

Liberation

JANUARY 2021

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

Rs. 25



REPEAL FARM LAWS

RESIST
CORPORATE SALVERY



HERE'S WHY →

THE FARMERS OF HARYANA, PUNJAB AND OTHER STATES OF INDIA ARE PROTESTING AGAINST THREE NEW FARMER BILLS.

THEY FEEL THE NEW AMENDMENTS AND BILLS ARE NOT ONLY 'ANTI-FARMER' IN NATURE, BUT ALSO INCENTIVISING TO BIG CORPORATION.



WHY ARE FARMERS PROTESTING?

THE BILL DOES NOT GIVE WHAT THE FARMERS ARE ASKING FOR AND NEED, WHICH ARE -

MSP-MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE TO BE GUARANTEED
SUPERVISION OF TRADE
FAIR TRANSACTIONS AND PRICES
EMPOWERING STATE GOVERNMENTS TO REGULATE AND PLACE ALL MARKETS ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD.

FARMERS FEEL THAT THE BILLS ARE A WAY FOR THE GOVT. TO ABDICATE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO PROVIDE THE FARMERS WITH A MSP OR MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE.

EXISTING SYSTEM

FARMER 

1. FARMERS SELL GOODS AT MSP - MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE, CONTROLLED BY GOVT. AT MANDIS

MANDI 

TRADER 

BIG CORP. BUSINESS 

2. BIG CORPORATIONS ARE ALLOWED TO TRADE, BUT THERE IS A LIMIT TO THE TIME AND AMOUNT OF PRODUCE THEY CAN HOARD/ STOCK. (TO PROTECT FARMERS)


CONSUMER 

NEW SYSTEM

FARMER 

1. FARMERS NOW SELL DIRECTLY TO CONSUMERS AT THEIR OWN RATES.

BUT RELIEVES THE GOVT OF 2. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MSP.

TRADER 

BIG CORP. BUSINESS 

3. THE BILL REMOVES THE LIMIT ON AMOUNT AND DURATION OF HOARDING OF PRODUCE BY CORPORATIONS.

4. LARGE SCALE STOCKING ALLOWS CORPORATIONS TO SET RATES LOWER THAN THE FARMERS.

CONSUMER 

THE PROBLEM WITH THE NEW FARMER BILLS

FARMERS ARE NOT GUARANTEED A MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE.

NO LIMIT TO THE AMOUNT AND DURATION FOR WHICH COMPANIES CAN 'HOARD OR STOCKHOLD GOODS'

MARKET IS OPEN TO MASS PRIVATIZATION.

HUGE IMPORT OF FOOD FROM POORER COUNTRIES CAN BE DONE BY CONGLOMERATES TO REGULATE PRICES WITHOUT REPERCUSSIONS.

THE GOVT. IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE FOR REGULATING PRICES.



CEREALS PULSES EDIBLE OIL ONIONS POTATO

HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES LIST, BY THE GOVERNMENT

BIG CORPORATIONS ARE NOW FREE TO MONOPOLIZE AND CONTROL THESE COMMODITIES



Liberation

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THE MESSAGE FOR 2021 FROM THE DELHI BORDER: FIGHT FASCISM, REJECT COMPANY RAJ!



The world has probably not seen a more difficult and challenging year than 2020 since the devastation of the world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. An extraordinary public health emergency claimed more than a million lives across the world and virtually brought normal social life and economic activities to a standstill as country after country sought to check the epidemic by imposing various degrees of lockdown for weeks and months together. Given the critically deficient state of public health infrastructure in India, and the utterly cruel, coercive and arbitrary nature of the Modi model of lockdown, India has had to suffer enormously on both counts – the epidemic and the lockdown, and even as the year draws to a close the devastation continues unabated.

While the people of India have been reeling under the combined havoc wrought by the epidemic and the debilitating lockdown, the Modi government came up with the slogan of turning the crisis into an opportunity. Correctly decoded, this new slogan means worsening the crisis of the common people to produce opportunities for the rich and the powerful. And parliamentary democracy has been brazenly 'sanitized' and reengineered to do it with clinical precision. Nothing illustrates this surgical strike on democracy more vividly than the way the Modi government has gone about enacting the new farm laws in utter disregard of the interests and opinions of the entire agricultural population in India. The farmers of Punjab who were once lauded by India's ruling classes for spearheading India's 'green revolution' have now been declared persona non grata, indeed sworn enemies, in Modi's "new India".

In the middle of the peak epidemic the government first promulgated three ordinances in early June and Punjab farmers immediately began protesting. The whole of Punjab soon rallied around the protesting farmers and the Akali Dal minister felt compelled to quit the Modi cabinet in Delhi. The Punjab Assembly unanimously rejected the ordinances and even BJP leaders started resigning from their own party. Instead of paying heed to the protests, the Modi government came up with the bills and bulldozed Parliament into

passing them into law. And now when farmers across the country are demanding repeal of these pro-corporate laws, the government has cancelled the winter session of Parliament! Meanwhile, there is evidence pouring in from all corners of the country of the Adani group frantically building its agribusiness infrastructure in 'anticipation' of the new laws. The ordinances and the dubiously passed laws merely formalized the plot already hatched by the government in collusion with its corporate cronies.


The year 2020 had begun on the rousing note of the citizenship movement when Shaheen Bagh became a household name with Muslim women taking the lead, and the spirit of Shaheen Bagh permeated the whole country. Just when the prolonged interruption caused by the disruptive combination of the pandemic and lockdown and the conspiracy hatched by the Modi government and the Sangh brigade to crush and defame the protests by perpetrating a pogrom and booking protesters under draconian laws made people wonder if and how the spirit of Shaheen Bagh could be rekindled, the farmers arrived in their tractors and trollies, defying water cannons, overcoming dug up roads, breaking through barbed wire fences, and pitched their tents around Delhi. They have not only given us our Kisan Shaheen Baghs, they have nullified the BJP's design of crushing the farmers' movement by unleashing police repression, they have rekindled the spirit of 1857 when peasants in uniform had marched to Delhi and unfurled the flag of freedom against the British Company Raj. Today India's farmers have once again encircled Delhi, this time to resist the fascist rulers and reject their design of shackling India to an unbridled Adani-Ambani-Company Raj.

From Shaheen Bagh to Singhu Border and Tikri Border, 2020 has been a glorious year for India's democracy, holding up the tremendous potential of people's assertion to stop India's descent into a fascist abyss. The Modi government tried to isolate, defame and crush Shaheen Bagh by presenting it as a misguided movement of Muslim separatists and now it is hatching a similar conspiracy against the farmers' movement, projecting it as a jamboree of Khalistan separatists and

rich farmers of Punjab. Revolutionary communists must foil this design not just by strengthening the resistance around Delhi but by spreading the spirit to every nook and corner of India and backing up the Delhi NCR resistance with a countrywide mobilization of all sections of farmers, workers and common people. The response

evoked by the 26 November trade union strike and 8 December Bharat Bandh clearly points to the possibility of a great convergence of struggles of diverse sections of people. And the outcome of Bihar elections indicates the growing possibility of taking the spirit of resistance to the electoral arena.

Let us usher in 2021 on the rousing note of the farmers' resistance. Forcing the government to take back the anti-farmer farms laws will be a big victory not just

for India's farmers but for all sections of people fighting against corporate aggression and fascist takeover. And this will also equip us effectively to meet the challenges of the next round of Assembly elections, including the crucial poll battles of West Bengal and Assam. More power to India's fighting farmers! Victory to India's battle for democracy! 

LET US USHER IN 2021 ON THE ROUSING NOTE OF THE FARMERS' RESISTANCE. FORCING THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE BACK THE ANTI-FARMER FARMS LAWS WILL BE A BIG VICTORY NOT JUST FOR INDIA'S FARMERS BUT FOR ALL SECTIONS OF PEOPLE FIGHTING AGAINST CORPORATE AGGRESSION AND FASCIST TAKEOVER.



CALL FOR DECEMBER 18

EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN THE PARTY TO CONSOLIDATE THE GAINS MADE IN BIHAR ELECTIONS!

TAKE ALL-OUT INITIATIVES TO BROADEN AND INTENSIFY THE ANTI-FASCIST RESISTANCE!

December 18, 2020 marks the twenty second death anniversary of Comrade Vinod Mishra. Since 1999 we have been observing this day as 'Sankalp Divas' or a day of pledge taking for the entire party to renew its revolutionary resolve. This year we are observing the day in the midst of an unprecedented farmers' movement which has every potential to grow into a powerful people's resistance against growing corporate domination (popularly being described as Adani-Ambani-Company Raj') and fascist takeover of India. The encouraging gains made by the party in the just concluded Bihar elections have placed us in a better position to increase our role and meet the challenges of freeing India from the fascist danger. We must prepare ourselves individually and collectively to rise to the occasion.

Comrade Vinod Mishra had led the party to its emergence as an all India centre of revolutionary communists leading a comprehensive network of mass organisations and a whole range of mass political initiatives including participation in elections. The increased electoral presence of the party provides a live expression to the elevation of our assertion from securing basic human dignity of the most oppressed people to winning electoral victories on the strength of growing struggles for people's rights. Comrade VM encouraged us to grow into a big Communist Party without ever weakening the core ideological moorings, robust progressive outlook and vibrant democratic culture and organisational cohesion of a revolutionary communist party. As we take up the challenge of realising the party's growth potential, we must never lower our guard on these cardinal characteristics of our party.

All through the 1990s Comrade VM sensitised the party about the growing danger of communal fascism. He saw the Bathanitola massacre in a new light, emphasising the unmistakable signs of feudal violence growing into a communal fascist assault on the poor and a virulent attack on the revolutionary Left. It helped the party stay alert and determined in the battle against the BJP and the Sangh brigade even as we confronted the RJD government in Bihar and subsequently the UPA government at the Centre. Today, saving India and India's democracy from the Modi regime's fascist aggression has become the most decisive challenge for the Left and other opposition forces. This is why the Bihar election victories of our party have received such appreciation across the country. This is why our appeal to the left-liberal camp of West Bengal to stop the BJP from capturing power has been so widely welcomed in West Bengal.

The fascist offensive of the Modi government and the economic, social and political disasters facing the country have generated powerful protests and mass opposition. Protests by eminent writers and other cultural personalities against mob lynching; student awakening in the wake of the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula that have now grown into a massive assertion of young India for education, employment and democracy; the unprecedented mass opposition to the NRC-NPR-CAA package with Muslim women, university students and civil society activists in the forefront; the farmers' movement that started acquiring countrywide shape following the Mandsaur massacre and has now assumed the proportions of a historic upsurge; powerful periodic struggles of women and various sections of workers - mass resistance has continued to grow defying severe repression and fascist violence and hate and disinformation campaign. While Modi managed to win a second term in the wake of Pulwama, subsequent Assembly elections in Jharkhand and Bihar have clearly showed the potential to carry this resistance into the electoral arena. In the forthcoming round of Assembly elections all attempts



must be made to oust the BJP from power in Assam, stop it from winning power in West Bengal and making inroads in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

While resisting state repression and the disastrous policies of the Modi government, we must never lose sight of the vicious role of the RSS, its intricate network and grassroots communication and mobilisation activities. The communist counter-offensive against the fascist project of the RSS should possess not

just characteristic communist ideological courage and political clarity but also the tenacity and intensity of mass work and the deepgoing and painstaking work style that communists have been known for. After the chaos of the Covid19 pandemic and the cruelty of the ill-planned lockdown, India will not submit to the dictates of the Modi government. The defiant spirit of Punjab farmers has already struck a massive chord with the fighting people across the country.

The encouraging gains made by the CPI(ML) in Bihar elections have aroused new hope and unleashed a lot of energy and enthusiasm among the Left ranks and change-seeking people. We must make the fullest use of this new juncture to revive the communist movement and thwart the fascist threat. □



BJP'S "LOVE JEHAD" POLITICS: HATING LOVE, LOVING HATE

(We take a close look at BJP's politics that brands interfaith marriage as "love jihad", and is trying to enact laws criminalising such relationships. We also include a report of AIPWA's meeting with victims of such a law in UP.)

WHAT IS "LOVE JEHAD"?

"Love jihad" is the term used by the RSS and BJP to spread hatred against interfaith marriages in which the man is Muslim and the woman Hindu.

As the @sanitarypanels cartoon puts it: the term "love jihad" is "a shorter way of saying we hate Muslims and think of women as property." As an editorial in the Indian Express observed, the "love jihad" lies and laws based on those lies "discriminate against and harass members of the minority community"; but "There is another target: women. Such laws assume women's helplessness, passivity and folly, as though constitutional guarantees do not apply to them; they do not know what is best for them. Women are being viewed here purely as vehicles of



reproduction — the community's property that it should 'protect' and keep 'secure'."

BUT ARE THERE NOT REAL CASES OF "LOVE JEHAD"?

The RSS and BJP claim that there are thousands of cases of "love jihad" – i.e a planned conspiracy by Muslim men to masquerade as Hindus in order to woo Hindu women, with the aim of converting them to Islam, and increasing the population of Muslims. This conspiracy theory claims that Hindu women are nothing but Hindu wombs, that must produce only Hindu children.

IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE AT ALL FOR THIS THEORY?

Police forces in many states have investigated and found no basis whatsoever for the theory.

1) Karnataka Police Findings:

i) In 2009, the Karnataka police CID was asked by a division bench of Karnataka High Court to look into allegations of "love jihad" in the marriage of an 18-year-old girl, Silja Raj, from Chamarajnanagar area of Bengaluru with a 24-year-old youth, Asghar Nazar, from Kannur in Kerala. In the interim report filed by the CID in the high court on November 13, 2009, Karnataka's then director general of police Ajay Kumar Singh stated: "There seems to be no prima facie evidence of 'love jihad' in the case of Silja Raj of Karnataka's Chamarajanagar district marrying Asghar of Kannur district of Kerala. Silja Raj has married Asghar out of her own volition."

ii) Subsequently after investigating hundreds of interfaith marriages that had occurred in Karnataka, the CID in a report dated December 31, 2009, stated that "there is no organised attempt by any group of individuals to entice girls/women belonging to Hindu or Christian religions to

marry Muslim boys with the aim of converting them to Islam".

