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Women Representation in Parliament and States Legislatures

Rajindar Sachar

Rahul Gandhi in his latest interview has emphasised that the first priority would be to give representation to women in Parliament. Similar determination has also been echoed the by BJP. But the reality on this subject belies the promises made by both the parties.

Sushma Swaraj, usually a calm politician, was so upset that she spontaneously blurted out 'I will shave my head if a foreigner Sonia Gandhi becomes Prime Minister of India'. Luckily, Sonia Gandhi saved this embarrassment to Swaraj by intelligently and strategically thrusting Manmohan Singh (though a loyalist to the core of the Gandhi family, but on merit of his own), as Prime Minister in 2004, notwithstanding the protest from scores of Gandhi family loyalists.

Switch to March 2010 and you see a happy embrace by Sonia Gandhi and Sushma Swaraj in the precincts of Parliament. What happened in the interim for such close bonhomie?

It was the passing of the Women's

Reservation Bill in the Rajya Sabha. The bill's journey began on September 12, 1996, when it was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the United Front Government of Deve Gowda. The bill called for reserving 33% of the seats in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies for women. As per the draft, the seats were to be reserved for women on a rotation basis and would be determined by draw of lots, in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections.

Everyone expected the legislation to be passed immediately. The bill, however, failed to get the approval of the house then and was instead referred to a joint parliamentary committee. The committee submitted its report to the Lok Sabha two months later. But nothing further happened. After I.K. Gujral became the Prime Minister in April 1997, he promised that it would be his topmost priority to pass this Bill. But again nothing concrete happened.

During Vajpayee's premiership, the bill was reintroduced in

Parliament in 1998. The Congress and the Left were heard openly pledging support for the Bill; therefore, had it been put to vote, it would have easily passed; but it was not done and the bill was allowed to lapse. The NDA Government again introduced the bill in 1999, 2002 and 2003, but never put it to vote.

When the UPA government came to power in 2004, it announced that the Act would be its first priority. But instead one had total silence on the Bill in the President's speech on the opening day of the Parliamentary session. This was an open and clear notice to women activists that the Bill, which had been so proudly projected as a commitment to gender equality, had been quietly buried, and was not likely to be revived in the conceivable future.

In 2008, the Manmohan Singh led UPA Government introduced the bill in the Rajya Sabha. After two years, the Rajya Sabha passed the bill on 9 March 2010. It was this event that made Sushma Swaraj and Sonia Gandhi embrace so emotionally. However, the Lok Sabha never voted on the Bill. The Bill lapsed after the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014.

Every time from 1998 to 2014, whenever Parliament met, women representatives were assured in all solemnity by each major political party that it hoped to pass the Bill in that very session. In reality, this was a tongue-in-cheek operation.

That is why one feels that women should support the alternative of double-member constituencies which will meet both the requirement of ensuring one-third quota for women

and, at the same time, will not disturb the present male seats.

Thus, Lok Sabha membership can be easily increased to 750, with a provision that one woman candidate will mandatorily be elected from those double-member constituencies, and, depending upon the votes received, it may be that even both elected candidate could be women. This law was laid down by the Supreme Court decades ago in former President V.V. Giri's case. The same principle will apply in the case of elections to the state legislatures.

Space in Parliament is not a problem. Shivraj Patil, once Union Home Minister, is on record admitting that space is not a problem if Parliament decides to increase the number of seats.

The alternative of double member constituencies can be done by amending Article 81(2) of the Constitution by increasing the present strength, which can be easily done if political parties are genuine in their commitment to the Bill.

I know the Delimitation Commission has already marked the constituencies on the basis of single member seats. But I do not think it is necessary to redraw the constituencies to make it double.

By a rule of thumb the top one third of the constituencies having the maximum voters in each state could be declared double-member. If the legislators are sincerely genuine they could even submit an agreed list.

At present, of course, a fresh process has again to be initiated in Parliament, because the previous

Reservation Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the previous Lok Sabha in 2014.

In the just finished election held propaganda in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat not one party, including the so-called seculars, with the exception of the Socialist Party (India), included the item of reservation for women in their election manifestos. Can such male chauvinism be allowed to exist in our country?

With the 2019 Parliamentary elections coming, is it not time for the women leadership in both the Congress and BJP to jointly clench their fists and warn all the parties that they will no longer tolerate injustice and neglect to continue? They may legitimately continue their differences on other subjects in the light of their own respective programmes, but at least on this issue they should unite. Let them give a rallying cry against the male chauvinists, like the one given by Spanish freedom fighters in the 1936 Civil War, '*no pasaran*, you shall not pass'—no more of continuing this injustice of not passing the Women's Reservation Bill, otherwise we shall join hands and will fight unitedly and openly. They should also request Mamata Banerjee and Mayawati to join hands with them on the issue of Women's Reservation Bill.

Let me recall that Dr Ram Manohar Lohia had opined that reservation for women was an instrument of social engineering—he could never have suggested splitting the strength of women's quota by further splitting them in sub-quotas.

Time is short. Only an effort by all the women will see through the Women's Reservation Bill.

Time for the Intelligentsia to Reflect on its Support to the BJP

Sandeep Pandey

It has been over three and a half years since Narendra Modi's Bhartiya Janata Party came to power at the centre in India. It was the favourite party of the educated middle class, especially upper caste people. People had high expectations. It was hoped that caste based politics will end and corruption will be curbed. Politics of nationalism also held an appeal for the youth. It was believed that nation would become strong by bringing back the glory of past. Narendra Modi was going to be the hero of such a resurgent India.

What has changed in this period? In addition to routine crimes and reasons for death of people like farmers' suicides or malnourishment related deaths, several new issues have come to seriously affect the nation. Now, if a person is suspected of having consumed beef, is seen carrying cattles for whatever purpose, decides to enter into an inter-caste or inter-religious marital alliance, especially the marriage of a Muslim boy with a Hindu girl, holds a contrarian point of view to that of Hindutva, defecates outside as there is no toilet at home, refuses to raise the slogans *bharat mata ki jai*, *vande matram* or *jai shree ram*, there is good possibility that he could be beaten up by some gang of lumpen elements claiming to represent one of the several Hindutva organisations that have sprung up, or may even get killed by assailants coming on motorcycles. India is not the same inclusive country as it was before 2014 when it was considered to represent a

culture of unity in diversity. Its dominant religion Hinduism was considered a religion of tolerance. Now it has come to symbolise an assertive, arrogant religion ready to produce violent reaction at the slightest provocation, either real or made up. In the name of going back to a glorious past, it is legitimising a mob culture of executing summary punishment to anyone perceived guilty. Worst aspect of this is the studied silence of top BJP leadership on these crimes.

