

Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Preamble

WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens:

Democracy,

The Biggest Gain

We made

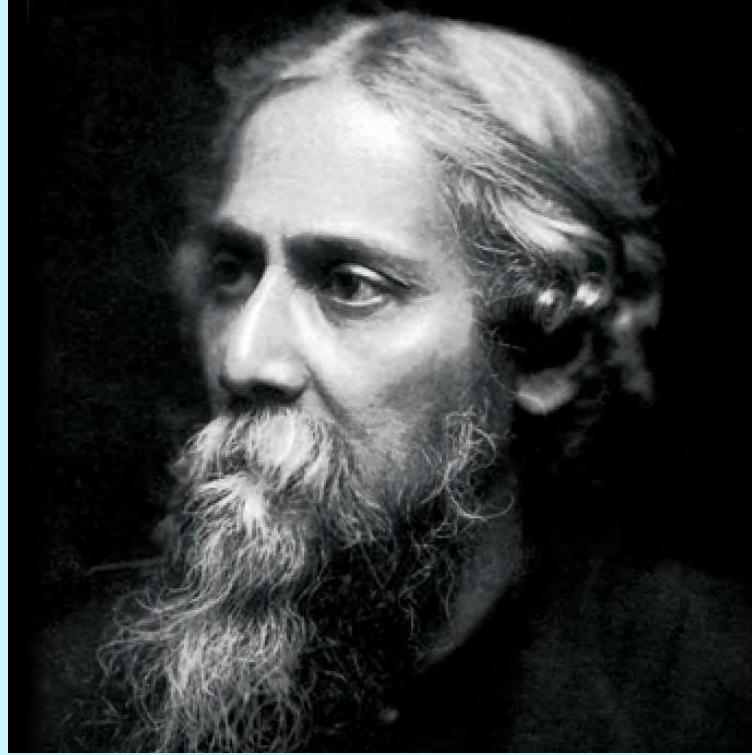
From Our Freedom Movement,

Must Be Saved At All Costs

There is no god in that temple

*[Tagore's poem 'Deeno Daan' (Destitute Donation)
written on 4 August 1900,
translated by Arunava Sinha for scroll.in]*

Said the royal attendant, "Despite entreaties, king,
The finest hermit, best among men, refuses shelter
In your temple of gold, he is singing to god
Beneath a tree by the road. The devout surround him
In numbers large, their overflowing tears of joy
Rinse the dust off the earth. The temple, though,
Is all but deserted; just as bees abandon
The gilded honeypot when maddened by the fragrance
Of the flower to swiftly spread their wings
And fly to the petals unfurling in the bush
To quench their eager thirst, so too are people,
Sparing not a glance for the palace of gold,
Thronging to where a flower in a devout heart
Spreads heaven's incense. On the bejewelled
platform
The god sits alone in the empty temple."
At this,
The fretful king dismounted from his throne to go
Where the hermit sat beneath the tree. Bowing, he
said,
"My lord, why have you forsaken god's mighty abode,
The royal construction of gold that pierces the sky,
To sing paeans to the divine here on the streets?"
"There is no god in that temple," said the hermit.
Furious,
The king said, "No god! You speak like a godless man,
Hermit. A bejewelled idol on a bejewelled throne,
You say it's empty?"
"Not empty, it holds royal arrogance,
You have consecrated yourself, not the god of the
world."
Frowning, said the king, "You say the temple I made
With twenty lakh gold coins, reaching to the sky,



That I dedicated to the deity after due rituals,
This impeccable edifice – it has no room for god!"
Said the tranquil hermit, "The year when the fires
Raged and rendered twenty thousand subjects
Homeless, destitute; when they came to your door
With futile pleas for help, and sheltered in the woods,
In caves, in the shade of trees, in dilapidated temples,
When you constructed your gold-encrusted building
With twenty lakh gold coins for a deity, god said,
'My eternal home is lit with countless lamps
In the blue, infinite sky; its everlasting foundations
Are truth, peace, compassion, love. This feeble miser
Who could not give homes to his homeless subjects
Expects to give me one!' At that moment god left
To join the poor in their shelter beneath the trees.
As hollow as the froth and foam in the deep wide
ocean
Is your temple, just as bereft beneath the universe,
A bubble of gold and pride."
Flaring up in rage
The king said, "You false deceiver, leave my kingdom
This instant."
Serenely the hermit said to him,
"You have exiled the one who loves the devout.
Now send the devout into the same exile, king."

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Democracy, the biggest gain we made from our freedom movement, must be saved at all costs

INDIA observed the 73rd anniversary of Independence in the midst of a raging epidemic. While many countries in the world are now recovering from the havoc of the Covid19 pandemic, in India the graph continues to be on a steep climb with more than 60,000 cases being added per day. With more than 25 lakh cases and nearly 50,000 deaths, the ID 2020 environment is undeniably pretty gloomy. The bizarrely planned and utterly mismanaged lockdown has only deepened this gloom with large sections of Indian people facing an acute economic crisis, which for many on the margin means an outright crisis of survival.

But the darkest shadow on the spirit of Independence comes from the government of the day which is every day making a mockery of the Constitution and the core constitutional principles of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. In short, we can call it a crisis of India's Independence where the history, agenda and vision of India's freedom movement are being sought to be subverted and rewritten by the powers that be. After seven decades of Independence, the history of our freedom movement appears a distant past for most Indians, and the Sangh-BJP dispensation is using this disjunction to the hilt to mount a concerted attack on the history and legacy of the freedom movement and its product, the secular democratic republic of modern India founded on the basis of the Constitution.

India's freedom movement has a very rich and diverse history that laid the foundation of the national unity and constitutional framework that we now tend to take for granted. From the Santhal Hool and other peasant-advansi revolts of the 1850s and the great 1857 First War of Independence, we have a glorious century of multifaceted people's resistance that eventually culminated in the ouster of the British colonial rule. From the early peasant revolts to Gandhian satyagrah to communist-led peasant upsurges like Tebhaga, Telengana and Punnapra-Vayalar, India's freedom movement was a protracted powerful assertion by India's peasantry. Old patterns of landlordism and usury have certainly been weakened, though not fully abolished, but the dream of peasant rights over land, water and forest today faces a stronger threat from corporate aggression.

India did not have a numerically big working class during the freedom movement days, but the working class and its struggles played a key role in strengthening and energising the popular assertion for independence. The trade union movement was of course led primarily by the communists and socialists, but Congress leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Jawaharlal Nehru were also closely associated with the All India Trade Union Congress (Lajpat Rai was the founding President in 1920 and Nehru became AITUC President in 1928). Dr Ambedkar played a very pivotal role in advancing the struggle for working class rights and pro-labour legislations. His Independent Labour Party had a powerful presence among Maharashtra textile workers and ILP treated Brahminism/Manuvad and capitalism as its twin targets. His famous statement that caste was not division of labour, but division of labourers pointed to the need for uniting labourers as a class by linking up the struggles against caste oppression and hierarchy and capitalist exploitation. Today the labour rights and legislations secured since the freedom movement days and the public sector built through the fight for nationalisation are being sought to

be systematically dismantled.


Along with peasants and workers, the freedom movement was very much a movement of common Indians with people from all walks of life plunging into the movement as the quest for freedom grew more and more intense. It was above all a movement of young, determined, inspired Indians where women fought alongside men. When we talk about the freedom movement we must always remember that most people were fighting for multiple freedoms at the same time – the struggle for freedom from caste oppression and injustice was an integral part of the freedom movement as was the women's fight for equality and emancipation from patriarchal control. Similarly, in the princely states, people were fighting simultaneously for freedom from their respective feudal-royal rulers as well as colonial subjugation. Without this struggle for freedom within the princely states the merger of hundreds of princely states with the Union of India would not have been so smooth and quick.

In terms of forms and methods of struggle and mobilisation, the freedom movement was the confluence of many streams that spoke to and influenced one another. The Congress of course emerged as the main platform and the mass struggles periodically announced by Gandhi attracted widest participation across the country, but the freedom movement was clearly not monolithic. If we look at the decade of 1940s, it was a mosaic of several major patterns where the Quit India Movement called by Gandhi but carried forward by spontaneous popular assertion, the INA expedition by Subhas Bose, the communist-led initiatives like the Tebhaga-Telangana and other peasant upsurges, the naval mutiny and powerful working class struggles, all contributed to the final push for freedom.

If there was one ideological stream which stood away from the freedom movement and even collaborated with the British rulers and only helped divide and derail the freedom movement with its communal agenda, it was the Hindutva brigade comprising Savarkar's Hindu Mahasabha and Hedgewar's RSS. The competitive widening of the communal fault-line by the Hindutva stream and the Muslim League, aided and abetted by the shrewd manipulation of British colonialism, eventually created an environment where freedom could only arrive mired in communal bloodbath and territorial partition marked by the traumatic displacement and migration of millions of people.

In an ironic twist of history today this Hindutva stream with no roots in India's anti-colonial freedom movement has emerged as the dominant ideological-political trend which rules at the Centre and nearly half of India's states and has a tightening grip on the institutional framework of our constitutional democracy. The communal division and trauma of partition, and the repressive repertoire of colonial rule are the key threads the Sangh-BJP establishment has picked up from India's colonial past. The Company Raj is being resurrected as corporate rule, draconian laws are being reinvoked as the basic legal infrastructure of statecraft, diversity and federal rights are being bulldozed under the steamroller of centralisation and nationalism is being rewritten as majoritarian domination and systematic marginalisation of minorities. And the right to chart our own course free from imperialist dictates is being increasingly mortgaged to the interests of US-Israel strategic axis as Indian foreign policy alienates neighbours and former friendly countries to appease the US and the economic policy camouflages a growing dependence on global capital and foreign corporations as 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Did the freedom movement give us any warnings about the shape of things that we encounter today? Yes, indeed. There was Bhagat Singh who warned us that freedom must mean a complete rupture with colonial governance and the class rule of landlords and capitalists, else freedom would degenerate into a transition from White English rule to takeover by their brown sahib successors. There was Dr. Ambedkar who pointed to the inherent tension between formal political equality and underlying social and economic inequality, the threat of personality cult trapping democracy in a dictatorial cage, and the calamity of Hindu Raj reinforcing the caste order to deny justice and liberty for the socially oppressed and the minorities.

Narendra Modi keeps telling us that nothing has happened in India in the last seventy years. That actually gives us a clear and honest idea of what he is actually trying to do – he is trying to dismantle whatever gains we made as a constitutional democracy and push us back to the trauma of partition and communal distrust and hate from which India has been trying to recover and move forward. And in doing this, he draws on the accumulated betrayals and capitulations made by successive previous governments vis-a-vis the dreams and values of the freedom movement and the commitments made in the Preamble to the Constitution of India. For we the people of India, the message is loud and clear. We have to hold on to and expand the gains we made in terms of the spread of democracy, and people's rights and participation, and save the democratic republic from descending into a fascist Hindu Rashtra where Corporate Raj and repressive governance will trample upon all our resources and rights. #FreedomFromFascism is the clarion call of Independence Day 2020. 

Invoking 'Contempt' To Crush Criticism

The 'contempt of court' judgement against Prashant Bhushan will go down as one of the most bizarre verdicts ever given by the Supreme Court of India. The apex Court took suo motu cognizance of two tweets by Bhushan and delivered a verdict running into more than one hundred pages holding him guilty of not just 'contempt' of court but destabilisation of the constitutional foundation of justice and democracy.

The judgement was delivered with remarkable speed even as hundreds and thousands of cases are pending to be heard and disposed by the court for years and even decades.

The contempt of court is a doctrine inherited from the colonial era which was made into an act in 1971. The arbitrary nature of the law can be gauged by the shocking fact that it needed an amendment in 2006 to 'introduce truth as a valid argument against contempt'.

While the act itself is arbitrary the selective nature of its application makes it even more so. The demolition of the Babri Masjid is one of the most open cases where a government and a party betrayed the commitment they had made to the highest court of India. The case is still going on after twenty eight years even as the same court has awarded the land for construction

of a temple and its foundation stone has also been laid. The court has mandated equal pay for equal work and government after government keeps violating it without ever being held guilty of contempt of court. And here are two tweets that have been treated as the greatest affront to the integrity and reputation of the judiciary in India.

Prashant Bhushan's tweets are of course not the first celebrated case of being held guilty of contempt of court. On 6 March 2002 writer Arundhati Roy was indicted of the same 'crime'. On 9 May 2017, the Supreme Court held Calcutta High Court judge Justice CS Karnan guilty of the same offence and sentenced

I Do Not Ask For Mercy

(Prashant Bhushan's Statement)

I have gone through the judgment of this Hon'ble Court. I am pained that I have been held guilty of committing contempt of the Court whose majesty I have tried to uphold -- not as a courtier or cheerleader but as a humble guard -- for over three decades, at some personal and professional cost. I am pained, not because I may be punished, but because I have been grossly misunderstood.

I am shocked that the court holds me guilty of "malicious, scurrilous, calculated attack" on the institution of administration of justice. I am dismayed that the Court has arrived at this conclusion without providing any evidence of my motives to launch such an attack. I must confess that I am disappointed that the court did not find it necessary to serve me with a copy of the complaint on the basis of which the suo motu notice was issued, nor found it necessary to respond to the specific averments made by me in my reply affidavit or the many submissions of my counsel.

I find it hard to believe that the Court finds my tweet "has the effect of destabilizing the very foundation of this important pillar of Indian democracy". I can only reiterate that these two tweets represented my bonafide beliefs, the expression of which must be permissible in any democracy. Indeed, public scrutiny is desirable for healthy functioning of judiciary itself. I believe that open criticism of any institution is necessary in a democracy, to safeguard the constitutional order. We are living through that moment in our history when higher principles must trump routine obligations, when saving the constitutional order must come before personal and professional niceties, when considerations of the present must not come in the way of discharging our responsibility towards the future. Failing to speak up would have been a dereliction of duty, especially for an officer of the court like myself.

My tweets were nothing but a small attempt to discharge what I considered to be my highest duty at this juncture in the history of our republic. I did not tweet in a fit of absent mindedness. It would be insincere and contemptuous on my part to offer an apology for the tweets that expressed what was and continues to be my bonafide belief. Therefore, I can only humbly paraphrase what the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi had said in his trial: I do not ask for mercy. I do not appeal to magnanimity. I am here, therefore, to cheerfully submit to any penalty that can lawfully be inflicted upon me for what the Court has determined to be an offence, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.

him to the maximum permissible punishment of imprisonment for six months. It is time India scrapped the contempt law along with its colonial era cousins like sedition and defamation laws which are only being issued to incriminate dissent

and punish freedom of criticism.

The statement made by Prashant Bhushan, which Justice Arun Mishra thought only 'aggravated his crime', has become a citizen's testament to truth and liberty in these troubled times when the Constitution is under

sustained attack and democracy is being sought to be sanitised of dissent. The overwhelming public support for Prashant Bhushan is certainly one of the most reassuring signs for the future of dissent and democracy in India. □

CPIML Statement: Criticism is not Contempt

New Delhi, 19 August

We are deeply disappointed at the judgment of the Supreme Court holding advocate Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt for two tweets. The judgment has the effect of stifling free speech and fair criticism and seeks to brush aside genuine concerns about the functioning of the Court and the administration of justice.

