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THE GLOBAL

The psychosocial dimension of power: An emotional analysis of the Davos elite's discourse on globalization

Mario D'Andreta

Understanding for intervening

Constructivist and psychoanalytic oriented social research provides evidence that human behaviour is driven by the shared meanings of the subjective social experience (Blumer 1969, Mead 1934, Berger and Luckmann 1966, Moscovici 1961, Matte Blanco 1975, Carli 1993). This perspective can be used to understand the cultural drivers underlying the elite's political and economic action.

The understanding of these meanings allows to identify possible strategies of intervention to induce change and enhance democracy, social and economic justice, quality of life and civil coexistence.

This knowledge can be gained by the analysis of socially produced discourses on relevant topics such as globalization, intended as the current common horizon of sense that guides social action.

On the basis of these assumptions, I conducted an analysis of the globalization discourse of the World Economic Forum Board members (TNI 2015) by applying the methodological approach of Text Emotional Analysis developed within the Carli and Panicia's model of collusion[1].

The image of globalization

The elite's image of globalization that arises from this work is not univocal and monolithic, but composed of four cultural dimensions corresponding to the clusters of dense words [2], obtained through the statistical analysis of texts under examination.

The first dimension is characterized by the following elements:

- ☐ a negative representation of the other, conceived as a featureless anonymous mass of persons acting solely on the basis of emotional factors (e.g. trust), instead of rational ones;
- ☐ the proposition of three main symbolic frames for the attribution of meaning to life experiences in the globalization age that are expressed by the words world, time and grow;

☒ the idea that globalization impacts over people's life and especially over that of young people;

☒ a form of thought based on genetic determinism and a pragmatic knowledge oriented to take possession of reality through technology.

The second dimension revolves around the three following aspects:

☒ the messianic hope in the dimension of bigness, represented by the international financial institutions (e.g. African Development Bank and International Monetary Fund) and by the Big Science approach of projects like the Human Genome Project;

☒ the social cost of the international financial institution's intervention represented by the risk of failing in the pursuit of the imposed ideal of 'growth, strength and power' based development, expressed by the threat of inflation and the imposition of living conditions to the limits of survival (e.g. Greece situation) that put under stress the European countries;

☒ the predominance of the economic factor in determining public policies, under the dogma of free market and personal gain.

The third dimension is focused on the following five points:

☒ the pursuit of strengthening the ability to provide, invest and manage budget and funds;

☒ a warped view of competition based on the search for conditions of privilege to successfully compete, that is strictly linked to the negative perception towards the taxes, seen as an authoritarian imposition that limits the satisfaction of one's needs;

☒ the consequent need of developing a social order based on the idea of freedom, conceived as absence of restraints to one's continuous expansion;

☒ the key importance of cognitive tools concerning capacities such as perceiving, recognizing, distinguishing, choosing and establishing, in the pursuit of this ideal of success;

☒ the increasingly relevant role of women in facilitating the access to the needed reforms to pursue this end.

The fourth dimension embodies the following fundamental elements:

☒ the role of supranational finance institutions (e.g. Inter American Development Bank Group) in producing a new sort of colonialism through the form of development aid based on providing sureness through financings in exchange of the gradual expropriation of local political and economic power;

☒ the effects of innovative financing schemes, such as impact investment, which despite being aimed at generating social benefit, actually becomes a way for taking possess of the last remaining fields of public intervention such as welfare, health, education and energy;

- ② the need of integrating development assistance recipient countries into the myth of making money in their regions;
- ② the tendency to interface solely with the business elite of these countries (lead companies' CEOs).

Emotions, relations and organizational level of the Davos elite

The central feature of the Davos elite culture of globalization that emerged from this analysis is the lack of democracy in the decision-making processes, both at relational and organizational level.

At relational level, this is expressed by specific patterns of inter subjective emotional and motivational dynamics. The former is characterized by the following elements: the provocation represented by the claim of imposing a specific dogmatic vision of reality, the control of the compliance to the obligations deriving from it, the distrust towards the other (due to its negative connotation and to the risk of non-repayment of the financings received), and the worries and complaints against limits.

These emotional dynamics reveal an approach to social relations oriented to the possession of the other rather than to a productive and creative exchange with it. This can be read as an expression of the fear towards the other and its unpredictable unknowness, grounded in the representation of it as enemy. This leads to the tendency of attempting to transform the unknown other into a well-known friend, a priori given and assimilated to one's own categories, in the effort of eliminating its unpredictability and the risk of its possible manifestations of enemy-ness. This, however, inevitably implies denying differences and missing the opportunities they offer.

The motivational pattern [3] is characterized by the prevalence of the need for power, as dominant social motivation, that articulates itself into three dimensions: a hierarchical pattern that counterposes elite and people, the big and who hopes in it, CEOs and employees and backers and recipients; a polar dynamic of belonging to/exclusion from the system of power based on the affective dependency to the other (expression of the motivational need for affiliation) induced by the logic of financial support to development programs; and a manipulative dynamics based on the contraposition between appearance and reality, as evidenced by the contrast between the positive image of development assistance policies and the expropriation of local political and economic powers produced by its exclusively financial logic.

As far as concerns the organizational level, the lack of democracy reveals itself in a dogmatic a priori conception of the international financial institutions grounded in a mythical dimension and hence appearing as immutable and little inclined to change and improvement. The functioning of these organizations seems to be based almost exclusively on the social mandate provided by the respect of socially grounded systems of values compliant with their ends and

on a substitutive function in the delivery of their services (development aid and sovereign debt crisis management). These institutions are permeated by an ethnocentric spirit, by virtue of which technicians (the experts) substitute themselves to the users of their services, expropriating them of their decisional power. In this way, these organizations operate without a real commission from their beneficiaries, thus not addressing nor being held accountable for their needs, expectations and objectives and for the efficacy of provided services.

Possible pathways for change and development

On the basis of results of the analysis carried out, several intervention strategies can be proposed to improve the above outlined scenario. The implementation of these strategies, however, requires an active and accountable involvement of all the interlocutors of the global elite.

The main relation-related goal to be pursued regards the participative definition and implementation of new rules of game for social coexistence, that allow to contain the possible manifestations of enmity within the relationship between belonging systems and the unknown others [4]. This requires to configure the other not anymore as enemy or well-known friend, but as unknown friend to become acquainted within a relationship of reciprocal exchange, creatively producing together for the common good. This model of social relations allows to unleash one's creative power (power of doing), avoiding the risk of transforming one's creative impotence into forms of power over someone or something (intended as a form of possession).

Regarding the motivation to power, the passage from a relational model grounded in the power over the other to the one characterized by the productive exchange with it, allows to by-pass the hierarchical model of relationship with the other, by focusing on goals and products of the relationship with it and on the development of competencies necessary to pursue them effectively. Consequently, also the dynamics of belonging, grounded in the emotions of power and affiliation, can evolve, passing from the model of possession of the other to that of exchange with the other. As a result, by overcoming the possession of the other as the dominant expression of power, the manipulative forms of power can also be contrasted (such as the current forms of development assistance that lead to the expropriation of local power), since the power becomes shifted towards more creative construction of the common good.

At organizational level, the main objective of improvement concerns the passage from a compliance based logic of action to the approach based on the commonly agreed goals and products, regarded as means of verification of the effectiveness of social action. This would consent to move from an organizational modality entirely grounded in social legitimation to one driven by the commission of verifiable products and services by their recipients, on the basis of their needs and goals. As a result, the recipients could increase their active role in the relation with the technical function, which hence could be oriented to integrate their decisional

power, facilitating the development of their competences in the autonomous achievement of their own goals.

This requires questioning, in ever more dialectical and argumentative ways, the dogma of the development vision proposed by the elite and to work on the definition and implementation of alternative hypothesis and models, for instance aimed at the re-embeddedness of economy in society and culture, as proposed by Polanyi (1944) and Granovetter (1985).

In order to push the process of change of the Davos elite's organizational culture, it is necessary, for instance, that the beneficiaries of the international financial institutions change their attitude toward these organizations, acting as commissioning party requesting their services, on the basis of their specific needs, goals and expected products. These latter represent, in fact, the verification means by which to assess the effectiveness of these organizations in fulfilling the proposed aims and to promote change and improvement of their ways of functioning.

The precondition to advance in this direction is the change of the social image of the elite's interlocutors by overcoming the negative connotation attributed by the elite referring to them as people (referable to the etymological meaning of the term plebs), by recuperating the sense of the Greek word *démos*, referring to the democratic governing power of citizens. Thus reconfigured, in terms of global citizenship, the elite's interlocutors can regain decisional and self-ruling autonomy and boost bottom-up democratization of government political systems (in terms of both participative and representative democracy), in a perspective of a collective and shared construction of the common future. This entails recovering the sense of public good, conceived as pertaining to the collectivity, in contrast to the private good, referring to an exclusive possession, that deprives someone of something.

The pursuit of this process of cultural transformation requires the development of specific competences, oriented to the development of an active and aware citizenship: this can become the goal and the product on which to rebuild the sense of the social purpose of public education and of its productive efficacy.

Notes

[1] The model of collusion is a psychoanalytic theory of social bonds grounded in the shared emotional symbolization of reality (Carli & Paniccia 2002)

[2] The dense words are those words that convey emotional meaning by themselves, independently from the narrative sense of the text (Carli & Paniccia 2002), such as, in this case, growth, hope, big, freedom, crisis, limit, fall, advantage, need, threat and lower.

[3] The motivational pattern has been analysed under the McClelland's human motivations model (McClelland 1987)

[4] Relationship on which coexistence is based according to the Carli and Paniccia's theory (Carli & Paniccia 2002).

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(Courtesy: CounterCurrents)

Reality starting to creep into the billionaire oasis of Davos

VIJAY PRASHAD

At this time of year, about 2,000 private jets fly into Zurich airport and various smaller Swiss airports (including the Dübendorf military airbase). Hundreds of helicopter flights move from Zurich to Davos, where the hotel rooms go for as high as US\$10,000 a night during the World Economic Forum.

This year's installment of the WEF, which began in 1971, opened on Tuesday and runs through to the end of the week. The theme is "Globalization 4.0," which refers, it seems, to the need to tackle the high-tech economy and create a new architecture for a crumbling world system.

Evidence of the irrelevance of the Davos summit and of that crumbling system is clear. Neither US President Donald Trump nor Chinese President Xi Jinping will be there. With the European Union falling apart, neither British Prime Minister Theresa May nor French President Emmanuel Macron will be flying in. Germany's Angela Merkel will be stuck with strongmen such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu. It will not be pleasant company.

Billionaires' club

The World Economic Forum slips into liberal language, reflecting concern for the deep disparities in the world and the crises of war and climate change. It is impossible to ignore fully the calamities in our world. They have to make a show of taking these things seriously.

There are currently 2,208 billionaires in the world, a number that has doubled since the global financial crisis of 2007-08. Most of them are from North America and Europe. They currently have more wealth than ever before, according to a new report from Oxfam International.

The combined wealth of the richest 26 among these 2,208 billionaires has reached US\$1.4 trillion. This amount of wealth is equivalent to the total wealth of the planet's 3.8 billion poorest people. That means that only 26 individuals have as much wealth as 3.8 billion people. Let that sink in.

Who are these 26 men and women? The top 10 of them are Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Warren Buffett (Berkshire Hathaway), Bernard Arnault (LVMH), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Amancio Ortega (Zara), Carlos Slim Helu (America Movil), the Koch Brothers (Koch Industries) and Larry Ellison (Oracle).

On this list, only one person, Carlos Slim Helu, is neither European nor North American. He is Mexican. Further down the list is one Indian (Mukesh Ambani) and several Chinese billionaires (Ma Huateng, Jack Ma, Li Ka-shing, Hui Ka Yan, Lee Shau-kee and Wang Jianlin).

It is not that these men – and a few women – work so hard that they earn their wealth. Most of them inherited their wealth; others were able to get their hands on public assets at fire-sale prices during the time of privatization. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of women in working-class and middle-class households do millions of hours of unpaid labor to maintain a system that has cut social safety nets and social welfare.

The Oxfam report has a startling piece of data. “If all the unpaid care work done by women across the globe was carried out by a single company, it would have an annual income of \$10 trillion – 43 times that of Apple.” And yet it is people who own Apple and its kindred firms who make the billions while these women earn nothing.

This is the actual structural crisis that will not be discussed at Davos. It goes against the interests of the billionaires to open this conversation.

Libyan beach

A few days ago, an inflatable dinghy sank off the Libyan coast. It was carrying at least 120 migrants. Three of them survived. They were brought to the Italian island of Lampedusa, where they said the boat carried people from West Africa and Sudan. There were children on board, and one pregnant woman. The men who survived came from Sudan and The Gambia.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) counts the number of people who attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. It says that in the first 16 days of 2019, 4,216 people attempted the crossing as compared with 2,365 in the same period last year. Thus far, 200 migrants have already died in these perilous waters.

Italy’s far-right government has been arresting those migrants who make it to Europe and taking them back to Libya. There is as yet no count of how many of these migrants go back to the boats and try to make the passage again.

It is estimated that close to a million migrants are amassed in Libya, some in concentration camps, hoping to make it to Europe. They mainly come from Bangladesh, Egypt, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan and Syria.

What brings them to Libya, even as they hear stories in their homelands of the dangers of this journey? Many come because war has torn their country apart – wars in Sudan and Syria as

cases in point. But the rest come because of the harshness of their lives, the impossibility of making a living where they continue to work but their work only fattens the bank accounts of the few.

Most of the migrants are economic refugees, people who work hard but starve and dream of a better life anywhere else. Policies that would help them at home – such as an increase in social welfare, universal health care and universal education – are denied.

The rich no longer want to pay taxes, which is what increases the wealth of the few and prevents even sympathetic states from offering a wide social-democratic agenda. The rich also hide roughly \$7.6 trillion from tax authorities, money secured in tax havens that could provide the finances necessary to improve the lives of people where they live.

Davos Man will smile at the World Economic Forum and talk at length about the need for “reform” and to tackle the “challenges” in the world. But at the same time, Davos Man will fight hard to protect the wealth that has been secreted away, wealth that people created, and that people are now denied.

