

# Liberation

JANUARY 2022

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

Rs. 25



2 YEARS OF

**SHAHEEN BAGH**

**NO TO CAA-NRC-NPR**

# Linking Aadhaar To Voting Is An Attack On Voting Rights

The passing of the The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha is a dangerous step towards eroding India's democracy. This proposed amendment seeks to link voting rights with Aadhaar verification. Like so many other anti-people laws, this amendment too was bulldozed through the Lok Sabha by a voice vote, overriding the demand by many Opposition MPs that the Bill be referred to a parliamentary committee that could reflect on its implications and consult experts.

The historic Constitutional Bench judgment of 2017 had upheld the Right to Privacy as a fundamental right – something the Government of India had denied in its defence of the Aadhaar Unique Identification programme. In 2018, the Supreme Court had upheld the Constitutional validity of Aadhaar but had restricted its use to state-run welfare programs, and had upheld a 2015 SC order halting the National Election Roll Purification and Authentication Programme, which had sought to link Aadhaar with voter IDs. In 2018, the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh violated this SC order and linked Aadhaar with voter IDs – as a result at least 55 lakh voters were arbitrarily deleted from voter rolls.

Already, Aadhaar linkage has already resulted in mass exclusion of the poor and needy from PDS rations and MRREGA benefits, due to technological failures, even leading to deaths from starvation. Aadhaar linkage has already led to large scale deletion of voters in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Further, it is clear that Aadhaar will link voter identification to the mobile phone and thus to social media, and will inevitably enable profiling of voters based on their social identity, political views and other preferences. This will allow for manipulation of voter rolls and deletion of voters based on such political and social profiling. It will also put the voters at the mercy of ruling party intimidation and allurements, since the ruling party can use Aadhaar to control access to welfare schemes as well as voting rights.

The Government's claim that Aadhaar linkage will be "voluntary" is deliberately misleading. Linking Aadhaar to voting will make it mandatory, just as linking it to welfare schemes

has ended up making Aadhaar mandatory. The claim that Aadhaar can "clean up" databases is ridiculous since Aadhaar itself has proven to be full of human errors as well as fraud: in fact, more so than electoral rolls.

Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship. Linking it to voting will be a blow to democracy. This move to strangle democracy must be resisted tooth and nail. Scrap Aadhaar! Say no to linking Aadhaar to voting! ■



# Liberation

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# Pledge of December 18

★ **Consolidate the Historic Victory of the  
Farmers' Movement!**

★ **Strengthen the CPI(ML) to Intensify  
the Battle against Fascism!**



**M**ajor questions of history are resolved through people's struggles on the streets. These words of Comrade Vinod Mishra have once again been proved right in our experience. Taking advantage of the Covid pandemic, Modi government had sought to transfer the reins of agriculture to big private companies through three fraudulently passed farm laws. But the farmers of Punjab managed to build up a movement in the midst of the pandemic that went on to write history by energising farmers across

the country, sustaining the movement for one full year defying draconian laws, demonising propaganda and violent attacks, and eventually forcing the arrogant Modi government to repeal the laws lock, stock and barrel. Comrade Vinod Mishra would have been most happy to see the farmers' movement grow into such a powerful anti-fascist barricade.

The Modi government understands the power of the farmers' movement. It clearly has the power to challenge corporate aggression, it also has the power to defuse the otherwise potent bomb of communal polarisation and inspire confidence all around among all forces fighting for their rights. Even while repealing the laws ahead of the crucial UP and Punjab elections, the Modi government is therefore refusing to arrive at a negotiated settlement with the farmers' movement. The 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' accompanying the Farm Laws Repeal Bill camouflages the bill as an 'Amrit Mahotsav' expression of magnanimity on the part of the Modi government to make protesting farmers happy. The arrogant and deceptive propaganda of the regime cannot however hide its defeat and desperation.

The farmers are absolutely right to press on for their other key demands including dismissal of minister Ajay Mishra Teni who instigated the violent attack on protesting farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri, withdrawal of all cases against farmers and activists participating in the movement and legal guarantee for MSP for all crops and all farmers. If Punjab, Haryana and western UP farmers successfully spearheaded the struggle for repeal of the farm laws, it is now for farmers of other states, especially where procurement is low and farmers are forced to sell at prices way below MSP, to play a bigger role in the next phase of the movement. While farmers are denied Minimum Support Price for their crops and most workers are denied Minimum Wages for their hard labour, companies are allowed to charge ever increasing Maximum Retail Price from the consumers. The battle for MSP will thus have to be linked with the fight for living wages and control over rising prices.

We should also realise that the movement has succeeded because of months of organised efforts and intensive and systematic mobilisation of farmers

in their millions. The inspiration generated by the historic victory of the farmers' movement should now be converted into extensive organisation building and wider political mobilisation.

A week after announcing the repeal of the farm laws, Narendra Modi chose the occasion of 26 November, the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India, to negate the basic spirit of the Constitution. Afraid of the Constitution, especially the vision upheld in the Preamble and the fundamental rights committed by the Constitution, becoming a weapon in popular struggles for rights, the Prime Minister sought to turn the Constitution upside down by making rights subservient to duties. It should be noted that the section on duties of citizens was incorporated through a constitutional amendment only during the Emergency. As the regime intensifies the assault on democratic institutions, federal framework and constitutional values and commitments, we must draw every inspiration from the victory of the farmers' movement to strengthen the anti-fascist resistance. The farmers' movement itself was inspired by the path-breaking equal citizenship movement and the heroic rise of the Shaheen Bagh model powered by Muslim women and university students.

2021 has been a year of terrible sufferings for the Indian people when the state abdicated its responsibilities to save lives, and resorted to brutal repression, cruel anti-people policies and systematic sale of public assets. Yet we are ending the year on the high note of people's victory won through heroic struggles and enormous sacrifices. The new year begins with crucial Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. Let us summon all our strength and energy to turn these elections into a powerful people's movement to push back the fascist forces.

Today as we observe the 23rd anniversary of Comrade VM's untimely demise, we must remember his lifelong battle to develop the CPI(ML) as a powerful communist party combining ideological boldness and organisational strength with courageous initiative and assertion of the people. The strengthening of the party holds the key to victorious assertions of the people. With growing challenges, we can also identify a lot of new potential for the expansion of the party and its enhanced role in terms of all-out initiatives and intervention. Let us seize the moment and make 2022 a year of even better efforts and bigger victories. ■



## ***Time's Up: Scrap AFSPA***

**T**he massacre of coal mine workers by a Special Forces unit of the Army in Oting village of Mon district in Nagaland is a heinous crime, compounded by attempts to cover it up by staging a fake encounter. The attempts by Home Minister Amit Shah and the Army officials to explain it away as a "mistake" cannot convince even the BJP's own members and allies in the North East.

The armed forces claimed that they ambushed and fired on a truckload of civilians (coal mine workers returning from work), killing six of them on the spot, because they had "credible intelligence" of movement by insurgents. But this excuse is flimsy for more than one reason.

In the first place the killings took place on a busy thoroughfare in broad daylight. In the second place the forces violated protocol by failing to inform and involve the local police

forces. Moreover, the armed forces fired without provocation or warning, let alone any attempt to identify the occupants of the truck - and this would be a human rights violation even if the truck in fact carried insurgents.

When local civilians heard of the killings and came to investigate, they say that they found the armed forces in the process of staging an "encounter". Justifiably enraged, civilians protested at the local army headquarters. Again, the army indulged in indiscriminate firing on civilian protestors, killing seven. The forces then reportedly fled the scene, firing even at residences of coal mine workers on the way. In total, 15 civilians have been killed so far in the ambush and its aftermath. Many others are severely injured.

This incident is no aberration. In the North East states, as well as in Kashmir, Bastar and other conflict

areas, civilian killings staged as encounters are common. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has its genesis in the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 1942 promulgated by the British to quell the Quit India movement. Shamefully this law with colonial roots has been in effect as an Indian law in the North East since 1958.

The AFSPA provides impunity from prosecution to armed forces on allegations of murder, torture and even rape. This is why, even though the Nagaland police has filed an FIR against the Special Forces in the Oting massacre case, it will be unable to pursue prosecution without sanction from the Central Government - and such sanction is almost never granted. Even in the notorious case where a judicial enquiry found Assam Rifles personnel guilty of the gangrape and murder of Thangjam Manorama in Manipur in 2004, the



Protest in Kohima in Nagaland on December 17 against the December 04 massacre of civilians by Indian army . YIRMIYAN ARTHUR

AFSPA has protected the guilty from prosecution till now.

The people of the North East have long protested against the AFSPA as the chief enabler of military atrocities against civilians. The protest by the women of Manipur at Assam Rifles headquarters where they stripped and held up a banner screaming “Indian Army Rape Us” remains a stinging indictment of the AFSPA. But successive governments of different hues have refused to scrap the AFSPA or hold Army and paramilitary forces accountable for crimes against civilians in the NE, Kashmir, Bastar and elsewhere. Some 1500 cases of fake encounters in Manipur over the last two decades are currently seeking justice in the

Supreme Court.

The BJP brands human rights defenders who raise the issue of fake encounters and rapes by armed forces as “anti-nationals” and threatens them with sedition laws. Leading Kashmiri human rights defender Khurram Parvez of the JKCCS has recently been arrested and faces cooked up allegations under the draconian UAPA law. The JKCCS is known for its meticulous documentation and advocacy of human rights in the Kashmir valley, including many massacres covered up to look like “encounters” just like the one just witnessed at Oting.

Now, even the Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Meghalaya - both BJP

allies - are demanding the scrapping of AFSPA, while a BJP leader of Mon district is accusing the Army of firing on him and other civilians and attempting to stage a fake encounter.

Alongside the repeal of AFSPA justice demands the demilitarisation and accountability for past military action and human rights violations. The enquiries into human rights violations in the North East and Kashmir, even when ordered in the past, have been a sham and the perpetrators have escaped unpunished.

Further, the trial in the Oting case as well as other allegations of crimes by armed forces must be held in open civilian court. There must be compliance with International humanitarian and human rights law and constitutional standards in all ongoing armed conflicts.

It is high time the country stands up against military solutions and demands for accountability from the forces. The whole country must rise up in protest to give the AFSPA a final push. As we observe 75 years of independence, it is high time that we get rid of the AFSPA which has its genesis in colonial governance, and ensure justice and accountability for every act of custodial violence in conflict areas. ■

## Bank Privatisation Is a Disastrous Idea - Stop It

Despite having been forced to beat a retreat on the pro-corporate farm laws, the Modi government is aggressively pushing for reversal of nationalisation in another key sector: banking. Five decades after the historic bank nationalisation, the government now desperately wants to bring down the minimum government holding in public sector banks from 51 percent to 26 percent apart from carrying out outright privatisation of select public sector banks. The government is however aware that in these five decades,

public sector banks have acquired a reputation for being safe and stable while private banks are considered risky in popular perception. Before going for privatisation, the government has therefore launched a new ‘depositors first’ rhetoric, promising depositors a refund of up to half a million rupees (last raised in 1993 to Rs one lakh) within a period of ninety days in the event of a bank collapse.

Total volume of bank deposits in India has grown steadily in the five decades of bank nationalisation and quite rapidly in recent years. In the last one decade deposits grew threefold, rising from the 50-trillion mark in February 2011 to 100 trillion rupees in September 2016, and to over 150 trillion by the end of March 2021. Despite growing promotion of private banks, public sector banks still account for two thirds of total deposits in India. Demonetization has had little effect on black money, but it has certainly forced more people towards banking, and



*Bank employees protesting against the attempts to privatise the Public Sector Banks on December 16 . GAON-CONNECTION*

growing use of digital transactions has also played a major role in the growth of banking in recent years. Bank privatisation first of all means enabling private companies to gain direct control over the massive financial resources generated through public savings.

The push for privatisation has been premised as a solution to the crisis of the banking industry and the biggest factor contributing to this crisis is what is euphemistically called NPA or non-performing asset. Now bank loans always run a certain risk of non-payment, but that in-built risk never assumed the proportions of today's NPA crisis till standard lending norms were adhered to and banking prudence was not sacrificed at the altar of the compulsions of crony capitalism and the collusive business-politics nexus. While liberalisation of banking norms has aggravated the malaise, the impunity granted to wilful defaulters has made it worse.

The scale of the problem can easily be seen from the following figures: a whopping Rs 11,68,095 crore or close to rupees 11.7 trillion worth of bad loans have been written off in last ten years, with as much as 10.72 trillion having been written off in the Modi era since 2014-15. Technically a written off loan can still be recovered, but the proportion of such recovery is not more than 15 percent. Meanwhile, NPAs continue to grow even as some

are periodically written off. The value of NPAs continued to hover at more than 6 trillion rupees even after 12 million worth of loans were written off in last ten years!

With nationalisation of banks came the emphasis on priority sector lending - lending for agriculture, MSMEs, housing, education, social infrastructure projects and purposes. The bulk of the NPAs has however originated elsewhere - primarily in the corporate sector. With privatisation, priority sector lending will suffer and banking will increasingly be pushed towards short-term profit-making through share market and other quick return investments. It should be noted that banking reforms are being accompanied by parallel pension reforms, whereby foreign investment in pension sector is being raised from 49 to 74 percent and pension funds too are being diverted towards the share market for quick returns. This is the perfect recipe for inviting volatility in India's financial sector. All these years India had managed to steer clear of the global financial crisis, the stability and resilience of India's financial sector will now give way to increased vulnerability and crisis.

The common people are concerned not just about the safety of their own deposits. They are equally concerned about the overall orientation and

performance of the banking system. For all Modi's rhetoric of taking banking to the masses, banking has been becoming increasingly expensive for common users who are having to pay user charges just to keep their own money. We have seen how big corporate borrowers get away even after turning wilful defaulters even as farmers, microfinance borrowers and other small borrowers like students, jobseekers and traders are subjected to endless harassment and even driven to suicides for failing to repay their small loans on time. Pensioners and middle class consumers depending on banks for ensuring a steady return on their savings are having a tough time with falling interest rates.

Depositors' interests are hurt not just in the rare cases of bank collapses but equally when banking becomes unsafe and expensive for common users and the financial resources generated through hard-earned public savings are used to promote private profits. Common people should all therefore make common cause with bank employees to stall the disastrous idea of bank privatisation. Just as the farmers have won with their own united struggle and popular support, bank employees too deserve wider support and cooperation in the battle against privatisation and for saving Indian banks and financial sector. ■

# Vaccine Racism and Omicron

▲ RADHIKA KRISHNAN

Since its emergence in end the 2019, the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) has been wreaking havoc on lives, livelihoods and economies across the globe. The character of viruses is to mutate and develop new forms and structures. COVID-19 is no exception and various mutations (at least 12 of these have been fairly widespread) of coronavirus have been identified since the first strain emerged in 2019. In late November this year, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified Omicron as a “variant of concern”. Not all mutations are a cause of worry. But Omicron, a variant of the COVID-19 virus which was identified in South Africa towards the end of November, has been identified as a variant of concern because it is known to spread much faster than other coronavirus strains. More alarming from a public health point of view is the concern that all the current vaccines are likely to be far less effective against Omicron as compared to other variants such as the Delta variant which caused the deadly second COVID wave earlier this year in India.

As scientists and public health experts tried to make sense of the ramifications of this new variant, and as governments across the globe rushed to shut down borders and restrict travel from South Africa and other countries in Africa, WHO’s Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus sought to highlight the inherent biases prevalent in public health policy in the world today. He spoke about lack of equity in access to vaccines, and how large unvaccinated populations lead to potentially more dangerous variants such as Omicron. Along with this, he shared a short video talking about the grossly unequal distribution of vaccines and the dangers of vaccine hoarding by rich countries. This video ended with a pithy tagline: “If the vaccine isn’t

everywhere, the pandemic isn’t going anywhere”. The science is simple: if people in any part of the globe are not vaccinated in large numbers, this provides a fertile breeding ground for the virus to mutate and create new (and possibly more dangerous) variants of itself.

So we need to ask, if the science is so clear, then why have we seen such an abysmal vaccination track record in many parts of the world? An article in the British Medical Journal states that only 6.3 per cent of people in lower income countries have received one dose of the vaccine, and only 7 per cent of people in Africa (where Omicron was originally identified) are vaccinated (<https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3074>). Only 1 in 4 of African healthcare workers have been vaccinated, compared to at least 75 per cent of healthcare workers in the global North. The contrast could not be more stark. While poorer countries are struggling to provide even one dose to even one-tenth of their populations, the US and UK are now giving booster shots to their citizens to protect them from newer and more dangerous variants, having vaccinated all those who wanted vaccines months back. This brings us to a crucial issue that we cannot and should not ignore: the issue of vaccine racism, and role of race and class structures and the role of the processes of colonialism, imperialism, liberalisation, privatisation and corporatization.

