

Oppose NRC & CAB, Fascist Hindutva Projects

On 20th November 2019, Home Minister Amit Shah announced in Rajya Sabha the Govt. decision to prepare a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in India. It is obviously a part of RSS-BJP Govt.'s efforts to make India a Hindu Rashtra. The purpose of the preparation of NRC is to target Muslims and to harass the common people. NRC should not be confused with census which is carried out every ten years and is due to be conducted in the year 2021. RSS-BJP are trying to confuse the people by saying that it is not targeted against citizens while its real target is Indian citizens only. While census data is collected by the Govt. through its agencies, in the preparation of NRC people will be asked to prove their citizenship. Experience in Assam amply proves how difficult that is going to be for the common people and working masses.

RSS-BJP are trying to couple this with Citizenship Amendment Act (CAB) providing for citizenship to the minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, the Muslim majority countries in the neighbourhood. The selection of these countries is on the sole criteria of these being Muslim majority countries so as to discriminate against Muslims in granting citizenship. There is no objective criteria- historical or even in present for this selection. The amendment specifically excludes Muslims from these countries from getting citizenship under the amendment even if they are facing prosecution in those countries. Inclusion of Afghanistan but exclusion of other neighbouring countries e.g. Myanmar where Muslim Rohingyas are facing genocide, further emphasizes the communal character of the amendment.

Preparation of NRC along with CAB is an attempt to carry forward Hindu Rashtra project of RSS. Hindu communal forces have since long been trying to make India exclusively for Hindus.

With economic crisis in the country deepening, growth sputtering, unemployment reaching astronomical figures and conditions of the overwhelming majority of the people, peasants and workers, declining, the

Organ of the Central Committee, CPI(ML)

people's resentment against the ruling dispensation is growing. Pro-corporate policies of the RSS-BJP Govt. are coming into sharp focus with public sector being squandered for the benefit of the big capitalists like announcement of disinvestment in five PSUs made on 20th November 2019. While the Govt. is unleashing repression and burden on the overwhelming majority of the people, RSS-BJP Govt. is showering money on the corporate. Telecom giants have been exempted from payment of their dues for the next two years at least. However, peasant distress and workers' plight are forcing their way into political discourse. Despite unleashing jingoist hyper-nationalist frenzy targeting Pakistan, Kashmir and Muslims during the recently held assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana and insipid campaign by the main opposition party Congress, Ruling RSS-BJP fared much below their claim and corporate media's projection. The results for the assemblies of these states has galvanized the ruling class opposition from the morbid state though it was largely despite them.

With the rise of people's disillusionment and anger, the RSS-BJP plan to disrupt the emerging unity of the people in struggle and to further sharpen the tools of repression, have been further augmented. As the people's anger mounts so do the conspiracies of the ruling RSS-BJP. RSS-BJP Govt. has given a push to NRC and CAB, the latter they had been forced to jettison during the last Lok Sabha term. These are two sides of the same coin. While NRC exercise targets poor people, NRC coupled with CAB is aimed at only the Muslims and is to further the Hindu Rashtra agenda of the RSS.

Central Committee of CPI(ML)-New Democracy strongly denounces the preparation of NRC and enactment of CAB as anti-people, communal and anti-India measures which must be firmly and energetically opposed. CPI(ML)-New Democracy calls upon all revolutionary, democratic and struggling forces to oppose these fascist measures of ruling RSS-BJP. All forces should be galvanized to oppose the preparation of NRC and CAB and mobilize the people for struggle against these measures. All sections of people should be mobilized in protest against this heinous attack on the people, on the secular character enshrined in the Constitution and unity of the people. The sinister designs of RSS-BJP should be exposed before the people and people should be mobilized into a broad-based and powerful movement against these designs.

CC Statement on Verdict on Babri Masjid Dispute

Bad in Law and Assault on Secularism

The judgment delivered by a five Judges Bench of the Supreme Court of India has allotted the whole of 2.77 acres of land which was under litigation in Ayodhya for the construction of a temple. Muslims' claim, which rested on the existence of the Babri Masjid on the site before it was demolished by the fascist hordes marshaled by RSS on December 6, 1992, has been dismissed. The claim of Nirmohi Akhara which rested on their managing Ram Chabutra in the outer courtyard, has also been dismissed and the claim of Ram Lalla diety has been upheld over the entire disputed land. In other words, Supreme Court bench has upheld the minority judgment delivered by Justice D.V. Sharma of Allahabad High Court.

The Supreme Court judgment is not grounded either in facts or on sound principles of jurisprudence. It only meant that the Court has adjudicated in favour of the faith of a section of society. What was on trial in this case was not only 2.77 acres of land on which Babri Masjid stood, but the very rule of law and principles of secularism. It is unfortunate that the Supreme Court judgment is wanting on these aspects. Supreme Court bench paid routine obeisance to secularism but could not uphold it. If democratic and secular opinion saw in the Allahabad High Court judgment a concession to majoritarianism, this judgment marks wholesale surrender before it. Even while the Court observed that both Hindus and Muslims had access to the site for offering prayers, the allotment of the whole land for the construction of Ram Temple is ample evidence of this surrender. Though the Court observed, "The Constitution does not make a distinction between the faith and belief of one religion and another", it however, went on to do just that. One can see what happened to the principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution even in theory while in practice it has been torn to shreds by those in power.

Supreme Court has revealingly asserted in the beginning itself, "This Court is tasked with the resolution of a dispute whose origins are as old as

the idea of India itself" thus making the idea of India co-terminus with this alleged dispute between Hindus and Muslims. This statement cannot but gladden the hearts of the communal forces which define India in terms of Hindu religion and in opposition to Islam.

