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Mandir and Masjid can Co-Exist

Kuldip Nayar

ON December 6, the demolition of the Babri masjid would be 25 years old. Instead of making amends for what the Congress government did in 1992 with the connivance of then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party government is bent upon building a temple at the site where the masjid stood once.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has made a statement that only a 'grand temple' would be built in Ayodhya and nothing else. This is unfair to the Muslims or the liberals who support the country's diversity and had come to agree that both the mosque and the temple could stand side-by-side at the site. However, the demolition remains a blot on India's secularism. To build 'only' the temple would tantamount to rubbing salt in the wound that was inflicted.

I recall that after the demolition, which initiated countrywide Hindu-Muslim clashes, Prime Minister Rao convened a meeting of senior journalists to explain what had happened. He sought the media cooperation in quenching the fire. He

said that the central government was helpless because of the determination by hundreds of *kar sevaks* to demolish the masjid. But Madhu Limaye, the late Socialist leader, later told me the puja that Rao performed was meant to camouflage the demolition. When an aide whispered into his ears that the masjid had been demolished, he opened his eyes.

Rao could have easily acted before the demolition took place. The proclamation to impose President's rule was ready a fortnight earlier. It was awaiting the cabinet approval. The Prime Minister did not convene its meeting. When the demolition began, there were frantic calls to the Prime Minister's Office.

Even if the Congress were to deny the allegation against Rao, the party has not yet explained how a small temple had come up overnight at the site where the masjid stood earlier. The centre was then in full control because UP had been put under President's rule after dismissal of the state government. In any case, the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute had transcended the state borders and the centre was following

the developments every day. The Justice Manmohan Singh Liberhan commission's silence on Rao's behaviour was meant to cover up his complicity and that of the Congress party.

"Let the temple come up." This was the remark by Atal Behari Vajpayee when I asked for his reaction to the destruction of the masjid one day after the incident. I was surprised by his comment because I considered him a liberal force in the BJP. In fact, the Liberhan Commission had named Vajpayee as one of the collaborators in pulling down the mosque. How could he have reacted differently when he was a party to the "meticulously planned" scheme to demolish the mosque?

That L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, the other two BJP leaders, were co-conspirators was known on December 6, 1992, itself. The surprising name for me was that of Vajpayee. The Vajpayee, when he was Prime Minister, was a changed person. He had led a bus of intellectuals and journalists to Lahore to give the message of peace and conciliation to the neighbours.

The indictment has exposed our polity because all the three came to occupy top positions in the country. Vajpayee became the Prime Minister, Advani the Home Minister and Joshi, the Human Resources Development Minister. If all the three were collaborators in the demolition of the Babri masjid, they were dishonest in taking the oath of office which demanded that the oath-taker would work for the country's unity and uphold the constitution that mentions secularism in the preamble. The Liberhan Commission has said that they were

among the 68 who were "culpable" in taking the country to the brink of "communal discord."

Not only that. The three leaders acted against the Supreme Court's order "not to disturb the status quo." In other words, they made a mockery of the country's judiciary and the constitution to which they swore before assuming power. And they ruled for six years without a tug of conscience.

The question is not only legal but also moral. How can the planned demolition be squared up with the holding of office by Vajpayee, Advani and Joshi? This is a matter that the nation should have debated to find an answer. Those who have no clean hands should not be allowed to defile the temple of Parliament.

Meanwhile, Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has been making efforts for mediation among the stakeholders. During his recent visit to Ayodhya, the spiritual guru has said that the problem could be solved through dialogue and mutual respect rather than "conceit and accusation." Even UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath, whom the guru had met, agreed to provide all necessary support.

The spiritual guru's meeting with the UP chief minister came in the backdrop of BJP launching its civil poll campaign from Ayodhya with promises of redevelopment. However, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, an arm of the RSS, and the Muslims Personal Law Board has rejected Sri Sri's offer to mediate on the issue. The feeling within the BJP leadership is that the decision be best left to the Supreme Court, which is slated to hear the case on December 5.

"Ram temple matter is in the Supreme Court and I think we should let the legal process be complete. Other discussions can be held after that," said Ram Madhav, BJP's National General Secretary. Similarly, the VHP also voiced its concerns over the Art of Living founder trying to resolve the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

"This is not for the first time that Sri Sri has taken this initiative. In 2001, he made attempts but failed. The reaction to his efforts was the same as today," VHP joint general secretary Surendra Jain had said. The real hitch is the statement by Bhagwat that only the temple would come up in Ayodhya and nothing else. When Muslims have, by and large, come to accept that the temple could be built by the side of the mosque, the RSS chief's lament is unwarranted.

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Moody's Upgrades India's Sovereign Rating: What Does it Really Mean?

Neeraj Jain

On November 17, 2017, international rating agency Moody's on Friday upgraded India's sovereign bond rating by two notches to Baa2 Stable from its lowest investment grade Baa3 Positive. This was the first ratings upgrade by Moody's for India since 2004.

Let us first explain these ratings, before going ahead with our analysis. The various ratings of Moody's are: Aaa, Aa, A, Baa, Ba, B, Caa, Ca, C. Aaa is the highest rating, and it means 'Highest quality, lowest risk.' C is the lowest, defined as 'Typically in default, with little possibility of recovery of principal and interest'. The category Baa that Moody's has given to India means 'Medium grade, moderate credit risk, speculative characteristics'. Attached to all these categories are one of three numeric codes 1, 2 and 3, which stand for stand for 'high', 'medium' and 'low' respectively. And attached to each numeric code are one of the three categories: Positive, Stable and Weak. Thus, when Moody's upgraded India's rating from Baa3 Positive to Baa2 Stable, it is an upgradation by two notches: Baa3 Positive to Baa2 Weak to Baa2 Stable.

