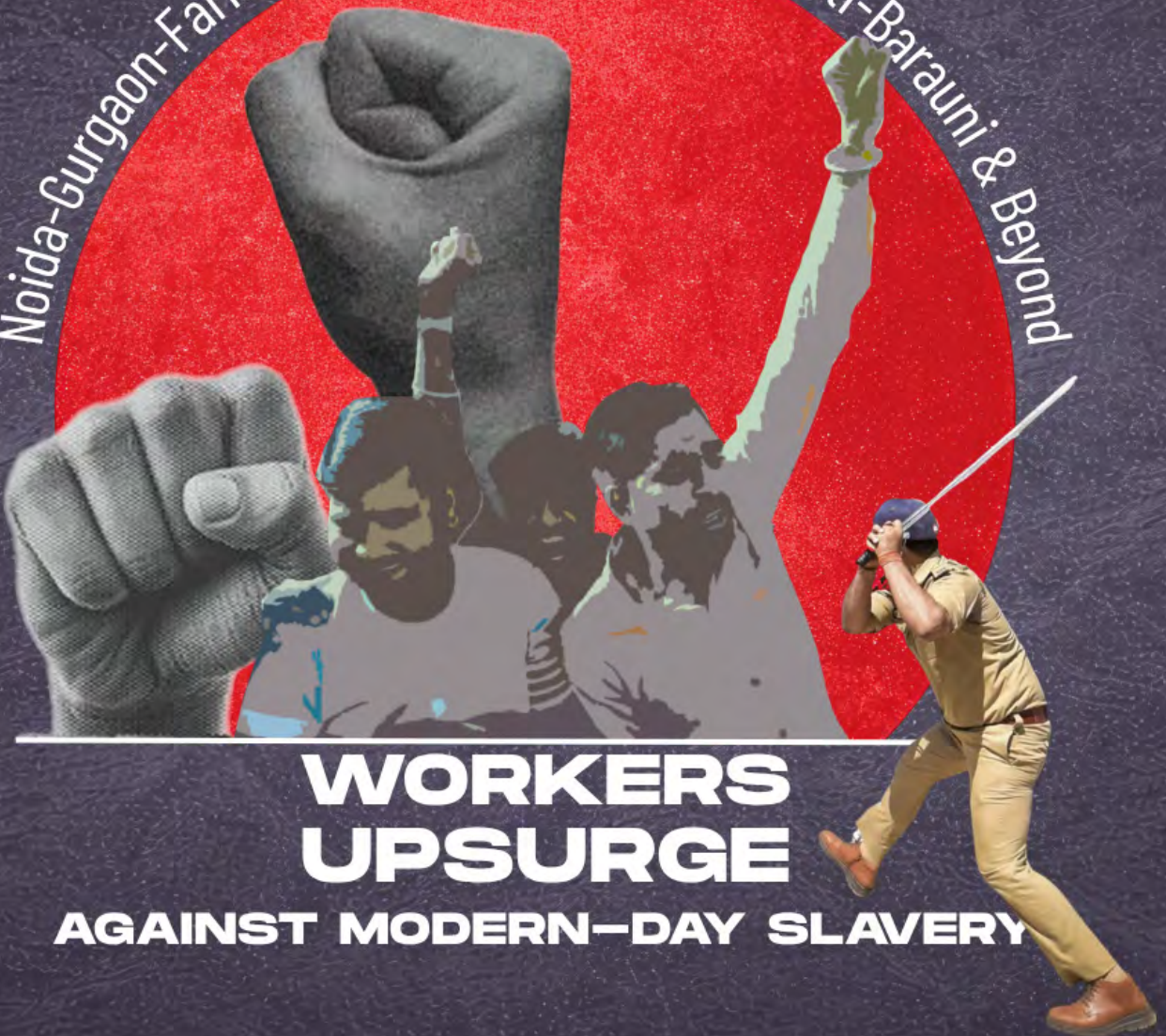


Liberation

MAY 2026
Rs. 25

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

Noida-Gurgaon-Faridabad-Panipat-Surat-Guwahati-Barauni & Beyond



**WORKERS
UPSURGE
AGAINST MODERN-DAY SLAVERY**

Call of April 22, 2026



We are observing the 57th anniversary of the foundation of our beloved party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), in a truly tumultuous world situation. The US-Israel war on Iran which has already entered its second month is turning out to be a huge blow to the global hegemony of US imperialism. Trump and Netanyahu had thought that they would be able to overpower Iran in a few days and could easily effect a regime change by killing the top leadership, along with the heinous targeted attacks on schoolchildren and other civilians. But Iran has displayed great resilience, rapidly entrusting new leaders and officials to fill the places of those killed by the US-Israel attacks. Along with this resilience Iran has displayed considerable military acumen and prowess to inflict continuing damages on US-Israel military targets and turn the Strait of Hormuz into a highly effective strategic weapon.

The result has been a massive outpouring of popular anger against the Trump Administration within the US itself. The European allies of the US have also begun to distance themselves from the Trump Administration, many refusing to offer any cooperation to the US war campaign. Arab countries offering military bases to the US and global technology giants operating from the Gulf region are increasingly feeling the heat of the war.

India too is having to pay a heavy price for the war waged by the US and Israel, with whom the Modi government has closely and disastrously aligned India. Nearly ten million expatriate Indian workers and professionals working in West Asia are now living in the shadow of tremendous uncertainty and insecurity. The war has created a major crisis of fuel and fertilizer in India. For millions of migrant workers, it is like a return to the Covid period lockdown when sheer survival had become such a big challenge. The combination of deep economic crisis and stark foreign policy failure marks a new juncture for our struggles in India, and we must respond with a bold anti-imperialist anti-fascist line of resistance.

As we observe our 57th foundation anniversary, we can see new signs of unrest among the people of

India. Millions of people across India are now having to fight for their right to vote, the most fundamental democratic right enjoyed by generations of Indians since the adoption of the Constitution. Protests are erupting among workers against the new labour codes, especially against the imposition of longer working hours. The trade deal with the US has disastrous implications for India's agriculture and farmers are getting ready for another round of decisive struggle to save agriculture from imperialist takeover. The question of rural employment guarantee is attracting renewed attention in the wake of the dismantling of the MGNREGA legislation. The stalling of the UGC regulations has rekindled the quest for meaningful social justice. 2026-27 marks the run-up to the centenary of two landmark events in India's history of anti-caste movement - Mahad Satyagraha (20 March, 1927) and the public burning of Manusmriti (25 December, 1927) and bi-centenary of Jyotiba Phule, one of the greatest pioneers of the quest for social equality and emancipation.

CPI(ML) is a party born in the fire of the great Naxalbari peasant upsurge. A party which proudly inherited the revolutionary legacy of the entire communist movement and has continued to renew itself by drawing on the strength, courage and initiative of the people in the face of all odds. The ruling classes across the world have written obituaries of the communist movement from time to time, but the movement has defied such triumphalist declarations and bounced back.

Today when the fascist rulers seek to malign the communists while suppressing and betraying the nation and its people with the blessings of imperialism, the CPI(ML) will have to uphold the communist banner and lead the struggle for a genuinely sovereign secular socialist democratic republic. Let us expand and strengthen the CPI(ML) in every possible way to fulfill the dreams of our great martyrs and serve the interests of our great people.

- Central Committee,
Communist Party of India
(Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation)



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CONTENTS

COMMENTARY

Manipur Crisis	05
SIR Bulldozer in West Bengal	07
My Vote, My Right: Karnataka Campaign	09
Criminalisation of Transgender People	11
Free Speech is Withheld in India	14
An Epstein in India – Ashok Kharat	15

ARTICLE

Law Against Dis-Honour Killings in Karnataka	16
On Jyotiba Phule and Mahad Satyagraha	18
Mahad Satyagraha and Manusmriti Dahan	19
Dimensions of Identity	25

IN-FOCUS

Wave of Workers' Revolt Continues	28
Displacement and Resistance in Sijimali	31

FILM

The Voice of Hind Rajab	33
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Implement Women's Reservation Forthwith!

Complete and Publish Caste Census at the Earliest!

Evolve a National Consensus for a Fair Delimitation!

Just a week ahead of Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the Modi government convened a special session of Parliament to place a Constitution Amendment Bill and two other related bills pertaining to the next round of delimitation of constituencies and implementation of thirty-three percent reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies that had already been passed in September 2023. A Constitution Amendment Bill can only be passed with at least two-thirds support of members present and voting. In the given arithmetic of the present Lok Sabha the NDA numbers are way short of the two-thirds benchmark and the bill naturally had negligible probability of getting passed. It is therefore little surprise that the 131st Constitution Amendment Bill actually got defeated with 230 members voting against it.

This was the first time the Modi government had to taste a defeat while attempting to amend the Constitution. In this sense, the defeat of the 131st Constitution Amendment Bill is the third major setback for the Modi government in recent years following the repeal of the

farm laws and the BJP's loss of independent majority in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. But it is hard to believe that the Modi government did not really anticipate this outcome. Surely it could not be smug enough to expect the TMC or DMK to stay away from the special session because of their preoccupation with Assembly elections in their respective states. Did the BJP then plan this session just to try and present itself as a martyr for the cause of women's empowerment?

The propaganda blitzkrieg launched by the BJP immediately after the defeat and withdrawal of the bills would indeed suggest that the Sangh brigade had its plans ready. Brazenly violating the spirit of the election code of conduct, Modi misused his office of Prime Minister to deliver an utterly partisan election speech in the guise of an address to the nation. The BJP believes that it has now got a new talking point that can shift the public attention away from the deepening economic crisis, the US-Israel war on Iran and the mass disenfranchisement caused by the SIR. But beyond speculating about the sinister calculations of the Modi government and

the Sangh brigade, we need to draw strength from the successful legislative resistance waged in the Lok Sabha to build more determined and dynamic opposition on the ground.

The biggest lie being peddled by the Modi government and the Sangh brigade is that the opposition has blocked the implementation of women's reservation. Narendra Modi has termed the defeat of the delimitation bill a murder of the dreams of women, even terming it a female foeticide. In reality, the bill on women's reservation was unanimously passed in Parliament in September 2023 and the BJP has to explain what it has done so far towards its implementation. It was the Modi government which had unnecessarily included the Census and delimitation as prerequisites for women's reservation in Parliament and Assemblies. With little progress on the Census front, the government now sought to hold women's reservation hostage to a dubious and utterly opaque delimitation exercise delinked from the census. It is this devious design that has now been exposed and defeated. The women's reservation bill passed in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on 20 and 21 September 2023 remains very much in force as the 106th Amendment to the Constitution.

No previous introduction of reservation, whether political reservation or reservation in other spheres to SC/ST communities, OBC reservation in employment and education or women's reservation itself in panchayats and municipalities has been contingent upon an increase in the overall strength of Parliament, Assemblies or

panchayats and municipalities, or number of available places in the arena of employment or education where such reservation was applied. The idea that one-third reservation for women could be done only by creating an extra space and not in the existing space trivialises the very idea and purpose of women's reservation. The bills that have now been defeated and withdrawn made it very clear that women's

In a parliament of 850 members drawn on the basis of the 2011 census, the southern states were liable to see their representation drop from 24.3% to 20.7%, the eastern states from 14.4% to 13.7%, the north-eastern states from 4.4 to 3.8 while the Hindi heartland states of UP, Bihar, MP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Delhi would have had their share surge from 38.1% to 43.1%.

reservation was only being used as an excuse for an arbitrary and sinister scheme of delimitation.

It is true that the 84th Amendment Act, passed by the Vajpayee government in 2001, had extended the freeze of parliamentary strength decided in 1976 by another twenty-five years and accordingly the next round of delimitation is due after the first census conducted after 2026. It so happens that the 2021 census itself was delayed and work for the new census began only in 2026. The government sought to delink the next round of delimitation from this current census and hence from any

consideration of the caste count that the new census is expected to produce. In fact, it sought to make any future delimitation exercise entirely opaque and arbitrary where the government of the day could get any design of delimitation executed with a simple parliamentary majority. The reason why the parliament's strength was frozen in 1976 and the freeze was subsequently extended by the Vajpayee government in 2001 was to minimise the effect of India's skewed population growth pattern on the parliament configuration. Any unqualified unfreezing of the numbers is liable to drastically tilt the regional balance of the parliament in favour of a few North Indian states to the neglect of the rest of India.

The so-called guarantees peddled by Modi and Shah in their speeches regarding maintaining the current proportion of states and regions were conspicuously missing in the actual text of the bills. In a parliament of 850 members drawn on the basis of the 2011 census, the southern states were liable to see their representation drop from 24.3% to 20.7%, the eastern states from 14.4% to 13.7%, the north-eastern states from 4.4 to 3.8 while the Hindi heartland states of UP, Bihar, MP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Delhi would have had their share surge from 38.1% to 43.1%. There was absolutely no logical explanation in the bills as to how the new numbers - 815 for states and 35 for Union Territories - were arrived at. On a matter as delicate as delimitation that called for a transparent and rational democratic process of consensus-building to strengthen India's unity in diversity and the federal balance, the Modi government

displayed a most casual and conspiratorial approach - convening a special session right in the middle of Assembly elections and furnishing the copies of the bills just on the eve of their presentation in Parliament to minimise the scope for study and scrutiny.

The Delimitation Commission enjoys greater constitutional powers than even the Election Commission. Once finalised, the delimitation formula is beyond the ambit of any parliamentary scrutiny or judicial review. And the Commission has the power not just to determine the size of Parliament or Assemblies, but also to draw the boundaries of constituencies. The delimitation exercise has already played havoc in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, redrawing constituencies and using the SC/ST reservation formula in a manner guaranteed to erode the opposition's chances of winning and structurally weaken the say of the religious

and linguistic minorities in the legislative arena. A pan-India replication of the J&K and Assam pattern of delimitation will render the electoral field of India utterly skewed in favour of the BJP's majoritarian anti-minority politics. Instead of being a rational process of updating, delimitation would degenerate into the most sinister form of gerrymandering where opposition votes are packed into a smaller number of constituencies or cracked (dispersed) widely to lose their critical numerical effect.

