

THE RADICAL HUMANIST



ESTABLISHED : APRIL 1937

(Formerly in the name of 'INDEPENDENT INDIA'
from April 1937 to March 1949)

Founder

M.N. ROY

Vol. 84 Number 9

DECEMBER 2020

Rs. 15 / MONTH



“The vaccine should be tested on politicians first. If they survive, **the vaccine is safe.** If they don't, then **the country is safe.**”

—MONIKA WISNIEWSKA
Polish Author

**BEST QUOTE IN
RECENT TIMES!**

The Real Heroes



When Dr. Abdul Kalam was the President, he visited Coonoor. On reaching there, he came to know that Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw was in the Military Hospital there. Dr. Kalam wanted to visit Sam, which was unscheduled. Arrangements were made. At the bedside, Kalam spent about 15 minutes talking to Sam & enquiring about his health.

Just before leaving, Kalam asked Sam, “Are you comfortable? Is there anything I could do? Do you have any grievance or any requirement that would make you more comfortable?”

Sam said, “Yes, Your Excellency! I have one grievance.” Shocked, with concern and anguish, Kalam asked him what it was.

Sam replied, “Sir, my grievance is that I am not able to get up & Salute my most respected President of my beloved country.” Kalam held Sam's hand, as both were in tears.

But the remaining part of the tale regarding this meeting is that Sam did tell APJ that he was not paid the pension of the Field Marshall's rank till then, for nearly twenty years. An aghast President went to Delhi and passed the pension with arrears within a week and sent the cheque of nearly Rs 1.25 crores through the Defence Secretary by a special plane to Wellington, Ooty, where Sam was ailing. That is the greatness of APJ. But then Sam received the cheque and promptly donated it to the Army Relief fund. Whom will you salute now? Indeed those real heroes are missing today.

From the WhatsApp post of **Mahesh Kumar Sharma**, Sonapat.

THE RADICAL HUMANIST

Vol. 84 Number 9, December 2020

Monthly journal of the Indian Renaissance Institute
Devoted to the development of the Renaissance Movement and to the promotion of human rights, scientific temper, rational thinking and a humanist view of life.

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CONTENTS :

Page No.

Editorial:

- Two Electoral Verdicts – Miles Apart** 4
Mahi Pal Singh

Articles and Features:

- The Real Heroes** 2
Mahesh Kumar Sharma

- The Radical Humanists' view on Joe Biden's election as the American President** 7

- SWAMI AGNIVESH - A KARMAYOGI** 8
Chaman Lal

- In My Own Voice: Gulzar, Pramila Dandavate and dissent** 12
Sagari Chhabra

- There is an environment of fear in India. The State must renew the commitment to rights** 15
The Hindustan Times

- Arrests in Bhima Koregaon case frame a transformation in India's polity and police force** 16
Christophe Jaffrelot

- October 16, 2020:
PUCL Maharashtra Statement on the Hathras Incident** 19

- Hathras Fact-Finding Report Finds Crime Was Cumulation of Casteist, Anti-Woman Tradition** 23
The Wire Staff

- Report of the Virtual Press Conference held on 21st October, 2020 organised by the PUCL: Opposition Leaders, Civil Society denounce arrest of Stan Swamy and other activists in Bhima Koregaon case; Call for repeal of UAPA!** 25

- PUCL Delhi Press Release: 28TH October 2020** 29
76 Foreigners on Indefinite Hunger Strike at Detention Centre at Narela, Delhi

- How K.R. Narayanan's Fidelity to Constitutional Values Led Him to Reject Bharat Ratna for Savarkar** 30
S.N. Sahu

- What about the Kashmiri Pandits? – Thirty Years Later, Make the Question Count** 33
Anmol Tikoo

- For Human Freedom** 36
Ramesh Korde

- Politico caste feuds vs judiciary in Andhra Pradesh** 38
P.A.S. Prasad

- Hundred Years of Indian Communist Movement: Promise Belied** 40
Bhaskar Sur

- M. N. Roy as a Freedom Fighter** 42
Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

- James Randi, Skeptic Extraordinaire dies at the age of 92** 43
Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

December 2020

THE RADICAL HUMANIST

3

Editorial :

Two Electoral Verdicts – Miles Apart

Mahi Pal Singh

The 2020 presidential elections in the United States have been significant in many ways. The President, Donald Trump, was contesting as a Republican candidate to get re-elected for the second term whereas Joe Biden, who was earlier a Vice-President, contested it as a Democrat candidate. It was a closely contested election and it seemed to be evenly poised towards the last phase of counting. But in several states, which seemed to be going in favour of Trump, the tables ultimately turned in favour of Biden towards the very end which gave Biden the much needed edge. Trump made every effort to get the counting of votes stopped on one pretext or the other when he saw that he was slowly but surely going to lose the election. But that was not to be and Biden and his Vice Presidential nominee Kamala Harris won more Electoral College votes (candidates) which would ultimately elect the new President on 14th December 2020. But, in spite of knowing that he is finally going to lose the election when the Electoral College elects the 46th American President, Trump refused to concede his own defeat as per the American tradition, still showing his stubborn nature. Even the slogan of Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, before the Indian American citizens, gathered at a meeting to see and welcome him when he visited America more than a year ago, '*Abki Bar Trump Sarcar*' (This time again Trump government), did not help Trump get enough votes to get re-elected as the President of America.

By rejecting Donald Trump, the American people have also rejected 'Trumpism', as it is called by many commentators, which stands for telling lies, destroying democracy and promoting racist discrimination and authoritarianism etc. By electing Joe Biden they have voted for

rational and scientific thinking which Biden and his Vice Presidential nominee Kamala Harris represent; they do not represent religious fundamentalism but reason and saner voices. It is hoped that during their tenure in office for the next four years, democratic values will get more respect in America for which the country is known.

However, the re-election of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in the Bihar Legislative Assembly elections, results for which were declared on 11th December 2020, in which the ruling NDA won 125 seats, as against the 110 won by the *Mahagathbandhan* (MGB) consisting of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Tejashwi Yadav, the son of Lalu Prasad Yadav, the several time Chief Minister of Bihar, now in jail on charges of corruption, and Rabri Devi, the latter's wife, also a former Chief Minister, combined with the Congress and some left parties, does not promise any such thing as the American President's election seems to indicate. In fact, it is being seen as vindication of the illiberal majoritarian approach of the Bihar's electorate although NDA won 125 seats by a wafer-thin difference of .03 % of votes as against the 110 seats of MGB out of a total of 243 Assembly seats. This time too, as always, all the leaders of the BJP including Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not talk of the NDA's achievements during its 15 year long rule but of Lalu Prasad Yadav's rule, or misrule, described by them as '*jungle raj*' till fifteen years ago. Obviously so because there were hardly any achievements of the NDA rule to boast of. They could not have talked of the forced mass exodus of migrant labourers rendered jobless and without money from other parts of the country walking on foot for hundreds

of Kms. under trying circumstances, many of them dying on their way home because of hunger, fatigue and illness, because of the arbitrary and sudden clamp down of lockdown in the country in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic without thinking about what would happen to the crores of daily wage labourers who would be rendered jobless suddenly. Arbitrary and highhanded decisions have been the mainstay of the Modi government right from demonetization of currency four years ago to faultily planned GST which badly impacted the lower rung business class and crores and crores of service class people who lost their jobs and livelihoods. In Bihar also, there is very high unemployment; education has been almost completely destroyed and healthcare is at its worst. Even then, if the NDA has won the election even by a margin of .03 % votes, the reasons have to be looked into beyond the communal and divisive politics of the BJP.

One obvious reason is the failure the Congress party, which has been acknowledged by the party itself, to win more than 19 seats out of the 70 demanded and contested by it. It was a repeat of its performance in the UP assembly elections where it was one of the causes of the defeat of the pre-election coalition of Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress. The Congress party, and particularly its leader Sonia Gandhi, cannot see beyond Rahul Gandhi as the party's supreme leader and the nation's future prime ministerial candidate even after the latter's rejection by the electorate again and again. He does not possess even the experience of a village *panchayat* Sarpanch. They do not realize that he is no match to Narendra Modi in spite of the latter's gigantic faults and shortcomings. Apart from his majoritarian and communally divisive stance laced with hollow nationalistic slogans, which polarizes the majority Hindu votes in his favour, the absence of a credible leader of good standing and wide acceptance in the opposition helps

Modi in the elections. There was a time, during Jawahar Lal Nehru's tenure, when almost all the Chief Ministers of the Congress ruled states were stalwarts and all of them were capable of being the Prime Minister of the country, like Lal Bahadur Shastri, Morarji Desai, K. Kamraj, Yeshwantrao Chavan, to name a few, some of them actually becoming Prime Ministers at a later date. During those times Nehru fostered strong and capable regional leaders, many of them joining his central cabinet sooner or later. However, in 1963 Kamraj proposed to Prime Minister Nehru that in order to maintain good rapport with the people all senior Congress leaders holding ministerial office resign and take up party work because continuous office incumbency was distancing leaders from the masses. As a result six Union Ministers, including Lal Bahadur Shastri, Jagjivan Ram and Morarji Desai, and six Chief Ministers, including Kamaraj himself, Biju Patnaik and S.K. Patil resigned from their posts to look after the party work. This plan was known as 'Kamraj Plan'. Whether it helped the party coming closer to the people and making it strong is debatable. But it certainly paved the way for authoritarianism and one person rule. Indira Gandhi's rise to power as the Prime Minister of the country was the beginning of that trend. Sonia Gandhi has kept that trend alive in the Congress by dwarfing all experienced leaders and keeping away young ones from developing into bigger and powerful leaders so that nobody in the party becomes powerful enough to challenge Rahul Gandhi's supremacy as the sole party leader. The Congress is free to choose anybody as its leader but the people are under no obligation to accept such a person as their destiny maker.

It is obvious that but for the inflated self assessment of the Congress party to get acceptability among the people of the state and its demand of 70 seats in the MGB and poor performance winning only 19 seats, the MGB

would have won the election and Tejashwi Yadav would have been the Chief Minister of Bihar. As the margin of defeat in Bihar elections shows, Tejashwi Yadav as the leader of the MGB found more acceptability among the voters, giving his party Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) 75 seats as against even the increased tally of 74 won by the BJP in spite of the Prime Minister and almost all big leaders from north India including Yogi Adityanath, the UP CM, one of the most communal and divisive leaders of the BJP, campaigning for the NDA. Nitish Kumar, the sitting Chief Minister and also elected by the NDA legislative party as its leader to lead the next government, could muster only 43 seats for his party Janata Dal (United), a fall from his earlier tally.

It is, no doubt, ultimately the people who decide who will rule them. They gave the verdict in favour of the NDA; so Nitish Kumar, although a junior partner in the coalition with 43 seats, is leading the NDA and has formed the new government. But who leads the coalition is not of much consequence. However, what is worry-some is that with a win in Bihar, the BJP has been emboldened. It thinks that it has got a mandate to play its divisive politics and to take its saffron agenda further in states like West Bengal, in the run up to the next state assembly elections in March-April 2021, which has largely remained secular during the rule of the left front government as well as the rule of Mamata Bannerjee's Trinamool Congress. The BJP's leaders have been continuously talking of implementing the CAA and the NRC, which are seen as discriminatory against the minority Muslims by most of the people and the opposition parties by and large, in the country.

Another problem is that the BJP is largely a party which does not promote scientific and rational thinking, unlike what the Constitution of the country enjoins every citizen to do as a duty. Instead of dealing with the country's problems in a scientific manner, it believes in performing

yajanas and *pujas* to solve them. Whether the problems get solved that way is highly doubtful. One recent example is performing of *yajanas* throughout the country by its workers and supporters to give Donald Trump a victory in the American elections, which, of course, failed. But it helps the BJP in keeping the people away from scientific education and rational thinking and depending on God and godmen for solving their problems. Wearing saffron clothes and flaunting their religiosity makes the BJP people and such other leaders connect with religious minded people better because these people start identifying themselves with such leaders. Such people can easily be influenced and swayed by hollow nationalistic slogans, false promises and claims and deceptive religiosity for political motives as has been done by Narendra Modi and his party again and again. It is easier to divide such people on religious lines and polarize them. It suits them to keep the people uneducated, unemployed and poverty stricken because they tend desperately to seek help of divine powers when they do not see any hope anywhere else. They can easily be made prone to believe in God for solving their problems and accepting their fate as God ordained and not to question the intention, inability and incompetence of the political class to do so. That way they enslave their minds, thinking and even their bodies. Belief and the ability to question do not go together. They lose the ability to question and without questioning scientific thought and knowledge, logical and rational outlook, democracy, and freedom of thought and action cannot be sustained and promoted. But only we can decide what we want ourselves and our future generations to be – open minded free citizens of a democratic system or mental slaves of an authoritarian regime who always succeed in ruling us by following the principle of 'divide and rule'. In such a situation, these rogues in politics are always the winners and the gullible, unsuspecting and unquestioning innocent people always the losers. 🌈

The Radical Humanists' view on Joe Biden's election as the American President

Joe Biden, in his first tweet after getting elected, said, "It is time for America to unite, and to heal."

America today stands badly polarized and deeply hurt by Trumpism. The Americans stood up to start on the path of a long journey of healing.

India too is deeply polarized and has been suffering divisive, communalist politics of the BJP/Sangh *parivar*. It is time for Indians to stand up, put an end to this

destruction and start the process of healing. It may take much longer for India to heal.

Trump is gone (as President) but Trumpism (telling lies, destroying democracy, racist discrimination, authoritarianism etc.) is not dead. It is reigning in many parts of the world including India. Trumpism has to be rooted out. The task is much more difficult in India because of its feudal past and the Sangh *parivar*.

