

Liberation

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CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)



Justice for Ankita Bhandari

Protests were held in Delhi and Uttarakhand against the appointment of BJP leader Dushyant Kumar Gautam as Governor of Sikkim, despite allegations against him of being the “VIP” in the Ankita Bhandari murder case. Protesters demanded justice for Ankita and opposed the Modi-Shah regime’s decision to appoint a person facing serious allegations to a constitutional post.

On October 18, a protest was held near India Gate in Delhi, with a large number of people from Uttarakhand joining the demonstration. They were taken into police custody when they arrived to protest against the decision.

CPI(ML) Liberation Uttarakhand State Secretary Comrade

Indresh, along with activists of the All India Progressive Women’s Association (AIPWA), joined the protest. Addressing the gathering, Comrade Indresh said, “Ankita Bhandari’s parents are at India Gate, anguished by the appointment of Dushyant Kumar Gautam as Governor despite the allegations against him of being the VIP in the Ankita Bhandari murder case. By appointing Dushyant Kumar Gautam as Governor, Modi-Shah are attempting to provide him a shield against the allegations in the Ankita Bhandari murder case. The struggle for justice for Ankita Bhandari will continue against this unjust decision.”

The protest followed demonstrations across Uttarakhand against the

appointment. On October 15, CPI(ML) Liberation leader Comrade Atul Sati addressed a protest in Joshimath, organised by constituents of the INDIA bloc, including CPI(ML) Liberation and the Congress, demanding justice for Ankita Bhandari and opposing Gautam’s appointment as Governor.

The protests have raised serious questions about the BJP’s political protection of those facing allegations of sexual exploitation and violence against women. The appointment of Gautam has intensified demands for accountability and justice in the Ankita Bhandari case, while the detention of Ankita’s parents for protesting against the decision has further exposed the administration’s response to those seeking justice. ■

Left-Ambedkarite Alliance Sweeps UoH Students’ Union Elections

The Left-Ambedkarite alliance of AISA, ASA, DSU, SFI and TSF has swept the central panel elections of the University of Hyderabad Students’ Union for 2026-27. Comrade Dilshada of SFI was elected President, Pratik of the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) as General Secretary, Nithin of the Tribal Students Front (TSF) as Vice-President, Abhinash Kumar of ASA as Cultural Secretary, and AISA’s Comrade Sidhant as Joint Secretary. AISA also won two councillor seats, with Comrade Sateesh winning from the School of Social Sciences and Comrade Sanat from the School of Economics. SFI and ASA also won two of the three posts in ICC-GS-CASH.

The victory comes after last year’s election, when the communal right

wing ABVP had won the Students’ Union after a long gap. The unity of Left and Ambedkarite forces had not been consolidated at that time. This year, the expanded alliance, with the inclusion of AISA, brought together a broader student movement and received an overwhelming mandate from the student community against the ABVP and its allies.

The ABVP-SLVD panel won the post of Sports Secretary and one post in ICC-GS-CASH, while ABVP was largely limited to a few seats at the school level.

The election also saw a sharp contest over the Cultural Secretary post. When Abhinash Kumar won by a margin of five votes against the ABVP candidate, ABVP demanded a recount. The Election Commission

then handed over the decision to the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean of Students’ Welfare. Students resisted this unprecedented move to hand over the decision on a student union election to the university administration and gheraoed the Vice-Chancellor. Following the student protest, the Election Commission rejected the demand for a recount and declared Abhinash Kumar elected as Cultural Secretary.

The victory at the University of Hyderabad reflects the growing unity of Left and Ambedkarite student forces and the rejection of ABVP’s pro-administration and anti-student politics. It also comes in the context of a nationwide student movement against the failures and policies of the BJP government, the same movement that forced the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and is now demanding the resignation of CEC Gyanesh Kumar. ■



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A Desperate Government's 'Regime Change' Propaganda Can't Crush the People's 'Spirit of Resistance'

Rattled by the Indian Express revelations about the ECI and SIR and the subsequent intensification of popular protests demanding immediate resignation of Gyanesh Kumar, scrapping of the SIR and repeal of the 2023 Act giving the government of the day a free hand to have an Election Commission panel of its own choice and granting the Election Commissioners lifelong immunity from any legal accountability, the Modi government has launched an all-out war on the protest movement against electoral fraud and mass disenfranchisement.

The most visible aspect of this war on democracy is of course repression. The kind of repression the Modi government has unleashed to stop the protests against 'vote chori' can only be compared to the colonial rulers' contempt for the Indian people. Deployment of tens of thousands of security forces, cancellation of trains, closing of metro stations, denotification of Delhi's best known protest site, violent detention and abduction of activists and even journalists covering protests, rampant sexual harassment of women protesters, and even the arrest of activists for unfurling the tricolour in a 'denotified' site - such a vicious application of a massive repressive apparatus to just stop a peaceful protest is clearly inspired, like so much of the Sanghi playbook, by the colonial model of governance.

The use of a whole range of diabolical policing techniques like house arrest, preventive detention, trying to force activists to sign 'peace bonds' and then treating those bonds as a voluntary surrender of the right to protest, police personnel hiding their identity while beating up protesters, strategic deployment of thugs in police uniform or in plain clothes to attack and beat up protesters indicates a new level of intensification of state repression and fascist terror. Alongside this repressive strategy, the Sangh-BJP establishment has also unleashed a massive propaganda offensive to discredit and delegitimise the movement. The two keywords of this propaganda war are 'anarchy' and 'regime change'.

Nothing could be more ironical than the 'anarchy' accusation against the movement. The chaos and mass inconvenience and harassment that people have had to suffer in Delhi and beyond because of cancellation of trains and closing of metro stations was all because of the government's attempts to stop the peaceful protesters. In fact on the only day the government allowed the march called by the INDIA bloc to happen, there was little chaos or disruption in spite of the sizable presence of protesters in central Delhi. Big mass protests are a defining feature of democracy anywhere in the world. Before the arrival of the Mo-Sha regime, Delhi itself has often been witness to protest marches and

rallies involving tens of thousands of people without causing any anarchic disruption.

By contrast, the Modi government today wants protests only to be held in designated sites and then denotifies sites close to Parliament building or various ministries and places all sorts of curbs on conferences and peaceful assemblies of protesters, and yet blames protesters for spreading anarchy when they are forced to find new venues and become mobile and flexible in their location. Some BJP leaders and RSS ideologues have started invoking Ambedkar in support of their anarchy accusation. Again, this is deeply ironical. In the same speech in which Ambedkar urged embracing constitutional rule of law and avoiding chaos and anarchy, he warned against the danger of degeneration of democracy into dictatorship. He quoted Thomas Jefferson to argue that the Constitution must be receptive and institutions held accountable to the needs and aspirations of coming generations.

Citing the famous Jefferson quote "What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?...". Ambedkar remarked that Jefferson's statement was "not merely true, but is absolutely true". The focus for Ambedkar was on democracy and constitutional morality. Today people are having to protest peacefully precisely against the dismantling of democracy and violation of institutional accountability by the Modi government and its handpicked Chief Election Commissioner. And the government is busy suppressing and discrediting the peaceful constitutional protest by raising a bogey of 'anarchy'!

The other bogey the government

is frantically trying to utilise is that of 'regime change'. Because of the brazen American history of engineering serial 'regime changes' by toppling governments in sovereign states and installing puppet regimes, the term reeks of foreign conspiracy and imperialist intervention. From the Iraq war to the ongoing Iran war and from the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to continuing regime change threats against Cuba, American foreign policy is a chronicle of regime change plots. But why on earth would the US plan any regime change operation in India to destabilise a government which supports US regime change operations across the world, and is willing to mortgage India's strategic autonomy and national interests to serve the US-Israel axis in every possible way?

The demand for a change in government is growing in India today on the basis of the experiences and struggles of the Indian people. It is a most logical conclusion being drawn by the people from their own bitter experience with the Modi government, and its myriad 'double engine' versions across India, its record of total failure and betrayal, and the daily doses of hate, lies and violence being dished out by the Sangh-BJP apparatus. And this is not the first time the people, led by the youth, are talking about a change of government. From change of government to change of the system, the call for transformation has been the lifeblood of democratic politics in modern India. Inquilab Zindabad (long live revolution) has been India's most popular pan-India slogan for more than a century now. The call for Sampurna Kranti or Total Revolution given by Jayaprakash Narayan in the mid-1970s triggered a major political churning that resulted in the

defeat of the Emergency and the rise of India's first non-Congress government at the Centre.

The Modi government and the Sangh-BJP establishment are trying to mislead the people and discredit the movement against electoral corruption by raising the bogey of regime change and hinting at a foreign conspiracy. It comes from their fundamental fear of the people and disdain for dissent that makes them identify and arrest activists talking about increased wages or climate justice as threats to 'national security'. But for once the BJP's 'narrative war' is also failing like its strategy of repression. No amount of accusations of anarchy or the bogey of foreign conspiracy can stop the people from fighting for fair elections on the basis of universal adult franchise, for a responsive government and accountable institutions. ■



Defining “Industry”: The Supreme Injustice

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

On August 20th, 2026, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court passed its judgment on the question of what constituted an “industry” under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. The answer determines who is protected by and has a remedy under industrial law. While at first glance, it looks like a definitional dispute, it is, in substance, a question about whose interests the law protects.

In 1978, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court in *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) v. A. Rajappa*, gave the word “industry” a wide construction and found that any systematic activity, organised through cooperation between employer and employee, undertaken for the production or distribution of goods and services to satisfy human wants, would qualify as an industry; this was irrespective of a profit motive. When this judgment was written, Justice Krishna Iyer was explicit about its interpretive stance that – “a worker-oriented statute must receive a construction where conceptually, the keynote thought must be the worker and the community, as the Constitution has shown concern for them inter alia in Articles 38, 39 and 43”. The effect of this judgment was to bring hospitals, educational institutions, charitable bodies, and government departments within the protective reach of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, alongside conventional commercial enterprises like factories, formal workspaces, etc.

This construction of the definition of ‘industry’ was tested and preserved until 2005, when a five-judge bench,

in *State of UP v. Jai Bir Singh*, was called upon to decide a comparatively narrow question. This dispute had to decide whether a state forestry department constituted an industry. With this came an occasion for employers to mount a challenge to the test laid down in the BWSSB judgment. The neo-liberal ideology was clearly visible in the judgment, which observed that “over-emphasis on the rights of the workers and undue curtailment of the rights of the employers... have given rise to a large number of industrial and labour claims resulting in awards granting huge amounts of back wages,” and that an expansive definition might operate as “a deterrent to private enterprise in India”. On this reasoning, that the wide reading of “industry” had become inconvenient to ‘enterprise’, the bench referred the question to a larger bench for reconsideration.

It is worth pausing on what the judgment meant by “over emphasis on the rights of workers...”, since the 2005 bench’s characterisation of workers’ rights as burdensome, bears little relation to its actual content. In fact, the Industrial Disputes Act does not confer extraordinary entitlements upon workmen. It establishes an institutional architecture of conciliation officers, labour courts and industrial tribunals for the investigation and settlement of disputes and prescribes procedural safeguards, including notice and compensation, governing lay-off, retrenchment and closure. To describe this framework as unduly protective of labour is to wrongly claim that the unregulated exercise of powers exercised by the employers over employees does not require any accountability measures, and any

checks on that means an imposition on the management.

The outcome of the judgment of the nine judges in *Bir Singh* is a preservation of the status quo. The Chief Justice’s opinion in the August 20th, 2026 judgment, which was written for himself and three other judges, proposed a narrower test, which he himself held would be hypothetical and inapplicable to pending cases. Despite other differences among the judges, the bench was unanimous that the interpretation developed in BWSSB would continue to govern all matters that arose under the Industrial Disputes Act.

By the time the reference was finally answered, the Industrial Disputes Act itself had been repealed and replaced by the Industrial Relations Code. The larger question this judgment leaves us with is not merely a technical question, but one which impacts the lives of lakhs of workers. Where the disparity in bargaining power between workman and employer is beyond dispute, what does it mean to actually protect the weaker side? The Industrial Relations Code, is narrower by design, excluding entire categories of institution and imposing thresholds resulting in lakhs of workers being pushed outside the law. This is true of the other Labour Codes as well.

Dr. Ambedkar’s warning about unregulated industrial relations speaks directly to what follows, where the State declines to make the rules, the private employer will make them instead, and the result is the “dictatorship of the private employer.” It is toward exactly such a dictatorship that these new Labour Codes of Slavery lead. The working class must resist them, and resist them decisively, to ensure that rights won through decades of struggle are not stolen. ■

Quick Commerce is Gaming its Workers

▲ GURSHABAD GROVER



Despite the varieties of economic stagnation in India, an industry experiencing explosive growth is quick commerce. These 'platforms' promise to deliver groceries and other consumer goods to doorsteps within minutes, and have made significant inroads in the urban elite market in the country. Instead of relying on centralised warehouses, these platforms deploy a network of strategically-located "dark stores" in city neighbourhoods. This infrastructure, in turn, relies on a large delivery and packing flexible workforce hired as independent contractors – "gig workers". With this burgeoning industry, 2025 saw a 60% surge in gig worker hiring in India.

Like traditional e-commerce, quick commerce operates a double-sided market: not only are customers charged for products, but sellers are charged for product placement, ads and positioning. But, an even more elucidating lens to view these platforms and companies' operations in India

is as a triple-sided market: gig workers, as non-employees, delivery "partners" are charged onboarding and other fees in order to be able to access work.

Progressive worker movements across the world have realised that this flexible delivery workforce and their exploitation poses a new scale of challenges related to wages, working conditions and social security. A new research project, GigSaathi, was launched with the motivation to understand the algorithms that shape the earnings and related payment 'incentives' for delivery workers in the quick commerce sector.

Algorithms are not just used to determine pay, but also for task allocation and automatically reviewing performance. These algorithms, aimed at fulfilling demand while optimising the company's profits, are a black box to the workers and public. This creates a unique dynamic of information asymmetry between the gig workers and the platforms.

GigSaathi aimed at bridging this asymmetry by directly collecting and analysing wage and incentive data from delivery workers associated with Blinkit, the largest company in this space commanding almost half of the market share. Delivery workers from multiple Blinkit stores shared screenshots of their pay-out pages with the research team, which they collated and analysed for trends.

The research team found that wage-setting is opaque and complex, calculated by a mix of algorithms and some manual controls by local managers. The

latter comes into play when specific conditions arise at the level of a store or neighbourhood, say heavy rain or worker strikes.

