

# LOK SAMVAD

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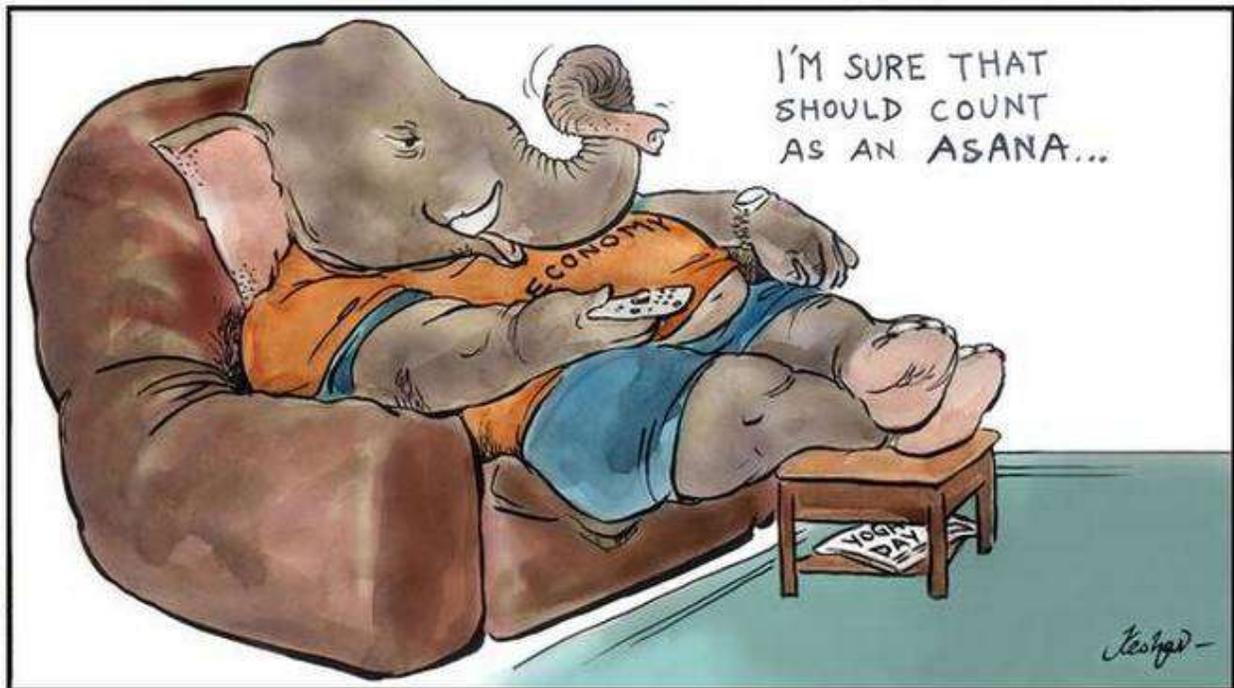
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Cartoon: Keshav / The Hindu

## **The Economy**

### **Four Years of Modi Government: Economy in Shambles**

ONE of the major planks of the BJP campaign in 2014 was that the economy had been reduced to shambles under the UPA - growth was flagging, the rupee had lost ground against the dollar, exports were sluggish and loans from banks to industry were increasingly turning bad. Modi, it was declared, would come and wave his magic wand and turn all this around. India would become the fastest growing economy in the world, the rupee would gain ground against other currencies, exports would boom and investors, both foreign and domestic, flock to make India a manufacturing hub. Of course, if all this happened non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks would turn performing. Agricultural growth would accelerate, and farmers' suicides would cease. Above all, this economic paradise would create two crore jobs a year. The pathetic performance on the jobs front is examined in another article in this booklet, so let us look at the rest of it.

What this examination of the performance of this government on the economic front also brings out is that it has delivered on its unstated promise to the corporate sector which so handsomely financed the Modi campaign in 2014. From the outset, it has obsessed about the 'ease of doing business' – a euphemism for subverting the rights of workers, tribals and anybody else who is a hurdle in the unrestricted loot of this country by corporates and for turning a blind eye to environmental concerns. It has happily colluded in the writing off of lakhs of crores of rupees by banks and it has spread out the red carpet for foreign capital in a way that puts to shame even earlier governments as committed to neoliberal policies as it is. For them, these four years have indeed ushered in achche din.

#### **GDP growth, foreign trade and the rupee**

How has the economy actually done in these four years? The question is a little difficult to answer because the entire basis of calculating the gross domestic product (GDP) has been radically altered, but let us leave that aside and look at what even these revised numbers tell us. By the government's own data, the growth rate of GDP at market prices has fallen from 8.2 percent in 2015-16 to 7.1 percent in 2016-17 and further to 6.6 percent in 2017-18. And this is at a time when the global economic environment has actually been extremely conducive. Most developed countries including the US have in this period seen their economies recovering from a slump and oil prices have been unusually low. In this relatively favourable setting, the Indian economy should have been able to tap global markets and to grow rapidly. Neither of these has happened.

India's exports have actually fallen from the pre-2014 levels. In 2013-14, India's exports of goods were worth \$314.4 billion. In 2017-18, they are officially estimated to have been \$302.8 bn. In the meantime, imports have grown from \$450.2 billion to \$459.7 billion, which means the deficit in the trade of goods has widened to \$156.8 billion from \$135.8 billion. The growth in imports would have been significantly greater but for the fall in oil prices (though it is also true that the fall in oil prices have also lowered somewhat the value of India's export of petroleum products). However, if we look at just the non-oil components of exports and imports, the picture is even more alarming. India's non-oil exports have risen a measly 5.1 percent over four years while its non-oil imports have risen 22.8 percent over the same period. As a result, the non-oil trade deficit in goods has grown two-and-a-half times over these four years from \$34.2 billion to \$86.6 billion. With oil prices now beginning to rise, the overall trade deficit in goods is only likely to worsen further in the remaining year of Modi raj. To understand just how much it can worsen, we only have to record that, between 2016-17 and 2017-18, the trade deficit grew by a whopping 44.5 percent. Exports of services have traditionally helped bridge some of the trade deficit. But even on this front, there has been a marked deterioration during Modi's tenure. India's net exports of services (exports minus imports) went down from \$76.6 billion in 2014-15 to \$69.7 billion in 2015-16 and further to \$67.5 bn in 2016-17, the last year for this data is available.

Given this scenario, it is hardly surprising that the rupee has taken a beating and is fast approaching its lowest levels ever against the US dollar. When this government took office in May 2014, the dollar was worth Rs 59. Currently, it is worth nearly Rs 68 and in February 2016 it had touched its lowest level of Rs 68.8, a level that it seems likely to reach and breach in the near future.

### **Make In India**

How about the much-touted Make in India programme of the government? The trade data makes it quite evident that the dream of ensuring that India challenges China as the manufacturing hub of the world has been a non-starter thus far. But what about industrial growth domestically? Again, the official data indicates a spectacular failure. The index of industrial production (IIP) has risen from 111.0 in May 2014 to 139.0 in March 2018, the last month for which data is available. That is an average annual growth rate of just 5.8 percent. If India wants to come close to achieving 8 percent GDP growth on a consistent basis, much of the thrust must come from industry which will need to grow at double-digit rates. The 5.8 percent actually achieved must be seen in that context. But the growth in the manufacturing index of the IIP is even lower, from 112.2 to 138.6, which is a compound annual growth rate of 5.4 percent.

In its attempt to boost the Make in India programme, the government has thrown open the doors to foreign direct investment (FDI) in virtually every sector while maintaining the fiction that it is not allowed in multi-brand retail (a fiction that has been thoroughly exposed by Walmart's takeover of Flipkart). Even sensitive sectors like insurance and defence have been

thrown open to FDI. There is not even the insistence that FDI is welcome if it sets up new units. Brownfield FDI – that is typically foreigners raising their stake in Indian ventures – has also been welcomed by this government in a continuation of the neo-liberal policies that have been pursued since 1991. This has allowed multinationals to gain greater control over their Indian offshoots or acquire Indian companies (as in the Walmart-Flipkart deal) without making the slightest difference to manufacturing in India.

It is not surprising that multinationals are not rushing to invest in putting up new units in India. After all, Indian companies themselves are in no rush to invest. The Reserve Bank of India reported last year that credit from banks had grown just 5 percent over the previous year, the lowest level of growth in credit registered in 60 years. As Mr Modi is fond of saying, “jo saath saal mein nahin hua, wo humne karke dikhaayaa hai” (What could not be done in 60 years, we have done it). Throughout the tenure of this government, this has been the trend. Credit growth, which was at 18.3 percent in the first quarter of 2010-11 had slowed to 9.2 percent by the first quarter of 2015-16 and to 5.9 percent in 2017-18.

Whatever little hope there was of people Making in India was destroyed by Modi’s enormously destructive and authoritarian move in suddenly making 86 percent of currency with the public worthless overnight in November 2016. Lakhs of jobs were lost as a result and the thousands of small units that went out of business are yet to recover from that body blow as the macroeconomic data reveals only too clearly. Demonetisation led to the deaths of more than a hundred citizens directly and caused huge disruption to the economy besides ruining hundreds of thousands of livelihoods. As many economists have pointed out, demonetisation set back the growth rate of GDP by close to 2 percentage points. A similar disaster, though of lesser proportions, was the notification of rules on animal trade in May 2017, which caused havoc to the livestock economy as well as to exports of meat and leather and leather products. The economic impact was particularly severe on Muslims and Dalits in rural India (not to mention the unleashing of murderous gau rakshaks on them by this notification). Then came the hasty and very poorly planned introduction of GST causing great harassment of small businessmen and entrepreneurs.

## **NPA**s

But who is paying the price for this colossal mismanagement of the economy? Are India’s powerful businessmen the ones getting ruined by this? As the story of bank loans turning bad reveals only too clearly, for the most part they aren’t – it is the people who are getting robbed and ruined. Let’s consider the facts. A recent paper by officials of the RBI shows that gross NPAs rose from 3.4 percent of bank loans in March 2013 to 4.7 percent in March 2015 and further to 9.9 percent in March 2017. The figures for March 2018 are not yet out, but the few pointers that are available all suggest the number will only go up further. The first of these is the quarterly reports put out by the banks for the three-month period ending December 2017. At that point, the combined NPA figure was a whopping 8.4 lakh crore, with about 6.1 lakh crore from the industrial sector. Again, the 20 banks that have announced their quarterly results for

January-March this year have seen NPAs rising from 7.2 percent a year ago to 8.3 percent and their combined NPAs were 32.7 percent higher than a year ago. Clearly, the problem is only worsening.

Lest you think that NPAs are only about categorizing some loans as doubtful and no money is actually lost by the banks in the process, here are some sobering figures. RBI data presented to Parliament by the government shows that in the five years from 2012-13 to 2016-17, a whopping Rs 2.5 lakh crore was written off by the banks, the overwhelming majority of this being loans taken by industrial houses. Of this sum, Rs 61,640 crore was written off in 2012-13 and 2013-14, which were UPA years. In the first three years of the Modi government, 2014-15 to 2016-17, the total sum written off was Rs 1,88,286 crore. What is worse, the figure has risen each year, from Rs 49,018 in 2014-15 to Rs 57,585 crore in 2015-16 and Rs 81,683 crore in 2016-17. The State Bank of India alone has recorded losses of over Rs 10,000 crore in the last two quarters, that is from October 2017 to March 2018. Punjab National Bank recorded losses of over Rs 13,000 crore in a single quarter, from January to March this year. That's over Rs 20,000 crore from just two public sector banks in less than half a year.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley tried to pin the blame for this on the UPA, saying it was a problem his government had inherited. It may well have inherited some bad loans. But far from cracking down on defaulters, the BJP government chose to help the corporates through loan refinancing and restructuring schemes, often not on sound financial reasoning. Of course, some corporates are especially favoured. For instance, two power companies controlled by the Adanis, known to be close to Modi, were extended loan refinance worth Rs 15,000 crore by public sector banks. This was done when earnings before tax of both these companies were not even enough to cover the interest cost on the loans they have taken. In this sweetheart deal, the previous defaulted loans were replaced with new loans and the loan repayment date was extended by one more decade. Similarly, Reliance Gas Transport Infrastructure Ltd (RGTIL), a corporate entity controlled by Mukesh Ambani, was given a loan refinance of Rs 4,500 crores and an extension of payment period by more than a decade.

These NPAs affect people in two ways. First, if banks have to assume that a fairly large chunk of their loans will have to be written off, they have to increase what they call the spread between the interest they pay on their deposits and the interest they charge on loans. So our deposits earn less interest and pay more interest on things like home loans. Second, when public sector banks start get stressed due to these bad loans, the government has to bail them out by injecting fresh capital. While the public sector banks need to be saved in the interest of our people, the route of 'recapitalisation' without making any attempt to bring the errant companies to book and recovering the losses to the banking system from them is really a device to bail out big business. That is, our money being used effectively to subsidise defaulting corporates including the Vijay Mallyas and Nirav Modis.

The other most dangerous development is the proposed Financial Resolution and Deposit Resolution (FRDI) Bill that would legitimise the transfer of the burden of risk on banking

operations to the depositors. If Banks fail the money deposited by ordinary people could be used by the banks to bail them out. In short, the Modi government's record on the economic front is disastrous.

(Courtesy: Peoples Democracy)

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## Brain drain

Arvind Subramanian quit his position as chief economic advisor to the finance ministry and decided to return to his career in academic research in the United States of America. He cited personal reasons behind his decision. The Union finance minister paid the usual tributes to Mr Subramanian and acknowledged his contributions as a policy advisor. His resignation comes at a time when the Indian economy is not doing too well and has to show strong signs of recovery, especially with parliamentary elections not too far away. A few months ago, Arvind Panagariya of Columbia University had quit his post in the Niti Aayog, once again going back to his university position. Raghuram Rajan also went back to the US in 2016 after his three-year term as governor of the Reserve Bank of India had come to an end. In his case, it was evident from his letter that the decision to quit was not his. There had been a strident campaign against him led by Subramanian Swamy of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Hence, in the past two years, three distinguished advisors who came to serve the Government of India have left rather unexpectedly. Two plausible reasons could be thought of. The first is that these personalities may have had issues with other senior civil servants in government. In such cases, the 'outsider' normally has to give way to the power of the set of 'Yes Ministers'. The second plausible reason is that at a time when open criticism of the government is frowned upon as never before, could it be that criticism inside the corridors of power is no longer tolerated as well?

If the first reason holds true, then the Centre's recent announcement to take as lateral entrants some senior executives from the private sector is not going to work well. If the ambience in government is such that expertise from outside is frowned at or looked down upon, then it will be very difficult for private sector executives to survive. It makes no sense to announce this form of entry as a policy for augmenting the experiential knowledge of the bureaucracy. If, on the other hand, the second reason is the dominant factor, then it is indeed cause for serious worry. Policy ambience is enriched when there is a diversity of opinion. Strong leadership is that which can extract the best out of such situations and formulate coherent, feasible policies out of this diversity in ideas. Any leadership that desires only homogeneity and conformity will find it difficult to frame policies that are acceptable to most, and are feasible at the same time.

(The Telegraph)

# The Reasons Behind High Cost Of Diesel & Petrol

Rohit Azad

With prices close to or over Rs 70 and 80 per litre, diesel and petrol are more expensive today than they have ever been. The recent cut of 1 paisa by the Indian Oil Corporation (ostensibly by mistake), which was later corrected to a cut of 15 paisa each, only added insult to injury. As a number of memes doing the rounds on social media have illustrated, an international comparison with neighbouring countries shows that the petrol and diesel prices in India are the highest in the region.