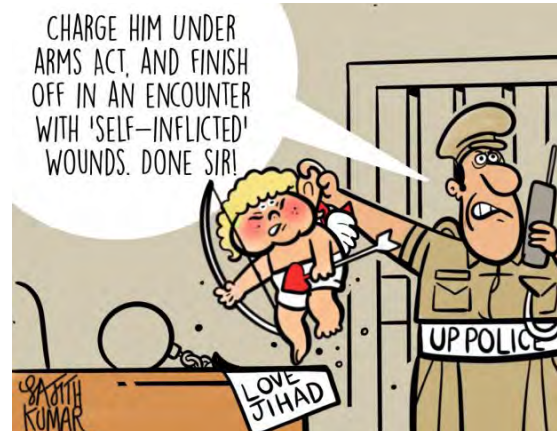
iii) The CID looked into cases of missing girls/women from a five-year period (2005-09) and found that 149 of these were Hindu women who had married Muslim men, while 10 had married Christian men. Also, 38 Muslim women and 20 Christian women had married Hindu men. One Muslim woman had married a Christian man, and 11 Christian women had married Muslim men. Out of 229 cases involving women who were reported as missing and later found to be in an inter-religion marriage, conversion had occurred only in 63 cases.

iv) The Karnataka CID asked Sangh men for details of the allegations of "love jihad" – but no details were given. The final report by then DGP (CID) Dr D V Guruprasad found that "No one has come out with any specific instance of 'love jihad' that has taken place in the state. Many of the girls who have married outside their religion and who could be contacted stated that they were leading a happy life after marriage. They are adults and have got married to persons of other religions fully comprehending the consequences of their action." (Source: '8 years before NIA, Karnataka CID probed 'love jihad', found no specific instance', *Indian Express*, August 22, 2017)

2) NIA probe in Kerala:

Following a directive by the Supreme Court in the Hadiya case, the NIA examined 11 cases of interfaith marriages in Kerala to probe into so-called cases of "love jihad". The NIA found "no evidence to suggest

that in any of these cases either the man or the woman was coerced to convert. At least one among the 11 marriages under examination was purely a matter of relationship gone sour." (Source: 'NIA ends Kerala



probe, says there's love but no jihad', *Hindustan Times*, October 18, 2018)

3) Kanpur SIT report:

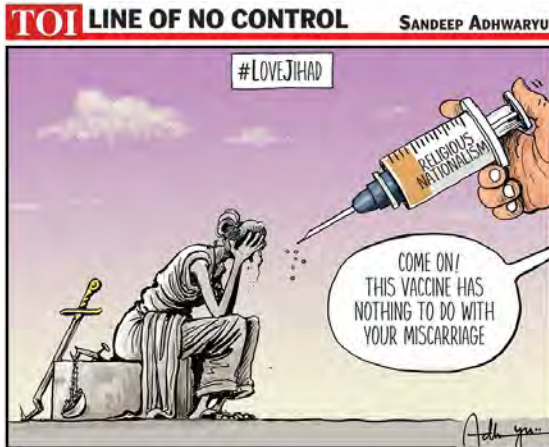
An SIT was set up to probe 14 cases of interfaith Hindu-Muslim marriage reported in Kanpur city. In 8 of the 14 cases probed, the women openly declared that their relationships with the accused were consensual and based on love. In the remaining 6 cases, the FIRs registered are still being investigated, though in one of those cases the accused Muslim man has been released on bail for lack of evidence.

4) Home Ministry statement: On 04.02.2020 in response to queries on "love jihad" cases, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs Shri G. Kishan Reddy responded stating that "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.” (Source: “No case of love jihad in Kerala: Centre tells Parliament”, *Hindustan Times*, February 4, 2020)

BUT WE HAVE HEARD OF CASES, LIKE THE ONE OF NIKITA TOMAR IN GHAZIABAD, WHERE MUSLIM MEN HAVE BEEN VIOLENT TOWARDS HINDU WOMEN. ARE THOSE NOT CASES OF “LOVE JEHAD”?

A man called Touseef stalked and killed Nikita Tomar in Ghaziabad. This is a case of stalking, not of “love jihad”. There have been many cases where Hindu men have stalked Hindu women: for example, law student Priyadarshini Mattoo was stalked and killed by Santosh Singh; actress Malvi Malhotra was stalked and stabbed by Mahipal Singh. Similarly, some Hindu youth killed Gulnaz in Bihar—that is also patriarchal violence, not ‘Prem Yuddh’ or ‘Love Jihad’. The community identity of the stalker or the victim is irrelevant here: stalking is a patriarchal crime.



There are many cases of rape, stalking, domestic violence, or murder committed by men of various communities against women of various communities. The Sangh cherry picks cases where the accused is Muslim and the victim Hindu, and then claims these are “love jihad”. Such a methodology actually reveals the Sangh’s lack of concern to fight

and end patriarchal crimes – they are only interested in communalising those crimes for political gain.

WHAT IS UP’S “LOVE JEHAD” ORDINANCE?

UP’s new “love jihad” ordinance is actually called the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance 2020. It is based on an Allahabad High Court judgement that said “that conversion should not be resorted to only for marriage”. That judgement by a one-judge bench was held to be bad in law and overruled by later judgements by larger benches of the Allahabad HC

This ordinance:

a) requires individuals seeking to convert and religious convertors (who perform the conversion) to submit an advance declaration of the proposed religious conversion to the District Magistrate (DM). Failure to submit this declaration is punishable by prison time and fines for both

the individual who converts, as well as the person performing the conversion. This means that a Hindu woman who converts to Islam, as well as the kazi performing the conversion, can be jailed and fined.

b) The ordinance seems to exempt conversions by non-Hindus to the Hindu faith, because it allows a person to “reconvert to his/her immediate previous religion”. This provision is in line with the Sangh’s “ghar wapsi” (return home) campaign, where Hinduism is claimed to be the “ghar” or original home of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and so on.

c) On receiving both the declarations, the DM must conduct a police enquiry into the intention, purpose,

and cause of the proposed conversion. The Ordinance prohibits conversion of religion through: force, misrepresentation, undue influence, and allurement; or fraud; or marriage. It also prohibits a person from abetting, convincing, and conspiring to such conversions.

d) A First Information Report (FIR) against unlawful religious conversion may be filed by any aggrieved person; his/her parents or siblings; or any other person related to them by blood, marriage, or adoption.

e) There is extra punishment if the person getting converted is a woman, a dalit or an adivasi, or in cases of mass conversion (where entire communities decide to convert, for example, as Dalits led by Dr Ambedkar converted to Buddhism).

f) any marriage done solely for the purpose of conversion; or any conversion done solely for the purpose of marriage is held to be null and void.

g) According to basic principles of justice, it is the accuser, not the accused who must prove that a crime has been committed. In a violation of this principle, the ordinance assigns the burden of proof of the lawfulness of a religious conversion on the persons accused of causing or facilitating such conversions. And it is not clear how the lawfulness can be proved, given that it is not enough for the person being converted to declare that they are doing so willingly. As Justice (Retd) AP Shah observed, “In any criminal case [where] conversion is presumed to be illegal, the burden of proof is usually on the prosecution. In this ordinance, every religious conversion is presumed to be illegal. The burden of proof lies on the person accused of illegal conversion to prove that it is not illegal. So there is a presumption

of guilt. The offence is cognisable. It is non-bailable and the police can arrest anyone.”

WHAT EFFECT WILL THIS ORDINANCE HAVE?

Basically, the District Magistrate becomes the government-approved khap panchayat who can arbitrarily declare conversions or interfaith marriages illegal.

i) The ordinance has provisions to punish the so-called victim of conversion, if they fail to give the DM a declaration explaining their reasons for converting to another faith. So a Hindu woman who converts to Islam can be punished under this law, if the DM so chooses.

ii) Women, dalits and adivasis are considered incapable of making their own decisions. The ordinance claims to protect these sections from “forcible” conversions – but it does not allow them to decide whether or not they are converting or marrying willingly or by force! Instead the State through the DM will decide! This is an unwarranted intrusion into the right to privacy of women, dalits and adivasis.

iii) If today, someone were to hold a public ceremony leading a group of Dalits in converting to Buddhism, as Babasaheb Ambedkar did in 1956, he would be punished under the law for “mass conversion.”

iv) If the ordinance indeed claims to protect women, why does the ordinance allow the parents, brother, sister, or any other relation by blood, marriage, or adoption to lodge an FIR? If indeed the ordinance is intended to protect (Hindu) women from forced conversion or deceit by Muslim men, why not allow the woman alone the right to file an FIR? The law itself is designed to be used to overrule and override the will of adult women, because it allows members of the woman’s family to

file a complaint even without her consent.

v) The “crimes” defined in the ordinance are of a very broad, vague nature. Justice Shah observed, “the term allurement itself is defined in a very broad way in this law: a single wedding gift like a wrist watch, a bangle, or say a ring, could amount to an allurement.”

IS THERE A LEGAL BASIS FOR SUCH AN ORDINANCE?

The UP Chief Minister had declared his intention to criminalise “love jihad” following an Allahabad High Court judgement that said “that conversion should not be resorted to only for marriage”. But a later verdict of the Allahabad High Court dashed away that flimsy legal pretext for criminalising interfaith marriages. This verdict by the Bench of Justices Pankaj Naqvi and Vivek Agarwal found that the previous High Court’s judgements in the Noor Jehan and Priyanshi cases (in which a Muslim woman converted to Hinduism, and a Hindu woman to Islam respectively) holding that “conversion just for the purpose of marriage is unacceptable”, were “not laying good law”. The Allahabad HC observed that “None of these judgments dealt with the issue of life and liberty of two matured individuals in choosing a partner or their right to freedom of choice as to with whom they would like to live.” (*Source: ‘Allahabad HC says previous orders on interfaith marriages not ‘good law’, Indian Express, November 25, 2020*)

If these judgements are not good law because they failed to appreciate and protect the life, liberty, and freedom to choose a partner, naturally an ordinance or law based on those judgements also violates the right to life and liberty and freedom to choose a partner.

But the BJP says that the ordinance

does not criminalise interfaith love. It only criminalises forced conversion and marriage based on a false identity (i.e cases where a Muslim man allegedly masquerades as Hindu to seduce a Hindu woman).

a) If a Muslim man has pretended to be a Hindu to marry a Hindu woman, how come such marriages adopt a nikaah ceremony? Clearly, if the Hindu woman is agreeing to a nikaah, she is fully aware that the man she is marrying is Muslim, not Hindu.

b) If a woman wants to file a complaint against a man who has cohabited with or married her while hiding his true name and identity, she can very well do so under Section 493 IPC, and needs no new law.

c) If the ordinance indeed claims to protect women, why does the ordinance allow the parents, brother, sister, or any other relation by blood, marriage, or adoption to lodge an FIR? If indeed the ordinance is intended to protect (Hindu) women from forced conversion or deceit by Muslim men, why not allow the woman alone the right to file an FIR? The law itself is designed to be used to overrule and override the will of adult women, because it allows members of the woman’s family to file a complaint even without her consent. This is why, in case after case filed by the UP police under this ordinance, we can see Hindu women being violently separated from their Muslim life-partners, by a toxic combination of Sanghi thugs and the police. In nearly all of the cases filed by the police under this ordinance, the woman asserts that she has loved and married of her own will – while it is her parents who, instigated by the Sanghi thugs, who have filed the complaint.

WHY DO HINDU WOMEN CONVERT TO ISLAM WHEN THEY MARRY MUSLIMS? WHY NOT MARRY UNDER THE SPECIAL MARRIAGES ACT, WHEREBY TWO PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT FAITHS CAN MARRY?

Women's groups have, for long, raised the demand to do away with the Special Marriage Act's requirement of a month's public notice, pointing out that it puts the life and liberty of inter-caste and interfaith couples in danger of organised violence. In the Cobrapost 'Operation Juliet' sting operation in 2015, one can hear BJP and RSS leaders describing how they stalk city courts to track and trace interfaith couples who, under the Special Marriage Act, have had to give a month's public notice of their intention to marry: "A lot of advocates are *swayamsevaks* ['volunteers' or members of the RSS]. They keep an eye to see if a Hindu girl registers at the city magistrate or the SDM's office for marriage and the date given. ... Then they call us. We go there with our whole team . . . fifty, sixty, seventy people." (*Source: 'Operation Juliet: Busting The Bogey Of "Love Jihad"', Cobrapost, October 4, 2015*)

It is to avoid such violence that interfaith couples tend to marry in Islamic nikah ceremonies or Arya Samaj rituals, where fewer questions are asked and the process is quicker. To avail of a nikah or Arya Samaj ceremony, one of the parties converts to Islam or Hinduism, as needed.

Would the government like to see less "conversions for marriage"? They should lose no time in doing away with the month-long notice period for marriages under the SMA.

THE BJP CLAIMS THAT THE NEW ORDINANCE IS TO PROTECT "MOTHERS AND SISTERS". BUT THE ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT WOMEN FROM MARRYING FOR LOVE, SOUNDS MORE LIKE AN HONOUR

CRIME. WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

Actually, the new ordinance is a sarkari honour crime against inter-faith relationships. Justice AP Shah said it reflects the "philosophy of a khap panchayat", and was aimed at perpetuating the subjugation of women. It gives legal cover and incentives to honour crimes – which should more accurately be described as crimes against women's autonomy.