The Court talked of the illegal nature of placing of idols under the Central dome of the Mosque on the night between December 22 and 23, 1949 and forcible prevention of Muslims from offering Namaz there and also of demolition of the Mosque on December 6, 1992. It then proceeded to reward the perpetrators of these illegal acts. After doing this, the Court observed, "Justice would not prevail if the Court were to overlook the entitlement of the Muslims who have been deprived of the structure of the mosque through means which should not have been employed in a secular nation committed to the rule of law." However, Court's direction of five acres of land to be allotted to Sunni Waqf Board outside the area (but in Ayodhya) is hardly a compensation for the illegalities committed against them. Hindu communal organizations had offered land outside the disputed area before the demolition of the Mosque in 1992 itself. It appears in the judgment as a compensation and not as upholding of a right for which the parties had come before the Court.

This judgment rewards the perpetrators of illegal acts and favours majority community over the minority. With this judgment the trial of those accused of demolishing Babri Masjid will anyway be reduced to a formality. Supreme Court itself had dismissed the petition asking for postponement of the judgment till the conclusion of criminal trial in the case of demolition. Moreover, this judgment will further embolden the communal outfits in their campaign against other places of worship of Muslims including Mathura and Kashi. The formal law of the land had not discouraged them then and would not do so now. They would rather feel vindicated by this judgment.

The Court observed that during the Mughal period both Hindus and Muslims prayed at the site. It only showed the history of communal harmony and communities living together in that period. It is a pity that our Supreme Court could not uphold even that despite secularism being enshrined in the Constitution and upheld as part of its basic structure by the Supreme Court itself. It is clear that this judgment has dealt a blow at secularism which had crystallized as one of the core values during the anti-colonial movement of the Indian people.

From the history of the dispute it is clear that British colonial rulers had created this dispute as a part of their divide and rule policy, in particular to annex Avadh. This dispute lingered on and led to an attack on the Masjid during the communal conflagration in 1934. In 1949, Hindu communal organizations including Hindu Mahasabha surreptitiously placed idols in the Mosque and the administration prevented Muslims from offering Namaz in the name of apprehension of disturbances, placing locks on its gates. Then came the opening of the locks in 1986 and Shilanyas in 1989, both during Rajiv Gandhi regime. The next sordid chapter was written in 1992 when fascist hordes of RSS demolished the Mosque. All this while at least legal rights of Muslims were not extinguished. But the Supreme Court through this judgment has extinguished this very right. The dispute has been legally closed with not upholding might of the right but right of the might.

One is left wondering why Supreme Court chose to give this verdict on a Saturday, that too on Second Saturday and particularly on the day when the historic opening of Kartarpur corridor is taking place. This event can be a good beginning of developing friendly relations with a neighbouring country. But it appears that those in power are not happy with that development as is apparent from their comments in the media. One is also left wondering why the Hindutva forces, RSS and BJP who have long been opposing judicial determination of this dispute saying that matters of the faith could not be decided by a Court of law, have been vigorously propagating this time that they would respect the Court verdict. This expression of faith by Hindutva forces has shaken the faith of secular democratic forces. Supreme Court's attitude towards suppression of democratic rights in Kashmir and refusal to even entertain *habeas corpus* petitions has already alarmed a large number of people who had looked up to the highest Court for defense of their legal rights.

This judgment will undoubtedly embolden the Hindutva forces which are out to crush the democratic rights of the people, apart from their attacks against minorities besides tribals, Dalits and women. It will be further advance the march of Hindutva fascism in the country. It is to be noted that different institutions of the state have caved in before Hindutva fascism.

With this decision paving the way for construction of a temple at the site of Babri Masjid, RSS-BJP have advanced on all three points on their agenda- Abrogation of Article 370, Construction of Ram Temple and Uniform

Civil Code. They have advanced on the latter by passing a law criminalizing triple talaq. RSS-BJP have been using these issues to communally polarize the people to sidetrack their main issues like price rise, unemployment and growing miseries of workers and peasants which are aggravating due to the crisis deepening due to the economic policies pursued by RSS-BJP Govt.

The policies of RSS-BJP Govt. are against the interests of the people, a majority of them followers of Hindu religion. Hindutva fascism is an attack on all working people belonging to all faiths and communities. Unity of all toiling people is the bulwark against Hindutva fascism. People and people alone can fight and defeat Hindutva fascism.

(This statement was issued by the Central Committee of CPI(ML)-New Democracy on November 9, 2019)

SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS CODE-2019

SWALLOWED THE VERY EXISTENCE OF MOTOR WORKERS

K. Polari

World over and in India, the working class won several welfare and job security enactments through its struggles. Since 1991, after introduction of new economic industrial policies, attack on rights of the working class and on the labour laws steadily increased. In 2014, after BJP coming to power

at the Centre, the use of sword on working class rights increased several fold. After assumption of power for a 2nd time with big majority at Centre by BJP, it immediately started to quash the rights of the workers. It was not able to do the same though it was in power for five years in its previous regime. But the 2nd time, within 3 months it started to amend the labour laws. It quashed 17 labour laws and pushed 2 new labour Codes in Parliament. One of them is Wage Code. By this all legislations such as Wages Act, Bonus Act, Minimum Wages Act, Equal remuneration Act for equal work disappeared. The 2nd one is the Occupational safety, health and working conditions Code. By this Factories Act 1948, Mining Act 1952, The Dock and Workers Act, Building Construction Workers Act 1996, The Plantation workers Act 1951, The Contract Workers Regularization Act 1970, Interstate Migration Workers Act 1979, The Working Journalists and News papers Employees Act 1955, Journalists' Wages Act 1960, Motor Transport Workers Act 1961, Sales and Promotions Employees Act 1976, Beedi and Cigars workers Act 1961, The Cine workers and Cine theatre workers Act 1981, total all these 13 Acts were abolished and the above Code came into existence. It has gone to a Parliamentary Committee due to struggles.

