

Liberation

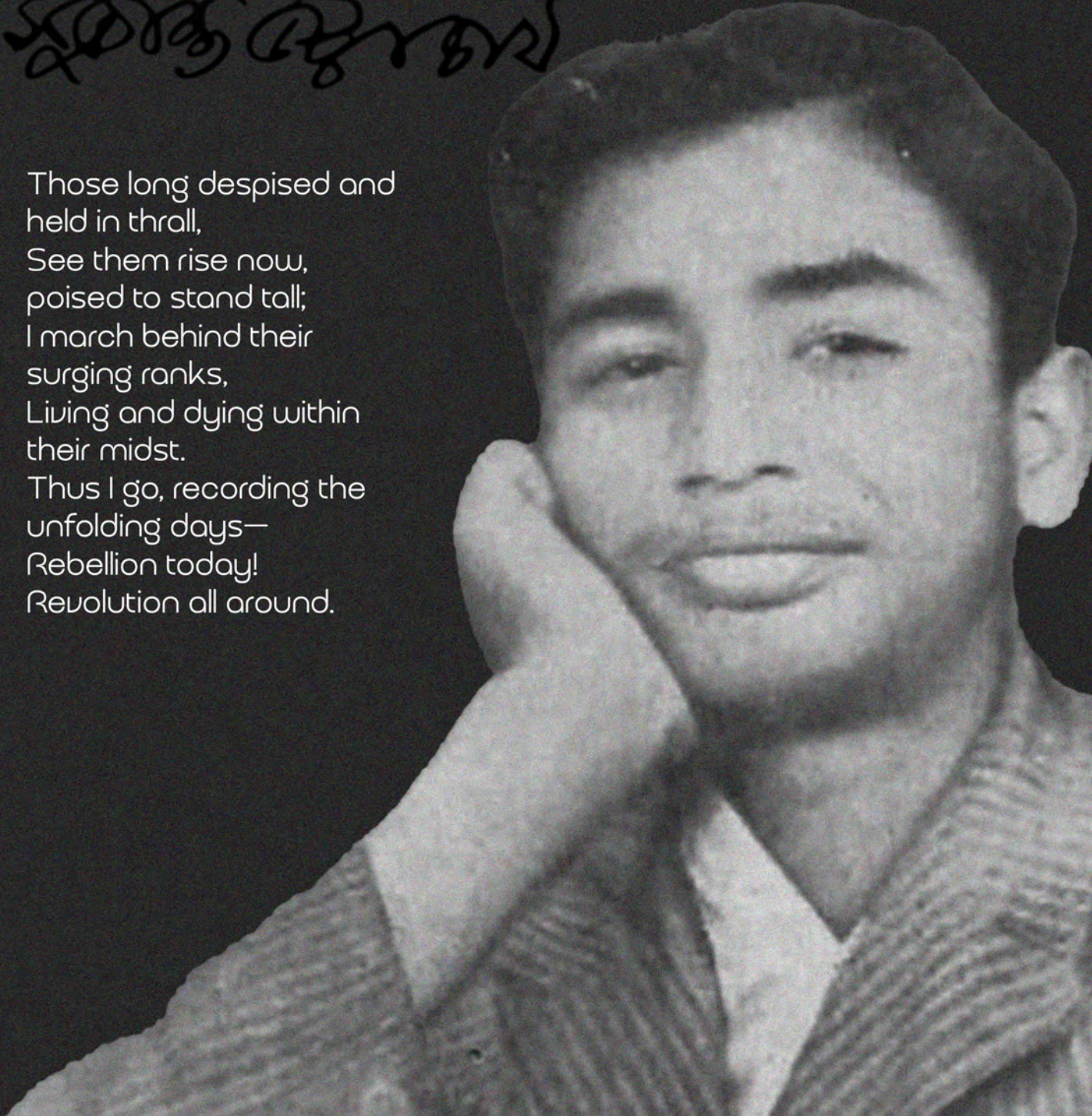
CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

SEPTEMBER 2026

Rs. 25

சுதந்திரம்

Those long despised and
held in thrall,
See them rise now,
poised to stand tall;
I march behind their
surging ranks,
Living and dying within
their midst.
Thus I go, recording the
unfolding days—
Rebellion today!
Revolution all around.



CPIML Liberation Pays Revolutionary Homage to Fidel Castro on His Birth Centenary

 In the occasion of the birth centenary of El Comandante Comrade Fidel Castro, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation conveyed revolutionary greetings and solidarity to the Communist Party of Cuba and the Cuban people, paying homage to the indomitable leader of the Cuban Revolution and his enduring revolutionary legacy.

Born on 13 August 1926, Fidel led the Cuban Revolution that overthrew the brutal, US-backed Batista dictatorship and transformed Cuba into a country determined to defend its sovereignty against the full weight of US imperialism. For decades, Washington sought to isolate, destabilise and destroy revolutionary Cuba. Fidel survived assassination plots and relentless attempts to crush the revolution, standing as a symbol of Cuba's refusal to bend before imperialist power.

Despite being shackled by imperialist embargoes, Fidel led Cuba to socialism and created systems of universal healthcare and education that shame much more prosperous capitalist countries, including its big-brotherly neighbour, the USA. With Fidel at the helm, Cuba supported the anti-colonial struggles, practicing internationalism with all its might. Fidel is especially fondly remembered by the African nations as a true friend who stood firmly with the national liberation struggles of Africa. Cuban troops helped Angola resist aggression by apartheid South African troops and helped Namibia win freedom.

In a letter dated August 13 to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya said that the life and revolutionary legacy of Fidel Castro remain a powerful symbol of resistance to imperialism, the struggle for socialism and internationalism.

The letter recalled the historic significance of the Cuban Revolution, which broke the grip of US domination over Cuba, ushered in an era of people's welfare and socialist construction, and defended

A revolution is a struggle to the death
between the future and the past.



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13 AUGUST 1926 - 25 NOVEMBER 2016



the country's sovereignty in the face of relentless imperialist aggression.

The letter also highlighted Cuba's unwavering solidarity with peoples fighting oppression and injustice across the world. Its internationalist medical missions in different countries, the letter said, remain an enduring expression of Fidel Castro's internationalist legacy.

CPI(ML) Liberation strongly condemned the continuing hostile policy of US imperialism towards Cuba. The letter noted that US imperialism continues to threaten Cuba and pursue aggressive attempts to destabilise the country. The party declared that it stands resolutely with the Cuban people as they carry forward the revolutionary legacy of Fidel Castro and defend Cuba's sovereignty, socialism and independence.

Reiterating its firm solidarity with the Communist Party of Cuba and the Cuban people, CPI(ML) Liberation reaffirmed its commitment to stand with Cuba in its struggle against imperialism threats. The letter concluded with the iconic revolutionary slogan of the Cuban Revolution: "¡Hasta la victoria siempre!" ■

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36 pages including covers

Annual Subscription Rates

India Rs. 300

Abroad US\$ 60

Digital Subscription Rs. 150

Online Payment: liberation.org.in

Pay By Bank transfer:

Account Name: Liberation Publications

Account No.: 90502010091855

IFSC Code: CNRB0019050

MICR Code: 110015388

Bank: Canara Bank

Dimagi Naxal: A Fearful Dictator Haunted by India's Defiant Youth



Narendra Modi has delivered yet another Independence Day speech from the ramparts of Lal Qila, his thirteenth August 15 address in a row. In the first few years following his 2014 ascent to power, his addresses used to have some immediate domestic and global context with the seventy-fifth anniversary of India's independence as the next milestone. After 2022, the goalpost was shifted straight to 2047 and now he remains conspicuously silent about the concerns that are foremost in people's minds which even his government can no longer ignore. For instance, the unprecedented Jantar Mantar protests that forced his government to sack education minister Dharmendra Pradhan after arrogantly announcing that the very concept of resignation of ministers is alien to the BJP's culture found no mention in his 80-minute address.

The spectre of Jantar Mantar however overshadowed his entire address. Without ever using the Gen Z word which now dominates public discourse across India, Modi invoked the youth as many as 52 times. He however kept completely quiet about the crumbling education and examination system that has now got even Gen Alpha into agitation mode, his only promise for the youth was a repeat of the vague old promise of giving AI training to create one crore jobs per year while in reality many more jobs are being destroyed across sectors and this alarming job loss is being attributed to the impact of AI. He talked about free online coaching when NITI Aayog tells that on an average 25 government schools are being closed down every day. He said nothing about SIR and the disenfranchisement of millions of voters on frivolous pretext of spelling errors and mismatches, nothing about caste census

that his government had promised to conduct just before the Bihar elections, but he appealed to the youth to help the government with the Census operation by updating and uploading family data.

Modi kept absolutely quiet about Gen Z and Jantar Mantar, but he introduced a new term to the Sangh brigade's hate-filled divisive vocabulary of internal enemies: after tukde tukde gang and urban naxal, andolanjeevi and anti-national, there is now a new entry in the form of "Dimagi Naxal" or intellectual Naxal. In a subsequent clarification, Kiren Rijiju tried to limit the Dimagi Naxal tag only to Maoist supporters and those who support Article 370. But in his speech Modi used this Dimagi Naxal tag with retrospective effect even applying it to intellectuals advising government policies in the UPA era. Evidently, he was referring to the power of the Left bloc in Parliament during the UPA period and the role of the National Advisory Council in enacting a set of legislations related to people's welfare and citizen entitlement and empowerment like NREGA, Forest Rights Act, RTI, Food Security Act and Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act.

Modi's problem is with all those legislations that expand rights and allow citizens a say in policy-making and governance. In 2014 itself he began with an unsuccessful attempt to scuttle the 2013 Land Acquisition Act that replaced the colonial era 1894 Act and provided for mandatory social and environmental audit, seeking of consent, payment of compensation and provision of rehabilitation and resettlement. Over the years the RTI has been systematically undermined, the Forest Rights Act has become a victim of deliberate non-implementation

and violation and now MGNREGA has been replaced altogether by a new law that has reversed all the fundamental features of employment guarantee legislation.

At a time when the Himalayan region is witnessing increasing landslides and climate catastrophes, air pollution has assumed alarming proportions right in the national capital region and there are growing public protests against deforestation and attacks on India's fragile coastal environment and ecology, Modi took pride in his government's open flouting of environmental concerns. He said his government had turned 99% of India's coastline from 'no-go zone' to 'go-ahead zone' without of course spelling it out that the coastline is now being handed over predominantly to the Adani group to strengthen its grip over India's infrastructure and ports.

The term Dimagi Naxal refers to the critical role of 'dimag' or brain, of intellect and intellectuals, in social, cultural and political matters, something the Modi government is extremely afraid of and wants to stop by all means. Even before the coinage of this term we have been witness to the assassination of writers like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, MM Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh and prolonged incarceration and systematic harassment and persecution of well known public intellectuals, cultural personalities and human rights campaigners of India.

The call for identification and isolation of Dimagi Naxals in Modi's Independence Day address is a sinister dog whistle for both the state and the goon squads of the Sangh brigade to target dissenting voices and activists across the board. Modi's stress on creating "a vibrant network of civil defence" is perhaps a warning about unleashing more repressive force on the people, launching a

new militia as well as more public-private partnership to tackle people's protests and movements by using retired Agniveers and legalising the goon squads of the Sangh brigade. The preposterous idea of policing people's brains follows from the Sangh brigade's practice of controlling people's minds, playing with their emotions and regimenting their expressions. It sounds eerily similar to the category of 'thought police' in George Orwell's classic portrayal of tyrannical dystopia in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

The attack by BJP goons on Sheikh Mohammad Hafiz in Bankura district of West Bengal and the killing of his father Mohammad Mafiq for exposing the pitiable conditions of a primary school in their village is just a pointer to the kind of violence and terror the Sangh-BJP establishment is planning to orchestrate to crush the Jantar Mantar spirit of courage, defiance and resistance which is now propelling the youth across India. But a generation which has turned a derogatory and dehumanising word like cockroach into a badge of proud identity and platform of protest will surely not be intimidated or deterred by Modi's sinister "Dimagi Naxal" coinage.

The fascists are constantly in search of internal enemies and the need for a new coinage to identify the enemy is an admission that the previous vocabulary is no longer working. Naxalism is only an Indian byword for communism and by linking 'dimag' or brain with Naxalism, Modi has in a way admitted to the growing appeal and resonance of communist ideas against today's environment of fascist aggression, failed governance and corporate plunder. Let intellect and conscience prevail over bigotry and blind faith or 'andh bhakti'. Let the mind be truly without fear. ■

The Month of August and the Spirit of Aazadi

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Every year India observes August 9 as the Quit India movement anniversary, a day dedicated to anti-imperialism which is specific to India. India in 1942 was the biggest colony of British Empire, and despite virtually continuous resistance and uprisings over the previous two centuries, the colonial rulers were still smug about the sun never setting on their vast global empire. When the Quit India resolution was passed in the Mumbai session of AICC, the colonial rulers reacted by arresting Gandhi and the entire Congress leadership. Yet the people of India took up the challenge, and 1942 became colonial India's biggest mass uprising after 1857, heralding the final push of the Indian people for nothing short of complete independence from colonial rule. The colonial rulers indeed had to quit within five years.

This year, the Quit India movement anniversary had a very special renewed resonance. Preceding the month of August was the July of Jantar Mantar. The colonial collaborators of 1942 are now the rulers of India. They tried to follow the same colonial rule book - Sonam Wangchuk was abducted and common protesters were sought to be silenced with lathis (immortalised by iconic mass singer Hemanga Biswas as the 'baton' left behind by 'Mount-baton sahib'), pellet guns (perfected in the Kashmir laboratory of state repression), tear gas shells and AK47 assault rifles. Yet, powered by the courage and stamina of Gen Z, the people of India proved themselves worthy successors of the 1942 Quit India spirit. The super-arrogant Modi government which had boasted that no minister would ever resign had

to sacrifice Dharmendra Pradhan.

The spirit of Jantar Mantar of July 2026 has since been permeating the whole of India. More than 450 law graduates from NALSAR Hyderabad have openly expressed their refusal to have their degrees awarded by the current Chief Justice of India whose track record has been one of sanctifying every unconstitutional measure of the Modi government. School students are rising in protest across India demanding a functional system of public education. A powerful movement has emerged in Jharkhand against paper leaks in competitive examinations. In a welcome sign of the times, the voices from the ground also resonated loudly in the monsoon session of Parliament, demanding the accountability of Home Minister Amit Shah for the police brutalities on student protesters. On 9-10 August India also witnessed massive demonstrations of trade unions and farmer organisations.

Having failed to crush the youth upsurge by brute force, the Modi government is now using the Sangh brigade to try to launch a counter campaign to malign the Jantar Mantar protests, while using the Jharkhand protests to serve the Sanghi narrative. The Godi media, which conspicuously ignored the Jantar Mantar protests, is busy projecting the Jharkhand protests as 'ideal' protests of Gen Z where there is no chanting of Aazadi slogans, no biryani served by any Junaid to feed protesters, no 'profanity' against the Modi government. When Comrade Neha reached Ranchi, where AISA had already been an active part of the Jharkhand protests, to uphold the underlying unity between Jantar Mantar and Jharkhand, the Sangh

brigade smeared her with ink. This cowardly attack only revealed the Sangh brigade's desperation and Comrade Neha rightly took it in her strides and her communist resolve to use that ink to write history has now become emblematic of India's GenZ courage which turned the derogatory 'cockroach' label into a new sign of defiance.

Can we allow the Sangh brigade to play its sinister 'divide and rule' politics with Gen Z protests? Can we allow the Modi government to incriminate the chant of Aazadi? If India cannot celebrate the slogan of Aazadi, does the Sangh brigade expect Indians to celebrate slavery? The word Aazadi connotes not just national independence, which the Indian people are determined to defend in the face of every imperialist threat, it also connotes the liberties and freedom of the Indian people as proclaimed in the Preamble to the Constitution of India. Nothing can be a more shocking insult to India as a sovereign democratic republic than incriminating the use of the very word Aazadi, call it independence, freedom or liberty.