First, an aspect that is intuitively understood by workers, for which we found concrete evidence of, is that there is no correlation between earnings and time spent on a delivery order. A significant proportion of workers' earnings is determined by invisible factors that are never reported to them and are difficult to compute based on the information they have. On average, workers earn approximately INR 48, travel around 5 kilometres, and spend approximately 20 mins per order. However, these had very high variations. By disregarding time spent per order, pay-out algorithms do not factor in multiple challenges and hurdles in workers' ways: traffic, security at housing societies or residential complex, rules that restrict 'outside' vehicles to a gate that is far away from the apartment, travel up flights of stairs, and casteist limitations around lift use.

Second, incentives made up on average about 24% of the total weekly earnings of a worker. Incentive pay is determined weekly – and often daily – based on supply of workers and customer demand. These are paid when workers meet certain conditions (number of orders delivered in a day or during certain hours, etc.). The incentives are clearly meant for labour control and have high variability. In fact, higher earnings per order correspond to a lower share of incentives in total earnings, and vice versa.

This creates significant wage fluctuation for gig workers, and is one of the main levers through which companies 'push' and 'pull' workers into their dynamic labour pool. Wages are regulated through gamified features making

it difficult for workers to keep up, and they are always 'playing' to maximise their incentives. Work is intensified without any guarantees of higher pay, keeping workers running on the hamster wheel to meet incentive targets.

The research stipulated that apart from the treatment of delivery work as contractual labour, other factors – including opaque wage determination, and complex labour controls – contribute to fracturing the workspace, and creating a severe impediment for worker organisation. The Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers Act of 2025 provides a small glimmer of hope in requiring platforms to be more upfront about these factors, but is not operational in toto. The fight continues on many fronts around worker conditions and wages, transparency around these systems will allow workers and their unions to make more authoritative claims and strategic decisions around actions and demands of companies and governments. ■

App Karamchari Ekta Union (AKEU), affiliated with All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), has been raising the demands of gig workers, and particularly of delivery workers of quick commerce platforms like Blinkit, Zepto and Instamart. The union has intervened in Delhi in incidents of store managers outright harassing and physically assaulting workers for demanding better wages.

The union actively demands extreme weather compensations (in heatwaves and floods) for the delivery workers, and a petrol and mobile internet allowance for the workers in the current conditions of soaring inflation.

The union's recent on-ground interventions also secured partial payments of wages owed to packers associated with Zepto. This emerging class of workers face unique forms of precarity and exploitation, demands better working conditions and wages, and legal changes that can guarantee their rights.

The Cities They Build, The Rights They Lack

▲ SURYO



The modern Indian city cannot exist without migrant workers. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were the two largest origin states for interstate migrants in the 2011 Census, which counted approximately 83 lakh people from Uttar Pradesh and 63 lakhs from Bihar living in other states. West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand also provides good number of migrant workers to other states. India has not conducted a population census since then and migrant workers remain especially poorly counted in India. Academics estimate there may be about 10 crore short-term migrant workers in India, today.

This movement of labour is driven by India's enormous geographical inequalities. Consider the differences in per-capita income. Bihar's per-capita net state domestic product — the value of state income divided by its population — was Rs. 69,321 in 2024–25. The corresponding figure was approximately Rs. 3.88 lakh in Telangana, Rs. 3.81 lakh in Karnataka and Rs. 4.93 lakh in Delhi. These figures reveal the vastly different income and employment opportunities available across states. Delhi's per-capita income was more than seven times Bihar's. Wage data tell a similar story. In 2024–25, the average daily wage of a male rural construction worker was approximately Rs. 923 in Kerala, compared with Rs. 389 in Bihar and Rs. 308 in Madhya Pradesh. These figures reveal the scale of the wage gradient within the same broad occupation. By migrating, a construction worker from Bihar may obtain substantially more than is available at home. The destination wage need not be fair or sufficient, particularly after accounting for urban rent, food, transport and periods without work. Dire economic conditions in the origin state, nevertheless, compel workers to travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres for wages that may remain exploitative.

Migration has been a near-universal feature of industrialisation. Cities have historically expanded by drawing workers from villages and less industrialised regions. The distinctive problem in India is the scale and persistence of regional inequality. Capital, infrastructure and secure employment are concentrated in a limited number of urban and industrial centres, while large parts of the country remain labour-supplying hinterlands. India does not possess a national labour market in which capital and employment are evenly dispersed. It possesses islands of concentrated capital connected to vast regions that reproduce and export labour. According to NITI Aayog, Indian cities occupy only 3% of the country's territory, but contribute approximately 60% of its GDP. At the time of the 2011 Census, Bihar was only 11.3% urbanised, compared with 45.2% of Maharashtra, 48.4% of Tamil Nadu and 47.7% of Kerala.

The failure of industrial policy to disperse productive investment has left states such as Bihar with widespread underemployment, low-productivity work and depressed wages. Employers in richer regions can then recruit from this large reserve army of labour. A migrant whose options at home are extremely limited may accept wages, hours and employment conditions that a settled worker with stronger local support can refuse. Contractors deepen this imbalance by controlling recruitment, transport, accommodation and the payment of wages. Indeed, many migrant workers do not even have fixed establishments to live in their destination city, often living, for instance, in the construction sites they work in. Low statutory wages, inadequate and irregular implementation, the absence of formal contracts and legal

and illegal restrictions on trade unions further reduce workers' bargaining power.

The problem, however, is not that migrants voluntarily "take" local workers' jobs. Employers use workers' unequal circumstances to make them compete against one another. Where trade unions and common wage standards are weak, access to a large and replaceable workforce can place downward pressure on the wages and conditions of migrant and local workers alike, transforming interstate disparities into a source of profit and capital accumulation. Capital takes advantage of a large reserve army of unemployed or underemployed labour in origin states, while using the threat of replacement by migrants to restrain wages in the destination economy.

In most cases, migrant workers are hired in contractual positions. The principal employer hires a sub-contractor, who then recruits workers. The workers are thus tied to the contractor, with the principal employer outsourcing legal responsibility. The frequent absence of written contracts or proof of employment, coupled with low minimum-wage enforcements, allows for wages less than the statutory minimum. Migrant workers accept these low wages, due to little recourse, and because despite being underpaid, the wages may be more than what they may have received in their origin state. Employers also outsource other responsibilities, such as accommodation for workers in the destination state. Workers often live in destitute conditions in the destination state – with many workers sharing small living spaces, or at times living at the construction site that they work in.

To make matters worse, the migrant worker often lacks social

security and political power in their destination state as ration cards and voting rights are tied to their origin and not destination. Migrant workers, therefore, are not politically represented at their destination. Blue collar migrant workers are overwhelmingly men, with their families continuing to reside in origin states. This places a disproportionate burden of domestic reproduction on the women in origin states, including childcare and care for older members in the household. The male worker having been relieved from this responsibility can be made to work longer hours under strenuous conditions in the destination state. The village, thus allows for capital accumulation in the city by taking on a disproportionate responsibility of unpaid domestic work, effectively subsidizing the city.

The logic of this system was explained by Milton Friedman, one of the most influential defenders of free-market capitalism. Speaking about Mexican workers in the United States, Friedman argued that immigration was beneficial only so long as it remained illegal. His argument was that undocumented workers would perform jobs employers needed while remaining excluded from welfare and social security. Interstate migrants in India are, formally, of course, citizens with equal constitutional rights. Yet, Indian capital derives a similar advantage from keeping their employment informal. Migrant workers are legal enough to build cities, operate factories and deliver commodities, but informal enough to be denied contracts, social security, political representation and effective protection from wage theft or dismissal. ■

Gyanesh Kumar Will Have To Go: Scrap SIR, Reconstitute the ECI

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The SIR launched by the Election Commission of India in June 2025 ahead of the Bihar elections now stands completely exposed as an instrument of mass disenfranchisement and multi-layered electoral fraud. The way the ECI inflicted this surgical strike on the fundamental constitutional promise of universal adult franchise and free and fair elections, the fulcrum of India's electoral democracy, has also robbed the ECI of its own credibility. The explosive investigative report published in the Indian Express on the murky functioning of the ECI, and the so-called clarifications offered by the Commission, have only confirmed the shocking rot in this constitutional body. The process has also cast a dark shadow on the Supreme Court of India, which has so far refused to intervene and given the ECI a free hand. India now faces the gravest constitutional crisis since the 1975 proclamation of the State of Emergency.

The rot started with the 2023 Act on the appointment of Election Commissioners, which struck at the heart of the idea of a neutral Election Commission. The freedom given to the government of the day to choose a subservient Election Commission, and the lifelong immunity granted to the Election Commissioners that places them above the ambit of law, cemented an evil nexus between the government and the ECI. The ECI sheds every semblance of neutrality, transparency and accountability to favour the BJP, and the BJP in turn defends the CEC to the hilt. The Indian Express report exposed the arbitrary and unilateral functioning of the CEC,

the marginalisation of the other Election Commissioners within the ECI, and the blatant centralisation of control and software manipulation in the name of cleaning up the electoral roll through the SIR. An ECI note now admits that the CEC had been acting unilaterally, with the Commission not even holding meetings with any formal record of agenda and minutes. Decisions taken in the name of the SIR therefore have no sanctity, and elections held on the basis of a doctored electoral roll by an EC functioning in such an arbitrary and opaque manner naturally lose credibility and legitimacy.

The Story of Two Forms

Nowhere is the institutionalised nature of the fraud clearer than in the way two forms, Form 6 and Form 7, have been weaponised by the BJP and the ECI to effect mass exclusion and selective inclusion of names in the electoral roll. The changes made in Form 6 have been exposed as arbitrary, unauthorised and illegal, since altering the clauses of the form is the exclusive prerogative of Parliament. The EC has now withdrawn the controversial clauses without any explanation. Its attempt to claim Supreme Court approval for the changes has been refuted by CJI Suryakant himself, exposing the EC's lie. The changes were clearly designed to obstruct the inclusion of Gen Z voters in the electoral roll. The ECI has also misused Form 6, which is meant to be an entry route for first-time voters with a legally verifiable undertaking, by forcing excluded voters to fill it up for re-entry into the roll. This is patently illegal, and despite objections from day one the ECI has persisted with

the malpractice.

More sinister has been the industrial-scale misuse of Form 7 to exclude eligible voters. There have been multiple reports of confiscation of bundles of pre-filled Form 7 targeted mostly against Muslim voters and voters likely to vote against the BJP and its allies. Wherever voters are excluded on the basis of complaints filed through Form 7, they must receive proper notices and opportunities to answer them, but this is hardly the experience of those who have been victims of mass exclusion. The most shocking pattern of targeting and victimisation has been witnessed in West Bengal. Retired Justice Indrajit Chatterjee, who has now resigned as chair of Appellate Tribunal 11, has revealed that as many as 2.54 lakh Form 7 appeals were filed before his tribunal by none other than the Additional Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal, seeking exclusion of voters who had been found eligible even by judicial officers. According to the Indian Express report, Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu complained that neither he nor his fellow Election Commissioner Vivek Joshi, nor the CEO of West Bengal, had any idea about the origin or authorisation of 16,10,311 exclusion appeals before the 19 West Bengal tribunals.

Supreme Court, an Ally?

The Supreme Court, which could and should have restrained the Election Commission, has instead played a shockingly irresponsible role, showing no concern for the voting right of adversely affected electors. When millions of voters held eligible by judicial officers were referred to tribunals in West Bengal, and it became clear that the tribunals would take years to decide on the appeals, the Court did not uphold the voting right of these voters during the pendency of the appeals. It downplayed the denial of vote as only a temporary

loss of right. Ahead of the forthcoming bypolls to Nandigram and Rezinagar, the Court has again trivialised the denial of vote to more than 18,000 voters whose appeals are pending before the tribunals, as though the right to vote in bypolls were dispensable. The institutional architecture of India's parliamentary democracy, the doctrine of separation of powers and the system of checks and balances that have been central to the survival of democracy in post-colonial India, are facing their gravest test. A meeting proposed for October 6th between the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the One Nation, One Election bills and the Supreme Court would have been a shocking instance of blurring the boundaries between legislature and judiciary. It has just been shelved. With so little institutional support, the survival of democracy in India now depends almost entirely on the maturity and alertness of the people of India, and on the non-BJP political spectrum, civil society and alternative media they can count on at this critical juncture.

Too Little, Too Late

It is in this context that the ECI has suddenly woken up to the reality of mass exclusion. Now that the whole country is talking about the disenfranchisement of more than 130 million voters, the Commission issued a circular on October 1st asking all CEOs to reach out to all 'left-out' voters within one month. Similar circulars have since been issued in almost all SIR-bound and post-SIR states. The term 'left-out' is actually a euphemism for arbitrary and targeted exclusion, designed to tilt the electoral balance in favour of the BJP and its allies. Even as the EC was issuing its circular, activists of CPI(ML) were holding a public hearing of excluded voters in Patna. Between June and September, party activists

had carried out a door-to-door verification survey in fifty select booths across ten of the twenty constituencies contested by the party in the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections. They did precisely what the EC has now asked BLOs to do, identifying excluded voters by comparing the post-SIR electoral roll with the pre-SIR June 2025 roll. The survey revealed a shocking wrongful deletion rate of 17 percent. Every circular now being issued by the ECI only testifies to the massive institutionalised fraud inflicted on India's electoral democracy and on the fundamental principle of universal adult franchise through the unconstitutional SIR drive.

The official response is too little, too late. The CEO of Delhi announced the resolution of around 20 lakh out of 33 lakh 'disputed' cases and asked Delhi voters to feel free to contact any of the 14,947 BLOs, 902 AEROs, 70 EROs, 13 DEOs or the CEO for redressal of grievances. Such announcements do not answer any of the questions concerning the unwarranted centralisation of powers within the ECI, the wrongful targeted exclusion of voters, and the impact of that exclusion, both in immediate electoral terms and in the loss of rights and security of every affected voter. The Commission's own 26 September press note, issued amid the 'crisis management' and 'damage control' that followed the Indian Express revelations, amounts to an effective admission of guilt. Gyanesh Kumar has clearly lost every right to continue as CEC.

The Message from Delhi of October 12, 2026

The protests that began with the launch of SIR in Bihar on June 25th, 2025 gathered renewed momentum after the Indian Express report of September 2026, and have since reached a decisive phase. Never before in independent India has

Gandhi Jayanti been celebrated as a day of protest by the people on this scale and in this manner this year. The legacy of Gandhi, the iconic leader who epitomised the power of peaceful mass protest by common unarmed people, came truly alive across India on his 157th birth anniversary. Scenes of hundreds of student activists and other citizens defying the massive, intimidating deployment of security forces around a fortified Jantar Mantar in Delhi, being repeatedly and brutally arrested and escaping from police buses to rejoin the protest, or of an entire crowd collectively singing the national anthem in Mumbai, will remain etched in our memory for years. While the protesting people invoked the Gandhian legacy, the government of the day resurrected the colonial model of governance by brute force. Defying the sealing of Jantar Mantar, the closing of metro stations, an unprecedented deployment of security forces and vicious violence meted out by police, paramilitary forces and state-sponsored goon squads, Delhi has since September 25th been relentless in raising the demand for the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar, the scrapping of SIR and the repeal of the 2023 Act. The Supreme Court, which has done so little to protect the franchise, did at least caution the government against unleashing heavy-handed repression on peaceful protests. The government still refuses to mend its ways, and on October 12th thousands marched from the Constitution Club to the Supreme Court.

