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UP Elections: Shape of Things to Come for the Country

Mahi Pal Singh

When Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, declared his government's decision to demonetise the high value currency notes of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 denomination in a televised speech on 8th November 2016, it was indeed a master-stroke of a veteran politician very well groomed in the art of political deception. Through this one step he diverted the attention of the masses from the back-breaking prices of the essential commodities under which they had been reeling for a long time of his government's tenure. It was like cutting down the second hand to divert the attention of a person reeling under pain because he has lost a finger of the first hand – making him worry about the bigger loss of his hand and the ensuing pain from it and forgetting the pain in the other hand which would look trivial comparatively. Secondly, the PM was inflicting greater pain and suffering, even deaths, on the people in the name of fighting corruption, black money and terrorism and exhorting them to bear the pain and suffering resulting from acute shortage of currency with fortitude in the name of a national cause. And so they did. Many of them even praised him for it thinking of the future benefits of demonetisation promised by the PM.

Even after more than two months Mr. Modi has been flaunting his move as beneficial to the people and criticizing his political opponents in his election rallies as anti-national and pro-corruption and pro-black money. But in spite of his rhetoric and oratory acquired by him as a long term RSS *pracharak* he must have gauzed the anger and opposition of the farmers who could not get a profitable price for their produce, the labourers who lost their jobs and those who lost their near and dear ones standing in the queues for changing their old currency with the

new one. He was not getting the kind of response from the election rally crowds, as he used to get earlier on, though most of them were BJP/RSS cadres or sponsored ones. That is why the whole BJP leadership has changed tack during the election campaign for the UP assembly election. They know that the simmering discontent and anger of the people against Narendra Modi and their party would not let them win the crucial UP election, crucial because after the demonetisation this is the first major election taking place in several states including Punjab, Goa, Uttarakhand etc., and also because win or loss in UP will, to a great extent, decide the shape of things to come in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Narendra Modi knows it well that a defeat in the UP elections will prove detrimental to the BJP and more so for him personally, because he and he alone decides everything in the government and the party, and it will become impossible for him to escape the responsibility of defeat though we all know that whether it is the Congress or the BJP, the responsibility of defeat is always shifted to the local leaders and workers and victory is attributed to the highest leader.

Considering the high stakes in the UP assembly elections, which they can ill afford to lose, now they are back at their well tested old poll strategy – communalism, divisiveness and of course, Ram Mandir. That is the reason why people like Sangeet Som, BJP MLA, Vinay Katiyar, BJP MPs Sakshi Maharaj and Yogi Adityanath have all been let loose for this, obviously with the connivance of Amit Shah, the national president of the party and Narendra Modi, who himself continues to use high-sounding phrases like '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*' and project his image as a '*vikas purush*'

though even this year's budget presented by his party in Parliament speaks against his election campaign *jumlas*.

To take up just a few examples: Expenditure on education, without which no 'vikas' is possible, as a share of the Centre's allocation has been falling for the last three years. In 2013-14, the last year of the UPA government, education got 4.57% of the total expenditure; in 2016-17 it came down to 3.65% and it is nearly the same at 3.71% for the coming year. The present government has carried forward the policy of abdication of responsibility of providing education to its people even more vehemently than the former UPA government led by the Congress did. They have left the field open to the mushrooming private schools, colleges and universities who have taken education out of the reach of common people. It is not a vocation, it used to be long ago, run by known educationists and social workers. Education has now become a business, run by businessmen, purely with the motive of earning profit, and as much of it as possible, even if educational institutions become plunder-ground with no holds barred, as most of them have become, and most of them are owned by businessmen turned politicians or vice-versa.

SC and STs have received lowered allocations

in the budget for their welfare. "In the Budget for 2017-18 according to a detailed analysis of allocations under various heads across ministries done by the National Campaign for Dalit and Human Rights (NCDHR), there is a shortfall of Rs 44,454 crore in the allocations made for Dalit communities and a shortfall of Rs 18,072 crore for *adivasi* communities," says Subodh Varma in a report published in the Times of India. "Actual allocation for Dalits is just 2.5 percent of total expenditure while for *adivasis* it is 1.5 percent", said Paul Divakar of NCDHR. Budget allocation for health services has been lowered while allocation for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was only marginally increased against the claim of 25% increase.

This is their way of turning 'Uttar Pradesh' into '*Uttam Pradesh*' as Mr. Modi is promising in his rallies which is no different from his promise of bringing in '*acche din*' at the time of 2014 general election. If his model of '*Uttam Pradesh*', or '*Uttam Bharat*' for that matter as what the country has seen during the last about 3 years of the BJP rule, the voters in UP will think twice before voting for him and his party. In about a month's time it will become clear whether they have chosen a non-communal government there or committed *harakari*.

The Radical Humanist on Website

February 2015 onwards 'The Radical Humanist' is available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India. Only the logo/ the name of the magazine needs to be clicked for opening it.

Now the books by M.N. Roy are available at this website under the section 'Socialist Movement' and then going to the dedicated page for "collected works". They may be downloaded from there and read.

- Mahi Pal Singh

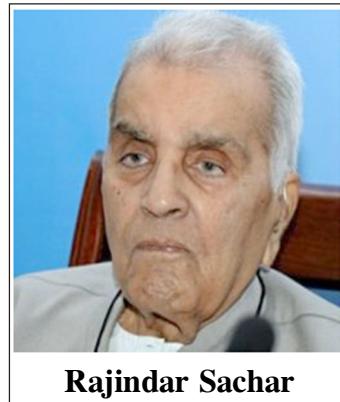
Why Viceroy Mountbatten fixed August 15, 1947 as the Independence Day

Some people have attributed Congress acceptance of partition of India in 1947 to the fact that “the persuasive voice of Gandhiji which made the working committee accept the partition and which, but for Gandhiji’s intervention, working committee might not have approved”.

This is grossly unfair and presents a wrong picture of final efforts by Gandhiji to prevent partition throughout upto the final stages. In fact it is now well known that when Jinnah was insistent, Gandhiji made a last desperate attempt by asking Nehru and Patel to step aside and let Jinnah be the first prime minister of undivided India and also let him form his ministry, the way he likes, including the choice if he wants to have only Muslim league Ministers in the Central Cabinet and assuring him that the Congress will not object. One cannot say what Jinnah’s reactions would have been. But considering that Jinnah is on record of insisting that his house in Mumbai / Delhi be not declared evacuee property because he wished to have good Indo-Pak relations and would like to spend one month every year in India and continue his contacts, it would have been worthwhile trying. But this suggestion could not be given a concrete shape because Nehru and Patel forthrightly said no to this proposal. So for many of us who were quite grown up at that time this reference to Gandhiji’s acceptance of partition is painful and does not represent true factual position.

In fact a reference to Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, the socialist leader’s book “Guilty Men of India’s Partition”, particularly because he was present in that final Congress Working Committee meeting, gives a correct factual position.

Dr. Lohia who along with Jayaprakash Narain attended that meeting, has written, “I should like especially to bring out two points that Gandhiji made at this meeting. He



Rajindar Sachar

turned to Mr. Nehru and Sardar Patel in mild complaint that they had not informed him of the scheme of partition before committing themselves to it. Before Gandhiji could make out his point fully, Mr. Nehru intervened with some passion to say that he had kept him fully informed. On Mahatma Gandhi’s repeating that he did not know of the scheme of partition, Mr. Nehru slightly altered his earlier observation. He said that Noakhali was so far away and that, while he may not have described the details of the scheme, he had broadly written of partition to Gandhiji. I will accept Mahatma Gandhi’s version of the case, and not Mr. Nehru’s and who will not? One does not have to dismiss Mr. Nehru as a liar. All that is at issue here is whether Mahatma Gandhi knew of the scheme of partition before Mr. Nehru and Sardar Patel had committed themselves to it. It would not do for Mr. Nehru to publish vague letters which he might have written to Mahatma Gandhi doling out hypothetical and insubstantial information. There was definitely a hole in the corner aspect of this business. Mr. Nehru and Sardar Patel had obviously between themselves decided that it would be best not to scare Gandhiji away

before the deed was definitely resolved upon. Keeping turned towards Messrs Nehru and Patel, Gandhiji made his second point. He wanted the Congress party to honour the commitments made by its leaders. He would therefore ask the Congress to accept the principle of partition. After accepting the principle, the Congress should make a declaration concerning its execution. It should ask the British government and the Viceroy to step aside, once the Congress and the Muslim League had signified their acceptance of partition. The partitioning of the country should be carried out jointly by the Congress party and the Muslim League without the intervention of a third party. This was, I thought so at that time and still do, a grand tactical stroke. Much has been said about the saint having simultaneously been a tactician, but this fine and cunning proposal has, to my knowledge, not so far been put on record.....there was no need for anyone else to oppose the proposal. It was not considered. I am writing this to put record straight”.

Gandhiji's anguish at the partition of the country was so unbearable that he refused to be in Delhi on 15th August – what nobility that the greatest fighter for the freedom of India refused to share this glory and left Delhi to fight against the communal carnage taking place at Calcutta and to give solid assurance of safety to the Minorities.

There is another aspect which is not so publically commented, namely that though I accept that conditions in the country had reached a level that it was not possible to prevent partition, yet we have not given sufficient thought to the fact that millions of deaths, the most immeasurable destruction in the process of partition, could have been averted if the leaders of the parties had shown statesmanship in carrying out the process of

partition. It is well known that Prime Minister Attlee had given June 1948 as the date by which British government will leave India when Mountbatten was sent to India in March 1947.

Had this schedule been observed, necessary and detailed arrangements for the safety of millions of population moving from both sides of India and Pakistan could have been made.

No doubt, pain, slaughter and mutual hatred would still have been there. But both the governments could have made safe arrangements for exchange of population and kept the government machinery intact for doing the needful. But no, it did not happen – and the reason was the unexpected unilateral announcement by Mountbatten in June 1947 that Independence Day would be on August 15th 1947, which left no time for any adequate and safe arrangements to be made for such unprecedented large migration of population.

Of course now one knows why this sudden announcement by Mountbatten at a press conference in June 1947 fixing 15th August 1947 as Independence Day was made. The real reason was the vanity and self glorification of Mountbatten, who had accepted the surrender of Japanese Navy on 15th August 1945, when he was the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command (SEAC), of Allied powers.

Our politicians were unfortunately too self obsessed with ignorance and vanity and as consequence kept ominous silence resulting in the death of millions and the destruction of massive property. Can history forgive them – I doubt very much.

New Delhi, 04/02/2017

(Justice Rajindar Sachar has been Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi and President, PUCL, India. rsachar1@vsnl.net; sachar23@bol.net.in)

Contours of economy?

Howsoever prudent the budget, the fact remains that it encourages the status quo. Probably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had UP elections in view. There is no new tax proposal, nor is there any long term plan of how to collect revenue. The dependence is on the indirect taxation and the curtailment of subsidies. There is nothing wrong in resorting to such method. But the adverse effect is obvious.

Today's India is crying for jobs. Thousands and thousands of graduates have no employment. The private sector has not expanded enough to absorb them. Agriculture is going up, as much as 4.1 per cent. But the graduates want a white collar job, even though the salary is low. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley admits that the budget has not created jobs. But his defence is that if and when the economy picks up, the jobs will come.

It is no consolation to the college quitting students that the jobs would come sooner or later. Some relief has been given to the small scale industry. But this is not adequate for giving fillip to the sector. The public enterprises, which were supposed to touch the commanding heights, have failed to do so because they are starved of funds.

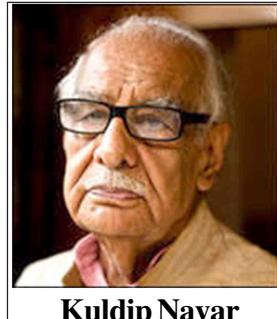
The biggest drawback is that there is no planning. When the Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed the reins of government he wound up the Udyog Bhawan. He did not believe in planning and thought it fit to spend as much money as required. There is nothing in such thinking except that there is no rhythm in expenditure. The government has felt the need, but has left to the ministry concerned to plan its own expenditure.

There is still an obsession with us that deficit financing should be curtailed. When the inflation hovers around 3.5 per cent, there is no harm in spending more. The system can take it. Only by spending more, the country can have new enterprises, private and public.