In the name of amendments, 44 labour enactments will be abolished to serve the interest of corporate companies. In place of them Central govt. intends to introduce 4 codes. Among them, one Code has already been passed by the parliament while the second has been sent to a Parliamentary Committee following workers' opposition. Those enactments, which were newly brought, do not contain even 0.01 % of workers' interests, and this is not an exaggeration. As against the old enactments, the new Codes do not contain any new provision for benefit of workers. Moreover 622 parts of 17 enactments were reduced to 134 parts and they were made as two Codes. All those old enactments were said to be aimed to give job security, health, wages and better working conditions. That means 488 parts out of 622 which were protective in nature to workers, were removed in the name of amendments. Managements were supposed to maintain many register as per old Acts. After amendments corporate companies can maintain all records with only one register. Those provisions which, even though poorly implemented, were in favour of workers, those 488 parts were removed. Government has announced that it has rationalized the earlier provisions and made them simple. Actually, in the name of rationalizing and codifying, very cunningly it has reduced the burden on managements.

With the Safety Code, it has also abolished the Motor Transport Workers Act 1961. By that all the rights of transport workers extended by the earlier Act will go away. Let us see what those were.

All the abolished enactments were specific for this special sector. Those enactments were made by keeping in mind the working conditions, health problems and wages etc of these specific workers. By abolishing all those legislations, their specialties and existences were cancelled. The working conditions of the transports workers are very different from Industrial and unorganized sector workers. By denying that difference they are merged with all other types of workers who actually have their own characteristics.

Moreover the Motor Transport Workers Act 1961 was applicable to the workers where their number was 5 in any establishment. But as per the new Code it is applicable only when the workers' strength is more than 10. That means that from now on, in any establishment if the transport workers' number is less than 9, the Act shall not be applicable. The establishments which are having nine drivers without cleaners do not come under purview of the new Code. If two workers are working on one vehicle and the vehicles are four they also do not come in purview of the new Act. All these provisions will give opportunity to the managements to escape from the liabilities. By projecting one establishment as 2 or 3 establishments and by reducing the number of workers they can escape easily from liability. Here workers would lose their rights. Actually to save the workers from the cunning tactics of the managements, in 2009, V. V. Giri National Organization recommended amendments to the Motor Transport Act, 1961. That Committee recommended improving of working conditions without any exemptions. Under any management, if only one worker is working, he should also be eligible for benefits along with PF and ESI etc. facilities. But those recommendations were not implemented by the then Governments and neither by present Government. Moreover when the required number of workers for applicability of the Act is increased from 5 to 10, 60% of Transport work force would be thrown out from the purview of the Act.

Some inspecting system was there in The Motor Transport Act, 1961. The authorities such as First Class magistrate rank chief inspectors and inspectors can conduct inspections to verify whether the transport companies and managements were following the Act or not. If any discrepancy is found they can initiate actions accordingly. As per new

code this system would disappear. In total, in the old legislation, from out of 12 sections, 6 parts explain about these supervising committees meant to save the interest of workers and employees. Now, by abolishing all those this new code is bringing all the workers into a single system and has created new inspectors cum facilitators. These can be formed at state and central level. It is the bitter experience of the past that though there were separate inspectors for separate sectors, the labour enactments were not implemented properly. But by creating only one committee for all sectors, implementation becomes a dream.

Moreover as per Motor Transport Act 1961, certified doctors must be there to look after the health and medical problems of the workers. If the numbers of workers are beyond 100, the management should maintain canteen. They should also provide rest rooms. Apart from giving uniforms to the drivers, they should also supply sweaters and rain coats. But in the new Code these are all under ambiguity. It is said that once in a year medical test will be conducted. By keeping these types of rules, the health of the Motor transport workers would be in danger.

The new Code provides a new weapon to the managements to dismiss the workers of Motor transport in the name of penalty and this will be so in the other twelve sectors too. As per old Act, if managements removed workers for vague reasons or if any accidents occurred during duty due to the negligence of managements, punishment would be given to the managements at the tune of 3 to 6 months jail or with Rs.500/- fine or with both. On workers also some limited punishments were there. But as per new Code, in the name of doing justice to the workers more burden has been imposed on workers. As per new Code for above said 'crimes' upto two years jail punishment can be imposed on managements and a Rs. 5,00,000/- fine may also be imposed. From this fine 50 % of that amount may be given to the family of worker at the discretion of the Magistrate. In case if it is not given to the worker's family, the amount of fine on the management maybe reduced to Rs. 3,00,000/-. That means in practice the fine of the management would be reduced. In any industry or institution it is very difficult for workers to prove that for accidents or for any other crimes, managements are responsible. The managements can easily throw all the blame on workers. They can create evidences as per it. They can influence the officials also. Govt. can say punishments would be given to the management as per this Code, but is not possible. But this Code has

given very good weapon to the managements. In this Code one more rule has also been added that, if the accident has happened due to the worker, Rs.10,000/- fine may be imposed on worker. Just like workers of other sectors, Motor transport workers are also not getting minimum wages. Getting minimum wage is a day dream. Paying of penalty of Rs.10,000/- is impossible. This rule gives the opportunity to the managements to exploit the workers. By putting these types of weapons in the hands of the management, it can give a method to disrupt the unity and bargaining capacity of the workmen.