There is a direct line between the increased wealth of the billionaires and the increased number of migrants who want to cross the Mediterranean. One lot flies into Davos in their private jets, while the other sits in sinking rubber boats in the sea.

*This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute, which provided it to Asia Times. Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter, a project of the Independent Media Institute. He is the chief editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He has written more than 20 books, including *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*, *The Death of the Nation and the Future of the Arab Revolution*, and *Red Star Over the Third World*. He writes regularly for *Frontline*, *The Hindu*, *NewsClick*, *AlterNet* and *BirGün*.*

State of the climate: How the world warmed in 2018

ZEKE HAUSFATHER

The climate data for 2018 is now mostly in, though the ongoing shutdown of the US government has caused some datasets to be delayed.

In this article, Carbon Brief explains why last year proved to be so remarkable across the oceans, atmosphere, cryosphere and surface temperature of the planet.

A number of records for the Earth's climate were set in 2018:

- It was the warmest year on record for ocean heat content, which increased markedly between 2017 and 2018.
- It was the fourth warmest year on record for surface temperature.
- It was the sixth warmest year in the lower troposphere – the lower part of the atmosphere.
- Greenhouse gas concentrations reached record levels for CO₂, methane, and nitrous oxide.
- Sea ice was well below the long-term average at both poles for most of the year. The summer Arctic sea ice minimum was the sixth lowest since records began in the late 1970s.

Warmest year on record in the oceans

Last year was the warmest on record for the heat content of the world's oceans. Ocean heat content (OHC) has increased by around 370 zettajoules – a billion trillion joules – since 1955. The heat increase in 2018 alone compared to 2017 – about 9 zettajoules – is around 18 times more than the total energy used by everyone on Earth in 2018.

Human-emitted greenhouse gases trap extra heat in the atmosphere. While some of this warms the Earth's surface, the vast majority – around of 93% – goes into the oceans. About two thirds of this accumulates in the top 700 metres, but some also ends up in the deep oceans. Annual OHC estimates between 1955 and present for both the upper 700m and 700m-2000m depths of the ocean are shown in the figure below.

In many ways, OHC represents a much better measure of climate change than global average surface temperatures. It is where most of the extra heat ends up and is much less variable on a year-to-year basis than surface temperatures.

Changes in the amount or rate of warming are much easier to detect in the OHC record than on the surface. For example, OHC shows little evidence of the slowdown in warming in the mid-2000s. It also shows a distinct acceleration after 1991, matching the increased rate of greenhouse gas emissions over the past few decades.

Just about every year since 1991 has set a new OHC record, showing that heat has continued to accumulate in the Earth system as concentrations of atmospheric greenhouse gases have increased.

Fourth warmest year on the surface

Global surface temperatures in 2018 were the fourth warmest on record since 1850, when global temperatures can first be calculated with reasonable accuracy. Temperatures in 2018 were between 0.9C and 1.1C warmer than temperatures in the late 19th century (between 1880 and 1900), depending on the temperature record chosen. Temperatures were dragged down a bit by a modest La Niña event earlier in the year, while the currently emerging modest El Niño event will mainly impact temperatures in 2019.

Global surface temperatures are reported by a number of different international groups, including NASA, NOAA, Met Office Hadley Centre/UEA, Berkeley Earth and Cowtan and Way. Copernicus/ECMWF also produces a surface temperature estimate based on a combination of measurements and a weather model – an approach known as “reanalysis”.

These records are created by combining ship- and buoy-based measurements of ocean sea surface temperatures with temperature readings of the surface air temperature from weather stations on land.

Unfortunately, the on-going US government shutdown has delayed the reporting of December 2018 temperatures, so the full 2018 values in the figures below are preliminary estimates. They use January-November data, but estimate December based on the change between November and December in the Copernicus/ECMWF dataset – which has not been delayed by the shutdown.

The global warming seen is not due to any adjustments made to the underlying temperature records. Short-term variability in temperature records is mostly due to the influence of El Niño and La Niña events, which have a short-term warming or cooling impact on the climate. Other dips are associated with large volcanic eruptions. The longer-term warming of the climate is due to increases in atmospheric CO₂ and other greenhouse gases emitted from human activity.

To assess the effects of El Niño and La Niña on the surface temperature record, Carbon Brief has produced an estimate of what temperatures would be in the absence of these events. Removing the effects of El Niño from the temperature record makes 2017 rather than 2016 the

warmest year on record for most temperature series, as 2016 temperatures benefited from a large El Niño event.

Temperatures for 2018 are bumped up modestly with the cooling effects of the early-2018 La Niña event removed, and 2018 would supplant 2015 as the third warmest year. Once El Niño effects are removed, the impact of major volcanic eruptions – such as those in 1982 and 1991 – are also much easier to identify in the temperature record.

Surface temperatures in line with climate models

Climate models provide physics-based estimates of future warming given different assumptions about future emissions, greenhouse gas concentrations and other climate-influencing factors.

Model estimates of temperatures prior to 2005 are a “hindcast” using known past climate influences, while temperatures projected after 2005 are a “forecast” based on an estimate of how things might change.

While global temperatures were running a bit below warming projected by climate models between 2005 and 2014, the last few years have been pretty close to the model average. This is particularly true for globally complete temperature records like NASA, Cowtan and Way, Berkeley and the Copernicus reanalysis.

Sixth warmest in the troposphere

In addition to surface measurements over the world’s land and oceans, satellite microwave sounding units have been providing estimates of global lower atmospheric temperatures – the lower troposphere – since 1979.

The records produced by Remote Sensing Systems (RSS) and the University of Alabama, Huntsville (UAH) show 2018 as the sixth warmest year on record. These satellites measure the temperature of the lower troposphere and capture average temperature changes around 5km above the surface. This region tends to be influenced more strongly by El Niño and La Niña events than the surface and satellite records show correspondingly larger warming or cooling spikes during these events. This is why, for example, 1998 shows up as one of the warmest years in satellites, but not in surface records.

The two lower tropospheric temperature records – UAH and RSS – show large differences after the early 2000s. RSS shows an overall rate of warming quite similar to surface temperature records, while UAH shows considerably slower warming in recent years than has been observed on the surface. Both are subject to some large uncertainties and have seen large adjustments in recent years that have warmed RSS and cooled UAH compared to prior versions of each record.

Greenhouse gas concentrations rising

Greenhouse gas concentrations reached a new high in 2018, driven by human emissions from fossil fuels, land use and agriculture.

Three greenhouse gases – CO₂, methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) – are responsible for the bulk of additional heat trapped by human activities. CO₂ is by far the largest factor, accounting for roughly 50% of the increase in “radiative forcing” since the year 1750. Methane accounts for 29%, while nitrous oxide accounts for around 5%. The remaining 16% comes from other factors including carbon monoxide, black carbon and halocarbons, such as CFCs.

Human emissions of greenhouse gases have increased atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, methane and nitrous oxide to their highest levels in at least a few million years – if not longer. The figure below shows concentrations of these greenhouse gases – in parts per million (ppm) for CO₂ and parts per billion (ppb) for methane and nitrous oxide – from the early 1980s through September 2018 (the most recent data currently available).

Sea ice remains low

Sea ice spent much of early 2018 at record lows in the Arctic and quite low in the Antarctic. It recovered somewhat at both poles by mid-year, but by the end of the year had returned to record lows in the Antarctic and is currently the third lowest on record in the Arctic. The Arctic spent most of the year well below the historical range over the 1979-2010 period and saw the sixth lowest summer minimum since records began in the late 1970s

Sea-ice extent only tells part of the story about changes at the poles; thickness (and volume) are also important variables, though they are more difficult to measure. The Pan-Arctic Ice Ocean Modeling and Assimilation System (PIOMAS) project provides estimates of sea-ice volume since 1979, shown in the figure below.

Sea-ice volume shows a clear downward trend. While some individual months have lower or higher values than others, the range in 2018 to date is consistent with the long-term decline in Arctic sea-ice volume. Unfortunately, due to the government shutdown in the US, sea-ice volume estimates for December 2018 are not yet available.

Looking ahead to 2019 surface temperatures

While a modest La Niña event helped drag 2018 down to being the fourth warmest year on record, modest El Niño conditions have developed over the past few months and are expected to persist through late spring. This will help bump up 2019 temperatures, all things being equal.

Both the UK Met Office and NASA’s Dr Gavin Schmidt have already predicted what temperatures might look like in 2019. Both suggest that 2019 will most likely be warmer than 2018, with a best guess of a second place finish and a range of anywhere between the warmest year and the fifth warmest year on record.

Methods

Carbon Brief has produced a raw global temperature record using unadjusted ICOADS sea surface temperature measurements gridded by the UK Hadley Centre and raw land temperature measurements assembled by NOAA in version 4 of the Global Historical Climatological Network (GHCN).

Raw land temperatures were calculated by assigning each station to a 5×5 latitude/longitude grid box, converting station temperatures into anomalies relative to a 1971-2000 baseline period, averaging all the anomalies within each grid box for each month, and averaging all grid boxes for each month weighted by the land area within each grid box. Raw combined land/ocean temperatures were estimated by averaging raw land and ocean temperatures weighted by the percent of the globe covered by each. The resulting global temperature estimate was “rebaselined” to 1981-2010 to be comparable to other estimates shown.

For the plot showing temperatures without El Niño/La Niña, the effect of ENSO was removed from each surface temperature record for each month using an approach adapted from Foster and Rahmstorf (2011). A regression model was used to estimate the impact of ENSO on each group’s temperature series from January 1950 through December 2018, using a three month lagged Oceanic Niño Index. This estimated ENSO impact was then subtracted from the temperature series to calculate what the temperature records might look like in the absence of an ENSO signal.

(Courtesy: Carbonbrief.org)

THE LOCAL

Are Actions Against the Venezuelan Government Really About Oil?

John Foster

Venezuela's economy is in freefall. Hyperinflation, power cuts and shortages of food and medicine are driving millions of Venezuelans out of the country. And yet the man many blame for the dire state of the nation, Nicolás Maduro, was sworn in as president for another six years in January 2019. So what is going on with Venezuela's economy, how did it get to this point, and what have Mr Maduro and his government done to halt the country's decline?

On September 26, 2018, Canada and five Latin American countries referred Venezuela to the International Criminal Court, citing “numerous, credible reports alleging the commission of serious international crimes.”

The announcement comes after several years of heavy US critique of the Maduro government. Sanctions imposed by Canada, the United States and the European Union in 2017 and 2018 represent a new level of pressure. Among many harsh words for the Venezuelan government, Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland has labelled its behaviour as “anti-democratic.”

While much attention is being paid to questions around democracy and human rights, the oil factor is being left out of the discussion. Venezuela happens to have its petroleum under state (not private) control, a source of animosity in Washington. Venezuela has used its oil wealth to relieve poverty and improve the health and education of its citizens — policies labelled socialist in the United States. The 2014 plunge in oil prices wreaked havoc with the Venezuelan budget. (It did the same in Alberta.)

Venezuela is a petro-state. It has the world’s largest oil reserves. Other oil-producing nations — Iraq, Libya and Iran — have come into Western cross-hairs in recent decades, with drastic consequences. In each instance, Western governments have identified democracy and human rights as a reason for intervention without mentioning petroleum. Venezuela is part of a bigger picture — the rivalry for control of the world’s oil and natural gas.

I describe this petroleum game in my new book, *Oil and World Politics*, and show how it is played by global and regional countries, each using whatever tools, allies and organizations offer advantage. The aim is to achieve gains in power, wealth or politics. The reality is: oil and geopolitics are inseparable.

Venezuela is a case in point. To address two years of governmental paralysis, President Nicolas Maduro established a Constituent National Assembly in 2017, which called an election to select new representatives. The working class and poor voted in huge numbers. The opposition —

representing the business elite, well-to-do and media owners — boycotted the election, held violent rallies and called for strikes.

Washington sided with the opposition by imposing sanctions on officials, including Maduro himself. It also imposed financial sanctions on Venezuela's banking and oil sectors. The United States claimed the measures were designed to "deny the Maduro dictatorship a critical source of financing to maintain its illegitimate rule." When Maduro won Venezuela's 2018 election in May, Western countries added more sanctions.

Historically, Venezuela has been a major source of US oil imports, but sanctions affect Venezuela's ability to produce and export oil. The latest US sanctions prohibit US institutions from dealing in new debt or equity issued by Venezuela or its national oil company PDVSA, and from making dividend payments to the Venezuelan government. These measures impact PDVSA's American refining and marketing subsidiary CITGO, preventing it from remitting a billion dollars or so annually. Lack of foreign exchange has impeded PDVSA from importing spare parts for maintenance. Further, sanctions make the financing of oil exports difficult.

The Venezuelan economy appears in free fall. Maduro blames "supremacist policies" of the United States and "economic war" by the country's opposition. He has introduced monetary reform to avoid the US dollar in oil transactions. China and Russia have befriended Venezuela, extending loans in exchange for oil.

Senior US officials have advocated regime change. US President Donald Trump has threatened military intervention. Since the days of President Hugo Chávez, the United States has disliked Venezuela's preference for its national oil company. It favours privatization worldwide. Although Venezuela allows foreign oil companies to operate under contractual arrangements, ownership of resources remains with Venezuela.

Washington facilitated a failed coup to unseat Chávez in 2002. It denies participation in a failed drone attack on Maduro in 2018, though it has worked closely with opposition leaders before and since and supported them financially through its National Endowment for Democracy. Are the threats and sanctions solely about Venezuela's governance? Other countries with democracy deficits are ignored.

Venezuela and Canada have both differences and commonalities. Venezuela regards oil as its national patrimony. Canada follows US approaches to petroleum policy, having abandoned its National Energy Program. Much of Venezuela's oil production comprises heavy oil and bitumen from the Orinoco river basin. Two-thirds of Canada's oil production comes from the Alberta oil sands, mostly bitumen. Both countries must send such oil to specialized refineries for upgrading before it is refined into useful products. Since refineries with this multi-billion dollar equipment exist primarily in the United States, Canada and Venezuela are in competition for US refineries.

