

janata

Vol. 73 No. 22

June 24, 2018

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An Apology Overdue

Kuldip Nayar

Certain dates are so important in a nation's history that they cannot be forgotten. One such is June 25, when Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, switched off the lights of democracy. Instead of resigning from her office after the Allahabad High Court verdict for a poll offence, she suspended the Constitution and committed the worst kind of excesses. One hundred thousand people were detained without trial and many were killed because they were staunch critics of Mrs Gandhi.

Belatedly at least, the Congress Party, which Mrs Gandhi once headed, should have regretted the imposition of a rule where there was no personal freedom and the press was gagged. It has never done so. The apology to the nation is long overdue. Congress President Rahul Gandhi can make no amends for what happened 43 years ago, yet he can at least tell the nation that both his grandmother and the party were wrong.

What happened during the emergency is an affront to the freedom fighters and the Constitution framers who considered the basic structure of the Constitution beyond amendment. But Mrs Gandhi, armed with a Presidential decree,

suspended elections and civil liberties. All her political opponents imprisoned during the period were tortured in prison and thousands were eliminated or banished. Several other atrocities, including forced mass-sterilisation of millions of people spearheaded by her son Sanjay Gandhi, were committed.

Justice J.C.Shah, a former Chief Justice of India who subsequently went into the excesses of emergency soon after the Janata Party under Morarji Desai came to power, had pointed out the atrocities committed against the people, including Mrs Gandhi's political opponents. The Shah Commission, constituted to go into the excesses committed during the Emergency, submitted its report in three parts, the last one on August 6, 1978. If the sheer size of the report—it had 26 chapters and three appendices running to over 530 pages—reflected the enormity of the violence done to democratic institutions and ethics, it also expressed grave concern about the happenings and the damage they had inflicted on the system. The Shah Commission report is a precious document with several lessons to be learnt.

Justice Shah discussed police

actions and the role of Sanjay Gandhi in the Turkman Gate incident in which the police fired on a crowd of people protesting against demolition of their houses. In fact, when Mrs Gandhi came to power in 1980, she tried to recall copies of the report wherever possible. So damaging was the report that she tried all her tricks but could not succeed. So she banned the report.

However, Era Sezhan, one of the founding members of the DMK and then an MP, republished his copy of the report in a book form called *Shah Commission Report – Lost and Regained*, in which he has rightly said: “It is more than an investigative report; it is a magnificent historical document to serve as a warning for those coming to power in the future not to disturb the basic structure of a functioning democracy and also, for those suppressed under a despotic rule, a hopeful guide to redeem the freedom by spirited struggle.”

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is in power at the Centre today. It suffered the most from the emergency, but it does not seem to have learnt the lesson which it should have. Mrs Indira Gandhi was overtaken by the mania of one-person rule. Today, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also riding the same horse at the command of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS). In fact, people today have started comparing the one-person rule of Mrs Gandhi with that of Modi’s. So much so that most newspapers and television channels have adapted themselves to his way of working, if not thinking, as they had done during Mrs Gandhi’s regime.

Veteran BJP leader L.K. Advani had remarked some time ago that the recurrence of emergency cannot

be ruled out. He further clarified that the arrogance of leaders leads to authoritarianism, taking a dig at Prime Minister Modi’s style of governance. Incidentally, Advani spent 18 months in jail for opposing the emergency. To snub Advani for his forthright comment, BJP did not invite him to an event where it honoured those who went to jail during the emergency.

What the nation went through during the 21 months of emergency should be a part of the curriculum of text books prescribed in schools and colleges. But instead of that, the phobia of Hindutva has overtaken most of the states in the country. The present lot of books is so prejudiced against Muslim rulers in India that

historians have voiced their criticism against them. The bureaucracy also seems to have got saffronised. The BJP-RSS combine is trying to change a pluralistic society into a Hindu Rashtra of sorts.

The Constitution is still a sacred document. But I am afraid that if in the 2019 elections, the BJP gets a two-thirds majority, the party would amend the Constitution itself. Article 370 which give a special status to Jammu and Kashmir and the spirit of pluralism which protects minorities could be the target. The party, which is the political wing of the RSS, may attempt to dilute if not abolish the concept of secularism.

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Shujaat Bukhari’s Notebook

Jawed Naqvi

Shujaat Bukhari was among the most informed and least exultant Kashmiri journalists I have met. He let his incorrigible smile and straight reporting do the talking. He was shot dead on Thursday evening outside the Srinagar office of the *Rising Kashmir* newspaper, of which he was editor.

There is predictable confusion about who may have killed him together with his two security guards. As is known to happen in the tense and fractious city that Srinagar has become, there will be more whispers than clear pointers to the crime. We can only surmise from his work, among other circumstantial factors, as to who may have been so annoyed with the much-admired media man so as to callously snuff out his life.

There was a time not too long ago

when journalists from Delhi would visit Srinagar and put their arms around their brave and courageous Kashmiri colleagues. The last four years have seen an equaliser of sorts. The shooting of Gauri Lankesh by suspected Hindutva killers underscored an atmosphere of terror and insecurity that the more upright Indian journalists in particular have been feeling quite palpably.

The once invincible Barkha Dutt has been speaking of efforts to silence her by stopping TV entrepreneurs from hiring her. Several of the best journalists are now working on news portals because the supposedly mainstream newspapers and TV channels are not allowed to hire them. The best women journalists are threatened on social media with rape and the men receive daily death

threats.

Teesta Setalvad and her husband Javed Anand, who exposed perhaps the worst crimes of the Gujarat pogroms, are facing legal cases and jail threats. Rana Ayyub, a courageous young woman, very reluctantly shares the mental torture she suffers from unspeakable palpable threats for her work in exposing the high and mighty in the field of communal violence. Anchor Ravish Kumar has worries about his family, but refuses to stand down as perhaps the boldest anchor in India today.

The threats extend to student activists like Umar Khalid and Kanhaiya Kumar and their teachers too are not spared.

