

janata

Vol. 75 No. 40
October 25, 2020

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MAS Wins Historic Elections in Bolivia

Neeraj Jain

The Movement towards Socialism (MAS) party in Bolivia, has swept the elections in Bolivia, according to an exit poll, surpassing what was expected in the polls.

MAS candidate Luis Arce received 52.4% of votes, while candidate Carlos Mesa of Citizens' Community (CC) alliance reached 31.5%, according to the poll done by consulting firm Ciesmori.

The law establishes that to win in first round, the winner must obtain 50% plus one votes, or at least 40% with a 10 percentage-point lead over the second most popular candidate.

Upon learning the unofficial election results, Arce thanked the Bolivian people for their support and trust and reiterated that he will work to regain stability and social peace.

De facto President Jeanine Añez acknowledged the defeat and congratulated the winners on Twitter.

Former President Evo Morales tweeted from Argentina where he is taking refuge after the 2019 coup d'état, *Sisters and brothers: the will of the people has prevailed. There has been a resounding victory for the MAS-IPSP. Our political movement will have the majority in both chambers. We have returned*

millions, now we will return dignity and freedom to the people.

Aware that it would be a thorny road for his homeland to rise again after the coup d'état, two massacres and the administration of a de facto government that in addition to persecutions, it cracked the economy and health care in just 11 month, Evo knows that a period of reconstruction starts now.

'Jallalla Bolivia, Jallalla democracy,' he said recently in this political refuge where he has lived since December 2019, a few days after the electoral victory of Alberto Fernandez, who allowed him to spend time in Buenos Aires after the coup d'état and amid a difficult departure, via Mexico, to preserve his life.

This Quechua-Aymara word unites the concepts of hope, festivity and beatitude, concepts that Morales has fought for since he arrived in this country 11 months ago, after a tough journey, so that his nation could recover democracy after the coup d'état that overthrew him.

Bolivia's first indigenous president, accused by the OAS of fraud in the 2019 elections that led to the coup, and by the de facto government of multiple crimes, was even banned from being a

candidate to the Senate on behalf of Cochabamba.

But after the victory of the MAS, his hope for being in his homeland is about to come true, although he also knows that the process led by Luis Arce has to be protected from all fronts. Arce was in charge of the economic cabinet during the Evo Morales Government, one of the pillars that was most developed during his 14 years in the presidency.

In the future, all Bolivians must prioritize the consolidation of the country's democracy, peace and economic reconstruction, Morales said on Sunday, at one of two press conferences he gave. He also called to put differences aside to reach a great national agreement.

With Lucho, as he calls Arce affectionately, and former Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca (in his role of vice president), together we will build a country that will put resentments aside and will never resort to revenge, underlined the former president.

(Compiled by us from newsreports available on the internet.)

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US-Backed Coup Gov't Concedes Defeat in Bolivia – But Difficult Road Ahead

Alan MacLeod

Bolivia's Movement to Socialism (MAS) party is celebrating what appears to be a crushing, landslide victory in Sunday's elections. Although official vote counting is far from over, exit polls show an overwhelming triumph for the socialists, and a repudiation of the right-wing military government of Jeanine Añez, who has ruled since the coup last November. At the same time, the corporate press appears less than pleased about the return to democracy for the Andean country.

In order to win outright in the first round, the top candidate needs at least 40 percent of the popular vote and a lead of 10 points over their nearest rival, and multiple polls have indicated that the MAS ticket of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca has won more than 50 percent, and have achieved a lead of over 20 points on their nearest challenger, Carlos Mesa (president between 2003 and 2005) — quite a feat in a five-way election. The MAS is also expected to have won a large majority in the senate.

Añez, who came to power in a coup overthrowing President Evo Morales last November, and whose government has constantly postponed the election throughout the year, knew the game was up and lauded the MAS on their remarkable achievement. "We do not yet have an official count, but from the data we have, Mr. Arce and Mr. Choquehuanca have won the election. I congratulate the winners and ask them to govern with Bolivia and democracy in mind," she wrote. Añez decided to drop out of the election herself last month in an

attempt to boost Mesa's chances of stopping Arce. However, today Mesa accepted defeat as well. "The result is overwhelming and clear. The difference is wide," he lamented.

Media disappointment at return of democracy

Across the spectrum, corporate media endorsed the events of November, refusing to label them a coup. The New York Times editorial board claimed that the "increasingly autocratic" tyrant Morales had actually "resigned," after "protests" over a "highly fishy vote." The Washington Post did the same. "There can be little doubt who was responsible for the chaos: newly resigned president Evo Morales," their editorial board wrote, as they expressed their relief that Bolivia was finally in the hands of "more responsible leaders" like Añez, (who, at the time, was giving security forces orders to shoot her opponents in the streets). Despite this, *The Wall Street Journal's* board decided the events of November constituted "a democratic outbreak in Bolivia."

Today, therefore, the corporate press is in a very tough spot, as they have to explain to their readers why the Bolivian people have just handed an overwhelming, landslide victory to a party they have been presenting as an authoritarian dictatorship who were overthrown by popular protests last year.

A year of political turbulence

Last October, Morales won an unprecedented and not uncontentious fourth term. Yet the U.S.-backed

opposition refused to accept the results, claiming that they had been rigged. The Organization of American States immediately backed them up, producing a flawed report on election meddling, something that was almost immediately disproven. Nevertheless, the right-wing mobilized and began a widespread campaign of terror, targeting, attacking, and kidnapping MAS politicians. On November 10, police and military commanders joined the coup, demanding Morales resign or else they would take matters into their own hands. Morales decided to flee to Mexico but made clear he was only leaving to prevent a bloodbath.

The military picked Añez, a little known senator from a party who gained only four percent of the public vote, to become president. She immediately granted security forces total pre-immunity for all crimes committed during the “re-establishment of order.” Her new interior minister, Arturo Murillo, oversaw the creation of masked, black-clad paramilitary units specifically aimed at political subversives, foreigners, and human rights groups. Journalists were attacked and, in one case, beaten to death, while foreign and alternative media were shut down completely. Murillo promised to “hunt down” his opponents like dogs. Morales himself was charged with crimes against humanity and faces spending the rest of his life in prison if he returns to his home country. Other MAS leaders on yesterday’s ballot also face long prison terms on dubious charges.

Añez pushed through the privatization of natural resources and state-owned businesses while in office, accepting loans from predatory organizations like the

International Monetary Fund. She also reorientated her country’s foreign policy away from an independent path towards one completely in line with U.S. foreign policy aims, pulling out of multiple regional alliances and entering new ones. Under Morales, for example, Bolivia had declared Israel a ‘terrorist state.’ Yet less than a month after the coup, Añez and Murillo were inviting IDF troops to the country to train their police forces in dealing with “leftist terrorism.”

The government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic has also taken on a decidedly right-wing tone. Cuts to health provisions and the expulsion of hundreds of Cuban doctors (whom the government labeled as “terrorists”) caused the public health system to crash just before the pandemic became worldwide news. As a result, Bolivia has the third-highest COVID-19 death per capita rate in the world, comfortably surpassing the United States in severity. Añez herself contracted the virus in July.

Añez used the intensity of the pandemic as justification to continually suspend the elections she claimed she would hold, calling herself merely an “interim president.” Yet many inside the country felt the coronavirus was being used as an excuse to keep herself in power indefinitely. Throughout the year, Bolivia was engulfed in near continual protests, shutting the country down. As a result, the summer was marked by the rise of the virus and by a weeks-long peaceful general strike calling for elections. Fearing a potential revolution, Añez conceded and agreed to hold them in October.

After months of organized

popular struggle in the face of a coup government that had been massacring them, Sunday’s result has been widely interpreted as a repudiation of the coup and a vote for socialism. *MintPress*’ Ollie Vargas, who has never made a secret of his political persuasions, said in the wake of the results:

On a personal level, I can’t believe this is finally happening, but it’s what we’ve always known. Despite the massacres, despite the persecution, despite U.S. intervention, the MAS is back and even more powerful. They can’t put a lid on the majority of the people.”