If the Modi government is suppressing our internal democracy, it is also mortgaging our hard won economic sovereignty and strategic autonomy to US imperialism and the genocidal US-Israel axis of war and aggression. It is therefore reassuring to see that even as student protests have foregrounded the agenda of universal public education, a corruption-free examination system, institutional autonomy and accountability of governments, the developing worker-peasant protests confront the government on the agenda of security and dignity of employment, defence of workers' rights, guaranteed living wages for all and the imminent threat of sacrificing the interests of India's farmers at the altar of US agribusiness in the name of an Indo-US trade deal. ■

Blame the Victims

Judicial Inquiry Commission's Report on Violence in Sambhal

▲ AFROZ ALAM

In August 5, 2026, the Yogi government presented the report of the Judicial Commission formed to investigate the Sambhal violence of November 24, 2024, on the floor of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly. This three-member commission, headed by retired judge Devendra Kumar Arora, included two retired IAS officers, Amit Mohan Prasad and Arvind Kumar Jain. The 450-page report claimed to have recorded the statements of 199 witnesses, along with forensic reports, video footage, and police records related to the incident.

The disclosures in the report primarily characterise the Sambhal violence not as a sudden outburst of anger, but as a pre-planned conspiracy aimed at tarnishing the government's image, halting the survey of the Sambhal Shahi Jama Masjid, and exerting pressure on the local administration.

The inquiry commission has praised the police for containing the violence, stating that the deaths of the four people, five according to local residents, killed in the violence were not caused by police firing, but by firing carried out by rioters. Thus, the report has given a clean chit to the police.

The inquiry report has blamed Sambhal's Samajwadi Party MP Zia-ur-Rahman Barq, local MLA's son Suhail Iqbal, Jama Masjid Committee President Zafar Ali, and others, all of them Muslims. Furthermore, it has recommended that the police administration take strict action against them.

It is pertinent to closely examine the causes behind the Sambhal

violence and take a look at the sequence of events, facts, and the policies pursued by the Yogi government at that time.

Violence in Sambhal

The violence in Sambhal occurred at a time when, on almost every alternate day, some Hindutva individual or organisation was claiming in some court that a mosque, dargah, madrasa, or idgah had been built by demolishing a temple. Courts were mostly accepting such claims and issuing notices, whereas the Places of Worship Act, 1991 prohibits them from doing so. Similar claims were made about places ranging from the Ghazi Masud Dargah in Bahraich and the world-famous Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah in Ajmer to madrasas in Deoband and Saharanpur. Through this, attempts were being made to spread communal division everywhere.

A claim was also made on the Shahi Jama Masjid of Sambhal, which was constructed between 1526 and 1529 AD by Mir Beg, the commander of the Mughal ruler Babur, upon his orders. This fact is recorded in the inscription on the arch of the mosque and mentioned in the book 'Baburnama'. Prayers have been offered here for the past 500 years.

Sambhal is a very old city falling in the Moradabad division, which includes Sambhal, Moradabad, Bijnor, Amroha, and Rampur districts. This region has the highest concentration of Muslims in the entire state of Uttar Pradesh, and the Samajwadi Party used to win a majority of MLAs and MPs, making it a challenging region for

the BJP. After the Babri Masjid demolition and the sharp communal polarisation that followed, the BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh, but it could not stay for very long. With the rise of the Modi wave, the BJP regained power, majorly helped by the communal division generated through the Muzaffarnagar riots.

The BJP understood that to stabilise its power in a large state like Uttar Pradesh, it would have to seek out new issues to increase communal division in regions wherever the Muslim population is large. Therefore, claims and attacks on mosques and dargahs increased from Saharanpur to Sambhal, Bahraich, Shravasti, Fatehpur, Balrampur, Banaras, Ambedkar Nagar, and other districts, while bulldozer actions in the name of encroachment gained momentum. Alongside this, action against Azam Khan was intensified in Rampur, where the average Muslim population in the state is the highest.

The Yogi government's arrogance grew further after its snatched electoral victory in Rampur. Sambhal was targeted as a centre for a permanent dispute and the politics of communal division in western Uttar Pradesh, similar to Ayodhya and Kashi.

Events Following the Filing of the Suit

A civil suit, 'Shri Harihar Mandir vs. Intizamia Committee', was filed in the Chandausi Civil Court (Senior Division) by eight Hindu petitioners, including Kaushalendra Krishan, head of Shri Kaila Devi Temple and legatee of Shri Kalki Dham, Advocate Harishankar Jain, and Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain. The petitioners claimed that the temple was forcibly demolished during the invasion of Mughal ruler Babur in 1526 to 1529 and a mosque was erected, and demanded the right to give Hindu devotees unhindered

entry for darshan and worship at the site.

This suit was filed on November 19, 2024, and on the same day, Judge Aditya Singh, without giving the other party notice and an opportunity to present its case, immediately ordered a survey and appointed Advocate Ramesh Singh Raghav as the Survey Commissioner. On the evening of November 19 itself, the Survey Commissioner, along with Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) personnel and the local administration, conducted a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid. Neither any violence occurred nor any protest took place.

The Shahi Jama Masjid of Sambhal has officially been a centrally protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India since 1920, and its character has always been that of a mosque.

As the entire process was completed peacefully, it seems the objective of those executing it was not fulfilled. Therefore, on November 24, without a second survey order from the court, the survey team reached there a second time, now accompanied by people from Hindutva organisations who were raising provocative slogans. This began to sour the atmosphere, leading to Muslim

community members coming out onto the streets. What followed is something everyone has seen: shots were fired and five people were killed.

The role of the police and how it is infected with a communal ideology is clear from the media statements of Anuj Chaudhary, the then CO of Sambhal Police. The civil court had even ordered the registration of an FIR against him. However, that very judge was transferred immediately.

Those who died in the firing during the violence were all Muslims. The commission report mentioned their names: Naim, Bilal, Mohammad Kaif, and Ayan. A total of 12 FIRs were registered by the police across different police stations, initially naming 25 people and 2,500 unknown persons. A total of 129 people were sent to jail, almost all of whom are Muslim. Around 120 people have received bail from the court. However, those against whom sedition and NSA have been invoked are still locked up in jail.

Zafar Ali, the President of the Jama Masjid Intizamia Committee, was arrested 40 days after the incident following his press conference, in which he claimed that the police had fired in front of him using non-government weapons. He was also about to appear before the judicial inquiry commission.

Apart from lawsuits and jail, dozens of homes, shops, and properties belonging to people from the Muslim community in Sambhal were targeted and damaged through bulldozer actions. The fear of more bulldozer actions in the name of encroachment on mosques, dargahs, and kabristans, and the politics of communal division, still prevails there.

The judicial inquiry commission's failure to take cognisance of the suit from the perspective of a conspiracy, the survey orders issued on the same day without hearing the concerned party, the second survey conducted without any new order, videos showing provocative slogans, videos of police firing, the press conference video of affected people including Zafar Ali, and CO Anuj Chaudhary's statements, while completely justifying the actions and statements of the government and police, raise questions about this one-sided report, motivated by the political objectives of the ruling party.

The report provides more excuses to further oppress and target the Muslim community while justifying the ongoing repression against them. This is precisely what the Yogi government needs for the 2027 elections. ■

Hands off the Revised Minimum Wages in Karnataka

▲ CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

A curious turn of events over the past weeks, revolving around the recently revised minimum wages in Karnataka, have called into serious question the social justice credentials of the Congress-led State Government. On 22nd May 2026, the Karnataka State government revised the minimum wages for 81 scheduled

employments in the range of about Rs. 23,000/- for unskilled workers and Rs. 33,000/- for skilled workers. Some managements, approached the Karnataka High Court challenging these revisions, which was spiritedly resisted by State represented by the Advocate General and the Left Trade unions. No interim order was granted by

the Court. Other managements, however, rather than relying on legal acumen, resorted to lobbying with the State Government to reconsider this decision. On cue, it appears, the Commerce and Industries department struck a note of discord amplifying the trepidation of employers and their organisations. The Finance department besides doing the same, has also raised the grievance that this would impact of the State's finances since the State government is the highest employer of contract labour to whom these revised wages will have to be paid.

Yet again, minimum wages becomes a much contested issue.

Memory is inexplicable. We simply forget. Barely a few months ago, lakhs of workers across the industrial belts of Haryana, Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh poured out of factories and workplaces and occupied the streets, demanding something that ought never to have required a struggle in the first place, the right to earn enough to live with dignity. Thousands of workers from hundreds of factories halted production and asserted, collectively, that wages frozen in the face of relentless inflation had become wages of destitution. Their demands were neither extravagant nor revolutionary. They asked for wages that could keep pace with soaring food prices, spiralling rents, escalating transport costs and cooking gas prices that had surged in the wake of the conflict in West Asia. Their demand was, in essence, the demand to survive.

The response of the State was revealing. Instead of recognising that the protests were a desperate assertion of the constitutional promise of dignity, it resorted to repression. Thousands faced FIRs, arrests and detention. Trade union activists were hunted down. The draconian National Security Act was invoked against labour organisers. The familiar script unfolded once again. A dispute over wages was recast as a law-and-order problem and collective bargaining was treated as criminal conspiracy.

Yet, despite the repression, the workers won. Both, the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh Governments were forced to enhance minimum wages. Governments that had, until then, maintained that the existing wage structure was adequate, conceded what workers had been saying all along, that the prevailing minimum wages had ceased to bear any relationship to the actual

cost of living.

While these struggles were unfolding in North India, Karnataka was completing a process of minimum wage revision that had been pending for nearly a decade. In April 2025, the State Government issued a draft notification revising minimum wages. The delay itself is telling. For almost nine years, wages remained substantially stagnant while inflation relentlessly marched ahead. The price of food increased. Housing became more expensive. Public transport costs rose. School fees escalated. Healthcare became prohibitively costly. Electricity tariffs climbed. Every component of a worker's monthly expenditure expanded, while wages remained trapped in a different economic era. Even the revised wages, are not a windfall as being projected; it is, at best, a partial correction of years of erosion in the purchasing power of wages. In fact Unions, applying the principles mandated by the Supreme Court in its 1992 Reptakos judgment, have projected that the bare minimum wages today would be around Rs. 42,000/-.

Yet, management lobbies, by misprojecting that this wage hike is unprecedented has resorted to the normal bogies. Karnataka, they argue, would become "uncompetitive". Industries would relocate to neighbouring States. Investment would dry up. Employment would suffer. The same arguments that resurface with ritualistic regularity every time minimum wages is revised.

Previously in 2017, when the minimum wages were last revised in Karnataka, management lobbies raised a furore that the wages were hiked by 75% and followed the exact same playbook and arguments. A Division Bench of the Karnataka High Court comprehensively rejected the managements' challenge to the wage revision. Pertinently, the then State

government, bowing to "pressure" from the garment industry lobby, withdrew in March 2018, three of these final notifications - Textile (Silk), Spinning Mills and Cloth Dyeing dated 30.12.2017. This was challenged by one of the Unions in the Karnataka High Court, culminating in the judgment of the Division Bench striking down the withdrawal as illegal and restored the final notifications. The Division Court specifically held that once the final notification was issued the State Government does not have the power to withdraw the same under the guise of review and revision, and further that, the moment the final notification was issued, a vested right was created in the employees to get wages as per the said final notification and the same could not be taken away through any such withdrawal. These ought to have been lessons learnt for the State Government.

In this context, the mythology of "industry flight" deserves closer scrutiny. In 2017, the managements claimed that the 75% minimum wage hike would sound the death knell for the industry in Karnataka, as they do now even though the hike is comparatively a modest 20%-30%. Capital has never moved solely because wages increased. Investment follows infrastructure, stable governance, skilled labour, efficient logistics, reliable electricity, access to ports and markets, institutional certainty and the size of the consumer economy. If cheap labour alone determined industrial location, the poorest districts of India would today be its manufacturing powerhouses. They are not. The repeated invocation of industry flight therefore serves a different political purpose, which is to transform workers' rights into a privilege contingent upon the consent of capital.

There is, however, a deeper question that is carefully avoided.

If industries threaten to leave every time workers demand wages sufficient to sustain life, what exactly is the model of development being defended? Is Karnataka expected to compete with other States by ensuring that its workers remain perpetually underpaid? Is the comparative advantage of the State to be built upon the inability of workers to educate their children, obtain healthcare or secure decent housing? If the viability of an industry depends upon paying wages that do not permit the worker to live with dignity, it is not the wage that is economically irrational, it is the business model.

The debate over minimum wages has never really been about economics alone, and has always been about power. The law on minimum wages emerged because Parliament recognised that the bargaining power between employer and employee is fundamentally unequal. A hungry worker with unemployment staring her in her face, does not negotiate freely. Left entirely to the vagaries of the market, wages gravitate not towards justice but towards desperation. The law therefore intervenes not to distort the market, but to correct an inequality that the market itself creates. Interestingly Ambedkar had this to say, which has sage relevance: "In an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals some one must make rules so that workers will work and the wheels of industry run on. If the State does not do it the private employer will. Life otherwise will become impossible. In other words what is called liberty from the control of the State is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer."

For ten years since 2017, minimum wages were not revised, and managements paid the unrevised wages and nothing more. For nearly a decade, workers silently absorbed the costs of inflation and subsidised industry by accepting wages that steadily lost their purchasing power. Yet the moment the law attempts a modest correction, the discourse abruptly shifts to the hardships of employers.

Perhaps that is why memory is political. We remember threats of industry flight, but forget years of wage stagnation. We remember the inconvenience caused by workers' protests, but forget the desperation that made those protests inevitable. We remember balance sheets, but not empty kitchens. And in forgetting, we permit the same argument to return every decade as though demanding a wage sufficient to live has somehow become an unreasonable demand. As such, the real question before us is not whether industry can afford to pay workers more; it is whether a constitutional democracy can continue to tolerate an economy in which those who create society's wealth are expected to remain permanently on the edge of poverty so that others may continue to accumulate it. To rephrase, the real question is not whether industries can afford to pay workers a little more, but whether workers can afford to continue living on wages that no longer cover rent, food, transport, education and healthcare. This is the question that the Karnataka State Government has to answer now. ■

Linking Women's Reservation to Delimitation is a Political Conspiracy

▲ VANDANA PRABHA

Women's political participation remains extremely limited in the world's largest democracy. In the 18th Lok Sabha, out of 543 MPs, only 74 are women, just 13.6 percent, and across the entire country, out of roughly 4,123 MLAs, only 390 are women, less than 10 percent. The representation of half of the population in important institutions of democracy remains confined to around 10–14 percent at most. This very imbalance greatly necessitates implementation of women's reservation. However, it must also be noted that women do not come from a uniform social background. Women of Dalit, Adivasi, backward, and other marginalized communities face even greater barriers to entering politics. Therefore, the demand for a sub-quota for OBC women alongside women's reservation is a question of social justice. If the objective of representation is to bring the diversity of society into Parliament, that diversity must also be visible within women's reservation.

Against this background, the unanimous passage of the women's reservation Act in Parliament in 2023 was a historic moment. The BJP dedicated it to the "Nari Shakti" (women's power) of the country and asserted that past governments had deceived women for decades. This criticism is not entirely baseless; since 1996, the promise of women's reservation was made repeatedly, yet no law could be enacted due to a lack of political consensus.

Yet, despite the bill passing in 2023, the government deliberately kept it stalled. A constitutional provision for 33 percent reservation for women was enacted but could not be implemented because the government cleverly linked this law to the 2027 census and the subsequent delimitation process. Until both these processes are completed, women's reservation cannot come into effect.