What is happening with the Pakistani media is so identical that it is tempting to believe that tormentors on both sides perhaps exchange notes. All these fine journalists standing their ground on both sides are people who can be considered the most self-assured holders of free opinions and sharers of information and knowledge. But, like Shujaat Bukhari and Gauri Lankesh, they are all extremely vulnerable to galloping intolerance.

The main players in the troubled strife-torn Kashmir Valley are India and Pakistan. Both have vehemently condemned Bukhari's murder. Which reminds me of some of the better-known mysteries of our times. There was a film called *No One Killed Jessica* about a lovely girl who was shot dead at a party in Delhi. It was probably based on the storyline from Ayodhya: 'no one demolished the Babri mosque'! The Pakistani equivalent would be: 'no one killed Benazir Bhutto'.

Two or three images come to my mind as it scans the canvas of

memories and possibilities for clues. The murder took place on the day the UN Human Rights commission brought out its first-ever report on the abuses in Kashmir on both sides of the border. The murder thus became the story rather than the damning rights report, which incidentally was strongly rejected by India.

There are factors that point to one direction and then to the other. Bukhari's brother is a minister in the Mehbooba Mufti government of which the Bharatiya Janata Party is an ally. This fact can create one kind of narrative.

But Bukhari's newspaper was highlighting reports that pointed to an opposite reality. Take the story of the rape and murder of an eight-year-old tribal Muslim tribal girl in Jammu in January this year. Right-wing Hindus have actively rallied in support of the accused. A report in Bukhari's paper on April 4 nailed the lie that she was killed by someone in a land feud.

"Strands of hair found in a temple where eight-year-old Asifa Bano was held captive before being strangulated after rape have matched with the victim's (Asifa) hair on DNA analysis," Rising Kashmir reported in the first week of April. "Official sources said that the crime branch, probing the rape-and-murder, had found hair strands from Devistan temple in Hiranagar after one of the accused revealed during interrogation that Asifa was held captive inside the temple. The crime site was searched and the hair strands were found and sent to Forensic Laboratory (FSL), New Delhi. The report confirmed that they were that of Asifa, the sources said."

Whose side was Shujaat Bukhari on, according to his report?

Let's also read a report Bukhari wrote on May 25. Veteran journalist and peace activist Om Thanvi shared it as the last one from the Kashmiri journalist in his email account. The report raises the prospect of the stalled SAARC summit being revived in Islamabad with India's participation. Everyone knows who would oppose the move. Bukhari began the report by critiquing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not addressing the Kashmir issue politically during his May 20 visit to Srinagar.

He then says that Modi was facing domestic pressure on many counts ahead of the 2019 elections. "He is preparing the ground to see that the SAARC summit takes place and instead of rhetoric, he might prefer 'peace' to be sold to the electorate. Relations with Nepal and Maldives are also indicating towards this thread. In order to get Pakistan on board for a successful SAARC, it is imperative to cool down tempers in and on Kashmir. In this backdrop next few months will be interesting to watch."

Sadly, Shujaat Bukhari will not be around with his notebook to jot down his astute reading of a complex and forbidding reality.

Courtesy: Dawn, June 19, 2018

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

Contribution Rs. 25/-

Published by

Janata Trust & Lokayat

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,

Naushir Bharucha Marg,

Grant Road (W), Mumbai 400 007

Obituary

Prof. Keshav Rao Jadhav: A Man of Courage, Conviction and Commitment

Prem Singh

Prof. Keshav Rao Jadhav, a prominent socialist thinker and leader, passed away on 16 June 2018 at a hospital in Hyderabad at the age of 86. Prof. Jadhav was running ill for a long time. His funeral took place the same day in Hyderabad in the presence of several leaders and activists associated with the Telangana movement and the socialist movement. His last rites were performed by his elder daughter according to Arya Samaj method. Senior socialist leader (now in Congress) Jaipal Reddy, former Supreme Court judge and one of the trustees of 'Ram Manohar Lohia Trust' Sudershan Reddy, revolutionary poet Varavara Rao, senior Congress leader K. Jana Reddy, Telangana Jana Samithi president Prof. M. Kodandaram, along with other leaders, writers, journalists and artists, were present at the time of the funeral.

A teacher by profession, Prof. Jadhav served as a professor of English in Osmania University till his retirement. Prof. Jadhav was a man of dreams and ideas who joined the socialist movement in his student days. He was deeply inspired by the philosophy of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. He was elected to the post of president of Socialist Yuvjan Sabha (SYS), the youth wing of the Socialist Party. He became a close associate of Dr. Lohia in the course of time and worked with him in Mankind and Jan. He published a series of booklets under the title *Lohia in his Words – A Collection of Quotations from the Writings of Dr.*

Lohia. Comrade Ravela Somayya is planning to compile these booklets into a book. Prof. Jadhav also brought out a magazine namely New Mankind, on the pattern of Mankind, which he kept publishing for 4–5 years. He also published another magazine named Olympus for almost for a decade. He kept himself engaged in holding and attending discussions/dialogues/workshops/seminars through various forums on issues/topics of social significance. He formed Lohia Vichar Manch with Kishan Patnayak. He was one of the trustees of 'Ram Manohar Lohia Trust'. He thus enriched the legacy of socialist philosophy and movement.

He played a major role in the movement for a separate Telangana state from late sixties to early seventies. He was arrested 17 times during the first phase of the movement and was jailed for two years. He led the Telangana Jana Samithi in order to achieve this goal. This was perhaps the reason that the Chief Minister of Telangana Mr. K. Chandrasekhar Rao consoled his demise.

Prof. Jadhav was a constant fighter for the rights of the marginalised sections. Simultaneously, he was a champion of civil liberties. He led the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in Andhra Pradesh and later in Telangana. Prof. Jadhav, a true democrat, was against violent methods to be used either by the state or by the ultra left groups called Maoists. He, however, was always in favour of a dialogue with the Maoists. He also constantly fought

against the communal forces and worked for peace, harmony and relief during spells of communal riots in the city of Hyderabad. Prof. Jadhav was jailed under MISA during the Emergency.