Dr. Ramesh Awasthi, Chairman, Indian Renaissance Institute (IRI) and leading Radical Humanist. 

Science oriented President and Vice President in USA at last

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the newly elected President and Vice President of USA openly declared that we must rely upon science for solving problems. This is quite welcome and a deviation from faith based President Donald Trump and Vice President Pence who always indulge in prayers for solving the problems of corona crisis etc. It is a welcome change. We hope that their administration will devote to science

in future. Church and Christianity have been playing very dominant role in America and religious organizations have been dominating the administration hitherto. Now a new trend is indicated by the elected President and Vice President. This will also boost up the activities of Humanists and the Center for Enquiry. In fact, the scientist Richard Dawkins strongly supported the new President.

**Dr. Narisetti Innaiah, veteran Radical Humanist and advisor,
The Radical Humanist.** 

Articles and Features :

SWAMI AGNIVESH - A KARMAYOGI

Chaman Lal

The passing away of Swami Agnivesh on 11 Sep 2020 at the age of 81 years marked the end of a life well – lived in the service of humanity. It also brought to its closure an important chapter in the story of my 10 year-long association with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

Fight against the Bonded Labour was the proudest part of Swami Agnivesh's life long-long struggle for the upliftment of the down trodden. The Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Liberation Front-BMM) founded by him in 1981 has been in the fore front of the fight against the evil of bonded labour since 1980s. It got intensified after the Supreme Court of India entrusted the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition Act, 1976 to the NHRC on 11 Nov 1997.

The charter of my duties as a Special Rapporteur of the Commission included all matters connected with bonded labour across the country except the four South Indian States and the Union Territory of Puducherry which fell in the jurisdiction of the Commission's Second Special Rapporteur. Shri K R Venugopal, IAS (Retd), former Secretary to PM, P V Narasimha Rao. This formed the basis of my privileged closeness to Swami Agnivesh which was cemented by our common concern and respect for the rights of the most vulnerable but least protected segments of Society- SCs, STs and the minorities.

BMM of Swami Agnivesh has made the largest contribution to the volume of bonded labour complaints handled by the NHRC since its inception in 1993. Swamiji used to bring personally to the Commission's headquarter complaints regarding practice of bonded labour at brick kilns, stone quarries and mining sites in

the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT) and the adjoining states of UP, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. He used to come with knowledge of full facts and circumstances of the alleged incidents and could answer any doubt or query.

Blessed with a Saint's body and a militant's mind, Swami Agnivesh represented a soul-force which was deeply felt and respected by the Commission's staff including the Chairperson and Members. Justice J S Verma, Chairperson NHRC was very particular in receiving the Swami Ji in his chamber and hearing him personally. I used to be summoned to attend these meetings.

After presenting the petition that he had brought, Swami Agnivesh would invariably express to the Chairperson his disappointment over the slow progress of pending complaints and poor implementation of the Commission's directions in the settled cases.

Three land mark judgements of the Supreme Court – PUDR (1982), BMM (1984) and Neerja Choudhary (1984) all having their origin in the campaign against bonded labour spear headed by Swami Agnivesh had facilitated the implementation of the Bonded Labour Act and enhanced the chances of the success of trials. This, however, has not made any significant impact on the bonded labour situation in the country mainly because of wilful disregard of their duties by the District Magistrates.

I used to watch with admiration Swami Agnivesh's passionate but dignified fury in expressing the insensitivity of the administration and callousness of the bureaucrats especially the District Magistrates to his petition on the plight of bonded labourers. He decried the habit of most DMs to deny the existence of bonded labour in

their area and cunningly explain every complaint as a dispute over payment of wages which is promptly settled without bothering to examine the allegation of the offence of employing bonded labour. He would ask in a tone of anguish and pain why the DMs are willfully disregarding their mandated duty under the BLA to detect presence of bonded labour in their area through efficient functioning of properly constituted Vigilance Committees, why special provisions of grant of judicial powers to executive magistrates and resort to summary trial are not being used for expeditious prosecution of offending employers; why the rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers under centrally sponsored government and Supreme Court guidelines is not receiving much attention and the budgeted funds are allowed to lapse.

Swami Agnivesh would also express his sense of dismay over the NHRC's helplessness in ensuring full compliance of its legally enforceable directions. I recall I had, in one of these meetings endorsed the Swamiji's lament by mentioning a report received from District Magistrate, Patiala (Pb). The arrogant bureaucrat had the temerity to suggest that the Commission should view the complaints of bonded labour in the context of the agrarian relations prevalent in the state. This simply meant legitimization of exploitation of agricultural workers by their landlords.

The subject of bonded labour involves detection, release and rehabilitation of the rescued victims and prosecution of the offending employers. Neglect of the rehabilitatory aspect and almost nil outcome of prosecution has been a constant complaint of Swami Agnivesh. He lamented over the poor execution of centrally sponsored schemes of rehabilitation despite detailed guidelines for rehabilitation—material, social and psychological in categories such as agricultural, non-agricultural skill/craft based. NHRC was empowered to issue enforceable directions and ensure robust monitoring.

There was one case of rehabilitation of freed

bonded labourers which I consider a model case of my ten years of stay in the NHRC. This is attributed largely to the personal efforts and constant involvement of Swami Agnivesh. The case concerns rehabilitation of 15 families comprising 27 members-16 male and 11 female of Saharia tribe (ST) of MP who were rescued from employment of bonded labourers at stone quarries In Gwalior region.

This case was detected by the BMM workers and brought to the notice of DM Shivpuri personally by Swami Agnivesh. Inspired by the personal involvement of Swamiji, DM Kanta Rao used all available resources and worked out a unique scheme of rehabilitation of the freed bonded labourers. As they had long experience of working at stone quarries, the sensitized DM allotted them on lease a stone quarry of suitable size. They were provided necessary implements and tools and helped to start a unit of their own and run it as free lease holders of the quarry. Each family was allotted government land for homestead purposes and provided low cost dwelling under Indira Awas Yojna with water supply and basic sanitation facilities. An Aangan-Wadi Centre was set up to bring the settlement under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). All families were issued ration cards and attached to the nearest PDS shop. An additional Primary School was sanctioned in a nearby village to accommodate the children of these families.

Accompanied by the DM, I visited the project site a month after it had become operational and interacted with the beneficiaries. The DM briefed me in detail about his remarkable initiative what impact on the lives of the beneficiaries was clearly visible. It was heartening to learn that whereas a husband and wife together were earlier paid Rs 250/- a day as bonded labourers, husband alone was making a daily earning of Rs 750/- as a free lease holder. They requested for installation of an additional hand pump so that they could start growing vegetables for their own

consumption. Before the DM could respond, I asked them whether they would mind paying for the additional facility out of their increased earnings. They looked at one another and readily accepted the suggestion. I felt delighted and congratulated the DM for restoring their self-esteem and human dignity which I consider the most essential though extremely difficult part of any strategy for rehabilitating the victims of injustice and exploitation.

As a devout Aryasmajist Swami Agnivesh was a religious man in the conventional sense of the term. He practiced Vedic injunctions and rituals, opposed idolatory and vehemently condemned bigotry. He stood for the equality and unity of all faiths, preached and promoted communal harmony and defended the rights of the minorities such as Muslims and Christians. It is firm belief in the equal worth and dignity of all persons regardless of differences of any kind was rooted in the vedantic principle that we are all equal speaks of the same supreme divine. He was understandably on the hit list of the Hindu-right and faced three attacks on his life-Bastar, Chhatisgarh (2011), Pakur Jharkhand (2018) and Delhi (2018). It is sad and shocking that a text book case of attempt to commit murder u/s 307 IPC punishable with ten years or life imprisonment was casually registered as a case of simple hurt carrying punishment of one year imprisonment in the Jharkhand incident. There has been no worthwhile investigation in any of these cases and the culprits remained untraced.

I remained in touch with Swami Agnivesh even after I left the NHRC in 2008 and started spending most of my time in a tribal pocket of Karnataka. He would occasionally consult me on phone about BMM matters pending with the NHRC and ask me to speak to the dealing section for their getting them expedited. It was always heartening to feel that the angry old man was continuing his fight with DMs over the issuing of release certificates and pursuing of rehabilitation of rescued bonded labourers.

I called Swami Agnivesh sometime in April this year to find out how he was facing the crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic. I learnt that he was unwell and was under treatment at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS). I started calling him after every 8-10 days to check his condition. He would warmly respond from the hospital bed and invariably say, "*bahut achha lagta hai aapka phone aane par*". I spoke to him 2-3 days before his death and sensed a worrying exhaustion and feebleness in his voice.

A friend who knew about my association with Swami Agnivesh informed me about his death of the 12th Sept morning after receiving the news from social media. I called the BMM office and obtained information about the site and time of cremation. Some well-wishers advised me strongly not to take risk of exposing myself to Corona virus by attending the cremation.

Swami Agnivesh was cremated at the Ashram/Training Centre of the BMM at village Bhedpa in District Gurugram. He loved visiting this place very often for rest and respite from the noisy life at his personal residence at the BMM HQ, situated next to the Jantar Mantar.

The cremation was organized by the Arya Samaj and the gathering of about 1000 comprised almost totally of the Swamis and young initiates in customary white robes representing the various Arya Samaj temples of NCT. The mortal remains of Swamiji were consigned to fire with Vedic chants. As I did not find any one known to me in the crowd, I stood silently in a corner near the pyre and paid obeisance to the venerable crusader of social causes in my own agnostic way.

I feel happy with myself after bidding farewell to Swami Agnivesh on his final journey. It was a risk indeed but not a risk that I could consider avoidable. I would have remained upset and angry with myself for several days if I had surrendered my moral obligation to the fear of corona.


I was always fascinated by the life of Swami Agnivesh governed beautifully by a mix of humanistic fervour of a compassionate heart and

leftist leanings of an activist mind.

I recall one of our sweet and short meetings when we discussed our reading habits and choice of books. He told me about his interest in the works of progressive Hindi poets Muktibodh, Dushyant, and Dhumal. He was fond of quoting the following lines from a Ghazal of Dushyant Kumar appropriately in his speeches and addresses:

*“Mere seene mein nahin to tere seene mein sahi
Ho kahin bhi aag, lekin aag jalni chahiye”*

(If not in my heart, let it be in your heart; But wherever be the fire, the fire must continue to light)

The author, a retired IPS officer is, a former DGP Nagaland and Special Rapporteur NHRC. 

Reader's Comments

Apropos of Mr. A.L. Rawal's comments published at page 20 of the October 2020 issue on 'Stop the witch hunt and persecution of Conscientious Dissenters: PUCL' (published at page 19 of The Radical Humanist dated September 2020):

IS THIS A BRAHMIN GOVERNMENT?

Prof. A.L. Raval made a peculiar argument in his comments (page 20 in October issue of The Radical Humanist). He took trouble to explain the battles of Buxur, Plassey and of 1857. You cannot expect the people at Bhima Koregaon to celebrate the victory of people who fought those battles as they are in no way concerned with those battles. They were not even nationalists. They were just employees of the colonial government. The people now wanted to celebrate the victories where their ancestors participated. Is it a crime?

They fought under the British banner against national forces and won. They were not concerned whether the fight was against national interests or against Brahmins. Their horizon was limited to earn a living by joining the army of the colonial government. There were thousands of Indian soldiers who fought on behalf of colonial Indian government in both the World Wars. Nobody detested them. Then why do you curse those who fought in the Bhima Koregaon battle? They fought because they were the employees of the colonial powers, not because they wanted to fight against the Brahmins. It is only when you look through coloured glasses that you conclude they celebrate because “at Bhima Koregaon the Brahmins of Pune lost.” Till now nobody came to such communal conclusion on that battle. You see in it a “vicious agenda to divide the Hindu society and sow the seeds of bitterness.” Is this what you taught in the DU for 41 years?

It may be true that the faculty member who “used to walk on his fours” could be a courier of Naxalites. Does it mean that he should be imprisoned for life without trial by a court? If the meeting at Bhima Koregaon was such a crime why those who started the confrontation were not arrested? Why all those who are suspected to have sympathy for it are being rounded up indiscriminately and thrown into jails? How many years will it take to bring them to trial? For you intellectuals will never be clean. Only those who conform to your ideology are clean. Isn't it?

Jitendra, Hyderabad

23 October, 2020

In My Own Voice: Gulzar, Pramila Dandavate and dissent

Sagari Chhabra

At the Indian International Film Festival many years ago, I saw Gulzar, Sai Paranjape and Amol Palekar huddled together. I wished Sai who I knew, but she nodded perfunctorily and I thought she was rather preoccupied discussing her next film project. Then again, the next day I saw the three in deep conversation, heads put together talking in almost hushed whispers. I watched but this time I stayed away.

Later I was invited to read my poetry at the Delhi International Literary Festival. It was a trip by bus to the Neemrana fort with other writers for which I had to get up in the early hours of the morning but on reaching there I was perfunctorily informed by the festival organizer, that the 'poetry slots were full' and I would not be reading. I was annoyed, I loathe going to fancy hotels but there had been a purpose, now my time had been completely wasted.

I looked around and spotted Gulzar dressed in his trademark white kurta-pajama, he had positioned himself besides a pastry counter and was serving each person like a *granthi* offers *kara prasad*. I joined him and together we served the *langar*. We got talking and I told him I had read his, 'A Story In The Name Of Kuldeep Nayar' published in translation in The Little Magazine. Someone asked what it was about and Gulzar asked me to retell it, as 'a reader'.