WHAT ARE CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN'S AUTONOMY?

Violence against women's autonomy is the leading form of gender violence in India, and that such violence hides in plain sight, masquerading as "protection of women from rape."

In 2014, The Hindu tracked 583 rape cases decided by New Delhi's district trial courts in 2013, and found that over 40 per cent of "what is classified as rape (in Delhi Police files) is actually parental criminalization of consensual sexual relationships, often when it comes to inter-caste and inter-religious couples." (*Source: 'The many shades of rape cases in Delhi', The Hindu, 29 July 2014*)

So, over 40 percent of "rape" cases are false, because they are filed, not by the woman who is alleged to be the victim, but by her parents or other members of her family and community. Such "rape" cases actually hide another form of brutal violence (including beatings, threats of acid attacks, force-feeding drugs, and forced abortions): inflicted on adult women by their own patriarchal families and communities.

But with the "love jihad" campaign and laws, this violence against women's autonomy does not remain a social evil: it gets political and legal backing from the ruling BJP party and the government directly.

Earlier, families who did not like their

daughter marrying a Muslim, might only have tried to bully their daughter and might have given up eventually. Today the same families find a government-backed Bajrang Dal at their door, offering state-sponsored force to back up their worst instincts.

"Love jihad" laws are not meant to address allegations of rape or coerced conversion or marriage under false pretences or anything else of which a woman may herself complain. "Love jihad" allegations and laws are acts of violence against any Hindu woman's decision to love a Muslim man. They are an attack on a woman's right to love someone of her own choice.

IS THE "LOVE JEHAD" CAMPAIGN VIOLENT TOWARDS WOMEN?

In October 2015, the media portal Cobrapost released recordings of their sting 'Operation Juliet' (ibid). Their reporters caught leaders of BJP and many Hindu supremacist outfits on secret camera, explaining in detail how their network works all over the country to separate Hindu women from their Muslim lovers/husbands. One BJP leader from Western UP explained how they beat up Hindu women to coerce them to disown their relationships with Muslim men: "If she doesn't listen to us, we hit her. We get her beaten up. We misbehave (*poori badtameezi karte hain*). Such a girl is thrashed with a wooden board (*bilkul, phatte se bajwate hain*)."

Another leader, BJP MLA Suresh Rana, added that the "woman insists, 'No matter what, I will stay with him. I won't go without him.' If she is taken aside and given two slaps, then she herself goes and gets the FIR registered claiming, 'He sexually assaulted me.'"

Ravish Tantri, the chief of Hindu Unity Forum in Kerala, was caught on camera describing his organisation's involvement in death threats and

forced marriages: “We warn her (the woman) that if she does not give a statement on her parents side and does not marry the guy prescribed by us, then the moment she and her husband step out of the court, they will be killed by our people.”

Members of Hindu supremacist outfits are also caught on camera describing how women are abducted, imprisoned and drugged to coerce them to relinquish their relationship with Muslim men.

Now, in 2020, one no longer needs a sting operation to hear the BJP leaders’ violence in the name of the “love jihad” lie. In a speech, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath issued a death threat to Muslim men in relationships with Hindu women, saying that such “love jihadis” should “prepare for their funeral”. (*Source: ‘Yogi warning: End love jihad, or get ready for Ram naam satya hai’, Indian Express, November 1, 2020*).

ARE THERE, OR HAVE THERE EVER BEEN SIMILAR LAWS IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

One of the key aspects of Nazism was the deterring and prohibition of inter-racial relationships between men and women. “Love jihad” campaigns and laws are inspired by Hitler’s racist ideology.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler accused Jewish men of seeking to deliberately ‘pollute’ the ‘Aryan’ race by seducing, and encouraging Black men to seduce, white ‘Aryan’ women. He wrote, “The black-haired Jewish youth lies for hours in ambush, a Satanic joy in his face, for the unsuspecting girl whom he pollutes with his blood and steals from her own race. By every means, he seeks to wreck the racial bases of the nation he intends to subdue. Just as individually he deliberately befouls women and girls, so he never shrinks from breaking the barriers race has erected against foreign elements. It was, and is, the Jew

who brought Negroes to the Rhine, brought them with the same aim and with deliberate intent to destroy the white race he hates, by persistent bastardisation, to hurl it from the cultural and political heights it has attained, and to ascend to them as its masters. He deliberately seeks to lower the race level by steady corruption of the individual...”

This hateful language is reproduced almost word for word by the Sangh and BJP here in India, claiming that the Muslims are trying to seduce Hindu women.

One model that Nazi Germany wanted to emulate was that of racist US laws enforcing segregation and prohibiting ‘miscegenation’ (inter-racial relationships). In 1934, leading Nazi lawyers met to draft the anti-Jewish ‘Nuremberg Laws’, and took for their model the notorious racist ‘Jim Crow’ laws of the USA. Anti-miscegenation laws that criminalized inter-racial sexual relationships and marriage were declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court as late as 1967. Hitler and the Nazis also admired another aspect of US racism – eugenics (forced sterilisation to prevent the birth of humans of genes deemed to be ‘inferior’). In the US in the 1930s, there were laws allowing forced sterilization of women deemed to be genetically ‘immoral,’ ‘criminal’ or disabled. A large proportion of such women were poor and/or Black. Hitler’s eugenics program (that finally led to genocide in the gas chambers) was also inspired by these racist laws.

Hitler also admired the genocide of the American Indians – the original inhabitants of the land now known as ‘USA’. “Indeed as early as 1928, Hitler was speechifying admiringly about the way Americans had “gunned down the millions of Redskins to a few hundred thousand, and now

keep the modest remnant under observation in a cage.” (*Source: Hitler’s American Model, The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law, James Q. Whitman, Princeton University Press, 2017*)

In the era of the ‘Jim Crow’ laws, Black men in the US could be killed for having or even being suspected of having consensual relationships with white women. Mob lynching of Black men – often on the pretext of allegations of ‘raping’ white women – was common. We have seen how Nazi Germany admired and wanted to replicate racist laws that provided a pretext and a rationalization of such mob lynchings.

In India, too, we can easily see how the ‘love jihad’ bogey raised by the Sangh Parivar and its various outfits is a copy of the ‘Jim Crow’ and the Nazi models.

WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA?

Justice Leila Seth, in her powerful plea to repeal Section 377 that criminalised homosexual relationships, wrote, “What makes life meaningful is love. The right that makes us human is the right to love. To criminalize the expression of that right is profoundly cruel and inhumane.” (*‘A mother and a judge speaks out on Section 377’, The Times of India, 26 January, 2014*.) Today, the Hindu supremacist outfits are spreading hate even against a kiss exchanged between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man in a Netflix film based on a novel by Vikram Seth, son of Justice Leila Seth!

The laws criminalising “love jihad” in UP and other BJP-ruled states are indeed cruel and inhumane. They represent the attempt by the BJP to push a toe out of the Constitutional ambit, to begin to build the legal infrastructure of the Hindu Nation.

Many have approached the Allahabad High Court to challenge the UP anti-love ordinance – and it is certainly hoped that the Court will strike down the ordinance. There are many recent instances in which Courts have ruled to protect the right of adult women to love and marry who they choose. But the very fact that this right is repeatedly subjected to legal challenges, indicates how fragile it is today. With the anti-love laws, India's ruling party wishes to strangle that already fragile right.

The BJP is trying to define India as a country that hates love, and loves hate. It is for India's people to fight back and prove otherwise. The Manusmriti, the Nuremberg Laws of Nazi Germany and the odious laws criminalising inter-racial love in apartheid USA and South Africa have been consigned to the dustbin of history and are abhorred the world over. The attempt to enact the same kind of laws in 21st century India must be resisted, tooth and nail, by movements of youth and women.

AN INTERFAITH COUPLE FACED VIOLENCE, A MISCARRIAGE AND ARREST. WE CAN'T SAY 'NO HARM DONE'.

(Kavita Krishnan writes about the visit of an AIPWA-AISA team to meet victims of the new UP anti-love ordinance. The article was first published in thewire.in)

At first glance, what strikes you about Muskan (Pinky) is how skinny and frail she looks, huddled in bed under a blanket: a far cry from her glowing self in the photograph of herself with Rashid, which made it the Telegraph UK story on her forced abortion.

Mohammad Sartaj Alam, one of the journalists who broke the story, had advised Muskan's mother-in-law,

to get a fresh ultrasound in some hospital outside Moradabad district. So Muskan was taken to Bijnor, where she got an ultrasound done at a private clinic. The report reads, clearly "RPC/blood clots in UT". This shows that there are "retained products of conception" (fetal matter left over after a miscarriage or abortion) in her uterus. We sent this ultrasound report to a senior gynaecologist, Dr Puneet Bedi, in Delhi, and had Muskan speak to him on phone. She told him she continued to bleed and experience pain. He explained to her, and to us, that it is standard practice to prescribe a course of antibiotics and painkillers after any miscarriage (whether it was spontaneous or induced by abortifacients). Failing this, uterine infections could develop, which might even prevent future pregnancies.

Muskan has alleged that the District Women's Hospital in Moradabad where she was taken while in police custody, injected her with abortifacients to induce an abortion. The hospital denies this – but their denial rings false because of their suspicious conduct. They declared that no miscarriage had occurred – which is now proven to be a lie. Most shockingly, in actions that befit a Mengele, they did not prescribe any antibiotics to Muskan after the miscarriage. Surely they knew that this could mean that she might lose her ability to ever bear a child? They also withheld Muskan's treatment papers from her, though she asked for them.

Kawalpreet Kaur from AISA, and Sneha, an advocate from Human Rights Law Network, went to buy the medicines Dr Bedi had prescribed, as Muskan made an effort to sit up and speak to me. Her mother-in-law, Naseema, and two aunts of Rashid's who have come down from Uttarakhand, ask me whether it is safe to give her eggs, meat, ghee to strengthen her up. She has been wasting away from blood loss, weakness, sorrow at the miscarriage and worry for Rashid's wellbeing, they tell me.

Asked about how she and Rashid met, she hid a little smile: the memory still brought her joy. She has a BA degree, and she was living alone and working in a financial company in Dehradun, when she met Rashid, who ran a saloon. They courted each other for over a year, then got married in July 2020.

Naseema told us that after the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 was passed, she began to worry about her son and daughter-in-law. She knew they had done a nikah ceremony in July 2020 in Dehradun, after duly informing the SP Dehradun as required by Uttarakhand's own Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act 2018. Since then, they had been living together happily, and



Muskan was pregnant. But Naseema was uneasy, hearing all the hateful warning issued by the UP CM and other BJP leaders against inter-faith relationships. She asked a lawyer, Deepak, whether it was advisable for the couple to get the marriage registered, to protect them from any harassment. He told her that the marriage must be registered, and took Rs 5000 from her, to get the documents uploaded and the marriage registered. Either he, or someone in the bureaucracy who was part of the registration process, must have informed Bajrang Dal.

Muskan describes how, on 5 December, she, Naseema, and Rashid's brother Salim were accosted by a violent Bajrang Dal mob on their way to get the marriage registered. The mob abused them, slapped and roughed up Salim, and videotaped the whole episode. I found a video on Facebook of some part of this heckling (*see screengrab below*). It is striking to see how calm and confident Muskan manages to remain, in the face of the Bajrang Dal thugs. They tell her "You have to get permission from the DM to get married – they've had to make a law for the likes of you". Asked on camera if her father or "guardian" has given her permission to marry Rashid, she replies, "I am an adult, I am 22, I have married him of my own choice 5 months ago."

The Bajrang Dal got Muskan's mother to the police station, and induced them to file an FIR alleging that Rashid had masqueraded as a Hindu to seduce her daughter, who is from a Scheduled Caste. Muskan scoffed when I asked her about this: "I am an adult, I know my own mind, and I was living on my own when I met Rashid. I knew full well he was Muslim. We loved each other. I converted to Islam of my own accord, and we both got married. My mother

does not know him, she has just parroted whatever the Bajrang Dal men asked her to."

Why did Muskan need to convert to Islam, and why did Rashid and she choose a nikah ceremony rather than registration under the Special Marriage Act? Muskan's experience of trying to get her marriage registered answers that riddle quite well. The SMA or registration process discriminates against couples. It places hurdles that couples who marry under the Hindu or Muslim or Christian or other religious laws, do not face. Unlike religious ceremonies, the SMA process requires a couple to put up a public notice of their intention to marry, and allow a month's interval for anyone to raise an objection to the marriage. Informers within the bureaucracy alert the Hindu-supremacist outfits, and they spring into action to separate the couple, unleash violence, and prevent the marriage. In the case of Muskan and Rashid also, the Bajrang Dal thug-in-chief who interfered, boasts that he has a network of informers everywhere. (*Source: 'Moradabad 'love jihad': What killed Muskan's child?' Newslandry, 20 Dec 2020*)

It is to avoid this kind of violence, that couples choose a religious ceremony. Since patriarchal objections to the marriage are most likely to be raised by the woman's community, it is the women in such relationships who tend to convert to their partner's faith. In another recent instance in UP, a Muslim woman converted to the Hindu faith to marry Naman, a Hindu young man. (*Source: Navbharat Times*)

On the day we visited Muskan, Rashid and Salim were released from prison. The police itself had filed a petition under Section 169 CrPC, informing a magistrate that they lacked evidence against the accused. But, as Muskan told us,

the police knew the truth from the start. Yet, they acted to appease the Bajrang Dal thugs rather than punish them for their attempts to terrorise an inter-faith couple. It is no wonder that Hindu supremacist thugs in UP act like a shadow government – after all, one of their own is the Chief Minister. When CM Adityanath issues death threats to Muslim men who love and marry Hindu women, he is promising the thugs his blessing and protection.