Table 1: Retail Selling Price in Neighbouring Countries

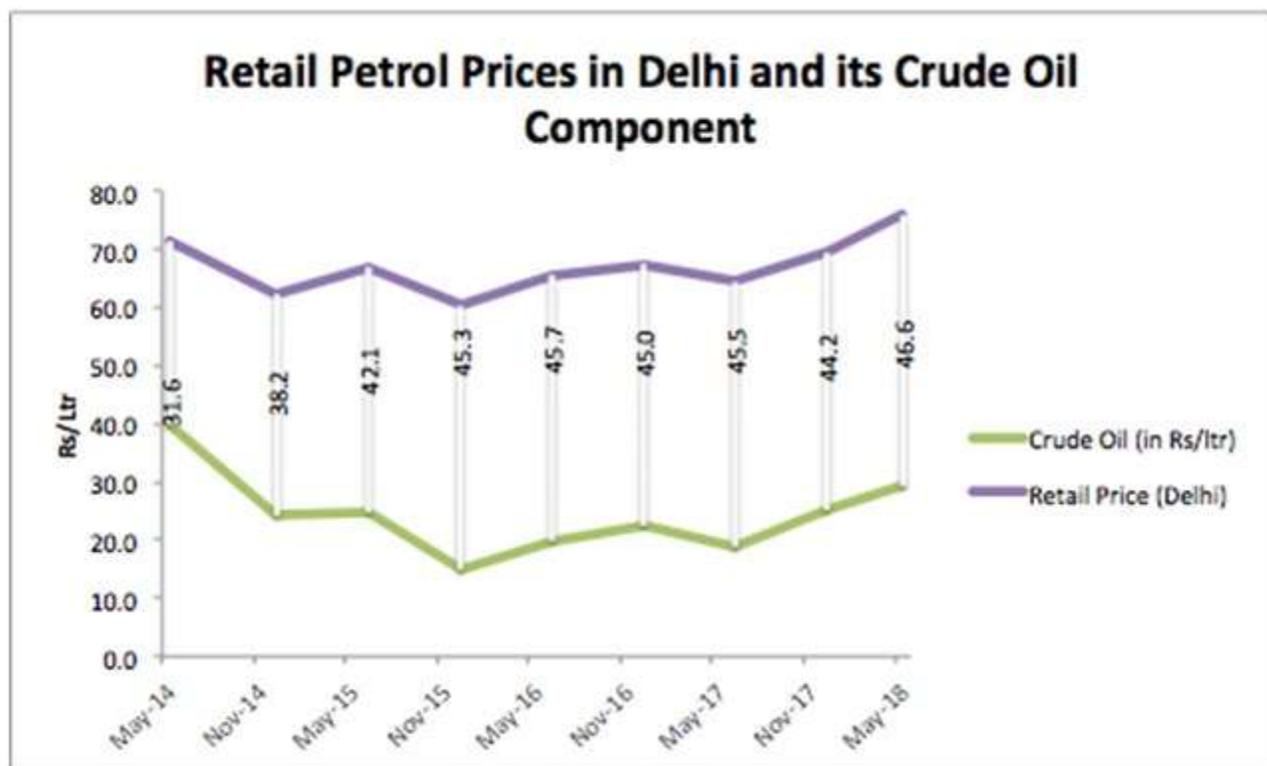
| Country           | Petrol          | Diesel |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------|
|                   | (INRs. / Litre) |        |
| India (Delhi)     | 74.63           | 65.93  |
| Pakistan          | 50.67           | 57.06  |
| Bangladesh        | 68.47           | 51.75  |
| Sri Lanka         | 49.67           | 40.33  |
| Nepal (Kathmandu) | 66.69           | 54.73  |

Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell

The price rise in general and of oil, in particular, was one of the reasons for the anger against the UPA government. While the crude oil prices were quite high during UPA-2 (USD 106.85 per barrel in May 2014 before the UPA demitted office), they have fallen dramatically over the better part of the tenure of Modi government (in the range of USD 30s). Yet the trend of retail prices is exactly the opposite. Of course, for the Indian public, it is the price of crude oil in INR and not dollars which matters. If the rupee gets weaker against the dollar, as it has during the current government, the Indian consumers receive limited benefits from the declining international oil prices.

So, what portion of the Rs 80 we pay for a litre of petrol go towards the purchase of crude oil? The difference between the retail price and the crude oil price comprise the taxes levied by the government, refining charges and the profit margins of the oil retailers in India. This difference is a burden on ordinary citizens since it measures what part of the fall in the international prices goes into the coffers of the government or the oil oligarchs instead of being passed on to the consumers. In the figure given below, it is evident that this burden is currently about 50 per cent higher than it was in May 2014 (Rs. 46.6/ltr now as opposed to Rs. 31.6/ltr earlier). This is because of an inbuilt asymmetry in retail pricing.

While a rise in crude oil prices is borne by the consumers, the benefit of a fall is not passed on to them, and if at all it is then only marginally so. Between May 2014 and Dec 2015, the crude oil cost fell from Rs 40 to Rs 15 per litre, whereas the retail prices fell only by Rs 11 per litre. On the other hand, an increase in crude oil prices has been matched by an equivalent, at times greater, rise in retail prices. The result is a paradoxical situation, where instead of reducing the role of the government in petrol and diesel pricing, deregulation of oil prices in India has done the exact opposite.



Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell, Author's calculation

But who's inflicting this burden, in other words, who's pocketing this gap? Indian Oil Corporation provides latest data on the breakup of retail prices which shows the share of the government in the overall price paid by the consumers (table 2). Close to half of what we pay goes as taxes to the government (central and state combined).

There are broadly two arguments being made by the government about high oil prices. First, the oil prices are high because state governments are greedy.

If the state governments can be persuaded to bring the taxes down, the price of oil can be brought under control. A look at the division of oil tax revenues between central and state exchequer, however, presents a different picture.

Table 2: Price Buildup of Petrol at Delhi on 31-May-18

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Crude Oil                                 | 29.26 |
| Price charged to Dealers by Oil Companies | 38.57 |
| Dealer Commission                         | 3.64  |
| Taxes (Excise Duty + VAT)                 | 36.14 |
| Retail Selling Price                      | 78.35 |
| Source: Indian Oil Corporation Ltd.       |       |

**First**, data from Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell shows that in the first year of Modi government, the petroleum sector contributed equally to the state and the central kitty. But since 2015, it has contributed one and a half times more to the central exchequer than to the states. Moreover, even if this claim of the government were true, which it is not, majority of the states have the same ruling party as the centre (as the party in power repeatedly reminds us). Does passing the buck to the state governments reduce the accountability of the central government?

**Second**, the government claims that these tax revenues are critical to the social sector spending. Any cut in taxes would mean a cut in such spending, which will hurt the poor etc. This argument is riddled with holes. One, indirect taxes, unlike the direct taxes, are not redistributive. The incidence of indirect taxes falls equally on all consumers, whether rich or poor. In other words, poor people shell out a greater proportion of their income than the rich to pay for these taxes. As a result, the government is extracting more from the poor through indirect taxes than it is spending on their wellbeing. Moreover, a government, whose priority is to give relief to the corporates is under continuous pressure to decrease corporate taxes. The ensuing gap in resource mobilisation targets is increasingly filled by indirect taxes, which is a regressive trend when it comes to redistribution.

Two, a cut in spending as a result of a fall in the revenue is a self-inflicted limit, which derives its legitimacy from fiscal conservatism which has engulfed the world economy in the form of austerity measures. Why would a government choose to do so in conditions of slow growth and an economy running below capacity is difficult to understand.

Three, higher indirect taxes on an essential good such as oil means stoking inflation in the economy from the cost side. While the Modi government hasn't seen inflation at the levels of the UPA-2 years, if it continues milking the oil cow, a future rise in crude oil prices can affect the fortunes of this government too.

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## **Moody's survey shows oil prices as the main risk to India's economy**

### **The Hindu**

Oil prices, pace of banks' balance sheet clean-up and investment remain the key credit risks in India, according to an investor survey by Moody's Investors Service.

While market participants in Singapore and Mumbai were unanimous in pegging high crude price as the main risk to India's economy, views varied on the second biggest risk, according to the ratings agency.

"When asked about the top risks facing the Indian economy, most of the respondents highlighted high oil prices as the top risk, while 30.3% of those in Singapore picked rising interest rates as the next top risk, and 23.1% of those in Mumbai picked domestic political risks as the second top risk," Joy Rankothge, a vice president and senior analyst at Moody's, said in a press release.

Participants at Moody's 4th Annual India Credit Conference, conducted by the credit ratings agency along with its Indian affiliate ICRA Ltd. in Mumbai and Singapore in June 2018, were polled on some of the most pressing credit issues facing India.

Almost 175 people representing more than 100 local and international financial institutions attended the conference, Moody's said.

The Debate: The peasant assertion in India

## The Invisible Class

Prabhat Patnaik



G.K. Chesterton has a well-known detective story involving Father Brown called "The Invisible Man", where 'invisibility' is supposed to characterize the postman: one is so used to seeing the postman come and go that one scarcely ever notices him. 'Invisibility' in Chesterton's sense, however, can get attached not just to an individual but to a whole class; and in our country, the peasantry undoubtedly is the 'invisible class'. The peasantry has been called many things by many people, from "a sack of potatoes" to "an awkward class". But it is above all an 'invisible class' whose presence, and providing of essentials to the urban population, is taken so much for granted that it is scarcely ever noticed by those who get these essentials. How else can one explain the fact that literally all discussions of the economy occur these days with no reference whatsoever to the plight of the peasantry?

The Narendra Modi government has just completed four years in office, and celebrated that fact with much fanfare. As if on cue, the third quarter gross domestic product estimates for India have come out for the financial year 2017-18, which show a higher growth rate compared to the past, and place India above China in growth-rate ranking, to the great glee of an

audience used to lapping up competitive T20 games. And yet in all this hullabaloo, no thought has been spared for the condition of the peasantry, which has remained the invisible class.

Let us do a very simple calculation. Let us take from the government of India's Economic Survey 2017-18 the nominal gross value added in the sector "agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying" for the year 2013-14, just before the Modi government came to office; and let us take the comparable figure for the year 2017-18 ("First Advance Estimate"). The nominal gross value added includes the gross incomes of all the people who obtain their income from this sector. We therefore get the total money income generated in this sector, which, incidentally, employs just over half of the country's entire workforce.

To obtain the real value of this money income we have to look at the bundle of goods it would command in the market, for which we deflate this money income by a consumer price index taken from the Economic Survey itself. (We use the combined CPI given by the Survey and calculate the index for the entire year 2017-18 by assuming that the observed inflation rate for April-December of that year, over April-December of the preceding year, will hold for 2017-18 as a whole).

We have to look, however, at the per capita figures. Within such a short period there is unlikely to have been any notable change in the distribution of the workforce across sectors, so that the rate of growth of the population dependent upon this sector can be taken to be approximately equal to the rate of growth of the country's total population. On this basis, when we look at the per capita real income of the population dependent upon this sector, taking population figures again from the same official source, we find that there has actually been an absolute decline between 2013-14 and 2017-18. The magnitude of decline is small, just over half a per cent; but it is an absolute decline nonetheless.

Two points, moreover, should be noted here. First, the figure for gross value added lumps together the incomes of the capitalists, the landlords and the rural rich, together with those of the agricultural labourers, and the bulk of the peasantry. Assuming, not unreasonably, that the capitalists, the landlords and the rural rich would not have experienced a fall in their per capita real incomes, but would rather have experienced some increase, we can safely infer that the fall in the case of the agricultural labourers and the bulk of the peasantry must have been correspondingly larger, and certainly by no means insignificant.

Secondly, the consumer price index does not fully capture the rise in the cost of living, because it does not catch the effect of privatization of essential services like education and healthcare that has occurred of late. It looks at the rise in the price of a given bundle of goods over the base year. If, for instance, there were only government hospitals in the base year, and a government hospital charged Rs 100 for an operation in the base year and Rs 110 in the current year, then the rise in the price of this item will be counted as 10 per cent. This would be so even though in the interim the facilities in the government hospitals may have dwindled so much that most people are forced to go to private hospitals which charge, say, Rs 300 for the same

operation. Hence, as far as this item is concerned, the cost of living for these people has gone up by 200 per cent (from 100 to 300) but the CPI would show only a 10 per cent increase. The decline in real income accordingly is much greater than what deflation by a CPI, as done here, suggests.

It may be argued that with the third quarter GDP estimates that have just come out, the 2017-18 gross value added figure will be larger than what we have taken, based on the "First Advance Estimate". But even if we take what the government now says will be the gross value added in this sector in 2017-18, our basic conclusion is not altered. The per capita real income of the population dependent upon this sector now remains roughly unchanged between 2013-14 and 2017-18, instead of falling by half a per cent. But given the fact that within this sector the capitalists and the landlords would certainly have seen some real income increase, and also that the CPI understates the increase in cost of living, the worsening in the per capita income of over half of India's population during Modi's four years in office is indubitable. And yet nobody is talking about this utterly deplorable record, even as facile comparisons with China fill newspaper pages.

The good thing however is that this 'invisible class' is finally beginning to stir and make itself visible. From the KisanLong March organized by the Left in Maharashtra to the 10-day strike of peasants in North India, we are witnessing an assertion by the peasantry the like of which has not occurred for quite a long time. And its effects are also beginning to be felt in election results. Whether in Karnataka where the Janata Dal (Secular) highlighted peasant distress and garnered much greater support than the 'pundits' had predicted, or in Kairana where peasant anger over cane arrears nullified the Bharatiya Janata Party's attempts at fomenting a communal polarization, we are witnessing at last a stirring of this invisible class.

Ironically, however, many still do not notice this class. The BJP's electoral losses are attributed by 'experts' to all sorts of factors, from 'anti-incumbency' to the mere pooling of Opposition votes; the dynamics of peasant assertion scarcely gets mentioned. But it is this which really threatens the BJP in 2019, no matter how many superannuated politicians it takes to Nagpur to provide respectability to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

**(Courtesy: The Telegraph)**

# A Long March of the Dispossessed to Delhi

P. Sainath/PARI

India's agrarian crisis has gone beyond the agrarian.

It's a crisis of society. Maybe even a civilisational crisis, with perhaps the largest body of small farmers and labourers on Earth fighting to save their livelihoods. The agrarian crisis is no longer just a measure of loss of land. Nor only a measure of loss of human life, jobs or productivity. It is a measure of our own loss of humanity. Of the shrinking boundaries of our humaneness. That we have sat by and watched the deepening misery of the dispossessed, including the death by suicide of well over 300,000 farmers these past 20 years. While some 'leading economists' have mocked the enormous suffering around us, even denying the existence of a crisis.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has not published data on farmers' suicides for two years now. For some years before that, fraudulent data logged in by major states severely distorted the agency's estimates. For instance, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal and many others claimed 'zero suicides' by farmers in their states. In 2014, 12 states and six union territories claimed 'zero suicides' among their farmers. The 2014 and 2015 NCRB reports saw huge, shameless fiddles in the methodology – aimed at bringing down the numbers.

And yet they keep rising.

Meanwhile, protests by farmers and labourers are on the rise. Farmers have been shot dead, as in Madhya Pradesh. Derided or cheated in agreements, as in Maharashtra. And devastated by demonetisation, as in just about everywhere. Anger and pain are mounting in the countryside. And not just among farmers but amongst labourers who find the MNREGA being dismantled by design. Amongst fisherfolk, forest communities, artisans, exploited anganwadi workers. Amongst those who send their children to government schools, only to find the state itself killing its own schools. Also, small government employees and transport and public sector workers whose jobs are on the anvil.

And the crisis of the rural is no longer confined to the rural. Studies suggest an absolute decline in employment in the country between 2013-14 and 2015-16.

The 2011 Census signalled perhaps the greatest distress-driven migrations we've seen in independent India. And millions of poor fleeing the collapse of their livelihoods have moved out to other villages, rural towns, urban agglomerations, big cities – in search of jobs that are not there. Census 2011 logs nearly 15 million fewer farmers ('main cultivators') than there were in 1991. And you now find many once-proud food-producers working as domestic servants. The poor are now up for exploitation by both urban and rural elites.

The government tries its best not to listen. It's the same with the news media.