Prof. Jadhav took an active part in the political activities of Janata Party and then the Lok Dal. He contested the Lok Sabha election from Medak constituency against Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Subsequently he became disillusioned with mainstream politics and got associated with Samajwadi Jan Parishad (SJP) that was formed in 1995 by Kishan Patnayak and other senior and young socialists to counter the New Economic Policies imposed in 1991. He held the responsibility of vice president in SJP. But his mind was ever on a quest. He played a major role in the re-establishment of the original Socialist Party in 2011 in Hyderabad as Socialist Party (India). He remained associated with this new party till the end.

Prof. Jadhav will be remembered as a man of courage, conviction and commitment. The Socialist Party (India) has lost three of its stalwarts—Bhai Viadya, Justice Rajindar Sachar and now Prof. Jadhav—within the last three months. The demise of Prof. Jadhav is indeed a big loss to the socialist movement in general and to Socialist Party (India) in particular.

We pay our humble tributes to him with a pledge that the fight for socialism will go on uninterrupted.

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Food and Farming System To Feed the Hungry and Protect the Environment

Bharat Dogra

It is widely agreed that increasing land availability to the poorest peasants and reducing inequalities in the distribution of agricultural land are highly desirable for reducing hunger and malnutrition in the world. Despite this, inequality in the distribution of agricultural land remains at a high level in many countries, and is at extreme levels in some Latin American countries.

Inequality is often expressed by a statistical measure called the “Gini Coefficient”, which varies from zero (equal assets for everybody) to 1 (one person owns everything). In most Latin American countries, the Gini Coefficient for land distribution is around 0.8. The inequalities in distribution of agricultural land may be the most acute in Latin America, but these also exist to a significant extent in most other countries of the world.

In a widely quoted publication titled *World Agriculture: Towards 2000*, the Food and Agriculture Organisation has emphasised that more equal land distribution is likely to increase productivity of land, “It is important to stress here that yields per hectare are as high on small as on large farms or, under traditional agriculture, even higher. With a few notable exceptions, total output per hectare is higher on small farms, chiefly because their intensity of land use is higher. A more equal distribution of production inputs, including services, can only help to strengthen the role of the small farm in expanding production.

The fact that some attempts at radical redistribution of land have led initially to lower production does not invalidate the conclusion that after some years a more even distribution of farming resources and inputs should help rather than hinder growth of output.”

This view of the FAO is supported by a six-country study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which estimated that: “If land were equally distributed among all agricultural families (including the landless), and the new equal holdings achieved yields equal to present holdings of the same size and used a similar level of inputs, food output could potentially rise by anything from 10% (Pakistan) and 28% (Colombia and a rice-growing Malaysian region) to 80% in northeastern Brazil. Such a radical redistribution is, of course, rarely attempted—but the figures indicate the theoretical potential.”

Therefore the evidence in favor of small farms and for having a more equal distribution of agricultural land is quite strong. It is another matter that as vested interests opposing redistribution are quite strong, the land reform effort can face several obstacles due to which there can be temporary setbacks. Such resistance can come from large landowners as well as corporate interests promoting large-scale farming of commercial crops with a big share of export crops.

The distortions created by local inequalities and an unequal

international trade system in fact feed on each other. The local powerful elites are eager to get luxury consumer goods while foreign companies are only too happy to meet these demands while gaining access to the cheap land and labour of these countries. The ultimate victims are the marginal groups on whom all the pressure of meeting the unreasonable demands of local and foreign elites is passed on. So empowerment of these poor and marginalised groups in their struggles to save their livelihoods is the most important factor in fighting hunger and famine. They do not need emergency food aid shipments (which in any case will probably never reach them in time) as much as the support of solidarity groups to save their livelihood base from the onslaughts of selfish, powerful interests at home and abroad.

In Africa, in the wake of the growing concern over diminishing per capita production of food, some ambitious food production schemes were initiated with the support of international aid agencies but they failed to meet the needs of the worst affected, most needy, precariously placed groups. As Barbara Dinham and Colin Hines wrote in a critique of these schemes in the *Ecologist*, “Large-scale food producing bypasses the problems confronting peasant communities who have been moved into smaller and less fertile land, who are not paid a sufficient price for the crops they produce for the market, who are ill-served by

distribution of storage networks, and whose needs for investment in education, health and water supplies are ill-met.” The real concern should not be just to increase production but to increase it on such farms, in such ways as to meet the food needs of the most needy households. Otherwise we will face such cruel distortions as those seen at the time of the Sahelian famine when vegetables were being airlifted for exports from famine affected countries! The need is not just for more food but for food which reaches the hungry of the world.

In recent years as growing concern has been expressed about the hazards of excessive use of agri-chemicals, particularly chemical pesticides, there has been increasing interest in alternative technologies which reduce or even eliminate the use of agri-chemicals while relying more and more on various natural processes and organic materials to get good yields, thereby also maintaining long term fertility of land.

According to the *World Resources Report*, “When on-farm and off-farm soil and surface water resource cost were included, resource-conserving farming outperformed conventional approaches by almost a two-to-one margin in net economic value per hectare (including off-site environmental costs).”

In Indonesia, a very instructive effort was launched in 1986 to avoid excessive chemical sprays of rice crops and replace the heavy dependence on chemical pesticides with a many-sided effort called ‘integrated pest management’ which included many non-chemical methods of facing the threat of pests. As Peter Kenmore, a USA scientist closely involved in this

effort explained, less than 2 years after launching this effort the use of chemical pesticides declined steeply while the yields of rice increased to a significant extent.

According to case studies of successful vegetable and rice farms using ecological methods in Philippines, in the largest set of adjacent farms totalling 1,000 hectares using the bio-dynamic farming method, there was a yield increase of 50 to 100 per cent and an increase in net income by farmers of 200 to 270 percent, compared to the green revolution methods. Nicanor Perlas, a Filipino agricultural scientist, said while presenting these case studies that a rapid transition from chemical farming to sustainable agriculture is possible if correct technical principles are followed.