So on 5 December, what was to be a happy and festive occasion turned into a nightmare. Rashid and his brother Salim were taken away to prison, Muskan was taken into a "shelter home", and Rashid's younger brother Nasir escaped a mob of Bajrang Dal thugs who were out to lynch him.

What Muskan told us about the shelter home was not surprising. "It is a prison, women are tortured there", she said, adding that there are other adult women imprisoned there for the crime of loving someone from a different caste or faith. "Their parents claim they are minors, and they are kept there, prevented from having mobile phones. No one but their own parents are allowed to meet women incarcerated in these "shelter" homes, they are made to cook and clean, and the staff bully them. They are told that they can be free from the "shelter home" only if they agree to give up their relationship and be released into parental custody.

The police and shelter home authorities knew Muskan was pregnant. Yet she was taken away from a loving home, violently separated from her husband who was jailed, and taken into custody as though she were a criminal. A few days later, she began to develop abdominal pains. The shelter home authorities said she was making it all up. When the pain became

unbearable, she was eventually taken to hospital on 11 December, where she was admitted, and, except for a brief interval, remained till 14 December. She says that she was given tablets and injections by the hospital authorities, after which she miscarried.

When Muskan was still in custody, I had heard a recording of a phone call she had managed to make to her mother-in-law. I asked Muskan how she managed to make the call. She said one could bribe the shelter home staff to use a phone. With great presence of mind, she recalled Naseema's number and managed to call and tell her that she suspected she had been forced to miscarry.

When Rashid and Salim come home, Naseema and the boys' aunts embrace them fiercely. Rashid and Salim are weeping. Rashid comes over to Muskan and holds her, and both are in tears. As media cameras flash and TV journalists keep asking questions, Rashid whispers to Muskan. He is obviously devastated at her weak appearance.

But Rashid and Salim are both guarded in what they say about the police. They were escorted into their own home by an officious, grim and unsmiling man in a black suit, who kept saying to the family "What are all the tears for, it is all okay now, all is now well." This man kept trying to disperse the media as well as activists like us. A friend of the family whispered to me that this man worked with the police, and his presence was meant to remind Rashid and Salim that they were being watched.

Rashid's is a very poor, working class household in Kanth village in UP's Moradabad district. Naseema has

had to spend a lot of money in bribes. Without bribes, she said, it was impossible to get warm clothes to her daughter-in-law in the shelter home, nor to her sons who were being held captive in a quarantine centre.

By the police's own admission, there is no evidence that Muskan, Rashid or Salim had committed any crime.



Protest by AIPWA and other progressive organisation in Bangalore against the lies of 'Love Jihad'.

Their arrest and detention was clearly illegal. The officious man in a suit may say "no harm has been done and all is well", but in fact, Muskan and Rashid and their loved ones are all victims of a series of violent acts by the Bajrang Dal, and by a range of UP Government authorities including the police, shelter home and hospital.

It would be truly obscene if we, the people of India, too say "no harm done", shrug and look the other way.

A loving husband and wife were violently attacked by an outfit which, by its own admission, trains its members in violence and makes a habit of separating inter-faith couples. The police, instead of acting against the thugs, illegally arrested the victims of the violence. A pregnant woman was subjected to trauma. Whether as a result of the trauma or as a result of forced administration of abortifacients, she suffered a miscarriage. The authorities lied, denied the miscarriage, and in order to protect the lie, failed to protect her from a possible uterine infection

that could affect child-bearing in the future. In two weeks, a pregnant bride in the pink of health has been reduced to a shadow of herself.

UP's anti-love ordinance is a blood-purity law to rival Nazi Germany's Nuremberg laws. Muskan's and Rashid's case is not a "misuse" of

the law. The only "use" of such an ordinance is to give legal cover to Hindu supremacist thugs who inflict violence on inter-faith couples. It is not enough for such ordinances to be struck down and declared unconstitutional by courts. Courts, if they are to do their duty, must order a

countrywide probe into the violent Hindu supremacist outfits that terrorise inter-faith couples, and their enablers embedded in the police and administration. They must mandate changes in the Special Marriage Act to do away with the month-long notice period. The Supreme Court Right to Privacy judgement must not just be an elegant piece of prose for the history books. Courts must act to protect the right of inter-faith, inter-caste and same-sex couples to privacy, so that any government employee who leaks information about impending marriages to vigilante groups, should lose his job and face prosecution. And last, but not least, all laws seeking to restrict conversion must be struck down. Faith, like love and marriage, is a private affair. The State cannot claim authority to ask adult individuals to furnish justifications for their decision to convert, or to marry. □



WHY VIDYASAGAR IS SO RELEVANT TODAY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE COMMUNAL FASCIST DISCOURSE

 SOUVIK GHOSHAL

[The inscription below this bust of Vidyasagar quotes Rabindranath Tagore: "His foremost virtue was neither his compassion nor his learning, but his invincible manliness and imperishable humanity." He saw education as a tool of enlightenment and empowerment of the masses. Said he, "Education does not only mean learning, reading, writing, and arithmetic. It should provide comprehensive knowledge. Education in geography, geometry, literature, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, physiology, political economy, etc. is very much necessary. We want teachers who know both Bengali and the English Languages, and at the same time are free from religious prejudices." Souvik Ghoshal, a historian by training, presents here a short account of the life and work of the great educationist, courageous social reformer, compassionate philanthropist and the father of modern Bengali prose. -- Ed.]

During the last phase of 2019 Lok Sabha election, BJP president Amit Shah's road show in Kolkata turned into a chaotic rabble and rowdies manning the show started hurling stones at protesting students of Calcutta University. Later, they broke into the nearby Vidyasagar College and demolished Vidyasagar's statue.

Why did Vidyasagar, nearly

200 years after his birth, become the target of the communal fascist brigade? Was it because he took little interest in religious matters and devoted his entire life to progressive social reforms, spread of modern education and material progress of the people? To find a proper answer to this question, we must know the man and his legacy in the backdrop of the social milieu in Bengal in the early years of British rule.

II

The 1757 Battle of Plassey installed British Rule in Bengal and Bengal Presidency became the base of British Imperialism in India. The brave resistance put up by the likes of Tipu Sultan, the Marathas and Sikhs, the adivasis and peasants failed to stop the chariot of British expansion in India. After some years of 'dual government policy', (where political power was nominally or apparently in the hands of Bengal Nawbabs while the economy was under the control of British East India Company), the Company took over direct control of all state affairs.

The British bureaucracy was trying to come to grips with the established laws of the land, the education system and traditional social customs so that they could lord it over the vast subcontinent with a small military and administrative force. In the process, Indology developed as a new branch of learning.

Initially the British East India Company officials preferred a policy of non-intervention in the sphere of religion and culture because they feared an adverse reaction from the people of India. However, under pressure from different quarters such as the Missionaries, the Liberals, the Orientalists, the Utilitarians etc, the company was compelled to give up the position of neutrality and to take up the responsibility of promotion of education. However, the administrators were divided on whether the company should promote western or oriental education, giving rise to the



Orientalist - Anglicist controversy.

Those who were in favour of continuation of the existing institutions of “oriental” learning and promotion of Indian classical tradition were called Orientalists. They wanted to acquaint the British officials with local languages and cultures in order that they could do their job more efficiently. The establishment of the Calcutta Madrasa by Warren Hastings in 1781, the Asiatic Society of Bengal by William Jones in 1784, the Benares Sanskrit College by Jonathan Duncan in 1791 and the Fort William College at Calcutta in 1800 were the most important initiatives in this direction. Orientalists were also keen to develop friendly relations with the elites of the indigenous society and that was the main reason behind the establishment of the Calcutta Madrassa on the one hand and the Benaras Sanskrit College on the other.

III

While the Orientalists had their way in the initial stage, a strong opposition was mounted by different groups in England, such as the Evangelicals, the Liberals and the Utilitarians. They strongly believed in the superiority of Christian ideas and/or western knowledge and institutions. The foremost proponent of this idea was the influential British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay. He asserted that the objective of education policy in India should be to promote western learning through English language.

These groups, collectively called Anglicists, believed that western education by English medium alone could lift Indians from their educational and cultural

backwardness. Since mass education was expensive, a more cost-effective way would be to first educate a group of people who would gradually spread education through the rest of society. In other words, education would filter down from the elites to the masses.

Even as the polemic was going on, the young Ishwar, aged nine, was walking with his father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay from Birsingha, a nondescript village in Bengal, to Calcutta in quest of better education and a better future. It was 1829. This was not a journey of just one father and son. It represented a growing trend among the Bengali bhadralok. Times were changing, and Calcutta --the then Capital of British India -- was fast emerging as a centre of modern education and literary-cultural-journalistic activities, a battleground of ideas old and new and a hot spot of social churning. No doubt only a tiny section of Bengali/Indian society got exposed to this new kind of education and social churning, but the impact was to be felt far and wide.

IV

In the year 1841 Vidyasagar graduated from the Sanskrit College and was appointed as a teacher in Fort William College. Five years later he left Fort William College and joined Sanskrit College as Assistant Secretary. He proposed a number of important changes to modernize the existing curricula. This led to a serious altercation with the College Secretary Rasomoy Dutta, who was a staunch Orientalist. Finally in 1849 he resigned from Sanskrit College and rejoined Fort William College as a head clerk.

In February 1853, Macaulay presented his ‘Minute on Indian Education’ that sought to impart English education to the ‘natives’. The old debate was finally settled in favour of Anglicists. It was decided that limited government resources were to be allotted to the teaching of western sciences and literature in English. The Government gradually made English as the medium of instruction in its schools and colleges and opened a few English schools and colleges.

In this backdrop Vidyasagar rejoined the Sanskrit college and finally became its principal. In recognition of his zeal as an educationist, the Bengal Government appointed him as the Special Inspector of Schools. But as we shall presently see, he had his own ideas of modern education. His goal was to fight illiteracy and make available to the broad masses the best of the “Orient” and the “Occident”.

V

But this was no easy task. Back in 1830s William Adam, a Scottish missionary, had been asked to tour the districts of Bengal and Bihar and submit a report on the prevailing state of education. Adam found that the system of education in the local schools, known as pathshalas, was really pathetic. There were no fixed fees, no benches or chairs, no system of separate classes, no annual examinations. In many a case, classes were held under a banyan tree, or in a village shop (think the Pather Panchali scene showing Apu in a typical pathshala) or temple, or at the teacher’s home. Teaching was oral and it was left to the teacher to decide what to teach and how.

Prompted by the findings of Adam report, the government of Bengal decided to found 101 primary schools Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Vidyasagar submitted a detailed plan for mass education in the vernacular medium on an extensive scale. Encouraged by the government he established several model schools in different districts. He also produced a good many textbooks, such as 'Banglar Itihas,' (1848) based on John Marshal's 'History of Bengal'; Jiban Charit (1849) (translations from the Chambers Biographical Dictionary, which traced the biographies of a good many western scientists); Bodhoday (1851), Kathamala (1856), Akhyan Manjari (1863). The didactic tales and discourses collected from Sanskrit and English sources reflected his concern for enlightenment of the broad masses.

VI

Vidyasagar was equally concerned with the spread of women's education. He collaborated with his friend Drinkwater Bethune, a British philanthropist, and served as the honorary Secretary of the girls' school established by the latter in 1849. As Inspector of Schools he established 35 girls' schools on his own initiative and expense. A vigorous activist to the core, he launched a movement to redress the wrongs done to women. In January 1855, to the chagrin of orthodox Hindus, he published a pamphlet on widow remarriage: Bidhaba Bibaha Bishayak Prastab. A second pamphlet on the same subject was published in October. Both pamphlets were translated into English next year under the title 'Marriage of Hindu widows'. Like his predecessor Rammohan,

Vidyasagar cited evidence from Hindu scriptures to support his contention that marriage of widows was actually sanctioned by the scriptures. He made a strong and emotional plea for the acceptance of widow remarriage and in 1856 successfully persuaded the government to enact a law permitting widow remarriage. These pamphlets showcase his profound knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, which he used in the cause of secular humanist enlightenment. In all such progressive social activities he faced tremendous resistance from powerful conservative sections of Hindu society but fought on courageously. He opposed child marriage and in 1871 launched a movement to end polygamy. He wrote a couple of pamphlets exposing the evil practice. However, he failed to create a sufficiently strong public opinion and to persuade the government to pass a law banning the practice.

While tirelessly responding to all the demands of public life, he found time to simplify and rearrange Bengali typography into an alphabet of 12 vowels and 40 consonants, eliminating the Sanskrit phonemes. This formed the foundation of 'Borno Parichay' (Introduction to the Letters) -- the ground-breaking Bengali primer published in two parts in 1855 -- which still remains unsurpassed as a primer. These texts, like his other works, stand witness to his vast knowledge as a Sanskrit scholar and expertise in putting ideas across to the reader/student in a simple, straightforward manner.

VII

There are critics who hold that Vidyasagar was just a pawn in the hands of the British Government

and worked as their collaborator. The fact is, while he made full use of official sponsorship in dissemination of the light of rational knowledge in the vernacular and in a secular, humanist idiom so rare in Bengal in those days (honourable exceptions include the works of Akshay Kumar Dutta, whose 200th birth anniversary is being celebrated this year) there was a huge gulf between his mindset and the motive of the British Government. The two approaches were bound to collide, and did collide. The Britishers planned to educate a small section of upper and middle classes, thus creating a class "Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (as Macaulay famously put it) who would act as interpreters between the government and masses and help spread the knowledge of western sciences and literature among the people. Vidyasagar had a totally different vision. His motto was to establish a large number of elementary schools and spread education far and deep in a direct, proactive manner. He rebelled against caste discrimination in education and opened the doors of Sanskrit College to lower caste students (previously it was exclusive to the Brahmins). And when in 1849 he found that his British superiors were not supporting his move to spread education in the remote villages, he promptly tendered his resignation.

