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25-year-old says abused, thrashed by group of 6 for wearing skullcap



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Kolkata Seminar Invitation

On 17th August, 2019 at 2 p.m. at Bharat Sabha Hall

(Indian Association Hall, B. B. Ganguli Street, near its Crossing with Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata)

Dear Friends,

Indian Renaissance Institute and Indian Radical Humanist Association, West Bengal Unit are going to jointly organise a seminar on:

1. 2019 Election: BJP's Victory - A Challenge to Secular Polity, &
2. Party-less Democracy

at Bharat Sabha Hall, Kolkata.

The Speakers include Mr. Jahar Sarkar, IAS (Retd.) & former CEO, Doordarshan, Prof. Apurba Mukhopadhyay, former Prof. Bardhaman University & was attached to the Netaji Research Bureau, Mr. Pravin Patel, a social activist of fame, Dr. Bhabani Dikshit, journalist & IRI Member, Mr. N.D. Pancholi, well known Civil Rights lawyer & one of the Vice-Chairmen, IRI, Mr. Ajit Bhattacharyya, Life Trustee, IRI and Ms. Sangeeta Mall, former Managing Editor, The Radical Humanist.

Prof. Miratun Nahar will preside over the 1st Session & Prof. Manju Ray over the 2nd.

You are cordially invited to attend the seminar.

For more details, please contact: Mr. Ajit Bhattacharyya. (M) 9433224517

**Mahi Pal Singh
Secretary, IRI**

In Memory of George Fernandes: His write up ‘On the threshold of a fascist state’:

Preface:

On the threshold of a fascist state

George Fernandes

(The recent 3rd June was remembered as birth anniversary of veteran political leader George Fernandes who recently died this year. Many friends paid glowing tributes to him. The eminent journalist Shri Jaishankar Gupta wrote an elaborative and inspiring piece on his life. No doubt George was a doyen in trade union movement in his earlier phase and played important role in the political developments of the country. He had his achievements and failings. I also had the

privilege of associating with him in trade unions movements as part of HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha) during seventies. Generally he came forcefully in support of civil liberties and democratic movements. I could not resist the temptation of publishing here what he wrote when I along with the printer were arrested on the charge of sedition for publishing a report on the attack by the Indian Army on Harminder Sahib on 2nd-7th June 1985 and other atrocities in Punjab by the

then government. The 200 page report was prepared by a five member team, including me, on behalf of the Citizens For Democracy (CFD) and its forward was written by Justice V.M. Tarkunde who was the President of CFD. There was a lot of hue and cry by the ruling party members of the Congress (I) shouting for the arrest of Tarkunde. The book containing the report was immediately banned and all its copies were confiscated by the police. However, George Fernandes immediately re-published the said book within a week on behalf of his organization Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat and started selling it openly, holding public meetings in several parts of the country. In the public meetings he would flaunt the book and declare, "I have published it and I challenge the government to arrest me."

The challenge was never accepted. The interesting part was that while we went on arguing for quashing the ban order in the Delhi High Court and the government assiduously resisting our petition holding that that the book was full of seditious material and could not be published, George went on openly publishing its several editions. The book was being sold as a hot cake and each of its editions mentioned that the book was banned by the government. 'The 'Preface' written by George Fernandes to the republished book "On the Threshold of a fascist state" is very interesting and relevant in the present circumstances as it highlights the importance and need for civil liberty organizations for preserving and promoting democratic values in the country. Though it attacks 'Congress (I)' of that time, in the present situation one has to substitute the word 'BJP' for 'Congress (I)' and it will be an almost fit. The Preface is attached herewith. – **N.D. Pancholi**

On the night of September 10, the Delhi Police arrested N.D. Pancholi General

Secretary of the Citizens for Democracy (CFD), an organization which was founded by Jayaprakash Narayan and which has the distinguished jurist and civil libertarian, Justice V.M. Tarkunde as its chairman. The arrest was made following the release earlier in the day of this report prepared by the CFD on the Government's atrocities in Punjab. The report was drafted by a five person committee consisting of Mrs. A. Amiya Rao, Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh, Mr. Sunil Bhattacharya, Mr. Tejinder Singh Ahuja and Mr. N.D. Pancholi.

On September 13, the newspapers reported that a case of sedition had been registered against the authors of the report and the CFD. It was also indicated in the reports that Justice V.M. Tarkunde would be arrested along with the other authors and office bearers of the CFD.

The Government's action need not shock us. With political parties of the Opposition not particularly active in fighting and exposing incidents of State violence, it is the civil liberties' organizations in the country that have been spearheading the movement against government atrocities on citizens, whether on a mass scale as in Punjab and Delhi, or on a group scale as in Bhanji in Bihar or Karamchedu in Andhra Pradesh, or on an individual scale as in deaths in police lock ups. These exposures have begun to unnerve the government, and hence the recent orchestration of attacks on the civil liberties groups and their leaders.

Several Congress-I members of Parliament have recently been using the immunity offered to them by Parliament to attack the PUCL, PUDR and other human rights and civil liberties organizations in the foulest of terms. They have alleged that these bodies are antinational and are financed by CIA funds, without adducing an iota of evidence while making such patently false and malicious

charges.

The case of the government and the Congress-I is simple: Their foul deeds and criminal acts shall not be exposed. They will run wild in Punjab, killing innocent people, they will organize mass killings of Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere; they will promote criminals in politics and in public life; they will let the police kill people without provocation. If anyone should document these brutal and criminal acts and publish the reports, such individuals or organizations that do this must be scandalized, terrorized and suppressed. This is precisely what fascism is about.

It is not necessary to emphasize that if the government and the Congress-I succeed in silencing the voice of those engaged in the struggle for civil liberties and human rights, the biggest losers will be the working class and the toiling masses of our country. There is the experience of the emergency of 1975-77 before us, and that is why we cannot afford to be passive spectators when the civil liberties organizations are under attack. It is necessary to launch a resolute campaign against the government's attacks, and be willing to pay any price in the process.

For once, political parties with democratic and socialist inclinations have reacted with alacrity to the government's attack on a civil liberties and human rights organization. The two major Communist parties have maintained a studied silence, which, however, need not surprise us. The Communists remember civil liberties only when their parties or persons are under attack from the establishment, and then too not in a fundamental sense, but purely as an expedient. The Janata Party president Chandrashekhar's statement hits the nail right on the head when he says that "R. Gandhi's government was poised to launch a serious onslaught on various civil liberties groups, in its sustained attempt to suppress the civil rights of the people". Chaudhary Charan Singh,

president of the Lok Dal has also been forthright while stating that the Government's action in arresting Pancholi is a "grave threat both to the freedom of expression and civil liberties".

The utterances of Srikant Verma, who has been trying with such persistence to become the new court jester can be dismissed with the contempt they deserve. What, however, should cause concern is the silence of the retired and sitting judges of the High Courts and Supreme Court to Verma's remarks on the nature of justice that Mr. Tarkunde may have meted out when he occupied the bench. Even if they should not have much use for Mr. Tarkunde, their own self respect demanded that the retired and sitting members of the Bench administer a sharp rebuke to the spokesman of the ruling party at the Centre. Judges who cannot protect the honour of one of their own may not be able to protect the honour and interests of those who go to them to seek justice; and when they wake up to discover that, it may be too late to do anything, as at least some of them may have discovered to their horror when Mrs. Gandhi turned fascist in June 1975.

One wants to hope that the trade unions and mass organizations will show some spine at this critical moment, and not only educate their members on the meaning and significance of the developing situation but also prepare them for action to safeguard the democratic rights and civil liberties of the people. It is obvious that the civil rights organizations are by themselves not capable of countering the attacks launched on them by the government and Congress-I, and if they should wilt under the pressure that is now applied on them, then there will be nobody worth the name that will be able to speak up for people's rights when the final crunch will have come.

October 2, 1985. 

Lessons from and for the republic

Modi is a past master in the art of generating images and hypnotic illusions to modulate public sentiments to his advantage

Valson Thampu

Prime Minister Narendra Modi at BJP headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday, May 23, 2019. It is erroneous to read the electoral result as a Modi wave. It is, rather, the high tide of magical illusions.

(AP)

As expected, the Bharatiya Janata Party has returned to power with an enhanced mandate, winning 303 seats. The Congress fared poorly; again, as expected. Rahul Gandhi, the Congress president, did all that he could to halt the Modi juggernaut. He couldn't have worked harder. Yet he lost badly, losing even his own pocket borough, Amethi. This makes the emerging situation all the more worrisome for those who long for a change from the present hypernationalist spin imparted to Indian politics.

The outcome speaks less of Modi's invincibility than of the political infantility of the Opposition parties. I wish Rahul Gandhi had read Plato's Republic. He would have realized then that the political world is an artificially and arbitrarily constructed entity in which reality is overshadowed by a contrived world of perceptions and illusions. The political shadow-play, as Plato depicts it allegorically, takes place in the un-real setting of the 'Cave' in which citizens live as spectators, chained to their particular stations, viewing images projected for them. What they see, and how they understand what they see, are decided by the puppeteers who project these images. They cannot converse with each other on the meaning or merit of what they are made to watch. To them, the shadow-play is the only

reality. They resent attempts to make them aware of the truth about their predicament.

Narendra Modi is a past master in the art of generating images and hypnotic illusions to modulate public sentiments to his advantage. He has shifted Indian politics from 'public opinion' to 'people's sentiments'. Rahul Gandhi kept attacking Modi on the falsehoods he was reeling off in his addresses to the adoring masses, not realizing that in the shadowy world of realpolitik the distinction between truth and falsehood is irrelevant. If anything, the masses prefer falsehood, if conditions conducive to it are created, as is the case now.

Consider this. Modi won the general election by projecting himself as the superhero who alone can put Pakistan in its place. The terrorist attack in Pulwama and the Indian retaliation in Balakot were used effectively to whip up hypernationalist euphoria. Those who demanded evidence for the Balakot attack were denounced as anti-national. The point of all this did not sink into either the Opposition leaders or the public at large. Truth is irrelevant in such situations; for it is not conceived as a textbook event for historiography, but as an electoral theatre where illusions, impressions and sentiments reign supreme.

Neither the Congress nor the two-dozen-odd Opposition parties understood the game plan. Or, if they did, they didn't dare tell the voters that these were electoral hypes meant to shut their eyes to the harsh realities afflicting them. By all counts, the people of India have lost, and lost significantly, in the last five years. The Modi-led National

Democratic Alliance government has failed on every front that impacts people's welfare. Every promise made in 2014 was broken. The nerves of our shared life are strained as never before. But none of these concerns figured in this election. A set of manufactured images, manipulated impressions and spiked-up excitements did.

In spite of the setback he has suffered, Rahul Gandhi is certainly the most improved leader in Indian politics. This is authenticated by the severity of the attack on him. But he still remains naive politically. He believes in the essence of our constitutional democracy. He has a caring heart. He is people-oriented. But all these attributes were lost on the voters. Why? The answer to this question involves the tension between politics and morality; or, as Plato said, between politics and philosophy. Can a good man be a successful politician? Does the politician who promises 'good governance' have to be devious and brutal to be effective in politics? But, if he is indeed a devious person, how can he deliver on good governance? This dilemma has come to the fore as never before.

This brings us, yet again, to the famous 'Modi-hug' with which Rahul Gandhi 'rattled' Parliament. Rahul improvised a contrast between Modi's 'anger' and his 'geniality'. It was a significant gesture. But it was perceived as gross impropriety. The message, alas, was lost on Rahul Gandhi. Ideals and values, to be effective, or even legitimate, in the political sphere need a context that is favourable to them. To see this properly, consider Rabindranath Tagore's stand as set out in Nationalism. He asserts that nationalism, if it means hostility to any segment of humanity, is unacceptable to him. He was understood and appreciated then. If Tagore were to say the same thing today, he would be damned as anti-national.

This highlights the need to educate Indian

society about politics. But education is not a priority for the political elite. The future of liberal education, its foundation weakened over the recent years, is bound to be gloomier in the days ahead. Liberal education, with its emphasis on rational and independent thinking, is assumed to be disruptive; and for good reasons too. It is indeed disruptive to the illusions-manufacturing process on which politics is predicated today. Elections are won on illusions. Those who monopolize the means for generating and marketing them will carry the day so long as the masses remain uncritical consumers.

There are, all the same, signs of hope. Take Kerala, for example. How has this tiny state bucked the trend? The BJP, for all its determined bid to break in, has drawn a blank there. Rahul Gandhi and the motley crowd of Modi-resisters need to pay heed to this. Keralites, given their legacy of educational and religious renaissance, can see through illusions and ulterior strategies. Besides, they appreciate the ideals and values that Rahul Gandhi espouses. That the Congress-led alliance swept the polls in Kerala can be largely attributed to Rahul's entry on its electoral landscape. The Left coalition had read the signs and had been rattled as a result.