Arce himself was in an equally joyous mood, telling Vargas last night that, “It seems that a great part of the Bolivian people have recovered their soul.” “I think the Bolivian people want to retake the path we were on,” he added. MAS supporters took to the streets to celebrate their victory, made all the more unlikely given the repression they have been subject to under Añez’s military regime.

Fears of violence and vote rigging against the MAS were rife, especially as the government had blocked foreign election observers from overseeing events, threatening to jail them. On Saturday, Argentinian congressman Federico Fagioli, an official observer representing his government, was arrested by police at El Alto airport. Video of the incident shows Fagioli shouting “I am being kidnapped” as multiple officers pick him up and forcefully carry him away.

What’s Next?

If Añez’s government does indeed step down, it will represent only the second time in Latin

American history that a U.S.-backed coup against a progressive administration has been overturned. However, in Venezuela in 2002, the countercoup took less than 48 hours. In Bolivia, people have organized for nearly a year to achieve the same ends, giving the government far more time to embed and establish itself. The Bolivian people have a long history of organized struggle bringing down governments. In the early 2000s, nationwide protests against gas and water privatizations rocked the country, toppling unrepresentative regimes (including that of Mesa's in 2005), setting the stage for Morales to become the most influential figure in Bolivian politics of the last 15 years.

The first indigenous president in the majority indigenous country's history, Morales ran on the idea of 21st-century socialism, using his country's considerable mineral wealth to fund social programs that

cut poverty by half and extreme poverty by three-quarters, halving unemployment and increasing the country's GDP by 50 percent. Yet his nationalization program and his outspoken criticism of capitalism and American imperialism on the world stage made him a prime target for regime change in Washington, who strongly supported the events of November, immediately recognizing and supporting Añez's legitimacy.

Despite the fact that the MAS' electoral victory looks certain, it is far from clear what sort of resistance they will face from other sources of power. "The next few days will be key for consolidating democracy in Bolivia. The MAS will need to embrace the patriotic elements within the police and military, to ensure the U.S./Murillo don't launch a second coup against the majority of Bolivians," Vargas warned. And how will the MAS deal with the coup plotters themselves, clearly guilty

of serious human rights abuses. Are they really in any position to exert authority over the situation?

Of late, wherever there are governments critical of U.S. power (Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Iran, etc.) they are met with crushing sanctions in an attempt to destroy their ability to oppose Washington. Bolivia under Morales had already been labeled by some in the U.S. as a "narco-dictatorship." If Arce does indeed come to rule his country, will he receive the Nicolas Maduro treatment?

For MAS supporters, however, those are questions for a different day. Today, they are celebrating a stunning and historic victory cheered by progressives the world over but angering Washington and corporate journalists in equal measure.

(Extract. Alan MacLeod is a Staff Writer for MintPress News, and has also written several books. Article courtesy: MintPress News.)

Progressive Champion Jacinda Ardern Wins Historic Landslide Reelection in New Zealand

Brett Wilkins

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern—hailed by progressives around the world for her government's response to the Covid-19, gun violence, and climate crises—has won a landslide reelection victory as vote counting in the country's general election came to a close on Saturday.

The *New Zealand Herald* reports Ardern's center-left Labour Party surged to certain victory, winning 49.1% of the vote and crushing the center-right National Party in an "absolute drubbing." The Nats received just 26.8% of votes cast, which means Labour will enjoy a 64

to 35 seat advantage in the 120-seat parliament.

Ardern arrived at Auckland Town Hall on Friday night to a jubilant reception as she took the stage with Labour MPs and her partner, radio and television presenter Clarke Gayford.

"Tonight New Zealand has shown the Labour Party its greatest support in at least 50 years," Ardern declared to raucous cheers.

Ardern said Labour was committed to building critical infrastructure, transitioning to 100% renewable electricity, the environment, and supporting the nation's most

vulnerable people.

"Over the next three years there is much work to do," she said. "We will build back better from the Covid crisis; better stronger with the answers to the [issues] New Zealand already faces."

Labour's result is the best that any party has ever achieved since the South Pacific nation adopted mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) in 1994.

National Party candidate Judith Collins, suffering what the Herald described as "an absolute bloodbath," phoned Ardern to congratulate her on her "outstanding result."

To the left of Labour, the Green Party won approximately 8% of the vote, with Green MP Chlöe Swarbrick on track to win the key Auckland Central electorate. Swarbrick will become just the second Green MP to win an electorate seat in the party's 30-year history.

Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson congratulated Ardern for "an extraordinary win" and said her party hopes to be part of a "strong, truly progressive government."

Around the world, progressives hailed Ardern's victory. The 40-year-old won widespread acclaim for the manner in which her government has dealt with some of the greatest crises facing the nation of 4.9 million people.

Foremost among these is the Covid-19 pandemic, which as of Saturday has claimed just 25 lives in the country. In stark contrast, the U.S. state of Alabama, which has the same population as New Zealand, has lost more than 100 times as many people to Covid-19.

Ardern's government has also passed landmark climate legislation that commits the nation to reduce its carbon emissions to zero over the next 30 years, and it drew applause from U.S. gun control advocates when it responded to the March 15, 2019 Christchurch mosque massacre by banning assault weapons just six days later.

Inevitably, envious progressive observers in the U.S. drew comparisons between Ardern and President Donald Trump, who John Nichols, the national affairs correspondent at *The Nation*, called "polar opposites".

(Courtesy: Common Dreams, a US non-profit newsportal.)

Kill the Bill, or It Will Kill Us All

Fathimah Fildzah Izzati

On 5 October, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's People Representative Council (the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, or DPR) adopted the "Omnibus Bill on Job Creation", a collection of regulations on labour law, investment and the environment vehemently opposed by labour movements across the country.

The Omnibus Bill is the successor of the "Master Plan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development" (MP3EI); both were formulated to create a "friendly climate" to investment. Since the 1965 anti-communist purge, Indonesia's political leadership has dedicated itself to fostering economic growth and foreign investments, no matter how they affected the welfare of working people.

Now, many of the articles included in the Omnibus Bill pose a significant danger to the well-being of Indonesia's working people and the environment. The sole purpose of the bill is to drive capital accumulation, i.e. to trim due diligence processes for granting business permits, reduce labour costs, perpetuate the flexible labour market system, and suppress trade union activities.

Both the government and DPR argued that easing business permits would reduce corruption. However, it has already become clear it will only give big business leeway to exploit natural resources or build infrastructure with less regulation. For example, requirements for a full AMDAL (environmental impact analysis) procedure, a minimum

standard needed in assessing business operation, will be relaxed.

"Job creation" is nothing but a pretext in the Omnibus Bill. The story of the "demographic bonus"—which implies Indonesia's overabundance of a reserve army of labour—has justified the proliferation of low-paid casual jobs in Indonesia's flexible labour market. It will also further increase the informalization of work, ending job security and social protection for the working class—which is already almost extinct.

But workers in the formal sector are all too familiar with precarity. Many of them are already caught in casual working arrangements or working in hazardous environments. With the Omnibus Bill passed into law, their vulnerability will be expanded to all sectors.

The drafting of the bill was itself a violation of the democratic process, involving only representatives of capital. The task force that gave feedback on the bill, fully drafted by the government through the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, was dominated by Indonesia's business associations while labour representatives were excluded. Moreover, both the government and DPR have refused to circulate the bill draft publicly from the very beginning.

Because of the threat that the Omnibus Bill poses to Indonesian society, workers, students, peasants, and all elements of social movements have boldly opposed it. Although it is dangerous to rally during the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of people in different cities now take to the streets..

At the same time, police repression has dramatically increased. Many of the protesters were beaten and arrested without due process and narratives about rioting protesters and vandalism continue to be echoed

by the government, social media influencers, and mainstream media to delegitimize protest.

Indonesia is in a dire situation. We need all our international comrades to stand in solidarity with the popular resistance in

Indonesia, directed not only against this particular draconian bill but also any type of capitalist exploitation.