I tried to render it faithfully: Gulzar tells Kuldeep Nayar that he is travelling to Sialkot, Nayar's hometown now in Pakistan. Kuldeep Nayar asks him to visit his family home that he had been compelled to leave like millions of others during Partition. Nayar recalls that there was a grave of a Pir on which his mother, Puran Devi a Sikh, used to light a diya every evening

with a prayer. He wonders is the grave still there?

Gulzar promises Kuldeep Nayar he will go to his former home; he recounts how everything in Sialkot has changed beyond description, but he locates the grave which has remained intact. It was touching that both time and marauding mobs had left the grave alone and with it a certain history of inter-faith living and harmony.

I had pushed our conversation to the recesses of my memory when a friend forwarded me an exquisite oral rendering of Gulzar's 'Taqseem' on the web by Arti Jain. The memoir is about a call that Gulzar receives from Sai Paranjape. She tells him that Pramila Dandavate wants to talk to him and wants a convenient time. Gulzar asks 'who is Pramila Dandavate?' and Sai responds, 'She is the wife of the former Finance Minister'. Gulzar asks, 'why does she want to talk to me?' He recalls that Sai hides behind the curtain of English to give him a formal reply. She tells him that there is a certain Sardar Harbhajan Singh who was a Minister of Civil Supplies during the Janata Dal and who had lost his son during the Partition. Harbhajan Singh is convinced that he, Gulzar is indeed his long lost son. Gulzar is clearly baffled; he responds that he was with his parents at the time of Partition and he was already 11 years old enough to know what was happening. The actor-director, Amol Palekar too calls with the same request and he gives a time to Pramila Dandavate for the next day.

Pramila Dandavate calls Gulzar from Delhi and reiterates what both Sai Paranjape and Amol Palekar have been expressing, but she also adds that Harbhajan Singh is willing to come to Bombay to meet him. Gulzar tells her that he is coming to Delhi in January for the international

film festival — it was November when she called — and that he would meet Harbhajan Singh then.

The three, Gulzar, Amol and Sai Paranjape meet at the Indian International Festival foyer and discuss the issue; so that is what I had witnessed as an unwitting bystander and delegate to the festival.

Gulzar recounts that he went to meet Harbhajan Singh who was present with his wife and a grown up son, Iqbal Singh; both Sai and Amol were also present.

He did '*pauri paunna*' to Harbhajan Singh and also touched his wife's feet who Harbhajan said was 'his mother'. He was deeply touched. Then Harbhajan Singh shared how they had a Muslim landlord who was both reassuring and supportive but when the marauding mobs came from outside he and his family were compelled to leave. As they trudged on foot across the border, weary, hopelessly tired, hungry and thirsty, somehow their younger children got lost. They searched every refugee camp for years thinking they would find them but it was not to be. Many years later they located their daughter now a grown up woman. She recalled that she had got exhausted with walking, wandered off and slept behind a tandoor, when she awoke the karavaan had left. The owners of the house kept her thinking someone would return for her but when no one arrived they made her do some chores, fed her and were decent. After she grew of age, the master of the house performed a nikah and married her. She bore him two children who are now well settled.

Gulzar asked Harbhajan Singh and his wife what emotions did she express when she met them, but they said she was calm and told everything in a matter of fact manner. Then he asked them how were they so sure he, Gulzar was their son?

Harbhajan Singh said his little son, Sampooran Singh too had gone missing over this ordeal of walking across the border and when

his elder son, Iqbal Singh read in a magazine that Gulzar was his pen name and he had changed it from Sampooran Singh, both he and his wife were convinced that he indeed was their long lost son. Just as their daughter, Satya was now named Dilshaad, he too was their son, Sampooran Singh.

Gulzar again explained that he was with his parents in Delhi during the Partition and gave a long explanation of his antecedents. They part with warmth and he again touches their feet. Time moves on and one day he gets a letter from the elder son, Iqbal that his father had died and his mother had said, 'Chotte nu zaroor dasna' — do let the youngest know. Gulzar writes, 'I felt I had lost my own Daarji' — father.

The story touched me, the Partition had divided not just the border but so many lives and scarred the psyche of millions but then I get the news that a memorial built by the Punjabis in memory of the victims of Partition with the words of Amrita Pritam, 'Aaj Me Aakha Warris Shah Nun...' - I invoke Warris Shah today - along with the words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz had been demolished. This memorial had been set up by those who had suffered the unspeakable horrors of Partition including freedom fighter, Baba Bhagat Singh Bilga, and writers, Kuldip Nayar, Harbhajan Singh Halvarvi and Poonam. During its inauguration, the waters of the five rivers of Punjab had been poured over it; how could anyone have trampled over the feelings of Punjabis on both sides of the border, I wondered.

Partition had been the Holocaust of South Asia where over a million had lost their lives and now in free India we had witnessed thousands walking home during the lockdown some collapsing from thirst and hunger. When will we ever learn? Now we are told that no data was kept of the migrants who died, so how will their families ever receive compensation?

There was another aspect of Gulzar's story that stirred memories. Gulzar writes that

Pramila Dandavate was 'the wife of the former Finance Minister' but surely she was much more than just that; she was a Member of Parliament in her own right and a champion of women's rights.

In the late eighties there was the case of N.G a young woman who was picked up from a dhaba in Dhaula Kuan taken into police custody and raped. As part of the Peoples Union of Democratic Rights fact-finding team we observed that nothing warranted her being picked up and taken to the police station. There was also no record in the Daily Diary of her being taken to the police station and the police were ambivalent about everything. She had now been lodged at the Nari Niketan women's shelter home and along with Harish Dhawan of PUDR I went to meet her. The authorities denied us a meeting with her but told us of the date when she would appear before the courts for her case.

On that day I reached the courts well before the time given to me only to learn that her case had come up as per schedule a day earlier. Obviously someone had lied to us and did not want us to meet N.G. I called the authorities at Nari Niketan and asked them where had she gone, surely she had left a forwarding address. They told me she had gone to the Brindavan temples in Mathura. That is when I decided to go the Mathura to search for N.G to tell her that she was not alone, that some of us did care. Sujata Madhok, a journalist with the Women's Feature Service and a friend, said she would accompany me and together we set off for Mathura. We combed the Brindavan temples, it was obviously a wild goose chase and there was no sign of N.G.

The PUDR report, 'Custodial Rape In Delhi' documented as many as fourteen custodial rapes within the span of 1988-1990. I documented the case of N.G and when I presented the report at a small meeting of Mahila Dakshta Samiti, Pramila Dandavate grabbed the report from my hands. Shortly after, I read in the newspapers

that two policeman had been suspended and then later, dismissed over a custodial rape. The R.K Puram police station where this custodial rape had occurred, started a Crimes Against Women's cell; so obviously the police had done some introspection and taken action over the issue. No trial could take place because the victim had 'disappeared'. However, it must be remembered that Pramila Dandavate got the wheels of justice moving by taking the report forward.

The story does not end here. I went on to direct a documentary film, 'Now, I will Speak' on rape. In the course of my research I went to Pararia in Bihar where the women had been gang-raped by the police who broke into their huts at night, in uniform. As I wandered around the area, I noticed a huge mass of land that had been dug out and earth-moving machines lying around. On inquiring from the villagers I learnt that a dam was to be built on the Punasi river and Pararia was one of the villages that would be submerged. The villagers were protesting; was rape used as a tool to suppress the movement for their human rights?

The film aroused a lot of attention and concerned debate and Pramila Dandavate organized a seminar and a screening of the film at India International Centre. At the discussion that followed, I was incensed that a group of women MLA's of the ruling party had said that no gang rape had occurred obviously to save the government of the day. I said, 'We cannot rely on politicians to stand for women's rights as they favour the political dispensation'. Pramila Dandavate looked at me and walked out of the auditorium. I was young and brash; I regret my words for here was a woman of conscience who had taken the report on 'Custodial Rape in Delhi' forward and ensured that action had been taken. However those were different times and however flawed our democracy, one could express dissent.

(To be Contd....on Page - 18)

There is an environment of fear in India. The State must renew the commitment to rights


*The action against a range of intellectuals and activists and journalists —
Sudha Bharadwaj, Anand Teltumbde, Stan Swamy, Apoorvanand, Harsh Mander
are among the better-known examples — indicates that the space for free
expression and dissent is jeopardised*

Indian democracy has always been a work in progress. There is no doubt that unlike most post-colonial democracies, the idea of representative democracy, elections, free speech, free association and rule of law took deeper root in India. But while there may be a difference in degree, there has never been a golden period where individual rights were sacrosanct and protected as rigorously as the original drafters of the Constitution had in mind. This was symbolised in Jawaharlal Nehru's push to bring in the first amendment, which restricted the scope for fundamental rights, Indira Gandhi's Emergency, Rajiv Gandhi's attempts at bringing in the anti-defamation bill, the curtailment of individual liberty under anti-terror laws, the fact that perpetrators of even mass crimes have often got away, and the crackdown on free expression for the fear of offending sensitivities. So no regime can claim it has been truly democratic.

Yet, even in the backdrop of this mixed history, what appears to be happening now is an almost unprecedented attack on civil liberties of citizens, especially those citizens who the government finds inconvenient. From Bhima Koregaon to the Delhi riots, from the 2016 episode in Jawaharlal Nehru University to the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests to even

Hathras, there appears to be a pattern where the fundamental right of citizens to life and liberty is increasingly under strain. If, in the past, political protection enabled distortions in the justice system to protect the powerful, what is now happening is that the political regime is using the justice system not just to protect its own, but to frame others under serious charges from sedition to inciting violence.

The action against a range of intellectuals and activists and journalists — Sudha Bharadwaj, Anand Teltumbde, Stan Swamy, Apoorvanand, Harsh Mander are among the better-known examples — indicates that the space for free expression and dissent is jeopardised. It gives rise to apprehensions that the political dispensation does not view criticism as an essential ingredient of democracy. It empowers the police to be vindictive rather than fair. It erodes the rule of law. And it creates fear. This is not to suggest that critics must not be held accountable for any illegal or unlawful activity; nor is it to endorse the viewpoints of many of these activists. But it does mean that the regime must revise its approach and deepen its commitment to rights.

Courtesy **The Hindustan Times**, 12 October 2020. 

The Radical Humanist on Website

'The Radical Humanist' is now available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India.

– Mahi Pal Singh

Arrests in Bhima Koregaon case frame a transformation in India's polity and police force

The current usage of the expression “urban Naxal” owes much to Bollywood film director Vivek Agnihotri, who defines an “urban Naxal as an intellectual, influencer or activist who is an invisible enemy of India”. The idea of such a conspiracy was propagated, however, by the Sangh Parivar.

Christophe Jaffrelot

On October 23, Stan Swamy, an 83-year old Jesuit priest, was sent to judicial custody in the Bhima Koregaon case. His is the latest arrest in a case that illustrates a significant transformation in India's polity and the country's police force.

Bhima Koregaon is a village in Maharashtra's Pune district where, in 1818, Dalit soldiers of the British army, mostly Mahars, trounced the troops of the local ruler, Peshwa Bajirao II, a Brahmin. On January 1, 2018, like every year, Dalits of Maharashtra, mostly Mahars, gathered to commemorate this event. On the eve of the event, an Elgar Parishad (“Congress for Speaking Aloud”) in Pune, whose organisers included two retired judges, saw speakers contesting “homogenising Hindutva” and criticising the Narendra Modi government. The police allege that this was the provocation for violence at Bhima Koregaon — participants of the event were attacked by upper-caste Hindu nationalists. They retaliated, leading to the death of one person.

A Dalit activist filed a complaint against two men, Sambhaji Bhide, who had past links with the Sangh Parivar, and Milind Ekbote, a former BJP corporator who had been jailed several times — on one occasion, for participating in a communal riot. The latter went to jail briefly, but the police, in spite of the report showing both men guilty of “a well-planned conspiracy,” began looking at a different angle after a disciple of Bhide, Tushar Damgude, filed a complaint.

This shift took place while the Pune-based Forum for Integrated National Security — seen

as close to the RSS — was putting forth the notion of a Maoist conspiracy. Soon after, the police made new arrests — the accused were presented as “urban Naxals”.

The expression “urban Naxals” designates alleged urban Maoists — in contrast with those in rural India, particularly the country's tribal areas, which are the crucible of the Indian version of Maoism, “Naxalism”. This expression was coined by Arun Jaitley in 2014 to describe activists of the Aam Aadmi Party, a regular political outfit. But its current usage owes much to Bollywood film director Vivek Agnihotri, who defines an “urban Naxal as an intellectual, influencer or activist who is an invisible enemy of India”.

The idea of such a conspiracy was propagated, however, by the Sangh Parivar. A 2019 booklet attributed to the RSS, to which Agnihotri also contributed, argued that “urban Naxals” had not only been “infiltrating police, armed forces, bureaucracy and civil services” but had also mounted a “campaign to overthrow the Indian government” and that “all Left-leaning professors and journalists [we]re Naxal supporters and even support[ed] violence by Naxal groups...”

In September 2018, the then Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, warned that Naxalites had “come to the cities and are trying to influence people.” Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself told students in 2019 to wonder whether “urban Naxals, some people who consider themselves intellectuals, are not trying to gain political

mileage by putting a gun over your shoulders [...] You will have to find out if this is not a conspiracy by them to destroy your life. They cannot think of anything else but hatred for Modi.”

