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CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

BIHAR ELECTS A FIGHTING OPPOSITION





STOP NIA RAIDS ON CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS IN J&K, DELHI AND BENGALURU

(CPIML Central Committee Statement)

We condemn the raids by the National Investigative Agency on a range of civil society groups and individuals in Jammu and Kashmir, Bengaluru, and Delhi. The NIA claims the raids are to crackdown on “terror funding” – but that is a transparent excuse to harass and silence all those expressing concern for the rights and wellbeing of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. By using the NIA to crack down on human rights defenders, humanitarian groups, journalists, and citizens, the Modi regime is seeking to ensure that there are no witnesses for its crimes against the people of J&K.

The groups and individuals targeted by the NIA have a long and impressive track record of human rights and humanitarian work. The Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), for instance, has researched and documented reports on unmarked mass graves, fake encounters, custodial torture, sexual violence and the impact of violence on children in J&K. The JKCCS has also pursued the cause of a credible probe to ensure justice for the Kashmiri Pandits killed in the Valley. The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) is an organisation that has led one of the longest standing peaceful struggles for justice and truth: organising parents of persons “disappeared” by the state forces to march every week in their memory.

Another target of the NIA raids is Zafarul Islam Khan, former chairperson of the Delhi Minorities Commission, and founding editor of the Milli Gazette newspaper, who runs the humanitarian group Charity Alliance. Under Mr Khan, the Delhi Minorities Commission published a damning report on the Delhi violence of February 2020, documenting evidence of Delhi Police involvement in the targeted violence against Muslims. The Charity Alliance had provided relief to the victims of the Delhi violence.

There are several other groups targeted by the NIA raids, that are known for their sustained humanitarian work, disaster relief work, and charity work in the J&K region. The Modi regime, by tarring such groups with the “terror” brush, is seeking to prevent the people of J&K from being able to access even humanitarian aid and relief during crises. NIA also raided the offices of the Greater Kashmir newspaper – a respected paper known for its impeccable and courageous journalism.

In Bengaluru, the NIA raided the home of Swathi Sheshadri – a concerned citizen who has responded conscientiously to people in need, and consistently raised human rights concerns in her own city and in other parts of India. During the lockdown, for instance, Swathi Sheshadri worked as part of the broad civil society coalition “Bangalore With Migrants” helping to provide relief to migrant workers left stranded in Bangalore without food or shelter.

Under the Modi regime, the NIA, like many other institutions, has become a “caged parrot”: known for weakening the case against bomb-blast accused BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur, and ensuring bail for Davinder Singh, the J&K police officer caught ferrying terrorists, while going after human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists in the Bhima Koregaon case. Now, the NIA witch-hunt is expanding, with the new pretext being Jammu and Kashmir.

All over India, the poor and oppressed are familiar with arbitrary, high-handed violence by police and other state agencies. The killing of Jeyaraj and Bennicks in Thoothukudi by the Tamil Nadu police has put the spotlight on India’s epidemic of rampant custodial torture and custodial killings. More recently, people have been outraged at the police lathicharge and firing on devotees waiting to immerse the Durga idol in Munger, Bihar. There have been angry demonstrations at the offices of the Munger police authorities, with some protestors even setting some vehicles on fire. People rightly rejected the police excuse that stone pelting by the devotees in reaction to the lathi charge, forced the police to fire. It is human rights defenders who hold up the Constitution as a shield between the police and the citizens, in Munger, Bastar, Jammu and Kashmir. It is journalists who expose the truth, be it in Munger or in Thoothukudi or the Kashmir Valley. The NIA raids and arrests of human rights defenders and journalists, is to remove that Constitutional shield. We the people of India must stand up to defend the rights and liberty of those who have been defending our rights as citizens and human beings.

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THE BIHAR VERDICT AND ITS RESONANCE FOR INDIA



DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The first major elections held in the shadow of Covid19 pandemic and its complement, the brutal lockdown and its disastrous aftermath, have produced a stunning outcome. Till as late as early October when nominations began for the elections, opinion polls were predicting an emphatic majority for the NDA in Bihar. It was expected to be an easy cakewalk for Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar, nobody gave the opposition even an outside chance. A month later, most exit polls however predicted a clear edge for the RJD-Left-INC opposition alliance. The final results allowed the NDA a fortuitous escape to snatch a narrow victory from the jaws of an almost certain defeat. The eventual difference between the NDA and the grand alliance was only about 12,000 votes and slender victories in a dozen seats for the NDA. There are widespread doubts and complaints about the vote counting process, especially the counting of postal ballots, and the Election Commission must dispel these doubts.

The credit for turning the elections into a veritable people's movement goes primarily to the youth of Bihar who transcended caste boundaries and voted overwhelmingly against the NDA. The formation of the RJD-Left-INC alliance with the CPI(ML) contesting from 19 seats, and the Left as a whole from 29 seats, and the focus on secure and dignified employment and other issues of immediate and basic concern like public health, education, livelihood, agriculture, wages and social security as the core election agenda changed the entire election climate. Even though the alliance fell marginally short of the majority mark, the emergence of a powerful opposition must itself be seen as a powerful rebuff to the BJP's design of opposition-free democracy and one-party rule. And the impact of this outcome could already be felt when shortly after the swearing in of the new cabinet Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar had to drop a tainted MLA they wanted to inflict on Bihar as the state's education minister.

BJP propagandists are trying to interpret the Bihar outcome as a pro-Modi verdict. Much like they had described the 2017 UP election results as popular endorsement for the demonetisation disaster, they

now want us to believe that the Bihar outcome marks the electorate's approval for the Modi government's handling of the Covid19 pandemic and the new laws enforcing complete corporate control over agriculture and aggressive privatisation of industry, infrastructure, education, healthcare and other public services. Nothing can be a bigger travesty of truth. The Bihar verdict marks not just a massive rejection of Nitish Kumar, it also reflects growing anger against the disastrous policies of the Modi government. It should be remembered that in 2010, four years before the advent of the Modi era the BJP had already won 91 seats in Bihar; the tally came down to 53 in 2015 when the BJP did not have the support of Nitish Kumar, and this time with renewed support of JDU and two more allies, the tally went up to 74, seventeen seats less than its 2010 peak. However, it is the JDU that has had to bear the brunt of the people's fury and a much weakened Nitish Kumar now holds office at the mercy of an increasingly emboldened and aggressive BJP.

A very encouraging political sign of the Bihar outcome is the electoral expansion and resurgence of the CPI(ML) and the rise of a 16-member Left contingent in Bihar Assembly. Top BJP leaders unleashed a virulent slander campaign targeting the CPI(ML) as an anti-national force, branded CPI(ML) young candidates as a 'tukde tukde gang', and seven of our eight candidates in the first phase registered comprehensive victories in the face of this volley of malicious lies. Comrade Amarjeet Kushwaha, honorary President of Revolutionary Youth Association, who has been in jail in a false case since 2015 elections and had to contest from jail, won with a convincing margin. Thumping victories of leaders of the radical student and youth movement - AISA leader and former JNUSU GS Comrade Sandeep Saurabh from Paliganj, Patna, RYA All India President Comrade Manoj Manzil from Agiaon (SC), Bhojpur, RYA Bihar President Ajit Kushwaha from Dumraon, Buxar - secured

through highly spirited, inspiring campaigns involving hundreds of local activists indicate great potential for a powerful youth movement against the fascist offensive of the Modi government. The CPI(ML) must make every effort to realise this potential with the help of the enlarged team of CPI(ML) legislators in Bihar.

THE NEXT ROUND OF ELECTION BATTLES, ESPECIALLY IN WEST BENGAL AND ASSAM, IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE AND WE MUST USE THE LESSONS OF BIHAR TO STOP THE BJP, STRENGTHEN THE LEFT AND SAVE DEMOCRACY.



Bihar has underlined the tremendous urgency and importance of the task of resisting the BJP in the electoral arena and combating its ideological and political aggression. Bihar has also pointed to the pivotal role of the revolutionary Left in this battle for the future of India and Indian democracy. And the job of the communists is not just to lend ideological courage, clarity and consistency to the battle for democracy but, equally

importantly, to provide and develop the organisational muscle and grassroot work to check the BJP's corrosive influence and disastrous politics on the ground. The RSS has copied the communist style of work and organisation to mislead the masses with its ideological diet of hate, lies and rumour. Communists must strengthen their work on the ground and the network of mass political communication to build effective resistance to the BJP and the Sangh brigade on the ground. The next round of election battles, especially in West Bengal and Assam, is of crucial importance and we must use the lessons of Bihar to stop the BJP, strengthen the Left and save democracy. □



Sitting in front row: Kavita Krishnan, Kunal, Dipankar Bhattacharya, Swadesh Bhattacharya, Dharendra Jha, Mira ji, Amar ji. Second row: Gopal Ravidas, Sandip Saurabh, Satyadev Ram, Ajit Kushwaha, Rambali Singh, Virendra Gupta, Manoj Manzil, Sudama Prasad, Mahanand Singh.

BIHAR ELECTS A FIGHTING OPPOSITION



[Even though the NDA has managed to secure a narrow win in Bihar, the Bihar Assembly elections, the first major elections held in the shadow of Covid19 pandemic and the brutal, painful lockdown, have sent out very inspiring messages for all forces fighting for secure livelihood, dignity and rights of the people and the future of India as a secular democratic republic.]

The Bihar elections became a veritable movement of the people and upsurge of the youth. The mandate clearly reflects Bihar's strong desire for change of government and even though the final numbers allowed the NDA to scrape through, the rise of a powerful opposition marks a big rebuff to the BJP conspiracy to render Indian democracy free of every opposition ('opposition-mukt' Bharat). On several seats which have been decided by very narrow margins, mostly in favour of the ruling NDA, there are valid concerns about irregularities or manipulation by the election authorities, efforts are being made to obtain evidence to mount a challenge as required.

The emergence of the RJD-Left-INC coalition was widely welcomed by the Bihar electorate and the CPI(ML) played a pivotal role in establishing the coalition as a viable alternative. This was vindicated by the electoral performance of our candidates - 12 victories out of 19 seats contested giving the Party the highest strike rate among the alliance constituents and an overall vote share of close to 4%. That this was achieved in the face of a vicious slander campaign against the party by senior BJP leaders is testimony to the growing support and goodwill generated by our struggles for and service to the people.

The thumping victories won by the student-youth leaders in these elections were specially satisfying as were the renewed victories won by our sitting MLAs.

The team of 12 MLAs of CPI(ML) coupled with the four victorious MLAs of the CPI(M) and CPI will serve as a powerful Left contingent within the anti-NDA opposition in Bihar Assembly. The emergence of a popular agenda centring around secure employment and quality education and healthcare for all as well as defence of farmers' and workers' rights, justice and rule of law augurs well for India's democracy, and the CPI(ML) will continue to fight hard for the implementation and advancement of this agenda.

The Bihar election campaign of the Party received valuable moral, political and financial support from comrades and friends across the country. The Central Committee extends warm greetings

and heartfelt thanks to all who supported the campaign. The results of Bihar and especially the signs of electoral resurgence of the CPI(ML) and other Left parties have generated a lot of hope and enthusiasm within and beyond Bihar. While making every effort to fulfil the expectations in Bihar, the CPI(ML) Central Committee appeals to the entire Party, Left ranks and the whole range of pro-democracy forces in the country to intensify the battle against the Modi government's disastrous pro-corporate anti-people policies and the BJP's divisive hate-filled politics of communal polarisation and fascist intimidation.- ed/]

NOT A MANDATE FOR “MODITVA”

In the recently concluded Bihar Assembly Elections, the ruling NDA scraped past the finish line by hook if not exactly crook. The Prime Minister, and BJP leaders, have interpreted the mandate as a vote of confidence in the PM's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown. Other commentators too have taken the verdict to mean that the communal and divisive rhetoric of the PM and other BJP leaders (invoking Jai Shri Ram, Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370, “Tukde Tukde gang”, “urban Naxal” etc) did eventually triumph. “Moditva”, it is claimed, took NDA to victory even as the Bihar CM Nitish Kumar faced anti-incumbency and anger. How accurate are these assessments?

Comparing the NDA and MGB performances in 2020 with their 2015 Bihar Assembly elections performances does not give us the correct picture about the “Moditva” effect, because the composition of the NDA and MGB were different in that election. Instead, a comparison with their performance in 2010 offers more insights. In 2010, the BJP was a “pre-Modi” BJP. Such a comparison finds that JDU's seats plummeted from 115 to 43; while BJP's seats fell from 91 to 74. So in Bihar, the pre-Modi BJP of 2010 outperformed the Modi-fied BJP of 2020. A “single engine” JDU without the backing of an NDA regime at the Centre, a Nitish Kumar minus the Modi effect, outperformed the “double engine” JDU and Nitish Kumar of 2020. The Left parties won just one seat in 2010; in 2020 they have won 16. The NDA decline since 2010 is due not only to disillusionment with Nitish, it is also due to six years of Modi rule.

Pre-poll surveys and opinion polls generally predicted an NDA victory, and did not consider the MGB to have any chance. In the 2019 General Elections, the RJD had a lead in just nine Assembly constituencies, the Congress in five and the CPIML in one. Few had any doubts that the NDA would easily be able to prevail over an RJD-Congress-Left alliance.