What has weighed with the finance minister is fiscal management, not political maneuvering. That is the reason why the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has criticized the budget, arguing that expectations have not been met. Arun Jaitley was thinking of country's fiscal health, even at the risk of annoying those who control the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

By bringing down the contributions to the political parties, from rupees twenty thousands to two thousands, he has risked the annoyance of all political parties, including the Leftists. But he had his eyes fixed on presenting a balanced picture before the country. Therefore, touching the contribution to the political parties was essential.

Markets have heaved a sigh of relief with Sensex zooming by 486 points when the budget was announced. There is, however, no any long-term capital gain tax on shares trading as many feared. Still the government should have in its mind some upper limit. It cannot be free for all. True, there is no planning commission, nor a socialistic pattern of society, as India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had envisaged. But to have



Kuldip Nayar

some contours for the economy are necessary.

To the common relief of the middle class, the government has proposed to halve the income tax to 5 per cent for those earning between rupees 2,50,000 and rupees 5,00,000 per annum. This will increase the number of tax payers because to hide money is also a great hazard. Many experienced it when they were exchanging the currency notes of rupees 500 and 1000. In the black market, they were sold at half the price. The Medicare scheme is noteworthy.

The government's decision to have the joint budget, the general and the railways, is a departure from the practice of many-many years. If I am not mistaken, this is the first time that joint budget has been presented before parliament since independence. If nothing else, it will keep railways out of politics.

Reducing corporate taxes for companies with an annual turnover up to Rs. 50 crore will benefit 96 per cent of companies. The idea of introducing electoral bonds is a novel one and possibly the first of its kind in the world. This will streamline and cleanse electoral funding. Banning cash transactions over rupees 3 lakhs will allow the banks to focus on value based banking rather than purely transaction banking.

Abolition of Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) may streamline funds coming from abroad. Providing infrastructure status

to affordable tenements and rationalization of area will make the housing sector more competitive. It is good that the builders who do not deliver the houses on time are punished through the obligation to give back part of money to the people who have given the advance.

Modi's government is half way from the general election. It has probably some perspective in view. But it is not visible and that is going to affect adversely the outcome of next general election. No doubt, he would like to have another term. His task has been made easy because Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi is not a formidable opponent.

The tragedy of re-electing Modi is strengthening the Hindutva. Those who take order from Nagpur, the headquarter of RSS cannot serve the country which has secularism as its ethos. The constitution which rules the country gives equal right to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. The BJP cannot challenge the letter of the constitution because of the Supreme Court which recently held that religion or caste cannot be used for propaganda purpose during the elections. It is not the letter but the spirit which counts. The economy will have to change accordingly.

(Kuldeep Nayar is a veteran syndicated columnist catering to around 80 newspapers and journals in 14 languages in India & abroad. **kuldeepnayar09@gmail.com**)

LIE-HUNTING

Lie - hunting is my profession. This is thankless job. But someone must tell the truth, if it is not to remain an empty concept. I have been lie-hunting ever since I learned to think for myself to distinguish facts from fictions. It has not won me popularity.

M.N. Roy

Union Budget 2017: Arun Jaitley has got his math wrong as sharp fall in economy not factored in

Arun Kumar

Union Budget 2017-18 has come at a very critical time for India. One of the largest shocks to the economy preceded it. From an economy which was doing well, growing according to official figures at about 7 percent, it has suddenly plummeted into a crisis with unemployment rising, investment falling, banking in trouble and so on. The budget was an opportunity to tackle this recessionary condition of the economy. Once an economy enters a recessionary phase, it cannot come out of it on its own. Private investment was falling even before November 2016 and has fallen further since then due to a decline in demand and fall in profitability. The unorganized sector was particularly badly hit immediately while the organized sector followed suit with a lag.

It was expected that the budget coming at this critical juncture would do something to help the economy to arrest the decline being experienced and cushion the ill effects on the economy and especially the unorganized sectors.

The Union budget 2017-18 does little of that. The expenditures are slated to go up from Rs.20.14 lakh crores (RE) to Rs.21.47 lakh crores, that is an increase of Rs.1.33 lakh crores or about 6.5 percent. This is hardly the stimulus to the economy that could help reverse the prevailing recessionary conditions.

The Budget assumes a growth rate of 11.75 percent in GDP in 2017-18. How is this estimated given that the Economic Survey itself said that the growth rate will fall but the effect of the fall in the informal sector cannot be taken into account at this time? Assuming that the rate of growth of the economy falls by 2 percent in the full year, from 7 percent to 5 percent then it implies that the economy is growing at close to zero percent in the period after November 2016. Projection for

the next year has to be on this base rather than on the base of what happened before November 2016. Those conditions are not prevailing at present so that one cannot assume that they will suddenly reappear. Post November 2016, many irreversibilities have come into play and they need to be taken account of. The Budget itself does not do much to revive the economy. If revival was attempted, the conditions that prevailed before November 2016 could have become relevant for calculations but in the present situation that is not the case.

If any projection is to be done it should be on the basis of the post November 2016 conditions, i.e., a zero or negative rate of growth. The price rise according to the government is likely to be in the range of 4 to 5 percent so that the nominal GDP can at best rise by around 4 percent and not 11.75 percent as assumed in the budget.

The implication is that gross tax collection assumed in the budget to increase by Rs.2.08 lakh crore over the revised estimates (12 percent) will not be achieved. The Revised Estimate over the Budget Estimate for 2016-17 itself is substantially higher by Rs.0.73 lakh crores (4.6 percent). Thus the increase over the previous year (2015-16) works out to a whopping Rs.2.47 lakh crore (17 percent). Given the slowdown in the economy after November 2016, this figure is unlikely to be achieved? Is this a wishful assumption?

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the budget was preponed by a month so it was planned on the basis of data that was available only up to November 2016. Thus, it is very likely that the post November figures have not been factored in. Both the Chief Statistician of the Government and the Chief Economist have said that the effect of demonetization on the GDP cannot be calculated

as yet. The Economic Survey and the budget speech both stated that demonetization has had an effect on economic activity but it is not mentioned how much the impact will be. Then, how can the budget be formulated? Its calculations are likely to go wrong.

Surveys of industry and trade that have been done recently suggest that there has been a sharp contraction in the economy. Wholesale markets in different parts of the country that this author has visited in the last few months still report a fall in turnover by 20 to 30 percent over the normal situation. There has been a sharp break in the economy and that needs to be taken into account but the budget fails to do that. Government is possibly aware of this situation but does not wish to admit it. So, without data being available and without the correct assumptions being made, the budget hides more than it reveals.

In brief, the budget then is in a trap. It assumes that the economy is back to usual (or will shortly do so) so does not take steps to deal with the grave situation facing the economy. For the same reason, it does not base its calculations on the correct data and that would mean that the budgetary calculations will go wrong and that will damage the economy further.

The Budget and the Economic Survey have both weighed in favour of a fiscally prudent stance. They have talked about keeping the Fiscal Deficit down to about 3 percent (a little bit this way or that) of GDP. So, if the revenue projections turn out to be incorrect due to the wrong assumption about the rate of growth of GDP, then if the deficit targets have to be adhered to, the only thing that could happen is that expenditures would have to be lowered. Usually when budgetary expenditures are cut, the axe falls on capital account and social sectors – what are called the soft areas. This would mean that whatever little stimulus is planned in the budget, even that would not materialize. The promises about giving to the farmers, poor and so

on would not be fulfilled at the end of the year.

The budget has also given tax concessions to the lower middle classes (those earning up to Rs.5 lakh per annum) and the small and medium businesses (with turnover of up to Rs.50 crore). The idea is to give a boost to consumption of those classes that are hurt by demonetization and to boost the profit of the small sector that is adversely affected. This would reduce the tax base of the economy but would not help revive demand since the fall in demand and profitability is far sharper than the amount of the stimulus.

A 2 percent decline in the growth rate of the economy would amount to a loss of Rs.3 lakh crore of output while the total stimulus is the taxes forgone, which according to the budget is only Rs.22,000 crores – totally inadequate to compensate the fall in demand or the loss of profitability of the SMEs.

The budget can be said to hide more than it reveals. It is framed assuming business as usual – something that is not true post November 2016. This is a fatal mistake. It has resulted in incorrect assumptions about revenues for the year 2016-17 and even more so for the coming year 2017-18. As a result either the planned expenditures or the fiscal deficit targets or both will not be met. Consequently, the budget does little to mitigate the crisis in the economy with production, employment, investment all adversely affected. The private sector will not invest more since it faces low capacity utilization and decline in profits while the government is not stepping up its investments to compensate for that. The budget ought to have been a ‘crisis’ budget and should have done a lot more. It would be apt to say, while Rome burnt, Nero fiddled.

Courtesy **Firstpost** Feb, 02 2017

(The writer is retired Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He is author of ‘Understanding the Black Economy’)

[Dalit and adivasi organisations have protested against the inadequate allocation for welfare of these communities in the Budget for 2017-18. According to a detailed analysis of allocations under various heads across ministries done by the National Campaign for Dalit and Human Rights (NCDHR), there is a shortfall of Rs 44,454 crore in the allocations made for Dalit communities and a shortfall of Rs 18,072 crore for adivasi communities.

“In the current Budget year, the government has shifted away from making policy mandated special plans for SCs and STs under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan and the Tribal Sub Plan and reverted to an older system of welfare budget allocations for these communities. This in our

analysis is retrogressive and makes SCs and STs mere beneficiaries of welfare programmes,” said Paul Divakar of NCDHR. Actual allocation for Dalits is just 2.5 percent of total expenditure while for adivasis it is 1.5 percent, he added.]

Raw deal in Budget, say Dalits

Subodh Varma

Dalit and *adivasi* organisations have protested against the inadequate allocation for welfare of these communities in the Budget for 2017-18. According to a detailed analysis of allocations under various heads across ministries done by the National Campaign for Dalit and Human Rights (NCDHR), there is a shortfall of Rs 44,454 crore in the allocations made for Dalit communities and a shortfall of Rs 18,072 crore for *adivasi* communities. [Emphasis added.]

They have also called for release of funds amounting to nearly Rs 12,000 crore meant for post-matric scholarships (PMS) for Dalits and *adivasis* that were not spent last year. This year's allocation does not take into account this huge unspent overhang from last year.

The earlier policy of allocating Plan resources as per the population share of Dalits and *adivasis* in the population had to be changed this year because the Plan and Non-Plan heads were merged. In this new

scenario, the share of allocations would get revised and work out to be 4.63 percent for Dalits and 2.39 percent for *adivasis*, the organisations said.

This follows from what the task force headed by Narendra Jadhav, set up by the Planning Commission in 2010, had suggested so that better allocation of resources for these sections could be done.

”In the current Budget year, the government has shifted away from making policy mandated special plans for SCs and STs under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan and the Tribal Sub Plan and reverted to an older system of welfare budget allocations for these communities. This in our analysis is retrogressive and makes SCs and STs mere beneficiaries of welfare programmes,” said Paul Divakar of NCDHR. Actual allocation for Dalits is just 2.5 percent of total expenditure while for *adivasis* it is 1.5 percent, he added. [Emphasis added.]

According to the Dalit and *adivasi* groups, the finance ministry had issued clear directions to all the relevant ministries/departments through a government order dated August 23, 2016, to follow the Jadhav task force guidelines for allocations to the SC/ST schemes. But from the final allocations it is clear that the guidelines were given a miss and allocations were done on a prevailing limited basis, they said.

The analysis of NCDHR shows that several

of the directly beneficial schemes for SCs & STs have been severely underfunded or funding has been slashed. A deeper analysis of the nature of allocation for SC welfare schemes show that only 49 percent are for targeted schemes for

SCs and STs. As per its calculations, the non-targeted schemes amount to Rs 26,684 crore for Dalits and Rs 16,276 crore for *adivasis*.

Courtesy timesofindia.indiatimes.com, Feb 4, 2017.

An Appeal to the Readers

Indian Renaissance Institute has been receiving regular requests from readers, research scholars, Rationalists and Radical Humanists for complete sets of books written by M.N. Roy. It was not possible to fulfil their demands as most of Roy's writings are out of print. IRI has now decided to publish them but will need financial assistance from friends and well-wishers as the expenses will be enormous running into lakhs. IRI being a non-profit organization will not be able to meet the entire expenses on its own. Initially, following 15 books have ordered for print: New Humanism; Beyond Communism; Politics, Power and Parties; Historical Role of Islam; India's Message; Men I Met; New Orientation; Materialism; Science & Philosophy; Revolution and Counter-revolution in China; India in Transition; Reason, Romanticism and Revolution; Russian Revolution; Selected Works – Four Volumes; Memoirs (Covers period 1915-1923).