The quality of educational institutions which was not very good to begin with is being further compromised by appointment of mediocre people with no independent thinking. Bhartiya Janata Party is supposed to represent the interests of the educated class, but it is a major contradiction that educational qualifications of some of its top leaders like Narendra Modi, Smriti Irani and Manohar Lal Khattar are suspect. It is not clear whether they have obtained their degrees in a genuine manner.

In spite of making numerous trips abroad, India's international standing has suffered because the unilateral focus of our Prime Minister was to isolate Pakistan at international fora by raising the bogey of terrorism. The world views Pakistan not as a perpetrator but as victim of terrorism. Most of India's neighbours—Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Myanmar—have moved closer to China and entered into long term partnerships with it. From the perspective of these

smaller countries, India has been found to be non-trustworthy compared to China. What can be a bigger failure of India's foreign policy than this?

Demonetisation was not honest. Even bigger denomination notes of Rs 2000 were soon brought into circulation, thus defeating the very purpose of checking corruption by making it inconvenient to carry large cash. All those who had black money as cash were able to regularise it, and so very little was eliminated. No serious effort has been made by the government to check those who have hoarded their black incomes as wealth. Sustenance of electoral politics on black money is an important source of corruption in this country but not a single office of any major political party or politician was raided. Similarly no industrialists or other big hoarders of black wealth were touched. Narendra Modi seems to have helped the corrupt. The honest suffered as their income dropped and they had to stand in long queues. In any case Narendra Modi has been discovered to be more of a buddy of Adani and Ambani than that of common people.

Goods and Services Tax was implemented as if something akin to independence of the country was taking place. Midnight Parliament was called. The fact that both after implementation of demonetisation and GST, the government had to frequently modify its decisions shows that not enough thought was put behind them. Both these decisions broke the backbone of the

economy. A large number of businesses closed shop. Hence instead of creating jobs as every government is expected to do, the Modi Government took them away. It is a good example of how the government has been operating far removed from reality.

Soon after Modi became the PM, every Member of Parliament was required to choose one village in his/her constituency and make efforts to develop it and showcase it as model of development. Smart cities were identified for further development. Even if we leave aside the problems with the 'Smart City' model, it has all turned out to be mere propaganda. Nothing special has happened in any of the chosen villages and cities. Even assuming that these chosen cities had indeed developed, what about the villages and cities which were left out? Is this the way a government goes about developing the nation – by doling out largesse to a chosen few?

BJP government has taken a decision to sell Air India. It is not averse to even a foreign carrier buying it. Indian Railways may be the next in line. This government has not created any asset worth the name, but is ready to sell things created by past governments of whom it is very critical. The test of any government is its ability to turn around things rather than take the easy option out.

Narendra Modi dedicated the Sardar Sarovar dam built by previous governments to the nation on his birthday without addressing the problem of people displaced due to the dam and the protests held by Medha Patkar prior to and on the day of the inauguration at a different location. Similarly, the Chief Minister

of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chouhan did the parikrama of Narmada with much fanfare, without even once inquiring about the displaced from the various dams built on the Narmada.

CM of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath's priority seems to be building of a temple in Ayodhya rather than looking into the issue of children dying from Japanese encephalitis in the Baba Raghav Das Medical College and Hospital very close to his Gorakhnath Math. He has publicly declared that 'secularism' is the biggest lie in the Indian Constitution.

Rather than provide alternative to the politics of caste, the BJP seems to have provoked the worst feelings

of caste and religion among people. Hate crimes based on religion, and caste based groups protesting the screening of *Padmavati* have further made people conscious of the boundaries of segregation in society. The Dalits and backwards at least have a reason to mobilise on caste lines —to fight the discrimination against them. But under the BJP rule, the upper caste groups are also mobilising and indulging in mindless acts some of which are turning violent. It is sickening to see people associated with the 'peaceful' religion of Hinduism derive vicarious pleasure watching or hearing about these violent incidents. The whole world is watching with horror India's transformation to a hypocritical nation.

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Remembering Kakori Martyrs on their 90th Death Anniversary

Bharat Dogra

In December 2017 the nation is observing the 90th death anniversary of four martyrs of the Kakori case which is regarded as an important event of our freedom movement. All four of them were hanged to death between December 17 to 20, 1927. These four freedom fighters, renowned for their great courage and firm resolve, were Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Rajendra Nath Lahiri and Roshan Singh.

Ramprasad and Ashfaqullah have also won widespread acclaim for their poetry. Some of their poetry was widely used in the freedom struggle. Both of them were very good friends, always willing to undergo great hardships to help each other.

The legendary friendship of Ashfaqullah Khan and Ramprasad Bismil has become a symbol of communal harmony. Just before their martyrdom both of them issued statements calling for Hindu-Muslim unity. Bismil in fact said that this is his last will that Hindi-Muslim unity should be established. Similarly Ashfaqullah appealed to Hindus and Muslims to avoid quarrels and work unitedly for the sake of their country.

All the four martyrs conducted themselves with exemplary courage in the middle of great difficulties after their arrest. They remain a source of inspiration right up to this day and will continue to be so for a very long time.

Sonia Gandhi kept the Congress Party United

Kuldip Nayar

In the rumble-tumble of election, the role of Congress president Sonia Gandhi has not been recognized. No doubt, the contest was between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi but the real rivalry was between the Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). And here Sonia Gandhi was relevant.

All pollsters predicted victory for the BJP in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. And this has come true. The Congress won 80 seats and BJP 99. There has been no surprise except the margin of victory. What has been noted is the improvement in the Congress tally. The party which has been in the wilderness in the last few years has come to be relevant again. The gap between the two has narrowed. It looks that Rahul Gandhi will give Prime Minister Narendra Modi a meaningful fight. The credit for this should go to Sonia Gandhi, who once again put life into the party.