YOUTH, CONTRACT TEACHERS, MIGRANTS, WOMEN BACKED MAHAGATHBANDHAN

There is no doubt, then, that the opposition alliance confounded the pundits to emerge as a credible and popular force that lost the elections only by a wafer thin margin. Moreover, the Magathbandhan performed the feat of firmly establishing permanent government jobs, equal pay for equal work, workers' rights, migrant workers' rights, as well as education and health as the foremost agenda for the elections.

The impact of the ‘equal pay for equal work’ promise made by the MGB can be seen in the fact that the MGB candidates got the lion's share of postal ballot votes: reflecting the enthusiastic support of the state's teachers who were on polling duty. Is it true that pain the humiliation meted out to migrant workers by the Modi regime at the centre and the Nitish Kumar Government in Bihar, made no difference to migrant workers' loyalty to the BJP and NDA? The Lokniti-CSDS survey found “that the NDA did far worse among migrant households than among non-migrants. Around four of every 10 households said they had a member/s living outside Bihar and among voters from such households, the NDA secured around four percentage points less votes as compared to non-migrant households.” (*Decoding the close Bihar election 2020 verdict*, *Indian Express*, November 19, 2020).

The claim of women voters being the key factor in the NDA victory does not really hold up to closer scrutiny, either. Shashi Shankar Singh, a close observer of the Bihar elections, noted in a Twitter thread that the 10 seats on which women polled lowest in comparison to men, were seats that the BJP won by a handsome margin. Women voters came out to vote most on seats in Seemanchal, Tirhut, Kosi and Mithilanchal, where they voted overwhelmingly for RJD, Congress, AIMIM and

CPIML. These are seats where male voters too favoured these parties. MGB parties as well as the NDA's BJP and JDU have won seats where women voters outnumbered men – and also seats where male voters outnumbered women. There is little correlation between a higher turnout of women, and an NDA victory.

VOTERS REJECTED BJP'S ATTACKS ON CPIML

The Bihar elections this year do not testify to the irresistibility and unstoppable of BJP's communal dog whistles and its campaign to brand its opponents anti-national. The most persuasive example of this fact, is the performance of the CPIML, the strike rate of which by all accounts was impressive. This is especially significant when one recalls that the election speeches of BJP's star campaigners, including PM Modi, President JP Nadda and UP CM Adityanath, as well as the BJP's media and social media campaign attacked the CPIML even on seats where it was not in the contest. To target the CPIML, the BJP used all the rhetoric we are familiar with from the hate-mongering TV anchors and shows. They called the CPIML "urban Naxal" and "Tukde Tukde gang", they charged CPIML with being "terrorist" because of its history of anti-feudal struggles, and "anti-national" because it stood with Kashmir against the abrogation of Article 370, and with the Shaheen Bagh movement against the CAA. What is remarkable is how these attacks were powerless to affect the CPIML's performance and its appeal amongst voters. An analysis by Scroll.in found that the CPIML "performed as well as the Rashtriya Janata Dal and even outperformed it across four subregions", concluding that this "indicates the presence of an actual resurgence of the Left, and not just an effect of alliance politics."

What we need to take away from the Bihar elections is not the myth of a teflon-coated Moditva that thrives in spite of its many sins by invoking Islamophobia and hate. It is the message for India's Opposition that carries both hope and a challenge: indicating that consistent

grassroots work that stands with people in their struggles, and recognises and boldly resists injustice, can in fact diminish the power of hate and bigotry.

A CPIML RESURGENCE BUOYED UP THE GRAND ALLIANCE

In the recently concluded Bihar Assembly Elections, the Left parties won 16 out of the 29 seats allocated to them; and the CPIML (Liberation) won 12 out of the 19 seats it contested. Even while NDA has scraped through, it is undeniable that Bihar has elected an inspiring Opposition, with a strong Left contingent at its core.

It is worth noting that an analysis in Scroll.in ('Decoding the Bihar results in 32 charts: Turnouts, vote shares, victory margins and more', November 15, 2020) found that "the CPIML performed as well as the Rashtriya Janata Dal and even outperformed it across four subregions," indicating "an actual resurgence of the Left, and not just an effect of alliance politics."

Moreover, the CPIML's performance buoyed up the entire Mahagathbandhan in its areas of influence. The Scroll analysis found that "in the southern regions, where the Mahagathbandhan swept, both the BJP and to a larger extent the JDU were badly defeated by various Mahagathbandhan candidates.... Census data reveals that there is a greater Dalit population in the Bhojpur area. The Mahagathbandhan did particularly well in reserved seats this election." While Bhojpur does have a significantly large Dalit population, it also has a fairly recent history of extreme feudal oppression. Over three decades of anti-feudal assertion led by the CPIML in Bhojpur and southern Bihar, has counted towards MGB wins in this region.



NO SHORTCUTS: ONLY BASIC ABCS

For the past some years, mainstream media discourse has been full of schadenfreude about the decline of Left politics in India. Even acknowledgements of the popularity of young student leaders on the Left, have been used to drive this discourse, pitting

the young leaders as “charismatic individuals” against supposedly outdated Left parties. The CPIML’s Bihar performance has, once again, proved that such “reports of the demise of the Left in India are greatly exaggerated.”

In the wake of the Bihar results, many have asked us what shiny, new, smart “Chanakya-niti” did the CPIML use in Bihar? The answer may sound disappointing. CPIML has no “secret sauce” or shortcut to offer. Its success now comes on the back of many cruel defeats and losses. CPIML’s work is all about the ABCs of the Left. But perhaps those ABCs do need restating with emphasis now. In that spirit, I would like to outline some key features of the CPIML’s work in Bihar.

STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

Right from its early days in the 1980s, the CPIML in Bihar acted on the firm Marxist-Leninist understanding that “class struggle” did not operate in an imaginary realm of “pure economic struggles.” Instead, struggles for social and political justice were recognised as being as integral to class struggle as those for economic justice. So, the ML movement in southern Bihar asserted the right to land and wages; the right for the oppressed communities to occupy public space as equals deserving of dignity; and the right for the oppressed to cast votes and even elect leaders.

The struggle for voting rights of Dalits and EBCs in Bihar, a struggle of which the CPIML was the driving force, is comparable in its historical significance to the Civil Rights movement of the USA which fought for African Americans to avail their right to vote. For a movement with that history, it is not difficult to see the NRC-NPR-CAA as a “voter suppression” move to snatch away hard-won voter rights; a move to disenfranchise not only the Muslims but entire oppressed labouring communities.

Some wonder how the CPIML alliance with RJD could work so well, given the sharp contention between the two parties the nineties and early noughties. The CPIML, unlike the CPI and CPIM, did not ally with the RJD when it was in power. Perhaps in large part as a result of this decision, the CPIML retained its independent

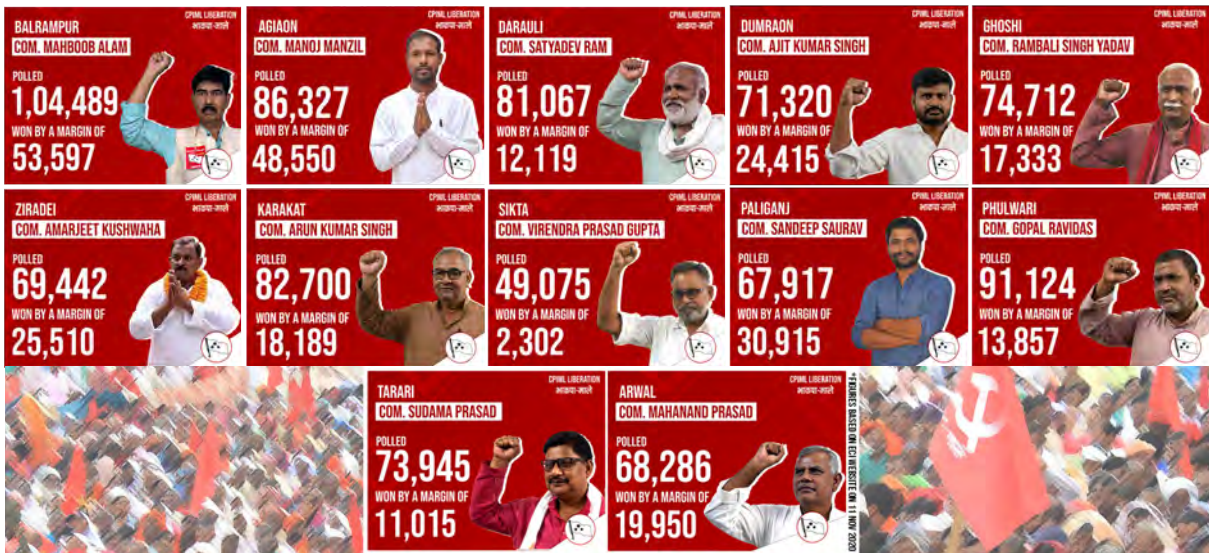
mass base and political profile, even as the CPI declined rapidly during the same period. But even during that period, the CPIML did not let up in its ideological and political work against the RSS and BJP. The CPIML mass base and rank and file now has no trouble recognising the dangers posed to democracy by the BJP in Bihar and India: and so an alliance with the RJD has been embraced as necessary and welcome.

Third, the CPIML is bold rather than shame-faced and furtive about taking up issues of political injustice. When Yogi was telling BJP election rallies the CPIML was “anti-national”, and thanks to the BJP, the people of Bihar can buy land in Kashmir, the CPIML reminded Bihar’s poor and deprived that what they needed was homestead land in Bihar – and it was the NDA regime that violently evicted them from such land in order to appease big landlords and corporations. Kapil Mishra and Anurag Thakur, the hatemongers responsible for the Delhi massacre of Muslims, campaigned in Bihar branding the CPIML as a “break India gang” for supporting Shaheen Baghs. The CPIML, meanwhile, did not hesitate to remind everyone to vote to defend the Shaheen Baghs which are the most inspiring civil rights and equal citizenship movement of our time. Every CPIML campaign speech urged people to ensure that no Umar Khalid, Sudha Bharadwaj, Anand Teltumbde or Stan Swamy was wrongfully jailed in Bihar.

It is not necessary, or even possible, to replicate the Bihar alliance model in every state where elections are due. The takeaways from the Bihar experience are: that an ideological and political resistance to the BJP’s expansion must be the top priority; that strengthening the Left movement is crucial to building a stronger bulwark against fascist politics; and that the Opposition as a whole needs to build grassroots agitations on issues of livelihood, jobs, education, and health, as well as against all instances of social and political discrimination and injustice. ■



CPIML MLAS WILL RAISE PEOPLE'S ISSUES INSIDE ASSEMBLY



INDRESH MAIKHURI

The Left is being much talked about after the Bihar Assembly election results. The three Left parties in the Mahagathbandhan have won 16 seats in this election. CPIML contested 19 and won 12 seats; CPI and CPM contested 6 and 4 seats respectively and won 2 each. This the largest tranche of Left representatives to reach the Assembly in the last one and a half decades and that is why the Left, especially CPIML, is now constantly the focus of discussion.

For the past many days the simple lifestyle of Balrampur MLA Mahboob Alam has been viral on social media. Posts of his simple lifestyle and very modest 'kachha' house were shared by even those who are not Left supporters. He has now been re-elected to the Assembly by the largest number of votes, getting 104489 votes and defeating nearest rival by 53597 votes. It is interesting to note that the nearest rival was the BJP candidate in 2015 and contested as VIP candidate in this election as the BJP gave the seat to the VIP. In other words, BJP gave its ally not only the seat but also the candidate!

However, Mahboob Alam is not the sole Left candidate to live simply. Simple living is the rule rather than the exception in the tradition of the Left, especially CPIML. That is why material wealth is not an eligibility criterion for getting a ticket in ground-struggle parties like the CPIML. A labour leader in Patna said during the election campaign, "At such a time when tickets are being auctioned to the highest bidder in other parties, Maley has given the ticket to a poor man who does not even own a house! This is indeed unique". He was speaking of CPIML candidate from Phulwari (Patna District) Comrade Gopal Ravidas. The same Gopal Ravidas who got elected to the Phulwari seat will 91124 votes.

Leaders are made in the CPIML through the touchstone of struggles. There can be no better example than Comrade Manoj Manzil. 32 year old Manoj who won the Agiaon seat with 86327 votes and a margin of 48550 votes comes from a landless dalit family. His father and mother work in a brick kiln. In his early days he was active in AISA. The family's finances were so straitened that after he was married (at a very young age) it became a problem to find space for his wife to stay. But Manoj never thought of poverty as his personal problem; for him it was an issue of struggle for thousands like him who were landless, poor, dalit and deprived. For the last one decade, any struggle against oppression or atrocity in his area saw Comrade Manoj at the forefront holding the red flag aloft.

He got the third place in the 2015 election but he was always first on the struggle front. Manoj could be seen in every fight for justice, be it sand workers' struggles or struggles against feudal oppression. His 'Sadak par School' campaign drew people's attention to the dire conditions in government schools run by the Nitish government that boasted about 'development'. Through this constructive campaign he also attracted people's attention to himself.

All 12 newly elected CPIML MLAs are well-known faces through people's struggles. Virendra Gupta who won the Sikta seat put his own life at risk to relentlessly fight against feudal forces for the rights of the landless poor. On the one hand there was the Shikarpur Estate representative fully armed with money and muscle power; on the other hand was Comrade Virendra Gupta running for election on the power of the landless, the poor and the farm laborers. In the end, the rural poor ensured the victory of their comrade-in-arms who stood with them in their struggles!