(Fathimah Fildzah Izzati is a socialist scholar from Indonesia and editor of IndoProgress.)

Mahatma Gandhi's Seminal Ideas Underpinned the Adoption of the UN Charter

Miloon Kothari

As the world confronts the twin threats of COVID-19 and climate change, the imperative for a multilateral system of governance, based on the ethics borne from human rights, solidarity and environmental justice, has never been more urgent.

2019 marked 150 years since the birth of Mahatma Gandhi; 2018 marked 75 years since the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights; 2019 and 2020 mark 100 years since the formation of the League of Nations; and 2020 mark 75 years since the adoption of the UN Charter.

We need to reflect on these commemorations of the lives of individuals, seminal documents and the creation of institutions. The time is opportune to examine the connections between these anniversaries from the perspective of India's contribution to the advent of an era of global multilateralism premised on the upholding of human rights for all.

The tenuous nature of global peace and security also compels us to revisit the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi to determine whether the concepts that underpinned his seminal contribution to a just world hold relevance today.

Five core and foundational

concepts comprise Gandhiji's contribution towards a just world: *Ahinsa* (non-violence); *Satyagraha* (truth force that guides nonviolent resistance); *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all); *Swaraj* (self-rule; freedom) and *Trusteeship* (custodianship of the earth and sharing of wealth and resources).

These seminal ideas and lessons learnt from their practice contributed to the content of the notion of universality of human rights and the concept of multilateralism as underpinning the work of United Nations as a body for all nations. This contribution is not well known and remains largely unexplored by Mahatma Gandhi's biographers. In his writings and actions towards the freedom of India and the formation of the United Nations, Mahatma Gandhi conceptualised the fundamental principles of multilateralism: balancing the sovereignty of nations with the necessity of a global organisation; the need to build a peaceful world based on respect for non-violence and human rights; the necessity of disarmament and denuclearisation and so forth.

Mahatma Gandhi issued a statement directed at the 1945 conference in San Francisco that

produced the UN Charter. One section of his statement quoted from the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolution of August 8, 1942, says:

“The future peace, security and ordered progress of the world demand a world federation of free nations. An independent India would gladly join such a world federation and co-operate on an equal basis with other countries in the solution of international problems. Thus the demand for Indian independence is in no way selfish. Its nationalism spells internationalism.”

In the nascent years of the UN, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru instructed our representative at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, to raise the issue of racial practices against the Indian minority in South Africa. In face of fierce opposition from the Allied countries, India succeeded in challenging the ‘domestic jurisdiction’ and ‘sovereignty’ clause (Article 2(7)) of the UN Charter by having a resolution passed that sought to censure South Africa for its racist treatment of Indians living in South Africa. The victory India gained at the UNGA in 1946 opened up completely new horizons

through which countries could no longer hide behind their nations boundaries and continue to violate human rights without facing a global challenge at the United Nations. The resolution that India succeeded in having adopted by the UNGA in 1945, paved the way for the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that codified the principles of universality and equality of all nations – a foundational principle of multilateralism.

India's influence in the drafting process of UDHR

Mahatma Gandhi also had a strong influence on our representatives that took part in the drafting process of the UDHR (Hansa Mehta, Begum Hamid Ali, Lakshmi Menon, M.R. Masani). Guided by Gandhiji's messages that infused India's freedom struggle in which they had all taken part, these individuals' influenced the content of seven articles of the UDHR:

Women's rights (India insisted on the word 'men' be replaced with 'human beings'); *Non-discrimination* (India added the words 'colour' and 'political opinion' as criteria for non-discrimination); *Freedom of movement* (India added the article calling for freedom of movement within a country); *The right to health* (India suggested that health is much more than 'the right to medical care' and proposed the term 'right to health'); *The right to work* (India added the principle of 'just and favourable conditions of work'); *Rights and Duties* (India insisted on the UDHR recognising the crucial role of duties done to rights attained) and *Secularism* (India's delegates made it clear that the UDHR applied to everyone in the

world and that there were millions of people who did not believe in God. The UDHR, consequently states that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed by nature with reason and conscience, and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood').

Many of the ideas that informed the content of the UDHR came from the intense debates and articulated outcomes of India's constitutional debates. There was a one-year overlap between the meetings of our Constitutional Assembly and the process at the UN that led to the adoption of the UDHR. Hansa Mehta was both a member of the Constituent Assembly and Eleanor Roosevelt's team at the UN Commission on Human Rights that drafted the UDHR. In turn our Constitution was also inspired, as reflected in several articles, by the UDHR.

It was in the years following the adoption of the UDHR that India, following lessons learnt from the conceptual thinking of Mahatma Gandhi, championed the cause of decolonisation. In ensuring that the UN had an influential inter-governmental body – the General Assembly – where all UN member states had an equal voice, India also made major contributions to the institutional architecture of the United Nations.

As we continue to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's 150-year birth anniversary, and are in the middle of commemorating 75 years of the UN, we need to proudly recognise the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders from India to the development of multilateralism as a defining, and lasting, characteristic of the global work of the United

Nations. The preponderance of conflict across the world and the now constant threat of the devastation that climate change brings compel us to recognise the contemporary relevance of the ideas of global solidarity and commonality of purpose espoused by Mahatma Gandhi.

Given the multiple crises the world faces today, from COVID-19 to conflict to climate change, can we draw lessons from the powerful ideology of non-violence and the concepts of sarvodaya that were some of the core messages of Mahatma Gandhi's life and work? Can we not recast Gandhi's visionary 'balance' between nationalism and internationalism; the necessary corrective of duties done and human rights acquired.

(Miloon Kothari is a human rights scholar/activist and was a former Special Rapporteur with the UN Human Rights Council. Article courtesy: The Wire.)

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लागत मूल्य : २०० रुपये में उपलब्ध।

संपर्क : जनता ट्रस्ट - ७७३८०८२१७०
(पोस्ट का खर्च अलग)

North East Delhi Pogrom: India's Top IPS, IAS, Eminent Former Judges to Probe Riots

12 October 2020: India's top IPS, IAS, eminent former judges have come together and volunteered to probe the North East Delhi riots of February 2020, including the role of Delhi Police, and its aftermath. The Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG), a group comprising of eminent, former bureaucrats, with decades of experience working with state and central governments, and jurists who have delivered landmark judgements have come together to in the wake of the questions that have been continuously flagged on the role of Delhi Police's, actions, alleged inaction, and now the controversial investigation.

The CCG has constituted this six member committee, named 'Citizens Committee on the Delhi Riots of February 2020: Context, Events and Aftermath'. These eminent citizens whose professional reputation is recognised all over the country, and abroad, will put together an updated, "contemporary record of acts of omission and commission" that have been observed during and after the Delhi riots of February 2020.

The CCG is an independent, non-political group that works to foster a civic culture bound by the ethos of the Constitution. The CCG released a statement on Sunday noting that "the investigation carried out into the riots by the Delhi Police has evoked extensive critical commentary in recent times", and the horrific nature of the riots in North-East Delhi in February 2020, the scale of violence, the loss of lives and the resulting communal divide between communities highlighted the need for such an expert committee to probe and analyse what transpired

before, during and after the riots. The Committee will submit a final report within 12 weeks of starting work.

The complete CCG statement is as below:

We are a group of former civil servants belonging to the All India and Central Services who have worked with the Central Government as well as different State Governments of India. We work towards fostering a civic culture bound by the ethos of the Constitution of India. As a group, we are not affiliated to any political party as we strongly believe in being neutral and impartial.