I vividly remember the scene in the Central Hall of Parliament after she won the general election in 2004. Members unanimously wanted her to head the government. But she was reluctant to do so. Probably, in her mind was the pernicious propaganda that she hailed from Italy. On her part, she was conscious that the tag of being Italian might adversely affect her son, Rahul.

She deliberately put Dr. Manmohan Singh in the chair of Prime Ministership because he had no politics and no ambition. His

tenure of Prime Ministership for ten years was eventless. Important files of Government of India would go to her place for processing and then to Manmohan Singh for mere signatures. Her political adviser Ahmad Patel took all the decisions. Sanjaya Baru, Media Advisor confirms this in his book "The Accidental Prime Minister".

Sonia Gandhi knew the charge which was made against her. But if she had to keep the seat warm for her son, Rahul Gandhi, there was no other way. Manmohan Singh does not, however, accept the allegation. Even when asked to comment on the criticism, he merely said: Posterity will judge.

True, today's Congress party has the stamp of her mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi. But Sonia Gandhi 'is the one who kept the party united. Otherwise it would have split into many groups. To her credit, she had come to be recognized by all the groups as the leader in the party. She was, in fact, the meeting point for all the segments. There was no challenge to her in the party.

The ease with which she has put her son, Rahul Gandhi in her seat shows that she is in fact the party. Rahul is conscious of dynastic charge. He has said openly that there should be a better way to select a person for Congress presidentship. In any case, the dynastic rule ends with Rahul Gandhi.

The problem with the Congress

party today is that it has not gone beyond the dynastic dependence. And, somehow, the people are not enamoured of the dynasty anymore. Rahul Gandhi doesn't sell although he passionately and honestly pursues the Congress principles laid down by his great grandfather Nehru. Priyanka, Sonia Gandhi's daughter, goes down well with the masses. This is probably because she reminds them of Indira Gandhi, who still enjoys pre-eminence in their thoughts.

All this are true, yet the Congress has lost its relevance and the party has to work hard to make people believe that it can provide an alternative. Prime Minister Modi is still acceptable in spite of the steps like demonetization of currency. People believe that it was all for their good even though they have to face inconvenience.

It is a long haul for the Congress to push out the BJP from power. The biggest problem is that secularism is not a concept as attractive as it used to be once. The people themselves have been influenced by Hindutva thoughts. In fact, there is a soft-Hindutva in the country today. How to resell the idea of India, that is democratic and secular polity, is the arduous task which the Congress is facing today.

That may influence the parliamentary election in 2019 and give direction to the country, including the Congress. The party's problem is that it has not won any

election since Modi has come into power. In Gujrat BJP has been able to retain power. This should worry the secular, liberal forces. The BJP is entrenching itself and the Congress loosing the importance in once had.

During the election, Rahul Gandhi went all over the country and faced the crowds all by himself. Sonia Gandhi was not there. This means that the people have accepted Rahul

Gandhi as a representative of the Congress. He too has gained confidence and addresses the people as if he has arrived. Sonia Gandhi can congratulate herself that when she put her in the *gaddi* of president, there was general acceptance. True, the badge of dynasty was there but the decision did not look dictatorial. Rahul Gandhi had worked with the party's cadre. He went to many places in the country where he sat on the ground with the ordinary

members to discuss the challenges that the party faced.

Rahul may not have faced privations which the party men do. But he has got the feel of the values that the party has preserved for the last 150 years. This will stand him in good stead when he directs the Congress as its president. It is an arduous journey but he will have to cover it if he has to make the top.

Why the Honduras Crisis Matters to Me

Rick Sterling

For seven months in 1969, I hitchhiked around the US, Mexico and Central America with my best friend from high school. Some class-mates from our school in Vancouver Canada saved their money and travelled to Europe or Australia, but Ollie and I headed south. It was an eye-opening experience for two middle-class Canadians. We had a lot of learning experiences in the US, but today I want to talk about Honduras because it is in crisis as I write this: the Honduran election took place on 26 November 2017, yet the results are still in contention. Will the current right-wing government manage to retain power?

When we visited the capital Tegucigalpa in 1969, we went to the university campus to meet and hang out with young Hondurans. They told us about the recent visit of President Richard Nixon who had taken office a few months before and then travelled to Latin America. The Vietnam war was still raging in 1969, and people protested against the war and Nixon wherever he went. The young Hondurans told us that when

Nixon visited Tegucigalpa, there had been a massive protest. Several students who had been protesting from the top of a university building had been shot dead. It made an impression as did the warm and friendly people we met, some living in shacks along the banks of the Choluteca River running through the capital.

In Nicaragua, we heard more eye-opening stories from the youth there. They told us about the Somoza family dictatorship, how corrupt it was, and how they came to power through US Marines. They also told us about the death of Cesar Sandino who fought for Nicaraguan independence but was killed by Somoza's National Guard in 1934. The Nicaraguan youth told us that when the US asked for proof of Sandino's death, Somoza shipped Sandino's head in a box to Washington.

Those and many other experiences changed my life. Over the coming decades, I kept an interest in Central America.

In 1979, when Nicaraguans overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, it seemed like a good thing. But President Ronald Reagan did not like an independent Nicaragua. Violating international law, the US organised a mercenary army called the "Contras" to destabilise and upend the Sandinista government. The mercenaries were trained in Honduras with US funding, supplies and weapons. The US Ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, oversaw the mercenary army attacking Nicaragua and the emergence of death squads in El Salvador. Tens of thousands of peasants and opposition activists were killed with impunity. In Honduras itself, there was widespread repression and murder of those challenging the status quo.

In 1998 Honduras was hit by Hurricane Mitch. The second worst Atlantic hurricane ever recorded caused huge destruction and death, especially in poor communities with weak infrastructure. The shacks and modest dwellings along the river bank in Tegucigalpa were all ripped

and washed away. Over 7,000 Hondurans died, including people we had met three decades before.

Six years later, in 2004, I was again reminded of the US role in Honduras when the same John Negroponte who had overseen the Contra operations went to Baghdad to take over management of the Iraq occupation. *Newsweek* magazine said he was going with a new strategy, which they dubbed the 'Salvador option'. Over the next year, sectarian death squads emerged to provoke sectarian bloodshed. Negroponte's right-hand man in Iraq, Robert S. Ford, was later appointed as US Ambassador to Syria in 2010 where he helped fuel the uprisings in that country. Thus there is a direct connection between US interference and aggression in Central America and the Middle East.