That march signalled glimpses of the hitherto untapped potential of a united mass awakening against the fascist Modi-Shah regime. When Delhi saw the remarkable Shaheen Bagh protests of 2019-20 against discriminatory amendments to the citizenship law, it remained predominantly a civil society affair, with the non-Left opposition mostly

staying away. When the farmers' movement began at the end of November 2020, Delhi responded in a bigger way, but the non-Left opposition again stayed away. Early this year, unprecedented workers' protests erupted around Delhi against the backdrop of the Iran war and a massive hike in the price of cooking gas, but there was little social support for the plight of the workers. Then came the Jantar Mantar protests of June and July. The demand for the resignation of education minister Dharmendra Pradhan became a rallying point for the larger student community and struck a chord with the entire youth. Large sections of the Left student movement and progressive civil society led and nurtured those protests, but major sections of the INDIA bloc remained somewhat aloof. It was the brutal crackdown of July 20th that triggered a bigger countrywide upheaval, with more and more parties getting directly involved, and the regime had no option but to dump Dharmendra Pradhan. The cumulative experience of the SIR assault and the growing loss of credibility of the ECI, especially of CEC Gyanesh Kumar, has now brought the country to the point of a decisive showdown. This time, the broader political opposition, civil society and the people's movement on the ground all seem to be converging. The belated September 30th meeting of the INDIA bloc and the growing assertion of Left student activists, other Gen Z protesters, progressive citizens, alternative media activists and the non-NDA opposition parties signal the hope of a determined democratic turnaround, breaking the fascist stranglehold.

Brute Force of the System

How is the system responding? It is increasingly using brute force, but on October 12th, when people

came out in such large numbers, the police had to take a step back and allow the march to happen. At the same time, the Police Commissioner of Delhi issued an order de-notifying Jantar Mantar as a designated protest site and notifying new sites miles away from the heart of the city. Ramlila Ground will of course still be available, but half the time it remains booked for religious functions and other festivities. For the remaining quarter of 2026 it is reportedly available only on December 29th, 30th and 31st, at a daily fee of Rs. 1.21 lakh. There can be no going back on free sites like Jantar Mantar for peaceful public protest. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's advice against disproportionate force and for respecting the constitutional right to peaceful protest has been treated with utter disdain by the Delhi Police. A contempt petition is now before the Court, and it remains to be seen how serious the apex court is about getting its own orders upheld.

While the systemic assault emerges from the fascist agenda of the RSS and the BJP, it encompasses even states where the BJP may be currently out of power. On the very day the people of Delhi seemed to be reclaiming their streets, 'My Vote, My Right' campaigners in Bengaluru were being subjected to brutal police repression and humiliation. States ruled by the Congress or other non-BJP parties cannot let the police treat protesters with the kind of brutality that defines BJP rule in the so-called 'double engine' states.

Clear Demand to Save Democracy

The demands before the country are therefore clear. Gyanesh Kumar must be removed from office and prosecuted for the crime of undermining the Constitution and

the electoral system of India, a demand now being raised from all corners of the country. The SIR must be scrapped and the damage undone. The voting right of every wrongfully excluded voter must be restored unconditionally and without delay. The rights of Electoral Registration Officers must be restored, and the centralisation injected into the preparation of electoral rolls through the digital route must be undone. Democracy demands fresh elections in all states and constituencies where the polls have been subverted by the SIR and dubious changes in the electoral roll since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The 2023 Election Commissioners Appointment Act, including the provision of immunity for Election Commissioners, must be repealed, and in consonance with the Supreme Court's verdict on the Election Commission, there must be a constitutional guarantee for the autonomy, neutrality and accountability of the ECI. There is no corruption bigger than electoral fraud. The absence of any fear of losing an election, and insulation from every grievance, anger and protest of the people, have made the BJP governments all the more arrogant and dictatorial. India must rise in unison to end the subversion of democracy by the Modi-Shah-Gyanesh Kumar nexus.

The message of October 12th for 'We, the People of India' is loud and clear. Like the July 20th Parliament March, the October 12th Supreme Court March has pushed the regime back, but for a decisive defeat of the fascist design we will need to deliver many more such blows and demonstrate still bigger unity and power of resistance. More power to the people, more victories to their united and determined struggles! ■

Disenfranchisement and Electoral Fraud Sparks People's Upsurge in India



The Modi-Shah regime's attempts to suppress dissent and push crores of people towards disenfranchisement have triggered a sustained wave of protests across India. In Delhi, the resistance intensified from September 25 through October, as students, youth, activists, teachers, lawyers, journalists, women protesters, INDIA bloc MPs and members of civil society took to the streets against electoral fraud, the fascist ploy of disenfranchisement and the unconstitutional Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Protesters demanded an end to disenfranchisement and the restoration of people's right to vote. The regime responded with barricades, mass detentions, lathicharges and police violence. Delhi was repeatedly turned into a fortress to prevent people from exercising their democratic rights. Yet every attempt to crush the protests brought more people onto the streets.

On September 25, a citizens' protest was held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi demanding Gyanesh Kumar's arrest over vote chori.

Protesters raised the slogan, "Vote Chori is Deshdroh". Hundreds participated in the demonstration, including CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar, Yogendra Yadav, advocate Prashant Bhushan, AISA President Neha, Anjali Bharadwaj, CPI(ML) Central Committee member Purushottam Sharma, AICCTU General Secretary Rajiv Dimri, CPI(ML) Politburo member Ravi Rai and other activists.

On September 29, Left parties jointly organised a demonstration outside the ECI headquarters at Nirvachan Sadan. The Delhi Police detained several Left party leaders and protesters at the barricades.

At their crucial meeting in Delhi on September 30, INDIA bloc leaders agreed on a joint action plan to defend democracy and voting rights. This included 'Save Democracy' marches across districts from October 2 to 8, a march by Opposition MPs to the ECI on October 6, and an effort to secure an appointment with the President of India in the second week of October. The plan also included five mass rallies across the country, a massive public rally

in Delhi on November 1, and an appeal for an early resolution of cases related to SIR and electoral matters pending before the Supreme Court.

Student-Youth Protests and Police Repression

October opened with a growing assertion of democratic rights on the streets. On October 2, Gandhi Jayanti, students, youth and citizens mobilised in Delhi in response to the call for resistance against the trampling of democracy. Near Jantar Mantar, protesters demanding justice were met with police violence and detentions. CPI(ML) Liberation activists, AISA members, Left party activists and Opposition leaders were among those detained. In Mumbai, a large peaceful protest was held at Shivaji Park in Dadar, with Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leaders and activists from several Opposition parties participating.

On October 4, during a citizens' march from India Gate to Jantar Mantar, the police specifically targeted AISA President Neha and whisked them away in an unmarked car. They were later released from Narela Industrial Police Station.

The Delhi Police's repression also targeted women demanding justice and journalists standing in solidarity with them. Journalist Rosy, a survivor who had filed a complaint against ACP Vivek Bhagat for molestation, faced police repression while demanding registration of an FIR. Instead of registering the FIR, the police detained Rosy and the journalists and activists protesting in solidarity with her. Several journalists were also manhandled in detention.



Later, police filed a counter FIR against the survivor.

On the night of October 5, the police arrested several journalists and activists protesting against the refusal to register the FIR, using trumped-up charges. They were granted bail later that night. Earlier that day, the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), along with other women's organisations, had protested at the Delhi Police Headquarters demanding registration of an FIR against ACP Vivek Bhagat. The episode exposed the impunity enjoyed by those accused of sexual harassment and the coercive machinery deployed against those demanding accountability.

On October 6, Opposition MPs marched from Parliament to the ECI as part of the INDIA bloc's call for action. CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad joined other Opposition MPs in demanding the removal of Vote Chor Gyanesh Kumar and an end to the unconstitutional SIR. A heavy deployment of police and paramilitary forces stopped the march near the ECI office, and several MPs were detained. CPI(ML) MPs and other Opposition MPs also condemned the police violence against students, youth and journalists during the preceding days of protests.

The message from the streets was unmistakable: the right to vote cannot be separated from the right to question the Election Commission, expose electoral fraud and resist the arbitrary exclusion of voters. The regime's response was to intensify repression.

October 10: Delhi Turned into a Fortress, but Protests Continue

October 10 marked a dramatic escalation in the crackdown. The Modi-Shah regime turned the national capital into a militarised fortress ahead of a protest called by the CJP, AISA and other Left student organisations at Jantar Mantar. More than 40,000 security and paramilitary personnel, in addition to a large contingent of Delhi Police, were deployed across central Delhi. Barricades were erected across the capital and its borders, 45 Metro stations were temporarily closed, and more than 200 trains to and from Delhi stations were cancelled or rescheduled.

More than 1,000 people were detained before the protest itself. Organisational leaders were tailed, while offices and residences were placed under surveillance. CJP leaders were detained aboard a flight, with a large police contingent entering the plane and taking them to an undisclosed location and were only released the next day.

The extraordinary mobilisation of security forces was intended to prevent protesters from reaching Jantar Mantar. Yet the blockade did not succeed in keeping people off the streets. As contingents of students and youth attempted to reach the protest site, police and paramilitary forces unleashed brutal repression, detaining hundreds and taking them to distant detention centres.

At AISA's call, a massive flash protest was organised in the INA-Delhi Haat area. CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar, Politburo member Ravi Rai, AISA President Neha, students and activists from various organisations, members of civil society and hundreds of citizens marched towards Jantar Mantar, crossing several police barricades. Neha, Ravi Rai and several others were attacked and detained. They were released only late that night.

CPI(M) General Secretary Comrade M. A. Baby and several Central Committee members were also brutally attacked by the police during a protest from Harkishan Singh Surjeet Bhavan.

Reports of custodial torture emerged during the day. In one such incident, AISA leader Saurabh and several others were allegedly taken to a bathroom at Sanjay Colony Police Station in Maidan Garhi and beaten. They were released only the following morning after public pressure.

Delhi's transformation into a fortress, the mass preventive detentions and the violence against protesters exposed the lengths to which the authorities were prepared to go to suppress dissent. The capital was barricaded against its own people. Protesters were detained before they could even assemble, leaders were targeted, and those who managed to reach the streets faced police violence.

Yet the crackdown failed to extinguish the resistance. The flash protest at INA-Delhi Haat and the attempts to reach Jantar Mantar demonstrated that the people would not surrender their democratic rights simply because the regime had deployed overwhelming force. The events of October 10 became a powerful assertion that the streets belong

to the people, not to the police barricades erected to silence them.

Jantar Mantar Denotified, Protest Space Under Attack

On October 11, the authorities moved to shut down one of the last remaining major spaces for popular democratic protest in the national capital by denotifying Jantar Mantar as a designated protest site. The move came two days after a Supreme Court bench headed by the Chief Justice of India had called for an alternative venue for protests in Delhi.

From Boat Club to India Gate, from the Red Fort to Jantar Mantar, successive restrictions have pushed democratic protests farther away from Parliament, the very centre of people's representation. But the events of the preceding days had already shown that repression could not contain the resistance.

The attempt to close Jantar Mantar could not close down the struggle. In the days that followed, students, youth and democratic forces continued to mobilise, declaring: "If the regime shuts down one space for protest, thousands of Jantar Mantars will emerge everywhere." And they did.

October 12: Opposition Leaders and Students March Towards Supreme Court

In response to the militarised blockade and police violence of October 10, the INDIA bloc called for a mass protest on October 12 to submit a petition to the Supreme Court. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar, AISA President Neha and other INDIA bloc leaders,

along with student organisations, took to the streets and marched towards the Supreme Court.

AISA President Neha marched at the forefront alongside Rahul Gandhi and Congress leader and MP Priyanka Gandhi. The stretch from Mandi House towards the Supreme Court filled with protesters opposing Vote Chori and demanding justice. The march brought together Opposition leaders, students and youth in a joint assertion against electoral disenfranchisement and the suppression of democratic protest.

The march was significant in the context of the October 10 crackdown and the move to denotify Jantar Mantar. The demand for accountability from the Election Commission and the restoration of voting rights continued to bring people onto the streets despite the growing restrictions on peaceful protest.

The October 12 mobilisation demonstrated that the struggle against electoral disenfranchisement could not be contained through police action or the closure of protest sites. Opposition leaders, students and youth continued to assert their right to question the Election Commission and demand protection of the democratic right to vote.

October 13-17: Tiranga March and Further Arrests

On October 13, CJP leaders Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka defied the denotification of Jantar Mantar by unfurling the national flag at the protest site. They were detained and sent to judicial custody and were released only after spending seven days in custody.

On October 16, thousands of students, youth, activists and members of civil society took to

the streets carrying the national flag in a Tiranga March called by AISA, CJP, SFI, the All India Students' Federation (AISF) and other democratic organisations and voices. The march, from Mandi House to Connaught Place, demanded the defence of democracy and voting rights and opposed the move to denotify Jantar Mantar as a designated protest site.

Comrade Dipankar joined the march alongside hundreds of students, youth and activists. As the march began, Delhi Police and paramilitary forces launched another crackdown. AISA President Neha was specifically targeted and detained along with other protesters. CJP leader Abhijeet Dipke had been detained even before the march began, when police picked him up from outside his place of stay.

Despite the barricades and police repression, thousands gathered at Connaught Place and surrounding areas, carrying the Tiranga and raising their voices against electoral disenfranchisement. Protesters demanded the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, the scrapping of SIR and restoration of voting rights to those deleted from electoral rolls.

Addressing the march, Comrade Dipankar asked, "Is this the capital of barricades or the capital of freedom? No barricade can stop the people's assertion of their rights and their struggle for democracy!"

The police crackdown continued beyond the streets. Following their detention, Delhi Police refused for several hours to disclose to lawyers where Neha and Abhijeet were being held. Neha's whereabouts became known only late that night, while Abhijeet's were established the following morning, when he was produced before an SEM. Neha was released from R.K.



Puram Police Station at around 6.30 am on October 17, after spending the night in detention. Abhijeet was released on bail after being produced before the SEM.