No significant change in the present trends is feasible without equipping the citizens of India with whatever it takes to see through the smokescreen of illusions and manipulations. It is erroneous to read the electoral result as a Modi wave. It is, rather, the high tide of magical illusions. It worked wonders where the masses are vulnerable to manipulations. It is a constitutional duty, as per Article 51A, to counter magic with logic. It has to be done through liberal education and, beyond that, through the spread of mass awareness to equip individuals to see through the propaganda that is being generated.

Courtesy **Telegraph India**, 30.05.2019. 

Media only questioned Opposition during Lok Sabha polls: Ex-CEC Quraishi

“Normally, the role of media is to question the government, what they are doing, what they are not doing... but they (media) were only questioning the opposition... ‘Why they (opposition parties) didn’t do something 50 years ago?’ Is that what the media should be doing?” Quraishi asked.

Former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi took a critical view of the media’s role during the recently held Lok Sabha elections, alleging that instead of “asking tough questions to leaders of the day”, it was “only questioning” the opposition parties.

He was responding to a question during a panel discussion organised at the India International Centre here, after the release of a report on poll expenditure, by a city-based think tank.

“Normally, the role of media is to question the government, what they are doing, what they are not doing... but they (media) were only questioning the Opposition... ‘Why they (opposition parties) didn’t do something 50 years ago?’ Is that what the media should be doing?” Quraishi asked.

“But it was all sugar and honey talking to leaders of the day. Instead of asking tough questions, they were expressing thanks that they were given time (by leaders),” he said without naming anyone.

The Lok Sabha polls were held in seven

PTI @moneycontrolcom

phases from April 11 to May 19. The results were declared on May 23.

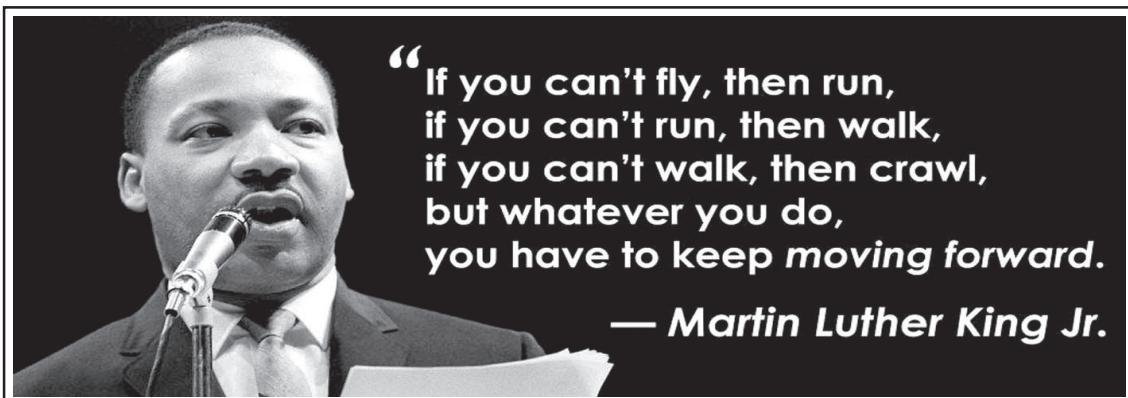
“Media’s role during the 2019 polls has been problematic and a bit questionable... Couple that with what happened on social media, the 48-hour silence period norms were violated with impunity,” Quraishi alleged.

“Because, it was a multi-phased election, and in one phase it was a silence period and in another campaign was happening... and it was impossible to isolate these two areas... people were getting exposed to campaigning. Media was aware and conscious of it, and playing speeches of various leaders repeatedly with whole day kind of telecast,” he said.

The former CEC said the media is considered the “eyes and ears” of the EC.

“We had issued instructions to our machineries down the line that if they see anything on media, consider that as a complaint to be followed up,” he said, speaking about his time in office.

Courtesy Money Control, Jun 4, 2019. 



BJP's inroads in Bengal, trifurcation of votes means Mamata Banerjee may not get desired result from Muslim vote bank

Shraddha Chowdhury Jun 03, 2019

Growing up with a brother six years older and twice my size was not easy. While he could be helpful when he wanted to be, more often than not, he drove me to my wits end. One of his most annoying habits was mimicking me and doing exactly what I would ask him not to. The more annoyed I got, the more he did just that.

The reports coming in West Bengal these days take me back to this part of my childhood. Only today, it's an irritated Mamata Banerjee versus irksome BJP workers and supporters chanting "*Jai Shri Ram*", trying to provoke a reaction out of her. So far, they have been successful in every attempt, with the Chief Minister of West Bengal even stopping her convoy during a visit to North 24 Paraganas district to yell at a group of men shouting the slogan.

"What do you think of yourself? You will come from other states, stay here and abuse us? I will not tolerate this. How dare you all abuse me? All of your names and details will be noted down," Mamata was heard saying in a video widely shared on social media.



File photo of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee.

Now one might wonder what it is about "*Jai Shri Ram*" that gets her blood boiling hot enough for her to have the West Bengal Police detain those shouting the slogan.

Although Mamata's Trinamool Congress won 22 of the 42 seats in West Bengal in the Lok Sabha elections, it was a virtual defeat for her

party, enough to be considered a drubbing by the BJP, which improved its tally from two to 18 seats in the eastern state. This, according to political analysts, was a result of the Hindu votes in the state moving to the BJP's kitty, with the TMC retaining its Muslim support.

"The trend of polarised voting is clear. In Muslim-dominated Assembly constituencies, Trinamool got an overwhelming majority due to consolidation of Muslim votes. There is another side to this consolidation, which benefited the BJP — they got the lead in 23 segments where Hindus seemed to have voted almost en masse for the saffron party's candidates," *The Telegraph* quoted political scientist and Rabindra Bharati University faculty member Biswanath Chakraborty as saying.

Let's clarify here that this is not to say Mamata and her TMC are anti-Hindu.

That religious polarisation would more likely than not determine the outcome of the polls in West Bengal became clear during campaigning, with BJP big-hitters Narendra Modi and Amit Shah bringing up issues like the National Register of Citizens, infiltration from Bangladesh and TMC's "Muslim appeasement" policy repeatedly at rallies. The Modi-Shah duo made their agenda abundantly clear, making sure to bring up Mamata's "pro-Muslim" decisions, such as her move to try to prohibit immersion of Durga idols the day Vijaya Dashami coincided with Muharram.

Besides trying to ban Durga idol immersions keeping Muharram processions in mind, her support for Bangladeshi immigrants was another point the BJP made sure to raise at election rallies this year. Her support for Bangladeshi immigrants and her targeting Modi for declaring he would send them all back to the neighbouring

country goes back to the BJP-TMC campaign ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

While her reasons for making such decisions may have been noble — we may never know — it gave the BJP fodder for its campaign and allowed it to gather its target vote bank of Bengali Hindus. The results of the Lok Sabha elections made plenty clear that there is dissatisfaction in the state with Mamata's style of governance and policies.

However, a deeper point to note would be the indication that years of efforts to consolidate Muslim votes for the TMC, with its “appeasement policies” as the BJP calls it, may not work for her party in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections.

In the 2016 Assembly polls, the TMC won from 85 minority-dominated Assembly segments. The Left Front and the Congress, which fought the elections together that year, were ahead in 39. The BJP had bagged just one. In the Lok Sabha polls this year, the Congress tally dropped to nine Assembly segments, whereas the Left failed to open an account in any.

This points to the fact that a significant majority of those who had voted for the Left and Congress earlier had now opted for either the TMC or the BJP. But looking at the shrunken size of the Trinamool's seat share and the dramatic rise in the BJP's — from just two in 2014 to 18 in 2019 — it is clear that the saffron party was the bigger beneficiary of this chunk of votes.

There is also the matter of the BJP further consolidating its Hindu vote bank over the next two years leading up to the Assembly elections. Much of the BJP's gains in West Bengal have been attributed to the Left and the Congress being pushed to the fringes of West Bengal politics and the saffron party eating into their votes. The BJP is likely to cash in on this sentiment and further strengthen its base in the state in the run-up to the polls. That this fete is

no longer a tough task for the party — which once had negligible presence in Bengal and continues to lack organisational structure in the state — speaks volumes about the threat it now poses to the TMC.

Moreover, attempts by the saffron unit itself to draw Muslims cannot be ruled out either. Ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP launched a drive to enrol Muslims into its fold and also fielded minority candidates from four seats. This, along with the desire for inclusion among members of the community, are two factors that could also lead Mamata to lose some of her trusted voters to the rival side.

It would not be wrong for the Trinamool Congress to fear this sudden spike in support for the BJP. It wouldn't be a stretch either to assume that Mamata's reactions to provocation by BJP workers and supporters could partly be due to this fear. Her efforts to hold on to Muslim votes may not yield the desired results in the 2021 Assembly polls as there is the risk of these votes getting split with the Congress and Left.

In April, at a rally in Muslim-majority Malda, Mamata had declared that she would not allow the BJP to play a “Hindu-Muslim game in West Bengal”. In June, she emotionally said: “Some accuse me of Muslim appeasement. My question to them is whether loving Hindus means you have to hate Muslims. I respect and love all communities and religion. This country belongs to everybody.”

Over the course of the election campaign, the chief minister was neither successful in spoiling the BJP's Hindutva game, nor could she truly dispel the image of appeasing the state's near 30 percent population of Muslims entirely. With the support of even this section of voters uncertain for various reasons, Mamata and her TMC have their work cut out for them to keep the flock together ahead of the 2021 Assembly polls.

Courtesy **Firstpost**, 4 June 2019. 

Unemployment Rate For 2017-18 At 45-Year High, Confirms Govt Data

Confirming unemployment rate projected in a pre-election leaked report, the government on Friday, 31 May, said joblessness in the country was 6.1 percent of total labour force during 2017-18, the highest in 45 years.

The data released by the government on a day when Modi 2.0 Cabinet took charge, showed 7.8 percent of all employable urban youth being jobless, while the percentage for the rural was 5.3 percent.

The joblessness among male on all India basis was 6.2 percent, while it was 5.7 percent in case of females.

Congress ‘Hopes’ PM Addresses Lower Unemployment

Congress senior leader Randeep Singh Surjewala tweeted, after the data for GDP growth, which slowed to five-year low of 5.8 percent in January-March 2018-19, “Slump in ‘economic growth’ & Runaway ‘unemployment’ are two imp challenges before the country (sic).”

“Hope PM & FM will address them by laying a short-medium-long term roadmap of kick starting the growth engine as also employment generating strategy.”

Randeep Singh Surjewala

The data was released a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took oath on Thursday, 30 May. Although the government refused to provide comparable numbers for the jobless rate, Chief Statistician Pravin Srivastava told reporters, “It’s a new design, new metric,” as quoted by Reuters.

He further said, it would be unfair to compare it with the past. In January, Business Standard reported the same figure, saying that it was based on an assessment carried out by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) between July 2017 and June 2018.

It also reported that the unemployment rate was highest since 1972-73.

(With inputs from PTI, Reuters)

Courtesy The Quint, 31.5.2019. 

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The pathetic plight of our secular democracy

Sukumaran C. V.

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 the spread of knowledge, skepticism and a critical attitude. These are the characteristic features of genuine secularism. — M. N. Roy

Exit polls predicted a second term for Narendra Modi. But even before the results of exit polls were out, my sixth sense told me that there is nobody in the Indian political firmament to replace him as PM or to oust him from that seat at least for the time being. In today's India, there is no political party or leader that/who can defeat the Modi-led NDA in the electoral arena. That is the biggest threat Indian secular democracy faces. Secular democracy in our country has completely been sidelined for the last five years and it will be eroded further in the coming five years. To accuse Modi and NDA rule of destroying secular democracy will not help us strengthening it. We have to retrospect and find out who really let our secular democracy down—the Hindutva forces for which secularism is anathema or the so called secular parties including the Congress and the Left?

As the Srikrishna Commission Report observes, "originally confined to the forward caste, *Hindutva* has recently gained currency and fashionableness and its appeal cuts across economic strata and linguistic divisions. Issues like reversal of Shah Bano decision...and the alleged appeasement of Muslims have increasingly helped the acceptance of *Hindutva* among the Hindus."

The systematic dismantling of Indian secularism started from the passing of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which was passed only to appease the Muslim fundamentalist elements. In the Shah Bano case, the Supreme Court invoked Section

125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which applies to every Indian citizen without considering their caste or religious identity. To sabotage the secular ruling of the SC in the Shah Bano case, in which Shah Bano won the right to alimony from her husband; the Rajiv Gandhi government, with its absolute majority in Parliament, casting an eye on the Muslim vote bank, passed the 1986 Act and started overtly jeopardising secularism. The Congress government under Rajiv Gandhi inflicted another heavy blow on the secular fabric of the nation in 1989 by banning Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, again to appease the Muslim intolerant elements in order to secure the minority vote bank without realising that the intolerant elements don't reflect the interest of the millions of ordinary Muslims.