For decades Honduras was alternately ruled by two political parties representing different branches of their oligarchy. They traded power back and forth, efficiently preventing alternative perspectives.

But things began to change in Honduras in 2006. President Manuel Zelaya came from the oligarchy but started to initiate changes benefiting the poor. He called for real land reform, raised the minimum wage and questioned the need for US military bases. That was too much. In June 2009 President Zelaya was kidnapped in the middle of the night and flown from the capital to the US military airbase called Soto Cano, only 48 miles away. Hillary Clinton had been in Honduras just weeks before. She disapproved of Zelaya and his policies. The coup went ahead.

After the 2009 coup, conditions in Honduras deteriorated rapidly. Tegucigalpa became the homicide capital of the world. Tens of thousands of youth fled the country as it was wracked by drug wars, corruption, and police or paramilitary repression. Alongside this, there was widespread popular resistance.

In 2011, I returned to Honduras to see the conditions first hand. With a delegation organised by Alliance for Global Justice and Task Force on the Americas, I visited peasants in the fertile Aguan Valley, indigenous communities in the mountains and workers and church activists in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. We talked with a hard-working activist named Berta Caceres and others in her indigenous organization COPINH. We learned that these communities were still actively resisting the coup and forming a new political party to challenge the right wing coup government not with guns but with votes. In 2015 Berta Caceres was recognised internationally with a prestigious award, yet she was murdered in her home last year.

In 2013 I returned again to Honduras, this time as an election observer. In the contest, the new LIBRE party surpassed the traditional Liberal Party and made a strong challenge to the right-wing National Party. There were many examples of election malfeasance, but Juan Orlando Hernandez of the right-wing National Party was anointed as the new President.

Since then, social and economic conditions have not changed. The Hernandez regime governs to the benefit of rich Hondurans and international corporations. He has a strong military alliance with the US

military and is very friendly with President Trump's Chief of Staff General Kelly.

That has set the stage for the most recent events. Days before the election *The Economist* ran an article describing a National Party training session in cheating techniques. The election was held on Sunday, 26 November. On election night, with 57% of the votes counted, the opposition challenger was ahead by over 5%. Then strange things began to happen. The election commission stopped updating the vote tally for 36 hours. On Monday, the head of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said 6,000 tally sheets were still missing from different polling places. A few hours later, he said they were missing 7500 tally sheets. When counting resumed on Tuesday, suddenly the existing President Hernandez started gaining votes, cutting the opposition lead and then winning. It all looks very fishy, even to the OAS monitors.

The situation is rapidly coming to a head. At this moment, it is not known what will happen. Initially, the opposition demanded a full and complete review of all the 18,000 tally sheets. Now they are calling for the annulment of the election and a new election under international supervision.

The Honduran government is either stonewalling or is paralysed. Hundreds of thousands of Hondurans have protested in the streets, with over twelve protesters killed. In a dramatic change, the elite paramilitary COBRA security forces have started to refuse orders, saying their job is not to repress their own communities.

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No Country for Women- Love and Rights in Troubled Times

Neha Dabhade

Recently in Rajsamand, Rajasthan, one Shambul Raigar brutally hacked Mohammad Afzarul, a migrant from Malda, West Bengal to death with his own tools and set fire to his body. This ghastly act was captured on camera by Raigar's 14 year old nephew who then circulated the video on social media. Raigar on the video justified his act by arguing that he was "saving" Hindu women from love jihad and similar consequences would follow for Muslim men if they indulged in 'Love Jihad' (Indian Express, 2017). Investigations found that the 48 year old victim hadn't married a Hindu girl. Though this brutal act foregrounds important questions regarding targeting of Muslims, spreading hatred against them and infringement of their rights with steadfast impunity, the act also necessitates discussion on so called 'Love Jihad' which has dominated the public discourse.

"Love Jihad" is a term coined by Hindu supremacists who allege that Muslim men "trap" Hindu women and convert them into Islam. Rajsamand case is not isolated in its bid to spread hatred against Muslims. There is a systematic campaign to malign and target the Muslim community under this campaign since a few years. Such targeting of any community is condemnable but there is also a need to locate women in this campaign and its implications on their rights and agency. The vitriolic campaign the Hindu supremacists would have us believe is to expose the libidinal vices of the Muslim men. What this smokescreen

really covers is the attitudinal violence which manifests in different forms – honour killings at the behest of Khap Panchayats, beating up of women in public spaces when seen with a man, portraying them to be objects of procreation with no agency of their own when they are asked to reproduce certain number of children for the 'nation'.

While literature on women's movement and communalism is replete with discourse of how women's bodies are sites of community honour during communal riots at the time of partition and subsequent riots and violence in order to dehumanize the 'other' community during communal violence, it is imperative to reiterate that violence against women is not limited to communal violence alone especially today when the trend of communal violence is changing. For example, there are no large scale riots where of substantial number of innocents from one community is targeted. Communal violence today relies more on creating a discourse which justifies targeting of a community and strengthening structures of inequality. The Hindu supremacists have deployed ways and strategies to subjugate women – not only women from 'other' community but women from their own community and perpetuate violence against them. This is achieved by imposing and naturalizing a discourse which draws boundaries around them restricting their liberties and controlling their choices. 'Love jihad' is one such way. 'Love jihad' is part of a larger

communalized discourse where women's agency is appropriated by fundamentalists and multiple patriarchies are reproduced in insidious ways. Today the Hindu supremacists with the tacit and sometimes overt support of the State are deepening unequal power structures and patriarchy through vicious campaigns and propaganda which they claim is to protect the Hindu women. All these campaigns strengthen their masculinized and exclusivist discourse which undermine women's liberties.