Growing a wide variety of indigenous crops should be encouraged. The richest knowledge of the biological diversity of a region is likely to be available only with local farmers. An eminent rice scientist of India, Dr. R.H. Richaria, identified nearly 17,000 rice cultivars and varieties in the Chattisgarh region of India with the help of farmers, particularly tribal farmers, and his co-workers. About the wisdom of the farmers he wrote, “Invariably I found in rice areas some rice growers taking keen interest in their local rice varieties as they are very much absorbed in them and they have all praise for them, so much so that they trace back the history of individual rice varieties to their ancestry with their utility . . . I also observed that some of them identify their rice varieties in their own way (not in terms of the modern knowledge of Botany) which amounts to thousands. This

inherent and intuitional facility of selection and maintenance of thousands of rice cultivars gradually being accumulated and descended upon for unknown centuries, ever since rice first originated must be preserved . . . Some of these varieties of rice were known for their high yield, some for their great cooking qualities, some for their aroma and some for other cherished qualities.”

In particular an effort should be made to support those locally useful crops and crop varieties which have been displaced thoughtlessly in recent years. Legume crops deserve special attention. Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, write in *Food First – Beyond the Myth of Scarcity* that “the beans and corn diet of Latin America, the lentils and rice of India, and the soyabean and rice diet of China appear to most Americans as starchy and nutrient poor. In fact they are not. Such diets evolved because they work. As basic dietetic staples, these combinations are, in fact, quite ingenious. In each case the two items together give more biologically usable protein than if each were eaten separately.” In view of this importance of mixing cereals and legumes to get a balanced diet, some experts have gone to the extent of referring to the diminishing production of pulses (or other legumes) as the divorce of agriculture from nutrition. This is particularly bad for the weaker sections who don’t have access to other, more expensive proteins. Therefore top priority should be given to increasing the production and availability of pulses.

An effort should be made to look at the entire agro-eco system instead of examining individual crops and grain yield in isolation. As an organic farmer of India G.R.

Iyengar said, “Few of us realise the havoc that modern agricultural practices are wreaking on our countryside. Farmers have forgotten the habits that supported a wide variety of wildlife and countless varieties of wild plants, flowers and trees that are essential for profitable and sustainable agriculture. What is happening in farming today is that the agriculture technology is acting in isolation, treating organisms in isolation, which leads to a disturbance of the natural system of checks and balances. It should be a sensitive balance of organisms in nature that should be allowed to spread. Few people realise today that there is a certain symbiosis between the various elements of nature like between flowers and pollen, soil and organisms. The role of the ecological balance in managing habitat has to grow.”

Reversing the degradation of land which has been continuing for so long will involve several bold initiatives, including some which can be expected to evoke a lot of resistance among strong vested interests. Yet there is no doubt that such initiatives have to be taken and cannot be delayed for too long. Protection of our precious cropland and soil is too important a task to be neglected any longer, particularly keeping in view the needs of the next few generations.

As a scientist B.Z. Rozanon has said so movingly: “The task of agriculture is thus not confined to obtaining the biological product but extends to constant maintenance and augmentation of soil fertility. Otherwise, we will very quickly consume what by right belongs to our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to say nothing of more distant descendants. It is

this—that our generation lives to a certain extent at the expense of the coming generation, thoughtlessly drawing on the basic reserves of soil fertility accumulated in the millennia of the biospheric development, instead of living off the current annual increment—that causes the increasing concern of scientists dealing with the state of the planetary soil cover.”

The World Commission of Environment and Development had recommended, “The legislative, policy and research capacity for advancing non-chemical and less-chemical strategies must be established and sustained.” However, in practice, few countries have followed this advice. In principle, it is widely agreed that agricultural policies should be guided by the objectives of protection of environment and sustainability. But in the real world, are agricultural policies really guided by these noble objectives? There is a growing suspicion that narrow-minded, short-term profit considerations have a far more powerful influence in real life farm policy decisions.

The World Resources Report minces no words in making a firm statement on this issue: “Current farm practices in industrialised countries have created incentives for farmers to use environmentally damaging practices and in many cases, penalised farmers for switching to more sustainable practices.” For example, the report says, the system of farm program payments in the USA has worked against long-term rotations and reduction of chemical inputs. In the European Community, price policies have discouraged production of pulses. Although mixed crop-livestock systems can be the basis for environmentally

sustainable farming, distorted price structures have tended to push agriculture in the other direction.

Several developed country and Third World farming, consumer, organic, animal welfare and environmental groups have formed the Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment (SAFE) alliance. According to SAFE’s campaign statement: “Agriculture is about more than simply producing food. It is a way of life and makes a vital contribution to the health of rural communities. SAFE seeks to switch farm subsidies away from price support towards payments for sustainable and environmentally enhancing farm management practices agreed on a whole farm basis. All the land on any one farm would be included in the scheme, and payments made would be tiered on an acreage basis.”

The effect of these whole farm management agreements, argues SAFE, would be “to put smaller family farms (the mainstay of many rural communities) back on a level playing-field with much larger farms, and to remove the present in built bias towards increased farm size.” Such agreements, argues SAFE, would both encourage participating farmers to modify their production methods to take full account of environmental factors, and also reward those, such as organic farmers, already practising environmentally-sensitive methods. The SAFE Alliance has tried to define the requirements of a good agricultural system:

- An agriculture that is supportive of rural communities, that halts the decline in full-time farm employment and provides a stable livelihood for farmers and farm workers;

- An agriculture that does not jeopardise the health of those who work or live on the land or the consumer through the use of polluting or toxic production methods;
- An agriculture that is capable of flexible response to national food and nutrition goals designed to improve public health;
- An agriculture that produces affordable food, of high nutritional quality and that minimises chemical and microbiological contaminants;
- An agriculture that does not lead to the reduction of soil fertility, that minimises reliance on non-renewable resources and that is sustainable;
- An agriculture that both conserves and enhances the countryside, not only in its visual aspect but also in terms of its resources and wildlife;
- An agriculture that respects the welfare needs of farm animals;
- An agriculture that does not threaten the development and maintenance of food security and sustainable agriculture in other countries, especially those in the Third World.

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Spectre of Fascism

Contribution Rs. 20/-

Published by

**Janata Trust
& Lokayat**

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Grant Road (W), Mumbai 400 007

Chavismo: Part V

The fifth part of a series of seven articles by Marco Teruggi on Chavismo, the ongoing socialist revolutionary project in Venezuela, that the Venezuelans fondly call Bolivarian revolution.