The targeted detention of Neha and Abhijeet, and the refusal to disclose their whereabouts to their lawyers for hours, constituted a grave attack on democratic rights and the right to peaceful protest. The continued incarceration of Saurav and Ashutosh further exposed the coercive character of the crackdown. Arbitrary detention and police violence cannot be allowed to intimidate those defending democracy and voting rights.

The Tiranga March carried a clear message: the national flag cannot be reduced to a symbol used by those in power while citizens demanding their constitutional rights are met with barricades, detention and police violence. The right to vote, the right to protest and the right to hold those in power accountable are integral to the democratic freedoms the flag represents.

Protests Across the Country

The resistance against electoral disenfranchisement and the Modi-Shah regime's assault on democratic rights was not confined to Delhi. Protests and mobilisations across the country brought together Left parties, student and youth organisations, INDIA bloc constituents and democratic forces.

In Bihar, an INDIA bloc protest was organised in Patna on October 7. On October 13, Left student and youth organisations, including the All India Students' Association (AISA) and the Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA), organised a march to Lok Bhawan in Patna. Both mobilisations formed part of the wider opposition to electoral disenfranchisement and attacks on democratic institutions.

In Chennai, the INDIA bloc organised a protest rally on October 15. West Bengal witnessed a rally by Left student organisations, including AISA and SFI, at Dharmatala on October 11. Protests were also held in

Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Kerala, alongside mobilisations in other states.

In Bengaluru, a Tiranga March was held at the Quit India Memorial, with democratic forces joining the opposition to electoral disenfranchisement. Comrade Clifton D'Rozario, CPI(ML) Liberation Karnataka State Secretary and Central Committee member, addressed the gathering and demanded the rollback of SIR, the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar and restoration of voting rights to those deleted from electoral rolls.

The Struggle to Defend Democracy Will Continue

The events of September and October have laid bare the Modi-Shah regime's response to growing opposition to electoral fraud and disenfranchisement: militarisation of the capital, restrictions on protest sites, mass detentions, police violence and the targeting of student leaders, activists, journalists and citizens. The attempt to suppress dissent has extended from the streets to police stations, where the whereabouts of detainees have been concealed from their lawyers.

Yet the people have refused to retreat. The regime may erect barricades, shut down protest sites and unleash police repression, but it cannot extinguish the people's struggle for their democratic rights. The fight against fascist disenfranchisement and electoral fraud is inseparable from the broader struggle to defend democracy, and that struggle will continue.

CPI(ML) Liberation salutes the students, youth, activists, journalists, women protesters and members of civil society who have stood up to repression in defence of democracy. ■

CPIML Survey Exposes Wrongful Voter Deletions In Bihar

▲ KUMAR DIVYAM

A CPI(ML) survey has exposed large-scale wrongful deletion of voters from the electoral rolls in Bihar during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) carried out before the 2025 Legislative Assembly elections. The findings were presented by CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya at a press conference in Delhi on September 26th. The party has demanded an immediate halt to the SIR and restoration of voting rights of all those wrongly excluded. Voters who continue to live at their addresses and remain eligible cannot be made to bear the burden of correcting irregularities arising from the revision process.

The survey covered 10 Bihar Assembly constituencies. Its findings were also presented at a public hearing in Patna on October 1st, where many people deleted despite continuing to live in Bihar shared their experiences and exposed blatant violations by the Election Commission, which is making a mockery of the Constitution, the law and the spirit of justice.

The threat is no longer limited to the vote alone. Aadhaar, ration cards and other civil rights of citizens are also under threat. The voter ID card is a document of identity in our country, and the Election Commission has pushed citizens into a crisis of identity in their own land, where genuine voters must struggle for their very basic citizenship rights.

Evidently, the SIR is an entirely biased process, carried out to influence election results in favour of the ruling party. This is not a minor irregularity, but outright

vote theft perpetrated through the Election Commission and the Chief Election Commissioner. When the SIR began in Bihar in the name of cleaning and making the rolls accurate, the CPI(ML) opposed it strongly and ran a mass campaign across the state, the Voter Adhikar Yatra, because it was clear even then that the exercise only meant to steal people's right to vote in broad daylight.

The CPI(ML) conducted a door to door survey among people whose names were deleted from the rolls in 10 Assembly constituencies. The survey, which revealed shocking figures and exposed the false claims of the Election Commission and the Chief Election Commissioner about a clean and impartial electoral roll, was conducted in two phases, in June 2026 and September 2026, and covered 13,759 voters across 102 polling booths.

SIR Deletions: The survey found 36 voters who had been removed on the grounds that they were dead, but are alive and present at their homes. Of 9,288 voters deleted during the SIR across 50 polling booths in the 10 constituencies, 1,550 people, or approximately 16.7%, were found at their addresses. Deleted unlawfully, they no longer exist on the electoral rolls.

Pre-SIR Deletions: Names deleted before the SIR (between January 2024 and June 2025) were also surveyed. Of 1,964 voters across 24 polling booths, 351 were found present at their addresses, another 18% of wrongful deletions.

Pre-SIR Additions: Names added between January 2021 and June 2025 were surveyed as a separate category. Of 2,507 voters across 28 polling booths, approximately 22%

were absent from their addresses. This raises serious questions about the transparency and verification of the process of adding and deleting names.

CONSTITUENCY WISE FINDINGS

Bhore: Of 1,111 deleted names across five polling booths, 233 were present at their homes, i.e., approximately 21%. Under pre-SIR deletion, 73 of 303 voters across four polling booths were present, approximately 24%. Under pre-SIR addition, 100 of 310 voters across three polling booths were absent, approximately 32%.

Ziradei: Under SIR deletion, 122 of 665 voters across four polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR deletion, 15 of 189 voters across two polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 48 of 231 voters across three polling booths were absent.

Darauli: Of 1,253 voters deleted across seven polling booths, 216 were present but missing from the rolls. Under pre-SIR deletion, 15 of 237 voters across two polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 102 of 339 voters across three polling booths were absent.

Paliganj: Under SIR deletion, 111 of 782 voters across four polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR deletion, 30 of 182 voters across two polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 48 of 144 voters across two polling booths were absent.

Ara: Of 1,356 voters deleted under SIR across five polling booths, 160 were present. Under pre-SIR deletion, 3 of 148 voters were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 51 of 513 voters were absent.

Agiaon: Under SIR deletion, 77 of 735 voters across four polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR deletion, 46 of 204 voters across

three polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 29 of 209 voters across three polling booths were not found at their addresses.

Tarari: Of 878 voters examined under SIR deletion across four polling booths, 183 were found at their homes with names missing from the rolls. Under pre-SIR deletion, 54 of 241 voters across four polling booths were present. Under pre-SIR addition, 3 of 122 voters across two polling booths were absent.

Dumraon: Under SIR deletion, 151 of 697 voters across four polling booths were present, with names removed from the rolls. Under pre-SIR deletion, 42 of 94 voters across two polling booths were present, approximately 45%. Under pre-SIR addition, 69 of 172 voters across two polling booths were absent, approximately 40%.

Arwal: Under SIR deletion, 173 of 785 voters across six polling booths were present, approximately 22%. Under pre-SIR deletion, 11 of 125 voters across two polling booths were present, approximately 9%. Under pre-SIR addition, 27 of 191 voters across two polling booths were absent, approximately 14%.

Ghosi: Under SIR deletion, 124 of 1,026 voters across five polling booths were present, approximately 12%. Under pre-SIR deletion, 62 of 241 voters across two polling booths were present, approximately 26%. Under pre-SIR addition, 71 of 276 voters across three polling booths were absent, approximately 26%.

It is important to note that all these figures relate to just 102 polling booths in only 10 Assembly Constituencies. If the same proportion is applied to the 65 lakh names deleted in Bihar, approximately 14 lakh votes would be found to have been deleted unlawfully. Elections were conducted in Bihar after depriving such a large number of voters of their fundamental right to vote. ■

Public Hearing on SIR in Bihar: Moving Towards a Decisive Movement Against the Chief Election Commissioner



CPI(ML) Liberation organised a public hearing at the IMA Hall in Patna on October 1, on the implications of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls conducted before the last Assembly elections in Bihar, and on the findings of the party's survey.

Raheesh Kumar of Kanaura village in Paliganj and his wife, Rinku Devi, have both had their names deleted, with "shifted" recorded as the reason. Showing their voter ID cards, they said, "We voted in the Lok Sabha elections based on these very cards. We live here. But this time, on polling day, we were told that our names were not on the list. Where are we supposed to run around? Should we do our daily wage work or run around to the BLO and offices to get our names added to the electoral rolls? If we miss even one day of work, there will be no food at home."

Vishun Singh, aged 64, a resident of Wajitpur in Arwal, was also deleted on the ground that he had "shifted". He discovered this only at the polling booth and had to return without voting. He said, "This is a conspiracy. I have voted in so many elections, but this time my name has been deleted. Where should I go?" Vishun Singh is an illiterate.

A jury member, Professor Bharati S. Kumar, former Head of Department of History at Patna University, found the survey findings extremely shocking and disturbing. The survey of 102 polling booths had found living voters whose names were missing from the rolls. This raises serious questions about the functioning of the Election Commission, and Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar must be held accountable and removed immediately. She added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have no right to remain in office given their tacit political connivance with the Commission. The SIR, she said, poses a serious threat to the country's democracy and to citizens' voting rights. If a citizen's vote is removed from the rolls, how can their democratic rights be protected? A broad-based and decisive democratic movement must therefore be built across the country, around demands including Gyanesh Kumar's resignation and the accountability of the Election Commission.

Another jury member, Uday Narayan Chaudhary, former Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly, said the statements recorded during the survey raise serious questions and that a case of sedition

should be filed against the Chief Election Commissioner. Reports indicate that more than seven million names have been removed in a similar manner across all 243 Assembly constituencies in Bihar, in contravention of the spirit of the Constitution, which envisages government of the people, by the people and for the people. He said people must also raise their voices against the country's economic policies and the handing over of its resources to a few large corporate houses and foreign interests. He hoped the INDIA bloc would launch a powerful democratic movement in the national interest, not merely against one individual or institution, but for the protection of democracy, the Constitution and people's rights.

Jury Member Pushpendra, the national vice-president of PUCL, pointed out that the hearing was being held at a time when the people had lost faith in the government, and the government too had accepted that these people were not going to elect it. The SIR, therefore, has attempted to render the people's will meaningless so that the government can remain in power. The testimonies confirmed this. On the very day the Chief Justice of India was excluded by law from the process of appointing the Election Commission, its legitimacy became questionable. In matters concerning elections, whether delimitation or the violation of voting rights, the role of the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice has also not been responsible.

CPIML General Secretary, Comrade Dipankar said the situation has reached a point where the people are no longer choosing the government; rather, the government is deciding whom the people should choose. It was with this objective that a new law was enacted in 2023 to appoint the Election Commission through a committee comprising the Prime Minister, one of his

ministers and the Leader of the Opposition. This deeply weakened the institutional impartiality of the Commission. Moreover, the Chief Election Commissioner and his two colleagues have been granted legal protection, severely restricting the scope for action against them.

The Indian Express reported that Gyanesh Kumar was taking decisions even without the agreement of the other two members. After a meeting at 3 PM on September 26th, the Commission stated that agendas and minutes of future meetings would be made public, which itself shows the lack of transparency within it. When ordinary people are struggling with inflation and an economic crisis, why should there not be transparency regarding the functioning and expenditure of constitutional institutions? Why would those who gain political benefits from this system take action against it? A lack of accountability is also evident in elected representatives, who, instead of answering the people's questions, display arrogance.

The SIR exercise in Bengal was even more extensive than in Bihar. Millions of names were removed on grounds of logical discrepancies. Following complaints, tribunals were set up, and it emerged that the removals were also affecting large numbers of people whom the Commission itself was trying to exclude. Complaints have also emerged in Delhi about large-scale deletions. The Commission said later that no VIP's name would be deleted, but under Dr. Ambedkar's Constitution every citizen's vote is equal. There are no VIP voters in a democracy.

Serious questions are also being raised about the Commission's arrangements concerning Form 6. It is the Commission's responsibility to make the electoral rolls transparent and reliable, not to create a process

in which genuine voters have to struggle repeatedly for their rights.

Demands were raised for the repeal of the 2023 law, rectification of irregularities in the rolls, fresh elections wherever necessary, elections by ballot, and, above all, the removal of Gyanesh Kumar. The complaints and concerns expressed by election officials in Goa and Maharashtra about the Commission's functioning should be taken seriously.

The history of farmers' and youth movements tells us that even the biggest demands can be achieved through democratic struggle. A movement is the people's greatest strength in a democracy. It was through such a movement that the country won its independence, and it is through this path of democratic struggle that we will defend our Constitution, our rights and our votes.

The jury included Professor Bharati S. Kumar, former Head of the Department of History at Patna University; Professor Ramashankar Arya, former Vice-Chancellor of Veer Kunwar Singh University, Ara; Pushpendra, National Vice-President of the PUCL; Uday Narayan Chaudhary, former Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly; and Shakeel Ahmad Khan, senior Congress leader.

Many voters whose names were removed from the rolls through the SIR gave their testimonies on the occasion – including, Suresh Bhagat and Ram Surat Chaudhary from Bhore, Bhagwan Sah and Ramashankar Sah from Ziradei, Baiju Pandit, Kundan Manjhi and Kuli Qureshi from Ghosi, Suryadev Ram from Agiaon, Mantu Kumar, Kiran Devi, Raheesh Kumar, Shivshankar Yadav and Nandani Devi from Paliganj, and Ambika Manjhi from Darauli. ■

The Nepal Flood: An Unnatural Rise of Natural Disasters

▲ SHAIRIK SENGUPTA



On 26th August 2026, Nepal suffered a massive flood. A wall of water high as buildings (about 9 meters) roared down the Bhote-Koshi river, swept off everything in its path, leaving over a thousand people dead, and more than five thousand missing. While we rebuild from the aftermath, we must ask about the underlying cause of this disaster. Only then, can we hope to prevent such incidents in the future. And in order to find our answer, we must look at the history of disasters in the Himalayas and find the common thread.

The flood in Nepal originated in a massive block of the Langtang Lirung glacier breaking off and falling down more than a thousand meters, on the valley floor below. The mass of ice and rock debris was so great that the impact was mistaken for an earthquake. This impact set off the gigantic wave that caused havoc throughout the Bhote-Koshi valley. Unfortunately, similar incidents have happened earlier, with the Chamoli disaster (Uttarakhand, 7th February, 2021) being the most well-known. A similar rock and ice avalanche had caused a flood in the Rishiganga Valley which killed more than two

hundred people and destroyed two hydropower projects. One of these hydropower projects – Tapovan-Vishnugad – was cleared for re-construction just six months after the disaster, along with five more. The fact that an area established to be at flood risk was cleared for dam construction makes it clear that building dams has become a greater priority than human lives and wellbeing. Chamoli particularly, suffers more due to its position as a major junction on the road towards the India-China border – devastating constructions have been waived off as military requirements for national protection. These construction projects have been identified as the root cause of the massive land subsidence in Joshimath – the town sank about five centimeters over twelve days. While the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), responsible for these massive construction projects spends its time trying to portray local private construction and tourism for the land subsidence, over five hundred more towns sit in subsidence-risk zones. Chamoli district alone, hosts about fifty hydropower projects.