Considering the horrific nature of the riots in North-East Delhi in February 2020, the scale of violence, the loss of lives and the resulting communal divide between communities, we felt that an expert body should carry out a thorough examination of what transpired before, during and after the riots. This has become even more necessary as the investigation carried out into the riots by the Delhi Police has evoked extensive critical commentary in recent times. We therefore conclude that a Committee with credible reputations in the higher judiciary, the civil service and the police would be best suited to contribute to an objective and fair understanding of the riots and their aftermath. We have invited the below-mentioned former public functionaries of high standing, with a proven record of public service and a reputation of rectitude to take on this onerous responsibility:

1. Justice Madan Lokur, former judge of the Supreme Court

(Chairperson)

2. Justice A.P. Shah, former Chief Justice of the Madras and Delhi High Courts and former Chairman, Law Commission
3. Justice R.S. Sodhi, former judge of the Delhi High Court
4. Justice Anjana Prakash, former judge of the Patna High Court
5. G.K. Pillai, IAS (Retd.), former Home Secretary, Government of India
6. Meeran Chadha Borwankar, IPS (Retd.), former Director-General, Bureau of Police Research and Development, Government of India

The Committee so constituted shall be called "Citizens Committee on the Delhi Riots of February 2020: Context, Events and Aftermath". This Committee's task is to create a contemporary record of acts of omission and commission around the riots, and their aftermath. The Committee is free to formulate its own procedure. It will submit a final report twelve weeks after it starts functioning.

The Terms of Reference for the said Committee are as follows:

1. To inquire into the events that transpired before and during the riots, including the response of the state machinery in dealing with the violence, restoring law and order, and related matters.
2. To analyse and assess the response of the police in investigating the riots.
3. To examine the role of the mainstream and social media in spreading information, both genuine and fake, before, during and after the riots, and its impact on events.

4. To assess the civic administration's efforts at providing relief and extending reparations to the victims of riots.

The Constitutional Conduct

Group expects the Committee to be committed to independence, impartiality and transparency in its functioning, and to ensuring that it conducts itself with integrity, that

all persons who engage with the committee are accorded dignity and respect, and that confidentiality of communications is protected.

Courtesy: Sabrangindia

Stan Swamy – The Man Who Loves His Brother

John Dayal

In one of those coincidences, the 83 year old Stan Swamy was arrested by India's high profile National Investigations Agency about the same time that another octogenarian, Francis, was declaring that all men [and women] in the world are brothers, and sisters, with responsibility to each other, and to the earth on which they all live, its resources, its environment, its climate.

Stan Swamy and Francis the Pope are both members of the five centuries old Society of Jesus. The Jesuits, as they are called, are currently, world over, at the cutting edge of the struggles of the poor and the marginalized resisting the plunder of their natural resources, and the crushing of their human dignity and constitutional rights.

To demand the freedom of the frail, ailing Catholic priest without an equally strong demand that the rights of the Tribals over their lands, forests, water and resources be safeguarded, would be belittling the man who has given the last half century of his life making their struggles his own. Born in Trichy, in Tamil Nadu – and in another of those coincidences, many Tribal languages have Dravidic roots – Fr Stan Smith has sought to interpret his vocation and training in Ignatius Loyola's philosophy in the service of the most deprived, the most threatened.

I have known of his work for all those decades and have known

him personally now for some time. I last met him in 2017, around this time, when the Karawane Mohabbat, founded by Harsh Mander, was in Jharkhand, and called on him at his spartan home in Bagaichi, on the outskirts of Ranchi one night to pay him our respect. The lawyers, activists and writers in the young team we led were thrilled to meet a legend, and a hero. He was gracious in receiving our salutations with humility, and a smile, saying he was but human, doing his duty with the people he loved.

The Adivasis of India are these people. Many scientists think of them as the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. But so disturbing is this thought to proponents of religious nationalism that international terms such as indigenous people, or the Hindi equivalent Adivasi, are an anathema. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its spawn, including the Bharatiya Janata Party ruling the country and many of its states, describe them as Vanvasis, or forest dwellers. Dalits, the former untouchables, are no less distressed, with their caste persecution with all its humiliation and violence, but they perhaps lack the exploitation by national and multinational capital and the threats to their natural resources.

In very brief summation of their plight, this about 8.6 % of India's population continue to suffer despite

conditional mandated affirmative action, a proportional representation in educational and government jobs, and in the political processes. As Minority Rights Group and many national activists point out on a daily basis, much of what is on paper does not exist on the ground. "Affirmative action policies – strictly limited to public sector – have not improved the prospects of Adivasis in the growing private sector. Adivasis often face hardships and exclusion because of physical remoteness, poverty and prevalent social prejudices. Since few Adivasis finish schooling, most are unable to use the reserved places in higher education or the civil service", says MRG.

The Panchayat Raj (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996, PESA, was introduced in the late 1990s as a legislative means of promoting self-governance in rural areas through the creation of local village bodies is perpetually sought to be diluted, sidestepped, sabotaged. "Adivasis continue to face prejudice and often violence from mainstream Indian society. They are at the lowest point of almost every socio-economic indicator the destruction of their economic base and environment poses grave threats to those who are still able to follow their traditional way of life and may result in the cultural extinction of many of the smaller Adivasi peoples."

Stan, and everyone else who has seen these areas, knows that their economic and social problems are born of their gradual displacement from their customary lands. “Adivasis have been denied land ownership rights over the last century and their displacement from their land has made them reach a stage where they are fighting to retain their economic and social identity,” an MRG report says.

The 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA) was enacted to secure the rights of Adivasis to their customary lands and forests. But its implementation is still not more than covering just 2.0 per cent of potential claims reportedly resolved. A February 2019 ruling by the Indian Supreme Court on implementation of the FRA 2006 put more than a million Adivasis at risk of eviction from their land and homes.

These set the stage for protests. The protests triggered government vengeance. And ultra-left political activity, which in turn precipitated large-scale state violence, at one time government luring a section of Adivasis under the banner of Salwa Judum to wage war on their brothers. Many were killed, many more arrested on charges of being Maoists, or assisting them.

Stan saw innocent Adivasis languishing in jails on trumped up charges, much as he himself is now in jail on what we know to be fabricated allegations. Swamy helped conduct a research study on the left wing undertrials in Jharkhand. The study found that of the 102 imprisoned youth they spoke with, as many as 97% said allegations against them were wrong. The government had imposed the worst laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) on them

without evidence. The large number of acquittals eventually vindicated the study.

As part of the Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Committee, Stan Swamy questioned the solitary confinement following the banning of Mazdoor Sangathan Samiti in December 2017. His paper, in the April 7, 2018 edition of the Economic and Political Weekly, written with human rights lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, now in jail in the Koregaon case, exposed the deplorable conditions in jail, and the repressive measures by the authorities without court sanction.

Swamy has consistently questioned why governments, of all political hues, do not implant PESA as it should be, and have been tardy in following Article 244(1) of the 5th Schedule which demands a Tribal Advisory Council sending its reports to the President of India.

Stan has, like many if not most activists, has also been supportive of the ‘Pathalgadi’ movement which has forefronted a traditional practice of honouring ancestors specially in the Khunti region of Jharkhand, by placing stone slabs in burial or cremation places.

In the 1990s, the retired bureaucrat turned activist BD Sharma and his colleague Bandi Oraon, used stone slabs on which constitutional provisions under PESA and fifth schedule were inscribed. This came to be known as Pathalgadi, a way to assert rights.

Governments, and their backers in India Inc. were not amused. The central government in 2013 passed the Land Acquisition Act, diluting the need for social impact assessment before any acquisition of land, and potentially removing legal safeguards of Adivasi lands.

Says Stan in the transcript of his interrogation by the NIA earlier this year “I moved to Jharkhand [from Bangalore] and was associated with the JOHAR (Jharkhand Organization for Human Rights) at Chaibasa for a few years. Then I moved to Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand state, and founded Bagaichi, a Jesuit social research and training center at Namkum, Ranchi. I have been active at Bagaichi for the last 15 years. I have been working in collaboration with people’s movements that were working against unjust displacement, human rights violations, illegal land acquisitions, and policies that were designed or amended to acquire more land, making the indigenous people landless. I have been writing and supporting the struggles for the implementation of the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitutions, implementation of the provisions of Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 and the Samata Judgment by the Supreme Court of India and promoted the concept of ‘Owner of the land will be the owners of Minerals therein’.