What does this upgradation mean? It basically means that Moody's has given the thumbs up for foreign investors to increase their investments in India. Why? According to newspaper reports, Moody's cited the BJP government's 'wide-ranging program of economic

and institutional reforms' for this ratings upgrade. These include:

- its efforts to reduce corruption, formalise economic activity and improve tax collection and administration, including through demonetisation and GST
- its efforts to reduce its expenditures, including through measures like targeted delivery of benefits through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system
- measures such as Aadhaar
- the measures taken by it to address non-performing loans in the banking system
- the fast pace of growth in incomes etc.

It further added that if the government took steps to further reduce its expenditures, and implemented key pending reforms, including land and labour reforms, that would help India further upgrade its sovereign rating.¹

This news made the headlines in almost all newspapers. Finance Minister Jaitley immediately termed this as a "belated recognition of all the positive steps taken in India in last few years." He went on to say, "it is a recognition and an endorsement of the reform process that has gone on in India particularly in last 3-4 years where a number of structural reforms have taken place

which has placed India on a path of high trajectory growth. It's also a recognition of the fact that India continues to follow a path of fiscal prudence that has brought stability to the Indian economy." He further added: "If you look at the big picture for three years in a row India is the fastest growing amongst the major economies. India is one of the few economies undertaking structural reforms. I'm sure that many who had doubts in their minds about India's reform process would now seriously introspect on their own positions itself."

The PMO tweeted "Moody's believes that the @narendramodi Government's reforms will improve business climate, enhance productivity, stimulate foreign and domestic investment, and ultimately foster strong and sustainable growth."²

This upgrade giving a thumbs up to the performance of the economy comes at a strange time, just when all the economic indicators show that the economy is performing terribly, with no signs of improvement in the near future. A few statistics.

India: External Accounts

Our external accounts were never in a worse state:

1. Our external debt crossed \$485 billion in June 2017, making India one of the world's most indebted countries.³ The Indian

economy has become totally dependent on foreign capital inflows, including both foreign direct investment inflows and speculative capital inflows, to stay afloat. All the glib talk about our large foreign exchange reserves is meaningless; as we have shown elsewhere, our foreign exchange reserves are much less than our 'vulnerable external liabilities' (foreign capital that has come into the country that can leave the country very quickly).⁴ This means that if foreign investors decide to pull out their money from India—which they can do at the tap of a computer key—our foreign exchange reserves are simply insufficient to prevent the economy from once again plunging into foreign exchange bankruptcy, similar to what happened in 1990-91.

2. In financial year 2017-18, our external accounts situation is getting worse. During the first quarter of this year, India's current account deficit (CAD) rose to a four-year high of \$14.3 billion. Our trade deficit for the first six months of this year zoomed by a whopping 166% to \$43.8 billion as compared to \$16.5 billion in April-September 2016.⁵

Economy Heading Into Recession

1. The economy is slowing down. Official data show that the India's GDP or gross domestic product slowed down to 5.7% on a year-on-year basis during the April-June quarter of 2017-18. More significantly, this was the sixth consecutive quarter for which the GDP growth has slowed down. It had touched a high of 9.1% in January-March 2016 quarter. After that it has continuously slowed down, to 7.9%, 7.5%, 7.0% and 6.1% in

the subsequent quarters, to 5.7% in Q1 of 2017-18.⁶

2. One may argue that even this growth rate of 5.7% is not bad, but in all probability, even this is a huge overestimate. That is because this quarterly data is largely based on data provided by the corporate sector and some other organised sectors of the economy. It does not include data from the unorganised sectors of the economy, which contributes to 45% of the GDP. This sector was hit hard by demonetisation and now the government decision to roll-in GST. While there are no official surveys that capture the extent to which this sector was hit by demonetisation, private surveys indicate that that this sector was badly affected, by as much as 60-80%. It also led to a huge increase in unemployment, as more than 92% of our workforce is employed in the unorganised sector. Basing himself on data provided by these private surveys, the noted economist Prof. Arun Kumar argues that it is possible that the GDP growth rate has actually fallen to way below 5.7%, and in all probability is near-zero.⁷

3. The drastic slowdown in the economy is also indicated by the collapse in credit off-take. Low credit off-take suggests that production and investment has slowed down. Credit off-take was already at a whopping six-decade low of 5.08 per cent during the financial year 2016-17. It in fact turned negative in July and August 2017, something that has never happened before.⁸

4. The Index of Industrial Production, a measure of India's factory output, turned negative (-0.1%) in June 2017, the first time it has happened in the past four years. The IIP growth for the first

quarter of 2018 (April-June) was only 2%, the lowest in the past eight quarters.⁹

5. The Modi Government has waived bank loans given to the rich in record amounts. It has written off bank loans to corporate houses and the rich to the tune of a mind-boggling Rs 1.87 lakh crore during its three years in power. On top of it, has also restructured loans to the rich whose total amount may even be more than this loan write-off figure.¹⁰ And yet, Indian bank's bad loans climbed to an astounding Rs 9.5 lakh crore by the end of June 2017.¹¹

Those were broad economic indicators. So far as the people are concerned, the situation has never been more worse:

Terrible Unemployment Situation

1. The overwhelming number of jobs in the economy, nearly 93%, continue to be in the informal sector, characterised by low wages, no job security and no social security benefits. And this has been so for the past more than two decades. The Planning Commission admits that during the decade 2000-10, the economy created no formal jobs, in fact the total number of formal sector jobs actually declined in absolute terms!¹²

2. The actual employment situation is far worse than suggested by the above figures, as economy is simply not creating jobs for all the new entrants into the job market, even in the informal sector. Total number of people entering the job market is estimated to be 13 million per year.¹³ Official figures indicate that barely 40% of the new entrants

into the job market are getting jobs. Barely 85.8 million got jobs during the period 1993-94 to 2009-10.¹⁴