In recent times, we have witnessed such criticism from several quarters including retired Judges of the Supreme Court, activists, lawyers, and intellectuals, and in our view, such criticism should be valued and heeded by the judicial institution.

We believe that the surest way for the judiciary to gain the respect of people, is not by the use of its powers of contempt, but by being independent, fearless and objective while upholding the human rights and civil liberties of the people. This judgment comes at a time when there is growing intolerance and tendency to criminalise dissent in the country. The Constitution is under attack, democratic institutions are capitulating to majoritarianism and the rule of law is being consistently undermined, by the Modi Government. Dissent, essential in a democracy, is curbed using the draconian UAPA and sedition law, etc. and any counter-majoritarian view is labelled as anti-national.

Many crucial institutions display a worrying tendency to express loyalty to the ruling regime rather than to the Constitution of India. Rather than performing their constitutional duty to apply their minds and make decisions without fear or favour, these institutions are giving the impression of rubber-stamping decisions of the executive. Such a tendency is fatal for any democracy. Any attempt to stifle criticism of institutions: whether it be the legislature, the executive, the judiciary or other bodies of the State, paves the way for a police State instead of a democracy. We stand in solidarity with Prashant Bhushan.

*- Dipankar Bhattacharya,
General Secretary, CPIML, on behalf of CPIML Central Committee*

Contempt of Court: An Archaic law in Modern Democracy

Vertika Mani Tripathi

THE recent judgment on Prashant Bhushan is one that arouses dismay and anguish. Given by the bench comprising of Justices Arun Mishra, B.R Gavai, and Krishna Murari, the judgement

holds Prashant Bhushan guilty of 'contempt of court' for his tweets. The first tweet says "CJI rides a 50 lakh motorcycle belonging to a BJP leader at Raj Bhavan, Nagpur, without a mask or a helmet, at

a time when he keeps the SC in lockdown mode denying citizens their fundamental right to access justice!" This has been found as contemptuous because the court opined that the line which says

that CJI kept the Supreme Court in lockdown mode, denying citizens access to justice is “patently false” even to Prashant Bhushan’s “own knowledge”.

What is strange here is the fact that the opinion presented by Prashant Bhushan has been presented by a large section of society many a times. The present government has been fairly criticized on many occasions for the unplanned lockdown and the migrant workers tragedy, as has the Supreme Court for not taking cognizance of the matter. Individuals, publications and jurists alike have talked about the migrants’ issues which caused unprecedented misery and issues of life and dignity. In fact, the Court did not bother to hold the present government accountable for blatantly lying in the court regarding no migrant workers being present on the road when everyone under the sky was aware of the apathy towards migrants during the pandemic.

Then, the question which becomes important is why a *Suo Motu* action in the present case, in particular? The Supreme Court failed to take necessary *Suo Motu* action in cases where it was much needed. Something as serious as Police reforms in regard to rampant cases of Police brutality, reported and unreported, did not make it to the list of issues which could be considered important enough to be taken notice of. To remind my readers, it took 11 years for the state of Tamil Nadu to act on the words of The Supreme Court in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006) which talked of robust setup for accountability. And guess what? No contempt charges were levied on the government for not abiding by the Courts’ words *Prakash Singh*’s case.

The second tweet says “When historians in future look back at the last 6 years to see how democracy

has been destroyed in India even without a formal Emergency, they will particularly mark the role of Supreme Court in this destruction, & more particularly the role of the last four CJIs.”

It is evident that the Supreme Court itself believes that the Emergency era has been the darkest era of the Indian democracy but at the same time fails to see the challenges to democracy posed by the present Government. There has been undue delay in hearing on issues like abrogation of Article 370, Electoral Bonds or Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. On 12th January 2018, a similar opinion was reflected when the four senior most judges of the Supreme Court said that many “less than desirable” things have taken place and unless this institution is preserved “democracy will not survive in this country.” The judges released a letter which alleged that there have been instances where cases having far-reaching consequences for the nation and the institution had been assigned by the Chief Justice of India selectively to the benches of “their preference” without any rational basis of such assignment.

Also, this judgment comes at a time when the dissent is alarmingly being criminalized by the state. People are being arrested under draconian laws like UAPA or sedition, for merely exercising their right to freedom of speech and protest. It makes us wonder if the judiciary after taking the role of mute spectator now is turning into the part of establishment which tries to curb dissenting opinions.

The power of the Judiciary to take punitive action against Contempt is embedded in the colonial history of England, just as legislators are endowed by our colonial masters with the penal provision for Sedition. The doctrine of Contempt of Court

was a provision to serve and protect the might of the Crown. It comes from a time when divinely-ordained monarchies used to rule and should be treated for what it is – an archaic law in a modern democracy.

Countries like U.K, Australia and New Zealand have provisions like the Contempt of Court but it is employed in cases where there is ‘real risk’. A remote possibility that some action may lessen the public confidence in the judiciary will not suffice for this law to be put into use. A similar condition is in under the law in U.S. which requires “clear and present danger” to the administration of justice.

In the Australian case of *Attorney General for NSW v. Munday*, Justice Hope stated:

“The truth is of course that public institution in a free society must stand upon their own merits: they cannot be propped up if their conduct does not command the respect and confidence of the community; if their conduct justifies the respect and confidence of a community they do not need the protection of special rules to protect them from the criticisms.”

Although, in case of *P.N. Dua v Shiv Shankar and Others*, the Court clearly held that mere criticism of the Court does not amount to contempt of court, the reality remains that because of no objective criterion been set for a Contempt case to be made, it is often used authoritatively by the Courts. The jailing of Justice Karnan, a sitting High Court judge is another instance of the highhanded use of the Contempt of Court law. Do we need a law that allows for such judicial arbitrariness? This is a question we, the people of India, need to ask. The existence of colonial laws like sedition and contempt of court in itself is not in keeping with the precepts of a free spirited democracy. □

5 August vs 15 August: Save Constitution, Save India

Dipankar Bhattacharya

The 5 August 2020 Bhoomi Poojan, or the foundation-laying ceremony, of the Ram Mandir now legally sanctioned by the Supreme Court to replace the Babri Masjid demolished nearly twenty-eight years ago, has been the most decisive political and ideological statement made by the RSS-BJP establishment in the middle of the raging epidemic and its complement, the protracted state of lockdown continuing since 25 March. The choice of the date, marking the first anniversary of the (un)constitutional coup against Jammu and Kashmir whereby the state was not only robbed of its special constitutional status under Article 370 but also of its very statehood and was bifurcated into two Union Territories, added to the already loaded political symbolism of the Ayodhya event.

The BJP claims that both abrogation of 370 and construction of Ram Mandir were mentioned in the party's 2019 manifesto and the Modi government is merely fulfilling its poll promises for which it has the people's mandate. This is a brazenly dictatorial interpretation of a victory won in a parliamentary democracy. The BJP may have the right to invoke its poll manifesto but it is sworn to govern on the basis of the Constitution of India. The deactivation of Article 370 without any discussion with the people of Kashmir was an outright violation of the Constitution. Likewise, Modi's participation in the temple foundation ceremony is in clear negation of the secular spirit of the Constitution which requires the

state to stay away from religion.

Modi's Ayodhya speech is the loudest and clearest ever statement of the Hindu Rashtra project of the Sangh-BJP establishment. He projected Ram as the supreme symbol of India's unity in diversity, and described the foundation of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya as the culmination of a centuries-long quest. August 5 was then put in the same bracket as August 15, thereby making the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya a national project and not just a religious project of disciples of Ram. The conflation of Hindu identity with India's national identity is the basis of the whole thesis of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva and Modi used Ayodhya precisely as a platform to expound the Hindutva framework without explicitly mentioning the Hindu Rashtra term.

5 August can by no means be bracketed with 15 August. If anything, it stands at loggerheads with the trajectory and significance of 15 August. Behind 15 August, 1947 was India's national movement for independence and the issue of Ram Mandir never figured on the agenda of that movement. Ayodhya-Faizabad and the entire region of Awadh was an important centre of the 1857 upsurge against the British rulers. The popular consciousness in the region pulsated with the spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity and the passion for freedom from the clutches of British colonialism. Even during the last decades of freedom movement when communal polarisation had reared its ugly head, the issue of Ram Mandir never had any

prominence.

It was only on the night of 22 December 1949 that the idols were fraudulently placed inside the mosque to turn it into a 'disputed structure'. The RSS which had been banned in the wake of Gandhi's assassination had just got the ban lifted in late July 1949 by giving an undertaking of loyalty to the Constitution and the tricolour and promising to run the RSS as a cultural organisation. In November Godse was hanged for Gandhi's assassination. That was a juncture when the RSS and other forces of Hindutva were badly discredited and cornered. It should also be noted that the Faizabad DM KK Nayar who refused to remove the idols despite clear instruction and had to subsequently quit the service on charges of dereliction of duty became MP from Bahraich in 1967 on a Jan Sangh ticket. The issue would be revived again in the 1980s with the BJP facing another low ebb.

The construction of the Ram Mandir of course now has the sanction of the Supreme Court. It is however ironic that the 9 November 2019 judgement of the Supreme Court, which awarded the disputed land title to the Ram Mandir trust, termed the 1949 placement of the idols an act of desecration of a mosque which robbed the Muslim community of its religious rights, and the 6 December 1992 demolition of the mosque an egregious violation of rule of law. Earlier in 1994 the Supreme Court had termed the demolition an act of national shame. One wonders without the crimes of

22-23 December 1949 and 6 December 1992 if the Supreme Court would have ever awarded the land title to the temple trust?

It was reassuring to see that on August 9, 2020 the workers and peasants of India hit the streets with the 'Save India' banner against the Modi government's aggressive

privatisation campaign and the ordinances enforcing corporate control over India's agriculture. The month of August in India is always remembered for the 9 August 1942 Quit India Movement and 15 August 1947 which saw India attain political independence. Beyond the inner circles of the

RSS-BJP parivar, August 5 will only be seen as a day when the Modi government violated the basic spirit of the Constitution. The spirit of August 9 and August 15 will always inspire the people of India to defend India and the constitutional foundation and framework of India's democracy. □

And Quiet Flows the Sarayu

Arindam Sen

With the initiation of the actual construction of Ram Mandir on the ruins of the Babri Masjid, and that on the first anniversary of the imposition of the longest - - and still continuing - - period of brutalization of the lone Muslim majority state in India, the temple town on the bank of Sarayu has been given a fresh coat of political saffron. It is being projected as the most prominent 'national' symbol of a proud and powerful Hindu Rashtra that has just won back the alleged birthplace of 'Bhagwan Ram' from the clutches of 'foreign invaders - turned - internal enemies'. But this is a fake image, superimposed on the real face of Ayodhya and photoshopped to suit the Sanghi project of falsifying history in order to serve their present agenda. To rediscover the real face and the true spirit of Ayodhya, one must travel a short distance back in time.

Storm Centre of First War of Independence

The princely state of Oudh/ Awadh, well known for its very fertile land, was annexed by the greedy British rulers in blatant contravention of existing treaties in 1856 (the interested reader may see a detailed description of that mischievous process in Marx's article The annexation of Awadh, published in New York Daily

Tribune, May 28, 1858).

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was then exiled to Calcutta on pension while his second wife Begum Hazrat Mahal and underage son were left behind in Lucknow. When in May 1857 the native troops of East India Company rose in revolt, Hazrat Mahal proclaimed her minor son as king, assuming power of administration on his behalf as Regent. From Delhi, Bahadur Shah Zafar proclaimed Mughal imperial recognition of this move, giving a major boost -- if only symbolic -- to the legitimacy of the king and the Regent. The local talukdars swore allegiance to the minor king and Hazrat Mahal, who pledged war against the British till death. She personally led the rebel sepoys on the battlefield and her bravery, courage and determination was a great source of inspiration to them.

The rebellion of the Indian soldiers – themselves "peasants in uniform" who came from and remained closely connected with (largely Hindu) peasant families – immediately led to an uprising of all sections of peasants groaning under the new, post-annexation land revenue system. A major reason why Ayodhya became a storm centre of the rebellion was that it was one of the main catchment areas for the Bengal regiment, supplying some 75000

men to the army.

The peasants were not alone. They were joined by talukdars, many of whom had their estates confiscated, craftsmen who had lost out to British machine products actively promoted by the new rulers, and so on. In addition to shared economic ruin, the pent-up anger of Muslims as well as Hindus against what they perceived as attacks on their religion and culture, also helped build the broadest popular mobilization for liberation from foreign bondage, with peasant-sepoy armed struggle at its core. Vast swathes of Indian people, across caste boundaries (including Ruhelas, Bundelas, Jats, Gujjars, Pasis, Mughals, Rajputs, Brahmans, Pathans, Satnamis, Bahavis, Kols and other tribal people (who did not then identify themselves as Hindu or Muslim), joined hands to fight British rule. Intellectuals of the uprising included Azimulla Shah, author of India's first national song: "We are its masters/ this Hindostan of ours."

After initial successes, the freedom fighters were overpowered by British forces, who recaptured Lucknow in March 1858. Scattered fights went on, often in the form of guerrilla warfare. Hazrat Mahal, closely pursued by the enemy, managed to move rapidly from place to place thanks to support

of the common people as well as the talukdars, both predominantly Hindu. The long journey across forests and rivers ended in Nepal, where she took political asylum. When in 1858 Queen Victoria issued a clemency proclamation to appease the people of India and douse the fire of rebellion in their hearts, Hazrat Mahal issued a counter proclamation, in her capacity as Regent Queen in exile. She reminded Victoria about the many instances of promises betrayed and urged the people not to trust the British. She was also personally requested to come back to India on a British pension, but turned down that offer too. In 1879 she died -- penniless but head erect -- in Kathmandu.

Among the most illustrious leaders of the uprising hailing from Ayodhya, mention must be made of Maulavi Ahmadullah Shah, a Sunni Muslim from an affluent family. Erudite and widely travelled in India and abroad, the "Lighthouse of Faizabad" authored a pamphlet, titled *Fateh Islam*, calling for a jihad against Britishers well before the eruption of revolt in 1857. This led to his arrest, but he came out when with the outbreak of the rebellion the doors of the Faizabad jail were thrown open.

Ahmadullah immediately joined the insurgents and was elected the Chief of 22nd Infantry Regiment. Aably assisted by Subedar Ghamandi Singh and Subedar Umrao Singh he won the famous Battle of Chinhat in June 1857 and successfully repulsed attacks on the city of Faizabad for nearly one year. He carried a bounty of Rs. 50000, in silver coins, on his head and for this hefty sum of money he was betrayed and murdered by a Zamindar named Raja Jagannath Singh.

The annals of Hazrat Mahal and

Ahmadullah, like those of Laxmi Bai, Nana Saheb and many others, tell us how Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder in our first war of independence. But it would be naive to assume that communal relations in those days were totally free from occasional tensions and conflicts. In a very perceptive piece titled 'Mid-19th Century Communal Tussle in Ayodhya Has a Lesson for Today's Awadh', Saiyid Zaheer Jafri, Professor of History at the University of Delhi, draws our attention to "the complex dynamics of conflict and co-existence between Hindus and Muslims in India, especially in the Awadh region". To illustrate his point, Professor Jafri tells us a real-life story showing how enmity was transformed into solid camaraderie against the common foe. Here is a short excerpt; with words within square brackets inserted by us mainly for making the excerpt shorter.