In this Code Govt. has given one more axe to the managements to use against the working class. Apart from other workers, if Motor Workers are absent without permission, the Code allows the managements to cut 8 days salary of workers. In old Acts there was such provision if workers go on strike without legal process. The workers' unions had demanded since long to remove this anti worker provision. But now this has been extended even to absence without permission. It would give one more cruel weapon to the managements to attack the rights of the workers. Motor Transport Workers Act 1961 aimed to look after the welfare of Motor Transport workers. By removing this Act, protection for their employment, health and working conditions are removed. Now Govt. has brought this code. At the same time they also made so many powerful changes to the rules of Motor Vehicle Act. By making rules in such a way they are intending to impose so many restrictions on Motor Transport workers. For forwarding this intent they introduced Road Transport Safety Bill, 2015. On 30-04-2015 nation wide Transport strike was conducted against this Bill. At that time Central govt. temporarily took back its step. This was a drama as on 09-08.2019 Road Safety Bill was brought into implementation through Gazette 51.

The total burden of road safety stands transferred on the Motor transport workers through the Bill passed by Gazette 51 on 09.08.2019 as Road Safety bill, without taking into consideration the conditions of the roads, the role of traffic control and the responsibility of the Government.

By making amendment to the Motor Transport Act in 2018 through G.O No. 859, license fees and challans were increased more than 200%. Now in 2019, through Road Safety Bill the total responsibility for road accidents has been put on the workers. In the name of reducing accidents, Govt. has increased fines and punishments to the tune of 500% to 2000 %. If we see the aim of the central Govt. it is clearly to increase the profits of

insurance companies and the income of state Govt.s instead of prevention of accidents. In the new Bill, 63 more rules were added to the rules of the old Act. Of these, except 5 or 6 rules, all other rules are aimed at controlling the workers and to loot their income sources .

As per the data given by the Central govt., every year 1.5 Lakh deaths are happening because of road accidents. It maintains that the Road Safety Bill was brought to reduce the death rate. Then why is the Govt. not focusing on industrial accidents? Don't they snuff out the lives of the workers? As per Govt.'s data, 75,000 deaths were taking place in industrial accidents. One lakh more worker's deaths are happening because of occupational diseases. For the total of these deaths of 1.75 lakh workers managements' negligence is the reason. In this, the improper implementation of Labour Laws is one important underlying cause for these deaths. The Bhopal Gas tragedy accident which had taken away the lives of 5500 people was witness to their negligence. The Centre is cunningly crying about road accidents and bringing bills to attack transport workers. But the Central govt. is not trying to bring any new special Act to prevent the industrial accidents. By observing this, the aim of the Govt is clearly visible. It is working for the benefit of corporate companies and managements.

Here we have to think about one more issue. When the Centre was making new Code by merging 13 Acts, it kept some options in its hands to make more amendments in future in favour of managements. It did that by adding one more provision to the Code. It says, basing on the sector wise necessities and on specific conditions, some sub acts shall be made through these provisions and rules. In one way it said it was simplifying the procedure by making only one Code in place of 13 Acts. But again, to serve the interests of managements, it has kept opportunity in its hands to make sub Acts, which goes against its stated intention of simplification.

Any how this new Safety, Health and Working conditions Code 2019 is completely drafted under the guidance of corporate companies. This is very dangerous for the Motor transport workers just as it is for the workers of other 12 sector covered under the new Code. So working class should wage militant struggles against these Anti-Worker amendments. There is no other way.

Economic Slowdown and Service of the Corporate

S.S. Mahil

Nowadays, there is plenty of discussion on the crisis in the economy in the pages of newspapers and on media channels. The spokespersons of the Central government and the parties in NDA as well as saffron scholars in television debates have been vigorously trying to prove that panic is not yet needed. India is still in a better position than the rest of world in terms of GDP. The whole world is moving towards economic depression and this has impact on India as well, they say. They concede that there is a downturn, but assert that the policies of the Modi government are not the cause. They maintain that in fact in India there is less impact than in other countries and this is due to Modi Govt's policies. The second argument they advance is that viewing the economy as a whole, employment has increased in some sectors if it has declined in some other sectors. The facts on the other hand are very fiercely mocking these official claims. We will investigate whether this current economic situation is a crisis or not.

Before we go into the facts let us examine the Government's claims. The government experts claim that employment has increased in some sectors. In fact, it increased in only IT sector. Secondly, this increase is because of outsourcing by US companies. Their second argument is that the inflow of foreign capital into India has increased. But this is not because India's economy is very healthy but because foreign exchange is coming to India. It is actually because of the trade war between the world's two large imperialist powers. Many multinational companies have stopped investing in these countries and some of them have parked their funds in India temporarily. This is not due to the positive policies of Government of India. It is true that the economic downturn is in many countries of the world but the economic downturn of developed countries is different from that of India. Even today China is the fastest growing economy in the world. One of India's largest auto companies, Tata Motors, is just one percent of General Motors.

Despite the misleading arguments on television, the ghost of an

economic downturn is rising. First the Deputy Chairman of Niti Ayog, Rajiv Kumar, sounded an alarm and this was confirmed by Shashikant Das, Governor of Reserve Bank of India, a history teacher who holds the keys to the Treasury of the Reserve Bank of India. When the figures for the first quarter of the fiscal year 2019- 2020 came in, it was found that the gross domestic production growth was at five per cent. All the government experts had estimated that the GDP growth rate would be around seven percent but when growth dropped to five percent, the Government looked for cover. As ASSOCHAM spokesperson Rajiv Goenka said, Industry is facing a serious situation and he demanded that it should be given a package of rupees one lakh crore by the government. All the Corporate shouted yes to this. And the government bent. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman announced, the next day, a package for domestic and foreign Corporate at a press conference. Modi government withdrew Rs. one lakh seventy nine thousand crore from Reserve Bank including from its emergency savings. Such a situation had never arisen before. But Sanghi experts are adamant as are also Government spokespersons and they are still publicly trying to cover up this economic depression.