VIII

The immense contribution of Ishwar Chandra to the development of Bengali language and literature can be gauged when we recall that prior to the 19th century, there was hardly any literary prose in Bengali. A beginning

was made by the Srirampore-based Baptist Missionaries followed by pundits and munshis of the Fort William College and then by a few newspapers since 1818. Rammohan Ray made a significant contribution with his essays and translations but it was Vidyasagar who really consolidated the structural base of Bengali. The Government officials were then looking for good Bengali prose for the purpose of circulating official orders. They requested Vidyasagar to create good prose books in Bengali for the British clerks studying in Fort William College and also for the young students of the missionary schools spread over Bengal. So he ventured upon translating books from other languages. He wrote Basudeva-charita based on the Sanskrit epic Srimadvagbat, but it did not see the light of day. A prolific and powerful writer, he then penned Betaal Panchabingshoti (1847) – 25 tales of a Betaal, translated from a Hindi version of a Sanskrit classic -- followed by 'Kathasaritsagara' ('Ocean of the Streams of Story'), a work in Sanskrit compiled in 11th-century by Somadeva, but based on yet older materials. While retelling old stories he took care to make them suitable for the modern reader. He translated Abhijnanashakuntalam by Kalidasa (1854) in prose, where Shakuntala and her two companions appear more like young Bengali girls; as does Sita in Sitar Banabas (1860). When he translated Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors and named it 'Bhrantibilash' (1886), he adapted it for Bengali readers and retold it as a narrative. His style, wit and humour made his works highly readable. As Rabindranath Tagore observed, "the first real artist of Bengali prose". His other literary

works include 'Mahabharata' in 1860, 'Oti Alpa Hoilo' in 1873, 'Aabaar Oti Alpa Hoilo' in 1873, 'Brajavilaas' in 1884 and 'Ratnopariksha' in 1886.

IX

Vidyasagar -- meaning an ocean of knowledge -- was also known as "dayar sagar" or ocean of compassion. He was always ready to help the poor, the sick and the oppressed. Even when he was a student at Sanskrit College, he would spend part of his scholarship to feed the poor and buy medicines for the sick. Later on, he paid fixed sums of monthly allowances to each member of his joint family, to family servants, to needy neighbours, to villagers who needed help and to the village clinic and school. This he continued without break even when he was unemployed and had to borrow substantially from time to time. In his last will he mentioned the names of all those who received his monthly allowances, added some new names to that list and also inserted a blanket category: "those who need help".

X

Throughout his life Vidyasagar fought hard against the obscurantist inhuman traditions of his society. The "Young Bengal" group of free thinkers emerging from Calcutta's Hindu College, and led by the young radical teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, were also doing the same since the early decades of the nineteenth century, but Vidyasagar went a big step ahead. Young Bengals agitated the society but Ishwar Chandra was a breaker of old obscure traditions and a maker of new constructive ways of life. In the face of stubborn opposition

from traditionalists he was able to influence the contemporary society much deeper than others. Noted historian and commentator of Bengal Renaissance Binay Ghosh was spot on when in his much acclaimed book 'Vidyasagar O Bangali Samaj' (Vidyasagar and Bengali Society) he upheld Vidyasagar as the central figure of Bengal Renaissance.

The doyen of Bengali prose realized that modern literature is a prerequisite of social reform. He translated from Mahabharata, Ramayana and from Kalidasa into Bangla not to return to ancient India, but to improve the literary tastes of the emerging intelligentsia. The literature he translated were mostly those of gods and goddesses, such as Rama and Sita, but he transformed them into adorable modern human beings. Unlike most scholars of his time, he was a champion of progressive change and liberalism. In these turbulent times, when the ruling dispensation is out to destroy secular, scientific and rational discourse in educational institutions and the society at large, we must cherish and draw upon the legacy of Vidyasagar in our ongoing struggle against religious bigotry, obscurantism and divisiveness. □

THE HISTORIC FARMERS' AGITATION AT DELHI BORDERS AGAINST COMPANY RAJ 2.0

AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

 NEHA TIWARI

The farmers of the country are creating history. A history of resistance against Company Raj 2.0. And as citizen of a country that had gloriously fought back the British Company Raj and snatched our own independence, we, who are observing and participating in the present farmers' agitation are proud successors of the legacy of resistance.

The present agitation is against the three anti-farmer agricultural acts passed by the parliament in September, when the country was still grappling with the Corona Virus pandemic and the economic disaster caused by unplanned lockdown. The three acts that the farmers are resisting are Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and

Facilitation) Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020. Along with these acts the proposed Electricity Amendment Bill that will cause disastrous for farming is also a point of contention. The government has also brought an ordinance that holds farmers responsible for Air Pollution and has provision of fine and imprisonment for stubble burning.

The anger of the farmers of the country have been accumulating since the Modi government came to power. The first act as soon as the Modi government came to power was to bring an ordinance for land grab. That was powerfully fought back by the farmers of the country. Subsequently we saw energetic protest by the farmers of Maharashtra, MP and many other parts against the increasing burden of indebtedness due to non-committal approach of the

government on MSP and increased cost of farming due to intensified corporate control on farming inputs.

Rather than addressing the demand of the farmers to control increased input cost, ensure MSP at the rate 150% of C2+ (As recommended by Swaminathan Commission) and freedom from debt, the government brought acts that will tighten the control of corporate bodies over agricultural produce and farming land.

I, along with other student and trade union activists of Delhi are among all those who are witnessing and participating in the battle led by our farmers against Ambani-Adani Raj.

FARMER'S MARCH TO THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

The workers and farmers of the country decided to comprehensively



strike back against the anti-worker, anti-farmer policies of the government on 26th and 27th November 2020. As workers from all over the country were observing nation wide strike against the disastrous wage code acts on 26th November, thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana started their march towards the national Capital. On 26th November when the Delhi Police was forcibly stopping a joint protest called by Trade Unions in Delhi Jantar Mantar, we were getting the encouraging news of the farmers' forward march towards Delhi.

From 26th November onwards as the different unions of farmers started their journey towards Delhi, crackdown on leaders of farmers union started. As the march of farmers in tractors towards the National Capital entered Haryana, the BJP led Khattar Government of Haryana did all to stop the march. The marching farmers were treated as enemy and different roads towards Delhi that passed through Haryana were turned into war borders. Several rows of barricades were put up. Roads were dug by police to stop the march of farmers. Water cannons were used targeting them. Walls of heavy stones were constructed. But the courage and determination of the farmers to fight back the disastrous agrarian acts and reclaim their rights

could not have been contained by these artificial barriers. Removing every barrier, the farmers reached the borders of Delhi on the adjoining night of 27-28th November.

Permission for Ramlila ground for gathering of the farmers was cancelled by the government. The farmers were instead asked to go to Burari ground at the extreme North corner of Delhi. The farmers unions rejected the proposal and started their sit-in protest at two borders of Delhi- the Singhu and the Tikri border.

Subsequently farmers from UP started their sit-in at Gazipur border of Delhi. From 13th December onwards, farmers from Rajasthan had blocked the NH8, a road that connects Jaipur with Delhi.

The Farmers' Agitation at Delhi Borders- A Nurture Ground for Democracy, Co-Operation and Resistance-

The protest sit-in of the farmers are a learning ground for collective decision making processes, cooperation and communitarian way of living together.

It is an amazing experience to see how thousands of people organised under several farmers unions are sitting to protest anti-people policies of the government and extending a cooperating hand to every one who is visiting their protest.

According to a report by Haryana police, the number of farmers sitting at Tikri border is more than 60,000. The farmers say the actual number is much more than what has been reported officially. The number of farmers sitting at Singhu border is no less.

The farmers have reached Delhi in their tractors. At both the borders one can see lines of tractors extending to kilometres. These tractors are

their resting place for night. As the temperature drops in Delhi with the progress of winter, the tractors that farmers use to till the land are going to be their place to rest for following months.

People from all courses of life, leaders of farmers' and workers' unions, lawyers, civil society members from all over the country speak from the stage throughout the day expressing solidarity. Cultural groups sing songs of struggles, telling stories of the relationship between farmers' and their land, citing histories attempted land grabs. Every two minutes the entire arena echoes with the uproars of slogans of unity.

The community kitchens at these protest sites are a lesson, if our parliamentarians want to learn, on ensuring that no one is left hungry. Three meals, with fruits and tea throughout the day, are served everyday for everyone. The women wake up at 4am and work in shifts to prepare the meals. Men also prepare food, breaking the traditional gender division of labour. Women are also leading the protest, managing the stage, giving speech and having a say on how the movement proceeds. Comrade Jasbir Kaur Natt among many other women leaders are inspiring us to cherish women's role in the movement.

In the trolleys that the farmers have brought along are all the essential grains, pulses, vegetables, oil, jaggery etc for the sustenance of the protesters. It is the season of harvesting potatoes right now, one of the crops removed from the essential commodities list through the Essential Commodities Act 2020. Those farmers who had stayed back in their villages are harvesting their crops and coming to Delhi so that others can go back to do the same. These relays have established a



COMRADE JASBIR KAUR NATT
STATE COMMITTEE MEMBER,
PUNJAB KISAN UNION (LAKM)

direct connection between Delhi and the villages in Punjab. Women back in villages have been taking out morchas everyday to mobilise those who haven't joined the resistance yet.

Farmers along with fighting against these 3 bills have also taken upon the task of educating themselves on all the other similar policies that are aimed at privatization of public services. There are detailed dissections of the laws and policies brought forth by BJP which are meant to steal resources from the people and put them in the hands of specific corporates. They call these legislations a move towards establishing Corporate Raj in India. Farmers are demonstrating that they reject these laws and this agenda and are unflinching in their resistance against both.

The current protests are in line with the erstwhile Anti-CAA-NRC mass movement, with the citizens upholding the constitution while the BJP regime continues to enact policies to break down the foundations on which our nation has been built. Anyone who thinks that the farmers are misguided in their demands for complete retraction of all three bills should visit the protest sites, they might learn a thing or two about the implications of these bills not just on the farmers but even on the rest of the population.

The farmers of the country are leading a mass battle against the fascist rule at centre. They are giving us, the students, the workers, the women, the dalits, the minorities a hope. A hope that no matter how powerful the hate machinery of the government may be, the people united, can and will bring down the anti-people policies imposed on us by the rulers. □



WHY ARE FARMERS RISING UP AGAINST MODI'S FARM LAWS

(Liberation explains why the farm laws need to be opposed, and addresses the misinformation being spread by the Modi regime against the farmers' movement).

WHAT ARE THE THREE FARM LAWS?

The Modi Government promulgates three new Farm Laws in September 2020, which are as follows:

- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020 lifts the restrictions on hoarding essential commodities like cereals, pulses, potatoes, onions, edible oilseeds, and oils.
- The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020

lifts the restrictions on trading farmers' produce beyond the physical premises of APMC markets (mandis). It prohibits State governments from levying any market fee, cess or levy outside APMC areas.

- The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 introduces a framework for contract farming, based on contracts between farmers and corporations. It does not provide any mechanism for fixing prices of produce.

WHY ARE FARMERS PROTESTING THESE LAWS?

Farmers all over India are protesting these laws. Their grounds are that these laws:

- change the whole face of agriculture in India, putting farmers at the mercy of companies/corporations, and freeing the Government from responsibility towards



agriculture. The laws amount to Company Raj in farming.

- that affect farmers in such drastic ways were passed hurriedly during Covid-19, without a physical vote in Parliament, and without any consultation with farmers' organisations. The Government "found opportunity in calamity" as the PM said, and took advantage of Covid-19 to subvert democracy and impose anti-farmer laws on farmers
- dismantle the existing framework of Minimum Support Price and APMCs (mandis), and allow the companies to hoard essential commodities and thus monopolise and control markets. Farmers have been agitating to demand guaranteed MSP at one and a half times the input costs; government procurement of produce and expansion and improvement of the APMC system. Instead, the Government is abdicating responsibility for paying MSP and for procuring farmers' produce, and paving the way for the demise of the mandis.
- weaken India's federal structure, by preventing State Governments from protecting farmers
- will eventually end up evicting farmers from their land, and will make them virtual slaves of agri-business companies
- impose Company Raj in India, preventing any citizen from approaching courts against any wrongdoing done by any officer of the Central or State Governments under this law! This means that citizens cannot seek justice any government officer who is corrupt and favours corporate interests

over the interests of farmers and citizens, because the offending officer can claim he was acting "in good faith" to implement the farm laws! This is basically an imposition of Emergency and a law to protect and promote the corrupt nexus between companies and government. (see box)

But won't the new laws give farmers freedom of choice and freedom from the APMC monopoly? Won't the resulting competition bring better market prices for their crops?

The Government claims that thanks to the new laws, farmers can get a higher price than the MSP outside the regulated APMC markets; and if they don't, they can choose to sell their produce at MSP inside the

regulated APMC markets.

Facts belie this claim:

- Most crops which are not procured by the Government are already sold in the open market – and markets usually bring lower prices than the MSP.

- Only 36 per cent of farmers' produce is sold in the mandis and the remaining is sold outside to private trade.
- The Government announced MSP for 23 crops but Government procurement at the fixed MSP inside the APMC markets mainly took place only for paddy and wheat (and some cotton, soyabean, pulses, mustard).
- The market prices of the 23 commodities are usually much

HOW THE FARM LAWS IMPOSE EMERGENCY ON ALL CITIZENS

Section 13 of The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 (aimed at destroying the APMC mandis) states that:

"No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against the Central Government or the State Government, or any officer of the Central Government or the State Government or any other person in respect of anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act or of any rules or orders made thereunder."