"Months before the annexation of the kingdom of Awadh in February 1856," writes Jafri, "the Hanumangarhi episode at Ayodhya created much bitterness not only among the two principal communities of the state, but it also led to the widening of the sectarian gulf between the Shias and Sunnis. The dispute related to the alleged desecration and demolition of an old qanati masjid [a make-shift, camp-type mosque, usually with a shamiana for a roof] ... within the premises of Hanumangarhi. The present structure of Hanumangarhi stands at a site which was donated by Nawab Abul Mansur Safdarjung, the second nawab of Awadh kingdom to a bairagi (hermit). The successors of the bairagi enclosed a much larger area, including an abandoned Qanati masjid, over which Muslims of the area lay claim. The bairagis ultimately demolished

the masjid during the nawabi era itself.

"After the refusal of the administration to help [re-]build the mosque, a call for jihad was given [by Syed Ghulam Hussain. Sunni Muslims responded in large numbers but Hussain, a Sunni, was killed by the bairagis. A larger mobilisation was then built up [by Maulavi Amir Ali, a pizada of Amethi] to rebuild the demolished mosque and to protect the other mosques [But Ali too, along with his followers, was killed by the forces of the East India Company and some Rajput taluqadars Now it was Ahmadullah who started preaching for jihad. Following his arrest and release, as noted above, Hindus and Muslims of Faizabad chose him as their leader.]

"On assuming leadership, Ahmadullah Shah reportedly issued orders for the destruction of the temples of Hanumangarhi. But [soon] he retracted the orders [because] now he was the leader of the people of Awadh, as well as the sepoys, Hindus and Muslims both. [In the battle of Chinhat, they] overpowered the British forces, who retreated to Lucknow.

"This is indeed an important turn of events -- somebody who visited Faizabad to avenge the death of Maulavi Amir Ali and to rebuild the Hanumangarhi mosque was ... chosen as the joint commander of Hindu and Muslim sepoys. ... Perhaps this entire episode brings out the deep-rooted and strong nature of the elements of composite culture of the region. ...

"The events around the Hanumangarhi incident should remind the people of Awadh and elsewhere the shared past of conflict and cooperation between Hindus and Muslims and sects within Islam. It should also remind us of the temporary nature of communal

and sectarian divides and of the fact that those divides can be avoided in favour of larger ideals of anti-colonial struggle, pluralistic values and also a peaceful co-existence.” (From *The Wire*, 06/Sep/2018, retrieved 12.08.20)

Professor Jafri could not be more accurate. Bhaichara (brotherhood) even in troubled times has always been a natural instinct of the people in Ayodhya. When after annexing the princely state the British authorities tried, with some success, to foment communal discord, Baba Ram Charan Das and Achhan Khan, a local landlord, convinced their respective communities to reach an understanding whereby both Hindus and Muslims would offer their prayers in designated areas within the mosque-temple compound. For this ‘crime’ and for supporting the uprising, they were hanged together on the Kuber Teela on 18 March 1858, the day after the British recaptured Faizabad. But the communal harmony they championed lived beyond them. For nearly a century -- that is up to December 1949 -- devout Hindus and Muslims continued to practise their religious rites in the designated areas within the same compound.

Hunting Ground of Hindutva Hounds

All that began to change in the communally charged atmosphere of pre-partition India. In early 1947 Mahant Digvijai Nath (President of UP unit and National General Secretary of Hindu Mahasabha) Swami Karpatri (a sanyasi with political ambitions, who would found the Ram Rajya Parishad a year later) and K K Nair aka Kandangalathil Karunakaran Nair (one of the many hard-core communal elements in the Indian Civil Service, at that time District Magistrate of Gonda) came together in a yagna arranged

by Maharaja Pateshwari Prasad Singh, head of the princely state of Balrampur. It was from this grand constellation -- a top leader of Hindu Mahasabha, a political sanyasi, an ICS officer and a feudal lord big enough to be called Maharaja -- that the hitherto vague idea of ‘liberating’ the Ram Janmabhoomi started taking the shape of a cold conspiracy.

However, the process gained steam only after Nair was transferred to Faizabad district in June 1949. He immediately got down to the nasty business in cahoots with Guru Datt Singh, city magistrate of Faizabad, who became his close confidante in no time. Their first move was to forward a petition submitted by a group of local residents, seeking permission for the construction of a grand temple at the Ram chabutara, to the state government. In reply the higher-ups asked Nair to send in his report and recommendations on the matter. Under instructions from Nair, Guru Datt Singh visited the spot and submitted his report to Nair, saying:

“... I ... inspected the site and enquired all about it in detail. Mosque and the temple both are situated side by side and both Hindus and Muslims perform their rites and religious ceremonies. ... There is nothing on the way and permission can be given as Hindu population is very keen to have a nice temple at the place where Bhagwan Ram Chandra Ji was born.”

Singh’s report went against the verdict passed by Faizabad sub-judge Pandit Hari Kishan Singh in December 1885 on a similar petition of the mahant of the chabutara, which was under his ownership. The judge in his wisdom said:

“This place is not like [any] other place where the owner has got the right to construct any building he

likes If a temple is constructed on the chabutara at such a place then there will be the sound of bells of the temple and shankh when both Hindus and Muslims pass from the same way and if permission is given to Hindus for constructing a temple then one day or the other a criminal case will be started and thousands of people will be killed.”

It was easy to see that this was a very valid and farsighted judgment, but Nair refused to see it. He just forwarded his recommendation based on Singh’s report to the state government. But the latter was not prepared to take any risks. So the plot for getting the thing done smoothly, and bypassing the courts, got stuck. However, the plan, deliberately leaked to the townspeople, made Nair a darling of the Hindu Mahasabhaites. In particular, the DM was seen frequenting the house of Gopal Singh Visharad, head of the Faizabad unit of the Hindu Mahasabha and a close aide of Mahant Digvijai Nath. And the secret talks held there led to a new plot for a violent coup in place of the failed administrative coup.

So on the night of 22-23 December 1949, Abhiram Das accompanied by more than 50 people trespassed into the mosque by breaking open the locks of the compound and also by scaling the walls. The lone constable on duty protested, but no one cared. The muezzin (one who delivers the azaan) Mohammed Ismail woke up and tried to resist. He was beaten up and made to flee. As Awadh Kishore Jha (a cousin of Abhiram Das) later recounted, Nair himself was present in the mosque before 6 o’clock in the morning, directing Abhiram -- who held the idol -- and others present about how to spread the message of the divine appearance of Ram Lala.

The fanatics placed the idol inside the mosque, erased the Islamic carvings and scribbled sketches of Ram and Sita. As arranged, a thousands-strong crowd gathered there raising religious slogans and singing kirtans, early in the morning. The minorities were forcibly deprived of their right of access and worship.

On hearing the news, an anguished Nehru instructed the UP Chief Minister GB Pant to get the idol removed. The instruction was formally passed on to the Faizabad DM, but the latter refused to comply on the grounds that it would lead to communal clashes. Both Pant and Sardar Patel allowed the stalemate to continue. Gopal Singh Visharad, presumably in consultation with Nair, used this opportunity to move a local court and get a stay, in January 1950, on the government order for removal of the idol. This supplied the Congress governments in the state and at the centre with a pretext for inaction: what could a government do on a matter that was sub judice?

The role of Nair was sharply criticized by the Allahabad High Court in the land title suit in 2010. The judgment referred to a letter written by Kripal Singh, SP of Faizabad, to Nair on 29 November, 1949. Singh informed that he visited the premises and saw several 'Hawan Kunds' (places or large utensils where the sacred fire was lit) all around the mosque. He ended the letter with a warning: "There is a strong rumor that on purnamashi the Hindus will try to force entry into the mosque with the object of installing a deity".

A letter like this would have prompted any DM to order preemptive measures for maintaining peace and status quo. But Nair not only sat on the report, he straightaway denied the facts mentioned in it. In a report

he prepared after the so-called 'appearance' of the idol, he wrote that the "news came as a great surprise as it had never been reported or suspected that there was any move to enter and occupy the Masjid by force". As the court pointed out, the "surprise" was a false pretence because the SP had warned about precisely such a possibility well in advance.

Such extreme communal bias and conspiratorial activities on part of an administrator was not acceptable even to Panth and Patel. Following a brief tussle with the government, Nair was compelled to retire from service. Later, as the RSS and Jan Sangh expanded their network in UP, he along with his wife Shakuntala, already a Hindu Mahasabha activist at the time of take over of Babri Masjid, joined that bandwagon. In 1967, Karunakaran and Shakuntala (the latter had already been elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952 and later elected to the UP Legislative Assembly, in both instances on Hindu Mahasabha tickets) were elected to the Lok Sabha on Jan Sangh tickets.

Nair has been accorded due recognition by both the Mahasabha and the RSS. Just on the eve of the ground-breaking ceremony on 5 August, *The Organiser* in its 1 August 2020 issue carried a report praising Nair's role in 1949 titled 'Unsung Heroes of Sri Ram Janmabhumi Movement'. It informs us that a memorial is being built in his home village in Kerala, under the aegis of KK Nair memorial charitable trust, on land donated by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Fascism as Majoritarian Revanchism

The atrocious annexation of the iconic mosque in 1949 was but a sequel to two tragic events

that marred the dawn of Indian Independence: the Partition and the murder of Gandhi. The next big event that shook the nation - - the political vandalism of December 6, 1992 - is too well-discussed to merit recounting. The RSS or its ideological camp followers are implicated in all these catastrophic events. But we cannot end this discussion without saying a word or two about a few persons who combined intense religiosity with sincere communal amity.

One of them was Mahant Ramchandra Paramhans Das, the then chief of the Hanumangarhi temple and President of the Ayodhya unit of the Mahasabha. To paraphrase from Professor Jafri's piece cited above, during the curfew imposed after 6 December, 1992, he tried wholeheartedly to ensure the security of and uninterrupted supply of ration to Muslim households. He did campaign for building a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid, but he is reported to have said to his disciples: "I want the Ram temple to be built at the site where Babar had unlawfully erected the Babri Masjid, but my temple will not be built over the blood of a single Muslim." The Mahant's six-decade-long friendship with Hashim Ansari, the main litigant and his opponent in the Babri Masjid case, is legendary. They used to go to the court in the same rickshaw and shared a cup of tea during breaks even though they were fighting a bitter case over Ayodhya.

We also cannot forget Baba Lal Das, Pujari of the Hanumangarhi temple (before he was removed by a BJP state government) who was a bitter and outspoken critic of VHP and RSS. Not unexpectedly, he was murdered in 1993.

The subsequent episodes of the Masjid-Mandir imbroglio were played out not in Ayodhya but

on the larger theatre of national politics; so in this article we shall only indicate the main thread of political developments that has brought the temple town to its presumptuous present in a bitter mockery of its glorious past.

The competitive Hindutva of 1980s -- the one-upmanship between the Congress under the Gandhis and the Sangh parivar in playing the Hindu card (which was a not-so-strange bedfellow of the Indian version of neoliberalism) -- resulted in the catastrophe of December 1992 in a relatively short span of time. But the next step - - fulfillment of the promise "Mandir wahin banaenge" (the temple shall be built exactly on that spot, i.e., where the mosque stood)

was predicated on a total Sanghi domination over every organ of the state, including the Judiciary, and all the ideological- pedagogic apparatuses of the ruling class. Once that was achieved in 2019, it was almost a cakewalk for the mukhiya of the executive -- with willing cooperation of the like-minded top boss of the Judiciary (who was soon to be rewarded with a post-retirement nomination to the Rajya Sabha) -- to go ahead with temple construction at the very site where his party had razed a historic mosque to the ground.

With the 5 August Bhumi Pujan, what KM Ashraf in his day succinctly called "mazhab ki siyasi dukandari" (political trade in religion) evolved into a new

stage: the politics of majoritarian revanchism. The ceremony marked a new leap in the evolution of Hindu supremacist nationalism, or simply Indian Fascism.

And yet, the legacy of all those who battled the British together and embraced martyrdom together in 1857, the heritage of people like Madari Pasi, an oppressed caste leader of the Eka (Unity) Movement of 1921, and the message of mutual respect and love conveyed by Pujari Lal Das, Ramchandra Paramhans and Hashim Ansari continue to live on in the memories and thoughts of the Ayodhyavasi. And quiet flows the Sarayu, the silent chronicler of Ayodhya – the real Ayodhya – its past, present and the unseen future. □

Reject NEP 2020:

Blueprint for Exit and Exclusion, Centralization and Commercialization

Dipankar Bhattacharya

After the economy and environment, the Modi government has chosen the lockdown period for making yet another major policy pronouncement: New Education Policy 2020. A draft running into 484 pages was submitted on 31 May 2019 soon after the beginning of Modi 2.0. The 484-page draft has now been compressed into a 60-page policy document which was approved by the Union Cabinet on 29 July, 2020. Yet again the government has taken advantage of the lockdown to bypass Parliament from having any say on such a major policy matter. Not only that, this is a time when the pandemic has disrupted and devastated even routine education, and students all over India are facing digital

exclusion as the Government pushes for online examinations. The Government, instead of involving students and educationists in an effort to address this new and challenging crisis for education, is choosing this time to force through a policy which peddles digital models of education!

The government claims to have shaped this policy after widest consultation, even though most organisations of teachers and students never heard from the government about the feedbacks they had supplied on the draft. The RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal of course welcomed the policy for having accommodated 60-70 percent of demands they had made.

The New Education policy 2020 is

presented as India's first education policy for the 21st Century aimed at "building a global best education system rooted in Indian ethos ... transforming India into a global knowledge superpower." Talking about the best global standards, the policy document makes a specific mention of America's Ivy League universities, the name used for eight of America's best-known private universities. And it mentions five countries to illustrate its idea of model knowledge societies of the modern era: the US, Germany, Israel, South Korea and Japan. We are of course not told what specific parameters the authors of the policy may have applied to determine these five role models of knowledge society. Of course the influence of the American

education system on this new document is all too obvious, and the policy welcomes American and other foreign universities to set up branches in India.

The new education policy acknowledges the widespread problem of students dropping out of the education system and lack of universal access to quality education. It mentions several policy objectives to address this problem and even claims that two crore students would be reintegrated into the education system. But it leaves us in the dark as to how this would be achieved. Instead of offering any means of retaining students in the education system, from school onwards to college and university, it institutionalizes the dropout phenomenon by offering multiple exit routes with a certificate at each dropout point. It is those from weaker classes, castes and genders who drop out: and it is those who will continue to drop out, albeit with a certificate in hand. It is clearly those who stay the entire course and get the complete degrees who will get the best jobs; certificates will not help the dropouts get better jobs.