Women's reservation and delimitation are two distinct subjects. The objective of the former is to increase women's political participation, while

the latter is tied to the redrawing of parliamentary and assembly constituency boundaries and the redistribution of seats. The legislation made these two processes dependent on each other.

Delimitation is a complex and debatable issue in Indian politics because it will determine the number of parliamentary seats each state receives and the impact it will have on the country's political balance. Several South Indian states have already voiced their concerns regarding this process. Linking women's reservation to delimitation is a clever ploy by the Modi Government to unnecessarily entangle the debate on women's representation with the politics of delimitation. The issue of women's reservation has a broad social acceptability, while the question of the delimitation process is already attracting political objections from different states. Thus, the BJP is thinking of gaining higher moral ground by labelling any political objections raised against delimitation as anti-women, while in the process it has successfully stalled the implementation of the women's reservation in the parliament. If the ruling party has ever considered women's political participation an urgent necessity, a clear timeline and political honesty must also be demonstrated.

Demanding the immediate implementation of women's reservation by freeing it from the conditions of the census and delimitation, the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) and other women's organizations under the banner of the National Coalition for Women Reservation have been continuously struggling. During the monsoon session of Parliament, an indefinite sit-in by women was held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. As part of this campaign, memorandums were submitted by the delegations of the coalition to the opposition and INDIA bloc MPs, appealing to them to oppose the BJP government's attempts at communal division and arbitrary delimitation, and the 33 percent women's reservation be implemented immediately on the basis of existing number of seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, and that it be delinked from the census and delimitation.

On this occasion, AIPWA National Secretary Meena Tiwari said that the government wants to use women's reservation for its political agenda of delimitation to acquire the power to arbitrarily increase the number of Lok Sabha seats. This was confirmed once again in 2026 when the government suddenly convened a special session of Parliament as if to pave the way for 33% reservation for women starting from 2029, yet failed to delink women's reservation from the controversial issue of delimitation.

AIPWA also organized protests and memorandum submissions across state capitals and district levels. This program was implemented in several states, including Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. In Bihar one-day sit-in protests were held in all districts, carrying this demand to every village and city.

The central government must stop the politics of further delaying women's reservation and implement it immediately. After waiting three decades for the law, women cannot be expected to wait indefinitely for its implementation now.

(Translated from Hindi)

ECI's SIR Begins with the Presumption That All Indians Are Aliens

*This is an abridged version of **Niraja Gopal Jayal's** speech delivered at a conclave of the Constitutional Conduct Group in New Delhi on 4 July 2026, published by The Wire.*

Both the Constitution and the Citizenship Act 1955 enshrined the principle of unconditional *jus soli*, citizenship based on birth on the soil of the country. However, slowly and incrementally over the last few decades, we have been moving away from the principle. The foundational conception of universal equal citizenship in our constitution and in the law on citizenship was underpinned by a presumption of citizenship. That presumption of universal citizenship is being replaced by a presumption of universal alienage.

The presumption of alienage is the principle underlying the NRC, it is the principle underlying the SIR, it is also the principle underlying the latest salvo against passport-holders, who can be excused for wondering if they might have been considered citizens if they didn't have passports that don't certify their citizenship.

But who gets the memo and who doesn't is for the most part a function of one's identity – religion, caste, class, gender, tribe, and so on. Occasionally, there is a black swan event – such as the story of the journalist R. Rajagopal – but, for the most part, it is precision targeting.

There are two critical aspects of the citizenship question: first, the question of who is/can be an Indian citizen; and second, how equally (or not) are rights of citizenship distributed across the citizenry? The influence of both RSS ideology and BJP policies and practices on the first aspect – i.e., who is/can be a citizen – is more significant, but in the present, this

also has consequences for the second. In both aspects, the RSS vision fundamentally contradicts the constitutional vision.

Who is/can be/ought to be an Indian citizen?

The RSS vision of this question is fundamentally anchored in Savarkar's *Essentials of Hindutva* (1923), especially his distinction between *punyabhumi* and *pitribhumi*. The RSS sees the work of the Partition as incomplete and Indian Muslims as a blot on the body politic who can, at best, be treated on sufferance as second-class citizens. It construes Indian citizenship as faith-based, in consonance with the idea of a Hindu majoritarian nation (Hindu *Rashtra*), of which Hindus are natural citizens, while Muslims belong to Pakistan or Bangladesh. Perfecting this congruence between religion and territory is the object of their project of reinventing citizenship, which has obviously received a fillip with the BJP coming to power.

This ideology has been the inspiration for the two most important amendments to the Citizenship Act 1955 in 2003 and 2019, the first enacted by the Vajpayee government and the second by the Modi government.

The 2003 amendment did three things. First, it did away with even conditional *jus soli* and made ineligible for citizenship any person born in India who had one parent who was an "illegal migrant" at the time of their birth. The term illegal migrant was code for Bangladeshi – ergo Muslim – migrant. Second, the Rules of the Act were amended such that the stigma of the term 'illegal migrant' would no longer attach to Hindu migrants who had come in from Pakistan, into the border states of western India, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. If the amendment to the Act smuggled in a religious category covertly

by the term "illegal migrant", the amendment to the Rules did so explicitly by exempting Hindus from this category. Third, the National Population Register and the National Register of Indian Citizens were introduced.

The 2019 amendment, as everyone knows, offered fast-track citizenship to 'migrants' other than Muslims, and introduced a formal religion-based differentiation into secular law.

The cumulative effect of these amendments has been to stigmatise and exclude Muslim citizens, in a way that abandons the constitutional vision of universal equal citizenship in favour of the RSS ideal of a hierarchy of citizenship in the Hindu *Rashtra*.

So, if we are to envision the possibility of more propitious circumstances, how might we think about the reconstruction of citizenship?

- India should once again affirm and restore the principle of unconditional *jus soli*, as in the original, pre-amendment version, of the Citizenship Act 1955. This would require the repeal of amendments, especially those of 2003 and 2019.
- Undoing the 2003 Amendment may be tough, because it is part of a complex web that now includes the Assam NRC and the Foreigners' Tribunals. Lawyers would need to weigh in on how and to what extent this can be undone, perhaps using a legislative instrument akin to the Repealing and Amending Act, 2025.
- NRC and NPR should definitely be scrapped, as should the SIR which has become a proxy for these.
- The Supreme Court has yet to pronounce on the legality of CAA 2019, but this amendment should be repealed.
- The nomenclature of 'illegal migrants' needs to be changed in the language of the Citizenship Act and

its Rules. The insidious distinction between 'illegal migrants' (code for Muslims) and 'refugees' (code for Hindus) must go.

The distribution of the rights of citizenship: inclusion and exclusion

Social and economic rights, even to the modest extent they were available, are presently under threat. Two aspects of this attrition are notable: first, the philosophy of welfare, which is a philosophy of welfare as charity rather than entitlement or right; and, second, access to welfare getting tied to the question of who is an Indian.

The SIR has implications for both the civil and political rights of Indian citizens – in the form of mass disenfranchisement – as also for their social and economic rights. Up until now, one's registration as a voter was limited to determining one's eligibility to vote. Today, the electoral rolls that have become decisive in determining an individual's citizenship status and in determining their access to welfare provisioning.

The relationship between citizenship and the vote is being inverted: from citizenship being the condition of the vote to the vote becoming an instrument for sifting citizens, for inclusion and exclusion, and for casting doubt on the citizenship of citizens, especially those who bear identities that are increasingly, at the behest of majoritarian politics, being disparaged in society.

So, what is to be done?

- First, and most urgently, the delinking of the voter list and welfare provisioning to mitigate the worst effects for those excluded by the SIR.
- The BJP's citizenship project is not a state-directed project alone. It is as much a societal project, underwritten by a concerted

ideological campaign and grass-roots mobilisation, with impunity for vigilante violence and hate crimes. Hence the redress cannot be directed entirely at institutions and laws; it must also involve civil society. The toxicity that has been systematically made to penetrate society is outside the domain of institutions, laws and policies. Civil society must focus on (a) the restoration of civil liberties and freedoms; (b) the restoration and the expansion of social and economic rights; and (c) the fostering of inter-community relations, the removal of inter-community distrust.

Undoing the damage implies not just a staccato recognition of the multiple and discrete ways in which constitutional democracy is being undermined on a daily basis, but in making the connections between what appear to be unrelated issues but are actually not.

The question of citizenship is one such. Apparently innocuous developments are occurring in different, ostensibly distinct, domains but they are all converging on a common purpose: to make Muslims into de jure second-class citizens. Their de facto second-class citizenship has already been achieved through the normalisation of everyday discrimination, through the emboldening of vigilante violence, and impunity for these. Now, the [BJP has turned their attention] to render India's largest minority as not just de facto, but also de jure, second-class citizens.

Niraja Jayal is a political scientist. She is the author of four books, including, most recently, Citizenship Imperilled: India's Fragile Democracy. ■

Greed for Profit and the Lament of Sivasagar

▲ **BIBEK DAS**

The tsunami-like flash floods that struck Sivasagar, Charaideo and part of Jorhat and Golaghat districts from 19th July onwards unleashed a scale of destruction that is unimaginable, irreparable and unprecedented. It would be entirely inappropriate to compare this disaster with the seasonal floods that Assam experiences every year. Such comparisons merely serve to conceal the real causes behind this calamity.

Nor can this disaster be regarded as a continuation of the floods that hit Sivasagar in 1981, nor can it simply be attributed to the widely circulated claim of a "cloudburst". The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has clearly stated that the rainfall recorded in Mon district of Nagaland on 18-19 July did not meet the official criterion for a cloudburst, which requires at least 100 millimetres of rainfall within an hour over an area of 20-25 square kilometres. It is true that the rainfall during those two days was far above normal, but it did not qualify as a cloudburst.

This naturally raises an important question: if not a cloudburst, what caused such extensive devastation?

There is now a broad consensus that rampant illegal coal mining, illegal stone quarrying, illegal earth excavation and widespread deforestation together created the conditions for this disaster. In that sense, what Sivasagar has witnessed is not merely a natural calamity but a human-induced disaster.

Sivasagar and Charaideo Districts of Assam are situated sharing

the bordering Mon district of Nagaland. The Dikhow -main rivers of Sivsagar district- originates in the Mon district of Nagaland flows through the entire Sivsagar district. The other rivers viz. Jaji and Bhogdai also come from Mon district of Nagaland and flows through Jorhat and Sivasagar. The havoc was caused by all three rivers but mainly by Dikhow. Coal fields are situated in Mon district and stone deposition takes place across the border of the both districts.

How have these illegal mining activities continued unchecked? Who is carrying them out? Under whose patronage are they operating? These questions are now being widely debated. It has become a matter of public discussion that several legislators belonging to the ruling party are allegedly involved in the coal and stone businesses.

What many people may not know is that the coal trade in the Naga Hills has today become even more profitable than the diamond trade. But how?

Mon district of Nagaland possesses abundant coal reserves. However, the Central Government has not granted formal approval for commercial coal mining there. Furthermore, Nagaland enjoys special constitutional protection under Article 371(A), so the ownership and control of its natural resources rest primarily with its indigenous communities. In other words, commercial extraction of coal is not legally permitted under the existing framework.

However, the Nagaland Government has permitted only limited rat-

hole mining within an area of two hectares. Reports now indicate that vast illegal open-cast mines, resembling artificial lakes, have been excavated instead.

Who is carrying out these operations? Since the coal is ultimately used for commercial purposes in Assam and other states, it is evident that enormous quantities of coal are being transported out of Mon district. It is also widely acknowledged that Mon district remains under the effective influence of the NSCN. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that such large-scale mining could take place without its knowledge or consent.

This naturally raises another question: are certain coal traders from Assam taking advantage of the relatively weak administration in Mon district by paying taxes or levies to the NSCN?

It is important to note that neither the Government of Assam nor the Government of Nagaland receives any royalty from this coal, because, legally speaking, commercial coal mining is not authorised there. It therefore follows that the coal business operating in the Sonari, a bordering area (assembly constituency) of Assam is most likely supplied from Mon district. The Government must clearly tell the people whether this coal trade is legal or illegal. It must also clarify whether the coal business allegedly associated with the BJP MLA of Sonari is lawful or unlawful.

Even if the people of Assam are unaware of it, the residents of Nazira know that the present MLA of the Nazira constituency is associated with the stone business. It is for reader's information that under the Sivasagar Forest Division (Assam) there is an independent forest beat known as Bihubar Beat, located within the Nazira constituency is famous for stone reserves. Readers may be surprised to know that

securing a posting as the officer in charge of this beat requires paying bribes exceeding one crore rupees to higher authorities. Such allegations themselves indicate the enormous money-value attached to this forest beat.

The Dikhow River carries large quantities of stones from the upper reaches of the Naga Hills, depositing them in the Bihubar and Chantak area. Consequently, this region has evolved into a major centre of the stone trade. Ironically, the recent disaster almost wiped out both the Bihubar and Chantak areas.

Before the construction of the four-lane highway across Upper Assam, the Forest Department had reportedly informed the Government of Assam that there would not be sufficient earth available for the project. Subsequently, several lakh cubic metres of earth were excavated from the Naga Hills and used in the construction of the highway.

Satellite data reveal that between 2001 and 2025, Mon district lost approximately 55,000 hectares of tree cover, the highest among all districts in the state. In addition, several instances of illegal encroachment on forest land have been officially documented. One such example is the 2,138 hectare Lokhipahar (Jaboka) Forest in Tizit, where large tracts of forest have allegedly been encroached upon and converted into private plantations.

What we have witnessed in Sivasagar is only a glimpse of the devastating consequences of the model of development pursued under the BJP.

The destruction caused in Sivasagar and Charaideo is multi-layered with far-reaching repercussions. Houses have been washed away, agricultural fields have been buried under sand and

silt, and many fertile areas are likely to become covered with stones, rendered uncultivable. Families have lost all their identity documents and official records.

People may be able to arrange food and clothing for the victims for a few days through public support, but the enormous infrastructural and long-term challenges created by this disaster cannot be addressed by anyone other than the Government itself.

Unfortunately, the Government of Assam has failed to display the empathy and responsibility expected in the aftermath of such a catastrophe. A government that claims to represent the very flesh and blood of Assam's indigenous people has shown little concern or compassion at a time when one of Assam's most historic and culturally significant regions has suffered unprecedented devastation. During India's freedom struggle, when the movement for independence had gathered tremendous momentum, the RSS found little opportunity to expand its politics of hatred. K. B. Hedgewar wrote:

"As a result of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, the nation's enthusiasm (for Hindu nationalism) had cooled down, and the social evils unleashed by that movement had raised their heads in a frightening manner. Nourished by the milk of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Yavana snakes began hissing venomously, inciting the nation towards conflict."

Today, the people of Assam are increasingly convinced that the Sivasagar disaster is not merely a natural calamity but one created by a nexus of government-backed mafias and illegal extractive activities. At a time when Hindus and Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder, rescuing one another; when leaders whom the Chief

Minister has often portrayed as political adversaries, such as Badruddin Ajmal and Mahbubul Hoque, came forward in a spirit of humanity to assist the victims; and when Akhil Gogoi and other social political activists devoted themselves day and night to the service of the flood-affected people, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his administration appeared ineffective and conspicuously absent.

Just as the Pulwama tragedy was, in the eyes of many critics, politically exploited instead of focusing solely on bringing the perpetrators to justice, there is now a growing perception that the Government is attempting to derive political advantage from this disaster as well, rather than addressing its root causes and the suffering of the affected people.

The real image of the Chief Minister's sense of responsibility became exposed when he reportedly remarked: "I received the information from the Chief Minister of Nagaland within ten minutes. But what could I have done?" This statement raises serious questions about disaster preparedness and administrative accountability. Disaster management agencies routinely issue alerts warning of approaching storms, heavy rainfall and other emergencies. Had the Chief Minister immediately issued a high alert to the Deputy Commissioners of Jorhat, Sivasagar and Charaideo after receiving the information, I firmly believe that nearly seventy per cent of those who lost their lives might have been saved.