3. This situation has further worsened under Modi rule. The quarterly surveys carried out by the Labour Bureau of selected labour intensive organised sectors finds that employment generation in 2016 had fallen to just 25% of the jobs generated during 2009-11.¹⁵ A more recent study says that there was an absolute decline in employment during the first two years of the Modi Government (2014-16), possibly the first time this has happened since independence.¹⁶

Appalling Poverty Levels

India's poverty levels are appalling. The Government of India claims that that poverty levels in the country have fallen from 37.2 percent in 2004–05 to 29.8 percent in 2009–10, and then within two years to 21.9% in 2011-12!¹⁷ A closer look reveals their trickery: the Planning Commission has deliberately lowered India's poverty line to the shamelessly low level of Rs 27.2 per day in rural areas and Rs 33.3 per day in urban areas (for 2011-12).¹⁸ In other words, our poverty line does not measure poverty, but destitution. Basing herself on the original definition of poverty line accepted by India's Planning Commission in the 1970s, wherein all people unable to access 2200 / 2100 calories per day in rural / urban areas are considered poor, the noted economist Utsa Patnaik has made estimates of the number of people in the country who are living below this poverty line using data from the NSSO surveys of 2004–05 and 2009–10. Her estimates show that:

- In 2004–05, the percentage of people in rural India unable to access 2,200 calories was 69.5 percent; this percentage had gone up to an appalling 75.5 percent in 2009–10!
- 64.5 percent of the urban population was unable to reach 2,100 calories energy intake in 2004–05; this figure too had gone up to 73 percent in 2009–10!¹⁹

To most people fed on a daily diet of media propaganda that India is rapidly growing and is an emerging superpower, these figures would appear to be an exaggeration. But these distressing figures are borne out by other surveys too:

a. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), established in 2004, estimated that 77 percent Indians lived below Rs 20 a day. This figure is in fact more than Utsa Patnaik's estimates for poverty in 2004–05.²⁰

b. India is one of the world's worst performing countries in providing its citizens two square meals a day. The Global Hunger Index, a report published by the International Food Policy Research Institute, ranked India at 100 out of 119 countries in its latest report released in 2017.²¹

c. Data from the National Family Health Survey–4 (2015–16) show that 38.4 percent of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition, because of which their growth is stunted (low height for age).²²

Analysing Moody's Upgradation of the Indian Economy

If the economy is in such terrible state, then why is Moody's praising the Modi Government and has upgraded India's rating?

The truth is, Moody's is not at all concerned about the state of Indian economy, it has not upgraded India's rating because it is doing well - which it is not, as all the above facts testify. The real reason why Moody's has given the thumbs up to Modi Government's economic policies is because it is continuing with the policies of globalisation–liberalisation–privatisation that have been implemented in the country for the last more than two decades. These policies are being implemented at the behest of the governments of the developed countries led by the USA, and the international financial institutions controlled by them, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (or IMF). The reason why successive Indian Government's at the Centre have been dutifully implementing their dictates since 1991 is because of our huge foreign debt, which under the Modi Government has now topped \$485 billion. (Discussing this issue in greater detail is beyond the scope of this article.)²³ The objective of these economic reforms is to remould the Indian economy and allow big corporations—both foreign and Indian—to acquire decisive control over it so that they can maximise their profits.

This can be easily understand by taking a look at Modi's policy of demonetisation that has been praised by Moody's. No one who knows anything about economics will praise demonetisation. Yet, Moody's praises the Modi Government for this, saying that it was a serious effort to reduce corruption and formalise economic

activity. As we have discussed elsewhere,²⁴ demonetisation was not an attack on corruption, that is just a lot of hot air. Where Moody's is right is in stating that it was a serious effort to formalise the economy. Demonetisation was indeed an attack on India's vast informal sector. The three biggest components of India's vast unorganised or informal sector are:

- i. Agricultural sector, on which 53% of the population depend for their livelihoods;
- ii. Small-scale or unorganised retail sector, which accounts for around 9% of total employment;
- iii. Small-scale or unorganised manufacturing sector, which accounts for 7.5% of total employment.

Why does Moody's want the government of India to attack this vitally important sector that provides 93% of the employment in the country and contributes nearly 50% of the GDP. The reason is, the big corporations stand to benefit. The foreign and big Indian corporations are interested in destroying India's informal sector and corporatising the Indian economy because it will give a further boost to their profits. Thus, for example, the big shopping malls will obviously want to destroy India's small scale retail sector so that all Indians will be forced to go to the malls to buy their needs. Likewise, agribusiness corporations want to destroy India's small farmers so that they can take over their lands and corporatise Indian agriculture. India's informal sector was already struggling for survival under the neoliberal economic reforms being implemented in the country since 1991 in the name of globalisation.

Now, in the name of demonetisation and cashless economy, the Modi Government has launched yet another offensive to further cripple it. No wonder that Moody's is full of praise for it.

The unfortunate truth is, Modi-Jaitley are implementing the World Bank dictated neoliberal policies at an even faster pace than the previous UPA Government. This is the real reason for Moody's upgrading India's sovereign rating. We give a few more examples.

1. In 2015-16, the new BJP government twice announced huge liberalisation of foreign direct investment (FDI) rules for foreign investors, and proudly declared that these reforms have made the country the most open in the world. It has gone to the extent of permitting FDI even in defence. It does not matter to Moody's that the more the FDI inflows, the more the profit outflows, which push the economic into deeper external debt crisis.