When such a devious delimitation design is executed in combination with a curated electoral roll and synchronised elections with Assembly polls being robbed of their autonomous context and reduced to extensions of the Lok Sabha elections (as proposed under the One Nation, One Election formula), all overseen by a handpicked election commission, the electoral system of India will

produce a permanent settlement of power for the BJP much like the colonial era 'permanent settlement' of revenue that had institutionalised landlordism in India. The defeat of the delimitation bill in Parliament marks just an initial setback for this sinister design. India must now reject this design decisively. We need a powerful countrywide movement to press for immediate implementation of women's reservation on the basis of the existing strength of Parliament and Assemblies, early conclusion of census and publication of the caste data, and evolution of a national consensus on the next round of delimitation to reconcile representation on various levels with the federal democratic character of the republic. The special session of Parliament has exposed and checked a key game plan of the fascists, we must now carry the message far and wide among the people on a war footing. ■

Manipur Remains Trapped in Deep, Devastating Crisis

▲ CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

Manipur continues to bleed, and the latest violence is a chilling reminder that the so-called restoration of normalcy remains a dangerous illusion. Since April 7th, 2026, violence has once again flared, resulting in the killing of two children. The horror of two infants being killed inside their own home has exposed the utter fragility of the peace that the government has been eager to project. Since then, protests have erupted across the valley, with further civilian deaths reported in

clashes with security forces. Far from being an isolated incident, this tragedy reveals how deeply unresolved the conflict remains.

For nearly three years, i.e., since May 2023, Manipur has remained trapped in a deep and devastating crisis. A state of barely 3.2 million people has been torn apart by sustained ethnic violence between the dominant Meitei community in the Imphal Valley and the Kuki-Zo tribes in the surrounding hills. More than 300 lives have been lost, while over 60,000 people continue

to live as displaced persons in segregated relief camps, cut off from any semblance of normal life. Even when the scale of violence appeared to reduce, peace never truly returned. What emerged was not peace but a fragile and militarised stalemate enforced by armed deployments, curfews, internet shutdowns, and buffer zones. The relative decline in violence owed less to any meaningful political solution and more to mutual exhaustion among the affected communities, combined with central security

force deployments. The events in Bishnupur have once again exposed the bankruptcy of a governance model that substitutes security management for political resolution.

It goes without saying that the violence and segregation that have raged for more than 3 years now, are the outcome of the actions - and inaction - of the BJP government. Even as the then BJP Chief Minister Biren Singh displayed utter incompetence and a disturbing reluctance to end the bloodshed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to prioritise foreign visits over the burning reality of Manipur. The dismal responses of both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in Parliament only laid bare their political bankruptcy and their complete inability to offer any meaningful, comprehensive solution to the crisis. The resignation of Biren Singh on February 9th, 2025 and the subsequent imposition of President's Rule for a year brought the state under direct Union control. Yet even this extraordinary intervention could not restore normalcy. Despite intensified disarmament drives and expanded humanitarian relief, fatal clashes continued.

Prime Minister Modi's long-awaited visit to Manipur on September 13th, 2025 more than 28 months after the outbreak of ethnic conflict, where he delivered public addresses at Imphal and Churachandpur focused extensively on infrastructure projects and investments in the State, while the ongoing conflict found only incidental mention, reduced to an appeal for peace so that development would not be hindered. A rather transactional approach exemplifying the limited political imagination of

the BJP seeking to substitute justice and reconciliation with promises of development.

The restoration of an elected government in February 2026 under Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh was projected as a turning point. His coalition, with Kuki and Naga representation, and the reconvening of the Assembly were presented as steps toward reconciliation. But symbolic gestures alone cannot heal a society fractured by years of violence, mistrust, and displacement. Tens of thousands continue to live in relief camps, economic life remains severely disrupted, and even inter-district movement is tentative. The condition of the camps remains a stain on the conscience of the nation, with basic services grossly inadequate and essential relief arrangements insufficient. A state cannot claim normalcy while its citizens are reduced to surviving in camps, dispossessed of home, livelihood, and dignity.

On the other hand, a civil society approach that is trapped in simplistic binaries reduces the crisis to a straightforward Hindu right versus minority conflict, which ignores the complex political realities of the state. In the last Lok Sabha elections, the Congress won both parliamentary seats in Manipur against the BJP, despite widespread fears of money power, force, and booth capture, puncturing the logic of the Meitei population being firmly in the grip of the Hindu right. Equally, the claim that the Hindu right works exclusively with the Meiteis to marginalise tribal groups is complicated by the fact that there are seven BJP legislators from the Kuki-Chin community, including a Deputy Chief Minister from the

community. There is no neat communal binary; what obtains is a complex fragmented political terrain marked by shifting alliances and competing social interests. Scholars have long argued that the protracted conflict in the state is inseparable from India's security and policing approach to the region, an approach that continues to carry the imprint of colonial logic. Borrowing from Bimol Akoijam, the "postcolonial" itself becomes an oxymoron in the context of Manipur, where the state's relationship with the region continues to be mediated through force, surveillance, and exceptionalism.

What we are witnessing in Manipur is nothing short of a historic betrayal. Never before in independent India has a government presided over such a complete rupture of the social fabric that entire communities within a single state have been driven into ethnic enclaves, separated by fear, violence, and militarised boundaries. This did not emerge in a vacuum. It is the direct political consequence of a double-engine BJP government that has manufactured division in a state which, despite its history of conflict, had repeatedly found ways to reconcile and live together.

What we are witnessing in Manipur is not merely a law-and-order problem, but a profound democratic failure. Until the political roots of the conflict are confronted - including the failures of governance, the distortions of centre-driven security policy, and the fractured social compact within the state - every claim of peace will remain hollow, and every fresh death will stand as a reminder of that failure. ■

The SIR Bulldozer is Destroying Electoral Democracy in West Bengal

▲ GURSHABD GROVER

The largest disenfranchisement exercise in the history of independent India is unfolding in West Bengal. The logic of the Special Intensive Revisions (SIRs) conducted in recent history has been simple: the Election Commission of India (ECI) is putting the onus on individuals to prove themselves as valid voters.

This time around in West Bengal, the ECI has reneged on even the most basic of promises it had made to the Supreme Court for the Bihar SIR - turning the disastrous and traumatic exercise into a population-level calamity. In the West Bengal SIR, the ECI refuses to be satisfied even if a voter is able to map themselves to the 2002 electoral roll. They may still be required to produce additional documentation.

Besides forcing individuals to carry out the onerous task of mapping themselves to the 2002 election, the ECI invented a new category for disenfranchisement: “logical discrepancy”. The ECI admits to using algorithms that are a black box to the public, with the aim to purge voters from the list for having mismatches in name spellings across documentation. With no standardised way to transliterate Indic scripts to the English alphabet, such “inconsistencies” are bound to occur. At the scale of millions, they are not logical discrepancies, but merely logistical vagaries of bureaucratic procedures.

Ostensibly then such an “algorithm” would produce near equal rates of exclusion via this category for Hindus and Muslims. The ECI deliberately obfuscated their public data to make such analysis difficult. But, Alt News and the Sabar Institute have painstakingly digitised records and concluded what the sane feared: Muslims represent a wildly disproportionate of those placed ‘under adjudication’ and disenfranchised.

Alt News digitised and analysed 12 lakh voter records across six constituencies. From the 3 lakh voters were placed ‘Under Adjudication’, 92.6% are Muslim whereas Muslims only make up 51.7% of voters. The overall Muslim adjudication rate for Muslims in this constituencies is an astounding 42.2%, i.e, a Muslim in West Bengal is nearly a coin flip away from being purged from the voter list. The adjudication rate for a Hindu? 3.5%.

The Sabar Institute’s analysis of the voter rolls in Nandigram - part of the assembly constituency where BJP’s chief ministerial candidate Suvendu Adhikari is contesting a seat - yielded a similar trend. Muslims make up 25% of the population in Nandigram, but 95% of the deletions. The Sabar Institute rightly called these patterns in deletions as “structural” across West Bengal.

From Samserjang to Mothabari, from Bhabanipur to Manikchak, more than half of all Muslim

voters in the constituency were placed ‘under adjudication’ (compared to 2.3% for Hindu voters). These numbers are not just enough to radically alter the course of elections, but they will actively deprive voting rights of entire communities.

Turns out that the opaqueness of the system and the invention of the ‘logical discrepancy’ classification is simply a new excuse to disenfranchise Muslims at an unprecedented scale. Oppression in the name of religion is not just a part of this exercise, the analysis of data suggests that it might be the point of it.

And what does the ‘under adjudication’ status mean for the 91 lakh excluded voters? 59.8 lakh such cases have been recklessly and hurriedly signed by judicial officers, who found 27 lakh voters as “excludable” - stripping them of their constitutional right to vote in a matter of days.

There is little recourse in reality now. The 27 lakh individuals that can argue their case in appellate tribunals. Only 19 of these tribunals have been set up and they’re all in a single building in Kolkata. Newslandry found people from all over the state - labourers and single mothers forgoing their daily wages, and the elderly - arriving there to argue their case and fight for their most basic rights, only to find themselves barred from entering the premises without an official summon. Newslandry rightly suggested that these tribunals are a “black hole” and

hope for an actual appeal is being dealt a swift death in Kolkata.

By April 22nd, the ECI had only added 136 people out of the 27 lakh back to the voter rolls. It had heard 138 cases, proving not only its abysmally slow rate of adjudication, but the fact that the majority of those effective have been unjustly excluded from a decisive election. 27 lakh people have to suffer the consequences of the ECI's decision to enact a mass destruction of rights rather than complete a routine revision that was its mandate.

With this SIR, the ECI's veneer of "independence" lies completely stripped off. Not that they are trying to hide it: the official ECI account on Twitter posted a thinly-veiled threat to the Trinamool Congress, and the Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar told their party delegation to "get lost" when they posed some questions.

The response of the Supreme Court of India to such grave injustice is also illustrative of its general decline and subservience

to the executive. On April 13th, it completely abdicated its constitutional responsibilities and refused to provide interim voting rights to those who were purged from the rolls. Thus, the judiciary has acquiesced to the largest single coordinated voter roll purge in the world in at least the past 30 years - and likely since universal suffrage became a global norm.

Innocent until proven guilty has been turned on its head, and now one is "under adjudication" until proven a citizen - effectively enabling mass repression and rewarding the BJP and ECI for their fascist tendencies.

With the mass disenfranchisement exercise complete, the BJP is keen to declare a premature victory. In an interview, Suwendu Adhikari seemed to be proud to have consolidated the "Sanatani" vote. When pressed about BJP's losing seats from West Bengal in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, he shared an eerie analysis of Muslim votes versus Hindu

votes, and gloated that "after the SIR, the contest is over."

It is important to tackle the hubris of the BJP by contesting the polls. Even though the Hindu nationalist party is hellbent on turning elections into sham rituals, some local polls still suggest a defeat for the BJP. The SIR itself has become a focal point for the upcoming contest, and we must continue to fight for the hard-won rights of people to a representative democracy.

The urgency of the restoration of voting rights for lakhs in West Bengal cannot be understated. The mass disenfranchisement is right in BJP's ideal "chronology" of events - the invalidation of a key identification document, for many, portends exclusion from other state programs and darker threats looming around the corner. In the West Bengal elections, we are not just advancing a front that upholds India's most basic rights, but fighting to dismantle the BJP's brazen bigotry and ploy to hollow out Indian democracy. ■

SIR: Joint Left Protest in Kolkata against Attack on Voting Rights

Left parties including CPIM, CPIML and CPI organised a joint protest march in Kolkata on 11 April from Dharmatala to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, protesting against the Election Commission's move to curtail voting rights in the name of SIR. The protest saw participation of leaders and activists from various Left organisations, who condemned this organised attempt to disenfranchise large sections of voters in West Bengal.

Addressing the march, CPIML State Secretary Abhijit Mazumdar said that the developments in West Bengal are shocking, with voting rights of millions being taken away without any fault on their part. He pointed out that nearly twenty

seven lakh voters who had exercised their franchise in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are now being denied their voting rights.

He said that the principle of eligibility has been turned upside down, where voting is no longer being treated as a basic democratic right but is being reduced to a matter of privilege and uncertainty. He said that any election conducted after removing millions of voters from the electoral rolls will be nothing but a farce at the most fundamental level.

He asserted that the people of West Bengal will give a fitting rebuff to those who seek to purge the electors to grab power.

My Vote, My Right: Karnataka Campaigns To Say NO TO SIR

▲ LEKHA ADAVI

Even as 2.89 crore voters in Uttar Pradesh, 91 lakh in West Bengal, 74 lakh in Tamil Nadu, 9 lakh in Kerala - a staggering 7.5 crore citizens in total - have been mass disenfranchised after the second phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls, the Election Commission of India continues to bulldoze with Phase III, which draws in Karnataka among 21 other states.

The legal picture adds to the urgency. The Supreme Court of India is still hearing the matter and has not ruled on SIR's legality. Yet the ECI has not paused. The Court itself has noted that the ECI's position before it has been shifting and inconsistent, and has intervened directly to oversee SIR's implementation in West Bengal - even before the case is decided - which does not fare well for democracy and its practice in India. In one pointed observation, the SC noted that if the winning margin in a constituency is 2% and more than 15% of the electorate could not vote, the constitutional and political damage is self-evident. In West Bengal, a state where the BJP has demonstrated it will pursue power at any cost, that damage is already done.

A Campaign Takes Shape

Against this backdrop of national mass disenfranchisement and state abdication, civil society organisations in Karnataka

resolved to act. The trigger was an early meeting convened by the Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka (CEO-K) with all political parties, including CPI(ML) Liberation. The CEO made clear he saw himself as a conduit for the ECI rather than a guardian of voters' rights, and that SIR would be implemented regardless. The announcement that SIR would be carried out in Karnataka came at a time when five municipal corporation elections in the Greater Bengaluru Authority area were imminent and the state government's socio-economic survey was already underway.

The response was to convene a broader gathering - Muslim, Dalit, women's, slum, student, and progressive organisations - to collectively plan for what was coming. That meeting gave rise to a round-table conference, attended by representatives of the farmers' and workers' movements, where a resolution was passed to resist SIR in Karnataka. The coalition adopted a name: the 'My Vote, My Right' campaign. Its dual mandate was to press the Congress-led state government to pass an anti-SIR resolution in the assembly, and to prepare legally for a fight if it came to that.

Mapping the Ground and the Gaps

The campaign's first phase focused on understanding what SIR actually meant in practice. Members met with Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) to hear directly

about the difficulties they and voters were encountering in the field. Complaints were compiled and filed with the CEO-K. No response came. Repeated requests for a meeting with the CEO-K went unanswered. Across the state, protests went up demanding that SIR be stopped.