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020 (opening up agriculture for privatised contract farming) states that:

"No civil Court shall have jurisdiction to entertain any suit or proceedings in respect of any dispute which a Sub-Divisional Authority or the Appellate Authority is empowered by or under this Act to decide and no injunction shall be granted by any court or other authority in respect of any action taken or to be taken in pursuance of any power conferred by or under this Act or any rules made thereunder."

Translated into ordinary language, these legal provisions mean that administration officials who are corrupt and favour companies' interests over farmers, are protected from any legal action. Farmer, farm unions, or citizens are prevented from seeking any legal action against such government officials, who are free to act as agents of companies instead of protecting people's interests.

lower than the MSP announces. So, in the case of produce which are not procured by the Government, the farmer has no choice but to sell at a lower price. For example, while the MSP for maize is Rs 1,850 per quintal, farmers have no choice but to sell at the market price, which is just between Rs 800 to Rs 1,000 per quintal.

- Nowhere in India were farmers demanding that they wanted freedom to sell outside the APMC mandis (they already had this freedom)! Markets failed the farmers, and that is why they were demanding state procurement of all crops at an MSP that is fixed at one and a half times the input costs (i.e 50% profit over C2 (Cost that includes land rent along with other costs). Instead, the Government is taking away even the existing MSP and APMC mandis!

Moreover, more than 80 per cent of India's farmers own less than 2 hectares of land. These small farmers cannot afford infrastructure to store or transport the crops (unless the crops are procured by the government), so they are under pressure to sell it before it spoils. Only by selling immediately after harvest can they afford to pay off their debts, and buy inputs for the next crop. With such a tight deadline, they go to the nearest mandi to sell the crop. If there are no mandis and MSP, the farmers will be forced to make a distress sale to corporations who can buy from their doorstep. So, far from giving farmers "freedom" to sell to corporations, the laws will put farmers at the mercy of the corporations.

Isn't it true that only farmers of Punjab, Haryana and western

Uttar Pradesh benefit from MSP?

State-wise procurement data from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and agricultural household data for 2012-13 from the National Sample Survey (NSS) show a very different picture. FCI data shows that under the Decentralized Procurement (DCP) Scheme, 25-35% of rice and wheat began to be procured from the DCP states, outside Punjab, Haryana and Western UP, by 2012-13.

A study by three economists and food security experts found that: "In the case of paddy, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been the star performers. These States today contribute about 10% each to the total paddy procurement in the country. For wheat, decentralised procurement has taken off in Madhya Pradesh in a big way, accounting for approximately 20% of wheat procurement. In 2020-21, wheat procurement from Madhya Pradesh surpassed that from even Punjab. Among agricultural households which sell paddy under the procurement system, while 9% and 7% come from Punjab and Haryana, 11% are in Odisha and 33% are in Chhattisgarh. An overwhelming majority of agricultural households selling wheat to the procurement agencies come from Madhya Pradesh (33%) compared to 22% from Punjab and 18% from Haryana." (Source: 'MSP — the factoids versus the facts', Prankur Gupta, Reetika Khera, Sudha Narayanan, *The Hindu*, December 19, 2020)

Have only large farmers benefited from MSP and procurement?

Gupta, Khera and Narayanan (*ibid*) answer this question:

"In fact, procurement has benefited the small and marginal farmers in much bigger numbers than medium

and large farmers. At the all-India level, among those who sold paddy to the government, 1% were large farmers, owning over 10 hectares of land. Small and marginal farmers, with less than 2 hectares accounted for 70%. The rest (29%) were medium farmers (2-10 hectares).

"In the case of wheat, 3% of all wheat-selling farmers were large farmers. More than half (56%) were small and marginal farmers.

"In Punjab and Haryana, the share of small and marginal farmers is not insignificant (38% and 58%, respectively, among paddy sellers). In the non-traditional States that adopted the DCP scheme, the overwhelming majority of farmers who sell to State procurement agencies are small and marginal. In Chhattisgarh and Odisha, for example, small and marginal farmers comprise 70-80% of all sellers to government agencies. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, nearly half (45%) of those who sell wheat to government agencies are small or marginal farmers."

Is it true that only a section of large farmers from Punjab and to some extent Haryana are protesting?

As we have seen above, the loss of MSP, APMC mandis and government procurement affects small and marginal farmers in large numbers, and also affects farmers in many other states. Moreover, a shift to corporate-led contract farming will put the vast majority of India's farmers at a disadvantage. Small and marginal farmers are even less in a position to compete with corporations in an open market, than large farmers.

So we can see farmers from Haryana, UP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Bihar

joining the farmers at the Delhi borders. It is absolutely untrue that farmers outside Punjab are welcoming the farm laws: farmers across India are united in opposing the farm laws.

The Government claims that MSP and government procurement will continue – so what's the fuss all about?

The Contract Act does not link prices for crops to MSP or the government procurement rate; Section 5 of the Contract Act only links it “to the prevailing prices in specified APMC yard or electronic trading and transaction platform or any other suitable benchmark prices”. In fact, the new laws make no provision for the farmers' long-standing demand to guarantee MSP for all crops, determined by Swaminathan formula of C2 costs plus 50 per cent.

So the Government and PM are lying when they claim that MSP and government procurement will continue under the new laws.

But abolition of the APMC Act has resulted in a higher overall growth rate and agricultural growth for Bihar, has it not?

In Bihar, the APMC Act was abolished in 2006.

According to neoliberal commentator Shekhar Gupta, after Bihar annulled its APMC Act in 2006, its agricultural growth rate increased, and even outpaced the agricultural growth rate of Punjab. But this claim ignores some inconvenient facts.

- It is true that between 2006-07 and 2011-12, Bihar's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) from agriculture grew at 4.8 per cent per year, while Punjab's GSVA from agriculture grew at about 1 per cent. But, as

R Ramakumar noted (see full article below), Gupta has been selective with facts. Between 2011-12 to 2019-20 “Bihar's agriculture grew at (-)1 per cent per year, while Punjab's agriculture grew at about (+)1 per cent per year (see Figure 1). In other words, Bihar's agricultural GSVA shrank in absolute terms, while Punjab's agricultural GSVA kept growing.”

- In any case, why has the so-called growth not resulted in growth in income for Bihar's farmers? Why do Bihar's farmers continue to be in the bottom rung when it comes to farm income? The farmer in Bihar, on an average, earns just Rs 42684 a year, which translates to Rs 3557 a month. (see image)
- Every year, there are reports of huge amounts (more than a million tonne) of paddy being illegally transported from Bihar to sell in Punjab's APMC mandis. The reason for this cumbersome, risky, and even costly exercise? Because the market price in Bihar is so much lower than the MSP the same paddy fetches in Punjab. (*‘Why are farmers from other states coming to Punjab to sell paddy in bulk?’*, *Indian Express*, November 17, 2020)

The Bihar experience exposes all the tall claims of the Modi regime and its apologists regarding the new laws, as false.

A 2019 study of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) titled ‘Study on Agricultural Diagnostics for the State of Bihar in India’ found:

“Despite the abolition of the

Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act in 2006, private investment in the creation of new markets and strengthening of facilities in the existing ones did not take place in Bihar, leading to low market density. Further, the participation of government agencies in procurement and the scale of procurement of grains continue to be low. Thus, farmers are left to the mercy of traders who unscrupulously fix lower prices for agricultural produce that they buy from farmers. Inadequate market facilities and institutional arrangements are responsible for low price realisation and instability in prices.

“With respect to procurement of food grains in Bihar, Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS) are entrusted with procurement of grains particularly paddy and wheat from the farmers at the government-announced minimum support price (MSP). The ground level evidence through discussion with farmers



shows that procurement operation is limited to a certain amount and time. **Farmers mentioned that non-availability of a fair price is the most important constraint in expanding agricultural output.” (emphasis ours)**

In Bihar, 14 years after the APMC system was replaced with the PAC system, private investment in agricultural infrastructure and facilities is still a far cry, and non-availability of a fair price is still the biggest issue!

The NCAER report found that in Bihar:

- There was increased volatility in food grain prices in Bihar since the abolition of APMC in 2006
- Farmers reported high storage costs at private warehouses.
- Over 90 per cent of the output of crops including paddy, wheat, maize, lentil, gram, mustard and banana are sold within the respective villages to traders and commission agents.
- Farmers reported, they do not get a fair price for their agricultural produce. Most farmers also reported that the need for immediate cash after harvest, compel them to sell at a lower price to traders. Further, government market facilities are not available near the village.
- Even if farmers take their produce to a distant market yard, they face the problem of paying extra (bribe) to commission agents. Farmers also cannot store produce at their household due to lack of space and the necessary storage conditions to avoid spoilage of grains.
- Farmers are forced to sell their

produce at whatever the price the traders are willing to offer.

(NCAER findings summarised by Anish Thakur in ‘Dismantling of the APMC: The Bihar Experience’, December 15, 2020, Groundxero.in)

Dr Sukhpal Singh (Senior Economist, Agricultural Marketing and Former Head, Department of

or contract farming. ...Therefore, there is no need to throw the baby with the bathwater in the rush to reform agricultural markets. It is easier to dismantle institutions than build them. The consequences could be very serious for the farm sector and the farming community.” (‘APMCs: The other side of the story’, February 8, 2015, The Hindu



Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana) warned in 2015 that “APMC markets are very important especially in States such as Bihar where small and marginal farmers comprise more than 90 per cent of the sector. These markets are important for small farmers who may not attract large buyers for direct purchase

Business Line)

Won't the new laws at least bring freedom from middlemen for farmers?

If small traders and middlemen (arhtiyas as they are called in Hindi) abuse the system, surely bigger corporations will do so even more?

Corporate farming will not get

rid of middlemen. Big companies themselves are huge middlemen. Plus, big companies will need intermediaries to reach farmers – and they will employ the same arhtiyas who worked in the APMC markets!

The APMC system has many problems – and farmers have been demanding that the system be improved to ensure that all farmers can benefit. But the new laws are not doing this. They are destroying a system which works – and replacing it with a system that can benefit only big companies.

These new Acts actually create five new slots for middlemen, which will no doubt be filled by those who were middlemen before these laws:

- Section 2(g) of the Contract Act describes a Farm Agreement as a “written agreement entered into between a farmer and a Sponsor or a farmer, a sponsor and any third party”. This “third party” is a middleman.
- Section 3(1)(b) of the Contract Act states that the “responsibility for compliance of any legal requirement for providing such farm services shall be with the Sponsor or the farm service provider”. This “farm service provider” is a middleman.
- Section 4(4) says monitoring and certification of quality and “the process of cultivation or rearing, or at the time of delivery, by third party qualified assayer...”. This “third party qualified assayer” is yet another middleman.
- Section 10 provides for “an aggregator or farm service provider”, the “aggregator” being any person, “including a Farmer Producer Organisation”, who acts as an intermediary

between a farmer or a group of farmers and a sponsor and “provides aggregation related services to both farmers and sponsors”. This middleman will have three roles — aggregating land of small owners for contracts, securing services from companies for farming and mobilising farm produce for sale to companies.

- Section 2(e) of Contract Act and Section 2(b) of the Mandi Bypass Act state that a “farmer” also includes “farmer producer organisation”. It is the rich farmer who is likely to organise the FPOs and act as an agency of the sponsor company. The original plan for FPOs was to be voluntary collectives of farmers to empower them to bargain with traders. These acts envisage a middleman role for them akin to the present-day moneylenders, brokers for banks, arhatiyas and commercial agents. There is no security clause in the Acts for the underprivileged.



- Section 5 (1) of the Mandi Bypass Act also provides for the FPO the role of establishing and operating “electronic trading and transaction platform... commerce of scheduled farmers’ produce in a trade area” – this implies

ownership and management of private mandis.

So, far from ensuring freedom from middlemen, the Acts actually enmesh the farmers in an even tighter web of middlemen.

Won’t contract farming mean better prices for the farmer and cheaper costs for the consumer?

Far from it. The companies, with a free hand to hoard essential commodities, will create monopolies. They may initially pay higher prices to farmers, to corner the market and squeeze out the APMC and MSP system itself. Once the APMC and MSP systems are dead and gone, the corporations will no longer have any compulsion to compete with MSP. So they will buy cheap and sell dear – harming both farmers and the consumer.

Since there will be no market taxes/fees imposed by the government, won’t it benefit both farmers and companies?

Section 6 of the Mandi Bypass Act does bar “market fee or cess or levy”, but only under “any state APMC Act or any other state law”. And, Section 5(2) provides that the “the person establishing and operating an electronic trading and transaction platform shall prepare and implement the guidelines for fair trade practices such as mode of trading, fees, ...”.

So there will indeed be mandi/market fees, but these will not be regulated by the Government!

Who, then, will benefit from the new laws?

Between May 2014 and 2018, that is, after Modi became PM, Modi’s closest corporate crony Gautam Adani set up 20 agri-business firms. Between 2005 and March 2014, Adani had set up just two such businesses. In 2019 alone, Adani

set up nine new agri-business firms. (see table)

It is quite clear that it is big companies like Adani who stand to benefit from the deregulation of agricultural markets.

wages for workers are legally guaranteed – but these laws are not enforced. In a climate where the Government pushes privatisation and contractualised jobs, labour

activist Vandana Shiva that overnight they had to change the trees of the variety of the apple, because Walmart changed the size of the truck. Farmers in Gujarat have complained that PepsiCo has been known to reject their potato crop “if the potato size is smaller than the prescribed 40-45 mm diameter”. (Source: ‘PepsiCo offers to amicably settle potato row, but with riders; court stay on farmers remains for now’, *The Hindu Business Line*, April 26, 2019) A farmer whose produce could be rejected, would be desperate enough to sell at a far lower price.