Vote Bank politics started to shatter Indian secularism from the very beginning of the Babri Masjid issue (in independent India) in 1949, when idols of Rama and Sita were placed inside the mosque at night. In December 1949, Akhil Bharatiya Ramayana Mahasabha organised a 9-day non-stop recitation of the *Ramacharitamanas* outside the mosque. At the end of this event, in the night of Dec. 22, the idols were stealthily brought and placed inside the mosque. Jawaharlal Nehru asked the then Chief Minister of the UP, Govind Ballabh Pant and the Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to remove the idols. They in turn asked the Faizabad district magistrate K K Nayar to see to it. K.K. Nayar virtually refused to remove the idols. He wrote to a provincial official that

removing the idol was “fraught with the gravest danger to public peace”. Nehru said in a telegram to Govind Ballabh Pant on Dec. 26, 1949: “I am disturbed at developments at Ayodhya. Earnestly hope you will personally interest yourself in this matter. Dangerous example being set there which will have bad consequences.” (*Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, S. Gopal (ed.)

That is all. Ultimately, Nehru’s secularism failed to remove the idols. And on December 6, 1992, Narasimha Rao’s Congress government looked the other way when the mosque was vandalised. The end result is that BJP, a party that could win only 2 seats in the 1984 general elections, mustered 282 in 2014 and 303 in 2019. See the condition of the so called secular parties today: Congress could win only 52 seats, CPIM 3, and CPI 2. One of the many reasons for this debacle of the Congress and the Left is their secularism that was not secular, apart from their corporate servile policies that devastate the Environment and the livelihood means of the poor. Had the Congress really adhered to secularism, Babri Masjid demolition and the subsequent communal riots would not have been there.

In Kerala a Muslim majority area was carved into a separate district called Malappuram when EMS was the Chief Minister as a reward for the Muslim League for being a partner in the Left Democratic Front! And it has been oppressing almost all people’s struggles, especially the environment movements like that of the *Vayalkkilikal* in Keezhaattur (which tries to save the fertile paddy fields of Keezhaattur from being destroyed for a bypass), allying with the vested interests led by the ‘development’ lobby that devastates the environment. And it invariably murders its political opponents and doesn’t tolerate even the slightest dissent. Hence it lost even in its strongholds. And in West Bengal where it had ruled for 35 years continuously, it could not win even a single seat. The secular parties should learn that merely abusing Modi and BJP won’t

revive their electoral prospects and save secularism. Before blaming Modi of shattering secularism and democracy, they should learn to be really secular and to face dissent democratically and to be with the people in their struggle against the corporate plunder of the Environment in the name of progress and development.

As Stanley Maron says in his essay “The Political Philosophy of M. N. Roy” published in *The Radical Humanist* (January 25, 1966): “Political parties are the chief evil in modern democracy, for they are the main cause of the concentration of power... The primary interest of political leaders once in office is that of remaining in office, for that is the only way in which they can have the power which is their objective... Their primary interest becomes that of protecting their power against those who have given it to them, and only secondarily of using that power on behalf of those who have given it to them.”

Indian secularism has been made an orphan by the so called secular parties whose primary interest was to retain power; and the Hindutva forces today are kicking and thrashing and lynching the orphan in the streets of India. If the orphan is still breathing, it is because of the strength of our constitution made by real secular democrats who sacrificed everything for the well being of the nation.

If the BJP stands as indomitable in the Indian political landscape today, the credit goes to the secular parties that used/use secularism just as a plank to garner minority votes to cling on to power. It is not Narendra Modi who shattered Indian secularism. Indian secularism has already been repeatedly shattered by the Indian secular parties including the Left. The people were fed up with the Congress variety of secularism and Narendra Modi with his fine rhetoric, energetic body language and powerful oration that mesmerizes the general public has cleverly utilised the disillusionment of the public and the

wider public have given him a red carpet welcome while we the secularists keep criticising Mr. Modi.

Narendra Modi will continue to be invincible till the people of India subscribe to secular democratic values. None of the present day secular parties is qualified to make the people or polity truly secular and to defeat Narendra Modi. Mr. Modi is really invincible at least for the time being.

In this age of Climate Change and Global Warming, the environmental cost of an NDA II government under an invincible Modi will be more than disastrous. See what the Environmental conservationist Prerna Singh Bindra says in her book *The Vanishing: India's Wildlife Crisis*: "In May 2014, India ushered in the Bharatiya Janatha Party led NDA government with a thumping majority. While the earlier UPA government had been steadily weakening safeguards for India's environment, forests and wildlife, the NDA carried forward this agenda in an even more aggressive and systematic manner. The ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) shed its fig leaf of a protection agenda, and positioned itself as a ministry tasked with the government's mission of 'ease of doing businesses', and in a series of measures diluted and dissolved regulatory

regimes. Rules, regulations, policies and laws that protect wildlife and forests are being diluted to accommodate industry, infrastructure, and what is deemed as 'development'. As part of its achievements, the government was to highlight in May 2015, the high number of clearances given by the National Board for Wildlife...Many of the projects cleared were in crucial wildlife areas, including within national parks, tiger reserves and elephant corridors."

Let me conclude by quoting from the "Preface to the Third Edition" of the book *M. N. Roy: Philosopher Revolutionary* (edited by Sibnarayan Ray): "...the future of mankind, and indeed of life itself, is globally threatened today by environmental pollution and ecological disorder brought about by man's inordinate greed and other irrational drives and by uncontrolled concentration and abuse of power. It seems that the significance of Roy as a humanist thinker who offered a philosophy of sane society which gives priority to reason and freedom, individuality and cooperation, cultural renaissance and politico-economic decentralisation, creativity and morality, has grown considerably in the contemporary context."

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Articles/Reports for The Radical Humanist

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Please send your digital passport size photograph and your brief resume if it is being sent for the first time to the RH.

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- Mahi Pal Singh, Editor, The Radical Humanist

Does Modi's Massive Victory Mean India Is Now A Hindu Rashtra?

The BJP's historic mandate points more to a crisis in the opposition rather than a paradigmatic shift in India's social fabric.

Sajjan Kumar

On 24 May 2019, a day after Narendra Modi returned to power with an even bigger majority than in 2014, Swapan Dasgupta, a senior BJP leader and Rajya Sabha MP, tweeted: "With 40 per cent of the vote in West Bengal, BJP is the preferred party of Bengali Hindus. TMC is the preferred choice of other communities. This reality must be acknowledged." Muslims constitute roughly 30% of West Bengal's population.

In Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state where Muslims are one-fifth of the population, the BJP did not field even one Muslim candidate in the 2014 Lok Sabha, 2017 Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Yet, the BJP swept all these elections, its vote share going up to 50% in 2019.

Assuming that Muslims did not vote for the BJP in these states, it appears that around two-thirds of Hindus have voted for the party. This has given rise to a debate on whether India is on its way to becoming an ethnic (read Hindu-dominated) democracy. After all, the BJP is winning election after election across the country—barring states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh in the south—by managing to consolidate Hindus behind it. Not only is the party getting away with denying representation to Muslims, it has also managed to unite Hindus beyond the hitherto antagonistic fault lines of caste and geography as a majority ethnic group with shared hostility to minorities in general and Muslims in particular.

Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha is credited with popularising the concept of ethnic democracy, and has outlined a tenuous combination of four features which define it.

They are: *a majoritarian electoral procedure, respect for the rule of law, respect for individual citizenship rights and institutionalised dominance of majority ethnic group in societal realm.* Using this framework can help us understand whether India has actually turned into an ethnic democracy or not.

1. A majoritarian electoral procedure

India follows the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, also referred to as majority voting system, where the winning candidates merely have to be ahead of their rival candidates in their respective constituencies rather than cross the 50% mark of total polled votes. In a country where the population ratio of Hindus and other religious groups is roughly 80:20, minority candidates would institutionally be in a weaker position to sail through the electoral fray. Therefore, it is a fact that the Indian electoral system creates a disincentive for minorities of all hues and institutionally ensures the return of majority groups from electoral constituencies.

Secondly, since 2014, opposition parties have hesitated to give representation to Muslim candidates, fearing that this would lead to Hindu-Muslim polarisation and benefit the BJP—another feature that confirms the majoritarian traits of India's electoral system.

However, this does not necessarily mean that India's electoral procedure is entirely majoritarian in nature and that minority communities have no hope of a fair fight.

The BJP's mandate has to be seen as an interplay of its supporters with a pro-

Hindutva and anti-dominant caste outlook.

To understand this, it's important to look at why the FPTP voting system was introduced as well as the shifting conceptions of what constitutes the majority in India.

Ahead of independent India's first general election, there were debates about the desirability of adopting other voting systems, primarily the proportionate electoral system, which creates parity between a party's vote share and the seats allotted to them. But the FPTP system was finally adopted due to two reasons: one, Indians were familiar with the British electoral model, which follows the FPTP system, and two, it was relatively less complicated at a time when the majority of Indians, who needed to understand the voting mechanism for the first time, were poor and illiterate.

Interestingly, the same system also brought in 9% Muslim electorate (nearly proportionate to Muslim population then) in 1980 when the Congress returned to power under Indira Gandhi after the Emergency. Therefore, the primary purpose behind the introduction of majority voting system in India wasn't the denial of due representation to minorities but rather keeping the system simple for illiterate and poor masses in the first election.

Many commentators have asked why the RJD failed to get a single seat in Bihar and why candidates such as Dimple Yadav, the wife of Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, lost in Uttar Pradesh. The usual rhetoric around Hindu-Muslim polarisation does not help us understand why this happened.

The answer lies in the BJP's strategy of othering the dominant intermediary castes in north and western India.

The BJP's mandate has to be seen as an interplay of its supporters with a pro-Hindutva and anti-dominant caste outlook. Take, for instance, the examples of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The opposition alliance in UP, led by SP

and BSP, fielded as many as 10 candidates from the Yadav caste alone while the BJP fielded just one. Similarly, in Bihar, the RJD-led opposition fielded one-fourth of its candidates from the Yadav caste while NDA fielded candidates from a diversified section of non-upper caste Hindus. Similarly, in Haryana, while the Congress gave more representation to dominant Jats, BJP played the anti-Jat card. In the tribal-dominated Jharkhand and Maratha-dominated Maharashtra, the BJP chief ministers are the non-tribal Raghbir Das and non-Maratha Devendra Fadnavis. In Modi's home state Gujarat, while the Congress tried to gain traction by appealing to the dominant Patidar caste by coopting leaders such as Hardik Patel, the BJP's social engineering appealed to non-Patidar sections.

In every case, the unsaid but intense subtext of BJP's victory remains the same. The saffron party does two kinds of othering. The othering of Muslims has been a feature of the party since its inception in varying degrees. But what has given it a strong foothold in the above-mentioned states is the othering of dominant intermediary castes such as Yadavs, Jats, Marathas and Patidars, who are aligned to dominant regional parties.

The BJP's political success from 2014-2019 is as dependent on sharpening divisions among Hindus as it is on sharpening the Hindu-Muslim divide."

It must be noted that these dominant intermediary castes have been the ruling elites since the 1960s in states such as Gujarat, Haryana and Maharashtra and since the 1990s in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. When their dominance began, fellow subalterns also hoped that they also would get a share in the deepening of democracy. However, the weaker subalterns realised that most of the socialist or non-Brahmin politics was catering to just one intermediary caste—Yadavs in

Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Patidars in Gujarat, Marathas in Maharashtra and Jats in Haryana. The BJP's success since 2014 has to be seen in this background, wherein the party started promoting numerically weaker OBCs as its regional faces, who then emerged as the mascot of aggressive Hindutva.

One should remember that Modi as a chief minister hailed from the numerically insignificant Ghanchi (oilpresser) caste. Similarly, the three-term Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chauhan, hailed from a lower OBC kirar caste. Other aggressive Hindutva faces such as Kalyan Singh and Uma Bharti are from the backward Lodh caste while Vinay Katiyar, the founding president of militant Bajrang Dal, hailed from the backward Kurmi caste. In Maharashtra, the party's face was the non-Maratha and backward caste leader Gopinath Munde, who died in 2014.

Similarly, among Dalits, BJP tends to privilege numerically weaker sections like non-Jatav-Chamars in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and non-Mahars in Maharashtra, who have been under-represented in the Dalit-centric Ambedkarite parties such as BSP and others.

Thus, the BJP's political success from 2014-2019 is as dependent on sharpening divisions among Hindus as it is on sharpening the Hindu-Muslim divide.