2. Ever since India began globalisation in 1991, foreign financial corporations have been demanding that the Indian Government end its control over the country's financial sector, in other words, privatise it, and allow foreign investors to enter and take it over. The BJP Government has taken several steps in this direction, including getting the Insurance Laws Amendment Bill passed by Parliament to increase FDI inflows into the insurance sector, and setting up the Banking Boards Bureau as an important step towards eventual privatisation of the banking sector, and gradually privatising the pension funds. That these steps will endanger the lakhs of crores of rupees of savings of the people that are deposited in these

public sector financial institutions, and will be devastating for the Indian economy in the long run, is of no consequence for Moody's; all that matters is the present profits of foreign investors.²⁵

3. The Modi Government is diligently implementing yet another policy demanded by India's foreign investors, that it reduce the fiscal deficit. Now, for an economy like India, a high fiscal deficit is actually good for the economy. The theory, that high levels of fiscal deficit relative to GDP will adversely impact growth, is humbug. John Maynard Keynes, one of the greatest economists of the 20th century, had debunked it long ago. He had argued that in an economy where there is poverty and unemployment, the government can, and in fact should, expand public works and generate employment by borrowing, that is, enlarging the fiscal deficit; such government expenditure would also stimulate private expenditure through the 'multiplier' effect. All developed countries, when faced with recessionary conditions, have implemented Keynesian economic principles and resorted to high levels of public spending and high fiscal deficits.²⁶ Then why do Moody's and the big foreign investors want the Indian Government to reduce its fiscal deficit?

Well, the truth is, they are not really concerned about the fiscal deficit. This can be explained by a simple argument. The fiscal deficit is the excess of the government's expenditures over receipts. Even a cursory look at the policies being pursued by the Government of India reveals that it is giving away lakh of crore of rupees as subsidies to the rich. Why don't Moody's and the foreign corporations demand that

the government reduce these huge give-aways and thereby reduce the fiscal deficit? But in the new economic lexicon of these foreign scoundrels, these concessions are called 'incentives' and are considered essential for 'growth'. Note that Moody's has no problems with the government writing off bad loans of public sector banks, it in fact has praised this. Then why are they pressing the Government of India to reduce its fiscal deficit? The real reason is: they want the Indian Government to reduce the concessions being given to the poor, which are aimed at making available essential welfare services like education, health, food, transport, electricity, etc. to them at affordable rates. They give these concessions are given the derisive name 'subsidies', and are demanding that these be drastically reduced in the name of containing the fiscal deficit. As the quality of these services deteriorates, that gives the government the excuse to privatise them, resulting in fabulous profits for the private sector.

- This is precisely why Moody's praises the government's efforts to implement Direct Benefit Transfer. This, together with Aadhaar, is nothing but a step to reduce government food subsidies and gradually wind up the public distribution system. It will lead to a huge increase in food prices, as the PDS was an important measure to check hoarding of foodgrains and speculation in food prices, and will spell absolute disaster for the millions of impoverished people in the country.²⁷

To conclude, the upgradation of India's sovereign rating by Moody's is not an indicator of how well the Indian economy is doing for the

people, but is an indicator of how well the economy is doing for profit maximisation of giant foreign and Indian corporations. India is on SALE, and the foreign investors and their ratings agencies are celebrating.

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Press Release

Farmers Freedom from Debt Bill

On 20th November, the Kisan Mukti Sansad began in New Delhi, as a culmination of the Kisan Mukti Yatra of more than 10 thousand kilometers by All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee in 19 states. Lakhs of farmers participated in Kisan Mukti Sansad. Since morning, thousands of farmers started marching with flags and sloganeering from Ramlila grounds, Ambedkar Bhavan, Gurudwara Rakabganj and different railway stations to reach Kisan Mukti Sansad at Parliament Street. The Sansad started with paying tribute to the farmers martyred in Mandsaur and other police firings, to farmers who had committed suicide and to farmers of Yavatmal, who died due to pesticide poisoning.

V. M. Singh, convener of AIKSCC, welcomed the farmers and said farming had become a loss making activity which was beneficial before. That’s why we are reminding the Prime Minister of this country about his promises of farm loan waiver and assurance of doubling farmer’s income. All the previous farm loans must be waived off. PM has to fulfill his promises when farmers showed faith in him during elections. After that Medha Patkar, leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan and National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM), chaired the

Neeraj Jain, “Modi Government and India’s Food Security”, Janata Weekly, Mumbai, <http://janataweekly.org>.

assembly of 545 women of families of farmers who had committed suicide and many other women farmers. Kavita Kurungati, a woman farmer, and convener of Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) put forward the issues of women farmers in detail and emphasized on the need of passing the bill for loan waiver and ensuring prices of farm produce at least raise to 1.5 times of the input cost.

It was shocking to hear the stories shared by women of the bereaved families. They felt for the first time that someone was listening to their grievances and were hopeful that no other family will face the consequences, which they had suffered due to farmer’s suicide. Farmers will not commit suicide but will resist now for their demands, asserted by them.

While addressing the women’s parliament, Medha Patkar said that this is a historic moment when women from all over the country have gathered for their parliament and not only they are discussing their issues but also putting forward the bill to Kisan Mukti Sansad, aimed at bettering lives of farmers, peasants, farm workers, adivasis, landless, tenant farmers, fishworkers. She said that Govt. have displaced more than 10 crores farmers from all over

the country including farmers of Narmada Valley without complete rehabilitation. Putting forward the need of alternative development policy, she declared the current policy disastrous for farmers, workers and others. We want development for all, not disaster. Women farmers raised their hands and approved the bill.

Hannan Mollah, president of AIKS, presented the Farmer's Freedom From Debt Bill, 2017 and the former MP, and Raju Shetty, MP and president of Swabhimani Shetkaari Sangathan, supported the कृषि उपज लाभकारी मूल्य गारंटी बिल.

Amidst applause, Convener, V M Singh felicitated Raju Shetty for joining AIKSCC leaving the ruling alliance of Maharashtra Government and contributing significantly to farmer's movement of Maharashtra, and former MLA Amra Ram for contributing significantly to farmer's movements of Rajasthan.

Hannan Mollah said that Government has looted the farmers by paying them less continuously and forced them into debt. This in turn caused the suicide of more than 5 lakh farmers in the country. Farmers will not allow this exploitation now. AIKSCC will not allow the Government to loot the farmers anymore, especially when governments are giving easy concessions to corporates. He also said that farmer's organizations from all over the country have consistently demanded for loan waiver but we are not only demanding but also presenting the bill for the Parliament to discuss and approve. Now, any small loan waivers cannot work for farmers, we need a comprehensive bill to ensure freedom from debt cycle for farmers.