Two points are particularly important and worth emphasis. Though the right has always entrenched inequality and discrimination against women, what is so different now in campaigns like 'love jihad' or the broader narrative on women in India today? Firstly the legitimacy that this fabricated campaign is gaining owing to the judgments like Kerela judgments and very little or no condemnation by the State is having a normalizing effect on this appropriation of women's agencies and choices. Not only is there no condemnation, but the State takes no action against vigilantes and forms squads like 'anti Romeo squads' which have been given a free hand to indulge in moral policing. Though there has always been a bid to control women's bodies and the paranoia around their sexuality, such acts of controls were not institutionalized or form the dominant discourse enjoying legitimacy in that sense.

Secondly the structures of control

were more rigid in rural areas and some degree of loosening of this structure took place in the middle and upper middle class in urban areas where the women negotiated for their right to work, mobility and to some extent sexuality or choosing a partner (inter-caste marriages even today have severe consequences and honor killings are not limited to rural areas alone). Change was also largely due to the women's movement which challenged patriarchy and asserted women's liberties and equalities. But this limited space that was created is also threatened with this attempt to entrench traditional discriminatory gender norms by Hindu right wing politics. Right wing politics and fundamentalism naturalizes and sacralises the family and sexuality and secludes women from public sphere. Right wing politics manipulates women's issues which results in disempowering women. This trend is a definite setback to the women's movement. This marks a shift in discourse which was dominated with sexual violence against women during communal riots to everyday violence through different social structures when one tries to understand the impact of right politics on women.

The case of Hadiya is a case in point. Hadiya, earlier Akhila Ashokan is a 24 year old homeopathy student in Kerala. Her story sums up perfectly the issue at hand. She converted to Islam out of her own free will and married a man of her choice. However as pointed out by authors like Janaki Nair and others, different sections of the society completely infantilized her and her choices. The Kerala High Court annulled her marriage with Shafin Jahan, a Muslim man and gave her custody to her parents. Her

parents virtually kept her locked inside the house with Hadiya begging for her freedom and wanting to live with her husband. The Supreme Court allowed her to go to college and continue her education but appointed the principle of the college as her guardian as if she was a chattel and not an adult full citizen of the country! The case of her marriage will be heard later by the Supreme Court thus prolonging her agony and injustice. All this is abhorrent to the notion of full citizenship rights of a woman. An adult woman who is a citizen of India we would have liked to believe is entitled to exercise her fundamental rights of right to religion and right to life. They are violated with impunity though women activists have been protesting and demanding justice for Hadiya.

There is analytical literature available to understand how women gravitate towards the right wing politics and how women become perpetrators as well as victims of violence reproducing hyper masculinized nationalism and end up strengthening patriarchal structures. But not much is said about the power mechanism at work in campaigns like love jihad. Here the centrality of women's body in communalized discourse is the focus. The agenda is reclaiming Hindu women and mobilizing them against the Muslims in turn reproducing multiple patriarchies at different levels- police, judiciary, families, community. Women have to pitch their fight for liberties at all these levels making it all the more arduous for them. This is what makes such campaigns so detrimental to the rights of the women and lays down ideological underpinnings of Hindutva.

The control of women's bodily

autonomy and the policing of strict gender norms is a hallmark of fundamentalist ideology that transcends all religious and geographical boundaries. In Hitler's Germany, "Aryan women" were encouraged to have more children while even before the holocaust there were large scale sterilizations of Jewish women. In India for instance, a five day fair was organized the Hindu Spiritual and Service Foundation (HSSF) in Jaipur in November, 2017. Focus was to address issues like family and human values, women's honour, patriotism, environment, ecology and pollution. It's noteworthy that it was made compulsory from government schools to attend it by the Rajasthan government. At the fair, Bajrang Dal was freely distributing manuals on "love jihad" which detail the ways in which Muslim men supposedly trap Hindu women – "friendship in school, bike ride, hanging out in restaurants, chatting on mobile, addressing their parents with respect and blackmailing through obscene pictures". It also prescribes remedies and precautions to the 'affected' Hindu family – "frequently check the female's belongings, call and SMS details, warn the Muslim boy if found with a Hindu girl, call Muslims as disgusting/terrorist/smuggler/traitor/Pakistan supporter in front of females at home" (Jain, 2017). If one has to interpret this, outlining such ways don't only spew hatred against Muslims and but also undermines many decisions a woman is entitled to take as a free citizen of the country – whom to interact with/ make friends with, who to share public space with and ensuring public spaces are equally accessible to women, freedom to choose what kind of relationship they want to have with the opposite sex or even same sex! The Hindu

supremacists also seek to deepen their idea of a patriarchal family which rests on the hierarchies and authority where women are considered property and honor of the family. Thus any amount of control and restrictions are justified as seen in the case of Hadiya's parents and the reasoning of the Kerala High court.

'Beti Bachao Baholao' campaign by the Hindu Jagran Manch is a form of 'reverse love jihad'. In this case, encouragement is given to Hindu men to marry Muslim women by giving them social and financial security. The target is to get 2100 Muslim women into the 'Hindu' fold in six months. The group has initiated a campaign in Uttar Pradesh in 2016, "save Hindu girls" by distributing pamphlets openly to educate the girls and their families (Verma, 2017). This step is vicious and exposes the attitude of the Hindu supremacists which view women as commodities. This brings the focus back on the overt nature of such campaigns and points towards the support it has of the State. The state and the Hindu supremacists that it supports naturalize this control and oppression by garbing it under 'Indian culture' and revivalism of the 'glorious past'. It puts women's choice and control especially over their bodies in jeopardy. The recent rule by the Home ministry to ban condom ads from 6am and 10pm can be seen in the same context. While women's movement has been fighting for women's reproductive rights, the State is undermining the process by again portraying such ads as not according to culture and in effect undermining the liberty and choice of women.