The Party of the Revolution

Marco Teruggi

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). It represents Chavismo in the neighbourhoods, Chavismo in the rural areas, Chavismo of the poor—in other words, it represents Chavismo, or the majority of the people, the supporters of the ongoing socialist revolutionary project in Venezuela. It is the party of Chavez. It was he who called for the formation of this new party at the end of 2006, proposed the name, and led the founding congress of the new party at the beginning of the year 2008. Speaking at the inaugural congress, with the defeat of the constitutional reform proposed by him in the referendum held just a few days ago on December 2, 2007 still fresh in his mind, Chavez called for a course correction in the political line, stated that it needed to be revised and rectified, and asserted that the new party was needed so that it could advance the revolution in the new direction.

The unfolding revolutionary process in Venezuela experimented with several political instruments before the founding of the PSUV. It began with the Bolivarian Movement-200, the political and social movement founded by Hugo Chávez in 1982. It planned and executed the failed February 4, 1992 coup attempt. After an intense debate within its ranks, the Bolivarian Movement-200

established the Fifth Republic Movement, a Socialist electoral party, in July 1997 to participate in the 1998 presidential elections. The Fifth Republic Movement, together with several other leftist parties, including the Communist Party of Venezuela, Homeland for All (Patria Para Todos—PPT) and Movement towards Socialism (MAS), formed a coalition known as the Patriotic Pole, and put up Chavez as the candidate for the Presidential elections. Chavez won a landslide victory in the elections, garnering more votes than any candidate in Venezuela's history.

Following the defeat in the December 2 referendum, on December 15, 2006, Chavez announced the proposal to set up a single, consolidated left wing party entitled the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Chavez encouraged all left-wing parties, representing the mass majority of the National Assembly, to dissolve into the PSUV. He stated that the biggest weakness of the Bolivarian revolution is the lack of a political instrument capable of confronting the challenges faced in the struggle to construct a new, socially just, Venezuela. And so he called for the formation of a new party, that would bring the currently fragmented social movements and political groups that back the revolution into a single organisation that

would determinedly advance the revolution forward: “Our forces are too disorganised, sometimes even work in opposition to one another, the various commanders lack coordination with other . . . the various parties supporting the revolution are fragmented, small, limited to certain areas, and instead of supporting the advance of the revolutionary process are sometimes more interested in furthering their narrow interests . . . such a divided movement cannot advance the Bolivarian revolution.”

Chavez warned that the future of the revolution was in danger. The people’s confidence in the revolutionary process had been undermined due to a range of problems with government programs, and the serious political weaknesses within the Chavista camp. Because of this, two million votes had been lost between his presidential election in 2006 and the constitutional reform of end-2007. For the revolution to survive and advance, it was necessary to win back the support of the people.

For this, it was of utmost importance to form a new political instrument to combat the major problems of bureaucracy and corruption affecting state institutions that were sabotaging government programs in favour of the poor and attempts to construct popular power. These weaknesses had also penetrated the Chavista camp, which had become home to many careerists and bureaucrats, including those who hold important positions. To fight the enemy within, Chavez stressed that the PSUV shall be governed primarily from the bottom up, focusing on mass-participation and democratic principles, and stated that the PSUV would be the

most democratic party in Venezuelan history. He said that such a bottom-up mobilisation of the Chavista ranks, wherein the activists at the bottom would mobilise in their communities and workplaces to fight for their interests—against both the capitalists and the new emerging political and economic elite that is attempting to consolidate itself at the grassroots level—and their organisation into a grassroots based party could be decisive in helping resolve the unfinished struggle for power between the oppressed (led by the Chavez government) and the oppressors.

The Party and Elections

A massive 5.7 million people signed up to become aspiring members of the PSUV over a six-week period between April and June 2008, a massive display of the deeply felt sentiment for political unity. Of these, more than half a million—whom Chavez called the socialist battalions or a frontline vanguard—began participating in meetings held every weekend from July onwards to discuss and debate issues of political program and structure, the proposed constitutional reforms, and issues related to how to increase mass participation of people in the revolutionary process and thereby advance the revolution. This gap between the massive numbers who showed their support for the new party by registering and the lesser number of people who turned up for the meetings—the cadre of the new party—was only to be expected, given the different levels of commitment, consciousness and time among the great mass of supporters of the revolution.

It is these socialist battalions who elected the 1,656 delegates to

the founding conference of the Party.

This party of cadres and masses had to perform the twin tasks of winning the elections on the one hand, and leading the advance towards socialism on the other. Both the tasks—one periodic, the other permanent—had to go hand in hand. Chavez believed that the task of winning the elections was in large part related to the development of the political consciousness of the people, their growing awareness about their rights, and their active participation in the various organs of grassroots political power that were being set up by the revolution.

Of course, despite Chavez’s attempt and intention to build a new party with radical new cadre from below, the whole process of building of the party has faced a number of problems. While many new cadre did come from the grassroots due to the radical politicisation of Chavismo, several cadre continued to be from among those very vested interests whom the revolution was aimed at. A key contradiction within the party is the struggle between the radical grassroots and what can be referred to as the “rightwing” of the Chavismo. Numerous organised groups, local power elites and the old bureaucracy attempted to ‘capture’ the battalions and influence the selection of delegates to the congress.

The imperative of winning elections further complicates the building of this revolutionary party. As Reinaldo Iturriza wrote in 2010, “It is necessary to win elections to advance the revolution. But sometimes, to win electoral victories, the party resorts to patronage or simply demagoguery to win the elections, but this produces a distancing between the party and

the people.” It produces a distaste for politics, depoliticises people, and reduces their enthusiasm for participation in the revolutionary process.

