SBS Chauhan.

For one thing Pakistan was a founding member of two Cold War-era military alliances formed under the US leadership in the 1950s—SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) established in 1954 with limited effectiveness during Vietnam War and other international conflicts but Pakistan withdrew from it in 1973 due to lack of assistance in its conflicts with India; CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation, initially known as the Baghdad Pact but renamed in 1959 due to withdrawal of

Iraq from it), which included Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and the UK with US support which dealt with regional stabilities including the 1979 Iranian Revolution. However, SEATO and CENTO were formally dissolved on 30 June 1977 and 16 March 1979 respectively and there is no news of any other military alliance in the region (South Asia and the Middle East) taking its place later. So, it is quite possible that Pakistan actively aided and abetted the main terrorist actions held in Indian Kashmir or other places of the country.

As regards these missing Indian POWs it is remarkable that the admission of the same was prominently published in a Pakistani newspaper '**Pakistan Observer**', then published from Dhaka reported on 05 Dec 1971 (in its Sunday edition) that five Indian pilots had been captured and one of them was Flt Lt Tomboy, a presumed distortion of Tambay. Later his wife Smt Damayanti during her search for her husband found many leads/evidences that gave credence to the fact that Flt Lt Tambay was being kept as a POW in Pakistan. Pakistan, however, never acknowledged the presence of Flt Lt Tambay in a Pakistani jail. Presently, Flt Lt VV Tambay's name features on the official list of the '**54 Personnel Missing in Action**', tabled in the Lok Sabha in 1979 by the then Minister of State of External Affairs Shri Samarendra Kundu—may be the same list given above.

It is interesting to note that Mrs Damayanti Tambay gave an extensive interview (available on YouTube—<https://youtu.be/zL2DFOeLaxw?si=GqG-KlOHCvAdPVbE> Premiered Oct 7, 2023 #NDTV #TodayNews #BreakingNews—a must watch in which she graphically describes her woes and utter loneliness she has been experiencing since all these five decades but firmly facing and countering them all along and how all her efforts to find the whereabouts of her husband in Pakistan and through Indian diplomatic and government channels have failed. NDTV describes: She is "a triumphant 6-time badminton champion and an Arjuna

Awardee, she conquered the sports arena with her skill and determination. However, Damayanti Tambay's life took an unexpected turn when her husband was captured during the tumultuous 1971 India-Pakistan war and never returned. In the face of this profound personal loss, Damayanti's strength and courage shone even brighter as she embarked on a new journey. Damayanti Tambay's life story is a testament to the power of the human spirit to overcome challenges and make a lasting difference in the lives of those around her." This writer deeply sympathises and commiserates with her but also feels she and her colleagues in JNU, a leftist student stronghold for decades, especially in those days till 2004 or so, failed to organise and conduct any concerted agitation in this regard and shake up the portals of power and wake up the entire nation to this horrible tragedy. This writer itself was in JNU Campus more than 2-3 times during those years with wide contacts among leftist student leaders and even faculty members but though Damayanti Tambay was there in the faculty as a Sports' Director, he never heard of her even, and even this shocking news of 54 Indian POWs missing this writer came to know only quite recently!

Well, be as it may, it seems there should be some good closure to this development with central government—now of BJP led by Mr. Modi but of any other party in near future for that matter—The government must exert full efforts to get these POWs—to the extent they are still alive, because by now they may be around 75-95 years ages if still alive—repatriated to the country and even approaching the International Court of Justice as India did in the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav—said to be a RAW agent, operating in Iran and border areas of Pakistan, captured and sentenced by a Pakistani military court to death—and temporarily succeeded by averting his hanging and the matter is still pending therein Also, social activists and intellectuals should exert their best efforts in this regard without any further negligence on the ground that none of them may be alive now. □□□

HOLBERG PRIZE

Celebrating Gayatri di in Bergen

Lakshmi Subramanian

I HAD THE SINGULAR PRIVILEGE of participating in a symposium that was put together under the auspices of the Holberg Prize Committee in the city of Bergen, home to Ludvig Holberg, the 18th century essayist, writer, philosopher and historian and in whose name the Holberg Prize is named after and awarded annually by the Norwegian government to an outstanding scholar in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In accordance with convention, the theme of the symposium was suggested by the laureate Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and a panel recommended by her to speak on it. The theme that Gayatri di chose was **'The Power of the Humanities'**, entirely appropriate to the work that she has done for more than sixty years as an academic, an activist and a life-long champion of the right to learn that carries with it the obligation to listen.