Bitumen is viscous like molasses and must be diluted with high-quality light oil to enable shipment by sea or pipeline. Bitumen is also high in sulphur and contaminants. Both the nature

of bitumen and the need for upgrading lower its value. When world oil prices exceeded US\$100 per barrel a decade ago, companies flocked to Alberta's oil sands with strong support from the Canadian government.

Recently, international companies have been divesting from the oil sands and investing in lower-cost resources elsewhere. The world is awash in crude oil and world prices are much lower. Prices are lower still for bitumen, given its quality. Canadian-based firms remain entrenched, but oil sands operations have failed to generate expected profits.

In 2018, Canadian exports to US refineries exceeded those of Venezuela for the first time. With more expansion of oil sands planned, actions to limit Venezuelan exports benefit Canada. Sanctions on Venezuela (Iran too) have helped tighten the global oil market and bolster prices, to Canada's and Alberta's benefit.

Wars for resources are illegal under the UN charter. Yet since 9/11, numerous countries with a petroleum connection have experienced conflict. Some — like Iraq, Libya, Iran and Venezuela — have petroleum resources. Others — like Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine — have a strategic location for pipelines. A few countries — like Somalia and Yemen — border strategic sea routes. All these countries are caught up in rivalry among the United States, Russia and China.

What's going on internationally remains largely hidden because of its complexity and the management of public perception. Sanctions against Venezuela are part of a US global push for energy dominance. It draws other countries in through organizations such as NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Its plans are to thwart Russia, a major oil and gas-producing country, and contain China, which gets most of its oil from the Middle East.

Russia and China have joined together strategically to promote new financial organizations as alternatives to the IMF and World Bank, challenging US dominance. Their mutual trade has expanded and they are cooperating diplomatically, economically and militarily. The two countries are trading in rubles and yuan, avoiding use of the US dollar.

Motivations are often complex and difficult to decipher. Yet Canada is collaborating with the US in sanctions on Venezuela, Iran and Russia, all oil-producing countries. Canada is also active in the Lima Group, the 14 OAS members exploring a solution in Venezuela. The Venezuelan opposition supports the group.

Canada's focus on Venezuela's internal affairs follows the pattern of Western arguments used against other oil-producing countries. The OAS charter stipulates "no state or group of states has the right to intervene ... in the internal or external affairs of any other state." Sanctions are a form of intervention, reducing Venezuela's ability to produce and export oil. Is Canada playing the petroleum game too? How the sanctions will affect democracy is uncertain, but they are already benefiting Canadian oil.

(Courtesy: OpenCanada.org)

THE LOCAL

Unemployment rises in 2018

Mahesh Vyas / CMIE

India's real GDP grew by an impressive 8.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2018-19. This was much higher than almost everybody's expectations. If there was a sleeping Doubting Thomas in an analyst's head he was woken out of his slumber when the numbers were released.

Questions are raised about the veracity of the estimate and whether the elevated growth rate is sustainable. It is at least worth wondering why the estimates did not generate as much joy as it should have but, it generated doubt and scepticism even among the optimists.

The GDP growth estimates are at odds with employment estimates. While the GDP grew by 8.2 per cent, employment declined by 1 per cent in the same year-on-year comparison of the first quarter of 2018-19.

Quarterly GDP growth estimates are generated largely by considering the performance of organised sectors. However, the employment / unemployment estimates generated by CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey covers organised and unorganised sectors and is therefore a lot more comprehensive than the CSO's quarterly estimates of GDP. It is possible, therefore, that the organised sectors did see an acceleration in growth as seen in CSO's GDP estimates but, deceleration in the unorganised sectors more than offset this growth.

In the meanwhile, we see the employment situation in the country deteriorating in the second quarter of the current fiscal year. The number of total persons employed in July was 1.4 per cent lower than it was in July 2017. In August it was similarly lower by 1.2 per cent. The count of employed persons has been declining since November 2017.

Interestingly, the labour force is expanding. This was not the case earlier. The labour force shrunk after demonetisation. It was 444 million in October 2016, i.e. just before demonetisation. Then it fell sharply. By July 2017 the labour force had shed 27 million to whittle down to 417 million.

The unemployed who had left the labour markets are returning. The labour force has been expanding since July 2017. At 428 million in August 2018, it was 11 million higher than its July 2017 level.

But, the expanded labour force is not finding jobs. While the labour force has expanded, the count of those employed has declined. As a result, the unemployment rate has gone up. The unemployment rate rose to 6.4 per cent in August 2018. This is higher than the 5.6 per cent rate seen in July and much higher than the 4.1 per cent unemployment rate recorded in August 2017.

It is quite likely that the labour force and the labour participation rate will keep rising. The labour force had shrunk following demonetisation because the shock led the unemployed to believe that there weren't enough jobs around and it was futile to look for them.

We saw this phenomenon on a smaller scale recently in Kerala where migrant workers returned home as floods devastated homes and, jobs as well. The destruction was so widespread and so devastating that migrant labour had no hope of finding jobs. Something similar on a much larger scale happened around demonetisation in November 2016.

After 9 months (i.e. after July 2017), the unemployed labour started coming back to the labour markets in search for jobs with a hope that the shock would have subsided and there could be jobs on the offer.

Data suggest that while hope among the unemployed may have returned, sufficient jobs have not sprung to absorb them.

Continued lack of jobs can throttle the flow of labour to the labour markets. This is what happens to females. Potential women workers are effectively dissuaded from joining the labour force when they notice the high unemployment rate among the few who attempt to join the labour force.

It is possible that we could return to the equilibrium prior to demonetisation when the labour force participation rate was about 48 per cent and the unemployment rate was about 9 per cent. Currently, the labour participation rate is about 43 per cent and the unemployment rate is about 6 per cent. The labour participation rate has stopped falling and the unemployment rate has started to rise.

The accelerated GDP growth rates and the elevated investment levels seen in them are good signs for the labour markets. While real GDP grew by 8.2 per cent, gross fixed capital formation grew by 10 per cent, y-o-y. This was the third consecutive quarter of impressive growth in GFCF. This impressive growth is, however, not reflected in CMIE's CPHS nor is it reflected in CMIE's CapEx database, which tracks investments across the country. Of course, some sectors, such as automobiles, steel, cement and electronics do show higher growth rates but this growth is not broad-based enough to assuage labour markets.

Who is afraid to answer questions on jobs in India

Mahesh Vyas / CMIE

In a week from the publication of the paper titled "All you wanted to know about jobs in India - but were afraid to ask" in early July 2018, I had raised ten observations to members of the EAC-PM pertaining to serious mistakes in the paper. The report was prepared for the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM). My observations were limited only to the incorrect use of CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) (India's Largest survey of Households) in the paper. These and some audacious assumptions had led to a "conclusion" that 12.8 million jobs were added in 2017.

I have followed up on my observations and even offered the entire record-level data of CPHS along with the services of a research assistant to help in the analysis, but neither my observations nor my offer met with any response. I was given to understand that a revised paper would be submitted to the EAC-PM by mid-September 2018, but I do not know if that was submitted or what happened if it was. Since then the aforementioned erroneous report remains on the EAC-PM website and since there is no correction to the errors and since the concerned EAC-PM member has left the EAC-PM, it is appropriate for me to now make public what, according to me, is wrong with the report.

The first mistake made by the report is in its understanding of how CMIE's CPHS defines the employment/unemployment status of a respondent. In the CPHS, we take a respondent's status as of the date of the survey. If the survey is conducted in the early hours of the day, it is possible that a daily wage worker may not know his/her status of employment. In such cases, we take the status of the preceding day. So, the status of a respondent is either on the day of the survey or the preceding day. This ensures easy and correct recall. The report submitted to the EAC-PM has misunderstood this and has assumed that if the respondent did not work on any of these two days but usually worked over the past year, CMIE also classifies them as employed. This is wrong and is at the root of all calculations in the report which renders much of the reports findings dubious.

CPHS is a complex survey with a stratified sampling design. Population estimates derived from such a sample necessarily require the use of appropriate weights inherent in the survey design. Ideally, the estimates should be derived using record-level data and appropriate weights for each observation.

The authors of the report had on offer from me of access to all the record-level data with the weights well before the report was submitted to the EAC-PM, but it was chosen to not use this data or the appropriate weights. The report uses population estimates of 11 age-sex groups published by CMIE using appropriate weights for "demographic extensions" apparently by using UN population projections. The elementary question is why was the available survey design, the available record-level data and the available weights corresponding to the survey design not deployed?

Then, the report cherry picks the labour participation rate for men from CPHS but not for women. The problem is that government-economists are unable to accept the CPHS finding that female labour participation rate fell sharply after demonetisation. The rejection of this finding is arbitrary and the simultaneous acceptance of male labour participation rate is evidence of cherry picking of only "suitable" data.

Nobody is afraid to ask questions on jobs in India. The question is - who is afraid to answer them.

The EAC-PM official website distinguishes between EAC reports and reports of individual members. The aforementioned report does not appear as an EAC report but as an individual members report. Implicitly, the report has not been accepted by the EAC-PM. But, it is used by commentators and such use often causes confusion. Authors juxtapose CMIE's estimates that show no job increases with the said paper that shows an increase of 12.8 million. This leaves the reader with a misleading impression that the truth could be somewhere in between. If the truth is always in between two opposing points of view, then it can be easily gamed. But, truth cannot be gamed. Readers must indulge and discern.

If we do not discern then we must be prepared for more confusion when NSSO releases its estimates in the coming few weeks. An informed debate using all available data transparently is imperative.

THE SCAM

The D-Companies

KAUSHAL SHROFF / The Caravan

Ajit Doval's sons run a web of companies including a Cayman Islands hedge fund even as father demands crackdown on tax havens

Vivek Doval's (left) hedge fund in the Cayman Islands is linked inextricably to businesses run by his brother Shaurya (right), a BJP politician who heads the India Foundation. That this fund is based out of the Cayman Islands is notable in light of Ajit Doval's public call for crackdowns on tax havens.

Trade documents accessed by The Caravan from the United Kingdom, United States of America, Singapore and the Cayman Islands show that the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval's younger son, Vivek Doval, runs a hedge fund in the Cayman Islands, an established tax haven. This hedge fund was registered merely 13 days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government demonetised all existing Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes, in 2016. Vivek Doval's business is linked inextricably to businesses run by his brother Shaurya Doval, a Bharatiya Janata Party politician who heads the India Foundation, a think tank that enjoys close proximity to the Modi government. That Vivek Doval runs an offshore hedge fund based out of a tax haven is notable in light of the established public position taken by his father—in 2011, Ajit Doval authored a report that advocated a strict crackdown on tax havens and offshore entities.

Vivek Doval, a chartered financial analyst who is a citizen of the UK and resides in Singapore, is the director of the hedge fund, named GNY Asia Fund. According to July 2018 document, Don W Ebanks and Mohamed Althaf Musliam Veetil are directors as well. Ebanks is named in the Paradise Papers—a leaked database of over 13 million documents regarding offshore entities—as the director of two firms, both registered in the Cayman Islands. He was formerly employed with the Cayman Islands government, and advised its finance secretary and cabinet ministers. Mohamed Althaf is a regional director for the Lulu Group International, which operates one of the fastest growing chains of hypermarkets in West Asia. The legal address of GNY Asia fund shows that it is under the care of Walkers Corporate Limited, a firm that finds a mention in the Paradise Papers as well as the Panama Papers, another leaked database that includes attorney-client information of millions of offshore entities.

The Caravan found administrative interlinks between Vivek's firms and those run by his elder brother Shaurya Doval—several employees working for Shaurya's businesses in India are closely involved with GNY Asia and entities connected to it. The overlaps between the brothers'

businesses indicate a larger financial universe run by them, with companies that are connected to the House of Saud, the ruling dynasty in Saudi Arabia.

In 2011, Ajit Doval, who was formerly a director of the Intelligence Bureau, submitted a report to the Bharatiya Janata Party, titled, “Indian Black Money Abroad: In Secret Banks and Tax Havens.” Among Doval’s co-authors was S Gurusamy, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ideologue who is currently serving as a director of the Reserve Bank of India. The report calls for a fierce crackdown on tax havens.

The Cayman Islands does not levy a corporate tax, making it an ideal destination for firms to register corporate entities without facing much scrutiny. By setting up complex, multi-layered ownership structures that include companies based in such tax havens, businesses of all variety are able to shield in parts or in full their taxable incomes.

GNY Asia, a hedge fund run by Vivek Doval, was registered in the Cayman Islands merely 13 days after the Narendra Modi government announced demonetisation.. Tanvi Mishra for The Caravan
GNY Asia, a hedge fund run by Vivek Doval, was registered in the Cayman Islands merely 13 days after the Narendra Modi government announced demonetisation.. Tanvi Mishra for The Caravan

GNY Asia was registered in the Cayman Islands on 21 November 2016. Amit Sharma, a chartered financial analyst, works as the hedge fund’s research head and its portfolio manager. Documents accessed by The Caravan show that Gordian Capital Singapore Private Limited, an asset-management firm, is a beneficial owner of the hedge fund—it enjoys three percent of all proceeds arising from GNY Asia. According to Gordian Capital’s website, GNY Capital Limited, a London-based company, “acts as an advisor” to GNY Asia.

Both Vivek and Sharma are listed as directors of GNY Capital. A document filed with the Companies House, the UK government’s registrar of companies, shows that the net worth of GNY Capital was close to £5,400 in October 2016—about Rs 4.4 lakh, based on the exchange rates prevailing at the time.

For the hedge fund to be operational, it would have required initial seed funding or capital—essentially, money that it could then invest ahead. The initial seed funding secured by GNY Asia is not known. Speaking to the business-news publication Bloomberg a few days after the hedge fund was registered, Sharma said that it will “get the majority of its seed money from strategic investors in the Middle East.” The article stated that the hedge fund would begin trading in December that year, that it would hold “concentrated positions in 30 stocks on average,” and that it would target an annual return of 15 percent. Sharma did not disclose the value of the assets that GNY Asia was managing at the time. A document filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission in July 2018 put the total value of the fund at \$11.19 million, or Rs 77 crore.

Edelweiss Custodial Services Limited is the official custodian for GNY Asia. Essentially, it holds assets on behalf of the hedge fund, and would be empowered to execute market transactions in its stead. In February 2017, the Edelweiss Group hosted the Edelweiss India Conference, an investor's conclave. Such conferences offer large companies a platform to meet and suss out future investors.