2. Respect for the rule of law

In most of post-colonial society, respect for the rule of law has been scant. From caste-based atrocities and ethnic clashes to communal riots, India has seen multiple examples of how fragile people's respect for the rule of law can be. But since 2014, when BJP came to power under Modi, there has been a qualitative shift in this. While violence related to caste, gender and ethnicity continued, the instances of anti-Muslim violence, especially from Hindu cow-vigilante groups, saw a colossal increase, as signified by incidents like

the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq and Pehlu Khan. And while Modi has either kept silent about this or made some token remarks late in the day, many of his MPs and ministers like Sakshi Maharaj and Giriraj Singh have consistently made communally provocative remarks. Most of these offenders were fielded as candidates in 2019 too, indicating the tacit encouragement they get from the top.

While Modi bowed to the Constitution of India before beginning his speech to MPs last week, there is little assurance that his minions will take a clue from the same. While India's first terror-accused MP Pragya Thakur hasn't said anything provocative since the furore over her eulogising Nathuram Godse, it is only a matter of time. Similarly, vigilantism in the garb of anti-Romeo squads and encounter-Raj have been on the rise in Uttar Pradesh since Yogi Adityanath took over.

3. Respect for individual citizenship rights

There are two ways of assessing the state of citizenship rights in any country, one in theory and the other in practice, that is, the de-jure aspect and the de-facto aspect. In the case of India, the de-jure aspect of citizenship and the constitutional rights granted to every Indian—fundamental rights related to life, liberty and equality—is excellent. But the translation of the same in practice has been hampered due to parochial and hierarchical socio-cultural outlooks. While the fundamental rights available to every citizen does not always lead to implementation, women and sexual/religious minorities, particularly Muslims, Dalits and tribal people, have been more at the receiving end. Nevertheless, more often than not, the state has prevailed over the inequalitarian societal realms when issues of discrimination have caught the country's attention.

However, of late, the BJP government has attempted to make the precarious *de facto* discrimination of an individual's citizenship

rights *de jure*, as evident from its attempt to pass the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which aims to change the territorial and inclusive basis of attaining Indian citizenship by introducing a religious basis to it. So the current ruling dispensation is attempting to convert Hindus into a unified Zionist bloc, with a complete othering of the Muslims. To that extent, the ruling party and its affiliates share a sense of ethnic outlook of democracy.

4. Institutionalised dominance of majority ethnic group

Political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot has written that the proportion of Muslims in elite institutions such as India's civil services and intelligence agencies is less than 5%. It's even less in the case of the Army. While this has been a feature since Nehru's time, it used to be offset by the fair representation in state assemblies, Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

However, since Modi has taken over, even Muslim institutional representation has shrunk considerably.

Thus, it has been argued that India is turning into a form of ethnic democracy with the systematic denial of a fair institutional representation for Muslims, even as the representation of Hindus from the marginalised castes is increasing (case in point: President Ram Nath Kovind).

So, is India a Hindu Rashtra now?

In this backdrop, it may be tempting to argue that with the Hindu subalterns coming into the saffron fold and their reward in terms of institutional representation right up to the highest positions of the republic means that a Hindu consolidation as envisaged by Savarkar and Golwalkar is complete. This would also mean that all the social and political movements that people from oppressed castes have been conducting against the dominant castes have been co-opted under the rubric of Modi-led Hindutva, thereby making Hindus a majority

ethnic bloc.

However, this would be a lazy analysis that misses the subtexts of the mandate in 2014 as well as 2019, besides taking a simple view of the underlying set of reasons accounting for Muslim underrepresentation in the elite and representative institutions of the state.

First, the under-representation of Muslims in elite institutions such as IAS and IPS must be seen in the context of community's socio-educational backwardness. The Sachar Committee report had pointed out that Indian Muslims can be broadly divided into three categories of Ashrafs, Ajlafs and Arzals. The committee found that the condition of Ajlaf and Arzal Muslims, who constitute more than 80% of India's Muslim population, was worse than that of Hindu Dalits, wherein they constitute the bulk of school dropouts and mostly do menial and daily wage labour. This is a major reason for the underrepresentation of Muslims in elite institutions as a proportion of their population.

The social and political movements that people from oppressed castes have been conducting against the dominant castes have been co-opted under the rubric of Modi-led Hindutva, thereby making Hindus a majority ethnic bloc."

Secondly, until recently, the share of Muslims getting elected to the upper House of the parliament and appointed as state governors by non-BJP governments was from the dominant Ashrafs. Thirdly, the Congress, as well as OBC-centric parties such as SP and RJD, have only catered to the interests of elite Muslims when it came to minority representation. Therefore, the systematic institutional decline of Muslims has to be seen in terms of their social stratification as well, rather than the way BJP and other Hindutva outfits have been homogenising the community.

It's no secret that the BJP and its other Hindutva affiliates want to convert Hindus into

a majoritarian ethnic bloc, leaving little institutional access and representation for minorities. However, any attempt to do this would exclude other sections of Hindus, as outlined in the first section. Hindus as a community are politically fractured, thereby negating the possibility of India's entry into the illiberal club of an 'ethnic democracy'.

The massive victory of Modi and BJP points

more to the crisis in the opposition rather than a paradigmatic shift in India's social fabric. The day the BJP's opposition gets its act together, the story will begin changing again.

The author is a political analyst associated with Peoples Pulse, a research organisation focusing on fieldwork-based political studies.

Courtesy **Huffingtonpost**, 28/05/2019. 

LET THE RESISTANCE BEGIN.....

A Lesson from History

So, this is the final picture: BJP 304 (vote share 38%), NDA 353 out of 542, Total Opposition about 200 with Congress alone 52 and several parties above 20 (DMK, TMC, YSRC).

This pales in comparison with the picture in 1984: Congress 414 (vote share 49%) out of 541, Total opposition about 116 with TDP 30, Left Block 33.

Yet this small and totally fragmented opposition was able to create such a resistance in and out of the Parliament that the politics of the country turned around in two years. Congress was handsomely defeated in 1989. Main issue: BOFORs.

Now there are many fine and vocal parliamentarians from Congress, DMK, TMC, SP, BSP, NC, Owaisi, others. And there are huge issues: RAFALE, Unemployment 45-year high, Negative industrial growth, Collapse of Agriculture and Farmer distress, Collapse of small business, Stray cattle, Astronomical debt, Massive NPAs, Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Pragya Thakur, Judge Loya.

Let the resistance begin. 



Nirmalangshu Mukherji

“Selections from The Radical Humanist” on the website

‘Selections from The Radical Humanist’ Volume I (1970 to 2005) and II (2006 to 2018) containing articles by all-time greats like M.N. Roy, (Justice) V.M. Tarkunde, Prof. Sib Narayan Ray, (Justice) Rajindar Sachar, (Justice) R.A. Jahagirdar, Kuldip Nayar and others on democratic freedoms, radical humanism, human rights, and emancipation of the downtrodden are now available at the website www.lohiatoday.com on the periodicals page where ‘The Radical Humanist’ magazine is put every month. The two volumes are also available at www.academia.edu and have been accessed by more than 500 people from various Indian cities and across the world from more than 35 countries. Readers may download these volumes from there and read whenever they like.

- Mahi Pal Singh

25-year-old says abused, thrashed by group of 6 for wearing skullcap

Was Returning From Mosque After Namaz; Assailants Yet To Be Arrested

Sanjay Yadav TNN

Gurgaon: A 25-year-old Muslim man, hailing from Bihar, was allegedly attacked for wearing a skullcap while returning from Sadar Bazar Jama Masjid after Isa namaz on Saturday night. He alleged that six men cornered him, by hurling abuses and saying no one is allowed to wear skullcap in the area, and then two of them thrashed him.

An FIR has been registered against unknown men at City police station under sections 153A (promoting enmity between groups on ground of religion), 147 (rioting), 149 (unlawful assembly), 323 (causing hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of IPC. Police, however, claimed that Aalam had not mentioned communal angle, and there is a mismatch between his accusations in the police complaint and his media statement.

According to the FIR, Mohammad Barkat Aalam hails from Bihar's Begusarai and lives as a tenant near the meat market in Jacobpura. He had arrived in the city around 20 days ago to learn tailoring, and was returning from the Sadar Bazar mosque around 10.15pm on Saturday when two men, who were allegedly drunk, accosted him. "I asked for help from four men on bikes nearby, but the two men who had first abused me said those on bikes were part of their gang. The bike-borne men joined them to abuse me, asking me to chant "Jai Sri Ram". When I said, "Why should I?", they threatened to feed me pork. They then pushed me to a corner, beat me up and threw my skullcap to the ground, before fleeing. There were many people at the spot, including some sanitation workers, but none came to my rescue," Aalam told TOI.

Soon after, police reached the spot. By then, many people had gathered there, and they demanded action against the accused. Police took Aalam to Civil Hospital, where an examination confirmed that he suffered two blunt injuries.

Despite his disclosure to the media that one of his attackers had demanded he repeat Hindutva slogans and thrown his skullcap to the ground, police said in his complaint and FIR, Aalam, who has been left shocked and scared, has only mentioned they had abused and thrashed him. They said he was levelling the additional allegations under pressure of some people.

A senior police officer said Aalam hadn't mentioned the communal angle in his complaint, adding he was initially reluctant to even file a complaint, saying it was a trivial scuffle, and only did so after police insisted. "We're investigating the matter and request all not to spread rumours," he added.

"There is a mismatch between Aalam's complaint and his media statement. We're probing that, and also trying to identify the accused using CCTV footage. Thus far, we've only inspected one, in which only the complainant and one accused can be seen involved in a scuffle. The accused will be arrested soon," said Rajiv Yadav, ACP (city).

The incident has left local Muslims angry. "People are being targeted even when it's Ramzan and they are offering namaz. Strict action needs to be taken or the situation may worsen. We'll speak to the administration," said a local on condition of anonymity.

Courtesy **TOI**, May 27, 2019 

Modi's New India: They are at it again, and with a vengeance: Here's A List Of All The Hate Crimes Against Muslims, Dalits Since Modi Won

Vigilantism seems to be back with a vengeance.

Newsroom:

It has been just over three days since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landslide victory, and he is set to take oath this week to begin his second term. Since then, at least six incidents of violence against people from marginalised communities have been reported from across the country.

These cases of violence against Muslims and Dalits have been taking place even as the Prime Minister, in a televised speech to his newly elected MPs, said, "Our mantra should be 'sabka saath, sabka vikas aur sabka vishwas' (with all, for everybody's development and having everyone's trust)."

"We have to break through this deception. We have to win their (minorities') trust... It is a big responsibility that we have to fulfil. Those who vote us are ours and even our most trenchant opponents are ours. We cannot believe in any discrimination," Modi said.

This time, the NDA is more powerful than it was in 2014, having won 352 seats, The BJP won 303 seats on its own.

During the tenure of the first Modi government, multiple people had been lynched on suspicion of cow slaughter with names such as Mohammad Akhlaq, Junaid Khan and Pehlu Khan serving as a reminder of the horrors of



Hindustan Times via Getty Images

right-wing extremism. While reports of such crimes had reduced before and during the Lok Sabha polls, there is once again a spurt in them.

Here are the incidents that took place in the last few days.

Man Shot At In Begusarai Because Of His Muslim Name, Asked To Go To Pakistan

According to reports, a man named Mohd. Qasim, a hawker, was shot at in Begusarai district on Sunday morning after being asked his name. A video of Qasim describing the incident has gone viral.

Qasim says that a man called Rajiv Yadav shot at him and told him "you should go to Pakistan."

Begusarai Superintendent of Police Awakash Kumar told *The Hindu*, "Yes, Mohd. Qasim has lodged an FIR in the incident at

local Cheria-Bariarpur police station and has also named one person in the FIR...we are conducting raid to arrest him but he is at large."

BJP's Giriraj Singh defeated Kanhaiya Kumar to become the MP from Begusarai.

Gurugram Man Beaten For Wearing Skull Cap

A 25-year-old Mohamad Barker Alam — a native of Bihar, living in the Jakob Pura area of Gurgaon.— was allegedly assaulted in Gurugram by four unidentified people for wearing a skull cap.

In a complaint to police on Sunday, Alam alleged that four unidentified youths accosted him and objected to him for wearing a skull cap. "The accused threatened me, saying wearing cap was not allowed in the area. They removed my cap and slapped me, while asking me to chant *Bharat Mata ki Jai*," he said in the FIR, registered at the city police station. "As I followed their instruction and chanted *Bharat Mata ki Jai*, they asked me to chant *Jai Sri Ram* which I refused. At this, the youths picked up a baton from the roadside and began beating me. They hit me on my legs and back," he added.

Gau Rakshaks Vandalise Dairy In Raipur

The Indian Express reported that gau rakshaks vandalised a dairy in the Gokul Nagar area of Raipur in Chhattisgarh, accusing the shop owners of selling beef.

While three people have been arrested in connection with the incident, members of Bajrang Dal reportedly raised slogans near the DD Nagar police station demanding a cross-FIR against the Muslim owners of the dairy.

Adivasi Professor Arrested For Facebook Post On Right To Eat Beef Two Years After FIR

Jeetrai Hansda, a professor at the Government School and College for Women, in Jharkhand's Sakchi was arrested on Saturday for a Facebook post he had written

on the right to eat beef two years ago. An FIR was registered against Hansda in June 2017.