The Party and Government

The building of a party that on the one hand has to advance the revolution, and on the other hand is also the ruling party, produces its own complexities. Almost all the mayors, governors and ministers are from the party. The tactics, priorities and strategies decided by the PSUV are also, to a large extent, the decisions of the government and the various institutions of the state, as the party controls the government. The direction taken by the party is also the direction taken by the government and the various institutions; it is in fact also the direction of the revolution. While the membership of the party overwhelmingly comprises of the ordinary people, including the people living in the slums in cities and the peasants in the villages, the leaders of the party are also the leaders of the government, including the mayors, governors, ministers, officials at various levels of the government, etc. For instance, the governor of a state is also the leader of the party in his state.

This produces several tensions. Thus, the party was created to advance a strategic objective: the building of socialism. In the long run, the achievement of this objective goes beyond (or against) the interests of the party, as a genuine development of socialism requires the party to gradually cede its space to the popular mobilisation of the people and the strengthening of their popular organisations, primarily the communes. This produces a

contradiction: those who lead the party, and at the same time are also in positions of power in the government, are often unwilling to gradually transfer power / control to popular organisations of people, and defend the authority of the state, to the detriment of the strategic objective of advancing towards socialism. The communes and the assertion of popular people’s power come to be seen as a threat by the mayors, the governors, by those in various positions of authority in government. They prefer forms of organisation of people which they can dictate as to what should they do, how they should do, when should they do, in other words, which they can control and direct.

The party has the advantage of being created by Chavez, and even after he is no longer there to lead it, his name and his immense authority benefits the party. It gives it immense advantage during the elections, as the people still love and remember Chavez. However, at the same time, the mistakes made by the party in advancing the revolution get amplified as it also the ruling party, and so the distance between the party and the people increases.

Thus, there are inherent contradictions in the very form of political organisation evolved by Chavismo to advance the revolution. These contradictions are inherent not just to Chavismo, but to the revolutionary process itself. On how the party and the people resolve these contradictions depends the future of the revolution.

If one examines the whole revolutionary process more closely, the contradictions inherent in PSUV are in essence the contradictions within all of us.

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Four Years of Modi Government: Two Circles of Growth - II

Arun Kumar

iv) Crisis in the Farming Sector

Farmers have been protesting across the country from Tamil Nadu to UP and Punjab. They are committing suicides on a daily basis as they are falling into debt trap. Farmers mostly belong to the unorganised sector of the economy. The NDA government on coming to power promised doubling of their incomes by 2022. During the campaign for the 2014 elections, they were promised the implementation of the Swaminathan Committee Report. They were told that they would be given a price 50% above costs. However, the bone of contention has been which 'cost' and how to implement the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme across the country.

The farmers have faced drought and a fall in their incomes. They have also seen their incomes collapsing due to demonetisation and the consequent shortage of cash. Where the rains have been good, prices have collapsed, like, in the case of pulses, tomatoes and potatoes in 2017, while the government has not been willing to make the necessary investment to procure these crops at MSP. On the other hand, costs have risen all around. Farmers have been forced to borrow at higher cost due to lack of access to bank loans. Cash shortage meant that they had to buy inputs on credit from the traders and had to pay a higher price.

Due to cash shortage, the purchasing power of the people employed in the unorganised sector went down and that meant that they bought less of the higher value

agricultural produce. Prices of pulses, vegetables and fruits fell drastically after demonetisation and did not recover for some time. This hit the incomes of a large number of farmers. It also appears that the traders took advantage of this situation and the farmers are still in their grip one and a half year after demonetisation.

In effect the ongoing crisis in the farming sector has deepened during the NDA regime with farmers protesting and demanding justice. They are demanding loan waiver and remunerative prices but the NDA government is not able to fulfill their demand.

4. The Big Policy Decisions and the Shocks to the Economy

As argued in the Introduction to this essay above, the NDA regime administered two big shocks to the economy and brought down the growth rate of the economy. These shocks also deepened the crisis in agriculture, banking, trade and the unorganised sectors as a whole.

The first shock was the sudden demonetisation of the high denomination currency notes on November 8, 2016. Since they constituted 86% of the currency with the public, there was a huge shortage of cash in the economy which meant that businesses slowed down, especially in the unorganised sectors of the economy which have little access to banks and electronic means of conducting businesses.

The currency shortage persisted for months, way beyond the 50 days given for exchanging the

old currency for new. The entire currency is back with the RBI, as this author has pointed out and which was later confirmed by the RBI. So, no black money was caught, but a large number of people who had never generated any black money were put to a great deal of inconvenience. They could not even withdraw their own money, some died due to the stress, marriages got postponed, patients could not get proper treatment, etc. The slowdown in the economy turned into a recessionary phase with decline in output, employment and investment.

As if this was not enough, the government then introduced GST, and that too without proper planning as it was too busy coping with the fallout of demonetisation. This has created problems for businesses even in the organised sectors. It further set back the unorganised sectors because of the complexity of the new tax and its flawed design. Thus, the entire economy again slowed down.

Even though the tiny and the small sectors are largely exempt from GST, they have been adversely impacted by the faulty design implicit in input credit and the reverse charge systems. The e-way bill system is also creating complications for the GST. Further, on items of daily consumption, the tax rate is kept at zero, so that the prices of goods of common use do not rise. But all prices have risen. This is a result of the fact that the indirect taxes are felt at a point other than where they are levied. For example, if the price of

trucks rises due to higher GST, then the cost of transportation of wheat will go up and its price would rise even though there is no tax on wheat.

GST also undermines the federal structure of the country. There is one tax rate for a given good / service all across the country. However, India is a diverse nation with different needs of different states. What is required by Tamil Nadu may not be good for Himachal and what may apply in Gujarat may not be appropriate for Assam. India is a union of States, each with their own needs which they are supposed to take care of in their own way. That is why autonomy was enshrined in the Constitution. But it is now getting eroded. Finally, the third tier of government has been left high and dry. There is no mention of the local bodies. This runs counter to the idea of decentralisation which is so essential for democracy in India.

5. The Claimed and the Actual Growth Rate of the Economy

A key problem facing the Indian economy for the last 3 years is that the data on the basis of which policy is being made does not reflect reality. Some economists have stated that the rate of growth was artificially boosted by 2% due to change in methodology after 2012. In other words, the actual crisis is being hidden behind the smokescreen of data. But this change in methodology was initiated by the UPA itself. That is why the low rate of growth during the last years of the UPA regime was also boosted by 2%.