MP Raju Shetty said that we would not spare anyone found cheating farmers. We, the farmers, had the capability to overturn the ruling government three years ago. No political party would have got clear mandate in the parliament. It is only because of farmer's support, Narendra Modi was able to come with clear majority on the promise of raising farmer's policies to minimum 1.5 times of the cost. We will not sit down quietly now. Raju Shetty said that the date of Kisan Mukti Sansad was decided in such a way that we would be able to raise our voices both inside and outside the Parliament. But the Prime Minister fled. He was afraid to face the Parliament and the farmers from all across the country, he added.

Yogendra Yadav, leader of Jai Kisan Andolan and Swaraj Abhiyan declared the Kisan Mukti Sansad a milestone in the history of farmers' movements while addressing the crowd. This is the first time when farmers bearing red and green flags have come together and it has become a rainbow when yellow and blue flag bearers also joined. Farmers have faced a lot of betrayal before from politicians and the governments but this is not going to happen anymore.

While addressing the farmer's rally, Atul Kumar Anjan, National President of AIKS, said that corporates are looking towards corporatization of farming, and marking seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc. He said that the narrative propagated by the Government and few economists about less production due to small and medium farm size is totally false. 54% of wheat production and 57% rice are being produced from these small and medium farms only.

Rajaram Singh, president of Akhil Bhartiya Kisan Mahasabha and former MLA, said that Government is continuously persuing running anti farmers policies in the country, giving profits to corporates and loss to farmers. The number of deaths due to hunger are increasing in BJP ruled states. Due to which, we farmers and workers will claim and demand for rights together otherwise we will not allow the government to run.

Butta Singh Burjgil, Secretary of Bhartiya Kisan Union (Dakaunda), said that the Congress party promised to waive off the farmers loan in their manifesto but after a long struggle by our organizations, the committee formed in the chairmanship of Dr. Haq only waived off crop loan of farmers having less than 5 acres of land and aggregated crop loan including the principal amount and interests together, less than Rs 2 lakhs. That too it is being kept for only those farmers who have taken loan from cooperatives which results into less than 10% of farmers indebted in Punjab from farm loans. This is again causing distress among farmers and pushing them towards suicide.

V. Venkat Ramiyaa, secretary of AIKMS, said that Government promised to double the income of farmers whereas they are actually keeping the support prices lower than the actual cost. Nine crops among 17 are kept lower than the CASP production cost. Central Government is not implementing their promise of doubling the farmer's income and due to this farmers will only fall into debt trap. Thus we are demanding comprehensive loan waiver. Government says that economy of the country will weaken due to farmer's loan waiver which is

completely wrong when the government itself providing lakhs of crores of rupees of subsidy to corporates.

Pratibha Shinde, secretary of Lok Sangharsh Morcha, said that thousands of farmers from the home state of Narendra Modi, that is Gujarat have arrived to put forward the struggle of farmers against the anti farmers policy of the state. The same BJP Government in Maharashtra announced for farm loan waiver but none have benefitted even after issuing certificates by Government of Maharashtra. This clearly exposes the anti farmer character of the state. Three Lakh farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra till now.

Kodahally Chandrashekhar, secretary of Karnataka Rajya Raiyat Sangh, said that the government policy is anti farmer and in favour of corporates. Seeds, fertilizers and pesticides produced by the corporates are very costly. Government never tried to control their prices and asks farmers to buy products by mortgaging their lands. The prices of diesel in India is 58 rupees whereas they are only 49 rupees and 41 rupees respectively in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Foreign companies are being called to buy farm produces at low prices by the governments.

Dr. Sunilam, executive secretary of Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, national convener of National Alliance of People's Movements, and former MLA, said that Prime Minister promised to double the farmer's income but due to GST and Demonetisation, already the farmer's income are on decline. In the last three years, public sector loans have increased to 10.65 crores

from 8.11 lakh crores. This is happening contrastingly when the farmers have raised the production of fruits, vegetables, and crops by one and a half times to 534 crore tons in the last decade. The central government is finishing farmers and villages by imposing Modani Model on them. Whoever challenges the government, they are killed in police firings as happened in Multai, Mandsaur and other places. He also said that farmers were on the forefront in India's independence struggle. Now again, 184 farmer's organizations have united for historic struggle which can be seen as a formation of new energy and hope among the farmers of this country.

During the Kisan Mukti Sansad, people demanded unconditional and immediate release of Akhil Gogoi, leader of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, who has been imprisoned for one year under the sedition charges under National Security Act. People called this murder of democracy and dissent. The farmer organizations coming from different parts of country have declared that they will form committees in their states and fight for the release of Akhil Gogoi.

Representatives from 184 farmer's organizations from 25 states expressed their views in Kisan Mukti Sansad. Satyan, Ashish Mittal, Rampal Jat, Avik Saha, Kiran, Sachin Ghade (Lok Sangharsh Morcha), Shetkari Sabha, K Putnaiyaa, KRSSMLA, Chukki Nanjul, Swami Shivappa, Vednata (KMSS, Assam), former MP Shekh Abdur Rehman (J&K), Prof. Prakash Prfile, Dr. A. K. Khan (Kisan Sangharsh Samiti), Adv. Aradhana Bhargava, Dilip Patidar (Mandsaur), Parmanand Patidar, Bhanuja (Raiyat Swaraj Vedike),

Soma, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch were among them.

Dr. Sunilam, Pratibha Shinde, Kavita Kurungati, Dr. Darshan Pal, Ashish Mittal, Prem Singh Gehlavat, and Avik Saha (convener of Jai Kisan Andolan) moderated the Kisan Mukti Sansad.