A lawyer from the team handling Hansda's case told *HuffPost India* that the arrest came after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls probably because the BJP did not want to anger the Adivasis and lose their votes before the polls.

Men Beaten In MP's Seoni On Suspicion Of Carrying Beef

A group of five *gau rakshaks* beat up two men with sticks and forced one of the victims to thrash a woman accompanying them with chappals on suspicion of carrying beef. The video of the incident, which went viral, showed the perpetrators beating them mercilessly and forcing them to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'. Reports say one of the accused, Shubham Baghel, was a 'Ram Sena' activist.

While there is no proof yet that the men were carrying beef, the police have arrested not only the cow vigilantes, but the victims of the assault as well.

The police told *PTI* that the three persons who were beaten up were arrested on 22 May as possession, transportation or sale of beef is illegal in Madhya Pradesh. They have sent the meat for testing to ascertain whether it is actually beef.

Madhya Pradesh is ruled by the Kamal Nath-led Congress government.

Dalit Couple Attacked In Vadodara

The home of a Dalit couple was attacked by a mob of 200-300 people from dominant castes after the husband had put up a Facebook post saying the government does not permit the village temple to be used for Dalit weddings.

The Indian Express reported that the woman, Tarulataben Mackwana, told the police that people had turned up with sticks and pipes, and she was also slapped when she stepped out of her home. They also thrashed her husband Pravin Mackwana.

Courtesy **HuffPost**, 27/05/2019. 

3 Thrashed Over Beef Rumours in MP, Forced to Shout 'Jai Shri Ram'



Self-proclaimed cow vigilantes allegedly thrashed three people, including a woman. (Photo Courtesy: Twitter/Md Asif)

Suspected cow vigilantes allegedly thrashed three persons in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni, accusing them of carrying beef, following which five accused have been arrested, police said Saturday, 25 May.

The group of five 'gau rakshaks' also allegedly forced one of the victims to beat up a woman accompanying them with chappals, a police officer said.

A viral video shows the accused holding the victims to a tree one by one and thrashing them, while the people looked on. The victims said that they were forced to shout 'Jai Shree Ram' slogans.

Dunda Seoni Police Station in-charge Ganpat Uikey told media that Shubham Baghel, a habitual offender, Yogesh Uikey, Deepesh Namdev, Rohit Yadav and Shyam Dehriya have been arrested for the assault. The five have been booked under IPC Sections 143, 148, 149, 341, 294, 323 and 506 and also Section 25 of arms act.

Victims Sent to Judicial Custody for Allegedly Carrying Red Meat

On 22 May, the victims, Taufik, Anjum Shama and Dilip Malviya, were arrested under the anti-cow slaughter act and sent to judicial custody after the cow vigilantes informed police that they were allegedly carrying 150 kg of red meat in an auto rickshaw and a two-wheeler from Khairi village, as per the statement issued by police.

Seoni SP Lalit Shakyawar said the meat has been sent to a laboratory for testing and the situation was under control.

Ganpat told media that after the video surfaced, a relative of one of the three persons filed an FIR. He said the vigilantes informed police after roughing up and beating the victims.

He added that one of the accused, Shubham Baghel, belongs to an organisation called Shriram Sena. He had been externed last year.

In the viral video, the accused are also heard shouting at the youths to repeat 'Jai Shree Ram' slogans while they force another victim to beat the woman who was with them.

Accused Seen Standing Beside BJP's Pragya Thakur

Singh's Facebook profile shows multiple posts in support of Malegoan blast accused and newly-elected MP Pragya Thakur.

About a month ago, he posted a picture on his Facebook profile with the BJP leader, saying that the Parliament "will echo with chants of 'Jai Siyaram' when she sets foot there".

'Welcome to New India': Owaisi

As the video was doing rounds, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi tweeted, "This is how Muslims are treated by vigilantes created by Modi voters."

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah also tweeted, quoting a poem by Mir Taqi Mir, "It's only the beginning of love, why

do you cry? Wait and see what happens next."

The All India Mahila Congress also tweeted, "This is how cow vigilantes are celebrating Vijayi Bharat in Seoni, MP. Muslim man being beaten on suspect of carrying beef and then his wife is thrashed to say Jai Shree Ram. Extremely sad."

This is how cow vigilantes are celebrating Vijayi Bharat in Seoni, MP. Muslim man being beaten on suspect of carrying beef and then his wife is thrashed to say Jai Shree Ram.

Extremely sad. pic.twitter.com/uzixWnht8W

— All India Mahila Congress (@MahilaCongress) May 25, 2019

(With inputs from India Today)

Courtesy **The Quint**, 25 May 2019 

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Cow vigilantes beat up three in M.P. for possession of beef; police arrest victims first

Anup Dutta

Police arrest victims first on suspicion they were carrying beef, detain attackers after video of assault goes viral.

Five people were detained in Seoni district of **Madhya Pradesh** for allegedly assaulting three people, including a women, on suspicion that they were transporting beef, the police said on Saturday.

The district police said Dilip Malviya, Taufik and Anjum Shama of Seoni were stopped by the accused when they were travelling in an autorickshaw near a restaurant on Mandla Road in the Kanhiwada area on May 22.

On being informed about the incident, the police came to the spot and arrested the three victims on suspicion that they were carrying beef. They were produced before a court and sent to jail, an official at the police station, who declined to be identified, said over telephone.

The police said they had seized 140 kg of red meat, adding that samples of had been sent for forensic analysis in Hyderabad.

It was only after the video of the incident was uploaded on social media by the head of the Shri Ram Sena that a sister of one of the victims saw the video, a day later, and lodged an FIR (First Information Report) with the police against the attackers.

Based on her complaint, the Seoni police arrested five persons, including the main accused Shubham Baghel, who had uploaded the video of the incident on his social media account.

“Five persons, including the main accused Shubham Baghel, have been arrested,” Superintendent of Police Lalit Shakyawar said. “Animal meat was found in the vehicle that the victims were using and it has been sent to laboratory for test,” he added.

An FIR had been registered against the five people under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Dunda Seoni police station, Mr. Shakyawar said.

The other four accused have been identified as local residents Yogesh Uikey, Deepesh Namdev, Rohit Yadav and Shyam Dehriya.

The accused were produced before the court, which remanded them to judicial custody till June 6.

Though the video was later deleted by the accused, it had already been widely circulated on social media, evoking strong reactions and comment.

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti condemned the incident. “Horrified to see cow vigilantes thrash an innocent Muslim with such impunity in MP. Hope Kamal Nath takes swift action against these goons,” she tweeted.

President of AIMIM, Asaduddin Owaisi, also cited the video and tweeted: “This is how Muslims are treated by vigilantes created by Modi voters. Welcome to a New India which will [be] inclusive and as @PMOIndia said secularism ka niqaab”.

Courtesy **The Hindu**, May 25, 2019 

If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.

- Nelson Mandela

In Haryana, demonetisation ended *ache din* for the plywood industry and its workers

Some labourers have had to switch to construction and other industries while others are making ends meet with half of what they used to earn.



Ashok Kumar (centre) worked at a Haryana plywood factory for Rs 15,000 and saved nearly a fourth of his salary. After demonetisation and the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, Kumar lost his job and now finds itinerant work at Fawara Chowk in Haryana's Yamunanagar for no more than 10 days a month, earning Rs 6,000 or less. | Manoj Thakur/IndiaSpend

Yesterday · 08:30 pm

Manoj Thakur, Indiaspend.com

Ashok Kumar remembered his *achhe din* (golden days) clearly. As a Class-10 dropout, he had a secure job that paid him Rs 15,000 per month to haul plywood between factories in a town called India's plywood capital. He and his wife saved Rs 4,000, and he had few complaints.

That was before November 2016, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced demonetisation, withdrawing 86%, by value, of India's currency. "I received November's salary in January and it was only downhill from there," said Kumar, as he waited – dressed in

an old sweater and worn slippers – in the northern Haryana town of Yamunanagar, at Fawara Chowk, an open-air labour market, for an itinerant job.

Then came the Goods and Services Tax – criticised for its shoddy implementation – in July 2017, and his factory cut about 110 of 200 jobs, including Kumar's. With no cash in circulation and a 28% GST on the manufacturing and sale of plywood, thousands who sought work here – from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and other northern states – bore the consequences.

The plywood industry's annual turnover dropped from Rs 16,000 crore in 2016 to Rs 12,000 crore now, said Devendra Chawla, national president of the All India Plywood Manufacturers' Association. He estimated that nearly 350 plywood manufacturing units shut down, as did 500 units supplying raw material; production at more than 100 units was halved, and thousands of unorganised sector employees lost their jobs. There are estimated to be 1,000 plywood industry units in Yamunanagar.

Kumar has a mother, wife, two sons and a daughter to support. Waiting for an employer to pick him up – he explained how his monthly employment had dwindled to between seven and 10 days and his monthly income fallen by about a third to Rs 4,000 - Rs 6,000. His wife now works as domestic help, earning Rs 6,000, but that was not enough to end their “suffering”, he said.

After demonetisation, payments were delayed due to the sudden cash crisis, which brought down the industry, said Ankur Jain, owner of Mahaveer Plywood. “In the plywood industry, one has to buy wood every day. We had no funds to buy raw material, and we also could not pay for the manufacture of raw material which we had earlier purchased.”

When he first came to Fawara Chowk – “fountain square” – to find work, Kumar had to wait a week before he was hired to unload wood for Rs 300 a day. He travels 20 km each way by bus or cycle to his mud home in a slum outside town.

Kumar represents India's failing demographic dividend – the economic growth that accrues from a large working-age population – and its crisis-ridden farms. Forced to drop out of school when his father, a farm labourer died, he found a secure government job impossible. Options for a Class 10 dropout, Kumar admitted, were “limited”.

India's demographic opportunity stretches longer than any other country, from 2005-'06 to

2055-'56, but falling fertility rates mean the window of opportunity is closing for many states, according to a 2018 United Nations Population Fund report. It has already closed for Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

“Every day while leaving home, I think of whether I will find work,” said Kumar, “Or if I will have to return home empty-handed.”

This is the ninth of an 11-part series reported from labour hubs across the country – places where unskilled and semi-skilled workers gather to seek contract jobs – to track employment in India's informal sector. (The previous stories were from Indore, Jaipur, Perumbavoor, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Bengaluru and Bathinda.)

This sector, which absorbs the country's mass of illiterate, semi-educated and qualified-but-jobless people, employs 92% of India's workforce, according to a 2016 International Labour Organisation study that used government data.

By delving into the lives and hopes of informal workers, this series provides a reported perspective to ongoing national controversies over job losses after demonetisation and the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax in July 2017. The number of jobs declined by a third over four years to 2018, according to a survey by the All India Manufacturers' Organisation, which polled 34,700 of its 300,000 member-units. In 2018 alone, 11 million jobs were lost, mostly in the unorganised rural sector, according to data from the CMIE.

Daybreak at Fawara Chowk

Fawara Chowk in Yamunanagar sees about 1,500-2,000 labourers like Kumar every day. Most of these labourers, from across Haryana and neighbouring states such as Uttar Pradesh, had worked in plywood units that either retrenched workers or simply shut down. The number of workers at the hub has “doubled and tripled” since the implementation of demonetisation and GST, a labourer said.



The labour hub wakes up earlier than other parts of the city. Around 6 am, workers start trickling in – the earlier they arrive, the higher the chances of finding work, we were told. The chowk is situated at the heart of the city, with roads connecting to the Yamunanagar bus depot and Jagadhri railway station. Several shops selling cosmetics and clothes, mostly knock-off brands, and other knick-knacks, dot the area. The narrow lanes are filled with bicycles, *tongas* (horse-carts) and scooters.

Workers standing in small groups looked up expectantly at every passing truck or rickshaw. Finally a contractor arrived and started sizing up the workers who surrounded him: the younger, the better. Those who do get recruited earn around Rs 300 a day for jobs in construction, painting, loading/unloading of wood and similar jobs. Before demonetisation, workers here used to get paid around Rs 500-Rs 600 a day, we were told.

Sundar Lal, 45, used to earn around Rs 12,000 at a plywood manufacturing unit till it was hit by demonetisation. He earns less than half now – Rs 4,000-Rs 5,000 – as a daily wage labourer.

Lal, a Class 5 dropout in a kurta-pajama and tattered slippers, deals with a tough daily commute to the chowk. His home is in Sarsawa in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district, a hut in a slum settlement 28 km away. He takes a bus to the labour hub, and a one-way ticket costs him Rs 25. And he is not lucky everyday. The best he can hope for is 10-12 days of work a month at a daily wage of Rs 250-300, half what he used to earn once.