The words of the great social reformer Srimanta Sankardev remain profoundly relevant even today:

"Famine shall strike the land, and the people shall perish for want of food; The rulers, in pursuit of revenue,

shall continue to oppress their subjects."

May this prophetic warning not become our reality once again. The Government must provide relief and rehabilitation to the flood-affected families in equal proportion to the losses they have suffered. While food and clothing may be arranged temporarily through public support, long-term rehabilitation requires decisive governmental intervention. Every affected family should be granted a comprehensive relief package, including a waiver of outstanding loans and immediate financial assistance of at least ₹1 million (ten lakh rupees) for rebuilding homes, replacing educational materials, and restoring other essential belongings.

A government that can extend tax concessions and financial incentives worth thousands of crores of rupees to large corporate houses should not hesitate to announce similar relief measures for the people of Assam who have lost everything in this unprecedented disaster.

Finally, the entire issue of illegal coal mining must be investigated through a judicial inquiry headed by a sitting Judge of a High Court. Illegal coal mining, illegal stone quarrying, and all forms of unlawful extraction of natural resources must be halted immediately. No society can allow the reckless pursuit of profit by a handful of individuals to endanger the lives, livelihoods and property of millions. Those responsible for this human tragedy must be identified, held accountable, and brought before the law.

Only by ensuring transparency, accountability and justice can such disasters be prevented from recurring, and only then can the people of Assam regain confidence that their lives and environment are valued above the greed of a privileged few. ■

The Kanwar Mayhem Under Yogi

▲ **LAL BAHADUR SINGH**

In Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, kanwaris attacked a school van. One can see in a video the innocent hapless children standing outside their broken van.

In Meerut the kanwaris brutally beat a policeman who can be heard frantically calling his officer "Saheb come soon". In Haridwar Kanwaris attacked a car and beat the driver mercilessly. These are only some examples. The situation is so bad that meanwhile SC has directed the Centre to formulate a national SOP for Kanwar Yatra safety.

Given the vandalism by the kanwaris, normal life was suspended, schools had been closed from 4 to 12 August in Meerut Ghaziabad region. 17 stations of Namo Bharat will remain closed during the yatra period.

Even as the country celebrated the victory of the peaceful democratic movement of GenZ in forcing education minister Dharmendra Pradhan to resign, this mayhem and anarchy on the roads formed another dimension of Modi-Yogi regime affecting crosssections of the population.

The kanwar yatra used to be a small religious affair undertaken by a few dedicated devotees until the late 1980s. Today, the kanwar pilgrimage to Haridwar in particular has grown to be India's largest annual religious gathering, with an ever increasing number of participants. This year some reports have estimated 48 million participants. It is obvious that till late 80s it was a sacred religious affair, however since late 80s

with the resurgence of hindutva politics, Kanwar yatra too gained momentum. Not only the number of yatris increased many fold but the number of youngsters increased tremendously. More specifically after Yogi came to power in 2017 the government started glorifying and giving open state patronage to the Kanwar yatra. There was sprinkling of flowers from helicopters on the kanwar yatris last year and again this year too it was done in 7 districts. In Shamli district, the DM and SP welcomed them by offering flowers.

With such glorification and state patronage, the BJP regime has attracted in the name of yatris a lot of lumpen elements who feel free to take law in their own hands and do any mischief on the road. They openly consume liquor, drugs and other intoxicants. The Yogi government is very much concerned about Muslims offering

namaz on the roads but lumpen kanwarias are free to do anything including vulgar songs and dance on the roads.

In fact Yogi as a means of his polarisation politics, ordered last year all shopkeepers in kanwar yatra routes to write their names on the boards. It was aimed at forcing an economic blocked of Muslim shopkeepers and deepening the Hindu-Muslim divide.

Thus Kanwar yatris have been turned into the worst kind of hooligans. They are mostly from poor backgrounds and OBC, SC origin, who obviously have no jobs and no future. RSS-BJP promotes this phenomenon of lumpenisation in order to make them hold trishul and swords in their hand. They are being converted into the foot-soldiers of hindutva brigade. It is these youth who are made to dance in front of mosques during Hindu festivals.

Can a government have any business to do with religious festivals of a particular religion? Equality of all religions is mandated in our Constitution, then how does a government welcome followers of a particular religion by offering flowers even when they become a serious law and order problem and involved in all sorts of hooliganism while the same government stops believers of minority religion offering prayers on their own rooftops?

This is the pure and simple rule of a majoritarian communal fascist state. Obviously what the BJP government is doing is against the basic tenets of our secular constitution. Democratic forces must oppose this violation of our secular democratic constitution as well as cultural degeneration in the name of religion and force the Yogi government to establish rule of law in the state. ■

Posing Environmental and Public Health Threats

Along with serious law-and-order lapses and a growing sense of insecurity among people walking on roads alongside Kanwariyas, there is also an alarming environmental threat posed by the huge number of Kanwariyas visiting the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar.

The Haridwar Municipal Corporation has reported collecting around 8,000 metric tonnes of plastic and other waste left behind by the yatris within the municipal corporation's boundaries alone. One can only imagine the enormous quantity of waste left along the many highways and towns that fall on the Kanwar Yatra routes. Uttarakhand Police reported around 4.8 crore Kanwariyas visited Haridwar this year, compared with 4.5 crore last

year. This increase in the number of pilgrims has reportedly resulted in around 1,000 metric tonnes more waste being generated in the town than in the previous year.

The accumulation of garbage, combined with the huge number of Kanwariyas exceeding the capacity of available civic amenities, also poses serious sanitation and public-health risks, not only to ordinary residents but to the Kanwar yatris themselves. These risks may persist even in the days following the conclusion of the yatra.

Ignoring these serious environmental and public-health concerns, the police administrations in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have instead patted themselves on the back

for their arrangements, claiming that there were "less disruptions than in previous years," despite multiple reports throughout the yatra period of vandalism and attacks on people. ■



Jantar Mantar and after: Key Takeaways for Democracy in India

▲ **DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA**

When the protests against paper leaks started in June, Jantar Mantar was just a venue. After the July 20 Parliament march followed by the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan on 25 July, Jantar Mantar has become a metaphor for a new phase of people's protests in India. Needless to say, Jantar Mantar did not happen in a vacuum. It drew on the energy and experience of every previous popular protest movement in the Modi era – from the student protests in the wake of the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula to the most recent Noida-Manesar workers' struggle for wage increase, and in between of course the unprecedented equal citizenship movement at Shaheen Bagh, the historic farmers' movement at Delhi borders and the women wrestlers agitation at Jantar Mantar.

Armed with the lessons learned from these previous struggles and backed by the unprecedented scale and intensity of youth anger, the Gen Z protest caught the Modi government off guard. The much tested and trusted protest-busting toolkit of the Modi-Shah regime proved utterly inadequate and the innate strength and resilience of the movement prevailed over the diabolical combination of cunning and violence. Having suffered a manifest loss of face and erosion of authority, the government is now desperately trying to corner the movement by unleashing state repression and media trial. In spite of agreeing to a general amnesty for all protesters, state governments in Bihar, West Bengal and a few other states went on a

mass detention spree. While most detained protesters have been released, targeted harassment and intimidation continues by other means.

Repression apart, the Modi government is known for its narrative war against every movement. The student movement of JNU was sought to be vilified as 'tukde tukde gang', the anti-CAA protests were dubbed anti-national and the farmers' movement became a Khalistani conspiracy. Given the massive numbers and composition of the Jantar Mantar protesters where classes, castes, communities, cultures and generations met in a carnival of solidarity and resistance, it became difficult for the Modi government and its Godi Media to paint it with one brush. The government that used to wax eloquent about India's 'demographic dividend' now seems to be targeting an entire generation, and especially young women protesters, as a misguided lot. Clearly, the regime is worried that the Jantar Mantar movement poses a threat to the socio-cultural stranglehold and ideological regimentation of the RSS which is so central to the project of Hindu Rashtra. Modi's pretence of 'mercy for protesters' is actually a not-so-veiled attempt to incite a patriarchal backlash against young women protesters which has already emboldened his followers to target women with rape and death threats.

How do we carry forward the hope and resonance generated by Jantar Mantar in July 2026? In its most immediate context, the movement was against paper leaks

and the proven incompetence and corruption of the NTA. The centralised NEET examination system and the policy framework of NEP 2020 have also been in question. The Modi government's response so far has been to replace Dharmendra Pradhan with Pralhad Joshi, amend the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act 2024 with harsher penal measures and appoint a task force under the leadership of Infosys chairman and architect of Aadhaar identification project Nandan Nilekani. Clearly, the government does not want to address any of the five core factors – centralisation, privatisation, commercialisation, technological fetishism and the ideological stranglehold of the RSS – responsible for the growing crisis of India's education and examination systems. In fact, if we take the proposed VBSA Bill into account, the problems are only bound to grow. The movement for urgent and effective reforms in the spheres of higher education and examination will thus have to be intensified.

Highly inspiring reports are now coming in of Gen Alpha (post-2012 generation) protests in Bihar, UP, Rajasthan and other states of North India against the crumbling state of affairs of India's school system. Thousands of government schools have been closed down, school infrastructure remains appallingly deficient, adequate appointment of teachers and improvement of teaching conditions and educational environment remains a far cry. Niti Aayog's own report puts the figure of schools closed down during last one decade at some 94,000, or an average of 25 schools a day! Nothing can be more reassuring for the future of democracy in India than a powerful upsurge of young India for universal quality education. Intimately connected

with education is the agenda of employment. A big section of participants in the Jantar Mantar protest actually comprised jobless youth or those labouring away in insecure and extremely low-paid jobs. Right to education, right to dignified and secure employment with living wages, universal healthcare and housing rights and protection of the environment, and not the so-called size of the economy, must be at the core of any relevant agenda of economic development for India.

Jantar Mantar showed us glimpses of an unprecedented political awakening and assertion of India's Gen Z. This is a generation which has grown up entirely in the Modi era, is extremely well-informed and is drawing its political conclusions on the basis of its own bitter first-hand experience of the disastrous Modi-Shah regime. This is a digital generation which honed humour and satire as its language of protest and defiance, and not only exposed and rejected the Godi Media but developed its own alternative media. Serial paper leaks and all pervasive corruption triggered the Jantar Mantar explosion, but the youth upsurge is not going to remain limited to these issues. The real agenda is effective change in India's education system and employment environment and enforcing the basic democratic principle of accountability. And the test of accountability is here to be applied to one and all. As the popular Gen Z slogan puts it, "Dharmendra Pradhan toh jhanki hai, Modi-Shah baki hai" or "picture abhi baki hai" (what you have seen is just a trailer, the film is yet to follow). Meanwhile we have seen one more trailer in the Bankipur bypoll in Patna with the BJP losing its traditional seat just vacated by party president Nitin Nabin as the party's 63% vote share in November 2025 dropped to 33%! ■

Gen Z's Satire Storms the Myth of Invincibility

▲ MANAS K GHOSH



It was 1943. The looming shadow of WW II overcast the sky of our planet. The smoke and the blood eclipsed the earth and the water, the sky and the mountains. The progress of the Fuhrer's army looked inexorable. The extremely active Nazi propaganda machinery was effectively erecting up a larger-than-life image of Hitler. He spoke; he whisked; he brawled. He was projected as a superman who could surge into heaven. The ordinary German mind was already colonized by the Nazi propagandas, and the rest of the world began to believe in Hitler's charisma.

During those years, Spanish filmmaker Luis Bunuel was living in the USA. He was assigned to prepare a shorter version of German propagandist Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 documentary film 'The Triumph of the Will'. The shorter version of ToW was made to be part of the toolkit for producing a counter-propaganda against the Nazis. Bunuel invited some chosen politicians and cultural personalities to watch the film. Among them were renowned filmmaker Rene Clair and legendary Charlie Chaplin. Both showed up and watched the film sitting together. Bunuel wrote that they had entirely different reactions.

Horried by the power of Hitler's images as constructed by Leni in this documentary, Rene Clair told Bunuel not to show the film to anybody ever. "Chaplin, on the other hand, laughed [while watching the film], once so hard that he actually fell off his chair," wrote Bunuel. Every time Chaplin saw the images of Hitler's animated speeches and idiosyncratic gestures on screen, Hitler, perhaps, appeared to him as a miserable buffoon inflated by the propaganda. "Was he so amused because of The Great Dictator?" Bunuel wondered! In 'The Great Dictator' (1940), leaving back the image of the adorable innocent little tramp, Chaplin appeared as a vociferous political satirist. His strident humor in the film brought down the Fuhrer's larger-than-life image to the ground;

his caustic humor brought the dwarf-turned-monster back to the stature of a dwarf again. Chaplin's film proved to us that if we amass enough courage in us to ridicule the power, the myth of the invincible falls flat before our eyes. This is the power of humor and laughter!

There have been moments in history when the power of humor reappears to challenge the authoritarian control. The rebellious students who occupied the university campuses and the streets of Paris in May '68 proved this. Barricades, which they erected against the system, were made not only with objects but also with wit and satire. For them, humor was a double-edged sword, one edge of which blue-penciled the monumental boredom of life subjected to them by capitalism, and the other edge was made to kill the monstrous political system of Charles de Gaulle. They stenciled on the street, "It is forbidden to forbid!"

We came across a similar spirit in the Jantar Mantar protest last month. There were reasons to believe that one major source of the strength of their unity was satirical posters, memes, and slogans circulated as real-life visuals and mediated viral images that ridiculed Modi and Dharmendra Pradhan. The brave act of ridiculing the Godi media-produced images of the 'strong man' and 'tough leader' crumbled to the ground in no time. The huge upsurge of humor and wit yielded a nation-wide magical effect. A strong sense of liberation flushed out the fear accumulated in the public psyche in the last decade. The horror of fascism that the people of India have been living through for more than one decade suddenly waned from public mind. The government, as expected, intended to stop the non-violent

youth uprising by waging unprecedented police brutality on them. It was an unequal battle between brave humors versus cowardice brutality.

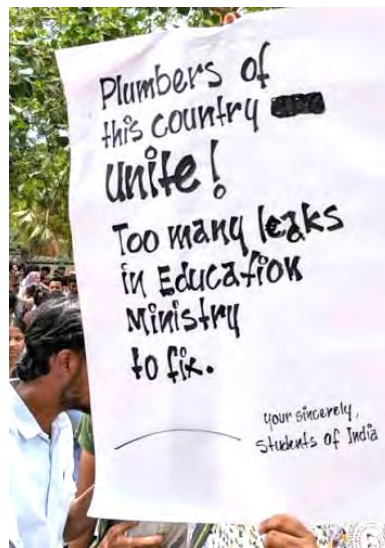
The protesters raised their voices against the violent onslaught that the police perpetrated on them. They unequivocally condemned the nationwide police brutality on the youth. But the beauty lies elsewhere. The resilience that they built up on the face of state violence was informed by humor. The sadist terror was unleashed on them, but they refused to be terrified. They did not even allow the horror of police brutality to set in the public mind. Let us emphasize the Gen Z phrase "FoMo"—the fear of missing out. After 20 July's police brutality on the protesting students in New Delhi, Gen Z made reels and other social media content on how the people who missed out the 20 July incident were suffering from FoMo. The witty reels and other contents put forward a funny message that youth who had not been present there on the Delhi streets for some reason were feeling hapless as they missed out the opportunity to be present there beside their friends and were excluded from the whole incident of police lathi-charge that their friends had encountered. The police wanted to create a phobia; the Gen Z responded with subtle and intelligent humor. This was not a stray phenomenon.