## The Failure of the COVAX Model

When the COVID pandemic emerged, public health officials were well aware that vaccine inequality would become a reality, unless collectively addressed by the world. As a result, COVAX was created – a global collaboration set up with the intention of ensuring that every person in the world would receive the vaccine. Poorer nations

would be provided enough vaccines to vaccinate at least 20 per cent of their populations free of cost. This would be funded by rich nations and charities. Richer nations on the other hand would benefit from COVAX, because COVAX could provide them access to the best vaccines developed anywhere in the world. As a result of their collaboration with COVAX, rich nations could avoid entering into exclusive financial arrangements with each and every lab working on a possible vaccine. Instead, they could focus on some potential labs and hope to use vaccines developed elsewhere through COVAX. Like most other public policies, COVAX however failed because of the lack of political will and public sector financing.

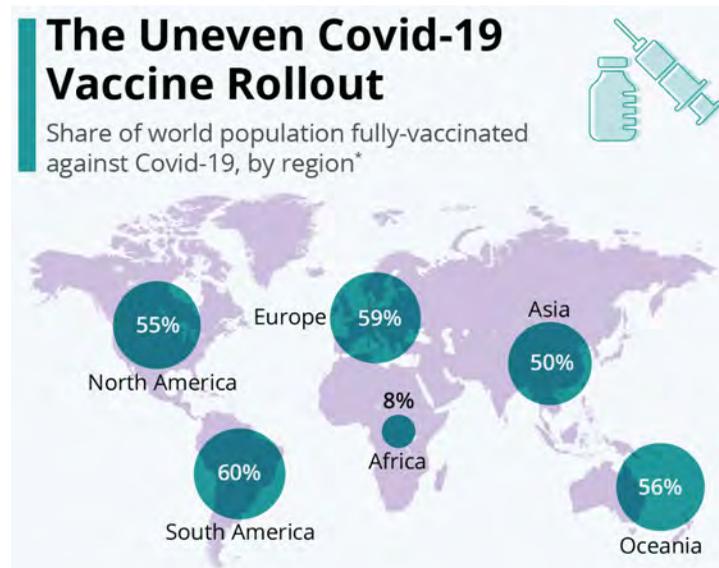
Poor nations, who depended on COVAX for their vaccine supplies, were left high and dry; in the middle of the pandemic COVAX stopped communicating with them and as a result several countries had absolutely no idea when (if at all) they would be provided vaccines. These countries had then to look for alternative sources of vaccines. Uruguay and Namibia for instance stopped waiting for vaccines from COVAX (vaccines that they had already paid for) and made their own deals with pharmaceutical companies, effectively paying twice. Countries who had the financial means to do so started making deals with vaccine manufacturers directly. But by this time, vaccine manufacturers had already committed their supplies to rich countries with whom they had contracts. Coming to the specific case of South Africa, when supplies from COVAX failed to come through, the African Union negotiated a new deal with Johnson & Johnson, and was promised 220 to 400 million vaccines. Most of this was never delivered and instead the company exported millions of vaccines to the US and EU. The figures are telling: 18 months after COVAX was formed,

booster doses are being administered in the global north, while 98 per cent of people in low-income countries remain unvaccinated. Equally telling is the fact that COVAX has contributed less than 5 per cent of the all vaccines administered globally.

COVAX, when questioned about the failure to meet its mandate, has indicated that individual countries have scuttled their efforts. At the height of the second wave in India, India announced a de facto ban on vaccine exports from the country. Given the fact that India is a major vaccine manufacturer, this was a big blow to COVAX which required vaccines manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). COVAX then asked wealthy nations to donate or sell excess vaccines which they had purchased and hoarded. One estimate states that the US and the EU together at one point had between 1 billion and 5 billion excess doses to redistribute. According to an article published by Stat, wealthy countries had pledged to donate 785 million doses to COVAX by the end of September 2021 and only 18 per cent finally arrived (<https://www.statnews.com/2021/10/08/how-covax-failed-on-its-promise-to-vaccinate-the-world/>). Moreover, even as COVAX was asking wealthy nations to share their supplies, it was also sending vaccines to them. As the Stat article points out, the UK, Canada and other rich countries have all received COVAX doses in 2021. In June, COVAX sent 530,000 doses to the UK alone. The entire continent of Africa received only four times that amount in the same period.

## Deadly Role of Intellectual Property Rights

As COVAX failed, countries had to depend on individual contracts and agreements with vaccine manufacturers. This gave rise to yet another important concern. For more than a year, the UK and the EU blocked a proposal from South Africa and India and 100 other countries to suspend intellectual property



rights (IPRs) related to vaccines on an emergency basis. Had IPRs for vaccines been suspended in the larger interest of public health, knowledge about vaccines could have been freely shared, vaccine production could have been localised and scaled up in many countries and vaccine shortages could have been handled much more efficiently. But thanks to the strong-arm tactics employed by the UK and the EU to veto such efforts, profits made by pharmaceutical companies were defended more than human lives in poor nations of the world. Companies, supported by powerful governments, held on to medical and technical knowledge about vaccine composition and manufacture. For example, when the WHO started building the first global manufacturing hub to produce mRNA vaccines with the cooperation of the South African government, Moderna and Pfizer refused to share any knowledge with the hub. In the absence of vaccines and any support from global vaccine manufacturers, African scientists have been trying to reverse-engineer the vaccines - a time-taking and unnecessary process, especially in the midst of a global health crisis. As a result of continuing protection of the IPR regime, large sections of the population in poorer nations remained unvaccinated. Infection and death rates remained high in these regions,

and new variants emerged through large-scale spread of the virus.

## Racism, South Africa and Omicron

The ugly face of racism has also shown up in this global panic around the coronavirus in general and Omicron in particular. Omicron has been detected in several countries including the UK, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Australia and South Africa. South African scientists were however the first to identify the strain, and were subsequently singled out for travel bans. The US, for instance, did not ban travellers from all these countries, even as it banned people travelling from South Africa.

Secondly, Africa hosted a large part of vaccine trials, thus exposing its people to possible risks. And yet when the vaccines were finally approved, Africa received a very small share of the vaccines, as we saw earlier. Thirdly, even when vaccines began to be made available, South Africa's healthcare infrastructure continued to reflect signs of its apartheid past, where access was deeply marked by racial boundaries.

Clearly, the experience with the pandemic tells us that it is equally a social, political and economic phenomenon. One cannot and should not study it as merely a medical and health disaster. ■

# Why We Oppose the Proposed Amendment of Age of Marriage 2021

**W**e, the undersigned are deeply concerned about the implications of the proposed amendment of age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. This Bill has been introduced in the Parliament and has been sent to the Standing Committee. We fear that the amendment, if implemented, will criminalise consensual marriages among adults; and end up curtailing the autonomy of adult women. We believe that the concerns about maternal and child health can be much more effectively addressed by improving the nutritional status of girls and women throughout their lives, while also protecting and promoting their autonomy; specifically the right of adult women to make decisions about marriage and motherhood without coercion and force applied by family, community, vigilante organisations, or government.

We express our concerns in the form of frequently asked questions, and our answers.



## Will it not promote gender equality by raising the minimum age of marriage of women (now fixed at 18) to that fixed for men (21)?

A citizen becomes an adult at 18. If a citizen is old enough to elect governments, are they not old enough to select a life partner? If they have the right to decide the future of the nation; do they not have the right to decide their own future?

The Law Commission report of

2008, on reforming family law, recommended a uniform age of marriage for boys and girls at 18 and not 21. The commission noted that, “the age difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be that of equals”. The Indian Majority Act, 1875 is equal for men and women and grant the right to enter into contracts for those who attain the age of 18. The CEDAW (the international Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) also recommends 18 as the minimum age of marriage.

Thus, we the undersigned recommend that the minimum age of marriage be fixed at 18 for both men and women.

## Will raising the age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 not promote better health among new born and very young children?

The Jaitley Committee has cited international studies that show that children born to adolescent mothers (10-19) years are more likely to be stunted and of low weight than those born to young adults (21-24).

But the issue is: If girls and women remain malnourished from birth onwards, getting married at 21 instead of 18, and having their first child at 22 instead of 19 cannot really improve the possibility of maternal and child survival and health. If the government is really serious about promoting better maternal and neonatal health and survival, why is it slashing the allocations of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme (the anganwadi program) in every successive budget? Why is it not instead universalising the ICDS

program; ensuring that as part of the ICDS, every adolescent girl receives her required daily quota of calories and protein; setting up sufficiently equipped primary health centres in every block where safe births can take place; giving the full amount of maternity benefits of Rs. 6,000/- without any disqualifying conditions in the case of every birth; and recognising anganwadi and ASHA workers and midday meal cooks as regular government employees with all benefits?

## Will it not promote better health and education for women, if their parents are legally prohibited from getting them married off at 18?

18 is currently the minimum age of marriage for women: women have the legal right to choose not to marry at that age, or at any age.

The proposed amendment will only end up criminalising all marriages in which the woman is below 21 years as ‘child marriage’, thus leaving every such woman as well as every child born to such unions, bereft of legal protections and pushed outside the formal reproductive healthcare network.

The government needs to promote education (including higher education) and also create job opportunities for women and support women who are resisting forced marriages.

If the government is serious about discouraging child marriages and supporting women’s education, why does it avoid taking the following measures :

1. Extending the RTE Act to include children up to 18 years to reduce drop-out of girl children at the middle-school stage

2. Ensuring free and quality education for girl children and women “from KG to PG”
3. Enhance incentives and provide free higher education to women students
4. Providing a government helpline offering immediate legal help and support to women and persons who are being forced by parents into unwanted marriage at any age; and to LGBTQ persons being forced into “conversion” therapy; and to persons in inter-caste, inter-faith, same-gotra and same sex relationships.

### **Won't the proposed amendment empower women by delaying marriage?**

In India, citizens become adults at 18. But NFHS and other surveys have shown how some 60% of adult women are denied the right to take decisions of their own: whether it be small decisions like leaving the house to visit the market or a friend; or big decisions relating to marriage and motherhood. Studies have shown that some 40% of rape cases reaching trial courts are not really ‘rape’ cases at all: these are instances of consensual elopements in which the parents of the girl or woman accuse her partner of rape. In these cases, the girl or woman is subjected to torture in the custody of her parents; and parents often falsely claim that their adult daughter is a minor, so that she is sent to a “shelter home” pending trial, during which she is only allowed to meet her parental family, not her boyfriend or husband. This parental coercion is now compounded by the organised, politically backed outfits which use force and violence to break up inter-caste and inter-faith relationships.

The proposal to increase the minimum age of marriage for women to 21 years will deprive adult women (between the ages of 18-21) from the legal right to choose to marry someone of their

own choice. In other words, far from empowering women, it will empower the patriarchal violence against women’s autonomy. Far from empowering women to exercise their own choice, it will restrict and criminalise the choices of adult women. Such restrictions on the rights of adult women are unconstitutional and unacceptable. Also, it will mean more punitive measures against poorer sections as child marriage mainly among rural poor (NFHS 5). Courts have already said that the law against child marriage overrides personal law. So the present law in any case applies to all communities.

### **How, then, to delay early pregnancies that adversely affect women’s health?**

Increasing women’s autonomy in all personal matters including marriage and motherhood is the single most effective way to promote women’s health. Just because the minimum age of marriage is 18 does not mean parents have a right to force women into marriage at 18. Just because women choose to marry at 18, does not mean they must get pregnant immediately after.

Government-run ‘population control’ programmes turn out to be a punishment for women, depriving women with more than 2 children of some of their basic rights and excluding them from welfare projects and schemes. Let the government remove such punitive measures and make short-term family planning safer and more sensitive to women’s needs; then getting married at 18 would not necessarily mean having the first child within a year. The government has yet to provide safe abortion and women-friendly contraception facilities that would empower women to plan their families according to their own choice.

We the undersigned therefore demand that the government withdraw the Cabinet proposal

to amend the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. Instead the government must fix the minimum age of marriage for all persons at 18; must strengthen and expand ICDS, RTE and other welfare and education programs to ensure nutrition, health and education for all girls and women.

Financial independence is a basic necessity for empowering women. Unemployment amongst women is very high, pushing them into insecure jobs in the unorganised sector. The government’s ‘concern’ for women should be reflected in its actions for providing livelihood opportunities which will help women to live a life with dignity.

Some reports say that teen-age marriages in India have come down by 51% since 2000; if this is true, it was achieved without legally enforcing a raise in the woman’s minimum age of marriage. The mean age of marriage has already increased to 22.1 (Min. of Stats, 2019 report). Economic and educational status of the women concerned is a crucial factor in deterring child marriage and early marriage.

To conclude: If the government is really concerned about the persistence of child-marriage in many of the states and about the health of women and children, its priority should be eradication of poverty as well as improving nutritional, educational and healthcare services. And whether at 18 or 21 or indeed at any age, every woman must have the unqualified right to decide whether, when, and whom to love and marry. ■

*All India Democratic Women’s Association – Mariam Dhawale*

*All India Progressive Women’s Association – Kavita Krishnan*

*National Federation of Indian Women – Annie Raja*

# Two Years Of The Historic Shaheen Bagh Protests For Equal Citizenship

**T**wo years ago, in the freezing cold of December 2019 in Delhi, people gradually began to notice that Muslim women had come to occupy a corner on a public street at Shaheen Bagh, desperate to make themselves heard against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register. Taken together in the “chronology” as explained by India’s Home Minister Amit Shah, NPR and NRC were designed to put the citizenship of all Indians at the mercy of the Government; and the CAA would then offer non-Muslims a way back to citizenship via “refugee” status; while excluding Muslims from such an option.

In December, police waged war on students of Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh, raiding the campuses and attacking students with batons and bullets. The spectacle of the injured students backfired on the government, galvanising students and citizens across communities into massive protests all over India against the police violence and against NPR-NRC-CAA.

Meanwhile, Muslim women all over India set up sit-in sites like Shaheen Bagh. These Shaheen Baghs turned into places to own, embrace, and celebrate India’s Constitution and its promise of equal citizenship. The sit-ins continued until a national lockdown imposed due to Covid-19 on 24th March 2020. In the time since, leaders of the movement have been arrested and imprisoned under the draconian UAPA, framed for the communal violence that BJP leaders unleashed against the Muslim minority coinciding with Donald Trump’s India visit.

As we complete two years since the Shaheen Bagh movement - arguably the most remarkable people’s movement since the freedom

struggle, the danger of NPR - the first step in the implementation of NRC - looms nearer. The NPR is planned to coincide with the next Census - even as the demand for a caste Census is rejected by the ruling BJP regime.

The young artist Ita Mehrotra’s graphic documentation of the movements at Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Millia Islamia have been published by Yoda Press as a graphic book. Liberation is proud and grateful that Ita Mehrotra allowed us to publish her work during the movement, and we reproduce some of her work in the feature below.

*Nitin Raj and Meena Singh interviewed many of the women protestors who sat in Ujariyaon at Eidgah, Gomtinagar; as well as Ghantaghar (the clock tower) in Lucknow. Excerpts from the interviews, along with a write-up by one of the protestors Tasweer Naqvi, follow.*

## How do you look at the farmer’s movement?

**Nuzhat (in her early 50’s):** I view it as our victory (she adds with a smile). Farmers have demonstrated to us that we can accomplish whatever we want if we are willing to sacrifice. I am overjoyed, and my bravery has grown as a result of their resistance.

**Shaheen (aged 40’s)- Homemaker and Asha Worker:** We learned from farmers’ struggles that by fighting, we can win the majority of life’s battles. We would have won if Corona had not arrived; they disrupted us; they merely put a halt to our demonstration on January 26th, but we resumed protesting the following hour. Now that elections are approaching, they have begun giving free refined oil, beans, and other necessities. But how long is it going to last? We are not going to fall for this.

**Roma (28):** Farmers have triumphed in a valiant war, they were able to

push laws back. Farmers maintained their togetherness, realising the danger of farm laws. They have informed us that if we work together, we can win any conflict.

**Zeba (30s):** One thing is evident after the farmers’ demonstration: this time, our (anti-NRC-CAA) protest will be more determined. Some people thought that NPR-NRC-CAA isn’t for us, as a result, they did not join us. Farmers, on the other hand, saw the risk that these regulations posed to their livelihoods, and they banded together to fight back.