Stan said he was surprised when on 28 August 2018, “my room in Bagaicha was raided by Pune Police saying that my name had appeared in an FIR in the riot case at Bhima-Koregaon, together with eleven others. During this raid, my laptop, mobile phone, a few CDs, documents and files were confiscated by the Pune Police. After about 10 months, since the first raid of my room, once again my room was raided, on 12 June 2019. In this instance too, the hard disk (internal memory) of my computer, mobile phone, my email and social media accounts were confiscated. The Jharkhand, the government headed by the BJP, filed an FIR against me and 19 other

activists based on a Facebook posts relating to Pathalgadi 2 movement in Khunti district, Jharkhand.”

“The FIR accuses us of inciting violence through Facebook posts during the Pathalgadi movement. Though this FIR was filed in the month of July 2018, it was never pursued. But, suddenly in the month of July 2019, it was activated, after the second raid in my room by the Pune police. Since the case against us was merely based on our Facebook posts, we appealed to the Jharkhand High Court to quash the case against us. However, the Khunti police have submitted an annexure, received from the Pune police, to the effect that I was one of the accused in Bhima-Koregaon case. To my surprise, during the hearing in the High Court, the Advocate General referred to me as a ‘dreaded criminal’.”

The National Investigation Agency finally shed all pretenses, and arrested the Jesuit priest from Bagaichi, Ranchi, 8th October. He was produced before the special court in Mumbai on Friday which remanded the octogenarian to judicial custody till October 23. He is currently in the mandatory Covid isolation.

In his pre-arrest video message, Stan has maintained “I have never been to Bhima Koregaon for which I am being made an accused. But ...what is happening to me is not something unique happening to me alone, it is a broader process taking place all over the country. We all are aware how prominent intellectuals, lawyers, writers, poets, activists, student leaders are put in jail because they have expressed their dissent or raised questions about the ruling powers of India.”

He said he was part of the

process and, in a way, happy to be so because he was not a “silent spectator”. “I am ready to pay the price whatever be it.”

The state has already paid a price. Its reputation is mud. Activists, chief ministers, political parties, MPs and common men and women have expressed their shock, their disgust.

Not that it will move the NIA, or the man in New Delhi whose

order it obeys. The Koregaon case is about an allegation that India’s intellectuals are conspiring to kill India’s prime minister.

Elsewhere, and in the past, young men and women were liquidated on such a suspicion.

(John Dayal is an Editor, occasional documentary maker, and human rights activist. Article courtesy: Mainstream Weekly.)

Hathras Case: The Intersecting Factors Behind Structural Violence Against Dalit Women

Priyanka Samy

Barely 24 hours after the remains of the 19-year-old-Dalit woman were consigned to flames by the police in Uttar Pradesh’s Hathras without the consent of the family, another sexual assault and death of a 22-year-old Dalit woman has surfaced from Balrampur in the same state.

Reflective of widely pervasive casteist mindsets, these brutal sexual assaults against Dalit women are being framed as isolated incidents of crime rather than atrocities which are the outcome of systemic and deep-rooted casteism and misogyny.

It is important to acknowledge that there are several intersecting factors such as identities, institutions and hierarchies that result in this kind of structural violence. Women are not a homogenous group and are differentially impacted by forces of caste, class, religion, ethnicity, race, among others. The social location of Dalit women at the lowest rung of caste, class and gender hierarchies results in them facing multiple forms of discrimination and targeted violence.

We have witnessed time and

again how rape and other forms of sexual violence are used against Dalit women to dehumanise the community and maintain caste-based hierarchies and power relations. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2019, nearly ten Dalit women are raped every day in the country with Uttar Pradesh recording among the highest numbers. This figure is likely a significant undercount as data for the total number of reported cases of sexual assaults is not disaggregated by caste or religion, so the exact figures of women from marginalised communities reporting sexual assault remain unknown. Most often, such cases do not even get reported due to fear of heightened backlash from ‘dominant’ castes.

In the Hathras case, reports suggest that the police initially did not want to register a case against the four accused, all of whom belong to the ‘dominant’ Thakur caste. A member of the ruling party dismissed the existence of caste-based discrimination in the village that continues to practice ‘untouchability’ and denied that

the incident of gang-rape had taken place in Hathras.

The victim, who had multiple fractures and injuries, lay in the normal ward of a hospital for more than a week before pressure built up. She was later shifted to the ICU. There, the victim's relatives allege that they were not informed of the impact of her injuries and that they had to plead with the doctors to attend to her. She was later shifted to Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, where she eventually breathed her last. Without the consent and presence of her family, the police forcibly and hurriedly cremated her body at 2:30 am on September 30 to erase all evidence in the case. The critical question here is, on whose behest were the police acting? The systemic sanction to violate Dalit women's dignity and rights, and the social capital and networks of impunity that men from 'dominant' castes leverage is appalling.

An examination of cases of sexual assault and violence against Dalit women reveals a pattern of impunity enjoyed by both state and non-state perpetrators. For instance, in the infamous gang-rape of Bhanwari Devi (1992), the perpetrators were acquitted in 1995 on the grounds that upper-caste men would not rape a woman from a lower caste due to reasons of 'purity'. The Hathras case has yet again exposed the fragility of accountability mechanisms and the justice system vis-à-vis Dalit women.

Meena Kandasamy, writer and anti-caste activist states that in just four years, between 2014 to 2018, crimes against Dalits have shot up by 47%. "This is a very dangerous trend if we factor that most crimes go unreported and thereby, unprosecuted," she says.

"What happened in Hathras is a

continuation of the same violence. Caste Hindus are convinced that they will enjoy all impunity. Simultaneously, just as UP tops the charts for atrocities against Dalits, it also tops the charts for crimes against women. These go hand in hand. A caste conditioned society which believes that it has the right to be violent against Dalits will unleash this violence at the first instance against women and children, and especially, because they are the most vulnerable," said Kandasamy.

The Nirbhaya case (2012) prompted the government to take several measures, which may have led to enforcing higher levels of reporting but that does not necessarily lead to higher conviction rates. As the NCRB data, 2018 shows only 25.5% of rape cases end in conviction. The amendments brought about in criminal law in 2013 were a step forward but they have failed to set the criminal justice system in motion or get the police to conduct unbiased investigations, prosecute the accused and provide witness protection (before, during and after the trial) to victims/survivors and their family members who most often are key witnesses in the criminal trials. Dalit women and other minorities continue to remain extremely vulnerable to sexual assaults and collective violence which has very specific gender implications.

Kiruba Munusamy, Supreme Court advocate and Dalit rights activist, states, "The low conviction rate points to the existence of caste prejudice both in the law enforcement as well as the judiciary. Police officials who are negligent in registering the case or invoking Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, deliberately do not follow

the procedures as mandated by law."

She says the law mandates that the case is investigated by an officer who is or above the rank of DSP, that the caste certificate of the victim not be attached, and that a chargesheet in rape cases be filed within 60 days. "But most of these requirements are not adhered to. After a long legal battle, when a case ends up in a conviction, the high court or even the Supreme Court reverses the conviction order acquitting the accused. The state machinery and the justice system have miserably failed Dalit women", said Munusamy.

Despite constitutional safeguards as well as special legislations like the SC/ST PoA Act, 1989, Dalit women continue to experience the violation of their fundamental rights. The state has consistently failed to provide even the most basic protection to Dalit women. Justice and accountability remain elusive and remote. The roadblocks lie in equitable access to justice and in terms of preventive measures as well as restorative justice – both of which are crucial for addressing the root causes underlying structural conditions and the apathy of the state that enables sexual assaults and targeted violence against Dalit women.

The derogation of rights and the abuse of law and protocols are clearly evident at every stage in this case. The sanction of barbarism, absence of due diligence by law enforcement agencies and the guarantee of impunity highlights the importance of understanding the systemic oppression and violence faced by Dalit women differently from that of non-Dalit women.