Parallel to this, mapping of voters was progressing at pace. Media reports indicated 73.2% completion. When the CEO-K eventually released figures, he claimed that 4.46 crore of Karnataka's 5.57 crore voters had been mapped. But buried in that same data was a revealing detail: only 19.13 lakh voters had actually been 'System and BLO verified.' The accuracy of the remaining mapped voters was left an open question - one the campaign was determined to raise.

The State Government: Promising Much, Delivering Little

The campaign engaged Karnataka's political leadership at several levels. A meeting with Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee Honorary President GC Chandrashekhara revealed that the party was running its own voter verification exercise - spurred by Rahul Gandhi's concerns about 'vote chori' - with BLA-2 agents working at booth level. Trainings were underway. Yet when campaign representatives attended one such session, it became apparent that the Congress's energy was directed primarily toward

preparing for the upcoming municipal corporation elections, which are expected to be held only after SIR concludes.

Efforts to meet Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar were not successful. The budget session, and the duo's internal contradictions, kept those meetings from happening. At a cabinet meeting, the Department of Law was tasked with studying the national picture and submitting recommendations within 15 days. Campaign representatives met with HK Patil, Minister of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, who heard the campaign's concerns and promised a stakeholder consultation before any report was submitted. That consultation has not been called. The report has not been submitted. The state government has yet to take a formal position.

The Communities Most at Risk

While the political negotiations continued, the campaign turned its attention to the communities that SIR would hit hardest. In Kodagu district, the campaign spoke to the Paniyerava Adivasi community and found a situation of near-total exclusion. These families have moved between plantations over the decades and cannot trace where their names appeared in the 2002 voter rolls - the document that SIR treats as its baseline. They do not possess the records that would prove their 2002 address, nor can many recall where their parents or grandparents were registered. A BLO working in the area was unambiguous: it had proven impossible to locate even one person's name in the 2002 voter list. A survey was carried out to

collate the community's electoral data and documentation, and a formal complaint was filed with the CEO-K. The situation, the campaign found, was not unique to one settlement - it reflected the condition of the Paniyerava community across Adivasi areas and plantation line-houses throughout the district.

A similar survey is underway for the transgender community across Karnataka. Preliminary discussions brought to the surface significant barriers: community members estranged from their families face difficulty obtaining their parents' voter details, while name and gender changes create further complications that SIR's rigid document requirements are ill-equipped to accommodate.

Awareness work has also been initiated among migrant workers in Bengaluru - people who have come for their livelihoods from districts in North and Kalyan Karnataka and now face uncertainty about their electoral status. The campaign has also attempted to reach Devadasi women, who, having been disowned by their families through generations of a brutal and exploitative practice, cannot furnish the family documents SIR demands. Their children face the same impossibility.

On the Ground: Workshops, Helpdesks, and Complaints

Awareness workshops have been held in Kodagu, Dakshin Kannada, Udupi, Chikmagalur, Mysore, Davangere, Uttara Kannada, and several other districts. In Bengaluru, workshops have been organised with slum organisations, domestic workers' unions, women's organisations,

transgender community groups, trade unions, and Dalit groups.

The campaign has also trained youth volunteers to run helpdesks across the city, assisting voters in locating their 2002 mapping details and preparing their documentation before SIR formally begins. The problems surfacing at these helpdesks are varied and telling: discrepancies in names and addresses, changed addresses, relatives' names that don't match records, an inability to recall 2002 registration details, names that were deleted from the 2002 rolls altogether. For each case, individual complaints are being filed with the CEO-K.

What This Fight Is About

The My Vote, My Right campaign is working on three fronts at once: raising public awareness about what SIR means in practice, providing direct assistance to voters who risk being excluded, and pressing the Congress-led state government to take a clear, formal stand in defence of Karnataka's voters. The state government has so far responded with process - commissioning reports, promising consultations - without producing any of it, showing their lack of seriousness.

What is at stake is not procedural and administrative. It is the right to vote - the foundational right of the Constitution, the one through which every other political claim is made. To allow SIR to proceed unchallenged, with its demand for 2002 documents that millions of Karnataka's most marginalised citizens simply do not have, is to write those citizens out of democracy. ■

The Heirs Of Bhagat Singh Will Never Be Intimidated By The Anti-Communist Bluster Of The RSS-Modi Regime

The Home Minister, in the parliament on March 30, repeated the typical RSS lies against the communist movement calling it inspired by a 'foreign' ideology.

The discussion on leftwing extremism in Parliament on March 30, 2026 predictably became a platform for the Modi government to vilify the entire communist movement in India. The Home Minister repeated the typical RSS lies against the communist movement calling it inspired by a 'foreign' ideology. Here's Amit Shah repeating the stupidest allegation made against communists, adherents of the most universal ideology of human emancipation, ever since the Communist Manifesto put forward the vision of a world without exploitation and oppression.

Communism has inspired India's finest patriots beginning with the HSRA leadership core of Chandrashekar Azad, Ashfaqullah Khan, Bhagat Singh and their comrades

and successive generations of heroes of India's freedom movement and champions of people's welfare and people's rights in independent India. In stark contrast to the glorious legacy of India's communists, the Sangh brigade has always stood at the other end of the spectrum, collaborating with the colonial rulers during the freedom movement days, and now misusing political power to mortgage the country's interests to the US imperialism and rob the working people to enrich the billionaires.

Mark the timing. This ideological vilification of communists from the floor of Parliament is meant to camouflage the most brazen capitulation by the Modi government to the US-Israel axis of aggression and war

and most blatant betrayal of India's national interests. This ideological witch hunt is however no longer limited to the anti-communist agenda of the RSS. With the sinister coinage and usage of terms like 'urban naxal', 'andolanjevi', 'anti-national' and the like, the government has been targeting every single stream of dissent in a bid to transfer all resources of India to a few corporate hands.

The heirs of Bhagat Singh will never be intimidated by the anti-communist bluster of the RSS and the Modi government. The communist movement will rebuff this agenda by intensifying the battle against fascism and imperialism on every front.

- Dipankar Bhattacharya,
GS, CPIML Liberation

Reject the Return to Colonial Criminalisation of Transgender People

▲ CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

The abrupt introduction of the Amendment Bill to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 in March 2026 has triggered widespread protests by thousands of transgender people across the country. In a

manner now characteristic of the Modi government's legislative approach, the Bill represented a roll-back of hard-won rights, and was brought forward without prior consultation, notice, or meaningful engagement with those affected. It was then

pushed through Parliament with undue haste, disregarding serious objections raised by the Opposition as well as by representatives of the transgender community, who questioned not only the process but the very rationale and necessity of the proposed amendments.

Transgender people have been part of the South Asian societal fabric for centuries with references in ancient mythology and folklore, continuing to the Mughal period where they played a significant role in governance and state power while holding influential positions serving as advisors and military leaders. British colonial rule brought with it systematic discrimination and criminalisation of the very existence of Transgender persons culminating in the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 which designated Transgender persons as a “criminal tribe” subjecting them to surveillance, restrictions on movement and livelihood, and social exclusion, with lasting effects of marginalisation. Transgender people were denied the right to wear female clothing and jewellery or even perform in public, and were subjected to severe police intimidation and coercion. The Criminal Tribes Act was finally repealed after Independence in 1952, yet the cultural stigma, institutional discrimination and societal ostracisation that it aided in shaping and building, continued unabated, which the transgender community courageously battled through their militant struggles across the country.

The major breakthrough achieved by these struggles was through the landmark Supreme Court judgment in *NALSA vs Union of India* (15th April 2014 and commonly called the *NALSA* judgment), declaring transgender persons a 'third gender', and recognising and directing equal access and opportunity for them in society. The *NALSA* judgment, crucially, recognised the right to self-identification of gender by transgender persons and set in place the legal recognition of the rights of the transgender

community. Without a doubt, spurred by the *NALSA* judgement, further sustained struggle and advocacy strengthened the collective demands of the community and compelled the Union Government to enact the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, marking a journey from the criminalisation of transgender people by the colonial powers in 1852 to the recognition of their rights through legislative fiat!

The 2019 Act was a major breakthrough for the recognition of the transgender community and the recognition of their rights, which included the right to self-identification; the right to an affirming identity documentation; education, social security and health of transgender persons; protection against discrimination etc. While it was criticised in its failure to provide a complete code for the protection of transgender people, the law was a starting point of recognition and rights-conferment on transgender persons.

However, this victory has turned out to be short-lived, with the Modi government introducing the controversial 2026 amendments to the 2019 Act, taking it perilously close to the colonial-era institutional discrimination and leading to widespread protests across the country and a spate of resignations from the National Council for Transgender Persons, despite which the same has been passed in Parliament and is now awaiting the formality of Presidential assent.

The *NALSA* judgment had affirmed, in no uncertain terms, that the right to self-identify one's gender flows directly from the guarantees of equality,

dignity, and personal liberty, and was explicit that this right is not contingent on medical intervention, bureaucratic certification, or the approval of the State. The 2019 law, despite many shortcomings, at least attempted to give statutory shape to this constitutional promise. The proposed Amendment Bill, however, marks a troubling and regressive departure.

Firstly, the amendment brings a fundamental change by introducing a restricted definition of a transgender person to cover only socio-cultural identities like Kinnars, Jogtis, Hijras, Aravanis, etc., intersex variations, eunuchs and those forced into transgender identity via mutilation or procedures. It explicitly excludes transmen, transwomen, genderqueer and non-binary persons, who, hitherto, enjoyed the protection of this very law.

Secondly, the specific purpose of the amendment to de-recognise self-perceived identities, outrightly denies the legislative history and legislative intent of the 2019 Act. The Statement of Objects and Reasons to the amendment Bill states that the law is intended to only protect those who “face severe social exclusion due to biological reasons for no fault of their own and no choice of their own”, and not to “protect each and every class of persons with various gender identities, self-perceived sex/gender identities or gender fluidities.” This militates against the binding *NALSA* judgment, which recognised the right of transgender persons to determine their own gender identity as integral to leading a life with dignity. This falsely-premised and regressive amendment discriminates against a large

category of transgender persons by denying them the right to be legally recognised by their gender identity.

This form of retrospective derecognition of “transgender persons” by twin exclusion by definitional restrictions, is a characteristic feature of law-making in the Modi era. Through the new Labour Codes, which too are fundamentally exclusionary, crores of workers who hitherto enjoyed labour law protections, have been pushed outside the purview of the law by definitional restrictions in the new Labour Codes. And similarly we are witnessing the retrospective derecognition of people’s citizenship and voting rights through the Special Intensive Revision.

Thirdly, the amendment mandates medical scrutiny that invades privacy and bodily autonomy. The relatively straightforward process for recognition as transgender persons under the 2019 Act, is replaced by a gatekeeping procedure where a medical board’s recommendation is mandatory, before the Deputy Commissioner scrutinises any application for the certificate of identity. This, represents the second major contravention of the NALSA judgment which expressly rejected the requirement of medical evaluation and recognised the fundamental right to self-identify.

Fourthly, this gatekeeping procedure is, by design, exclusionary and meant to create sufficient bureaucratic red tape to deny protection to those it purportedly aims to protect. It is common knowledge that the transgender people

facing “severe social exclusion”, whom the restricted definition aims to protect, are largely from economically, culturally and socially marginalized communities. Replacing a legal framework that allowed for self-identification with a complex framework fraught with extensive administrative and medical scrutiny, is bound to place protection of this law beyond their reach. This is another aspect symptomatic of the Modi regime - deregulation of the economy facilitating corporate loot and natural resource handover, on the one hand, and draconian policing of constitutional and legislative entitlements to the vulnerable communities, on the other.

Lastly, the amendment to Section 18 introduces new offences, which criminalise force/compulsion of persons to “to assume, adopt, or outwardly present a transgender identity”. This stigmatises and pathologises transgender identity as being a result of coercion, instead of a representation of personal autonomy. Further, it may render communities like hijra jamaats, kinnar akhadas, etc., as well as community support groups vulnerable to criminalisation, while acts of community support and solidarity will be misconstrued as inducement. This erodes social support which has, historically been central to the survival and welfare of transgender people. The provisions are reminiscent of the colonial Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 which criminalised transgender persons for appearing dressed or ornamented as women. The provisions are capable of misuse against the support systems of the transgender person, outside of their natal families, and can

put the transgender person to further risk.

Alongside the amendment to the Transgender Act, 2019 following this broader anti-diversity and anti-rights agenda of the Sangh Parivar, the manner in which the amendment was forced through is in line with the BJP’s concerted effort to reduce law-making and parliamentary process to a mockery. Immediately after the amendment Bill was introduced, two members of the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) resigned since the decision to move the amendment Bill forward was taken without any formal consultation with the NCTP, which undermines the very purpose for which this Council was established. Jst. Asha Menon (retd.) Chairperson of the Advisory Committee appointed by the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India, to look into the strengthening of the systems in place under the Transgender Persons (Protection Of Rights), Act 2019, including to assess any shortcomings in the statute, has gone public stating that the Advisory Committee was not consulted and that the Amendments “have therefore come as a great shock and would be a tremendous set back to the efforts to mainstream the community”.

This attack by the Union Government on the transgender community and the reimposition of colonial stigmatisation and criminalisation of transgender people, must be strongly condemned and resisted as part of a determined movement of the people against the BJP and its parent body, the RSS and their project to undermine democracy and the Constitution. ■

Free Speech is Withheld in India

▲ GURSHABAD GROVER

Doom-scrolling Indian political Twitter has a new texture these days. Alongside the usual vitriol, posts and entire accounts increasingly dissolve behind a grey notice: “withheld in India in response to a legal demand.” X told the Karnataka High Court that it received over 29,000 such demands from Indian authorities in the first half of 2025 alone - roughly 160 a day. This is what the Modi government’s reshaping of the online sphere looks like, thanks to the legal changes it’s been making under the Information Technology (IT) Act.

Displaying a unique fervour for political repression, the BJP Government has amended the IT Intermediary Rules four times since 2021. And they’re back for more.

First, in 2021, a major overhaul of the Rules mandated internet services and social media platforms act quickly when the Central Government asks them to take down content. Then, in 2022, they were obligated to take more steps to keep “prohibited” content off the platforms. In 2023, the proposed “Fact Check Unit” could dictate the “facts” that could stay online. In 2024 - this time without formally amending the Rules - the BJP Government set up a Sahyog portal that allows various government authorities to issue content takedown notices quickly to many online platforms. Sahyog, meaning cooperation, ushered in a new era of collaboration: now all ministries and police departments can cooperate on hampering the exercise of free speech.