All over the country the Gen Z refused to submit before the psychological warfare the police administration waged on them. The images of Patna youth asking the police, 'Keya Ansu gas nehi hayn aapka paas,' and then their dancing before water canon went viral. The Gen Z's witty method of refuting the brute authoritarian force that they have successfully deployed in the recent protests was a new phenomenon. They provide

institutional politics with a new style of articulation. 'Chhappan inch ka chhota bandar' was taken up by the opposition MPs, as they coined slogans out of those lines sung by the students. This is unprecedented in Indian politics.

The recent student activism informed by satire and humor made me fully understand why Chaplin burst into a series of laughter while watching Hitler on screen. The Gen Z of India realized that so long you fear the authority of an authoritarian rule, it continues to subjugate you. So, they made it a laughing stock. We emphasized much on understanding fascism as a content. We ignored the fact that fascism is a form too. The Godi-media 24x7 as a collaborator of the current totalitarian rule showcases the form of Indian fascism for the masses. We must underline the fact that the power of fascism often originates from its form.

The Gen Z of this nation erected an impermeable barricade of satire, parody, and other forms of comedy before the regime. The immediate consequence of which is that the horror of fascism, at least for the time being, ceases to function. The form of fascism is successfully demystified, the propaganda dismantled. ■



The Twin Crises of Education and Unemployment

This is an abridged edited version of the essay, 'What Links Jantar Mantar with Noida' published on the Research Unit for Political Economy (RUPE India) blog on 30 July 2026.

The immediate demands of the recent student-youth rallies in Delhi and elsewhere related to the incessant leaks of examination papers. But the remarkable surge of participation in these protests showed that this movement had tapped widespread anger among the youth beyond just the question of leaked papers. The discussion of these events has largely focussed on the nature of this generation of youth, their modes of expression, and so on. But we need to shift the focus to the objective reasons for their anger.

India's youth have much to be agitated about. They confront a privatised and expensive education system which does not yield them jobs; the disappearance of jobs that are worth the name; and declining real wages. All three phenomena are clearly the outcome of the economic policies followed in the neoliberal era.

Higher education as a method of extracting the meagre resources of working people

Sixty years ago, the Kothari Commission recommended that public expenditure on education should be 6 per cent of GDP, and successive governments ever since have paid lip service to this target. The New Education Policy of 2020 repeats the 6 per cent target, but the combined spending of the Central and state governments is stuck at around 2.7 per cent of GDP.¹

Neoliberal policy opposes any increase in public spending,

arguing that the private sector is more efficient at delivering the goods. But the private sector enters education only if it finds it profitable, for which it charges higher fees; so the burden on households grows. Household spending on education is increasing faster than public spending on education. Within total household spending, the share of spending on education more than doubled between 1990-91 and 2017-18.²

Let us look specifically at higher education, in the context of the recent protests. A timely and thorough study, *The State of Working India 2026 (SWI)*, by the Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University, Bangalore, provides many insights. Unless otherwise attributed, the data given below are from this study.

Over the last few decades, a larger section of Indian parents have nurtured the hope that their children will enjoy a better life than their own. They are aware of the 'graduate premium', i.e., the fact that college graduates on average earn more than those without college degrees. And so families have sent their children to college in sizeable numbers in the post-1991 era, particularly since 2000. The number of college graduates has risen by 100 million (from 49 mn to 149 mn) over the past 20 years. Even those with meagre resources have scraped together the funds to pay college fees, private tuitions and other costs. Nearly a third of India's college students are now drawn from

the poorer half of the population. (Of course, poor households are unable to place their children in the courses which yield higher wages, such as medicine.)

Demand for higher education has thus risen steeply. However, as we mentioned earlier, in the post-1991 neoliberal era the Government restrained spending on higher education, and so a growing market was handed over to the private sector. As *The State of Working India* remarks, "This new and burgeoning demand made higher education an attractive investment option". The number of higher education institutions has grown rapidly, to 69,534 today; but while the public sector accounted for half of higher education institutions till the 1980s, the private sector now accounts for over 80 per cent.

This growth in the private sector has been accompanied by a decline in quality, reflected in the worsening student-teacher ratio. A recent survey cited by the Government claims that only 55 per cent of India's college graduates are 'employable';³ a 2019 survey found that 80 per cent of engineering graduates were not employable in any job in the 'knowledge economy'; and a TeamLease survey in 2024 claimed only 10 per cent of the 1.5 million engineering graduates that year would land jobs.⁴ This is after households who send their children to engineering colleges each spend over Rs 70,000 a year on fees and other expenses.

Only a third of graduates get salaried jobs

The central problem, however, is not the supply of adequately skilled labour, but the demand for labour: not enough jobs are being generated. That is, there is a general employment crisis, within which there is a crisis of graduate

employment. While India's colleges have turned out 100 million graduates over the last 20 years, only 56 million of them found employment, and only 34 million of them got salaried jobs, implying that the other 22 million 'employed' graduates were consigned to self-employment or casual labour. Just one in twelve college graduates gets employed in a role matching their education.⁵ A 2022 survey by the National Council for Applied Economic Research found that a third of food delivery platform workers had college degrees or above.⁶

Since many graduates are competing for a handful of salaried jobs, employers have the upper hand. The growth in monthly salaries of graduates has flattened since 2011; indeed, in the case of male graduates, real wages (i.e., wages after discounting for inflation) have fallen outright since 2011.

By the definition adopted in India's official surveys, "persons who are engaged in any economic activity" during the relevant period are considered "employed", whether or not their employment fully employs them or yields them a living. This means that a rise in employment can take place even as conditions actually worsen. For example, in a situation of distress, a family may throw as many as it can onto the labour market, however little each may earn. Thus in the last six years, women have joined the workforce as unpaid helpers on family farms. And young men have left education to take whatever work they can get, in order to support the household. These are signs of desperation among labouring families, but the same data are then trumpeted by the Government as a rise in employment rates and a rise in women's participation in the workforce.

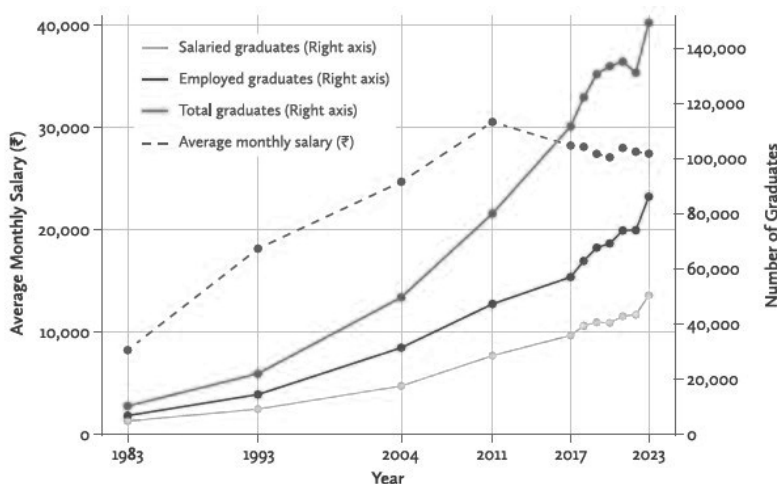


Chart 1: Graduate employment has not kept pace with the supply of graduates. (State of Working India 2026, p. 132.)

The employment crisis and the pattern of growth

Why are there not enough jobs? This is a much broader question, which needs a deeper exploration than is possible here. At the heart of it is the entire pattern of growth. The absence of a revolutionary transformation of agrarian relations after 1947 prevented the widely-dispersed growth of demand, and prevented the emergence of a widely-dispersed, labour-intensive industry catering to that demand by making humble items of mass consumption. As a result, workers were not drawn out of agriculture into manufacturing. Employment in larger private firms (the 'organised sector') grew slowly; in 1991 it was still only 40 per cent as large as public sector employment. And public investment itself grew too slowly to absorb all those who had acquired education and training.⁷

When growth did take off in the 2000s, it was driven by the demand of the top 5-10 per cent of the population, who consumed high-end goods and services made with capital-intensive technology, requiring large imports, and requiring less labour.

The construction boom did cause the growth of construction labour, but this was in sweated, low-paid jobs. At any rate the construction industry has been limited to infrastructure and luxury housing, not housing for the masses, who lack purchasing power.

Meanwhile public sector employment proper, composed of directly employed workers who enjoy some job security and decent wages, has fallen outright in the neo-liberal era.⁸ The public sector's share of total employment fell from 5.2 per cent in 1993-94 to 3.7 per cent in 2011-12.⁹

As the agrarian crisis has intensified, agricultural households have sought to supplement their meagre farm incomes with meagre incomes earned in casual labour, low-paid service jobs (e.g., as security guards), petty retail, and various types of self-employment – all expressions of distress. This model of development has not essentially changed even as governments have changed hands from the Congress to the BJP over the years.

Now, with changes in the global economy, the better-paid jobs in IT have stopped growing and,

owing to AI, may shrink, with repercussions for many sectors. The employment crisis is set to worsen, and today's youth – both those with college degrees and without – will have to think about what changes need to be brought about to overcome it.

(Full article: <https://rupeindia.wordpress.com/2026/07/30/what-links-jantar-mantar-with-noida/>)

1. Economic Survey 2025-26, p. 519.

2. Household spending on education rose from 1.5 per cent of GDP in 1991-92 to 2.7 per cent by 2017-18. The share of total household spending (Private Final Consumption Expenditure) spent on education more than doubled, from 2.1 per cent to 4.4 per cent over the same period. — Venkatanarayana Motkuri and E. Revathi, "Private and Public Expenditure on Education in India: Trend over Last Seven Decades and Impact on Economy", Indian Public Policy Review 2024, February 6, 2024.

3. Cited by Minister of State for Education, Sukanta Majumdar, in reply to Lok Sabha Unstarred Question no. 1260, December 8, 2025.

4. TOI Education, "Pursuing engineering once a fad, now a dilemma: Only 10 percent of 15 lakh graduates likely to land jobs this year", October 29, 2024,

5. Institute for Competitiveness, Skills for the Future: Transforming India's Workforce Landscape, p. 23.

6. National Council for Applied Economic Research, Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Food Delivery Platform Workers, August 2023, p. 21. The NCAER found that 32.7 per cent of food delivery platform workers were college graduates and above; 3.6 per cent were technical graduates; and 1.3 per cent were vocational graduates.

7. In 1983 itself, the unemployment rate among young college graduates was 35 per cent. — State of Working India 2025-26, p. 172.

8. R. Nagaraj, "Public sector employment: What has changed?", Indira Gandhi Institute for Development Research, November 1, 2014.

9. Public sector employment was 19.4 million in March 1994, out of a total workforce of 374 million; it fell to 17.3 million in March 2012, out of a total workforce of 474.2 million. (Economic Survey 1999-2000 and 2016-17 for public sector employment in 1994 and 2012, respectively; for total workforce in 1993-94 and 2011-12, Santosh Mehrotra et al., "Explaining Employment Trends in the Indian Economy, 1993-94 to 2011-12", Economic and Political Weekly, August 9, 2014. More recent Economic Surveys do not provide data regarding public sector employment.) ■

Student-Youth Struggle Wins Major Victory in Jharkhand

▲ NEERAJ KUMAR



Inspired by the movement at Jantar Mantar in Delhi, the Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium in Ranchi witnessed a historic agitation by job aspirants, forcing the government to concede all demands!

The Jharkhand government has canceled a total of 44 recruitment drives conducted through TSR Data Processing Private Limited (TDPL), a private examination agency that was engaged to conduct several recruitment examinations for Jharkhand government recruitment bodies since 2014, including those for the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC), and ordered investigations into the alleged rigging. These cancellations included recruitments for drug inspectors, assistant professors, deputy collectors, dental doctors, assistant engineers, civil judges, forest range officers, and additional public prosecutors.

On July 29, job aspirants sat on an indefinite sit-in protest at Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium in Ranchi. A large number of aspirants and general student-youth spontaneously poured in at the stadium in support of this agitation. AISA and RYA organized torchlight processions, protest marches, and other events in Ranchi and across the state to support the movement, appealing to the Hemant Soren government to cancel rigged examinations and urging young people statewide to further strengthen the struggle.

On August 7, AISA and RYA organized a march from Birsa Chowk to the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly. The march was also supported by AISF, Jharkhand Janadhikar Mahasabha, and SFI. Thousands of general students, along with leaders of various student-youth organizations including AISA National President Com. Neha and RYA General Secretary Com. Neeraj Kumar, participated in the march.

As the march was moving toward the Assembly, RSS worker Amarnath Pandey, along with three associates, shouted slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" and attacked Com. Neha and several female student leaders leading the march from the front. Failing to inflict physical harm, they threw ink. Students immediately apprehended those goons and handed them over to the police.

Prior to the Assembly march, AISA National President Com. Neha and other AISA-RYA leaders, visited Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium to meet student leaders and aspirants, including Devendra Nath Mahto, Habiba, Sabita, and Rupesh - who had been on an indefinite dharna and hunger strike since July 29, 2026, protesting paper leaks, manipulation, and irregularities in recruitment exams like JPSC and JSSC. She listened to the students' grievances and expressed solidarity with their struggle.

Comrade Neha addressed the marchers and said the student-youth of Jharkhand are on the path of agitation for their legitimate demands, and the Jharkhand government, particularly Chief Minister Hemant Soren, must resolve the students' demands swiftly. She noted that Jharkhand is the land of the struggles of Birsu Munda, Sido-Kanhu, Phulo-Jhano, and Jaipal Singh Munda. She remarked that BJP-RSS elements want to weaken the student movement by throwing ink, but they should understand that ink is meant for writing, not for throwing. She added that attempts to intimidate female students and protesters represent their gravest miscalculation, noting that a dictator is the most cowardly of all, whereas the resolve of those who believe in struggle knows no bounds. She declared that students and young people fighting for their rights and democracy shake the foundations of their divisive politics of hatred and oppression.

RYA State President Sandeep said the student-youth movement will continue to demand transparency, accountability, and comprehensive reforms in the recruitment system.

The march saw participation from RYA National General Secretary Comrade Neeraj, Sonu Pandey, AISA State President Vibha Pushpa Deep, State Secretary Trilokinath, Vijay, Sneha, leaders of other student organizations, and thousands of students.

The unity, solidarity, and tactical acumen of the protesting students marginalised the BJP-RSS's conspiratorial attempts and steered the movement towards victory. The BJP-RSS left no stone unturned to pit this movement against the agitation at Jantar Mantar, spreading propaganda that the Jantar Mantar movement was led by misguided individuals and traitors, where "Junaid's biryani" was served, whereas here "temple prasad" was available, and so on. Warnings and death threats were widely circulated on social media against AISA President Neha, a leader of the Jantar Mantar movement, when she was scheduled to arrive in Ranchi. Upon her arrival, she was attacked and ink was thrown at her. Despite these provocations, the students and youth participating in the movement rejected the BJP-RSS's hateful designs, maintained their unity and solidarity, and carried the agitation through to a successful conclusion. ■

Condemn the Right-Wing Attack on AISA President Comrade Neha



On August 7, during the Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha march, a right-wing attacker threw ink at AISA President Comrade Neha Bora and other women protesters in Ranchi. The attacker, identified as Amarnath Pandey, is an RSS member. Responding to the attack, AISA President Comrade Neha Bora said, "I wear this ink with pride. They use ink to shame people; we will write the future with ink."

In a statement, CPIML Liberation General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya said that, having failed to silence the youth movement through police repression, the Sangh brigade had now resorted to street violence and online abuse. He said the ink attack on the AISA President exposed the growing fear of the Sangh brigade towards the rising Gen Z movement and young women activists in particular.

The BJP government's use of lathis, tear gas, police repression, and attacks by right-wing forces would not silence India's youth. The growing unity of students and young people against corruption, unemployment, and divisive politics, the party said, would continue to expand.