(Priyanka Samy is a member of the National Federation of Dalit Women. Article courtesy: The Wire.)

“Herd Immunity” Is Unethical, Says WHO

Countercurrents Collective

October 13, 2020: The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against the idea of allowing Covid-19 to simply spread through society, calling this “herd immunity” approach to fighting the pandemic “unethical.”

“Never in the history of public health has herd immunity been used as a strategy for responding an outbreak, let alone a pandemic,” said WHO chief Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus said during a virtual briefing on Monday, calling the idea “unethical.”

Tedros added that herd immunity to a virus is usually achieved when the vast majority of the population, 80 percent, in the case of polio, is vaccinated, rather than deliberately infected.

“The vast majority of people in most countries remain susceptible to this virus,” he said, adding that “allowing a dangerous virus that we don’t fully understand to run free is simply unethical. It’s not an option.”

Tedros’ words came days after the WHO’s Dr. David Nabarro warned world leaders against using lockdowns as their “primary control method” against the virus.

Nabarro explained that lockdowns only buy healthcare systems time to “reorganize, regroup, [and] rebalance your resources,” and have disastrous economic consequences that worsen poverty and inequality in society.

The WHO did not always oppose lockdowns, but it cautioned at the outset of the pandemic that, unless accompanied by proper systems of isolation and contact tracing, they would only pause the spread of the virus.

Worldwide, nearly 38 million cases of Covid-19 have been recorded, along with more than a million deaths.

U.S.

The U.S. has seen the highest number of cases and deaths in the world, with 7.7 million and nearly 215,000 respectively.

WHO warns of ‘very serious’ Covid-19 situation in Europe

About a month ago, the WHO warned:

Europe is facing a “very serious situation” with the coronavirus spreading at “alarming rates.”

The number of new Covid-19 cases in Europe has surpassed the spikes observed during the first wave of the disease that swept across the continent early this year, WHO Regional Director Hans Kluge said during a news conference on Thursday.

Hans Kluge said:

“Weekly cases have now exceeded those reported when the pandemic first peaked in Europe in March,” he said. “Last week, the region’s weekly tally exceeded 300,000 patients.”

Over half of European nations have reported an increase of more than 10 percent in their new coronavirus cases over the past two weeks, while seven of them have seen a more-than-twofold increase, the official said, urging the nations to re-impose lockdown measures as soon as possible.

“In the spring and early summer we were able to see the impact

of strict lockdown measures. Our efforts, our sacrifices, paid off. In June, cases hit an all-time low. The September case numbers, however, should serve as a wake-up call for all of us,” he warned.

Even those countries which been relatively spared by the pandemic have observed a sharp increase in active cases.

(Courtesy: Countercurrents, an Indian newswebsite. Article is an extract.)

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by
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Published by
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Samata Shikshan Sanstha,
Pareira Wadi,
Mohili Village,
Sakinaka, Ghatkopar (W),
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Mobile : 9820092255
Contribution : Rs. 300+

How India's Leader Modi Is Changing Laws to Help Imperialists Dominate the Country's Agriculture

Prabhat Patnaik

The two bills rushed through India's parliament on September 20 were objectionable in every conceivable sense. The very fact that they were being rammed through the Rajya Sabha, without being put to vote despite demands for a division, was grossly anti-democratic. The fact that the Center made unilateral and fundamental changes in agricultural marketing arrangements that fall within the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution was a blow against federalism. To resurrect the pre-independence arrangement under which the peasantry was exposed to the capitalist market without any support of the state, and which crushed it during the Great Depression of the 1930s, was a betrayal of the promise of independence. To pit millions of small peasants against the might of a handful of private buyers, as the bills propose to do, is to open them up to monopsonistic exploitation, meaning exploitation by a single or a few buyers.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of course, has been claiming that the state is not leaving peasants at the mercy of the monopsonists and that the government-guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) regime will continue. But the bills contain nothing on this; and the government refuses to incorporate into law, which testifies to its bad faith, the right of the peasantry to get a minimum support price in accordance with the Swaminathan Commission recommendation that puts the MSP at Cost C2 plus 50 percent. The peasants in short are

being thrown, as under colonialism, to the mercies of a market where price fluctuations have a notoriously high amplitude; and they are rightly putting up a fight against their descent into debt and destitution.

In this entire debate, however, an important dimension has been missed. The debate has been entirely about the condition of the peasantry. But one must also take into account the question of food security, which immediately brings imperialism into the picture.

Imperialism has long been attempting to push countries like India to become food-import-dependent and to divert their land area currently devoted to food grains toward other crops that imperialist countries cannot grow, as these can be grown only in tropical and semitropical regions. This, however, would mean that the tropical and semitropical countries would have to abandon food security.

Food security in a country like India requires self-sufficiency in food production. Food imports are no substitute for domestic food production for several reasons. First, whenever a country the size of India approaches the world market for food grain imports the world prices shoot up, making imports exorbitantly priced. Secondly, quite apart from the fact that the country may not have sufficient foreign exchange to pay for such import, there is also the additional fact that the people may not have enough purchasing power to buy food imported at such exorbitant prices. Third, since food surpluses exist with the imperialist

countries, even buying food at such exorbitant prices requires the blessings of imperialism. In fact, denying food to a country at a crucial juncture is a powerful lever in the hands of imperialism to browbeat countries to kowtow to its demands.

All this is not an abstract matter. India was a food grain importer under the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 or the PL-480 from the latter half of the 1950s. When there were two disastrous harvests in 1965-66 and 1966-67, and Bihar in particular faced famine conditions, India was forced to become a virtual supplicant before the United States for food imports. It became a case literally of carrying food from ships to kitchens. That is when former Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi asked Jagjivan Ram, the then food minister, to expedite the drive toward food self-sufficiency, and the Green Revolution was ushered in. The country is still far from being self-sufficient in the sense of growing enough to provide everyone adequate food. But at least it is no longer import-dependent; on the contrary, so drastic is the squeeze on purchasing power in the hands of the people that it has been making regular and substantial exports every year despite India's people being among the hungriest in the world.

Africa by contrast was cajoled by imperialism into abandoning domestic food grain production and shifting areas toward export crops. The consequences in terms of recurring famines in Africa in the

recent period are too well-known to need repetition.

After 1966-67, an elaborate arrangement in terms of MSP, procurement prices, issue prices, procurement operations carried out in the mandis (agricultural markets), a public distribution system, and food subsidies has been devised that seeks to ensure that the interests of the producers and the consumers are reconciled and the country grows enough food to obviate any need for imports. This mechanism is fundamentally antithetical to neoliberalism; not surprisingly it has been getting whittled at the margin, through for instance the distinction introduced in the mid-1990s between the above poverty line (APL) and below poverty line (BPL) populations, with only the latter being eligible for subsidized food grains. Even so, it has prevented the country's becoming a mendicant for food in the world economy.

Imperialism has made strenuous efforts to dismantle this arrangement, the most obvious being the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization negotiations during which the United States has been arguing that India's procurement operations at a preannounced price are against the principles of free trade and should be wound up. No government in India until now was so timid or so gullible as to cave in to this imperialist pressure, because of which the Doha Round has been stalled. Now, alas, India has for the first time a government that is either too scared or too ignorant to stand up to imperialism on this issue. In the name of "modernizing agricultural markets" "21st-century technology" and the like, India is going back to the colonial days when per capita food grain output was declining even

as land was being diverted toward export crops. It is in reality pushing the imperialist agenda.

True, the immediate beneficiaries of the new agricultural marketing policy will be business tycoons like the Ambanis and the Adanis, but they will be entering into contract farming arrangements not so much for food grains as for fruits, vegetables, flowers, and a range of other crops that they will not only sell in the domestic market but also process for exports. An essential corollary of contract farming by private monopsonists is a shift of acreage from food grains to non-food grains, exactly as had happened in the colonial period when a host of export crops like opium and indigo had come up in lieu of food grains in the Bengal Presidency. And the exploitation of peasants by indigo merchants, famously captured in Dinabandhu Mitra's 19th-century play "Nil Darpan," is exactly what the peasantry today is apprehensive about and wishes to avoid.