Documents accessed by The Caravan show that GNY Asia attended this conference. A little over two months after it was registered in the Cayman Islands, GNY Asia was present at several meetings with some of the largest corporate players in the Indian market, including formidable banking institutions. At one such meeting with a private-sector bank, a research analyst named Akul Jhajharia represented the hedge fund. GNY Asia attended at least two other investor meetings in June 2017, with sizeable corporate enterprises. No GNY Asia representative aside from Jhajharia has been named in the documents we accessed.

A comparatively new and small fund, Vivek Doval's GNY Asia stood out at these meetings. It shared its place at these tables with the likes of Goldman Sachs Asset Management Private Limited, which was incorporated in 2008; ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company Limited, incorporated in 1993; Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Limited, incorporated in 1994; and the SBI Life Insurance Company Limited, which was incorporated in 2000.

Though the value of GNY Asia at the time the meetings took place is not known, per the document submitted to the US government, it was valued at \$11.19 million over a year later, in mid 2018. By comparison, Motilal Oswal Asset Management, a company that was present at one of the meetings in February 2017, held close to \$2.5 billion or Rs 17,000 crore, of equity assets under its management at the time. HDFC Life Insurance Company was also present at two of the February meetings. By then, it was managing assets worth nearly Rs 92,000 crore. Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company, another large insurance firm that was present at one of the meetings, was managing assets worth at least Rs 88,000 crore.

Curiously, when the meetings took place, GNY Asia did not have a Legal Entity Identifier code. The LEI is a 20-character code that acts as a unique identifier for a firm, company or any business that seeks to enter into a financial transaction. In the aftermath of the financial crisis that struck the American and European markets in the late 2000s, markets across the world were besieged by a common problem of lack of clarity and accountability in commercial transactions. To resolve this, the LEI number was devised as a measure of affixing a distinct identity for all financial entities. The number is now regarded globally as a risk-management parameter. GNY Asia was issued its LEI number in September 2017.

The procedure that led Edelweiss to include GNY Asia, a little-known, relatively small fund, domiciled in what global banks consider a high-risk jurisdiction, and lacking a key safety parameter, remains a mystery. The Caravan sent a questionnaire to Edelweiss Custodial Services, asking what parameters were considered before accepting GNY Asia as a client, and including it in the investors' conference. We did not receive a response.

In 2014, SEBI classified several categories of foreign investors under the umbrella term, “foreign portfolio investor,” or FPI, aligning India’s classification with global norms. SEBI also began categorising FPIs into three types, based on the risk they posed as investors. Registering as an FPI allows SEBI to regulate and supervise the investor, through Know Your Customer requirements. At the time of publishing, GNY Asia was not registered as an FPI.

In early November 2018, the operating address for GNY Capital, the firm advising GNY Asia, was changed from a location in Hampstead, London, to one in Bounds Green, in the same city. Data on companies registered in the UK, which The Caravan accessed, shows that there are 120 companies registered at GNY Capital’s new address.

Media reports indicate that Vivek Doval was in Noida in mid January 2017. Along with his father, the NSA Ajit Doval, Vivek arrived at a registry office in Noida to complete ownership formalities of a flat purchased in his name in a complex called Unitech Horizon, in Greater Noida.

The Caravan sent a detailed questionnaire to Vivek Doval regarding GNY Asia—its assets, its seed capital, and its trading history, among others. We asked Vivek if, during this trip to India, he met any officers from the companies whose investors’ meetings GNY Asia attended in the subsequent months. We did not receive any response.

Edelweiss Custodial Service’s turnover has seen exciting rises in recent years—from Rs 5.64 crore in the financial year 2015–2016, Edelweiss Custodial’s business jumped to Rs 34.97 crore in the next financial year. It then climbed even higher, to Rs 166.8 crore in the financial year 2017–2018—near-magical jumps of approximately 520 percent and 380 percent, respectively. With regards to net profit, the financial year 2015–2016 was disappointing for the custody agent, as it registered a loss of Rs 80 lakh. But it scripted a turnaround here as well—in the next financial year, it clocked a profit of Rs 11.4 crore, which rose by over 330 percent to Rs 49.35 crore in the financial year 2017–2018.

In 2017, foreign direct investments—money coming into Indian markets from abroad—from the Cayman Islands rose meteorically. Data from the RBI’s annual report for that financial year shows that FDI inflows from the Cayman Islands shot up by 2,226 percent, rising to \$1,140 million from \$49 million in the previous financial year. In two quarters alone—one ending in December 2017 and another ending in March 2018—the cumulative FDI inflow from the Cayman Islands stood at \$1.08 billion. The money which came to India from the Cayman Islands in the financial year 2017–2018 is nearly as much as the money which came to India from the same tax haven in the first 16 years of the century.

Documents accessed by The Caravan also show that Vivek Doval’s overseas ventures are inextricably linked to businesses run by his elder brother, Shaurya Doval, in Asia. The elder Doval brother has emerged into public life in recent years—after a career as an investment

banker abroad, Shaurya returned to India in 2009. Not long after, he became the director of the India Foundation, working alongside Ram Madhav, an RSS leader who is now a national general secretary of the BJP.

The organisation worked behind the scenes in Delhi for a few years, but its star rose after Narendra Modi was elected to power at the centre. The foundation has since organised various meetings with foreign ambassadors and dignitaries, and helped organise events for the prime minister's foreign trips, including his high-profile rally at the Madison Square Garden in New York. Several BJP ministers serve as India Foundation's directors, and its role as a close advisor of the central government is an open secret. Media reports indicate that Shaurya is now considering a political career as well. In December 2017, he attended the BJP's state executive committee meeting in Uttarakhand, and has been officially residing in the state in recent months. The Doval family hails from the state's Pauri Garwhal district, and it is this seat that Shaurya is reportedly likely to contest in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In mid 2018, Shaurya launched social programmes in Pauri Garwhal, aimed at improving employment, health and education in the district.

Shaurya's public work has not obstructed his business—he sits firmly at the heart of a complex web of Asia-based companies that are intertwined with his brother's ventures in the UK and the Cayman Islands. Shaurya is currently the CEO of Torch Investment Management, a Singapore-based asset-management company that is part of an umbrella group named Torch Financial Services. He was formerly the head of Zeus Caps, an equity and asset-management firm based in India. In early 2017, Zeus Caps's operations merged with those of Torch Investment Management, forming Torch Financial Services. In January 2019, in his capacity as the head of Torch Investment, Shaurya delivered a talk at the Raisina Dialogue, a highly publicised conference on geopolitics, organised by the Observer Research Foundation.

The Caravan found that several people who are in business with the younger Doval brother are connected to the older one as well, or vice versa. Aside from his roles at GNY Asia and GNY Capital, Amit Sharma also serves as a director for YFin Advisor, a Delhi-based company. Shaurya Doval is the only individual with a share in the company. Jhahharia, who represented GNY Asia at an investors meeting in February 2017, was, according to his public profiles, formerly employed with Zeus Caps, which Shaurya co founded. Jhahharia also claims to be an associate at ZAD Support Services Private Limited—the former title of a company now named Torcia Advisors Private Limited, where Shaurya is a director. Another employee of Torch Investment, Priyanka Dua, an economist by profession, has a LinkedIn profile that states she is working with GNY Capital.

On the supervisory board of Torch Financial Services is Mishaal bin Abdullah bin Turki bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, from the House of Saud, the family that rules over Saudi Arabia.

Torcia Advisors is registered to a residence in Dwarka that is owned by the NSA Ajit Doval. In October 2015, in a letter to the registrar of companies, Ajit Doval had declared that he had “no objections” if ZAD, as Torcia was then known, were to use this residence as its registered office.

The Indian job portal wisdomjobs.com recently featured a post from Zeus Strategic Management Advisors Private Limited. Shaurya and his mother serve on the board of directors for Zeus Strategic, alongside one Puneet Kamra—who is also a director at Torcia Advisors. The post was soliciting applications for a business analyst for GNY Capital, Vivek’s UK-based firm.

The Caravan sent Shaurya Doval a detailed questionnaire regarding his business ventures and the overlaps with his brother’s firms. He did not respond. Our request for comment to the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, too, went unanswered. We will update the report if and when we receive responses.

In his 2011 report on offshore entities and tax havens, Ajit Doval wrote, “Let us look at the volume of the untaxed black money that is estimated to circulate in and dominate the global financial markets unquestioned and unsupervised.” The report, which had been commissioned by the BJP, said. “These monies, which have no declared or known owners, are laundered into the official financial markets of the world through the intervention of tax havens, which are countries that levy no tax or levy what is an apology for tax, so as to attract capital to their countries. These tax havens are largely tiny tots in the global geography and demography but they hold the rest of the world to ransom ... This money, besides being tax evaded, is entirely unsupervised.”

The report recommended that every electoral candidate confirm in their election affidavit that they do not hold illegal money abroad. According to the report, it “does not need to pontificate on the evil effect of this kind of untaxed, unmonitored and uncontrolled money, to the global financial system.”

(Courtesy: The Caravan)

The Scam

10% General Reservation: The Biggest Scam

Shivam Shankar Singh

The BJP government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced a bill to give 10% reservation to the economically poor that fall within the General category. This group had not received any reservation benefits until now, but would become eligible for reservation with the passage of the bill in both houses of Parliament on 9th January 2019. As soon as it was introduced, it was hailed by BJP supporters as a major reform in introducing economic justice into a system that had previously depended on social backwardness (defined by caste) to determine people's eligibility for reservation. Even the opposition supported the bill, restricting its criticism to the specific criteria laid down to determine economic backwardness, to the fact that there aren't enough new jobs being created, or to the fact that it could be struck down by the Supreme Court and was only a political gimmick. All three are valid criticisms, but they miss a much larger, fatal flaw in this new reservation.

The Obvious Flaws:

The eligibility criteria selected — an income less than 8 lakhs per annum, less than 5 acres of agricultural land and a residential plot below a certain area made over 80% of the general category population eligible for the reservation, making it useless in effect. Since the economically poor segment identified under this criteria already has a representation of over 10% in educational institutions and government jobs, there would be no logical reason for the cutoff of this reserved category to be any different from the cutoff for the general category itself.

The other criticism leveled by the opposition is based on the fact that in its 1992 judgment on the Indira Sawhney case a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled such reservation invalid. The bench categorically ruled that backward class cannot be determined exclusively on the basis of economic criterion, and that economic factors could only be used in addition to social backwardness. More importantly, the judgment also limited the maximum possible reserved seats to 50 per cent. If this new 10% reservation is enacted it would violate that limit and take the total number of reserved seats to 59.5 per cent.

How this is THE most anti general category legislation disguised as pro upper caste legislation:

In the best case scenario for the general category, the reservation will be struck down by the Supreme Court and nothing will change. In that case it is only one more jumla by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the worst case, the reservation will actually be upheld and the 50% ceiling placed in 1992 by the Supreme Court will be broken.

According to estimates, 20% of the Indian population belongs to the Scheduled Caste; 9% belongs to the Scheduled Tribe; and 41% belongs to the Other Backward Classes category. This means that about 70% of the population belongs to a currently reserved category while 30%

falls in the general category. The reservation available in educational institutions and government jobs for the 70% population belonging to the reserved categories is at 49.5% due to the court orders, and the system maintains fairness by allowing those from the reserved categories to get seats from the general category if they meet the cut offs.

Therefore the 30% general category population of India is eligible to compete for 50% of the vacancies and seats, while the reserved categories compete for these 50%, plus the percentage of seats in their own category (i.e. Scheduled Castes currently compete for $50\% + 15\% = 65\%$ of the total seats, OBCs compete for $50\% + 27\% = 77\%$).

What'll happen when the 50% ceiling is broken:

As soon as the ceiling is broken, some politician will realize the political benefit of proposing a hike in seats for the reserved categories. A politician will tell the reserved categories that they're getting far less than their fair share. The politician will make all people belonging to the reserved categories feel like victims and state that they must demand reservation at least equal to their share in the population. He'd claim that OBC reservation should be 41%, not the current 27%. SC reservation should be 20% instead of the current 15% and ST reservation should be 9% instead of 7.5%.

This would obviously get this politician tremendous support from all these categories — SC, ST and OBC — and consequently a lot of votes. The reserved categories are 70% of the population, and therefore they're also 70% of the voters!

The only thing stopping this scenario is the 50% limit imposed by the Supreme Court, and our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, is trying to demolish that limit with a move he's sold to the nation as being a majorly positive one for the general category.

In essence, the removal of this limit will all but ensure that the number of seats that a person belonging to the General Category is able to compete for is reduced from the current 50% to 30%. This move by the PM almost guarantees that seats available for the general category will decrease by 20%, if not immediately then in 5 to 10 years. Will a 10% reservation on economic grounds still seem like a pro general category move, especially when it comes out of the remaining 30%?

(Courtesy: Medium)

The Scam

The Curious Exit of Modi's Blue-Eyed Boy

Urjit Patel's stunning move on Dec. 10 to resign as the 24th governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sparked another bout of uncertainty in India's economy and political landscape.

The move, coming around nine months ahead of when his term was set to end, is a culmination of months of acrimony with the government that played out in the public eye.

The Narendra Modi government's priority at the moment would be to find a replacement for Patel, who quit just days ahead of the next central bank board meeting scheduled for Dec. 14. It is likely that the government may appoint someone to take charge before that. There is speculation that NS Vishwanathan, the RBI's senior-most deputy governor may take interim charge.

Meanwhile, Patel's stint at the RBI is noteworthy.

For one, he was hand-picked by the Modi government and viewed as its "yes man." And yet, Patel served the shortest tenure as an RBI governor since 1992.

Here's a look at the highs and lows of Patel's time at India's central bank:

September 2016: Takes charge as RBI governor on Sept. 04, succeeding Raghuram Rajan who isn't offered a second term by the government. Modi faces a severe backlash.

November 2016: On Nov. 08, the government stuns India by rendering two-high value currency notes illegal. This sparks a cash shortage in the country. Banks forced to work round-the-clock to ensure cash supply. Nearly 70 people, including overworked bank officials, reportedly die due to causes directly or indirectly related to demonetisation. Printing of new notes drains the RBIs coffers.