First of all, let's talk about the gross domestic production growth rate that is being discussed the most. In reality the situation is far worse than this. Five percent growth figure is due to change of basic figures, otherwise the rate would have been 3.2. Now look further, it is not even 3. There are two main sectors of Industry, the organized and the unorganized sector. The organized sector contributes fifty five per cent and the unorganized sector contributes forty five percent of its share to the gross domestic production, but in the unorganized sector ninety four per cent work force is involved, while in organized sector it is just six per cent. It is to be noted that this five percent growth rate figure does not include unorganized sector statistics because unorganized sector statistics come after one year. However, the reality is that Demonetization and GST hit this sector the most. This sector has seen the most 'bloodshed' of jobs. In addition to that, the embezzlement of non-banking financial companies and IL&FS has also destroyed it. The most striking manifestation of this is the loss of employment of about our crore workers in the unorganized sector. The growth rate of the sector is certainly below zero percent. Even in the organized sector the growth rate is measured on the basis of data of those companies of which 38.7 per cent do not even exist. These figures are not from a private entity but from the Central Statistics Organization and the

National Sample Survey of India, both government agencies. Frontline's independent investigations have also confirmed this scam. These companies have no offices, no meters, nor bills. In fact, gross domestic production rate is minus. Noted economist Arun Kumar also believes that the growth rate is in the negative.

There is a serious crisis in the financial sector including the banking sector. In these sectors many big scams have been revealed. Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksey who have been exposed as guilty of big scams in the area, have escaped abroad. NPAs, the sinking loans, have broken the backbone of the banks. From 2014 to 2018, in four years banks have waived off five lakh, fifty five thousand and six hundred three crore rupees' loan of big capitalists. Nevertheless the situation is that the banks are immersed in debt which is 9.3% of the total capital of the banks. The result is that the banks are sinking. It is important to remember that the crisis of imperialism in 2008 started in the form of bank crisis. The banks were private in the West and when big banks collapsed there was stunned response. Because the banks in India are in the public sector, when some banks start to sink, they are merged with other banks therefore the seriousness of the banks' crisis is not discussed. However, the fact is that out of twenty seven banks in public sector only twelve banks are now left.

Exports also are stagnant. The exports under Manmohan Singh's government in its last year, i.e., 2013-14, were worth 315 billion dollars. In the first Modi regime it could never reach this level. Thus, economic depression is an undeniable fact. The five percent figure is in fact the factory output. This crisis is affecting the Corporate and due to this the Finance department swung into action and the Finance Minister held a press conference and announced concessions and benefits to domestic and foreign Corporate. It was first announced that the ten percent surcharge imposed in this year's Budget on the companies with more than Rs. 400 crores turnover was being withdrawn. Sitaraman announced Rs. 70 thousand crores would be given to the banks so that the banks could make cash available to Industry. Giving concession in tax collection, she said that if the tax case was not solved within a month then the notice would be considered cancelled and proceedings would be initiated only after giving new notice. Giving concession to foreign portfolio investment, rules in single brand retail have also been relaxed. Coal sector and captive production have been opened for 100 percent FDI investment. Digital media has been

opened for foreign investment. Limit on foreign investment in aviation, media and insurance sectors is set to increase more than 26 per cent. The question now is whether these steps of the government will be able to overcome the economic recession.

All economic experts agree that the cause of this downturn is the sharp decline in demand. As is the situation in the international market, the imperialist powers are fighting for the maximum share of the market as the world's two largest economic powers, America and China, are in a trade war. In this case the consumption of Indian goods in the international market is highly unlikely to increase. So, the Indian economy has to rely on its own domestic market to survive the downturn. Hence it is necessary to increase the purchasing power of the people of the country. But the steps announced by the Finance Minister will not be of help in this direction. When we talk about the domestic market, about two third of the population lives in villages and our country's fifty-one percent population is engaged in the agrarian sector. Agriculture sector's growth rate dropped from five to two percent but when government tries to tackle the economic downturn, all its focus is on Corporate. In the Central Government plan, agricultural sector has no place. The Government does not seem to be alarmed by the economic down turn in the agricultural sector, though the situation is that lakhs of peasants and agricultural labourers have committed and are committing suicide. The Government had announced that it would double the income of peasants by 2022 but how would it achieve that? No disclosure has been made by the Prime Minister or the Minister of Agriculture. No road map has been submitted by the Government for this. On the contrary, the Government has played a joke on the peasant families by giving them six thousand rupees a year each! This claim of help to peasants is like the jumla of giving fifteen lakhs in every Indian's account by bringing back black money from abroad. According to a study by the United Nations Organization for Economic and Social development, forty five lakh crore rupees of Indian peasants have been looted between 2002 to 2019. On the other hand, from 2008 to till now, the Governments have been providing support packages to the Corporate. The Corporate is being given one lakh twenty thousand crore rupees every year in various forms of aid. So far the Corporate has been given eighteen lakhs crores in this way. The Government has not given anything to those whose forty five lakh crore rupees have been looted, but for those who have looted eighteen lakh crores from Government Treasury, the doors of the Treasury have been opened. Then

whose Government is this? Of course, the Government serves domestic and foreign corporate. Rural labourers are dealing with unemployment. MGNREGA guarantees minimum hundred days' work in a year, but rural labourers, on an average, got only 38 days' work under MGNREGA. Work offered is less than half of the assured and wages are much less than the wages in the area, that's why MGNREGA is a last resort. How can domestic demand be increased without touching the rural area which is where two third of the population is located? Taxes on prime interest and car loans and house loans by the banks will be cheaper. But a person does not build a house every day and a house will be built once in a life time. Similarly, a car is not purchased daily. It is not the first priority of the lower middle class. Because of this, the steps taken by the Government can hardly make any impact on the economic downturn. These excuses can be a means to fill corporate treasury. In this case there are huge question marks on the wisdom of withdrawing money from the Reserve Bank's reserves. They were not even withdrawn in the 1990s when gold was mortgaged. On the question of withdrawal of money for the government, two RBI Governors and one Deputy Governor were shown the door. Government formed a committee headed by Bimal Jalan to cover this.