**Saba (30s):** Only ten percent people came out on the road for our movement; the others remain at home, thinking this is not for them. But if Corona had not arrived, our protest would have succeeded in the same way that the farmer’s protest did.

## How did you first get to know about the anti-CAA protest?

**Nuzhat:** I learned about the demonstration via my husband’s friend; my husband was unsure whether I would join the protest, so he contacted his friend to urge me to do so. His friend phoned me and told me that there are women sitting at Eidgah who are sitting like Shaheen Bagh, so I made a meal and then went to Eidgah to look for it and after that I joined the protest.

**Shaheen:** We were getting news from Assam of detention centres where news of families was coming, and my family was supporting me. All the news was horrible; women were torn from their husbands and children. This infuriated us and spurred us to fight because the laws affected everyone, so we had no choice but to resist.

## What were the reactions of your families as well as your husbands and

## what you all got from joining the protest?

**Saba:** Our family sometimes acts as I am going to 'ruin' my life, so we have to battle that as well. My husband, on the other hand, was supportive, but I was struggling to come out for the demonstration and to stay within the protest. My spouse took me and persuaded me to join the demonstrations since I had changed so much. I used to be quiet, but now I am so talkative that I like talking to everyone. My husband was overjoyed, but my sister-in-law was not. As a result, my mother-in-law began to request that I should be asked to stay at home. But the events of January 26th enraged my mother-in-law; she became so enraged when she witnessed police thrashing everyone at the protest site that she too began to speak up in anger.

**Zeba:** I've evolved. I'm not frightened of the cops at all, and the demonstration has helped us figure out what else we can do. Before the protests, I merely noticed the injustices that were occurring throughout the world, but now I don't just see them; I ask why they are occurring and why they should not.

**Roma:** Our perspectives have broadened, and while we are concerned about the politics of the future, this demonstration has boosted our confidence. In our daily lives, we are more watchful. We will not go just because someone says so; this is our country; how can we leave without fighting? Women are beginning to realise that there is no need to choose between spouses and families. We'll have to look after things, but we won't have to suffer any more. We will no longer be silent. Rehaan (her husband) used to think that politics was not for me, but now he encourages me to give bytes and make remarks. He now encourages me to attempt new things.

**Zeba:** Every day, I struggle, and I do it every day. My spouse is completely unaware that I am here for an interview. I've had several arguments with my hubby. We never imagined



we'd be fighting a cop in the middle of the night. We now understand our strengths and weaknesses, and we know who we are. My spouse dislikes my social life, but it is my desire to keep it going. I battled my spouse and even joined the demonstration. After arguing with my spouse, I sometimes have to cook twice. This was my passion prior to the protest, but after the demonstration, I realised that I can turn my passion into a reality. It was my desire to keep the protest going and to defeat CAA.

**Shaheen:** If we promise ourselves that we want to aim for it we have to wage a war.

Women can do anything you can see. She is driving a car, a train she is also making home she can also make a

nation.

## What was the most memorable moment for you during the protest?

**Nuzhat:** On the day and night of January 26th, police officers ordered us to disband the demonstration, and they attempted to persuade us to leave the Ujariyaon and join the protest at Shaheen Bagh. We asked them how we'd get to the Shaheen Bagh. How can we leave our families and children behind? They stated that a bus will be arranged for us. When we refused to comply with their "requests", they employed a variety of techniques to disperse us.

On the night of January 26th, police tried to intimidate us by wielding sticks and yelling at us. We weren't

terrified, though, since we weren't quite ready to leave. That night, we fought till the wee hours of the morning. The police repeatedly harassed us, threatening to put an end to our demonstration. They ruined our food and took away our shelters, but we never gave up hope.

That night, I started arguing with the cops, and I got into a fight with a cop named Dubey. They pushed us away from the location, and we waited a few hours before taking the opportunity and reclaiming our spots. That night, a policewoman targeted me because she spotted me assisting people, the day before and, I received an FIR. But I wasn't scared since I wasn't alone.

### **Do you think sitting again like farmers, if laws are enacted?**

**Nuzhat:** If they implement NPR, NRC and CAA, we will fight back. We may lose our lives, but we will not sit on

the sidelines. Farmers have won the war, and we will sit in protest like them. We are ready and we are not frightened.

### **What about your husbands, have they changed? Do they help you at home with housework? Do they talk about politics with you?**

**Shaheen:** Husbands have remained unchanged. I had to do my housekeeping while the protest was going on, and then I had to join the demonstration. I still have to wash my husband's underwear once the protest is over! He has remained the same.

**Nuzhat:** (She did not react to this question, but after hearing Shaheen, she remarked): During the protests, we were so free that we didn't have to work very hard; I can't remember where I ate. We were having a great

time throughout those days. We were both enjoying our free time and meeting new people.

### **Do you all know each other from the beginning?**

**Roma:** We didn't know each other (she looked at Saba and Zeba), but during the demonstration, we became friends.

**Saba:** Our subjects of conversation with each other have also shifted. We used to discuss our daily lives, but now we talk about political meetings as well.

**Zeba:** We also meet weekly, sometimes every 15 days, and we go everywhere we need to go together. We love our friendship, which began during the demonstration. I think people want to join politics, but people are afraid to do. My husband is afraid for me because of this regime. ■

## **The Protest Changed Me**

### **▲ HAZRA**

*(Hazra was in class 11th when she participated in the sit-in at Ghantaghar. Now she is doing her Bsc from Shia P.G. college, and she is a member of AISA)*

**T**he farmers were so brave, and I felt brave just watching them protest. My family was involved in the protest at GhantaGhar, so I joined them. My family now thinks that I can fight

anyone, even the police. My family is not afraid to send me anywhere that I can join the protest. Men at our house have not changed at all, they never cooked food, except my chhote Mama, he makes tea for everyone.

After the protest I changed. I was aware that I can protest. I want to study more, my family is asking to marry but I won't, I will study.

I met many women like Uzma Parveen at the sit-in. She was there with her kid. I got to know my friends from the protest. Now they are now with me in Shia P.G. college. During protests, I saw a very dangerous side of the police and at that very moment I stopped fearing the police. Police tried to disperse us, they threw water on us in January, they tried to march around us to threaten us, as war is going to happen but we also held each other's hand around Ghantaghar to make the chain to protect each other. I remained there for 66 days. ■

## **They Fear Women's Wrath**

### **▲ IRAM RIZVI**

**W**e sought to create the Ghantaghar demonstration similar to the Shaheen Bagh protest, and we were successful. It wasn't an individual action; it was a movement,

and I, along with many other women, demonstrated our sisterhood.

What I can say about myself is that I was a housewife who was quite ordinary, busy taking care of her family, uninterested in politics or

anything else, but I had a desire to assist others from the beginning. We chose to sit in Ghantaghar to express our sympathy with Shaheen Bagh. This demonstration increased my abilities to assist

others. I've seen a lot of movement. My shaky moment came when the police began taking our blankets; some women were terrified because of their uniforms, so some women left their blankets; however, I was not willing to leave my blanket. Soon other women too began demanding their blankets back from the police; at the same time, a

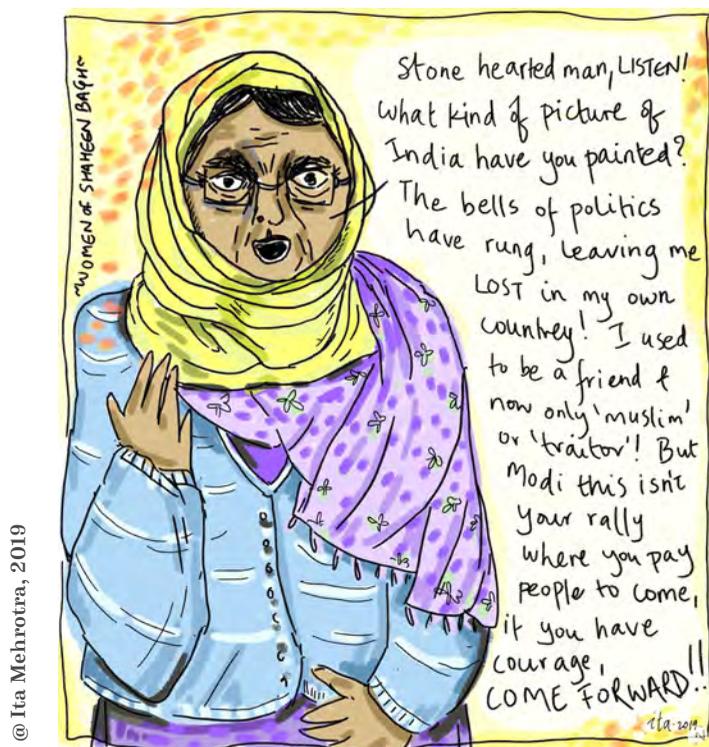
crowd of women began yelling, and I shouted, "UP police Kambal Chor! (UP police are blanket thieves.)"

We also protested at the police station. We also purchased a Rs 20 rope, which we used to surround the Ghanta Ghar and use as a protective barrier around us. We changed the course of history. If they dare to pass CAA rules, they

will have to deal with the wrath of women on the road. Yogi Ji isn't married, Modi Ji has abandoned his wife, and they haven't taken care of their wives. How are they going to deal with the rage of protesting women? If they don't want to face the repercussions, they should not do it. ■

## Remembering The Revolution at Ghanta Ghar

▲ TASWEER NAQVI



© Ita Mehrotra, 2019

I can never forget that morning of 27 January 2019 when I reached the Ghanta Ghar dharna, my heart full of wonder and eagerness.

This dharna had been started by women at Ghanta Ghar in Lucknow against CAA-NRC on the lines of Shaheen Bagh. At that time I was with my son in Gurgaon. As soon as I heard the news I yearned to go to Lucknow! And somehow I did manage

to get there, and reached the dharna spot on the morning of 27 January. The venue was awash with the pleasant winter sun and I saw that hundreds of women were sitting on the ground in front of the steps.

A stage had been built on top of the steps, women were sitting on some of the chairs, there was a dais and a mike. A young girl full of enthusiasm and energy was at the mike, speaking

and raising slogans. Many women recognized me as I was associated with Unity College. Soon I was taken by the women to the mike.

With tears of love in my eyes, my voice thick with emotion, I was face to face for the first time with the people who were going to be part of my existence for the next 3 months!

That was it, I would go every morning to the dharna spot and return in the evening. Ghanta Ghar became my school, my college! Those simple women became my most important teachers! They were that section of society who had never gone to school. They had hardly ever even crossed the threshold of their homes, had hardly ever met people who were not family members! They were women who did household chores all day long. But there was a longing within them to know the world, to achieve something new. They had the strength to face storms, rains and extreme heat.

Over the mic, I used to tell them every day about women from the past who did important work but have been wiped away from the pages of history, like Savitri Bai Phule, Fatima Shaikh...they used to listen with great attention, and even ask questions afterwards.

I told them, whoever among you can write, please do write. And many among them started coming up to

the mike and presenting their poems, stories, ghazals etc. They used to make beautiful paintings and embroidery and show us all. They had found a place to showcase their talents! Some sang beautifully, some were excellent at acting and theatre. When they raised slogans, their zest, their energy was a thing worth seeing, as was the courage they displayed when they held a march. Their discipline in matters of food, refreshment, bath, work etc was exemplary. And when the police came, what courage and cheer they showed!

When it rained, their patience and perseverance was something to see.

If one of their companions fell ill, how anxious and troubled all of them became! When any of the women on dharna died, their grief knew

no bounds. There was also a small library where women interested in reading used to come and read books.

They used to make such creative posters, such creative models! They celebrated Holi with great enthusiasm, and they also celebrated New Year all together. They had risen beyond 'Hindu-Muslim'. I even saw transgender persons amongst them; for the first time they got to see and know trans persons closely, and there was so much love exchanged! What's more, they even developed an affectionate relationship with the women police personnel deployed there! So affectionately they used to ask me, madam, about whom are you going to tell us today?

Here, I got the opportunity to meet great activists, great social workers,

writers and poets. If I were to write about them all it would become a book!

On 15 March when the movement had to be put on hold due to Covid, my eyes were tear-filled. My greatest regret was for the women who would now be constrained to go back to their dull routine lives.

I have lived my life to its near completion, but I have this to say to young activists: please do, do organize such programs where the simple, common woman can participate and bring out her creative talents, meet and smile with everyone, laugh out without restraint...for her such programs will be no less than a boon!

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## ***Carry Forward the Radical Legacy of India's Freedom Movement***

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**T**he Modi government has turned the seventy fifth anniversary of India's independence into a massive exercise of rewriting and hijacking India's history. The ideological and organisational predecessors of today's BJP hardly played any role in India's anti-colonial national awakening, busy as they were collaborating with the colonial rulers and assisting them in executing their 'divide and rule' strategy by dividing and derailing secular Indian nationalism with their politics of Hindutva or Hindu supremacist communal nationalism. Today, their successors are busy rewriting history and redefining India on those disastrous lines.

The Modi government is celebrating the 75th anniversary as Amrit Mahotsav of India's independence, poisoning the air with lies and hate in the name of Amrit or nectar. The declared focus seems to be on

celebrating unsung heroes of India's freedom movement. There can be little objection to this stated objective except that the greatest unsung hero in the BJP's history of freedom movement is VD Savarkar, the first theorist of Hindutva who had laid the ideological foundation of India's eventual partition apart from tarnishing the glorious tradition of India's freedom fighters with his repeated petitions seeking mercy for the 'prodigal son' and promising to serve the interests of the colonial masters. Many in the Sangh parivar also openly celebrate the 'legacy' of Nathuram Godse, the Hindutva terrorist who had killed Gandhi soon after independence.

Apart from rehabilitating Sangh parivar icons as 'unsung heroes' and projecting the parivar itself as an 'unsung stream' of freedom movement, and distorting and misappropriating various episodes and icons of struggle, the BJP's war on

history seeks to devalue and discredit the goals and gains of the freedom movement, virtually reducing freedom to the 'horrors of Partition'. Significantly enough, the government has now proclaimed August 14, the day of formation of Pakistan as 'horrors of Partition remembrance day'. Muslims as a community are demonised as villains who walked away with parts of India as their own land while Hindus are projected as victims who suffered the trauma of Partition - denying the shared trauma across communities which characterised Partition

While celebrating the seventy fifth anniversary of India's independence we must therefore not just revisit the major events and turning points in the history of freedom movement and the heroic struggles and sacrifices by countless freedom fighters, but also grasp the ideological battle and conceptual evolution that marked the freedom movement and constitutes

its radical legacy that resonates even today after more than seven decades of freedom. As the Modi government tramples upon the constitutional democratic framework of our republic and rules like the descendants of the erstwhile colonial rulers, the 'bhure Angrez' or brown sahibs Bhagat Singh had warned us about, we must invoke the radical legacy of our freedom movement to wage our ongoing battle for freedom from fascism.

During the colonial era, freedom was first of all freedom from colonial subjugation. It was our national liberation struggle, and this vision of national liberation was anchored around the people of India as the arbiters of the nation. Much before the Indian National Congress formally adopted the Purna Swaraj resolution, anti-colonial fighters in India had begun to articulate the notion of freedom and popular sovereignty. The 1857 anthem declared the people of India as the owners of the country: 'hum hain iske malik, Hindostan hamara' (we are the owners of this land, Hindostan/India belongs to us). The Ulgulan of Birsa Munda issued the clarion call "Abua Dishum, Abua Raj" (our state, our rule). This spirit of popular sovereignty or power to the people found its constitutional recognition in the preamble to the Constitution with "We, the people of India" solemnly resolving to constitute India into a sovereign republic. The people are thus central to the idea of India and Indian nationalism.

The people of India have always been a diverse lot. Diversity - ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious - is the foundational principle of India's unity. Improved communication and increased migration certainly led to closer bonding and greater national unification in the course of the freedom movement, but this unity must not be mistaken for a quest for uniformity or homogeneity. Attempts to bring about uniformity or homogeneity have always weakened unity and been strongly rebuffed by adversely affected regions or communities. The unfortunate eventual partition did diminish diversity to an extent,

but even post-partition India is by far the world's most diverse country. The freedom movement developed a healthy understanding and mutual respect and recognition for India's diversity which alone can explain the resilience of India's national unity and the quick integration of hundreds of princely states (under Hindu and Muslim rulers) with the Indian nation-state.