The five-member Lal family is struggling to stay afloat – just water and electricity bills total up to Rs 200. Lal's wife works as a farm labourer and earns just Rs 2,000-Rs 3,000 a month. Their two daughters take care of the household while their son works at a tea shop where he earns Rs 3,000 a month.

Lal said he has “no choice” but to agree to low wages because the labour market is full of desperate workers willing to settle for the same or even less. “How will my family survive if I don’t work at low wages?” he asked. On most



Sundar Lal, 45, used to earn around Rs 12,000 at a plywood manufacturing unit till it was hit by demonetisation. He earns less than half now as a daily wage labourer. Photo credit: Manoj Thakur/IndiaSpend

days, unable to afford vegetables or *dal* (lentils), the family has *roti* with just salt.

Promise of jobs did not materialise

Haryana will elect a new state government in October 2019. In the 2014 state assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party under Manohar Lal Khattar's leadership won 47 of the 80 assembly seats, defeating the Congress led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda and the Indian National Lok Dal led by Om Prakash Chautala.

In a state plagued by a job crisis and farmer distress, the BJP had released a manifesto that appealed to all sections of society. It had guaranteed the youth 100 days of work, a monthly stipend of Rs 6,000 for Class 12 graduates and of Rs 9,000 for college graduates. The party had also promised loans of up to Rs 1 crore to those wishing to set up new businesses and a minimum wage of Rs 300.

But an RTI reply revealed that of the 1,521,854 youths who registered under various employment programmes in 2014-2018, only 647 (0.042%) had found a job. The applicants were mostly from districts like Jind, Faridabad, Rohtak and Yamunanagar.

Haryana's unemployment rate is the third highest in the country, at 19%, behind only Chandigarh (22.7%) and Tripura (22.9%), showed data provided by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, as of March 2019. In October 2016 – a month before demonetisation was announced – the unemployment rate was 9.8%, and this rose to 15.4% in December 2016. A year later, in October 2017, the unemployment rate rose to 14.3% and went even higher in October 2018, to 18.7%. December 2018 recorded an unemployment rate of 24.5%, the highest yet since January 2016.

"It will not be wrong to say unskilled labourers work like bonded workers," said PP Kapoor, an RTI activist who has been working independently for labour rights in the state. He traced the problem to "faulty" government

policies and the lack of attention to workers' welfare. Workers were not getting minimum wages, not being paid regularly, were deprived of good medical facilities and were offered no options for rehabilitation in the event of job loss.

Nayeb Singh Saini, Haryana's labour minister, denied these charges. "The government has been working continuously for the welfare and social security of labourers," he told *IndiaSpend*.

Schemes had been implemented to ensure worker welfare, he said, pointing out that more youngsters have been brought into the job-guarantee programme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme; there is compensation for workers in case of death; health insurance for workers and their dependents and free health services to families living below the poverty line. The minimum wage, too, had been increased regularly, he pointed out – between January and June 2017 it was Rs 318.46 for an unskilled worker and this was increased to Rs 339.51 by January to June 2019. (Minimum wages are fixed for six-month periods.)

Under the Haryana Building and Other Construction Workers board, workers are entitled to benefits such as pension for those above 60, loans for home construction, insurance for labourers and their immediate dependents, maternity benefits, financial assistance for children's education and so on. As of September 2018, 776,000 workers has registered under this scheme. However, the number of beneficiaries is unclear.

Data on the MGNREGS website, as of April 27, showed that of the 1.6 million workers registered, only 638,000 (40%) are currently active. The average number of employment days provided per household in the financial year 2018-2019 was 33.73, against the 100 guaranteed. And the average daily wage was Rs 281.27, 17.51% less than the minimum wage prescribed by the state.

At Fawara Chowk, all that workers want is for the government, any government, to create jobs across various industries and raise/standardise wages. They will now support any party that comes up with the most workable job creation strategy and promises to “revive” the state’s plywood industry.

A flourishing job hub in disarray

Haryana’s Yamunanagar, situated on the banks of the river Yamuna, acquired two plywood manufacturing units in the early 1980s.

In the early-to-mid-90s, when agroforestry was being promoted, the plywood industry in Yamunanagar was thriving and by 2014, it had reached its peak, said Chawla. The area alone contributed more than 60% to the country’s plywood market, but the downfall began with demonetisation, followed by GST, he added.

Mohan Lal, 65, has worked for over 30 years in a Yamunanagar plywood factory. Today, the man who was once an expert in cutting plywood, seeks odd jobs at construction sites dressed in a torn shirt and trousers.



Mohan Lal, 65, has worked for over 30 years in a Yamunanagar plywood factory. Today he seeks odd jobs at construction sites. Photo credit: Manoj Thakur/IndiaSpend

Lal and his family used to live comfortably on the Rs 16,000 he earned and there were Sundays and government holidays off. They lived in a basic but comfortable one-bedroom home in the Old Hamida area of Yamunanagar.

Demonetisation sent Lal’s life into a spin. The plywood factory where he worked shut down. The job loss and cash-crunch forced him to relocate his family to a kutchha (makeshift) house in a slum in Sarsawa, Saharanpur – about 28 km from Fawara Chowk. After struggling to find a job in plywood units that struggled to stay afloat, he started working as a daily wage worker. Even a year after demonetisation, he could find only five to seven days’ work a month at a daily wage of Rs 250-Rs 300. His monthly income dropped to between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,000. His sons live separately; one works as a cleaner at a government school while the other works as a watchman at a night market. His wife is ailing and unable to work.

Yamunanagar has lost its reputation as a destination for job seekers, said Satish Dhiman, president of Pehar, an organisation working for unorganised sector workers. “The government has failed to safeguard the rights of thousands of workers and their families,” he said, denying government claims about the success of employment schemes.

One unit shut, another may shut soon

Ankur Jain, the owner of six plywood manufacturing units in Haryana, claimed that another 40% of Yamunanagar’s plywood factories shut down by March, 2019. He himself employed 129 workers but had to fire more than half of them after demonetisation. This year, he was forced to shut down one of his six units due to increasing losses and may wind up one more. The 49-year-old has two

children in college and is “stressed” about affording their tuition fees.

Both demonetisation and hasty implementation of GST have left the plywood industry in a panic, said Neeraj Garg, a chartered

accountant and financial advisor to several units.

The fall of the plywood industry was also impacted by the collapse of the construction sector, said Garg. Earlier, material was supplied to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country from here. However, demonetisation crippled the construction sector and pulled down demand for plywood by about 40%, he said.

Plywood prices are expected to rise too – before demonetisation, the price of raw wood was Rs 150 per quintal, now it has gone up to Rs 700, said Arshu Mehta, a 46-year-old plywood businessman in Yamunanagar.

Earlier, under the control of the state forest department, plywood factories were issued licenses based on the availability of wood. Between 2011 and 2017, no licenses were issued to open up plywood manufacturing units. However, in 2018, the BJP government opened licensing applications for plywood units without carrying out an inventory of the amount of wood available.

There has been a demand and supply mismatch in the state, since enough poplar and

safeda (eucalyptus) trees have not been planted in the last 10 years in Haryana and this has led to a shortage in wood supply and an increase in prices, said Mehta.

Mehta alone had to fire 22 permanent, 43 contract and 50 other labourers from a single unit; production at another unit came down to less than half. Not only have labourers been fired, the ones remaining either received a pay cut or did not get a raise. At Mehta's factory, labourers earned about Rs 15,000 before demonetisation and some earned another Rs 4,000 for overtime. Now, more than half his workforce has lost their jobs and the ones who are still employed, have received pay cuts and lost out on benefits such as overtime.

To protest against 28% GST, in 2017, more than 1,100 plywood units in the state went on an indefinite strike. They demanded that GST be brought down to 18%, which the government agreed to. However, Yamunanagar's plywood industry is yet to recover.

This article first appeared on IndiaSpend, a data-driven and public-interest journalism non-profit. 

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

India's armed forces are losing their political neutrality – putting national security at risk

Military leaders and politicians must act quickly to stem the slide.

Sanjiv Krishan Sood

There was a time, Indian armed forces personnel followed one cardinal principle: that they would not discuss politics or women. That seems to have changed now. Politics now appears to be the most favoured topic of discussion among armed forces personnel – serving and retired.

While this is a problem that India needs to address, the shift in the armed forces' ethos from secularism to the majoritarianism that has afflicted the rest of India is more worrying.

A few years ago, I was invited to speak at an event organised by an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological mentor of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The organisation claimed to work for the welfare of the border population.

Many senior retired military officers as well as a few young serving Army officers were part of the audience. I was surprised to see the serving officers were in uniform. The others present included personnel from the police, banks and other civil departments.

In my speech, I enthusiastically recommended ways to improve the lives of residents living in border areas. A couple of meetings later, I realised that the organisation was focussed on profiling the border population on communal lines. Many speakers also raised questions about the patriotism of Muslims who live in border areas in the East.

I immediately put an end to my association with that organisation.

That serving defence officers were actively associated with a politico-religious organisation and that several retired senior defence officers are increasingly joining active politics soon after retirement establishes that India's defence forces are rapidly getting politicised.

Indian politicians, the military leadership and

the media – to an extent – are responsible for this trend.

What India needs to realise is that the professionalism of the armed forces will be the first casualty if the slide towards politicisation is not stopped. If promotions occur on the basis of an officer's political ideology, the best officers will no longer be promoted, compromising India's security. If that happens, we won't be very different from Pakistan that went down that road decades ago.

BJP and armed forces

India's politicians are most responsible for damaging the political neutrality of the armed forces.

The country has fought four wars since Independence – three of which it decisively won – but no political leader at that time attempted to take political advantage of those victories.

That has changed.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, for instance, has brazenly and cynically attempted to cash in on the armed forces for votes. It started with the surgical strike across the Line of Control in September 2016. The party played up these strikes during the campaign for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections held months later, which it won in a landslide. More recently, the BJP politicised the Indian Air Force strikes in Balakot, Pakistan, in February, with an eye on the 2019 general elections.

Countries usually do not publicise such operations in order to retain the scope for deniability as previous Indian governments have done in the past.

But India has behaved differently with the BJP at the helm.

During his campaign speeches over the past

months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often attempted to ride piggyback on the actions of the armed forces to project himself as a strong leader.

For instance, the photographs of the security forces personnel killed in the February 14 suicide bombing in Pulwama were displayed in the background when Modi delivered a few election speeches.

Similarly, Modi's party colleagues have referred to the Army and Air Force as "Modi ki Sena [Modi's Army]" or "Modi ki vayu Sena [Modi's Air Force]" while campaigning. These are clear attempts by the BJP to politicise the defence forces and gain politically from the successes and even deaths of soldiers. *Minister of State for External Affairs by the Modi government.*

Controversial appointments

Another step towards the politicisation of the armed forces is the supersession of capable defence officers for those hand-picked by the Union government.

The appointment of Bipin Rawat as Army chief in 2016 was the first such instance by the BJP-led Centre. His appointment saw two equally capable generals being superseded.

The justification the government gave for Rawat's elevation was that he had more experience in counter insurgency operations. But that is not even the core function of the Army, and the explanation does not sound convincing.

The government acted similarly while appointing the chief of the Navy. In March, setting aside the principle of seniority, it named Vice Admiral Karambir Singh as the next Chief of Naval Staff. Singh will take over from Admiral Sunil Lanba who retires on May 31. This prompted Vice Admiral Bimal Verma – the officer who had been superseded – to move the Armed Forces Tribunal.

This does not augur well for the image of the forces. It will also hurt the professionalism of the forces as senior officers will now hesitate to give their honest professional advice to the

government for fear of displeasing them and risking a chance at a promotion. If this continues, the Army may never produce another Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, who was known to speak his mind to his political masters.

The fact that the superseded officers in the cases mentioned above reached the rank of an Army Commander or equivalent is evidence of their professionalism, integrity and capability to hold the post of chief. The supersession of such highly capable officers therefore raises doubts about the government's intentions.

The matter gets further politicised when Opposition parties question these appointments and attribute political motives to the appointments.

Rogue officers?

But why blame only politicians? Several senior officers have tarnished the reputation of the armed forces with their conduct after retirement.

These officers can be divided into two types. One, those who spout venom against minority communities as armchair analysts for television channels or on social media. Two, those who join politics after retirement and debase the institution they come from by their conduct.

Several retired senior Army officers can be seen participating in TV discussions these days. Some of their opinions are vitriolic. They indulge in heated discussions on religion, patriotism, nationalism. They cast aspersions on the patriotism of members of the minority community and also spread canards against the icons of India's freedom movement.

Other senior retired defence services officers spout venom against members of minority communities on social media.

That these men were once senior officers who commanded a large body of diverse troops is a sad reflection of the systems in the armed forces that allow such rogue (for want of a better word) officers to reach higher ranks.

Officers and politics

Several senior armed forces officers also join politics upon retirement. This is not a new trend.

The case of former Army Chief General JJ Singh, however, is unusual.