The policy emphasizes early childhood care and education (ECCE) and proposes to equip the Anganwadi network in this direction. We are told that an 'excellent curricular and pedagogical framework' for ECCE for children up to the age of 8 (including a sub framework for 0-3 year olds) will be developed by NCERT. We are also told that 'wherever possible' mother-tongue/home language/local language will be the medium of instruction not just till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. This talk of prioritising the mother tongue as medium of instruction in primary school, can only be an eyewash in the absence

of any plans to ensure quality education in the mother tongue in abundance, right through to higher education. Else, those from mother tongue medium schools, are left at a disadvantage later in an ecosystem where English continues to be the doorway for opportunity and advantage. The new language policy will create a situation where mother-tongue/home language/local language medium will be seen as inferior, while English medium schooling will be reserved for the rich, and the door will be wide open for imposing Sanskrit in keeping with the Sangh agenda.

And finally, the document also makes a passing mention of putting in place suitable facilitating systems to provide 'equitable and quality education until Grade 12 to all children up to the age of 18'. All this sounds well for a policy document on education, but it does not however spell out how the government proposes to ensure universal education up to Grade 12 (age 18). How can education be ensured as a fundamental right if it is not provided free of cost to all? The new document talks about affordable quality education for all, but once again we do not know what the government means by affordability for all and how it proposes to ensure that. The policy does not propose expansion and improvement of the government school network as the key to ensuring universal access to education. It talks about curbing commercialization, but within the framework of increased privatization. The technique is simple; it just qualifies the word private by frequently using terms like "public-spirited" private schools or "philanthropic" private schools. Who are these public-spirited philanthropists? Are they the same corporate profiteers who are preying on people's aspirations for

their children by selling education at ever steeper costs? Or Sanghi schools that promote Manusmriti? Will they who pay the piper (i.e fund education) not also call the tune (decide the agenda and priorities of education)?

It talks about increasing public expenditure on education but only to repeat for the umpteenth time since 1948 the unmet goal of spending 6% of India's GDP on education. Only a common school system, the kind of which the Muchkund Dubey commission had recommended for Bihar in 2007 (but was dumped by the Nitish Kumar government much the same way it also dumped the report of the Land Reform Commission), forcing children from all backgrounds to attend government schools can improve the quality of government schools and promote the inclusive spirit of social equality and respect for diversity. Short of such a radical thrust, and a concrete roadmap of implementation, much of the policy objectives are bound to remain a wishful vision statement.

The substantive changes proposed in the policy revolve around a stronger focus on vocational education and the restructuring of higher education and research. The focus on vocational education is intended to produce a more skilled workforce suited to the requirements of big capital. The policy wants to expose at least half the students to vocational education, introducing it at Grade Six itself including opportunities for internship. It is not difficult to understand the implications of such early introduction of vocational training and internship. Large numbers of students from socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) will be pushed in the process away from general education to low-skilled low-paid

jobs via “vocational education”, with “vocation” being code for hereditary caste-based occupations. In other words, rather than universalisation of education up to Grade 12, the new education policy may well lead us to institutionalization of teenage labour and caste-based division of labour. Thinking and intellectual development, which is the motto of education, will be reserved for the rich and the powerful, while the poor, socially deprived and the downtrodden are condemned to caste-based slavery. We may recall that the Modi regime had amended the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act to allow children under the age of 14 to work in “family based enterprises”, invoking casteist arguments of caste-based labour to justify the policy.

Apart from diversion of students through the vocational education route, the new policy announces a thorough restructuring of college education. A few years ago, Delhi University had experimented with a four year undergraduate programme which had to be withdrawn soon after its introduction in the face of massive opposition from students and teachers. The new policy reintroduces that failed FYUP idea in the form of a four-year degree course with exit options at the end of every year. The Masters degree is reduced to only one year and M. Phil courses are totally done away with. This, coupled with promotion of private universities and entry of foreign universities, will only restrict the access of common students to higher education and research. As in schooling, here too multiple exit options will only cover up and disguise the problem of the phenomenon of the socially and educationally deprived dropping out/being pushed out of college and university even after having made it in. The policy of course talks about

a National Scholarship Portal and provision of 25% to 100% funding for half the students in private colleges and universities, but only the implementation of the policy will give us a real idea of these figures. There is a strong apprehension that the scholarships for Dalit and adivasi students, will be done away with, and these students will be left to fend for themselves.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of any education policy. The new policy talks about the need to attract the best and the brightest of students to the teaching profession and treating them with due respect, but is silent about the grievances among teachers about their growing job insecurity, the phenomenon of contract teaching and rampant violation of the Supreme Court mandated principle of equal pay for equal work. Another disturbing feature of the new policy is the trend of over centralization – from the formation of a National Education Commission and a National Research Foundation to the system of common assessment and entrance tests at various levels, the policy advocates extensive ‘light but tight’ central control and leaves little room for state governments despite the fact that education is in the concurrent list of the Constitution.

With an aggressive Sangh-BJP establishment at the helm of central power, such over-centralisation can only pave the way for increasing saffronisation of the entire educational sphere. Even though the NEP has mentioned constitutional values in several places along with phrases like scientific temper, critical inquiry diversity, pluralism and inclusion, we will have to remain vigilant about changes in the curriculum and about attempts to regiment research according to the ideological script

of the RSS.

In the face of massive opposition to the government’s earlier attempt at Hindi imposition, the NEP has chosen the roundabout way of the three language formula as a potential route for undermining the autonomy of the States to decide their own policies and forcing Hindi and Sanskrit on non-Hindi speaking states. States like Tamil Nadu must be able to retain the two-language formula according to their own conditions and requirements, and must not be forced to accept the three-language formula. No attempts must be made to weaken the linguistic character and autonomy of India’s states.

Another important point on which the new policy remains conspicuously silent is caste and caste-based reservation, SEDGs being the new catchword even though the means for ensuring increased access for SEDGs remain characteristically unclear. What is clear is that the agenda of commercialisation, privatisation, and foreign universities is likely to replace public, state-funded education with elite educational enclaves (educational SEZs) minus social justice and caste-based reservation measures.

India’s existing education system does indeed need a radical overhaul. Educationists have for long pushed for replacing the current system of parallel public/private, rich/poor streams with a system of common neighbourhood school system providing free education of an equitable standard for all. They have for long pushed for the government to prioritise spending on education so that no Indian is deprived of the best school and college/university education due to a lack of money or a shortage of seats. The Modi regime’s proposed NEP is emphatically not the overhaul

India's education policy needs. Instead it is designed to exclude and close the gates of education for the vast majority of India's poor and deprived students; weaken social justice and reservations; open the floodgates for privatised,

commercialised education; and institutionalise what Dr Ambedkar called "graded inequality". The NEP in its present form must be withdrawn and scrapped; and instead, efforts must be made to realise the Common Neighbourhood

School System recommended by the Muchkund Dubey Committee, and a system of free, state funded higher education including college and university education for all. That is the educational overhaul that India needs. □

National Exclusion Policy: Institutionalisation of Graded Inequality

N Sai Balaji, President AISA & Former JNUSU President)

The new National Education Policy is here after 34 years, passed in a hurried fashion by the Cabinet of the Central Government. The Modi government is implementing structural changes in the Indian education system at a time when Parliament is closed due to pandemic without any debate. Prime Minister's slogan "Aapada mein avsar" (Opportunity in Crisis) came true when government decided to institutionalise "Graded Inequality" in the education sector during the pandemic.

If Ambedkar would have been present in today's time and read the NEP document, he would have torn it up publicly and burnt it to ashes on account of its central message i.e. annihilate social justice. NEP 2020 when carefully read brings out a blue print to undo the demands for accessible, affordable, and quality education and erase the progressive policies of social justice of the past decades. The whole thirty-three thousand plus word document mentions "social justice" just thrice (if you also count the mention of Ministry of Social Justice) and doesn't even mention reservation, something that has come to define social justice in our country and faces the most number of attacks.

It is not a coincidence or a

mistake, but a planned elimination of the policy of equality. The passing of the NEP, laying the foundation of the Ram Mandir on the debris of secularism with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailing it as a remarkable document are to be seen as part of a pattern. A pattern that entails undoing the 30 year long fight for access, equality, and justice in the sphere of education. On August 7th, 30 years ago, the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, declared in Parliament the acceptance of recommendations of the Mandal Commission, i.e. reservation for Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This was a historic moment, as the commission granted 52% of India's population 27% of reservation in jobs and educational institutions.

The privileged and anti social justice forces erupted in rage. They burned down streets, brought the country to a halt. They saw the policy of equality as a pushback against their dominance and power in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Their authority over the marginalised began to shake, if not break which was inevitable if reservation were implemented. Unable to counter the demands of social justice from the OBCs, RSS-BJP unleashed a campaign of hate. L K Advani went

on a rath yatra across the country in the name of the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign. This was also an effort to rally people demanding social justice and those against it under one banner through hate and violence by BJP.

However, with all the hurdles, reservations were implemented and this heralded another phase of democratisation of Indian campuses and society after introduction of reservations for SCs and STs. From universities to jobs, the process of democratisation through OBC reservation grew. Those who were denied opportunities and condemned to marginalisation and exclusion, saw education as a medium of upward social mobility.

Through the introduction of NEP and laying of a foundation for the construction of the Ram Mandir, the BJP-RSS are signalling the reversal of the recommendations made by the Mandal commission after 30 years. This is the reason why despite exposing how 10,000 OBC seats in NEET examination belonging to state quota have not been filled and in return were converted to general seats, there has been stoic silence from the PM, the BJP, and the RSS. Instance after instance, people have exposed the scuttling of OBC reservation and annihilation of

social justice in recruitment exams and at college and university levels, there still has been no response from the government.

The push for online and digital modes of education, privatisation of school and college education, and closing down of schools and colleges are a clear indication towards restricting access. Nearly 60-70% Indians do not have access to a proper internet connection. This figure is even more glaring if we take the rural populations. Online education and the government's desperation towards implementing it despite all limitations has made reservation and social justice irrelevant as reserved seats will lie vacant as the marginalised do not have internet access. For others who have managed education somehow, the selling of PSUs, railways, and other government owned industries to corporates, puts the the last nail in the coffin, taking away job security as unemployment rises. No government jobs would also mean no reservation as private firms as well as educational institutions are kept free of the bounds of reservation. The cycle of limiting opportunities for the oppressed classes is thus complete.

The NEP is therefore an instrument of exclusion. Taking the example of the much-celebrated multiple entry/exit four-year undergraduate programme, while on the outside it seems as a reasonable choice offered to the student. However, this choice-based policy is nothing but conversion of educational arena into a shopping mall with degrees as products, where a student enters with an empty basket, and money will define both the extent as well as quality of education a student has access to. In order to climb up the ladder, educational loans will

only be the module. Structurally this policy is designed to ensure that only the privileged with the money and resources will survive, and the poor and marginalised will have neither opportunity nor access, and even if they do, it will be at the mercy of corporate establishments.

This is exactly what India looked like before 1990, a country where privilege ruled. The Mandal agitation and the democratisation of Indian society through OBC reservations along with SC and ST reservation brought a paradigm shift. It created an entry point for the oppressed and marginalised into the hitherto closed arena of knowledge systems. It created a counter narrative to daily casteism. It generated social solidarities across platforms. It raised a voice in favour of the annihilation of caste and the dismantling of "graded inequality", however BJP-RSS had different plans, just like they did in 1990s. To communalise, privatise, and hegemonise the Indian polity, its economic system, cultural space, and social structure.

That is why Hindutva is a project to unite the divided society on a project of hate. That is why, the politics of "Mandir" and "Market" are back to destroy the demand for further democratisation of the marginalised through fundamentalism of hate and legitimisation of inequality. NEP is just a step in this process to undo history and to rewrite the future. That is the reason Sanskrit is back to be promoted and taught in schools, to teach Brahmanism and institutionalise segregation in and the division of Indian society.

New Economic Policy 2020: Against Democracy and Autonomy (We requested a public policy commentator for his opinion on New Education Policy 2020. As desired by him, we are publishing

it as an anonymous opinion piece.)

On 29 July, 2020, India got its New Education Policy (NEP, 2020)— which replaced the National Policy of Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986)— in the middle of an ongoing Covid-19 pandemic which continues to upend the current academic year across educational institutions throughout the world. Given that the NEP was eagerly awaited since the process of preparing it was initiated five years back, the terseness of the final document—only 63 pages long (the 1986 policy was 186 pages long)— surprised many. However, everyone agrees that it was long overdue, particularly in the changed global and national context and in view of significant ongoing transformations, due to technological and other political economy factors, in the job market and education sector throughout the world.

NEP, 2020 is a document with 'grand visions' and national aspirations, but with hardly any roadmap or details about how to realize them. There is generous use of the following words in the document—"local" (81 times), "multi-disciplinary/multidisciplinary" (69 times), "holistic" (41 times, to the delight of the RRS affiliates who oppose "liberal" education), "global/globally" (25 times), "flexible/flexibility" (23 times), "autonomy" (21 times), "universal" (20 times) and "creative" (12 times). The document also doesn't appear to contain anything that directly point towards communalization or saffronization of education, as argued by some critics—unless one interprets the mention of "ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought" as a "guiding light" of NEP, 2020, as telltale signs of Hindu revanchism in the space of education. Given the track record

of the incumbent government in its first and ongoing second terms, one can't be faulted for being sceptical of such exercise of "restraint" in the education policy. Nevertheless, the absence of an overtly communal slant to education in the policy document is a welcome relief in an increasingly gloomier landscape of bigotry and hatred.

There is much more in the document that one cannot but agree with. Who can disagree with choosing mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary school, doing away with rigid and early specialization in arts and sciences in high schools, making the education system sensitive to the local context, knowledge, resources and needs, making the undergraduate curriculum flexible, along with multiple entry and exit points for students, replacing higher education institutions offering single or a narrow set of programs by multi-department, multidisciplinary institutions offering the full range of education and setting up of Special Education Zones (SEZs) in regions with large populations of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs)?

The problem with the NEP, 2020 lies in the misalignment of the lofty objectives of the policy with the proposed structure of centralized governance. The NEP, 2020 came under attack from opposition political parties, teachers' associations and student organizations, for the manner in which it was brought into effect—with the Union Cabinet approving it, during the pandemic and without adequate discussion in the parliament. It has been a familiar ploy of the present government to enact radical changes in policies related to critical areas like privatization of public sector industries, labour laws, environment and

education policies etc., using the lockdown and restrictions on social interaction due to the pandemic, as an opportunity to bypass democracy and dissent. This reeks of a deliberate strategy of "shock therapy" that exploits a crisis situation, when citizens are too distracted or constrained to resist, to push through controversial and contested policies—as explained by Naomi Klein in her book "The Shock Doctrine".

One of the charges levelled against the NEP, 2020, by opposition political parties and powerful regional parties, is that it goes against the spirit of federalism in governance of education. One must note, however, that the process of centralization of governance of education has been going on for quite some time—with the key change being the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1976, bringing education from the State list to the concurrent list and dramatically altering the balance in favour of the Union government. The NPE, 1986 continued the trend. This centralization is manifest in the NEP, 2020 too; it contains some of its boldest recommendations with respect to the overhaul of the framework of regulation of higher education—embedding the regulatory in a single umbrella institution, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), with four separate verticals for regulation (National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC)) for the entire education sector, excluding medical and legal education, accreditation (National Accreditation Council (NAC)), funding (Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)) and standard setting (General Education Council (GEC)).