Comrade Neha Bora and other AISA leaders are currently undertaking the nationwide GenZ Rising tour, reaching out to young people and building resistance around their concerns and aspirations. ■

When Revolution Found Its Voice

▲ SOUVIK GHOSHAL

(Bengali speakers and readers worldwide are now celebrating the birth centenary of Sukanta Bhattacharya, arguably West Bengal's most beloved and widely read, recited and remembered revolutionary poet who had died even before he turned 21, just three months before independence and the accompanying partition of Bengal and India. Three of Sukanta's poems were set to music shortly after independence by Salil Chowdhury, one of the all time greats of modern Indian music, whose birth centenary was observed on 19 November 2025. They were sung by Hemanta Mukhopadhyay, (known as Hemant Kumar in the world of Hindi music) and became classics of the progressive cultural movement and heritage of Bengal. The Sukanta-Salil-Hemanta convergence returned again in the turbulent 1970s with one more poem turned into an unforgettable melody. Liberation pays tribute to these giants of progressive culture by revisiting the magic created by the Sukanta-Salil-Hemanta convergence. The article has been written by Souvik Ghoshal, a member of the editorial board of Deshbrati, the Bengali weekly organ of CPI(ML). -Ed.)

Revolutions are remembered through manifestos, prison diaries, martyrdoms and mass uprisings. Yet no political movement secures a lasting place in public memory by ideas alone. Ideas survive only when they acquire an emotional vocabulary- when they become stories, images, rituals and songs. Every enduring political tradition eventually discovers that while ideology may persuade the intellect, music inhabits memory. Long after organisations fragment, programmes are revised and slogans lose their urgency, songs continue to travel across generations, carrying fragments of a historical imagination into times radically different from those that produced them.

Few examples in modern South Asian cultural history illustrate this truth more compellingly than the four songs that brought together the poetry of Sukanta Bhattacharya, the music of Salil Chowdhury and the voice of Hemanta Mukhopadhyay. Abak

Prithibi (1950), Bidroho Aaj (1950), Runner (1951) and, after an interval of nearly two decades, Thikana (1970), are often remembered simply as memorable songs based on Sukanta's poems. That description, though accurate, remains profoundly inadequate. These four works constitute something much larger: one of the most successful attempts in Indian cultural history to transform Marxist political consciousness into enduring artistic form.

Their achievement lies precisely in the fact that they never sound like political instruction.

The history of revolutionary art is filled with works that became prisoners of their own ideological certainty. Across the twentieth century, countless poems, songs and plays were written in the name of socialism, anti-fascism or national liberation. Many served their immediate political purpose with distinction; very few survived as independent artistic achievements. Once the historical moment passed, their rhetoric

often remained while their aesthetic vitality faded. The collaboration between Sukanta, Salil and Hemanta belongs to an altogether different tradition. These songs refuse the familiar opposition between artistic excellence and political commitment. Instead, they demonstrate that, under certain historical conditions, each can deepen the other.

Understanding this remarkable convergence requires returning to Bengal in the 1940s. The decade transformed not merely the political landscape but the very meaning of culture. The Bengal Famine of 1943 exposed the catastrophic violence of colonial political economy. Anti-fascist mobilisation linked local struggles with global conflicts. Peasant movements, workers' strikes and the Tebhaga movement challenged entrenched structures of power. Independence arrived, but accompanied by Partition, displacement and communal violence. Hope and catastrophe entered history simultaneously.

For artists, neutrality became increasingly impossible.

Literature, theatre, painting and music were compelled to confront questions they had rarely faced with such urgency. What is the responsibility of art during famine? Can beauty remain detached from hunger? Is the artist merely an observer, or also a participant in history? Such questions were not unique to Bengal. Similar debates animated European anti-fascist movements, Soviet artistic circles and Latin American revolutionary culture. Yet Bengal produced its own distinctive answers.

The Communist Party of India became one of the principal sites

where these questions acquired organised cultural expression. Whatever one may think today of the Party's political successes or failures, its contribution to twentieth-century Indian cultural life remains extraordinary. It recognised earlier than most political organisations that class struggle was not confined to factories, fields or legislatures. It also unfolded within language, literature, theatre, cinema and music. Culture was understood neither as decorative entertainment nor as a secondary activity, but as a terrain where ideology itself was produced, contested and transformed.

This understanding found its most influential institutional expression in the Indian People's Theatre Association—IPTA. IPTA occupies a unique position in the cultural history of modern India because it attempted something unprecedented. It sought to dissolve the conventional distinction between elite culture and popular culture without sacrificing artistic ambition. Folk traditions, urban modernity, political theatre, poetry, classical influences and international musical idioms were brought into conversation with one another. Songs were expected to be sung collectively, yet they were not artistically simplistic. Theatre addressed immediate political crises, yet aspired to lasting dramatic value. The movement insisted that political commitment need not imply aesthetic impoverishment.

It was within this intellectual climate that Salil Chowdhury emerged. Salil is frequently described as a composer, lyricist or music director. All these descriptions are true but insufficient. He was, perhaps more fundamentally, a musical thinker. Few twentieth-century Indian composers

possessed such an unusually wide musical imagination. Bengali folk idioms, Baul traditions, Western classical harmony, Soviet mass songs, Eastern European choral writing, jazz harmonisation and modern orchestration all entered his compositional vocabulary. Yet these influences never appeared as quotations. They were absorbed into a coherent musical language uniquely his own. His Marxism shaped not merely the subjects he chose but the structure of his music itself.

This is an observation that deserves greater attention than it usually receives. Political commitment in Salil's work is often discussed only at the level of lyrics. Yet his compositional practice also reflects a profoundly dialectical imagination. Contrasting melodic ideas coexist rather than eliminate one another. Harmonic movement generates tension before resolution. Individual instrumental voices retain relative independence while contributing to collective unity. The music itself often embodies relationships between individuality and collectivity that parallel the political ideals informing his worldview.

Such observations should not be mistaken for deterministic claims. Music is never reducible to ideology. Yet in Salil's finest works, political consciousness and musical architecture repeatedly illuminate one another.

If Salil represented Marxism through musical form, Sukanta Bhattacharya represented it through poetic language.

Sukanta's place in Bengali literature is paradoxical. He died before reaching the age of twenty-two, leaving behind a body of work remarkably small in quantity yet astonishingly expansive in influence. He is routinely introduced as "the

revolutionary poet," a description that has become so familiar that it often prevents closer reading. The label emphasises ideology while obscuring poetry.

Sukanta was revolutionary not because he wrote about revolution, but because he transformed the imaginative possibilities of Bengali political poetry. His achievement becomes clearer when situated within the larger history of modern Bengali literature. Rabindranath Tagore explored the moral and spiritual autonomy of the individual. Kazi Nazrul Islam infused poetry with rebellion, cosmopolitanism and anti-colonial energy. Jibanananda Das created an intensely interior modernity, discovering metaphysical solitude within everyday landscapes. Sukanta inherited all these traditions while redirecting poetic attention towards historical materiality.

Bread, factories, labour, hunger, smoke, machines, workers, children, streets—these are not merely subjects in Sukanta's poetry. They become categories through which history itself is imagined. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in his treatment of hunger. Earlier literature often approached hunger as individual suffering deserving sympathy. Sukanta transforms hunger into political knowledge. Starvation ceases to be accidental misfortune; it becomes evidence of a historical system. The famous declaration that poetry becomes inadequate before bread has sometimes been interpreted as a rejection of literature. It is, in fact, exactly the opposite. Sukanta demands a poetry capable of confronting material reality without aesthetic evasion.

His Marxism therefore never appears as external doctrine imposed upon experience. It emerges organically from lived

history. This explains why Salil found Sukanta so congenial. The composer did not discover ready-made songs inside Sukanta's poems. What he discovered instead were dramatic structures awaiting musical interpretation. Every poem already contained movement, conflict, rhythm and emotional architecture. Salil's task was neither to decorate the verse nor to simplify it for popular consumption. His task was considerably more difficult: to translate poetic dialectics into musical dialectics. That distinction is fundamental.

Setting a poem to music always involves interpretation. The composer must decide where emphasis belongs, where silence acquires meaning, how melodic ascent transforms verbal expectation, whether rhythm should follow speech or challenge it, how orchestration expands emotional perspective, and how the human voice mediates between language and melody. Every such decision constitutes criticism as much as composition.

Salil therefore reads Sukanta as carefully as any literary critic.

He discovers musical possibilities hidden within syntax, metaphor and cadence. Sometimes he intensifies emotional tension already present in the poem. Sometimes he deliberately restrains it. Sometimes orchestral texture reveals layers of meaning that remain implicit in the written text. The result is not illustration but reinterpretation.

This is why describing these works simply as "songs based on Sukanta's poems" misses their historical importance. They represent a rare dialogue between two artists working within a shared political imagination but through entirely different artistic languages.

Only one element remained necessary before that dialogue could enter public memory.

It required a voice capable of carrying intellectual complexity without rhetorical excess; a voice that could embody political conviction without sacrificing emotional subtlety; a voice simultaneously intimate and collective.

That voice belonged to Hemanta Mukhopadhyay.

2

If Sukanta supplied the political imagination and Salil Chowdhury the musical architecture, the four songs themselves became the laboratory in which poetry was transformed into sound. They reveal a composer who never treated music as a decorative accompaniment to literature. Nor did he regard poetry as sacred text that must remain untouched. Every setting is a reinterpretation. Salil reads Sukanta not as a passive admirer but as a fellow artist who enters into conversation with the poem, discovering within it rhythms, tensions and emotional trajectories that the printed page only partially reveals.

The first of these collaborations, *Abak Prithibi*, is perhaps the least declamatory and therefore, paradoxically, among the most politically sophisticated. The title itself announces astonishment. But Sukanta's astonishment is neither romantic wonder nor existential bewilderment. It arises from confronting a world structured by contradiction. Beauty coexists with brutality, abundance with starvation, hope with despair. The poem refuses to simplify reality into either optimism or pessimism. Instead, it inhabits contradiction. That instinct is profoundly dialectical. The world is not static; it is a field of opposing historical forces.

A less imaginative composer might have interpreted the poem primarily as one of melancholy. Salil hears something different. He hears thought in motion. Consequently, the melody avoids excessive sentimentality. It unfolds through long lyrical arcs that resist easy emotional closure. Instead of seeking immediate resolution, musical phrases frequently extend beyond the listener's expectation, creating a feeling of suspended reflection. The tune appears to think aloud.

Equally significant is Salil's harmonic language. Bengali modern songs of the period generally remained rooted in relatively straightforward tonal movement. Salil, by contrast, often introduces unexpected harmonic shifts that subtly alter the emotional colour without disturbing the melodic continuity. These changes never call attention to themselves; rather, they function like changes in intellectual perspective. As the poem moves from one image to another, the harmony quietly reorganises the emotional landscape.

This compositional method mirrors Sukanta's poetic technique. His images rarely remain isolated. One image generates another, each enlarging the historical horizon of the previous one. Salil achieves an analogous effect through harmony. Musical space continually expands beneath the melody, allowing philosophical reflection to acquire emotional depth.

Rhythm, too, deserves attention. *Abak Prithibi* does not proceed through the relentless pulse associated with many political songs. Instead, its rhythm breathes. Moments of motion alternate with moments of repose. This flexibility preserves the contemplative quality of the poem while preventing it from becoming static.

The orchestration demonstrates another characteristic feature of Salil's mature style.

Instrumental passages are never mere interludes. They function structurally. Brief orchestral responses frequently complete thoughts left suspended by the vocal line. In Western musicological language, one might describe these passages as forms of commentary rather than accompaniment. They extend the semantic field of the text.

Such sophistication explains why the song continues to reward repeated listening. One discovers not simply a memorable melody but a carefully constructed musical argument.

The relationship between words and melody deserves particular emphasis.

Salil rarely forces Bengali speech into artificial rhythmic patterns. Instead, he allows the natural accentuation of the language to guide melodic movement. This respect for spoken cadence prevents the poem from losing its literary integrity after becoming a song. The listener never feels that the music dominates the words. Rather, language and melody appear to discover one another.

If Abak Prithibi is dialectical meditation, Bidroho Aaj is disciplined mobilisation.

The title promises rebellion, but Sukanta's rebellion differs markedly from romantic insurrection. It is not an explosion of individual anger. It is organised historical agency. The poem speaks not through isolated heroism but through collective determination. Revolution appears not as emotional catharsis but as historical necessity.

Salil immediately grasps this distinction.

Many revolutionary songs rely upon loudness to communicate

political conviction. Salil rejects that temptation. He understands that confidence does not require theatrical exaggeration. Instead, he constructs musical momentum through rhythm.

The pulse is firm, deliberate and unmistakably forward-moving. It evokes marching, but without reducing the song to military rhetoric. The rhythm creates a sense of collective movement, suggesting people advancing together rather than individuals displaying courage. Politics here is choreographed through metre.

Melodically, ascending figures play an important structural role.

Repeated upward movement generates expectation. Yet Salil carefully avoids allowing these ascents to become predictable. Climactic moments are balanced by passages of restraint. Emotional intensity is therefore accumulated rather than continuously displayed.

This dynamic economy reflects one of Salil's greatest strengths as a composer.

He understood that permanent excitement quickly exhausts itself. Genuine dramatic power depends upon contrast. Crescendos acquire meaning only because quieter passages prepare them. In Bidroho Aaj, the alternation between restraint and assertion mirrors the discipline essential to any organised political movement.

The orchestration reinforces this impression. Rather than overwhelming the vocal line, instrumental textures frequently widen the sense of collective space. One almost hears individuals gathering into a larger historical community. Musical density increases not for spectacle but for solidarity.

There is also a subtle relationship between text and melodic contour.

Sukanta's poetry possesses

an inherently muscular syntax. Sentences frequently propel themselves forward through cumulative energy. Salil responds by avoiding fragmented melodic design. Instead, he constructs extended phrases whose momentum parallels the syntactic movement of the poem itself. Speech becomes song without surrendering its argumentative force.

This capacity to preserve intellectual coherence within musical expression distinguishes Salil from many of his contemporaries.

Political songs often simplify language to facilitate collective singing. Salil moves in the opposite direction. He trusts listeners with complexity. His compositions invite participation without demanding simplification.

By the time Runner appeared in 1951, the creative partnership between Sukanta's poetry and Salil's musical imagination had reached remarkable maturity.

Few poems in modern Bengali literature have entered popular consciousness as completely as Runner. Yet its popularity has occasionally obscured its artistic complexity.

The runner is not merely a messenger. He is history in motion. The figure occupies an extraordinary symbolic position. Anonymous, tireless and perpetually moving, he links scattered human lives without ever becoming the centre of attention himself. He carries messages, but his own story remains largely invisible. Sukanta thereby elevates an ordinary worker into the protagonist of historical change.

This is deeply consistent with Marxist historical thought.

History is not made primarily by celebrated individuals but by innumerable anonymous labouring people whose collective activity

sustains society. The runner becomes an emblem of precisely such historical agency.

Salil recognises this immediately.

Instead of approaching the poem as descriptive narrative, he translates movement itself into musical structure.

From the opening measures, rhythmic propulsion dominates the composition. The beat rarely settles into comfortable equilibrium. Forward motion becomes almost irresistible. Importantly, this is not merely onomatopoeic imitation of running footsteps. Had Salil simply imitated physical movement, the song would quickly have become repetitive.

Instead, he creates what might be called historical momentum.

Every phrase appears to push the next phrase forward. Cadences frequently avoid complete closure, encouraging continuous motion. Musical expectation remains active. Even moments of temporary repose seem less like conclusions than brief pauses before renewed movement. The melody reflects this same principle.

Wide intervals are used with remarkable economy. Rather than indulging in virtuosity, Salil shapes the vocal line around purposeful movement. The tune feels energetic without becoming acrobatic. This restraint allows the narrative force of the poem to remain central.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Runner is the relationship between individual voice and collective imagination.