The obsession for “development” in risky areas is an obstinate threat, a unifying desire across political parties, governments, and even nations. After all, each signature on each clearance level for a massive project comes with massive financial perks for the signatory. The risk remains for the people living in (or being displaced from) the construction area. The refusal to restrict clearance despite risks is probably most clear in the case of Sikkim’s Teesta-III hydropower project. Since 2005, Affected Citizens of Teesta, an indigenous advocacy group, had warned about flood risks in the Teesta valley, as the South Lhonak Lake had swollen to dangerous levels. On 4th October, 2023, a permafrost

landslide dumped about fifteen million cubic metres of rock and ice into the South Lhonak Lake. The resulting wave breached the moraine, releasing roughly fifty million cubic metres of water and eroding 270 million cubic metres of sediment. It killed 129 people and destroyed the 1,200MW Teesta-III dam.

Teesta Urja (now Sikkim Urja) built the dam on a build-own-operate-transfer basis — 60% Sikkim government, the rest split between Athena Projects, Asian Genco and PTC India. The ₹13,965 crore project was debt-financed by a consortium led by two central government lenders, the Power Finance Corporation and the Rural Electrification Corporation. Earlier still, Western private equity — Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners, General Atlantic, Goldman Sachs Asset Management, Everstone Capital, and UK-based Ashmore — held equity through a holding vehicle and had already exited. The project was also registered under the UN's Clean Development Mechanism to earn carbon credits as a "clean" project, a classification watchdogs called fraudulent since the dam would have been built regardless of the carbon financing. The profits went to the central lenders who could count on the generated interest, and the private equity investors who structured and exited before 2023, regardless of what happened after; whoever brokered the carbon credits.

Disasters in Himalayas however, cannot be only seen as the fallout of money-making interests. Expansion of infrastructure is also a weapon of the expansion of Hindu majoritarian politics of current times.

Days of extreme rainfall, compounded by rapid snow/glacial melt and the collapse of the moraine-dammed Chorabari Lake

above the town, sent a debris-laden flood through Kedarnath and the wider Mandakini-Alaknanda system (16th June, 2013). Estimates of the dead and missing run above 4,000, making it one of the deadliest Himalayan disasters on record. A Supreme Court bench had reserved judgment on a hydropower environmental-clearance case in the same river basin one month before the disaster hit — and went on to note the "mushrooming" of hydro projects, tunnelling, muck disposal and blasting across the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi basins as a likely amplifier. In August 2013, the Court froze all new hydro clearances and ordered an expert review. That freeze did not hold: it took until May 2026 — thirteen years and at least four more major disasters in the same basin (Chamoli 2021, Joshimath 2023, Dharali 2025) — for the central government to finally tell the Court it opposed any new hydro projects in the Alaknanda-Bhagirathi system beyond seven already committed. Kedarnath is one of the Char Dham, so its reconstruction was never just an engineering project. It became a high-visibility signature project associated with Prime Minister Modi personally — he has visited repeatedly, and in May 2019, on the final day of national election polling, he meditated overnight in a cave near the shrine, an event covered heavily by national media. While such electoral shenanigans have kept the BJP's Hindu vote flow alive, it is the locals and the seasonal workers — pony operators, porters, dhaba owners — who service the pilgrims who now face extra risk from the expanded Char Dham infrastructure in an established fragile area.

The Char Dham infrastructure, a flagship of the Hindu majoritarian project, has caused more disasters across time and space.

On 5th August 2025, a flash flood hit Dharali (Harshil Valley, Uttarakhand). The valley had filled with hotels built to serve the fast-growing Char Dham pilgrimage trade, resulting in commercial construction sitting directly in the flood's path. Five people died and a hundred are still missing. The ₹12,000 crore, 889 km Char Dham Highway is declared by the government to be dual-purpose: pilgrimage tourism and troop/missile-equipment movement to the India-China border. When environmentalists challenged the road-widening in the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Defense intervened directly, and the court ruled that the width standards for "strategic" segments couldn't be second-guessed against military necessity. Pilgrim presence has burgeoned, as has the pockets of NHIDCL's private road-building contractors. Natural disasters like cloudbursts or flash floods may come without warning, but putting more people in the path of disaster is an informed irresponsible choice for the sake of political prestige.

Similar Hindu majoritarian projects have claimed lives elsewhere. A cloudburst hit Chisoti village during the Machail Mata Yatra pilgrimage (August 2025), killing seventy people, and injuring three hundred, with dozens missing. Roads had been recently extended all the way to Chisoti, specifically to grow pilgrim volume. Until a few years ago, pilgrims walked the entire route. Kishtwar's own district administration and allied media have explicitly and publicly framed this as a deliberate strategy: an August 2026 feature (in *Organiser*, a publication aligned with the Hindu nationalist movement) described Kishtwar's transformation "From North India's Power Capital to North India's Religious Tourism Hub," crediting the Machail Mata Yatra as "the driving force" of that shift — published a full year after

the cloudburst killed dozens of pilgrims on the very route being promoted.

The infrastructure, therefore, cannot be taken as an experimental mistake on the government's part, stemming from the government's innocent desire to only serve citizens. The abrogation of article 370 in 2019 has acted as an effective tool to change Jammu and Kashmir's demographic. The infrastructure expansion in the name of development for pilgrimage is part of the same majoritarian agenda.

Hindu majoritarian politics trash India's own mountains while claiming to save the Hindu's in danger, but the same government adopts foreign policies putting more people at risk. China has financed and built hydropower and infrastructure in Nepal since roughly 2010 as part of its wider Belt and Road push; the Pokhara International Airport (~\$216 million, financed by a loan from China's Export-Import Bank) is the most-cited example, and is now widely reported as underused and unable to service its own debt. India, in turn, changed its own power-purchase policy in 2018 to explicitly refuse to buy electricity from any Nepali hydropower project with Chinese investment — using market access as a geopolitical lever against Beijing's presence, not for any stated technical reason. India has since won far more Nepali hydropower operating contracts than China (10 vs. 5, per 2023 reporting). Nepal, sandwiched between two much larger powers competing for hydropower influence, has strong incentive to approve rapid, competing infrastructure build-outs across fragile Himalayan valleys — exactly the terrain where Thame, Rasuwagadhi, and the 2026 Langtang Lirung disaster all befell — without the

kind of coordinated, cross-border hazard monitoring a less contested border region might manage. The Rasuwagadhi/Trishuli corridor is not incidental infrastructure; it is the literal trade and hydropower artery this India-China competition was built around, and it has now flooded catastrophically twice in thirteen months (July 2025, August 2026). Chinese and Indian state-linked engineering and financing firms have clear benefits, whichever government scores the geopolitical win of influence in Nepal. Nepal's own political and NEA elites navigating the contracts also win. The ones to lose, in all scenarios are the rural communities in the fastest-building, least-monitored valleys, and Nepal's broader economy — tied on one side to an export market (India) that can cut it off with a unilateral policy change, and on the other to debt-financed connectivity (China) whose repayment burden lands on the Nepali state regardless of whether the project ever performs.

In the discussion so far, we have implied climate change is a fact of nature, an apolitical force, and we must adapt our climate change related disaster responses accordingly. We should be clear that this is not at all the case. Climate change may have been driven historically by the developed nations, but the changed climate affects tropical nations like ours disproportionately. Developed countries are responsible for nearly 80 per cent of global cumulative carbon emissions over the last two centuries, while hosting only fourteen percent of the global population. South Asian countries all rank in the twenty nations most vulnerable to climate change. In just the last decade, human mortality due to climate change related disasters was fifteen times higher than in less vulnerable, developed countries. Even a small warming

causes our glaciers and permafrost to melt faster, our weather to behave more chaotically. Recent studies show that if current emissions continue, the Himalayas could lose up to eighty percent of its glaciers — directly affecting 240 million people in the mountains and over 1.5 billion people in the valleys below. And hence, India cannot keep campaigning on the global stage for relaxations to emissions, but should rather use its economic and strategic strength to enforce strict emission norms. The past few climate summits have mostly been a fervent campaign by world leaders to scuttle emission norms for the sake of non-renewable energy interests. The ruling government's irresponsible actions towards the global and Indian environment surely benefit corporations like Adani who are all too happy to be in both mining and power plant business at the same time. In a time where public transport needs to be developed to ensure most people can move around with least emissions, the ruling governments across India seem to be obsessed with encouraging private transport and associated infrastructure (e.g. a tunnel road in Bengaluru disguised as a congestion relieving mechanism). The central government has attacked the Indian railways' passenger trains (while celebrating a few Vande Bharat trains). India can not afford to take insufficient environmental protection measures. It is us who are most at risk from climate change related disasters. And India has enough scientific and technical capability and creativity to develop climate solutions. Climate change is not a lost cause unless we decide to give up on ourselves. And as the recent movement across the nation showed, it is better to give up on leaders who have given up on everyone but themselves than to die silently in masses. ■

PART I

Anandamath, Vande Mataram and the Making of Hindu Nationalist Imagination

▲ **SOUVIK GHOSHAL**

1

Few works of nineteenth-century Indian literature have acquired as complicated a political afterlife as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 'Anandamath'. Fewer still have produced a symbol as powerful and contested as 'Vande Mataram.' The history of 'Anandamath' and "Vande Mataram" cannot be adequately understood through either of two conventional narratives. The first celebrates Bankim as an uncomplicated prophet of Indian nationalism and reads "Vande Mataram" exclusively as the sacred song of the anti-colonial struggle. The second reads Bankim, simply as the precursor of modern Hindu communalism, and treats 'Anandamath' as little more than an early manifesto of Hindu nationalism.

Both interpretations are inadequate.

Bankim was a considerably more complicated intellectual figure. His early literary career was shaped by colonial modernity, Western education, rationalism, social criticism and the emerging Bengali middle class. His later writings, however, increasingly sought the regeneration of Indian society through a reconstruction of Hindu ethical and religious thought. In this transformation, the nation increasingly appeared not merely as a political community, but as a sacred cultural entity.

That transformation is crucial

to understand the political career of 'Anandamath'. It is equally important to distinguish Bankim from those who came later. Bankim did not formulate Savarkar's doctrine of Hindutva. He did not establish the Hindu Mahasabha or the RSS. He could not have anticipated the political programmes of Savarkar, Hedgewar or Golwalkar. Yet, the intellectual and symbolic vocabulary he developed – Mother India as a sacred mother, the recovery of Hindu civilisational strength, the moral regeneration of society, disciplined self-sacrifice, the fusion of religious imagery with national consciousness and the representation of Hindu history as a source of political regeneration – provided an extraordinarily fertile cultural resource for later Hindu nationalist politics.

The story, therefore, is not one of simple ideological inheritance. It is a story of "appropriation, transformation and political reinterpretation".

2

To understand Bankim's later nationalism, one must first resist the temptation to read his entire literary career backwards from 'Anandamath'. Bankim's early fiction belongs to a very different intellectual world. With 'Durgeshnandini' (1865), followed by 'Kapalkundala', 'Mrinalini', 'Vishabriksha', 'Indira', 'Chandrashekhara', 'Rajani' and eventually 'Krishnakanter Will' (1878), Bankim helped create the modern Bengali novel. The

central concerns of these works were not yet the construction of a Hindu nation. They included love, marriage, sexuality, family, property, social convention, female agency, morality and the conflict between individual desire and social norms. This was the world of a colonial intelligentsia negotiating modernity.

Bankim was deeply influenced by European literature and intellectual thought. He was neither a simple traditionalist nor a defender of an unchanging Hindu social order. He was fascinated by science, rational inquiry and the intellectual resources of the West, even while becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the cultural and moral consequences of colonial domination.

The importance of this early phase becomes particularly evident when we consider 'Samya'. Published in 1879, 'Samya' contained a striking engagement with the question of social inequality. Bankim subsequently withdrew the work from circulation as part of his authorised writings. This decision was significant, although it should not be converted into the simplistic claim that Bankim was once a "socialist" and later became a Hindu nationalist.

The change was subtler. The central question of his intellectual life was shifting. The Earlier Bankim was preoccupied with the problems of "individual and social reform". The Later Bankim increasingly became preoccupied with the "moral regeneration of a civilisation". And in his search for the foundations of that regeneration, he turned increasingly towards Hindu religious thought. By the late 1870s, Bankim was increasingly concerned with the question of why Indian society appeared politically weak and morally disorganised under colonial

rule. The answer he increasingly developed was not simply political. 'India needed a moral reconstruction'. Religion, in this new formulation, was not merely ritual or private faith. It was a source of ethical discipline, social duty and collective strength. This was the intellectual soil from which 'Anandamath' emerged. The transformation is particularly important, because Bankim did not merely return to traditional Hinduism. He attempted to "reconstruct Hinduism through the categories of modernity".

He subjected religious traditions to rational examination. He reinterpreted Krishna. He engaged with the Bhagavad Gita. He sought to identify an ethical core within Hindu religion that could produce disciplined, active and morally regenerated human beings. The Later Bankim was, therefore, neither simply orthodox, nor simply modernist. He was attempting to create a modern Hindu moral philosophy. This was the basis of his Later Nationalism.

3

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* is one of those Bengali novels whose influence has extended far beyond the literary sphere, leaving a substantial imprint on society, politics and historical consciousness. Bankim drew some of its materials from a particular chapter of history — the Sannyasi Rebellion. But, he altered those historical materials to such an extent that *Anandamath* can no longer be regarded simply as a historical novel.

Bankim had already demonstrated his extraordinary ability to blend history and imagination in *Rajsingha*. He had shown how effectively the historical past could be employed as a backdrop for romance and

adventure in *Durgeshnandini* and *Kapalkundala*. In *Chandrashekhara*, he had demonstrated his distinctive skill in placing the moral crises of society and family against a historical background. Again and again, Bankim showed how history could be appropriated and reshaped for different literary purposes.

In *Anandamath*, however, he used history for a different and more explicitly political purpose. Here, the historical setting becomes the vehicle for articulating a political vision.

At the centre of *Anandamath*, stands a group known as the Santan community — the "Children." The real architect and ideological guide of this organisation remains largely in the shadows. Only towards the end, we hear, through the enigmatic physician, the philosophical, historical and political ideas that lie behind the movement.