The Constitution gave us a commitment to non-discriminatory and equal citizenship, it kept the state relatively free from religion and even though it did not recognise India as an explicitly federal country, the states had a degree of autonomy on many subjects. The need was to carry forward the process of secularisation, federal restructuring and greater recognition for India's essential diversity and pluralism. The BJP government under Modi is moving rapidly in the opposite direction - CAA has introduced discrimination among citizens, and immigrants applying for citizenship, on the basis of religion; the state is increasingly behaving like a Hindu state; the centre is arrogating all powers to itself reducing states virtually to the status of glorified municipalities; and plurality is being increasingly demonised and subordinated to uniformity.

Apart from Azaadi or freedom, the other keyword of our freedom movement was inquilab or revolution, immortalised in the slogan 'inquilab zindabad' or 'long live the revolution'. Coined by the Urdu poet and freedom fighter Maulana Hasrat Mohani and immortalised by Bhagat Singh

and his comrades, this slogan drew our attention to the revolutionary significance of freedom and to the centrality of continued struggle and eternal vigilance for progressive changes and rights. And this revolution saw itself as part of an international anti-imperialist mass awakening.

Indeed, the other slogan which Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta raised in the Central Assembly was 'down with imperialism'. India's freedom movement was not an isolated and exclusive fight against British colonialism, it grew as an integral part of international anti-imperialist resistance. And after the 1917 Russian revolution when Europe witnessed the rise of fascist reaction, the progressive stream of India's freedom movement supported the anti-fascist resistance in Europe. Six Indians - writer Mulk Raj Anand, journalist Gopal Mukund Huddar, doctors Atal Menhanlal, Ayub Ahmed Khan Naqshbandi and Manuel Pinto, and student Ramasamy Veerapan - had joined the International Brigade to fight against the fascist troops led by General Franco. Indians based in London raised funds and Jawaharlal Nehru paid a solidarity visit to Spain in 1938. While the RSS in India drew inspiration from Mussolini and Hitler, India's progressive freedom fighters joined forces with the anti-fascist resistance in Europe.

The freedom movement was not just about ending the British rule in India, it was about building a modern democratic progressive India. Adivasis and other peasant communities



who constituted the biggest mass base of the freedom movement were fighting relentlessly for freedom from landlords and money-lenders. After the Adivasi revolts and the 1857 war of independence, British colonial rule consolidated itself not just through military control and repressive laws, but also by the strengthening of feudal power exercised by the class of landlords created through 'permanent settlement' and other revenue systems, perpetuation of the power of princely states and vigorous application of divide and rule between Hindus and Muslims. In the revealing words of a senior British military official of that period, "Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races...Divide et impera should be the principle of Indian government' (Lt. Col. Coker, Commandant of Moradabad, cited by Rajani Palme Dutt in *India Today*, 1940). The landlords and the puppet rulers of princely states, with a few honourable exceptions, constituted the social foundation of colonial rule and hence the anti-colonial struggle drew its strength from peasant struggles against landlords and money-lenders.

Abolition of landlordism and usury emerged as the central slogan of the peasant movement in colonial India. With the Gandhian satyagrah movement not according due emphasis on this core agenda and moving away from all signs of peasant militancy, the peasant movement founded its own militant platform in the shape of All India Kisan Sabha. The All India Kisan Sabha was formed in April 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as its first President and it released a Kisan Manifesto in August 1936 demanding abolition of the zamindari system and cancellation of rural debts. Powerful peasant struggles not only weakened feudal-colonial power in rural India but also created a powerful narrative and countervailing force against communal polarisation and violence. After independence, the old form of landlordism was legally abolished, but

beyond that land reforms remained largely unaccomplished and of late we are seeing a reversal of land reforms. Replace colonial with corporate and we will see the peasant movement grappling with the new threat of corporate landlordism and debt crisis.

The battle for working class rights including the right to organise and fight for better working and living conditions constitutes another important part of the radical legacy of India's freedom movement. These struggles led to the passage of several legislations concerning workers' rights during the colonial period itself. From the Factories Act and Trade Unions Act 1926 to Payment of Wages Act and Minimum Wages Act, many of India's core labour laws were passed before Independence. Apart from the All India Trade Union Congress founded in 1920 and the organised Communist movement since the 1920s, the Independent Labour Party formed by Dr. Ambedkar in 1936 also made major contributions to the securing of working class rights in colonial India. The ILP which identified both Brahminism and capitalism as enemies of the working class emerged as a significant trend in Bombay Presidency, secured major electoral victories and played a key role in the legislative arena as well as broader worker-peasant struggles.

1936 was indeed a year that gave rise to two radical calls. While the Kisan Sabha called for abolition of landlordism, Ambedkar came out with his clarion call for annihilation of caste. The call for annihilation of caste effectively raised the agenda of social

justice to the higher plane of social transformation. Departing from the limited Gandhian theme of abolition of untouchability, Ambedkar drew India's attention to the need for doing away with the entire caste system. Rebutting the attempts to justify caste in the name of division of labour, Ambedkar exposed caste as division of labourers. The answer would clearly lie in unification of labourers on an anti-caste basis whereby caste would dissolve into class. A convergence of these radical ideas - abolition of landlordism, annihilation of caste and unification of labourers - had the potential of taking class unity and class struggle to a much bigger scale and higher level, but unfortunately this potential could not be realised at that juncture. This is precisely where we need to explore this unfulfilled potential and legacy of the freedom movement in today's India.

The freedom movement also meant increasing participation of women in public protests which in turn led to widespread questioning of patriarchal practices and controls and strengthening of the battle for equal rights and dignity and freedom for women. The participation of women was not limited to a few specific forms of struggle - from the Santhal Hul and 1857 war of independence to Chattagram armoury raid and militant peasant uprisings like Tebhaga and Telangana, women were in the forefront of almost all major phases and forms of struggle. There were struggles where women played the leading role as in the less well-known Nupi Lan struggles of Manipur (1904 and 1939). Nupi Lan



*Nupi Lan memorial in Imphal.*

in Manipuri literally means ‘women’s war’ and the Nupi Lan waged by Manipur’s women against the local king and rich traders as well as the colonial power was fought in defence of women’s relatively high status in Manipur which patriarchal colonial forces sought to undermine, but also secured freedom for Manipur’s male workers from bondage and oppression. It was truly the forerunner of today’s Shaheen Bagh protests against the discriminatory and divisive CAA or

the powerful protests against AFSPA and state repression and terror by women in Manipur and Kashmir valley.

For the BJP, nationalism means Hindutva, and celebration of the Amrit Mahotsav of Azaadi is an exercise in hijacking of history to serve the Sangh brigade’s unfinished project of transforming secular democratic India into a fascist Hindu Rashtra. For us, the legacy of the freedom movement remains a

powerful warning against the perils of communal polarisation and colonial survivals, and a lasting inspiration to harness the untapped potentials and fulfil the unrealised promises of the journey of “we, the people of India” towards the goal of modern India as a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic. The people of India defeated the fascist conspiracy in the course of the freedom movement, they will defeat it again after seven decades of independence. ■



## **The 1921 Munshiganj Peasant Massacre in Rae Bareli**

▲ HIMANSHU

**W**hile addressing nation through video telecast on the eve of Guru Parab on November 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced repealing of the three black farm laws that had fuelled the rebellion of farmers in India. These laws were a step in the direction of corporatization of the farming sector. Ever since these laws were promulgated, farmers from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh rallied in large groups towards the capital; stopped there, they staged a sit-in at the borders of Delhi till the laws were repealed.

The repression unleashed by the BJP government at the Centre as well as the states of UP and Haryana against the farmers’ movement bring to mind the colonial repression of peasant resistance. 7 January marks a 100 years of the massacre of peasants at Munshiganj in Uttar Pradesh.

Munshiganj peasant massacre

The Munshiganj peasant massacre in colonial India happened on 7 January, 1921 in the Awadh region of India, in the Rae Bareli district of the present day election-bound Uttar Pradesh. It is one of the peasant massacres which remains in the margins of the history of peasants movement in colonial India.

Peasants were one of the most exploited communities suffering the consequences of the colonial expropriation. Economist Utsa Patnaik has shown how the export of grains from colonies to Europe at the cheapest possible cost was central to colonial rule.

The British colonial administration brutally repressed the peasant movement and collaborated with the feudal Taluqdar forces. Protesting against the exploitative working condition, rentism and taxation of Taluqdars under colonial rule, the farmers movement in Awadh region of the then Central Provinces began in different areas. Awadh region witnessed the cruelest form of feudal atrocity in India. Pratapgarh, one of the important centres of the peasant agitation inspired other places for protest.

Baba Ram Chander, a Fiji-returned kisan leader formed the Kisan Sabha in 1920 in Rae Bareli. Farmers from all religious communities came together in class solidarity to fight the feudal-colonial nexus. Several Kisan leaders were arrested by British administration whose interests were served by the feudal Taluqdars. In Fursatganj, Rae Bareli, a farmers’ gathering was

met with police brutality killing six. Rumors about kisans looting the market were also planted by administration to delegitimize their agitation. Protesting farmers marched towards the district headquarters in large numbers from different areas. Massive deployment of colonial police met the marching farmers on a bridge made over Sai River in Rae Bareli. They brutally fired on the farmers’ march, killing many. The Sai River was full of dead bodies of farmers and their blood. Freedom fighter and journalist Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi described this as the second Jallianwala Bagh massacre in his newspaper Pratap. Despite the attempts of British administration and Taluqdars to suppress the news, it was published which led to massive dissatisfaction against the colonial rule. Finally the British administration brought land-related laws in 1922 meeting some of the demands of the farmers.

The British administration served the interest of hereditary feudal Taluqdars who enjoyed a royal life through rent, taxation and ownership of lands. This brought poor tenant farmers into economic crisis pushing them to protest. The nexus between the British colonial rule and the Taluqdars is comparable to the nexus between the Modi regime and the Ambani-Adani type corporations. Farmers’ resistance, inspired by over a hundred years of anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles, could humble the Modi regime. ■

# The Satara Prati Sarkar

▲ GAIL OMVEDT

*Liberation will be serialising this seminal article by the late Dr Gail Omvedt in its coming issues as part of its Freedom 75 series. Below is a short introduction by activist Bharat Patankar, who was Gail's life partner.*

*[In the background of the ongoing debate about "freedom" and its arrival on the stage of history of India, this research paper by Dr. Gail Omvedt becomes very important contribution, revealing lesser known aspects of the freedom movement. It shows that much research is still required for understanding the factors which really were crucial for forcing the British imperialist rulers to leave Indian subcontinent for good. Gail analyses the "Parallel government" movement in Satara district of Maharashtra as a part of freedom movement in its final stages after the slogans "Quit India" and "Do or die" were given by the then Congress party. Much of the area in the district had sevadals of young people, people's courts which made British government courts redundant, libraries containing progressive books in every village. Police Patils, who were lowest representatives of repressive machinery of British government were forced to resign or they themselves resigned from their posts. Freedom fighters used to move around openly in the area! British government could not defeat this parallel government*

*from 1943 to 1949. Because it was giving justice against feudal lords, money lenders, criminals, casteists, rapists and those who oppressed women, people were protecting their parallel government from the oppressive machinery of the British government. Gail has brought forward this history with class, caste and gender analysis showing its potential to go forward towards realising the dream of liberated humanity.*

*Gail's analysis brings forward real strength and potential of these kind of aspects of the freedom movement. At the same time she brings forward the potential of exploited masses in creating organic intellectuals from amongst themselves. Her analysis shows that so-called freedom fighters coming from high caste and class background were just celebrated without making even five percent of the contribution made by these organic intellectuals.*

*This article will stimulate the creative thinking of readers for the process of understanding contemporary reality and for alternative ways for changing the society towards realising the dream of liberated humanity. - Bharat Patankar]*

*Nana Patil: I don't know how the activity I and my co-workers have done in Satara district fits in (with) your philosophy of truth and nonviolence. But in doing our work we tried to implement your principles as far as it was possible. We wrecked trains but we didn't wreck a single passenger train. But we broke the hand that was responsible for a murder, a rape, or a robbery: we also beat police informers. But if we hadn't done that we wouldn't have been able to do anything. We wouldn't have been able to organize a movement. The advice you gave us in August 1942 to 'do or die', and the advice you gave us that if national leaders are jailed then every Indian should consider himself to be independent and organize a movement to throw out the English according to his own understanding, was what we*

*followed. We fought the English through the guerrilla methods of Shivaji Maharaj.*

*Gandhi: Naná Patil, whether your movement fits in (with) my philosophy or not is not so important as the fact that you kept the 1942 freedom movement alive, and Satara has defended the name of that movement. I am one of those who feel that the violence of the brave is better than the non-violence of the cowardly!*

*(A reported encounter between Gandhi and Nana Patil, May-June 1944)<sup>1</sup>*

**I**n 1942 the 'August Revolution' exploded all over India following the arrest of all top Congress leaders on 9 August. Inspired by the 'Quit India' resolution passed by the All India Congress

Committee (AICC) at Bombay, millions of ordinary peasants, workers, students, middle class professionals, artisans and employees took part in marches, demonstrations, clashes with the police, sabotage and various other forms of underground activity in the fervent belief that the final battle of the freedom struggle had come. This time they fought not only with the idea that they were free to use all means, including violent ones, but also that in some form or another they would take their future in their own hands and set up their own government. The mass uprising, essentially leaderless, was crushed in a couple of months by British military power at the national level. But sabotage and other guerrilla activity continued strongly for about year and sporadically after that, and some forms of locally

[1] Reported Notes by Nathaji Lad, in Jaysingh Rao Pawar, (ed.), *Krantisinh Nana Patil (Arundhati Prakashan, Kolhapur, 1983)*, p.258.

based underground activity went on until independence seemed a settled fact and elections were declared in 1946.

Western Maharashtra as a whole was characterized by a widespread and high level of guerrilla activity and insurrection in 1942 and early 1943, though it was not quite as violent as Bihar.<sup>2</sup> But in Satara district something further developed: the underground activity was prolonged and a parallel government or *prati sarkar* was set up and continued to function until 1946 in spite of British repression and the indifference of the Congress leadership. Its activities included peoples' courts or *nyayadan* mandals as well as various types of armed activities and constructive programmes. The major activists of the movement eluded arrest entirely until 1944, when a few turned themselves in on the advice of Gandhi, and a few others were captured. But others replaced them and the majority were never caught. The *prati sarkar*, in fact, had begun to function effectively at a time when such movements elsewhere in India were being suppressed, and continued to flourish until independence. Its last armed encounter with the police (resulting in two deaths) took place

after the naval mutiny in 1946.

The 1942 movement signalled the end of British rule by making it crystal clear that the imperialists did not have sufficient force to govern the country in the face of the increasingly powerful and organized opposition. Yet while a few books in English exist and articles on local revolts are beginning to appear, little of this movement has been seriously studied.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the movement was not only a challenge to the British but also remained an embarrassment to the party which inherited their power, not simply because its upsurge contradicted the ideology of non-violence, but even more because it had its base among particular classes and political forces which were beginning to articulate themselves as demanding a different kind of independence, a 'worker-peasant' state. The case of Satara resulted in the paradox that the main Maratha leaders of the Congress were forced to try to claim the movement as their heritage while most of the actual leaders of the movement remained in permanent opposition. Political conditions have thus hardly been favourable for detailed scholarship. The important questions- how did



**Gail Omvedt**

2 August 1941 – 25 August 2021

this movement take place why in Satara district in particular? What was its significance for the development of political power and social structure western Maharashtra? - remain to be answered. This essay is an initial attempt to formulate some of these answers.