Although a single singer narrates the journey, the music continually suggests a social world extending beyond the individual performer. Instrumental writing broadens the acoustic horizon. The listener senses villages, roads, fields, distances and communities that remain invisible but emotionally

present.

This cinematic quality became one of Salil's defining characteristics.

Long before background scoring became central to Indian cinema, he was already thinking orchestrally. Music creates space. Geography becomes audible.

There is another reason why Runner occupies such a distinctive position within Bengali political music.

Unlike many revolutionary songs that celebrate leaders or movements, Runner celebrates labour itself.

Its hero possesses neither fame nor authority. He possesses endurance. That shift is politically significant.

By making an ordinary worker the moral centre of the composition, Sukanta and Salil together redefine heroism. Historical dignity belongs not to spectacular power but to necessary labour. In that respect, Runner remains one of the most profound artistic representations of working-class subjectivity in modern Bengali culture.

Yet the transformation of these poems into enduring public memory depended upon something beyond poetry and composition. It depended upon a voice capable of embodying both intimacy and history.

That voice was Hemanta Mukhopadhyay.

3

When Salil Chowdhury returned to Sukanta Bhattacharya in 1970 to compose Thikana, Bengal was no longer the Bengal of 1950. Two decades had altered the political landscape beyond recognition. Independence had lost much of its emancipatory promise. The Tebhaga movement belonged to history. The Communist movement itself had undergone ideological debates, organisational splits

and strategic realignments. The food movement had shaken West Bengal. Naxalbari had exploded into the political imagination. State repression had become a daily reality. The optimism of the late 1940s had given way to a far more complex emotional climate, where hope survived, but no longer in innocence. This historical distance matters.

Thikana should not be heard simply as another Sukanta setting after a long interval. It is, in many ways, Salil's return to Sukanta through the accumulated experiences of two turbulent decades. The composer who approached Sukanta in 1950 and the composer who revisited him in 1970 were the same individual, but not the same historical subject. Between those two moments lay political victories, ideological disappointments, artistic maturity and exile from certainties that once appeared unshakeable.

That history quietly enters the music. The word thikana—an address, a destination, a place of belonging—is itself profoundly suggestive. Sukanta's poetry repeatedly imagines movement rather than arrival. The search for a just society is never completed; it remains an unfinished historical project. Salil's setting preserves precisely this sense of incompleteness. Unlike the assertive momentum of Bidroho Aaj or the relentless propulsion of Runner, Thikana moves with measured introspection. The melody seems less interested in proclaiming than in searching.

This change is not ideological retreat. It is political maturity.

Every historical movement eventually confronts the distance between aspiration and reality. Revolutionary hope survives, but it acquires memory. Confidence learns self-criticism. Certainty becomes reflection. Salil's

composition captures this altered emotional landscape with remarkable restraint. Musically, Thikana demonstrates the confidence of a composer who no longer needs dramatic gestures to achieve expressive depth.

The melodic design is economical. Individual phrases breathe naturally, often ending with subtle openness rather than emphatic closure. Harmonic progression quietly expands emotional resonance without drawing attention to itself. The orchestration is carefully judged, leaving sufficient acoustic space for the words to retain their philosophical gravity. Silence plays an unusually important role.

Pauses are not absences but moments of thought. One hears not hesitation but contemplation. The music trusts listeners to inhabit emotional ambiguity without demanding immediate resolution.

That trust distinguishes Salil from many composers of political music.

4

To evaluate the Sukanta-Salil-Hemanta convergence today merely as historical artifacts of post-independence Bengali culture is to miss their ongoing political life. In an era characterized by hyper-capitalist alienation, the erosion of labor rights, authoritarian populism, and the rise of divisive identity politics, these four songs remain startlingly urgent. The structural crises that Sukanta diagnosed in the 1940s have not disappeared; they have mutated into modern forms.

The gig economy worker, the food delivery agent navigating urban highways at night, and

the migrant laborer walking thousands of miles across state borders are the direct contemporary counterparts of Sukanta's postal runner. The song's critique of invisible, hyper-exploited labor rings even truer in the age of algorithmic capital.

As global wealth concentrates in fewer hands while millions face climate displacement, poverty, and war, the child's shock at entering a world defined by hunger remains an accurate diagnosis of global capitalism.

In an era where political dissent is routinely criminalized and state propaganda seeks to homogenize public thought, the martial, uncompromising call of "Bidroho Aaj" acts as a vital cultural defense against political apathy.

In a contemporary world defined by refugee crises, statelessness, and forced migrations, the quest for a "Thikana" (an address/a place of belonging) transcends its original 1970 context to become a universal anthem for marginalized populations everywhere.

The political journal of today must recognize that culture is not an ornament of political movement, but its heartbeat. The Sukanta-Salil-Hemanta convergence demonstrates that when radical political theory, structural musical innovation, and popular vocal artistry align, they create a cultural force capable of surviving the decay of political parties and changing geopolitical landscapes.

These songs do not belong to archives or nostalgia. They remain active, unyielding manifestos set to music—waiting to be sung whenever the people march again. ■

Matchstick

Sukanta Bhattacharya

(Poem Translation from Bangla by Amitendu Bhattacharya, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus, India. Asiatic, Vol. 14, No. 2, December 2020)

I'm a tiny matchstick.

So insignificant, perhaps I'm not even noticed.

Still, remember:

My face is fat with gunpowder,
An intense desire to be
afire rules my heart.

I'm a matchstick.

Just the other day a commotion was created.

Do you remember? A blaze started
In the corner of the house for
dropping me

Disdainfully, without putting me out?

So many houses I've burnt down,
So many palaces I've reduced to
dust.

Singlehanded, I did. A
tiny matchstick.

Likewise, we can devastate
Vast swathes of land.

Will you still treat us with contempt?

Don't you recall the day
When we were all aflame inside a
matchbox?

You were startled – we heard
The wails from your contorted faces.

Limitless is our power: you have
sensed it

Over and over. And yet, why don't
you understand?

We won't be contained in your
pockets.

We will break free, will go in all
directions:

To towns, marketplaces,
and hamlets,

From one horizon to another.

We burn repeatedly due to utter
neglect –

This you know all too well

What you don't know is

When we will conflagrate together

For one last time. ■

Israeli Hands, Indian Arms and Palestinian Bodies

▲ GURSHABAD GROVER

“One day everyone will have always been against this.”

Omar El Akkad's words from 2023 ring prescient as countries across the globe move to recognise the genocide of Gazans at the hands of the state of Israel, even if material support to Palestinians remains scarce. Media operations and public deception are abound to create a false impression that these countries oppose genocide and human rights violations. In a stunning contrast, the Indian government does not even aim for plausible deniability in its contribution to the Zionist project's horrific crimes. India's diplomatic support to Israeli regime continues, and its material support for human rights violations has in fact increased since 2023.

The bloodstains of India's complicity in the genocide of Palestinians can never be rubbed away.

A recent report by Amnesty International confirms the terrifying magnitude of India's complicity in the genocide. The organisation's analysis of publicly available data finds that Indian companies have supplied hundreds of thousands of parts for military-grade weapons and explosive ordnance to Israel since October 2023. In more than 2,500 shipments since then, parts of pistols, revolvers, missiles, armoured vehicles and artillery rounds flowed from our country to the genocidal regime. These figures are conservative, but beyond doubt prove that Indian companies have supplied arms to the Israeli regime.

One shouldn't be surprised to know

that one of the bigger partnerships in this craven and bloodthirsty trade is a partnership between Elbit Systems, one of the largest Israeli arms suppliers, and Adani Enterprises. Other documentary evidence by the Middle East Eye has already established that Al-enabled technologies like Arbel, described as improving “operator lethality”, was co-produced by the Indian defence sector and is being used against Palestinians.

Under the Genocide Convention, which India has ratified in principle, states have an obligation to prevent genocide. India has failed that by a mile, and has actively contributed to violations of the Genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law. Obligations under these treaties are breached if “support is provided to a Party to a conflict when it is known, or should have been known, that there is a clear risk of the support provided being used to commit or facilitate violations of the Conventions.” The ICJ's advisory opinion in 2024 had already reiterated that any support to Israel's occupation is also illegal. In an April interview with Frontline, Francesca Albanese – the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Occupied Palestinian Territories – also stated that India's arms dealing with Israel amount to complicity in the crimes under international law.

India is mired in moral and legal crimes, and increasingly stands isolated from the rest of the world.

At the Bogota Summit in July 2025, many countries from the Global South – including Colombia, Cuba,

Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, South Africa – had agreed to not just stop shipments of arms, but halt fuel and dual-use transfers and to deny such shipments access to their ports.

Traditionally, the “West” has been the staunchest ally of the United States' imperialist program. While most governments in the Western world pledged unqualified support to Israel's mounting military actions in and after October 2023, even their consciences have awoken in the last year. The socialist-led Spanish government announced a total arms embargo against the genocidal state of Israel in September 2025, while others like Belgium, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom have partly curtailed arms supply to the regime.

Perhaps the most shameful juxtaposition is not with other countries, but with India itself.

In the years of the Non-Aligned Movement, a steadfast principle of Indian foreign policy was the support of sovereignty of the Third World, and a vocal opposition to military adventurism by colonial powers. India was also the first country to place a trade embargo against apartheid South Africa. When apartheid was dismantled, India could proudly proclaim its contributions to the just cause.

The India of 2026 stands out in sharp relief: a republic revelling in an abyss of moral depravity that was unimaginable thirty years ago.

The increased extent of India's partnership with Israel is somewhat explained by the ideological affinity between Zionism and Hindutva.

As Azad Essa describes in *Hostile Homelands*, both always shared the dream of an ethnic nationalism underpinned by a reflexive hatred of Muslims. With the Bharatiya Janata Party's tenures in Parliament and government, India has now had a steady history of material support for Israel, and vice versa. Hindu nationalism has aped the Zionist blueprint in multiple ways, and India and Israel have become enthusiastic collaborators in repression. Indian arms kill people in Palestine. Israeli technology – marketed for the purpose of crowd management, surveillance and counter-insurgency – is deployed here against the voices of democratic dissent. Both states shield each other diplomatically at the international level.

While the crude Islamophobia of the Hindu right-wing is easier to identify as a contributing cause of this partnership, Indian foreign policy is perhaps afflicted by a deeper malaise: foreign policy "realism" that started taking shape as India turned towards economic "liberalisation" in the 1990s. This amoral approach towards international relations "is not held back because of ideological reservations" (in the words of the Ministry of External Affairs), and abandons international solidarity at the altar of purported "complete self-interest."

If we want any of India's progressive legacy on the international stage to survive, we have to muster up a tiny portion of the courage that Palestinians show every single day. We must consistently demand a complete trade embargo with the Zionist settler-colonial project and make material strides towards the end of the Israeli regime's apartheid and occupation. ■

Hands off Asia! People's Alternatives, Resistance, and Socialist Horizons'



In the background of imperialist aggression across the world and the crises of inequality, the rise of the far-right, and climate change induced by neoliberalism, "Hands off Asia! A People's Call for Sovereignty and Solidarity" was organised in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 16, 17, and 18 July by the International Peoples' Assembly, with the support of the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Comrade Clifton D. Rozario, Central Committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, took part in the conference.

The conference was attended by over 70 delegates from 43 organisations from 17 countries across the Asian region. Speakers delved into the threats posed by the US-Israeli axis and its imperialist aggressions and threats, militarism, the neoliberal crisis, movements across the world, and the challenges before the forces of the Left and the people. The conference also saw a special session dedicated to solidarity with Cuba. The conference paid tribute to the Cuban Revolution and the internationalist spirit of the Cuban people.

Comrade Clifton addressed the session on 'People's Alternatives, Resistance, and Socialist Horizons', where he spoke about the rich and long history of resistance across Asia and the ongoing people's struggles. He said that Asia is not entering history as a passive victim of imperialism. It carries the legacies of anti-colonial revolutions, workers' uprisings, peasant wars, indigenous resistance, and movements for social justice, which make victory inevitable. Each country will find its own path based on its prevailing objective conditions, material realities, history, and legacy of struggle, motivated by the belief that no human being should be exploited. The fight against military alliances, sanctions, resource extraction, debt domination, and corporate land grabs must be linked with workers' struggles for wages and rights, peasants' struggles for land, and indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination. Imperialism survives by fragmenting these struggles; resistance advances by connecting them.

He stressed on the importance of concrete international solidarity across people's struggles, including anti-imperialist movements. ■

Modi's Delulu of 'Viksit Bharat'

▲ SURYO

Until a few years ago, Narendra Modi often made short-term economic promises—about jobs, growth, and development—that were supposedly to be realised in the next few years. However, unable to fulfil its medium-term promises, the Prime Minister has now shifted the goalposts to 2047, claiming that in the next 21 years India would realise her aspiration of becoming a developed country, i.e., Viksit Bharat. What does he promise?—a few fictions of Atmanirbharta, some more fantasies about how India will be a developed country by 2047, and a sinister blueprint of a complete corporate takeover of India's natural resources, and a hint of how farmers and workers may "have to" suffer.

I. The fiction of Atmanirbharta

Modi spoke at length about Atmanirbharta, on building domestic production capacity and expanding exports. Following Trump tariffs and the large shock that cost India's textiles, fisheries, and exports overall, Modi has reverted to the rhetoric of Make in India and Atmanirbharta. The supposed idea is that India would reduce its import reliance by increasing production in India, by incentivising foreign companies to move their supply chains to India.

Central to this argument is Modi's repeated boast that his government has removed thousands of "compliances" and regulations in order to improve the ease of doing business, which means fewer safeguards for workers, consumers, communities and the environment from corporate malpractice. Yet the record of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) provides little evidence of the

promised investment boom. World Bank (WB) data put net FDI inflows at just 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024—nearly 60% less than what it was when Modi took office in 2014. According to the Reserve Bank, net FDI collapsed to 0.01%—virtually zero—of GDP in 2024-25, the lowest in twenty-five years. Modi's treatment of the Indian economy has managed to make conditions worse for workers while simultaneously failing to produce the promised surge in foreign investment.

Modi attempts to mock his critics by arguing that globalisation has fallen out of the global lexicon in the past decade. However, the government's actions—boasting from the same ramparts of free trade agreements with almost 40 countries since 2014—hardly support his stated intent, because these trade deals make it cheaper for foreign producers to sell in Indian markets with limited concessions for Indian exports.

To supposedly boost Indian domestic production and exports, Modi lays out a seven-point strategy, what he calls "Saptadhara". Under manufacturing, Modi targets increasing manufacturing by reducing costs while simultaneously improving quality, and urges the country to change its "work culture". The only way this is remotely possible without research and innovation is through cutting wages and deregulating labour.

In agriculture and food processing, Modi says that farmers and producers alike must reform their "traditional systems", and that Indian agriculture must travel "from the field to the export market"—which likely means greater privatisation like what was tried with the farm laws.

Under technology and innovation, Modi talks about Made-in-India sixth-generation wireless technology (6G) reaching every corner of the country. Given Reliance Jio's dominant position in Indian telecommunications, will "Made in India" 6G translate into further public subsidies, rebates and state support for corporations such as Reliance Jio?

Under Gati Shakti, Modi talks about undertaking port-led development. In an economy in which the Adani Group has acquired an extraordinary position in ports and logistics, does state-supported "port-led development" mean public investment, land and infrastructure will further consolidate the position of corporations such as Adani?

Modi also boasts of the National Critical Minerals Mission and of the creation of a "critical mineral corridor" with agreements with foreign countries. In simple terms, villages and forests could be cleared to aggressively mine critical minerals which will be sold off to rich countries. He also boasts that 99% of India's coastline, once declared a "No Go Area", has been reopened as a "Go Ahead Area" for offshore exploration. This could destroy entire habitats and livelihoods over India's long coastline.