Some of these efforts were thwarted thanks to High Courts.

The Bombay and Madras High Courts stayed parts of the digital news and streaming provisions in 2021, and in September 2024 the Bombay High Court struck down the Fact Check Unit.

But such hurdles can hardly stop tyrannical zeal.

In February this year, the Government decreased the compliance time for platforms for takedown notices from 36 hours to 3 hours. This essentially forces online platforms to blindly censor speech based on the Government’s demand - regardless of whether the takedown order is legal or not - or else face legal repercussions.

And now the IT Ministry has released draft amendments on March 30. That gives the Modi cabinet an impressive batting average of one amendment per year, with most strokes aimed at hitting criticism of the government far over the boundary of democracy.

These recent Draft Rules propose expanding the censorship power of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to all citizens and internet users who post news and about current affairs. Effectively, the Government is intent on bypassing the very provisions the Bombay High Court had in essence stayed because of suspect legality. This spells a death knell for independent and progressive journalism that thrives online, and has all but disappeared from national newspapers and television. As the Internet Freedom Foundation put it, these changes are “a massive expansion of an unconstitutional censorship and regulatory power.”

The Draft Rules also make it

mandatory for internet services to comply with and guideline or advisory that the IT Ministry publishes - severely blurring the line between executive whim and actual law that needs to be complied with. This is particularly concerning because the Ministry has often issued these advisories in private, and decreases the transparency of government censorship on social media.

Developments over the last five years mean that anything that the BJP Government deems objectionable is removed from online spaces within three hours, and the Draft Rules seek to entrench this hegemony. The government remains the sole arbiter, and these takedowns have no oversight: users typically receive no notice, Parliament has no say, and the courts rarely step in to create precedent to stop this juggernaut of stifling free speech.

The IT Intermediary Rules were a way to define rudimentary compliance measures for internet services. In practice, the Modi government has consistently bypassed the Parliament through these executive-issued Rules that go way beyond the law, and turned them into an architecture for suppressing criticism. Everything from CPI(ML) Liberation leaders flagging the Delhi Police’s vandalism of an Ambedkar portrait, to reporting by The Wire and Alt News, to an individual calling the Prime Minister “totally useless,” has been blocked swiftly and without explanation.

If this proves anything, it is that Modi and his government are not entirely useless. They are remarkably efficient at one thing: silencing dissent. ■

An Epstein in India – Ashok Kharat

A Perversion of the Rotten Capitalist Patriarchal System!

▲ UDAY BHAT

Ashok Kharat, a self-styled “godman” from Nashik, Maharashtra, has been accused of sexually abusing women, filming those crimes, and using the recordings to blackmail victims and extort money from their families.

The crimes came to light through his own employee, Jadhav, who uncovered Kharat’s practice of recording sexual abuse and weaponising those videos for blackmail. What began as one whistleblower’s revelation quickly spiralled into a sweeping exposé of fraud, extortion, and deep political complicity. The scale and nature of his crimes prompted the media to dub him the “Epstein of Maharashtra”, a reference to American financier Jeffrey Epstein, who abused and trafficked young women for the benefit of powerful political and business elites.

The expose of Ashok Kharat shows the structural rot fed by patriarchy, class privilege, and the cynical use of religion. Kharat, a merchant sailor who falsely called himself Captain, relocated to Mirgaon, Sinnar in Nashik district roughly fifteen years ago. He built a Mahadev temple, established the Shivanika Sansthan, and reinvented himself as a numerologist and spiritual healer. Women who were unable to conceive, families facing poverty, workers without employment, that is the desperate, helpless and the dispossessed came to him to escape their troubles, and he exploited them.

Kharat enjoyed impunity for his crimes as he invited favours of the big and the mighty. Media reports suggest that politicians like Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Ministers Deepak Kesarkar and Chandrakant Dada Patil, including Maharashtra Women’s Commission Chairperson Rupali Chakankar, and dozen others are believed to be associated with him. BJP leader Amit Shah was photographed with him in 2014. Kesarkar himself admitted that at least forty MLAs maintained ties with Kharat.

Kharat took advantage of his political connections and broke several laws to further his organization. Kharat duly became a fixer – acquiring vast land tracts, building a luxury farmhouse, diverting a pipeline to his property while the surrounding drought-stricken region went without access to water. A preliminary SIT investigation has already indicated that NAFED-linked companies were allegedly defrauded of Rs. 1,300 crore by Kharat’s family firms. As the investigation progresses, more such transactions are expected to come to light.

The growing unscientific views and superstitious beliefs among people is fuelled by the political patronage that such “godmen” enjoy. The sexual abuse was enabled by a system that ridiculed women for not bearing children. Fraud was committed against those who desired proper housing, employment security, etc. The “godman” preying on

the vulnerable and the desperate.

The RSS-BJP ideological project is foundationally hostile to rationalism, scientific temper and egalitarian social reform. Since the BJP has come to power, the political legitimisation of fraudulent godmen has accelerated dramatically. This is no coincidence. Asaram Babu, Ram Rahim, Ramdev – the list of criminals and fraudsters for whom state protection was extended under this regime is long and damning. Add to this the felicitation of persons accused of crimes against women, defending Brij Bhushan Singh facing allegations from women wrestlers, or Kuldeep Singh Sengar, the glorification of Manusmriti, the spectacle of Kumbh Mela deployed as political theatre – and a coherent ideological architecture designed to reinforce caste hierarchy, patriarchal control, and religious obscurantism, because all three serve the interests of capital and the ruling class.

The victims of this architecture, as always, are Dalit women, Adivasi women, working-class women, women from backward communities. Their exploitation is not incidental to the system. It is the system.

While Rupali Chakankar has resigned and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has expressed performative concern, real accountability will come with prosecuting every politician and civil

servant who provided protection to Kharat. It means full rehabilitation and justice for every survivor. It means enforcing the Anti-Superstition Act without political exception. It means dismantling the structural conditions that enable Kharats in the first place.

Maharashtra's radical tradition of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Dnyaneshwar Tukaram, Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Sant Gadge Maharaj, is a tradition of precisely this kind of struggle. A

struggle that names oppression structurally, that refuses to separate the woman question from the caste question from the class question. That tradition must be reclaimed - urgently and militantly. ■

A Right to Love: Karnataka's New Law Against Dis-Honour Killings, A Step Forward and A Long Road Ahead

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

"I am convinced that the real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish...The real remedy for breaking Caste is intermarriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste."

- Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

The Karnataka Legislature recently passed the Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava¹) Act, 2026 a significant and much-needed step towards addressing the continuing menace of so-called "honour" crimes.

Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar identified endogamy as a central mechanism through which the caste system has been historically preserved and perpetuated. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr. Ambedkar noted that the rigid boundaries of caste are maintained not only through social and occupational segregation but, most fundamentally, through control over marriage.

By mandating endogamy the caste system ensures its continuity across generations, thereby institutionalizing hierarchy, exclusion, and discrimination.

Inter-caste marriage directly challenges this mechanism. It is precisely because of its potential to change social relations and norms, that such unions invite intense social backlash, including what is commonly called "honour killing". The terms "honour killing" and "honour crime" are misleading and dangerous labels. There is nothing honourable or justifiable about these acts. The word "honour" perversely masks what these crimes truly are: murders and acts of violence designed to punish individuals for asserting their autonomy. It is crucial to reject

any suggestion that these acts are connected to honour, and to recognise them instead as grave violations of individual rights and dignity that demand urgent legal and social intervention.

The violence these crimes involve is frequently directed at either or both partners. Women who assert their agency and choose partners outside the sanctioned boundaries of caste face severe punishment, ranging from confinement and ostracism to assault or murder. Men from oppressed communities bear the brunt of the violence, brutally attacked or killed as a warning to others who might similarly defy caste norms.

The roots of this violence run deep. The manumriti, which

[1] "Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava" is part of a vachana written by the 12th century social reformer Basavanna, meaning "He is ours" or "He is one of us" in reference to the message of universal humanity and connoting equality and dispelling castes and religions. Basavanna, who rebelled against the caste system to lay the foundation of the Lingayat faith system—an amalgamation of all castes—used the words meaning 'he is a part of me' to say all people are one.

strips women of autonomy over their bodies and their choices, places them under the permanent authority of fathers or husbands or sons. What is called an “honour” killing today is, at its core, the enforcement of manusmriti’s rules. It is precisely this order that the Constitution of India was written to dismantle.

It must also be noted that “honour”-based violence is not confined to inter-caste relationships, but also to inter-religious marriages. Inter-faith unions have increasingly become targets of organised intimidation.

The scale of the problem is significant, though not recognized, and undercounted. According to the National Crime Records Bureau Report India witnessed 530 such “honour” killings since 2015. It must be noted that this was included as a crime category only after 2014, and was therefore only recorded from thereon.

The Supreme Court has, time and again, taken serious cognizance of “honour”-based crimes, especially those targeting inter-caste and inter-faith couples, recognising them as not only criminal acts but also as violations of fundamental rights under the Constitution, and in fact even called for a law to be passed in this regard. Karnataka, which has witnessed a troubling rise in such crimes in recent years, has now answered that call, with a law that is the product of decades of struggle by activists, and civil society.

At its heart, this law is an affirmation of a foundational constitutional principle, that the freedom to choose one’s partner, to marry, and to live with dignity is a fundamental right. Violence, threats, harassment, coercion of any form inflicted in the name of honour or tradition are viola-

tions of constitutionally guaranteed rights. The law makes explicit what the Constitution guarantees, that every person, regardless of caste, community, or religion, has the equal and inviolable right to marry the person they love, without any hindrance from anyone, including the parents and other family members.

The main aspects of the law are:

- **The right to choose:** The law begins with a clear and unambiguous affirmation that every person has the right to liberty, freedom of expression, and the freedom to marry a person of their choice. This is irrespective of caste, religion or community. Any attempt, by an individual or a group, to obstruct that choice is a criminal offence.
- **Criminalising the full spectrum of harm:** The law does not stop at murder. It criminalises the entire range of violence and coercion inflicted in the name of “honour”, ranging from physical threats, social and economic boycotts, excommunication, and symbolic disownment rituals.
- **Obligations on the State:** The law places a legal duty on the Government to train officers, run sustained public awareness campaigns, and ensure that the law reaches those who need it most.
- **Fast Track Courts:** Dedicated courts are to be established so that justice for victims is swift and certain, not lost to the delays that have long plagued such cases.
- **Institutional oversight:** The *Eva Nammava Vedike* (translit. ‘He is Ours’ Forum) and district-level Monitoring Committees are established to oversee implementation, address grievances, and ensure

that the law does not remain a promise on paper.

While welcoming this much-needed legislation, it is necessary to express concern regarding the provision prescribing a minimum punishment of five years for murder committed in the name of honour. This stands in contrast to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which mandates life imprisonment or the death penalty for murder. There is no justification for treating honour killings less seriously than ordinary murder and this incongruity must be urgently corrected.

The passage of this law marks a beginning, not an endpoint. The Government must ensure strict enforcement of the law. It must also follow through with concrete action, and provide schemes and incentives to encourage inter-caste marriages, including ensure reservations for inter-caste couples and various other steps in this regard.

The Constitution’s promise of fraternity is a call to actively dismantle every structure that divides, excludes, and degrades. The caste system and religious divides are precisely such structures, which fracture society and deny the possibility of fraternity. The Karnataka law is one step in that direction. However, laws are only as strong as the will to enforce them, and the deeper work of dismantling caste prejudice and cannot be legislated into existence. As a society, we must confront the fractures that run through us, the hierarchies and divides of caste and religion that have been inherited, normalised, and too often left unquestioned. The larger work belongs to all of us, to break these structures of inequality and exclusion and together build a society on the constitutional promise of equality and fraternity. ■

Commemoration of the Bi-centenary of the Birth of Jyotiba Phule and Centenary of Mahad Satyagraha

Let Us Spread the Phule-Ambedkar Fire of Courage, Education and Reason against the Fascist Reign of Fear, Hate and Bigotry

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

We are now just one year away from the bi-centenary of the birth of Jyotiba Phule, one of India's greatest social revolutionaries. In a society where the powerful and the privileged have been dominating for centuries by monopolising knowledge, imagine an initiative that weaponises education to challenge both caste hierarchy and patriarchy. Imagine a vision of a truth-based order to counter the obscurantist reign of lies and bigotry. Imagine the quest for scientific modern agriculture with farmers' rights guaranteed by a welfare state to end the plight of millions of debt-ridden poor peasants. In Jyotirao Phule, nineteenth century India had witnessed the blossoming of this radical idea which was nothing short of the beginning of a social revolution in a feudal and colonial setting.

At the age of twenty-one, Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai, with the help of friends Fatima and Usman Sheikh, established the first school in India for Shudra and Atishudra girls in Pune in 1848. Another school for girls of all castes followed in 1851, followed by an evening school for working people in 1855. To put this into perspective, 1848 was the landmark year when the Communist Manifesto made its first appearance, setting the global stage for stirrings of freedom from capitalist plunder

and colonial brutality. Soon after, in 1857, large parts of India rose in revolt against the British rule, marking the first war of India's independence.

The fight for education in India in the 1850s was not merely a battle against illiteracy. It was a direct challenge against a social order that banned women in general and people of oppressed castes from accessing formal education. It was thus the beginning of a social upheaval without which colonial India could not really have a political awakening. Like Vidyasagar in Bengal, Phule in Maharashtra was also a great champion of widow remarriage. He even organised a barbers' strike to oppose forcible tonsuring of widows. In 1868 Phule threw open the water tank in his house for drinking by people dubbed 'untouchable'. This was nearly sixty years before Ambedkar would lead the Mahad Satyagraha to claim equal right to water as a free public good.

In 1873 Phule publishes his seminal work, 'Gulamgiri', against the caste system in India, and dedicates the book to the civil war fought to end slavery in America. In the same year he and his wife, Savitribai Phule, establish the Satyashodhak Samaj - or the Truthseekers' Society - to dismantle the caste hierarchy and promote the education of women and oppressed castes. Having had

to withstand relentless assault from conservative quarters for his own views, Phule always stood up for other scholars and reformers facing social stigmatisation and vilification, be it defending Tarabai Shinde for her feminist writings or Pandita Ramabai who received a lot of flak for her conversion to Christianity.