Throughout most of the novel, the visible leader of the Santan order is Satyananda. His principal associates are Bhavananda, Jibananda, Dhirānanda and other ascetics who have renounced domestic life and dedicated themselves to the worship and service of the Mother. Under the leadership of Satyananda, Bhavananda and Jibananda, the Santan organisation steadily expands.

Their struggle is directed against the existing rulers.

The historical background is the period following the Battle of Plassey and the Battle of Buxar, when the East India Company had acquired the Diwani, or effective economic authority, over Bengal, while formal political sovereignty still nominally remained with the Nawab. After the defeat of Siraj-ud-daulah at Plassey and Mir Qasim at Buxar, the Nawabs of

Bengal had effectively become puppets of the East India Company. Mir Jafar and his successors occupied the throne largely in name.

It was during this chaotic period of dual government that the Sannyasis launched their attacks. Again and again, the leaders of the Santan order insist that a ruler who fails to protect his subjects has no legitimate claim to their allegiance.

But, it becomes equally clear that their objective is not merely to overthrow an ineffective or oppressive government. They seek to destroy Muslim rule and establish Hindu rule in its place. According to the Santan leaders, Muslims obstruct the Hindus in the practice of their religion and, therefore, must be weakened and ultimately expelled by whatever means necessary.

One of the most revealing statements occurs when the Santan leaders describe the condition of the country: "Of all the countries—Magadha, Mithila, Kashi, Kanchi, Delhi, Kashmir—where is there such misery? In what country do people eat grass because they have no food? Eat thorns? Eat termites? Eat forest creepers? In what country do people eat jackals and dogs, eat corpses? In what country can people not keep money safely in their chests, cannot sleep peacefully with a Shalagrama on the throne, cannot keep their wives and daughters-in-law safely in their homes? They rip open a woman's belly to take out her child. With every other king there is a relationship of protection and maintenance with his subjects; but where does our Muslim ruler protect us? Religion is gone, caste is gone, honour is gone, lineage is gone—and now even life itself is disappearing. If these drunken, shaven-heads are

not driven out, what remains of Hindu identity?" The political logic is unmistakable. The Santans are not simply rebels against misrule. Their rebellion is increasingly articulated as a project of Hindu political restoration.

The Santan organisation consists, on the one hand, of several thousand men forming a relatively well-organised fighting force and, on the other, of a smaller but ideologically committed leadership. Not all members of the army are religious initiates. Some participate for material rewards. But, the leadership belongs exclusively to those who have accepted the ideological discipline of the order.

Satyananda explains: "The Children are of two kinds—initiated and uninitiated. Those who are uninitiated are householders or beggars. They appear only when there is war, and after receiving their share of the loot or some other reward, they leave. Those who are initiated have renounced everything. They are the leaders of the community. I do not ask you to become an initiated Child; there are plenty of men with sticks and clubs for fighting. Unless you are initiated, you will have no authority in any serious work of the community."

Thus, Anandamath does not merely present a collection of philosophical rebels. It depicts a movement with an organisational structure, ideological initiation and military discipline. The Sannyasis recruit thousands of volunteers, initiate them into the cult of the Mother and inspire them to sacrifice their lives. They establish weapons workshops, construct fortifications and dig defensive moats around them. Mahendra, a powerful zamindar, becomes an important supporter of these activities. The movement, therefore, possesses the essential

characteristics of an organised revolutionary force: recruitment, ideological training, military preparation, financial resources, weapons production and territorial defence.

The political ideology of Anandamath is inseparable from its conception of religion. Satyananda identifies the Santans as Vaishnavas, but immediately makes it clear that their Vaishnavism is radically different from the devotional tradition associated with Chaitanya.

When asked how the Santans can be Vaishnavas when non-violence is regarded as the supreme principle of Vaishnavism, Satyananda responds:

"That is Chaitanya's Vaishnavism. This is merely the half-religion that arose in imitation of atheistic Buddhism. The true characteristic of Vaishnavism is the suppression of evil and the rescue of the earth. Vishnu is the preserver of the universe. He has taken bodily form ten times to rescue the earth. He himself destroyed the demons Kesi, Hiranyakashipu, Madhu-Kaitabha, Mura and Naraka; the Rakshasas such as Ravana; and kings such as Kamsa and Shishupala. He is the conqueror, the giver of victory, the saviour of the earth, and the chosen deity of the Children."

Satyananda then draws an explicit distinction between the loving Vishnu of Chaitanya and the powerful Vishnu of the Santans: "Chaitanya's Vishnu is full of love—but God is not merely full of love; He is infinite in power. Chaitanya's Vishnu is only loving; the Vishnu of the Children is only powerful. We are both Vaishnavas—but both are only half-Vaishnavas." This is

politically significant. Bankim is reconstructing Vaishnavism as a doctrine of power, discipline, combat and political action. The passive or purely devotional Hindu is rejected. In his place stands the militant religious subject — the warrior who regards the suppression of the enemy as a religious duty. This transformation of religious doctrine is central to the ideological architecture of Anandamath.

Yet, the political trajectory of the Santan movement contains a remarkable contradiction. Satyananda and the other Santans initially wish to move towards confrontation with the English, who are steadily emerging as the new rulers of Bengal. But their hidden leader, the mysterious physician, ultimately rejects that course.

Indeed, the novel's conclusion makes an extraordinary argument: English rule will bring peace, order and welfare; it will put an end to the disorder associated with Muslim rule and, paradoxically, create the conditions necessary for the eventual revival of Sanatana Dharma. Even before the final chapter, the novel repeatedly hints at this distinction between Muslim disorder and English rule.

For example, Bankim writes: "The Kotwal informed the royal government and had the Brahmachari and Mahendra confined in prison. That prison was terrible; almost no one who entered ever came out, because there was no one to administer justice. It was not an English prison — for there was no English administration of justice then. Today is the age of order; then was the age of disorder. Compare the age of order with the age of disorder."

The contrast is deliberate. The Muslim political order is associated

with arbitrary rule; English rule is associated with law, order and institutional governance. The most explicit articulation of this political position comes in the final chapter of the novel.

In the eighth chapter of the fourth part, the hidden protagonist finally emerges and reveals the political logic behind the entire movement. Satyananda and the other Santans wish to continue their struggle not only against the old Muslim regime, but also against the rising power of the English, because they ultimately desire the establishment of the Hindu rule.

The physician tells them otherwise. "The English are not the enemy; they are the allied power." The exchange deserves close attention. Satyananda asks why, at the very moment when he has defeated the enemy and cleared the path for Sanatana Dharma, he has been ordered to abandon the struggle. The answer is unequivocal: "Your task has been accomplished. The Muslim kingdom has been destroyed. You have no further task. There is no need for further bloodshed." Satyananda objects: "The Muslim kingdom has been destroyed, but Hindu rule has not been established. The English are still powerful in Calcutta." The physician replies: "Hindu rule will not be established now. If you remain, there will be needless slaughter. Therefore, come." Satyananda is devastated. If Hindu rule is not to be established, he asks, who will rule? Will the Muslims return? The answer is: "No. The English will now rule." The physician then gives the ideological justification: "The English are highly learned in external knowledge and highly skilled in educating people. Therefore we shall make the English rulers. Through English

education, the people of this country will become educated in external knowledge and will thereby become capable of understanding inner truth. Then there will be no obstacle to the propagation of Sanatana Dharma."

This is one of the most politically revealing passages in *Anandamath*. The novel does not end with a straightforward call for immediate anti-colonial liberation. Instead, its hidden political philosophy proposes that British rule is historically useful, because it can provide the knowledge, education and social discipline necessary for the eventual regeneration of Hindu civilisation. The English, therefore, are not simply enemies. They are temporarily useful instruments of history. The physician goes even further: "As long as the Hindu is not once again knowledgeable, virtuous and strong, English rule will remain unbroken. Under English rule, the people will be happy and will practise their religion without hindrance."

Satyananda, however, refuses to accept this logic. His emotional commitment remains with the Mother. The physician tells him: "Your vow has succeeded. You have served the welfare of the Mother — you have established English rule." This is perhaps the greatest irony in the political structure of *Anandamath*. The Santans believe that they are fighting for the Mother. Yet, according to the novel's hidden ideological authority, their rebellion itself has helped establish the political conditions for British rule. The Sannyasi warrior imagines himself as the liberator of the Mother; the physician tells him that his historical task is to prepare the ground for British rule. Thus, *Anandamath* contains a striking political paradox: the destruction of Muslim political

power is presented as the necessary precondition for Hindu regeneration, while British rule is presented as the temporary historical instrument through which that regeneration can ultimately become possible.

This is where the historical foundations of *Anandamath* become particularly problematic. The novel draws its inspiration from the Sannyasi Rebellion, which took place intermittently from approximately 1763 to 1800. But, Bankim had to significantly alter the historical record in order to make it fit his narrative. The actual rebellion cannot be reduced to a Hindu struggle against Muslims. It was, in substantial measure, a peasant rebellion in which Hindus and Muslims participated together. Majnu Shah was one of the principal leaders of the movement. Nurul Muhammad was another important leader. Yet, Bankim recasts this historical rebellion through his own ideological perspective and presents it primarily as a struggle against Muslims. This creates a fundamental tension between history and narrative. The historical Sannyasi movement does not fit neatly into Bankim's Hindu nationalist reconstruction of the past. The novel, therefore, transforms history rather than reproduce it. The contradiction becomes particularly striking in the battles described in *Anandamath*.

In the actual conflicts represented in the novel, the names of English officers — such as Thomas and Edward — are mentioned. Yet, no Muslim military commander is given comparable individual representation. At the same time, the battle cry repeatedly used by the Santans is: "Mar Nere!" — "Kill the Muslims!". The historical enemy is, therefore, selectively reconstructed.

Bankim takes a complex anti-colonial and agrarian rebellion involving both Hindus and Muslims, and reshapes it into a predominantly Hindu political drama, in which Muslim rule becomes the principal historical antagonist. The result is not history. It is political myth constructed out of history.

Bankim transforms history into political mythology. The Sannyasis are transformed from historical figures into disciplined warrior-ascetics who subordinate personal existence to the cause of the Mother. The most important conceptual innovation of 'Anandamath' is, therefore, not its historical setting, but the transformation of the nation into a sacred object. The country is no longer merely land. It becomes "Mother" – and the Mother is progressively visualised through Hindu religious imagery. This is a revolutionary political metaphor.

Modern nationalism generally requires an imagined community that transcends local loyalties. Bankim supplied such a community with an extraordinarily powerful emotional symbol: the motherland as Mother. But, the metaphor contained an unresolved contradiction. If the Mother is simply the land of all Indians, the symbol can potentially embrace everyone. But, if the Mother is represented through specifically Hindu divine forms, the universal political community begins to acquire a particular religious identity. That tension would remain embedded in "Vande Mataram" and would eventually become unavoidable in twentieth-century Indian politics.

(To be continued) ■

Funding Genocide, Defunding Education: On Student Protests in France

▲ ASMITA PATHAK

Over 8 lakh demonstrators have taken to the streets of France in the last month. While the protests started as a focused student movement demanding better infrastructure and funding for education, the heavy-handed response of the national government has diversified the demographics and aims of the movement, and brought the economic crises facing the country into sharp relief.

GDP per capita in France has stagnated to less than 1% annual growth rate since the economic crisis of 2008, and youth unemployment currently stands at a staggering 20%. This has created a cyclical condition where the government cannot generate enough tax revenue, forcing it to borrow: France's total debt now stands at more than its entire GDP.

As the demonstrators shun conservatives and liberals, they have welcomed the French Left, which finds its voice in Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Mélenchon, leader of the La France Insoumise, has publicly called for "freezing" the national debt owed to the Bank of France and the European Central Bank's Eurosystem, a move that would likely trigger a fissure in the Eurozone.

In some ways, France represents the malaise that spreads through European imperial core: its other major economies like Germany, Spain and Italy have gone through periods of high inflation. Youth unemployment in Spain and Italy also exceeds 20%, and their national debt is also soaring. These crises in Europe are exacerbated by the subservience of its political class to US whims, which promotes militarisation and international adventurism instead of heeding the demands of the working classes. —Ed.

In 2025, as a lecture ended at my university in Paris, I noticed a few students talking with the professor. They needed to leave early, and I heard her say she would try to give them as much time as possible before the other classes finished. It made little sense to me at the time; it seemed an otherwise ordinary day, and I paid it no attention. As I left the building, however, I saw those same students standing outside with a megaphone. They had hung a banner on the front gate and were chanting, "Free, Free Palestine!" Was this why they had left class early? Was this what the professor had been referring to?

Demonstrations like this are common at most public universities in France. Students often organise a blocus (blockade), a well-established protest strategy in which they barricade the institution's entrance with heavy objects, often garbage bins, and halt all academic activity to pressure the administration and the government. French students learn to mobilise and voice their political opinions as early as high school. This has been especially visible in recent weeks, with lycéens (high-schoolers) demonstrating

since late September to make their grievances heard.

What began as a strike at the Lycée Saint-Exupéry in Créteil, a Parisian suburb, has since spread nationwide. According to the French newspaper *actuParis*, the first protests began on September 21st, when students joined a teachers' strike over low pay and insufficient postings. Drawing on the broader discontent of other public servants, including firefighters and nurses, the students organised a blocus that quickly gained momentum in other suburban schools. According to *The Guardian*, approximately 400 high schools were blockaded, prompting the national high-school union, *Union Syndicale Lycéenne*, to call for a nationwide blockade and mobilisation on September 29th.

While the late-September demonstrations served as a starting point, the union followed up on October 1st with what it called "Acte 2" (Act 2), extending the high-school protests to universities with the support of unions, including *La Fage*, *L'Union Étudiante*, and *L'Unef*. Multiple universities across France joined the mobilisation. Public spaces, too, were marked by violence and brutal police repression. Minister of Education Édouard Geffray claimed that violent groups had infiltrated the mobilisation and ordered a shift to online education as high schools closed. As the movement spread across the country, protests turned decidedly violent in several locations, with demonstrators beaten and tear-gassed. In one harrowing incident in Lens, a high-school student was severely injured when a grenade exploded in his hand.

The students' protests stem from the current government's policies, which have brought

significant budget cuts across major public sectors. According to *France 24*, the government aims to save 43 billion euros amid spiralling public debt. These austerity measures include freezing wages and pensions and fund cuts for almost all public services. In education alone, the government has eliminated 1,588 teaching posts, cuts that Geffray has defended by pointing to declining student enrolment.