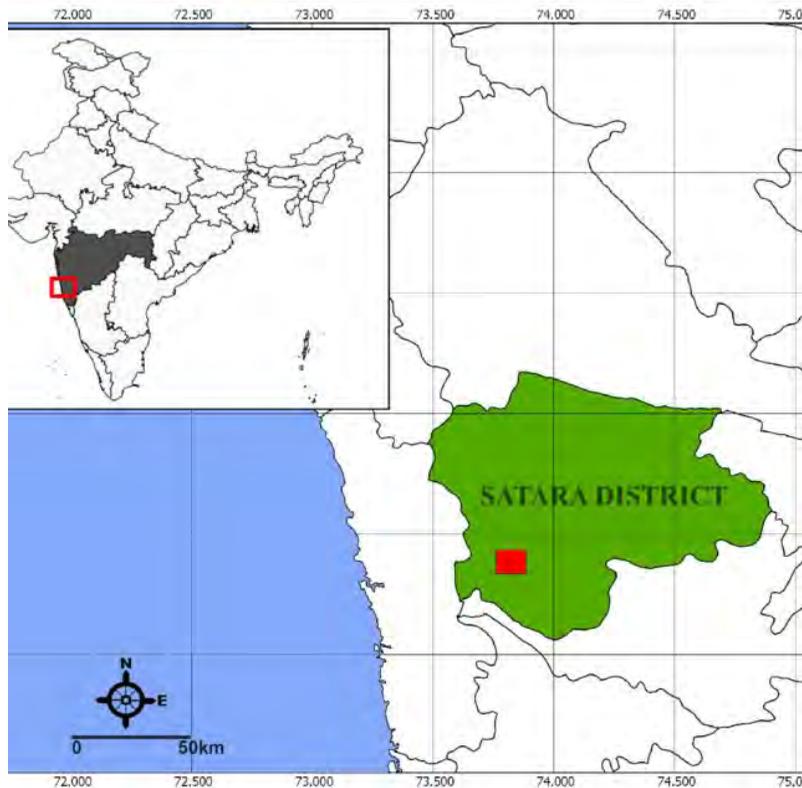
## Satara District

The Satara of 1942 (which includes present-day Satara and most of present-day Sangli district) has been a Maratha political centre from early times. From the time of Shivaji through the non-Brahman movement of the early twentieth century, the nationalist movement in the 1930s and 1940s, to the Samyukta Maharashtra movement and the nearly unchallenged

[2] A map of the depth and extent of disturbances is given in Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in 'Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces' in D.A. Low, (ed.) *Congress and the Raj* (Columbia, 1977), p.317.

[3] English works include Harcourt, *op. cit.*; Francis Hutchins, *The Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement* (New Delhi, 1971); Arun Chandra, Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement: The Second World War and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, 1987). Most such material is based on police records, which are often inadequate, especially in the case of underground revolutionaries whose very purpose was to carry on their activities without being known or caught by the police. An additional factor (at least in the case of Maharashtra) appears to be the reluctance of Congress powerholders to bring up the issue of who were the real participants. A more or less 'official' source book-B.G. Kunte, (ed.) *Congress Activities, 1942-46, Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement, Vol. IV* (Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1977) is remarkable for the fact that it almost totally ignores the *prati sarkar*. A book in preparation by Prof. A. Shinde, also based on police records, will apparently be more thorough but also has been criticized by freedom fighters for ignoring non-recorded events - and will apparently slide over some sensitive issues such as the role of Y.B. Chavan! The Marathi material now coming out will remedy most of these deficiencies. These include Pawar, *op.cit.* Kranti Agrani G. D.Bapu Lad Smarnika (Kundal, 1983); Viplavi Chamundrao (a pseudonym), *Swatantryacya Himachalavar Mavalele - Don Divya Vare* (Kirloskar 1971), Dattatray Balwant Lohar, *Swatantryacya Sangram 1930 to 1948* (Sangam Press, Sangli, 1982); Dhanvantari, 'Kundalce Krantivir G.D. Bapu', *Rashtrshakti*, (10 Jan. 1983); Muktabai Sathe, 'Bilaschicya Harijan (Mang) Strici Atmakatha' (unpublished manuscript). Finally Baburao Gokhale, *Jagrut Satara* (Second Edition) has a very thorough account.

In addition to these, my sources included interviews with: Bhagwanrao (Bappa) Patil (Hanmant Wadiye), Baburao Gokhale (Karad), Dhanvantari (Laxmanrao Kulkarni, Kasegaon), Indutai Patankar (Kasegaon), Abba Gawade (Kasegaon), Barde Guruji (Wategaon), D.G. Deshpande (Islampur), Namdevrao Karadkar (Sangli), Naganath Naikaude (Walwa), G. D. Bapusaheb Lad (Kundal), Pandurang Borate (Kumta Koregaon), Muktabai Sathe (Bilashi), and Rajamati Patil-Birnale (Anakalkhop). Some family records including two letters from Y.B. Chavan to Babuji Patankar (6.2.46 and 8.2.46), an open letter from N. G. Gore to the Satara activists (13.5.46) and other socialist party correspondence and leaflets dating from 1945-51 have also been used.



The present day Satara District. In 1942, the district also included areas of present day Sangli district.

dominance of the Congress party in Maharashtra, it has kept this centrality. It has seemed a typically peasant district, lacking both the overtones of Brahman hegemony that still remain in Pune to the north or the more 'feudal' remnants in the one-time princely state of Kolhapur to the south. Today, though, many of these peasants have become capitalist farmers, and waving fields of green sugarcane, cooperative sugar factories, educational institutions, dairy and irrigation societies make this a central area of Maharashtra's 'sugar barons', one that has fostered the major political leaders of the state. Y.B. Chavan (Congress leader, Chief Minister of Maharashtra and a leading minister in the Central Government, died in 1984), Vasantdada Patil (Congress leader and former Chief Minister), Rajarambapu Paul (former Congress leader and Minister, President of the state unit of the Janata Party until

his death in 1984). N. D. Patil (leader of the Peasants and Workers Party). Satara passed under British control in 1850-51 and was described as follows in the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency :

*The subdivisions of Satara, Tasgaon, Karad, Valva, Jalvi and Wai, nearest to the Sahyadris, were the most favoured in soil and climate the richest, best tilled and most populous. They were watered by numerous streams and fed by abundant and seasonable rain. They were crossed by lofty mountains whose steep sides were often clothed with crops, while their tops were crowned with fields and villages. In these subdivisions much of the land was alienated on rent-free or service tenure, or what remained and was assessable, the largest part was miras, that is held by hereditary owners who could not be ousted so long as they paid the government*

*rental. The commonness of this favourable tenure kept the west of the district in the highest cultivation. The landholders, most of whom were Kunbis, were hardworking and skilful husbandmen. They understood the rotation of crops, the value of manures, and the necessity of refreshing some soils by fallows. Individual holdings were small....<sup>4</sup>*

These central and western *talukas* on the black soil valleys of the Krishna river and its tributaries, flanked by the Sahyadris, are characterised by very large villages, many of them with a population of four to five thousand even in the nineteenth century and over 10,000 today. The main peasant foodcrop was *jawari*, but commercial crops such as sugarcane, tobacco and chilli which are central to the economy today, were grown even in 1850, while mango groves, cotton and teak forests were also found. These *talukas* along with the mainly mountainous Patan and Shiralapeth, then a part of Valva, were the centre of the 1942 movement. The drier eastern *talukas* of Khanapur, Khatav and Koregaon were also involved, but less prominently. The *prati sarkar* barely touched the part of Satara district north of Satara town.

In caste terms, the district was dominated by Kunbis (Maratha Kunbis) who constituted 50% of its population in the 1930 census. Satara district, more than any other, had a concentration of this famous 'peasant warrior' caste. The British viewed them on the one hand as uncultured freebooters ('wild and predatory Mahrattas') who represented a danger to the empire, and on the other as prosperous peasants who wear its economic base. The early *East-India Gazetteer* was candid in its racist expression of this ambivalence:

*The Mahratta military chiefs are generally coarse, ignorant and rapacious, and so much resemble their common soldiers that they might*

[4] *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. XI : Satara (Government Central Press, Bombay, 1885), p.347.*

change place without much striking the observation of a European. Of all these classes, however, we see only the worst specimens; and were they again reduced to freebooting desperation, they might become the most dangerous opponents that Asia could produce against the valour and discipline of Europe. The Mahratta peasantry still have pride in the former triumph of their nation and retain some ambition to partake in military exploits, but their present habits are... frugal, sober and industrious.<sup>5</sup>

Almost all those who now call themselves 'Marathas' were described as 'Kunbis' in the early Gazetteers, but then, as now, a distinction was drawn among the various clans or *bhaukis*, placing some as aristocratic or *shahannavkuli* Marathas and some as commoner Kunbis. But the division was open to some argument; intermarriage was possible between the two sections, and most of the *shahannavkuli* families as well as the 'common' Kunbis were basically peasant cultivators sharing a militaristic tradition. Aspects of this militarism included ongoing family feuds, which arose over disputes about land or social rank and was often carried on for generations; tradition has it that if a man was murdered a child from his family would be selected raised, fed, and trained solely for the purpose of avenging the murder. The District Gazetteer itself referred to Kasegaon one of the villages in the district which was later an important centre of rebellion, by saying that the inhabitants have an unenviable character for crime and litigiousness, mischief to crops, cattle-poisoning and arson having been frequent for many years<sup>6</sup>; and dacoity was prominent in the hilly areas of Valva and Shiralapeth talukas.

Other non-Brahman castes including the Dhangara (shepherds), artisan castes and even the untouchables shared this general 'Maratha' culture. Among the untouchables the Mahars were bound to perform forced service for the village and its various feudal overlords, but were free of the kind of abject slavery imposed on untouchables in states such as Tamilnadu and Kerala. This caste was to provide the social base for the most militant *dalit* movement in modern India, led by Dr Ambedkar. Their hereditary rivals, the Mangs (or Matangs), were even more renowned for toughness and lawlessness and along with the low-caste Ramoshis (classed as a 'criminal tribe') were considered almost a synonym for banditti.

Although the Bombay Gazetteer characterizes the area as a *ryotwari* with small holdings predominating, there was in fact a good deal of landlordism. On the one hand there were the various forms of land alienation noted in the *Gazettee* with *inams* having been given for various kinds of military or priestly service. By the time of British conquest, after two centuries of Peshwa rule, much of this was held by Brahmans. Maratha feudalists survived and Kolhapur and a couple of smaller states (and Satara itself until 1850) were ruled by Maratha chiefs, but two other big princely states (Miraj and Sangli) and some smaller ones were Brahman-ruled and numerous Brahman *inams* dotted the area. Along with this, as Perlin has shown, by late Peshwa times the *ryotwari* reality was being undermined by the fact that Maratha and Brahman feudalists used the *watan* privileges that were a part of the village structure to build an economic base of landlordism, by buying up various kinds of *patilki*, *deshmukhi* or *inam* rights often

spread over many villages to be managed under one huge landlord household.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this, the trade growing out of the rich agriculture of the region was controlled by merchants at the lower level (local Vanis, southern Jain Vanis, Telis and others) and, higher up, by Brahman bankers.

Thus the social structure of the district can be described as one of caste-feudalism. Feudal rulers and landlords (mainly Brahmans and aristocratic Marathas) were at the top, followed by the merchants and the priests and administrators who backed up their power. This feudal structure entered the village level itself and included local *inam* holders, and often the family or clan of the village *patils*, as well as the Brahman accountants and priests. The exploited toilers were not simply an undifferentiated 'peasant' (or peasant and artisan) class, but were also divided by caste into three broad sections of cultivating peasants, artisans and untouchable field labourers. While many of the artisans and untouchables were classed as *balutedars* who were considered to have a right to the share of the harvest due to the work they performed, they were not considered to have any rights in the land itself. The majority community, the Kunbi-Marathas were themselves divided into lineages with different ranks and degrees of rights in the land, and the highest section among them could aspire to and attain a share of feudal exploiting sections even before the British conquest, and the division between *bahujan samaj* and *shetji-bhatji* - which became the central theme of the later non-Brahman movement - had its roots in this earlier period. ■

[5] Walter Hamilton, *The East-India Gazetteer*, (published 1825), p.170.

[6] *Satara Gazettes*, pp. 480-81.

[7] Frank Perlin, "Interior" and "Exterior" in *Rural Formations: Difference as Relation in the countryside of the Late Medieval Deccan*, Paper presented at Peasants Seminar, School of Oriental & African Studies, London, 4 March 1977 (subsequently published in *Journal of Peasant Studies*).

# Withdraw Deocha Pachami Coal Project

▲ MADHURIMA BAKSHI

**D**eocha Pachami coal block, situated at Mohammadbazar block in Birbhum district of West Bengal has been reported as the largest coal mine in Asia and second largest in the world. It has been allocated to West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited (WBPDC) in 2018 by Ministry of Coal, Government of India. Recently, the state government has begun the process of initiating the open cast coal mining 'industry'. A compensation and rehabilitation package worth Rs. 10000 crore is being discussed in media though there is no official gazette notification yet. Proposed mining area spreads over around 3,400 acres, with an approximate storage of 2,102 million tonnes of coal. Mining in this region would lead to complete eviction of thousands of families among which a major section is from tribal population. Reportedly, more than 21000 people, including 9034 from the Scheduled Tribe and 3601 from the Scheduled Caste communities live in 4314 houses in the coal block area.

*On November 26, a delegation team of CPI(ML) Liberation met the people of the proposed project area in an effort to understand the opinion and thoughts of the local residents. The team visited Mohammadbazar market area, Deocha, Harinsingha, Dewanganj and Nischintipur villages and had conversations with the potentially affected villagers. The major observations are briefly described below.*

**1. Most of the villagers with whom the delegation team met and had a conversation with was either vehemently against the coal project or very apprehensive about it.**

A large section of the locality directly depends on the stone industry (cutting stones from quarries, crushing manually/ by crushers, transporting

and distributing them) in the region. There are many people who are involved in farming at one time a day and work as daily laborers in the stone industry at another time. People in Mohammadbazar market area, about ten kilometers outside the project, are afraid of coal mining for two main reasons. First, the employment opportunities that existed in the current stone industry will no longer exist with the advent of coal mining. They are worried that they will be thrown into a life of uncertain income by leaving their current land for the coal project. On the other hand, the area already suffering from pollution from crushers will further be victims of air pollution from the open cast coal mine. There are many people in Deocha village, four-five kilometers away from the project area, whose farmland falls within the proposed mining area. Most of them have small businesses in the market, their children are studying in colleges and universities, some of them are also working. They have objections in taking the job of junior constable (as proposed in the rehabilitation package) at distant locations. They have repeatedly raised the issue of long term effects of open-mined coal mines, overriding their hopes of immediate financial gain by selling the land. Villagers are also anxious as many lands will be swallowed up by the huge amount of soil and stones that have to be dumped to extract coal from such depths. They are extremely concerned about their homes and lives in the aftermath of vibration and dust storm coming from open cast mining. Citing the example of the nearby Bakreshwar Thermal Power Station and other colliery areas, they sounded worried saying "the locals will no longer be locals; the Don-Mafia rule will overpower." Even in the adjoining villages of the project area, the proposal for a mining project

has come down like a nightmare. They are seeing their future full of uncertainties and misery. The people of the minority community of Dewanganj are feeling extremely endangered as many of the residents of this village do not have land deeds and hence see no positive outcome from the proposed 'rehabilitation' package.

**2. The government rehabilitation package has not considered the real situation of the people of the area, most of them fear disaster.**

The owners of the land are mainly the elders of the house and the number of family members has gradually increased in the next generation. As a result, the employment of one person (in the post of junior constable) in a family and the one-time money will put the families in a state of great insecurity. Women can't imagine living in just a 600 square ft house without having a backyard and open environment. An adivasi woman, the leader of 15 self-help groups, said "Mahila Ekta" has decided to not to give their lands. The father of the family thinks which son to nominate for the job of constable! What will be the source of income for the other children and their families! Landowners outside the project area want jobs according to their qualifications.

There were several others who pointed out that many tribal families have been living for generations having no land recorded in their name. There are many people who are living on khas land for decades. The package is supposed to give minimal to them whereas they will lose everything they have. Apart from these, a general atmosphere of distrust was observed throughout regarding the real implementation of 'rehabilitation' comparing to the announced one.

**3. 'Mining will not be done by force' - the Government promised, but on the ground it has started acting differently.**

Tribal population was enraged registering their disagreement about

the project and unwillingness to leave their land in a meeting organized in Harinsingha village on Nov 25. Videos of the protest were spread on social media and published in various newspapers. Two days later, another video clip surfaced showing a leader of the previous day's protest 'confessing' their mistake, in the presence and control of a former tribal village leader who is currently associated with ruling TMC. While talking to the delegation, all the tribal leaders were afraid that their names would be transferred to the DM's office. Head of Adivasi Gaonta in Harinsingha demanded a detailed discussion on the rehabilitation package considering all stakeholders and very cautiously said that the land would be released on the basis of consensus only if the rehabilitation process is completed earlier. At the same time, he repeatedly stated that this is his personal opinion and the delegation must meet the villagers, especially women. It was the women who opposed the project in the strongest possible terms in front of the delegation. The former tribal leadership of the villages has become part of the ruling party and is completely separated from the villagers. Recently, Deocha Pachami Adivasi Janajati Bhumi Raksha Committee has been formed to organize the campaign against proposed coal project and resist the eviction.

The people of Dewanganj directly expressed concern about police surveillance and said that police vans are patrolling the neighborhood at night without any reason. Police vehicles were also seen circling the village three times while the delegation team was in the village. Earlier the people of their village were forcibly detained by the police on their way to the public hearing called by the district administration in Deocha Ganj. Shortly after leaving from Harinsingha, local police came to the delegation team and took their names and addresses.