When the media do skim over the issues, they mostly reduce them to demands for a 'loan waiver.' In recent days, they've recognised the minimum support price (MSP) demand of farmers – the cost of production (CoP2) + 50 %. But the media don't challenge the government's claims of already having implemented this demand. Nor do they mention that the National Commission on Farmers (NCF; popularly known as the Swaminathan Commission) flagged a bunch of other, equally serious issues. Some of the NCF's reports have remained in parliament 12 years without discussion. Also the media, while denouncing loan waiver appeals, won't mention that corporates and businessmen account for the bulk of the non-performing assets drowning the banks.

Perhaps the time has come for a very large, democratic protest, alongside a demand for parliament to hold a three-week or 21-day special session dedicated entirely to the crisis and related issues. A joint session of both houses.

On what principles would that session be based? The Indian constitution. Specifically, the most important of its Directive Principles of State Policy. That chapter speaks of a need to "minimise the inequalities in income" and "endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities, opportunities...." The principles call for "a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

The right to work, to education, to social security. The raising of the level of nutrition and of public health. The right to a better standard of living. Equal pay for equal work for men and women. Just and humane conditions of work. These are amongst the main principles. The Supreme Court has more than once said the Directive Principles are as important as our Fundamental Rights.

An agenda for the special session? Some suggestions that others concerned by the situation can amend or add to:

Three days: Discussion of the Swaminathan Commission report – 12 years overdue. It submitted five reports between December 2004 and October 2006 that cover a multitude of vital issues and not just MSP. Those include, to name a few: productivity, profitability, sustainability; technology and technology fatigue; dryland farming, price shocks and stabilisation – and much more. We also need to halt the privatisation of agricultural research and technology. And deal with impending ecological disaster.

Three days: People's testimonies. Let victims of the crisis speak from the floor of Parliament's central hall and tell the nation what the crisis is about, what it has done to them and countless millions of others. And it's not just about farming. But how surging privatisation of health and education has devastated the rural poor, indeed all the poor. Health expenditure is either the fastest or second fastest growing component of rural family debt.

Three days: Credit crisis. The unrelenting rise of indebtedness. This has been a huge driving factor in the suicide deaths of countless thousands of farmers, apart from devastating millions of others. Often it has meant loss of much or all of their land. Policies on institutional credit paved the way for the return of the moneylender.

Three days: The country's mega water crisis. It's much greater than a drought. This government seems determined to push through privatisation of water in the name of 'rational pricing'. We need the right to drinking water established as a fundamental human right – and the banning of privatisation of this life-giving resource in any sector. Ensuring social control and equal access, particularly to the landless.

Three days: The rights of women farmers. The agrarian crisis cannot be resolved without engaging with the rights – including those of ownership – and problems of those who do the most work in the fields and farms. While in the Rajya Sabha, Prof. Swaminathan introduced the Women Farmers' Entitlements Bill, 2011 (lapsed in 2013) that could still provide a starting point for this debate.

Three days: The rights of landless labourers, both women and men. With mounting distress migrations in many directions, this crisis is no longer just rural. Where it is, any public investment made in agriculture has to factor in their needs, their rights, their perspective.

Three days: Debate on agriculture. What kind of farming do we want 20 years from now? One driven by corporate profit? Or by communities and families for whom it is the basis of their existence? There are also other forms of ownership and control in agriculture we need to press for – like the vigorous sangha krishi (group farming) efforts of Kerala's Kudumbashree movement. And we have to revive the unfinished agenda of land reform. For all of the above debates to be truly meaningful – and this is very important – every one of them must focus, too, on the rights of Adivasi and Dalit farmers and labourers.

While no political party would openly oppose such a session, who will ensure it actually happens? The dispossessed themselves.

In March this year, 40,000 peasants and labourers marched for a week from Nashik to Mumbai making some of these very demands. An arrogant government in Mumbai dismissed the marchers as 'urban Maoists' with whom it would not talk. But caved in within hours of the multitude reaching Mumbai to encircle the state legislative assembly. That was the rural poor sorting out their government.

The highly disciplined marchers struck a rare chord in Mumbai. Not just the urban working class, but also the middle classes, even some from the upper middle classes, stepped out in sympathy.

We need to do this at the national level – scaled up 25 times over. A Long March of the Dispossessed – not just of farmers and labourers, but also others devastated by the crisis. And importantly, those not affected by it – but moved by the misery of fellow human beings. Those standing for justice and democracy. A march starting from everywhere in the country, converging on the capital. No Red Fort rallies, nor skulls at Jantar Mantar. That march should encircle parliament – compel it to hear, listen and act. Yes, they would Occupy Delhi.

It might take many months to get off the ground, a gargantuan logistical challenge. One that has to be met by the largest and widest coalition possible of farm, labour and other

organisations. It will face great hostility from the rulers – and their media – who would seek to undermine it at every stage.

It can be done. Do not underestimate the poor – it is they, not the chattering classes, who keep democracy alive.

It would be one of the highest forms of democratic protest – a million human beings or more showing up to ensure their representatives perform. As a Bhagat Singh, if alive, might have said of them: they could make the deaf hear, the blind see and the dumb speak.



**(This article was originally published in the People's Archive of Rural India on April 23, 2018)**

# What Frightens Modi Most About Farmers' Stir

Raman Swamy

BJP chief ministers are viewing the Kisan Andolan as an agitation aimed at undermining the authority of elected governments and posing a law and order problem. That is why more than 20,000 policemen have been deployed in rural districts identified as potential “trouble-spots” – with strict instructions to avoid using guns as far as possible (to prevent another Mandsaur or Tuticorin or Jallianwala Bagh).

But the BJP government at the Centre is looking at the farmers uprising from a different perspective altogether. Senior Ministers and bureaucrats are recognizing that this is a civil disobedience movement in the making, with the potential of being as much of a game-changer as Gandhi’s salt satyagraha. Historical comparisons are usually inappropriate, particularly when there are differing views on whether the Salt March achieved its objective or not. However, like the British rulers in the 1930s the BJP government today is faced with a peaceful mass movement which it finds difficult to comprehend and cope with.

As reports keeps trickling in that farmers are joining the protest in droves in State after State (most of them BJP-ruled) and that the call by the activist organizations to boycott mandis is gaining traction in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and beyond, Union Home Ministry officials have been taking stock of the escalating situation by the hour, with the awareness that this is just the beginning of the ten-day action plan.

The BJP leadership is still smarting from the humiliation of the series of by-election defeats and party spokespersons find it easy to shut their eyes to the root causes of the farmers’ stir by blaming the Congress party for instigating and inciting the kisan revolt.

The Modi government too is incensed that its elaborate celebrations of four years in power have been torpedoed by a variety of crises – the two-day paralysis of banking operations being the most recent embarrassment.

Signs of growing prospects of Opposition unity and muscle-flexing by NDA alliance partners have further dampened the mood of the BJP rank and file, at a time when even the normally starry-eyed mainstream media has been tepid in its coverage of the Prime Minister’s foreign expedition to Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.

Instead of being lionized for his Act East initiative, Narendra Modi returns home to just as the kisan andolan gathers momentum. Television screens are showing alarming visuals of milk being poured and vegetables being dumped on the road by defiant producers and growers and wholesale markets wearing a deserted look in town and country across the land.

The Prime Minister’s administrative advisors are evidently urging him to grasp the significance of what the farmers are doing -- i) they are challenging and disrupting the established agricultural supply chain; ii) they are in effect directly exposing the profiteering role played by

traders, transporters and middlemen; iii) they are precipitating a severe shortage of milk, fruits and vegetables in urban India.

Narendra Modi does not need his party advisors to spell out the devastating political impact this sequence of events will have on the BJP's electoral fortunes and, indeed, on Modi's own personal popularity and leadership image.

Within the Sangh Parivar it is taken for granted that the trading community has always been the backbone of support to the BJP (and the Jana Sangh in its earlier avatar). If the stranglehold over agricultural marketing that traders, middlemen and wholesalers have enjoyed till now is broken or even diluted as a consequence of the current uprising by farm producers, the backlash will be brutal for the BJP in terms of hard cash contributions as well as manpower and lung power support.

Moreover, sky-rocketing prices due to shortage of supplies of milk, fruits and vegetable in towns and cities would arouse the anger of urban India and alienate the BJP from the middle-class support base.

It is hardly surprising therefore that instructions have evidently been sent to chief ministers like Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Manoharla Khattar and Devendra Fadnavis to deal with the farmers with an iron hand, to project the andolan as a conspiracy fed and fanned by the Congress party and to do whatever is necessary sow seeds of suspicion and distrust among the 130-odd farmers bodies involved in the countrywide stir.

In stark contrast to this approach is the empathy exhibited by Punjab chief minister Amrinder Singh who has issued a statement saying he understood the logic behind the farmers' movement which he said "was an act of desperation".

Even more evocative was the promptness with which the Captain's colourful colleague, Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu drive down to a village in Fatehgarh Sahib and purchased milk and vegetables directly from a farmer.

He had clearly and instinctively grasped the rationale behind the protest - we will not sell our produce to unscrupulous middlemen who pay us a pittance and sell to consumers at an exorbitant profit; if you want fresh fruits, vegetables and milk, come to our village, pay us a decent amount and fulfill your needs.

That is exactly what Sidhu did and what thousands of urban residents ought to do in the days ahead.

**(Courtesy: Frontier weekly, June 05, 2018)**

## The Scam

# The curious case of Ahmedabad bank and Amit Shah

In third week of June a story that had been circulated by the IANS newswire was first published and then either altered or taken down by several news organisations with no explanation given. That alone would be enough to raise eyebrows. But the episode was all the more curious because it related to an article about deposits shortly after demonetisation in a bank in which Bharatiya Janata Party President Amit Shah is a director. Scroll.in has sent queries to the news organisations that pulled the story down or changed it and is yet to receive replies from them. But beyond the questionable media behaviour, there is also the matter of what IANS reported in the first place.

### What is the background?

The IANS report is based on Right to Information replies received by an activist from Mumbai regarding currency notes collected by banks during demonetisation, the government's move in November 2016 that required all banknotes of Rs 500 and above to be deposited into the banking system so that they could be replaced by new notes.

The policy was intended to be an attack on black money. The idea was that people holding on to illicit cash would either choose not to deposit it for fear of being caught or would return it and have to pay penalties. But demonetisation also came with a huge disruption to the economy, with many reporting that clever accountants were finding ways around the rules for those with black money – even as the bulk of law-abiding citizens were stuck in lines waiting to deposit their savings and then faced a severe cash crunch afterward.

### What is the story?

The RTI replies received by Manoranjan S Roy, according to IANS, showed that one district cooperative bank in Ahmedabad – which has BJP President Amit Shah as a director – received as much as Rs 745 crore of withdrawn banknotes after the move had been announced. This was the highest amount of deposits in any district cooperative bank. Second on that list was the Rajkot District Cooperative Bank, which included as chairman Jayeshbhai Vitthalbhai Radadiya, a cabinet minister in the BJP-run Gujarat government. That bank received Rs 693 crore withdrawn notes in the first five days.

Moreover, the RTI replies revealed that the amount of withdrawn notes deposited in those two banks dwarf the amounts received by other ones, such as the apex Gujarat State Cooperative Branch, which received just Rs 1.11 crore.

### What is the implication?

Just five days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the note ban, the Reserve Bank of India decided that no District Central Cooperative Bank, also known as DCCBs, would be allowed to accept demonetised notes. Although the central bank did not explain its move, the popular belief was that Know Your Customer norms at these institutions were lax and would allow black money to easily be laundered, defeating the purpose of demonetisation. In light of this, the receipt of a massive amount of Rs 745 crore in one district cooperative bank within five days of the note ban would seem unusual. There is no illegality implied in the RTI reply, but the amounts involved bring up questions about why the numbers at the bank were so much higher than in others.

The Congress, naturally, jumped on the information, and especially the link to Shah and other BJP leaders, alleging that the unusual volumes had some link to the saffron party also becoming tremendously rich over the last year.

In its press statement on the matter, the Congress added to these allegations pointing to a number of other DCCBs in Gujarat with BJP connections. “19 months post ‘Modi Made Disaster’ of Demonetisation, it is now officially clear that this entire exercise was the Biggest Scam in Independent India, indulged to convert its ill-gotten ‘Black Money’ into ‘White’!” said Randeep Surjewala, Congress leader, according to the statement. The party did not, however, explain how it was arriving at this conclusion.

### **What about the clarification?**

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, which oversees DCCBs and had sent the RTI reply to the activist, issued a clarification on Friday afternoon, seeking to add context to the story. It pointed out that the Ahmedabad bank was a very successful one, seeming to imply that high deposit volumes at the institution was not unusual.

It said that 98.66% of accounts in the Ahmedabad bank received deposits of less than Rs 2.5 lakh each. Of all the accounts in the bank, not just the ones that saw deposits, NABARD said that just 0.09% received deposits of more than Rs 2.5 lakh each. It also claimed that the average deposit amount at the Ahmedabad Branch was Rs 46,795, lower than the average across DCCBs of Gujarat. It also sought to add context about the branch itself, saying has total business levels of more than Rs 9,000 crore and is one of India’s top DCCBs.

These numbers do add context to the statistics revealed in the RTI reply, but they do not serve as anything of a clean chit or a denial. Indeed, the NABARD release does not deny the fact that the Ahmedabad cooperative bank received the highest amount of money of any DCCB, although it seeks to blunt that information by saying that when combined, Maharashtra district cooperative banks overall received more demonetised notes than those in Gujarat. It also said that NABARD conducted “100% verification in Ahmedabad DCCB which revealed that the bank had complied with all the KYC Guidelines of the RBI while accepting the demonetised notes”.

### **Where does that leave us?**

Despite the RTI information and the NABARD statement, very little is clear about the story. What we do know is that the Ahmedabad DCCB, which lists Amit Shah as a director, received

what seems like a disproportionate amount of demonetised notes in the five days after the note ban announcement. NABARD has attempted to contextualise this information, suggesting it is a highly successful DCCB. But in doing so raises further questions about the small number of accounts in which huge amounts of money were clearly deposited.

As per NABARD, 98.66% accounts deposited less than ₹2.5L i.e approx 1.58L Accounts deposited less than 2.50 i.e around 395 Cr.(considering each deposited ₹2,49,999)  
Rest 2k account holders deposited around ₹ 351 Cr ??

Meanwhile, the Congress, taking its cue from the manner in which the BJP often spread corruption allegations in 2013, jumped from this information straight to claiming that Amit Shah “made a whopping Rs 745 crores” without any evidence to that effect. The party has also sought to connect the episode to the Jay Shah allegations, by which a company owned by the BJP president’s son was alleged to have seen a massive spike in revenues the year after Modi came to power.

The Congress’ intentions are evident. Demonetisation is perhaps Modi’s most significant decision and though it is widely believed to have failed, the move is still not seen as a political liability for the BJP. The Congress is attempting to use this episode to insinuate that the BJP used demonitisation to launder its own illicit cash.

But neither the RTI information nor the NABARD clarification offer the full picture. This unfortunately fits into the general trend of very little about demonetisation or its aftermath being understood or subjected to scrutiny. Both the RTI and the clarification add some information, but they still present an incomplete image of what exactly was happening in district cooperative banks before the RBI decided to stop them from accepting deposits of old notes.

**(Courtesy: Scroll.in)**

## Why media houses delete Amit Shah story?

News websites including Firstpost, New Indian Express, Times Now and News18 took down an Indo-Asian News Service-sourced story about a bank in which BJP president Amit Shah is a director

Hours after it was published, a story about Bharatiya Janata Party President Amit Shah's links to a district cooperative bank in Gujarat which collected deposits of demonetised ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes totalling ₹745.59 crore—within five days of PM Narendra Modi's announcement of the demonetisation decision—has been taken down by as many as four news websites. None of the websites or their editors have issued any clarification about why the story was taken down. The story by news agency Indo-Asian News Service had reported that the "Ahmedabad District Cooperative Bank (ADCB) secured deposits of ₹ 745.59 crore of the spiked notes—in just five days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the demonetisation announcement". The Ahmedabad District Cooperative Bank received the maximum deposits among all the 370 district cooperative banks in the country, as per the IANS article which was based on a RTI reply received from the Chief General Manager and Appellate Authority, S Saravanavel of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, by RTI activist M Manoranjan S Roy. "All the district cooperative banks were banned from accepting deposits of the banned currency notes from the public after November 14, 2016—five days after demonetisation—on fears that black money would be laundered through this route," said the IANS article.