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We make an earnest appeal to you to please donate liberally for the cause of the spirit of renaissance and scientific thinking being promoted in the writings of M.N. Roy.

Thanking you.

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Preliminary Statement on Budget

Neeraj Jain

Lokayat and Socialist Party (India)

The PM and many leading intellectuals have praised the budget as a pro-growth budget, a pro-poor budget and a pro-farmer budget. The reality is exactly the opposite of all these epithets.

While total budget outlay has increased over the figure for 2016-17 BE by 8.5%, in reality, as compared to the GDP, it has fallen from 13.13% to 12.74%. This is an indication that the government is curbing its budget spending. In other words, how is it a pro-growth budget?

This year, the Finance Minister, in order to deflect criticism as regards the concessions being given to the country's richie rich in the form of deductions / exemptions given on corporate taxes, customs and excise duties, has changed the methodology for calculating these deductions, and has therefore drastically brought down the custom and excise duties exemptions. Even with the new methodology, the figures show that the exemptions are higher than that of the previous year, and have gone up from Rs 2.25 lakh crore to Rs 2.38 lakh crore, a rise of 5.8%.

The earlier methodology was being followed for the last 11 years. Calculating these exemptions given to the rich based on the earlier methodology, these exemptions (excluding the exemptions given in personal income taxes, which are more oriented towards the middle classes) work out to: 83,492 (corporate taxes) + 250,642 (customs duties) + 224,940 (excise duties) = 559,074 or Rs 5.59 lakh crore. (In making these calculations, the customs duties exemptions has been calculated as below: The *Statement of Revenue Impact of Tax Incentives under the Central Tax System: Financial Years 2015-16 and 2016-17* in the budget documents gives the the total estimated

customs revenue impact of tax incentives for 2016-17 as Rs. 307,707 crore by the old methodology, and from this the revenue impact of input tax neutralization schemes is deducted, which stands at Rs 57,065 crore, to give the customs duties exemption by old methodology of Rs 250,642 crore. Similarly, the excise duties exemptions are calculated in the following way. The statistics given in section no. 2.8 and 2.9 in the *Statement of Revenue Impact of Tax Incentives under the Central Tax System* show that the revenue impact of tax incentives on the Central Excise side for 2016-17 (estimated) is the same as that for 2015-16 (actuals). Therefore, to estimate the excise duty concessions for 2016-17 by old methodology, we have assumed that they have remained the same as the 2015-16 budget estimate made in the budget statement of 2015-16, that is, Rs 224,940 crore—this is actually an underestimate, as normally the excise duty concessions have been increasing every year by at least 10% over the previous year's estimates.)

The total concessions to the richie rich for 2016-17 are the highest ever, even more than the record level of Rs 5.51 lakh crore for 2015-16.

Another important subsidy to big corporates is in construction of roads and highways, for which the total allocation has gone up from Rs 58,000 crore in 2016-17 BE to Rs 64,900 crore in 2017-18 BE. Obviously, a major portion of this is going to be transfers to corporate houses in the form of PPP—which is nothing but a transfer of public resources to the private sector.

And on the other hand, while the media has praised the budget as a pro-poor budget, the figures speak for themselves: While in absolute

terms, there has been some increase in the total social sector spending of the government, which is only to be expected if inflation is to be accounted for, the total social sector expenditure of the government (Rs 492,635 crore) as a percentage of the GDP is only a low 2.92%. It is definitely not such a large sum for the budget to be called a pro-poor budget. And it continues to be below the level of 3.23% that was budgeted by the Finance Minister in his first budget of 2014-15, and is also below the level of 3.43% that was estimated in the budget of the UPA Government in 2010-11. In this context, it needs to be recalled that the total social sector spending of the governments at the Centre and States combined is a mere 7% of the GDP, which is far lower than not only the developed countries (30% and more) but also other emerging market economies like the Latin American countries who spend as much as 18%

of their GDP on the social sectors. Coming to the total spending on agriculture (including Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Water Resources), while this too has seen some increase in absolute terms in this year's budget, in actual terms, it continues to languish at 0.98% of the GDP – even below the level of 1.07% of the GDP reached during Jaitley's first budget of 2014-15. And this for a sector, on which more than 50% of the population depend on for their livelihoods. It is not that the government does not have funds, it is a question of priorities. The total spending on all agriculture-related sectors is just Rs 1.65 lakh crore, which is just 30% of the total tax concessions and exemptions given to the rich this year! So much so for it being a pro-farmer budget!

In solidarity

How to establish democratic freedom?

We stand for a thorough reconstruction of the national life. Our political objective is the establishment of democratic freedom which will mean effective political power for the people. We strive not only for national freedom, but also for the social emancipation of the toiling masses. Our task is to spread enlightenment which will dispel obscurantism in the political and spiritual life of the country. We advocate modernism in every walk of life against revivalism. We want the disinherited to come to their own and enjoy the richness and fullness of life on this earth. We want man to be the master of the world and the maker of his destiny. This is why we radicals favour India's active participation in the war against Fascism. Fascism stands for the destruction of the political, social and cultural ideals of democracy... The war against Fascism can be won only by rousing in the people their urge for freer and fuller life. The supreme task of our movement is to develop that urge, and thus while defeating Fascism, to lay securely the foundations of a free society which is not only free of foreign rule, but also free of native tyranny, exploitation and injustice.

M.N. Roy

BUDGET 2017

[At first glance it would seem as if the Finance Minister's announcement of an allocation of Rs 48,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme is a dramatic increase of nearly 25% over last year's allocation of Rs. 38,500 crores. In fact, the increase is a mere 1%, of Rs 500 crore, as two supplementary allocations during the course of the year made the total budget of 2016-'17, Rs 47,500 crore.]

The rise in allocation to MGNREGA is not 25% but just 1%, say activists The government needs to make adequate funds available for the rural work programme, they say.

At first glance it would seem as if the Finance Minister's announcement of an allocation of Rs 48,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme is a dramatic increase of nearly 25% over last year's allocation of Rs. 38,500 crores. In fact, the increase is a mere 1%, of Rs 500 crore, as two supplementary allocations during the course of the year made the total budget of 2016-'17, Rs 47,500 crore. [Emphasis added.]

Regardless of the budget allocation, what needs to be understood is that for the MGNREGA to work as per the legislation, it needs to have adequate resources to be made available for work to be provided on demand. As of today, 22 out of 34 states have negative balances. As per the ministry's own data a total of Rs 3,469 crores in pending liabilities have already piled up, even as they have spent 93% of the funds available for this financial year. This is likely to dramatically go up over the next two months, as traditionally demand for work has peaked during this season.

The Supreme Court has issued a series of strong orders in the ongoing Swaraj Abhiyan Public Interest Litigation, one of which stated, "the Government of India is directed to release to the State Governments adequate funds under the Scheme in a timely manner so that the 'workforce' is paid its wages well in time. The Government of India must shape up in this regard."

Despite this, as per the Ministry's mechanism of preparing indicative labour budgets, even to honour only the approved budget for the months of February 2017 and March 2017, nearly Rs 10,013 crores would be required (at the average cost per person day of Rs 228). This means that we would end the year with close to Rs 13,482 crores in pending liabilities, and a budgetary allocation that has not even kept pace with last year's amount in real terms.

This unpredictable under resourced fund flow mechanism has implications for implementation, particularly timely payment to workers, which greatly affects faith in the employment guarantee. The Supreme Court order emphatically stated that delayed wages were unacceptable and a violation of the rights of workers. Yet this continues with impunity. At present 54% of the wage payments continue to be delayed, and as a result Rs 231 crores of compensation to workers also remains due.

For casual workers suffering from the distress of demonetisation, the MGNREGA is intended to provide livelihood security net for exactly such situations. However, with pending liabilities already piling up, the situation is likely to get worse in the next two months as budget releases will only be made in April. Further, the notification for the requirement of aadhaar for accessing work under the MGNREGA from the next financial year, again in violation of repeated Supreme Court orders to not make

aadhaar mandatory, is likely to have massive disruptive and exclusionary effects. The People's Action for Employment Guarantee demands that the Supreme Court orders on Aadhaar and adequate funding be followed, the notification on mandatory Aadhaar be revoked and the adequate funds be made available to the MGNREGA to truly function as a demand based programme.

Signed by **Aruna Roy**, **Nikhil Dey** and **Shankar Singh** from Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS); **Annie Raja** (National Federation of Indian Women); **Kamayani Swamy** and from Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan for People's Action for Employment Guarantee.

Courtesy **Scroll.in**

Demonetisation: What they have said

The Indian Supreme Court while hearing one among a slew of cases filed against the sudden demonetisation decision in various courts, observed that it "appears to be carpet bombing and not surgical strike" which government repeatedly claims it to be.

Nobel laureate Indian economist Amartya Sen, severely criticised the demonetisation move calling it a "despotic action" among other things.

Former Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist of the World Bank, Kaushik Basu, called it a 'major mistake' and said that the 'damage' is likely to be much greater than any possible benefits.

Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician and Planning Commission of India member, called it a "hollow move" since it did not really address any of the purported goals of tackling black money or fake currency.

Prabhat Patnaik, a former professor of economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi called the move 'witless' and 'anti-people'. He criticised the simple way in which black money was assumed as "a hoard of cash", saying that it would have little effect in eliminating "black activities" while "causing much hardship to common people.".

Noted economist and journalist, T. N. Ninan wrote in the Business Standard that demonetisation 'looks like a bad idea, badly executed on the basis of some half-baked notions'. Deepak Parekh (Chairman of HDFC) had initially appreciated the decision to ban the Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 notes, but later said that the move had derailed the economy, and expressed skepticism about its outcome.

Demonetization a Human Rights Issue in a Neoliberal Economy

The Prime Minister of India on the evening of November 8, 2016 announced to roll back notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination on the promise that this step will end corruption and will make a dent on terrorism. It is not for the first time that demonetization has been introduced in India, however the sudden announcement without any preparation caused trouble to millions of people across the length and breadth of the country. The autocratic coercive way demonetization was introduced, caused millions of common people to stand in serpentine queues outside ATMs and Banks to exchange old notes and to withdraw their hard-earned money. A common citizen is harassed and told that he has no control on the cash he or she owns. The scheme was introduced ignoring the constitutional and the legal provisions and has caused economic turmoil in the country and openly defied socio-economic rights of common citizens. Experts argued that like recession, demonetization in the form of surgical terrorism has weakened the economy. Many have been deprived of their daily bread because they could not access their small treasure they have deposited in bank nor could exchange whatever they have in hand to buy products to satisfy their daily needs. Demonetization has deprived and further disempowered poor and vulnerable while promoting corporate agenda of neoliberalism benefitting rich and powerful.

More than 200 people died in queues or otherwise due to impact of demonetization. Further, no voices have been raised to provide compensation to families who died standing in the queues. Countless of people in a neo-liberal economy could not bear the pain, stress and strain caused by the *tughlaqi farman* (arbitrary

order) issued by the government who justified and cajoled people to bear with the sufferings and sacrifice for the greater good of the nation though the rhetoric of black money failed and therefore the goal was changed by the government within a few days from ending corruption to creating a cashless economy. In a neoliberal unequal free market economy where the majority has already been struggling to meet its daily needs, the sword of demonetization has further crushed the poor, marginalized and commoners or the 'have-nots' alike while strengthening the corrupt, rich and the 'haves' while coercing common people to go cashless. The graded inequality has been further deepened because of the arbitrary decision made by the government. The dark impact of digital nightmare of demonetization like a monster further deepened the divide in the hierarchical, graded and the socially and economically stratified society where those surviving at the bottom and on the margins of the society were further oppressed while those at the top or powerful and corrupt enjoyed the privileges of accumulating and consolidating their wealth in the form of new currency notes. The poor, the labourers, the wages workers, the farmers, the women, the elderly, the sick, the needy, who have little cash at their disposal were deprived of their hard earned money they have saved in the form of notes of Rs 500 and 1000 because many could not bear the punishment of standing in the queues for hours and for number of days to exchange their old notes for



Dr. Shalu Nigam

the newly introduced notes of Rs 2000 or even to get the change in Rs 100 or other denominations. The promise of '*achche din*' made the mockery of the poor and vulnerable. Forcefully making India go digital without any basic preparation acted as a lethal weapon of the state sponsored surgical monetary strike or terror against common people of India. People are compelled to stand in queues or starve, there was no other choice available to them.