Arwal is an old battleground for the struggles of the CPIML. Laxmanpur Bathe falls in Arwal, where on 1 December 1997 the feudal army Ranveer Sena massacred 58 dalits and backward section people, including a large number of women and children. When Ranveer Sena Mukhiya Brahmeshwar Singh was asked why women and children were killed, he replied that children were killed because they grow up to become Naxals, and women were killed because they give birth to Naxals. BJP leader Giriraj Singh sees the epitome of Mahatma Gandhi in this cruel and barbaric Brahmeshwar Mukhiya; this speaks volumes for his and the BJP's character.

CPIML's Comrade Mahanand Singh has won the Arwal seat for which the election was held on 28 October in the first phase. On the same day in the morning a gentleman adorned with a trishul-like tikka came to our campaign vehicle and said, "Be assured, Mahanand is winning; our people have left on motorcycles to vote for him". In the neighboring District to Arwal, Jehanabad, trade union leader Rambali Singh Yadav of the CPIML has been elected to the Assembly from the Ghosi seat.

CPIML had 3 MLAs in the last Assembly. All three—Mahboob Alam, Satyadev Ram and

Sudama Prasad—have been re-elected to the Assembly with an even bigger margin than last time. These 3 MLAs were the strongest Opposition voices in the last Assembly. They consistently raised the people's issues inside and outside the Assembly with posters and banners, and many times the Honorable Speaker could be seen requesting them not to wave posters and placards. On one occasion the Speaker said to CPIML LoP Mahboob Alam, "You have once again brought a poster. Why do you trouble the poster-makers every day!" Obviously the issues raised in the posters were making the ruling powers uncomfortable. On another occasion the Speaker said, "Mahboob Ji, do remember the meaning of your name. It is Mahboob". They expected CPIML MLA 'Mahboob' to show some 'Mohabbat' (love) towards the ruling powers. But he is the people's 'Mahboob'; he will not set aside the people's issues to show love to the ruling powers!

On one occasion Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was so flustered by MLA Satyadev Ram's questions that he lost control of himself. Comrade Satyadev Ram raised the question of distributing 'fazil' ceiling land and other government lands among the poor. When Nitish Kumar became CM for the first time the Land Reforms Commission was constituted led by D Bandopadhyay. The report submitted in 2008 by the Commission gave data of lands in Bihar and made recommendations for distribution of land among the poor. Under pressure from big land owners, Nitish Kumar put the Land Reforms Commission report in cold storage. It was in this context that Darauli MLA Satyadev Ram raised the issue of allotment of land to the landless, when Nitish Kumar exploded in frustration and said, "Where is the land? This is 'bakwas' (rubbish)". The frustration was double edged: the CPIML MLA raising the issue on the one hand; and his bowing down to the diktat of land owners on the other hand, leading to the shelving of the Commission report.

This same Satyadev Ram who forced CM Nitish Kumar to explode in frustration was re-elected from Darauli with 81067 votes and a margin of 12119 votes.

Young, CPIML faces fresh from student politics have also found places in the new Assembly: RYA Honorary President Comrade Amarjeet Kushwaha from Jeeradei in Siwan; former JNUSU

Secretary and AISA National General Secretary Comrade Sandeep Saurav from Paliganj; RYA Bihar State President Comrade Ajit Kushwaha from Dumraon. Of these, Amarjeet Kushwaha is in jail for the past 5 years on a false and fabricated case. Fighting the election from jail, he won the seat with 69442 votes and a margin of 25510 votes.

A wonderful mélange of experienced as well as young leaders ready to fight on the streets for people's rights is in the Assembly now. Now it is the turn of issues on the streets to find their place inside the Assembly. The issues of education, employment, health, and land for the landless that were raised during the election campaign will now echo inside the Assembly. During the campaign BJP leaders including the BJP President tried to make the people afraid of Maley; inherent in this attempt was the BJP's own fear that MLAs who would relentlessly pursue people's issues would reach the Assembly. Their fear has now been turned into reality. ❑

BIHAR ELECTIONS AND CPIML VICTORIES TELL STORIES OF HISTORIC STRUGGLES



Bathani Tola Memorial (Left), Kranti Park, Arrah (Right)

[Many observers of the Bihar elections have commented on the CPIML's influence in the South Bihar constituencies, accounting for the bulk of CPIML victories as well as helping to win seats for the Mahagathbandhan in these regions. This influence is a result of decades of struggles, many of which are of historic significance. All we can offer here are some snapshots of these struggles.]

On April 19, 1986, Bihar witnessed the terrible Arwal massacre, when police fired on a protest by the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS), an organisation of landless peasants, and killed 21 of them. In the 1980s, a host of armed and illegal private terrorist outfits defended feudal landed interests. These interests were threatened by the activities of the MKSS and the Indian People's Front (IPF) which was associated with the CPIML. The police firing was intended to snuff out the resistance – but it had the opposite effect.

A July 1986 report by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) described the region thus: "The central belt (of plains south of the Ganga river) comprises of the districts of Rohtas, Aurangabad, Bhojpur, Patna, Gaya, Nawada, Munger, Nalanda, and Rhagalpur. Through this belt flow the Punpun and Son rivers which join the Ganges as well as a number of small rain-fed streams. The region is primarily dependent on agriculture, chiefly cultivation of rice. Here the social contradictions arise from the agrarian structure. Disparity in landholdings, pitifully low wages, non-implementation of land reform laws are the principal sources of tension; to a limited extent, the problem of bataidari

(share-cropping) also leads to social conflicts in this region.”

The IPF spearheaded the struggles for the right of Dalits to cast their vote. In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, when large numbers of dalits for the first time succeeded in exercising their franchise and electing IPF and CPIML leader Comrade Rameshwar Prasad as member of Parliament from Ara, a polling booth at Danwar-Bihta village in Bhojpur (this village is now in Tarari, the seat CPIML won in 2015 and now retains) was attacked and 22 voters killed for daring to cast their vote. The then Ara DM, M.A Ibrahimji in his book 'My Experience In Governance', noted that ““The magistrates and police officers (deputed in the village in the wake of five killings) were treated to a feast at night by Jwala Singh (Tarari block pramukh) and his castemen.” It was the same Jwala Singh who had ordered the killings!

The electoral victories of the CPIML in 1996 were followed by the formation of the feudal terrorist outfit Ranveer Sena, which enjoyed the patronage of the BJP and Sangh leaders as well as upper caste leaders from various other parties. The Bathani Tola massacre of July 1996 followed. Bathani Tola too falls in the Tarari constituency. From Bathani Tola in Bhojpur to Laxmanpur Bathe, Shankarbigha and Narayanpur in Arwal, the Ranvir Sena perpetrated a series of barbaric massacres between 1996 and 1999.

Arwal is known as the birthplace of Comrade Shah Chand (mukhiya ji) who was falsely implicated in a TADA case and sentenced to life in Jehanabad. Against this backdrop, in February 2000, Comrade Shah Chand contested the elections to Bihar Assembly as the CPI(ML) nominee from Arwal and finished second by a narrow margin of just some 2,000 votes. Comrade Mahanand's victory from Arwal is a tribute to Comrade Shah Chand's memory.

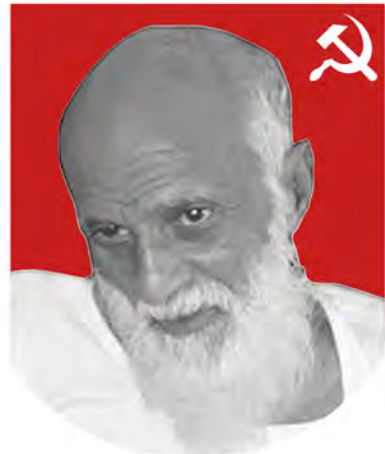
The Siwan range is the site of long CPIML struggles against feudal hegemony. The RJD strongman Shahabuddin protected those feudal interests and unleashed violence against CPIML leaders and cadres in the 1990s. Even as the CPIML resisted and survived this violence, it never allowed the BJP to communalise the issue.

It is extremely significant that Comrade Amarjit Kushwaha fought and won the Ziradei seat from jail (as Comrade Satyadeo Ram won Darauli from jail in 2015). Both comrades have been falsely implicated in a murder case. They are leaders of a struggle of dalit landless poor who survived a potential massacre intended to evict them from their rightful homestead land. The entire murder case is cooked up to punish the landless poor and their leaders.

With the national rise of the BJP in the 1990s, it was the CPIML that was the most consistent force in Bihar mobilising against the BJP and Sangh Parivar.

The other areas where CPIML scored victories are Sikta (West Champaran) and Balrampur (Seemanchal). Champaran, known as the historic site of the Indigo movement during the freedom struggle, is where the CPIML has mobilised rural landless poor against the feudal estates. At Balrampur, where Comrade Mahboob Alam has been reelected MLA for a fifth term, CPIML is known for championing the rights of the rural landless poor as well as for resisting the communal politics of the BJP.

Below, we have Comrades Om and Kavita Krishnan share some reflections on the Agiaon and Sikta constituencies respectively. Both experiences tell us something about how CPIML embraced rather than evaded issues of political justice. - ed/-]



COMRADE SHAH CHAND

NOTES FROM THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AT AGIAON



 OM PRASAD

Before the de-limitation exercise in 2010, large parts of what is today the Agiaon Assembly Constituency in Bhojpur were part of Sahar constituency which was represented for three consecutive terms by the legendary leader of Bhojpur, Comrade Ramnaresh Ram. Today, Agiaon is dotted with memorials and plaques marking the martyrdom of comrades in the struggle against feudalism and for social dignity of Dalits and the rural poor. Bhaluni, Nagari, Nadhi- Nanour, Babubandh in Agiaon are places which have become synonymous with the brutal repression that was faced by the Party and the people of Bhojpur. It is this history of sacrifices and struggles that resulted in a powerful rebuff to J. P Nadda calling the CPIML a 'terrorist organization'. In fact, Nadda and his allegations against the Party became the popular laughing stock and the butt of many jokes for rest of the election campaign in Agiaon!

Comrade Manoj Manzil winning this seat with a margin of over 48,000 votes is nothing short of stunning, but this victory has been a culmination of decades of arduous and patient hard work and sacrifices. CPIML's assertion in the electoral arena has long been sought to be suppressed and while the Ranveer Sena has been defeated, the ruling classes and feudal forces continue to see the CPIML as a threat to their dominance. In the last three major elections before 2020 we faced attacks including murders of our leaders in the Agiaon area. During the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections Comrade Budhram Paswan was murdered. Just before the 2015 Assembly elections Comrade Satish Yadav was killed by the local feudal mafia and on the day of polling in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, party supporters were attacked while casting their votes. Even this time around Comrade Manoj was arrested immediately after filing his nomination on a completely spurious case. This elicited widespread anger, he was released on bail a few days later. Comrade Manoj has some 30 FIRs registered against him, all collected during various struggles and movements. While the Election Commission categorizes him as someone with a long 'criminal record', public memory in Agiaon is long enough to remember that FIRs on CPIML leaders are sure markers of standing up undeterred to face state and feudal power.

The election campaign in Agiaon this time rested on the indisputable credibility of the CPIML as a party committed to people's struggles and the popularity of our candidate Comrade Manoj, who over the last 5 years has led a range of struggles touching upon the lives of people across communities. While the movement for ensuring good quality education in Govt schools 'Sadak pe School' is now well known, Agiaon has been the centre of many other struggles.

A hugely popular movement of farmers led to water being released in to the canals after a gap of 14 years. Comrade Manoj has been at the forefront of fighting for providing compensation to the rural

poor on multiple occasions, in the last five years his and the party's efforts have led to compensation being handed out by the Govt. to the tune of 88 lakhs. Even during the lockdown when the cruel NDA governments both at the state and the centre obliterated the livelihoods of millions, there were movements for more effective disbursement of rations and against police high handedness against shopkeepers. But most significantly the Agiaon assembly constituency also saw a popular Shaheen Bagh style sit-in protest in Gadhani against the CAA-NRC-NPR with enthusiastic participation of both Muslims and non-Muslim rural poor. The importance of this proactive mobilization against the divisive agenda of the BJP-RSS was clearly visible during the elections. The BJP IT Cell tried its best to communalise the election in Agiaon by circulating a doctored video showing Comrade Manoj giving apparently 'anti-Hindu' slogans (actually, these were slogans against Hindu supremacist politics), but it proved to be a damp squib as their agenda to vitiate the campaign was given a powerful rebuff by the people who refused to fall in to the IT Cell's trap and voted in large numbers against the NDA's candidate.

The margin of the party's victory also makes it evident that Comrade Manoj emerged as the popular choice of the people cutting across castes and communities. It also underscores once again that electoral results are a direct consequence of continuous and consistent struggles and ground work and not shying away from mobilizing people on issues that are considered 'divisive'. In fact the lessons from Agiaon point to the opposite, only by mobilizing people on issues like CAA/NRC, Art 370 can one make the rural poor immune to the ideological onslaught of the RSS and BJP and also defeat them. □

SIKTA VICTORY AND THE EQUAL CITIZENSHIP MOVEMENT AT WEST CHAMPARAN



 KAVITA KRISHNAN

CPIML candidate Comrade Birendra Gupta won the Sikta seat in West Champaran. It was the only seat the MGB won in West Champaran. The candidate who polled a close second was Dilip Verma, an 'independent'. Verma actually belongs to the feudal Shikarpur Estate which illegally holds hundreds of acres of land and oppresses the poor, and has in the past been a BJP MLA. The JDU candidate Khurshid Ahmad who was also the sitting MLA polled third. There was also an MIM candidate Rizwan Riyazi who polled some 8000 votes.