In June 2018, the Maharashtra police —the BJP led the ruling coalition in the state at the time — in the course of its investigation in the Bhima Koregaon case, arrested five “urban Naxals” who were accused, not only of instigating violence (in spite of the fact that only two of them took part in the Elgar Parishad), but also of plotting a “Rajiv Gandhi-style” assassination of Modi. Their profile matched that described by Agnihotri: Surendra Gadling was a lawyer, Shoma Sen a retired English professor, Sudhir Dhawale a poet and publisher, and Mahesh Raut and Rona Wilson were human rights activists. Two months later, the police arrested poet-activist Varavara Rao, lawyer and trade unionist Sudha Bharadwaj and human-rights activists-cum-authors-and-columnists, Arun Ferreira and Vernon Gonsalves.

Two more “urban Naxals” were arrested in April 2020: First, Anand Teltumbde, a former Bharat Petroleum executive, regular contributor to the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), professor at the Goa Institute of Management and author of a number of books, including *Republic of Caste*; and then, Gautam Navlakha, an ex-editorial consultant of the EPW and member of the People’s Union for Democratic Rights. Earlier this month, Swamy, who has worked amongst the tribals of Jharkhand, was arrested also because of his alleged Maoist links.

They were all accused under the draconian anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, of a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing the government and assassinating the Prime Minister. The accusations were made on the basis of letters recovered from the computers of two of the arrested. Amnesty Tech, the Amnesty International’s digital-security team, discovered subsequently that one

of these computers contained malware allowing remote access and alleged that the letters could have been planted. The allegation that the letters had been manufactured cannot be dismissed given that the communication of the Naxals is always heavily coded.

While searching the houses of the accused, the Maharashtra police listed as evidence against the accused literature that is not banned — they also commented on the political ideas and social attitudes of the accused. For instance, the men in uniform who searched the house of Varavara Rao’s daughter Pavana and son-in-law K. Satyanarayana, a professor at the English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad, asked, “Why are you reading books on Mao and Marx? Why do you have books published in China? (...) Why are there photos of Phule and Ambedkar in your house, but no photos of gods?” To Rao’s daughter, they said, “Your husband is a Dalit, so he does not follow any tradition. But you are a Brahmin, so why are you not wearing any jewellery or *sindoor*? Why are you not dressed like a traditional wife? Does the daughter have to be like the father too?” In trying to make people comply with the upper-caste version of their religion and exhorting them to reject leftist ideologies in an anti-intellectual manner, such policemen echo the discourses of the Hindu nationalist vigilantes.

The internationally renowned historian, Romila Thapar, and other scholars filed a petition in August 2018 against these arrests. But two of the three judges on the bench refused to release the accused on bail. The dissenting judge, Justice D Y Chandrachud, observed: “A clear-cut distinction has to be made between opposition to government and attempts to overthrow government by rising up in arms.” For him, the Bhima Koregaon case was “an attempt by the state to muzzle dissent... each of them is prosecuted for being a defender of persons subjected to human rights violations.” In other words, the accused in the Bhima

Koregaon case were victims of judicial authoritarianism and political prisoners.

A day after the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government — which had replaced the BJP-led government after the September 2019 elections — decided to review the chargesheet against the accused, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs handed over the investigation to the NIA.

On October 20, Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights “urge[d] the Government [of India] to ensure that no one [...] is detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful

assembly — and to do its utmost, in law and policy, to protect India’s robust civil society”. She also urged “the GoI to release people charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for simply exercising basic human rights that India is obligated to protect.”

This article first appeared in the print edition on October 29, 2020 under the title “Mirrors of Bhima Koregaon”. The writer is senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris, and professor of Indian politics and sociology at King’s India Institute

Courtesy **The Indian Express**, October 29, 2020 

In My Own Voice: Gulzar, Pramila...


Contd. from page - (14)

Today I find the Delhi Police charging those who have spoken for peace for the rights of the minorities and expressed dissent. In the Delhi riots of February '20 in which 52 people were killed - mostly Muslims - the brilliant economist, Jayati Ghosh who has done sterling work on the farmers' crisis, Professor Apoorvanand whose very conduct bespeaks of ahimsa and filmmaker, Saba Dewan who organized the 'Not In My Name' rallies against lynching — have been named! These academics and filmmakers are dissenters and eminent members of civil society; the Delhi Police needs to do some serious introspection.

The days of Pramila Dandavate seem so free; there were flaws in our democracy then as well but we could speak. The recent gang-rape at Hathras and subsequent cremation of a Dalit girl at the death of the night as well as Amnesty International being forced to close its India office, shows there are attempts to erase the rights and speech of our people.

Free speech can never die, it can be suppressed at the peril of the nation; we must take heed or else we will have to set up a monument for the India that was.

(**Sagari Chhabra** is an award-winning author & film-maker; she is director of the 'Hamaara Itihaas' archives.)

Courtesy **Mainstream**, VOL LVIII No 43, New Delhi, October 10, 2020 

Articles/Reports for The Radical Humanist

Dear Friends,

Please mail your articles/reports for publication in the RH to: **theradicalhumanist@gmail.com** or post them to: **G-3/617, Shalimar Garden Extn. I, Rose Park, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad-201005 (U.P.)**

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

A note whether it has also been published elsewhere or is being sent exclusively for the RH should also be attached with it.

- Mahi Pal Singh, Editor, The Radical Humanist

PUCL Maharashtra Statement on the Hathras Incident

PUCL Maharashtra condemns the caste-based brutal rape and murder of the young Dalit woman from Hathras, UP, by upper caste men and the deliberate mishandling of the case, including delayed FIR, medical examination and burning of the body and destruction of evidence by state authorities.

PUCL Maharashtra condemns the even more reprehensible act of the UP government to create a false counter narrative in an attempt to threaten and criminalize the victim's family and its supporters.

PUCL Maharashtra believes that beyond bringing in public attention and calling for end to the Caste biases in the political, executive, penal and judicial system, it is imperative that we need to counter the everyday Caste and gender violence which have become a norm in Indian Society. The atrocious crimes committed by men from upper caste, supported by the State machinery on the victim at Hathras in UP though exceptionally heinous, is also reflective of everyday reality of caste and gender discrimination, as also violence faced by marginalized Castes and communities. It is a reflection of sanctioned caste discrimination perpetuated in everyday life of deeply misogynist, casteist and Brahminical Indian society.

The unit-level data of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2015-16 indicates that an estimated 99.1% of sexual violence cases are not even reported. NCRB data on Caste and Gender violence shows increase in crime committed against SC/STs in year of 2019.

A total of 45,935 cases were registered for crime against Scheduled Castes (SCs), an increase of 7.3% over 2018 (42,793 cases). Crime rate (per lakh of population) registered showed an increase from 21.2 in 2018 to 22.8 in 2019, within which 7.6% (3,486 cases) cases were of Sexual Assault/Rape.

A total of 8,257 cases were registered for

crime against Scheduled Tribes (STs), showing an increase of 26.5% over 2018 (6,528 cases). Crime rate registered increased from 6.3 in 2018 to 7.9 in 2019, which includes 13.4% (1,110 cases) of Sexual assault/rape and 10.7% (880 cases) of assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty.

The deliberate mishandling of the crime in Hathras

At every step the State machinery has deliberately disobeyed the directions under law and willfully neglected to perform their duty in this heinous case of caste-based sexual violence. They have attempted to protect the guilty and deny not only justice, but even proper medical treatment to the Dalit woman.

- **Delay in lodging of FIR of rape:** The young Dalit woman was sexually assaulted and grievously attacked on 14th September 2020. There are two videos in the public domain where the victim clearly speaks of sexual assault. Though the police were informed, and the victim was admitted in hospital on 14th September, the police took her statement only on 21st-22nd of September after which the FIR of rape was lodged. The FIR needs to be registered immediately however it was only after a week of the assault that her statement was recorded.

- **Delay in collecting medical evidence:** Despite the woman being in the hospital from 14th September, 2020 and repeated assertions of rape, the medical the medico-legal examination report was given by Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital only on 22nd September and samples were collected for the FSL report from JNMCH only on 25th September.
- **Denial of rape by Police:** Despite the MLC report stating that the victim's vagina had been penetrated by a penis and her dying declaration to the Magistrate stating that she was raped, relying on the FSL report which was based on evidence collected 11 days after the incident and post mortem report, which was 14 days after the incident, the ADG (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar refuted the allegations of rape on the ground that there was no sperm or ova found. The law is clear that mere penetration to any extent of the penis (or object) is sufficient and there is no necessity for ejaculation of sperm to constitute the offence of rape. Neither of the two report (FSL and post-mortem report) are relevant to a case of rape as per judgements of the Supreme court and the provisions brought in by the Criminal Law Amendment, 2013.
- **Burning of the victim's body:** The hospital and the police intentionally failed to hand over the body of the victim to her family for cremation. On the contrary the UP police and the District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxar, proceeded to burn the body of the victim at 3 AM on 30th September, in absence of any relatives, not only denying her right to dignity in life but also in her death. The act of burning the body of the victim by the police, is a deliberate and willful act of destruction of evidence.
- **Barricading the village:** The entire village was barricaded preventing not only the press and activists from meeting the victim's family but denying them access to any support from community or outside world. Denying information of atrocities being committed in Hathras to the people by preventing the entry of media, civil society and opposition parties.
- **Creating false narrative to threaten the family:** Falsely suggesting that this incident could also be a case of honor killing and attempting to shift the blame of the death of the victim on the family. Casting aspersions on the victim's character and making public statements that the members of the family would be subject to polygraph and narco-analysis test, are all attempts to intimidate and threaten the family of the victim and create a false narrative.
- **Creating false narratives to intimidate the press and people:** Under the bogey of International conspiracy against UP government, by lodging 21 FIRs in UP and 6 in Hathras under Sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 124A (sedition), 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups), 153 B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration), 420 (cheating) and 109 (punishment for abetment) of the IPC and by arresting four journalists under UAPA Act, the government is attempting to intimidate the press and the people from speaking up for the victim and her family and community.

Further, it is essential to recognize the consistent pattern in the present dispensation's attempts to turn the narrative of oppression and crimes against marginalized groups and not only shift the blame on the victims, but actually turn them into culprits. There is a clear intention not only to protect the perpetrators, but to further empower them. The Hathras case is part of a continuum of conscious and concerted efforts over the past few years to portray victims as perpetrators, as in case of the Bhima Koregoan

violence and the CAA/NRC protests. Victims have been systematically arrested, imprisoned under draconian legal provisions and branded guilty of the very offences that have been perpetrated upon them.

In earlier targeted and mass crimes against marginalized minority and dalit, tribal communities including the 1984 Sikh massacres, 1989 Bhagalpur violence, 1992-93 Bombay violence, 2002 Gujarat violence to Kandhmal in 2008 real perpetrators were never brought to justice and only a few foot soldiers were punished. The affected communities have still been denied justice over all these decades. However, the current political dispensation has pitched its goal higher to commensurate with its ideology and has embarked on a new offensive. The legal and judicial system has been “legally” turned on its head and the suffering victims in fact have been systematically arrested, imprisoned under most draconian legal provisions, and branded as guilty of violence which in fact has been perpetuated on them.

Chronology of well worked out State strategy

Bhima Koregaon violence

On 31st December 2017, Elgar parishad was organized in Pune by around 260 civil society groups, preceding the gathering at Bhima Koregaon on January 1 to commemorate the 200th year of the Bhima Koregaon battle. The parishad attended by thousands of people from all over Maharashtra and elsewhere concluded peacefully with pledge to stand by Constitution of India.

On 1st January 2018, many Dalits on their way back home from Bhima Koregaon were violently attacked and their vehicles and property destroyed. A complaint was lodged against Mr Ekbote and Mr Bhide, well known proponents of the Hindutva ideology. However, instead of arresting or even investigating them, the then BJP government arrested number of Dalit youths in the agitations that were held in the state on

2nd January 2018 to protest the violence. Since June 2018 onwards, 16 people across various states have been arrested under the draconian UAPA Act as a part of false narrative created around this case. The majority of these were not even present at the Parishad. The people arrested are poets, writers, academics, lawyers, trade union activists, and human rights defenders. Many are senior citizens and some are octogenarians in a poor state of health. They have been denied bail even though there is no evidence against them (the material provided by the state does not meet the criteria of admissibility in court) and the state has even failed to begin the trial after two years. People who have been struggling to get justice for the survivors of caste and state violence are themselves being falsely projected as perpetrators of violence.

Delhi Violence

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) passed by Parliament on 11 December 2019, sparked massive protest all over India. The protests were led by the youth, predominantly women and Muslims in defense of Indian Constitution. Inspired by the women of Shaheen baug in Delhi, many cities and villages saw hundreds of women sit in peaceful dharana for months. No amount of police or even judicial pressure or violence and gun brandishing, deterred the women from their peaceful protest.

On 23rd February 2020, in the presence of Ved Prakash Surya, DCP of North East Delhi, BJP leader Kapil Mishra threatened to empty the sites where the protestors were sitting *indharnas*. On February 24, 25 and 26, parts of North East Delhi witnessed large-scale violence and rioting. Much of the violence began with attacks on anti-CAA protest sites, leaving several dead of which majority were Muslims, hundreds injured, property destroyed, masjids vandalized, and thousands of lives affected.

While no action was taken on the inflammatory speeches made by BJP leaders, including Kapil Mishra and Minister of State for

Finance Anurag Thakur, several activists, academicians and students who were part of the peaceful anti-CAA movement have been arrested under the UAPA Act. Many more are mentioned in the chargesheet, to serve as a continuing threat.