After he retired in 2008, he served one term as the governor of Arunachal Pradesh. He decided to fight the Punjab Assembly elections in 2017 despite that.

As a candidate of the Shiromani Akali Dal, an ally of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, it was disappointing to see him use abusive words against Congress leader Captain Amarinder Singh, who is now the chief minister of Punjab, in a video that went viral in 2017.

In another video, JJ Singh was seen campaigning for the Punjab elections with all his service medals pinned on his chest. The Election Commission later barred him from wearing medals while canvassing.

Besides making a spectacle of himself, Singh's acts tarnished the image of the average Army officer.

But it's not just retired Army officers.

In May, the Leh district election officer wrote to the Indian Army on a complaint raised by a candidate alleging malpractice in the electronic postal ballot system by a commanding officer. It was claimed that the officer was asking the troops under his command about their voting preferences instead of providing them with the ballot so that they could cast their vote themselves.

Army has denied any wrongdoing in this case, but as the saying goes, "There is no smoke without fire."

Cooling-off period must be mandatory

I believe that any government servant, especially armed forces personnel, should only be allowed to join politics after a cooling-off period of not less than five years.

The bureaucracy and the armed forces are the iron framework of the nation. They are the ones who ensure continuity of government policies by remaining neutral and not letting their own political ideologies interfere with their work. They must remain neutral.

In my opinion, the politicisation of defence

forces personnel is more dangerous than that of bureaucrats.

This is because senior Army officers have the influence to politically motivate all troops under their command. This can lead to a situation of the kind seen in Pakistan, where the Army has repeatedly captured power and is involved in governance even today despite the presence of an elected civilian government.

The soldiers who make up India's defence forces come from diverse areas unlike those in the Pakistani Army, which predominantly consists of personnel from Punjab. The diversity in the Indian forces drastically reduces the possibility of a coup from occurring. However, if troops are driven by unity of political ideology and communal fervour, this eventuality cannot be ruled out.

Unlike the Pakistani Army, Indian defence forces have always maintained political neutrality so far.

Since Independence, India's defence forces have prided themselves for the secular practices they have adopted. One example of this is the establishment of a "Sarva Dharm Sthal" or "an abode for all religions" in each military station.

Officers and men attend prayers and festivals held at these places of worship without any hesitation. Here, it is not unknown to find Muslim officers leading a puja and a Hindu officer leading namaz.

But this harmony is under threat now. We are fast approaching a stage where "Sarva Dharm Sthals" are in danger of being reduced to mere showpieces. This situation is neither good for the defence forces nor for India.

It is time the leaders of the armed forces take urgent steps to prevent troops from losing their political neutrality. Politicians too must tread with caution and not allow this important institution to fall into an abyss.

Sanjiv Krishan Sood retired as additional director general of the Border Security Force. His Twitter handle is @sood_2.

Courtesy **Scroll.in**, 26 May 2019. 

Budgam helicopter crash | Feel cheated, says family of sergeant on board Mi-17

Ashok Kumar

JHAJJAR, May 25, 2019



'We had the right to know the circumstances in which he died'

A day after the February 26 Balakot air strike, as Indian and Pakistani fighter jets were engaged in combat over the Naushera sector in Jammu and Kashmir, news filtered in of an Mi-17 helicopter crashing in Budgam. Six IAF personnel on board and a civilian were killed; among them was sergeant Vikrant Sherawat. With preliminary probe findings suggesting that the helicopter was shot down by India's own ground-based air defence systems, Sherawat's family said they feel cheated over being kept in the dark all these months — the IAF officers who brought his remains home had alluded to a "technical fault".

'Facts hidden from us'

At their house in Bhadani village here, Sherawat's father Sri Krishan, 62, lies on a

wooden bed, anguish writ large on the farmer's face. "We had the right to know the circumstances in which he died. We don't understand the politics. But it could be because of the elections that the facts were hidden from us. The way the Pulwama attack was politicised to seek electoral mileage, it seems the matter [friendly fire] was hushed up to avoid embarrassment to the government in election season," says Mr. Krishna.

Sherawat's widow Suman said that a week after the incident, she had stumbled upon an article in a Hindi daily suggesting that the chopper was possibly hit by friendly fire.

Kanta Devi, the late sergeant's mother, said that a couple of his Air Force friends from neighbouring villages had also hinted at it, but advised her to keep silent.

Court of Inquiry

The Court of Inquiry probing the incident is expected to submit its report in the next couple of weeks but until a definitive official version is shared with them, all the family has is information through the media.

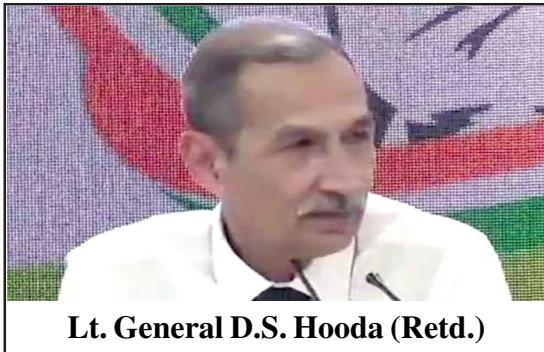
"News reports suggest the senior-most officer among those guilty is being transferred as punishment. I demand that all officers responsible be given strict punishment," said Ms. Devi.

Courtesy **The Hindu**, May 25, 2019



Man Who Led Surgical Strikes Slams Sadhvi Pragya's Remarks on 26/11 Hero, Seeks 'Respect' For Forces

Thakur had earlier said late ATS chief Karkare, who lost his life in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, died because she had 'cursed' him.



New Delhi: Lieutenant General Deependra Singh Hooda on Sunday condemned Malegaon blast accused and BJP candidate from Bhopal constituency Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur's comments on 26/11 hero Hemant Karkare, saying security forces need to be respected.

"Yes it does hurt when such things are said about a martyr, be it from the Army or the Police, full respect should be given. These utterances are not good," General Hooda, who was the Northern Army Commander during the 'surgical strike' in September 2016, said at the official release of his report on national security for the Congress.

Thakur had earlier said late ATS chief Karkare, who lost his life in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, died because she had "cursed" him.

"He tortured me and subjected me to harsh abuse which was unbearable. I told him he will be destroyed. A little over a month later 'sutak' (ritual observed after death of a family member) was going to start ... just over a month later, he was shot dead by terrorists and the inauspicious period ended," she said.

Under attack from all quarters, she clarified her controversial remarks and said she was taking back her statement."I felt that the enemies of the country were extracting benefit from my

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comment, therefore I take back my statement and apologise for it. It was my personal pain," she had said. "He (Hemant Karkare) died from the bullets of terrorists from the enemy country, he is certainly a martyr," she added.

Karkare was killed along with two other senior police officers while fighting terrorists during the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai in November 2008.

The BJP distanced itself from the controversial comment saying it was her personal view which she might have made "due to years of physical and mental torture". "BJP considers Karkare a martyr. This is Sadhvi Pragya's personal statement which she might have given because of the mental and physical torture she had faced," the party said.

Leading the opposition charge, the Congress said Prime Minister Narendra Modi must apologise for Thakur's remarks and take action against her. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the remarks were an insult to every soldier who has sacrificed his life for the country while fighting terrorism.

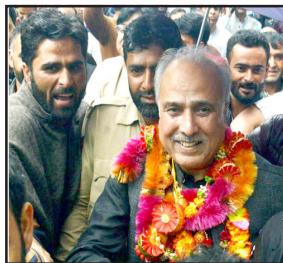
Reacting to Thakur's statement, Digvijaya Singh, who is fighting her in Bhopal, said: "Hemant Karkare was a dedicated officer. He laid down his life for the country and we should be proud of him. No one should comment on it."

The IPS Association had also condemned the remarks against the late police officer. "Ashok Chakra awardee late Sri Hemant Karkare, IPS made the supreme sacrifice fighting terrorists. Those of us in uniform condemn the insulting statement made by a candidate and demand that sacrifices of all our martyrs be respected," the association tweeted last week.

Courtesy News18.com, April 21, 2019. 

THE TRIBUNE INTERVIEW JUSTICE (RETD) HASNAIN MASOODI, ANANTNAG MP-ELECT

‘No one can scrap Articles 370, 35A’



*Hasnain Masoodi
former High Court
Justice and newly
elected Member
Parliament from
Anantnag Lok
sabha constituency.*

Justice (retd) Hasnain Masoodi of the J&K High Court is credited with dethroning the queen of Kashmir politics, Mehbooba Mufti, from south Kashmir by winning the Anantnag seat. Talking to The Tribune reporter Ishfaq Tantry, Masoodi said as long as the rules of the game were followed, nobody, not even Parliament, had the power to scrap Articles 370 and 35A.

Now that the BJP has come to power, how do you, as a former HC judge and an MP, see the future of Articles 370 and 35A?

Even if the BJP has come back to power, the National Conference has won all seats in Kashmir. I take this win as a message to the Central government that look the people of Kashmir are united on Articles 370 and 35A and the final, lasting and just solution to the Kashmir dispute. Had people given a fractured mandate, we would not have been speaking with the same authority. This victory is not a mere victory but a statement on behalf of the people of Kashmir to the Indian people that you cannot play with the identity, integrity and autonomy of our state.

What would be the consequences, legal as well political, if the BJP government goes ahead and scraps the Articles?

As long as we follow the rules of the game, nobody can do it because nobody has the power and courage to do it. Be it the Central government, Parliament or any other institution, they don't have the constitutional or legal right to

play with Article 370 because it is a permanent feature of the Constitution and cannot be scrapped, amended or modified. But, only as long as they follow the rules of the game. The Article 35A is the fallout of the Delhi agreement. We have amended our Constitution of 1939 because of the Delhi agreement and they (India) have also amended their Constitution by getting into it Article 35A. So, 35A is not a mere Article. It has its roots in the Delhi agreement. The pact was reached between two persons through their representatives.

How are you going to defend the special status of J&K in Parliament?

The logic, law, facts and history are on our side. We only need to articulate them.

Will the National Conference have a tie-up with the other regional parties like the Peoples Democratic Party in future?

No way. Because the PDP is the other face of the coin. It is the Modi-Mufti combine. No question of having any kind of understanding with the PDP or any other party during the Assembly elections. We are going it alone as we also have a good presence in Jammu, Pir Panjal region and Chenab. We only need to consolidate our position and we will make the next government on our own.

What are your priorities as an MP?

We have infrastructure, roads, tourist destinations, sufficient accommodation but no tourists. Our PhD scholars are joining militant ranks. Even our youth who have good opportunities like university professorships are quitting. What are the reasons? Because we have kept the pot boiling. My first priority is to do whatever I can do for the final, lasting and just solution for Kashmir. That would be through a tripartite dialogue.

Courtesy **The Tribune**, May 31, 2019. 

J&K human rights groups release report documenting decade-long torture of civilians by security forces

Meena Menon

Editor's note: The following report contains graphic descriptions of physical violence. Reader discretion advised.

The list is long: 432 names. All of them were subject to varying degrees of torture, even waterboarding and shocks to the private parts, in the last decade or earlier by security forces in Jammu and Kashmir and some in New Delhi's Tihar Jail. Those who survived bear the painful physical and mental aftermath.

The question of Kashmir evokes more nationalistic fervour than perhaps any other issue in India. Yet the same people who clamour that it is our “*atoot ang*” (inseparable limb) are blind to the torture and mayhem unleashed on its citizens. After the indiscriminate use of the pellet gun in 2016, which killed many and injured thousands, including children, there was a brief outrage. Often, the exile of Kashmiri Pandits and their deaths by armed groups is used to counter the narrative of human rights violations. And so the suffering in Jammu and Kashmir — either of the Pandits or the Muslims, both characterised by a lack of investigation and apathy — oscillates for credibility between arguments and counter-arguments of who has been victimised more.

Despite all that is already known about the deplorable human rights situation in the state, a new report “*Torture: Indian State's Instrument of Control in Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir*”, launched on 20 May, by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCSS), must make the rest of the country take a hard look at what is going on there. Though that would be expecting too much. The cover page says it all — with a picture of Qalander Khatana from Kalaroos, Kupwara, whose legs were amputated as a result of the torture he underwent.

This report is the tip of the iceberg and there could be tens of thousands of cases, says Shazia Ahad, an activist from JKCSS. Torture is the most underrepresented human rights violation in Kashmir and there is complete silence over it, even in the local media. The main reason for this report is to break that silence. The activist hopes that more people will come forward to tell their stories and there will be pressure on the Indian government from the international community.

This is the first comprehensive report on torture since 1990, in Jammu and Kashmir, which has testimonies of 432 victims recorded over a period of 10 years. The findings provide a face to the many who survived brutal torture, and the case studies are exceedingly shocking and point to the fact that India is on par with other nefarious centres of torture in the world, for instance, Guantanamo Bay and the erstwhile CIA's black sites.