Amit Shah has been a director of the bank for several years and still holds the position in the bank. Terming the taking down of the article by so many websites "Modi government's crackdown on the media", the Congress party on June 22 demanded explanation from the PM. AICC Communications in-charge, Randeep Surjewala said, "By suppressing the media, truth cannot be hidden" at a press conference held at AICC headquarters in Delhi. It is not the first time that a story critical to the BJP president has been removed from a news website. Referring to a story that was published in the Times of India last year, Surjewala said, "A story about 300% increase in the assets of the BJP president was also removed from the paper's website within hours of being published". "Was it done under the pressure of Amit Shah too?" asked Surjewala.

# RTI activist Manoranjan Roy: Anything can happen to me, anyday

*He fears for his life and safety of his family, admits the activist from Mumbai, **Manoranjan S Roy**. Life for him had changed ever since his RTI applications revealed discrepancies between the supply and deployment of Electronic Voting Machines in elections. But his recent disclosure that the Ahmedabad District Cooperative Bank with BJP national president Amit Shah as one of the directors collecting a whopping Rs 750 crore in just five days after demonetisation, has brought him unwanted publicity. Excerpts fom a conversation with **Ashutosh Sharma**.*



## **Q. Why are you avoiding talking to the media?**

A. It's because of my past experience. When I needed media the most, they ignored me and the important issues that I was raising. Media come to you only if you have something sensational to share. I find a majority of the media pursuing hit-and-run journalism. They don't seem to have the time or they lack the commitment to follow-up and take issues to their logical conclusions.

So far as IANS is concerned, it has reported all my stories in the past. I have a good professional rapport with one of its journalists in Mumbai. We share a relationship of mutual respect and trust and that's why I prefer to speak only to him.

**Q. Several media organisations have taken down the report on the Ahmedabad District Cooperative Bank. What's your reaction?**

A. It indicates the kind of influence the ruling party and the government exercise over media. Either the editors or the owners of media houses are afraid of the current establishment or they simply have compromised on journalism. This kind of fear was never there earlier.

In the last few years, government officials have started refusing information under the RTI Act. It is becoming difficult to extract information from the Government. What's more, after providing the information under RTI Act, authorities now give clarifications or contradict their own information under political pressure. But nobody seems to be worried.

**Q. What does the information furnished by National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) to your RTI queries convey?**

A. Demonetisation has turned out to be a massive scam that enabled BJP leaders more than anyone else to turn black money into white in a legal way. It was all pre-planned and raises serious questions.

The RTI replies from NABARD also revealed that the Rajkot District Cooperative Bank, whose chairman Jayeshbhai Vitthalbhai Radadiya is a cabinet minister in Gujarat, also got deposits of old currencies worth Rs 693.19 crore.

**Q. But NABARD has issued a rejoinder and claimed that there was nothing wrong in ADCB receiving demonetised currency and that the amount was also not unusual...**

A. It's a poor attempt at cover up, and at the behest of the central government. NABARD is now claiming that the total demonetised notes deposited with the district cooperative central banks (DCCBs) in Maharashtra were higher than those deposited in Gujarat. This is not true, according to NABARD's replies to my RTI applications.

Maharashtra's 30 DCCBs (out of total 370) secured deposits of Rs 3,985 crore worth of banned notes averaging Rs 132.83 crore per bank. But in Gujarat, 18 DCCBs secured deposits of old notes worth Rs 3,640 crore, which means an average of Rs 202 crore per DCCB.

Let NABARD challenge me in a court of law, then I'll let it be known to the country how they are manipulating the system and conning the country. Why NABARD and other agencies haven't ordered a probe against the ADCB yet? Isn't it a matter of investigation? It's a clear scam.

**Q. Did you consult any expert before releasing the RTI reply to the media?**

A. No. I don't have the resources to utilise the services of experts. I started out as an informer of the Income Tax department and whatever I have learnt is through practical experience. People have this impression that I have a dedicated team of researchers but I am all alone in my war against black money.

**Q. What made you seek these details from NABARD, what were your questions and when did you file the application?**

A. I've been gathering information on black money since 2012. The RTI replies received from the RBI and three security printing presses—in Nashik, Dewas and Mysuru—pertaining to currency notes of certain denomination received and sent by the security presses from 2000 to 2011 showed contradictory figures. It revealed large quantities of missing or excess currency notes.

So, I filed a PIL in Bombay High Court in 2015 which was disposed of by the court in August 23, 2016. Then demonetisation followed in November and I was naturally curious to know how many demonetised notes are returning to the banks.

I filed my application in March 2018, and asked NABARD about total currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination deposited with State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) and District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) from November 8, 2016 to December 31, 2017.

While sharing the information, NABARD in its reply stated that the SCBs were allowed either to exchange or take deposit suspended bank notes up to December 30, 2016 whereas DCCBs were not allowed either to exchange or take deposits of suspended notes after November 14, 2011.

**Q. Did you file any RTI application to the Income Tax department after receiving replies from the NABARD?**

A. No. RBI had set a limit of Rs 2 lakh per account on depositing money during demonetisation. I have no information if RBI or Income Tax department have sent notices to depositors of Amit Shah's bank if they had exceeded the deposit limit. It is for the Home Ministry, RBI, CAG, the Central Board of Direct Taxes and other such authorities to get to the bottom of it.

**(Courtesy: National Herald)**

The Global

# Noam Chomsky on Fascism, Showmanship and Democrats' Hypocrisy in the Trump Era

*After 18 months of Trump in the White House, American politics finds itself at a crossroads. The United States has moved unmistakably toward a novel form of fascism that serves corporate interests and the military, while promoting at the same time a highly reactionary social agenda infused with religious and crude nationalistic overtones, all with an uncanny touch of political showmanship. In this exclusive Truthout interview, world-renowned linguist and public intellectual Noam Chomsky analyzes some of the latest developments in Trumpland and their consequences for democracy and world order.*

**C.J. Polychroniou:** Noam, I want to start by asking for your reading of what took place at the Singapore summit, and the way this event was covered in the US media.

**Noam Chomsky:** It's reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes and the dog that didn't bark. What was important was what didn't happen. Unlike his predecessors, Trump did not undermine the prospects for moving forward. Specifically, he did not disrupt the process initiated by the two Koreas in their historic April 27 [Panmunjom] Declaration, in which they "affirmed the principle of determining the destiny of the Korean nation on their own accord" (repeat: on their own accord), and for the first time presented a detailed program as to how to proceed. It is to Trump's credit that he did not undermine these efforts, and in fact made a move toward facilitating them by cancelling the US-South Korean war games, which, as he correctly said, are "very provocative." We would certainly not tolerate anything of the sort on our borders – or anywhere on the planet – even if they were not run by a superpower which not long before had utterly devastated our country with the flimsiest of pretexts after the war was effectively over, glorying in the major war crimes it had committed, like bombing major dams, after there was nothing else to bomb.

Beyond the achievement of letting matters proceed, which was not slight, no "diplomatic skills" were involved in Trump's triumph.

The coverage has been quite instructive, in part because of the efforts of the Democrats to outflank Trump from the right. Beyond that, the coverage across the spectrum illustrates quite well two distinct kinds of deceit: lying and not telling relevant truths. Each merits comment.

Trump is famous for the former, and his echo chamber is as well. Liberal commentators exult in totting up and refuting Trump's innumerable lies and distortions, much to his satisfaction since it provides the opportunity for him to fire up his loyal — by now almost worshipful — base with more evidence of how the hated "Establishment" is using every possible underhanded means to prevent their heroic leader from working tirelessly to defend them from a host of enemies.

A canny politician, Trump surely understands well that the base on which he relies, by now almost the entire Republican Party, has drifted to a surreal world, in part under his influence.

Take the major Trump-Ryan legislative achievement, the tax scam — “The US Donor Relief Act of 2017,” as Joseph Stiglitz termed it. It had two transparent aims: to enrich the very wealthy and the corporate sector while slamming everyone else, and to create a huge deficit. The latter achievement — as the main architect of the scam Paul Ryan helpfully explained — provides the opportunity to realize the cherished goal of reducing benefits that serve the general population, already very weak by comparative standards, but still an unacceptable infringement on the prerogatives of the 1%. The congressional Joint Committee on Taxation estimates that the law will add \$1 trillion to deficits over the next decade. Virtually every economist generally agrees. But not 80 percent of Republican voters, of whom half believe that the deficit will be reduced by the gift their leader has lavished upon them.

Or consider something vastly more significant, attitudes toward global warming (apologies for the obscenity: climate change), which poses a severe threat to organized human life, and not in the distant future.

Half of Republicans believe that what is plainly happening is not happening, bolstered by virtually the entire leadership of the Party, as the Republican Primary debates graphically revealed. Of the half who concede that the real world exists, barely half think that humans play a role in the process.

Such destructive responses tend to break through the surface during periods of distress and fear, very widespread feelings today, for good reason: A generation of neoliberal policies has sharply concentrated wealth and power while leaving the rest to stagnate or decline, often joining the growing precariat. In the US, the richest country in history with unparalleled advantages, over 40 percent of the population don't earn enough to afford a monthly budget that includes housing, food, child care, health care, transportation and a cell phone. And this is happening in what's called a “booming economy.”

Productivity has risen through the neoliberal period, even if not as much as before, but wages have stagnated or declined as wealth is funneled to a few bulging pockets. Distress is so severe that among white middle-aged Americans, mortality is actually increasing, something unheard of in functioning societies apart from war or pestilence. There are similar phenomena in Europe under the “business first” (“neoliberal”/“austerity”) assault.

Returning to forms of deceit, one technique is simply lying, honed to a high art by the Maestro. Another technique is not telling parts of the “whole story” that matter.

To illustrate, consider the analysis of “Trump's claims about the North Korea deal” by the expert and highly competent fact-checker of The Washington Post, Glenn Kessler. His article originally ran under the title of “Not the Whole Story,” with the title presented in extra-large letters to emphasize the ignominy. Kessler's acid (and accurate) critique of Trump's distortions and inventions opens by declaring (again correctly) that “North Korea has a long history of making agreements and then not living up to its obligations,” citing the most crucial case, the September 2005 US-North Korea agreement (under six-power auspices), in which, in the official wording, “The DPRK [North Korea] committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] safeguards.”

As Kessler points out, the North Koreans did not live up to these promises, and in fact, soon returned to producing nuclear weapons. Obviously, they can't be trusted.

But this is "Not the Whole Story." There is a rather significant omission: Before the ink was dry on the agreement, the US undermined it. To repeat the unwanted facts from our earlier discussion of the matter, "the Bush administration broke the agreement. It renewed the threat of force, froze North Korean funds in foreign banks and disbanded the consortium that was to provide North Korea with a light-water reactor. Bruce Cumings, the leading US Korea scholar, writes that 'the sanctions were specifically designed to destroy the September pledges [and] to head off an accommodation between Washington and Pyongyang.'" The whole story is well-known to scholarship, but somehow doesn't reach the public domain.

Kessler is a fine and careful journalist. His evasion of "the whole story" appears to be close to exceptionless in the media. Every article on the matter by The New York Times security and foreign policy experts is the same, as far as I've seen. The practice is so uniform that it is almost unfair to pick out examples. To choose only one, again from a fine journalist, Washington Post specialist on Korea Anna Fifield writes that North Korea "signed a denuclearization agreement" in 2005, but didn't stick to the agreement (omitting the fact that this was a response to Washington's breaking the agreement). "So perhaps the wisest course of action," she continues, "would be to bet that it won't abide by this one, either." And to complete the picture with a banned phrase, "So perhaps the wisest course of action would be to bet that [Washington] won't abide by this one, either."

There are endless laments about the deceitfulness and unreliability of the North Koreans; many are cited in Gareth Porter's review of media coverage. But it would be hard to find a word about the rest of the story. This is only one case.

I don't incidentally suggest that the deceit is conscious. Much more likely, it's just the enormous power of conformity to convention, to what Gramsci called hegemonic "common sense." Some ideas are not even rejected; they are unthinkable. Like the idea that US aggression is aggression; it can only be "a mistake," "a tragic error," "a strategic blunder." I also don't want to suggest this is "American exceptionalism." It's hard to find an exception to the practice in the history of imperialism.

So far, at least, Trump has kept from disrupting the agreement of the two Koreas. Of course, all of this is accompanied by boasts about his amazing deal-making abilities, and the brilliance of his skillful tactics of threatening "fire and fury" in order to bring the dictator to the negotiating table. There are many accolades by others across the spectrum for this triumph — which is about on a par with the standard claims that Obama's harsh sanctions forced Iran to capitulate by signing the joint agreement on nuclear weapons, claims effectively refuted by Trita Parsi (*Losing an Enemy*). Whatever the factual basis, such claims are necessary to justify harsh measures against official enemies and to reinforce the general principle that what we do is right (with occasional tragic errors).

In the present case too, there is good evidence that the truth is almost the opposite of the standard claims, and that the harsh US stance has impeded progress toward peaceful

settlement. There have been many opportunities in addition to the 2005 agreement. In 2013, in a meeting with senior US diplomats, North Korean officials outlined steps toward denuclearization. One of those who attended the meeting, former US official and Stimson Center Senior Fellow Joel Wit reports that, “Not surprisingly, for the North Koreans, the key to denuclearization was that the United States had to end its ‘hostile policy’.”

While the US maintains its threatening stance, the North Korean leadership — “not surprisingly” — has sought “to develop a nuclear arsenal as a shield to deter the US while they moved to develop the economy.” The North Korean government, in June 2013, “issued an important new pronouncement that it was open to negotiations on denuclearization,” Wit writes, adding that, “The Obama administration dismissed it at the time as propaganda.” He adds further that “the North Koreans have given a great deal of thought to denuclearization and almost certainly have a concrete plan of action for the upcoming [Singapore] summit, whether the White House does or not.” In fact, at the 2013 meetings, “the North Korean officials actually laid out a concrete plan to achieve denuclearization,” Wit reports.

Not the only case. China’s “double freeze” proposal, supported by Russia, Germany and others, has been on the table for years, rejected by Washington — until the Singapore summit.

Trump’s diplomacy, such as it is, has been subjected to withering attack, especially by liberal opinion: How could the US president agree to meet on friendly terms with a brutal dictator? How could he fail to demand that North Korea end its human rights violations, which are indeed horrendous?

Willingness to look at “the whole story” suggests some other questions, of course unasked — in fact, unthinkable: How could Kim agree to meet on friendly terms with the head of the state that world opinion overwhelmingly regards as the greatest threat to peace? How could North Korea fail to demand that the US end its human rights violations, also horrendous? Has North Korea done anything remotely like invading Iraq, the worst crime of this century? Or destroying Libya? Has it been condemned by the ICJ [International Court of Justice] for international terrorism (“unlawful use of force”)? And a lot more that is easy enough to reel off.

It made perfect sense for North Korea not to bring up US crimes as a condition for moving forward. The proper goal of the meeting was to expedite the efforts of the two Koreas to pursue the directions outlined in their April 27 Declaration. And the argument cuts both ways.

**Interestingly enough, while Trump seeks to appease his political doppelgänger in Pyongyang, he has succeeded in alienating most of the US’s major Western allies, including Canada, France and Germany. Is this the consequence of his alleged foreign policy doctrine “We are America, bitch”?**

There are extensive efforts to try to discern some coherent doctrine that guides Trump’s behavior, but I suspect it’s a fool’s errand. A very good predictor of Trump policy is [his fixation on] ... reversing anything associated with the despised “Kenyan Muslim” he replaced: in foreign policy, tearing up the successful Iran deal and accepting the long-standing possibilities for addressing the serious North Korea crisis (proclaiming to have created an astonishing

breakthrough). Much the same is true of other actions that look like random shots when the driving forces are ignored.