CPIML, and Comrade Birendra in particular, has been organising struggles of the Dalit and Adivasi landless poor for land, facing attacks on his life by the feudal "estate" landlords. False cases, jail time, abduction and

attempts on his life: there is nothing that Comrade Birendra has not faced during these struggles. He is sometimes referred to as the “Robin Hood of West Champaran”, but soft-spoken Comrade Birendra is embarrassed by such terms. He has been forced “underground” in the past because of the many false cases against him. In the past few years, CPIML helped sugarcane farmers in their struggles for remuneration and rights.

But what I wanted to share here is a memory from the movement against CAA NPR NRC in this region, which helps to explain why the CPIML and Comrade Birendra enjoy the confidence not only of the landless poor but also of the Muslim minorities in the region.

In February 2020, I spent many weeks in Bihar campaigning for a march to the Bihar Assembly by CPIML against the CAA NPR NRC. We wanted to try

and mobilise the non Muslim working class in large numbers alongside Muslims. It was proving harder than some comrades had expected. In our own mass base, non-Muslims tended to be indifferent to the threat posed by the trio. I would attend meetings where comrades would assure me, “All is well, these people will attend the rally”. I would ask, “What pushback, doubts, arguments did you face?” If the said comrades replied “None at all”, I would tell them I was sure people had not really understood the issue. We would then hold small meetings where I would try and ask questions and listen, and find a “way in” towards a realisation of the threat NPR NRC CAA posed to the non-Muslim poor.

At Bagaha, in West Champaran, Comrade Birendra had organised a Jan Ekta (People’s Unity) Convention on 17 Feb, and he was very confident that it would be well attended by our supporters, mostly non-Muslim landless poor. When I arrived at Bagaha, I could see he was worried and unhappy. The turnout was a fraction of what he had expected. As I had suspected, people had said they would turn up, but had not really felt any urgency to do so. There were about

500 people in the grounds, perhaps less. But of those present, most were women of the Tharu adivasi community.

I spoke there for about 45 minutes, explaining how the CAA NPR NRC worked as a system, and how it affected Muslims and non Muslims respectively. I could see that my audience listened intently. The grounds were close to a market, and the sound system broadcast the speech to the market area. When we were done, I could see Comrade Birendra was still a bit unhappy. Anyway, we moved on to our next destination.



Anti CAA-NRC-NRP protest in West Champaran

The next morning Comrade Birendra called, much more cheerful. He said he had walked around the Bagaha marketplace close to the grounds where we held our convention, and was pleasantly surprised to find that our little meeting was the talk of the town. Many told

him they had understood what CAA NPR NRC was for the first time ever. Someone had recorded my speech and made a CD/pendrive copy of it for circulation! Our Champaran comrades also learned how to communicate the issues better, and eventually a good number of people from there joined the March to the Assembly on 25 February.

Why I shared this long account is to show how campaigning on CAA NPR NRC among non Muslims, while difficult, was not just a morally right thing to do - it is also politically rewarding. It vaccinates people against the most virulent strains of communalism, at the very least. And at best, it creates a solid ground for progressive politics, that can stand its ground better than most parties whose politics of social or economic justice is built on shifting pragmatic sands, and is shorn of any issues of political justice (equal citizenship is, after all, the paramount question of political justice). In Sikta, it helped the CPIML and Comrade Birendra get the confidence and votes of Muslims, and significantly restrict the effect of communal propaganda among Hindus.



 V. ARUN KUMAR

The Bihar Assembly Elections held in October-November 2020 was one of the first elections for CPIML Liberation where the social media and ground level campaign strategy were used in tandem. Amid the COVID -19 pandemic and BJP-RSS's fake news industry, the party's intervention in social media was inevitable and necessary.

Somewhere in September, a small team of cadres with experience in social media went from the Central office to the Bihar State Office. Soon we realised that the task in front of us was daunting. But amid all the challenges and roadblocks, we found a way out. Innovation became the norm. Have you ever heard of a 'war room' (as media used to call the social media campaign centres of various parties) operating without any broadband connection? We did it! The party's office in Kadamkuan in Patna is an area where, for some reason, no service provider could provide broadband. With various permutations and combinations and multiple trial and errors, finally we managed to find a way around using simple mobile internet.

First, we began with an on-the-move 'war room' – relocating from one room to another depending on which room was free. Seeing us try to find a stable place to work, our comrades in the Bihar office created an entire 'war room' in a matter of a few hours, with much ingenuity and creativity.

The core factor that helped in driving the social media campaign was the rich history of our party's struggles and sacrifices of thousands in Bihar. No matter where we travelled, we found stories of the party's struggle and sacrifice and thus our cameras never stopped rolling.

It was at Bhojpur's Ekwari, one of first places in Bihar where the fire of the Naxabari movement rose, where we found our opening visuals for our campaign. The first visual was of a 5 year old girl with the flag of CPIML Liberation, shouting, 'Inquilab Zindabad' (Long live the revolution). Soon our camera panned to a corner where a 70 year old was standing in a red shirt. "It was CPIML Liberation that fought for our right to sit on the cot, for our wages. We will vote for CPIML Liberation even if we are killed," he said.

Between the old man and the child, four generations have passed but the flame of Naxabari is still alive in their eyes. And that was aim of our campaign, to keep this flame alive for the generations to come that will be more tech savvy and glued to visuals.

One of the videos worth mentioning and that increased our aspiration,

was of CPIML MLA Comrade Mahboob Alam that broke all our earlier records and crossed 11 million views. This video gave us the more insights into the world of social media campaign and helped in





better strategising our campaign.

What was unique about our social media campaign compared to others. We did not have corporate campaign companies or consultants that were churning out abstract posters or videos. Every poster and video produced from the 'war rooms' in the Bihar State Office or at constituency level were a product of people's movements and voices. One of the biggest task of circulation of campaign materials was at the constituency level, with hundreds of WhatsApp groups created at block and panchayat level. This was done manually by comrades going to each area and gathering numbers and adding people to groups. Without this, our campaign would have come to a standstill.

As our first experience in a large scale social media campaign, Bihar elections helped us in synergising our strategy based on whatever resources available. At the same time, it exposed a lot of gaps that needs to filled. One such is the need for the social media communication strategy to become part and parcel of the party's organisation structure.



LESSONS FROM BIHAR: EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH COMRADE DIPANKAR

(Excerpts from interviews given by Comrade Dipankar to Indian Express and The Hindu)

What lessons do the Bihar results hold for the Left in the next round of Assembly elections, especially West Bengal? (Manoj CG, IE)

In West Bengal and Assam, the number one priority of the Left must be to stop the BJP...I think the Left has to get its act together in Bengal. So rather than competing with the BJP in opposing the Trinamool...it should be the other way around. Of course we will oppose the Trinamool wherever necessary, but let us contend with it against the BJP. The BJP has to be recognised as the No. 1 threat to democracy across the country and also inside West Bengal.

Are you suggesting some sort of an understanding with the Trinamool? (Manoj CG, IE)

Well, I am not saying that. I'm saying that first of all, the Left should be very clear that the thrust has to be squarely against the BJP. There cannot be any mix-up. So far, many of the Left parties have been treating the Trinamool as the No. 1 target... Yes, they are in power but (we) should clearly see the writing on the wall. And the writing on the wall is that the BJP is a growing danger in West Bengal.

This election saw a resurgence of the Left parties in Bihar, considering they have been practically written off in the rest of the country. What changed for the Left in Bihar? (Sobhana K Nair, The Hindu)

Writing off the Left because of some electoral weakness and decline is a problem of the mainstream media. As far as the Left is concerned, we have been active in Bihar. These results vindicate two things. One is the continuous work that the Left and our party do on the ground among the rural poor, unorganised workers, farmers, students and so on. There are three Ds on our agenda — Dignity, Development and Democracy. People have developed their own critique of development.

For example, in Bihar, you could see people saying that there can be no jobless development. We have only helped the people in arriving at this realisation and articulating it. We have worked without fear... for example, many parties feel squeamish to talk about the human rights of Muslim youth. The courage to stand for truth and consistent politics is the reason for our electoral victory.



The next challenge for the Left is the West Bengal Assembly poll in April 2021. How will the Bihar results impact the election in West Bengal? (Sobhana K Nair, The Hindu)



The Left should feel inspired because, in West Bengal, the Left all along has been powerful. People think that Bengal political soil is more hospitable for the Left, while Bihar is a more difficult terrain. If the Left can perform in a difficult State like Bihar and in a difficult situation like the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no reason why the Left in Bengal can't do better. The key to the success of the Left in Bihar is the work done on the ground. It is not someone's charisma, it is not that someone gave good speeches. It is basically the silent and protracted work carried out by the Left, which paid off.

Which is the bigger political enemy, the TMC or the BJP, in West Bengal? (Sobhana K Nair, The Hindu)

Definitely, the BJP is the bigger political enemy. The TMC is the party in power and, of course, the Left will have to oppose the TMC government but there can be no bracketing of the TMC and the BJP together. The Left cannot be indifferent to the idea that tomorrow there

can be a BJP government in Bengal. A BJP government in Bengal will be a bigger threat for the Left and the entire democratic set-up.

There have been differences of opinion within the Left on the strategy for the West Bengal poll. Your comments. (Sobhana K Nair, The Hindu)

Among the Left parties, we will be discussing to sort out whatever differences there are. In Bengal, the CPI (M) and other Left parties have not been sufficiently alert and alive to the threat the BJP poses there. The biggest worry for me is the way Left votes are declining and the BJP's are growing at the Left's expense in West Bengal. The Congress is trying to dominate the Left-Congress understanding in Bengal. I don't know how other Left parties will respond to that. The Left should reassert itself in Bengal, and its resurgence is not possible in collaboration with the Congress.



“LOVE JEHAD” LAWS ATTACK WOMEN’S RIGHTS

(In the wake of the decision by various BJP state governments to enact laws criminalising “love jihad”, we reproduce statements by the All India Lawyers’ Association for Justice and the All India Progressive Women’s Association, on the issue.)

STOP CRIMINALISING LOVE

(Statement by All India Lawyers’ Association for Justice)

All India Lawyers’ Association for Justice condemns the announcements of various BJP- ruled states to pass a law against ‘love jihad’, a pejorative and communal term for inter-religious marriages, which has no basis in fact or law. AILAJ believes that every person has the right to marry or not, and to select their partners as per their will and desire. It is demanded that the Governments, instead of pursuing a communal agenda that penalizes those who exercise their constitutional freedoms, take immediate steps to enact a law that would specifically cover the field of so-called ‘honour’ crimes as directed by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in the case of Shakti Vahini vs. Union of India (UOI) and Ors. [AIR 2018 SC 1601].

BJP’s statements unlawfully terming the concept of inter-religious marriages as ‘love jihad’ go against the very essence of Articles 14, 21 and 25 of the Indian Constitution, which recognize the fundamental right of an individual to equality, to live with dignity and to freely profess, practice and propagate religion, which cumulates in every individual’s right to love and marry a person of one’s choice. The statements are a direct attack on the Constitution and the individual freedoms of the people in this country.

Justice DY Chandrachud in his concurring judgment in Shafin Jahan Vs. Ashokan K.M. & Ors. [(2018)16 SCC 368], popularly known as the ‘Hadiya judgment’ held that the right to marry a person of one’s choice is integral to Article 21 of the Constitution and that matters of belief and faith, including whether to believe are at the core constitutional liberty and that the Constitution exists for believers as well as for agnostics and that it protects the ability of each individual to pursue a way of life or faith to which she or he seeks to adhere. It is further held that, “Matters of dress and of food, of ideas and ideologies, of love and partnership are within the central aspects of identity... Society has no role to play in determining our choice of partners.”

A Division Bench judgment by the Kerala High Court in Anees Hameed Vs. State of Kerala [ILR 2017(4) Kerala 389], the Kerala High Court held: “We are appalled to notice the recent trend in the state to sensationalise every case of inter-religious marriage as either love jihad or ghar wapsi. Disturbing news is coming from several parts of the country that young men and women who undergo inter-caste marriages are threatened with violence or violence is actually committed on them. In our opinion, such acts of violence or threats or harassment are wholly illegal and those who commit them must be severely punished. This is a free and democratic country and once a person becomes a major, he or she can marry whosoever he or she likes.”

In fact, on 04.02.2020 in response to queries on “love jihad” cases, the Hon’ble Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs Shri G. Kishan Reddy responded stating: (a) to (c): Article 25 of the Constitution provides for the freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion subject to public order, morality and health. Various courts have upheld this view including the Kerala High Court. The term ‘Love Jihad’ is not defined under the extant laws. No such case of ‘Love Jihad’ has been reported by any of the central agencies. However, two cases from Kerala involving inter- faith marriages have been investigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

We demand that instead of creating issues, the BJP governments should focus on addressing the rampant murders of couples, solely because they belong to different castes and communities, called “honour killings”. In fact there is complete failure of the

Governments to tackle the same.

In Lata Singh v. State of U.P. [(2006) 5 SCC 475], the Supreme Court directed the administration and police authorities throughout the country to ensure that “if any boy or girl who is a major undergoes inter-caste or inter-religious marriage with a woman or man who is a major, the couple are not harassed by any one nor subjected to threats or acts of violence, and any one who gives such threats or harasses or commits acts of violence either himself or at his instigation, is taken to task by instituting criminal proceedings by the police against such persons and further stern action is taken against such persons as provided by law.” The Court further notes on dangers of ‘honour’ killings, and notes that there is nothing honourable in such killings, and in fact they are nothing but barbaric and shameful acts of

**WHAT MAKES LIFE
MEANINGFUL IS LOVE. THE RIGHT
THAT MAKES US HUMAN IS THE
RIGHT TO LOVE. TO CRIMINALIZE
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- JUSTICE LEILA SETH

murder committed by brutal, feudal minded persons who deserve harsh punishment.