Unwilling to enrage people with eviction which might trigger a

resistance movement right now, the government has decided to start mining at several hundred acres of government land, which is available and not occupied by anyone. The government and administration has kept the villagers in complete darkness and all they just informally know is that digging will start on "government land" in the forest adjacent to Dewanganj. But when the government starts digging "its own land", the villagers are afraid that there will be no other way for them but to give their own land too.

Overall, the delegation felt that the people here are extremely anxious and concerned for their lives livelihoods and the environment. There is a deep lack of communication between the government and the people of the area. The eight-member delegation team included Ashok Mandal and Pradyot Mukherjee from Birbhum district, Surinder Singh and Krishanu Bhattacharya from West Burdwan district and Malay Tewari, Laboni Jangi, Anupam Roy and Madhurima Bakshi from Kolkata.

There are many questions related to the geological, geotechnical and environmental impact of open cast mining. As per GSI reports, this coal reserve is characterized by thick layers of coal deposit (coal seam) present within thick layer of rocks making it further difficult to mine with the currently available technology of both underground as well as opencast mining. As the top layer is very deep, a large amount of overburden is to be removed first and dumped in the adjacent area in order to get access to those coal deposits, which will actually require more land beyond the reserve and also pretty time consuming.

Reducing the use of fossil fuels in order to address climate crisis has been repeatedly called at every international environmental conference in recent times. The latest IPCC report and the COP26 in Glasgow also highlighted the dangers of temperature rise and the need to minimize burning of fossil fuel.

India along with other countries have agreed to 'phase down' the use of coal and gradually transitioning towards renewable energy sources. Introduction of such new open cast coal project raises many pertinent questions in this context amidst efforts to combat climate challenge. Another concern is the low water retention capacity and reduced water level in the project area. Conversations with local villagers not just raised widespread concern of eviction and loss of land and livelihoods but also pointed out the danger of losing the cultural and landscape ecology of the region. It was due to the agitation of local tribal population in 2010, the stone industry owners were forced to follow some regulations to restrict air pollution which has caused severe respiratory problems including silicosis. The proposed project can further worsen the situation.

The rise of Mamta Banerjee from the Singur movement against land acquisition has made her take every foot step carefully regarding this coal project as she very well knows the tragic fate of the Left Front Govt. in Singur-Nandigram. In her eloquent speeches, she has mentioned to give 10-13 lakh rupees per bigha land and rehabilitation for the evicted people. There is no basis for such a promise yet, as there is no official gazette notification to this effect. Moreover, another reality is the agricultural laborers, sharecroppers and those who live in khas lands are always kept out from any such compensation. It has been said that this coal reserve will ensure huge power supply to meet the power shortage in the state though at present there is no shortage of electricity. PDCL is claiming in their website that the social impact study of this mega project has been completed; while the police, administration and ruling party have been trying to keep the local indigenous, minority, dalit and poor people away from public hearings. People living in the nearby mining area of Raniganj-Asansol have experienced the severe environmental impacts of open cast mining. The proposed project will

evict thousands of villagers, whose traditional livelihoods are agriculture and stone-cutting. Shortly after the announcement of the Chief Minister, corporate tycoon and one of the biggest private player in coal sector Gautam Adani's visit to Kolkata and a closed door meeting with the CM gives the hint that in future this natural resource might end up being in the hand of Adani Power instead of WBPDC. The state administration is right now in a process of bypassing the long term impact study of this project and is keen to start mining by

terrorizing and intimidating people by police and local TMC goons. Not allured by verbal assurances of so-called alternative employment and rehabilitation package, a large section of the tribal population has called for resistance against eviction in the name of 'development'.

The government's coercion to establish expensive open cast coal mines, destroying the environment and completely evicting thousands of people from their land, livelihood and culture needs to be opposed. We

demand that the state government should immediately publish the survey report on environmental and social impacts and all the information related to rehabilitation package in the white paper. In case of acquisition of land, it is necessary to declare whether the full consent of the local gram sabha and panchayat has been obtained in accordance with the Land Acquisition Act 2013. The democratic voices of West Bengal must stand with the people of proposed Deocha Pachami coal project in their struggle for existence. ■



## Who Will Benefit From the Kharawshrotaa Mega Project?

### A Report from an anti-Adani Struggle in Odisha

For the last two years the people of Aali and Rajkanika blocks in Kendrapara District have been up in arms against the project of the Odisha Govt to supply water to the port of Dhamra located in the adjacent Bhadrak District and the drinking water to residents of Bhadrak District from the Kharawshrotaa river. In more ways than one the river forms the lifeline of these two blocks. Along with these two, the blocks of Patamundai and Rajanagar also depend on the river for agriculture and drinking water. To understand the anger and resoluteness of the movement against this it is important to understand the particular geographical lay of the area and the history of the relationship that people have with the river.

The Kharawshrotaa river is a tributary of the Brahmani River. It flows away from the Brahmani at Jenapur in Jajpur district and re-joins it just before the Brahmani flows into the Bay of Bengal. As a result of this, the volume of water flowing in it is totally dependent on the flow of water in the Brahmani. The Brahmani is one of the three rivers whose combined deltas make up the Bhitarkanika National Park, which after the Sunderbans is the only mangrove forest in South

Asia. The rivulets around the forest are also home to endangered salt water crocodiles along with other flora and fauna. It's been only one and a half decades that a bridge was built on the Kharawshrotaa river and the area was connected with all-weather roads with the district headquarter.

The areas around the river have been flood prone. Floods resulted in water logging which affected the rabi crops, they were devastating for the kharif crops and also brought much death and destruction of human life in their wake. The whole district of Kendrapara is hit by cyclones nearly every year. As a result, for those practising agriculture livelihood has been perennially uncertain. Such prevailing conditions have meant that there is substantial migration from this region to other parts of the state and to other states in the country for employment. Even after Independence the region has been the victim of negligence and govt apathy. No attention was paid for the first two decades of Independence for instituting flood control measures and providing safe drinking water facilities to people in the region. In 1969 the region saw the first organised movement

demanding flood control, measure to stop sea water entering the river and electricity. The movement was led by the Praja Socialist Party. It was a widespread movement which saw large scale participation of farmers, women, the young and the old. Many were arrested but the strength of the movement ensured that the Odisha govt. came to the negotiating table and as part of the agreement to institute flood control measures it committed to the construction of the Rengali Dam in Angul District which was upstream on the Brahmani River.

But the construction of this dam did not have any benefits for the people in Aali and Rajkanika. The water and electricity from the Rengali Dam went to the mines and industries in Angul and Kedhujhar districts. In the meanwhile, due to the dam upstream the flow of water in the Kharawshrotaa dried up completely in summer and the water became salty due to the lack of any measure preventing sea water from entering and the low volume of fresh water in the river. This had other side effects too. Ground water started to become saline. The South canal from the Rengali Dam which was supposed to supply water to Aali and Rajkanika remained a pipe dream. Every 10-15 years the Govt came up with a proposal which would adversely affect the lives of the people living along the Kharawshrotaa, this has led to the growing realisation among the people that the only way to secure their lives

and livelihood is to protect the river. In January 2020, it was out of the blue that the Govt of Odisha announced the construction of the 'Kharawshrotaa Mega Project' and construction equipment and vehicles turned up at one of the 'ghats' of the river. Immediately people of the two Panchayats near the ghat convened an all-party committee to oppose the construction of this project. On the initiative of Com. Bidhan Das of the CPI ML who held mike meetings across Aali and Rajkanika a renewed 'Kharawshrotaa Banchao Sangharsha Samiti' (Save Kharawshrotaa Struggle Committee) was formed. On February 12 the committee held an open convention which saw wide participation from all sections of the society, a resolution was passed demanding the Odisha Govt to stop the Kharawshrotaa Mega Project. On 8th October after the first wave of Covid the contractor again tried to start construction but work stopped as women bravely put themselves in the path of the JCBs, trucks and other vehicles. This movement has generated wide solidarity and support from activists from all across the state of Odisha. The official claim of the gov is that the megaproject will provide drinking water to four blocks of Bhadrak district. This claim is baffling because Bhadrak district itself has two major and other minor rivers flowing through it. There has been no consultation with Gram Sabhas or other elected representatives while planning the project. There has been no effort from the Govt to address other pressing issues related to the Kharawshrotaa river, like it virtually drying up during the summer months but it is in a hyperactive mode to implement this mega project. Lack of safe drinking water has been a long-standing problem in Kendrapara district but there has been no effort from the gov to address this.

The real reason for this megaproject is not somewhere the Govt wants anyone to look. The Govt of Odisha is going to provide water from the Kharawshrotaa to the Dhamra Port, which though in Bhadrak District is

geographically close to Rajkanika. The port is owned by Dhamra Port Company Limited (DPCL), a fully owned subsidiary of Adani Ports. The Govt of Odisha is spending nearly 1000 crores to supply fresh water to the Adani's port in the name of supplying drinking water to the people of Bhadrak District. The Govt is desperately trying to portray that the movement to save the Kharawshrotaa River is an attempt to deny the people of Bhadrak drinking water! This is far from the truth. As we mentioned earlier there are major and minor rivers in Bhadrak from where water can be tapped. If the Adani port at Dhamra needs water, why can't it set up a desalination plant to tap sea water? Why destroy the lives and livelihood of those who depend on the river.

The project will also adversely affect the Bhitarkanika National Park. Till date there is no assessment of the effects this project will have on the mangrove forests which are critical in acting as a natural barrier to cyclones which hit this part of the eastern coast with increasing frequency. The reduction of flow of fresh water in the river will also mean an increased volume of salt water flowing into it from the sea. This is also starting to show its effects. Of late there have been instances of salt water crocodiles coming up the river up to Aali giving rise to incidents of human animal conflict. The movement has predictably been met with repression by the Odisha Police. Many large democratic protests have been declared illegal through the imposition of section 144 CrPc and false cases have been foisted on leaders and activists of the movement. The major demands of the movement are as follows:

- The Govt must tap the already existing water resources in Bhadrak district to provide drinking water and not from the Kharawshrotaa river especially since people living on its banks themselves do not have a regular and safe supply of drinking water.
- There must be a scientific study

conducted by renowned experts to assess the ecological effects the project will have locally and on the Bhitarkanika National Park.

- The government of Odisha must create an environmentally sustainable barrage that can stop the surplus overflow of the water to the Bay of Bengal. The surplus water can be used for the drinking water projects both for the people of Kendrapada and Bhadrak district.
- Govt of Odisha must immediately institute measures to ensure to stop the flow of large volume of sea water in to the Kharawshrotaa river.
- The Govt must withdraw all cases on protestors and release those who have been arrested under false charges.

The Naveen Patnaik led BJD Govt is more than happy to follow the lead taken by the Modi Govt in selling off our natural resources to Modi's favourite capitalist friends, Adani and Ambani. Even though the BJP in Odisha is on paper opposing the project it is silent on the real intention behind the project which is basically to provide clean water to the Adani owned port in Dhamra.

This movement has now gained widespread support across the state. It is imperative that all progressive movements who are fighting against the subversion of democracy by the Modi Govt through a corporate communal nexus must stand in shoulder to shoulder with the 'Save Kharawshrotaa Manch'. The CPI ML and its activists are active participants in the movement. Com. Bidhan Das from our party is one of the leading activists and leader of the joint platform. At a time when critical infrastructural and communications and transport infrastructure like railways, airports and ports are being handed over to Adani on a platter by the Modi Govt. the people of Aali and Rajkanika need all our solidarity and support in this crucial battle for saving the river and securing their livelihoods. ■

## ***Mahadalit Youths 'Punished' For Not Voting in Bihar Panchayat Election***

**B**alwant Kumar Singh, resident of Singhna village, standing for the Mukhia election in Dumri Panchayat, Amba/Kutumba Block with the election symbol of 'brinjal' made 4 Mahadalit youths from Kharanti village do sit-ups for half an hour as 'punishment' for allegedly not voting for him after accepting money; moreover, he also committed the heinous act of making the 4 youths spit and then lick up their own spit. This barbaric incident was perpetrated on 10 December 2021 when the entire world was observing International Human Rights Day. This sample of shameful feudal oppression as 'punishment' under 'slave system' was perpetrated at about 7 or 8 AM on International Human Rights Day. It was done under the 'Sushasan' (good governance) government in Bihar, the same government that has the support of Mahadalits as well as the 'Babus' who are the oppressors of Mahadalits. This is amazing engineering on the part of Nitish Kumar, whose social management is such that he secured the support of Mahadalits, extremely backward castes, as well as the upper creamy sections, but dalits and the poor cannot get any respect or dignity or any chance to be in power. The social structure of feudal oppression in various ways is roaring along merrily. At the social level, could persons of the dominance and standing of Balwant Singh be subjected to such a punishment on the suspicion that they did not give their vote in return for money accepted in the election?

Balwant Singh, who perpetrated this barbaric incident on youths of the Mahadalit Musahar caste, feared neither the law nor 'Sushasan'. Tearing Constitutional rights to shreds has become a common act for these people. They consider themselves all-powerful and having a birthright to oppress, abuse, beat and even kill

weaker sections.

Such barbaric acts are enabled by the protection given by the ruling powers to dominant castes, as shown by numerous clear messages sent out under the Nitish government. Feudal criminals know they will not be punished, and commit their crimes of oppression freely against dalits, poor and minorities and even post videos of their crimes. Countless incidents of mob lynching have occurred. Perpetrators of massacres like Bathe, Bathani Tola, Shankar Bigaha and Miyanpur have gone scot free. Dominant criminals have become so emboldened that they do not hesitate to kill if they find that they are losing elections. Now that dalits and the poor are raising their voice, they are being violently and ruthlessly repressed. The Constitution, democracy and voices of dissent against BJP's inflammatory ideology are under relentless attack.

### **The incident of 10 December 2021, around 7 or 8 AM:**

Balwant Singh of Singhna village, Dumri Panchayat called four Musahar youths of Kharanti village, accused them even before counting of votes of not voting for him, and first made them do sit-ups for more than half an hour and beat them up. Balwant Singh was having doubts of his election victory and wanted to recover the money he had spent on campaigning. The 4 youths were:

1. Manjeet Bhuiyan (18) s/o Ramsurat Bhuiyan
2. Anil Bhuiyan (35) s/o Sirtan Bhuiyan
3. Kamlesh Bhuiyan (25) s/o Ram Sewak Bhuiyan
4. Arvind Bhuiyan (18) s/o Satendra Bhuiyan

After making them do sit-ups and made to spit and lick up his own spit, Balwant Singh collected back

the money he had allegedly given the four youths for the election.

The four youths told a CPIML team that Balwant Singh had given them Rs 3000 each for election expenses. All of them even voted for Balwant Singh. When pressure to 'punish' them began building up in neighbouring village Baija Bigaha, the four youths kept saying emphatically, counting has not even started, how can you accuse us of not voting for you? But Balwant Singh refused to listen to anything.

The Central and State governments are celebrating 75 years of independence, Amrit Mahotsav, but in this remote area in Bihar's Aurangabad District there are neither government facilities nor social security. If the government does not learn a lesson from this incident, development and social security will remain meaningless ciphers on paper only.

In Kharanti village there are 40-45 Musahar families, 20-25 Ravidas, 4 Paswan and 7 Pasi families. The Ravidas Tola is a little separate, while the other houses are close together. When a marriage takes place in a dalit family, the couple start living separately. Therefore their names are not on the parents' half constructed houses, ration cards etc. Many aged men and women are also deprived of rations as their fingerprints have become blurred with age. Most houses here are constructed only up to door level and have make-shift roofs. Not even a single toilet has been constructed in any of the homes in the village, but the government has declared all the Panchayats to be ODF. There are no taps, no primary schools, and as children have to go 3-4 kms to Baija Bigaha for school, many remain without schooling. The Anganwadi centre is located in an old ruin, without windows, no schooling and very little or no nutritious meal arrangements. This is the reality of the government's public welfare schemes.

The CPIML has asked the Bihar

administration to ensure:

- Strict punishment for Balwant Singh.
- Rs 2 lakhs each as compensation to each of the victim families. The government has announced Rs 50000 which has not come yet.

- Pucca houses, ration cards for all families in the village. Guarantee of rations to the elderly whose fingerprints have become blurred.
- Construction of primary school in Kharanti village.

*The CPIML team comprised Politburo member Amar, Arwal MLA Mahanand, Aurangabad District Secretary Munarik Ram, AIARLA leader Upendra Paswan, Raj Kumar, Birju Ji and Chandrama. ■*

## **Session of Indian Institute of Marxist Studies held in Bangalore**

Interactive Session with Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, organized by Indian Institute of Marxist Studies (IIMS), on Wednesday 15 December 2021, at Ashirwad, Bangalore.