We need to understand the method unfolding to counter any wide spread protest spreading across India. The long standing economic distress starting from demonetization, imposition of GST, and unprecedented sudden lockdown, torture and displacement of lakhs of working population, loss of livelihood all these issues are sought to be diverted through, on the one hand, magnifying local issues such as Sushant Singh Rajput's unfortunate suicide, Kangana Ranaut's rants and Rhea Chakraborty's alleged drug consumption, and on the other hand crushing any genuine dissent through use of criminal laws against human rights dissenters and Foreign Exchange laws against human rights NGOs. The action taken against Amnesty International is but just the latest example of such persecution. In addition to all of this the hollowing of independent institutions such as CAG, Election Commission, RBI, Human Rights Commissions, Right to Information Commissioners and the Parliament itself is a dilution of democracy itself. The judiciary has also by and large succumbed to the pressures and is failing to perform its role as an overseer of constitutional democracy.

It is imperative for us to see the similar modus operandi in all these cases where victims are being branded as perpetrators. It is the same pattern emerging even in the Hathras case where cases are being filed against journalists and activists and false narratives against the family is being constructed. Genuine dissent is being crushed by use of criminal laws against victims, human rights dissenters and journalists.

This is dangerous trend which ought to be recognized and stopped especially in the days of post truth when there is little distinction between fact and fiction. When such a trend

has seeped into the investigative, judicial and administrative institutions and the government has become the master of false narratives, justice for marginalized sections will become a distant dream unless we constantly question the state and hold them to account.

PUCL Maharashtra demands:

- a) The case of Hathras be transferred outside the state of Uttar Pradesh to Delhi.
- b) The Investigation of the case be handed over to a Court appointed and monitored Special Investigating Team consisting of police officers of impeccable reputation including women and Dalit police officers.
- c) The negligent state officials including the police, medical professionals, District Magistrate Praveen Laxar, who failed to perform their duty towards the victim and her family be prosecuted in accordance with law including under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and the provisions brought in by the Criminal Law Amendment, 2013
- d) All state officials involved in illegally burning the body of the victim and destruction of evidence including the hospital officials who handed over the body to the police, the police and the district magistrate must be prosecuted in accordance with law;
- e) The victim's family be given protection by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) or police who are members of the Dalit community.
- f) The victim's family should be given the choice of appointing a Special Public Prosecutor to handle the case;
- g) The other FIRs and criminal charges surrounding this incident, against journalists and persons supporting the victim's family be dropped.

Mihir Desai,

Convenor, Ad-Hoc Committee,
People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL),
Maharashtra 

Hathras Fact-Finding Report Finds Crime Was Cumulation of Casteist, Anti-Woman Tradition

The team's report noted that as a minority in the village, Dalits had been "experiencing a number of repressive acts and atmosphere over decades".

The Wire Staff

New Delhi: A fact-finding report on the gang rape by upper caste men and eventual death of the 19-year-old Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras district was released by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) on Tuesday.

The members of the fact-finding team, which visited the village of Bulgarhi in Hathras included Medha Patkar from the NAPM, activist and writer Mani Mala, member of the Socialist Party (India) Sandeep Pandey, Supreme Court Advocate Ehtesham Hashmi, Khudai Khidmatgar and NAPM member Faisal Khan, Delhi Solidarity Group's Joe Athialy and Amit Kumar, Hansraj from Narmada Bachao Andolan and a student, Anand Athialy.

Referring to the Khairlanji murders that took place in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district, the report said, "After 14 years, on the same date, i.e., September 29th, we have witnessed the Hathras incident, rape and murder of another Dalit victim." The report terms these "atrocities" a result of the "cumulative effect of caste, gender, inequality and injustice."

After the team obtained written permission from the Sub Divisional Magistrate, the team reached the village in two separate groups of five and four members at around one pm on October 9 to talk to the victim's family. The report noted that as a minority in the village, Dalits had been "experiencing a number of repressive acts and atmosphere over decades".

The upper caste families of Thakurs have used services of Dalit families as agricultural labourers. The report notes that Dalits in the village primarily earn their income from rearing

cattle. "Dasya's [name changed] family through her father, was allotted 5 bighas of land by Mayawati's government in 1990s. However, till today, they are in physical possession of only three and half bighas while the rest is apparently encroached upon by some Brahmin family. They have small supplementary income from cattle rearing, through sale of milk," the report said.

The report also referred to an old incident where the victim's grandfather was attacked by the accused Thakurs' grandfather over a rift involving cattle, after which his finger was cut off. But the two families have not witnessed any sort of violence or confrontation in the past two decades, and hence the incident of September 14 was "totally unexpected and unwarranted."

The report also mentioned that at the AMU JNMC Hospital, where the victim was taken after the reference from a district hospital, the hospital staff were not cooperative as they were under "enormous pressure" since the beginning of this case.

The report says, "It is, however, shocking that the doctors, who must have checked her whole body, didn't examine anything related to sexual assault, nor did they enquire with her family till she herself brought out the truth. This passage, rather wastage, of time could be deliberate since late examination couldn't ever prove rape."

The report also referred to the MLC report which records her version of penetration of her vagina by a penis.

Refuting the theory about a purported honour-killing and that the victim was in a relationship with the accused, the report said

that the victim had been harassed by the accused men from the family, Sandeep and others for the last six months. She was once pulled by him near the field but had escaped. “The family, however, was very categorical in refusing to accept the false story of some communication as also relation between Sandeep and Dasya who were in touch through phones and therefore she was killed by her own family, which was honour killing,” it said.



Medha Patkar, Manimala, and Hansraj from the Fact-Finding team answer questions from media persons.

Photo: NAPM fact-finding report

The report said that while some local political leaders, including Congress leader Shyoraj Jivan, had come to see the victim, no prominent leaders from the state capital, Lucknow had paid any attention to the case. Condemning the arrest of Jivan, the report says, “Shyoraj Jivan was one who spoke out in anguish and anger and made a statement to some media in the same mood that if anyone happens to look at Dalit girls with wrong intention, his eyes would be popped out! We hear such kinds of statements by many in politics that are violent especially when it is based on casteism and communalism that goes unpunished! However, Shyoraj Jivan was arrested and is still in jail.” The team also condemned the arrest of a journalist from Kerala along with three others while on their way to the village.

Noting that the cremation was undertaken without the consent of the family in the wee hours of the morning after her death, the report said that wide media attention and uproar was inevitable. It was because of this public outrage, the report said, that the Uttar Pradesh Government announced a compensation of Rs 25 lakh to the victim’s family. However, only 8-10 lakhs have been received by the victim’s father.

The report said that the police’s behaviour, in this case, has been rather “suspicious” and noted, “The reasoning, which the state government was compelled to present, when there was condemnation coming in from all quarters, was that they wished to avoid violence by getting rid of the body. None can believe this as the police can’t, themselves, declare their inability to protect the victim and to prevent any untoward incident.”

It also alleged, “Rather such an awfully inhuman and criminal act on the part of the state with no repentance, nor any response to our serious questions or legal challenge, has proved that the state itself wanted to suppress the issue with casteist, *manuvadi* and inhuman anti-woman elements exposed through this and other incidences in Unnao, Balarampur, or Azamgarh cases, before and after.”

Courtesy **The Wire**, 20.10.2020. 🌈



21st October, 2020

Report of the Virtual Press Conference held on 21st October, 2020 organised by the PUCL

*Opposition Leaders, Civil Society denounce arrest of Stan Swamy and other
activists in Bhima Koregaon case;*

Call for repeal of UAPA!

Introduction

PUCL organised a virtual Press Conference on 21st October, 2020 to condemn the illegal arrest of Fr. Stan Swamy of Jharkhand and 15 other activists in the Bhima Koregaon case. The Press Conference was to create a platform for different civil society groups and political parties to jointly condemn the brazen abuse of UAPA by the Central Government against dissenters and demand repeal of draconian anti-human rights laws like UAPA and anti-sedition law. The following is a summary of the speeches made by different speakers.

On 8th October, 2020, 83-year-old Father Stan Swamy became the 16th activist to be arrested in the Bhima-Koregaon case. A month previously, on 7-8th September, cultural activists Sagar Gorkhe, Ramesh Gaichor and Jyoti Jagtap (members of Kabir Kala Manch) were also arrested in the same case. Since 2018, 16 activists, lawyers, poets, writers, cultural activists and intellectuals, who have worked for the rights of Adivasis, Dalits, minorities and other marginalized groups over many decades, have been jailed, and falsely charged with sedition and the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Today (21st October, 2020), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) organised a press conference against the recent arrests and the continuing attack on dissent and democratic norms through the Bhima-Koregaon case. The press conference was addressed by political leaders of opposition parties, eminent activists, and lawyers. Opening the meeting, V. Suresh, General Secretary of the PUCL, observed that while the vast majority of those accused under UAPA are finally acquitted in the case, the stringent requirements for bail make it very

difficult for those charged under this Act to get bail, and consequently, they end up being imprisoned for years under fabricated charges. The 'Bhima Koregaon model' of arresting people unconnected with the incident, by roping in academics, lawyers, cultural artistes, film makers, journalists and activists for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government, has now become the model used by the NIA and Central Government in the Delhi violence of February, 2020 and in Hathras incident also.

Mihir Desai, senior advocate at the Bombay High Court, shared the history of the Bhima Koregaon violence that led to the case. He pointed out that despite ample documentary evidence of the involvement of Hindutva leaders, Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ekbote, in the violence at Bhima Koregaon on 1st January, 2018, the Pune police chose to investigate only accusations against Elgar Parishad, a gathering organized by 250 Dalit and Bahujan groups and presided over by Justice Kolse Patil and Justice PB Sawant. He added that the chargesheets relied entirely on unsigned, unverified, uncorroborated type-written letters and the testimonies of a few witnesses, whose names

had not yet been revealed to the accused. As a lawyer, Mihir Desai clearly rubbished the evidence as unsubstantial, and the charges as completely flimsy. The fact that the accused, especially the elderly ones, are being denied COVID bail points to the intention to persecute. He added that the Central Government ordered the NIA to take over the investigation as soon as the Maharashtra government started raising questions about the evidence for “reasons too obvious to state.”

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, unable to join the press conference, sent a video message. He acknowledged Stan Swamy’s work with the Adivasis and marginalised in Jharkhand since decades and strongly condemned his arrest. He added, “Today, it is the issue of Stan Swamy, tomorrow it will be your turn, then it will be our turn. Tomorrow it will be your state, today it is our state.”. He strongly spoke against the attacks on values of federalism. He gave the example of the recent auction of coal blocks without any consultation with the state government. He appealed to all political parties to come together and oppose the growing attacks by the BJP led central government on the civil liberties, federalism and the democracy itself. He specifically said, “when the country is subjected to anarchy, when Hitlerism is practiced at some places in the country, the opposition should not hesitate to stand together, irrespective of which political party they belong.” (The English transcript of the CM’s speech is attached).

Marianus Kujur, the director of XISS, Ranchi talked of Stan Swamy’s life, principles and work. He said that “Stan Swamy is not a tribal by birth, but a tribal by choice.” He has written extensively on tribal assertion and against land displacement. Stan has always stood for inclusiveness, diversity and for the poor. He raised a critical question that since 60 years, no one has ever raised such questions on him and how come he became anti-national in the last

two years.

DMK MP Kanimozhi spoke strongly against the growing attacks on the right to dissent. The central government even used the pandemic as an opportunity to inflict anti-people laws on people. She added that is the time for people to break their silence, to gather and stand up together and fight against these attacks to save the country. Political parties have to make a choice at this time – are they going to be silenced and subdued, or are they going to fight for people’s rights, states’ rights and democracy? She also said that there is a need to repeal all draconian laws such as UAPA.

Sitaram Yechury, the General Secretary of the CPI (M), said similar to Bhima-Koregaon case, in the Delhi riots case too, the perpetrators are going scot free while the victims are being further victimised. He said that it is not a simple question of amending the UAPA – the entire UAPA law has to be repealed, along with sedition, since it is open to gross misuse. He said that UAPA, sedition law and NSA need to be seen together as part of the larger plan of the BJP and RSS to pave the way for a rabidly fascistic, intolerant and authoritarian Hindutva nation. It is using central agencies to undermine the Constitution, while shielding the real perpetrators of violence. The need of the time is for all opposition political forces to come together to defend the secular democracy, Constitution and to preserve human rights values.

Jharkhand’s tribal activist, Dayamani Barla, pointed out that Stan Swamy’s arrest is part of the larger conspiracy to loot Jharkhand’s natural resources – *jal, jangal, zameen*. The need of the hour is for all people to come together – be it political parties, social activists, or writers and intellectuals – resist the illegal UAPA, and declare that they will not give up till the UAPA is repealed.

D Raja, General Secretary of the CPI, reminded everyone that during the Bhima

Koregaon violence, thousands of Dalits were not only attacked, but they were also charged with violence in hundreds of cases. He recalled that the CPI has opposed UAPA from the time it was introduced, has also pointed out the dangers of Right Wing Extremist organizations which are trying to convert our democratic nation into a theocratic nation, when other parties only talk about Left Wing Extremism. He also requested organisations and political parties to stand up for G N Saibaba who is being denied bail despite being 90% disabled. The central government is ruthless government and does not believe in Constitution and democracy as opposed to B R Ambedkar's vision and values. He also added that the larger fight is to call out the communal, fascist ideology of RSS and BJP.

Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP from Kerala, unequivocally condemned the arrest of Stan Swamy, called the charges against him preposterous, and his arrest "inexplicable," seeking his immediate release. He recalled the extensive work that Stan Swamy had done with the adivasis of Jharkhand and also that he had previously worked at the Indian Social Institute at Bangalore. He said that people like Stan should be wholeheartedly encouraged in their noble work and stated that he stands in solidarity with Stan Swamy.