All of this has to be done while satisfying the usual Republican constituencies: primarily the business world and the rich. For Trump, that also means unleashing the more brutal wing of the Republican Party so that they can dedicate themselves even beyond the norm to the interest of private wealth and corporate power. Here the technique is to capture the media with attention-grabbing antics, which can be solemnly exposed while the game goes on — so far, quite effectively.

Then comes the task of controlling the so-called “populist” base: the angry, frightened, disillusioned white population, primarily males. Since there is no way for Trumpism to deal with their economic concerns, which are actually being exacerbated by current policy-formation, it’s necessary to posture heroically as “standing up” for them against “malevolent forces” and to cater to the anti-social impulses that tend to surface when people are left to face difficult circumstances alone, without institutions and organizations to support them in their struggles. That’s also being done effectively for the time being.

The “We are America, bitch” posture appeals to chauvinistic instincts and the white supremacy that is a deeply rooted feature of American culture and is now exacerbated by concern that whites might even become a minority. The posture can also delude working people into believing that their tough-guy protector will bring back the world they’ve lost. Such propaganda exercises cannot, of course, target those actually responsible for the plight of the victims of neoliberal globalization. On the contrary, attention has to be diverted away from corporate managers who largely shape state policy while establishing complex global supply chains to maximize profit at the expense of working people. More appropriate targets are desperate people fleeing horrors for which we are largely responsible: “foreigners” who have been “robbing us” with the connivance of “treacherous liberals” and other assorted devils that can be conjured up in periods of social breakdown.

Allies, friends, who cares? There is no need for policies that are “coherent” in any traditional sense. Consequences don’t matter as long as the primary goals are met.

**After months of harsh rhetoric against China’s trade practices, Trump has decided to impose tariffs of \$50 billion on Chinese imports, prompting Beijing, subsequently, to declare that the US has embarked on a trade war and to announce in turn that it will retaliate with similar measures against US imports. First, isn’t it true that China is merely practicing today the same sort of mercantilist policies that the US and Great Britain practiced in the past on their way to global ascendancy? Second, is the targeting of tariffs expected to have any impact either on China’s economy or on the size of the US trade deficit? And lastly, if a new era of protectionism is about to take off, what could the consequences of such development be for the reign of global neoliberalism?**

Several questions arise. First, what is Trump’s motive? If it were concern about China’s economic management and trade policies, he wouldn’t be going out of his way to alienate allies with tariffs and insults but would be joining with them to confront China on the issues of concern. If, however, the driving force is what I discussed earlier, then targeting both China and

allies with abuse and tariffs has a certain logic: It may play well in the rust belt, contributing to the delusion that our hero is fighting to ensure jobs for working people — though it's a tricky strategy, because it harms other parts of his loyal base, mainly farmers, and also, though more subtly, because it imposes a new tax on consumption, which is what tariffs amount to.

As for China's economic policies, yes, they are similar to those that have been used by developed societies generally, beginning with Britain and then its former North American colony. Similar, but more limited. China lacks the means available to its predecessors. Britain stole superior technology from India, the Low Countries, Ireland, and by force and severe protectionism, undermined the Indian economy, then the world's most advanced along with China. The US, under the Hamiltonian system, resorted to high tariffs to bar superior British goods, and also took British technology in ways barred by the current US-initiated global trading system. Economic historian Paul Bairoch describes the US as "the mother country and bastion of protectionism" into the 1920s, well after it had become far and away the richest country in the world.

The general practice is called "kicking away the ladder" by economic historians: first use the practices to develop, then bar others from following.

Earlier, Britain's economic development relied on large-scale piracy, now considered by its former practitioner to be the most heinous of crimes. Keynes wrote that the booty of English pirates, like the famed and admired Sir Francis Drake, "may fairly be considered the fountain and origin of British foreign investments." Piracy was also a standard practice in the American colonies. Both British and US economies also relied crucially on the most hideous system of slavery in human history. Cotton was the oil of the industrial revolution, providing the basis for manufacturing, finance, commerce, retail. Such practices are not available to China.

Like Britain before it, the US called for "free trade" when it recognized that the playing field was tilted properly in its direction. After World War II, when the US had incomparable power, it promoted the "liberal world order" that has been an enormous boon to the US corporate system, which now owns about half of the global economy, an astonishing policy success.

Again, following the British model, the US hedged its commitment to "free trade" for the benefit of domestic private power. The British-dominated "free trade" system kept India as a largely closed protectorate. The US-dominated system imposes an extreme patent system ("intellectual property") that provides virtual monopoly power to major US industries. The US government also provides huge subsidies to energy industries, agribusiness and financial institutions. While the US complains about Chinese industrial policy, the modern high-tech industry has relied crucially on research and development in the publicly subsidized sector of the economy, to such an extent that the economy might fairly be regarded as a system of public subsidy, private profit. And there are many other devices to subsidize industry. Procurement, for example, has been shown to be a significant device. In fact, the enormous military system alone, through procurement, provides a huge state subsidy to industry. These comments only skim the surface.

Britain abandoned laissez-faire when it could no longer cope with Japanese competition, part of the background for World War II in the Pacific. Some in the US are having similar qualms today,

concerns that Trump is cynically exploiting. But not the powerful corporate sector that relies crucially on the US-designed global economic order.

The corporate sector relies so extensively on the global economy it has designed that it is sure to use its enormous power to try to head off a major trade war. The Trump tariffs and the retaliation might escalate, but it's likely that the threat will be contained. Trump is quite right, however, in proclaiming that the US would "win" a limited trade war, given the scale of the US economy, the huge domestic market and unique advantages in other respects. The "We are America, bitch" doctrine is a powerful weapon of intimidation.

**The Trump administration is moving full speed ahead with its intent on cracking down on unauthorized entries to the country by separating immigrant children from their parents. More than 2,000 children have been separated from their parents during the last seven weeks, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions sought recently to justify Trump's immigration policy by citing a verse from the Bible. What can one say about an advanced Western society in which religion continues to crowd out reason in shaping public policy and public attitudes? And didn't the Nazis, although they were no believers, also use Christianity to justify their immoral and criminal acts?**

The immigration policy, always grotesque, has descended to levels so revolting that even many of those who foster and exploit xenophobia are running for cover — like Trump, who is desperately trying to blame it on the Democrats, and like the First Lady, who is appealing to "both sides of the aisle" to come together to stop the obscenity. We should, however, not overlook the fact that Europe is crawling through much the same gutters.

One can quote scripture for almost any purpose one likes. Sessions doubtless knows that "all the law" hangs on two commandments: loving God and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But that is not the appropriate thought for the occasion.

It is true, however, that the US is unique among developed societies in the role of religion in social life, ever since the Puritans landed.

**Recently, Trump stated that he had the absolute right to pardon himself (after he had already said that he could shoot someone on New York's 5th Avenue and not lose any support), while his lawyer, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, said the president could even commit murder in the Oval Office and still not be prosecuted for it. Your thoughts?**

After praising Kim [Jong Un] effusively as a strong leader who "speaks and his people sit up at attention," Trump added: "I want my people to do the same." When the predictable reaction followed, he said he was kidding. Maybe. I hope we don't have an opportunity to find out.

**While it is clear that the country is well on its way to becoming a pariah nation, the Democrats continue to focus their attention primarily on Trump's alleged collusion with Russia and unethical behavior, all the while trying to outflank the president on the jingoist front, adopting new restrictions for the 2020 elections so they can keep away the likes of Bernie Sanders, and of course, playing masterfully the fundraising game that works in a**

**plutocracy. With all this in mind, how would you describe the nature of contemporary US politics?**

Much as in Europe, the centrist political institutions in the United States, which have long been in the driver's seat, are in decline. The reasons are not obscure. People who have endured the rigors of the neoliberal assault — austerity in the recent European version — recognize that the institutions are working for others, not for them. In the US, people do not have to read academic political science to know that a large majority, those who are not near the top of the income scale, are effectively disenfranchised, in that their own representatives pay little attention to their views, hearkening rather to the voices of the rich, the donor class. In Europe, anyone can see that basic decisions are made by the unelected Troika, in Brussels, with the northern banks peering over their shoulders.

In the US, respect for Congress has long been hovering in single digits. In recent Republican primaries, when candidates emerged from the base, the Establishment was able to beat them down and obtain their own candidate. In 2016, that failed for the first time. True, it's not far from the norm for a billionaire with enormous media support and almost \$1 billion in campaign funding to win an election, but Trump was hardly the choice of the Republican elites. The most spectacular result of the election was not the Trump phenomenon. Rather, it was the remarkable success of Bernie Sanders, breaking sharply with US political history. With no support from big business or the media, Sanders might well have won the Democratic nomination had it not been for the machinations of Obama-Clinton party managers. Similar processes are apparent in recent European elections.

Like it or not, Trump is doing quite well. He has the support of 83 percent of Republicans, which is without precedent apart from rare moments. Whatever their feelings may be, Republicans dare not cross him openly. His general support in the low 40s is not far from the norm, about the same as Obama's going into his first midterm. He is lavishing gifts on the business world and the wealthy, the authentic constituency of the Republicans (with the Democrat leadership not far behind). He has thrown enough crumbs to keep the Evangelicals happy and has struck the right chords for racist/white supremacy elements. And he has, so far, managed to convince coal miners and steel workers that he is one of them. In fact, his support among union members has increased to 51 percent.

It is hardly in doubt that Trump cares almost nothing about the fate of the country or the world. What matters is me. That's clear enough from his attitude toward global warming. He is perfectly well aware of the dire threat — to his properties. His application for a seawall to protect his Irish golf course is based explicitly on the threat of global warming. But pursuit of power impels him to lead the race to destruction, quite happily, as is evident from his performances. The same holds of other serious, if lesser, threats, among them the threat that the country may be isolated, despised, declining — with dues to pay after it's no longer his concern.

The Democrats are now torn between a popular base that is largely social democratic and a New Democrat leadership that panders to the donor class. Under Obama, the party was reduced to shambles at the local and state level, a particularly serious matter because the 2020 elections will determine redistricting, offering opportunities for gerrymandering even beyond today's scandalous situation.

The bankruptcy of the Democrat elite is well-illustrated by the obsession with alleged Russian meddling with our sacred elections. Whatever it might amount to — apparently very little — it cannot begin to compare with the “meddling” of campaign funding, which largely determines electoral outcomes, as extensive research has shown, particularly the careful work of Thomas Ferguson, which he and his colleagues have now extended to the 2016 elections. As Ferguson points out, when Republican elites realized that it was going to be Trump or Clinton, they responded with a huge wave of last-minute money that not only led to Clinton’s late October decline but also had the same effect on Democratic candidates for Senate, “virtually in lock step.” It is “outlandish,” Ferguson observes, that former FBI Director James Comey or the Russians “could be responsible for both collapses” in the final stage of the campaign: “For the first time in the entire history of the United States, the partisan outcome of Senate races coincided perfectly with the results of every state’s presidential balloting.” The outcome conforms very well to Ferguson’s well-supported “Investment theory of party competition.”

But facts and logic matter little. The Democrats are bent on revenge for their 2016 failure, having run such a rotten campaign that what looked like a “sure thing” collapsed. Evidently, Trump’s severe assault against the common good is a lesser matter, at least to the party elite.

It’s sometimes been noted that the US not only regularly meddles in foreign elections, including Russian ones, but also proceeds to subvert and sometimes overthrow governments it doesn’t like. Horrifying consequences abound, to the present, from Central America to the Middle East. Guatemala has been a horror story since a US-backed coup overthrew its elected reformist government in 1954. Gaza, declining in misery, may become unlivable by 2020, the UN predicts, not by acts of God. In 2006, Palestinians committed a grave crime: They ran the first free election in the Arab world, and made the “wrong” choice, handing power to Hamas. Israel reacted by escalating violence and a brutal siege. The US reverted to standard operating procedure and prepared a military coup, pre-empted by Hamas. In punishment for this new crime, US-Israeli torture of Gaza sharply increased, not only with strangulation but also regular murderous and destructive US-backed Israeli invasions, on pretexts that quickly collapse on examination. Elections that come out the wrong way plainly cannot be tolerated under our policy of “democracy promotion.”

In recent European elections, there has been much concern about possible Russian meddling. That was particularly true of the 2017 German elections, when the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) did surprisingly well, winning 94 seats in the Bundestag, the first time it had won seats. One can easily imagine the reaction had Russian meddling been detected behind these frightening results. It turns out that there was indeed foreign meddling, but not from Russia. AfD hired a Texas media firm (Harris Media) known for support of right-wing nationalist candidates (Trump, Le Pen, Netanyahu). The firm enlisted the cooperation of the Berlin office of Facebook, which provided it with detailed information about potential voters for use in microtargeting those who might be receptive to AfD’s message. It may have worked. The story seems to have been ignored, apart from the business press.

If the Democratic Party cannot overcome its deep internal problems and the slow expansion of the economy under Obama and Trump continues without disruption or disaster, the Republican wrecking ball may be swinging away at the foundations of a decent society, and at the prospects for survival, for a long time.

**(Courtesy: [truthout.org](http://truthout.org))**

## The Local

# Brahminisation Of Hindustan

Murad Ali Baig

The Brahmins were the priests of the tribe of the Aryas (not Aryans) who mainly shaped India's religion that evolved to become Hinduism. There is however no unanimity about where these Aryas came from. There was also a tribe of Aryas in ancient Persia who had a priestly class called Arthvan (phonetically similar to Brahmin) meaning a person of essence. Like the Rig Veda in India they had a similar holy book the Zend Avesta. Both books were written in a similar language as Old Sanskrit was nearly identical to Old Persian. They were also written in the same cursive Kharoashti script written from right to left. The phonetic Devanagari script was only used in India after the 5th century CE.

According to the Zend Avesta they also had a class of warriors called Rastashwar (charioteers) that is phonetically similar to the Kshatriyas in India. Their third class was the Vastrayosh, similar to Vaishya, who were their cattle herders and workers. When the Aryas gave up their nomadic life and settled down the Vaishyas became traders and farmers. There had originally been no fourth class but as the nomads picked up tribal people and stragglers on their travels they later added a fourth class who were called Hutoksh in Persia and Shudra in India. As the Persians could not pronounce 'S' that became 'H' so Shudra is phonetically not very different to Hutoksh. They similarly called their sacred intoxicant Haoma like the Soma in the Rig Veda.

Both texts and their very sophisticated language must have taken a very long time to evolve and could not have suddenly erupted out of nowhere. The Persian Aryas were related to several other 'Indo European' tribes as they spoke a similar language and revered similar deities like Varuna, Surya and Indra as is recorded in the Treaty of Boghazkoi (Cappadocia) between the Mittani and Hittite tribes in 1380 BCE. In India however the Harappan civilization has revealed almost nothing of any literary culture and the extensive ancient Tamil texts show a completely different tradition of language and scripts. In later times Tamil and other indigenous languages borrowed many words from Sanskrit.

There is no evidence that the Aryas went from India to colonize west Asia but considerable evidence that a number of tribes speaking an old Indo-European language settled in the Caucasian area, south of Russia, and streamed southwards in waves after 1,800 BCE. Well-documented records in West Asia show that many of tribes like the Hittites and Kassites entered Turkey and destroyed Syria in 1732 BCE. The Mittani attacked Babylon in the same year, while the Hyksos attacked Egypt in 1,730 BCE. The Dorians and Achaeans went to Greece and the Italics to Italy. The Aryas may have slowly migrated to Iran and then to India through Afghanistan.

As most of their artifacts were of biodegradable wood or leather they have left little to prove where they originated from. Scholars have studied the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) in studies of populations from all over the world. This shows that western-Eurasian lineages found in India today average 5.2 per cent as compared to 7.0 per cent in Europe. On the basis of the same

data protagonists of the 'Aryan Invasion' and 'Out of India' beliefs draw totally opposite conclusions. A complicating factor is that the genes of modern people today cannot prove what they were 4,000 years ago. It however seems unlikely that a large number of people chose to leave a well watered land like India to migrate huge distances over harsh mountains and deserts to the barren lands of central Asia.