Company	CIN	Incorporated on
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS LIMITED	U63090GJ2005PLC045356	25/01/2005
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (MP) LIMITED	U74120GJ2014PLC079278	21/03/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (HOSHANGABAD) LIMITED	U63000GJ2014PLC079611	28/05/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (SATNA) LIMITED	U63000GJ2014PLC079612	28/05/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (HARDA) LIMITED	U63023GJ2014PLC079601	28/05/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (UJJAIN) LIMITED	U63000GJ2014PLC079619	29/05/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (DEWAS) LIMITED	U63090GJ2014PLC079629	29/05/2014
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (KATIHAR) LIMITED	U63090GJ2016PLC086566	23/03/2016
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (KOTKAPURA) LIMITED	U63090GJ2016PLC086571	23/03/2016
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (KANNAUJ) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095059	10/1/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (PANIPAT) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095073	11/1/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (BARNALA) LIMITED	U63090GJ2017PLC095187	18/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (MOGA) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095190	18/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (RAMAN) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095188	18/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (MANSI) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095203	19/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (NAKODAR) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095202	19/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (BATHINDA) LIMITED	U63030GJ2017PLC095224	20/01/2017
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (DAHOD) LIMITED	U74999GJ2018PLC103504	2/8/2018
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (BORIVALI) LIMITED	U63030GJ2018PLC103573	8/8/2018
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (DHAMORA) LIMITED	U74999GJ2018PLC103574	8/8/2018
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (SAMASTIPUR) LIMITED	U63090GJ2018PLC103908	5/9/2018
ADANI AGRI LOGISTICS (DARBHANGA) LIMITED	U63090GJ2018PLC104685	10/10/2018

What if the Government agrees to write an MSP guarantee into the new laws, say through a fourth ordinance?

What if the Government were to make remunerative MSP a legal right, as demanded by the farmers even before the new laws were enacted?

The fact is that unless the new laws allowing hoarding of essential commodities and weakening APMCs are not rolled back, a legal entitlement to MSP will just remain on paper. Why?

- Labour laws and minimum

laws remain only on paper. The same will be the fate of MSP also unless APMCs and Government procurement are not simultaneously strengthened.

- Companies can, with the help of Government, find many loopholes to undermine a law guaranteeing MSP, and arm twist farmers into selling at a lower price. For instance, companies can refuse to buy crop if it fails to meet an arbitrary standard. For instance, a South-African farmer told environmentalist

Even if a fourth law guaranteeing MSP were to be enacted, it would just serve to sweeten the poisonous pill of the three new laws. Legalising MSP to ensure 50% profits over and above input costs is certainly needed – but scrapping the three new laws is just as necessary.

The Government promises that the country’s food security and the ration system for the poor will not be affected.

The Essential Commodities Amendment Act allows companies to hoard food grains and other commodities. This means that there will be no regulation of food prices, and no limits on hoarding and black marketing. Corporations and MNCs will control the whole market chain. This means that subsidised food grains under the PDS will be replaced by a cash transfer scheme, forcing the PDS beneficiaries to buy in the open market.

This law further states that these changes shall not apply to orders under PDS and targeted PDS ‘for the time being in force’. The use of

MANY-PRONGED ASSAULT ON FARMERS

Even as farmers protest the three farm laws, the Modi regime continues to assault India's farmers in other ways also: by encouraging agri-dumping by transnational agri-businesses. It is importing crops at concessional interest rates. A writer observed, "While the farmers were marching towards Delhi against the farm laws, the government decided to import 5 lakh tonnes of maize at a concessional import duty of 15% (down from 50%). The government bought imported maize for about Rs 3,200 a quintal. Meanwhile, it was giving Rs 1,850 a quintal to Indian corn farmers. Currently, Bihari maize farmers cannot get Rs 5 a kg.

The same writer observed that the Trump administration gave \$46 billion in farm subsidies to the US farm sector. "This sum amounted to 40% of farm income as the farm debt stood at a staggering \$434 billion." But the subsidies went to "Big Ag" (big agribusinesses) and banks. "The top 1% got 26% of the payment. Out of the 10 top beneficiaries of farm subsidies 2020 eight are banks or credit unions."

Why can't India increase import subsidies and ban imports of crops that can be grown in India? After all, "EU has already, at various times, banned produce from countries including the US, and the WTO has not prevented them from doing so."

(Source: 'The Pandora's Box of Agri Reform, Subsidies and Tariffs', Indra Shekhar Singh, *The Wire*, 21 December 2020)

the phrase "time being", for PDS, is very sinister." It implies that the PDS system is temporary only.

The Government claims that fears of farmers losing their land to corporations is false.

Protesting farmers say that they fear that thanks to the new laws, corporations will be able to grab their land. (*Farmers' concern: 'Will lose land to corporates because of the new laws', Indian Express, December 13, 2020*)

But the Government claims that these fears are baseless.

But what happens if the farmers, thanks to a crop failure, is unable to honour the contract into which he has entered with a company?

Section 15 prohibits recovery "against the agricultural land of the farmer". But Section 9 links "farming agreements" "with insurance or credit instrument under any scheme of the central government or the state government or any financial service provider to ensure risk mitigation and flow of credit to farmer or sponsor or both." This means that credit could be linked

to mortgaging of farmers' land, and a failure to repay credit could result in losing the land.

Surely privatisation is needed for progress? Farmers already receive heavy subsidies. Is it not time for the Government to step back from farm subsidies and regulatory control?

Agriculture provides livelihood for the vast majority of Indians, and yet public investment in agriculture between 2011-12 and 2017-18, remained between 0.3 and 0.4 per cent of the GDP. In contrast, super-rich corporations receive 6 per cent of the GDP in tax waivers, write-offs and concessions alone – not counting the debt write-offs and dirt-cheap land, water, etc that they are given. Taxpayers should demand that their taxes go towards supporting farmers not companies.

Farm incomes are extremely low. Farmers even in the relatively more prosperous states earn just Rs 18000 per month – why should they be forced to face market competition, when tycoons like Adani and Ambani are protected

from market competition and gifted juicy monopolies by the Government?

The Adanis and Ambanis secretly fund India's ruling BJP through electoral bonds – and this is why the BJP regime insists on serving the interests of these companies rather than the interests of farmers and India's poor who need rations.

WHAT IMMEDIATE IMPACT HAVE THE FARM LAWS HAD?

The dangerous impact of the farm laws has become visible almost immediately. Paddy prices in mandis have crashed below MSP in many states, as a result of the looming prospect of scrapping of MSP. A significant proportion of the paddy crop was sold below MSP in mandis in Uttar Pradesh (47% crop sold below MSP), Gujarat (83%), Karnataka (63%), and Telangana (60%). In Chhattisgarh, which has emerged as a major producer in the past decade, no less than 4.4 lakh tonnes of paddy was sold below MSP.

Yet the government has put out data to show that this year's kharif

procurement is going on “smoothly” and that already, 22.5% more procurement has taken place compared with last year. How is that possible? The answer is that traders are buying grain at lower prices from farmers and selling it to government agencies like the Food Corporation of India (FCI) or other state-level procurement agencies, at the higher price which is the MSP. Only this can explain the fact that while a substantial share of farmers are getting lower-than-MSP prices, government procurement is still running smoothly and they are paying out MSP. (Source: ‘Paddy Prices Have Crashed Below MSP in Many States’, *Newslick*, 13 December 2020)

BIHAR VERSUS PUNJAB: SELECTIVE USE OF DATA MISINFORMS POLICY

R. RAMAKUMAR

A few days into the farmer’s agitation in India, a video episode of the programme “Cut the Clutter” hosted by journalist Shekhar Gupta was circulating in the social media. Those who criticised the farmer’s agitation were seen sharing the video episode to argue out the merits of the three Farm Acts passed by the central government in September 2020.

This episode is an excellent example of selectively using data to push a partisan point. Gupta says that the arguments against the Farm Acts are “BS”. The key point hammered in by Gupta is that Bihar is a success story of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) reforms in India. For this purpose, he compares agricultural growth rates in Bihar and Punjab. According to him, after Bihar

annulled its APMC Act in 2006, its agricultural growth rate increased, and even surpassed the agricultural growth rate of Punjab. He cites a paper authored by Ashok Gulati et al. from where he picks up these growth data between 2005-06 to 2014-15.

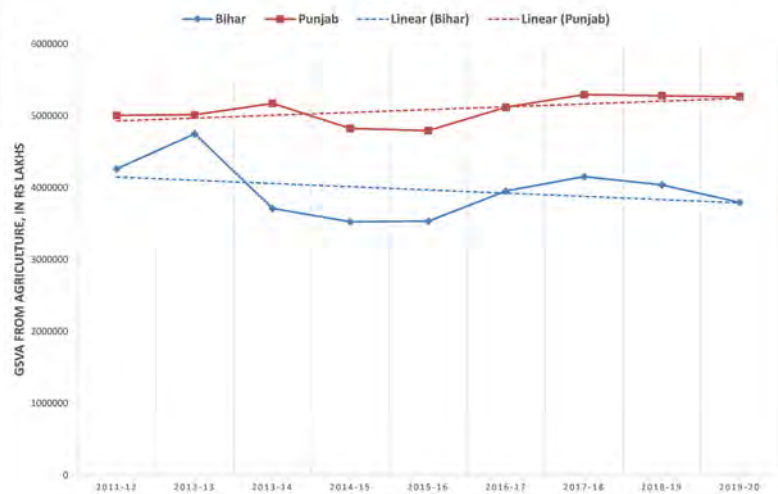
Such a startling claim led one to look at the data on agricultural growth rates. I first considered data for Gross State Value Added (GSVA) from agriculture at constant prices (base year 2004-05 = 100). It turns out that between 2006-07 and 2011-12, Bihar’s GSVA from agriculture grew at 4.8 per cent per year, while Punjab’s GSVA from agriculture grew at about 1 per cent. This is indeed accurate. However, this is an incomplete story. If Bihar’s APMC reforms indeed worked wonders for the State, we should

while Punjab’s agriculture grew at about (+)1 per cent per year (see Figure 1). In other words, Bihar’s agricultural GSVA shrank in absolute terms, while Punjab’s agricultural GSVA kept growing.

Why did Bihar’s agricultural GSVA shrink after 2011-12 if its APMC reforms were a success? Did the “Nitish Kumar magic”, to use Gupta’s words, disappear into thin air? And why did Punjab’s agricultural GSVA continue to rise at a positive rate in the same period?

In a national comparison also, Bihar fares poorly. I considered data on Value of Output (VOO) from all “crops” at 2011-12 prices between 2011-12 and 2017-18. In this period, the VOO of crops in Bihar grew at 0.9 per cent per year,

FIGURE 1 GROSS STATE VALUE ADDED (GSVA) FROM AGRICULTURE, CONSTANT PRICES, BIHAR AND PUNJAB, 2011-12 TO 2019-20, IN RS LAKHS



see the same results replicated in longer time series also.

Thus, I considered the new series of GSVA from agriculture at constant prices (base year 2011-12 = 100) between 2011-12 to 2019-20. In this period, Bihar’s agriculture grew at (-)1 per cent per year,

while VOO of crops in India as a whole grew at 1.5 per cent per year.

While Gupta celebrates the first set of growth rates, he is silent on the second and third sets of growth rates cited above.

In all these comparisons, we should remember the fact that Bihar’s

numbers were far lower in levels compared to Punjab's numbers. In 2012-13, the value of output per hectare was Rs 35,825 in Bihar and Rs 78,652 in Punjab. In the same year, the average monthly income from cultivation per agricultural household was Rs 1715 in Bihar and Rs 10,862 in Punjab. In other words, a short stretch of high growth is hardly adequate to punch Bihar ahead of Punjab in agricultural incomes. Further, a negative growth rate in Bihar after 2011-12, over a low base, is a sign of crisis, not promise.

The selective use of data to push neoliberal standpoints has been a mark of commentaries that have attacked the ongoing farmer's agitation (see for example, another instance at "Per hectare farm income: Does Bihar really outshine Punjab?" by R. Ramakumar and Ashish Kamra, Financial Express, 25 November 2020. Poor empirical basis for policy changes can end up being disastrous for the recipients of the policy. That is exactly what has transpired with agricultural policy over the past 25-30 years. Gupta would do well to remember this. (Source: Foundation for Agrarian Studies) □

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BACKS AGAINST THE WALL

WISTRON FACTORY WORKERS' STRUGGLE



AICCTU visited Narasapura Industrial estate (Kolar district, Karnataka) to meet with the workers in light of the incidents of 12.12.2020 when thousands of workers protested at Wistron factory raising several demands, and which ended in properties of the factory being destroyed and police action against the workers. A protest was also held at the Deputy Commissioner's office at Kolar on 18th December 2020 demanding urgent steps to be taken to safeguard the rights of workers. Excerpts from AICCTU's report follow.

Wistron, a multinational corporation from Taiwan, has its establishment at Narasapura Industrial Estate where iPhones are assembled for Apple Inc. Operational post lockdown, it employs 1343 regular/permanent and

8490 contract workers, supposedly sourced from six contractors. The workers are engineering graduates, ITI diploma holders and PUC/10th standard pass. Contract workers consist of three broad categories (a) migrant workers from other States including Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, etc., (b) migrant workers from other districts of Karnataka, and, (c) workers from various villages in the taluks around Narasapura. The workers, especially those from the nearby villages are from extremely poor backgrounds and a large number of them belong to the Dalit community.

WAGE THEFT BY WISTRON

At the time of their appointment, they were informed that they would receive wages of Rs. 22,000/- per month including overtime wages. The Wistron establishment only operates 2 shifts – 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. (day shift) and 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. (night shift). The conditions of work are rather horrific. Each worker is compelled to do 12-hour shifts every day/night and has no say on which shift they can opt for.