As outlined above, Hindu supremacist and the state are placing

a formidable challenge before the women's movement in India and women's lives as a whole. Their status as free citizens is systematically undermined by a regressive discourse which is used also to fan communal tensions and stigmatizing vulnerable communities. It will be immensely timely if such campaigns can be seen in the larger framework of oppression of women and deepening of patriarchal structures. The location of women in national agenda has to be critically examined and debated by all sections of the society. The control on women's agency and liberties under the patronizing pretext of "saving" should not be allowed to be used for undermining their own rights and spreading hatred against other communities. Instead the State must be questioned and made accountable

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In less than four years, all the warnings given by those who understand the dangers posed by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the ideological parent of BJP, have come true. It is time the educated people and intellectuals who supported BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha election and in various states must reflect on

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Just as the 2009 coup in Honduras was a setback for all Latin America, the outcome of the current crisis will have consequences far beyond Honduras. The US foreign policy establishment clearly wants the continuation of the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Despite all the indications of electoral malfeasance and human rights abuses, the Trump Administration has praised the

for the policies which affect women's real issues like livelihoods, healthcare, education, equal laws etc. to ensure they truly are citizenship rights in reality and not just in the Constitution. It is not surprising that India fares poorly when it comes to human development indicators related to women even in comparison to countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Different sections of the society, which has uncritically internalized the need of control over women since they are portrayed as bearers of 'honour', must be made aware of the agenda of such campaigns. This means creating a different vocabulary of rights for women, a narrative which emphasizes on equality and nonviolence. Else women stand to lose the hard earned space and rights they have after struggling for so long.

what kind of country we want? The ideology which is responsible for Mahatma Gandhi's murder and demolition of Babri masjid, which invited the problem of terrorism to India, is undoing whatever progress India has made in the direction of a progressive modern nation based on Constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Hernandez government. Meanwhile, North American reporters, analysts and activists are doing what they can to support Honduran popular forces and stop the theft of the Honduran election. The coming days may be momentous. I have explained why it matters to me. But this is more important than a personal connection. It should matter to anyone concerned with progress, justice, respect and international law.

Courtesy : teleSUR News

Indian Struggles in 1917: on the eve of the Russian Revolution

Anil Nauriya

Seldom in history do things happen suddenly; they are often years in the making. It is known that during his South Africa years Mahatma Gandhi had corresponded with Leo Tolstoy, described by Lenin in 1908 as the mirror of the Russian Revolution. This correspondence was three or four years prior to Gandhi's last major agitation in South Africa, in which tens of thousands of Indian mine workers and plantation workers and other indentured workers struck work.

By the time the Russian Revolution took place in 1917, Gandhi had already been back in India for two years, barely a month before the death of one of two leading statesmen who had guided Gandhi's politics in his South African life, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The other, Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India, would pass away shortly in the midst of the coming struggle in Champaran, Bihar.

The Marxist Socialist Narendra Deva, a keen student of Lenin's life and writings, would observe that the Bolshevik Revolution placed the masses at the centre-stage of history for the first time.

In India, too, 1917 was a curtain-raiser to events two years later that would mark the beginning of mass involvement in the movement for freedom. As Gandhi's critic M N Roy acknowledged in his memoirs, Lenin looked upon Gandhi "as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement" and "a revolutionary".

But what is significant is that while 1917 saw Gandhi devising methods of struggle to bring about institutional changes that would also lead to self-government, or swaraj, each of the four struggles preceded the climax of the Russian Revolution was connected with the peasantry as well as labour.

The Indentured Ultimatum

One of Gandhi's earliest ultimatums to the Government was to end indentured emigration from India. Recruitment of indentured labour for South Africa's Natal province had ended in 1911, but continued for Fiji and some other places. In 1915, Viceroy Charles Hardinge had himself urged abolition, but the authorities in London were reluctant. They wanted the Colonies utilizing such labour "(to have) reasonable time to adjust themselves to the change", hoping to delay the inevitable as long as possible.

On February 26, 1917, Gandhi gave an ultimatum to end indentured recruitment by May 31, failing which he would advise a passive resistance struggle. If the request was not acceded to, he said, "all practical steps should be taken to prevent Indians from leaving the country for labour in Fiji." The pressure had its effect. Recruitment of indentured labour from India was stopped on March 12, 1917.

Champaran

His confidence in passive resistance strengthened, Gandhi now

turned his attention to the grievances of peasants in Champaran. By April 15, he had reached Bankipore, Patna and from there, later the same day set out for Motihari in Champaran district.

India and Russia were moving, almost step for step, even if they were to different beats. Gandhi's country was under colonial rule, while in independent Russia the Tsarist monarchy had abdicated more than a month ago. The day after Gandhi reached Champaran, Lenin, who had been in Switzerland till then, reached Petrograd, (now St Petersburg). On April 16, 1917, Gandhi sent instructions that his Kaiser-i-Hind medal be returned to the British regime; an order to leave the district, meanwhile, had been served on Gandhi and he had refused to obey. He had been arrested on his way to a village to inquire into the condition of indigo workers.

After struggles, surveys, and enquiries in the district, the Champaran Agrarian Act followed. The legislation abolished the Tinkathia system under which ryots had to set apart a certain proportion of their best land for the landlord's crops.

In retrospect, some historians have argued that the amendments then made did not go far enough. This somewhat Trotsky-like criticism may well be valid; yet the relevant question to ask would be what, if anything, the later Kisan Sabhas that emerged in Bihar in the decades before India's independence and

which are believed to have been active and radical, did to take the Champaran struggle forward.

Fact is, Champaran initiated a wider engagement of the national movement with peasant struggles. It did not come about entirely as a matter of chance. When Gandhi was still in South Africa in 1908 there had been indigo-related disturbances in Champaran. This had revived memories of similar struggles in some Bengal districts from the 1860s. On January 8, 1910, Gandhi's South African journal *Indian Opinion* had devoted its entire front page to an account from the Calcutta press on this 19th century struggle which referred to the courage and self-sacrifice of the indigo ryots of Bengal as being without parallel in the world. Gandhi's journal had described that struggle as "thrilling" and commented that passive resistance "can have no better illustration". It had thus become an inspiration for and vindication of the passive resistance then being conducted in South Africa.

Internments in the Home Rule agitation

In the year following Gandhi's return to India, two Home Rule Leagues had been founded by Annie Besant and BalGangadharTilak, respectively. In June 1917 Annie Besant and some of her associates were interned in Ootacamund. At this juncture Gandhi, who was in Motihari, Champaran, again advised passive resistance. In a letter at the end of June to J B Petit of Bombay, an early supporter from his South Africa days, Gandhi wrote: "The descent at the present moment upon the villages by you, Mr Jinnah and such other leaders cannot but end in arrests. This propaganda must be

carried on in spite of Government prohibition and to that extent it may be considered illegal but for a passive resister not unlawful. There are various other methods which I am unwilling to advise until passive resistance in its present form has soaked into us a bit."