In fact, in *Shakti Vahini vs. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.* [AIR 2018 SC 1601], the Supreme Court prescribed a slew of recommendations to ensure the protection of couples who enter into inter-caste or inter-religious marriages. It prescribed that a law on the lines of abolition of 'sati' and 'dowry' be implemented to fight the social menace of 'honour killings'. However, till date, the directions and recommendation of the court have been ignored and statements are made time and again to threaten the freedom of individuals in their choice of life and practicing religion.

It may be noted that Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underscores the fundamental importance of marriage as an incident of human liberty and states that the men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family and that they are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution, and that such family is entitled to protection by society and the State.

The proposed law is also problematic because the structures of caste and religion are kept in place by the structure of arranged marriage. In fact when young people exercise their right to love across lines of caste, religion and gender, they are doing so at enormous personal risk and in the process disrupting existing lines of social authority. Thus, the right to love is not just about personal autonomy but about challenging rigid social structures. By doing so, lovers open up space in existing culture for all of us.

Instead of implementing the decisions of the Apex Court in ensuring the protection of the free, secular, fraternalistic and democratic principles of the Constitution based on which the country thrives, the politicians are propagating inequality, hatred and are snatching away the rights of the people of this

country. Such statements are steeped in patriarchal, paternalistic notions, where women need to be "saved" from "predatory" men, thus denying the agency and the autonomy of the woman, which is yet another mode for controlling women. This is in furtherance of the communally divisive ideology of the Sangh Parivar. AILAJ condemns these statements and seeks that the constitutional principles and democratic rights are upheld by the elected representatives of the country.

WE FIGHT HATE, BJP FIGHTS LOVE

BJP WANTS TO END RIGHTS OF HINDU WOMEN
ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

(AIPWA Statement)

Many BJP-ruled State governments have announced that they are going to make a law against 'Love Jihad'. Central Minister Giriraj Singh has also demanded such a law in Bihar. AIPWA strongly opposes any such law because such a law would be a lethal attack on the freedom of Hindu women and their Constitutional right to make their own decisions in life. Such a law has no place in the India that believes in Ambedkar's Constitution.


Till date the police, investigative agencies, and courts in many States and the country have said that there is no such thing as 'Love Jihad'. There is no proof for saying that Muslim youth are hatching a conspiracy to convert Hindu women under the guise of love. The truth is that the youth of India are breaking the bonds of caste and religion and falling in love, and this is to be welcomed as beneficial to the country. According to the BJP, if a Hindu woman loves a Muslim man it will be considered 'Love Jihad' and legal action will be taken against this. All in all, a legal weapon is being handed to 'honor crime', the patriarchal violence against love.

Standing resolutely against Manuvadi patriarchal forces, Dr Ambedkar had passed the Hindu

Code Bill that has many provisions for equality and freedom of Hindu women. Laws against the dowry system and Sati practice were made after long battles. The law against 'Love Jihad' is a BJP conspiracy to weaken these laws and snatch away Constitutional rights of Hindu women. Therefore today the danger to Hindu girls and women is not from Muslim youth but from the BJP which is playing politics in the name of Hindus. History is witness to the fact that all ruling forces that run the government in the name of any religion are the enemies of women's rights.

Love can never be a 'jihad' or a war. Nikita Tomar was stalked and murdered by a Muslim youth –but that was not 'Love Jihad' because Nikita was not in love with that youth. Stalking and killing was also done of Priyadarshini Mattoo by Santosh Singh. Similarly, some Hindu youth killed Gulnaz in Bihar—that is also patriarchal violence, not 'Prem Yuddh' or 'Love Jihad'.

Any adult citizen has the right can adopt any religion according to his personal wish and discretion and take their own decisions in matters of love and marriage. Actually, religious conversion for marriage takes place largely because the Special Marriage Act requires one month's notice which gives room for violence against such marriages. People resort to religious conversion to escape this violence. AIPWA demands that the provisions of the Special Marriage Act should be changed and the one-month notice period should be scrapped.

AIPWA appeals to the women and youth of the country to stand up and be counted to save freedom and autonomy. Where better laws and action are needed against 'hate', BJP wants to make a law against 'love'! We appeal to the people of the country to foil this conspiracy by the BJP. 

PART II

PLUMMETING GDP AND BOOMING STOCKS: INDIAN ECONOMY IN CORONATIMES



ARINDAM SEN

In the last couple of issues *Liberation* carried pieces on the highly worrisome pandemic situation in India and the Modi regime's dogged refusal to adopt a proper stimulus package as advised by not only the Left and heterodox economists but also the acknowledged experts in bourgeois economics and institutions like the World Bank. In this delayed concluding part of the article initiated in October last, we shall try and elaborate on the essential reason behind this refusal, the alternative strategy being followed and its implications for the economy and the people of India.

Simply put, the government is afraid to put money in people's hands because that will involve more deficit financing, which is an inviolable taboo in a neoliberal economy under the hegemony of global finance.

THE NEOLIBERAL NO-NO

And why is it a taboo? Because it leads to inflation, which erodes the value of investment returns (dividend, interest). For example, if a five crore stock earns six per cent return and inflation runs at seven per cent, the investor will earn a negative return of one per cent and thus the value of even his capital will diminish. As Warren Buffet put it, inflation is the most "devastating tax" with a "fantastic ability to simply consume capital". The financiers therefore hate inflation and deficit financing. So governments fear that in a high inflation scenario global agencies will lower credit ratings of the country concerned and investors (not only from foreign countries, but domestic ones too) will look for greener pastures with a lower inflation rate. The outflow of foreign and even part of indigenous capital, with attendant devaluation of the home currency, would lead to a crash in the stock market and may be a run on the banks. Governments in all countries are mortally scared of such a scenario. So they believe they must religiously obey the perennial edict on so-called financial prudence issued by the Buffets and the FIIs, FPIs and DIIs^a. And they would not hesitate to do that even at the cost of shrinkage in the real, productive economy - - in the total value of goods and services produced, i.e., gross domestic product or GDP. In fact this is precisely what is happening in our country. The self-proclaimed nationalists in power - - the protagonists of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* - - are shamelessly sacrificing the economic interests and political sovereignty of the nation to placate the national and international moneybags.

But how did finance capital come to occupy such a dominant position in the international hierarchy or network of capital?

GENESIS OF CORPORATE FINANCE CAPITAL

Credit or finance appeared in course of evolution of capitalism to perform the necessary function of greasing the wheels of industry and commerce. In course of time, however, it gradually rose to a position a notch higher than the latter - - above the real economy, which produces goods and services - - disconnecting itself more and more from it. (It is tempting to draw a parallel with the evolution of the state, which arose out of society but placed itself above society, alienating more and more from it; but to do so will not be scientifically flawless.) The genesis of finance capital involved a protracted and complicated process, but we can cut the long story short with five bullet points.

1. Already in the second half of nineteenth century, Marx took note of "a new financial aristocracy, a new variety of parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation promotion, stock issuance and stock speculation". (*Capital*, Vol.

[a] Foreign institutional investors (FII) and foreign portfolio investors (FPI) refer to investors from other countries while domestic institutional investors (DII) refer to Indian mutual funds, insurance companies, pension funds, banks and other financial institutions.

1) This, he observed, was closely linked with enhanced role of credit both as accelerator of growth and, when stretched beyond a limit, as harbinger of crisis.

2. The role of credit in the capitalist system as a whole went on expanding and reached a qualitatively new stage with the advent of modern imperialism, a parasitic and decaying system marked by new features like all-round monopolisation, export of capital outweighing export of commodities, the rise of the financial oligarchy etc. Money capital now morphed into finance capital and attained a much more influential position. As Lenin pointed out more than a hundred years ago in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*:

“Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which the separation [“of money capital from industrial or productive capital”] reaches vast proportions. The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy; it means that a small number of financially ‘powerful’ states stand out among all the rest.” Thus, the “twentieth-century marks the turning point from the old capitalism to the new, from the domination of capital in general to the domination of finance capital.”

3. Lenin also showed that “Modern banks concentrated the social power of money in their hands, and began to operate as “a single collective capitalist”, and so “subordinate to their will not only all commercial and industrial operations but even whole governments.” Very important in this context was the three-way “personal link-up” between industry, banks and the government.

Elaborating on the new stage, Lenin wrote:

“The development of capitalism has arrived at a stage when, although commodity production still ‘reigns’ and continues to be regarded as the basis of economic life, it has in reality been undermined and the bulk of the profits go to the ‘geniuses’ of financial manipulation. At the base of these manipulations and swindles lies socialised production, but the immense progress of mankind, which achieved this socialisation, goes to benefit... the speculators.”

4. The separation of money capital from productive capital and the supremacy of the former continued to grow. With the onset of liberalisation, globalisation, privatisation in the closing decades of the 20th century, finance capital arrogated to itself the freedom to move in and out of enterprises, economic sectors and countries. In the process there arose, in the words of Paul Sweezy, “a relatively independent financial superstructure ...sitting on top of the world economy and most of its national units”. That is to say, there is now an “inverted relation between the financial and the real”, where “*the financial expansion feeds not on a healthy real economy but on a stagnant one*” (*The Triumph Of Financial Capital*, Monthly Review, June 1994; emphasis added).

5. At the turn of the 21st century yet another method of making money out of money bypassing the hassles of production was devised with the help of information technology and the rapid spread of internet connectivity. A completely new breed of firms like Amazon, Alibaba, Facebook and Google gave rise to what has been called platform capitalism. These online or digital platforms do not own

productive facilities or inventories (Uber for example owns no vehicles; Facebook creates no content; Alibaba and Amazon have no inventories) but provide the vital “interface” between sellers and buyers/users, in the process stealing, assembling, using and misusing huge quantities of data.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT CRISIS

In its apparently unstoppable ascendance and growing dominance, monopoly finance capital faced a very tough challenge in the crisis of 2007-08 and the deep recession that followed. In the US, George W. Bush (and others of his ilk in other countries) bailed out private financial institutions including banks with taxpayer money and imposed ‘austerity’ (huge cuts in government spending) on the public. But the challenge was not just economic, it was very much political. A groundswell of anger against the greedy corporations and the US Government’s pro-super-rich policies found expression in the occupy movement and other protests launched under the slogans ‘99% versus 1%’ and ‘Wall Street versus Main Street’. While spreading out to the wide world, in its epicentre the political impact of the movement also helped a black Democrat win two consecutive victories in Presidential elections. But the Obama Administration did precious little to curb the power and influence of big money. The fattest moneybags retained their strength. They successfully repulsed the popular movement for equality and justice by orchestrating a right wing populist counter-campaign complete with racist, majoritarian, misogynist, xenophobic venom, which culminated in the election of Donald Trump.

Thus began a new phase of

more aggressive rightward shift in *economic policy* (tax cuts and other sops for the rich, austerity for the working people) and *in political strategy/form of state* (gradual shift from democracy to autocracy/authoritarianism/fascism) -- a universal trend with important national variations. The blatantly pro-billionaire, anti-people economic policies of the communal fascist government in our country is but a specific instance of this general trend.

So this is how Marx's "new financial aristocracy" and Lenin's "financial oligarchy" has today evolved into what we now call *corporate-finance capital*. We prefer this term because it is theoretically correct (it recognises the coexistence and interdependence-conflict dynamic that defines the relationship between the financial sector on the one hand and the industrial and trade sectors on the other) and politically explicit (it pointedly identifies and targets the class enemy of our era - - the giant corporations which immensely influence economic and political policies of nation states.

Myriad are the ways by which corporate finance capital manages to fatten itself even during the most difficult periods like the present one. And by far the most important avenue runs through the stock market.

HOW BOURSES BREED BILLIONAIRES

Per a report published by the Swiss bank UBS in early October, the wealth of the world's billionaires increased by 27.5 per cent between April and July this year, the period when the pandemic was at its peak. Their wealth by the end of July had touched a record high of \$10.2 trillion. A UBS spokesperson added that when stock prices were

falling in February-March, the billionaires, rather than offloading their stocks, bought up stocks from smaller owners who were busy panic-selling. So when stock prices increased after April, they got enormous capital gains.

It is easy to see that these gains arose essentially because the small stock-owners did not have the capacity to hold on to their stocks. Thus the increase in concentration of wealth during the pandemic resulted from a well-planned, secretive business move on the part of big players at the cost of small/retail investors. This is one of the many ways big capital uses every crisis -- economic, political, natural, medical, environmental, whatever -- to bolster its monopoly position and accelerate concentration of capital.

The same thing we are witnessing in our country, as a brief survey of the Forbes list of 100 richest Indians, released in early October, would show. The list reveals that more than half of them saw their collective net worth growing by 14% over the past one year to reach US\$517.5 billion. The list also features nine newcomers who acquired much of their fortunes during the severe economic downturn. For most of the hundred tycoons, the main source of growing net worth (total assets minus liabilities) could hardly be profits made in normal business operations, i.e., production and sale of goods and services, because economic activities started slowing down well before the Pandemic and then most of India went into a severe shutdown. In fact many of the gainers incurred substantial losses in their business activities in this period. Clearly, the huge appreciation in wealth came from a surge in stock prices -- a stock market boom -- *propelled by factors not related to the gainer's business*

performance and the country's economic fundamentals. While some amassed wealth despite the pandemic and lockdown, others prospered thanks to these conditions.