There is no avenue for redressal of grievances of the workers. The irregular, erratic and reduced payment of wages is an issue that was raised repeatedly and yet remains unaddressed. While the workers were promised monthly wages of Rs. 22,000/-, they have received substantially less wages despite having worked overtime on all days without any leave. Wages for the month of November are yet to be paid to the workers despite their numerous requests to do so. One issue that the workers have raised is the fudging of their attendance leading to them getting lesser wages.

INCIDENT

On 12.12.2020, workers yet again sought their wages from the HR and other Wistron officials but were turned away. This appears to have happened between the night and day shifts. Wages continued to be withheld, and an agitation ensued, in the course of which some of Company's property was damaged. There is no doubt that it is the non-payment of wages and other labour law violations which are the immediate cause of the unrest.

It is being reported that about 150 workers have been arrested, however, no details are available about them. There is also an atmosphere of fear prevailing and workers are living in the anxiety that the police will come banging on their doors irrespective of whether they participated or not in the December 12th incident.

DEMANDS:

- 1. State Government must drop all charges against the workers and release them immediately**
- 2. Wistron should withdraw their criminal complaints against the workers.**
- 3. Wistron must immediately pay workers all due wages and re-start production and the Labour Department must ensure job, wage and social security of the workers including hours of work and working conditions**
- 4. All the contract workers must be recognized as direct employees of Wistron and must be paid all their dues.**
- 5. The Labour Commissioner should ensure that an atmosphere is made conducive for the formation of a workers union, which management should recognize and negotiate with to resolve the issues of workers.**



TRIBUTE

DIEGO MARADONA (1960-2020)

 OM PRASAD

With Maradona's death, a generation of football players from South America is slowly passing us by: a generation which includes greats like Garrincha, Zico and Socrates and Pele. This was a group of individuals who played the joga bonito (the beautiful game) the way they learnt it as kids in the slums of Rio, Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires. Their style not dictated by computer simulations and big data, they played football based on their instincts. This is what marked them out as great players. They saw an opening where no one else did, as if they had eyes at the back of their heads .

Diego Armando Maradona was born in a barrio (slum) on the outskirts of the Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires. His father who descended from a family of native Indians worked in a factory. His mother came from a family of Italian migrants. Maradona was what in Argentina is called a 'negrito', something which he remained acutely aware of throughout his life. Like many footballing greats, his skills with the ball were noticed before he entered his teens. He went on to sign up for Boca Juniors, a club traditionally supported by the working class. As news about his magical left foot spread across the world, he transferred to Barcelona and then to the Italian club of Napoli where he attained a demigod status.

Maradona's footballing skills could well be argued to be belonging to another planet. His being left footed made him all the more mystical. He could turn with the ball at the blink of an eye on the podgiest of grounds and move across the field at lightning speed. When he dribbled it seems as if the time had stopped and a million pair of eyes were glued to the ball between his feet. He played at a time when tackling from the back was a legal form of stopping players and referees were less inclined to protect players who would be naturally singled out by the opposition for 'special treatment'. His greatness can be attributed to what the English footballer Gary Lineker described about Maradona's footballing skills, 'He was always on first name terms with the ball'.

Outside the world of football, he lived a less than ideal life. As the journalist Niren Tolsi wrote, 'his personal life was rendered chaotic by claustrophobic fame, narcissism, self-destruction, and excessive consumption of booze and drugs'. He did not acknowledge a son born outside his marriage for nearly three decades and his wife and his girlfriend accused him of harassment and violence. This aspect of his life remained with him nearly till his death. The other thing that remained constant in Maradona's life was his politics.

Maradona's coming of age in Argentina was also the time when the country was forced into accepting the notorious structural adjustment program of the IMF which dismantled the welfare net around Argentinian citizens,

throwing millions into penury. The diktats of the 'Chicago Boys' along with a military dictatorship and the killing of young Argentinians in the Falkands War shaped Maradona's politics. And the Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' followed by the Goal of the Century in the same match against the English in the 1986 World Cup perfectly summed up the North vs South divide that he fought against throughout his life.

His greatest footballing triumph outside the World Cup came with the Italian club, Napoli. The club based out of the southern Italian city of Naples were the perennial losers in the Italian League. The city itself has been destroyed several times by the volcanic eruptions



of Mt Vesuvius, and its historical and geographical proximity with the African Continent and its warm climate meant that Neapolitans had darker skin color than the rest of Italy. This resulted in plenty of racist abuse when Napoli played in other parts of Italy. It was seen a city of disease and pestilence, dirty and dangerous. It came as a surprise that Maradona, the best player in the world, would chose such a team. It was a situation which he relished and under him Napoli ended the dominance of the Northern Italian teams of Juventus and Milan. Napoli reached heights which they have not seen since. He became an instant God in Naples; Eduardo Galeano in Soccer under Sun and Shadow describes, ‘..in Naples Maradona was Santa Maradona... in the streets they sold pictures of this divinity illuminate by the Virgin’. The victory of Napoli against Juventus and Milan was seen as a victory against the ‘Northern Bosses’; private entrepreneurs based in northern Italy who owned most of the Italian economy.

It did not come as a surprise that he publicly chose to display his tattoo

of another famous Argentinian, Che Guevara. It was finally the doctors in Cuba, where he went at the invitation of Fidel Castro, who helped him kick his cocaine habit. But it was also a start of a friendship with extended to Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Lula. He participated in the protests against the Free Trade of the Americas in 2004 wearing a T-shirt which had ‘George Bush is a war criminal’ printed on it. He extended his support to the fight of the Palestinians against Israeli apartheid and remained a firm and vocal opposer of Northern Imperialism led by the United States.

In the decades of the 80s when it was slowly becoming clear that commercial interests were taking over governance of football, Maradona was the first opposition. In the 1986 World Cup, which was held in the Mexican heat, he opposed playing matches in the mid-day sun, in temperatures above 40 degrees. They were scheduled at that time because that was the ideal time for TV audiences in Europe. He demanded that football governing bodies open their books

for scrutiny so that revenue earned could be passed on to impoverished players lower in the rungs. He even set up the International Professional Players Association along with George Weah of Liberia and Eric Cantona of France. As Galeano wrote, he was football’s ‘most strident rebel ... He wasn’t the only disobedient player, but his was the voice that made the most offensive questions ring out loud and clear’.

But Maradona’s larger than life style of living had its consequences. His wife accused him of mental harassment and he was seen in a video hitting his last girlfriend Rocio Oliva. On the occasion of his testimonial match in 2001, on being asked about his drug and alcohol abuse, he publicly said, ‘I made mistakes, I paid for them’ but he never admitted nor expressed regret for his abusive behaviour with women despite evidence suggesting otherwise.

With all his flaws, Maradona will remain one of the brightest stars on football’s firmament.



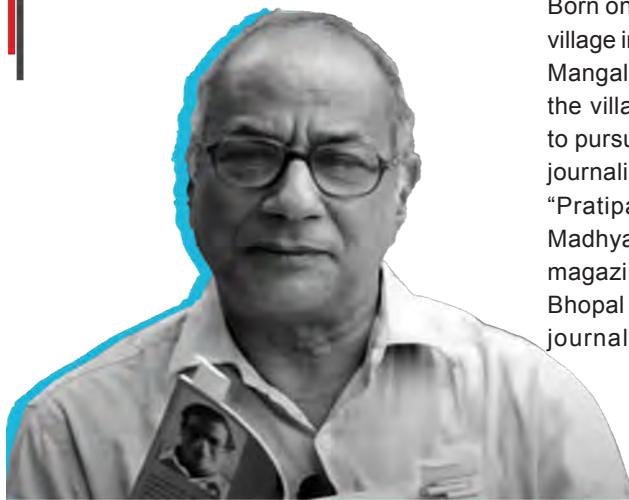
MANGALESH DABRAL

The world suffered an irreparable loss with the passing away of poet Mangalesh Dabral on 9 December 2020.

Born on 16 may 1948 at Kaafalpani village in Tehri District, Uttarakhand, Mangalesh spent his early years in the village and then came to Delhi to pursue journalism. He began his journalistic career with the weekly ‘Pratipaksh’ and then joined the Madhya Pradesh Sahitya Parishad magazine ‘Purvagrah’ and lived in Bhopal for some time. His literary journalism started around 1978

with the Hindi daily ‘Amrit Prabhat’ published from Allahabad. He edited the Amrit Prabhat’s Sunday literary supplement and set a new standard for literary journalism. He even got a free spirit like Viren Dangwal to write the superb column ‘Ghoomta Aina’ for the Sunday supplement.

His most glorious phase of literary journalism was with the ‘Jansatta’ where he got the opportunity to work in a new paper with an Editor like Prabhaskar Joshi. Through its weekly issue, Jansatta prepared a



new generation of young writers who, under Mangalesh Ji's motivation, wrote with a new perspective not only about literature but also about society, politics, environment, cinema, theater, gender and other subjects. He also made Jansatta the forum for beautiful translations of world poetry and poetry in Indian languages. He gave important translators like Suresh Salil to the Hindi language.

Mangalesh Dabral, who found special recognition from his very first collection of poems 'Pahad par Laltain', wrote many great poems which were collected in five anthologies. He received prestigious awards like 'Pahal', 'Sahitya Academy' and 'Om Prakash Smriti' for his poetry. Along with poetry he was also a master of prose and translation. To him goes the credit of introducing renowned Bangla poet Nabarun Bhattacharya to Hindi readers, and he was also the co-translator of the Hindi translation of Nabarun Bhattacharya's anthology 'Yeh Mrityu Upatyaka Nahi Hai Mera Desh'.

He also had a great interest in music, cinema and travel literature. He was the only Hindi poet who had close friendships with poets in all Indian as well as foreign languages, and because of this he enriched Hindi readers with translations of Indian and foreign language poetry.

His poems have been translated into several languages. Recently, Italian translator Dr. Mariola Offredi published the Italian translation of his anthology 'Aawaz bhi ek Jagah hai' under the title 'Anche la Voce e un Luogo'. He was committed lifelong to democracy and was often involved in deep debates and arguments with the Right Wing through his Facebook posts. It was due to this commitment that he was at the forefront of the Award returning campaign in 2017 and returned his Sahitya Academy award. He was associated with the Jan Sanskriti Manch and was its National Vice President. He was a lifelong friend of Left, of the CPIML, and people's movements.



COMRADE TRIDIB GHOSH

Veteran human rights campaigner from Jharkhand, Comrade Tridib Ghosh, fell to Covid-19 in Ranchi on 15 December. In the 1980s and 1990s Ghosh da was a popular leader of Indian People's Front and CPIML in the Ranchi-Hazaribagh region.

He is survived by his wife Prof Malanch Ghosh and his son.

We will always remember his outrage against police atrocities and oppression of adivasis and his warmth and affection for comrades. Red Salute, Ghosh da!

AUSTRALIA'S STOP ADANI CAMPAIGN IN SOLIDARITY WITH INDIAN FARMERS

As a people-powered movement that has prevented the Adani company from digging its climate-wrecking coal mine for ten years, the Stop Adani movement of Australia stands in solidarity with Indian farmers leading mass peaceful protests against Prime Minister Modi and Gautam Adani's farm laws.

Arguably the largest protests in human history, with organisers estimating 250 million people took part, farmer-led protests erupted in response to three laws passed by Modi's Government, with farmers concerned deregulation of agricultural markets will favour corporate interests such as billionaire Adani's agricultural businesses, and make farmers vulnerable to exploitation. Blatant crony capitalism in India and Australia favours billionaires at the expense of communities, families and the environment. Recent news of a \$1 Billion (5000 crore) loan from the State Bank of India to Adani confirms that Modi's Government is working for corporate interests above all else.

In Australia too, Governments have showered Adani's coal project with public funds and special treatment, with mass protests stopping a \$1 Billion public loan to Adani in 2017. Governments must act in the public interest by putting farmers, communities and the environment first. The Stop Adani movement will continue to push government decision-makers to act for the public good, and support those campaigning against crony capitalism in India. Stop Adani spokesperson and Indian-Australian Manjot Kaur said: "My family in Punjab comes from generations of farmers, the same farmers that are currently protesting against Modi and Adani's farm laws.

"My father, grandfather, and many before me have been farming wheat on the same land, for generations. My family wants to continue farming for generations to come, but these law changes and climate change threaten our way of life. My grandfather has seen the weather change, seen the river he used to play in become polluted, and struggled against drought.

"Crony capitalism in India is driving Indian farming communities to the brink - from deregulating agricultural laws for big corporates to the State Bank's 5000 crore (AUD \$1 Billion) loan to Adani for their dangerous coal project, a project that will mine and burn coal and bring more climate disasters to Indian farming communities. Farmers that are fighting for their existence are the ones who deserve support from the state bank and protection from the Government, not billionaire coal companies like Adani."

Central Queensland farmer Simon Gedda said: "As an Australian farmer in Queensland, I stand in solidarity with the millions of Indian farmers who are pushing back on Adani and the Government's farm laws. "It can be tough being a farmer, not only do we battle the elements and increasingly, climate change impacts, but we are now called on to protect farmers rights against billionaire coal barons. This is a fight many Australian farmers understand, and it's a fight we can't shy away from. "Adani and pro-coal Governments are ruining farmers' livelihoods from India to Australia." Amongst other changes, the farm laws could lead to minimum support price (MSP) safeguards being scrapped. MSP guarantees a price for farmers for particular crops, no matter the seasonal outlook.

As the world experiences more droughts, heatwaves, floods and storms from climate change, driven by export coal from Australian coal mines, these farm law changes make Indian farmers even more vulnerable to the seasonal disruptions that will intensify with climate change. Projections estimate climate change will reduce wheat yield in India by up to 23% by 2050.

(Source: Green Left Weekly)



SALUTING ONE YEAR OF THE HISTORIC EQUAL CITIZENSHIP MOVEMENT AGAINST CAA NPR NRC



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