Decades before Ambedkar would identify caste as being anti-national and call for the annihilation of caste, Phule asserted that "There cannot be a 'nation' worth the name until and unless all the people of the land of King Bali - such as Shudras and Ati-shudras, Bhils (tribals) and fishermen etc, become truly educated, and are able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated." Of course, this 'bahujan' vision of nationalism articulated by Phule in the latter half of the nineteenth century contrasts starkly with the religion-based Hindutva nationalism propagated by the likes of Savarkar in the early decades of the twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, Savarkar's heirs in power are today desperate to reduce Phule to just another 'social reformer' and appropriate him as an EBC icon.

The trail blazed by Phule continued to light the path of India's freedom, especially freedom from caste oppression

and obscurantist dogma. Born just a year after Phule passed away in 1890, Ambedkar inherited and carried forward the legacy of Phule through his relentless crusade against caste discrimination and social injustice and single-minded focus on education and empowerment of women. Ambedkar recognised Buddha, Kabir and Phule as the three great masters who inspired him in his mission to establish the vision of humanism and rationalism and the core values of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a befitting coincidence that the bi-centenary of Phule's birth will also mark the centenary of the historic Mahad Satyagraha (20 March 1927) and the public burning of the Manusmriti, the code of social slavery (25 December 1927).

Remembering Phule and Ambedkar today is not just about

commemorating those inspiring chapters of India's history, it is about rekindling the radical spirit of the Phule-Ambedkar legacy to rejuvenate the battle for liberty, equality and fraternity in today's India. Education that both Phule and Ambedkar viewed as a fundamental tool of reason and social mobility is being recolonised as a preserve of the rich and the privileged and used as an instrument of ideological indoctrination, cultural uniformity and political control. The demand for discrimination-free education campuses is being mocked as an addiction to permanent victimhood. The Phule-Ambedkar vision of a welfare state guaranteeing the rights and benefits of India's farmers and workers is being trampled upon by a corporate state transferring all resources to ever fewer hands.

Adult suffrage guaranteed to every citizen as a constitutional sign of equality is no longer a universal fundamental right, with millions being subjected to systematic disenfranchisement and a life of utter uncertainty. And the Indian national identity advocated by Phule and Ambedkar on the basis of liberty, equality and fraternity - free from any division and discrimination in terms of caste, gender and creed - is being systematically refashioned on the basis of Brahmanical Hindu supremacy and cultural majoritarianism. Let the observance of the bi-centenary of Phule's birth, and the centenary of Mahad Satyagraha and the Manusmriti burning, become an occasion to spread the Phule-Ambedkar fire of courage, education and reason against the fascist reign of fear, hate and bigotry. ■

Contemporary Reality in the Context of the Centenary of Mahad Satyagraha and Manusmriti Dahan

▲ SUBODH MORE

“Drinking the water of the Chavdar lake will not render any of us immortal. We did not drink the water from this Chavdar Tank until today, yet neither you nor I have perished. Our visit to the Chavdar lake is not merely for the sake of drinking its water. We must go to that tank solely to demonstrate that we, too, are human beings, just like everyone else!”

– Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
Second Bahishkrut Parishad, Mahad, 1927

March 20th, 2026, marks the commencement of the centenary year of the historic Chavdar lake Satyagraha, an assertive act of civil resistance, and the burning of the ‘Manusmriti’ (December 25th, 1927) in Mahad,

Maharashtra. The Chavdar lake Satyagraha of Mahad holds immense significance within the movements for social transformation in India and the broader struggle for human liberation. The force of the resistance achieved by

Chavdar lake Satyagraha, laid the foundation of an independent ‘Dalit Movement’ in India.

Before the Mahad Satyagraha, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Ramaswamy Periyar, and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, among others,

who were, the non-Dalit revolutionary social reformers had led struggles for social equality and to challenge the practice of untouchability.

The distinctive feature of Chavdar Lake Satyagraha or the Mahad Satyagraha lies in the fact that this battle for social equality was initiated and led by the Dalit community. The leaders of Mahad Satyagraha were those who had to endure indignity sanctioned by the caste-based hierarchy, an ideology enshrined in the Manusmriti.

In a remarkable moment in the history of social reform movements in India, the 'Chavdar lake Satyagraha' and the 'Manusmriti Dahan' (Burning of the Manusmriti) was led by the prominent Dalit proponents of social transformation. The struggle took place at Mahad, a town in the Konkan region of Maharashtra at the foothills of Raigad, which was the erstwhile capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. This event was underpinned by a specific historical and social context. Following the arrival of the British, the 'untouchables' of the Konkan region gained an opportunity to serve in the British Army. Dalit soldiers in the British Army, were able to experience a transformation in their daily lives. Their employment enabled them to cast off the mindset of servitude and embrace self-respect and independence. They gained access to education, economic mobility and the subsidiary benefits it brought along. Even during this period, we saw a lot of influence of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and others. Gopalbaba Walangkar, a Dalit

member of the British Army, was one among those who was influenced by Mahatma Phule and actively worked towards kindling the spirit of struggle among the Dalits against the social inequalities and injustices. His campaign was mainly in the Konkan regions of Mahad, Dasgaon, and Dapoli. He raised awareness, primarily through, 'Anarya Dosh Parihar Mandal', an organization he founded to irradicate the stigma attached to the non-Aryans.

Several activists joined Walangkar to stand at the forefront of the social reform movement in the Konkan region. Among those who supported him were Subedar Ramji Sakpal, i.e., Dr. Ambedkar's father, Madiwale Joshi (aka Vitthal Hate) from Dasgaon, Gangaram Bhagoji Savadkar from Veer, Subedar Gangaram Bhatankar from Panvel, among several others. He was a pioneering social reformer and journalist of the Konkan region, who served as the Secretary of the 'Anarya Dosh Parihar Mandal'. The British government of the time appointed him as a member of the Mahad Local Board in 1895, thereby recognizing his work to foster social awakening and enlightenment.¹

During his tenure as the local body member, Walangkar moved a resolution advocating that all public tanks, wells, and water sources be opened to everyone, i.e., including the Dalit community and that the children of the Dalit community be granted admission to schools. It was a historical moment.

Subsequently, in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1923, Rao Bahadur S.K. Bole, followed Walangkar and successfully

passed the 'Bole Resolution'. The resolution mandated that all public places, wells, tanks, water sources, and dharmashalas are made accessible to everyone, including the Dalit community. A similar resolution was passed in 1924 by Surbabana Tipnis, the President of the Mahad Municipality. However, he was unable to effectively implement this resolution in practice in Mahad or elsewhere.

The initiative to ensure the actual implementation of this resolution, which sought to open the public spaces, wells, tanks, and water sources was taken by Ramchandra Babaji More, an educated, Dalit youth from Dasgaon. Ramchandra had endured the stings of untouchability practice during his own educational pursuit. He had to wage a struggle against the orthodox elements in Mahad, merely to secure an admission into the school. It was only after submitting a petition to the District Collector and writing letters to newspapers, followed by a directive issued by the Collector that RB More was granted admission into the high school.

RB More drew his ideological inspiration primarily from Gopal Baba Walangkar and from Babasaheb Ambedkar's elder brother, Balaramdada Ambedkar. He took the initiative to ensure the actual implementation of the Mahad Municipal Council's resolution to give access to the public tanks to everyone. At a young age, RB More convened the first meeting of youth from the Dalit communities in the Dasgaon, Veer, and Mahad regions in 1924. This meeting was held in Mahad, in

[1] Gopal Baba Walangkar — The Pillar of the Ambedkarite Movement, Prem Hanwate, 2021, Swayandeep Prakashan

‘Maharwada’, a locality where the Mahar’s lived. Today, that location is situated adjacent to the ‘Kranti Bhumi’.

During this gathering, RB More apprised every one of the details of the ‘Bole Resolution’. He resolved to organize a ‘Bahishkrut Parishad’ (Conference of the Excluded) in Mahad, under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, to facilitate the resolution’s implementation. No individuals from non-untouchable communities were present at this meeting. It was this very assembly that entrusted RB More with the responsibility of persuading Dr. Ambedkar to attend the conference. Following this meeting, he, along with Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad, a Mumbai-based veteran leader of the Dalit community, met with Dr. Ambedkar at his office along with the social activist Anant Chitre (Bhai Chitre). RB More informed Chitre and Dr. Ambedkar about the proposed conference and expressed that they both should be part of this conference.

During his subsequent visits to Mumbai, RB More persistently followed up with Dr. Ambedkar regarding the organization of the conference. Dr. Ambedkar sent his associate along with Kamlakant Chitre, a member of the ‘Bahishkrut Hitakarini Sabha’, to assess the progress of the conference preparations in Mahad in 1925. RB More convened a meeting of prominent activists from the Dalit community in the Mahad region, along with Chitre. This meeting was attended by Subhedar Vishram Savadkar, Bhanudas Kamble (from the Charmakar community), among others. Following this

meeting, Chitre, More and Savadkar had a meeting with the Municipal President of Mahad, Surbabana Tipnis, seeking clarification on the legal aspects of the resolution and announced that, soon a ‘Bahishkrut Parishad’ would be held in Mahad under Dr. Ambedkar’s leadership to ensure the implementation of the ‘Bole Resolution.’ At that time, Surbabana Tipnis pledged his cooperation for the conference.

Over the next two years, RB More continued to meet with Babasaheb and with Dalit youths working in Mumbai to discuss matters related to the conference. During this time he, with the assistance of Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad, established a youth organization in Mumbai called the ‘Mahar Samaj Seva Sangh’. RB More served as the General Secretary, while Bhikaji Gaikwad became the President and Keshavrao Adrekar was the Treasurer. Activists of this organization toiled day and night to publicize the upcoming conference throughout the Mumbai and Konkan regions and to raise funds for the event, for which the play, ‘Sant Tukaram’ was performed at the Damodar Hall theatre in Mumbai.

In his efforts towards press for the implementation of the Bole Resolution, RB More formally notified the local Tehsildar and police administration that he intends to hold a public event at the Crawford Tank and wells located in his village Dasgaon. On December 4th, 1926, approximately 200 to 250 people were present in Dasgaon, for this event. The ‘Bole Resolution’, which granted access to drinking water to all, from the public tanks and wells, was

thus implemented for the first time in Dasgaon, three months prior to the Mahad Satyagraha. Prominent activists from the Dalit community from the Mahad region participated in this event. The proceedings were presided over by Adarkar, a progressive gentleman, and RB Potdar, a member of the local goldsmith community, also participated as a leading member.

Following the event in Dasgaon, a renewed sense of vitality and enthusiasm emerged within the Dalit communities of Mahad and the wider Konkan region. People began to engage vigorously in the work of the Mahad Bahishkrut Parishad. During this same period, Bhai Anant Chitre informed Bapu Sahasrabuddhe via a letter (in January 1927) that RB More and Vishram Savadkar were making rapid progress in their preparations for the conference, and therefore, a date for the conference should be secured from Dr. Ambedkar. Subsequently, in February, Dr. Ambedkar communicated the dates of March 19th-20th, 1927.

The historic ‘Bahishkrut Parishad’ was held in the assembly hall of the Vireshwar Theatre in Mahad, presided over by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and under the chairmanship of the Reception Committee headed by Sambhaji Tukaram Gaikwad, who was the Konkan’s first ‘Dadasaheb’, aka, ‘Karmaveer’. RB More was the chief organizer of the conference, who introduced all the dignitaries and the guests at the conference. There were only two non-Dalit attendees who were present on the stage to serve as guides and mentors - Bhai Anant Chitre and Bapusaheb Sahasrabuddhe

- who had both travelled from Mumbai for the Mahad conference.

Additionally, the Town Council President of Mahad, namely, Surbabana Tipnis and a few others were from the non-Dalit communities of Mahad, who participated in the conference. On the afternoon of March 20th, following an appeal made to the delegates during the conference proceedings by Bhai Chitre, the entire congregation led by Dr. Ambedkar marched in a procession through the market place of Mahad towards the 'Chavdar lake'. At the lake, everyone from the conference delegates, drank the water from this public lake, from their cupped hands, i.e., they touched the water from the tank. In doing this, they not only enacted the direct implementation of the 'Bole Resolution', but they also asserted their fundamental human right to equality.

In the aftermath of this event, the casteist, orthodox, and fanatical elements resorted to spreading the rumours claiming that the 'untouchables' were now planning to storm the Vireshwar temple and desecrate the shrine. These rumours incited the common people and devotees, who then subjected the Satyagrahis attending the conference to a brutal, life-threatening assault. Men, women, and children as well as the elderly, were injured in large numbers because they were attacked by the orthodox people in Mahad. In some instances, the Satyagrahis fought back, offering a tit-for-tat response and resisting their attackers. The entire town of Mahad was engulfed in an atmosphere of chaos and tension. Eventually, the police

intervened to disperse the attackers and provided security to Dr. Ambedkar and all the Satyagrahi activists. Thus, the first conference was concluded, though successful in the claiming of the access to public lake, it also was scarred by the violent reaction from the non-Dalits.

As the Dalits drank water from the tank, the Brahmins of Mahad along with the self-proclaimed custodians of orthodox culture, raised a massive outcry, claiming that the 'Chavdar Tale' had been defiled and rendered impure. To ritually 'purify' this tank, which they deemed sacred, they poured 108 pitchers of cow dung and cow urine (known as 'Panchagavya') into it. This was performed amidst the chanting of sacred mantras, thereby upholding the tenets of the Brahminical faith. Furthermore, they filed a petition in court claiming that the Chavdar Lake was not a public resource, but rather a private property, thereby once again barring the Dalits from accessing the water.

This conference enabled the Dalits to realize their own collective strength. It instilled in them a newfound sense of self-awareness and bolstered their self-confidence. The act of the Dalits collectively drinking water from the tank sent a resounding message across the entire state of Maharashtra and indeed the nation that the Dalit masses had finally awakened and would no longer endure a life of helplessness, indignity, and humiliation. The Chavdar Tale 'Bahishkrut Parishad' played a pivotal role in igniting a sense of self-respect within their community. The

Dalits had now found, from within their own ranks, a capable and illustrious leader in the person of Dr. Ambedkar. It was through this very struggle that the distinct identity of the Dalits emerged; and it was through this Chavdar Tale Satyagraha movement that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's independent leadership rose to prominence!

It is imperative to underscore the fact that the 'Mahar Samaj Seva Sangh' played a lion's share in organizing this historic Satyagraha and the accompanying 'Bahishkrut Parishad'. This emphasis is necessary because many biographers and scholars of Dr. Ambedkar have failed to accord this fact its due recognition.