For the first category, the rising fortunes of Mukesh Ambani (henceforth Ambani) -- India's most successful crony capitalist who has enjoyed equal favours from both UPA and NDA regimes and retained the top position for thirteen years in a row -- serves as a good illustration. He alone grabbed more than half of the gains made by fifty-plus dollar billionaires together, adding as much as \$37.3 billion, raising his fortune by 73% to \$88.7 billion. Just a few months ago, however, his financial conditions were not exactly enviable. In April global crude oil prices fell to their lowest since 1999 and hit Reliance Petrochemicals very hard. The RIL chairman decided to forgo his annual salary of ₹15 crore even as management staff with annual salary in excess of ₹15 lakh accepted a 10% reduction in fixed pay. RIL even requested its nearly 900 dealer-operated retail outlets for a 10% reduction in monthly rent for 10 months. But this loss was insignificant compared to the blow on Dalal Street. A massive bear run, which was aided by FIIs offloading more than \$15 billion stock in the month of March alone plus a 5.2 per cent drop in the value of the rupee compared with the US Dollar, sent Reliance stock price down by 25%. As a result, Ambani's net worth sank 28%.

The devastation spared almost no one in India and abroad. Gautam Adani, a distant second on the list of richest Indians, lost \$6 billion or 37% of his wealth and so did other biggies.

But the bear phase did not last

long. The Government of India and the RBI promptly handed out generous doses of liquidity so as to prevent a free fall of financial asset prices. Shares of Reliance Industries soared again when, during the lockdown, Ambani raised more than \$20 billion from a string of glamorous foreign entities (as noted at the beginning of Part I) for Jio Platforms and more than \$5 billion for Reliance Retail. Similarly, Gautam Adani recouped his losses and augmented his net worth 61% to \$25.2 billion. Two steps up the ladder, two steps down and two steps up again - - for the rich and well connected, this indeed is the way of life.

Among the other category of gainers -- those who profited directly from the global health and economic crisis -- the foremost were some of the pharmaceutical companies. The fortune of vaccine billionaire Cyrus Poonawalla, owner of Serum Institute of India was up 26% to \$11.5 billion. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, founder and MD of vaccine-maker Biocon, saw her wealth nearly doubling to \$4.6 billion. In both cases, share prices rose in anticipation of the huge profits these companies were expected to earn in future by selling COVID-19 vaccines.

The rich list includes several big players whose exclusive or main source of riches is the stock market, such as 'big bull' Rakesh Jhunjhunwala. Moreover, with thousands of new small investors thronging the stock market in a situation of low interest rates on fixed deposits, it is but natural that brokerage farms also would be doing brisk business. Thus it is that Kamath brothers Nithin and Nikhil, the founders of Zerodha, India's biggest stock brokerage firm and of True Beacon (which is

focused only on ultra-high net worth investors) have entered the Forbes list this year. Incidentally, their father Sanjeev Bikhchandani, co-founder of Info Edge (India), which owns popular job and property websites (during the staggered lockdowns online purchase and sale of property increased many-fold) is also among the nine newcomers on the list. Nikhil, aged 34, is the youngest among the top 100 billionaires.

In sum, this is how stock markets in India, as in other countries, generate personal wealth in billions of rupees/dollars without contributing a paisa or a cent to the national product, i.e., the GDP of the country concerned. At work here is the process of big fish eating small fish, which in modern times takes the shape of concentration of capital.

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION

While doing some research on recent trends in Indian stock exchanges, the present writer came across a blog post which correctly notes that equipped with a cheap mobile phone with free 4G data and helped by a discount broker, "youngsters in rural India and suburban India were entering stock market. Even the more sophisticated lot started joining them soon as the interest rates in fixed income instruments started falling. Then came COVID-19. A whole nation was forced to sit idle in home for months. Millions joined in stock investment." The author of the post welcomes this as a healthy development that breaks the grip of "autocratic" players and "democratises" the stock market, making it a level playing field for small investors.

On this I commented that the oligopoly of foreign and domestic institutional investors have the

organised strength to come together and force a bear rally on the markets at a time of their choosing and pick up best shares at low prices, thereby pushing up the prices again. The whole process would lead to huge losses, if not financial ruin, of the larger section of retail investors and corresponding gains for the Jhunjhunwalas and Ambanis. So, as always, *matsanaya* (big fish eating small fish) still prevails on the bourses - - only on a much larger scale than ever before.

The response I got really helped me understand how big predators actually hunt and feed on smaller souls and gain weight:

"Thanks for the comment. I agree. I have a strong suspicion that our DIIs have some kind of cartel which is not known to the outside world. Why do I say so? 13th March trade in Indian bourses were too correlated to be ignored. Market hits a lower circuit which leads to expectation that once market opens, there would be further downslide. However, strangely, during the pre-market hours after market opening, almost all good stocks were picked up at whatever price was there on offer leading the index end up about 5% higher! The kind of money required for this is not in command of any single entity or even a few entities. It requires a cartel of much larger size. And I do not believe that all of a sudden all big guys started dreaming about Indian market within that circuit break period who were selling vigorously half an hour back. So, there is a cartel which can try to bring down the market as you apprehend."

The confessions of the bullish market insider in India and the observations of a Swiss bank spokesperson point to the same thing. Giant speculators,

euphemistically called investors, no longer just bet on but also, to a large extent, calibrate the price movements and thus feed on smaller players. At times the mechanism does fail. But then they always have the state itself at their beck and call as the saviour of first resort, which helps them replenish -- and expand -- their coffers.

THE STATE AS CUSTODIAN OF MARKET BUOYANCY AND THE VICIOUS CYCLE

This role of the Indian state has been particularly conspicuous throughout the Modi regime. A few months before Corona struck, the government compelled RBI to release rupees 1.76 lakh crore, the better part of which was then handed over to big corporates as tax cuts and other incentives. This was complemented by RBI announcing successive rate cuts, which made cheap credit available for investment in the stock market. Both measures ensured relative stability and buoyancy in the bourses. During *Coronatimes* too, the primary intent of all 'packages' and measures has been to preempt stock market bursts rather than boost consumption and effective demand.

No doubt that intent has been, one might say, over-fulfilled. Thanks to the fiscal and monetary stimulus provided by the government and the RBI respectively, there was a major spurt in institutional investment. And that helped the BSE Sensex, which fell from around 40K in late February to 26K in late March, regain the lost ground to reach nearly 40K in August. A major role in this grand resurgence was played by PSUs like LIC and SBI. They had to buy stocks and boost 'market sentiment' under government orders, in utter unconcern for the high risks they were exposed to. Since August, the market so far has defied the gravitational pull of the worst contraction in independent India and touched nearly 44 K as of 20 November^b.

The revival has been spectacular indeed, but whose interest does it serve? Glittering prosperity of the select few grows in glaring contrast to the pathetic pauperisation of the working masses. Inequality of income and wealth, class polarization in other words, goes hand-in-hand with deliberately fanned up communal, caste and other frictions. While the latter jeopardize our democratic-secular-pluralist ethos, growing inequality generates a vicious cycle in the economy. Deprivation of the labouring billions dampens demand and thus decelerates the real, productive economy, causing further job losses and reduced incomes for the mass of people, which in turn leads to reduction in consumption and therefore production, even as the wealth of the nation continues to be usurped by the rich. So we are back to worse inequality.

We must break free from this vicious cycle. We must get rid of those under whose supervision it is moving on with increasing ferocity -- the corporate communal fascists in power -- and move on towards a radical democratic transformation of society. We must see to it that the ongoing and forthcoming struggles on the streets and on the parliamentary arena are consciously directed to this goal. ❑ *(Concluded.)*

[b] Here it is important to remember that the BSE Sensex and the Nifty 50 reflect the ups and downs in prices of only 30 and 50 blue chip shares respectively. So the rise and fall in these indexes tell us nothing about the conditions and prospects of the entire corporate sector.



 RADHIKA KRISHNAN

Earlier this month, the presidential elections in the United States, as well as elections to some seats in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate finally ended. The 2020 US elections were unique in many ways. For one, the continuing CoVID pandemic somewhat altered normal procedures followed during elections. A substantial proportion of Americans voted through postal ballots in order to avoid exposure to the virus. While the use of postal ballots is not entirely new to the US electoral system, the sheer scale of postal ballots received

this time around made it a unique experience for all those managing the polls. It meant that millions of ballots had to be opened, scanned, verified and tabulated before the results could be announced. Secondly, and more importantly, this was an election whose political significance was hard to understate. On the ballot was one of the world's most powerful right-wing, fascist demagogues.

Donald Trump, whose rise to the Presidential office began with the (infamous) racist "birther" campaign falsely alleging that Barack Obama wasn't born in the US, has spent the better part of the last few years poisoning political discourse in the US with rampant misogyny, open race baiting, Islamophobia and xenophobia. He has preyed on the worst, most vile instincts inherent in the US, amplifying and encouraging prejudices, hatred and insecurities from the biggest bully pulpit available in the US. Also crucial to note is the fact that Trump has over the years effectively gained complete control over the Republican Party (GOP). He has held Republican Senators and senior leaders of the party in a vice-like political grip, getting them to obsequiously pander to his lies and his dangerous efforts to bend and misuse institutional power. This apart, the Trump regime has been waging a relentless war against the environment and against public healthcare and education. The last four years, in fact, had showcased the extent of fragility of democracy in the US, and the potential of fascist cultural narratives overwhelming democratic norms.

THE RESULTS: TRUMP OUT, TRUMPISM TO STAY

While the results are yet to be officially certified (a process that

normally takes some months), the outcome is clear. Donald Trump has lost, defeated by the Democrat Joe Biden. Biden is slated to win 306 Electoral Votes (he needs just 270 to win the Presidency). Not just has Biden won the popular vote by a margin of 3.6% over Trump, he has received the highest number of votes (more than 79 million) any candidate has got in American history. It is not easy to displace an incumbent President seeking reelection in the US, making Biden's victory much more special. Besides easily defending states that have traditionally been Democrat strongholds, Biden managed to win back several states that Hillary Clinton lost narrowly in 2016. This includes the so-called 'Rust Belt' – the industrial centres of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Biden won handsomely in cities of Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the Rust Belt. More damning, however, for the Republicans was Biden's ability to perform exceptionally well in the suburban areas surrounding these cities, precisely because suburbs such as these had catapulted Trump into power four years back. These defeats apart, the death knell for the Trump reelection campaign was Biden's victory in the traditional Republican strongholds of Arizona and Georgia. Even popular Democrat candidates such as Obama hadn't managed to win in these states, known to be socially conservative.

To add to this victory is the fact that Kamala Harris is now the Vice President elect of the US. She will be the first woman to be elected to such a major post in the US. Her origins make her victory all the more special. Born to an Indian woman and a Jamaican father, she is a strong symbol of America's multicultural ethos – an ethos which

has been an unsettling and irritating thorn for Republicans. It comes as no surprise that Harris received more than a usual share of attention that a Vice presidential candidate gets during the campaign. While most Democrats faced accusations of being "dangerously liberal", "socialist" and anti-America, Trump and other Republicans repeatedly subjected Harris to sexist and racist barbs. Trump told exultant crowds at his rallies that they should not let her become the first woman President at any point; her laugh was mocked by Trump ("something wrong with her", he said commenting on her laugh); her name was arrogantly mispronounced ("Kamala-mala-mala. I don't know. Whatever", said a Republican Senator); and she was referred to as "nasty" and a "monster". Harris's victory at a time when race relations in the US are particularly fraught, and when we are seeing a strong patriarchal pushback against ideas of gender justice and equality is surely an important moment. Republicans have relentlessly weaponized cultural wars and race hysteria, aiming to warn the Democrats that socially conservative America will never accept serious challenges to social fractures of race and gender. Kamala Harris is a defiant response to this Republican narrative.

It is important, nevertheless, to recognize that this election wasn't a thorough repudiation of Trump and Trumpism. Trump received more than 73 million votes – 10 million votes more than he received in 2016. He received a greater percentage of votes amongst key demographics – Black men, Latino men and white women in particular – than he did in 2016. He has received the second highest votes for a Presidential candidate in the US. The story does not end there. Republicans performed extremely well in the

House and Senate races. They have taken back several House seats from the Democrats, coming extremely close to challenging the Democrats' majority in the House of Representatives. Moreover, they have performed well in the Senate races too. As of now, the Republicans have 50 seats in the Senate and the Democrats have 48 (out of 100). The only chance the Democrats have to control the Senate is to win both the Senate runoff races in Georgia in early January. By all accounts, this will be an extremely difficult feat to pull off, and by the end of January, the Republicans would have retained their control over the powerful US Senate. The Republican candidates who won Senate seats are those who hitched their political wagon to Trump and Trumpism. In other words, they highlighted the fact that they were Trump's favourites (unlike some Republicans who chose to distance themselves from some of Trump's policies and rhetoric), and were rewarded handsomely by the electorate. None of this is good news for the Democrats and Progressives in the US. They have in front of them the looming specter of a Republican-controlled Senate which will dictate everything from policy to Cabinet appointments, and of a political narrative that will continue to be deeply influenced by Trump.