One wonders how this centralized system would work

in a continent-size country with more than 1.3 billion people, with dozens of different languages, and with different regional histories and levels of economic and human development. How can such an overly-centralized system be sensitive and flexible with respect to the 'local' context, needs and aspirations, as vigorously argued (81 times) in the policy? One can hardly discern any role for the states as an equal partner in the creation of the national regulatory framework—instead the states are mentioned in the context of "careful planning, joint monitoring, and collaborative implementation" of the policy. Let us not forget that many states of India are country-sized, in terms of population. To centralize policy at the state-level itself is problematic, given the remarkable diversity within states. To reduce the role of states to that of collaboration in a policy centralized at the national level is a disastrous move that would cripple the educational outcomes at the individual level and the achievement of social justice at the social level.

This trend towards centralization appears more problematic, when we look at the financing of education in India. While the total expenditure by central and state governments on education hovered around the lowly figure of 3 % of GDP in recent years, the centre's historically meagre expenditure has declined further from over 0.5% in 2014-15 to less than 0.5 % of its GDP in 2018-19. The overwhelming share (more than 90%) of the total expenditure by central and state governments on education is currently borne by state governments. For example, at present, there are fifty four central universities and more than four hundred state universities. Central

universities have traditionally been much better-funded than state universities—creating a two-tier system. The scarcity of well-funded higher education institutions mean that central institutions are coveted by students and faculty, and intense competition to get admission in these universities have generally consolidated a perception of its students as a creamy layer among college and university graduates, while most state institutions are seen as serving the education demands of the common (wo)man. This two-tier structure therefore goes against the federal spirit and equality for all in education. The trend towards centralization of governance of education therefore runs contrary to objective of running educational institutions in public interests. The NEP, 2020 commits to raising the total expenditure by states and centre on education to 6% of GDP, as recommended more than 50 years ago in the first education policy of India in 1968 (Kothari Education Commission, 1968) and reiterated in NPE, 1986, without specifying how much of that additional expenditure is to be borne by the centre. This is particularly critical in the current Indian context, with inter-state economic disparities rapidly increasing in the last few decades with consequent divergence in states' financial and administrative capacities to follow particular models and standards of education set by the centre.

Another instance of centralization in the NEP, 2020, is at the level of individual higher education institutions (HEIs), in the form of a proposal for granting “graded autonomy” to the HEIs and enabling them to become “independent self-governing institutions pursuing innovation and excellence” (NEP, 2020; Pg

49). The autonomy of the institution is to be achieved, according to the NEP, 2020, through the setting up of a Board of Governors (BoG) for all autonomous institutions, consisting of highly competent and qualified people. The BoG will be empowered “to govern the institution free of any external interference, make all appointments including that of head of the institution, and take all decisions regarding governance” (ibid). The danger in this model is the possibility of imposition of a hierarchical corporate model of governance on academic institutions, with little or no voice of stakeholders like faculty, staff and students in the running of the institution. Such a model allows even greater scope for political appointment of Chairman and members of BoG, with no checks and balances against arbitrary assumption and exercise of power by the BoG, which may work against the long-term interests of the institutions. In such cases, the role of the head of the institution might be re-imagined in the likeness of the CEO of a corporate organization. This will deal a death blow to the existing democratic models of governance of educational institutions.

Talking of social justice, several proposals in the NEP appear problematic, even if some of them appear to be progressive on paper. For example, the proposal in NEP, 2020 to set up a National Testing Agency (NTA) to administer a common aptitude test for university admissions, seems to be inspired by the standardized exams like SAT and GRE for USA; however there is growing criticism of such tests in USA on grounds that these tests work against disadvantaged groups. It is also not clear how such a common aptitude test will reduce the dependence

on coaching centres—its avowed objective—given that elsewhere the NEP allows for ‘diversity’ in school curricula. What else, but coaching, can bridge the gap between the school and the entrance exam curricula? While the language policy in school—use of mother language as medium of instruction at least till Grade V, and if possible, till Grade VIII—may appear desirable, the lack of proficiency in English can severely compromise the prospects of students in the job market. Whether we like it or not, English continues to be the marker of social and economic mobility in a country that is yet to be decolonized. Particularly, for historically disadvantaged groups, access to the English language is critical to overcoming social barriers to improvement; learning English as a second language from the primary level itself is therefore essential. It is also not clear how the students will cope in primary schools where the regional language is different from the student’s mother tongue or if the student’s parents have transferable jobs. Indian society is highly aspirational. Research shows that only 2% of Indians are middle-class by income criterion, but 50% think they are. One wonders how the Indian society which venerates English as the language of upward mobility will take to such a language policy. In sum, the new NEP has an erroneous supply-side perspective — if there is a ‘supply’ of the vernacular languages in schools, the ‘demand’ will follow. But the ‘demand’ for types of education is likely to be shaped by the conditions of the labour market in a neoliberal economy.

This last aspect is even more critical in the current context

when the world is witnessing significant shifts in the labour market. In the wake of revolutionary and disruptive innovations in information and communication technology, artificial intelligence and automation, the labour market has witnessed striking trends in the last couple of decades. These trends—referred to as “job polarization”—involve changing skill-composition of jobs available in the labour market, in rich as well as in developing countries. While the demand for low-skilled and high-skilled jobs has increased, the number of middle-skill jobs has rapidly decreased. The high-skilled jobs are those requiring analytical abilities, problem-solving skills and creativity. People with these qualities are likely to be highly educated and employed in professional, technical and managerial roles in engineering, finance, medicine etc. Low-skilled jobs are either those involving physical dexterity and manual labour or those involving flexible, interpersonal communications that cannot be easily automated—e.g. food production, cleaning, security and care-giving services, witnessing and bartending, etc. But these have also traditionally been low-paid jobs and require no more than school education.

Traditionally, it has been the industry’s demand for middle-skilled labourers with decent salaries that had sustained the demand for higher education degrees. These jobs included sales, customer support, administration and secretarial support, construction, production, transportation, maintenance and repair and so on. It is the large chunk of these middle-skill occupations, that are routine and rule- or procedure-based, that is being automated away. This

has resulted in an “hour glass” economy—with the consequent vanishing of “middle class” in rich countries, making them look more and more like developing economies. The two fastest growing occupations in USA, for example, are food and beverage service workers and personal care aides. These and many other jobs for which there is a growing demand don’t require college degrees and don’t pay much. In the developing countries themselves, the promise of upward economic mobility is increasingly threatened in the face of mounting “skill barriers” to movement of people of from low-productivity, low-income agrarian livelihoods to high-productivity, non-agricultural jobs with decent wages. These trends are unleashed and stand to be exacerbated by the further spread of use of artificial intelligence and robotics on a larger scale in manufacturing and services.

It is important to note that high-skill jobs, that are creative and analytical, will most likely need proficiency in the globally more widely used languages like English. But, even low-skill jobs may require either or both vocational training and communication skills (including certain proficiency in English) in a multi-lingual society like India. It was reassuring to see that NEP,2020 acknowledges this reality at the outset—“[w]ith various dramatic scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, many unskilled jobs worldwide may be taken over by machines, while the need for a skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics, computer science, and data science, in conjunction with multidisciplinary abilities across the sciences, social sciences, and

humanities, will be increasingly in greater demand” (NEO,2020: Pg 3). The emphasis on vocational education (the word appears 76 times in the document) as well as emphasis on liberal arts, including languages, is a reflection of the dramatic shifts in the labour market prospects and the uncertainty of availability of decent jobs. The flexibility with respect to completion of school and college education (with multiple exit and entry point for students) and choice of curriculum (including between vocational and academic streams) is a reflection of the precarious conditions of employment throughout the world. These parts of the NEP,2020, seem to be the only pragmatic elements in of an otherwise purely aspirational document with the usual rhetoric of achieving universal access to education, making India a global knowledge superpower, catapulting Indian institutions to the list of globally top-ranking institutions, accelerating the digital transformation etc. as well as achieving targets set by Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, 2030, and other recommended goals (gross enrolment ratio, expenditure on education etc.)

In sum, despite some positive prescriptions, which are to be expected in any policy document in the 21st century, and some pragmatic elements, the NEP, 2020, is disappointing in its failure to clearly put forward a roadmap of essential changes to the ailing education sector in India which will ensure social justice by reducing inequalities between regions and social groups. Political forces should oppose this policy for its vacuous commitments and problematic recommendations inimical to federal and local autonomy and organizational democracy in academic institutions. □

Body Blow to India's Handloom and Handicrafts Heritage

Sangram Mandal

The All India Handloom Board and the All India Handicrafts Board were dissolved by the development commissioners for these sectors on 27th July and 3rd August, just few days before the National Handloom Day of 7th August. The Modi government explained demolishing the boards as being "In consonance with the vision of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance', and "part of efforts to strive for a leaner government apparatus." Citing the same rationale, the government has also disbanded the All India Powerloom Board recently.

In a 'Mann Ki Bat' episode of 2018, Narendra Modi claimed that the board handicrafts, khadi and village industries were set up during Jana Sangh leader Shyama Prasad Mookerjee's tenure as Industries Minister. However, Mookerjee was in office only until 1950. The truth is that the Handicrafts Board was set up in 1952 by freedom fighter Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay and separate boards for handicrafts and handloom, and the Khadi and Village Industries Commission were started in 1957. The Modi regime can only claim credit for demolishing this legacy.

Annual reports published by the Ministry of Textiles since 1992 have not show any significant progress on the handloom board front. Also, for decades, there were not any recognised and proven steps towards the progress and growth of the weaver, artisans and the boards by the government. The last measures in this direction were the Janata Cloth Scheme and other controlled cloth schemes introduced by the government in 1976 with the intention of providing continuous employment to

the weavers and supply of subsidised cloth to the poor.

The government claims now that the boards were utterly useless. But the government has no answers as to why it has failed to appoint new office bearers and new management board since 2015. The last notifications put up on the Textile Ministry website relating to the two dissolved boards show that the term of 121 handloom board members had expired in 2018, and that of the 65-member handicrafts board in 2015. These posts had since then been vacant.

The current Government claims that it has introduced several schemes and policies to support growth of the sector, one of those is the dubious Mudra scheme. The government's annual report of 2017-18 claims that they have covered 52059 weavers under the Mudra scheme with an average loan of Rupees 44000 per head. But the truth is that the reader will never find an artisan or weaver benefited with the said Mudra scheme.

In India, after agriculture, handloom and its various branches provide survival and sustenance for the largest segment of people. Nearly 74% of the weavers are women artisans. The weaving industry is largely rural, and the decentralized unorganized sector is one of the mainstays of India's rural economy.

People from all over the world have flocked to this country to learn eco-friendly weaving techniques. As per the official handloom census, out of 36.46 lakh weavers in the country, 10% belong to Scheduled Caste, 16% to Tribal and 45% to OBC community. Collectively, they are able to produce 6,203 million square meters of products throughout the

year, and this production generates a turnover of about Rs 2,249 crore. Today, what is the condition of a weaver in India?

Let us look at the current socio-economic condition of the weavers living in the villages at the junction of Margram in Birbhum and Khargram in Murshidabad of West Bengal. The weavers of this area mainly produce silk sarees. The population of the Natungram of Bishnupur Gram Panchayat in Margram 2 no. block is at about 1500, each of these 350 families is involved in weaving. There are about 300 looms in the whole village.

Wages range from Rs 420 to Rs 380 for 12 yards and 8 yards, although weaving takes about the same time regardless of the yards of cloth. All the family members have to be engaged in weaving, weaving and weaving, drying and so on. In other words, for working 18 to 22 hours for two to three days, the income of the whole family is just Rs 360 to Rs 420.

The moneylender will sell each sari at his next level of Rs 2500-3000 per piece. His profit per sari is Rs 800-1200. A moneylender employs at least 10 such weavers, who produce a couple of saris every day ready to be sold to him. In other words, after a week of backbreaking work, a weaver's family can earn a maximum of Rs 900. However, everyone knows how much a silk sari costs by the time it reaches the hands of the buyer, after dyeing, designing, colouring, labelling. Those profits all go to the moneylenders.

Scrapping the handloom, handicrafts, power loom boards is a huge body blow to the suffering weavers of India, and to India's precious heritage of handloom and handicrafts. □

China's Concentration Camps For Uyghurs: In China's Own Words

In the past few years, there are increasingly disturbing reports about China's internment camps for Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. There have been many credible academic studies as well as journalistic reports documenting the systemic incarceration of an entire nationality/ethnicity, in the name of a "war on terror." China, and Chinese media, have claimed that these reports are distortions by the "western media" and "western nations" interested in discrediting China.

Information on the issue tends to be from ideologically polarised sources. So, like so many issues in today's world, there is a tendency to take positions based on ideological camps rather than facts. Every report in the BBC, New York Times or Washington Post can be dismissed as "fake news" and "Western propaganda", while likewise any report from Xinhua or Global Times can be called "Chinese propaganda".

How should we, on the communist, Marxist Leninist Left in India and the world, view the matter? Marxists have to look at any matter from the perspective of facts and the highest principles of the rights of people and of oppressed communities. No one should choose to believe or disbelieve facts, or support or oppose oppression, based on "camps" in the global world order. There is no doubt that the US and its allies have vested interests in isolating China; and also in spreading a variety of racially motivated Sinophobic material, which has many takers

in India. But that cannot mean that those who are firmly opposed to any such US/NATO agenda, make no independent assessment/criticism of China's policies and its treatment of dissenters, minorities and oppressed nationalities. In fact, it is important that if rightwing discourse is attacking China, a consistent Left must assess and critique China's policies from a firmly Marxist vantage point. Even at the height of the Cold War, the CPIML made its own independent assessments and critiques of the Soviet Union from a Marxist perspective, rather than taking stances based on Cold War camps. The CPIML also opposed the Tiananmen Square massacre. We pointed out that facts simply did not support the claim that the protesting students were all part of a rightwing pro-capitalist plot, and that regardless, nothing could justify the massacre of protesting students. In August 2009, *Liberation* carried a piece by Arindam Sen titled 'Mao Zedong Thought and Ethnic Clashes in Xinjiang', outlining the Chinese State's divergence from Mao's "emphasis on opposing Han chauvinism" in dealing with contradictions with minority nationalities.

On the current situation of the Uyghurs in China, *Liberation* attempts to separate the wheat from the chaff, by closely and critically reading China's own official public White Paper on their Uyghur policy; and their official responses to leaked documents and other reports in various news outlets. We scrutinise these official positions and responses of the Chinese state and ruling

regime, to see if they match up to the principles of upholding the rights of people and oppressed communities that we on the Left demand from any regime. So, does China's policy towards the Uyghur people stand up to such scrutiny?

China's 2019 White Paper On Uyghurs

After a period of denying all reports of the existence of internment camps for Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region, China changed course, and decided not only to admit the existence of the camps but to justify and even boast of these camps as a successful model of fighting "terrorism." In March 2019, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China published a white paper titled "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang". This position paper can be accessed on the official website of the Chinese Government at http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2019/03/18/content_281476567813306.htm.

This paper begins with a long discourse on "terrorism", and stating that since the 1990s, and especially in the wake of the September 9/11 terror attack in the US, separatist forces aiming to establish Xinjiang as "East Turkestan" separate from China, have been indulging in terrorist activities there. The paper cites several of these instances.