The meeting was attended by party comrades and members of the mass organizations, as well as by friends and sympathizers in Bangalore. Comrade Dipankar addressed the meeting for around 45 minutes, and that was followed by an interactive session.

In his address Comrade Dipankar focussed on the need to build a united front against fascism in India. He called Hindutva the Indian version of fascism. He pointed out that Hindutva politics in India displays the three key features of fascism.

First, one can notice a hollowing out of the constitution and of democratic institutions: through direct state repression and also by giving the constitution a Hindu nationalist interpretation. Comrade pointed out that recently the Prime Minister underplayed the significance of fundamental rights and emphasized

on the fundamental duties.

Second, there is an intensified corporate aggression including the large-scale privatization of public assets such as banks and railways.

Third, the creation of an internal ‘enemy’, heightened attack on them through hyper-nationalism and privatized violence (through the troll army, vigilante groups, and so on), are clear signs of fascism.

Comrade Dipankar suggested that these three aspects have not just escalated in degree since 2014 but these together constitute a sea-change in Indian society and politics. There is an attempt to redefine Indian nationalism along Hindu supremacist lines by promoting Hindutva ideologues like ‘Veer’ Savarkar as champions of the freedom struggle. Earlier, nationalism in economics implied public ownership of key assets, whereas now it means privatization. Comrade called this a qualitative change and reversal.

Dalit, women and Adivasis are major targets of Hindutva but barring scattered instances, one does not yet

find a resistance from these groups on a large scale. Hindutva forces have been aided by the political decline of key opposition forces - from the Congress to the social justice parties as well as the Communist parties.

Towards the end Comrade emphasized again that it is important to build a united front against fascism. There is a lot of encouragement to be had from the farmers’ movement and the anti-CAA movement. There are small and big resistances in many places and our task is to coordinate and broaden the scope of these movements. Climate change is opening up a new horizon of resistance, as are the tendencies in the restructured working class towards organizing itself. Student movements also provide us a lot of hope. Bhagat Singh and Babasaheb Ambedkar’s ideas should be our key reference points in these efforts. And even as we focus on building movements, we should also build electoral alliances that can keep Hindutva out of power.

The session ended with a few questions regarding the role of the Left in the current situation. Comrade Dipankar clarified that in a united front the Left should not lose its identity. The idea is to find common ground while holding on to our own and expanding it in the process. ■

## **Right to Employment March Organized in Lucknow**

Students and youth across Uttar Pradesh are weighed down with the problem of unemployment and are struggling on various issues such as recruitment of new teachers

in primary schools, advertising of 27000 posts by the Middle School Selection Board, appointment of selected candidates, modus operandi and appointment in UPSSSC, Higher

Education Services Commission, UPPSC, corruption and reservation scam in the 69000 teachers appointments, Police recruitment, UPSI, or the most recent issue of the paper leak in the TET eligibility exam. The brunt of the miserable state of all these Commission-Board exams has to be borne by unemployed students and youth coming from

poor farmer-worker backgrounds. None but the government is directly responsible for this. Therefore it is essential that instead of fighting separately, we must all raise our voice in unison across the state against unemployment and for the right to employment with dignity. It is in this direction that we are carrying forward the 'UP Maange Rozgaar' (UP Demands Employment) campaign. On 2 December 2021 students and youth from all over Uttar Pradesh reached Lucknow for the movement. Intellectuals, farmers, workers, women and university students also joined in full support of the Right to Employment march.

The large number of student-youth organizations and movements for employment that are part of the UP

Demands Employment campaign raised all the prominent demands of students and youth, including: starting the recruitment process for filling 25 lakh government posts without delay; answer why the claim to provide 70 lakh government jobs in 5 years remains unfulfilled; white paper on employment; revoke the decision to sell national assets; immediate loan waivers for all self-employed persons; Rs 10000 unemployment allowance for all unemployed youth; probe into the reservation scam in the 69000 teachers recruitment; cancel appointments of non-reserved persons to reserved posts; stop tampering with social justice in recruitments; guarantee social justice in employment; start the factories and industries in the District and give employment to youth; regularize all

contract workers; guarantee equal pay for equal work; probe paper leaks in competitive exams; transparency in the recruitment process, and institutional changes to guarantee regularity; free application forms; admit card should serve as bus/rail pass; repeal New Education Policy; end privatization; make employment a fundamental right.

Campaign convener Sunil Maurya condemned the police repression on and arrest of students and youth who had come to Lucknow for the march and demanded the release of all the arrested persons. He said that the Yogi government must fulfill without delay all the demands of youth demanding their right to employment, or be prepared to face even more intense protests. ■

## **Lecture on 'Freedom Movement and Partition' At Nainital**

A lecture on 'Freedom Movement and Partition' was organized by the Nainital People's Forum on 12 December 2021 at the Nainital Town Hall. The main speaker AIPWA National Secretary Comrade Kavita Krishnan underlined the importance and necessity of revisiting the history of the freedom movement in today's times. In this the 75th year of independence, the Modi government is distorting and falsifying history and consciously presenting a communal version of the freedom struggle and partition and through this making every effort to carry forward their communal campaign. In his speech at Kedarnath, Modi appealed for giving religious places respect equal to places associated with the freedom struggle, and by stressing their 'historic role' in 'protecting religion' took another step forward in changing the definition of the freedom struggle and the independence won after so many sacrifices. At this juncture it has become more important than ever to disseminate the true legacy of the freedom movement and any

communal edition of the freedom struggle.

Citing many examples from medieval history, Comrade Kavita pointed out how, through communal rewriting of history, rivalries and fights between various kings are being presented as Hindu-Muslim fights. Noting the pro-British role of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, she cited books and writings by freedom fighters Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Rajaji etc as well as writings of prominent Hindu Mahasabha and RSS leaders like Savarkar, Golwalkar and Shyama Prasad Mukerjee to make clear the Sangh's view of the freedom struggle. Looking after the interests of the British Raj and refusing to recognize the Indian National Movement as a struggle for independence--this was the viewpoint of the Sangh. The Sarvarkar whom the RSS-BJP are today trying their best to ensconce as the greatest hero of the freedom struggle had not only promised undying loyalty to the British and apologized for his 'mistake' in

participating in the freedom struggle, but was also the first person to propose the 2-nation theory saying Hindu and Muslim are not just 2 religions but 2 nations and can never live together. It is this theory of Savarkar which the Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League further expounded to pave the way for Partition.

Comrade Kavita appealed to everyone, particularly to youth, to desist from acquiring falsehoods through Whatsapp University and instead read books written by prominent historians on the freedom struggle and medieval history.

The program was presided over by renowned historian Prof Shekhar Pathak. CPIML Garhwal Secretary Indresh Maikhuri gave a talk on 'Freedom Struggle and Dalits in Uttarakhand'. The program was conducted by Advocate Kailash Joshi and attended by a large number of people including teachers and students of Kumaon University, lawyers, farmers, retired employees, ASHA Union, Rickshaw Union and Horse Buggy Union representatives. ■

## Villagers Protest Corporate Land Grab In Odisha

When people in coastal Odisha were living in panic as the news of a cyclone hitting the coast was in circulation 24x7, around 3 AM in the night on December 4, 2021 3/4 platoon police entered Dhinkia Village to arrest Debendra Swain, the main leader of Anti-Jindal & Anti-POSCO Movement. 500 people immediately rushed to their leader's house to rescue him. The collective resistance

of the villagers against the police action was nonviolent and peaceful. But the police beat up villagers with batons, badly injuring two women Santi Das (60), and Tanu Das( 50); and two men Mathuri Das (50), and Manas Bardhan (32). But police had to return without making any arrest.

The Odisha Govt is forcibly grabbing the fertile agricultural land and

homestead land of 11 Villages for the Jindal South West (JSW) Limited Steel Plant. Around 2pm on 20th Dec, 2021, the villagers of Dhinkia made a massive demonstration against the forcible destruction of betel vines at Mahala village border. Suddenly police forces entered Dhinkia village and started thrashing people, injuring many. The police arbitrarily arrested two persons Ajodhya Swain and Milirani Swain without any reason. Those who sustained injuries include Natha Samal, Prakash Jena, Bhramar Das and Lokanath Swain. ■



## Chile Elections: 'History is Ours, and People Make History'

**“T**hey have force and will be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested by neither crime nor force. History is ours, and people make history.” These were the final words of Salvador Allende; a socialist President of Chile who was overthrown in 1973 by a right-wing coup organised by Augusto Pinochet and backed by the United States.

More than four and half decades later, the far-right wing forces, of which Allende was referring to and the remnants of it have begun to crumble under the weight of the united people's struggle. In 2019, Chile witnessed a historic mass uprising by students and workers against the increasing inequality, right-wing violence and privatisation of public resources. The protest also demanded changes to the current Constitution of Chile, which was inherited from Pinochet's bloody dictatorship.

This 2019 movement further consolidated the “social processes,” and in the 2021 General Elections held

in November, Chileans vehemently rejecting the right-wing forces and elected progressive candidate Gabriel Boric as the next President of Chile.. The 35 year old Boric, a former student leader represents left wing Social Convergence Party which is part of the Apruebo Dignidad alliance, which includes Communist Party of Chile (PCCh).

Boric secured more than 55.86 per cent of the vote, defeating the far-right candidate Jose Antonio Kast who got 44.15 per cent votes. This people's mandate thus also puts an end to right wing conservative regime

of Sebastián Piñera.

Boric, as a student representative had played an important role during the 2011-2013 Chilean student protests during Piñera's regime against the rampant privatisation of education and rising cost education.

**“If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave”**

Until September 11, 1973, the date of the coup, Chilean society had been characterised by the increasing



participation of the working class and toiling masses. The period also witnessed rise of public ownership of production, which was once controlled by big corporations. All of this soon changed as with the rise of Pinochet regime as Chile was forcefully thrown onto the road of neoliberalism. This free-market economy plan had been highly influenced by the "Chicago Boys," a group of right-wing and neoliberal economists (Milton Friedman 's disciples) educated in University of Chicago or its allied institutions - with the help of Ford Foundation. The birth of this group was not by any accident, it was well planned strategy of the U.S. (allegedly funded under the US State Department's 'Chile Project' #S199900030) and the Chicago Boys were also involved in coup against Allende.

While the Chicago Boys charted the country's path to free market, Pinochet cleaned the way by eliminating anyone who became an obstacle.

The brutal legacy of neoliberalism instilled by Pinochet dictatorship is visible across Chile, including in the country's constitution - which the successive government's since 1990s either failed to change or wilfully supported.

Piñera and far-right Presidential candidate Kast had envisioned this neoliberal model as the future for Chile. Both Piñera and Kast are product of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, that also laid the foundation for Chicago Boys with University of California. Kast, son of a former German officer with ties to the Nazi Party, is also anti-abortionist, anti-LGBTQ and a vehement supporter of Pinochet. He was also the only major presidential candidate to stand against the rewriting of Pinochet era constitution.

Meanwhile, the conservative government of Piñera had been marred with corruptions, acts of state led violence against protesters. Piñera had also granted pardons to 10 convicted criminals who participated

in the torture, murder, and disappearance of political opponents during the Pinochet's dictatorship.

While previous left leaning governments who attempted to break free from the neoliberal tentacles in the post-Pinochet dictatorship era achieved some success; Boric and the left wing alliance's has a historic task ahead. It has, for now, managed to stop Chile from sliding back into the Pinochet era barbarism, but with deep rooted neoliberalism, Chile's socio-economic situation is at the verge of collapse.

Chile ranks among the top 20 most unequal countries in the world, with the top 1 per cent holding 33 per cent of the country's wealth. COVID further aggravated the material troubles of the low-income Chileans who make up the majority of the population. In fact, over half of all workers earned insufficient income in 2020 to keep their families above the official poverty line. A year into the pandemic, almost 30 per cent of poor Chileans lacked work, while over three-quarters reported being unable to meet their most basic needs.

This crisis was reflected in the 2019 uprising, which the Piñera initially attempted to suppress using the military and state violence. Tens of thousands of people across Chile rose against poverty wages, against a privatised pension system that condemns most retirees to undignified old age, and against apartheid-like health and education systems. More than 30 people were killed and hundreds were arrested

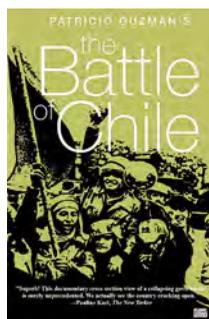
and subjected to torture. Many cases of sexual violence were also reported.

The Left alliance has vowed to take forward the demands of the working class and toiling masses of Chile against the corporate loot and increasing inequality. Their agenda includes increasing public investment in education, health, social security (including pension) and reforming the country's mining sector that has running the lives of people and the surrounding ecology. Boric has also promised to expedite the process of creating a more inclusive society by ensuring increasing participation of women, non-binary Chileans and Indigenous peoples. The alliance will also have an historic responsibility to complete the on-going process of rewriting of the Pinochet era Constitution. In Chile, no transformation of the society and bridging the inequality is possible without completely dismantling the Pinochet's neoliberal tentacles.

*"If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave,"* Boric said during a campaign. *"Do not be afraid of the youth changing this country."*

With the people's mandate, Boric and the Left alliance has a historic opportunity - and also responsibility - to consolidate the anti-neoliberal resistance and complete the socialist revolution process that was derailed by US backed Pinochet regime. ■

#### WATCH:



**The Battle of Chile (1975-1979)**

by  
Patricio Guzmán



**Chicago Boys (2015)**

by  
Carola Fuentes  
Rafael Valdeavellano

#### READ:

**Chile Documentation Project, National Security Archive**, Declassified files from the USA's Covert Operations in Chile against Allende and in Support of Pinochet.

# The New Strategies of Hindu Supremacists in Britain

▲ AMRIT WILSON

**A**fter a year of intense struggle, and in the face of harsh repression, India's farmers' movement has won a remarkable and inspiring victory.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been forced to give in to at least one of its key demands - the repeal of the pro-corporate Farm Laws, which they say his regime had arbitrarily imposed. Some 700 farmers have lost their lives in this year of struggle. Others say they have draconian charges hanging over them.

Modi's climb-down is most likely because elections are looming. Nevertheless, the farmers' victory is a brilliant spark of hope which illuminates the power of people's movements and delivers the message that the struggle must continue - and that the Hindu supremacy and fascism of Modi's BJP Government can be defeated.

In Britain, while many trade unions and Labour Party branches have expressed their solidarity with the farmers and others resisting Modi, there has been a surprising lack of interest in the fact that the BJP's toxic ideology is coming to our doorsteps here.

The Hindu right has systematically set up, or taken over, a host of organisations in the UK. They include: the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), which is the overseas wing of the RSS - the fascistic ideological parent of the BJP; the Hindu Council UK; the National Hindu Students Federation; the National Council of Hindu Temples; and the charity Sewa International, which was exposed in 2002 for channelling funds to organisations which carried violent communal attacks in Gujarat.

It is also active as suave British Indian businesspeople and financial analysts, who are the other, hyper-

neoliberal, face of the Modi regime - less well-known Priti Patel and Rishi Sunak-type figures. Against a background of Modi's deepening relationship with Israel, these members of the Hindu right have been urging the Indian Government to copy Israel's strategies - and not only militarily in Kashmir.

## 'Hinduphobia'

Back in 2014, when Modi first came to power, Alpesh Shah - a hedge fund manager and columnist for UK's pro-Modi Asian Voice newspaper - wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, urging him to make it the business of India's Government to look at how Hindus are treated worldwide.

*"This doctrine is not novel in international relations," he said. "The people of Israel provide protection for Jews wherever they are in the world, of whichever nationality. We shall extend no less protection to Hindus."*

The assumption - central to Shah's letter - that Hindus are under attack was already being used routinely by the BJP and its cohorts in India to instigate violence: lynching, massacres and pogroms against Muslims.

More recently, this notion of Hindus as victims has surfaced in the West too, increasingly suggesting that Hindus (like Jews) are under systematic racist attack - both in the UK and globally, and that they face 'Hinduphobia' and require justice and protection.

Racism, however, requires a contemporary or historical structure that generates and perpetuates it. No such structure exists in the case of Hinduphobia. Unlike antisemitism, Islamophobia or anti-black racism, it has no historical or material basis. In the UK, racism against Indians has always been directed at us as 'Asians'

- and, since the 1990s, in the form of Islamophobia (if we are Muslims) - but never as Hindus. As someone from a Hindu background, in the nearly 60 years I have lived in this country, I have never faced racism directed at me as a Hindu despite often wearing a sari and a bindi.