WHY REMOVING TRUMP WAS SO IMPORTANT

This underscores how exceedingly difficult it was to defeat Trump, and what a concerted effort it has taken political and grassroots activists to chip away slowly at his popularity. This message needs to be conveyed emphatically to liberal and democratic voices across the world. Following Trump's defeat, there has been some talk of how

this means little in the long run. One face of US imperialism, one bully, has been replaced by another, we are being told. Nothing can be further from the truth. To begin with, a defeat of a fascist demagogue who thrives on racist and xenophobic dog whistles doubling as red meat for the adoring audience in his rallies is good news. One cannot serious contest the importance of defeating someone whose political agenda is to reaffirm white supremacy and to dismantle democratic institutions.

There is, in addition, a serious problem with equating a Trump administration with a Biden administration. While both surely would stand for US imperial interests across the globe, the fact is that a second Trump term would embolden right-wing, fascist, authoritarian, conservative forces across the world. Putin, Erdogan, Bolsonaro, Modi, Boris Johnson and others have thrived on the enthusiastic support they receive from the US administration. It is not only workers and indigenous movements who seek global solidarities; right-wing fascists also seek to build alliances in their quest for social, cultural and economic hegemony. For Indians battling RSS's cultural nationalism and Islamophobic discourse, it helps not to have a loudspeaker in the White House amplifying poisonous rhetoric that will provide a validation of RSS' cultural world.

As media organizations in the US announced that Biden would be the next President, lawyer and author Van Jones broke into tears on the CNN on Prime Time television. He spoke of what Trump's defeat means for Muslims demonized on a routine basis by the White House, for immigrants who have their small children separated from them, for Black men and women who have

over the past four years borne the brunt of a louder and shriller white supremacist narrative. Trump's defeat matters, he emphasized. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) reinforced this point when asked why she, as a progressive, socialist Democrat was campaigning actively for Biden: "I don't think anyone can look me in the eye and say that they won't be better off in a Biden administration, that they won't be more protected under a Biden administration...we can make tactical votes". Let us not forget that in Trump's America, his supporters actually asked a Navajo Native American elected as a state representative if he was "here legally"; "Get out of the country", he was told by a mocking and aggressive crowd in Arizona.

This is precisely why grassroots groups such as the Indigenous Environmental Network worked hard to mobilize against Trump. They provided the votes to send Trump packing from the White House and saw his defeat as a result of their collective power. This was their victory, they remind us, while also telling us that they will hold a future Biden administration accountable for safeguarding environmental rights and dignity of their communities. What do we learn from these voices emerging from the US? That removing Trump from office is an immediate and urgent priority. That their vote for Biden, far from being a free pass for him, would be followed by battles against his administration to ensure their rights. One cannot imagine a clearer and most unambiguous understanding of American politics.

IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS FROM THE US ELECTIONS

In the days to come, we will hear a lot about how the Biden campaign

managed to unseat Trump. We need to point out one factor here, which is especially relevant to India. Democratic institutions in the US have not been dismantled or horrifically weakened the way they are in India. They are still in a position to provide some pushback to fascist narratives. The media in the US, for instance, has had a role to play in Trump's defeat. Many channels have together provided continuous antidotes to Trump's barrage of lies, half-truths, racism, sexism and political hypocrisy. Trump, as well as key GOP leaders, have had to face tough questions on all controversial decisions they have taken – ranging from the ban of immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries, to the Trump administration's walking away from climate talks to most recently the GOP's hasty moves in October this year to install a right-wing conservative judge in the Supreme Court. After the elections, these media outlets have ripped apart Trump's attempts to claim that the election was somehow "rigged" and stolen away from him, by providing timely and point-to-point rebuttals to each of Trump's lies. Unlike Modi, who has a media ecosystem lapping up his every word, Trump has had to deal with the media by calling them "fake news". Even in the face of authoritarian onslaughts, various state bodies (such as those in charge of conducting elections) have also showcased degrees of autonomy and professionalism that we rarely see in India.

That being said, a lot more was required to defeat Trump in an atmosphere where he enjoys massive support from a committed mass base. Here is where the experience of grassroots groups needs to be located. These experiences supply important lessons for anti-fascist organizers everywhere, because they highlight the potential of hard, committed grassroots work. Bernie Sanders, who missed being nominated by the Democratic Party as their candidate twice in a row, ran an energetic campaign amongst voters who would prove crucial to a Democrat victory. He ran several virtual meetings in Kentucky, West Virginia, Iowa, Wisconsin, Colorado, Texas, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Michigan, focussing on Latino, rural and working class voters.

He campaigned specifically for strong action to address climate change, for a minimum wage for every working family, and for expansion of publicly funded healthcare and education. These issues, not really the focus of the Biden-Harris campaign, helped to mobilize key constituencies such as workers' unions and youth. Sanders has long been supported by a growing group of young socialist leaders in the Democratic Party. The

'Squad', as Trump derisively called them, consisting of AOC, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Ayanna Pressley and others ran spirited campaigns on the ground. They mobilized and registered voters, ran door-to-door campaigns wherever possible, used their resources to run advertisements on social media and TV. The important message from the 'Squad' was that there is absolutely no short cut to establishing a deep connect with voters; listening to them, talking to them, working with them on their day-to-day problems throughout the year. "Embrace the Base" and embrace issues close to the base's needs and aspirations was their message to the Democratic Party leadership, a party used to big bucks and mega campaigns but unused to running sustained campaigns throughout the year. After the election, Omar for instance released data on the number of people (running into several hundred thousands) that her campaign had personally contacted through text messages, phone calls and face-to-face meetings. This manner of campaigning and establishing a close connect politically insulated them from barbs of being "un-American", too "dangerously socialist" and so on.

While the Squad was busy running intense campaigns, Black, Latino and Arab-American leaders in the Democratic Party had a slightly different challenge – the challenge of upturning systemic, decades long voter suppression of their communities aided and abetted by not just the Republicans but equally by local administrations. As Stacey Abrams realised after her close (and losing) battle to become the Governor of Georgia, something had to be done to address this systemic problem. Over the last two years, several grassroots groups have worked hard and quietly to register voters and to establish a long-term connect with them. These campaigns have been particularly effective amongst Black and Latino workers in Georgia and Arizona and even in the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. Several political commentators have noted that Black women organizers such as Abrams and LaTosha Brown crafted the Biden victory, by helping him win several crucial states. For the Democrats, the message was clear: regular campaigning was the key to success. This message was made even more clear given the lacklustre performance of the Democrats amongst Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans in Texas and Florida. Trump ran an aggressive campaign, portraying all Democrats as Castro-lovers and dangerous Communists. In the absence of an effective counter messaging by the Biden campaign, these

communities voted overwhelmingly for Trump, easily delivering Texas and Florida to him.

ISSUES: COVID AND LIVELIHOODS

A dominant theme running through several political commentaries about the US elections was that the CoVID pandemic played havoc with Trump's re-election campaign. Had the pandemic not happened, we are told, Trump would have won. There is of course some merit to this argument. It goes without saying that Trump mismanaged the pandemic on an epic scale. He did almost everything that should not have been done. He claimed CoVID was a hoax, he claimed that it was just a flu, that it would disappear. He disparaged masks and people who wore them. He disagreed, rudely and publicly, with medical experts and the World Health Organization. He undermined his own coronavirus task force. In other words, he created a mess as a result of which one of the world's most development countries with the best resources showcased one of the worst CoVID related statistics in the world. Deaths skyrocketed, with Republicans showing more keenness to launch culture wars around masks. Old white men, in particular have shown their disapproval of Trump's handling of the virus by voting in large numbers for Biden.

However, the CoVID-related narrative was hardly a one-way street. To understand this, it would be instructive to borrow a story narrated by Aditya Chakrabarty in the Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/12/donald-trump-poor-white-americans-despair-leader>). Chakravarty introduces us to Mike Stout and his family in Pennsylvania. Mike Stout, a union leader one time employed in a steel plant, was happy to see Obama elected in 2009, excitedly watching Obama's inaugural in 2009. As time elapsed, his job disappeared. His daughter, eeking out a far more precarious living as employee in a hotel than her parents, lost her low-paying job this year during the pandemic. Hope dissipated for the Stout family, only to be replaced by a sense that the political class cares little for them. It is this kind of voter whom Trump appeals to. A person who is economically and socially insecure, raging against a system that does not seem to care. Trump's CoVID messaging – a combination of denigrating science and masks – also included a message that did hit home for millions of working families. As he raged against lockdowns, he claimed, repeatedly, that the "solution should not be worse than the disease itself". Trump therefore managed to convey that he is trying to save jobs, while the Democrats want to shut down the economy. For

families anxious and worried about the falling economy and jobs fast disappearing, this was a message of hope. The CoVID-related narratives therefore probably helped both campaigns. The US elections have let us know, in so many ways, that livelihood, dignified jobs, decent wages and access to healthcare and education matter to them.

The Republican base of course needs assurance that American culture will continue to be dominated by the majority White population. They are keen to engage in the culture wars that the Republicans thrive in. "Law and order", right to own guns, control of abortion rights, continue to enthuse them. However, these elections tell us that they too are keen to hear about jobs and livelihoods, about healthcare and education.

THE ROAD AHEAD IN US POLITICS

Republicans today are hopelessly caught in Trumpism. There are calls, from within, to make the GOP the party of the "working class", buoyed by voters they have identified in the Rust Belt and elsewhere. But this is a tough road for them to tread on, given the fundamental fissures within the party. It is far easier for the GOP to fashion itself as the voice of the 'marginalised' white, America, upset with growing multiculturalism as well as social, political, and cultural assertion of Blacks, Latinos, Muslims and other non-white minorities. For the Democrats, it is high time for them to reclaim the working class space from Trumpism. Several Democrat leaders have pointed out that the Party has to evolve a language to speak to disenfranchised workers who feel that the Democrats have ditched them. It is time to make Mike Stout and his family believe in the Democrats once again. It is here that Sanders, AOC and the progressives in the Democratic Party have useful ideas and experiences to share. Only time will tell what path the US chooses to take in the days and years to come. Right now, of course, the country is busy dealing with a President who refuses to accept his loss and who is busy weaponizing his loss to rake in money for his political future. ❑

JEREMY CORBYN, ISRAEL AND THE ONGOING STRUGGLE WITHIN THE UK LABOUR PARTY



ANANYA WILSON-BHATTACHARYA

On October 29, news of former leader Jeremy Corbyn's sudden shock suspension from the Labour Party spread rapidly across the UK. That morning, a report had been published by the Equalities and Human

Rights Commission (EHRC) inquiring into anti-Semitism in the party. In the wake of the report, Corbyn claimed that the scale of anti-Semitism in the party had been 'dramatically overstated for political reasons' – and was promptly suspended. He has now been reinstated by the National Executive Committee (NEC) following a major public outcry from Labour members, including many Jewish members. However, current leader Keir Starmer has unilaterally withdrawn the whip from Corbyn, effectively meaning he is now an Independent MP (in his North London seat, where he has served since 1983 and remains immensely popular).



2009: Jeremy Corbyn joins Palestinian demonstrators in London's Trafalgar Square. Credit: Theodore Iasi

From the outset, Corbyn's lifelong support for Palestinian rights has made him a target for the Israeli state and its supporters in the UK establishment, including inside the Labour Party. In 2018, pressure was mounted on Corbyn's then-leadership to adopt in full the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, which allowed criticisms of the Israeli state to be framed as examples of anti-Semitism. When the leadership did eventually adopt the full definition, they emphasised that this would not preclude criticism of Israel or championing of Palestinian rights, which was framed as controversial by the party's right and the wider establishment. The mainstream media coverage of this episode fed into a

wider smear campaign branding Corbyn and his supporters as anti-Semitic, a phenomenon Corbyn alluded to in the comments which led to his suspension. This coverage included claims that 34% of the membership held anti-Semitic views (the actual figure is closer to 0.3%, the lowest of any UK party). Many of the cases of anti-Semitism which have been put forward in the past few years have been supported by little to no evidence aside from comments about Israel. Meanwhile, a report leaked in April demonstrated that genuine cases of anti-Semitism had been ignored by internal staff loyal to the right wing of the party, in order to further discredit Corbyn's handling of anti-Semitism.

When Corbyn was reinstated on November 17, Starmer declared that 'this is a sad day for Jewish people' – entirely ignoring the swathes of Jewish Labour members that have continued to staunchly support Corbyn throughout this episode. Shortly after his suspension, Jewish members in Corbyn's constituency penned a letter (which only progressive, local newspapers were prepared to publish) asserting Corbyn's support for the local Jewish community, and urging Starmer to reinstate him instantly. These Jewish party members, and Jewish supporters of Palestine in general, have consistently spoken out against the insidious weaponization of anti-Semitism to silence any criticism of Israel – and have faced more hostility and abuse for this position than anyone else, often being called 'self-hating' by opponents.

Corbyn is not the only Labour politician to be targeted for criticizing Israel. The day before Corbyn was reinstated, Gemma Bolton, a newly-elected member of Labour's National Executive Committee was placed under investigation for a 2018 tweet calling Israel an apartheid state, and in June, left MP Rebecca Long-Bailey was dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet for tweeting an interview which mentioned Israeli Secret Services teaching US Police violent tactics. Meanwhile, Rachel Reeves – an outspoken admirer of the notoriously anti-Semitic, Nazi-supporting 1930s Conservative MP Nancy Astor – remains in Starmer's shadow cabinet, speaking volumes about his supposed commitment to rooting out anti-Semitism within the party. Clearly, Starmer's real focus is rooting out anyone that dares to criticise Israel – which includes many on the left of the party. On a personal level, Starmer has close links with the Israeli state, and has cast being the polar opposite of Corbyn as the defining feature of his leadership. As Jewish South African politician Andrew Feinstein has pointed out, this weaponization of anti-Semitism to fight factional political battles, and to silence criticism of Israel, trivialises real anti-Semitism.