Following this historic conference, on April 3rd, 1927, Dr. Ambedkar launched a new fortnightly periodical titled 'Bahishkrut Bharat', under his own editorship. In it, he gave a detailed account of the Mahad Satyagraha and announced, "We will return to Mahad in December to hold a second conference for the excluded."

The English-language newspapers of the time took note of the Chavdar Lake agitation, and recognised it as a "significant, progressive social event." However, newspapers such as Lokmanya Tilak's 'Kesari', 'Kulaba Samachar', Bhopatkar's 'Bhala', and 'Chabukswar', placed the blame for the riots squarely upon Dr. Ambedkar and the Satyagrahis of the Dalit movement. They attempted to add fuel to fire and took great pleasure in verbally attacking Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's leadership.

Instead of siding with Dalits

who were brutally attacked, these newspapers chose to align themselves with the casteist elements of society. Through editorials and various columns in Bahishkrut Bharat, Ambedkar delivered a scathing rebuttal to the critics across all these newspapers, employing extremely forthright language and precise arguments. Consequently, the message regarding the second conference reached the entire Dalit community and people began preparing to attend the conference by organizing various small and large meetings and gatherings. Mindful of the physical assaults that the Satyagrahis had to endure and the determination to attend the second conference with an aggressive stance and a readiness for conflict, a militant youth organization named the 'Ambedkar Seva Dal' was established under the initiative and guidance of the chief organizer, RB More, modelled after the Congress Seva Dal. Later, Babasaheb renamed this very organization the 'Samata Sainik Dal'. For the second conference, people arrived imbued with a fierce determination to fight and prepared even to lay down their lives. Some had even wiped the vermilion from their wives' foreheads before arriving, while Audrekar, a key activist of the 'Mahar Samaj Seva Sangh' had brought his own funeral shroud along with him.

During the three days of the second 'Bahishkrut Parishad' from December 25th to 27th, 1927, Dr. Ambedkar, through the hands of Bapusaheb Sahasrabuddhe, publicly burned the manumriti for the first time in Maharashtra. This act took place at Mahad - a site now known as 'Kranti Bhu-

mi' (Land of Revolution) - and served as a direct challenge to the orthodox custodians of the Hindu faith. So, 99 years ago in Mahad, the waters of rebellion began to boil, and the flames of revolt were ignited against orthodox thought. Consequently, December 25th - the day of the manumriti dahan - is also observed in Maharashtra as 'Indian Women's Liberation Day.'

This, in brief, is the thrilling history of the Mahad Chavdar Lake Satyagraha and the burning of the manumriti. However, as we celebrate the centenary year commemorating the Mahad Chavdar Lake Satyagraha and the burning of the manumriti, it is imperative to reflect upon the current status of this illustrious legacy in contemporary times.

Today, the very inheritors of the manumriti have become increasingly aggressive, launching attacks against Dalits and women. In Jaipur, a statue of Manu, the proponent of inequality, still stands proudly and under police protection within the premises of the High Court. Unsurprisingly, in that very state of Rajasthan, a Dalit student named Indra Meghwal was brutally and inhumanely beaten by a casteist teacher - a member of the so-called 'upper castes' - simply because he drank water from a pot reserved for the teacher; the assault proved fatal, claiming the life of the young Indra Meghwal (2022). Similarly, in a village in the Khandesh region of Maharashtra, casteist elements from the village brutally assaulted young children from the Dalit community merely because they had bathed at a public well (2018).

A few years prior to this in-

cident, in Jalna, relatives of a high-caste minister murdered a young Dalit man named Dilip Shendge, and subsequently set fire to his home, simply because he had drawn water from the village's public hand pump (2003).

In the India of the 21st century, our beloved country, governed by the Constitution of India, Dalits are being killed for reasons as trivial as wearing a footwear, a groom riding a horse and wearing a traditional turban, sporting a moustache, or for that matter choosing a 'Jai Bhim' ringtone on their mobile phone.

In certain states, Dalits have fallen victim to the wrath of Manuvadis merely for building permanent houses in their villages or for bringing new furniture and appliances into their homes. In both small towns and large cities, so-called high-caste individuals refuse to rent out accommodation to Dalits. In Maharashtra, as well as in several other states across the country, oppressor communities are unwilling to allocate space for burial or cremation, even after a Dalit person has passed away. In short, untouchability and discrimination continue to be openly practiced, persisting even beyond death.

Dalit students studying at institutions such as IITs, TISS, Central Universities, and medical and engineering colleges are compelled to face discriminatory treatment at every step. They are forced to endure casteist slurs and taunts. Consequently, in such institutions, brilliant students like Darshan Solanki and Dr. Payal Tadvi are driven to the point of death by suicide. The discriminatory social treatment meted out by

the management in these institutions has led to the “institutional murder” of brilliant Dalit students like Rohit Vemula.

From Khairlanji, Maharashtra (2006) to Hathras, Uttar Pradesh (2020), incidents of rape and atrocities against Dalit women continue to occur brazenly. Far from receiving justice, the victims’ families who chose to raise their voices and express their anguish against these injustices are being burned alive or murdered by upper-caste perpetrators. Meanwhile, the police, the administration, and the judicial machinery is often found dancing to the tunes of casteist and communalist rulers. They often take up the role of mute spectators.

By publicly burning the manusmriti, Dr. Ambedkar endeavoured, with the aid of the Indian Constitution, to lay the foundation for social equality, secularism, and a scientific temper. Today, these very constitutional values are being trampled upon daily by the communal politicians. Under the guise of imparting spiritual teachings, a conspiracy is currently underway, with the blessings of those in power, to surreptitiously introduce the manusmriti into college and university curricula, thereby

glorifying it.

Under the banner of “skill development,” the government is acting on behalf of the Sangh Parivar and is implementing a hidden agenda to further entrench the caste system by glorifying traditional caste-based occupations, all in the name of education.

Following the Kala Ram Temple agitation, and in protest against the caste system and inequality within Hinduism, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar declared at Yeola, near Nashik, in 1935, “Although I was born a Hindu, I shall not die a Hindu”. Subsequently, after 21 years of this speech, he renounced Hinduism, which is a religion that perpetuates inequality and embraced the Buddhist Dhamma, which champions equality and scientific rationality. Furthermore, during the Dhamma Deeksha ceremony, he administered 22 vows to the people; through these vows, which included pledges not to revere or worship Hindu gods and goddesses, he formally severed ties with Hinduism and its associated customs and traditions.

Today, the Sangh Parivar and the Chief Minister are celebrating the centenary of the Mahad Chavdar Lake agitation as a mere “event.” Moreover,

by employing the rhetoric of ‘Samarasata’ (social harmony/assimilation) rather than true ‘Samata’ (equality), they are attempting to place Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the same league as Golwalkar, Hedgewar, and Savarkar, the right-wing leaders who were religious fanatics and proponents of a Hindu Nation. The Brahmanical conspiracy orchestrated by the Sangh Parivar must be thwarted by progressives and by those who identify themselves as Ambedkarites.

Furthermore, those celebrating the centenary of the Mahad Lake Satyagraha ought to demand an answer from the government: Will this government observe “Manusmriti Dahan Din” across the country December 25th? Will it incorporate a lesson regarding the burning of the manusmriti into the curricula of schools and colleges? Additionally, during this centenary year, will it remove the statue of Manu currently situated within the premises of the Rajasthan High Court?

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had recognized the threat posed by a ‘Hindu State’ as early as the time of the Mahad Satyagraha. Referring to the riots in Mahad, he stated in 1927:

“Your unfitness for Swarajya (self-rule) has been conclusively proven by the recent riots in Mahad. You are unwilling to acknowledge the citizenship rights of minority communities. You possess no desire to treat the poor and vulnerable with justice; had a Hindu State come into existence, the plight of the ‘Excluded Classes’ would have been utterly catastrophic... Had the Collector not been a European, and the Police Inspector a Muslim—officials of such backgrounds—and had the Muslims of Mahad not offered shelter within their own homes to the men, women, and children of the Excluded Classes, those Hindus who style themselves as the ‘Touchable’ would have crossed every limit of atrocity.” (Bahishkrut Bharat, 1927)

(Translated to English by Swati Vaidya) ■

Dimensions of Identity: The Need for a Change in Perspective

(This article is an expanded version of the address delivered by the author at the Anil Sinha Memorial Lecture Series in Lucknow on 21st February, 2026)

▲ RAMAYAN RAM

In academic circles, identity discourses have long been regarded as a post-colonial phenomenon. In the latter half of the 20th century, nations and civilisations that had freed themselves from imperialist colonial subjugation witnessed the organised emergence of distinct social, political, gender, ethnic and linguistic identities. It is generally observed that anti-colonial movements tend to deny the existence of these identities in the name of broader national interests. Yet these discourses not only questioned the epistemology of colonial knowledge, but also gave voice to expressions that had been suppressed for thousands of years. Identities are constructs of discourse, developed under the various dimensions of post-colonial thought. Although this idea emerged from a linguistic discipline such as post-structuralism, its impact is revolutionary - distinguishing itself from a capitalist framework like postmodernism. In the 1980s, serious and multidimensional research and debate on this subject began in universities across America and Europe. Writers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Fredric Jameson shaped the contours of post-colonial discourse. Works like 'Black Skin, White Masks' and 'The Wretched of the Earth' (Fanon), 'Orientalism' (Said),

'The Location of Culture' and 'Nation and Narration' (Bhabha), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak), and 'Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (Jameson) challenged the knowledge-based dominance of the West and provided a theoretical foundation for the discourses of Black people, women, minority and other oppressed identities in the Third World. Behind these debates lay references to left-wing thinkers such as Gramsci and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as the liberation struggles of Black people in Algeria, the African-American movement, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and India's own renaissance and anti-colonial movement. Together, these gave post-colonial identity discourse a left-leaning orientation and a neo-leftist character.

A right-wing thinker like Francis Fukuyama, a fervent supporter of corporate capitalism behind the façade of so-called liberal democracy, describes the idea and movement of identity as a strategic manoeuvre by the left. He writes that until the mid-twentieth century, Western leftists waged a struggle for socio-economic equality centred on the working class. However, global capitalism, particularly in America and Europe, economically elevated the working class to the status of the middle class, gradually freeing them from a proletarian

identity. The global proletarian movement weakened, and socialist state systems like the Soviet Union and China descended into authoritarianism. As a result, the goal of social and economic justice that the old left had set could no longer be achieved through class struggle.

In this context, following the May 1968 student movement in France, academic leftists in the 1960s and 70s turned their attention to social issues - issues that were simultaneously arising in America as well. These included minority rights, feminist questions, environmental concerns, the problem of migration, LGBT rights, and most prominently the question of racial discrimination. Fukuyama calls the thinkers who engaged with these questions the "Generation of 1968." He argues that the left, thus, abandoned class struggle and began to mobilise around various identities and marginalised groups - a development that manifested as identity politics. He further contends that left-wing identity politics created the conditions for the rise of right-wing identity politics, giving rise in America and Europe to demands for white rights, men's rights, and claims that jobs, wages and resources should be the primary entitlement of local white populations. This tendency can be understood in the Indian context through the lens of Hindu rights, upper-caste and

male entitlement, and slogans like “Long Live Brahminism.” In Fukuyama’s view, the left is responsible for the rise of identity and identitarianism, while right-wing identity politics, which presents dominant groups as victims, is merely a reaction. He declares identitarianism dangerous to democracy because it fragments the nation’s broader structure and identity, creating a negative environment for national unity, dialogue and cohesion. As a remedy, he advocates an inclusive liberal democracy as the only effective solution. Throughout this entire analysis, however, he conveniently shields corporate capitalism by blaming identitarianism for the authoritarianism festering within liberal democracy, the economic inequality generated by capital, and the crisis of democracy itself.

Let us now attempt to understand the conditions surrounding the rise of this ideological current in India using the above framework. Prof. Pranay Krishna, in his book ‘Sources of Post-Coloniality and Hindi Literature’, writes: “Identity or self-recognition cannot be formed without the Other. Every identity is the result of a process of ‘Othering.’ What we are will be determined by what we are not. The differential meaning-process of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is present in all identity discourses – be they national, ethnic, racial, or gendered.”

In India, when the question of Shudras, “untouchables”, Adivasis and women-marginalised by the caste-patriarchy rooted in the varna system – entered the world of literature, culture and thought, identity discourse was born.

The politics that began around the participation of Dalit and backward castes after the Emergency came to be called identity politics. Since the question of caste, and the goal of eliminating caste-based discrimination from India’s social, cultural and political life, was never taken seriously by India’s ruling classes, and was equally neglected in the world of literature, identitarianism, upon its emergence, filled the vacuum left by the left-democratic movement. The consequence was severe damage to the politics and ideology of the socialist-left across virtually all of India. Not only did they suffer a loss of social base, but they also faced a formidable intellectual challenge. Consequently, the left in India, particularly in the Hindi-speaking belt, began to view identities as antagonistic to the concept of class. The dialectic of caste and class, which had persisted since the time of Dr. Ambedkar, was applied wholesale to the context of identity. Progressive writers and thinkers expended their energy branding identitarianism as the primary cause of the left’s weakening, labelling it a divisive, fragmentary ideology, and thereby reinforced a narrow conception of class based on the oldbase-superstructure dialectic. In sum, against the backdrop of postmodernism’s rise in the West and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, identitarianism came to be viewed as an enemy ideology, and the possibility of any dialogue or cooperation with it was foreclosed. It is instructive to note that while in the West identitarianism was understood within the framework of the left, in India it became established as a reactionary idea. In this context, Prof. Pranay Krishna writes:

“It was precisely because Dalit identity took shape during the colonial era that its clash with nationalism became inevitable. One must remember here that the Dalit identity movement was led by the Dalit middle class, which had itself come into existence through the processes of colonial modernity. On the other side, the reins of the nationalist movement too were in the hands of the new middle class and industrialist classes produced under colonial processes. Frequently, critics obscure the historicity of these processes by employing evaluative rather than factual language. What is needed is not to draw conclusions by treating identity discourse or the discourse of the nation as normative givens, but rather to analyse the objective processes through which they came into being.”