II. The fantasy of Viksit Bharat-by-2047

Narendra Modi made several tall claims about India's development goals and argued that progress since 2014 has been in line with India's aspirations of becoming a developed country, "Viksit", by 2047.

Modi claimed that 25 crore people had been lifted out of poverty over the last twelve years. The 25 crore figure comes from a NITI Aayog report covering 2013-14 to 2022-23 that has several problems. First, the Aayog

changed the definition of poverty to measure multidimensional poverty—but not one of the 12 dimensions considered measures either income, employment, or consumption expenditure. Second, even for the variables considered, they were not measured for either the start year or the end year over which the claim is made.

Inequality is higher today in India than under colonial rule: the World Inequality Lab finds that 22.6% of national income went to the top 1% in 2022-23, the highest in its series since 1922, with the same 1% holding 40.1% of national wealth. However, even if we ignore inequality for a moment, for India to become a high-income country by 2047—a reasonable monetary definition for developed country—India would need to have a per capita income of around 22,000 dollars by 2047. Currently, India's per capita income is about 2,800 dollars.

This means that India would need an average per-capita growth rate of around 11% per year for the next 21 years when measured in dollars, as opposed to the current growth rate of around 5% per year since 2014. In the decade before 2014, India's nominal dollar GDP growth rate was indeed about 10–11%. When measured in rupees, the growth rate required would be about 15% per year, since the rupee has been

depreciating relative to the dollar at about 4% per year under the Modi regime, with the dollar at around 95 rupees currently—it was 58 rupees when he took office. The rhetoric of Viksit Bharat is not matched by the growth trajectory required to achieve even a narrowly monetary definition of a developed economy.

But the Modi government does not seem to care about income, let alone education, healthcare, nutrition, etc. Instead, he misplaces his priorities on targets like how many Indian corporations make it to the Fortune 500 list—fifty, he proposes—how many big commercial banks make it to the top five global financiers, and how many big Indian pharma companies, law firms, rating agencies, consulting firms and accounting firms make it to the list of the world's biggest firms. These are measures of the scale and global position of Indian capital, not measures of the material welfare of the Indian population.

III. The reality of Corporate Takeover

Moreover, Modi makes claims about India achieving energy security—not primarily for giving people better access to electricity or clean cooking fuels, but for the production of semiconductors and operation of data centres. Modi now says India will produce 100 gigawatts (GW) nuclear energy

capacity by 2047. India's current nuclear capacity is 8.78 GW, less than a tenth of the target. Even if India were to meet this fantastical target, where would all this uranium be mined? On whose land will this infrastructure and mining be built? Whose villages will be cleared? Whose homes will be demolished? Modi intends to expand private participation in nuclear energy production, while simultaneously proposing an enormous expansion of mining, energy infrastructure, data centres, ports and industrial corridors.

The common thread running through these proposals is a model of “development” in which the resources of the country—land, minerals, coasts, energy and labour—are increasingly reorganised around the requirements of large corporations. Atmanirbharta, on these terms, appears not as economic self-reliance for the Indian people, but as the construction of an internationally competitive Indian corporate sector through the transfer of public resources, ecological commons and labour into private accumulation. Under such misplaced priorities and fantastical assumptions, how will India become developed by 2047? ■

Voices of Youthful Resistance Against a Culture of Repression

10 Years of Chorus Cultural Group

▲ **KAMINI TRIPATHI**

To mark the completion of a decade of its journey, Chorus organized a poetry reading session in Patna on July 26, 2026, at the IMA Hall, Gandhi

Maidan, Patna. The theme of this event “Feel the Pulse of Our Times through Poetry,” (kavita yug ki nabz dharo) was an expression of youthful, defiant voices standing

firm against a repressive culture. This gathering featured some of the prominent voices representing the collective conscience of the 21st century with tools of linguistic resistance against an inhuman system which is also causing severe devastation to our environment.

The highlight of the event was the participation of young poets from various corners of the country, giving voice to virtually

all marginalized experiences, poets who have cultivated their own distinct vision to perceive the world anew. At a time when the repressive forces loom large with conspiracies and violence, striving aggressively to establish their hegemony through every conceivable anti-human instrument, there are still those who drown out their hateful clamor with the strumming of a tambura, who share their hunger with the stray cats of desolate cities, and who laugh at engineered fear even as blows rain down upon them. These young poets are among those very people.

People from the city poured into an auditorium in Patna to listen to the poetry, chairs fell short, and there was not even standing room left. This demonstrated the enduring resilience and spirit of resistance inherent in the city of Patna - a shared consciousness that, in such barbarous times, continues to place its faith in unbridled, radiant voices, and holding the dream of liberation as an inalienable right.

First to take the stage was Adnan Kafil Darvesh, a young poet honored with the Bharat Bhushan Agarwal Award, who recited poems. His poetry serves as a luminous counterpoint to the darkness of fascism in our world. His verses summon the aspirations of children who yearn for a complete, radical transformation of this society.

As the second poet, Anupam, from Delhi, recited poems offering a profound critique of the social conventions woven from body to mind by a society that regards women as natural subordinates. Anupam's poetry brings forth a civilizational critique in opposition and dreams of a society where women and men share equal partnership in material world, politics, and love, a world where a woman has the freedom to sculpt herself as a human being, the

primary precondition for which is the reshaping of man.

A young poet from Allahabad, Shivangi Goyal's poetry expresses her raw fury with merciless honesty, refusing to conceal tender sensitivities, desires, wounds, and abrasions.

Vihag Vaibhav, also honored with the Bharat Bhushan Agarwal Award, has recently returned from a prestigious translation workshop held at a university in Denmark. His poems underline the fight for identity and dignity is a struggle to change the entire world, articulating the unification of different identities in a sharp, aggressive register. He asserts that in the perilous, fascist world we inhabit, there is no room for those who fail to resist.

Poet Rupam Mishra recited many poems vividly bringing alive the reality of rural life. She expresses the silent resistance of women against an oppressive patriarchal society. Her poetry captures the transformative power of love capable of challenging this era of hatreds, while a mother, dreaming of a beautiful world, draws strength from her children. Rupam views the world through this very lens in her verses.

Presiding over the event, the poet and critic Mrityunjay observed that in these perilous times all oppressed identities and voices of resistance must converge in order to forge a shared path. And this very path is being carved out by a new generation of poetry. He also recited poems "Chemotherapy" and "Gaza."

Throughout the poetry readings, members of Chorus presented musical renditions of poetry. Notable musical performances included Nirala's Gahan hai yah andhakara (Deep is This Darkness), Raghuvir Sahay's Padhiye Sita (Read Sita) and

Virendra Dangwal's Hamara Samaj (Our Society). The vocals were rendered by Samta Rai, Runjhun, Riya, and Rita, accompanied by Jyoti on the guitar.

On behalf of the organisers, poets Anchit, Nivedita Jha, Gunjan Upadhyay, and Pratyush Chandra Mishra honored the guests with beautifully crafted poetry posters. Runjhun, compered the program in a lyrical way. Samta Rai, Secretary of Chorus, expressed her gratitude to all the participating poets and the listeners in the audience which included a large number of intellectuals, literary critics, artists, academicians and cultural activists including poets Alokadhanwa and Madan Kashyap; critics Ramji Rai and Siyaram Sharma; Manoj Singh, National General Secretary of Jan Sanskriti Manch; sharp critic Pranay Krishna; social scientist Vidyarthi Vikas; poet Kaushal Kishore; Sanjay Joshi from Pratirodh Ka Cinema; poet Ranjeet Verma; poet and writer Sanjay Kumar Kundan; poet Kumar Mukul; fiction writer Santosh Dixit; writer Sushil; social workers Madhubala and Sushmita; senior theater artist Zahoor Alam; Rajkumar Soni from Chhattisgarh; Ajay Kumar, Feature Editor of Prabhat Khabar; Jitendra Kumar from Arrah; litterateur Shahanshah Alam; poet Rajesh Kamal; writer Prabhat Parineet; poet Ramesh Ritambhar and young poet Tanuj from Banaras, among others. Poets Arvind Paswan, Nikhil Anand Giri, Krishna Sammiddh, Prabhat Jha, Shovan, former JNUSU President Nitish, poet Matrisharan Priyadarshi, and Naushad Raza, a research scholar from Aligarh Muslim University, were also present. ■

Prof. Sumit Sarkar

Professor Sumit Sarkar passed away in Delhi on 13 August 2026, at the age of 87. One of the most influential and respected scholars of modern Indian history, Professor Sarkar died after a long illness.

Amidst tears, hugs & soulful renditions of 'We Shall Overcome' & 'Bol ke Lab Aazad Hai Tere', we bid goodbye to this gentle giant at the Green Park Crematorium on 15 August. Ironical that the man who theorized the making of modern India better than anyone else turned into ashes on Independence Day.

Over more than five decades of dedicated scholarship, he reshaped how the history of colonial rule, anti-colonial nationalism and social reform is researched, taught and understood around the world.

Born in 1939, Sarkar grew up in a family steeped in history. His father, Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar, was a renowned historian. An alumnus of Presidency College, Sarkar earned his master's and PhD from the University of Calcutta, where he later taught. He also taught at the University of Burdwan and Oxford.

Sumit Sarkar altered South Asian historiography with his first major monograph, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*, published in 1973. Moving away from elite, top-down narratives, Sarkar used meticulous archival research and down-to-earth descriptions to analyse nationalist mobilisation, student involvement, peasant participation, and internal tensions between moderate and extremist factions.

In 'Modern India' he analysed British colonial exploitation, including the drain of wealth,

deindustrialization, and agrarian distress, alongside what he termed the 'politics of the people'. By documenting peasant rebellions, labour strikes, Dalit movements, and gender roles, he demonstrated how mass movements with radical economic agendas continually kept nationalist leaders under pressure and influenced them.

Professor Sarkar was a founding member of the Subaltern Studies collective research project, which sought to bring non-elite history to the forefront. However, he later became one of its most critical voices. Sarkar distanced himself from the group, cautioning against an absolute separation between elite and subaltern domains, and criticising post-modernist trends that blanketly rejected Enlightenment values, secularism, and the nation-state in ways that converged with indigenist and right-wing critiques.

Sarkar turned the shorter essay form into a miniature monograph and textbook. He produced landmark essay collections, including *Writing Social History* (1998), *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (2002), *Modern Times: India 1880s–1950s (Environment, Economy, Culture)* (2014), and *Essays of a Lifetime: Reformers, Nationalists, Subalterns* (2017). Together with Tanika Sarkar, he co-edited multi-volume readers such as *Women and Social Reform in Modern India* and *Caste in Modern India*.

Prof Sarkar stood firmly against the rising tide of fascism during the 1990s. In 1993, he co-authored *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, presenting a sharp historical critique of majoritarian politics.



His commitment to historical truth was demonstrated during his editorship for the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) project, *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1946*. Publication of his volume was blocked in 2000 by the ICHR under the BJP-led government, before being cleared and published in 2007 under a new administration.

In 2004, the West Bengal government awarded him the Rabindra Puraskar, awarded for his book *Writing Social History*. In 2007, Sarkar returned the award in protest against the expulsion of farmers from their land in Singur and Nandigram by the CPI(M)-led Left Front state government, reaffirming his independence and moral integrity.

His colleagues and contemporaries point out how he represented the unusual unity between intellectual and personal modesty. His student and historian Charu Gupta writes: 'At demonstrations, one often saw him standing quietly somewhere in the crowd, almost anxious not to be noticed. Yet he was there, during some of the darkest moments, including protests after the anti-

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Sikh violence and against communal mobilisation. Moral courage, for him, required neither volume nor self-display. This is perhaps what I shall remember most.' Professor Sumit Sarkar leaves behind an extraordinary legacy that continues to define South

Asian history courses, competitive examination syllabi, and academic debates. Generations of historians, teachers, and students owe their understanding of India's past to his lucid prose, empirical thoroughness, and commitment to social justice. ■

Comrade R. N. Singh

Comrade R. N. Singh, senior leader of the Jharkhand State Committee of CPI(ML) Liberation, passed away on the morning of August 10 at a hospital in Ranchi. For the past four decades, Comrade R. N. Singh was one of the most committed and dedicated leaders of the Party in the Palamu region. In recent years, he had been working from the Party's Ranchi headquarters.

Just a day before his death, Comrade R. N. Singh visited the student-youth protest site at Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium, standing firmly with the struggles of the people until his very last days.

His passing is an irreparable loss to the Party and the people's movement. His unwavering commitment, courage, and lifelong dedication to the cause of the oppressed will continue to inspire us.

Red Salute to Comrade R. N. Singh! ■



Comrade Mahendra Chaudhary

Comrade Mahendra Chaudhary, former Central Committee member and former Rajasthan State Secretary of CPI(ML) Liberation, passed away on 11 August 2026 after a prolonged illness. He had been bedridden for nearly two years following a brain stroke.

Inspired by the Naxalbari peasant uprising, Comrade Mahendra joined the communist movement during his student days in the 1970s. He went to the countryside and began working among peasants in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan.

Comrade Srilata Swaminathan and Comrade Mahendra Chaudhary worked together as a team under the banner of UCCR(ML) until the 1980s. They subsequently joined CPI(ML) following the party's successful intervention in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections and the massive mobilisation in Delhi on 8 October 1990. From then on, Comrade Mahendra successfully carried out all responsibilities in the party for as long as his health permitted.

Comrade Mahendra served as the Rajasthan State Secretary for nearly three decades. He also worked extensively among tribal communities in the regions of Pratapgarh and Salumbar in South Rajasthan.

We mourn his passing with deep sorrow and pay our revolutionary respects to a comrade who devoted his life to the communist movement. We pledge to carry forward his dream of a socialist society through a determined struggle against the present fascist regime.

Red Salute to Comrade Mahendra Chaudhary! ■





Homage Paid to Kashipur-Baranagar Martyrs

On the 55th anniversary of the Kashipur-Baranagar massacre, CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, West Bengal State Secretary Comrade Abhijit Mazumdar and other party leaders paid homage to the young communists martyred in the state-sponsored massacre of August 12-13, 1971.

The Kashipur-Baranagar massacre, in the northern outskirts of Kolkata, was one of the most brutal episodes of state repression during the notorious Siddhartha Shankar Ray regime in West Bengal. The regime had turned the state into a police state in its bid to crush the Naxalbari upsurge and the communist movement through

serial massacres, fake encounters, illegal detention, custodial torture and state-sponsored street violence.

Paying homage to the martyrs on August 13, Comrade Dipankar recalled the brutal history of state terror unleashed against young communists and reaffirmed the party's resolve to carry forward their struggle for justice, liberty and revolutionary change.

He said that the legacy of the Kashipur-Baranagar massacre assumes renewed significance today, when the Modi-Shah regime is institutionalising the police-state template across India. Draconian laws, state repression and street thuggery are being deployed to silence communists and other

dissenting voices, while Muslims and other marginalised social groups are increasingly facing systematic persecution and repression.

Comrade Abhijit Mazumdar said that remembering the Kashipur-Baranagar martyrs means intensifying the struggle against state terror and fascist repression. He called for strengthening resistance on all fronts and advancing the battle for democracy, justice and liberty.

The martyrs of Kashipur-Baranagar remain a powerful symbol of resistance to state-sponsored violence and continue to inspire the struggle against fascism and for a society free from exploitation and oppression.

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CHARU BHAWAN, U-90, SHAKARPUR, DELHI - 110 092

PUBLISHED BY:

Dipankar Bhattacharya for the Central Committee, CPIML
from Charu Bhawan, U-90, Shakarpur, Delhi - 110 092

EDITOR: Arindam Sen

PRINTED BY: Lekhraj Singh Chauhan at Graphic Print,
383, F&E, GF, Patparganj Industrial Area, Delhi - 110 092

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