The profane trinity of Jan Dhan, banks, financial institutions or ATMs and compulsorily shifting to digital payment to move to cashless economy and further less-cash economy overlooked the basic facts that majority of population hardly has access to technology or the knowledge to use apps, or are techno literates. Non-availability of free Wi-Fi or bandwidth availability or awareness relating to cyber security provisions are further concerns that have hardly been acknowledged by the government while autocratically pushing the demonetization. In fact, what has been deliberately overlooked in the process is that the significant number of people do not have access to banking system. More than 90% of population has never used non-cash payment mode to pay for goods or services, not many have bank accounts even in urban areas even if one forgets for a moment that in most rural areas people have to walk miles to access bank facilities. Lack of infrastructure, nonuse of technology clubbed with state supported coercive policy helped corporate financial institutions to suck the people's hard earned resources like parasite.

The nightmares to poor and common citizens continued unabated despite protests being made at several places and many of them were forced to pay through their lives as for most of the invisible workforce earning their livelihoods of 93% people working in the unorganized sectors

as farmers, fish workers, forest dwellers and those surviving on forest produce, wage earners, petty labourers, street vendors, slum dwellers, shopkeepers, construction workers, migrants, homeless or even as workers in small and medium scale industries like bangle making, papad making, incense stick making, brick kilns, small grocery stores and similar such occupations are derailed by cashlessness in every city and town. The demand for the casual labourers has shown sharp decline post demonetization with steep fall in wages and overall income. The rural women entrepreneur programmes crumbled as women who run petty businesses or are self-employed find it difficult to sustain their livelihood in the absence of fluid money. The brutal onslaught on tribals, farmers, landless workers, and artisans in vast country side has pushed them to periphery of survival. More than 60 percent migrants are compelled to go back to their home town as they are deprived of their livelihood in cities because of shrinking paid opportunities available. The small savings of women, elderly, sick and disabled, if any, are rendered useless because of the harsh, shocking and sudden decision taken by the government. The good monsoon that may have helped those who survive on farming is washed away because of the autocratic policy adopted by the present government. The informal economy in every village on which people have been surviving for generations is suddenly crushed, crumbled and collapsed. The prices of vegetable and fruits crashed at both retail and wholesale level because of less availability of cash leaving small and marginal farmers in perilous situation. The perishable vegetables like tomatoes and onions could not be sold and the farmers are not eligible for any insurance cover under the crop insurance schemes because demonetization is not covered by any clause in the insurance schemes. The sick and vulnerable further suffered and many faced serious health

hazards because they are left with nothing to purchase their daily medicine or food. The system that is tilted against the poor gave rise to new form of bondage where the issue is no more restricted to land or loan but to a range of labour and employment based on natural resources. Indian rural poor and tribal communities suffer tremendously due to demonetization.

Those who gained from this entire process are banks and the corporates as for every cashless transaction they will end up earning a percentage of profit. The full-page advertisements depicting the picture of Prime Minister appeared on the front pages of many national and local dailies thanking the PM for demonetization clearly show a growing perilous nexus between the state and the business and against common people while shattering the whole premise of democracy and welfarism. The mockery made by the PM in his speech in Japan just the next day after demonetization of 'corrupt standing in the queue' revealed the narrow mindset of the government which is catapulting nation into chaos while excluding poor from the system in the guise of financial inclusion. The formal banking and financial system ignores and excludes poor as they are being made to stand in queues to withdraw their hard-earned money while the government keep on waiving loan for the bigger corporate defaulters. The large concern is that even using RTI no information is provided on such issues, which makes government accountable about the utilization of black money which tantamount to undeclared emergency. The economy is hit hard by the demonetization and may take a long time to recover and the economists all over the world have pointed out that it is a foolish measure which has permanently damaged informal sector.

Meanwhile any attempt to question, analyze,

dissent or critic the idea of demonetization is dubbed as anti-development, anti-national, anti-business and anti-state thus heralding the end of democratic process. The warped discourse on nationalism used the buzz words such as 'terrorism, soldiers, security, corruption and black money' to silence the voices against it. The sword of de-legitimization is used against those who speak in dissenting voices. The narrative of depriving corrupt rich of his resources while enabling poor to enjoy wealth has been used to reiterate the wrongful premises is utilized by the government though intentionally no steps have been taken against those rich people who have already transferred their wealth in various forms. The immoral way this government is working has threatened and assaulted the entire democratic structure of the country, deepened inequalities, worsened the economy and has shook the basic tenets of political freedom, economic inclusion and democratic accountability. Bundle of lies are being used to falsely assure common people of development and to justify the autocratic misleading step of demonetization. As those notes of 500 of 1000 Rs have been made redundant by just one stroke, similarly the rights of poor people have been dismissed within a few days by the tyrannical rulers leading to holocaust situation

To save democratic institution from dismantling what is required is to counter these lies propagated by the government with facts and data and making common people aware of the reality hidden in the garb of rhetoric of nationalism and patriotism. Making the government socially, legally and morally accountable for its misleading action is possible only through solidarity and action of those who are at the receiving end. The war against corruption, against powerful oppressors, against one percent capitalism and neo-liberalism can

only be fought when the oppressed, the workers, the subalterns and those marginalized unite. India needs to reject this callous, arbitrary, deadly attack on the common people and must demand for social justice. The neoliberal corporate agenda which breeds greed, corruption, inequality, atomization and hatred can only be countered by the demands for social justice, strengthening of democratic values and socialism or as MN Roy has articulated, "Our object is the economic freedom of the producing classes; this ultimate goal will be attained after a long and bitter struggle; therefore our primary task is to organize masses and lead them in the struggle for economic freedom." Elsewhere he noted, "We stand for a thorough reconstruction of the national life. Our political objective is the establishment of democratic freedom which will mean effective political power for the people. We strive not only for national freedom, but also for the social emancipation of the toiling masses. Our task is to spread enlightenment which will dispel obscurantism in the political

and spiritual life of the country. We advocate modernism in every walk of life against revivalism. We want the disinherited to come to their own and enjoy the richness and fullness of life on this earth. We want man to be the master of the world and the maker of his destiny. This is why we radicals favour India's active participation in the war against Fascism. Fascism stands for the destruction of the political, social and cultural ideals of democracy... The war against Fascism can be won only by rousing in the people their urge for freer and fuller life. The supreme task of our movement is to develop that urge, and thus while defeating Fascism, to lay securely the foundations of a free society which is not only free of foreign rule, but also free of native tyranny, exploitation and injustice."

Shalu Nigam is a practicing advocate, researcher and an activist. She has written several books and articles on human rights, gender and governance issues. She may be contacted at shalu_nigam@rediffmail.com

SEARCH FOR OUR ABIDING HERITAGE

Those who have conceived the idea of a Renaissance as a historical necessity know fully well that the great thinkers of ancient India made valuable contribution to the common human heritage. There are two aspects of human thought. One is temporary. That aspect of thought is valid for one particular period of history, but loses its force in another period of changed social environments. But there is an abiding under current throughout the history of human thought. In the absence of that, culture, progress, civilization would be impossible. Whenever mankind comes to a dead end, to what appears to be a dead end, it naturally looks back, trying to draw courage and inspiration from the abiding features in past traditions. It is necessary to discover the abiding features of the culture and thought currents of ancient India. If they can help us to visualize what is in store for us in the future, it will surely be worthwhile to dig in the past. We must dig deep in the mountainous heap of rubbish which has been built up as the bulwark of age-long stagnation, and which is mistakenly cherished even today as our heritage.

M.N. Roy

Demonetisation: Rural India Hit Hard, Farmers Skip Season, No Work for Daily Wagers in Orissa

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

BASUDEV MAHAPATRA

BHUBANESHWAR: With the sowing season for the winter (Ravi) crop in full swing, Nabarathi Kuanr, 60, of Sudrukumpa village of Kandhamal district in Odisha has no option but to skip a cropping season as he is unable to get seeds and fertilisers from the government and the cooperatives because of the scarcity of lower denomination notes after the Indian government on November 8 declared that Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 banknotes have been demonetized.

“They say the situation will improve in few days,” Kuanr said. “But, is the soil condition going to be the same and conducive for sowing till that time?”

The situation with farmers who have sold their Kharif (autumn) harvest is all the more dire because they all have invalid Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes in cash, which is not accepted by private businesses and even at government-run facilities.

“They are not able to avail the limited exchange facility because the banks ask the farmers for documents like Aadhaar or PAN card, which most of the tribal and backward farmers of Kandhamal district do not have,” said Panchanan Mishra, a development activist of Phulbani who works for the welfare of farmers in Kandhamal district.

Local cooperative societies and the district cooperative banks do not accept the old currency notes. And many of the farmers do not have accounts with nationalised banks to deposit the cash available with them. So farmers having cash with them are in a helpless state, Mishra said.

As somebody’s misery is an opportunity for

the cunning others, middlemen have emerged to take advantage of the farmers’ helplessness.

“Because farmers living in remote villages face huge problem to walking long distances and reach a bank to exchange their higher denomination notes, some middlemen take their notes at a value discounted by 20 to 30 per cent,” says Udit Sahu, in-charge of a Customer Service Point in Dungripur village of Koraput district.

Farmers and poor people living in the rural Odisha and tribal hinterland have been severely affected by the demonetization drive because coming to the banks and getting their cash is a huge challenge for them.

Small businesses in rural Odisha are also in distress because consumers do not have the capacity to purchase even essential items due to non-availability of appropriate currency notes. Transactions have dropped by more than 60 per cent and it has been difficult to make our livelihood,” Kalia Behera of Bhanjanagar village in the south Odisha district of Ganjam said.

The situation is even worse for people who live on daily wages. Demonetization has badly hit Basanti Marandi, who hails from the northern district of Mayurbhanj in Odisha and makes a living as a daily wage laborer.

“I don’t know if I am to get work today because labor contractors don’t hire many laborers for their work since the government has decided to scrap 500 and 1,000 rupee notes. Even if I go to work, getting wages is again uncertain because the contractors also are short of 100 rupee notes to pay the wages,” says Basanti while waiting for someone who can hire her for a day’s work.

At least 3,000 laborers gathered at Bhubaneswar's Nayapali labor point are passing through similar uncertain fate. Migrated from almost all parts of rural Odisha for survival, the state of these laborers is symptomatic of the situation with poor people across the state.

“Only half of us get work these days because there are only selected takers and the demand of laborers has fallen due to restricted availability of lower denomination notes,” Maheswar Pradhan, another laborer hailing from Bhanjanagar village of the southern district of Ganjam, said.

Most construction work has slowed since announcement of demonetization. Real estate and infrastructure builders and contractors are unable to accommodate more daily wage laborers in their projects because of the scarcity of lower denomination currencies.

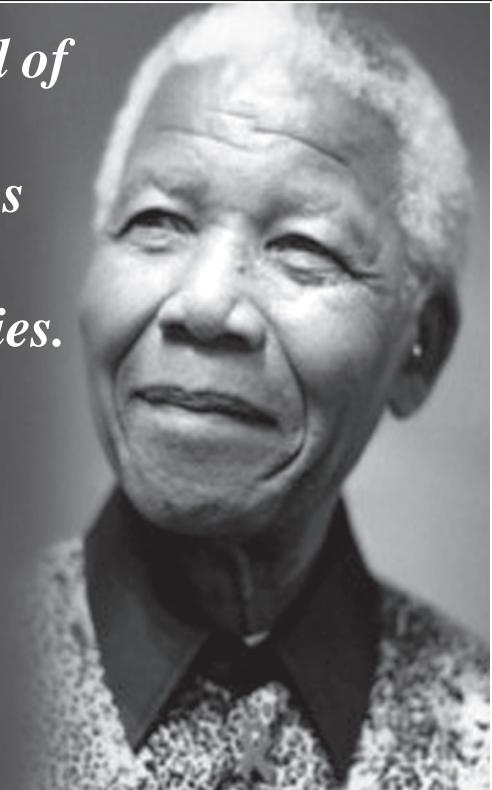
“Making payments to laborers is a big issue. While getting enough amount of 100 rupee notes is still not possible, the laborers are not interested in higher denomination notes of 2,000 rupees because some of them needs to stand in the queue for a day to get 100 rupee notes against it,” said Brundaban Dalbehera, a Bhubaneswar-based real estate developer.

“If the government claims that the intent behind demonetization drive is good, it required more preparedness on the part of the government to manage the post-demonetization situation,” said Ashok Parida, a development activist from Kandhamal.