Ironically, equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism amounts to equating Jewish people with the state of Israel – itself a form of anti-Semitism, according to the IHRA definition which Starmer has championed.

There is a clear strategy here: rooting out not anti-Semites, but leftist members. Anti-Semites can stay, so long as they don't criticise the Israeli government. Those at the helm of the insidious smear campaign around

anti-Semitism have gained power within the party. It is noteworthy that Corbyn's suspension came during the NEC elections, in which a large number of left candidates were expected to win. For many on the left, the suspension was the final straw – after six months which saw revelations of internal sabotage from the party's right in the 2017 General Election, followed by multiple suspensions and penalising of left MPs for fabricated reasons or simply for their politics – prompting them to tear up their membership cards and leave Labour for good. But people quickly caught on that a mass exodus of left members during the NEC elections was exactly the outcome those behind the suspension had been hoping for. Ultimately, the left candidates did retain a significant presence on the NEC. However, seven months on from the end of Corbyn's leadership, the future of the left within Labour remains uncertain.

Many have talked of a new party being formed. But Corbyn himself is unlikely to form a new party, despite no longer being an MP for the party he has remained loyal to and kept faith in for over four decades. Besides, many struggle to imagine a non-mainstream party attracting new members on the scale that Corbyn's Labour did when he became leader in 2015. Regardless, at this time of unprecedented economic hardship in the wake of a global health pandemic, enduring institutional racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia and a deepening climate crisis, and with a far-right government set to remain in power for another four years, the left must devote itself to building and strengthening movements which can lay the groundwork for a genuine alternative to become a reality. ■



TRIBUTE

RED SALUTE TO SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE!

Paying tribute to the legendary actor of Bengali theatre and cinema Soumitra Chatterjee, CPIML general secretary Comrade Dipankar wrote, "Adieu, Soumitra Chatterjee! For decades you strode like a colossus on the cultural canvas of West Bengal, and now you won't be around when West Bengal is fighting the biggest battle ever to save its cultural soul and social ethos. Your legacy will inspire us to win this battle."



Today, the people of India recall Soumitra Chatterjee as the unforgettable "Apu" and "Feluda" of Satyajit Ray's films. They also remember him as a public intellectual who spoke up boldly for secularism till his last day. One of his last acts of public protest was to sign his name on a protest banner against the CAA NPR NRC.

His last published piece appeared in the CPIM organ Ganashakti's festival number, where he said "I still believe that the Left path is the only alternative," and spoke up against communalism. He wrote: "I am surprised that the man during whose tenure Gujarat witnessed communal riots in 2002 is now ruling India. Indians are tolerating these people and voting them to power once again....So many people are dying during the pandemic and yet there is politics in the name of Ram." Denouncing lynchings in the name of beef he asked, "How can someone put a diktat on what to eat?" Referring to demolition of the Babri Masjid, Chatterjee wrote, "I will always raise one question. Where were the political parties that could have stopped it? Speaking against the incident is not enough. People should have been brought together under their flags."

In 2018, Soumitra Chatterjee joined other eminent poets, novelists, writers, human rights activists, and actors to issue a call to the people of West Bengal to join a protest rally on 8th April from Esplanade to Rabindra Sadan against the Islamophobia and communal violence that gripped many parts of the state on the eve and on the Ramnavami Day, 25 March, when the BJP MP of Asansol, Babul Supriyo and the RSS whipped up a communal frenzy.

In 2019 Soumitra Chatterjee and 48 others had signed a letter to the Prime Minister following the lynching of Tabrez Ansari in Jharkhand, expressing anguish and concern at such lynchings, and especially at the fact that Ansari had been forced to chant "Jai Shri Ram" (Victory to Lord Rama) by his tormentors and killers. Right-wing public personalities including Kangana Ranaut had written a counter letter accusing Soumitra Chatterjee

and others of being out to “break India”, and had demanded sedition charges against him. PM Modi, in a veiled reference to the protest letter against lynching, said in speeches during the Bihar elections, “They (the opposition) are part of the Break India gang, they want to stop you from saying Jai Shri Ram.” Following Soumitra Chatterjee’s death however, Modi and Shah, with an eye on West Bengal elections in the near future, hypocritically tried to claim him as a “Bengali icon.” But Soumitra was much more than that: he was a fine artist and a sensitive, conscientious human being, who used his voice to defend India’s constitution and secularism from the BJP and RSS. The true tribute to his memory would be to put up a determined fight against BJP’s communal politics in West Bengal.

The world we knew

(Excerpts from Soumitra Chatterjee’s last article)

I often think of my childhood friend Benu these days. In these troubled times, his face returns to me, floating before my eyes. We lived in the same neighbourhood in Krishnanagar. Benu – Benu Rahman – was my Fazluka’s son. Benu was more Hindu than Hindus. I would get irritated because he followed so many of those rules and rituals. And he would say to me, “Pulu, you should follow some of these,” but I would scold him.

I also think about Rupchand jethu (Rupchand Tapadar). I didn’t meet him when I went home for the pujo vacation. What a scolding I got when he found out!! Rupchand jethu was a Christian.

That was the world we knew.

When elders visited our home, I would touch their feet. It made no difference whether they were Hindus or Muslims or Christians. Yes, I had heard the word ‘communalism’ as a child, but it didn’t really make an impression on my mind. Why? The situation, the environment for the word to be significant was not there. The riots of ’46 had no effect in any part of Nadiya. Not in Krishnanagar either. But now? I truly feel despondent about where we are now. What is this darkness in the country I know? And will it ever be able to come out of this darkness? I do not know if I will ever see, once again, the country I knew.

I am surprised that the man who was in power in Gujarat during the horrific riots of 2002 is now the man on the throne of India. The people of India are tolerating him and his party. They are being re-elected. Perhaps people can’t see a powerful alternative. Or they are unable to understand the toxic nature of this politics.

During this pandemic, many people are getting infected, so many are dying. In a word, this is intolerable. But politics in the name of Rama continues in the midst of all this.

The funny thing is, since childhood, we all know the Rama in whose name they want to build a temple. For

hundreds and thousands of years, Rama has lived in a space of love and inspiration. Tell me, the Rama who went to live in the forest to carry out the promise made by his father – would he live in a grand temple? Of course, carrying out his father’s words, living in the forest – these are only stories. But our values are shaped by them. They become the symbols of our values. But where are these values now? We are actually letting go of our culture.

If anyone can be an alternative, it is the Left. But where is their steadfastness? Are they inspiring belief in people’s hearts? When I face these questions, I feel despondent. I don’t know where this country is going to end up. The Right is gaining in strength all across the world. We see many forms of injustice – which cannot take place unless the authorities keep their eyes shut. My question is – how do we change this?

In our country today, we have gau-sevak and gau-rakhshak. We hear that the cure for Covid is cow urine, or that the virus will disappear if we bang plates and light candles. And then we hear claims that India is a great and powerful nation!

I can’t express in words the anger I feel when I see the drama about eating beef. Where else can you get such high protein for such low prices? People around the world eat beef. Most important, who is anyone to decide what others can and cannot eat? A Hindu might object to eating beef. But why should that objection be imposed on someone else? Dictating other people’s food habits – is this the level to which we have descended. Muslims are being murdered in the name of eating beef. We have not seen this before in India – we saw India at a time when even our school textbooks told us what this nation is built on.

In conclusion, I want to say that religion and politics are being cleverly mixed to produce fundamentalism. Who loves Rama and who loves Rahim should not even be an issue. Again, this is why I feel that only the Left can be an alternative to all this.

Open Letter To PM Modi Signed By Soumitra Chatterjee

(Text of open letter written to Prime Minister Modi on 23 July 2019 by 49 eminent citizens, including Soumitra Chatterjee, Aparna Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, Anurag Kashyap, Ashis Nandy, Tanika Sarkar and Ramachandra Guha. An FIR was filed against these 49 citizens accusing them of “sedition”.)

We, as peace loving and proud Indians, are deeply concerned about a number of tragic events that have been happening in recent times in our beloved country.

Our Constitution describes India as a secular socialist democratic republic where citizens of all religions, ethnicities, gender and castes are equal. Hence, to ensure that every citizen enjoys the rights given to her/

him by the Constitution, our submission is:

1. The lynching of Muslims, Dalits and other minorities must be stopped immediately. We were shocked to learn from the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) reports that there have been no less than 840 instances of atrocities against Dalits in the year 2016, and a definite decline in the percentage of convictions.

Further, 254 religious identity-based hate crimes were reported between January 1, 2009, and October 29, 2018, where at least 91 persons were killed and 579 were injured (FactChecker.in database, October 30, 2018). The Citizen's Religious Hate-Crime Watch recorded that Muslims, (14% of India's population) were the victims in 62% for cases, and Christians (2% of the population), in 14% cases. About 90% of these attacks were reported after May 2014, when your Government assumed power nationally.

You have criticized such lynchings in Parliament Mr. Prime Minister, but that is not enough! What action has actually been taken against the perpetrators? We strongly feel that such offences should be declared non-bailable, and that exemplary punishment should be meted out swiftly and surely. If life imprisonment without parole can be the sentence in cases of murder, why not for lynchings, which are even more heinous? No citizen should have to live in fear in his/her own country!

Regrettably "Jai Sri Ram" has become a provocative 'war-cry' today that leads to law and order problems, and many lynchings take place in its name. It is shocking to see so much violence perpetrated in the name of religion! These are not the Middle Ages! The name of Ram is sacred to many in the majority community of India. As the highest Executive of this country, you must put a stop to the name of Ram being defiled in this manner.

2. There is no democracy without dissent. People should not be branded 'anti-national' or 'urban Naxal' and incarcerated because of dissent against the Government. Article 19 of the Constitution of India protects freedom of speech and expression of which dissent is an integral part.

Criticising the ruling party does not imply criticising the nation. No ruling party is synonymous with the country where it is in power. It is only one of the political parties of that country. Hence anti-government stands cannot be equated with anti-national sentiments. An open environment where dissent is not crushed, only makes for a stronger nation.

We hope our suggestions will be taken in the spirit that they are meant – as Indians genuinely concerned with, and anxious about, the fate of our nation.



RED SALUTE TO COMRADE DHANANJAY!

CPIML expresses its deep condolences at the sudden and untimely demise of senior journalist Kumar Dhananjay on 21 November 2020.

Kumar Dhananjay worked as a journalist for the last two decades, first with Aaj Tak and in the last few years with various independent media outlets. Throughout his career as a journalist he remained committed to democratic values and just causes.

Comrade Dhananjay joined JNU in 1993 as a student of French in the School of Languages. From his early days in JNU he had been an activist of AISA and played a leading role throughout his studentship in the 1990s. In 1994 itself he was elected

as JNUSU Councillor in the School of Languages with a record number of votes and became the Convenor of the School. He was one of the leading organisers in the struggle to restore Deprivation Points in 1994 and the anti- Fee Hike movement in 1995. He played a prominent role in the movement for justice after Comrade Chandrasekhar's martyrdom, and was injured in a lathicharge during that struggle.

With his passing away journalism and the cause of democracy has lost a fellow traveller and a fearless voice.

ALOKE RANJAN DASGUPTA



Poet, essayist and translator Alope Ranjan Dasgupta passed away on 17 November. He authored

20 books of poetry and translated Bengali and Santhal poetry and plays into English and German, and also translated literature from German and French into Bengali. In tribute to Alope Ranjan Dasgupta, we reproduce one of his poems in translation.

*In the Wonderful Absence of Power
While pondering in a forest the
names of possible ministers*

*for the shadow cabinet
the day slipped past, and all of a
sudden
a frail deodar tree tottered towards
me.*

*Its roots are rather loose, and to
tell the truth
it has hardly a single leaf left;
We both enveloped in the joy of
lacking power
postpone setting up our government.*

[translated by himself]

CONDEMN ATTACK BY BJP-BACKED GOONS ON CPIML LEADER IN TRIPURA

The CPIML condemns the attack by BJP-backed goons on CPIML Central Committee member and Tripura Secretary Comrade Partha Karmakar's home in Udaipur, Tripura. At around 8.30 pm on 15 November, some two dozen BJP backed goons tried to storm Comrade Partha Karmakar's house. They made death threats against him, accompanied by obscene abuses, warning him to stop campaigning against BJP and stop holding any meetings at his house or anywhere outside. They tried to jump the boundary wall of his home, and they threatened several of his neighbours who came to his rescue.

The police did not come when called, pleading that they were busy with Diwali. They promised to send an officer to record a statement the following day, but as of 16 November evening, no police officer has made any appearance.

It should be noted that there have been two similar attacks in the past by BJP supporters - on the CPIML office in Udaipur and on a protest dharna by the party.

These attacks point to the BJP reign of terror in Tripura, in complicity with the Tripura police and Government.

CPIML demands immediate arrest and prosecution of the goons who attacked Comrade Partha Karmakar's home and issued death threats against him.

-CPIML Politburo



CPIML Central Committee member and Tripura Secretary Comrade Partha Karmakar

TO OUR READERS: LIBERATION PRICE REVISION

Due to escalating production cost of Liberation, we are forced to increase the per issue price from Rs 15/- to Rs 25/- with effect from January 2021.

-Manager. Liberation

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