—Kisan Mukti Sansad

Books by Surendra Mohan

1. **Vikas Ka Rasta: Nai Arthik Neetiyon ka vishleshan..** Price 600 rupees.
2. **Samajwad, Dharma Nirapekshata aur Samajik Nyaya** Reissued as second edition; Price 500 rupees
3. **Vartaman Rajneeti ki Jwalant Chunaution.** Price 400 rupees.
4. **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia ki Neetiyon:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

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Om Saraf lives and dies ‘unconventionally’

Suresh Chander

Shri Om Prakash Saraf was a man of extraordinary sensitivity and human wisdom, a bridge between various regions of state of Jammu and Kashmir, including Pakistan administered Kashmir.

Doyen of journalism Om Saraf on Saturday breathed his last here after a brief illness. He was 95. As per his wish, his mortal remains were donated to Government Medical College Jammu for research, and he desired not to hold any rituals after his death.

Born on May 3, 1920, he started his journalistic career at a young age of 18 as joint Editor of Rattan (1938-47) and Ranbir (1942-50). Even Munshi Prem Chand contributed to Rattan, a children’s magazine. Ranbir was banned by Sheikh Abdullah for its independent policy notwithstanding the fact that Om Saraf was one of the founding members of the National Conference.

Many National Conference members along with Om Saraf, from Jammu, were expelled by Sheikh Abdullah when they were part of the emergency administration in 1947 after Maharaja handed over power to Sheikh Abdullah. It did not deter Omji to side with Sheikh Abdullah after his arrest in 1953.

It was his conviction of making the section of pro-Pak Muslims in the State to give up their fanaticism. He engaged with them throughout his active life. It was due to his efforts that a would be administrator

of failed infiltration in 1965 in valley realised that violence is no solution to local problems and left the country for good.

It was this conviction that he founded Praja Socialist Party in 1954 in Jammu and Kashmir and was elected as its first Chairman. The PSP had members from both sides of the Pir Panjal and attracted a large number of young students and others among them, to name only a few, former CJI Adarsh Sen Anand, DD Thakur, ex Governor and Dy. Chief Minister of J&K under Sheikh Abdullah, ex DG Police SS Wazir. In his own words:

Our contention had been that the presence of a pro-India opposition as against a pro-India Government will always be helpful to the cause of people of Kashmir as much as for Indian democracy. Let not every Kashmiri who is anti-Government be labeled as anti-State. The need for it further increased when the communal, reactionary elements in the Valley and in Jammu succeeded, as it appeared, in creating a gulf between the people and the forces really working for the accession of the State with India. Let not the Government party alone become the monopoly of pro-India elements. The failure of the one-party State experiment to check the communal and reactionary forces should have opened our eyes.

It speaks volumes of his foresight and follies of the central government. Had the forces represented by PSP not been crushed, the narrative of

Kashmir would have been different. This was intolerance at its worst that too during Nehru’s regime. It is sad that Nehru, a great upholder of democratic values, allowed it to happen

His 1962 election as a candidate of the Praja Socialist Party, his proposer and seconder were abducted on the night of filing nomination, from Srinagar’s Amirakadal constituency is still talked about in serious and knowledgeable political circles as one man’s attempt to fight corrupt, brutal and unscrupulous political power.

It is amazing that a man with no official or political position could command the respect and affection of public figures and bureaucrats across the socio-political spectrum from Leh to Lakhapur. They looked to him more for affection than for guidance. His home in Srinagar had no locks, anybody could come and stay without any formal permission. He had differences with RSS brand of ideology and surprised me when a prominent leader of Jan Sangh came in early morning to collect a memorandum or a resolution which he had asked Om Saraf to rewrite. This speaks volumes of his integrity and respect of his political opponents.

He was personally known to most of Presidents, Prime Ministers, senior bureaucrats including Judges in Pakistan administered Kashmir. In his demise, a vital link between various regions of Jammu and Kashmir has been lost.

At the personal level, he had a legion of admirers. He treated everybody as his equal and became member of their families. One could discuss anything with him whether it was the existence

of God or necessity to say thank you or not. He never imposed his own viewpoint but encouraged others to articulate their views. Om Saraf had a rare quality of seeing only positive qualities of others,

never once he talked ill or negative qualities of others. Always spoke of their virtues.

He was a sort of modern Rishi. With him an era has ended.

Birth of the PSP in Kashmir

Om Saraf

Shri Om Prakash Saraf, founder Chairman of PSP in Jammu and Kashmir in 1954, passed away on November 25, 2017 at the age 95+. The best tribute to him is in his own words on Birth of P.S.P. in Kashmir. He wrote this article in 1959 and is of relevance even today. - Suresh Chander

The problem of emotional and spiritual integration of the Jammu and Kashmir State with the Indian Union is undoubtedly one of the few vital problems confronting the nation ever since independence. That we, of the Praja Socialist Party in Jammu and Kashmir, as part and parcel of an all-India party, stand for it was in fact the main reason for our setting up a Party unit five years ago. Ours remains so far, the only organization in the State which is bound by the ideology and constitution of an Indian party.

All along since 1947, it had been and perhaps still continues to be the policy of the Government of India not to encourage the formation of any secular, democratic opposition in the State. They have always advised us to restrict our struggle within the National Conference. On the other hand, the National Conference, which had been our united front till 1947 was, in our view, no longer a fit instrument for bringing about the necessary social change. Like the Indian Socialists who left the Indian National Congress, the Socialists in Jammu and Kashmir left the

National Conference. First, separate parties came into being in Jammu and Srinagar; and later, these merged to form the PSP in the State in November, 1954.

Our contention had been that the presence of a pro-India opposition as against a pro-India Government will always be helpful to the cause of people of Kashmir as much as for Indian democracy. Let not every Kashmiri who is anti-Government be labeled as anti-State. The need for it further increased when the communal, reactionary elements in the Valley and in Jammu succeeded, as it appeared, in creating a gulf between the people and the forces really working for the accession of the State with India. Let not the Government party alone become the monopoly of pro-India elements. The failure of the one-party State experiment to check the communal and reactionary forces should have opened our eyes.