Cases of torture are rarely registered or punished and reports on human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir tend to be wilfully ignored or flatly denied by the government and security forces. In February 2018, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Parliament that since 1990 the Jammu and Kashmir Government had sought the sanction of the central government for prosecution of members of the security forces in 50 cases [which is needed under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act]. The central government refused to sanction prosecution in 47 cases, while decisions remained pending in relation to three cases as of April 2018.**

Take the case of Saqib Ahmad Bhat, a student and resident of Khudwani, Kulgam. He was arrested in June, 2017 and allegedly tortured for

nine days, with electric shocks at Reshipora police station and then the Special Operations Group (SOG) (of the Jammu and Kashmir police) at Camp Cargo, Awantipora before he was released on 13 October, 2017. He was among those sexually harassed as well, the report said. He named his alleged perpetrators: all belonging to the security forces — the Indian army, the SOG, the police and the Central Reserve Police (CRPF).

Mehmood Ahmad from Lathung, Surankote, was studying to be a laboratory technician when he was arrested in August, 2002. He was part of the team that had won a cricket tournament against the SOG but the SOG labelled the team anti-national. He was blindfolded and taken to a ‘safe house’ in Jammu (undesignated places, run by SOG, which are not police stations and are purely meant for interrogation and torture), the report said. Along with eight cricket team members, he was kept there for 25 days and tortured severely. Ahmad was chained for 24 hours and couldn’t even go to the toilet. Finally, another human rights activist who was also brought to the safe house, helped him to file a case. He and the others were presented in court, where they were released on bail after six months. However, they were rearrested and booked under the Public Safety Act (PSA), with two years in jail. They were in and out of prison until their cases ended in 2017. Mahmood runs a pathology laboratory in Poonch now.

Tasveer Hussain died in 2003 as a result of torture in Jammu and his is one of the few cases where the Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) passed an order on a complaint from his brother Mohammed. The SHRC in its ruling observed that, “This is a brute type of Human Rights Violation committed by Taranveer Singh Randawa or Captain Toor [from Poonch].” The SHRC recommended the government pay a compensation of Rs 1 lakh and give job benefits under government rules to the next of kin. A case was registered against

Captain Toor which was transferred to Crime Branch Jammu for further investigation.

The 560-page report says that 238 of 432 victims were given electric shocks during detention; 127 of them reported that the shocks were administered to their genitals. During the Cordon and Search Operations (CASO)s in the 1990s, the armed forces would carry a portable battery along with them and it was used to administer shocks to people who were tortured during these operations. At least 24 of the 432 cases were subjected to waterboarding: Jan Mohammad Paray from Doda said that water was poured on his face, which went in through his nostrils. Mohammad Altaf Sheikh from Srinagar said that during torture, his face was covered with a cloth and a bucketful of water was poured over it. Mohammad Ramzan Shoosha from Sopore said that he was gagged and a bucketful of water was poured on his face. About 101 victims said that their head was dunked in water repeatedly. Often, this water would be filthy or mixed with chilli powder. Abdul Rashid Dar from Pulwama said that he was arrested by the Border Security Force (BSF) in 1992 and taken to a nearby river in Nilora. Here, they took his shirt off and put his head in and out of water for two hours.

The report noted that one of the least vocalised aspects of torture in Kashmir is the widespread use of “sexualised torture and humiliation techniques such as stripping, parading people naked, photographing them, electric shocks to the private parts, and forced sexual acts including rape and sodomy.” About 190 people were stripped naked, foreign objects like rods, petrol, chilli powder and needles were inserted into the rectum of 23 of the victims, two of whom were Muzaffer Ahmed Mirza and Manzoor Ahmad Naikoo, causing multiple ruptures to their internal organs. While Mirza died after a few days in hospital of a ruptured lung, Naikoo had to undergo five surgeries. A cloth had been wrapped around Naikoo’s genitals and then set afire.

Others, like Mohammad Ahsan Untoo, who is a prominent human rights activist from Kashmir, said in his testimony that he was sodomised when he was detained in Tihar Jail in Delhi. On 27 October, 2009, 11 boys between the age of 13 and 19 were arrested in Srinagar on the charges of throwing stones. During their detention, the boys were forced to sodomise each other. Not only did the perpetrators watch the whole incident, they even recorded it on their mobile phone, verbally abused the victims and spat on them.

The report records the case studies of 24 women, of whom twelve had been allegedly raped by Indian armed personnel. A bride from Anantnag was travelling to her husband's house on 18 May, 1990, along with her aunt and some other relatives. They were stopped by BSF personnel and indiscriminately fired upon, in which one person was killed. The bride and her aunt were dragged into the nearby field and gang raped. A case was registered at Dooru police station against the BSF personnel which was closed for some reason. Cases involving rape rarely get punished, for instance, the Kunan Poshpura case.

However, the number of women on record is not proportionate to the actual number tortured, as the victims were reluctant to speak up. Of the cases documented, 27 were minors (one girl, and the rest boys). The report points to "the arbitrary detention of minors under the Public Safety Act which has seen an unprecedented increase in numbers since the onset of the non-violent mass uprising of 2008. These arrests are usually made on the charges of stone throwing."

According to the data obtained through a Right to Information Act application, 623 juveniles were arrested for stone-throwing and lodged in the Srinagar juvenile home between 23 September 2011 and 21 April 2017. They comprised nearly 50 percent of the total 1,086 detentions. Since 2008, at least seven minors have died due to custodial torture and another six have died due

to beating by the state forces, the report said. However, in 2012, the Jammu and Kashmir State Assembly amended PSA to prohibit the detention of people under 18 years of age.

Even young boys are not spared. A nine-year-old boy, Sameer Ahmad Rah, a resident of Batamaloo, Srinagar, was allegedly beaten to death by the CRPF on 2 August, 2010. According to his father, the CRPF personnel caught Sameer while he was on his way to his uncle's house. They started beating him with long bamboo sticks and kicked him. The report said, "His head was repeatedly smashed on the right side due to which he fell down on the ground. The troopers then trampled (over) his chest and inserted a bamboo stick into his mouth to take out the toffee from his mouth. When his attackers thought that he had lost consciousness, they threw him into a nearby field full of stones, which caused his death."

Victims have been randomly picked up and tortured, like a 17-year-old boy, who was arrested in May 2017, taken to the Batamaloo police station, and beaten and verbally abused for two days without any reason given. At least 80 had been tortured during Cordon and Search Operation (CASO)s, raids or at checkpoints. In 2017 at least 540 CASO's were carried out in Jammu and Kashmir, which is more than one CASO per day. There were 128 in August 2018. During one such operation, which lasted for three and half hours, a school in Tral area of Pulwama district was cordoned off by the 42 Rashtriya Rifles. The students were paraded before the armed personnel and the school buses were also searched. In 2018, 275 CASO's were conducted in Jammu and Kashmir, the report said.

According to the data from APDP and JKCCS, a total of 4,042 people have been killed between 2008 and 2018 in Jammu and Kashmir, of which 1,067 were civilians, 1,898 militants and 1,077 armed forces personnel. The report said that detention, particularly prolonged, unrecorded detentions for the purpose of custodial

interrogation, was a continuing and constant feature of the counter-insurgency policy. Cases of torture which make it to the Jammu and Kashmir SHRC also fail to get any closure. The report says that the Commission's recommendations are often not implemented. In 2006, the SHRC chairperson justice (retd) AM Mir resigned from his post saying that "SHRC is just an eyewash to befool the international community that human rights of people are being respected. When our recommendations were not implemented, Commission's credibility got eroded and people lost faith in it."

In 2017, the government turned down almost 75 percent of the recommendations made by the Commission, only accepting a mere seven of the 44 recommendations for compensation and ex-gratia relief. The state government informed the Assembly in 2018, that out of the 229 recommendations made by the Commission since 2009, only 58 were accepted by the government. As few as 27 of the 432 cases documented in this report, were taken up by the SHRC. Of these cases, 20 were decided in favour of the complainants and six are pending.

During the unrest in 2016, the report said an estimated 8,000 and more civilians were illegally detained, including 582 under the PSA. According to estimates by the APDP, more than 8,000 people have been subjected to enforced or involuntary disappearance since 1990. On 22 June, 2016, the then Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, in her written reply to the state legislative assembly stated that there were 4,587 'missing' persons. She claimed that these 'missing' persons had crossed over to Pakistan administered Kashmir for arms training, a claim strongly refuted by the relatives of the disappeared. Instead of probing the cases of disappeared persons, successive governments have repeatedly tried to obstruct inquiry and disseminate false and unverified information as to the whereabouts of the missing, the report pointed out.

With laws like the Armed Forces Special

Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA) used for prolonged detention, the report points out that "An environment where torture, both against combatants and non-combatants, is carried out with impunity, and irrespective of gender and age, is telling of the widespread prevalence of this practice as a 'normal' way of punishing a community to teach them a lesson and coerce them into falling in line." The government is not keen to repeal or amend AFSPA in Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2017, during India's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, despite the recommendation made by various member countries, India refused to accept the recommendation to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances which it had signed in 2007. More importantly, the report said the Indian government has tried to stop the reporting of human rights violations meted out in Kashmir by banning the entry of foreign journalists into Jammu and Kashmir, which has been denoted as a "protected area" under Foreigners' (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.

The predictable silence so far on this report from the powers that be indicates that doubtless this document too will gather dust, while the political situation will be in a constant ferment. Torture and death have become part of everyday life in Jammu and Kashmir, with a few human rights groups taking the trouble to address and document it, with little help from the state or the law.

***(Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), (UN OCHR) June 2018).*

Courtesy **Firstpost**, May 31, 2019. 

Birth Centenary of Late N. Damodaran (1919 – 2016)

Late N Damodaran was one of the earliest Radical Humanists of Kerala, whose celebrated work in Malayalam *M N Roy, Swathanthryanweshiyaya Viplavakari* [M.N. Roy, A Radical in Quest for Freedom] is one of the most authoritative and pioneering work on M.N. Roy for which he was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Academy award for the best biography in 1990. Late Damodaran's birth centenary was celebrated in his native place at Valanchery on Wednesday, 22nd May 2019 at the MES KVM College Auditorium.

The memorial lecture was delivered by Shri Alankode Leela Krishnan, a celebrated Malayalam poet and a renowned orator. Dwelling at length about Damodaran's intellectual acumen and sharp memory and his ability to articulate his ideas and accommodate divergent viewpoints, the poet said late Damodaran's views are relevant even to this date. He was especially appreciative of Damodaran for upholding the values of secularism, championing the freedom of expression and his ability to interact with young and old, intellectuals and laymen alike. To quote Shri Leela Krishnan "Damodaran died at the age of 97. Even at that age he was young at heart in his thoughts and logical convictions".

Shri M A Baby, a Polit-Bureau member of the CPI (M) and a former Education Minister of the State, spoke on the new trends in Indian politics. He laid emphasis on the need for the left parties to introspect about the reasons for their diminished role in developing and rallying the secular ethos in different parts of India against the growing menace of communalism.

Their weaknesses need to be recognized and rectified at the earliest. Baby believed that this can be done only with the help of likeminded people in different parts of the country. They have to be prepared for a long drawn fight against all communal forces such as the *Sangh Parivar*. It should be more of a cultural rather than a political battle, he added.

Shri Hameed Chennamangaloor, while speaking on fascism in India, reiterated the idea of Late Prof Bipan Chandrawho held that it was minority communalism, to a great extent, that was responsible for the rise of majority communalism. It was this very reason, he believed, that brought the right wing to power at the Centre. He also bemoaned the double role played by the political parties in the killings of various known social and cultural activists.

Professor Thomas Mathew, one of the few living Radical Humanists in Kerala, spoke in depth about Radical Humanism and its relevance in contemporary Indian society and polity. To him Damodaran was a true representative of Radical Humanism.

On this occasion the third edition of M N Roy's biography (mentioned above) by N Damodaran, published by DC Books, was released.

The distinguished gathering was welcomed by P Rajendranathan, eldest son of N. Damodaran, while the vote of Thanks was proposed by his youngest son, Manvendranathan.

Report by: **P. Chandramohan**
Flat No 17, RBCA CGHS, Sector-10, Plot-3,
Dwarka, New Delhi-110075. 

Give and take

"All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals. Any compromise on mere fundamentals is surrender. For it is all give and no take."

: - Mahatma Gandhi



Mr. Alankode Leelakrishnan, Malayalam poet and orator, delivers N. Damodaran commemoration speech



Mr. P. Rajendranathan welcomes chief guests and audience



Mr. M. A. Baby, Polit-Bureau member of CPI(M), speaks on 'the new trends in Indian politics'



Prof. Hameed Chennamangloor, social critic, speaks on Facism in India



Prof. M. Thomas Mathew speaks on Radical Humanism and its relevance in contemporary Indian society and polity



Audience at Late N. Damodaran centenary celebration

“We should win the trust of minorities”: PM Modi! Modi proposes and the Bhakts execute!