There are two noteworthy features about Gandhi's advice to J B Petit from Champaran. Firstly: go to the villages. In this attempt to reach out to the peasantry, Gandhi seems to anticipate the later emphasis on the peasantry within international Marxism which would come with Dimitrov in Bulgaria and Mao in China; he was reflecting also an obvious compulsion of India's social formation of the time, in that the peasant-based population was overlaid with a further layer of a full-blown foreign colonialism.

In the two scenarios, Lenin had gravitated towards the workers and soldiers. Gandhi moved toward the peasantry, which was drawn to the national movement as never before. Secondly, there is in Gandhi's communication to Petit evidence of an attempt at some planning of the sequence of the moments of passive resistance.

There were countrywide protests against the internments leading to withdrawal of the orders against Annie Besant and her associates by September 1917.

The Social Struggles of 1917

Perhaps the most fascinating of the four major Indian struggles of 1917 was the one against untouchability and the way this was reflected in the political and social conferences held in Godhra, Gujarat, from November 3, 1917, some four

days before the climax of the Russian Revolution. The political conference was attended also by BalGangadharTilak, whose trial and sentence had been followed and commented on by Lenin in 1908.

Echoing the underlying message of the other struggles embarked on during the year, in his presidential address, Gandhi told the Political Conference on November 3, "We have to demand swaraj from our own people. Our appeal must be to them. When the peasantry of India understands what swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible."

He called for the entire law on indenture to be repealed: "It is no part of our duty to look to the convenience of the Colonies." The inter-religious question and the social inequalities prevailing in India had characteristics not known in many other countries, including Russia. Repeatedly, in 1917, Gandhi spoke for Hindu-Muslim accord. In the Godhra conferences he lashed out against the practice of untouchability. At least since September 1915, when he had taken in a Dalit and his family into his settlement in Ahmedabad and encountered some resistance over it, he had been considering "the efficacy of passive resistance in social questions" such that this would "embrace swaraj."

The Social Conference at Godhra, which was presided over by Gandhi, on November 5, 1917 included persons from the so-called untouchable communities and was attended by, among others, Abbas Tyabji and Vithalbhai Patel. "Do not suppose", Gandhi told his listeners, "that that community belongs to a lower status; let the fusion take place between you and that community,

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Jolt on Jerusalem

J. L. Jawahar

Zionists chose to settle in Palestine claiming it as the land given to them by God. Both before and after getting mandate over Palestine, Britain took upon itself all responsibility to ensure formation of the state of Israel. But even before the formation of Israel, they washed off their hands as Israel Jews were not faithful to them and also rebelled against their officers. The Jews got themselves declared as an independent sovereign state under the name Israel in 1948 and obtained recognition from the almighty government of the United States of America. Since then there was no President of America that dared to question whatever Israel did. The Muslim countries around Israel opened their eyes and tried to wage a war against Israel. But they failed miserably as there was no unity. There were many more unsuccessful attempts. It gave an excuse for Israel to occupy the land beyond its declared borders. Millions of the people were rendered refugees and they fled to neighboring countries. They live on the mercy of the United Nations Organisation in refugee camps for generations without any hope of returning to their homeland. The occupants declared generously that the land belongs to Palestine and they hold it only as a lever to force peace on the Palestinians.

But there is a powerful right wing within Israel who did not agree to cede any part of the occupied land under any circumstances as it all belongs to them as a gift given by God. The western powers are Christian nations and they believe in

the Holy Bible and did not think of questioning the validity of a spiritual sanction in a temporal world. The government of Israel faced a problem. They could have gladly accepted the demand to annex all the area of West Bank as part of Israel as demanded by the right wing. But the people there are mostly Muslims and they are more in number than all the Jews settled in Israel. If the area is annexed all of them would become citizens of Israel and it ceases to be a Jewish state. At the same time they could not surrender the area, as it is required to settle the Jews that are coming to Israel from other countries. As a solution they held the area under military rule without annexation, with all consequences of military occupation. That is, the local people are virtually under military occupation.

The rightists started occupying the West Bank area and construct settlements, initially without consent of their government, to make it difficult to surrender it at a later date. The government did not dare or not willing to question the settlements. In course of time a stage is reached where the government made it a policy to help the settlers by offering all help to construct settlements and protection of the army against harassment by the local people. Step by step, as time passed on, Israeli occupation of the West Bank area of Palestine has become a *fait accompli* and the world got habituated to it as if it is something natural.

It naturally creates friction with local people. But might is right. The local people are treated as if they are the occupants over the land belonging to Jews. Their houses are demolished and crops uprooted to make way for the settlements. Any form of resistance is met with disproportionate punishments and their life was made unbearable. The resistance is labelled as 'terrorism' with full support of America and all western powers so that they do not deserve any mercy or human consideration.

Some of the countries try to raise the issue in the Security Council to censure Israel for the inhuman treatment meted out to the Palestinians. But America was there to veto any such resolution. And there is no record to show that Israel ever showed any respect for international opinions. There was no need as long as American support is there. Anwar Sadat, the only Arab leader who dared to visit Israel for peace talks, declared that the trump cards for peace in the Middle East are in the hands of United States of America. It is a fact.

Jerusalem is the heart of Palestine. It is the holy place for all the religions of the Book – Christians, Jews and Muslims. Christians are not asking for a share in the city, for whatever reasons we do not know. Perhaps they are convinced they will not be objected whoever is in charge of the city. But both the Jews and Muslims want to possess the city particularly as it is the seat of holy centers. While occupying the

Western Bank Israel settled with the western part of Jerusalem leaving the Eastern part under the control of Jordan at that time. But the rightists in Israel declared that they would never leave the city again. They extended their hold to the Eastern part as well and declared the undivided city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Settlements are established within the city of Jerusalem and also around it.

It was not accepted by the foreign powers. The occupation of West Bank by Israel itself was under dispute. Taking the entire city of Jerusalem was considered serious violation of international law. None of the foreign powers agreed to shift their embassies to Jerusalem in spite of it being the capital city. They stayed with Tel Aviv where they settled earlier. Even America, that was in support of whatever Israel does, did not agree to shift their embassy. Perhaps they felt shy, as it would be an open support for defiance of international law.