What has been striking about the agricultural arrangement till now is that while looking after (however inadequately) the interests of the peasants, it has prevented the large-scale diversion of land use toward non-food grains and export crops. The dismantling of that arrangement will not only hurt the peasantry but also lead to a diversion of area from food grains to non-food grains and export crops, thereby undermining the country's food security.

The matter indeed is simple. Since land is a scarce resource, land use must be socially controlled. It cannot be dictated by considerations of private profitability. True, since land is in the possession of the peasants, they have to be looked after even while land use is being

socially controlled. They must, in short, get a remunerative price even as land use is being socially controlled. This is what the existing arrangement tried to achieve, which the present government wants to destroy; whatever failings it had, it needed to be rectified within the ambit of that arrangement itself. Destroying that arrangement without even being aware of the need to have social control over land use is precisely the kind of folly that one associates with India's current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. Imperialism would like such destruction; and the BJP government is happily obliging.

The only region in the entire non-socialist third world that has shown an acute awareness of the need to have social control over land use, since land is a scarce resource, is Kerala, which has enacted a legislation against the diversion of paddy land for other purposes. That legislation showed perspicacity; the BJP government's agriculture bills show just the opposite.

(Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

Spectre of Fascism

Contribution Rs. 20/-

Published by
Janata Trust & Lokayat
D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Grant Road (W),
Mumbai 400 007

Amidst Pandemic, Billionaires' Wealth Zooms – Globally and in India

Farooque Chowdhury, David Ruccio, and Wire Staff

A new report—*Riding the Storm, billionaires insights 2020*—by UBS and PwC reveals that the world's uber-rich have increased their already-huge fortunes by more than a quarter; and this “miracle” happened amidst the ongoing pandemic ravaging life of billions of the poor in continents.

Wealth of this handful of uber-rich, according to the report, grew by 27.5 percent—\$10.2 trillion—during April-July period. That was the apex point of the Covid-crisis.

According to the UBS, the billionaires had mostly benefited from betting on the recovery of global stock markets.

The report noted: Wealth of the billionaires had hit “a new high, surpassing the previous peak of \$8.9 trillion reached at the end of 2017.”

What's the number of billionaires today? It's 2,189—a record high. In 2017, it was 2,158.

Josef Stadler, the head of UBS's Ultra High Net Worth department, said: “Billionaires did extremely well during the Covid crisis. Not only did they ride the storm to the downside, but they also gained on the upside.”

This acquisition of “benefit” is at the cost of the workers and nature, who produced the wealth.

And, these workers, millions going through untold suffering—unemployment, and consequently, hunger, loss of shelter, lack of health care, fear of murderous uncertainty—in countries, go unheard, unattended, non-politicized, unaware of class question, appropriation/exploitation. Rather, they are manipulated, divided, segregated, infused with

anti-worker ideas, concepts and attitudes.

US billionaires recoup all their wealth

U.S. billionaires have recouped all of their wealth—and more—during the Pandemic Depression. Meanwhile, since May, the number of poor Americans has grown by about 8 million. And the number of American workers applying for and receiving unemployment benefits continues at record levels.

According to *Forbes*, Pandemic be damned: America's 400 richest are worth a record \$3.2 trillion, up \$240 billion from a year ago, aided by a stock market that has defied the virus.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began to sweep the world earlier this year, the wealth of U.S. billionaires plummeted in lockstep with the stock market. Yet, just six months after the market bottomed out—with hundreds of thousands Americans dead and the coronavirus still to be contained—the wealthiest Americans are doing better than ever. In other words, the pain, at least for the ultra-rich, was remarkably short lived. On the whole, during the first six months of the pandemic, the United States added more than 29 more billionaires, increasing from 614 to 643. The Pandemic Depression has been a boon to their fortunes.

Meanwhile, more and more American workers, who have lost their jobs or been furloughed, are attempting to survive on meager unemployment benefits. And many of them and their families—especially

Black people and children—are now falling below the poverty line.

In India too, billionaire wealth rose by a third during lockdown

India's billionaires reported a rise in their combined net worth by more than a third during the first four months of the coronavirus-induced nationwide lockdown, i.e., between April and July, defying the impact of the global economic fallout of the pandemic.

According to the *Billionaires Insights Report 2020* published by UBS and PwC, the net worth of Indian billionaires between April and July increased by 35% to \$423 billion.

Since 2009, the net worth of India's billionaires surged 90% as on July 31, 2020 – to rank sixth in the world, after the US, China, Germany, Russia and France, respectively.

According to the *Forbes' India Rich List 2020* released earlier this month, the net worth of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, rose 73% over the past year to nearly \$89 billion (Rs 6.52 lakh crore). This is over three times more wealth than the second richest person on the list, Gautam Adani, at \$25.2 billion. With this, Ambani remains the wealthiest Indian for the 13th year in a row.

Others in this list include HCL founder Shiv Nadar, Serum Institute of India's Cyrus Poonawalla, Biocon chairman and managing director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, among others.

According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Reliance Industries' (RIL) chairman Ambani

became the only Asian tycoon to be among the world's top 10 richest people.

As India heads for its worst recession, it is ironic how “fewer billionaires saw their wealth erode this year than they did in last year”, *Forbes* said in its report. Therefore, it is also important to note that India's richest 1% of the population holds 42.5% of national wealth while the bottom 50% – the majority of the population, owns a mere 2.8%, showed an Oxfam report. India's top 10% of the population holds 74.3% of the total national wealth while the bottom 90% holds 25.7% of national wealth, the report said.

“Mr. Ambani's companies (particularly the telecom giant Jio) have prospered, and his personal wealth has increased substantially,” Jayati Ghosh, chair of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, told the *Economic Times*.

The Hurun India list named the richest individuals in India having a wealth of Rs 1,000 crore or more as on August 31, 2020. The names included Ambani, Hinduja brothers (SP Hinduja, along with his three brothers) with a joint wealth of Rs 1.43 lakh crore, HCL founder Shiv Nadar with a wealth of Rs 1.41 lakh crore, among the 828 rich Indians.

The cumulative value of these 828 individuals on the 2020 list stood at \$821 billion (Rs 60.59 lakh crore), up from \$140 billion (Rs 10.29 lakh crore) in 2019, a large part of which was due to the rise in share price of Reliance Industries.

(Article has been compiled by us from articles by Farooque Chowdhury in *Frontier Weekly*, David Ruccio in *MR Online* and an article by *The Wire Staff* at thewire.in.)

Exclusive: America's True Unemployment Rate

Felix Salmon

A person who is looking for a full-time job that pays a living wage — but who can't find one — is unemployed. If you accept that definition, the true unemployment rate in the U.S. is a stunning 26.1%, according to an important new dataset shared exclusively with "Axios on HBO."

Why it matters: The official unemployment rate is artificially depressed by excluding people who might be earning only a few dollars a week. It also excludes anybody who has stopped looking for work or is discouraged by a lack of jobs or by the demands of child care during the coronavirus crisis.

- If you measure the unemployed as anybody over 16 years old who isn't earning a living wage, the rate rises even further, to 54.6%. For Black Americans, it's 59.2%.

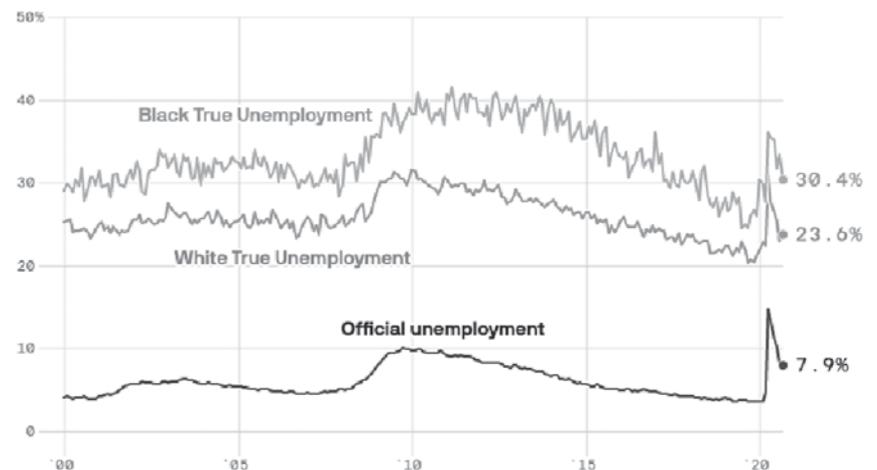
The backstory: The official definition of unemployment can be traced back to the 1870s, when a Massachusetts statistician named Carroll Wright diagnosed what he referred to as "industrial hypochondria".