June 2017: In a bi-monthly meeting of the RBI, Patel reveals that the monetary policy committee (MPC) has refused to meet finance ministry officials ahead of the MPC meet. It was believed that the government had called for a meeting to wield its influence on the MPC to reduce interest rates to boost lending.

August 2017: The RBI pays only Rs30,659 crore (\$4.23 billion) as dividend to the government, less than half of what was paid the previous year.

February 2018: The RBI comes up with stringent bad-loan reporting norms as a result of which several banks are put under the prompt corrective action (PCA) plan.

The biggest-ever banking scam in India is reported by state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) which has been defrauded of nearly \$2 billion. Later that month, finance minister Arun Jaitley blames the RBI for being less vigilant.

March 2018: After a month-long silence on the scam, Patel finally passes the buck to the government and blames it for giving the RBI limited power over public sector banks such as PNB. The government denounces the RBI's comments and says it has enough powers.

April 2018: The RBI puts 11 of the 21 government-owned banks under PCA. In order to improve their financial health, there are several restrictions placed on these lenders, including on lending, hiring, and expansion. This later becomes a bone of contention between the government and the RBI.

August 2018: The government appoints chartered accountant S Gurumurthy and cooperative banker Satish Marathe to the RBI's central board as independent directors. Gurumurthy has been a vocal critic of some of RBI's moves under Patel.

October 2018: The government appoints retired bureaucrat Revathy Iyer and Sachin Chaturvedi, head of a Delhi-based think tank, to the RBI board. It removes Nachiket Mor, an old RBI hand, from the board.

On Oct. 19, the central bank puts out a strongly-worded dissent note on its website against the government's suggestions for setting up an independent payments regulator.

On Oct. 26, Viral Acharya, deputy governor of the RBI, makes an extremely charged speech and warns that undermining the RBI's independence can be "potentially catastrophic."

On Oct. 30, the government blames the RBI for not checking the banks against indiscriminate lending, which led to a bad loan crisis.

Meanwhile, in the last week of October, several media reports appear stating that the government is considering invoking section 7 of the RBI Act, an unprecedented move. The section allows the government to give directions to the RBI on certain matters.

November 2018: Subhash Chandra Garg, the economic affairs secretary, takes a shot at Acharya and the RBI. In his speech, Acharya had mentioned that governments that do not respect the autonomy of the central bank may incur the "wrath of the markets."

On Nov. 19, after a nine-hour-long meeting the RBI and the government signal that all is well now. The RBI also issues a statement, which details out some of the issues that were discussed and the steps that the two parties have jointly agreed on.

December 2018: In its bi-monthly policy meeting on Dec. 05, Patel refuses to address any questions from the media on the friction between the RBI and the government.

On Dec. 10, Patel steps down from his post with immediate effect citing personal reasons.

The Social

India's New Rules To Govern Social Media Raise Fears Of More Censorship

Megha Bahree / Forbes

The Indian government spoiled the holiday festivities for many last year by introducing on Christmas eve a draft policy of rules that would force a whole range of internet companies to remove content from their platforms. The regulations are intended to curb the misuse of social media and stop the spreading of fake news that sparked unrest and violence earlier this year, but internet companies and privacy advocates say the new measures are a threat to free speech.

The government is proposing to amend Section 79 of India's IT Act, which would require internet companies to take down content deemed inappropriate by authorities. If a company receives a complaint from a law enforcement agency, the firm would be required to trace and report within 72 hours the origin of that content and to disable that user's access within 24 hours. Implementing such a measure would effectively break the end-to-end encryption services of platforms like Facebook-owned Whatsapp.

Another recommendation would require internet companies to purge their platforms of "unlawful" content, although a clear definition of what that actually constitutes has yet to be decided, prompting concerns that its loose definition leaves it open to abuse.

Amba Kak, a lawyer and public policy advisor in India for Mozilla, which is the owner of web browser Firefox, says the new provisions will turn internet companies into censors and undermine users' security. She provided an update on the debate through an email interview, just over a week prior to the deadline for the proposed amendment.

BAHREE: What is the proposed amendment to the intermediary laws about? What does it say?

KAK: The new rules proposed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) dilute the legal provision which ensures that internet companies generally have no obligations to actively censor content. Under the new rules, all "intermediaries" are required to "proactively" purge their platforms of "unlawful" content or else potentially face criminal or civil liability. Intermediary is defined very broadly to include just about any online company ranging from social media and e-commerce platforms to internet service providers. The rules also require services to make information about the senders of content and messages available to government agencies for surveillance purposes. This is a sharp blow to end-to-end

encryption technologies, used to secure most popular messaging, banking, and e-commerce apps today.

Why is this of concern?

This is a concern because it turns online companies into censors and undermines security. We do need to find ways to hold social media platforms to higher standards of responsibility, and tackling harmful content on the internet is no doubt a challenging task. But the rules end up putting even more trust on these companies to decide what content is appropriate and what isn't, and they haven't earned that trust.

The rules don't define what counts as "unlawful" content, but this would likely include all content that is illegal under various laws in India. And because of the overly broad sweeping definition, companies will be forced to make judgement calls in the absence of context, and will be incentivized to "take down first, think later," or prevent such content from surfacing at all to protect themselves at the expense of users.

Instead of acknowledging this complexity and scale, the draft rules direct companies to rely on technology to fix the problem. They promote the deployment of "automated tools to filter content." We would be very cautious about treating automated tools as a silver bullet for illegal content - this essentially prioritizes speed over the accuracy of content removals.

Also, a broad definition of "intermediaries" goes far beyond social media companies. The government has justified this move based on "instances of misuse of social media by criminals and anti-national elements." For entities like internet service providers, browsers and operating systems, these content control obligations seem entirely misplaced and inapplicable, but they still create a legal risk that can't be ignored.

There's a tendency to see this issue as a fight between big tech companies and the government, but, above all, this is a threat to the internet users, as it will inevitably lead to over-censorship and chill free expression.

Where has the matter reached?

The rules are still in draft stage. The MEITY [Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology] has opened it up for consultation, and given time till 31st January for stakeholder comments. They'll publish all comments by 4th February and close the consultation on the 14th after allowing time for stakeholders to counterclaim.

While these rules could be notified by the government in a hurry, it's clear that they will require a complete rethink, and one that takes into account stakeholder feedback.

What are the changes you (not just Mozilla, but the wider industry as a whole) would like to see in the proposal?

Besides the concerns already mentioned, some of the others voiced by Mozilla, members of civil society and industry are:

One-size-fits-all obligations for all types of online services and all types of unlawful content is arbitrary and disproportionately harms smaller players.

Requiring services to decrypt encrypted data weakens overall security and contradicts the principles of data minimization, endorsed in MEITY's draft data protection bill.

Disproportionate operational obligations, like mandatorily internet companies to incorporate in India, are likely to spur market exit and deter market entry for SMEs.

What are the chances the amendment will be passed in its current form? How soon?

I don't expect these rules to be notified in the current form. The backlash from a diversity of stakeholders has hopefully given the government enough reason to pause. This issue requires detailed deliberations over the subsequent months, and India has an opportunity to take a measured approach that can be instructive to governments that are grappling with this issue in other countries as well.

Social media giants plan push-back on India's new regulations

Reuters: Global social media and technology giants are gearing up to fight sweeping new rules proposed by the Indian government that would require them to actively regulate content in one of the world's biggest Internet markets, sources close to the matter told Reuters.

The rules, proposed by the Information Technology ministry on Christmas Eve, would compel platforms such as Facebook, its messaging service WhatsApp and Twitter to remove unlawful content, such as anything that affected the "sovereignty and integrity of India". This had to be done within 24 hours, the rules proposed.

The proposal, which caught many holidaying industry executives off guard, is open for public comment until Jan. 31. It will then be adopted as law, with or without changes.

The move comes ahead of India's national election due by May and amid rising worries that activists could misuse social media, especially the WhatsApp messaging service, to spread fake news and sway voters.

Industry executives and civil rights activists say the rules smack of censorship and could be used by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to increase surveillance and crack down on dissent. Social media firms have long battled efforts by governments around the world to hold them responsible for what users post on their platforms.

U.S. and India lobby groups, representing Facebook and other companies, have sought legal opinions from law firms on the impact of the federal proposal, and have started working on drafting objections to be filed with the IT ministry, four sources in the sector said.

"The companies can't take this lying down. We are all concerned, it's fundamental to how these platforms are governed," said an executive at a global social media company.

An estimated half a billion people in India have access to the Internet. Facebook has about 300 million users in the country and WhatsApp has more than 200 million. Tens of millions of Indians use Twitter.

The new rules, the sources said, would put the privacy of users at risk and raise costs by requiring onerous round-the-clock monitoring of online content.

Internet firm Mozilla said last week the proposal was a "blunt and disproportionate" solution to the problem of harmful content online, and one which could lead to over-censorship and "chill free expression".

The IT ministry has said the proposal was aimed at only making social media safer. "This is not an effort to curb freedom of speech, or (impose) censorship," Gopalakrishnan S., a joint secretary at India's IT ministry said on Saturday when the ministry ran a #SaferSocialMedia campaign on Twitter.

Facebook and WhatsApp declined to comment.

A Twitter spokesperson said the company continues to engage with the IT Ministry and civil society on the proposed rules.

“This will be like a sword hanging on technology companies,” said Nikhil Narendran, a partner specializing in technology law at Indian law firm Trilegal.

TIGHT REGULATIONS

Such regulations are not unique to India. Vietnam has asked tech companies to open local offices and store data domestically, while Australia’s parliament has passed a bill to force companies to give police access to encrypted data. Germany requires social media companies to remove illegal hate speech within 24 hours or face fines.

Nevertheless, the proposal would further strain relations between India and global technology firms. They have been at odds since last year due to federal proposals requiring them to store more user data locally to better assist legal investigations.

The new rules, called “intermediary guidelines”, also propose requiring companies with more than 5 million users in India to have a local office and a nodal officer for “24x7 coordination with law enforcement”.

When asked by a government agency or through a court order, companies should within 24 hours “remove or disable access” to “unlawful” content, they stipulate.

The rules also mandate companies to reveal the origin of a message when asked, which if enforced would deal a blow to WhatsApp which boasts of end-to-end encryption to protect user privacy. WhatsApp has battled criticism after fake messages about child kidnap gangs on its platform sparked mob lynchings in India last year.

“You have created a monster, you should have the ability to control the monster,” a senior government official said, referring to WhatsApp.

“We remain flexible in principle (to suggestions), but we definitely want them to be more accountable, especially the big companies,” the official said.

The Political

Anand Teltumbde's appeal on his imminent arrest

I, an IIM-A alumnus, IIT Professor, executive director of BPCL, Ex-MD & CEO of Petronet India, senior professor and chair, Big Data Analytics in Goa Institute of Management, author of 26 books, columnist in the Economic and Political Weekly, writer of innumerable articles, a noted scholar of caste-class and public policy issues, leading public intellectual and democratic and educational rights activist face imminent threat of arrest as an 'Urban Maoist' in the vilest post-independence plot by the state.

I need your support

Anand Teltumbde

You may have learnt from the media that my appeal for quashing the false FIR against me filed by the Pune police was rejected yesterday (January 14) by the Supreme Court. Fortunately, it gave me to four weeks to seek pre-arrest bail from the competent court.

Up till now, I felt confident that whatever charges the police levied could be proved as criminal fabrication once they landed before the court and hence I did not feel the need to bother you. But my hopes stand completely shattered and I am left with just seeking bail right from the Pune sessions court, to the Supreme Court. The time has come to build a visible campaign in support of me from various sections of people so as to save me from imminent arrest.

Many of us did not know that the arrest under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) can mean years of incarceration. Even a hardened criminal can get away with his crime with a metered punishment of a year or two but an innocent person merely for the police, invariably acting at the behest of political bosses, claim that they have evidence against him could keep him/her in jail for years.

For me, arrest means not simply the hardship of prison life. It will keep me away from my laptop which has been integral with my body, from my library which has been part of my life, half-written manuscripts of books committed to various publishers, my research papers which are in various stages of completion, my students who staked their future on my professional reputation, my institute that invested so many resources in my name and recently appointed me to its board of governors.

It will also keep me away from my numerous friends and of course my family: my wife, who, as the granddaughter of Babasaheb Ambedkar, hardly bargained for this fate and daughters who are already disturbed not sure of what has been happening to me since August last year.

Coming from the poorest of poor families, I passed through the best institutes in the country with scholastic achievements. As an alumnus of the hallowed IIM Ahmedabad, I could have easily lived a luxurious life if I had chosen to ignore the social oddities around me.

However, to contribute to improving the lives of people, I decided to just make enough money to sustain my family at a reasonable standard of living. I decided to devote my time to make intellectual contribution, the only thing possible in my state, towards making the world a little more just.

Informed by this instinct, the residue of activism during my school and college days naturally landed me in organisations like Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR), of which today I am the general secretary, and the All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE), of which I am a presidium member.

There is not an iota of unlawfulness in either my voluminous writings or selfless activism. Rather, my entire academic career and corporate career of nearly four decades has been without a single blemish and is exemplar of integrity of the highest degree.

Therefore, even in my worst nightmares I could not imagine that the state apparatus of this country – to which I contributed so much through my professional life – could turn against me with such an abuse as a criminal.

It is not that the vindictive state apparatus in India has been criminalising innocent people to protect thieves and looters of this country that made this country the most unequal in the world. It is the manner in which it created the current criminal farce, out of an innocuous event called Elgar Parishad in Pune last year, to incarcerate select human rights defenders, intellectuals and activists in peoples' movements to curb dissent in the country that is unprecedented in its nakedness and blatant abuse of power. This may be the vilest plot in post-independence India that the state has hatched against its detractors in vengeance, disbanding every democratic decency.

[You may read further if you wish to know details of the case or else skip it to the last three paras]

The Plot Sinister and I

Justice P.B. Sawant, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, and justice B.G. Kolse Patil, an ex-judge of the Bombay high court, conceived the idea of using the 200th anniversary of the Last Anglo-Maratha battle that took place at Bhima-Koregaon in 1818 to mobilise people against the communal and casteist policies of the BJP.