Rupali Jadhav of Kabir Kala Manch said that as the group always raised questions against anti-people policies of any government at power, and hence, they have always faced persecution. She said that her colleagues (arrested in the case) were being coerced by the NIA to give false evidence in a statement before a Magistrate under the threat of arrest. They were being asked to implicate others who had already been arrested. They refused to do so, and chose to face arrest. She added that despite evidence against Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ekbote, leaders of Hindutva organisations, in the Bhima-Koregaon violence, they are still roaming scot-

free. On the other hand, organisations of Adivasis and Dalits, such as the Kabir Kala Manch, are being attacked by the government.

NCP's MLA Supriya Sule said that she grew up in a liberal India where people could raise their voices to question those in power. But now anyone who speaks is branded as anti-national. She clearly said that the Bhima-Koregaon case that happened in her area in Maharashtra, there is absolutely no connection between the activists (accused) and the violence. Everyone knows that they are innocent and the NCP is with them. She added that whenever the state government wants to carry out a fair investigation, the central government intervenes and does not allow it. In the instant case of Bhima Koregaon violence, when Maharashtra police under the current government was being very fair and just, the Central Government ordered the NIA to take over the investigation. She called the current situation a state of undeclared emergency.

Eminent economist Jean Dreze pointed out that there are several draconian laws, such as the UAPA and certain state laws, that are increasingly being used to target Dalit, Adivasis and the marginalised people, not just intellectuals, and brand them as Maoists. Stan Swamy worked on the issues of undertrials and it is ironic that he himself has become one now, facing the same fabricated charges. He added that in the past, political parties did not take a stand on such laws. Now for the first time, there is a prospect of building a broad based coalition against such draconian laws, as the political parties themselves are becoming targets of such laws. There is a need to consolidate the opposition to UAPA & such laws and make it go beyond certain political boundaries. He called upon the parties to give a pre-commitment to repeal of such laws if they came to power, as part of their commitment to democracy at large.

Theodore Mascarenhas, the Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese, Ranchi, called the arrest blot

on the country's democracy and traditions.

The Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case exposes the extent to which the central government is willing to undermine constitutional values and suppress dissent. All the civil society representatives and political leaders unequivocally condemned the Bhima-Koregaon case, attack on democracy and federalism and demanded immediate release of Stan Swamy and other activists.

PUCL demands from the Central Government:

1. Immediate release of octogenarians Stan Swamy and Varavara Rao imprisoned in the Bhima Koregaon case and 95% disabled Prof. Saibaba kept in Anda cell in Nagpur Central Prison, on humanitarian grounds to enable them to take appropriate treatment and care in a facility of his choice.
2. Dropping charges against all the 16

accused in the BK case, setting them free and closure of Bhima Koregaon conspiracy case.

3. Repeal of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.


The meeting gave a call to all political parties, human rights groups and civil society organisations to unitedly launch an All India campaign for the repeal of UAPA and sedition law.

The videos of speeches of speakers are available at

<https://twitter.com/JharkhandJanad1/status/1318816815351386112> and

documents are available at

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sLE1KknPhg8MJje1FYzG2mvcAFzc-VHS?usp=sharing>

Dr. V. Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL,
Ravi Kiran Jain, President, PUCL 

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76 Foreigners on Indefinite Hunger Strike at Detention Centre at Narela, Delhi

76 foreigners being kept at Detention Centre located in Beggars' Home, Lampur, Narela at Delhi have gone on indefinite hunger strike from today morning in protest against the inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live at the Centre. Inmates informed PUCL today that the food served to them is not worth eating - boiled vegetables saturated with tasteless water is the daily routine and breads remain half cooked. There is no provision for drinking water and inmates are forced to buy the same from outside. There is no cleanliness in spite of the much propagated 'Swachhata Abhiyan' (Cleanliness Drive) of the government. The lavatories and bath rooms continue to remain dirty and repulsive to use. There is corruption in the supply of daily necessities like tooth brush, tooth paste, soaps, winter shoes etc. against allotted provisions. Some inmates who require daily medicines are not allowed to procure them. The facility of TV has been discontinued for the last one year. On 17.08.2019 a district judge had visited the centre and had instructed the Suptd. to arrange TV immediately but till now

nothing has been done. Some inmates of old age require hot water for bathing and blankets but there is no arrangement for the same. There are some other complaints also. In spite of repeated representation there is no redressal. Instructions issued by the Delhi High Court relating to the upkeep of the Centre and related provisions for the detenues are being blatantly flouted. The behaviour of the Superintendent at the Centre is inhuman. The foreigners belong to several countries including Burma, Spain, Afghanistan, Pakistan, African ones. Many inmates are living at the Centre for years together even after completing their sentence. PUCL call upon the Central and State Governments to inquire into the grievances of the agitating detenues and take immediate steps for their redressal.

N.D. Pancholi, Sheoraj Singh, Arun Maji
on behalf of People's Union For Civil liberties,
Delhi. (M) 9811099532

<https://webakhbar.in/76-foreigners-on-indefinite-hunger-strike-in-delhi/57063> 

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How K.R. Narayanan's Fidelity to Constitutional Values Led Him to Reject Bharat Ratna for Savarkar

The former president's life and work were anchored in social sympathy and scientific humanism

S.N. Sahu



K.R. Narayanan and V.D. Savarkar. Photos: Wikimedia Commons and YouTube

“Let us examine if the constitution has failed us, or [if] we have failed the constitution”.

We would do well to remember these memorable words by the late K. R. Narayanan, speaking in parliament on the golden jubilee of the republic. In 2000, the Vajpayee government had sought to revise the constitution, but the former president's pointed words made the government announce that a Commission would be appointed to review the working of the constitution instead of a direct revision.

Today marks the late president's birth centenary. It is fitting to remember his leadership not just on this day but also at a time when the constitution seems to be on shifting sands as some in power seek to undermine its sanctity.

‘A man with wide social sympathy’

His brilliant academic record at Travancore (now Kerala) University and the London School of Economics is well known. Professor Harold

Laski, who taught him at LSE, called him “a man with wide social sympathy”.

In fact, this trait was a guiding force throughout his life and it is that perspective which enabled him to go beyond the superficial or formally stated, to understand what lay at the heart of a matter. “At the core of our constitution,” he said, “lies the form of social justice and social democracy”.

It was this ideal of social democracy that empowered him to bluntly refuse the offer of upper caste Hindus, who asked him to put on a ‘sacred thread’ so that they could accept him as one of their own. The young Narayanan had topped the university while doing his MA in the early 1940s, but took pride in his own identity and hard-earned merit, resisting any attempt by others to define him based on their terms.

During the infamous communal riots in Gujarat in 2002, President Narayanan issued a

press statement describing it as “a crisis of our state and society,” and asked Prime Minister Vajpayee to deploy the army to put a check on the violence. He and his wife took the time to meet some of the victims who had travelled to Delhi to request the prime minister to intervene.

When Narayanan interviewed Mahatma Gandhi

As a young reporter for the *Times of India*, Narayanan interviewed Mahatma Gandhi on April 10, 1945 in Mumbai. He pointed out that the Congress and stalwarts such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad did not support the cause of the Scheduled Castes enough.

He also asked Gandhi *ji* how the seemingly irreconcilable Hindu-Muslim issue could be resolved in a peaceful way, to which Gandhiji replied, “That awful situation can only be dealt with properly through Satyagraha.”

These gentle words seem almost anachronistic in the majoritarian, muscular world we see around us today, especially so in our own country.



K.R. Narayanan and Mahatma Gandhi. Photos: Wikipedia

The Gita in Turkey

Narayanan also had a distinguished career as a diplomat, especially as ambassador to China and the US.

It is less known that when he was posted as

India’s ambassador in Turkey in the mid 1970s, he played a key role in lifting a ban on the Bhagavad Gita imposed by that country. A raid on the office of the communist party in Turkey led to the confiscation and proscribing of the Gita, which was found along with other literature on communism.

Narayanan however managed to convince the Turkish authorities to lift the ban, arguing that the Gita is sacred text.

JNU and the art of leadership

His tenure as the Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University provided Narayanan with opportunities to guide and take the institution forward in the academic field. He has acknowledged that he learnt the art of leadership during his tenure there.

Today when JNU is being vilified and unfairly targeted for its culture of free speech and dissent, it seems ironic that a former president of India acknowledged a degree of indebtedness to those very environs.

Rejection of Bharat Ratna for Savarkar

While describing the demolition of the Babri Masjid as an “egregious violation of law” in one voice, the Supreme Court saw no dichotomy in handing over the land where the Masjid once stood to those who committed that violation, so that they could build a temple in honour of Ram.

Presiding over the Rajya Sabha in 1992, Narayanan likened the destruction of the mosque as a tragedy similar to the assassination of Gandhi *ji*. It is indeed tragic and worth keeping in mind that those who rejoiced in the demolition of that

mosque are now standing by the assassin of Gandhi *ji* and even openly upholding the legacy of V.D. Savarkar who led the fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha which was responsible for the assassination.

It is well known that the BJP in its election manifesto for the Maharashtra assembly elections, promised that Savarkar would be conferred the Bharat Ratna. But it is little known that during his tenure as president, Narayanan quietly buried the proposal of Prime Minister Vajpayee to confer the Bharat Ratna to Savarkar.

In 2000, Narayanan proposed the name of *shehnai* maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan to Vajpayee for the Bharat Ratna. Vajpayee agreed, and in turn proposed Savarkar's name as well. Narayanan did not object, but kept the file aside and maintained a diplomatic silence.

When he went to greet Vajpayee on his birthday in 2001, he was told that Savarkar's name was being withdrawn. Twenty years after that incident, the possibility of a Bharat Ratna for Savarkar is being used as bait for an election at opportune times.

On numerous occasions Narayanan upheld

the idea of India as a living example of the confluence of civilisations. In his Maulana Azad memorial lecture, he persuasively argued that civilisations can come together as a confluence of ideas, values, cultures and creeds.

In these divisive times, it would seem that a confluential approach is the need of the hour.

Scientific humanism

A special New Year's card for 2000 was designed by the president's secretariat, on his instructions. The inner cover had a photograph of Einstein and Nehru, with a quote from Nehru's *Discovery of India* which said that in future, there would be an alliance of science and humanism out of which would emerge scientific humanism.

That new year card conveyed his worldview, anchored in science and humanism, both of which are now indispensable if we are to defend the idea of India. It is for his vision, ideas and values that Narayanan's legacy is of enduring significance.

S.N. Sahu served President K.R. Narayanan as Officer on Special Duty and Press Secretary.

Courtesy **The Wire**, 27 October 2020. 🌈

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What about the Kashmiri Pandits? – Thirty Years Later, Make the Question Count

An empty question, cynically recycled in tweets and speeches, needs to be replaced with actual questions about healing for Kashmiri Pandits, their culture, and for Kashmir itself.



A Kashmir where Kashmiri Pandits have full democratic and human rights can only be a Kashmir where everyone has these rights. Photo: Jesse Rapczak/Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

This month marks 30 years of exile for the Kashmiri Pandit community. The question, ‘what about the Kashmiri Pandits?’ rings again in our ears. But if the past is anything to go by, there will be no answers.

‘What about the Kashmiri Pandits?’ has become an empty question, recycled in tweets, op-eds and speeches for political mileage, deflection, or for whatever purpose anyone wants. But this glib question has consequences: It forces Kashmiri Pandits to relive their traumas. It raises then dashes any hope of closure. And it deepens hostility towards Kashmiri Muslims, and even towards Muslims across India.

I left Srinagar with my family 30 years ago, thinking we were going for a short vacation, and ended up never returning from Delhi, now tagged as a Kashmiri Pandit migrant. I want to commemorate this 30th year by asking three questions – actual questions about healing and

dignity for Kashmiri Pandits.

First, how do we seek justice for those who were killed, and get to the truth of what happened in 1990?

Second, how can the Kashmiri Pandit identity survive as a distinctive and distinguished cultural group?

Third, what does a real future look like in which Kashmiri Pandits might return to their homes in the Valley?

Seeking actual justice

Hundreds of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee Kashmir from 1989 onwards. We still have no verified numbers for how many were killed. A few FIRs have been filed; convictions have been even fewer.

In 2017, the Supreme Court rejected a review



Anmol Tikoo

petition asking to reopen 215 cases on the killing of over 700 Kashmiri Pandits. If the government and the people of India care so much, why have we never had a judicial commission to establish the facts – which should mean the killings of all Kashmiris, both Pandits and Muslims?

Instead of all the conspiracy theories that abound, we could have the rule of law, offer some closure through transparent and fair trials, and some sense of justice.

To actually do justice to the memory of those who were killed, we need to hold specific individuals to account for specific acts: Who killed whom? And why were the state and its functionaries unable to protect and reassure a minority community?

Instead, we either hear remarks like “It was years ago, Kashmiri Pandits have done well – it’s time to move on” — Or else we hear, “Everyone was in on it, They have always been like this”. Both push us further from truth or justice.

Hannah Arendt, the foremost political theorist of post-Nazi Germany, reminds us: “Where everyone is guilty, no one is.” We cannot accept ‘mass hysteria’ or ‘mob thinking’ as an explanation; this is how we have always allowed riots to tear India apart without any consequences for those orchestrating them.

Those who did commit the violence find strength in imaginary numbers. Those who didn’t participate feel wronged – some weren’t even born in 1990, and others had nothing to do with the violence. The cycle of resentment keeps on turning.

Worst of all, this attitude uses the suffering of one group to justify new and ongoing violence against others. The ‘action-reaction’ logic normalises violence – making it into a universal law. Is that the best we can do to honour the memory of those killed and those who have suffered?