- By restricting the "unemployed" label to men who “really want employment,” Wright managed to minimize the unemployment figure.
- Wright went on to found the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and he brought his unemployment definition with him.
- To this day, to be officially counted as unemployed you need to be earning no money at all, and you need to be actively looking for work.

By the numbers: In January, when the official rate of unemployment was 3.6%, the true rate was seven times greater

True and official unemployment

Jan. 2000 to Sept. 2020



Data: Ludwig Institute for Shared Economic Prosperity; Chart: Axios Visuals

— 23.4%. That's according to new calculations from the Ludwig Institute for Shared Economic Prosperity, founded by Gene Ludwig, a former U.S. Comptroller of the Currency.

- "I was shocked," he tells Axios on HBO, "that a quarter of the population that want work can't earn a living wage."
- The recession made everything worse. Only 46.1% of white Americans over the age of 16 — and a mere 40.8% of Black Americans — now have a full-time job paying more than \$20,000 per year.

The bottom line: The unemployment catastrophe in America is not new. It's been at crisis levels for decades, but it has been hidden behind the official numbers. Ludwig's hope is that his new data will light a fire under Congress to address this national emergency.

(Felix Salmon is the chief financial correspondent at Axios. He writes the weekly Axios Capital newsletter and covers all the ways that money drives the world. Article courtesy: Axios, a US based news website.)

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

Contribution Rs. 25/-

Published by
Janata Trust & Lokayat

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Grant Road (W),
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Does 'Merit' Have a Caste?

Rajat Roy

The recent incident of casteist slurs used by a Kolkata-based college student, against one of the key initiators of Dalit feminist discourse in West Bengal Professor Maroona Murmu of Jadavpur University, tells us the endemic nature of caste-based violence in academic institutions in India, and West Bengal is no exception to it. Caste violence has been continuing in West Bengal as a matter of 'public secrecy' – by practicing daily caste rituals without explicitly talking about them, unlike many parts of India.

The student attacked Murmu by calling her a 'meritless' 'quota professor'. This episode mirrors casteist stigmatisation in the most nuanced form – whereby the policy of reservation is juxtaposed against the perception on merit.

A few months ago, some IIMs had approached the Union government wanting to be listed as 'institutions of excellence' and thereby doing away with the reservation policy. Like the Kolkata-based college student, many students and faculties of India's elite institutions, which provide 'first world services at the third world rate', have often made anti-reservation remarks by calling it the 'murder of merit'. The anti-reservation ideologues claim that reservation undermines the quality of education in India, and in the name of historical wrong, it causes injustice in the present day.

It is in this context one should raise concern about the two crucial but interlinked issues – one, what is merit and secondly, why reservation?

The word 'merit', according to Oxford dictionary means, the

'quality' of being good and of deserving praise or reward. At a policy level, this definition is by and large a neutral definition. Once this neutrality is accepted, then one can measure the 'quality', and in most cases it is done through examination.

In India, access to higher education isn't scheduled as a fundamental right and one has to desire to be in higher education. Moreover, the essential and yet normalised feature of higher education is based on a principle of 'exclusion' and discrimination, as argued by sociologist Satish Deshpande. Merit as a 'neutral' ideology justifies this discrimination which is materially practiced through examination. As Deshpande points out, it is not how 'well' but how much 'better' one has performed in the examination. Thus, examination or merit necessarily has a relative side as well. This brings me to the second question – why reservation.

Societal structures and their interactions have significant impact on what we are. Even if one asserts that merit is a neutral category, social relations are yet not neutral, rather they are shaped largely by economic and cultural structures. Both these structural inequalities end up creating differences among humans' capacities and moral stamina.

To get a better rank in an examination (especially in higher education) and thus be identified as meritorious, one needs many types of resources – economic (better primary education and training, freedom from other work) and social and cultural (networks, contacts, esteem, confidence and guidance)

– and hard work. All these different resources are a function of social relations, and are interlinked.

Is our society equal in terms of distributing resources, be they economic or cultural? Even after seven decades of independence, many empirical studies suggests that the caste-based graded hierarchy still divides us along the line of occupational and social habitations. Not only does it determine the nature of work one performs, but also the human's 'worth' is termed by caste.

In every sphere, the lower castes seem to be falling short of attaining a life that can be called a life of dignity. Thus, even after reserving seats for lower caste people, we manage to isolate them in schools, in university spaces, in workplaces, in parliament, in markets (one significant aspect of this is reflected when Dalit capitalists formed the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), or in housing societies. Access to primary and higher education, drop-out ratios, teacher/faculty appointments, research output and the nature of research are all determined by the social reality of caste. Even economic mobility doesn't let one to forget her caste position in our society.

Given this fractured social reality of Hindu society, how can one cultivate merit? Can merit be developed independently of one's social reality? Any well-wisher for 'national unity' and 'progress' can't argue that merit exists in a vacuum. Rather a meritorious life, i.e. a life possessing the quality to be good, accepts social reality and works towards improving it.

Anti-reservation 'merit' is a myth and an individual profit-driven project, and does not initiate social 'progress'. If for the upper

castes education is a means to ensure a comfortable life which is individualistic, then positive discrimination for the lower castes is an act of social change. Thus in the Indian context, social justice becomes a meritorious gesture.

Elite academic institutions are no exception to this social reality. The reason for these institutions being so outrightly anti-reservation is because these institutions are largely run by upper castes. For instance, as per data gathered through an RTI in 2018, total sanctioned posts for faculty numbers of 18 IIMs are 784, among which 590 are from the general category, 27 are OBCs, eight are SC and two is ST. There are 157 unfilled posts.

Given this composition of premiere institutions like IIMs, which claim to provide world-class education, it is easy to see why the 'neutral' category of merit is used for upper caste domination. Ironically, one can say without giving access to people from marginalised sections, these institutes have reserved posts only for the upper castes by using merit.

There are times when we encounter someone from a downtrodden family (either economically, caste-wise or both) who has been able to enter these institutions or get a good job with or without reservation; these 'exceptional' and rare instances are often celebrated and reported by the mainstream media as well. What is interesting to note is that firstly, these exceptional moments create a legitimacy for claiming that merit is neutral and therefore justify upper-caste dominance in these institutions; and secondly, in these instances we ignore the 'afterlife' of merit. This means not just doing

better in examinations but also continuous performance after that, which is largely ignored.

In this afterlife of merit, new sets of trauma begin – by victimising the lower castes and tribes through differentiated treatment, condemning their existence through casteist slurs, nepotism, humiliating them by not recognising their skills. What happened to Murmu is just the latest addition to this list.

While for upper castes, progress signifies getting a degree or a job, for a lower caste or tribal intellectual, there is a continuous evaluation from society, even if the latter has been actively contributing towards the academic world. This social burden already took the lives of Chuni Kotal, Rohith Vemula, Payal Tadvi, Balmukund Bharti and many others. These individuals became exemplary through their death, which is not an individual death but the death of collective confidence and dignity, in the name of the 'neutrality' of merit.

(Rajat Roy is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Presidency University, Kolkata. Article courtesy: The Wire.)

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Published on Sunday, October 25, 2020 & Posted on Wednesday, October 28, 2020 at Mumbai Patrika Channel, Mumbai GPO-1



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