The caste-class dialectic has existed within the Indian left movement from its very inception. Rather than accepting caste as a fundamental social reality, the left tended to treat it as a cultural veneer, assuming that with the abolition of private property through economic revolution, the caste system would dissolve of its own accord. M. N. Roy, one of the earliest leaders of India’s communist movement, wrote in his 1922 book ‘India in Transition’ that colonial rule had, through the economic and political measures of a highly developed capitalist state, carried India beyond the feudal stage, and that caste, as a feudal remnant, therefore held no significance. This understanding of caste persists in large sections of the Indian left today, where caste is dismissed as inconsequential and class is determined solely

on an economic basis in the classical Marxist sense. Yet Lenin, the great leader who made revolution possible in Russia, included in his definition of class a person's position within a historically determined system of social production, as well as the exploitation of one person's labour by another on the basis of social position. In other words, Lenin too considered social factors important in determining class relations within production. In India, the varna system has historically been a division of labour based on socially enforced laws, and this point merits serious consideration.

Dr. Ambedkar held that social transformation was a prerequisite for any political transformation. He argued that whether the aim was to build a democratic nation or to carry out a socialist revolution, the annihilation of caste must be the first step. He raised fundamental questions about this critical shortcoming of India's freedom movement, which is why both the national movement and the communist movement regarded him as a divisive force within popular unity. Ambedkar, however, had attempted to understand the dialectic of class and caste in India in a dialectical manner. He accepted class as the basic unit of society and concluded that "caste is an enclosed class." That is, for class structure to become free, the shackles of caste must be broken, something that will not happen automatically after an economic revolution. Ambedkar further argued that caste and patriarchy in India are mutually dependent and mutually reinforcing, and therefore the struggle for women's identity is inseparable from the struggle for

caste annihilation. Thus in India, a unified and interdependent form of identities emerges - one that is a vehicle for revolutionary change, not an obstacle to it.

The landscape of identity politics that has emerged over the past three decades has demonstrated that it possesses no fundamental agenda for the liberation of the oppressed, for social justice, equality or democracy. It is confined to securing participation within the existing capitalist-feudal order, which is why goals such as caste annihilation, women's equality and rights, secularism and economic justice hold no real significance for it. Focused narrowly on cultural identity and the achievement of social respect for its own community, this ideology and politics is highly susceptible to sliding into the right-wing camp and being absorbed by the broader identity politics of Hindutva. We are witnessing today numerous political parties rooted in Dalit and backward identities becoming fellow travellers of Hindutva politics. Many so-called Bahujanist and Ambedkarite, Mandalist writers, thinkers and literary figures are falling into the camp of the RSS and Hindutva. On the other side, Hindutva ideology and politics is pursuing a strategy of constructing a broad Hindu identity by "Othering" Muslim minorities. The historical and cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims are being established as their permanent identities, and by portraying the majority Hindus as defeated, victimised and vulnerable, slogans of Hindu unity and a Hindu nation are being manufactured. To construct this reactionary Hindu identity, a false history of Shudra and

Dalit castes is being fabricated - one that holds Muslim invaders responsible for the inhumanity and brutality of the caste system. In this fabricated and invented history, Shudras and Dalits are portrayed as part of a noble lineage who were subjugated for refusing to submit to Islam.

Under this reactionary identity construction, concepts such as upper-caste identity and male identity are being cultivated - presenting dominant social groups as victims in order to pit them against genuinely marginalised identities. This is, in essence, a conspiracy to manufacture a conflict between progressive identity and reactionary identity.

In such circumstances, the progressive and left-democratic camp must engage in dialogue and joint action with identity movements. In this moment of confrontation, it is necessary to make the cause of marginalised identities one's own. It is essential to understand that identities do not fragment the concept of class, but that they broaden it. Rather than treating identitarian ideology as an enemy or as a fragmentary creed, it is necessary to build a commonality among identities and make them fellow travellers of revolutionary change. In this direction, greater research, reflection and shared struggle are urgently needed. ■



From Manesar to Noida: Wave of Workers' Revolt Continues Against Exploitation

The workers' resentment in major industrial centres of North India continues to erupt and spread to newer industrial zones. This phenomenon began earlier in the year and has intensified with each wave. It is as if workers were waiting for someone to take the lead in speaking out against their inhuman working conditions and near-starvation wages. Protests across various industries have followed one after another, often spontaneously, but with a clear and firm resolve. At their core, workers are demanding wage increases and safer, humane, and dignified working conditions.

Most of the protesting workers are non-unionised and contract workers across key sectors such as energy, automobiles, garments, and associated industries, where large production units employ in thousands. They are deprived even of statutory minimum wages, which themselves are insufficient to meet basic monthly expenses given the price rise of essential commodities, inflation, etc. Working conditions are as exploitative and degrading, with 12-hour shifts often without breaks, requiring workers to remain standing throughout. Legally mandated provisions such as double wages for overtime and weekly holidays are frequently denied. In cases of workplace injury or illness, workers often bear medical expenses themselves. A significant issue raised by women workers in Noida concerns sexual harassment and the absence of effective internal complaints mechanisms.

The protests now spread to newer regions, including parts of Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. State responses in BJP-ruled states are aligned with industry interests, involving intimidation, threats, provocation, and heavy police action against workers. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued warnings against those "spreading industrial unrest". Several leaders of trade unions in Gurugram and Noida, even those who were not linked to factories where workers held protests, the Yogi government began implementing a well known pattern of persecution. On the very first day of the street protests, it declared that the workers were linked with Pakistani elements, naxalvaad, urban naxals, etc., and that such links will be duly investigated. Many activists who went to Noida in solidarity with the workers were arrested. Hundreds of workers have been detained from roads, homes, or factory premises. Now UP police claim to have arrested the 'mastermind' from Tamil Nadu - who is after all an engineer by profession and an activist actively supporting workers' demands.

These developments reflect the actual mindset of the UP and Haryana administrations hellbent on denying workers any democratic space to peacefully raise their voice against semi-slave exploitation of wages and labour time.

The arrests in Noida were made by police so indiscriminately that some minors and non-workers were also picked from roads and sent to jail. There are deliberate

procedural violations by police, including not informing families of arrested workers or providing copies of FIRs.

The activists of All India Association for Law and Justice (AILAJ) accessed two FIRs in Manesar and Gurugram filed by the police, and have said that they bear grave and immediate consequences for workers. The addition of "sweeping and serious accusations, especially 'attempt to murder' in FIR No. 94/2026, conspiracy, common object liability, and offences framed as attacks on public servants, jointly and severally, have the predictable effect of making bail harder to secure, prolonging incarceration, and sending a chilling message to all workers that participation in collective protest may be answered with inflated and false criminal charges". AILAJ activists were also detained by Gurugram police when they tried to meet workers on the streets, and were escorted out of the city.

April began with protests across multiple factories in the Gurugram-Manesar belt, continuing a broader national trend. Workers from companies such as Honda, Munjal Auto, Richa Textiles, Satyam Auto, and Pricol gathered at factory gates to demand wage increases. When management did not engage, many moved onto public roads while maintaining peaceful protest. Authorities too tacitly sided with the factory managements and resorted to violence, lathi-charge, tear gas shell and arrests by the police. Braving all repression, the

number of participating factories more than doubled in the next two to three days, and the number of protesting workers also swelled to many thousands.

On April 9th, the Haryana government announced a 35% increase in minimum wages. However, even the revised wages remain inadequate. With reported monthly earnings ranging from Rs.8,000 to Rs.13,000 for long working hours, without any weekly holiday, the revised wages are still seen as insufficient. A study by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) estimates a minimum monthly requirement of Rs.42,000 for a family. The Haryana State Minimum Wage Committee had recommended Rs.23,196 in December 2025. With 35% increase a worker's wage in unskilled category comes to be only Rs.15,220 per month, which is grossly insufficient.

Nevertheless, this wage increase was viewed as a victory for workers' collective strength. The message spread quickly to the whole NCR region and workers in NSEZ Noida phase 2 came to the factory gates to raise their wages. Many big industries, including Motherson, Richa Garments, Dixon Tech saw peaceful flash strikes for two-three days without any violence. The agitating workers maintained polite dialogue with whoever came to talk to them from management, administration or police. But on April 13th, there was heavy police repression on workers on the highway. Many claim this situation was a result of provocations and threats by managements and police. Indiscriminate arrests were made in huge numbers.

Following these events, the

Cost Of Living Crisis Can No Longer Be Ignored

(Some points raised in the opinion column by Himanshu, Indian Express, April 21st, 2026 article titled – "In Noida and beyond, workers' protests are proof that cost of living crisis can no longer be ignored")

The cost of living crisis can no longer be ignored. Since January 2026, inflation has increased, with food inflation rising even more, and LPG prices reportedly acting as a trigger, reaching Rs.400-500 per kg. At the same time, regular wages in urban areas declined by 1.2 per cent per annum between 2011-12 and 2022-23, with a corresponding decline of 0.6 per cent per annum in rural areas. More than 310 million workers registered on the E-Shram portal report that 94% earn less than Rs.10,000 per month. The latest Annual Survey of Unorganised Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2025 shows average monthly earnings of Rs.10,376 in rural areas and Rs.13,012 in urban areas. Stagnant earnings alongside rising inflation have persisted for nearly a decade, a trend also highlighted in the Economic Survey, which notes declining incomes of regular and self-employed workers.

Uttar Pradesh government announced an interim wage increase of 21%. Despite this, protests continued to spread across additional sectors and factories in Noida and surrounding regions.

Parallel developments have been observed in other industrial centres across Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand, as well as in major NTPC power plants in Bihar and Jharkhand.

The new labour codes have structurally weakened worker protections by facilitating flexible hiring and firing, redefining wage calculations, permitting longer working hours, restricting the right to strike at 14-day notice, hence making all genuine strikes illegal. It has diluted safety and maternity protections among many other rights accrued to the working class, while giving a free hand to sham contractors and employers.

Prominent intellectuals,

writers, citizens and cultural organisations have issued a joint appeal calling workers' wage struggle, a part of a broader defence of democratic rights and human dignity. They have called to actively come in support of the workers struggling against state repression.

On April 19th, lawyers and activists held a press conference in Delhi raising concerns about police actions in Noida, including allegations of wrongful arrests and targeting of activists. They cited cases such as the arrest of writer and activist Satyam Verma in Lucknow and the detention of poet and activist Katyayani, among others, and criticised actions against individuals associated with Mazdoor Bigul.

The All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) has condemned the arrests and detentions and said the police in Noida have targeted activists and even lawyers who were trying to provide legal assistance to

How Workers' Exploitation is Systemic

The financial data of Samvardhana Motherson International Limited shows that its revenue has steadily increased from Rs. 57,370 crore in FY21 to Rs. 1,13,663 crore in FY25, while profits have risen from Rs. 1,243 crore to Rs. 4,146 crore over the same period.

At the same time, a large section of shop-floor and contract workers earn around Rs. 13,000 per month, or roughly Rs. 1.5-2 lakh annually. With a workforce of around 90,000, this indicates that workers receive only a very small share of the total value generated within the company.

Even without a detailed cost breakdown, it is evident that each worker is associated with the production of substantial economic value, given the scale of revenue and output. However, their wages remain low and close to unviable subsistence levels, while the value they help generate is increasingly appropriated, as reflected in rising profits.

In this company, revenue has nearly doubled over five years, and profits have more than tripled, but workers' wages—especially at the lower end—have remained stagnant. This indicates that increases in productivity

and output are not translating into proportional increases in wages. Instead, a growing share of the value produced is being appropriated as surplus.

Workers earning Rs. 8-13,000 a month are contributing to a rapidly expanding enterprise, yet they receive only a fraction of the value they help generate. In effect, a significant part of their labour time remains unpaid.

As revenue and profits rise, wages remain near subsistence levels. Data points to a clear pattern: the expansion of capital is built on the systematic appropriation of surplus generated by labour.

Dixon Technologies, Kent RO Systems, Richa Global Exports, and Spark Minda are among the companies that have come into focus during recent worker agitations in April. Although they operate in different sectors, a common characteristic among them is the persistence of low, near-starvation wages, even as revenues and profits have grown. In many cases, real wages have remained stagnant or even declined. (See the table)

(Compiled by Saurabh Naruka)

Dixon Technologies

Year	Revenue	Profit
FY21	6,448	160
FY22	10,697	190
FY23	12,192	256
FY24	17,691	368
FY25	38,860	1,096

UNO Minda Limited

Year	Revenue	Profit
FY21	6,000	300
FY22	8,200	420
FY23	11,000	650
FY24	13,500	750
FY25	14,500	800

Samvardhana Motherson

(India proxy within consolidated)

Year	Revenue	Profit
FY21	57,370	1,243
FY22	63,774	817
FY23	78,788	1,670
FY24	98,692	3,020
FY25	1,13,663	4,146

(Reminder: consolidated suppresses wage share due to global ops)

Kent RO Systems

(estimated trend)

Year	Revenue	Profit
FY21	900	120
FY22	1,000	140
FY23	1,050	160
FY24	1,100	180
FY25	1,150	200

5. Richa Global Exports

(estimated garment model)

Year	Revenue	Profit
FY21	800	40
FY22	900	45
FY23	1,000	50
FY24	1,050	55
FY25	1,100	60

Note: Richa is private limited so figures are estimated based on information available in public domain

(All figures in Rs. Crores)

workers. Comrade Amar Singh, District Committee President of the Gautam Buddha Nagar unit of the AICCTU, was placed under house arrest along with several other union leaders on April 13th. Rajiv Dimri, General Secretary

of AICCTU has said the ongoing protests clearly indicate that workers across the country have become fully aware of the nexus between corporate profiteers and the Double-Triple Engine BJP governments. AICCTU warns

the government and employers against using violent force on the workers protesting for bare minimal survival needs. These protests shall only intensify further if the demands of the workers are not met. ■

Violence, Displacement, and Resistance in Sijimali, Odisha

In the intervening night of April 6th-7th, 2026, a large police contingent descended on Kantamal village in Odisha's Rayagada district. Armed personnel, reportedly supported by drones, entered the village after cutting off electricity. What followed, according to the residents, was an indiscriminate baton charge, firing of tear gas shells and widespread violence. Many villagers, including women were injured. A cow was reportedly killed by a tear gas shell.

Fear gripped the village in the aftermath. Several injured individuals avoided seeking medical care, apprehensive of arrest. Police authorities stated that the operation was aimed at apprehending a local resident, Subas Singh Manjhi. However, villagers have questioned the scale and timing of the raid, why it was conducted in the dead of night, why homes were forcibly entered, and why force was used so broadly against residents.