In announcing the nationwide protest, the high-school union cited teaching staff shortages, poor infrastructure, and densely packed timetables that keep students at school for exhausting hours. Students also raised complaints about *Parcoursup*, the French platform for university admissions introduced by the Macron government in 2018. Earlier, students were admitted to university through *APB* (Admission Post-Bac), meaning admission based on the *Baccalauréat* exam. More importantly, universities were not allowed to take in students completely on the basis of merit. *Parcoursup* transformed this process by prioritising merit and allowing students to be selected based on their academic standing. Students argued that its reliance on continuous assessment and merit ignores the realities of racial and financial hardship, since students from underfunded suburban schools are structurally disadvantaged by algorithmic grading. Crucially, French students have also spoken out against differentiated (higher) tuition fees for non-European students and demanded the abolition of the *CVEC*, a 100-euro student service fee paid at enrolment alongside tuition, another policy adopted by the Macron government as part of the "Bienvenue en France" (Choose France) program

aiming to increase the number of international students in France. Earlier, both European and non-European students paid a subsidised amount (243 euros for Masters and 170 euros for Bachelors).

Yet, while the government repeatedly cites ballooning debt when students demand adequate funding for what is a constitutional right, it simultaneously displays opulence in military and ammunition deals. According to an *Al Jazeera* article titled "'Multiple Threats': Macron Raises France's Military Budget 40%," the military budget for 2024–2030 will stand at 413 billion euros, up significantly from the 295 billion euros allocated over the previous six years. Furthermore, an investigation led by the Palestinian Youth Movement and the French collective *Urgence Palestine* revealed that France continues to supply military equipment to Israel, contrary to government claims made in 2024.

The glaring contradiction between the students' grievances and France's budgetary priorities suggests that the government is more interested in funding the research and development of armaments, used to perpetrate violence both against its own citizens as they protest and in Palestinian conflict zones. The students, therefore, are not just complaining about overloaded timetables and a lack of toilet paper. They are demanding accountability from a government that chooses to turn a blind eye to the precarious circumstances of its own people, while emptying its coffers for what can only be complicity in genocidal violence. ■

“Housing is a Class Struggle”: On the Growing Housing Movement in Spain

▲ SURYO

Spain has seen a new wave of housing protests after a series of evictions brought the country's deepening housing crisis into sharp focus. Among them was the eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal in Madrid, who died in early October, two weeks after losing her home. On 2 October, the government's housing decrees were voted down in the Congress of Deputies, with the PP, Vox and Junts voting against, and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called a snap election for 29 November. The movement is now preparing for a general strike on 11 November, bringing together housing organisations, the major trade unions, and the feminist, anti-racist and ecological movements.

Liberation spoke with Sarah Bretschko, social scientist at ICTA, Autonomous University of Barcelona, and an environmental and urban neighbourhood organiser based in Barcelona, Spain about the economic conditions behind the protests, the organisation of the movement, its demands and the possibilities for a broader working-class struggle.

The protests drew international attention after the eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal in Madrid, who has since died. But evictions have been happening in Spain for many years. What explains the eruption of the movement at this particular moment?

SARAH BRETSCSKO: First of all, it's actually not a single eviction. What has been reported in international media is the eviction of Maricarmen in Madrid on 23 September. But a few weeks prior to that, a 54-year-old woman, Olga, who lived in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat in the suburbs of Barcelona, took her own life after having been evicted from her home. It's a less pretty case, because she was a much poorer woman. She left behind two kids. Within the movement in Spain, her death was another key trigger for why the protests kicked off as strongly as they have.

These evictions, although they might be portrayed as extreme

cases in international media, are actually something that happens every week. In each city in Spain, and more so in the bigger cities, the housing syndicate calls for protests to prevent evictions practically every single week. The eviction of Maricarmen and the death of Olga were the drop that caused an already extremely explosive issue to boil over.

The material conditions are key to understanding this. Rents have been rising enormously over the last five to ten years, while there has been a complete stagnation of salaries for the working classes in Spain basically since the turn of the century. The segment of the working class that depends on renting because it doesn't have access to buying flats is in an extremely precarious situation. Renter protection is very, very weak in Spain, and people don't have the possibility to find new rental contracts when their contracts run out.

All of this comes in combination

with rising costs of living in general, with a very racist rental market where people who aren't from a Spanish background are discriminated against a lot, and with tourism, which causes the proliferation of short-term rental contracts and the removal of apartments from the market. But at the heart of it is this extreme increase in rents and the stagnation of salaries, in a very neoliberalised housing market.

How would you describe the organisation and participation of the movement? Is it primarily organised through housing syndicates (tenants' unions), or are trade unions, students and political organisations also participating?

I would say the backbone of the movement is the renters' union, the Sindicat de Llogateres, as it's called in Catalan. It is organised in neighbourhood sections, or town sections in smaller places, with umbrella organisations that usually work regionally. The strongest ones are in Barcelona and Madrid.

These organisations have been active for many years. At the neighbourhood level, they focus on supporting people who are in precarious situations because of the housing market. They try to prevent evictions, find new places to live for people who are evicted, and help you if you have problems with your landlord.

But the umbrella organisations have been very active in recent years in politicising housing. They replaced a narrative that said the problem is too little supply for too much demand with one that says this is actually a class struggle. The problem is a neoliberalised housing market where housing is treated as an asset, with a flood of international speculative investment funds buying up



housing and speculating with it. That has been a very strong contribution by the movement.

What makes the movement stronger right now is that it has reached a scale where other movements and organised groups are starting to collaborate in this struggle. There will be a general strike on 11 November. There has been dialogue between the main unions and the housing syndicate before, but this is the first actual material collaboration where all the major trade unions are on board. The feminist movement, the anti-racist movement and the ecological movement are now also organising to support the housing struggle.

The general strike is still a few weeks away. How is the movement building towards it?

Sarah Bretschko: In the weeks after the protests broke out following Maricarmen's eviction, protest camps were set up in Madrid and Barcelona, and they are still ongoing.

Since the strike was called, strike committees have been forming,

usually at the level of each neighbourhood and also at the level of sectors. So the teachers' union has its strike committee, but your neighbourhood also has a strike committee. These groups have started to meet weekly, and I suppose that in the week leading up to the strike they will meet even more often. They are organising what the strike will look like in their specific neighbourhood and mobilising more people, for example bringing on board small shops and other business owners.

The renters' syndicate has experience with this. In the past it has gone door to door to mobilise for demonstrations and, more importantly, for rent strikes in buildings that were supposed to be evicted. So now there is a big effort to get more people on board who aren't already involved in the housing struggle. I can only speak for Barcelona from personal experience, but the neighbourhood strike committees are really well attended. There are around a hundred people from each neighbourhood coming to

the committees, and then they report back to their groups. It seems quite powerful at this point.

What are the immediate demands of the movement, and how does the political situation in Spain under Pedro Sánchez's government affect the prospects of achieving them?

There is a list of demands that the housing syndicate has communicated, which can basically be summarised in the new decree that is supposed to be passed at the national level. A new housing decree was supposed to be passed in the week after Maricarmen's eviction, but it was voted down by Vox, the far-right party [along with the PP and Junts]. So right now there is no significant change in the housing law. And the strike will take place around three weeks before the elections that Sánchez called after this fallout. Housing will be the central issue of these elections, so that timing is also in play.

Sánchez's party is basically so-called social democratic. He is very good discursively and likes to position himself broadly in line with what many left movements have been struggling for in recent years, also on Palestine, for example. But it's a discursive move. Everyone in Spain understands that Sánchez is not actually a socialist, as he sometimes gets portrayed in international media.

On the one hand, having such a strong movement at a moment of elections where housing is the central issue is an opportunity. With Sánchez in power, there is a chance that this decree actually gets passed and that there is some legal change in terms of renters' law and protection. But it's not a given. If there is not enough

pressure from the streets, it is very easy for Sánchez to just say, okay, I will pass a watered-down version of this decree, and that's it. So in some way the situation is favourable for the movement, because the ruling party is not completely opposed to it. But it's also not that we actually have a left government, or a government that's far from the political centre.

Suppose the legislation does go through. Do you expect a gap between the law on paper and its implementation on the ground?

Again, I think it will depend a lot on pressure from the streets. If the whole list of demands that the housing syndicate is propagating gets passed, that would be quite a move, because it includes, for example, a 50% reduction in rents, which is quite radical. One of the strengths of the housing syndicate is that it is really informed on the legal situation and very accustomed to helping people who have struggles with their landlords. So if the legal situation changes, the movement is already in a good position to keep pushing for these changes to actually be carried through.

The big discursive move has been situating the housing struggle as a working-class struggle. A strength of the strike on 11 November is that it brings together housing rights with workers' rights; some of the demands also have to do with salaries. The question is to what extent we can keep pushing the demands. In the long term, the demand has to be to expropriate landlords, and not just to force them to lower rents. In Spain the housing market is almost entirely privatised. There is some public housing, but it is very limited, so this is a really progressive demand in a country without even a tradition of public housing. But the housing movement as it stands is in a good position to keep pushing in this direction. ■

Housing Crisis and the Demands of Tenants' Unions

1. REDUCTION IN RENTAL PRICES

Rental prices cannot be left to the market to determine. Therefore, the rental price reference index must be reformed and linked to wages.

2. BAN ON EVICTIONS WITHOUT ALTERNATIVE HOUSING AND INDEFINITE LEASE AGREEMENTS

Minimum conditions for residential stability must be guaranteed as a prerequisite for material security. To this end, we demand a ban on all evictions involving vulnerable individuals who lack alternative housing, and that rental agreements be made indefinite.

3. EXPROPRIATION OF HOUSING OWNED BY BANKS AND VULTURE FUNDS

Housing held by major speculators must be reclaimed and placed under public control; furthermore, speculative purchases must be prohibited to prevent the hoarding of properties.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC HOUSING STOCK

A genuine public housing stock must be built, financed through a special tax on rent-seeking (income derived from property ownership). It must also be made entirely public, removing minimum income thresholds for access.

5. RECOGNITION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS

Rights must be guaranteed through the self-organization of workers. Consequently, trade union rights must be recognized within the housing sector—including the right to collective bargaining, union representation, and rent strikes in instances where property owners fail to meet their obligations.

6. INCREASE OF THE INTERPROFESSIONAL MINIMUM WAGE (SMI) TO €1,600, AND A MINIMUM PENSION EQUAL TO THE SMI. The minimum wage must guarantee decent living conditions. Currently, it does not.

7. REDUCTION OF THE WORKWEEK TO 35 HOURS—WITH THE PROVISION THAT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS MAY ALWAYS NEGOTIATE A FURTHER REDUCTION.

Reducing working hours means sharing the workload and combating unemployment, while improving health, quality of life, and work-life balance.

8. WAGE INCREASES TO ADDRESS THE ACTUAL LOSS OF PURCHASING POWER.

For a very large segment of the working population, rent or mortgage payments consume between 40% and 60% of their income; however, this is insufficiently weighted in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), creating a discrepancy between official inflation figures and the real cost of living.

9. DEFENCE OF ALL PUBLIC SERVICES. ■

The Battle between Rustication and Resistance at JNU

Danish Ali

The year 2026 will be remembered for the wave of student protests sweeping across the country, from Jantar Mantar to university campuses. Months before the Jantar Mantar when dissent is increasingly treated as a nuisance rather than a democratic right, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) remains a crucial battleground for public education, social justice and student democracy.

Long branded “anti-national” by the BJP-RSS nexus, JNU has historically resisted privatisation, fee hikes, attempts to dismantle affirmative measures such as the deprivation point system and made those sitting in power uncomfortable through its bold discourse on caste, gender and hierarchies. Since November 2025, JNU students have been fighting not only for their rights but also for the survival of student democracy and the space for dissent on campus.

The immediate flashpoint is the installation of facial recognition technology (FRT) and metro-style gates in the Central Library. Presented as security measures to keep away ‘illegal students’, these installations have raised concerns about surveillance and shrinking democratic space. The administration’s response to student opposition has only intensified the controversy. All four JNUSU office-bearers, along with the former union president, were rusticated and fined ₹20,000 each. Out-of-bounds orders followed, photographs of the rusticated students were pasted at all the campus gates, their names removed from hostel records,

mess facilities shut, scholarships blocked and academic futures jeopardised.

Eight more students were fined ₹19,000 each. Their notices shamelessly cited their presence at the protest site, where they were seen clapping, smiling and raising slogans. In this curious interpretation of discipline by the JNU admin, even applause became punishable. One wonders whether the next circular will prohibit raised eyebrows or require prior permission to smile.

These arbitrary measures have been made possible through the draconian Chief Proctor’s Office (CPO) Manual, which the union considers an instrument of repression. Restrictions on protests within 100 metres of administrative buildings and residential spaces effectively renders much of the campus off-limits. Its provision concerning “anti-national activities” raises an obvious question: who defines what falls under this category, and under what safeguards? Vague rules become especially dangerous when those interpreting them also have the mindset to criminalize dissent and student politics at large.

The crackdown escalated when a march from the university gates towards the Ministry of Education on February 26 resulted in an FIR against students. In total, 14 students including the AISA President Neha, JNUSU President Aditi, Vice President Gopika, former JNUSU President Nitish and myself were sent to Tihar Jail for three days. It’s tragic how our country’s government offices which are meant to listen to the concerns of the masses have become so

inaccessible and students are criminalized and jailed just because they dared to take a March towards them.

Hunger Strike

JNUSU and 15 other students began a hunger strike on 3rd October, demanding an end to rustication and addressing a wider set of campus related issues. For several days, the administration made no attempt to initiate a dialogue. Medical check-ups for rusticated students on hunger strike were also denied reflecting how inhumane the JNU admin can act with its own students.

Surveillance and Gates

The demands extend far beyond surveillance. The recent building collapse in Satya Niketan, which claimed so many student lives, has highlighted the precarious living conditions many students face in Delhi. JNU, despite its substantial hostel capacity, is not immune. Students have reported ceilings and fans falling in hostels and library spaces, which has sometimes caused serious injuries. The only response to our consistent demand for repairs has repeatedly been that funds are unavailable. Barak Hostel, opened following a student hunger strike, still lacks mess and Wi-Fi facilities which raises a question: what good is a hostel if basic amenities remain out of reach?

Whenever the union raises these questions, the admin has one response to all these i.e. scarcity of funds. Fund cut is a systematic way through which public universities are being destroyed which leads to infrastructure collapse and this is the way through which public universities are being privatised.

Students of JNU were also demanding reform of the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) along the lines of the Rohith Act. Caste

discrimination remains a serious concern across universities, and JNU has witnessed its share of such cases despite being a progressive campus. Very shamefully, the Vice-Chancellor earlier this year made a comparison of Dalits' experiences with an ingrained "victimhood mentality" which further sharpened concerns. In such a context, a functional, independent and accountable EOC is essential to address discrimination inside the campus.