Every now and then there will be an announcement that negotiations will be held between Israel and Palestinians. It is all a drama. None of them are serious about it. They do not stop construction of settlements at least during the negotiations. What could be the matters that could be discussed and settled by negotiations? Even when the negotiations start, Israel makes unilateral proposals and America supports it and prevails on Palestinian representatives to accept it. Naturally negotiations fail and the entire media shouts that Palestinians do not want peace. Any act of revolt is readily labelled 'terrorism' and condemned.

The Presidents of America

continue to support Israel out of internal compulsions. It makes no difference whether the President is a democrat or a republican. They know what they are doing is wrong. Now and then they grumble a bit louder and then shut their mouths. George W. Bush asked the then Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon to stop construction of settlements. He was told that constructions were not started with permission of America and they will not be stopped at their instance. That, in spite of the fact that Israel cannot thrive as a modern state without help from America. President Obama pleaded with Netanyahu, the present Prime Minister of Israel, to stop construction of new settlements and got a rebuff. He did not *tell* him; he pleaded. At the end of his regime he took the courage to see that America did not apply veto against a resolution of the Security Council censuring Israel. He did it only to embarrass his successor. Obama waited until the last hour of his tenure as President to release the grants for Palestinian Authority. Why did he wait till then? Is it a genuine intention? Naturally the successor, Donald Trump, stopped the flow of grants applying his prerogative. Even this outspoken successor states that "the construction of new settlements may not be helpful in achieving Israel-Palestinian peace." He did not tell them not to construct new settlements. He took care to see no mention is made of Palestine State. The signs are clear that the US will never prevail on Israel to stop construction of new settlements, leave alone telling them to vacate the settlements. Without support from US other nations or the UNO will not be able to do anything. Meanwhile Israel developed confidence even to defy America, their only supporter. The occupation

stays. Construction of settlements goes on uninterrupted. The land on the West Bank of Jordan River, meant for the so-called state of Palestine, gets nibbled gradually. Any delay in formation of the state of Palestine is in favour of Israel as they use the time to extend settlements and consolidate their hold on land by creating rights on land. It becomes part of Israel, *de facto* if not *de jure*. And who needs *de jure* possession when the *de facto* possession is not questioned by anyone?

That is the status quo. Now and then we hear that America is trying to bring peace by starting negotiations between Palestine and Israel authorities. They expect Palestine authorities to accept whatever Israel proposes. Naturally talks do not start. Palestinians are blamed. Meanwhile occupations go on increasing. Nobody raises any objection. And even if there is any objection Israel never had the habit of paying attention to that. They go on doing what they want. They have the support of the sole super power. Any delay in peace process is to the advantage of Israel as they can go on expanding settlements so that it would be more difficult to remove them. Palestine state has become a dream, a vain dream never possible to materialize. But every leader says that they want peace by establishing two states – Palestine by the side of Israel. In the heart of hearts they know pretty well that it is an impossibility in the present situation. Israel is entrenched so strongly on the West Bank, the land expected to be that of Palestine state, that it is impossible to root out them.

That is the situation when the President of United States, Donald Trump declared that he wants to

accept Jerusalem as the legal capital of the state of Israel and shift his embassy there. It caused such a commotion as if he is making a fresh declaration regarding occupation by Israel. The situation was the same for decades. Nothing was done to bring peace to the area of Middle East. Now that Trump has announced his recognition of Jerusalem as the *de jure* capital of Israel everybody starts shouting as if the possibility of two states is made

impossible by that. Palestinians led by Abbas were literally begging to settle peace by establishing the two states. Nobody did anything towards that end for decades. But everybody blames Trump for saying what he said. Whether good or bad, Trump says whatever he feels undiplomatically. In this case it has resulted in precipitating the problem so that the urgency to solve it is being felt. If those who are blaming Trump are really serious to solve the

problem and bring in the two state theory, this is the time for it. Pious statements do not serve any practical purpose. UNO is rendered ineffective by applying veto and there is no other organisation to represent international law. It is the law of jungle that is prevailing in the international field now. Might is right. Let them have the day. That reflects the civilisation of the civilised world in the twenty-first century.

Dharma Yajna at Banaras in 1943— A Shameful Affair

Chandra Bhal Tripathi

In a Facebook post on 8-12-2017 my friend Faisal Khan, National Convener, Khudai Khidmatgars, sarcastically referred to two slogans *Dharma ki jai ho* and *Adharma ka naash ho* in the context of the burning and killing of a Muslim labourer from Malda (WB) in Rajsamand District of Rajasthan. I wish to mention here another incident that I witnessed as a young boy where also these two slogans were raised, along with two others, *Praaniyon men sadbhavanaa ho* and *Vishwa ka kalyaan ho*. I was present at the Dharma Yajna on the banks of the Ganga at Varanasi in 1943 as a young curious boy when this jamboree was organised by Swami Karpatriji in the august presence of Maharaja Cossim Bazar, Dr M.S. Aney, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherji and Sri L.B. Bhopatkar (who later became President of All India Hindu Mahasabha), among others. This yajna was actually performed to pray for the victory of British forces against the Axis powers in the Second World War and was financed by the colonial British Government. It is during this yajna

that they gave these slogans. What is important is to remember that while hundreds of maunds of wheat, barley and ghee were being put to fire (swaahaa) in this yajna, the Bengal of these two worthies Maharaja of Cossim Bazar and Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherji was going through one of the greatest human tragedies—the terrible Bengal

famine of 1943 in which more than 40 million starved to death, mainly because of hoarding and blackmarketing by middle class Hindu traders who were incidentally the main financiers of the RSS during those days. Raising the slogan ‘Dharma ki jai ho’ while committing such an irreligious act —was it not blasphemy then too?

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and then you will be fit for swaraj.”

Two days after the extraordinary Social Conference held at Godhra, precisely a century ago, the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd and inaugurated the Russian Revolution that would affect the course of history by creating a state that became for more than 70 years a countervailing force to the old colonial powers.

Along with the forces of nationalism that swept across the world in the 20th century, the new countervailing power too contributed, even by its mere existence, to the

demise of colonialism. At the same time it also unleashed forces which both strengthened and through premature zeal, weakened the nationalist movements and sometimes even contributed to dividing them.

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