They invited activists and progressive intellectuals to a planning meeting. I too was initially invited by someone on behalf of Justice Sawant and later by Justice Kolse Patil. I regretted that I could not attend the event due to my academic engagements, but acceded to his request to be the co-convener of the conference along with many others.

I did not hear what transpired until I saw a leaflet on WhatsApp regarding the Elgar Parishad. I was supportive of the idea of commemorating the end of the oppressive Peshawadom and also the martyrdom of the Mahar soldiers, whose names are inscribed on the obelisk at Bhima-Koregaon.

However, I was uncomfortable with the projection of the Elgar Parishad that the Bhima-Koregaon battle was won by Mahar soldiers to avenge their oppression during the Brahmanic rule of the Peshwas. I thought that such a distorted reading of history may further reinforce identitarian obsession of the Dalits, making it difficult to strike broader unity of people.

I wrote an article in The Wire along these lines. It evoked angry responses from Dalits. I rethought the entire matter and stood my stead, in the spirit of a true intellectual. Incidentally, this article, the responses to it, my reconfirmation of my views should dispel the charge that I was working at the behest of someone to instigate the Dalits. But where irrationality reigns supreme, such rationale will not break any ice with the regime or its police!

More than 250 organisations had joined the Elgar Parsihad, some of them belonging to the Marathas, who had never aligned politically with the Dalits in the past. Since the BJP-Shiv Sena formed a government in the state under a Brahmin chief minister, the displeasure of the Marathas manifested in various forms.

The biggest of course was the Maratha Morchas that erupted using the pretext of an unfortunate incident at Kopardi where a minor Maratha girl was raped and killed by some miscreants, one of whom happened to be a Dalit.

The administration had promptly acted and therefore the legitimate demand for justice to the victim was tilted to an unconnected demand for the annulment of the Atrocity Act. The mass mobilisation was used later to demand reservations for Marathas. Marathas began sensing the need to align with the Dalits to defeat the Brahmanic dispensation in the state. It reflected in

some of their youth organisations joining the Elgar Parishad and echoed their sentiment in the slogan, “Bury the Peshawai”.

It was just symbolic but could be seen as portending a risk to the BJP’s applecart. Both the main organisers of the conference also happened to be Marathas. It scared the power obsessed BJP, which responded with commissioning its agent provocateurs in Milind Ekbote of Samastha Hindutva Aghadi and Sambhaji Bhide of Shiv Chhatrapati Pratishan to create a rift between Dalits and Marathas.

A Samadhi of Sambhaji Maharaj, son of Shivaji, situated at Vadu Budruk, just four km from Bhima-Koregaon was used to cook up a controversy. For the last 300 years, the popular history of the Samadhi holds that when Aurangzeb killed and threw away the dismembered body of Sambhaji, one Govind Mahar collected the pieces and gave Sambhaji a respectable funeral. He built a memorial on his field. When he died, his family built his memorial by the side of Sambhaji’s.

The conspirator duo fabricated a story that it was not Govind Mahar but a Maratha family ‘Shivale’ who did it and provoked the Marathas against the Dalits. Using this rift at Vadu Badruk, they could incite Marathas against the Dalits congregating at Bhima Koregaon on January 1, 2018.

The preparations in surrounding villages were visible to the public but the administration feigned ignorance. On December 29, 2017, the Dalits found the canopy and the information board put up at the Samadhi of Govind Mahar damaged. It created tension between communities as designed, but to the misfortune of the conspirators, the villagers patched it up the next day.

On December 31, 2017, the Elgar Parishad took place as planned at Shaniwarwada. At the end of the conference, the people present were administered the oath that they would never vote for the BJP and would try to protect the constitution of India. The entire conference was video-recorded by the police as well as by the organisers. Nothing untoward occurred at the conference and all the delegates dispersed peacefully.

As for me, I had come to Pune for the marriage of my closest friend’s son on December 31, 2017, at 10:55 am. We stayed at Shreyas Hotel, attended the marriage the next day and left the hotel at 12.40 pm to travel back Goa. Having come to Pune, my wife wanted to see her nephew (Sujat Ambedkar) and sister-in-law (Anjali Ambedkar) at Shaniwarwada. Hence, we took a detour of 5-10 minutes and left in search of tyre shops to replace one of the tyres of my car that had developed a crack. Fortunately, I have evidence of the exact times enroute to establish that we did not attend the Elgar Parishad. Having arrived in Pune, I could have easily stayed on

through the conference. But due to my discomfort with the premise of the conference and the need to return to my work in the institute, I avoided it.

On January 1, 2018, when Dalits congregated at Bhima-Koregaon, the Hindutva goons mounted an attack as planned, pelting stones from the terrace of houses lining the road, beating people and burning the stalls. The police just looked on as they were not in enough number. It clearly established the administration's complicity in the plan.

That some mischief was cooking in the area was known almost to all common people. The December 29, 2017 incident at Sambhaji's Samadhi had given a clear confirmation for these rumours. But the administration feigned ignorance to let the riots happen.

The stray videos that made the rounds through WhatsApp messages clearly show the saffron flag bearers shouting slogans in the name of Ekbote and Bhide chasing and beating the Dalits who were caught unaware. Many Dalits were injured, their vehicles damaged, stalls burnt down and a youth killed.

I was completely unaware of what happened during the Elgar Parishad and even about the attack that happened on January 1 until that afternoon. This could clearly be established by the email correspondence between Siddharth Varadajan, the founding editor of The Wire, and I about the article The Wire carried on January 2, 2018.

Freehand to the police

On January 2, a social worker and member of the Bahujan Republican Socialist Party, Anita Ravindra Salve lodged a complaint with the Shikrapur police station naming Ekbote and Bhide as the culprits for the attack on the Dalits the previous day. No action was taken.

On January 3, Prakash Ambedkar called for a Maharashtra Bandh on the next day, which went largely without any untoward incident. However, the police actuated themselves thereafter and started arresting Dalit youths on the pretext of committing violence.

On January 8, one Tushar Damgade, an RSS functionary and a follower of Sambhaji Bhide, filed an FIR naming some Kabir Kala Manch activists for organising the Elgar Parishad, claiming that inflammatory speeches were given in the Parishad that caused violence on January 1. It was prima facie a preposterous claim.

Firstly, the police themselves had witnessed the proceeding of the Elgar Parishad and had a complete video recording to verify the claim. If indeed there were any inflammatory speeches, they could have filed FIR themselves and acted against the speakers. There was no need to wait for nine days for someone to file an FIR.

Next, the provocation in the Elgar Parishad could only be addressed to Dalits. If so, they would not get beaten if they were incited. In the melee, a Dalit youth lost his life. Nonetheless, the police picked it up for executing the scripted plan. They raided houses of the named people.

As if acting on a clue, they began insinuating that the Elgar Parishad was funded by the Maoists, ignoring the public statements by Justice Kolse-Patil, the chief organiser of the Elgar Parishad along with Justice Sawant that they did not need any money. Till date, having developed this event into a big conspiracy of the Maoists and misleading courts to believe in this lie, the police haven't enquired with these two justices to verify their premise. In the chargesheet, they have attached a statement attributed to Justice Sawant, which he has publicly denied. Even such a grave crime is ignored by the courts.

With the pretext of the Maoist funding theory, the Pune police, in a "joint operation" closely coordinated with the police of Nagpur, Mumbai and Delhi, raided the houses of and arrested five activists on June 6, 2018. They were not connected with the Elgar Parishad. After the arrest, the police weaved stories – from claiming that the five persons were behind the violence that disrupted the annual celebrations at Bhima Koregoan, to saying they were supporting Naxal activities to finally the most recent story that they were plotting a "Rajiv Gandhi style" assassination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These stories came handy for the police to apply the dreaded UAPA, which does not leave one with any defence and can incarcerate him/her for years in jails.

Basically, these raids were used to get hold of the electronic devices of the victims that can then be used to yield whatever police want to claim. The method of raids was strange. The raiding police would carry two witnesses from Pune to distant places like Delhi, Nagpur and Mumbai, making a mockery of laid down procedure.

They would confine the residents to a room and carry the confiscated materials to another room for sealing. Susan Abraham who is herself a lawyer and witnessed this process when her house was raided for her husband Vernon Gonsalves, said the police had brought their own computers and other devices with them. The police claim their process of confiscation is foolproof and the judges faithfully accept it, as they videoed the complete process. The judges would not care to understand that electronic devices could be tampered even remotely and any number of files could be transmitted within a matter of seconds. Video cannot be a method of establishing the integrity of electronic devices.

As an expert in information technology, I can prove this as fraudulent. The integrity of the computer devices could only be guaranteed by a hash value generated by a specific algorithm and unless (both) are acknowledged by the victim, it can never be relied upon. The courts

would take a blind view saying that it is a matter of trial, knowing fully well that it could take several years and until then an innocent person and his family could be completely ruined.

Police began claiming that they recovered letters (not mails—because mails are non-repudiable) from the computer of one of the arrested persons purportedly written by the Maoists. The letters produced by the police were bizarre, speaking of real names of people providing their real phone numbers, etc. That these letters were pure fabrication by the police can be seen from the manner they are worded. As though the Maoists are running a government organisation that elaborately communicates their plans and expects their recipients to preserve records for audit. They are known for their secrecy, using networks of human couriers and insisting upon destruction of messages after they were read. Such an organisation could not be communicating with its functionaries through essay like letters.

Many people analysed these letters and called them a fabrication. Experts such as Ajay Sahany, executive director of the Institute of Conflict Management, which deals with the studies of such organisations trashed them as fake. Even Justice Chandrachud of the Supreme Court, the only judge who has gone into the merit of the police case, in his minority judgment faulted these letters and recommended the entire case be investigated by the SIT as prayed for by Romila Thapar and other public intellectuals.

But the strange process of law would not budge by these contra evidence and would be ready to sacrifice the lives of innocent people at the altar of the so called process of law, which itself in reality is worse than punishment.

These letters had names of Rahul Gandhi, Prakash Ambedkar, Digvijay Singh, etc. indicating that they were also accomplices of the Maoists' plans. It squarely exposes the political intent of defaming these leaders. It is strange that the police would not even try to get the facts from these political people and the courts would not ask them why.

Strange charges against me

Along with six other activists, four of whom were arrested on August 28, 2018, the Pune police raided my house. They took a duplicate key from the security person and opened the house in our absence without any warrant. As written in the panchnama, they videographed the interiors and locked the house.

We were in Mumbai. As TV channels flashed the news of our house being opened and searched, my wife rushed back on the next flight and lodged a complaint with the Bicholim police station, providing our telephone numbers if the police wanted to ask us anything.

On August 31, the additional director general of police Parminder Singh addressed a press conference in Pune and among others, flashed one letter in support of my involvement. The letter was written by someone supposed to be a Maoist to some Com Anand referring to a Paris Conference in April 2018, which appeared to be true. I did attend an academic conference along with many scholars from all over the world, which was organised by the American University of Paris.

It was hilarious in its narrative, indicating that the Maoists gave money to this university and asked them to invite me for it. It also suggested that they arranged with “Com. Étienne Balibar” (a highly respected French Marxist scholar) that he would interview me (sic) and “Com. Anupama Rao and Shailaja Paik” (professors teaching in Bernard College and Cincinnati University, respectively) that they would invite me to their universities as guest lectures.

I obtained the letter from NDTV and mailed it to Balibar and the organiser of the conference, Lissa Lincoln. They were stunned by this canard and wrote back to me. Balibar angrily sent a letter of protest and even wrote to the French Embassy. Lincoln explained how the university invited me and bore the entire expense for my attendance. On the basis of solid evidence, I decided to prosecute Paramjit Singh for defamation and wrote a letter to the Maharashtra government on September 5, 2018, seeking its permission as per the procedure. There has been no response until today.

Meanwhile, since there was apparently no case against me and thinking that my letter to the government might have brought them a sense of guilt, I decided to file a petition for quashing the FIR against me to the high court. The bench rightly asked the police to submit an affidavit listing all the things that they had against me. The police submitted the affidavit listing five charges vide five letters, including the one discussed above. In my reply, I refuted all their contentions and proved that even if the letters were held as genuine, they do not make any triable case.

The other four letters were:

The first letter written by someone to someone saying that some Anand has taken responsibility of organising Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC), which came to limelight in 2015 when the IIT Madras administration derecognised them. I was then professor in the business school of IIT Kharagpur, more than 2,000 km away from Madras. If I had an inkling of organising students, I could do it in my own IIT; not the most distant IIT. In any case, when the APSC learnt about it in the newspapers, a founding member sent me a letter saying that I did not have any role in their formation or activities.

The second letter, again written by someone to someone referred to some Anand making a “good suggestion” in the meeting of Anuradha Ghandy Memorial Committee (AGMC). Well, if

that Anand also is identified as me, I am a member of the trust along with many other respectable members. It is a decade-old registered body with its PAN, bank account and respectable people as its members. It held public lectures by eminent scholars like Samir Amin and Angela Davis which were widely covered by the press. As for my role in the trust or committee, I could not even attend their meetings and lectures barring a couple of them over the last ten years because I was physically away (at IIT Kharagpur from 2010 to 2016 and thereafter at Goa).

The third letter again written by someone in which there is a reference to some Anand taking responsibility of organising a fact-finding into the Gadchiroli encounter. Presuming the Anand in the letter is me, I am a general secretary of Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR), whose raison d'être is to find the facts in cases of suspected human rights violations. However, the fact remains that neither I organised this committee nor participated in it. As a matter of fact, I have been a general secretary initially in deference to the wishes of the previous general secretary, P.A. Sebastian and thereafter, at the insistence of its members although I was away from Maharashtra all this while.

The fourth one was a note allegedly recovered from someone's computer that had a scribble: "Anand T .. 90T Surendra (through Milind)". It is interpreted as I was paid Rs 90,000 by Surendra through Milind (sic). It was ridiculous and product of poor imagination to imagine that I would take money as I have been paying that kind of money every month in income tax for years. In any case, such scribbling is said to be no evidence in law.

My rejoinder to the police affidavit thus refuted all these charges. But at the end, the police gave some 'sealed' envelop to the judges and the court rejected my petition, without referring to any of my above refutations or my personal credentials whether the police claims could be plausibly connected with my profile.