Marxist Leninist principles demand that we try to identify and address the material and political basis for militancy, rather than blaming it on "outside" forces

or on “religious extremists.” For instance, we remind our fellow Indians that the Indian State cannot be allowed to get away with the claim that militancy in the Kashmir Valley is a product purely of Pakistani interference or “Islamic extremism”. There are genuine political grievances that the Kashmiri people have: and militancy is primarily a product of the refusal of the Indian State to admit or address those grievances. For militancy in Kashmir, Manipur, or Nagaland, there are historical and political grievances at root, compounded by Indian State’s brutal and repressive policy of treating entire communities in these regions as potentially “terrorist”. The Chinese Government’s paper on Uyghurs does exactly the same as what the Indian State does: blame militancy on “outside interference” and “religious extremists”. Our August 2009 piece analysed the issued underlying Uyghur resentment and alienation. Why does the Chinese state not reflect on their own failings in addressing the root political issues, and failure to win the confidence and support of the people in the Xinjiang province?

It is also interesting that while the Chinese State blames all criticism of its Uyghur policy on “Western capitalist propaganda”, its own policy document echoes the US, NATO “War on Terror” propaganda and policy (a fountainhead of Islamophobic state sponsored violence), complete with the invocation of 9/11 as a watershed moment.

Policing A Community In The Name of “Preventing” Crime

Across the world, from Black communities in the US to India’s policy in Kashmir, Manipur, Nagaland, and Bastar, repressive states have labelled entire communities as prone to “crime” or “terror”, to justify intrusive surveillance and state terror against people of those communities, based on their identity not on crimes committed by them. “Salwa Judum” in Bastar is one instance, where the Indian State justified acting to displace and imprison entire adivasi villages, in the name of “preventing Maoist terror”.

The White Paper makes it clear that the Chinese State does much the same: treating the entire Uyghur population as prone to religious extremism and terrorism, and justifying mass incarceration of Uyghurs in “reeducation camps” in the name of “preventing” terrorism.

A UAPA On Steroids

So what is the legal basis for the Chinese State to send vast numbers of Uyghur people to such camps? What is the legal basis for judging that an Uyghur individual is in need of “reeducation”? The Counterterrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China attempts to cover its own back by stating that no one should be targeted on the basis of any specific religion or ethnic identity. But this is how the Government White Paper describes the scope of the law under which persons can be sent by “people’s courts” to the “deradicalisation” centres: “In the course of counterterrorism and de-radicalization, the local government forbids any organization or individual from using religion to split the country,

spread religious extremism, incite ethnic hatred, undermine ethnic unity, disturb social order, harm citizens’ physical or mental health, hinder the implementation of the country’s administrative, judicial, educational and cultural systems, or harm national security, national interests, public interests and civil rights and interests. It prevents ill-intentioned people from using religion or religious activities to create disorder or commit crimes.”

Nearly every word in this paragraph is vague and open to arbitrary and subjective interpretation by the State. For instance, there is no clarity on how the law distinguishes spreading religious faith from “spreading religious extremism.” If a religious preacher advocates abstaining from alcohol, for example, is he spreading faith or extremism? If an Uyghur person speaks about Han Chinese majoritarian domination, or imposition of the Mandarin language, is he or she guilty of “undermining ethnic unity” or “disturbing the social order”? If an Uyghur person wears a beard, or observe a fast during Ramzan, are they hindering “implementation of the country’s cultural systems”? How does the State distinguish “ill-intentioned people” from “well-intentioned” ones?

All in all, the Counterterrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China is like India’s draconian UAPA (or its predecessors POTA and TADA) on steroids: a handy tool which empowers the State to surveil and criminalise the most innocent and ordinary of actions, especially if the said actions are committed by a religious minority or ideological dissenter.

Imposition of Mandarin Chinese Language

As Indians, we are acutely aware of the sensitivities and sensibilities of various nationalities and ethnicities regarding language. We are also aware of how India's fascists seek to impose homogeneity in the name of "Hindi" linguistic and "Hindu" religious supremacy. India has witnessed and continues to witness mass protests — in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Karnataka, for example — against the imposition of Hindi.

Likewise, for the Uyghurs and other minority ethnicities in the Xinjiang region, language is a key, precious and sensitive part of their identity. Imposition of Mandarin Chinese (the language of the Han Chinese that constitute the majority in China) is resented, and seen, understandably as an attempt to erase Uyghur culture and identity.

The White Paper repeatedly states that the Xinjiang people's weak command over the Mandarin Chinese language makes them less capable of telling right from wrong, illegal from legal. The vocabulary of the White Paper implies that the Uyghur people are uncivilised and childlike: and need to be civilised by being taught Mandarin Chinese and the rule of law.

The White Paper is peppered by a disturbing number of references to how "rural residents in Xinjiang" have a tendency to become criminals because they "are weak in the use of standard spoken and written Chinese language, slow in acquiring modern knowledge, and have poor communication skills", and thus "such people are more inclined to be incited or coerced into criminality by terrorist and extremist forces." Perhaps what is most disturbing about

reading this White Paper is that it is a document China has made available in the public domain. The Chinese State feels no qualms or hesitation about declaring such racist stereotypes as its official policy! This policy terming the speakers of ethnic minorities' own languages as "slow", non "modern", and "poor in communication skills", and therefore prone to crime, is reminiscent of the Criminal Tribes Act in colonial India. Reading these passages, there is no doubt that the Chinese State's official policy seeks to humiliate and criminalise the language, culture, and entire communities of Uyghur people.

Note: Chinese State policy openly sees knowledge of Mandarin Chinese as a test of patriotism. To put this in perspective: If the Modi regime were, in an official policy document, to declare knowledge of Hindi to be a test of patriotism, (and conversely, a lack of knowledge of Hindi as a proof of lack of intelligence and criminal/terrorist potential) it would easily be recognised and resisted as a fascist policy of enforced homegenisation.

Mass Displacement/ Forced Labour?

The White Paper refers repeatedly to "transfer employment" as a job policy for the Xinjiang region: it speaks of "implementing the plan of transfer employment for 100,000 laborers in southern Xinjiang in three years (2018-2020)"; "having realized the transfer employment of 75,000 people"; and "transferring 8.305 million surplus rural labourers for employment in Xinjiang from 2016 to 2018." What exactly does "transfer employment" mean? Do the labourers have any choice in the matter of where they choose to work, and whether or

not they would like to "transfer"? There have been reports of China relocating thousands of Uyghurs from Xinjiang in western China to factories across the country where they work "under conditions that strongly suggest forced labour," producing for a variety of global brands including Apple, Nike, Amazon, Samsung, Zara, H&M, Microsoft, Mercedes-Benz, and Uniqlo.

Is this policy of "transfer employment" forced labour? This question can only be decided by the Uighur workers themselves, if they could answer in an environment free of fear of loss of liberty. All we can say, based on the official documents and statements of the Chinese State, is that such an environment certainly does not exist.

Does China Deny The Authenticity of Leaked Documents?

Now, we come to the documents leaked, reportedly by someone from within the Chinese regime, to the New York Times newspaper in November 2019.

The first thing we at Liberation did was to check whether China questioned the authenticity of the documents. The answer is: No.

A report titled "Western media report on Xinjiang lacks morality", the Global Times (the international version of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper) dated 17 November 2019, wrote that "The New York Times disclosed more than 400 pages of "leaked files" from Northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and maliciously attacked China's governance in Xinjiang." The use of the word "disclosed" suggests that the Chinese State and CPC are not denying the

authenticity of the documents.

The same report merely blames the critical analysis of the said documents by the NYT, on “Western public opinion used their value system to criticize the vocational education and training centers in Xinjiang.”

This very notion of a “Western value system” which is distinct from an Eastern one is a racist and colonial trope, embraced and regurgitated by rightwing ideologues in both the supposed “East” and “West”. The Indian far right, for instance, denounces Marxism and communism itself as a “Western value system”.

The report, after claiming that Xinjiang cities are now free of terror and crime, asks a question: “How many people in the world will oppose such changes in their own cities and prefer to live in a so-called democratic and free society where extremism prevails and terrorism is rampant?” Repressive regimes across the world (including that of India in Kashmir) justify restrictions on liberties and democracy as a necessary sacrifice in exchange for “safety”, “welfare” and “development”. We may recall the Right to Privacy verdict in India which rightly observed that “The refrain that the poor need no civil and political rights and are concerned only with economic well-being has been utilised though history to wreak the most egregious violations of human rights. Above all, it must be realised that it is the right to question, the right to scrutinize and the right to dissent which enables an informed citizenry to scrutinize the actions of government.”

In the voice of the Global Times, the Chinese State effectively admits that Xinjiang under their rule is neither democratic nor free. But if you hold democracy and

freedom to be vital components of any substantive safety, welfare, and development, the Chinese State dismisses you as being an advocate of a “Western value system”!

Note that the Chinese State does not claim to be upholding a socialist value system as opposed to a capitalist or imperialist one. That is a relief, since any socialist value system should by definition have higher standards of democracy, human rights, freedom, and civil liberties than the ones held by bourgeois capitalist democracies.

The Thought Police

The leaked documents read as though they are pages from a dystopian novel like Orwell’s 1984.

Students returning to Xinjiang from campuses in other parts of China for summer holidays are dismayed to find their parents, grandparents, or other relatives missing. The documents lay down instructions and a detailed Question and Answer script for local government officials, explaining the protocol for responding to the students’ anguished questions.

The first thing that strikes one, is that the documents repeatedly refer to the camps as “concentrated education and training school students”. Naturally, this is a translation from Chinese into English: but China has not claimed there is anything wrong with the translation. So, it seems clear that China in its internal documents effectively admits to holding Uyghur people in “concentration camps”.

The Q&A script makes it very clear that the persons are being detained in camps without having committed any crime at all. For instance, in reply to the question “Did they commit a crime? Will they be convicted?”, the scripted

reply is: “They haven’t committed a crime and won’t be convicted.”

But the script repeatedly uses the dehumanising language of lack of “health”, “infection”, “virus”, “disease” and “malignant tumour” to describe the condition of the incarcerated Uyghur persons: “It is just that their thinking has been infected by unhealthy thoughts, and if they don’t quickly receive education and correction, they’ll become a major active threat to society and to your family. It’s very hard to totally eradicate viruses in thinking in just a short time. It needs to be dealt with like detox for drug addicts.”

The script warns the students that their own conduct can affect the amount of time for which their relatives are detained: “family members, including you, must abide by the state’s laws and rules, and not believe or spread rumors, and take an active part in collective life. Only then can you add points for your family member, and after a period of assessment they can leave the school if they meet course completion standards.”

The script also indicates that the camps are no less than prisons. In reply to the question “Can my family members ask for leave to visit me?”, the script offers the reply: “This is strict, regulated and concentrated training behind closed doors....In general, leave won’t be granted while they’re in training and study. If you want to see your family member, we can arrange for you to see them through video.”

The documents also prescribe strict surveillance and censorship of the students and their social media posts, and “direct thought guidance” to indoctrinate these students, warning that “Returning students from other parts of China have widespread social

ties across the entire country. The moment they issue incorrect opinions on WeChat, Weibo and other social media platforms, the impact is widespread and difficult to eradicate." It is clear from this that the Chinese State is the Thought Police which decides which opinions are "incorrect", and which openly and unashamedly claims the authority to tell students what to think.

The documents' claims that they are providing "jobs" and "vocational training" to improve the lives of the incarcerated persons is undermined by the fact that many detainees had careers as scholars, civil servants and entertainers, and are being detained as punishment for their "incorrect thoughts".

"He refused to round up everyone who should be rounded up"

The documents leaked to NYT revealed that in August 2016, a hard-liner named Chen was transferred from Tibet to govern Xinjiang. Chen issued an order to "Round up everyone who should be rounded up." This vague order made it clear that the criteria for being "rounded up" were entirely arbitrary. One official Wang, who ordered the release of more than 7,000 camp inmates, was punished by being "detained, stripped of power and prosecuted." His confession, in which he wrote (presumably under duress) that "Without approval and on my own initiative, I broke the rules," was publicly read out to officials in Xinjiang. But the real reason for his punishment was hidden in a secret internal report which was among the leaked documents. The report said that "He refused to round up everyone who should be rounded up": a phrase that

could have come straight from the pen of Orwell. (The New York Times article on the leaked documents can be read on Indian Express at <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/absolutely-no-mercy-leaked-files-show-chinas-mass-detention-of-muslims-in-officials-own-words-6123796/>)

Islamophobia and Double Standards

Remember when Trump instituted the "Muslim Ban", banning immigrants or refugees from certain Muslim majority countries, associating those countries with terrorism? That policy was rightly protested for its Islamophobia and racism. The Chinese State's documents display a similar Islamophobia. The Q&A script cites a question frequently asked by students about their incarcerated relatives: why were Xinjiang residents being detained in camps for travelling to two dozen Muslim majority countries (including Turkey and Saudi Arabia) using passports issued by the Chinese State? The reply: "Because they have visited countries where religious extremism is very serious and they may have come under its influence, the dangers are immense as soon as the buds of religious extremism appear. That's why it's really necessary to put them through legal-system education and patriotic education after they return." The Global Times report cited above states that some areas in southern Xinjiang are sensitive to chaos and terror because they "are bordered by Pakistan and Afghanistan."

The double standards and hypocrisy of the US when it comes to attacking China on the question of Islamophobia, civil rights, racism, and detention/internment camps

are obvious. But the hypocrisy and double standards of countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in supporting China's Uyghur policy are also glaringly obvious.

Among the more than 50 countries that have signed onto a letter endorsing Chinese "governance" in Xinjiang, are the same Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that Chinese State documents associate with terror and religious extremism. So, Uyghur persons are persecuted for visiting Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: yet Pakistan and Saudi Arabia support this persecution. Turkey under Erdogan is busy repatriating Uyghur refugees to China to face certain imprisonment and possible death, using the underhand means of first allowing them to be extradited to a third country. Pakistan and Turkey are very loud on the violation of human rights of the people of Kashmir by the Indian State. Why are they silent and complicit in the violation of human rights of the Uyghur people by the Chinese State?

We do not have to look further than China's own documents and its own propaganda organs to recognise that the Chinese State is holding vast numbers of Uyghurs in concentration camps, subjecting the entire Uyghur community both inside and outside the camps to forced indoctrination, surveillance and censorship, and attempting to erase the identity and culture of the Uyghur people. China has been touting its Xinjiang model as a successful model of "counterterrorism" which the world should adopt. Certainly, Narendra Modi and his fascist regime in India, would be happy to adopt China's Xinjiang model for Kashmir, and for minorities and dissenters in the whole of India, lock, stock, and barrel. □

Pettimudi (Munnar) Tragedy:

Continuing Climate Change Disasters, Lack of Preparedness and Failures in Delivering Relief

Aneesh Markose

The catastrophic landslide of August 6 at Pettimudi, Rajamala, which is located 20 km from Munnar town and about 38 km away from Painavu, the district headquarters of Idukki, is known to have claimed at least 83 lives of tea estate workers including their families comprising women, children, and the elderly. After more than ten days of rescue efforts, only 58 bodies have so far been recovered. A number of bodies were found at locations nearly 2 kms downhill and perhaps many will continue to lie buried under the rubble.