If the current rate of growth is more than 6%, it is still one of the best in the world and there is no crisis. It is a healthy rate of growth by India's own historical yardstick. This should have produced a 'feel

good' in the economy. But that is not the case, with businesses complaining and NPAs continuing to rise. So, is the data hiding reality? Why is the government repeatedly talking about boosting the growth rate?

This author has been arguing for over a year that the current rate of growth is not more than 1%. What is the evidence that the actual rate of growth is around 1% and not 6%? This has to do with the erroneous methodology used to estimate quarterly rate of growth of the economy. The estimates given are advance estimates and provisional estimates that are repeatedly revised. They are largely based on projections from the past, which is not a correct methodology if there is a shock, and the Indian economy has had two of them as pointed out above.

The quarterly rate of growth of the economy is estimated by resorting to data largely from the organised sectors of the economy and that too from select corporate firms. Thus, at best, it represents only organised sector growth. The data for the unorganised sector constituting 45% of GDP comes with a time lag. It is based on surveys conducted in reference years once every few years. In between the reference years, the ratio of the organised and the unorganised sector is used to project the growth of the latter. In effect it only gives the growth of the organised sector. This methodology fails if there is a shock to the economy and the ratio between the two sectors changes. The method applicable till November 7, 2016 would not apply after November 9, 2016.

Since no comprehensive official survey has been done of the

unorganised sector during the initial months after demonetisation or in the first few months of implementation of GST, the impact of these two policies on this sector will never be captured in the official data.

According to private surveys done during the period of demonetisation, the impact was found to be consistently dramatic, showing an adverse impact of between 50 and 80% and an increase in unemployment. This is significant since 93% of the workforce is in this sector. This led to a drastic fall in demand. According to RBI, capacity utilisation in organised industry fell. Even before demonetisation, capacity utilisation was hovering at between 70 and 75%—a low figure. Demonetisation further adversely impacted investment, as data suggests. In turn, this slowed down the growth of the economy even after the note shortage ended.

Even if the unorganised non-agriculture sector output for the year declined by 10%, while the organised sector grew at the official rate of 6%, then the average rate of growth for the year would turn out to be less than 1%.

The introduction of a faulty GST and its poor implementation has led to a deep adverse impact on the unorganised sector from July 1, 2017. The organised sector which was expected to gain from GST has also been hit hard for the same reasons—poor design and poor implementation. Instead of 'ease of doing business', business became more difficult. There was utter confusion, massive increase in paper work and increase in compliance costs. This has adversely impacted the climate of investment and led to a further slowdown in the economy.

In short, there is inadequate data to assess the actual performance of the economy. Government will keep claiming that things will improve on the basis of the limited data it has—as usual, the golden period is always ahead. The international agencies, like the World Bank, IMF, ADB and Moody's, which are supporting the government's contention of a high growth rate do not collect data independently and depend on government data. So their assessment is not an independent view.

The drastic slowdown in the economy is also indicated by the collapse in credit off-take by industry. Low credit off-take suggests that production and investment have slowed down. In October 2016 it was already at its lowest point in the last 50 years, and it fell to its lowest level in 60 years after demonetisation was announced. Worse followed with negative growth in July and August 2017. This has never happened before in the Indian economy.

Interest rate cuts have been suggested as a panacea but this does not work when demand is short and capacity utilisation low. Will demand pick up with cut in interest rates? It is argued that the demand for white goods bought on loan can rise (due to a lower EMI) and so can the demand for housing. But these are discretionary purchases and will only be undertaken if the sense of crisis in the mind of the public is overcome. In times of crisis, the public becomes cautious and does not increase its purchases or invest in these items. If people feel that their incomes are falling due to rising inflation or that their job is uncertain, they would not increase expenditures on discretionary items, in spite of a lower EMI.

The investment climate has also been vitiated by the constant attack on businesses after demonetisation. Not that they are paragons of virtue but what they do does matter to the economy. There is an attempt to brand those who deposited money in the banks during demonetisation as black money holders. This is being done to claim success of the failed demonetisation. While some who deposited large sums of money indeed were laundering their black money, the indiscriminate character of the move to brand everyone has vitiated the environment. Added to this, GST has created uncertainty about input credit, additional paper work, e-way bill, etc. and this has vitiated the investment climate further. So, 'ease of doing business' is not visible.

The government itself sensed the brewing crisis. It revived the Economic Advisory Committee to the PM. This is a vote of no confidence in the Ministry of Finance which is primarily responsible for economic policies.

If the actual rate of growth of GDP is close to 1%, then a small increase in the fiscal deficit to boost demand would not do. It would have to be raised by a much larger percentage to raise the rate of growth to 6%. The purists suggest that this would dent private investment. That would have been true for an economy where credit off-take was robust and the economy was running at full capacity. But that is not true, so a higher fiscal deficit is feasible to mitigate the economic crisis.

The present situation in India is similar to the one during the global crisis of 2007–08 when the world economy went into a recession and was prevented from going into a

depression by the major economies raising their fiscal deficits. The US raised its fiscal deficit from 3% to 12%. China went in for a \$600 billion expenditure package on rural infrastructure. India escaped the recession and had a healthy rate of growth of 5% because of increased spending in rural areas based on a large increase in its fiscal deficit. The FRBM act was put on hold.

6. Two Circles of Growth

The government has presented data on the growth in the automobile sector and travel by air to argue that growth is robust. The moot point is that do the poor in India consume any of these? Further, a total view cannot emerge from citing growth of some sectors. If some sectors are growing fast in a slowing economy then other sectors must be declining. It is the poor belonging to the unorganised sectors that have been hit hard by both demonetisation and GST, as argued above.

Today there are two separate circles of growth, with one growing at the expense of the other and leading to widening disparities. It also enables the government to ignore the unorganised sectors.

The unorganised sectors are also hit hard by inflation. The wages of the people working in these sectors are not indexed and tend to lag behind inflation, so their purchasing power falls when prices rise.