Thinking that I had a strong case, I approached the Supreme Court, but the court took a view that they would not interfere with the police investigation at this stage and asked me to seek a pre-arrest bail from the competent court.

[Resume here if you skipped the above paras]

The case has reached a crucial point where all my beliefs stand shattered and I am devastated by the prospect of imminent arrest. Nine of my co-accused are already in jail facing harassment of the legal process. Unlike me, they did not have an opportunity to seek your help. Your standing in solidarity with me will not only lend me and my family strength to endure this torture but also may give a message to the fascist rulers that there are people in India who say 'NO' to them.

The Political

AIFRTE condemns threatened arrest of Prof. Anand Teltumbde

Professor Anand Teltumbde, an IIM-Ahmedabad alumnus, IIT Professor, Executive Director of BPCL, Ex-MD & CEO of Petronet India, Senior Professor and Chair, Big Data Analytics in GIM, author of 26 books, columnist in EPW, writer of innumerable articles, a noted scholar of caste-class and public policy issues, leading public intellectual and democratic and educational rights activist faces imminent threat of arrest as an 'Urban Maoist' in the vilest post-independence plot by the state.

The criminal farce of exploiting an important day of commemoration for the Dalits, the anniversary of the battle that took place at Bhima-Koregaon in 1818 in which the Mahar soldiers played a leading role in defeating the Peshwa rulers, to incarcerate select human rights defenders, intellectuals and activists in peoples' movements and curb dissent in the country is an unprecedented and blatant abuse of power.

The police have claimed that there was a plot to carry out a "Rajiv Gandhi style" assassination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi! Fabrications such as this have allowed the police to apply the dreaded UAPA which leaves no defence for the arrested who can be incarcerated for years without evidence. It is a perfect vehicle for the police, acting at the behest of their political bosses, to claim knowledge of fabricated "crimes".

Under the circumstances, on 14th January 2019 the Supreme Court rejected Prof. Teltumbde's appeal for quashing the "false" FIR against him filed by the Pune Police, stating that the matter was under investigation and that he could seek pre-arrest bail from the competent court within four weeks.

Coming from the poorest of poor family, Prof. Teltumbde has passed through the best institutes in the country with scholastic achievements. It naturally propelled him to take cudgel for the disadvantaged people in the manner possible for his professional jobs. He is currently General Secretary of the Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) and Presidium Member of All India Forum for Right to education (AIFRTE), a movement for people's educational rights. There is not an iota of the "unlawful" either in his voluminous writings or his selfless activism. His entire academic career and corporate career of nearly four decades has been an example of integrity of the highest degree.

In the country, when the due process of law itself is a punishment that the police use to the hilt, it is nothing short of capital punishment to a professional-intellectual-activist like Prof Teltumbde. People in the past have been kept in jail for averagely five years before they were acquitted of every charge. There is absolutely no accountability of anyone in our justice delivery system for this unlawful incarceration and destroying victims and their families. Prof Teltumbde expressed his anguish over this prospect that he would be kept away from his intellectual activities, from his students who are admitted in the Big Data Analytics course, the first of its

kind he launched this year, and worried about the investment that GIM made. He is worried about his half-written manuscripts of books committed to various publishers, research papers at various stages of completion, and his family—wife, who, as the granddaughter of Babasaheb Ambedkar hardly bargained for this fate and daughters who are already disturbed not knowing whatever that has been happening to him since August last year.

AIFRTE strongly condemns the threatened arrest of Prof Teltumbde and demands that the Maharashtra government should immediately drop all charges (including those under UAPA) against Prof Anand Teltumbde.

AIFRTE also appeals to all its member organizations and to the university community across the country to immediately begin this process by approaching the national and regional media, issuing statements through social media and organizing protest meetings.

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The time has come to build a visible campaign in support of Prof. Teltumbde across the country and among various sections of the people to prevent his imminent arrest.

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THE STRUGGLE

When the State Conspires Against Us

Patricia Mukhim / Shillong Times

This article appears on Day 35 of the mining tragedy at Ksan. The lack of compassion for the 15 miners was palpable from Day One. Arguments like this have been floating around – “Why did the miners choose to go down that hell hole despite knowing the risks involved? Aren’t they there for the money?” And in hushed tones the conversation goes... “Apart from the three locals the others are not even, ‘our people.’ And nearly all of them are Muslims...perhaps illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Assam and Garo Hills in Meghalaya, so why bother? But all this is par for the course when humanity is dead. The fate of those people inside the mine is sealed by their very socio-economic status. For them digging coal is a livelihood. For the mine owner it is wealth accumulation.

Wealth is power and we see that so clearly. Without wealth you have no voice. Even democracy costs money. Without money you can’t buy votes, so how can you contest elections? Wealth can buy property across the country; it can buy loyalty from the political establishment. Wealth can buy academic degrees. There’s no end to what wealth can do. It can get you the best, most expensive treatment for the host of ailments you pick up because you are rich and pampered. The rich mine owner can either contest elections himself or fund someone’s election and then make him/her dance like a puppet on a string. So what if in the process of mining, the rivers are poisoned and turn a sulphurous blue? So what if the soil is rendered unfit for growing food? Those with money can buy the food they like at a premium. It’s the poor that need to grow their food in what is called ‘subsistence farming.’ And there are many subsistence farmers in Meghalaya in case we forget and continually raise the bogey that coal mining provides livelihoods. The question is: Livelihoods at what cost? The way the mine owners and their supporters are arguing the case for coal mining is: Who will provide livelihoods to the hundreds of people relying on coal mining? The same can be said for drug peddling too. The drug peddler also feeds his family and accumulates wealth from that trade. So why is he treated as a criminal? If drugs have taken away many young lives then coal mining too has killed and continues to kill many unfortunate souls.

What is tragic and also ironic is that the State is willing to go all out to argue the case on behalf of the mine owners. Why is the Conrad Sangma Government so beholden to the coal lobby? Is it because the entire 2018 election was funded by coal? Is it because the NPP had promised to work at lifting the ban on coal mining if it comes to power and now has to deliver by hook or crook? So is this a Government by, of and for the coal mine owners? What happens to all of us who are not mine owners? To those of us who care for this Mother Earth that we live in? Those who can no longer watch in silence while the earth is abused day in and day out? Earth cannot speak for itself. It only acts in fury and that fury is awaiting us. What will happen to the coal mine areas when an earthquake of high intensity strikes? The abandoned mines will collapse one by one and anyone who is inside at the time will be dead. And it’s not as if such phenomenon had not happened. In 2011 Sohkympkor village in Jaintia Hills witnessed cracks on the earth’s surface that cut across the PWD road near a market place. At the time Mr BM Lanong was Deputy Chief Minister and also the Minister Mining and Geology. After seeing the

cracks and speaking with geologists he was told the crack was due to rampant mining. After that there was silence on that front and Government never paid attention to the unscientific and hazardous mining practice in Meghalaya.

Then there are those who argue vociferously that the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution guarantees rights to tribals living under it to mine the earth beneath any which way they choose to. This is such a convoluted reading of a Constitutional guarantee provided to people at a time when they were part of the larger state of Assam with a predominantly non-tribal population. The Sixth Schedule was meant to conserve forests (other than reserved forests) water bodies and the culture of the people for whom it was created. Essentially the Sixth Schedule is for protection of our land; not for extractive mining which destroys the land and the waters that provide sustenance to us. Nowhere does the Schedule speak of individual rights of the tribal. It was envisaged to protect community rights. The rivers, forests and lands then were common property resources (CPR) which are meant to be shared inheritances, not privately owned. Much of the coal mines were once community-owned land which have been grabbed by a few moneyed people in connivance with the heads of the elaka. This abuse of the principles of the Sixth Schedule now also needs to be contested in a court of law because of the propensity of some to misuse this for private gains. The Sixth Schedule as conceived by JJM Nichols Roy was an instrument to protect tribal 'homelands', their culture and by extension their environment, for, how does culture thrive without the environment to foster it? Of course the Sixth Schedule also empowers the District Councils to enact laws on inheritance of property, marriage and social customs and is also vested with the power to try cases between tribals. The Sixth Schedule empowers the Councils to collect land revenue and taxes from markets etc., not to pay salaries to their staff but to utilise those funds for securing the rights of the community. And certainly the Sixth Schedule does not say a word about mining because that already comes within the purview of state laws.

And to those arbiters of tradition who keep harking back to the Instrument of Accession one would like to ask this question: What has the so-called 'Khlieh ki Nongsynshar Shnong' done to protect the rights of the poorest in the community? Have they taken cognisance of the large scale damage to the environment? Did our ancestors not care about Ka Mei Ramew (Mother Earth)? Do they ever allow the poor to have their voices heard in their elite gatherings? The socio-economic caste census 2011 is not lying when it says that 76% of rural Meghalaya is landless. Is the above organisation even concerned? In fact the above-mentioned organisation is not just elitist but patriarchal too. So whither the Sixth Schedule? Is it really protecting all of us tribals or some influential private mine owners who seem to have so many powerful people speaking on their behalf?

Plight of trapped miners in Meghalaya raises important question: Just how low will mining elite stoop to make a profit?

Patricia Mukhim

Only by a strange twist of fate will the miners — trapped in the flooded mine at Ksan in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills for over two weeks — survive the catastrophe. How can anyone inside a 70-foot vertical shaft and man-sized horizontal tables where coal is dug by people — more often by children whose mobility is easier inside these dank, dark mines — remain alive after 15 days? The miners use pick-axes to dig the coal and when enough is dug, they load it onto a box which is then pulled up by an equally crude method.

Anyone going into these rat holes knows that the mine roof could cave in any time and they could be trapped inside and left to die. The modus operandi is that people going inside the 70-foot shaft have to squat and work at digging the coal. The horizontal rat holes are no more than two or three feet high, so there's no way anyone can stand and work. That's how difficult rat hole mining is.

The miners — four from Assam, seven from the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and three from the local area in East Jaintia Hills — have been trapped inside the flooded mine for 15 days. There are hundreds of abandoned coal pits in the area and when miners dig around, they are not aware that they could hit an abandoned mine filled with water. That's how water entered the mines. Such mine accidents have been taking place since 1992.

They recurred in 2012, 2013 and 2014 when due to various reasons such as the cables of a crane carrying coal snapping midway and falling on workers, crushing them to death or because of the collapse of a mine roof. Coal-mining on a commercial scale in Meghalaya began way back in 1972. At the time, there were no television cameras to focus on mine tragedies. People from the area say they are not sure how many people are buried inside those mines when the mine floods or caves in due to shocks.

Unless some family members come looking for them, mine owners don't bother if people are trapped inside. It's considered a professional hazard where the miner opts to enter the mines knowing fully well the risks involved, but is driven to undertake this horrendous task because there is money in the job. In a sense these miners are the economic slaves of the 21st Century. They are forced by circumstances to undertake this precarious activity.

What is appalling in all of this is how long it took this news of the mine tragedy to travel to the rest of the country, although local papers with an online presence have been reporting on this from Day One. The national media only took cognisance of this news after around a week had passed and social media was rife with images of the mine in East Jaintia Hills. And then Rahul Gandhi decided to tweet about the tragedy three days ago, only because he needed to hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was in Assam but could not spare another 20 minutes to travel to the site of the tragedy. And now there is a full-fledged political battle about who has done what even as the miners are either struggling to stay alive or are, by now, perhaps dead.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) present in the East Jaintia Hills, as admitted by its commandant SK Singh, cannot dive beyond 30 feet — 40 feet short of the levels of water in the mine. Equipment, if it arrives, will come too late in the day to make a difference to human lives. The Kirloskar Brothers who manufacture powerful pumps that helped save the 13 young boys and their coaches from a flooded cave in Thailand have assured all help. The NDRF says it needs at least 10 pumps, each with horsepower of 100. The problem is that the requisition for this life-saving equipment went out too late. There are so many questions that need to be raised.

Why is it that not a single minister from the MDA government led by Conrad Sangma, visited the site of the tragedy? It was only on Thursday (14 days after the disaster) that two ministers — Lahkmen Rymbui (education minister) and Kyrmen Shylla (Minister for Disaster Management) — visited the ill-fated Ksan mine. The Congress MLA from Rajabala, Garo Hills, Dr Azad Zaman, visited the mine on the second day after the incident because seven of his constituents were among those trapped inside. We are certainly lacking in compassion or have reached a point of compassion fatigue.

What is even more appalling is the response of the Congress MP, Vincent Pala who raised a Zero Hour motion in Parliament on Thursday. We imagined his first priority would be to call attention to the plight of the trapped miners but, instead took the opportunity to argue on behalf of the coal mafia, asking that rat hole mining should now be regularised because it is a traditional practice. It is pathetic that someone should even ask that such an inhuman practice be allowed to carry on. It's like asking Sati to be legitimised, because it is part of tradition.

That the MP took the opportunity to speak at this important forum not for the miners and to question the Central government's apparent lack of empathy and responsiveness, but to plead for a selfish cause just goes to show how callous the political class has become. Pala and his family members also own coal mines and have acquired immense wealth from this trade.

The coal business has created a wealthy tribal elite that has now entered politics and literally runs the government. It is instructive that even the BJP promised to lift the ban imposed on coal mining by the National Green Tribunal in April 2014. The ban came after the rivers flowing from Meghalaya to Assam were poisoned with Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and a student's body from that state went to the Supreme Court. The NGT imposed the ban, but did not have the wherewithal to keep a watch on whether illegal mining is continuing, which it is.

Interestingly, even a month ago, the state government denied that there was any illegal coal mining happening in Meghalaya. And yet the media in the state reports consistently on how coal is illegally transported. This mining tragedy has therefore exposed the government's lie. Interestingly, in Meghalaya, the government and police officials also own mines. Hence, the collusion is complete.

Meghalaya has estimated coal reserves of 559 million tonnes (MT), spread over an area of 213.9 square kilometres (approximately one percent of the total geographical area of the state). On a daily basis, around five million MT of coal used to be exported to Bangladesh via the Tamabil border. That natural resources that generate revenue for the state should be

mined goes without saying, but such resources must be scientifically mined without too much adverse impact on humans and the environment.