Media reports citing local sources indicate that the number of casualties may be well over a hundred. A birthday celebration and a 'bangle-wearing' ceremony attended by nearly thirty relatives and guests visiting from other parts had taken place in two of the collapsed labour line houses. It is likely that some of these guests were in the two houses on that fateful night. However, Tata Consumer Products Limited, in whose possession the tea estate and the land is, would acknowledge the number of dead and missing only on the basis of a list of authorised occupants as noted in the estate records. The Kerala government too seems to be of the same view.

Relief announced by the Chief Minister:

Critical questions were widely raised about the inadequacy of the immediate relief announced for the families of the deceased in

Pettimudi. The discriminatory nature of the announcement of relief amounts offered to families was also pointed out citing the example of the air crash in Calicut on August 7. In the former case it was just Rs 5 lakhs in respect of each deceased, whereas in the latter, relief amount was nearly double. However, it was later clarified that the relief announced by the Chief Minister in the case of Pettimudi victims was just part of a larger package of rehabilitation to be undertaken by the government after taking stock of detailed aspects of loss of lives and property. The Chief Minister subsequently visited the site and announced that all survivors of the totally landless victims would be provided with governmental support in procuring new land and shelters for them.

In the above circumstances, it is imperative that the government of Kerala take urgent steps to expedite the assessment of loss of lives and the loss of moveable and immovable properties of poor estate workers. Proper follow-up measures, putting in place adequate mechanisms to compensate and deliver relief in a convincing and transparent manner are equally important. Particularly, estate workers of this region and society at large should be taken into confidence through concrete action. Tata and Co. should also not be allowed to escape the responsibility in their capacity as employers in providing relief to the survivors and solving the long pending demands for decent

housing for workers.

Against the backdrop of the Pettimudi tragedy, some of the questions raised in 2015 by the women estate workers who led a historic and partly successful agitation of tea estate workers in the Munnar region come to the fore once again. Pombilai Orumai, the organisation which was led by two women estate workers Ms Gomati and Ms Lisi could succeed in getting average wages in tea estate enhanced from just around Rs 200/- to Rs 385/- . Many other demands such as distribution of land to the landless, adequate housing for all estate workers and better educational facilities for children could not be pursued by the organization for many reasons. In this scenario, serious differences of opinion within the leadership and the resultant split in the organisation were a contributing factor.

In the aftermath of the Pettimudi disaster, Ms Gomati wanted to meet the Chief Minister as he arrived few days ago in Munnar to visit the scene of the disaster. She was not only denied permission to meet the CM but was also forcibly removed and apprehended by the police. In a passionate appeal to the Kerala Government and the people, Gomati described the pathetic social and economic situation, problems of landlessness, structural discrimination suffered by estate workers at the hands of not just the estate owners like the Tatas but also under the elected governments.

Another important grievance

of estate workers is being denied housing after retirement unless any of their children is enrolled as a worker. The retirement benefits and savings available for an estate worker are generally not sufficient to buy land or settle elsewhere and hence many estate workers are virtually compelled to make their children work in the estate just for the sake of shelter.

According to the officially acknowledged data both by the Tatas and the government, in the Munnar region alone. They are all estate workers from different generations whose living spaces are extremely constrained because of landlessness, lack of accommodation, and bifurcated units of families having to live under one roof.

Pettimudi Landslide :

Far too often, natural disasters of this nature are attributed to human interference. However, this is not the case in Pettimudi and the surrounding region. Since 2018, Kerala has experienced destructive August floods and landslides for the third time in a row.

While the devastating floods of 2018 took the lives of over 486 people from almost all districts, over sixty deaths were caused by major landslides in the Western Ghats regions of Thrissur, Waynad, and Idukki districts. Agricultural and other sources of income of people of the entire state were irrecoverably affected. They were not adequately compensated by the relief package either.

In the middle of August of 2019, floods returned to Kerala and landslide wreaked havoc in Kavalappara and Puthumala, respectively of Malappuram and Waynad districts claiming 59 and 19 lives and entire land and properties of the affected families. One may

remember that the normal pattern of southwest monsoon in Kerala is one that begins with the month of June and gains maximum intensity towards the middle of July to recede gradually in the weeks following. The state which used to get rains in a somewhat distributed manner for six months now finds the pattern severely altered for the last three consecutive years. Some of the worst tragedies have now been experienced in the earlier halves of August. These were also marked by exceptionally phenomenal and unprecedented spells of rainfall in shorter spans in the affected locations, which underlines the dire necessity of administrative preparedness for the serious consequences and challenges of climate change.

Against the backdrop of the calamities that occurred in 2019, the government of Kerala had appointed a committee of experts to review the situation and recommend most suitable remedial and preparatory measures to be taken by the administration. Dr P R Arun, who is a scientist with the ground water division of Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM) and a member of the above committee, has made separate observations about Kavalappara and Puthumala tragedies of 2019 and about the latest major calamity at Pettimudi this year.

In the case of Kavalappara landslide in Malappuram district, Dr Arun observes that large scale human interference had obstructed the natural courses of downward flow of streams and rivulets. This, together with digging up of the top soil upto a depth of 70 cms for making thousands of large pits for planting rubber in a nearby area could indeed have contributed to the tragedy. These local

interference factors in combination with phenomenally heavy rains in the locality became the ultimate cause of the major landslide that literally washed off a community claiming 59 lives. At the same time, Dr Arun observes that the causative factors of Puthumala landslide were different. He believes that multiple cloudbursts and unusually heavy rains in the interior of forests had generated a huge volume of water that temporarily gathered causing water levels to rise as high as the crowns of many big standing trees. As the downpours continued, pressure of flowing water atop as well as within the dam-like structure brought about its destruction. This resulted in enormous volumes of earth sliding downwards along with gushing waters, wreaking havoc in the human habitat.

Coming to the 2020 August tragedy in Pettimudi, Dr Arun observes that the landslide is likely to have occurred independently of local human interference. Huge clusters of rain clouds seem to have formed deep inside the forests, as a result of which rainfall became exceptionally concentrated and heavy over a tiny portion of forests. Consequently, a major chunk of the hill itself slipped downwards destroying everything on the surface. Dr Arun suggests that this may be a phenomenon causing surficial shifts, and when combined with human interference, capable of bringing on similar disasters. The land area of Kuttanad in Alleppy district is shown to have surfaced from the Arabian Sea as part of such phenomenon believed to have occurred between 5000 to 6000 years ago.

As long as one listens to the explanations mentioned above, there is much reason to believe that these tragic landslides could be repeated in the near future as

well. Therefore, it is evident that meticulous preparedness and planning at the administrative and

governmental levels alone could restrict the human costs of climate change to a minimal level. □

Protest Against Persecution of Peasant Leaders

CPIML and All India Kisan Mahasabha observed 14 August 2020 as a day of protest across the country for the release of CPIML CC member and AIKMS National Secretary Assam youth leader Balindra Saikia and against the witch hunt of AIKMS National Secretary and Viplavi Kisan Sandesh Editor Purushottam Sharma whom the Delhi Police detained at the Thana for 8 hours and interrogated with the intent of falsely implicating him in the Delhi riots.

Balindra Saikia was arrested from his home in Dibrugarh District and sent to judicial custody. He had been leading a series of agitations for compensation for farmers who have lost their lands to a road construction project. Before the arrest, a mob led by BJP-supported goons surrounded his house in the morning and challenged him to come out of the house. This continued till local Party supporters reached the spot. A complaint was filed in the Thana but instead of arresting the anti-social elements, the police arrested Balindra Saikia. He was subsequently released on bail, several days later.

A few days earlier, another CPIML CC member from Assam Comrade Bibek Das was witch-hunted merely for a Facebook post on the condition of tea garden workers and poor in Vishwanath District.

The targeting of activists like Akhil Gogoi, Bittu Sonowal, and CPIML leaders Bibek Das and Balindra Saikia is clearly a part of the BJP government's countrywide cycle of repression to crush voices raised in favor of the Constitution and rights of the working class.

Similarly, CPIML and AIKMS have condemned the conspiracy to implicate AIKMS National Secretary and Viplavi Kisan Sandesh Editor Purushottam Sharma in the case relating to the Delhi riots. Under the excuse of investigation, the Delhi police Special Cell made Comrade Sharma sit at their Lodi Colony office for 8 hours.

The protests were held in Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Karnataka, Pondichery, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Punjab and other States. □

of Police demanding suspension of Mithanpura Thana in-charge Bhagirath Prasad responsible for the midnight brutalization of the women and strict action to be taken against him. The demands also included proper treatment and compensation for the injured women, withdrawal of the false case registered against girl students associated with AISA, and immediate arrest of the criminals who attacked the AIPWA-AISA-CPIML office. A good number of women were present at the dharna including AIPWA District President Sharda Devi, District Councilor Vijnesh Yadav, Kusumi Devi, Shanti Devi, Shahnaz Khatoon, Israt Khatoon, Rekha Devi and Sunita Devi.

Speaking on the occasion women activists said that the stark truth about the Nitish regime is that dozens of male police forcibly enter homes and brutally beat up and injure and misbehave with women; women students and their relatives are falsely implicated in fake cases; the Mithanpura Thana in-charge makes vulgar comments and indecent allegations in the CPIML office against girl students and women but even after 10 days no action is taken against him. The police maintain a nexus with the criminals who attacked the CPIML office, instead of arresting them. The role of the Thana in-charge remains suspicious. He still continues to make baseless statements and propaganda against girl students and women.

They said that even during this Corona pandemic women are being made victims of police brutality under the Modi-Nitish governments. What kind of women empowerment and 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao' (Protect and Educate Daughters) campaign is this?

The Nitish government should take serious note of the police

Midnight Police Brutality Against Women in Muzaffarpur

All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) organized a dharna at the office of the District Collector Muzaffarpur against brutal beating of AIPWA activists (women and girls) and misbehavior by the police who entered their

homes in Police Line Kanhauli and registering of false cases against girl students. Demanding justice for the women subjected to this police brutality, AIPWA submitted a memorandum to the Collector and the senior Superintendent

brutality against women, the false case registered against girl students their harassment by the police; but this does not seem to be happening and the intimidation and

threats by the police are continuing unchecked. Women, students and the common people in Bihar are living in the shadow of fear. □

Women Protest for Freedom from Debt



Responding to the call given by RAIPWA and Self Help Groups Sangharsh Samiti, Freedom from Debt Day was observed across the country on 13 August 2020.

Loans given by micro-finance companies and private banks have become a deathly debt trap for rural women who are unable to come out of the vicious cycle. The interest rate is so high that in many cases it has become equal to the principal amount. This is the new form of usury. If the central government can give waive loans worth billions of rupees and give bail-out packages to big corporates, why cannot the loans of small debtors be waived?

The following demands were made by women on Freedom from Debt Day:

1. Waive group loans of all women in Self Help Groups.
2. Waive all Lockdown period installments of individual loans up to Rs 1 lakh, whether they are loans taken from the government, micro-finance companies or private banks.
3. Stop debt collection on all small loans till 31 March 2021.
4. Ensure employment for women in Self Help Groups and guarantee procurement of their

products.

5. Make loans up to Rs 1 lakh interest-free.
6. Make education loans interest-free.
7. Form a State level Regulatory Authority for group loans.
8. Interest rate for loans for self-employment up to Rs 10 lakhs should be 0-4%.
9. All small loans for which interest has been paid equal to or more than the loan amount should be closed.

Rural women, midday meal cooks, scheme workers and members of SHGs participated with great strength in the Freedom from Debt programs.

Speaking at Chitkohra in Patna, AIPWA Bihar Secretary Shashi Yadav said that the Reserve Bank of India has issued orders banning debt collection till 31 August, but micro-finance companies and private banks are forcibly collecting installments even during this time. At some places they have backed down due to women's movements but at other places they are intimidating women and forcibly collecting installments. In one case where a woman expressed inability

to pay, she was told to sell her body and arrange the payment! Where women are not in a position to pay, their household goods are being taken away. Corona and Lockdown have already broken the back of households; in this situation how can women be expected to pay installments?

Scheme Workers and Rural Health Workers Strike

ASHA (health) workers, midday meal workers and Anganwadi workers held a 2-day strike on 7th and 8th August, in which lakhs of scheme workers struck work all over India. These workers (mostly women) are protesting the fact that they are putting their lives on the line during the pandemic, and yet are not even receiving a minimum wage.

The ASHA strike in Bihar began a day earlier on 6 August, while the strike became extensive in most other States in the country. The solidarity extended to the just demands of the strike by society and other organizations, especially frontline workers like sanitation and contractual health workers, has given a great strength.

On 9 August (Quit India Day) the scheme workers and ASHAs formed the backbone of the Save India Satyagraha/Jail Bharo protests called by Central Trade Unions.

Raising slogans for full wages, dignity and rights, ASHA workers alleged that the Central as well as State governments are using ASHAs like bonded labor.

Shockingly, the ASHAs had criminal cases filed against them by the Delhi Police for participating in the Central Trade Union' protests at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on 9 August. □

Dheerlalit Pandit Jasraj

Awadhesh



Pandit Jasraj passed away on 17 August in New Jersey, USA, at the age of 90. He was the foremost living exponent of the Mewati Gharana of Hindustani classical music. Pt. Jasraj can be seen as the confluence of the 'popular' and 'classical' or of 'secular' and 'spiritual'. Purity and experimentation walked hand in hand in his music.

He was born in Hisar, present day Haryana. He was initiated into the world of music by his father at the age of three. His father Pandit Motiram passed away when Jasraj was four years old. His elder brothers Pandit Maniram and Pandit Pratap Narayan were accomplished musicians too. After the demise of his father he started learning tabla under the guidance of Pandit Pratap Narayan. By the age of seven he had begun accompanying his brother in concerts. In a few years' time he was accompanying great musicians on the tabla and was considered a very talented tabla player.

As a child he was drawn towards music not just because of his family but by a very unusual influence. Those days his family lived in the city of Hyderabad. Jasraj used to pass a small restaurant on his way to school. One day he heard a song playing on the record and forgot to go to school. From the next day his routine changed. He stopped going to school. This five year old child

would sit on the footpath in front of the restaurant throughout the day to listen to that one particular track, have his tiffin, and come back home on time. This impressive singer was none other than Begum Akhtar and the track was 'Deewana bana hai toh deewana bana de'

On several occasions he himself narrated the story of how he had turned towards singing. Once, at the age of fifteen, he accompanied Pt. Kumar Gandharva on the tabla at the Lahore radio station. Next day another singer of great reputation came to his house and started complaining to his brother Pt. Maniram about how Pt. Kumar Gandharva made a blunder while singing at the radio station. Jasraj was listening and told him that according to his understanding Kumar Gandharva's performance was flawless. The complaining singer was elder to him and immediately rebuked him saying 'Jasraj, you beat the hide of dead animal. You should not speak when we are talking about ragas as you cannot understand it.' In two or three days' time there was another incident which showed him the inferior status of the accompanying artists. That was when he decided to turn towards singing and earn respect for himself.