Official data claims that inflation rate is low. Unfortunately, the inflation data does not give the true measure of price rise. Most of the services are not counted in the index of inflation. So, if school fees go up or health costs rise due to a deteriorating environment, they do not get counted. With privatisation, these costs have been shooting up

even for the marginal sections.

Should the decline of the unorganised sectors not have an impact on the organised sectors and reflect in their slowdown? Not if the latter is growing at the expense of the former. They are increasing their market share.

The government is also talking of financial inclusion and digitisation to help the unorganised sectors. The Jan Dhan Yojana and Mudra are supposed to give access to banks and to credit. However, those who do not have enough to eat and are in debt to private lenders are not going to put money in savings accounts. No wonder most of the Jan Dhan Accounts have zero balance. RTI revealed that many bankers put a few rupees into these accounts out of their contingency funds. And as already discussed, Mudra scheme is unlikely to have made any great impact on production and employment.

The government while pursuing a pro-business agenda needs a fig leaf of helping the poor as well. So, it keeps announcing marginal schemes for the poor and the farmers without impacting their status. But this is

nothing new, given that this has been the case since independence.

7. Conclusion

When it came to power in 2014, the NDA took over an economy that was recovering from the macroeconomic shock it had experienced in 2012–13. However, it administered two big shocks in the shape of demonetisation in November 2016 and introduction of GST in India in July 2017. Both of them led to a crisis in the economy, more particularly in the unorganised sector of the economy which produces 45% of the nation's output and employs 93% of the workforce. Consequently, an economy that the government claimed to be the fastest growing economy in the world in October 2016 collapsed and its rate of growth fell to less than 1%.

The official figures do not show this steep decline since the quarterly growth rates are based on corporate sector data. Even if this is taken at face value, as in the attached graph, the trend rate of growth has been declining since 2014 while for the few years before that, it was rising. This is partly a result of the twin

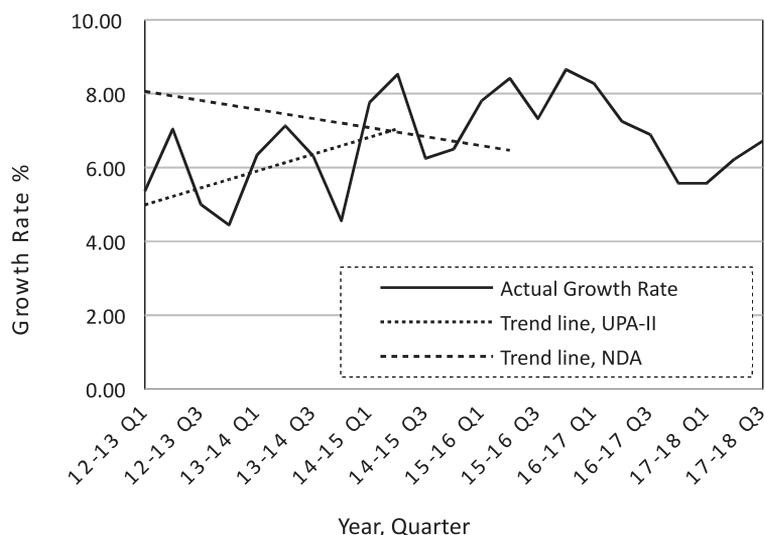
shocks.

The many promises made by the party in power and the government in the last four years remain unfulfilled, like, curbing the black economy. The government has been high on hype but weak on delivery. For instance, the PM stated that demonetisation was an attack on the black economy but data shows that all the money came back and the black economy continues to flourish. It only caused hardship to those who never generated any black incomes.

The ruling party has not been able to check the corruption of its own party people, like, those involved in iron ore mining scams, VYAPAM scam, DMAT scam, and so on. While spectrum was auctioned as required by the Supreme Court, many court cases have fallen through since the cases were not properly presented in the Courts. Big new scams are beginning to surface, like, Neerav Modi, Rotomac and Bank of Baroda cases. Many smaller scams are erupting on a daily basis, like, the question paper leakage, IDBI and other bank frauds.

It has been pointed out above that the impact of the two shocks and the pro-business policies has been felt largely in the unorganised sector. This has created two separate circles of growth. The organised sector is growing at the expense of the unorganised sector. Consequently, the majority is getting marginalised and that is aggravating the already high inequalities in the country. This is effecting demand in the economy and leading to low capacity utilisation in much of industry, especially the mass consumption items. The government data showing rising sales of automobiles and increase in air travel pertains to the

Quarterly Annual Growth Rate and Trend 2012-2018



consumption of the well-off. The low capacity utilisation results in reduced levels of investment in the economy.

The rate of inflation has moderated but that also represents a weakness of the economy—demand from the unorganised sectors has declined. Further, our inflation data does not take into account the rise in prices of services and they are the ones that have risen the most in the last few years due to rise in the tax on services. Thus, the actual rate of inflation is higher than that given out by the government. The farmers are the worst hit by the collapse of the prices of agriculture products. Thus, inflation rate being low has multiple impacts and is not an unmixed blessing. The government is unable to manage all these factors simultaneously.

The improvement in the current account deficit of the external sector is a result of relatively favourable international factors, especially the fall in crude oil prices. This may now be reversing. This has little to do with policies. In fact, experts have criticised the government for not managing the advantage it got earlier to provide long term stability to the economy.

Employment is the big problem today. The educated youth are facing a crisis because they are not getting the jobs appropriate to their skills. Artificial Intelligence, mechanisation and greater protectionism in the US are posing threats to employment generation. Farming continues to face a crisis and suicides are continuing. The Fiscal Deficit is declining under the pressure of international finance capital to the detriment of the poor and underemployed. The crisis of

NPAs in the banking sector has been growing, leading to the twin balance sheet problem and that is another reason that investment is not picking up.

The government has to stop being in denial about the nature of the current crisis in which output, prices, investment and employment are all hit. The economy is facing the consequences of that denial now. With the government bowing to international finance pressure and not willing to take bold pro-poor steps, the situation is in all probability going to get worse, despite all the propaganda of the government about its achievements in its four years in power.

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(Concluded)

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