Surviving as a culture

In 2004, I visited Kashmir for the first time in 14 years. When I saw kids playing cricket and shouting at each other, I felt an unexpected delight at hearing my mother-tongue spoken in public. I felt a comfort that I didn’t even know existed – a comfort of not hiding your strange language and mannerisms, and finding my Kashmiri self, to some extent, at home in a public setting.

In the years since 1990, the great loss of the Kashmiri Pandit community has been the dissolution of their cultural world. People say Kashmiri Pandits have done well and have comfortable lives across India and abroad. But this comfort is undermined by the real loss that exile brings.

Being Indian doesn’t mean you stop speaking Marathi, Tamil, Assamese or any of dozens of mother-tongues. For Kashmiri Pandits, survival has meant assimilation into north India; surviving at the cost of living inside their language and culture.

Instead of cultural chauvinism or tokenism, there is need for better and more accessible histories of Kashmir, extensive language programs, and creative and varied thinking, dialogue, and work in Kashmiri—the ingredients for a living culture.

But above all, linguistic culture has to fight terrible odds to survive if it has no locality. And the fact is that the only place where Kashmiri Pandits’ language and culture are at home is the Valley.

Last August, the government decided to repeal Article 35A. The law had problems that needed fixing, but it recognised that Kashmir was a unique place – if not for other social, historical, and geographical reasons, then at the least as the one place that had resisted the logic of Partition.

Despite 30 years in exile, I remained a ‘state subject’ under 35A. Removing this law willy-nilly has exposed all culture of all Kashmiris,

regardless of religion, to erosion.

Some people take great pride in Kashmiri culture, yet want a 'demographic transformation' by flooding the Valley with outsiders. Let's call it for what it is – an act of spite, and of mutually assured destruction.

Himachal, the north-eastern states, and other tribal areas have legislative protections to preserve their identity. Kashmir deserves the same – for Muslims and Pandits together. Otherwise, the disappearance of Kashmiri and Kashmiri Pandit identity completes what some believe was the goal of the perpetrators of the violence in 1990: the final ethnic cleansing.

Returning to what?

In 2015, my mother and I returned to Srinagar to visit – her first visit in 25 years. In our old neighbourhood, my mother scurried away, looking for our neighbours. I braced myself for a bitter experience. But just a little while later, we were all sitting in our neighbour's house, as my mother and her neighbour shared with each other all that they had lost in the intervening years – people, places, things; entire possible lives.

The conversation was a fraught one, of course. But it showed me that we could speak with each other and not just shout at each other. The rupture of 1990 had not yet obliterated the recognition of a life together. My mother and her neighbour could still speak of their own mothers borrowing *haakh* from each other.

The BJP, Congress, NC, PDP, Hurriyat – nearly everyone agrees that Kashmiri Pandits have a right to return to the Valley. But rehabilitation schemes on paper and transit camps on the periphery is not much to show for all this consensus.

When Kashmiri Pandits say *hum wapas aayenge*, what does the return look like? And what does the Valley look like?

It can't be the return of a terrified minority group. That's where they were before 1989, and that history could still repeat itself. It can't

be the return to ghettos (or for the rich, gated communities) next to army barracks, like we have now.

It also can't be a return to an apartheid Kashmir, where the Valley is divided into Muslim and Pandit enclaves, as some in the Kashmiri Pandit community have suggested. If we create another border in a divided state, another wall between these Kashmirs, will anyone be safe?

How would we apportion land between Kashmiri Muslims – who are 95% of the population – and Pandits, who would be 5% at most? Which areas? These supposed solutions will protract the conflict rather than allow KPs to return with security and honour.

A Kashmir where Kashmiri Pandits have full democratic and human rights, where they live as citizens without fear, can only be a Kashmir where everyone has these rights.

This future is only possible through a process of truth and reconciliation, allowing for both reparative and restorative justice. That could mean economic support for those whose homes were destroyed or taken over since 1990. It could mean rebuilding cultural and religious sites.

But more importantly, it would mean active peacebuilding measures between Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, and other communities. This is not work that needs to happen after justice is delivered, but simultaneously, if the Valley is to be home to both Muslims and Hindus.

Luckily, we can learn from similar efforts in South Africa, in Mindanao, in Northern Ireland and Colombia. If nothing else, both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have common ground in their losses and grief. It is in working through this grief that we may begin to see each other anew.

Instead, we are trapped in silos where the same horror stories reverberate, with no dialogue, and our grief turning into rage which creates more grief in the world.

(To be Contd....on Page - 37)

For Human Freedom

A social organization with economic relation and political institution are not static. It continuously grows and evolves. In course of time the limits under which a system has progressed and developed become too restricted for further growth. Within those limits the unfoldment of potentialities of human creativeness can no longer be unfolded. Therefore, it becomes necessary to recognize to establish social order with the purpose of widening the horizon of freedom, growing bolder, growing greater latitude to their creativeness of man. (M.N. Roy)

From the above it can be inferred that nothing is static or absolute. Change and evolution is the only truth. Growth of the smallest of the small as one full human being is the proof of it. Human being is live and grows, as the highly new experiences are the proof that change and evolution is fact.

However, a large section of Indian people have completely ignored the observation of Roy who expired in 1954. A large majority section of the people even in the 21st century is loitering in the past centuries.

We live in the 21st century. However our social and cultural life is not only stagnated but is moving in back centuries and we are living in almost in the 19th century. If this is not stopped Indians will have no future and will drag on to live in the past century and our future will become bleak.

Our forefathers who were active in national independent movement were wedded to democratic way of life. It is they who framed the constitution. It can be called the most wedded democratic way of life. However in course of time we experienced that we gave free hand to authorities and to the leadership to capture and come in power.

In view of the above, freedom lovers, of course they are in minority, must make all efforts

to make people imbibe democratic way of life in all the affairs and must not be restricted to politics alone.

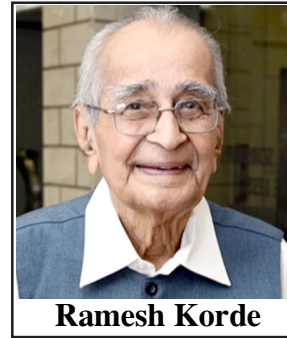
It is an historical truth that when man is born, he is not born with any pre-conceived ideology. He is open to influence by social, cultural and religious atmosphere. It is social-cultural atmosphere that exists around which makes him religious and to have blind faith in non-existing God.

Even in the 21st century science has made tremendous progress in all affairs of life. Man must free himself from all dogmas that have become outdated and antiquated and false beliefs. Science and scientific outlook are the only means available to man to find out the truth that can free man from all dogmas and unwanted beliefs before he takes up struggle for political freedom and civilization.

We have experienced that the so-called truth as defined by religion is beyond the reach of human reasoning power and intelligence. Reason is the only means available to human beings to find out truth.

Religion claims and advocates that truth could only be revealed to sadhus and saints who have power to rule over society, backed and supported by the ruling class. This means that it is the basic tenets of authoritarianism that is used by power hungry politicians to capture state power to exploit common people who form majority of Indian population.

Religious beliefs and dogmas have done nothing but to serve the interest of rich upper classes to exploit common man who forms the majority. Indians are taught that they should accept their position as their moral duty. They



Ramesh Korde

have not only been told to reconcile to their herd lot but to look upon established order as an expression of divine disposition.

History informs us that capitalists challenged the feudal religious order to capture state power. When they defeated feudal religious power, they gave up then non-religious secular outlook and adopted religious authority to get support of large numbers of Indian people so that they could remain in power and encouraged the worship of the leaders. Such movement cannot encourage truthfulness, honesty and even sincerity in public life.

Contd. from page - (35)

What about the Kashmiri...

Thirty years marks a generation, and a critical crossroads. We have a whole generation born since 1990, with entrenched trauma and little hope of healing – people whose only understanding is of a Kashmir torn and destroyed. On the other hand, there are those with memories of a shared existence, which now face the headwinds of oblivion.

The question we need to ask instead of “What about the Kashmiri Pandits” is this: Do we wish to extend lives of trauma and oppression for all Kashmiris, or to pivot back, lending our faith to a Kashmir where they all live with dignity?

Anmol Tikoo is a filmmaker and an educator currently living in Pune.

Courtesy **The Wire**, 22/Jan/2020 🌈

At present Indians are living in difficult times. It is more necessary to ask ourselves what are the things that we think worth living for and worth dying for. Our object is to have society which is composed of individuals who are happy and free and creative. We do desire that human beings should all be equal and free. We must conceive society like an orchestra, living happily and enjoying life in perfect coordination. Late Lord Bertrand Russell had observed that our society should be like orchestra in which different performers have different parts to play and different instruments upon which cooperation results from a conscious common purpose.

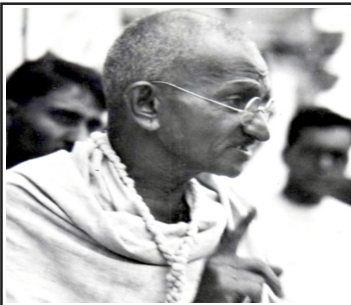
We must make all efforts to achieve this progressively.

I close this article by quoting from writings of late Roy. He wrote that if we want progress we must apply modern scientific mode of thought to our religious beliefs just as we apply to all our problems. National culture divides humanity. But human culture leads to unity of all human beings living and residing on the planet earth; the home of entire humanity.

Mr. Ramesh Korde is a Radical Humanist of 93 years age, associated with the Radical Humanist movement since 1950. He has used the terms Radical Humanism, New Humanism, Scientific Humanism and New Renaissance interchangeably.

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You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Politico caste feuds vs judiciary in Andhra Pradesh

P.A.S. Prasad

“Dear Sir,

You are a disgrace to all mankind to let all these women breakup homes and expect us chaps while they rob us of what we have worked and put us out on the street. I only hope that you have the same trouble as us. So do us all a favour and take a Rolls and run off beachy head and don't come back.”

This is a letter by an aggrieved angry member of the public addressed to the then Lord Justice of Appeals, Lord Denning, on his decision upholding the right of a deserted wife to stay in her marital home. Lord Denning was considered the greatest Judge of the century. He was called a people's Judge; he was never piqued by such communications from the public. He took care of post cards written to him. To some he agreed and acted upon it. In one case he received a post card stating that Denning had no jurisdiction in that particular matter. Denning accepted the contention as well as the informal format of the communication. Lord Denning firmly believed that the press should have access to the courts and freedom to criticize Magistrates and the Judges. He was described as the most loved Judge.

But coming to the judiciary in India we followed the British legacy of address such as ‘Your Lordship’, ‘Your Honour’, and other formalities of decorum and the procedural norms.

But we are touchy of infringements. But somehow we hang on to the specter of contempt. In the process and political executive winds blowing, we are losing the main thrust of justice delivery to common man.

We seem to forget and learn from history that in this land we had justice in the court

of the Peshwa, Ramasastry, who condemned and sentenced the Peshwa himself, the ruler of the land, to death for the murder of his entrusted ward and nephew Narayanarao, and he left the kingdom saying that his sentence would not be carried out! In the recent past we had Radha Binod Pal, when the British were ruling this country. Justice Pal was appointed member of the tribunal for the trial of Japanese war criminals after the end of the Second World War. He was the only dissenting member who found the accused not guilty, as they carried out the orders of their superiors. He had the courage to dissent in such a climate. A grateful nation Japan named an avenue in his name.

After independence we had notable and bold decisions including unseating of Indira Gandhi by the Allahabad High Court. We have quite a few notable cases.

The above analogies are in the context of the stay order status quo shackled Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddi, who literally sent an SOS to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) about his plight. Thwarted on every development move he makes for the state, by Ex CM, Naidu. a few bar associations and others raised objections, found fault, termed it as improper interference into judicial functions and suggested it might tantamount to contempt of the court.

The objections raised indicate that they were not aware of the circumstances under which Jagan was compelled to address a polite letter listing in detail the court cases filed against the A.P. government, and the stay orders, gag orders and status quo orders issued by the A.P. High Court.

Ex CM Naidu is unable to withstand his

shock defeat by a huge margin, that too by a rank junior in age. Above all, the caste factor: Naidu is a Kamma and Jagan is a Reddi. This caste rivalry has been there since long. Before the arrival of NTR on the political scene of A.P., caste was never a factor in A.P. politics. A.P. had brahmin, BC, OBC, Reddi, some of them Christians etc. as CMs, but there was no caste tension. Important positions were held by all. But NTR was different. He wanted to make up for his caste being on the wrong side. The Kamma community is agriculturally very hardworking, well knit; they entered big business and monopolized the film industry. They have become very rich and wealthy. NTR gave them political power also and since then they had been trying to have firm grip on political power while the Reddis, though very well to do and politically at the high end, are factionists and never united. When V.V. Giri contested against Sanjeeva Reddi in the Presidential elections, the Reddis cross voted in favour of Giri and Sanjeeva Reddi lost.

It is in this backdrop that Jagan came to power with a massive mandate in 2019. It was a thunderbolt hit for Naidu. Jagan was faced with a huge financial crisis. In the previous regime Naidu squandered in grandiose graphics for a world class capital at Amaravati, made several trips to various countries studying plans and so on, but nothing tangible happened. Jagan then decided to have three capitals for A.P. on the lines earlier advised by the Sivaramakrishnan Commission to save huge construction cost, time and energy for building the capital at Amaravati. The dreams and Plans of Naidu of enriching himself and his community and make themselves fabulously rich in perpetuity, if Amaravathi becomes the capital, stand ruined if Jagan implements his policy of three capitals. Then

Naidu has decided to thwart and throttle Jagan with court cases to checkmate every move of the A.P. government.