That it did not and does not is our grievance. Asoka Mehta, who

inaugurated our Party unit, was beaten in broad daylight in an open street and some other leaders met with the same fate. It had been the privilege of our State Party executive that all of its members had been assaulted by the ruling party goondas at one place or other at different times. The saddest part of it all was to be dubbed by Prime Minister Nehru himself in the course of his speeches in Parliament in 1955, first as a Hindu communal body and, then after some weeks, as a Muslim communal body. Obviously he had been misinformed by interested authorities. At both times I failed to get an opportunity to bring to his notice personally the right perspective. I, however, had once an occasion to explain my case to Dhebarbhai, the then Congress chief, on the eve of his visit to Srinagar. It was, nevertheless, a hopeless experience.

I can well understand unqualified support the Congress leaders gave to the National Conference at the party level but the common national cause will not be served if every opposition to the State is dubbed by

the Government of India, and even the Indian National Congress, as hostile to India. The absence of a powerful progressive opposition, perhaps more than anything else, was responsible for giving a new lease of life to narrow regional forces represented by the Praja Parishad in Jammu and the Political Conference in 1953. Prime Minister Nehru's uncharitable attacks on the Kashmir PSP, soon after its inception, had actually resulted in popular anti-Government sentiments being exploited full by the regional elements.

Unfortunately Hindus and Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir are broadly separated regionally and linguistically also. This triple communal, linguistic and regional division is probably the greatest hindrance in the way of establishing cordial relations between the people of Jammu and Kashmir themselves. It equally affects the relationship of Kashmir with the rest of India. In such a situation I feel it is imperative for leaders of the ruling party in India to tolerate at least, if not

encourage, the functioning of a healthy democratic socialist opposition throughout the State. Also, unless the State Government chooses to behave like a healthy democratic Government permitting an opposition to function in the State, it will continue to be responsible for communal, regional and linguistic rivalries endangering the very integrity of the State and the relationship between India and Kashmir. You may have to doubtfully look at "irrevocable accession" and then resort to "finalise" it over and over again.

It will be wrong to shut our eyes to a number of pro-Pakistan Muslims who will always be there, so long as Pakistan is there to whip up sentiments and some Hindus are there to react to it in an aggressive manner. No doubt, Prime Minister Nehru has ruled out the possibility of a plebiscite in the State in the existing context of the world situation which obviously, however, is not in our hands entirely; yet, the need for an Indo-Pak agreement on Kashmir will be there, always. I do not know

to what extent the people of Kashmir will be ultimately required to play a useful part in any agreement with Pakistan. But in pursuance of India's role that it is seeking to play today, quite rightly, in the world politics, a policy of respecting the local wishes is as conducive to the cause of amity between India and Pakistan at present as it will surely be in the future for an amicable settlement of outstanding disputes between the two countries.

I leave it to the Government of India to frame its Kashmir policy. But speaking as a public worker, I believe I will have done some service to the cause of peace, democracy and socialism if I, as a PSP worker, succeed in making a section of pro-Pak Muslims in the State give up their fanaticism and instead desire genuine India-Pak friendship and in convincing Indians that those who oppose the Bakshi regime are not all pro-Pakistanis or constitute a danger to the security of the State. I am pretty certain Bakshi's policy of "gun or gold" has done more harm than good to India.

Freedom Of Speech For Whom - II

Some constitutional and philosophical underpinnings

Justice B.Sudershan Reddy

Asserting that "[C]ivil and political rights and socio-economic rights do not exist in a state of antagonism", Justice Chandrachud went on to elucidate some of the consequences of perpetrating epistemic injustices upon the citizenry: (i) Subversion of political freedoms making the task of ensuring the optimal allocation of social and economic welfare more

difficult; (ii) Rent seeking behaviour (or corruption) enabling capture of social welfare benefits by those not eligible to receive them; and (iii) "*Opacity necessarily being conducive for monopolization of scarce resources. He went on to state:*

"On the other hand, conditions where civil and political freedoms

flourish ensure that governmental policies are subjected to critique and assessment. It is this scrutiny which sub-serves the purpose of ensuring that socio-economic benefits actually permeate to the under-privileged for whom they are meant. Conditions of freedom and a vibrant assertion of civil and political rights promote a constant review of the justness of socio-economic programmes and of

their effectiveness in addressing deprivation and want. Scrutiny of public affairs is founded upon the existence of freedom.”¹

Justice Chandrachud also recognized great merit in the work of Prof. Amartya Sen – one of the greatest scholars that this nation-state has produced.² Prof. Sen’s work on famines, and the realization that no famines have ever been reported in democracies, led to a great realization: the watchful eye of the citizenry, combined with the competition for their political affections, ensures that the elites and those who are manning the levers of power, do not ignore the signals of great calamities like famines. In that sense, the condition of freedom itself becomes a mark of development – because the innate autonomy of the citizen and necessity of agency of the citizen in having a say in working of the levers of power are essential to the citizen herself being in a position to demand respect for her innate human dignity; and protect herself against misdirection of the collective power away from ensuring the maintenance of the core content of human dignity of human beings. The implication is clear:

Epistemic injustices, in which the citizens are denied both the information about the happenings with their elected government, as well as non-communication of their dissent or approval to the elected government could lead to great tragedies. Democracy, as a system of government by the people, would be undermined if the rights to information, rights to freely speak and right to be heard are denied to them.