The NGT had asked the state government to come up with a mining policy back in 2014, but the mine-owners have been putting pressure that rat hole mining should continue. Now they are using the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to argue in favour of traditional rat hole mining. Clearly, India's idea of positive discrimination vide the Sixth Schedule that was designed to protect the culture and tradition of the tribals of North East India is today becoming a double-edged sword. The Sixth Schedule is being bandied around as an instrument of the ruling mining elite.

How low will they stoop in this wealth-creation project is the question.

(The author is Editor, The Shillong Times)

THE STRUGGLE

Sukalo: The Face of Tribal Struggle in Sonbhadra, UP

Adivasis comprise about 70% of population of Sonbhadra, a heavily forested region in Uttar Pradesh. Many Adivasis living in the region have been denied of their lands and rights because of the Sections 4 and 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 192, a colonial legislation to regulate the movement and transit of forest produce. Many Adivasis, including women, have also been charged with false cases under this Act.

However, the collective and enduring struggle of Adivasis brought into force the Forest Rights Act, 2006 — an acknowledgment of the rightful ownership of Adivasis on their forests and land. Though the Act is yet to be implemented in its full essence, several activists struggle hard to bring this to reality. This is the story of Sukalo, an adivasi woman who refused to back down and continues to fight for the rights of her people despite all odds, even today. Sukalo is an important force in the struggle for implementation of Forest Rights Act 2006 in the Sonbhadra region.

“We will not beg, we will claim our lands back. It is clear to us that the Government is not supporting us. Our movement will win our rights back, I am sure!” says Sukalo Gond while tying her cattle as dusk approaches. Sukalo, in her fifties now, is an Adivasi leader from Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh. Marching almost rhythmically in a forest rights rally in 2006, her first such experience, Sukalo realised that the possibilities were many and things were bound to change for many like her in the days to come. Little did she know at the time that soon after, she will become one of the leading women activists of the forest struggle of Adivasis in Sonbhadra empowering other women through her own lived experience and life-struggles.

Adivasis In Sonbhadra

Prominent tribes residing in the Sonbhadra area are — Gond, Karwar, Pannika, Bhuiyan, Baiga, Cheron, Ghasiya, Dharkaar and Dhaunar. Most Adivasis residing in villages are dependent on forests for their livelihood. They often collect tendu leaves, honey, dry branches and medicinal herbs from the forests and sell those in the markets. Some also have small farms, on which they grow rice or different vegetables. Many Adivasis living in the region have been denied of their lands and rights because of the Sections 4 and 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927—a colonial legislation to regulate the movement and transit of forest produce. Many Adivasis have also been charged with false cases under this Act.

A Dam(n)ing Indictment of ‘Development’

While the Adivasis have found themselves at the peripheries of development models of the India state, this specific site of Sonbhadra and the Kanhar dam is a contested region that has seen interventions from many stakeholders. The Sonbhadra district is a victim of the uneven

development paradigm that India adopted after independence. The entire region is affected by industrial pollution and displacement of local people has become a regular phenomenon.

Researches have pointed out that Sonebhadra's waters have become poisoned and the air toxic to breathe. The Kanhar dam is placed in this spatial context. The initial foundation of the dam was laid in 1976. It was said that this project will impact Uttar Pradesh's Sonebhadra, Chhattisgarh's Sarguja and Jharkhand's Garhwa districts. According to an estimate, the water belt of the dam would cover 2000 sq kilometres and 80 villages belonging to 3 different states would come under the influence of this water belt. Due to this, about one lakh Adivasi villagers would lose their ancestral land.

The turning points in the construction of the Kanhar dam kept getting more dramatic as years passed. The work would start at regular intervals and then stop. A closer look at the documents of the Department of Irrigation and Public Works Department showed that though the project was never executed continuously yet the expenditures were shown throughout. The work was stopped in 1984 and the money was diverted to Asiatic games. It again started in 1989 and 16 families were displaced. After that, for almost two decades the work was stopped. What followed was multiple foundation stones laid by different people like Mayawati in 2011 and Shivpal Singh Yadav in 2012. But the work did not start anytime soon. All this while, the Adivasis constantly faced the threat of displacement.

Tired of this vicious cycle, the Adivasis in Sonebhadra started the Kanhar Bachao Andolan in 2000 on the initiative of Gram Swaraj Samiti. The purpose of this movement was to highlight and oppose the disastrous implications of the Kanhar Dam on nature and human beings in this area. The Adivasi and Dalit villagers of the area clearly rejected the dam. Human rights groups like People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) associated with the movement called the dam not only illegal but also unconstitutional.

Sukalo's Initiation into the Campaign

Sukalo is the living witness to a time when there was no awareness among the forest dwellers about their rights and claims on forest land. Atrocities and violence against them was rampant. The police would often barge into their houses and destroy their hutments or physically abuse them with impunity.

Her initiation in the movement to demand the implementation of forest rights in 2006 and the involvement thereafter in various struggles strengthened Sukalo's belief that rights had to be fought for and that the Adivasis will not beg! Sukalo is not only a leader, a treasurer with the All India Union for Forest Working People (AIUFWP), but also takes cares of her family, her cattle.

When the work of the Kanhar dam resumed in December 2014, the villagers protested this and sat for a dharna. They were intimidated all the while. As they shifted the protest site closer to the dam, the cadres of Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) opened fire on the groups of

peaceful protesters on April 14, 2015. While one of the protesters Akklu Chalo died in this, several others got seriously injured.

Sukalo recalls the horrific sight of the police firing. "18 rounds were fired right in front of my eyes. It was terrible. They arrested almost all the women leaders including Rajkumari immediately". She adds, "I had no option but to run away, they were arresting everybody." Being on the move for 15 days, traveling through Chhattisgarh and Bihar alone, she reached Delhi. She stayed in Delhi for a month, after which she returned to Sonebhadra.

In the wee hours of June 30, 2015, just as a big dharna and rally in support of a 100 day nationwide campaign for land rights and labour rights was about to begin, Roma and Sukalo along with other activists were arrested and sent to Mirzapur jail.

Incarceration and Intimidation

Sukalo describes the experience of the month long incarceration in the Mirzapur jail. "It was a life-changing experience. A lot of women and children were fabricated in false cases and imprisoned. Some women had just given birth to children." However, Sukalo continued the struggle even from within the four walls of the jail. She, along with her other inmates sent multiple letters to the higher ups. She sat for multiple hunger strikes within the prison, both for basic facilities within the prison and the rights of land and resources outside. She would hand over the letters to other activists during Mulaqats.

Her struggles combined with the resilient efforts of her comrades and their unity within the jails, won all of them minimum wages for the work they did inside. Though she was released later, all the fabricated cases still remain foist on her.

Describing the experience in the jail and how their collective strength turned it around into a struggle for rights within the four walls she often goes back in time. She remembers a time when daily wages that the Adivasis would receive were as low as Re. 1 or Rs. 2. Mostly, the wages would be much lesser than minimum wage, a concept they did not quite know at the time. She literally grew with the struggle not just for forest rights but also labor rights of the Adivasis residing in the area. When she got involved, most Adivasi women were oppressed, both in the family and in the society outside and were not aware of their rights. However today she resolutely speaks, "We have a right to live if we are born on this earth. While there was a time when I could not look any man up in the eyes, today I even negotiate alone, whether it be a minister or police officer."

Sukalo resolves to continue the fight at any cost despite the challenges that lay ahead. "The struggle is not just for land, but the dignity of existence of an Adivasi woman." Sukalo says with a sense of finality.

THE MEDIA

2018: The year Indian women journalists took the power back

Rituparna Chatterje / Newslaundry

In a year of “unprecedented hostilities” towards journalists, “nearly half” the media deaths were from countries that are not at war—India, Mexico and, for the first time, the US—according to a report by the non-governmental, non-profit media watchdog Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF). India, RSF said, was one of the deadliest countries for journalists with six fatalities, attempts to murder, and online hate campaigns targeting journalists.

It’s been a disquieting year for women in media. It has also been a year of outstanding courage and resilience. From death threats to sustained harassment from both governmental and non-governmental agencies and shadow armies online, women have had to take on a bruising battle just to be able to do their job.

In May this year, Masrat Zahra, a Srinagar-based freelance photojournalist who captures the conflict in one of the world’s most militarised zones, posted on Facebook a candid picture one of her colleagues shot of her thick in action in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir. Zahra, who is seen half crouching in the photo, surrounded by Indian Army men in an orchard, captioned it “Gun vs Camera”. Within hours she was called a “mukhbir”, or informer, and was the target of a cycle of harassment women who on social media platforms know intimately.

Journalist Rana Ayyub, who won two awards this year—the Outlook Youth Icon of The Year and the Most Resilient Global Journalist at the Peace Palace in Hague—was the target of a deepfake pornographic clip for speaking up about the rape of a minor girl in Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir. In the days that her harassment continued, she had to be sent to the hospital with heart palpitations, anxiety and high blood pressure caused purely due to stress. But the awards, she said, have come as a salve and acknowledgment of her work.

“It managed to ease my nerves for what has been the worst year of harassment and intimidation for my work,” Ayyub told Newslaundry. “(There were) fake tweets, rape and death threats, a morphed porn video circulated in my name after which I was doxed. I hope I can put this behind me and expect a saner and safer 2019 not just for me but for every journalist in the country in the months leading up to the general election.”

In April, an FIR was lodged against journalist and cartoonist Swathi Vadlamudi for allegedly hurting religious sentiments of Hindus for raising the issue of sexual harassment of women depicted through a cartoon on Ram and Sita.

Women aren’t alien to retributive action by law enforcement forces guided by majoritarian public sentiment. They understand the danger to which their field work exposes them in addition to gendered hate campaigns online. Often they are targets of all three with little or no support from institutions that are tasked with their protection.

In March this year journalist Emmy C Lawbei was baton-charged by the Assam police while she was out covering a students' protest on the Assam-Mizoram border. Lawbei posted a photo of her shoulder and back with a patchwork of purple bruises that she sustained when the police started charging at her. She told them several times that she was a journalist. It didn't matter. Patricia Mukhim, the editor of The Shillong Times, came under attack in April when two motorcycle-borne assailants hurled a petrol bomb into a bedroom of her house. Thankfully, Mukhim escaped unhurt.

The threats kept coming.

"I will hang you," Nidhi Razdan was told via an Instagram message. Journalists Sagarika Ghose, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, among others, were part of an assassination hit list put up by one Vikram Aditya Rana on Facebook threatening them with the fate of slain journalist Gauri Lankesh.

In Chennai, journalist Sandhya Ravishankar took to Twitter to describe her targeted harassment after she published a four-part report on the mining mafia. The petrol tube of her bike was cut and the CCTV footage of her meeting with a former DGP in 2017 at a cafe in Chennai was leaked.

Media was often complicit in violating the rules that guide responsible reportage. Times Now in May broadcast two shows on the Tarun Tejpal rape case titled "Secrets of a dark night" that were both blatantly violative of India's laws and a survivor's right to privacy.

Independent journalist Swati Chaturvedi, who was awarded the RSF's Prize for Courage this year, said she'll remember 2018 for good reasons. "I did some investigative stories that had huge impact, such as the Rajan list of defaulters, and the expose on the India Foundation and conflict of interest. Happily can't even remember all (her stories from 2018), which is brilliant for a work-obsessed person. Winning the RSF prize for courage—the first Asian to be awarded—was the cherry on the cake," she told Newslaundry.

The world watched in horror as a group of journalists—Saritha Balan (The News Minute), Radhika Ramaswamy (News18), Pooja Prasanna (Republic TV), Mausami Singh (India Today) and Sneha Mary Koshy (NDTV)—came under attack while covering the protests following a Supreme Court order overturning an age-old ban on the entry of women of menstrual age to the Sabarimala temple. Protestors smashed the windows of Ramaswamy's car and kicked Balan. Singh was reportedly dragged from a nearby bus and slapped and stoned by protestors. Prasanna's car was surrounded and she was attacked with sticks.

The already unsafe spaces that women work in are often vitiated further by the misogyny of those in power—the men who have hundreds under their command to threaten the safety of a woman with a stray comment. "Illiterate scoundrels are now in media," BJP leader SV Shekher said after journalist Lakshmi Subramanian alleged that the Tamil Nadu governor "patronisingly" patted her on the cheek in order to evade a question asked by her.

But let this not be a cataloguing of the grounds women have been forced to give to be able to tell the stories that matter. Let this year be also remembered for the tectonic shift in public response following the #MeToo dialogue in India.

In a power move that cracked open the lid over news media's most sordid open secret, an army of women exposed systemic sexual abuse in the newsrooms and the media gods that perpetrate them. The mask was pulled off the men who have built illustrious careers on the work, life and labour of women.

The fire that journalist Priya Ramani lit, scores of women carried forward. But for the courage of Pallavi Gogoi, Sandhya Menon, Shutapa Paul, Shuma Raha, Suparna Sharma, Prerna Singh Bindra, Kadambari Wade, Ghazala Wahab, Anoo Bhuyan, Japleen Pasricha, Sonora Jha, Avantika Mehta, Sharda Ugra and many, many other women, the resistance would have been years in coming.

This year has also tested the courage under fire of Dalit women reporters, particularly those reporting from the heartlands. The Khabar Lahariya team has brought out the stories of women's fight against institutionalised patriarchy and domestic violence among others and their feedback from the ground after the second wave of #MeToo is heartening.

"Men have stopped sending porn videos, blue films and morphed photos for now. We can sense a fear from them that women might speak out of they say or do something objectionable," Khabar Lahariya editor-in-chief Meera Devi told The Quint.

When asked to name the women reporters who stood out in 2018, senior journalist Laxmi Murthy told Newslaundry: "I don't believe in making stars of anyone." But she has her eyes set on specific goals for women in 2019. "Creating space for every woman journalist to have a voice, overcoming lack of privilege/barriers in language, region, caste and class. Visibilising the work of scores of women journalists whose contribution to journalism remains unacknowledged," she added.

Make no mistake, women are fighting back—be it against structural misogyny, pay disparities, or lack of access to equal opportunities. Hopefully 2019 will be a year that will enable conversations that will help bridge the gap.