There is an atmosphere of uncertainty at the world level. This could be a major crisis for India if foreign liabilities were to be paid immediately as foreign investors are withdrawing money from financial market. These liabilities will surely increase because the liabilities are over five hundred billion dollars while the reserves are about four hundred billion dollars. The value of the rupee is falling continuously with which liabilities themselves are increasing. It is very likely that after Demonetization and GST, the plunder of the Reserve Bank's reserves could prove to be the third major stupidity of the Modi government.

Particulate Matter in the Air and Concern of the Ruling Elite

While people of several cities in the country including capital Delhi choked on the air oversaturated with particulate matter, the ruling elite of the country could ultimately pin down the 'culprit' behind this sordid conspiracy- the poor peasants of Punjab and also of Haryana. The exercise undertaken by the govts. at the Centre and the state govt. of the territory of Delhi and the ultimate in the judiciary of the country- the Supreme Court- came down heavily on this 'terrorist' out to destroy the peaceful life of the urban conglomerate. State Govts. of Punjab, Haryana and UP have been ordered to stop nefarious activity of stubble burning by these trouble makers. Though air pollution in Delhi has invited the concern of the ruling elite, the condition in the whole of North India is abysmal and several cities, poor cousins of the Capital, suffer even worse situation in terms of air pollution.

Undoubtedly, air pollution in the country has reached dangerous levels and Capital Delhi has emerged as the pollution capital of the world, the most polluted city among the 1600 major cities investigated by World Health Organization (WHO). Not only Delhi, other cities of India are not far behind. 13 out of the 20 most polluted cities are in our country. Air pollution kills 1.5 million people every year in the country. Nearly half of the newborns in the country (2.2 million) suffer from lung damage owing to high levels of air pollution. These are some of the facts in circulation. While the extent of the air pollution and its ill effects are undoubted, causes behind this are most debated. While the Govt. of Territory of Delhi has routinely announced "Odd Even" Scheme for use of private cars always after the prediction of turn in weather, to enable AAP Govt. to claim success, it is more a show to meet the criticism of its inactivity than for any proven effect at the stage when air pollution has crossed measurable limits. This is like putting of police check posts in all corners of Delhi after any blast. Its target is gullible people and not air pollution. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sishodia rode on a cycle to his office. He was apparently not communicated the advisory issued by Health Minister of Delhi to not undertake physical activity in the open. Central Govt. is smug with the success of its "Swatch Bharat Abhiyan" with its photo-ops, though air pollution has not responded and which is not their fault. After all there was no pollution in ancient India and repository of

our rulers does not go beyond that. Environment Minister Javadekar has prescribed "start your day with the music" though not suggesting type of music which can act as deterrent to the effects of air pollution. Health Minister Harshvardhan prescribed eating of carrots to minimize effects of air pollution signaling that the Govt. has no intention of taking steps to reduce it. While the ruling elite including Govts. at the Centre and states and also judiciary talked (and only talked) of curbing Diwali celebrations with firecrackers which lead to both smoke, noxious gases and particles, but it hardly had any effect because it was mere talk. It still continues to be an important cause for the sharp spike in pollution levels in Delhi.

According to Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), 65% of the air pollution in Delhi is due to local sources i.e. generated due to activity in Delhi. According to the Centre, whose Chairperson is on the Supreme Court appointed Committee on Environment, stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana contributes about 5 to 7% of the pollution load in Delhi. While stubble burning by peasants is a favourite whipping boy of the Central and State govts., they do not bother to explain why there is excessive particulate matter in the air in several areas of Delhi and that too not uniformly. Obviously this cannot be due to pollutants carried by air from afar. According to the CSE, there are 14 such areas in Delhi itself and burning of municipal solid waste and industrial waste is a big contributor to air pollution.

Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Central Govt. had brought out a research paper in October 2018 on the air pollution in Delhi. According to that paper, 41% of the particulate matter in the air of Delhi is due to vehicular emissions, 21.5% is contributed by dust and 18% by the industries. The Association of Automobile makers has seen to it that the Report is consigned to the dustbin and no Govt. will take it out given the alarming slowdown in the automobile industry. There are seven millions of motorcycles and scooters in Delhi. Badarpur Power Plant (Closed since 2018 end) had been another contributor of particulate matter. According to a Report, while it contributed to only 8% of the power supply in Delhi, it accounted for nearly 80 to 90% of the particulate matter pollution from the electric power sector in Delhi. There are many hotspots of air pollution in Delhi including Bhalswa and Ghazipur landfills which remain unattended by the two Govts. Both the govts. believe in perception management as the means to power, as shows in the inaction in tackling fire simmering for months in landfills. AAP Govt. has boasted of distribution of masks among

students but a large number of them are not given these as yet. What is the purpose of giving after the peak is over, except the profit of mask makers? The claims of the Delhi Govt. of having reduced pollution levels by 25% over past few years has been challenged by environmental groups. It has been pointed out that the assessment teams of the Central Pollution Control Board, which are set up in various parts of Delhi, have not recorded this improvement. Detoxifying arrangements for sulphur gases have not been installed at electric generation plants in Delhi and a second deadline for the same has been given to the Delhi Govt. in the course of the current proceedings in the Supreme Court.