In the US, one may assume, pressurised by the Hindu right, the FBI has added anti-Hindu bias as a possible cause of hate crimes. But its statistics, published in August, show that such crimes are negligible, even as attacks on black people and south Asians have escalated.

## Does Hinduphobia exist in Muslim-majority countries?

In Pakistan, there have been attacks on Hindus but they can be seen clearly as just one element of the communal or sectarian violence directed at multiple minorities (including Muslim Shias and Ahmadiyas, Christians and others) by a majoritarian state. 'Hinduphobia' is therefore no more valid as a concept than 'Christianophobia'.

In Bangladesh, horrific attacks have recently taken place on the Hindu minority. But the killings and attacks on temples are not part of a global phenomenon. Communal violence has been endemic in south Asia for many decades - often rising to terrifying levels. This has been acerbated, many activists say, by the knock-on effects of the rise of the BJP and raging Islamophobia in India on the south Asian region as a whole.

As for the claim that Hinduphobia exists in India too, this is absurd since India is a Hindu-majority country with a Hindu supremacist government in power.

Most significantly, there have never been any globally relevant structures, laws or policies - akin to the 'War on Terror' for example - which have attacked or discriminated against people as Hindus.

Alpesh Shah's implication that there is a global community of Hindus similar to the world community of

Jews that Zionists claim to speak for, is equally flawed.

What does now exist is a network of Hindu supremacist activists in the US, UK, Europe and Australia who seek to clamp down on criticisms of the Modi regime and have most recently been working hard to get Hinduphobia accepted as a form of racism.

## Tactics Used in the UK

In each country, these activists adapt their strategy to fit in with 'local' conditions.

In the US, universities have been a focus. Last month, they targeted an academic conference critiquing Hindutva – the ideology of the BJP. Participants were sent death threats. One speaker, the poet Meena Kandasamy, had pictures of her children posted online with captions such as “ur son will face a painful death”, as well as casteist slurs. At the same time, there were vociferous claims that the conference was an attack on Hinduism and, as such, Hinduphobic.

In the UK, the Hindu right appears to be following a slightly different route.

In 2018, the Hindu Forum of Britain arranged a private meeting with Gideon Falter, CEO of the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism (CAA). The chair – none other than Conservative MP Bob Blackman, who has a history of hosting Islamophobes – declared that there was a need to “learn from the way the CAA had got the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism passed in the Labour Party” with regards to supposed anti-Hindu sentiment.

A year later, two weeks before the 2019 General Election, a spokesperson for the Hindu Council UK supported Rabbi Mirvis' claim that the Labour Party is antisemitic and added that it is anti-Hindu too because a conference resolution had criticised Modi's policies in Kashmir.

More recently, the Hindu right

appears to have been attempting to draw in unsuspecting progressives. This has already had some success.

The 1928 Institute claims to be a descendent of the anti-colonial India League which was active in Britain from 1928 in campaigning for India's independence. However, while the India League saw the struggle in India as part of a larger struggle against imperialism and racism – and included such socialists and anti-imperialists as Harold Laski, Bertrand Russell and Fenner Brockway – the 1928 Institute's list of 'notable members' includes a corporate billionaire who admires Modi. Even the Prince of Udaipur, scion of one of India's most wealthy oppressor caste Rajput dynasties, is on board. The 1928 Institute told Byline Times it has “*diverse members with no influence over the organisation*”.

The 1928 Institute has launched 'non-political' research into the identity of British Indians. In a discussion on Zoom, a spokesperson told me that its database of British Indians was built up by “*kind of reaching out to people*”. (The 1928 Institute has subsequently disputed this and said that the research was compiled using “a robust methodology approved by the University of Oxford”). The results were predictable: 80% of those who responded had experienced prejudice as a result of their Indian identity. The most commonly reported type of prejudice was Hinduphobia.

One of its report's key recommendations states: “*It is critical that anti-Indian racism, in particular, Hinduphobia, is acknowledged and addressed by institutions such as media houses and universities. We recommend that this type of discrimination should be framed in a similar, zero-tolerance manner to that of Islamophobia and antisemitism.*”

The spokesperson acknowledged that the data sample may have been “skewed” since Hinduphobia was only mentioned by a comparatively small number of people, and that too in optional comments.

The 1928 Institute has subsequently told Byline Times that the findings may have been “*misinterpreted*” and “*misquoted*” and stressed that it has no right-wing affiliations. However, its research has given the notion of Hinduphobia an enormous boost and much publicity.

It has been picked up by Hindu right groups across the world as ‘proof’, at last, that Hinduphobia not only exists but affects British Indians more than any other form of racism. In the UK, Samir Shah – one of the authors of the controversial Sewell Report on the findings by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities – has weighed in on Hinduphobia. Racism against Hindus may or may not exist, he says, but “*understanding*” it will “*nip it in the bud*”.

Meanwhile, Navendu Mishra – a member of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs – has tabled an early day motion which “*acknowledges research by the 1928 Institute which revealed that 80% of British Indians have faced prejudice because of their Indian identity, with Hinduphobia the most prevalent... and calls on the Government to take steps to urgently address this worrying rise*”. It has been signed by 45 MPs, including not only those known to be supporters of Modi such as Barry Gardiner and Bob Blackman (who were awarded the prestigious Padma Shri by the BJP Government), but others one would not expect to see in their company.

While the difficulties these MPs may face in refusing to endorse calls to confront racism are understandable, they need to understand that Hinduphobia is a fabrication and endorsing it in Parliament will help those who stoke the fires of Hindu fascism. They need to realise too that many British Indian communities have been historically opposed to the Hindu right and many others are increasingly horrified by what they see unfolding in India today. ■

*The article first appeared in Byline Times*

## ***SASG Statement on the Nationality and Borders Bill***



**S**outh Asia Solidarity Group unequivocally condemns the UK government's new proposed Nationality and Borders Bill.

The bill sets out a range of draconian measures to exclude people from the UK, including a lethal change which allows Border Forces to turn back boats carrying refugees across the Channel.

One of the key measures of the Bill allows the Home Office to revoke people's citizenship without their knowledge, and expands the pool of those eligible to have their citizenship revoked. Two in five people from non-white (ethnic minority) backgrounds could become eligible, including approximately 635,000 people born in India (the largest group likely to be affected), and almost half of all Asian British people (born in the UK).

This is especially disturbing when considered alongside the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) bill, which, if passed, will significantly increase police power to arrest protesters. Revocation of citizenship is overwhelmingly bound up with criminalisation. These two bills together clearly seek to deter anyone with non-British heritage – particularly people of colour, and those born outside the UK – from attending protests on any issues of social and political justice. This simple, peaceful action could lead

not only to arrest, but to loss of their citizenship – which is never a danger for white British people. This is an overtly racist piece of legislation.

The Home Office is trying to justify this bill by claiming that no one will be made stateless – which would violate international law – and that people will be able to claim citizenship of the country where they or at least one of their parents were born. But we must also examine the foreign governments which the Home Office claims will generously offer citizenship.

The bill and its being introduced alongside the PCSC bill bears striking resemblance to the Indian BJP government's use of two key laws. These are the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) introduced in 2019, which clearly aims to disenfranchise India's Muslims, and the much older Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), under which countless activists, journalists and dissenters have been arrested, particularly since Modi's government came to power in 2014. Muslims, alongside Dalits, Adivasis, and people from other minority groups, have been especially targeted, arrested and criminalized under the UAPA.

The Nationality and Borders Bill is a sign that the UK is following in India's footsteps: coupling a clampdown on dissent with a targeted campaign to revoke the citizenship of already-

marginalised minorities. This is no coincidence. As we have discussed elsewhere, the UK Home Secretary Priti Patel is a known ally of the RSS – the BJP's parent organisation – and is clearly aware that the Indian government is a kindred spirit and will never grant citizenship to anyone dissenting against a right-wing establishment, either its own or that of another country.

A significant number of people of Bangladeshi origin are also likely to be eligible to have their citizenship revoked under the Nationality and Borders Bill. A crucial precedent for the bill is the case of Shamima Begum, which made headlines in 2019 after then-Home Secretary Sajid Javid revoked her British citizenship on the grounds that she was eligible for citizenship of Bangladesh. This was despite Shamima having been born a British citizen, with only her parents holding Bangladeshi citizenship. The Home Office refused to budge even when the Bangladesh government declared that she would face the death penalty on entering Bangladesh. This is to be expected of a government known for arresting, disappearing and torturing dissenters such as Shahidul Alam, Shafiqul Islam Kajol, Kabir Kishore and Mushtaq Ahmed, along with countless others.

The UK government knows what it is doing. This bill is clearly a route to disenfranchisement and even deportation of people of colour on an unprecedented scale. But it goes beyond even that. The Home Office is effectively collaborating with other governments to make people stateless. We must see this bill in the context of the widespread disenfranchisement of minorities and clampdown on protest by far-right and authoritarian governments globally, as a global attack on activists and marginalised people.

We stand in opposition to this bill in solidarity with all those resisting similar legislation in South Asia and across the world, in the name of democracy, anti-racism, and a continued fight for social justice. ■

# Modi Regime: Undermining Parliamentary Democracy

(At a glance, Nirbhay shows you how the Modi regime has been undermining parliamentary decision-making.)

- **Use of ordinances** – Article 123 of the constitution grants the President law-making powers during recess of the Parliament. The role of the Parliament is to make laws and that of the executive is to implement them. However, ordinances which are examples of subordinate legislation give the executive the power to make laws. In the case of D.C. Wadhwa v. State of Bihar, Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati observed:

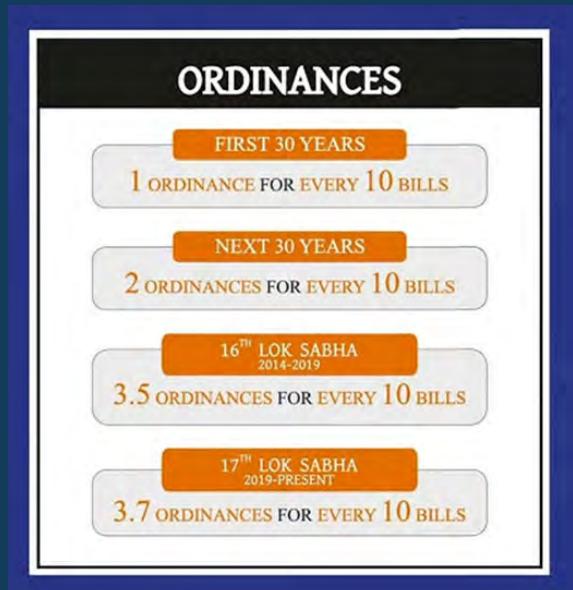
“The power to make an ordinance is to meet an extraordinary situation and it should not be made to meet political ends of an individual. Though it is contrary to democratic norm for an executive to make a law but this power is given to the President to meet emergencies so it should be limited in some point of time.”

The Modi regime is an expert at passing ordinances. In the first 30 years after independence, 1 ordinance was passed for every 10 bills. From 2014-2019, 3.5 ordinances were passed for every 10 bills. From 2019 onwards, 3.7 ordinances have been passed for 10 bills. At this pace, we might have more ordinances than bills if this government stays in power!

**Goodbye Parliamentary committees** – In the 16th Lok Sabha (2014 to 2019), only 25% of the bills were referred to parliamentary committees which was much lower than the 71% in the 15th and 60% in the 14th Lok Sabha respectively. Let us understand why this is a problem. Parliament scrutinizes bills in two ways. The first is by discussion on the 2 houses. This is compulsory. Since Parliament meets for around 70 days a year, there is not enough time to discuss every bill in detail on the floor of the houses. Moreover, debate in the house is mostly political and is not constructive in the sense that it doesn't get into the technical details of the bill. The second way is referring the bill to a parliamentary committee. This ensures a detailed discussion on the bill. This however is not mandatory. Former US President Woodrow Wilson sums it up perfectly “... it is not far from the truth to say that Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work”.

- **No public consultation** – The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy 2014 mandates departments to publish proposed legislation in the public domain and solicit comments and inputs for a minimum period of 30 days. Of the 29 bills listed for passing during the winter session, 17 (60%) saw no public scrutiny before being listed in the parliament. Of the 12 bills which saw public scrutiny, 6 did not follow the rule of a thirty-day deadline.

Is it legal to use ordinances, to subvert parliamentary committees, to avoid public consultation of bills, to disrupt Parliament? Yes! Is it something that must be done in democracies? No! These are loopholes offered by democracy and must be used sparingly in order to avoid destruction of democracy. This regime knows how to use democracy to subvert democracy as all demagogic regimes do. ■



# FOUR WARS OLD FOURTEEN YEARS OF CHILDHOOD IN GAZA

Of the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza, 41% are children aged 14 or under. These children have lived their entire lives under Israeli blockade and experience multiple types of trauma.

“  
 In Gaza, there is no ‘post’ [traumatic] because the trauma is repetitive and ongoing and continuous.”

Samah Jabr  
 Chair of Mental Health Unit, Palestinian Ministry of Health

### TYPES OF TRAUMA

#### CHRONIC TRAUMA

Prolonged, pervasive distressing events such as poverty or institutionalized discrimination

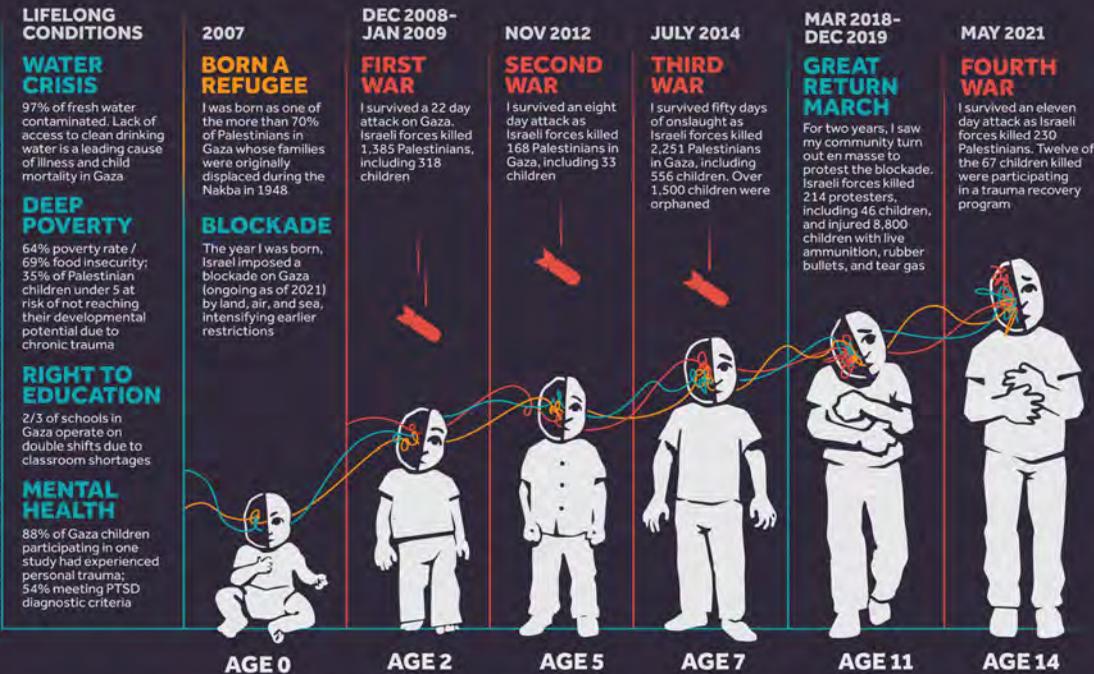
#### INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Psychological trauma experienced by the descendants of a person who has survived a traumatic event

#### ACUTE TRAUMA

An extremely distressing individual event

JUNE 2021



VISUALIZING PALESTINE

SOURCES [bit.ly/vp-trauma](http://bit.ly/vp-trauma)  
[WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG](http://WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG)

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Sixty-seven Palestinian children were killed during Israel's 11-day assault on Gaza in May 2021. Our latest visual looks at what life is like for the hundreds of thousands of children who survived, for whom a ceasefire offers little relief. This is childhood in Gaza. Around half of Gaza's population of 2 million are children, and 41% are aged 14 or under, which means hundreds of thousands of kids have known only life under the dire conditions of Israeli blockade, which began in 2007. (CREDIT: Visualizing Palestine/ <https://visualizingpalestine.org>)

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