(Basudev Mahapatra is a Bhubaneshwar-based journalist. This is being carried as part of an arrangement with VillageSquare.in, a communications initiative focused on rural India.)

“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

– Nelson Mandela



Jallikattu, like Shah Bano

[Jallikattu is a traditional sport, played in mostly rural Tamil Nadu by farmers during Pongal celebrations in early January. This “sport” was banned by the Supreme Court in 2014 in the judgment Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja. The court held that the sport is inherently cruel towards bulls and hence violative of sections 3 and 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. The judgment categorically held that the bull’s body is not anatomically designed to be running like this and no matter what you do (be it putting chilli powder in the animal’s private parts, poking it with spears or biting/breaking its tail), the cruelty is inescapable since the bull has to be scared out of its mind to run as it is made to. Such running is essential for the bull to be “tamed”, which is the literal definition of Jallikattu.]

The bending by AIADMK and BJP-led governments to vote-bank pressures in Tamil Nadu is regressive. It ignores the judgments of the Supreme Court.

With respect to Jallikattu, the situation is not very different. What we are seeing now is the making of the Shah Bano of animal rights.

In 1985, the Supreme Court of India gave a landmark judgment — Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum. It is now known simply as the “Shah Bano” judgment. This case emanated from Indore where a prosperous lawyer threw out his wife (Shah Bano, aged 65 years) and refused to give her any maintenance, citing a conflict with Muslim personal law. She challenged this and claimed maintenance under section 125 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC). The case went all the way to the Supreme Court. The SC rightly held that any religion’s personal law aside, CrPC is a secular law and that she was indeed entitled to maintenance. This was heralded as a progressive judgment and with Shah Bano getting her due, one would imagine that things would have ended there. Wrong. They had just begun.

The Muslim orthodoxy went ballistic. They said this was an interference in their personal laws and the practice of their religion and culture. There were widespread protests in the country.

Eventually, the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, buckled. He passed the Muslim Women Protection Act, 1986 which essentially nullified

Prashant Bhushan, Siddhartha K. Garg

the landmark and progressive Shah Bano judgment. What is even more interesting is that the then Congress government had won a brute majority in Parliament after the 1984 elections with 414 seats and yet, Rajiv Gandhi, whose government represented a new India with the talk of computerisation and referred to as “Camelot”, succumbed to the pressure of vote-bank politics.

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of Jallikattu.*** [Emphasis added.]

This obviously caused a lot of consternation in Tamil Nadu and in January last year, to make the sport legal again, the Central government (with the BJP having a strong 282-seat majority, not unlike the Rajiv Gandhi government of 1984) passed an executive order allowing Jallikattu.

Needless to say, it was challenged in the Supreme Court and the notification was stayed on the very first hearing. The review to the 2014 Nagaraja judgment by the government of Tamil Nadu was dismissed by the Supreme Court in November last year and in December, the challenge to the notification was also reserved for judgment. So, that meant, at least till January 1, 2017, Jallikattu was banned.

Like the Shah Bano judgment, this should also have ended right here. But alas, this year again in early January, around Pongal, there was a huge hue and cry to make Jallikattu legal again. There was even talk of the Centre coming out with an ordinance to this end, but it rightfully decided against such a misadventure for the matter was sub-judice. So, when that move did not pan out, the Jallikattu protesters took to the streets and took over Marina Beach, in an extraordinary and commendably peaceful protest. The BJP at the Centre, seeing the right opportunity to make inroads in Tamil Nadu, said that it will not pass an ordinance but support the state of Tamil Nadu in every other way.

The pro-Jallikattu camp's defence is that the sport is an essential practice for the preservation of Tamil culture. This argument does not hold weight because the march of civilisation leads to the abandoning/banning of many inhuman and regressive practices like Sati, child marriage and untouchability, which were once considered essential cultural practices, inextricable from tradition.

The latest chapter in the saga is that the state of Tamil Nadu purportedly issued an ordinance

allowing the outlawed sport; on January 23, it passed an amendment to the PCA Act 1960 in an emergency session of the Tamil Nadu assembly to make the game legal again. This "regulation" of Jallikattu has been tried and has failed. There was a specific law brought in earlier for this purpose, called the State of Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act 2009. For five-odd years from 2009 to 2014, the SC did try to regulate the sport, but when nothing worked and the expert reports showed blatant cruelty, the court was left with no option but to ban the sport in its entirety.

Such cowing down by the government has had a domino effect, with other states jumping into the fray and demanding that their banned traditional sports also be legalised. These include bulbul fighting in Assam and cock fighting in Andhra Pradesh. One can only wish that the government had shown the same level of alacrity in amending the PCA Act 1960 to increasing the punishment for killing animals from a mere Rs 50 fine to at least some time in jail. But unfortunately, the mute cannot speak, let alone vote, and no legion of stray dogs or animals will ever descend on Jantar Mantar in Delhi to ask for protection.

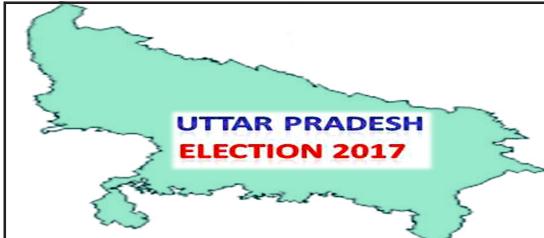
The cowing down by the BJP and AIADMK to vote-bank pressures, especially when the rights of the mute, who can't come out to the beach to protest are at stake, is the making of another Shah Bano. Nagaraja is one of the most progressive judgments of our times and redefines how we give effect to the dictum of Mahatma Gandhi: The progress of a society is measured by how it treats its animals. It is the embodiment of Article 51A (g) which confers the fundamental duty on us to have "compassion for all living beings", and not just humans.

Courtesy **Indian Express**, 31 January 2017.

Prashant Bhushan is a senior lawyer and **Siddhartha K. Garg** is an advocate in the Supreme Court and runs an animal rights NGO in New Delhi.

UP Elections 2017: BJP's Divisive Agenda

Ram Puniyani



The forthcoming UP Assembly Elections (2017) are regarded as very crucial for all the political parties and more so for the future of secularism and democracy in the country. BJP's rise on the national scene began at a higher pitch with Ram Temple agitation and the consequent rise in communal violence. Since then it has been adding more divisive issues and with greater vehemence to reap electoral benefits.

Even before the elections in UP were declared many a BJP leaders had been raising issues like Ram Temple, Love Jihad and exodus of Hindus from Kairana. In Gujarat Modi during the Gujarat carnage used the infamous 'action-reaction' theory and the statement that refugee camps have become the 'child production centers' and so should be closed down. In due course to give a neutral cover to the underlying communal agenda he did shift to the 'development agenda', which was more of an eye wash. Along with the media blitz and a clever publicity he tried to sell his image of 'development man' and took the policies to woo the Corporate World. But the slip always kept showing. Even during the creation of euphoria of 'Acche Din' during 2014 General elections, he kept on raising the issues of Pink revolution (relating to beef) and Bangladeshi immigrants in the context of saving Rhinos in Assam.

His associates did keep talking of issues related to Hindutva agenda like Ram Temple, Triple Talaq, Article 370 at the same time. The

propaganda of development and communal message carried the day for BJP during 2014 elections as it managed to get simple majority on its own in Lok Sabha. Now Election Commission has censured BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj for his remarks where he blames Muslims for the rise in population.

Currently in UP elections; the attempt is on to sell 'national pride', in the form of surgical strike on Pakistan and demonetization as a measure to root out black money. It seems both these have floundered in public image as by now it is well known that surgical strike was followed by the killings of Indian soldiers in large numbers. The pangs of demonetization for the average people are too severe to make them forget their post demonetization suffering to be able to support the move. Sensing this; this party has stepped up on the divisive propaganda. The BJP manifesto delineates this in a very clever manner. It invokes Hindu pride; it talks of ushering in 'Sampooran Hindu *samaj* (Total Hindu society) The Ram Temple issue finds its place. The critics say that Ram Temple issue is a permanent treasure for BJP to consolidate its vote bank as and when needed. Since Babri demolition, this issue has been finding mention in all BJP utterances, knowing full well that the matter is lying in the Supreme Court.

Now new dimensions have been added to the armamentarium by various leaders of BJP. Clearly Modi will underplay communal issues or present them in a subtle way while his colleagues down the line are more involved in these utterances in a direct and forthright manner. The issue of Hindu exodus from Kairana was raised by BJP M.P. Hukum Singh a while ago. Now another BJP MP Yogi Adityanath has made it more frightening by saying that whole of Western UP is being

converted into Kashmir, and Hindus are being terrorized and are being made to flee the area. As a matter of fact the issue is that post Muzaffarnagar violence thousands of Muslims were forced to leave their villages. Hukum Singh's assertion of Hindu exodus from Kairana was proved to be more of make-believe as from his list of families which had supposedly left the village, many of them were right there and some had left for social and economic reasons. Now BJP manifesto is talking about White paper on the issue.

The Muzaffarnagar riots were instigated around the issue of love jihad, now the BJP manifesto is talking of creating 'Anti Romeo squads', which is a hidden message against inter-religious marriages, the love jihad issue being projected in a newer language. Beef has been the major polarizing point for BJP, now after Dadri incident they have reaped a rich crop of polarization around this issue and manifesto is promising to close down mechanized abattoirs. The BJP's double standards about gender justice are frighteningly obvious. While it is very concerned about the issue of Triple Talaq for Muslim women, it is quiet about the atrocities faced by dalit, tribal and Hindu women. Clearly raising the issue of triple talaq has nothing to do with justice for BJP; it is a stick to beat minorities with, notwithstanding the fact that Muslim women do require the abolition of practices like this

which are retarding their social progress.

Sangeet Som, BJP MLA, had recently circulated the video of his post Dadri speech. An FIR was registered against him for violating the law and the code of conduct for violating the poll code. Similarly another BJP MLA Suresh Rana has been booked on charges of inciting hatred after he said that curfew will be imposed in Kairana, Deoband and Moradabad if he is elected again in assembly polls next month. Yogi Adityanath has stated that voters should remember riots and rapes before casting their votes.

These are few from the numerous incidents from the speeches of this outfit, whose core electoral strategy has been to polarize along religious lines. Through its machinations it has been adding issue after issue to the earlier existing issues like Ram Temple and article 370. Today it has a large set of such issues which are spelt out by different leaders. Another aspect of this propaganda is that there is also a division of labor among these leaders. While some try to play development card, some present communal agenda in a concealed language others are blunt and direct in inciting the communal Hate. The Supreme Court has opined that Electoral process should be a secular activity, we need to remind ourselves of that and Election Commission needs to implement the restraint in a more effective way.

GENUINE SECULARISM

An alternative development in the democratic and therefore genuinely secular direction will be possible only when the placid background of ignorance, superstition and blind faith will be ploughed up by spread of knowledge, skepticism and a critical attitude. These are the characteristic features of genuine secularism.

M.N. Roy

What is the RSS!

RSS, BJP and many other organisations have been claiming to champion the cause of the Hindus

The RSS, BJP and many other organisations have been claiming to champion the cause of the Hindus, who are being discriminated against and victimised by the ‘pseudo-secular political parties’ like the Congress Party, the Communist Parties and the different brands of the socialists. I do not propose to defend those parties, but would like to examine RSS’ claim to be the defenders of the interest of the Hindus. True, they have been asking Hindu women to produce at least four children to beat their Muslim counterparts in the demographic contest. They have also been asking Indian Muslims expressing their fear or dissatisfaction to go to Pakistan. And they have also been busy in bringing the prodigal children of Hindus (i.e. Muslims and Christians) back to the Hindu - fold under their ‘*Ghar Wapasi*’ programme. They have successfully razed the Babri Masjid to the ground. They have also changed the name of Aurangzeb Road in Delhi. And they are continuously reminding us of all the atrocities the Muslim rulers committed against Hindus a few centuries ago. Their souls would not remain in peace unless the Muslims and Christians accept what they call cultural nationalism - a way of life they call Hindutva.

But what good these have done to the Hindus except to give power and pelf to the RSS, BJP and the others doing politics in the name of Hindus? If the so called pseudo-secularists are doing a vote-bank politics by exploiting the minorities, the RSS, BJP and the others of their ilk are doing vote bank politics by exploiting a section of the majority community.

Let the Hindus ask them about the GOOD they have done to the Hindus in the states they have

ruled in the past or are ruling at present? What specific good the BJP government at the centre did to the Hindus in the past or is doing now?..