The Struggle for Inclusive Education

Students are demanding the restoration of JNU's own entrance examination, the JNU EE, arguing that the National Testing Agency's (NTA) examination irregularities have significantly undermined confidence in centralised testing. They believe that the university's entrance system was better suited to its academic requirements. The restoration of GSCASH, JNU's elected mechanism for addressing sexual harassment, is another longstanding demand. Abolished in 2017 and replaced by a body called ICC, it remains central to students' call for an independent, representative body that ensures timely and fair action on complaints of sexual harassment. At a time when students, especially young women across Delhi are taking to the streets of Delhi for gender justice, it is crucial that JNU leads its own movement for GSCASH.

Economic justice matters, too. The slogan "Do hazaar mein dam nahi, paanch hazaar se kam nahi" (₹2,000 is not enough; nothing less than ₹5,000), captures frustration over the stagnant merit-cum-means fellowship amid rising living costs. Other demands include more Central Library seating, functional 24-hour lifts in hostels allocated to students with disabilities, transgender reservation and appropriate accommodation, repaired roads, and renovation of the stadium and union office. .

Student Unity Forces Administration to Backtrack

The sustained and united resistance of JNU students, culminating in a 17-days long hunger strike, has forced the university administration to commit to revoking the rustication of JNUSU office-bearers and a former JNUSU president, withdrawing FIRs against protesting students and dropping proctorial enquiries related to student movements, among other demands.

This commitment marks an important victory for the students' collective struggle against the administration's attempts to suppress dissent and undermine democratic representation on campus. The hunger strike brought together the fight against punitive action on elected student representatives with wider demands for equitable access to education, safe and dignified hostel facilities, and a democratic and inclusive university.

The fight was never merely about cameras and gates in a library, but about the right to dissent, the defence of public education, and the democratic character of the university itself. ■

From Nachol to Vidhan Sabha: The Rebel That Was Ila Mitra

▲ **SOMENATH GUHA**

Nachol, a small village in the then Rajshahi district and now Chapai Nawabganj district, North Western Bangladesh, was predominantly a Santhal village. The year was 1950 and the Tebhaga movement had almost petered out to other areas with significant gains for the peasants. In contrast, the movement in Nachol, which had been a hotbed of communist activities, was just picking up. Ila Mitra (8 October, 1925 – 13 October, 2002), a 24-year-old communist activist, had galvanised the peasants.

Ila became a member of the Communist Party in 1943, at the age of 18 years. This was also the year of the infamous Bengal famine in which lakhs of people perished. Ila became a member of 'Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti' and worked in the langarkhanas distributing cooked food. She was a Bengali Honours graduate and an established star athlete who was selected for the 1940 Olympics. Unfortunately, the Olympics that year was cancelled due to the on-going World War. She then got married to a communist whole-timer, Ramendranath Mitra (aka Ramen), who was the son of a zamindar in Ramchandrapur. This transition from a liberal father's house in Calcutta to a conservative zamindar family in the far-off Ramchandrapur was difficult for Ila, despite Ramen's communist ideals, as it was unthinkable for a daughter-in-law of a zamindar family to engage with common people. With great difficulty, she convinced her mother-in-law and opened a school in the area, which then became her outlet to engage with the masses. However, this soon encountered issues when the conservative Muslims in the area alleged that a 'mleccha' was out to violate the purdah system of their women. However, poorer Muslims countered this allegation by counter questioning that the purdah of the Muslim women is not violated when they work in the houses

and fields of the zamindars! The opposition quietened thereafter, and thus, the school that began with a mere three students began to flourish, where decades later, a college was being run!

When the Noakhali riots occurred after the gruesome killings in Calcutta, Ila and other women activists went to Hasnabad and stayed there for nine months, where there was relative calm. Ila later reminisced that communalism, feudalism and domination of men over women went hand in hand. Meanwhile, the movement against zamindars who were unwilling to part with two-thirds of the produce, continued unabated. This made it no longer safe for Ila and Ramen to live in their house, and therefore, they went underground. Initially, it wasn't easy to live with the Santhals, as there was distrust that Ila was a woman of the zamindar house. But, she slowly began to earn their trust by helping them with domestic chores and learning their language, and this helped her transform into a new avatar – Ranima – as she was fondly called.

The Santhal, Muslim and Hindu peasants rallied around her and their struggle became more militant with occasional clashes between the peasants and henchmen of the landlords. This was also a time when Ila was in the final stages of her pregnancy, and gave birth to a son in 1948. The police were on a relentless look out for her and Ramen, and due to this, she had to leave the house after 16 days of giving birth. The police frequently entered villages, beat up people and burnt down huts. In retaliation on January 5th, 1950, about 5,000 peasants attacked a police party and killed all of them. This incident happened so suddenly, that Ramen and Ila were unable to control the mob. Severe repression followed, where villages were burnt down, and hundreds of people killed.

People fled their homes. The peasants repeatedly requested Ila to be taken to safety, but she refused to leave until everyone was safe. Dressed as a Santhal woman, she accompanied a group to Ruhunpur station, where she was immediately captured, as her attire could not hide the sparkle of rebellion in her eyes.

She was subjected to severe torture and physical abuse. The police repeatedly tried to force the peasants to confess that it was Ila who had instigated them to kill the police, but the peasants did not relent to the pressure. Several of them were killed in front of her eyes, and the resultant trauma devastated her. In the Rajshahi jail, she was reduced to mere bones and everyone thought her death was imminent. Ramen then daringly came to visit her "for the last time" in disguise, and brought along Mohan, their six-year-old son. They didn't recognise each other.

After having failed to implicate her in the mass killing of the policemen, and upon the advice of doctors, she was granted parole. In 1954, she left for Calcutta with Dr. KS Alam, whose medical treatment and the care of women inmates of Rajshahi jail, ensured she remained alive. However, she never fully recovered despite treatment. She completed her Master's Degree in 1957 and then settled for a teaching job in Sibnath Shastri College. All the while, the East Pakistan government made repeated efforts to bring her back, but thanks to the efforts of CPI and leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Hirendranath Mukherjee, she was given Indian citizenship. All her life she worked for the party, and was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly from 1962 to 1977. She consistently worked for refugee rehabilitation, peoples' education, and particularly



women's education. In 1962 during Indo-China war, she went to jail with other communist stalwarts. She lived in Park Circus in 1964-65 when riots broke out in the city. Even when engaged in cooking, she would come down, clad in saree and 'khunti' in hand and stand amidst the mob daring anyone to attack her Muslim neighbours. She was an active participant in the Food Movement of the 1960s. During Bangladesh Liberation war, her house was an open shelter for Muktizoddhas – the same after Naxalbari in 1967. Her door was always open for young men and women who were on the run or living underground. Using her powers as an MLA, she saved many from arrest or encounters. From 1970-74, she was arrested three times mainly for taking up the peasants' cause. In her later years, she began translating progressive literature. Her translation of 'The Girl from Hiroshima' fetched her the Soviet Land Nehru prize. She also translated a biography of Lenin. She took active part in installing the statue of Lenin in Esplanade and naming a major road in the area as Lenin Sarani. The present state government is trying to undo the same, a reflection of the terrible time we are facing now.

Ila Mitra's entire life was dedicated to the peoples' cause. She was a true revolutionary, India's own Mother Courage. ■

Remembering Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy: A Professor, A Friend and A Comrade

Danish Ali

At a time when JNU, along with other public universities across the country, is facing a deliberate attack by the BJP-RSS regime, the very idea of universities as spaces of academic freedom, debate, and dissent is under threat. The imposition of privatisation, saffronisation, and Sanghi recruitment threatens these ideals. In such times, the loss of Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy is irreparable and tragic.

Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy was among the finest professors to have ever graced JNU's School of International Studies. Generations of students will remember him not merely as a professor but also as a friend and comrade. Students could always turn to him for advice, help, or financial assistance. He was always among the first to extend a helping hand and stand in solidarity with them whenever the need arose.

Prof. Chenoy embodied what it means to be a professor at a public institution, someone who remains true to his ideas and teaches not only in classrooms but also on the streets through his actions. Throughout his life, he fought fascist, communal, and casteist ideologies through his scholarship and actions. He challenged the narratives of forces that promote riots and genocide while standing at the forefront of struggles against them. In the truest sense, he was a professor who lived by his ideas and put them into practice.

In 1997, when Comrade

Chandrashekhar Prasad, whom we dearly remember as Comrade Chandu, was assassinated in Siwan, Bihar, Professor Chenoy marched alongside JNU students on the streets of Siwan, demanding justice. His presence reflected the kind of professor he was, one who stood with students through concrete actions, not merely words.

When JNU came under attack from the BJP-RSS nexus and its godi media, and the witch-hunting of students began, many became fearful, and even taking the name of JNU became a taboo. Yet, when many compromised and bowed to pressure, professors like Chenoy stood firm with students and strengthened the call to "Fight Back JNU."

Throughout the fee-hike movement and the movement against the CAA-NRC, he remained steadfast in his support. His presence was reassuring. He was also a prominent voice in support of Palestine and consistently condemned the genocide of Palestinians. At a time when speaking about Palestine in centres like the School of International Studies is becoming increasingly difficult, his courage and conviction remain an enduring example.

It is a tragedy that JNU, which once had professors like Chenoy who engaged with students and supported their struggles, is now facing an acute crisis over recruitment irregularities and appointments based on Sangh connections rather than merit. Such developments threaten the university's democratic and



academic traditions. Prof. Chenoy's memory reminds us that JNU was not always like this and it does not have to remain this way.

As students and young people across Delhi and the country continue to protest against the fascist BJP regime, one cannot help but imagine that, had Prof. Chenoy been alive, he would have wholeheartedly supported these struggles and stood at their forefront, showing us the way forward.

Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, his partner and an eminent professor who retired from JNU, has been a pillar of support for students. We cherish her presence and salute the grace and strength with which she carries herself in this moment of grief.

Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy will not be forgotten. He will be remembered as an example of what it means to be a professor, a friend of students, and a comrade in struggles. His life and legacy will continue to inspire generations of students to fight injustice and uphold academic freedom and the culture of debate and dissent in JNU.

Red Salute to Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy from the current JNU Students' Union and the entire student community. ■

Comrade Mahendra Patel

Comrade Mahendra Patel, a veteran CPI(ML) Liberation leader in East Champaran, Bihar, passed away on October 13, 2026, at the age of around 80. A resident of Bahadurpur village in Adapur block, he had been suffering from a heart ailment. He was among the key leaders who established the Party in East Champaran in the 1970s.

Comrade Mahendra Patel fought resolutely against divisive forces that sought to split the Party in the early 1980s, a period in which several comrades laid down their lives. He survived repeated attempts on his life and several stints in jail, remaining steadfast in his commitment to the revolutionary movement.

CPI(ML) Liberation pays revolutionary tribute to Comrade Mahendra Patel, whose courage, steadfastness and lifelong dedication to the Party and the people's struggles continue to inspire the revolutionary movement. ■



Comrade Shivpujan Yadav

Senior CPI(ML) leader of Patna district, Comrade Shivpujan Yadav, passed away on October 21, 2026, at the age of 72. Born on January 1, 1954, in Narahi village, Patna district, he came into contact with CPI(ML) leaders during his nearly six months in jail during the Emergency.

In 1981, he joined the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha and became a leading figure in the anti-feudal struggles in the area. He contested the Assembly elections from Vikram in 1995 and Masaurhi in 2000. Through decades of underground work, peasant movements and open political activity, he made an important contribution to building CPI(ML) and the peasant movement in Patna district, organising rural poor people and peasants against exploitation and oppression. ■



Comrade T. Pandian

Comrade T. Pandian, veteran leader of CPI(ML) Liberation and former Chennai District Secretary, passed away in Chennai on October 1. He was one of the important leaders of the Tamil Nadu telephone workers' movement and remained closely associated with the struggles of workers and the Party.

The Party pays tribute to Comrade T. Pandian's lifelong commitment to the working class movement and his contribution to building the Party and strengthening struggles for workers' rights. His dedication to the cause of the working class and the revolutionary movement remains an inspiration to comrades carrying forward these struggles. ■



Comrade Swaroop Singh Danu

Comrade Swaroop Singh Danu, a senior CPI(ML) Liberation leader and a veteran of the Bindukhatta land struggle in Uttarakhand, passed away at his residence in Bindukhatta late in the evening on October 20.

Comrade Danu was among the early comrades who took part in the Bindukhatta land struggle. He was actively involved in every major people's movement in the area. As a member of the CPI(ML) Liberation Nainital District Committee, he participated in struggles concerning land rights, ration cards, employment, the demand for revenue village status, the dairy movement, the Century factory movement and the municipal movement, among others.

Comrade Swaroop Singh Danu devoted his life to the struggles of working people and the building of the Party. His commitment to grassroots organising and his close bonds with the people of Bindukhatta will remain an enduring part of the region's history of struggle. ■





BJP-RSS Attacks Progressive Bookstalls Across West Bengal; Left Forces Resist Bulldozer Raj

The BJP-RSS has unleashed a series of attacks on progressive bookstalls run by Left and communist parties across West Bengal, targeting spaces that have carried revolutionary literature and progressive ideas to the people for decades.

On October 15, Comrade Babun Chatterjee, CPI(ML) Liberation West Bengal State Committee member and Secretary of the Jadavpur-Dhakuria Local Committee, was attacked by BJP goons near Dhakuria Bus Stand in Kolkata. The miscreants attempted to prevent the bookstall from being set up, verbally abused and physically assaulted Comrade Babun Chatterjee, veteran Comrade Amalendu Bhushan Choudhury and others. Comrade Babun Chatterjee sustained an eye injury. The comrades received preliminary treatment at Baghajatin Hospital.

The attacks continued on October 17, when the BJP-RSS regime brought bulldozers against progressive bookstalls run by communist parties at 8B Bus Stand

in Jadavpur.

Hundreds of Left activists and democratic voices took to the streets, pushed back the bulldozers and defended the bookstalls from demolition. Activists stood guard at the stalls throughout the night, determined to protect these spaces of progressive literature and democratic expression.

On October 20, in Bakhrahat in South 24 Parganas, bookstalls run by CPI(ML) Liberation and other communist parties were also vandalised.

For nearly four decades, CPI(ML) Liberation and other Left parties have been setting up bookstalls across West Bengal as part of the state's rich revolutionary cultural landscape. The BJP-RSS regime is seeking to bulldoze Bengal's revolutionary cultural heritage, terrorise those who carry forward the legacy of people's struggles, and silence the spread of progressive ideas. But the resistance at Jadavpur shows that books, ideas and the spirit of struggle cannot be crushed by fascist violence. ■

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