It seems that the Aryas first settled in the Indus river valley from where they gradually moved north and entered the Gangetic Plain from where they slowly spread all over India as indicated by their distinctive gray ware pottery. There is no mention of the Ganga River in the Rig Veda but many references to the Saraswati that might have even been the Harirud (Sarirud) of Afghanistan. It also makes no mention of tigers and elephants unique to India.

The Rig Veda is actually the only Veda because the later Sama Veda and Yajur Veda were essentially rearrangements of the hymns of the Rig Veda with priestly texts added. These were all elaborated as the Brahmanas, Aryankas and Upanishads. Kalpas and Yugas feature nowhere in the Rig Veda and seem to have also been a Puranic idea. The Artha Veda was added very much later to include many non Vedic indigenous traditions concerning cosmology, astrology, yoga, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, etc. The early Vedas and shastras do not mention reincarnation but often mention the eating of beef at their fire sacrifices.

The Rig Veda describes the local inhabitants of India as dark skinned 'Dasyus' with whom they clashed as well as walled cities (Puras) that might have been the Harappan cities that they proudly destroyed. Several historians believe that India's earliest organized religions were Shaivism and Jainism. Tamil Sangam poetry preserves some of the old traditions of the original Puranas. After the legendary Brahmin warrior priests like Agasthya and Parusharam entered south India about the 3rd century BCE, 18 of the Puranas were translated into Sanskrit. As Rig Veda makes no mention of Brahma and Shiva and has Vishnu as a very minor god among its 33 deities it is postulated that Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu were not Vedic but gods of the Puranas. Some speculate that the epic Mahabharata could have been a clash between the invading Kauravas and the resident Pandavas as Krishna and Draupadi were recorded as being dark complexioned. Perhaps their descendants became the great kingdom of the Pandyan.

While Brahmins took their evolving Brahminism southwards Siddharth Gautam started a new religion in the north in the 6th century BCE. Buddhism was probably a reformed and less extreme form of Jainism. It was however the emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE who spread Buddhism (Dhamma) that became India's dominant religion for a thousand years. Unlike Brahminism it did not believe in a miracle producing god who would grant boons in exchange for Vedic sacrifices. Buddhism believed that salvation only came from the evolution of the souls of all living things by their actions that shaped their Karma enabling them to evolve in subsequent lifetimes. Though Buddhism was the main religion of India it co existed with Brahmin sects that grew stronger over the centuries. The Gupta Empire (320 – 550 CE) began the Hindu renaissance though there was no Hindu religion at the time but many hundreds of sects that had Brahmin priests. The word Hindu, as a name for a religion, was alien to all sacred texts till 1826 when Ram Mohun Roy first coined the word.

The caste of Rajputs had completely disappeared during this thousand year period but revived in the 7th century and the Brahma Kshatra progenitors of the revived Rajputs severely

persecuted the Buddhists and Jains. Inspired by Shankaracharya (788 – 820 CE) it destroyed Buddhism and weakened Jainism. The Brahmins however ingested many Jain and Buddhist beliefs like reincarnation and Karma and added many Puranic deities like Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu as well as Ganesh, Hanuman, Kubera, Kali and Devi to their pantheon of deities. As the Brahmin adopted gods of the Puranas their Vedic gods faded into legend. The worship of Krishna and Rama were still very far in the future.

Buddhist and Sanskrit accounts mention that the country had been made up of 18 Mahajanapadas (great kingdoms) each comprising a number of smaller kingdoms so there may have been over 200 kingdoms with their own traditions, languages and local deities. The first name of the country was Jamundwipa (island of jamun fruits). In the 6th century BCE the Persians under Cyrus ruled the land of the Indus (Sindhu) as the 19th province of their huge empire but they pronounced Sindhu as Hindu and all the land east of the Hindu Kush was thereafter called Hindustan. It had never been called Bharat that was the name of one of the ten earliest Arya tribes.

Many Brahmins believe that India has no history except that which is recorded in Sanskrit texts but no Sanskrit text mentions Alexander, Mauryas or Kushans and starts their calendar from the victory of king Vikramaditya of Ujjain over a Saka tribe in 56 BCE though the Saka era actually begins in the year 78 CE. These Sakas were probably the nomadic Scythian tribes from eastern Europe, who streamed into north India. Sanskrit as a sacred language was therefore forbidden to people of low castes as evidenced by the story of Ram's killing of Shambhuka because he was a Shudra who was studying the Vedas. Perhaps even more serious was the fact that women had also been forbidden from learning Sanskrit. It therefore was never a 'Mother Tongue' but a theological language for male priests and scholars. Local languages and dialects therefore continued to be used for all domestic matters. Buddhist scriptures were therefore told in Pali, the common language of north India, and written in Prakrit.

The caste system is not found in the Rig Veda except for one small verse. It only hardened after a Brahmin called Kulluka Bhatta wrote an elaborate commentary on Manu's old Manusmriti in the 7th century CE that made the caste system rigid and unforgiving. The terror of pollution made all those defined as being of lower caste into loathsome pariahs to be abused and shunned. All forms of creativity were now frozen into a series of inflexible Shastras. All art, sculpture, music, literature architecture, medicine and even sex were frozen into ritualistic and lifeless forms. The guilds of artisans and craftsmen that had been so honored in earlier times were reduced to low caste workmen. Now there was blind worship and indiscriminating awe. The past became sacred and all that it produced, good and bad, was revered alike. Slavish imitation was inculcated as duty while novelty and originality became crimes.

After the eighth century Many Rajput kingdoms flourished with their Brahmin priests and many huge temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu began to spread north, east and west modeled on the fine examples from south India. The rich offerings of devotees made them very rich and temples became guilds of bankers. It was these spectacular riches so conveniently found at one place that attracted robber warlords like Mahmud of Ghazni.

The entry of Islam from the 12th century was very traumatic as their rigid beliefs were alien to Indian thought. The early Afghan Sultans and the Mughal rulers were not very religious until the

Sunni orthodoxy of Aurangzeb from about 1680 CE. An exception were the wandering Sufis who preached a purely spiritual faith that did not concern itself with social or moral issues or the rituals of religion. Not surprisingly, many Sufi shrines became places of worship for people of other faiths. They believed in simple direct worship and developed large followings. They believed the Vedantic idea that "God is everywhere and the whole world is a manifestation of the emanation of God." They converted more people to Islam than all the Muslim soldiers and priests.

The Bhakti Movement probably originated in 7th century Tamil Nadu and spread northwards to influence other religious communities. Ancient Alvar poetry is attributed to twelve Vaishnav saints (including one woman) and was all about being 'immersed in God'. While the southern movement had been focused on a devotion to Vishnu and Shiva, another devotional movement developed in north India after the 12th century that was centered on the mortal heroes Krishna and Ram, who were both called incarnations of Vishnu. The tolerant Bhakti faith, however, co-existed peacefully with other movements in Hinduism though the Brahmins initially condemned bhakti as it was opposed to caste and disregarded Brahmanical authority. A prominent devotee in the north was the woman Meera Bai. The Bhagavat Gita, incorporating many Bhakti beliefs, probably evolved at this time and was inserted into the epic Mahabharata. As Kabir, Farid and Nanak were probably Sufis the impact of Sufism on Sikhism was profound. Bhakti and Sufism gave spiritual depth to the ritualized religiosity of both Hinduism and Islam.

The influence of Christianity after the 15th century, with its lifelike statues and paintings of a suffering Christ, may have also contributed to the evolution of Krishna and Ram because lifelike statues and paintings were much more emotionally satisfying than stone idols. Chaitanya (1436-1532 CE) and Goswami Tulsidas (1532-1623 CE) were mainly responsible for raising Krishna and Ram from mortal heroes of legend to deities of worship. The Ramacharitamana was a long lyrical poem written by Goswami Tulsidas. It soon captured the minds of people and made cows into objects of veneration and the eating of beef shifted from being an item of diet to something sacred. Cow slaughter soon became a big political issue because beef was commonly eaten by Muslims. The first movement to protect the cow began with the Sikh Namdhari sect in 1820 and Dayanand Saraswati founded the Gorakshini Sabha in 1882. These provoked communal riots and beef moved from being a matter of diet to becoming a defining icon of Hindu versus Muslim identity.

It also made Ayodhya a place of pilgrimage. The first recorded incident of violence between Hindus and Muslims at Ayodhya took place in 1853 when a Hindu sect called the Nirmohis claimed the structure, contending that the mosque stood on the spot where a Hindu temple had been destroyed. There was subsequent violence from time to time. On 22 December 1949, when the police guards were asleep, two small statues of Rama and Sita were surreptitiously installed. On hearing this news, Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister, directed the UP Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant to see that the deities were removed but no action was taken.

In 1984, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad launched a massive movement for the opening of the locks of the mosque. On 6 December 1992, the RSS and its affiliates organized a huge rally with some 150,000 'Kar Sevaks'. The vastly outnumbered police fled and the mosque was soon brought down. The event however propelled the BJP to become a major political force. The

Janta Party (later BJP) had only 5 seats in parliament in the 1991 elections but got 161 seats in 1996. In the General Elections of 2014 the BJP won 282 seats.

The BJP believed in Hindutva a word that was first coined by Vinayaka Damodar Savarkar (1883 – 1966) in a pamphlet he had written in 1923 called 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu.' It advocated a narrow interpretation of the Hindu identity and promoted by other organizations who were to later become members of the Sangh Parivar or a family of organisations led by extreme right wing Hindu groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). M.S. Golwalkar (1906-1973) believed that India's customs, traditions and ways of worship was its uniqueness and that this had a strong cultural underpinning that was native to India. He believed that all Indians shared "the same philosophy of life, the same values and aspirations". They called for the protection of all traditions, holy structures, rivers and animals in a unified Hindu society to include all including Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains... inclusive of all who are born and who have adopted Bharat as their Motherland. It also stated that Muslims, Christians and Parsis too are Hindus by culture although not by religion. They were especially hostile to all things Muslim or Christian. The foundations of most of Hindutva thinking is based on Sanskrit literature that was a huge corpus of writing, entirely written by Brahmin scholars in Sanskrit, therefore reflects the Brahmin world view. They consider the Vedas to be the source of all wisdom

India is and has always been a multicultural country with many widely different religious practices and linguistic traditions will not easily become a homogenous monocultural society. The Brahmin continuing aversion to the low castes has been moderated because the Adivasis are a big political community who need to be wooed. Though there are 22 official languages and 1,635 dialects (according to the 2011 census) Hindi, the national language, is spoken by 41% of the population. The BJP is however trying to force Hindi on all the states.

As the BJP have evolved to become a major political party the ideologues are now trying to project Hindutva as the philosophy for the creation of a 'Hindu Era' similar to a British Era or a Muslim Era. Their vision of Hinduism is a nation that will integrate all castes and language groups in one homogenous whole. Brahmins today account for just 5.5% of the Indian population but Hindutva wants to create a Hindustan that is mainly rooted on Brahmin beliefs.

**(Courtesy: Frontier weekly)**

# On 43rd Anniversary of Emergency In India: RSS Played Double-Game As Usual

**Shamsul Islam**

An internal Emergency was imposed on the country by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June 25-26, 1975, and it lasted for 19 months. This period is considered as 'dark times' for Indian democratic polity. Indira Gandhi claimed that due to Jaiprakash Narayan's call to the armed forces to disobey the 'illegal' orders of Congress rulers had created a situation of anarchy and there was danger to the existence of Indian Republic so there was no alternative but to impose Emergency under article 352 of the Constitution.

RSS claims that it opposed Emergency promulgated by Indira Gandhi heroically and suffered immensely for resisting Emergency. But there are dozens of contemporary narratives which decry this claim of the RSS. We will be referring here to such two narratives by a veteran thinker and journalist of India, Prabhash Joshi and TV Rajeswar, former Intelligence Bureau [IB] chief who was the deputy chief of IB when Emergency was imposed. They recounted the days of Emergency (or state terrorism) when RSS surrendered to the repressive regime of Indira Gandhi, assured her and her son, Sanjay Gandhi to enforce faithfully the draconian 20-point programme announced by the Emergency regime. Large number of RSS cadres came out of jails by submitting MAAFINAMAAS (mercy petitions).

Despite all this betrayal thousands of RSS cadres continue to get monthly pension for persecution during Emergency. The BJP ruled states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra decided to award a monthly pension of Rs 10,000 to those who were jailed during the Emergency period for more than a month and Rs 5000 to those who were jailed for less than a month. This rule took care of the financial interest of those RSS cadres who might have submitted mercy letters completing only one or two months' jail term. For securing such a fat pension there was no such condition that the beneficiary should have been in jail for the whole period of the Emergency.

Interestingly, in the case of anti-British freedom struggle there has not been even a single RSS cadre to claim the freedom fighter pension. It may be noted that nobody remembers hundreds of Communist youth, branded as Naxals who were killed in fake encounters during the Emergency. Interestingly, Shiv Sena, the Hindutva co-traveler of the RSS openly supported the Emergency.

The narrative by Prabhash Joshi appeared in the English weekly TEHELKA on the 25th anniversary of the Emergency.[1] According to him even during the Emergency "there was always a lurking sense of suspicion, a distance, a discreet lack of trust" about RSS' joining the anti-Emergency struggle. He went on to tell that "Balasaheb Deoras, then RSS chief, wrote a letter to Indira Gandhi pledging to help implement the notorious 20-point programme of Sanjay Gandhi. This is the real character of the RSS...You can decipher a line of action, a pattern. Even during the Emergency, many among the RSS and Jana Sangh who came out of the jails, gave mafinamas (apologies). They were the first to apologise. Only their leaders remained in jail: Atal Behari Vajpayee, LK Advani, even Arun Jaitley. But the RSS did not fight the Emergency. So why is the BJP trying to appropriate that memory?"

Prabhash Joshi's conclusion was that "they are not a fighting force and they are never keen to fight. They are basically a compromising lot. They are never genuinely against the government".

TV Rajeswar, who served as Governor of Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim after his retirement from service, in his book, 'India: The Crucial Years' [Harper Collins] corroborated the fact that "Not only they (RSS) were supportive of this [Emergency], they wanted to establish contact apart from Mrs Gandhi, with Sanjay Gandhi also".[2] Rajeswar in an interview with Karan Thapar disclosed that Deoras "quietly established a link with the PM's house and expressed strong support for several steps taken to enforce order and discipline in the country. Deoras was keen to meet Mrs. Gandhi and Sanjay. But Mrs. Gandhi refused." [3]

According to Rajeswar's book, "RSS, a right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation, was banned in the wake of the Emergency. But its chief, Balasaheb Deoras, quietly established a link with the PM's house and expressed strong support to several steps taken to enforce order and discipline in the country. Sanjay Gandhi's concerted drive to enforce family planning, particularly among Muslims, had earned Deoras's approbation." [4]

Rajeswar also shared the fact that even after Emergency the "organization (RSS) had specifically conveyed its support to the Congress in the post-emergency elections." [5] It will be interesting to note that even according to Subramanian Swamy in the Emergency period, most of the senior leaders of RSS had betrayed the struggle against the Emergency. [6]

The contemporary documents in the RSS archives prove the narratives of Prabhash Joshi and Rajeswar truthful. The 3rd Supremo of RSS, Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras wrote the first letter to Indira Gandhi within two months of the imposition of Emergency. It was the time when state terror was running amok. In letter dated, August 22, 1975 he began with this praise of Indira:

"I heard your address to the nation which you delivered on August 15, 1975 from Red Fort on radio in jail [Yervada jail] with attention. your address was timely and balanced so I decided to write to you". [7]

Indira Gandhi did not respond to it. So Deoras wrote another letter to Indira on November 10, 1975. He began his letter with congratulating her on being cleared by the Supreme Court of disqualification which was ordered by the Allahabad High Court, "All the five Justices of the Supreme Court have declared your election constitutional, heartiest greetings for it." It is to be noted that opposition was firmly of the opinion that this judgment was 'managed' by Congress. In the course of the letter he declared that "RSS has been named in context of Jaiprakash Narayan's movement. The government has also connected RSS with Gujarat movement and Bihar movement without any reason...Sangh has no relation with these movements..." [8]

Since Indira Gandhi did not respond to this letter also, RSS chief got hold of Vinoba Bhave who supported the Emergency religiously and was a favourite of Indira Gandhi. In a letter dated January 12, 1976, he begged that Acharya should suggest the way that ban on RSS was removed. [9] Since Acharya too did not respond to Deoras letter, the latter in another letter without date wrote in desperation,

"According to press reports respected PM [Indira Gandhi] is going to meet you at Pavnar Ashram on January 24. At that time there will be discussion about the present condition of the country. I beg you to try to remove the wrong assumptions of PM about RSS so that ban on RSS is lifted and RSS members are

released from jails. We are looking forward for the times when RSS and its members are able to contribute to the plans of progress which are being run in all the fields under the leadership of PM." [10]

Riding the juggernaut of the rulers, specially the autocratic ones has been an old practice in RSS. It was the reason that no leader and cadre of RSS participated in the anti-colonial freedom struggle. In fact, the RSS worships brute force and totalitarianism. The most prominent ideologue of the RSS, 2nd boss of the organization, Golwalkar decreed as back as 1940 that "The RSS inspired by one flag, one leader and one ideology is lighting the flame of Hindutva in each and every corner of this great land." [11]

Recently, the former President of the Indian Republic, Pranab Mukherjee was invited by the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat to be the chief guest at its graduation ceremony for the new recruits. Pranab Mukherjee was indicted as one of the top leaders of Congress for Emergency excesses. The tragedy of RSS is that India continues to be run under a democratic polity so its love for brazen power has to be balanced by double-game.