They have nothing to show, but may blame the Indian Constitution for preventing them from doing anything specially for the Hindus, and **MAY ASK YOU TO KEEP ON VOTING FOR THEM TILL THEY HAVE THE REQUIRED MAJORITY TO MAKE INDIA A HINDU RASHTRA (AS PAKISTAN IS AN ISLAMIC RASHTRA/STATE)** to enable them to do something.

But is an organisation claiming to champion the cause of Hindus obliged to fight its internal evil only if it is voted to power, and refrain from doing anything to reform the Hindu community and institutions if it is not in power? The RSS was formed in 1925 to fight the “yavan-snake” (i.e. the Muslims) and had been fighting the Muslims, which suited the British rulers, but never spoke against the evil of caste system and abominable practice of untouchability. How can a champion of the Hindus turn a blind eye to the evil of untouchability? It was Ambedkar, who fought against the caste system and untouchability. And it was Gandhi, (who was not a victim of untouchability), who fought against this evil for decades. While Ambedkar fought from without, Gandhi fought from within. It was Gandhi, who tried to reform the Hindu society not the RSS or the Hindu Maha Sabha. It was Vinoba Bhave, who led the movement for the entry of the ‘untouchables’ to the temples and faced violence to his person and not the self proclaimed votaries of Hindutva. It was again the Congress and the other ‘Pseudo Secular Parties’, which gave important positions

to the leaders of the backward castes or the Dalits in their organisations and government. Has the RSS given important positions to any Dalit or a person from the backward castes in it? Has the RSS done anything to reform the Hindu society?

Hindu Maths are known to be dens of corruption of all kinds. Most of them are headed by uneducated Mahanths without any knowledge of the scriptures or piety. They are notorious for being addicts of intoxicants and leading a licentious life. Many get married and lead the normal life like anybody else treating the Math property as their own. In sharp contrast, an uneducated person cannot be a priest in a church. He must be educated in his scriptures and must strictly follow a prescribed way of life. An uneducated Muslim cannot be employed to lead the prayer at a mosque. And none of them are the owners of the mosque or church property. But our Mahanths continue to rule the roost with the blessing of the RSS and its associates, who call these ignorant, licentious persons 'Saints'. They use them for their political support and extend patronage to their ignorance and licentious way of life.#

An organisation, which turned a blind eye to the inhuman treatment to millions of Hindus and even now refuses to take up the issue, an organisation which never took up the issue of reform of the Hindu society and Hindu religious institutions and has forged an alliance with the self serving Mahanths turning a blind eye to their stinking ignorance and corruption claims to be a champion of the Hindus. Nothing can be a greater bluff and irony!

Their whole politics is based on creating a fear psychosis among the Hindus by throwing dust in their eyes. They have succeeded to a great extent (particularly in the upper castes) in portraying the minorities as an enemy and a threat to the Hindus and are thriving on the politics of hate. That politics poses a grave threat to India.

*The word has been used to show the horror of injustice done to fellow human beings and not in a pejorative sense.

There are exceptions. It is not suggested that every Hindu Matth is a den of corruption and every Mahanth or head of Hindu religious institution is uneducated and licentious.

Political Practice of Radical Democracy

The most fundamental task is to educate the people. Election campaigns can be utilized for this task. Democracy will not be successful so long as the masses can be swayed by demagogic or appeal to emotions. On the eve of an election, when various parties will make big promises to catch votes, the electorate should be advised and helped to examine the promises and vote intelligently. That will mean political education. On the same occasion, the people should be told that they are not obliged to vote for this or that party; that they can just as well vote for a locally nominated candidate who will be their man, known to them, and therefore can be controlled more easily. The initial propaganda for the nomination of local candidates, instead of partymen, will lead to the formation of People's Committees. The people will replace the party, and a long step towards real democracy will be taken. That will be political activity of fundamental importance, and active participation in the current politics of the country without engaging in the scramble for power.

M.N. Roy in 'Politics without Party'
Published in Radical Humanist, 25th Sept., 1949.

When Dying is Better than Living

Mohandas Gandhi was a sublime failure as a leader. For him politics was not about power but an experiment with truth. It is of course lapidary TRUTH to which, he thought he had a special access. His autobiography, boring as it is, has a solemn title MY EXPERIMENT WITH TRUTH. It is a vulgar and rather naive narrative purporting to show his immense moral superiority over others.

As a leader his greatest failure was to understand the political and social development brought about by the British rule. The early Liberals like Dadabhai Naoroji, W.C. Bonerjee or Badruddin Tayebji had a better understanding of the situation. While they looked forward to a future when India, envigorated by science, would take her rightful place among the front ranking nations. Surendranath Banerjea in his autobiography A NATION IN MAKING wrote, "We must in our onward journey assimilate from all sides into our character, our culture and civilization, whatever is suited to our genius, and is calculated to strengthen and invigorate it, and weave it in the texture of our national life. Thus cooperation and not non-cooperation association and not isolation, must be a living factor in the evolution of our people." Gandhi's politics was just the opposite: inspired by Ruskin and Carlyle, he was for the rejection of modernity, science and technology. His ideal was 'village republic' regulated by patriarchy and caste system. Dr Ambedkar, another forward looking prophet, rightly commented, "I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India .. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism?" Again, contrary to the global vision of early nationalists, Gandhi insisted on non cooperation and narrow isolationism whipping up mob hysteria. As a leader, his sole contribution was to lead India to a communal



23/08/2009

Bhaskar Sur

holocaust and eventual partition. His politics has left a dark legacy of chicanery, humbug and stupidity dressed as wisdom. It is no wonder that Hindutva forces are strongest exactly in those regions which once came under the spell of Gandhian politics.

After the failure of the reckless August Movement in '42, he found his power fast slipping from his hands and he had played out his role. His former followers like Patel and Nehru were after the spoils of power. A megalomaniac and a man driven by a will to power, he declined to be another living corpse. He was soon to find a new role- a champion of the victims of sectarian violence and the downtrodden which angered the Hindutva who, otherwise, shared most of his views. Gandhi developed a martyr complex- a prospect of eternal glory by laying down his life for what he saw as a greater cause. After the Partition of the country, the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were steadily gaining ground and looked like very close to seizing power. Gandhi's death at the hands of a Hindu fanatic changed it all. There was a turning of the tide. An anguished and irate mob rose against the religious fascism, and for a time being at least, the Indian secular democracy found a fresh lease of life. It was perhaps Gandhi's sole contribution to Indian democracy and redeeming grace!

Trump's no ally of India, handle him with care

Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar

Don't get euphoric because Narendra Modi was fifth in the list of world leaders to be phoned by Donald Trump on assuming office. Before phoning Modi, Trump called the president of Mexico, whom he has now kicked in the testicles by declaring that he will force Mexico to pay for the new border wall. Canada was higher on Trump's phone list than India, and he has warned Canada that the NAFTA treaty must be renegotiated in America's favour. Being high on Trump's phone list is at best irrelevant and at worst a warning.

Forget Trump's breezy declarations of friendship to Modi. This means no more than his telling Nawaz Sharif in December that he was "a terrific guy". Trump wants "friends" that do his bidding. Doormats are most welcome.

He is a raging bull, raging against his country's relative decline. He will trample those in the way of his "America First" approach, including close historical allies like NATO and Japan. India is not important enough for him to target immediately. But, make no mistake, he will not spare India his neo-protectionist, neo-isolationist avatar. He is willing to scrap the liberal economic consensus that the US forged in the 20th century, helping it win the Cold War. This is going to hurt all those who gained from that liberal, globalising era, including India.

Indo-US friendship in the wake of Trump presidency made it to Suttor fair as a giant kite used the two world leaders bromance as its theme during the kite competition. Trump's declarations of friendship to Modi mean no more than his telling Nawaz Sharif that he's 'a terrific guy'. He wants 'friends' who do his bidding.

If pushed beyond a point, China will retaliate against Trump's protectionism. That could lead to global trade wars of the sort that deepened

the 1930s Great Depression. Normally, the situation would be saved by diplomacy, but Trump seems contemptuous of diplomatic niceties. He will get tough on visas for Indian software engineers to work in the US. He will get tough on drug patents and other intellectual property rights. He could get aggressive on India's high agricultural tariffs. Nothing about him is predictable except that he believes he can bully his way through anything.

The Bush-Obama approach saw India as the only credible check on China in the 21st century. So, the US wooed India with one-way concessions, like the nuclear deal and backing for a seat in the UN Security Council. Those days of one-way goodies are over. Trump wants reciprocity at the very least, and one-way goodies in his direction if possible.

He has already nixed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, decreed cash penalties for US cities that do not act against undocumented immigrants, ordered the construction of a wall on the Mexican border that Mexico will have to pay for, banned visas for Muslims from many countries, and told NATO allies to pay more for defence or lose US support. He has cleared the controversial Keystone pipeline with the proviso that the pipes must be manufactured in the US (which will breach WTO rules). He rejects the multilateral trade approach where the views of many nations count, and wants instead bilateral trade deals where the sheer size and clout of the US can be used to extract better terms.

How does one handle a superpower that has become a raging bull? With caution, flexibility and new alliances.

Do not assume that a raging bull is a friend, but don't wave a red rag in its face either. Resist

protectionism and bullying smilingly without ugly confrontations. Use technical hurdles (like WTO rules and dispute mechanisms) to the maximum.

Aim to create new alliances on different issues. It will be suicidal to take on Trump unilaterally, but coalitions will have more clout. Europe and Japan will have problems with Trump, and India could join hands with them on select issues.

China proclaimed itself at Davos to be the new champion of a liberal economic order, singing hosannas to globalisation like the US used to during the Cold War. India cannot treat China as a friend, but can join hands with it on trade. India has joined the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and BRICS Bank, and more of this is feasible. However, it

would be a mistake to join a free trade area with China: that will kill Indian manufacturing.

Maybe the Trump approach will fail, and the US will revert to normal. Protectionist tantrums are common but temporary in democracies, and maybe this one will pass. But there is a major risk that the globalising, liberal economic order of the 20th century is over. India must prepare for a new, more inward-looking world, one that includes outright trade wars.

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War or Peace in the Trump Era

We need to build on the call for a new détente with Russia, even as we oppose Trump's and Putin's authoritarianism and domestic policies.

Joseph Gerson

Former Secretary of Defense William Perry has long been warning that nuclear war is more likely now than during the Cold War. Now we face the added uncertainty of Donald Trump taking our already militarized government to new heights with increased military spending and by stocking his regime with an unprecedented number of generals. We also find ourselves in a hall of mirrors with a president who lies out of all sides of his mouth and contradicts himself from moment to moment, and who apparently is not on the same page with his secretaries of state and defense.

Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin are committed to ending the post-war liberal democratic order, with Trump praising his new best friend in Moscow while criticizing Angela Merkel as German elections approach. Adding to the surrealism, Putin has joined Trump in the lie that the Donald “won a convincing” election victory, and gold coins emblazoned with Trump’s image are being minted in Moscow.

But, it is difficult to see into the future when Trump’s picks for secretaries of war and state speak about the importance of NATO and the need to be tough with Russia, while their boss challenges these commitments. Yet, nominee for secretary of state Rex Tillerson’s Exxon-Mobil has long sought an end to the sanctions against Russia in order to open vast new oil fields. And then we have the right-wing Republicans from John McCain to Max Boot and many Democrats committed to investigating the Russian sabotage of the election, a break-in that was more successful and damaging than Watergate.

We don’t know if we had a Manchurian

candidate and now a Manchurian president. Nor do we really know who will be leading U.S. foreign and military policy formulation. Just last weekend we watched the rise and fall of Trump’s ignorant and improvisational bid to trade ending sanctions against Russia for a mutual reduction of superpower nuclear arsenals. Trump supports spending for the trillion-dollar nuclear triad, but he has been silent about the quadrupling U.S. military spending in Europe, the deployment of U.S. troops to Poland, and the presence of first-strike-related U.S. missile defenses in Romania and soon in Poland.