It is only in the months of October-December that this problem is talked of while air pollution levels remain high throughout the year. Particulate Matter (PM) levels remain between 101 to 200 from January to September. This is much higher than the prescribed limit by the WHO i.e. below 25. However, between October to December the levels go through the roof breaking the record and record keeping machines. This is the time when two additional factors come into play. One is the cold weather which precipitates the PM and keeps it in the air. Also relatively stagnant air which is common during this season, compounds this problem. In this season, peasants in Punjab and Haryana clear their land for sowing of Rabi crops. With the new harvesters the stubble is left standing in the fields, and has to be cleared for sowing. Poor and even middle peasants cannot afford machines for the purpose and hence burn it in the fields. This smoke is carried by air to distant places, thus its dispersal is dependent on the air movement. Western winds carry this smoke to Delhi and other cities aggravating the air pollution there with clearance being slow due to above listed factors. Contribution of this factor, though small overall, becomes significant in this season. However, one-sided emphasis on this factor is misplaced and shows that the ruling elite is unwilling to address other factors which lead to increase in PM in the air, namely dust (generated by construction activity) and vehicular emissions. They are callous even in addressing disposal of industrial and municipal waste because much more powerful forces are involved. This partly explains the scapegoating of poor (and middle) peasants.

Ruling classes and the corporate media also avoid the real cause behind this increase in stubble burning. To an extent stubble burning has been prevalent from old times as a practice by peasants throughout the country

but its recent spurt in Punjab and Haryana has been spurred by imperialist sponsored model of agricultural development called Green Revolution. These areas saw multi-crops in this season (Maize, Jwar, Bajra, Pulses and Peanuts etc. were sown in this season) which have been replaced by paddy cultivation which has not been the traditional crop of this region. This large scale rice plantation has depleted the water table in the region and the Govt. forced peasants since past few years to delay paddy plantation from early May to late June to utilize rainfall. This makes this crop ripen at the end of October and peasants including small peasants have a very small window of time to prepare the land for sowing of Rabi crop. Hence the stubble clearance is now done at a time when weather turns in this region. But the Govts. are silent on this as these are wedded to the imperialist interests behind this change.

One hears talk of ban on construction activity but a cursory survey would show that is more on paper while construction activity goes on. Similarly the question of industrial waste management is not addressed by the Govt. It needs Govt. intervention in case of small industries which cannot afford their own plants for the purpose. Nearly three decades back a number of small industries were thrown out of Delhi on this pretext but really to exploit the higher commercial value of land. At that time TUs and democratic organizations had demanded that Govts. take the responsibility of waste management of small industries but the Govts., serving the interests of big capitalists including foreign capital, turned a deaf ear, throwing these units and thereby their waste to remote areas. Even now the Govts. target these employment generating small units but refuse to take responsibility for the waste management. And who will talk about municipal waste management, which squarely falls within the purview of the Govt? These factors operate round the year but ruling elite hardly bothers about them.

The ruling elite can hardly address this problem except take ameliorative steps when crisis situation supervenes. They are obsessed with spurring growth by any means and any planned development is a taboo to them, smelling as it does of 'socialism' to them. They wish to unleash the "animal spirits" of Capitalism to usher in their development and these animal spirits are soaked in pollutants, as they crave for increasing profits by all means. Industrial safety is not their concern and they leave behind the waste for others. Govt.s, on the other hand, have no appetite to spend for the people,

obsessed as they are with showering benefits on the corporate. So any planning for the well being of the people including taking care of healthy air, is not on their agenda. A large populace of India does not yet have clean water and now even larger number is deprived of clean air as well. But these systemic causes are not the concern of the Govt.s or Judiciary.

Hearing this matter, Supreme Court Bench presided over by Justice Arun Mishra called the actions of the Govts. as “gimmicks” which is not much off the mark. The Bench went on to say that these Govts. are interested only in gimmicks and elections. It is doubtful whether their response would be better if the ruling classes do away with elections all together. In fact, the Supreme Court left much to be desired in its order. While it did question the Govt. of Delhi for its failure to add 3000 buses to the DTC fleet which it had promised last year (Delhi Govt. added only 120), the Court could have issued simple directions like reducing fares of the metro which have gone beyond the reach of common people. It could have directed the Central and State Govts. to meet the expenses of clearing the stubble in the first hearing itself. They did not direct these obvious measures.

After breast beating by the Govts. and other state institutions like Judiciary, it will be the weather goddess which will, as it always does, come to the rescue and bring the PM levels to the poor or very poor level from the severe. The air movement will take away some part, rain will also lend a helping hand. In the meanwhile, millions will suffer from lung ailments, lakhs will die of them and children will be the particular victims of lung damage at a vulnerable age. Rulers have no desire to address the causes. They must be seen to be concerned and they are going through the motions. Once the severe phase passes it will be business as usual.

(On 6th of November, the Supreme Court passed an order directing the state govts. to pay Rs. 100 per quintal to peasants to clear the stubble. Govts. are also directed to provide machines to peasants. While this order is better than the earlier ones it does not take care of the totality of the conditions of the peasants who are forced to take recourse to stubble burning. It is doubtful whether this payment will be able to address the question. We have to see this in the backdrop of increasing indebtedness of peasants due to squeezing of their incomes as input costs increase but the prices of agricultural produce do not keep pace. In fact agrarian crisis has deepened greatly and small peasants are its major sufferers. Govt.

should provide use of machines to poor peasants free of cost for the survival of this big section of peasantry.

Supreme Court also asked the Govt. counsel whether they say “there is no solution”. Solution obviously is there. But do the ruling elite including higher judiciary have the will to look for it, leave alone go for it?)

RCEP and Modi Govt.