I am, I submit, a bit perplexed as to why public intellectuals,

professionals in the press and the broader media, have not commented more about the nature of the submissions made to the Supreme Court that fundamental rights, such as right to privacy and human dignity, are less relevant to the poor and the illiterate and that they are essentially elitist concepts. I am actually positively shocked to hear that, in certain regions of our country, at least as reported in the media, government servants have been asked to take photographs of men and women defecating in the fields to “shame them”. The gap between what the Supreme Court asserts as essential to “human dignity” and the manner in which administrative officers treat citizens could not be more flagrant. How could it not be, when we have individuals who are wielding constitutional powers are reported as claiming that “mid day meals” have rendered schools as places to eat and not to learn. And yet the implications of such actions – to the notions of human dignity being entertained within the portals of governance and the contempt that the poor and the illiterate, the marginalized and the lowered castes are subject to – have not yet become a cause for much greater and sustained scrutiny and critique by the media and the public intellectuals who fancy themselves as being capable of forming public opinion. The “right to be informed”, and the “right to be heard”, as a part of condition of epistemic justice, and their violation as denigration of human dignity needs to be unpacked a bit more.

Arguing that while we have managed to overcome the limitations of extreme poverty and the shackles of ignorance in sustaining the project of constitutional democracy, Professor Amartya Sen argues that

we seem to have had greater difficulty in constructing spheres of reasoned, and reasonable debates, so that tolerance can inform us with regard to the opinions of others and description of the conditions of others. Let us take the last point up – the condition of others.

According to Sen, while we may justifiably congratulate ourselves for sustaining formal institutions of democracy, we ought not to be satisfied with just that. He argues that we also ought to be able to pursue the critical analysis of what we have achieved, through our collective action via the State, by way of material, cultural and socio-psychological developments for our people. This immediately places in focus the issues regarding what development (or what developments) have been achieved in the nearly seventy years of the working of a constitutional democracy, especially for those at the bottom of the socio-economic totem pole. And we will have to readily admit that the results here are, however charitable we might be, rather mixed, and as Professor Sen points out, this may be a case of not quite an immeasurable failure as of “measurable underachievement”.

In the middle of 1940s, Babasaheb Ambedkar also noted – after surveying the rubble of World War 2 – that liberal parliamentary democracies tend to become fascist, and while achieving some modest economic gains might end up legitimating, on a much wider scale and with greater intensity, the dehumanization of those who have been subjected, historically, to unconscionable social and economic injustices and deprivations. In his speech on the occasion of ratification of the Constitution, Dr Ambedkar

drew a very vivid contradiction between the grant of political freedom, based on notions of political equality, and the conditions of graded and unconscionable inequality, in the social and economic sphere. His worry was two-fold: (a) that graded social and economic inequalities would imply, in real terms, the inability of the weak, the marginalized, the lowered castes and those pushed into ignorance, to protect their political freedoms; and (b) that the institutions of political democracy could be destroyed, either by the masses and/or in combination with the elites who eviscerate the normative content of institutions of constitutional democracy.

Yet, notwithstanding his deep and intimate understanding of the extent of discrimination and dehumanization that Dalits had been subjected to, Dr Ambedkar had posited a condition that could make the elites and the ones commandeering for themselves most of the fruit of social action much more empathetic towards their fellow citizens. He believed that a move towards a humanist oriented society, in which citizens are allowed to identify with, and feel an empathetic resonance with fellow human beings – recognition of the essential equality and oneness with each other – might lay the foundation for a more secure social democratic polity. The Directive Principles of State Policy, in Part IV of the Constitution, and in particular the emphasis in Article 38 and Article 39 – the former demanding instantiation of social justice in all institutions of national importance and walks of life, and the latter demanding that the State establish a welfare state, in which economic forces and common resources are not concentrated in the hands of the

few to the detriment of common good – were expected to undergird the scrutiny of how the society and economy are constructed and used to deliver the benefits of social action. Those principles were to provide the foundations for our empathetic resonance for fellow citizens, and inform our voices with an urgency to eliminate the conditions that dehumanize a vast majority.

Over the past few decades, much of the elite discourse has acted as if the Directive Principles of State Policy do not exist. We seem to have constructed an era of “I, Me, Mine”, in which “laissez faire free markets” on a global scale are supposed to be the only legitimate institutions, and the philosophy of “greed is good” being the only worthwhile value to pursue. If we were to critically evaluate the dominant content of our discourses, at least of the voices that have captured the ears of the political elites, all that the poor and the marginalized require are meagre benefits that might “trickle down” to them as the “animal spirits” of predatory capitalists are left free to indulge in rapine, plunder and loot. At best, some of the more recent statements by certain individuals, who maybe presumed to be very important opinion makers in the broad camp of a particular ideological regime, have even claimed that: (a) the State does not have any responsibility to modulate the economy to ensure the creation of jobs; and even more shockingly, that (b) the very concept of welfare is alien to Indian ethos and culture, and that such concepts were introduced into India by the foreigners, specifically British. When I read these reports I was

left scratching my head as to whether these gentlemen occupying important positions, official and unofficial and with apparently influential voices – as either ideological mentors or professional advisers – in policy making, have even read the Constitution of India in general, the text of Directive Principles of State Policy in particular and much of our constitutional gloss that India, as a nation-state, was established to instantiate, progressively, a welfare state in which human dignity will be protected.

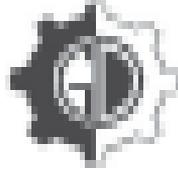
What is even more shocking is that few commentators, in the media and in public discourse, have sought to critically analyse and debunk such claims and propositions. On second thoughts, that should not really be shocking, isn't it? After all, in the rush to be a part of the global elite, riding on cultural assuredness of the few that was built on the demolition of the human dignity of the many, hasn't it been a long time since we spoke about “welfare of the people” as the primordial reason to be of the nation-state? In the trickle down model, how could it possibly be? When the welfare of the people, who are being left behind in illiteracy, squalor, bad health, want, poverty and still subject to unconscionable levels of discrimination, is to only be what leaks through to them, because the ones at the top have allowed benefits of social action to seep down, or have missed preventing it from seeping down, then human dignity is no longer an a-priori goal. And in degradation of its ontological status we would have effectively degraded our national commitments.

(To be concluded)

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