However, the teenager's journey which began with the purpose of earning respect for himself transformed into a journey of self-exploration eventually touching musical excellence. His musical journey can be divided into two parts. The first is about achieving excellence in music and the second related to bringing spirituality to the core of his music. However,

his spirituality never made him intolerant to others' beliefs. In the 2002 Gujarat carnage Ustad Faiyaz Khan's tomb was vandalised in Vadodara. Ustad Faiyaz Khan is considered to be one of the greatest vocalists Hindustani classical music ever produced. Pandit Jasraj was pained with this act of vandalism and declared to bear all the expenses of the restoration of the tomb. Starting his concert with 'Om Namo Bhagwate Vasudevay' and ending it with a bhajan never came in the way of him singing a bandish like 'Mero Allah Meherban'. However it was unfortunate to see his name as one of the signatories on a letter urging people to vote for Modi in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. It was painful for many of his admirers to see him supporting a figure whose politics went against the musical heritage Jasraj stood for.

I cannot resist sharing another story about Pt. Jasraj. The famous dancer Leela Samson once told me that she came across a very talented student who wanted to learn from Pt. Jasraj. He wanted Leela Samson to introduce him to Pandit ji. Eventually, she fixed a meeting with Pandit Jasraj at his Mumbai residence. Pandit ji gave a tanpura to the student and asked him to sing something. Student was very nervous and he could not even tune the Tanpura. Pandit ji patiently waited and then tuned it for him. When the student started singing Pandit Jasraj closed his eyes and listened carefully. When he finished singing Panditji asked him about his guru. The student took two names but Panditji was not satisfied. He asked about his real guru but the student was unable to think of any

other name. Then Panditji told him about the speciality of his singing style and said your real guru is not in this world and that you have been heavily influenced by Abdul Karim Khan Sahib. The student was stunned. He told Panditji that his father had records of Abdul Karim Khan which he had heard as a kid. Pandit Jasraj told him that sometimes gurus bless like this too. I am no one to teach you. This kind of musical sensibility and humility is indeed rare today.

Pandit Jasraj took 'murkis' and 'taans' from what is considered light music and infused them with his spirituality through his voice, which had the qualities of a vibrant waterfall. Through this he was able to generate such an effect

on listeners that no one was left behind. For this he emphasised on shuddha shabd and shuddha bhava. In music words and poetry were considered secondary. That's why they were not pronounced with clarity. Pandit Jasraj thought that it was important to communicate the exact words too. Otherwise one can sing a raga flawlessly but the performer will not be able to awaken the desired emotions among listeners.

Pandit Jasraj created a unique style of jugalbandi (duet) which was named after him as 'Jasrangi'. In this style male and female singers sing two different ragas in complete harmony with each other. In an interview he said that in all the vocal male female jugalbandis

he always saw at least one singer suffering due to their different nature. He wanted to create a complete harmony and the ancient Moorchhana Bhed (ascending and descending movement of seven notes in successive order) came handy in doing so.

In Sanskrit poetics nayakas (the heroes) are divided into several categories based on their characteristics. If one has to categorise the music and the personality of Pandit Jasraj he will fall in the category of the Dheerlalit. A hero who is the confluence of calm, of romance, and an aesthetic of eternal playfulness. Pandit Jasraj's music is that confluence of these qualities and he will always be remembered for that. □

Salute to Feminist Scholar and Activist Iliina Sen

With great grief, CPIML bids farewell to feminist scholar, activist, teacher and writer Iliina Sen, who succumbed to cancer on 9 August 2020. She was 69.

Iliina Sen worked closely with women's and people's movements in Chhattisgarh since the 1980s, when she and her partner Dr Binayak Sen moved to the state inspired by Shankar Guha Niyogi. Binayak worked with the Shaheed Hospital set up by and for workers by the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS). Iliina worked with the renowned Dr Richcharia in a valiant attempt to protect unique seeds and rice varieties of Chhattisgarh from corporate farming policies of the government. She also worked with the trade union of mines workers organised by Niyogi in Dalli Rajhara.

Iliina Sen's pathbreaking collection of essays published in 1990 as *A Space Within The Struggle* is still a classic. It traced the role of women within workers'

and peasants' movements: a role that till then tended to be insufficiently acknowledged within those movements, as well as within the feminist movement. As a teacher at the Mahtama Gandhi Antarashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalya in Wardha, and later at TISS in Mumbai, she was one of the pillars of the women's studies discipline in India.

In 2007 her partner Binayak Sen, a civil liberties activist and doctor, was arrested by the Chhattisgarh Government under the draconian UAPA law, accused of "links with Maoists". The UAPA is a law that allows the government to imprison people for their dissenting beliefs, for years without trial and without bail. Iliina threw herself into the fight to free Binayak and other political prisoners, and Binayak was eventually released on bail by the Supreme Court in 2011. She was especially active in drawing national and international attention to the scores of adivasi prisoners



who were branded Maoists and imprisoned in Chhattisgarh jails. She wrote about the experiences of that struggle in a memoir, *Inside Chhattisgarh – A Political Memoir*. But this fight took its toll on Iliina's health. She was diagnosed with cancer soon after Binayak's release.

CPIML extends condolences to Iliina Sen's partner Binayak Sen, and their two daughters. Her loss is a heavy one for the women's movement, the civil liberties movement and women's studies as a discipline, but her spirit and determination will continue to inspire us. □

Comrade CD Dimri

Comrade CD Dimri, 85 passed away on 9 August at the Escorts Hospital where he was admitted in the morning due to breathing difficulty. He had been having respiratory troubles for some years which kept him mostly confined to the house.

Comrade Chakra Dhar Dimri was associated with the CPIML for about 4 decades and he remained dedicated to the Party till the last. Before he joined the CPIML, he was with the CPI. He was a prominent leader of Secondary School teachers in Delhi. He went to jail in the teacher's agitation in 1968 and was suspended from his job. He remained active among teachers in various ways.

His home was always a place where comrades met and talked. He shared a warm rapport with comrades of all ages. During the Uttarakhand State movement he played a leading role in forming a forum to mobilize support among migrant Uttarakhandis in Delhi. Comrade Dimri contributed in a large measure to the progressive-democratic atmosphere that prevailed in his home. He is survived by his wife and four sons. Comrade Rajiv, AICCTU General Secretary, is his eldest son who left his MBBS studies half-way and became a Party full time activist.

Comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya offered comrade CD Dimri red flag at Nigan Bodh cremation ground amidst floral tributes and slogans.

Red Salute to Comrade DC Dimri!

Comrade Bashir Ahmed

It is hard to believe that our beloved comrade and versatile artist cartoonist Bashir Ahmed is no more with us. He had been ailing for some days and was undergoing treatment. But his sudden demise at 11 am on 8 August 2020 left

everyone stunned.

Bashir Ahmed 65, was a frontline activist in the movement for a separate Jharkhand State, a social organizer and a people's cartoonist. The posters and murals that he created were extremely popular with the people. He was an active participant in all struggles, whether in capital Ranchi or in remote villages. His home and family provided shelter at any time for leaders and activists facing state repression during the struggle for Jharkhand State. As an important part of the core founding team of Jharkhand's first student-youth organization AJSU he was well-beloved as an artist by Jharkhand's intellectual fraternity including Dr Ramdayal Munda and VP Kesari. His cartoons were very popular in established newspapers as well as countless other journals and magazines. He was one of the important centers for the cultural dissemination to Left-democratic people's organizations and their campaigns and movements. He stood firmly with activists, youth and intellectuals during the ups and downs of the Jharkhand movement.

Comrade Bashir Ahmed was at the frontline in the fight for Jharkhand state. After the formation of the State he found that all his dreams were betrayed.

He was active in the central team of 'Janhaq', a publication that gives voice to people's issues and also played an important role in the cultural aspects of other newspapers and magazines.

In recent years he played a leading role as a core committee member of the All India People's Forum (AIPF) against mob lynchings, state repression and attacks on minorities, adivasis and deprived sections. Despite undergoing open heart surgery he played a role beyond his physical

capacity in people's struggles against eviction, migration, and snatching away of adivasis' rights. In recent times he raised his voice against political persecution, false cases and sedition charges by the BJP regime against activists.

Inspired by Comrade Mahendra Singh, he formally joined the CPIML along with many of his friends. The Party recognized and valued his all-round abilities, organizational skills and versatile talent, and gave him a leading role.

Comrade Bashir made many political cartoons recently depicting the pain inflicted on the people by the Modi regime's unplanned and cruel handling of the Corona crisis and Lockdown. Many portals, websites and newspapers published his cartoons regularly.

Comrade Bashir was ceaselessly active in the frontline of CPIML's struggles as an activist and an artist.

Adieu, Comrade Bashir Ahmed! We will miss you and your warm smile, your spirited activism and humanism, your telling cartoons!

Comrade Bhagwan Das

We mourn the passing of Comrade Bhagwan Das, veteran leader of the Indian People's Front (IPF) in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, who breathed his last on 7 August. Comrade Bhagwan Das had contested from Jugsalai as an IPF candidate for the Bihar Assembly.

Red Salute to Comrade Bhagwan Das!

Manoj Shrivastav

CPIML mourns the sudden demise of Shri Manoj Shrivastav, former bureaucrat and academician, who succumbed to Covid19 in Patna AIIMS. An academic who ended up becoming a bureaucrat, he had served in various capacities through his illustrious professional career in Bihar. All through his career he remained true to his core

concern for people's empowerment and good governance.

A rare public spirited intellectual, Manoj Srivastav will be sorely missed. He was a great story teller, full of ideas and anecdotes, and a great well wisher of the CPI(ML) movement in Bihar. Our deepest condolences to his family and admirers.

Comrade Shyamal Chakraborty

Veteran leader of the CPIM and CITU in West Bengal, Comrade Shyamal Chakraborty succumbed to Covid-19 at a Kolkata hospital. He was 76. He had been a former CPIM MP as well as former Minister in the West Bengal cabinet, who had led the CITU in West Bengal.

Our condolences to Comrade Shyamal's comrades and family members.

Comrade Ranu Dasgupta

Comrade Ranu Dasgupta, veteran sympathiser of the Party since its formative years, passed away at her residence in Dumdum on 16 August. She was 92. Like her own family she played the role of an affectionate guardian for the Party, taking great care of all Party leaders and activists visiting her place.

Red Salute to Comrade Ranu Dasgupta!

Trepan Chauhan

The CPIML expresses deep grief at the demise of activist-writer Trepan Chauhan and pays tribute to his memory.

Trepan Chauhan was a writer and activist who always stood for the rights of the poor, workers and farmers through his writing and being active in movements. He stood strongly with the people of Uttarakhand in their struggles for the right to Jal-Jangal-Jameen (Water-Forest-Land). He carried out a long struggle by organizing local villagers against the forcible eviction of people for the Hydrel Project at Falenda in

Tihri. Trepan Chauhan supported small hydro projects run by the local people instead of big ones run by big companies. 'Yamuna' and 'He Bwari' were two of his novels which were written with the background of the struggle for Uttarakhand State. He worked to organize construction workers in Dehradun. Till his last breath he fought serious illnesses with exemplary forbearance and courage.

With his untimely death the CPIML has lost a friend and comrade.

Comrade Raheem Sheikh

Comrade Rahim Sheikh, veteran member of the Dharmada Muragachha local committee of the Party in Nadia district of West Bengal passed away on 20 August following a sudden cardiac attack. He was closely associated with Comrade Subodh Mazumdar in the militant peasant struggles that developed in his area during the 1980s. Despite his advanced age and falling health he remained active and devoted to Party work till his end. His selfless dedication and tireless involvement in Party work will continue to inspire comrades.

Rupa Banerjee

Rupa Banerjee, an advocate of the Calcutta High Court, and a former AISA activist, passed away at the untimely age of 46. As a student of JNU in the mid 1990s, Rupa came to JNU as a supporter of the ML movement, and was a staunch activist of AISA. With her camera, she captured some of the few photographs of Comrade Chandu and other comrades that are precious archives of that chapter of AISA's history in JNU.

All her life, she remained committed to the ideals of revolutionary social transformation, and to the struggle against Hindu supremacist fascism. She leaves behind her life partner Ranjoy Ghosh and her two sons Raj and Ron.

Rupa's loss is a heavy one to her sons and her partner, and she is deeply mourned by comrades and friends all over India.

Red Salute to Comrade Rupa!

Comrade Surya

We are shocked at the untimely demise of AISA activist Comrade Surya, who passed away on 21 August in Hyderabad after suffering an Ischemic Stroke.

Surya was a research scholar at HCU. He was from a very humble, marginalised dalit family and had worked really hard to get admission in HCU.

Surya fell a victim to private healthcare and criminal negligence of a private hospital. The Citizens' Hospital in which Surya was first admitted denied him treatment after testing him for COVID 19 and finding him positive. He was shifted to Continental Hospital, but by then his condition had worsened. He was put on life support. The hospital demanded Rs 1-3 lakhs per day. His COVID report came out to be negative on 20th August, just a day after he was tested positive and denied treatment. Surya was declared to be brain dead on the afternoon of 20th August, and was kept on a ventilator. Another COVID test was done later and even that test report came out to be negative. The COVID anti body test was also negative, meaning he never had COVID.

The HCU administration, especially the Medical Officer and DSW, did not co-operate during the efforts to get Surya treated.

The criminal negligence of the hospital cost Surya his life. We resolve to not let Comrade Surya's struggle go in vain. The fight for quality and affordable health care for all will be continued more resolutely.

We express our condolences towards the family of Comrade Surya and demand justice for him.

Red Salute to Comrade Surya!



Farewell to Rahat Indori

The death of renowned Urdu poet Rahat Indori on 11 August 2020 is an irreparable loss to Indian literature and the composite culture of our country. Born in Indore in 1950, we lost this scholar, poet and lyricist to the Covid19 virus suddenly and untimely. He was 69.

At a time when the centuries-old harmony and composite culture of our country is being destroyed by the politics of communal fascism, Rahat Indori ceaselessly raised his voice through poetry for Hindu-Muslim unity. His poetry was well known and loved by ordinary people on the streets.

The anti-CAA struggle that swept across the country also got inspiration from Rahat Saheb's poetry. His lines 'Sabhi ka khoon shamil hai yahan ki mitti mein/Kisi ke baap ka Hindustan thodi hai' (This is

a soil sustained by the blood of all/Hindustan is not the inherited paternal property of anyone) resonated with the movement against the CAA/NPR/NRC tool the Modi Government is using to strip Indians of citizenship based on their whims and prejudices. People in the movement used these lines from the same poem to speak truth defiantly to the fascist regime

Rahat Saheb faced death as a friend, writing 'Ek hi nadi ke hai ye do kinare doston/Dostana zindagi mein maut se yaari rakho' (These are two banks of the same river, my friends/keep friendship with Death while living and loving Life). Truly, the legacy of such a people's poet can never die.

If they are against me, no matter

It's not a matter of monumental importance

All this that envelops us is mere smoke

Not the sky that envelops the world

If set afire, many a house will burn

My home stands not alone here!

The enemy is mighty, I know, But he is not fearless of death as I am

What I utter is the truth, My tongue speaks not your falsehoods

He who is lord of the kingdom today will not be tomorrow,

He too is a tenant only and not owner of any bequeathed mansion

This is a soil enriched by the blood of all,

Hindustan is not anyone's paternal property...

- *Rahat Indori*

ASHA workers at Jantar Mantar during Save India campaign on 9 August 2020



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