Putin’s Ambitions

Putin is no innocent in an era when U.S., Russia and Chinese relations resemble the rules of the games among Mafia Dons. To counter NATO expansion and its provocative military exercises, Russia has launched its own massive military exercises, deployed nuclear-capable missiles to Kaliningrad between Poland and Lithuania, is about to deploy new Topol ICBMs, and apparently has already begun meddling in the German and French elections to unseat Chancellor Merkel and to promote the neo-fascist Marine LePen,

This is a dangerous era with similarities to the period before the First World War. The world is marked by rising and declining powers – especially the U.S. and Russia – anxious to retain or expand their privilege and power. We have arms races with new technologies, resurgent and in some cases neo-fascist nationalism, territorial disputes, resource competition, complex and increasingly fluid alliance arrangements, economic integration and

competition, aggressive autocratic leaders and wild card actors, certainly including Trump. These dynamics won't disappear even if Trump and Putin find themselves in bed together, along with those women of the night whose virtues Putin has praised.

Although the U.S. elite – including Trump – remains committed to U.S. “primacy” and is preparing vast increases in U.S. military spending, the Russian elite remains scarred by the memories of devastating invasions of Russia from the west by Napoleon, the Kaiser, and Hitler.

But it is not all defense. Putin is committed to restoring Russia's 20th century sphere of influence, if not its empire, whose roots trace back to Kievan Rus, as well as restoring Crimea as Russia's warm water port from the 19th century. It's no wonder that with NATO expansion and Washington's conventional, high-tech, and space weapons superiority, Putin warned us three years ago that “If you compress the spring all the way...it will snap back hard.” That snapping apparently hit our political system when and where most of us were not looking.

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev correctly pointed to the roots of the current crisis when he castigated U.S. post-Cold War “triumphalism,” the treatment of Russia like a “dismissed serf,” and NATO's expansion to Russia's borders despite the 1991 Bush-Gorbachev agreement not to move NATO a centimeter closer to Moscow.

NATO's Ambitions

You don't have to embrace Putin to acknowledge that NATO was founded “to keep the Germans down, the Russians out and the Americans in.” NATO's founding led directly to the creation of the Warsaw Pact, and NATO's recent expansion has been less than benign.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, once President Carter's national security advisor, argued that whoever dominated the Eurasian heartland would be the world's dominant power. To project coercive power into the Eurasian heartland as an “island power,” not located in Eurasia, the U.S. requires, he asserted, toeholds on Eurasia's western, southern, and eastern peripheries. NATO provides that toehold, he wrote, with “vassal state” NATO allies making possible “entrench[ment of] American political influence and military power on the Eurasian mainland.”

Despite his campaign rhetoric, this is not something Trump is ready to surrender. The British press reports that Trump's people are signaling that Europe can either have the European Army that Germany and France are planning in the wake of Brexit, or it can have NATO, but not both.

Beyond the ostensible goal of containing the Soviet Union, NATO made it possible to integrate European governments, economies, militaries, technologies, and societies into U.S.-dominated systems. It has ensured U.S. access to military bases for interventions across the Greater Middle East and Africa. And, as Michael T. Glennon wrote, with the 1999 war against Serbia, the U.S. and NATO “with little discussion and less fanfare ... effectively abandoned the old U.N. Charter rules that strictly limit international intervention in local conflicts...in favor of a vague new system that is much more tolerant of military intervention but has few hard and fast rules.”

It was the Ukraine crisis, which was not precipitated by Moscow, that snapped Putin's spring. Ukraine was (and still is) an E.U. and NATO aspirant nation. Leading up to the Maidan revolution, Washington and the E.U. poured billions of dollars into nurturing Ukrainian allies to turn the former Soviet republic toward the West. Then came the European Union's

ultimatum that Ukraine could take the next step toward E.U. membership only by burning its bridges to Moscow. Eastern Ukraine has been economically tied to Russia for decades and religiously for centuries. As tensions built in Kiev, CIA Director Brennan, Assistant Secretary of State Nuland – famous for her “fuck the E.U.” disrespect of Washington’s vassals – and Senator McCain journeyed to the Maidan to encourage revolution. When the shooting began, the U.S. and the E.U. conveniently failed to hold their Ukrainian allies to the previously negotiated power-sharing agreement.

From early on, the realistic alternative was creation of a neutral Ukraine, tied economically to both the E.U. and Russia. Despite the far right here in the U.S. (apparently including Trump) and Putin seeking to undermine the European Union, creating a reunified and neutral Ukraine could be one dimension of the Common Security diplomacy that we should be demanding.

Since Russia launched its proxy war in eastern Ukraine, competing NATO and Russian military exercises have ratcheted up military tensions to the point that Germany’s Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier condemned last year’s NATO Anaconda-16 military exercises, the largest war game in Eastern Europe since the Cold War, as “warmongering.”

In Syria, meanwhile, Russia’s murderous intervention should be seen as a continuation of its Cold-War-era support for the Assad regime, as a means to reinforce its access to the Tartus naval base on the Mediterranean, and as a way to demonstrate its reemergence as a world power and to chip away at declining U.S. Middle East regional hegemony.

Both the Ukraine and Syrian Wars have brought us back to the nuclear brink. Again,

we need to worry about what might happen if a U.S., Russian or Polish soldier, in anger or by accident, fires an anti-aircraft missile that brings down a U.S., NATO, or Russian warplane. As the trilateral European-Russian-U.S. Deep Cuts Commission concluded, “In the atmosphere of deep mutual mistrust, the increased intensity of potentially hostile military activities in close proximity – and particularly air force and naval activities in the Baltic and the Black Sea areas.... may lead to miscalculation and/or accidents and spin off in unintended ways.”

Putin said that he considered the possible use of nuclear weapons to reinforce Russian control of Crimea. And now General Breedlove, until recently NATO’s Supreme Commander, insists that the U.S. must enhance its nuclear exercises with its NATO allies to demonstrate their “resolve and capability.” Let’s not underestimate the dangers.

What to Do?

We can be hopeful and encourage some relaxation in U.S.-Russian tensions. But, we also need to be on guard against the possible creation of an authoritarian, racist, Christocentric U.S.-Russian axis, which seems to be where Senior Advisor Steve Bannon may want to take us. There is also the possibility that the pressures from the Deep State, congressional war hawks, and Trump’s egomania and need to dominate, could spark a major crisis if and when Putin takes provocative actions or makes unacceptable demands. Either way, we have to struggle for democracy and demilitarization and to prevent a crisis escalating to the unimaginable.

This is a time to take seriously the recommendations of the Back from the Brink report, which I am going to embellish slightly:

We need to build on the call for a new détente

with Russia, even as we oppose Trump's and Putin's authoritarianism and domestic policies. Places to begin would be nuclear weapons reductions, withdrawal – not expansion – of “missile defenses,” and reversing the military buildup in the Baltic region.

We should educate ourselves and others about the role of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe,) “the single multilateral platform on which dialogue on relevant security concerns can and should be resumed.” Over the longer term, we can work to replace NATO with the OSCE.

Although the Back from the Brink Commission called for restraining nuclear weapons modernization, our goal must be ending the development and deployment of these omnicidal weapons. This also means opposing the \$1 trillion nuclear weapons upgrade and pressing for the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe. Negotiating treaties to outlaw cyber and space warfare wouldn't be a bad idea either.

Finally, while it is not all that we want, we need to educate about and promote a “common security” foreign policy. Common security reflects the truth that neither a person nor a nation can be secure if their actions lead their rivals to be more fearful. At the height of the Cold War, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme brought together leading U.S., European and Soviet figures to explore ways to step back from the brink. Common security was their answer. As European friends tell us, it requires

that “the interests of others are seen as legitimate and have to be taken into account in decision making processes...[it] means negotiation, dialog and cooperation; it implies peaceful resolution of conflicts. [And that] Security can be achieved only by a joint effort or not at all.” This is how we won the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which functionally ended the Cold War in 1987, and it may provide our way forward.

Much more will be required of us. In addition to the uncertainties and tensions in U.S.-Russian relations, Trump has gone out of his way to increase military and economic tensions with China. Millions of immigrants and Muslims among us are under threat, as is the climate and what remains of our democracy itself. The dangers are as great as we know they are, but we also know that it is darkest before the dawn, and that is we who bend the arc of history toward justice, peace, and environmental sustainability.

Courtesy fpif.org, January 23, 2017

Joseph Gerson is director of the American Friends Service Committee's Peace & Economic Security Program and vice president of the International Peace Bureau. His most recent book is *Empire and the Bomb: How the US Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World*. This essay is adapted from a presentation at the conference “Challenging Trumpism, Militarism and War” at American University, January 22, 2017.

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted: “Lamentably, it is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.”

Let us in an upper caste-dominated society acknowledge the vast undeserved space we occupy. Let us cede what has to be ceded.

Paper read by Mr. Ajit Bhattacharyya at the IRI meet on 29.01.2017 at New Delhi:

FORMATION OF A STUDY GROUP ON THE FEASIBILITY OF THE RADICAL HUMANISTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Ajit Bhattacharyya

Dear friends, I first heard the name of M. N. Roy while studying in class eight. Then I thought him a 2nd Col. Suresh Biswas, a Bengalee globe-trotter who finally joined the Brazilian Army and fought their battles. When I was reading my degree course (1957-59) I read a foot note in my Political Science Text Book which stated that M. N. Roy's idea of Party less Participatory Democracy may take two hundred years to become a reality. This futuristic thinking attracted my imagination and I found out the Royists in Kolkata while doing my Masters there.

But now within seventy years, Roy's idea of Party less Democracy seems to become worthy of experiment and as a relevant alternative. This is because the Political Parties (at least in India) have discredited themselves beyond recovery. And the mood of the general public may be gauged by their tricky comments.

On 7-1-17, the Anchor of a Bengali T.V. Channel (CTVN-AKD PLUS) mentioned a conversation heard in a way side tea stall: 'What Political Party will win in the next Election?' asked a person. Sharp came the answer - 'NOTA, (None Of The Above) of course'. Such amusing anti-Party public comments are heard in India for the first time.

But this is not to say that the Political Parties have lost their stream or their lust for power. Being exposed before the public eyes through their intense mutual slanders and judicial actions, they are now trying to justify their questionable acts and failings as conspiracy

and attempted vendetta of the opponents. Devoid of any signs of shame or repentance the alleged Bangarulakshmans of different Parties are now on regular road shows with their other Party colleagues. In West Bengal roads and rail tracks are blocked every day for hours.

Some Political Parties, it seems are bent upon criminalizing vast numbers of people so as to have a wide bonded and captive cadre base of their own.

We may mention three examples which are just mere tips of the huge ice boulders hidden under the seas. In recent years scores of Dance Bars have sprang up along the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass connecting the Kolkata airport. It was reported in the Ananda Bazar Patrika on 10-12-16 that the daily income of the bigger Bars was 8/9 hundred thousands before demonetisation. Though the income decreased to a good extent in the first few days soon the Bars became good suppliers of small and new currency notes to the cash starved nearby Bank Branches which have good rapport with the Bar owners. This Bars sees frequent out bursts of bombing and shoot outs and even murders.

Muslemen working in the local "Syndicates", (mostly registered co-operatives), which supply building materials to the promoters. are their main patrons. Both the patrons and the Bars get overt and covert support from Political elements.

The Jawahar Bagh in Mathura was ill legally occupied by Ram Vriksha Yadav, a cult leader,

for years together. He turned the park into an armed gang centre. 29 people along with the gang leader and a high Police Officer were killed last year in a clash between the Police and the gang. But their Political mentors escaped untouched.

Thirdly, I may cite the recent countermanaging of voting in three Tamil Nadu Assembly seats for bribing the voters. Money and wine have long become main stays of elections there.

In such a menacing and unpromising setting, our turn and time seems to have come at last. Certainly, we are now reduced almost to a non entity (in numbers only). But History is not a game of numbers only. We therefore, should take to the unfolding waves and start experimenting with our idea of Party less Democracy along with other like-minded friends. We shall have to participate in the Electoral process as independent candidates

without any common symbol or flag. No matter whether we win a single seat in the near future or not, this very attempt may have a cascading effect, freeing the Elected Legislators from the hard mentality of Party Politics.

But such a struggle cannot be fruitful in the airy void of atomised and unconnected individuals. They must have a catalytic facilitator. I think that the "Citizens for Democracy" may facilitate, inspire and back up the idea. The C.F.D. has never directly participated in Electoral Politics. I am also not talking of that.

I, therefore, propose that we should form the Study Group in this meeting with two Conveners and a few members from among us, The Study Group will contact the C.F.D. with the proposal and seek their opinion on the issue and do other needful work. Thank you very much.

Reader's Comments

Dear Mr Pancholi,

I appreciate your sending me the Radical Humanist every month. I enjoy reading it.