The Social

## Social media monitoring hub: Tender date extended again

theprint.in

**New Delhi:** The Modi government's ambitious plan to set up a social media monitoring hub seems to have found few takers with the tender inviting bids for the project being extended for the fourth time.

Originally, the Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Ltd (BECIL), a PSU under the information and broadcasting ministry, had called for submission of bids for supply of software for the project by 17 May.

The date was first extended to 24 May, then to 31 May, which later became 18 June. Now, the new date is 20 August.

According to official sources, only two firms responded when the first tender was floated for software that was supposed to be "designed and developed in India", in line with Modi government's 'Make India' initiative.

As the tender needed at least three or more companies to be in consideration to pass the financial bid, the exercise was dissolved.

Sources in the industry say that the tender was extended again to "loop in the new I&B secretary Amit Khare".

However, ministry officials said Khare too, like critics of the project, doubts its validity and purpose.

### Govt plans to listen to digital chatter

The bid document for the project — Social Media Communication Hub — clearly states that it requires "a technology platform to collect digital chatter from all core social media platforms as well as digital platforms".

The tender further mentions that the "platform may be used to disseminate content and hence should support publishing features".

The proposal says it requires the tool to be able to "listen to email", and should be able to assist the government to tailor campaigns to target individuals to promote "positive" opinions and to neutralise "negative sentiments" about government schemes.

In addition to this, 716 district-wise SMEs are expected to conduct “social media publicity” campaign.

However, government sources admit that “no such software exists that can easily and legally hack into personal emails” and claim that the ministry has no intention to “read” or “listen to” emails considering such attempts would amount to hacking and would be entirely illegal”.

The sources also indicate that the government is looking for a software on the lines of TalkWalker, a social media analytics and monitoring platform or Meltwater, a media and social media monitoring software.

Protests against the project

The Internet Freedom Foundation, an NGO that advocates a “free and open internet”, served a legal notice on the I&B ministry last month, asking the government to recall the tender.

Apar Gupta, co-founder and trustee of the NGO, argued that there is no statutory instrument or legislation which can be used to justify the creation of the Social Media Communication Hub.

“The scope of the hub is supposed to fall under the government’s ‘New Media Cell’. However, the New Media Cell was set up by a notification in 2013, not a law, and the activities of the hub are beyond the scope of that notification as well,” he claimed.

Many influencers and politicians have also raised concerns that the project could invade an individual’s right to privacy, and the right to freedom of speech.

Trinamool Congress MLA from Karimpur in West Bengal, Mahua Moitra, has filed a PIL against the project.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi also questioned the Modi government on why the tender does not clarify if the data being accessed by the government will be encrypted. He also sought to know why the BJP government is “spending Rs 42 core of our own tax payer’s money to snoop on us”.

# How false WhatsApp messages led to mob killings in India

**[gulfnews.com](http://gulfnews.com)**

A single WhatsApp message, distributed over 10 to 15 days could get a person killed in India today.

This statement is not the result of a single case, but of around 27 killings, in different states across the country.

WhatsApp is a free-to-download messenger app that allows sharing of texts and audio visual content. Used by over a billion people across the globe, 200 million of the app's users are in India. WhatsApp also has free audio and video calling features.

WhatsApp said on Wednesday it was "horrified" by a spate of lynchings in India sparked by false rumours shared on its platform as the government accused the messaging service of irresponsibility.

More than 20 people have been killed in India in the last two months, according to media reports, after rumours were spread on smartphones about child kidnappers, thieves and sexual predators.

The attacks - usually targeting outsiders - have left authorities scrambling to mount an effective response, with awareness campaigns and public alerts having limited effect. With more than 200 million users, India is WhatsApp's biggest market. Its parent company Facebook has also been grappling with a global data privacy scandal.

## **The cases**

While there is no clear marker of when this trend of false messages started, it is safe to say that widespread mob lynching incidents started towards the end of April this year.

In all of these cases, there are two common factors; a WhatsApp message that claims that certain individuals are a threat to children, and a mob that decides that street justice is their prerogative. These messages, always false or misguided, have given mob vigilantes a new reason to take law and order into their own hands.

Here are some gory examples of vigilantism fed by false WhatsApp messages since then;

April 27, Tamil Nadu: A man, falsely suspected to be a child trafficker based on WhatsApp and other social media messages, was caught, beat up by villagers and then handed over to the police. Upon ascertaining that the man was in fact innocent and mentally unsound, police released him. He was later captured by a group of young people and beaten to death.

May 27, Andhra Pradesh: A transgender was killed when three people were beaten up by a mob in Chandrayangutta after rumours circulated on WhatsApp alleging that the victims were part of a child-trafficking gang. The victims had, however, reportedly requesting alms in the area during Ramadan.

June 8, Assam: Two men were lynched to death in Assam by a mob after WhatsApp messages alleging that the men had a child captive in the SUV that they were travelling in went viral. Reportedly the two men were dead when police arrived at the scene. Later that week, a gruesome video of one of the young men pleading was widely shared and seen.

June 27, Gujarat: A 45-year old destitute woman of a nomadic tribe from Rajasthan was beaten to death in Ahmedabad when a mob turned up accusing her and her tribe of being child kidnappers. The same message that triggered this attack, also led to four other killings in the state on the very same day. The message alleged that a group of foreigners had entered Gujarat to kidnap and sell children.

June 28, Tripura: Two separate killings occurred in the state; all connected to viral WhatsApp messages. Sukanta Chakraborty, was attacked and lynched to death, while spreading awareness about erroneous rumours. Another man was killed in West Tripura on the same day, when around thousand people formed a mob to 'catch' four men, alleged to be child kidnappers. They were hawkers hailing from Uttar Pradesh.

### **And now the latest...**

July 1, Maharashtra: Five men were bludgeoned to death when a mob of more than twenty people descended on them in Dhule. One of the targeted men was seen talking to a local child which is when a group of people gathered around the men starting off the attack. The men were actually from a nomadic community in another district, having arrived in Dhule looking for work.

### **The message**

The message in these cases is always a false video, audio or text content that alleges that a child-trafficking gang is loose in the city. Some of the pictures used, as reported by the CNN, are of children in war-torn Syria or even from Rohingya refugee camps.

According to reports, police stated that these rumours surfaced out of the blue in many regions, with no link to any actual reports of child kidnapping or trafficking.

The messages sometimes also focuses on 'outsiders' in each state, which means the people targeted usually don't speak the native language of the state and are migrants. In Tamil Nadu, for example, the victims included Hindi-speaking individuals from other states.

### **WhatsApp woes**

WhatsApp has over 200 million users in India and is one of the most commonly used communication platforms in the country. WhatsApp's current encryption systems mean that law enforcement officials cannot effectively monitor every message that could be deemed as false or provocative content.

According to cyber laws, the admins of WhatsApp groups that spread false or malicious content are to be held responsible. However, the accessibility of WhatsApp and data services makes it impossible to 'nip it in the bud'.

A smartphone user could get up to 1.5GB of data daily at less than Dh11 for 28 days in India. Even if he or she couldn't afford that, WhatsApp is a medium that requires a small data allowance to share and receive information – a 200MB allowance for less than INR 5 per day is enough to facilitate the spread of false messages.

### **Police and the government**

In most of these cases, police have arrested attackers – based on video footage and scene evidence. The attackers have been booked under murder and riot charges. It is harder, however, to track down the actual propagators of the messages that led to the deaths.

### **Lynching**

The Indian government asked WhatsApp to take immediate action to end the menace of spreading messages that impact the country's law and order situation and ensure that the platform is not used for such malafide activities, an official statement said in Mumbai on Tuesday.

"Instances of lynching of innocent people have been noticed recently because of large number of irresponsible and explosive messages filled with rumours and provocation are being circulated on WhatsApp. The unfortunate killings in many states such as Assam, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tripura and West Bengal are deeply painful and regrettable," the statement from the IT Ministry said.

It added: "While the law and order machinery is taking steps to apprehend the culprits, the abuse of platforms like WhatsApp for repeated circulation of such provocative content is equally a matter of deep concern."

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has taken serious note of these irresponsible messages and their circulation on such platforms.

"Deep disapproval of such developments has been conveyed to the senior management of the WhatsApp and they have been advised that necessary remedial measures should be taken to prevent proliferation of these fake and at times motivated/sensational messages," the statement said.

The government has also directed that spread of such messages should be immediately contained through the application of appropriate technology.

It has also been pointed out that “such platform cannot evade accountability and responsibility specially when good technological inventions are abused by some miscreants who resort to provocative messages which lead to spread of violence.”

### **WhatsApp’s reply**

Facebook Inc.’s WhatsApp messenger has told India that curbing the spread of false messages through its platform is a challenge that required a partnership between the tech firm, civil society and the government.

In a letter dated July 3 to India's IT ministry and reviewed by Reuters, WhatsApp said it is giving people controls and information they need to stay safe as well as making changes to group chats to prevent the spread of unwanted information.

The firm also plans to run long-term public safety ad campaigns in India, it said in the letter.

India's IT ministry on Tuesday asked WhatsApp messenger to take steps to prevent the circulation of false texts and provocative content that have led to a series of lynchings and mob beatings across the country in the past few months.

**The Political**

# **PUBLIC STATEMENT BY ADVOCATE SUDHA BHARADWAJ,**

**Visiting Professor, National Law University Delhi and National Secretary,  
Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties**

I have been informed that Republic TV aired a programme on 4 July 2018, presented by anchor and MD Arnab Goswami as “Super Exclusive Breaking News”.

The programme, which is being repeatedly shown, contains a long list of ridiculous, scurrilous, false and completely unsubstantiated allegations against me. Goswami has claimed that I have written a letter (identifying myself as “Comrade Advocate Sudha Bharadwaj”) to a Maoist – one “Comrade Prakash” - stating that a “Kashmir like situation” has to be created. I am also accused of having received money from Maoists. I am also said to have confirmed that various advocates, some of whom I know as excellent human rights lawyers and others whom I do not know at all, had some sort of Maoist link.

I firmly and categorically deny that the letter referred to by Goswami – if at all such a document exists - has ever been written by me. I firmly refute all the allegations that the Republic TV has made against me, defaming me, causing me professional and personal injury. In its programme, the Republic TV has not revealed the source of such a letter. I find it curious that a document purporting to contain evidence of such serious crimes should first surface in the studio of Arnab Goswami.

I have been a dedicated trade unionist since the past 30 years, working in the organisation of the late legendary Shankar Guha Niyogi, Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, in the working class shanties of Dalli Rajhara and Bhilai, and hundreds of workers are witness to the fact. As a part of my work as a trade unionist I became a lawyer in the year 2000 since when I have fought scores of cases of workers, farmers, adivasis and poor people in the fields of labour, land acquisition, forest rights and environmental rights. Since the year 2007 I am practising in the High Court of Chhattisgarh at Bilaspur and was nominated by the High Court to be a member of the Chhattisgarh State Legal Services Authority. In the last year I have been teaching at the National Law University Delhi in the capacity of a Visiting Professor, where I offered a seminar course on tribal rights and land acquisition; and a part of the regular course on law and poverty. As a part of the programme of the Delhi Judicial Academy, I addressed the presiding officers of labour courts from Sri Lanka.

My pro-people positions and work as a human rights lawyer are a matter of public record. I am perfectly aware that they stand in direct opposition to the views so loudly and frequently expressed by Arnab Goswami and Republic TV.

In my opinion the present malicious, motivated and fabricated attack on me is because I recently addressed a press conference in Delhi to condemn the arrest on 6 June of Advocate Surendra Gadling. The Indian Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL), an organisation of lawyers has also strongly taken up the issue of other lawyers such as Advocate Chandrashekar of Bhim Army and Advocate Vachinathan arrested after the Sterlite firing. It is clear that in targeting such lawyers, the state is trying to silence those who stand for the democratic rights of citizens. The state strategy is to create a chilling effect and deny equitable access to the legal system. Also very recently the IAPL had organised a fact finding into the difficulties faced by lawyers in Kashmir.

As a human rights lawyer I have appeared in cases of habeas corpus and fake encounters of adivasis in the High Court of Chhattisgarh and also made representations to the National Human Rights Commission in the defence of many human rights defenders. Recently the NHRC had sought my assistance in investigating a case in Village Kondasawali ( Sukma, Chhattisgarh). In all these cases I have acted with the professional integrity and courage expected of a human rights lawyer. This indeed appears to be "my crime" which has earned me the super exclusive attentions of Arnab Goswami.

I have asked my lawyer to send a legal notice to Arnab Goswami and Republic TV for their false, malicious and defamatory allegations against me.

**Advocate Sudha Bharadwaj**  
**New Delhi, 4th July.**

## **Statement of Civil Society members condemning the attack on Advocate Sudha Bhardwaj**

We the undersigned wish to place on record our utter disgust, contempt and outrage at the latest in the series of machinations by Republic TV, working to its brief as a propagandist for the ongoing crusade against all those who take public stands in defence of democracy, secularism, human rights, Constitutional propriety and rule of law.

Republic TV's latest target is Advocate Sudha Bharadwaj, National Secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, Vice President of the Indian Association of Progressive Lawyers and Visiting Professor at the National Law University Delhi. She is widely-known for her three decades of work as a trade unionist, human rights defender, environmental lawyer and a respected advisor to several state institutions including the state legal aid bodies and the National Human Rights Commission.

According to Republic TV, this committed and dedicated lawyer and activist is an "urban Maoist" who is "plotting to break India" with separatist groups and armed guerrillas across the country. The basis for the long list of scurrilous allegations and malicious insinuations against Advocate Bharadwaj is a letter purported to be written by her that Republic TV claims it has accessed.

The provenance of this letter is not revealed and we are not told how it came into the possession of Republic TV. The language of the letter is crude and clumsy, with the supposed author self-identifying as "Comrade Advocate Sudha Bharadwaj" and mentioning the names of various known and unknown individuals who are meticulously addressed as "Comrades". The contents – or rather, what Republic TV claims are the contents – are supposed to establish a "sensational" connection between the Kashmiri separatists, "urban Naxals", students from JNU and TISS, and others who take public stands against the antipeople policies of the state. According to Republic TV, these are "incontrovertible and unquestionable facts" that cannot be questioned.