The symposium was the inaugural event of the Holberg week (2-6 June, 2025) that had several events featuring the Holberg laureate Gayatri di and the Nils Klim laureate Daniela Allattinoglu. It was an extraordinary week, where I had the opportunity of listening to Gayatri di's interactions with Nordic scholars, in particular the Nils Klim laureate, and of engaging with the school programme that is also part of the Holberg week. I do not wish to present a summary of the events (all of them happen to be available on the internet as YouTube recordings) but will use this occasion to reflect on my appreciation of Gayatri di's work as I have come to know it, albeit in a limited way. Being neither a student of literature nor of philosophy and post-colonial theory, my familiarity with her work is limited but not without consequence. It was her essay, "Can the Subaltern



Speak?" that spoke to me powerfully, an essay that I could relate to and one that acted as a conduit to understanding her extraordinary scholarship that was theoretically rooted in Western philosophical traditions and equally at home with local realities. It is this combination that has continued to exercise for me a powerful appeal—a combination that resists easy stereotyping of her work and positionality and renders her work of translation as a self-conscious political act. I got to know Gayatri di better when our mutually close friend Hari Vausudevan helped develop a project that we called 'Radiating Globality: Old Histories and New Geographies', that took us to Chandernagore, Kolkata, Princeton, Dakar, and Yunnan. It was in course of this project that I really got to know the seductive power of Gayatri di's imagination in revisiting globalisation, its antecedents and pre-histories that we have tended to overlook in our linear study of colonial power and dominance. It was also during our discussions that I got to know firsthand the extraordinary work she has done with schools, the everyday challenges she encountered and the uncompromising stand she takes on learning in the mother tongue and in enabling the process of learning and training, what she calls muscle memory and which has been denied for millennia to the impoverished and marginalised in India. Her work is not, she vehemently insists, philanthropy but an act of entering voluntarily and sincerely into the texture of society.

In the symposium that we were part of, in the Holberg Laureate lecture that she delivered thereafter, and the acceptance speech that came at the end, all these facets came forward as she took us through her work. The power of the

Humanities, she demonstrated emphatically, lay in training the soul, training the imagination by displacing oneself; something that was absolutely essential if one is to take democracy seriously. The Humanities, she demonstrated, is a powerful tool that can actually be deployed in tackling the crisis that faces the world, but only if we consider the practice of learning seriously. This cannot be reduced to knowledge management structured around speed and efficiency, put forward by corporate universities, but has to engage with a textural focus on different needs, respecting the wealth of local and global languages, an engagement with desire and aspirations in the classroom, be it *Columbia* or *Purulia*. The Holberg Laureate lecture elaborated the power of the Humanities in reimagining the future, in reimagining imperatives—collective, individual—in rearranging desires that alone can help participate in democracy and in taking a planetary view of the future. Training the imagination was the recurrent motif of the lecture that she delivered with elegance and eloquence. Bergen came together to celebrate this remarkable display of scholarship and empathy which came full circle when she gave the final acceptance speech for the award and referred to another prize that she had got in West Bengal, when villagers voluntarily gave her a building for the school that she proposed.

It was a magical and enchanted week when students, scholars, school children, and teachers came out in full numbers to hear what is undoubtedly one of the most important voices we have in our midst, at a time when the world is battling uncertainty and divisiveness and speed running fascism. Two words suddenly carried more potency for all of us assembled there and with which I would like to conclude this brief note: imperative and imagination.

□□□

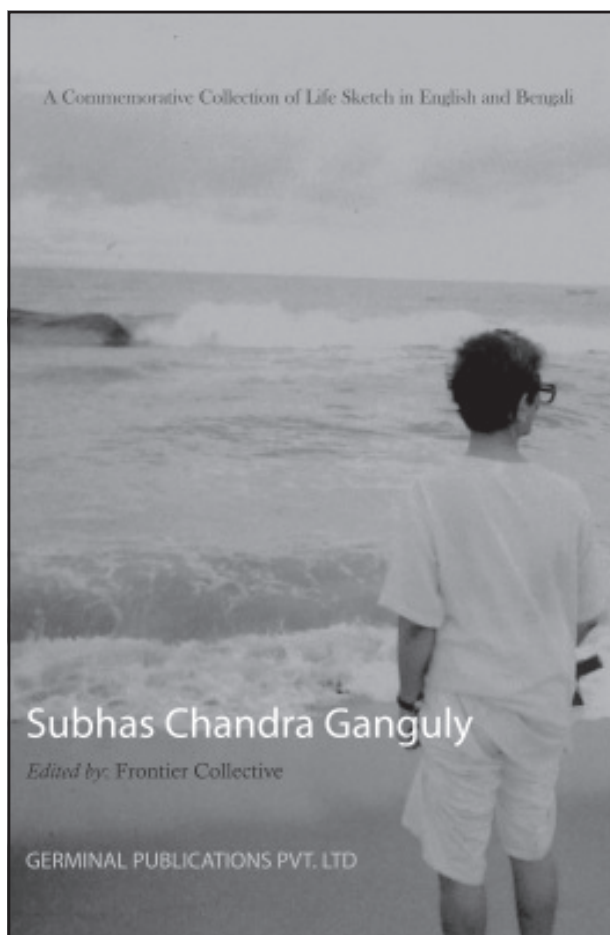
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