The incident did not occur in isolation. In the weeks prior, the District Collector had visited Kantamal to resolve the situation, but he asked villagers to produce land ownership documents. It is a well known fact that such a demand is fundamentally unjust: forest dwellers have lived on the land

for generations without formal titles, a condition recognized under laws such as the Forest Rights Act and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act. These laws are meant to protect the rights of Adivasi communities in Scheduled Areas, yet administrative actions have ignored these protections.

Kantamal is approximately one of 18 villages facing displacement due to the proposed Sijimali bauxite mining project, awarded to Vedanta Limited in 2023. The project spans roughly 1,549 hectares, including nearly 699 hectares of forest land, and affects predominantly Adivasi and Dalit communities. Despite strong opposition from Gram Sabhas, the project moved forward through initial clearances. Villagers maintain that their consent, legally required, was never genuinely obtained.

The Sijimali region is a biodiverse forest landscape interwoven with rivers and streams that sustain local livelihoods. For generations, Adivasi communities have depended on this ecosystem not only economically, but also culturally and spiritually.

Environmental concerns are significant. Mining activities in similar regions have led to deforestation, soil degradation,

and water contamination. In fact, districts such as Kalahandi, Rayagada, and Koraput have reportedly lost over 20% of forest cover in the two decades till 2020 due to extractive projects. Critics warn that Sijimali will further accelerate this trend, damaging river systems and exposing communities to hazardous mineral pollutants.

Pattern of Crackdown and Criminalisation

Residents and activists argue that the Kantamal raid is part of a broader pattern of coercion.

- In late February 2026, around 200 police and paramilitary personnel conducted operations in multiple villages, pasting warrants at the homes of leaders associated with the Ma Mati Mali Suraksha Manch, a grassroots organisation opposing the project since 2023.

- On March 10th, a raid in Tala Ampadar village led to the arrest of 21 people, including women and a pregnant woman.

- On April 3rd, prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita were imposed in the area where road construction for the project is underway.

Villagers continued peaceful protests despite these measures. The Kantamal incident was

intended to deter such resistance.

Over the past three years, locals report facing numerous criminal cases, arrests, and detentions, including the use of stringent laws.

A central issue remains the question of consent. The Odisha administration has stated that Gram Sabha approval was obtained in December 2023. Villagers allege that this process involved forged signatures, including those of deceased individuals and minors.

The earlier public hearings of October 2023 reportedly saw strong opposition from residents. Petitions challenging the project have since been filed in the Odisha High Court, where the matter remains under scrutiny.

It has been reported that key clearances are still incomplete. For instance, forest clearance for a 2.98 km access road is still pending, and only preliminary approval (Terms of Reference) has been granted for the mining project.

A delegation from parties including the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the All India Forward Bloc visited the area on April 10th to document testimonies of the affected people. They reported that several villages, including Sagabari, Banteji, Bandel, Kantamal, and Tala Ampadar remained under heavy police presence, with continued drone surveillance.

Yuthisthir Mahapatra, CPI(ML) Odisha state secretary, said that the situation in the Sijimali area is extremely alarming due to the proposed mining project, which poses

grave human rights concerns. He alleged that local Adivasi communities are living under immense fear and distress, facing intimidation, assaults, and torture with the complicity of the state government.

He further stated that the Sijimali bauxite mining project is located in Scheduled Areas of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts, where the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 must be strictly implemented. However, he alleged that Vedanta Limited was granted a lease for approx..1,549 hectares (including 699 hectares of forest land), without obtaining key clearances, which is in complete violation of statutory requirements, and also that some of the clearances are pending till date. He added that forest clearance is still awaited for the 2.98 km road under construction, which has become a point of conflict, and that the compliance report is also pending with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Rayagada. Regarding environmental clearance, only the Terms of Reference (ToR) have been granted, while the final clearance is still pending.

The Odisha administration has claimed that Gram Sabha consent was obtained on December 8th, 2023. However, villagers allege that this consent was fabricated through forged signatures, including those of deceased persons and minors. Public hearings held in October 2023 reportedly saw strong opposition from villagers, who, despite facing intimidation and threats during the process, have filed petitions before the Odisha High Court. They maintain that the project is illegal in the

absence of genuine Gram Sabha consent.

Left parties have demanded the withdrawal of prohibitory orders imposed under Section 163 of the BNSS, cancellation of Vedanta's Sijimali mining project, and an immediate halt to all mining and construction activities. They have also called for the removal of police forces and drone surveillance from the area, the unconditional release of those arrested along with withdrawal of cases, urgent medical treatment and compensation for the injured, and a high-level inquiry into the incidents of April 7th. Additionally, they have demanded strict implementation of PESA 1996, FRA 2006, and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, along with the conduct of fresh Gram Sabha meetings that are impartial and free from fear, coercion, and intimidation.

The situation in Sijimali reflects a deepening crisis in which people's development, environmental protection, and constitutional rights are at serious risk. For the Adivasi communities of the region, the struggle is not only against displacement, but also for the preservation of a way of life that is intimately tied to their land, forests, and identity. The events in Kantamal raise urgent questions about the human cost of resource extraction and about a government driven by corporate greed. It is a grave irony that the President of India, the Union Tribal Affairs Minister, and the Chief Minister of Odisha all belong to the same tribal community of Odisha, where Sijimali is located. ■

A Voice That Cannot Be Silenced: Palestinian Resistance and Hind Rajab

▲ LEKHA ADAVI

With over 21,000 children killed in Palestine, 170 more bombed in a single school in Tehran, and nearly four lakh children displaced in Lebanon, the story of six-year-old Hind Rajab as told in the docufilm *The Voice of Hind Rajab* arrives not as art seeking awards, but as evidence demanding reckoning. This is a film about a child being murdered by Israeli forces in real time - in a world where the US-Israel axis has made it abundantly clear that geopolitical interest will always be placed above Palestinian lives. It forces every viewer to ask one gut-wrenching question: at what point did we stop recognising this as genocide?

What sets this film apart from every other document of the Palestinian catastrophe is its formal honesty. Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania does not cast an actress to play Hind, neither does she reconstruct, dramatise, or soften the plot for world viewers. Hind speaks loud and clear for herself. Her actual voice, drawn from the real emergency call recordings, runs through all 89 minutes of the film, while actors playing Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) volunteers respond to her in real time. The audience is made captive. There is no fast-forwarding, no averting of eyes, no refuge in the thought that what you are hearing is fictional. A child's voice, first seeking comfort, then frightened, then pleading, simply rings in your ears until it doesn't anymore.

On January 29th, 2024, Hind's family were fleeing their neighbourhood in Gaza to escape an IDF assault when their car was surrounded and fired upon. All six family members travelling with Hind were killed on the spot by Israeli forces. The six-year-old, trapped amongst the dead bodies of her relatives, called the PRCS. PRCS volunteers stayed on the line with her for hours, navigating military blockades and bureaucratic obstruction, trying desperately to route an ambulance through a city that Israeli bombardment has systematically turned to rubble. The ambulance that finally set out to reach her was blown to pieces by Israeli forces, killing paramedics Youssef Zeino and Ahmed Al-Madhoun. When Hind's body was found weeks later, journalists counted 335 bullet holes on the car.

The PRCS call centre becomes the film's entire world. Beige walls, computer screens showing digital maps of destruction, cursors tracing ambulance routes through streets that no longer exist in any passable form shows the impossible work being done in the wake of an active genocide. Ben Hania's direction favours claustrophobia and long silences. The restraint is a political choice. Hind's voice needs no amplification, and the PRCS workers around her doing everything humanly possible within a system designed by Israeli military policy to ensure they will fail, need no melodrama to break your heart.

To reduce the Gaza genocide to numbers is a form of anaesthesia that power has always relied on. Ben Hania refuses it entirely. This is the film's deepest political act. A child who told her rescuers she was scared and asked them not to hang up is not a casualty figure. She is Hind Rajab - specific, irreplaceable, six years old. By centering her voice, Ben Hania dismantles the abstraction behind which governments that arm and fund Israel have sheltered themselves. You cannot watch this film and continue to speak of Palestinian deaths as unfortunate collateral. You cannot watch it and call what is happening in Gaza a conflict or a war.

The People Who Answered

The film is equally a portrait of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, and this is where one of the most systematic crimes of this genocide must be named plainly. The PRCS is Palestine's primary emergency medical service. Since October 7th, 2023, its volunteers and staff have worked under conditions that no international humanitarian law framework was ever designed to handle, because that framework assumes, at its most basic level, that a Red Crescent emblem on a vehicle will be respected. In Gaza, Israeli forces have treated it as a target.

Over 51 PRCS staff and volunteers have been killed on duty since the genocide began. Every single one of them wearing the emblem that should have

guaranteed their safety under the Geneva Conventions. On January 10th, 2024, nineteen days before Hind died, four PRCS paramedics were killed when Israeli forces struck their clearly marked ambulance. Then, on March 23rd, 2025, eight PRCS medics were among fifteen aid workers shot dead by Israeli forces in Rafah's Al-Hashashin area. Their ambulances had emergency lights on. Their uniforms were clearly marked. They had gone out to assist casualties from an earlier Israeli airstrike. Their bodies were found nine days later buried in a shallow mass grave, hands bound, shot in the head. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called it the single most deadly attack on Red Cross or Red Crescent workers anywhere in the world since 2017.

When the killings came to light, the IDF claimed the vehicles had been moving without lights. A video recovered from the phone of one of the murdered medics showed otherwise - emergency lights flashing, uniforms visible, as Israeli soldiers opened fire. The IDF's own investigation found, eventually, that there had been professional failures. It recommended no criminal charges. The PRCS called the report full of lies. Amnesty International called it evidence of war crimes. The IFRC's Secretary General asked one question that had no good answer: when will this stop?

The Ambulance That Never Came

The Red Crescent volunteers in Ben Hania's film are not failing Hind because they are incompetent. They are failing her because the infrastructure of rescue has been deliberately and methodically dismantled

by Israeli military policy. Ambulances cannot move freely through a city where every street is a potential kill zone. Authorisations take time because the military controls every movement corridor. The bureaucratic agony on screen - the waiting, the rerouting, the desperate appeals up chains of command - is not dysfunction. It is the direct, intended consequence of an occupation designed to make Palestinian life unrescueable. The helplessness in the eyes and voices of the PRCS volunteers, watching their colleagues and fellow citizens being murdered while they sit with headsets on, hits you like a physical blow.

According to United Nations data, at least 1,060 healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza since October 2023. More aid workers have died in this single conflict than in any other conflict year since records began. These numbers are not collateral. They reflect a deliberate campaign against the infrastructure of survival, against hospitals, against ambulances, against the human beings who staff them, against the very institutional capacity that might allow a six-year-old child trapped in a car to be reached before she bleeds to death.

The PRCS workers kept the line open. That is what was left to them. The world that watched and continued arming Israel could have done far more.

What Cinema Can Demand

The Voice of Hind Rajab has been described as demanding, raw, and emotionally overwhelming - not easy cinema at all. That is precisely what it needs to be. Easy cinema produces feeling

and then lets you go home. Ben Hania's film will not let you go home. It wants you to understand, not in your mind but in your body, what it means to be six years old and alone in a car in Gaza, asking the person on the other end of the line to please not hang up.

The film's global festival reception with the standing ovations, the prizes, the starry executive producer roster, reflects a cultural reckoning. It does not matter to Governments that continue to supply weapons to Israel that over 60,000 Palestinians have been killed, that medics have been massacred, that protestors across the globe are asking them to stop arming Israel. Perhaps they will not be moved by a film also. But a film creates memory in a way that a news cycle cannot. It preserves testimony in a form that outlasts the political moment and the comfortable forgetting that power always depends upon.

Hind Rajab's voice is now part of the world's cultural record. The PRCS workers who stayed on the line with her - who have gone on going out on missions knowing their marked vehicles offer no reliable protection, who have buried colleagues found in mass graves - they are part of that record too. The Voice of Hind Rajab demands that we ask not only what happened to one child on one January morning in Gaza, but what kind of world - what kind of government, what kind of international order - makes it possible for this to keep happening, day after day, with no end in sight. That is not a question any film can answer. It is a question this film makes impossible to stop asking. ■

Comrade Vijay Singh

Comrade Vijay Singh, a devoted communist and an outstanding teacher of History at Satyavati College in Delhi University passed away on 17th April 2026. Comrade Vijay was born in England in 1946 where his father was serving as a senior official, and in the late 1960's after completing his higher education chose to come to India with his determination to engage in revolutionary politics and people's movements.

Given his education he chose academic space as the place for instilling progressive ideas and thinking. He along with his life-long partner Comrade Tripta Wahi, who also returned with him from England and who was also a History teacher, chose to be part of an independent Left Teachers' group in Delhi University.

Comrade Vijay Singh along with a few other teachers in the History teaching circle of Delhi University made it his mission to bring high standards in the teaching of the course as well as in the appointments of the teachers, opposing favouritism in appointments. In the 1980's he was part of the 15-teachers group in Delhi University who redesigned the History undergraduate course that was being taught and got the course successfully passed. This added several important aspects of Indian history and social structure to the course that was just not part of the teaching prior to that. Notable among this is the effort to instil the understanding of Indian social history cutting across the periodisations while studying specialisations like ancient, medieval or modern. He was also among the prominent teachers at the forefront of struggles against sexual harassment and for gender justice.

In the history of Delhi University teachers' movement, another fact worth remembering is that he was among a very few teachers who stood for justice for a fellow teacher, S.A.R. Geelani, who was falsely implicated in the Parliament Attack Case of 2002.

He was of the belief that classrooms are also an arena of class struggle where you combat against the dominant and hegemonic ideas that a hierarchy based society automatically imparts to the youth of that society.

Among the things that he is most well known for is the publishing of the journal Revolutionary Democracy, which is continued to the very last, except a brief pause in between. He also spent a long time in Russia studying the Soviet Archives for his Doctoral Thesis and later he made important contributions in the study and understanding of the period of Soviet Union under Comrade Stalin.

Heartfelt Tributes and Red Salute to Comrade Vijay Singh!



Comrade Damayanti Sinha

Comrade Damayanti Sinha, former District Committee member in Patna Rural District passed away in Dhanarua 18 April 2026. She was also a former member of the Zila Parishad. She was suffering from cancer. Her passing is a great loss to the Party. She had always been on the forefront of rural poor and agrarian workers' struggle and contributed greatly towards building a strong and resilient organisation in the district.

We pay our tribute to the departed comrade, express condolences to her bereaved family and friends and will always cherish the memory of her inspiring struggle and sacrifices.

Red Salute Comrade Damayanti Sinha!



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