It is in this design that petition after petition are being filed in the A.P. High Court against the A.P. government decisions and orders and stay orders, status quo orders, gag orders have been obtained from the High Court. Every move of Jagan, i.e., the A.P. govt., from the three capitals move, removal of the state election commissioner, allotment of house plots to the landless poor, construction of guest houses, to the enquiry into the fire mishap in a hospital and so on. Jagan's functional and policy decisions are being paralysed.

It is common knowledge that the agitation of the farmers of Amaravati against three capital move, for nearly one year, legal expenses involved for so many cases engaging top lawyers and other related expenditure is met by cash rich Naidu and his party.

Jagan, ultimately when his breathing has become difficult and under these compelling circumstances, complained to the CJI and also held a press conference highlighting the details of cases filed against his govt. and the orders passed by the A.P. High Court in each case. He alleged bias of the judges of the A.P. High Court, as well as being influenced by Justice Ramana of the Supreme Court for all the adverse orders passed against his govt.

The propriety of such an unprecedented move by a state Chief Minister having come to power with a clear mandate by the people overthrowing the regime of Naidu, is debatable. It depends on the judicial wisdom and the majesty of the Supreme Court to decide and uphold justice in this remarkable case.

14-1-126, Nowroji Road, Visakhapatnam-530002 



Hundred Years of Indian Communist Movement: Promise Belied

Bhaskar Sur



It was hundred years ago on October 17, 1920 Indian Communist Party was born in exile in Tashkent. The man behind who made it happen was M N Roy, a man of 35.

Roy had earlier founded the Communist Party of Mexico in November 1919 and presented his Supplementary Theses on Colonialism, along with Lenin's at the Second Congress of the Communist International. According to Robert C North, Roy's Theses served as a template for all subsequent peasant revolutions in Asia, Latin America and other underdeveloped countries. It is a signal and the sole Indian contribution to the development of communist praxis. Roy wrote with a rare insight:

"Two distinct movements which grow further apart each day are to be found in dependent countries. One is bourgeois movement, with a programme of political independence under the bourgeois order. The other is the mass struggle of the poor and ignorant peasants and workers for the liberation from the various forms of exploitation." Though the first phase has already been achieved, the more important second phase remains to be accomplished. Political, social and post colonial India is wielded by a political elite comprised of capitalists, the increasingly affluent middle class and an exploitative new political class the members of which almost entirely come from the upper castes.

The party was formed by the Indian revolutionary exiles like Acharya, a Tamil radical from Madras, Swadeshi extremists such as Bam Roy and Abani Mukherjee from Calcutta and converted Muslim mujahirs who had waged a war on the British and used Tashkent as a transit point. Roy, though born in an orthodox Brahmin

family, had outgrown his Hindu nationalist phase and was thinking of a party in which Muslims would be equal stakeholders. Accordingly Mohammad Shafiq was elected as the General Secretary of the new party. Kris Manjappa, his biographer writes, "About 80 per cent of the young men who served as the main colporteurs of communist literature to India, such as Saukat Usmani, were Muslims." This did not endear him to his former Swadeshi associates such as Bhupendranath Dutta, Swami Vivekananda's Marxist brother. He saw it as a futile exercise in the central Asian wilderness. In his "Unpublished Political History" he writes with much unconcealed bitterness, "Who were there in the party? Who else but Mr and Mrs Roy, people close to them and Muslim Mujahirs." Even most of the early Bengali Muslims, like Muzaffar Ahmed, were Roy's recruits. It is ironic that Ahmed would turn out to be one of the most malicious slanderers of Roy when he would be expelled from the Comintern for his criticism of the Soviet party under Stalin, use of terror to deal with dissent and reducing the communist parties as instruments of the Soviet foreign policy. According to Prof Shobhonlal Duttgupta, with the exit of Roy, the path of the independent development of the CPI was sealed forever. Henceforth, the party looked to Moscow for all its policies and important decisions. Later, when Chinese Communist Party under Mao emerged as a contender for the leadership of the world communist movement, a large section of Indian communists would veer towards this line. It led to the split in 1964 when CPI-M would be formed accusing the parent party of revisionism much as, a few years later, the more militant section would level same charges against the CPI-M - betrayal of the revolutionary cause and

‘revisionism’. They would have none but Mao as the Chairman of the new party! However, it did not take much time for the CPI ML, more Maoist than Leninist, to get fragmented on the issues of “correct line”, or ‘deviations’, right or Left. Indian communists dissipated more energy in ‘the inner party struggle and inter party struggle’ than fighting different forms of oppression and exploitation.

Looking back on all these ‘ideological struggles’ seem closely reminiscent of theological controversies between iconoclasts and icon worshippers in the Eastern Church; between Catholics and Protestants; between Lutherans and Anabaptists or Shi’ites and Sunnies. Like these fanatical religious groups, for communists, re-visioning, that is critiquing the theory, is an inexcusable crime, the secular equivalent of heresy and apostasy. No Marxist can be ever expected to doubt the Theory of Surplus Value as no Muslim can question if the Quran was revealed or not. If one dares to become a critic as Roy did, he would be marked as a ‘renegade’ and all the bitterly quarreling groups would close their ranks to malign, vilify and silence the heretic. They won’t mind inventing sensational lies and piously believing in them. Indian communism has had its triumphs and tragedies. The dream of an egalitarian, just society, with all the ‘scientific’ frills has a tremendous moral and imaginative appeal. It attracted the most intelligent, creative and idealistic people who staked everything to create, what they believed, a better and more livable world. In the 40s and 50s the Indian People’s Theatre (IPTA) attracted the best talents like Hussain, Ravi Shankar, Shambhu Mitra - to name only a few. Most of them later felt suffocated in the atmosphere of rigorous regimentation and lack of creative freedom. Yet it had a very positive impact on the cultural life of a nation going through the trauma of the famine, communal holocaust and the tragic partition. The liberal attitude of Nehru and democratic space made it possible.

The paradox is that they were using democracy to further an agenda which would put an end to democracy. They wanted, and still want, to replace this ‘phoney democracy’ with the a dictatorship of the proletariat or the same thing under a euphemism – ‘people’s democracy’, the kind of ‘democracy’ people enjoyed under Mao or Hoxa. These intelligent and selfless idealists wasted their considerable talents to present the horrors of dictatorship as a pleasant, romantic experience, and surrendering one’s conscience and freedom to the omniscient Party as the greatest virtue. Like elsewhere, in India communism is fast losing its ground and ideological appeal. We now know dictatorship in whichever name is a bad thing; that cosmic forces are not working to take things from socialism to communism when classes will disappear and the state will become a fiction. We also know Marxism is based on some wobbly foundations and despite its apparent scientism; myths are its driving force. Two great myths are the ‘historical role’ of the proletariat and the imminent collapse of capitalism. Now capitalism has proved itself to be more dynamic and enduring than Marxism. It is not capitalism which collapsed but the Marxist regimes and more dramatically, Marxism has turned out to be the philosophy of underdevelopment. As capitalism advances, it recedes. After the Liberalization was initiated in the early 90s, Indian capitalism gained momentum with impressive growth rates. Consequently, communist parties suffered steady erosion. Capitalism in its neo-liberal incarnation proved to be as disastrous to communism as the great asteroid was to the Mesozoic huge reptiles. India is now facing the fearful rise of religious fascism that is systematically subverting democratic institutions and ethos. We now need the dedicated idealism of the communists sans their ideology; their dreams without their illusions; their intellectual passion without their fanaticism.

Taken from the Facebook post of Bhaskar Sur. 

M. N. Roy as a Freedom Fighter

Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

Before adopting the name M. N. Roy there was great transition in the life of Roy. Narendranath Bhattacharya was a freedom fighter for India. But he chose to neck out the British rulers through violent method and took guns to chase them. During the First World War the trend was to fight the British rulers through violent methods. This was long before Naxalbari movement in Bengal. As a youth Narendranath Bhattacharya (the original name) worked along with Jatin and fought the Britishers. No doubt it was an uphill task. While Gandhiji started his fight in nonviolent way, Narendranath and his group thought otherwise. In that journey Narendranath travelled several Asian countries and far-east. He could not get the arms but he gained rich experience. But the promise made by Germans to supply arms tempted Narendranath to undertake hazardous task. He travelled to China and Japan and changed his name innumerable times to escape the police and the British intelligence. His mentor Jatin lost his life during that fight. Naren travelled to USA by ship under the guise of catholic priest, bible in his hand even though he did not know anything to chant! He also adopted several names to escape the eye of intelligence. There was the temptation from Germans to help the movement with money and arms. Naren landed in San Francisco of USA. He had introduction letters with him. He approached Dhan Gopal, poet and teacher in Stanford University. Dhan Gopal suggested that Naren should change his name as Manabendra. Roy agreed and thus his new name stuck - Manabendranath Roy.

Not only that, it was great turning point in his life. On the suggestion of Jatin, Roy not only changed his name as Manabendranath but took Evelyn Trent as his wife. They travelled to New York where they met Indian freedom fighter

Lala Lajpat Rai in Columbia university campus, in New York. Lajpat Rai helped them but the Indian intelligence was after Roy. Again to escape them, the Roy couple travelled to Mexico. They had introduction letter from Stanford president which helped them. In Mexico, as promised, Germans provided money and asked Roy to come to China borders for collecting arms. But that plan failed. Instead Roy couple played very important role in Mexican politics. It drew the attention of Lenin in Russia and he invited them to Russia. Yes, that was a big turning point in the life of Roy. Till then he was an ardent militant nationalist in search of arms. He gave up that and left to Russia. Again in Russia and China Roy and his wife Evelyn played a big role. They established Communist Party of India from Tashkent and continued the fight against Britishers from abroad. As a communist, Roy vigorously fought against the British rule. After his historical role in Russia and China, Roy determined to go back to India for continuing his fight. Promptly he was arrested in India and put in jail for 12 years, later changed to 6 years. So the freedom fighter had long innings as freedom fighter who never sought land or money unlike others. He suffered 6 years in jail as a freedom fighter and continued his fight after release too. Only during the Second World War Roy realised that freedom for the country was inevitable after the Second World War. It has come to be a prophetic truth. Roy as freedom fighter had 45 years in his record. That was tremendous march. And then he dreamed new humanism for independent India, long journey with great aim and hazardous travel.

After all M N Roy was a great freedom fighter in word and action. Not a small achievement. 🌈

Meeting Hall at Radical Humanist Bhavan, Inkollu, Andhra Pradesh



Spacious meeting hall construction on the current Radical Humanist Bhavan at Radical Humanist Center, Inkollu will start on Sunday 25, October 2020.

Nagarjuna University registrar, Ravela Sambasivarao will inaugurate the construction of this meeting hall.

Bharat Hetuwadi Association Chairman Ravipudi Venkatadri will participate.

As Ravipudi Venkatadri garu's 100th birthday is being celebrated on 9-2-2021 at Radical Humanist Center, Inkollu, this meeting will start on that day.

Thanks to all the donors and friends who are cooperating.



Vatsavayi Narayana Raju

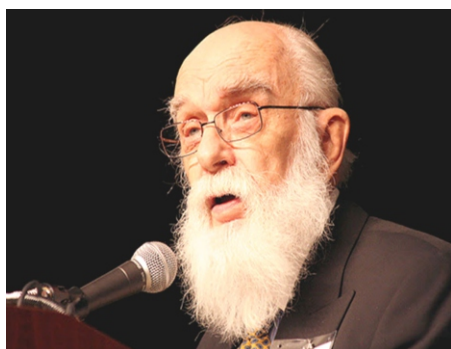
Radical Humanist Center, Inkollu former President, donor, Vatsavayi Narayana Raju garu Kari Haribabu, Happy to see him mentally happy even at the age of 88. He wanted the meeting hall to complete well. Happy to be under the construction of the meeting hall. Greetings to Vatsavayi Narayana Raju.

From the Facebook post of
Meduri Satyanarayana

James Randi, Skeptic Extraordinaire dies at the age of 92

“The word “skeptic,” in fact, comes from the Greek *skeptikos*, for “thoughtful” — far from modern misconceptions of the word as meaning “cynical” or “nihilistic.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “skeptical” has also been used to mean “inquiring,” “reflective,” and, with variations in the ancient Greek, “watchman” or “mark to aim at.” What a glorious meaning for what we do! We are thoughtful, inquiring, and reflective, and in a way we are the watchmen who guard against bad ideas, consumer advocates of good thinking who, through the guidelines of science, establish a mark at which to aim.”

- MICHAEL SHERMER



(1928-2020)

James Randi our great friend, magician, rationalist, humanist, who exposed fraudulent magicians, homeopaths, religious cheats died at the age of 92. We had wonderful experiences with him, met a couple of times, and read his great books. I had correspondence with him.

James Randi revolutionised the skeptical thinking by exposing the fraudulent religious charlatans, cheaters, myth propagandists, homeopaths, astrologers through his scientific magic.

Great person. We have lost an outstanding skeptic.



*My daughter Dr. Naveena and my grandson Rohit Josh met him at humanist conferences.
Dr. Narisetti Innaiah*

Printed and Published by **Satish Chandra Varma**, on behalf of the Indian Renaissance Institute at
A-1/103, Satyam Apartments, Vasundhara Enclave, Delhi-110096. (M.) 9811587576

printed at **Subhashini Offset Printers**, F-10, Jagdish Nagar, Patel Nagar III, Ghaziabad-201001 (UP)

Editor: **Mahi Pal Singh**, Raghav Vihar, Phase- 3, Lane- 3, Smith Nagar, Prem Nagar, Dehradun- 248007. (Uttarakhand)