Now that it is available online at Lohiatoday.com, I suggest that you do not mail the print issue to me hereafter. That saves the magazine some money and also helps the environment by cutting down on paper consumption.

I hope the Radical Humanist will continue to be published and also available online for ever as it is one of the few readable magazines and continue to highlight the issues, generally ignored by other media, like the pernicious effects of demonetization and the situation in Kashmir in the November issue which I just received.

You can start sending me the issue again if for any reason it is not available online in future.

With best regards,

Purnachandra Aramalla

9 Ariel Ct, Sands Point, NY 11050-1248

+1 516 273 8767 (mobile)

Human Rights Section:

WSS PRESS NOTE, 2 February 2017

WSS applauds the “NHRC Effect”

Government of Chattisgarh takes action to restore rule of law in Bastar IG Kalluri asked to proceed on long leave

WSS welcomes the actions taken by the Government of Chhattisgarh to restore its credibility and regain the confidence of the citizens of Bastar. In a series of decisive administrative actions yesterday, the state government announced the appointment of Sri P Sundararaj, IPS as DIG of the newly-created Dantewada Range. Bastar IG Sri SRP Kalluri has been asked to proceed on long leave.

These actions follow on the heels of the appearance of senior state government officials before the National Human Rights Commission on 30 January 2017. The NHRC had summoned these officials to answer for the apathy of the state government in responding to the egregious violations of human rights and vendetta against human rights defenders perpetrated by the police and police-sponsored vigilante groups encouraged and supported by the police under Sri Kalluri.

Taking cognisance of media reports and multiple complaints and submissions from WSS and other human rights groups, the NHRC conducted its own investigation in March 2016 into complaints of mass rapes and sexual violence against Adivasi women by police forces during search and combing operations in the remote villages of Peddagellur, Bellam Nendra and Kunna. The NHRC investigation team met and recorded the statements of 16 women who had filed FIRs of rape, sexual assault and physical violence. The team also looked into the systematic hounding and intimidation of activists, lawyers and media professionals who were bringing these incidents to light, by the police and vigilante groups under the direct patronage of IG Sri Kalluri. A follow-up investigation in January 2017

recorded the statements of 20 more women also filed FIRs of sexual violence ranging from mass rapes to sexual assault of minor girls and pregnant women.

In its landmark order of 7 January 2017, the NHRC held the state government vicariously responsible for the egregious violations of human rights in Bastar. The strongly-worded order validated our contention that sexual violence was being used as a weapon in the state’s “war against Maoists” in Bastar. The NHRC order also pulled up the state government for its failure to provide the mandatory compensation to the complainants and for not registering cases under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

In the months since our initial complaint and the NHRC investigation, more than a dozen complaints and submissions were placed before the NHRC by WSS, Human Rights Defenders Alert and other human rights groups, highlighting the deteriorating situation of human rights and the increasing vulnerability of human rights defenders in Bastar. Defying strictures by the Supreme Court and the NHRC, Sri Kalluri publicly announced the launch of “Mission 2017”, an all-out vendetta against all those who were calling the state to account. Adivasi leaders, human rights activists, lawyers, academics, fact-finding teams and journalists were targeted, hounded and threatened by the police and police-sponsored vigilante groups. The intention was clearly to ensure that there are no witnesses to the gross violations of the human rights of Adivasi citizens in the war against Maoists in Bastar.

Senior officials of the state government finally

appeared before the NHRC on 30 January 2017 to answer for their failure to ensure the rule of law in Bastar, even as human rights activists and citizens across the country rallied in support of researcher Bela Bhatia after she was attacked by goons from AGNI, a vigilante group promoted by the police. The closed-door meeting continued for several hours as complainants waited anxiously outside.

The actions announced by the state government today are a testimony to the NHRCs commitment to the principles of human rights that it is charged with protecting and upholding. WSS thanks and applauds the NHRC for its stewardship of these principles, and for renewing our faith in the strength and power of our democratic institutions.

While celebrating these developments, we are sharply aware that this is only the first step in the long road to restoring peace, justice and the rule of law in Bastar. WSS will continue to mobilise public attention while pursuing our complaints and submissions in cases currently before the NHRC.

We urge the NHRC to:

1. Allow human rights defenders who have been attacked, vilified, threatened and falsely implicated in criminal cases by Bastar police, and on whose behalf complaints have been brought before you by WSS and HRDA, to be legally represented and to appear before the Honourable Commission in person to make their submissions and record their testimonies.

2. Recommend immediate suspension pending an independent enquiry into the actions of Mr. SRP Kalluri (IGP Bastar Range), Mr. RN Dash (SP Bastar) and Mr. IK Elesela (SP Sukma, formerly ASP Bijapur who headed operations in Bijapur district in 2015-2016 during which Adivasi women were subjected to sexual and physical violence by police personnel).

3. Recommend that a status report be filed by the state of Chhattisgarh on action taken by the

police on FIRs that have been lodged in connection with vigilante attacks on Ms. Malini Subramaniam, Ms Soni Sori and Ms Bela Bhatia.

4. Recommend registration of cases under Section 166-A of the Indian Penal Code against police personnel who refused to record FIRs of sexual violence on complaints of Adivasi women in Chhattisgarh.

5. Recommend that police officers being investigated for rape, extrajudicial killings or any other human rights violation not be given awards or promotions while investigations are ongoing. It may be noted that Mr. IK Elesela was promoted from the ASP Bijapur to SP Sukma District even though multiple complaints of mass sexual violence during the operations he led as ASP were under investigation.

6. Appoint an NHRC Focal Point to act as the interlocutor for all complaints from Chhattisgarh. The person selected should be a member of the National Core Group of NGOs of the NHRC who commands credibility and respect.

7. NHRC to conduct an inquiry into the activities of vigilante groups such as AGNI, Samajik Ekta Manch and others, including their source of funding and their nexus with the police and the administration.

8. NHRC investigation reports to be made available to human rights defenders and complainants.

9. Issue comprehensive guidelines for search and cordon operations undertaken by police, the CRPF, District Reserve Guard and others in Chhattisgarh. The NRHC's own investigations confirm that these operations can become occasions for rape, sexual assault, illegal detention, torture, harassment, looting and attacks on Human Rights Defenders.

For further information contact -

Shalini Gera, Kalyani Menon Sen

Human Rights situation in India going from bad to worse

Prominent Indian Human Rights Defender Dr. Lenin Raghuvanshi, tells The Oslo Times

Feb 4, New Delhi: Dr. Lenin Raghuvanshi, is an Indian Dalit rights activist fighting against Caste discrimination and police torture. His organization, People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR) works to protect human rights of lower caste and minorities in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Dr Lenin's organisation has so far helped 4000 domestic violence victims, rescued around 5300 of people from torture, provided 50000 children quality education and freed around 3500 bonded labourers. Raghuvanshi has called for the establishment of a neo-Dalit movement to eliminate the caste system and overthrow feudalism, thereby establishing a society based on equal dignity for all humankind. For his human rights advocacy, Lenin was beaten and attacked; now he lives under constant threat, by the feudal and fascistic forces in Indian society.

Lenin was organizing forces behind the formation of People's SARRC in Kathmandu in 2005. It was an effort to build human rights mechanism in SARRC countries where the discourse of human rights is still in its nascent stage.

Dr. Lenin has been awarded, with M.A. Thomas National Human Rights Award 2016, along with ACHA Star Peace Award from Association for Communal Harmony in Asia USA 2007 and Gwangju Human Rights Award from Foundation of South Korea and International Human Rights Prize of the city of Weimar.

Dr. Lenin Raghuvansi in an exclusive interview with The Oslo Times's human rights columnist, Amit Singh spoke about his experience fighting against Caste

discrimination, police torture, domestic violence against women, freedom of expression and religious extremism in India.

Excerpts:

What inspired you to work against caste discrimination and bondage labor?

I was influenced by the ideals of my grandfather who was a freedom fighter and Gandhian. Initially I started to work on environmental rights and sanitation awareness. In 1992, I came into contact with Kailash Satyarthi (Nobel Laureate) through Swami Agnivesh. I worked with him on issues of Child labor and bondage labor. I realized, most of bonded labor hails from lower caste; and it was primarily lower caste children who were the victims of bondage labor. Thus, in order to redress the problem of bonded labor and Caste discrimination, I have established People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR) in 1996.

Tell us more about your Org.?

PVCHR is membership based organization. It has 62000 members. PVCHR follow rights based approach to all social problems. We work for the peaceful society based on justice, fraternity and liberty. We provide testimonial therapy to police torture victims, seek justice for marginalized groups and do human rights advocacy.

Tell us about domestic violence against women in India. What are the causes?

Indian traditional family values are based on inequality where male member call the shots. Family is centred on patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity is employed to subjugate women. Women are dominated through physical, sexual

and psychological violence affecting not only current generation, but also future generation. In order to stop domestic violence against women mind set of the people based on hegemonic masculinity, must change. Without changing hegemonic masculinity, it is impossible to bring sustainable peace at family, society and globe.

What is the situation of human rights defenders particularly tribal activist under the Modi's government?

Situation of human rights defenders is going from bad to worse. The rise of corporate fascism has played a key role in this situation. Big corporate needs natural resources and minerals. Thus, in the collaboration with the government, they are snatching land from tribals and indigenous groups. Those who are protesting against big corporates are being framed in false cases, and attacked. Activists working for the rights of the tribal's in Baster district in Chattisgarh, are a such examples. Human rights defenders working for the protection of tribal women and marginalized groups are under attack. Activist working on issues of government transparency using right to information act to extract information, lives under constant threat by the government and non state actors.

Why are Caste-based discrimination and violence still prevalent in India?

India is still a semi feudal society where everything is determined by the Caste system. Caste biases have been percolated from the social to governmental and political structure. Thus, Caste system has become the focal point and violence is ingrained in this system. Through discrimination and violence system is maintained. Hegemonic masculinity also plays a role to subjugating lower caste. Hegemonic masculinity involves patriarchy and elements of caste domination. We can see hegemonic masculinity is widely prevalent in South Asian region where

Caste related atrocities and violence against women is common.

What is your opinion on human rights violations in Kashmir?

Police and military are involved in human rights violations in Kashmir. They represent mainland India and suppress voices of local Kashmiri people. There is a conflict between two identities and two nationalities in Kashmir. Also, communal conflict and intense nationalism lies at the origin of the violations in Kashmir.

What is your view on religious extremism in South Asia?

In the psych of the South Asians religious intolerance is deeply rooted. It can be seen in Islamic fascism in Pakistan and Bangladesh and in Hindu fascism in India such as Vishva Hindu Parishad (V.H.P) and Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S). Such elements are cause of religious extremism in this region and are threat to peace and harmony in the concerned society.

In addition, painful memories of Indo-Pak separation still linger and dictate relations between the two nations. There is a need for conflict resolutions to redress grievances of injured parties from both sides so that religious extremist cannot egg on people on this volatile issue. There is a need to protect existing tradition of religious pluralism and diversity from religious extremism. Religious extremism can be challenged by the religious pluralism.

What do you think on the situation of freedom of expression in India?

Freedom of expression is being curtailed, more than ever. Space for dissent is narrowing. In earlier times, it was caste driven system which control freedom of expression. Now in the times of neo-liberal policies it is big corporate who control the media and runs the show. They decided news content in main stream media and

this deeply affects media freedom. In addition, writers and journalist with independent thinking are attacked by the religious extremist and government agents. Journalists working to protect human rights of marginalized groups are facing threat from government agents and their voices being silenced by charging them in false case such as Bela Bhatia in Baster district of Chattishgarh state. Some journalists have been harassed and some are killed.

What is future of human rights movement in India?

Human rights movement is unstoppable. Movements of oppressed and women cannot be suppressed. Democracy cannot function without

human rights movement. Human rights is aspiration of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Thus, there will be movement for human rights in future India.

What message do you have for our readers?

Restoring and respecting five values-federalism, diversity, pluralism, human dignity and inclusiveness- are vital for peaceful society. And human rights and rule of law are essential instrument to realize all these values giving win-win situation to all.

Courtesy The Oslo Times International News Network

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Two Nation Theory - It was not Jinnah's Discovery

The RSS Bharat Mata – apparently *savarna*, fair skinned, laden with ornaments, holding always the RSS *bhagwa jhanda* never the *tiranga*!



Artist Lal Ratnakar's Bharat Mata, the proud adivasi/dalit/mazdoor woman, dark skinned, holding her work tools, standing before a buffalo, with the *tiranga* by her side



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