Based on the telecast, the alleged letter belongs to the shoddy archive of similar "documentary proofs" that are regularly leaked to the gutter press by investigation agencies eager to pin various "crimes" onto activists, leaders of people's movements, political opponents, human rights defenders, critics of government policies and other citizens who are exercising their legitimate rights to free speech, dissent and political action.

The frenzied propagation by Republic TV of these concocted allegations and invented charges against known critics of the ruling party is clearly aimed at blurring the lines between evidence and allegation, accusation and proof, coincidence and causality in the mind of viewers who do not have access to multiple sources of information. Equally dangerous is the creation and demonisation of virulent labels like "urban naxals" and "tukde-tukde gang", 1 which gain currency solely by virtue of insistent repetition and circulation, despite being legally, factually

and politically untenable. The lethal consequences of this shameless manipulation of public opinion is today visible in the form of the targeted lynchings of Muslims, Dalits and others identified as criminals based on malevolent WhatsApp messages and videos.

Ludicrous though this attack on Advocate Bharadwaj may seem, it is also a signal of the widening dragnet being used to establish absolute control over all institutions and spaces of governance. We call on all responsible people to condemn and expose this attack as the latest attempt by the Modi sarkar and its embedded propagandists in the media to bypass democratic institutions, undermine the rule of law, stifle all voices of dissent and crush all those who seek to question or challenge their autocratic rule.

We also call on media bodies, professional associations and senior journalists to come out and condemn practitioners of this form of toxic, unethical and malicious “journalism”.

## The Struggle

# Workers: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

## Asia

### **India: Rural childcare workers in Mohali to demand teachers' salaries**

Hundreds of rural childcare (anganwadi) workers protested from May 28 until May 31 in Mohali to demand the same pay rates as teachers. The demonstration was in response to a state government directive that children above three years of age be enrolled in pre-primary classes in government schools. Anganwadi workers already act as de facto teachers for the children in the three- to six-year age group.

The protesters said the state and central Indian governments had failed to provide adequate equipment to the facilities and that the decision to merge these centres with primary schools was worsening the situation. There are 64,000 anganwadi workers in almost 27,000 centres in Punjab state. They are not paid a proper wage but just receive an honorarium payment.

Around 35 protesters, all of whom were women, fainted due to heat and fatigue during the protest.

### **Hundreds of striking nurses arrested in India's Chhattisgarh state**

Six hundred protesting government nurses were arrested by police in Rajpur, the capital of Chhattisgarh state, on June 2. The nurses had been taking industrial action over the previous two weeks to demand a salary increase.

Two days before the arrests, Chhattisgarh's Bharatiya Janata Party state government imposed its draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) and outlawed the strike.

The government nurses, who only receive 3,500 rupees (\$US52) per month, want their wages increased to 4,600 rupees. While other government employees are paid according to 7th pay commission recommendations, the state government nurses receive less than the 6th pay commission.

Nurses called off their strike on June 4, following assurances from the state government that their demands would be met. The Indian media has failed to report what the nurses were charged with or whether they were later released.

### **Bangladesh coal miners end strike over unpaid wages**

Over 1,000 workers and staff from Barapukuria Coal Mine returned to work on June 2 after walking out on May 13 to demand payment of nine months wages and 12 other claims.

Picketing workers blocked management from entering the mine office and seven workers were injured in the first week of the strike when police attacked workers.

Workers had given management until April 26 to settle their claims. Residents of 20 nearby villages supported the strikers and also lodged a six-point log of claims.

The claims included permanent employment of outsourced workers, introduction of profit and gratuity bonuses, six-hour shifts for underground workers, rehabilitation of families whose homes were damaged due to mine operations and compensation for injured members in the form of jobs with the company.

While no precise details on the return to work are available, the strike ended after negotiations between the company, the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, mine workers and local villagers.

### **Bangladesh garment workers demand wages**

Up to 250 protesting Ashiana Garments workers in Dhaka blocked the main road between Malibagh and North Badda on May 31 to demand unpaid wages and the Ramadan religious festival allowance. Workers said the company had not paid wages for the past three months or given any indication that they would receive the annual Ramadan allowance.

The company, which was hit by a major fire in April this year, had promised to pay outstanding wages by May 31 but when workers arrived at the plant, the doors were sealed shut.

Workers ended their protest after assurances from Bangladesh's department of labour and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association that the factory owners would pay the wages by June 2. According to its website, Ashiana Garments has an annual turnover of \$US9 million.

### **Sri Lankan water supply workers strike for outstanding pay rise**

More than 12,000 National Water Supply and Drainage Board workers in Sri Lanka have been on strike since June 4 to demand payment of their outstanding triennial salary increments. It followed a half-day walkout late last month.

Apart from water purification, all breakdown repairs, new water supply installations, meter readings and office work have come to a standstill. Water purification and pumping workers will join the industrial action if strikers' demands are not met.

The Water Supply Joint Trade Union Alliance, which called the strike, said that national strike action and protests have been organized for next week. On June 5, about 2000 workers demonstrated outside the Ministry of National Water Supply and Drainage in Colombo.

The workers have not received a wage increase due to be paid for January 2018. Although the water authority management agreed to a 25 percent pay increase following industrial action in January and February, the promised payments have not been received.

## **Two-day strike paralyses Sri Lankan postal service**

Two-day strike action by 4,000 postal workers beginning on midnight June 4 paralysed national postal services this week. The workers want proper recruitment procedures and several other demands.

While workers are determined to fight, the two main unions—the Sri Lanka Postal and Telecommunication Services Union and the Joint Alliance of Postal Unions—are attempting to keep the workers divided while appealing to management for negotiations.

The walkout, which seriously impacted on Sri Lanka's main post offices, including the Colombo central postal exchange, defied the postmaster general's threats to cancel strikers' leave and impose punitive measures.

## **Migrant workers protest in Taiwan**

About 60 migrant workers protested outside Google's Taipei 101 office in Taiwan last Sunday. The Filipino workers have accused HTC Corp, a consumer electronics company, of illegally docking their pay, including by forging agreements. They are demanding an end to the practice and an improvement of their working conditions.

The workers demonstrated outside Google's premises because in 2017, the tech monopoly bought a large stake in HTC's operations and smartphone intellectual property.

Early this year, HTC's migrant employees were pressured to sign an agreement terminating their existing contracts. Many signed under the impression that they had no choice. Others have claimed that management forged their signature on the deal.

The move has been used to reduce workers' pay to cover \$NT2,500 in monthly expenses per employee, including for food, accommodation and plane tickets. Under the previous contract, these expenses were reportedly covered by the company, without any pay decrease.

## **Australia and the Pacific**

### **Downer Group workers strike for pay increase**

Workers at Downer Group's construction and maintenance division in New South Wales (NSW) Hunter Valley and Illawarra began a three-day strike on Wednesday and have also imposed a month-long ban on overtime for a 3 percent wage rise.

Downer designs, builds and sustains assets and infrastructure facilities. Around 430 workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), walked off Downer projects on a number of industrial sites including coal mines, steel works, power stations and light rail construction.

Around 200 of the workers marched in Newcastle on Wednesday and others demonstrated outside BlueScope Steel in Port Kembla on NSW's South Coast.

Negotiations between the unions and Downer for a new workplace agreement have been stalled since January. The company is offering a 2.25 percent pay increase and no improvement on current conditions.

The last union agreement with Downer imposed a two-year wage freeze and cuts to site allowances and redundancy benefits.

Downer's profits are surging on the back of large infrastructure projects with the company paying some of its executives \$500,000 in bonuses.

### **Bureau of Meteorology workers take action over wages**

A protracted campaign of limited industrial action, including rolling stoppages and bans by workers at the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) for a new enterprise work agreement and pay increase, is continuing. The previous agreement expired four years ago.

BOM management has rejected any pay increase above a government mandated 2 percent pay ceiling and wants to cut allowances for staff working in remote locations and other work conditions. It has also ruled out back-dating any wage rise effectively imposing a four-year pay freeze.

This week workers inserted messages in weather forecasts and social media posts on the Bureau's official weather channels to highlight the dispute. The messages included "#BOMonSTRIKE" and "#5yearpayfreeze" and links to a union petition.

Management responded by imposing "additional quality control," requiring administrative checks on all social media posts before forecasts are transmitted.

Last year the Community and Public Sector Union agreed to low pay increases in retrograde work agreements across most of federal government departments.

### **Hunter Valley mine workers strike over safety**

About 250 workers at Mach Energy's Mount Pleasant coal mine near Muswellbrook in NSW's Hunter Valley went on strike for three days on Monday after a man was injured in a rigging accident.

According to an Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) spokesman, the worker's upper-arm muscle was "torn from the bone" and he had to be taken to hospital for surgery.

The strikers were members of the AMWU, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union and the Electrical Trades Union and are employed by G&S Engineering, a contracting company.

On Wednesday G&S Engineering made an application to the Fair Work Commission, the federal industrial tribunal, seeking to have the strike declared illegal but then dropped the action.

The strike has ended but workers will not participate in any “high risk duties” until G&S establishes basic safety systems, including a first-aid office and an emergency response team.

**New Zealand: Fast food workers continue Wendy’s strike**

Workers at the Dunedin branch of fast food restaurant chain Wendy’s took strike action last weekend. It was a continuation of a strike in Wendy’s stores throughout the country the previous weekend.

The strike was called after months of negotiations between Unite Union and Wendco broke down over pay and break times. Wendy’s has also failed to compensate workers for days-in-lieu owed to staff for working on public holidays. Last November, Wendy’s staff took the issue to the Employment Relations Authority, which ruled in favour of the workers.

Unite have limited all strike action. Unite Union organiser Sonja Mitchell told the Otago Times, “Ideally, we would like a living wage for all workers but we think at least the people who are responsible for opening the store and closing the store.”

This would leave a majority of staff on or just above the minimum wage. The supposed “living wage” of \$20.55 is only a few dollars above the minimum wage and based on the bare necessities to survive.

## **New Zealand tug boat operators threaten strike**

Tug masters and engineers at Port Nelson threatened to strike from yesterday 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. Monday. The notice was issued after negotiations around a collective agreement broke down.

According to the Merchant Service Guild, Port Nelson workers are on call 24 hours for 14 continuous days. The union continued negotiations with the Port Nelson company on Wednesday in an attempt to prevent the walkout.

**New Zealand primary school teachers to discuss pay offer**

Around 50,000 primary school teachers will begin meetings to discuss the latest government pay offer. The ministry of education has offered a pay rise of 2.2 to 2.6 percent for teachers with more than three years’ experience, which is about 86 percent of the workforce, and 4.3 to 4.7 percent for newer teachers. The increases would occur every year for the next three years.

New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) members have demanded a minimum 16 percent increase. If teachers reject the government pay offer they are likely to vote in favour of strike action.

The first teachers’ meeting will be on June 18 in Manukau. While the union is calling for teachers to reject the offer, it heavily promoted Labour during the 2017 election and after it formed government, claiming teachers would get better pay.

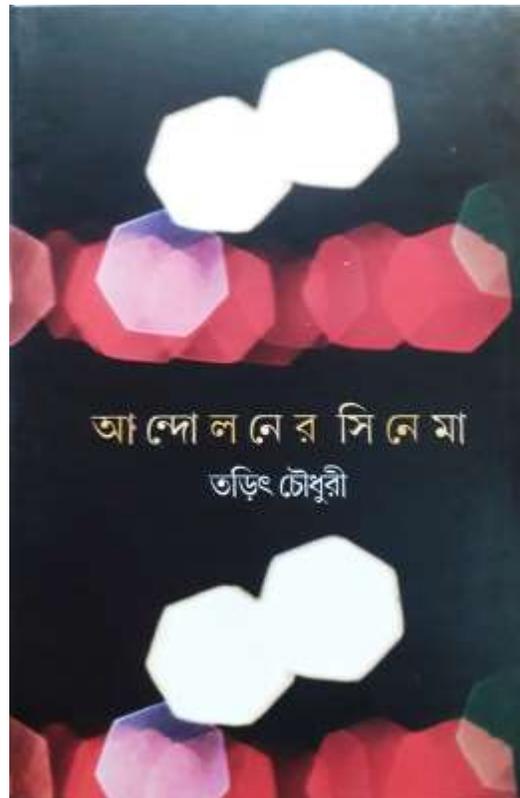
## The Review

# Films of Movements

Rajat Kanti Dasgupta

**Book: *Andolaner Cinema* by Tarit Choudhury**

**Published by Gangchil, Kolkata 700111**



The author has chosen the title of the book 'Films of Movements' which from his perspective is, and by general agreement, the most important constituent of the more broad-based domain of political cinema. If we accept that political cinema is a genre of cinema by itself, its crop has been rich through the ages in the films of Griffith, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Charlie Chaplin, Joris Ivens in the early years of film-making. In the post second world war era, films of this class assumed mainstream status in the hands of Costa Gavras (*Z*, *The Missing*), Gillo Pontecorvo (*Battle of Algiers*). Fassbinder (*Fear Eats the Soul*) and others. The author has made a clear statement in the introductory piece of this volume under review that his essays will reflect his search how film-making has been a fellow-traveller with people's movements. From this stated global position, the author has entered into the realm of Indian films. The refrain of the author in four of his eight essays in the book is the lamentation that Indian directors have not cultivated political issues, chronicles of movements or activism in their films except in patches. In his quest for analysis of this near absence of political cinema in Indian context, at least up to 1950's, the author has attributed this phenomenon to colonial rule and more particularly to the repressive censor statutes- Indian Cinematograph Act, 1918. He observes that political plays in

Bengal were not unknown even in early twentieth century, whereas the films of the time were mostly mythological or based on social issues of sentimentality. While on this subject, the author could have delved into the economics of film-making of that era which vastly influenced not only the class of films being made but also the preference of the viewers where political cinema had no place. Yet, the hesitant baby steps of Do Bigha Zameen ( Bimal Roy) or Dharti Ke Lal (K.A.Abbas) could have found a place in any of the essays. Growth of film-making into a vast industry in the countries where it is relevant, has been made possible by the considerations of market economy it had created, except perhaps in regimented societies of Soviet Block. Makers of political cinema, often due to limited viewership and lack of interest of financiers, had to wade through difficult waters to make it happen. Joris Ivens, the maker of the Spanish Earth, the documentary on Spanish Civil War, is an example.

The arrangement of the book, comprising one introductory piece and eight essays, some of them too brief though to be called 'essays', is somewhat unstructured. The ideas of the author have not developed in a linear narrative from one essay to a subsequent one. The fourth essay is mostly on the history of political cinema in Russia and later Soviet Russia. He returns to his subject in the fifth essay, but the brevity of the next piece-titled 'চলচ্চিত্রের ইতিহাস শ্রগৌ সংগ্রামরেও' disappoints the reader. Far from its challenging title, the author in this one-and-a-half-page writing, gives only some disjointed information without doing any justice to the title. The fact that political cinema has been an uncharted territory in Indian filmndom, has been emphatically but often repeatedly mentioned in three essays of the book, not necessarily with complementary new findings from his search. In the last two essays, in the context of Film Society movement in Bengal and the worldwide turmoil of the late 1960's, the author stated what he has already done elsewhere in this volume, except mentioning the names of some short films of political genre which have been made in India from 1970's by Anand Patwardhan and other directors of his ilk.

The repetitive statements notwithstanding, the strength of the book is the relevance of the principal issue raised which is that political cinema is an important vehicle of man's struggle for space and freedom and against the machinations of the rulers. In that context, review of a couple of such films- Indian or international- would have given the readers the right perspective.

The eight essays and the introductory piece, run into fifty-two pages. For unstated reasons, the author has added thirty-four stills at the end of the book, not all from films of movements. Some of the films, stills of which have been used, have not been mentioned in his essays. Also, in this section, Battle of Algiers has been stated to have been directed by Costa Gavras. This is actually a landmark political film made by Gillo Pontecorvo.

Yet, the author's work is a curtain raiser for vernacular film literature and will certainly stimulate further analytical work on the subject.

**(Courtesy: Frontier weekly)**