Indian Govt. has decided not to sign the agreement on Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) for the time being while other fifteen countries involved have decided to proceed with the Agreement. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reported to have remarked that the deal in its present form fails to reflect the basic spirit of RCEP. The statement issued by the RCEP countries noted, “India has significant outstanding issues, which remain unresolved.”

There was widespread opposition to RCEP agreement in the country. This free trade agreement between 10 ASEAN countries with their six free trade partners, namely Japan, China, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India is bound to seriously affect domestic producers in agriculture, dairy and industrial manufacturing. People of the country including organizations of peasantry, milk producers and even bodies of industries had opposed the signing of this agreement. Despite this widespread opposition, Indian Govt.’s refusal to sign the agreement is not primarily due to this opposition of the people. Indian rulers are used to trampling people’s interests under feet. If this were not so, Modi Govt. would have made the issues clear from the beginning as the provisions of the Agreement are clear. Further there would be no need to keep the doors open for the future as the 15 countries have decided to proceed ahead despite India and text based negotiations, i.e. framing of ground rules, have been completed. Future negotiations would not mean renegotiations of these principles but only some “give and take” in the tariff lines. It is worth recalling that Narsimha Rao led Congress minority Govt. had signed the WTO agreement despite countrywide protests against it. But there was a vital difference. All the

imperialist countries were united on the WTO then but that is not the case with RCEP.

The real reason of Modi led RSS-BJP Govt.'s opposition is the opposition of US imperialism to this agreement. Contradictions among imperialist powers are intensifying and trade war is unfolding between USA and China. US imperialism signaled its opposition to the Agreement. It was also apparent from the fact that neither President Trump nor Vice-President Pence chose to attend the meeting, sending the Trade Secretary in their place. US hand behind the delay caused in RCEP was pointed out by several leaders but most clearly by Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohammed. Modi led RSS-BJP Govt. has demonstrated its tilt towards US and its allies on a number of occasions. It was much in evidence in recently held "Davos in Desert" meet organized by Saudi Crown Prince Salman.

Asia has become a battle ground between US imperialism and Chinese Social-imperialism. Recognizing the need to combat the rising influence of China in Asia, Obama Admn. had coined "Pivot to Asia" which envisaged posting a large part of its military to Asia to contain China. Along with this went "Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)", a large trading bloc encompassing countries with nearly half of the global GDP. Pitting India against China has also been an important component of this strategy of US imperialism. Trump Admn. has torn down TPP retaining military component of the "Contain China" policy along with snaring India into this new coined "Indo-Pacific Region" thus signaling the importance of India in this strategy.

With US tearing down TPP, the negotiations for a regional bloc without US gained momentum, though the process was initiated in 2012. With the rise of protectionism in US under Trump, even the US allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand looked towards China and ASEAN countries to enhance their trade and overcome stagnation in their economies. On the other hand, India, wary of the influence exercised by China and egged on by US imperialism, delayed the process. However, patience of other countries ran thin and they chose to go ahead with RCEP without India. It was precisely for delivering this message that China's Xi had recently come to Mamallapuram in Tamilnadu to meet Modi.

Though Modi led RSS-BJP and their apologists would claim to keep India's interests above everything for not signing RCEP agreement but the whole performance of RSS-BJP proves otherwise. Whatever taxes they

had increased on the foreign companies they meekly withdrew. They opened coal mining in India to 100% foreign ownership. They waived off the requirement of 30% purchase from domestic sources for single brand retail. These are only some of the measures recently taken. In fact the increase in customs duties over the last two years, which were diluted and waived off under different pretexts, were only to increase the base duties for the purpose of RCEP negotiations and not in the interest of domestic production. They have been trying to entice foreign capital with lower wages, lower taxes and open loot of the natural resources. This is the essence of their "Make in India". Hence, their refusal to sign the RCEP has little to do with the protection of agriculture, dairy and manufacturing and everything to do with their desire to align with US imperialism particularly against China.

The fact is that a large country like India cannot develop by dependence on the foreign markets or foreign investments. Export dependent and FDI driven model of development pursued by the successive govts. in India was only to reinforce the rule of big comprador capitalists and big landlords. There was no attempt to increase the purchasing power of the people which meant improvement in their standard of living or in the domestic production which called for freeing the country from imperialist yoke and semi-feudal fetters. This model has been crisis ridden and periodic attempts to tide over the crisis by further increasing the stranglehold of foreign capital provided only temporary respite to the rulers leading to further aggravation of the crisis. Modi Govt. is pursuing the same model only increasing the dependence of the country, exploitation of its toiling people, workers and peasants, and of the natural resources of the country. No large country like India has developed by taking this course of dependence and without undertaking restructuring of its society.

Modi led RSS-BJP Govt. has led the country into a tighter embrace of the US and its allies. Indian ruling classes view China as a rival to their regional ambitions which they hope to realize under the tutelage of US imperialism and its allies. This is while they maintain their relations with Russian imperialism. This has no contradiction with the current ruling dispensation in Washington. In the unfolding trade war they wish to draw closer to US so as to make India a favoured destination of Capital from US and its allies. In this even the Congress leadership is in the loop. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in the course of the recently concluded assembly elections, while criticizing Modi Govt.'s performance, had advised

the Govt. to utilize the trade war between US and China.

While Indian people and organizations of different sections had demanded Indian Govt. not to sign RCEP, they should be alert to the policies of the Modi Govt. against Indian producers and particularly working masses. Modi Govt. is planning to sign a further deal with US imperialism which will have adverse effect on a number of sectors. A powerful movement should be built against domination of Foreign Capital and their compradors in different sectors.

Modi Govt. has made clear that it would pursue RCEP to pursue the changes it seeks. But the real intent is to keep the door open to provide for the trade deal between USA and China on which the Govts. of these countries are negotiating. Compradors are covering their tracks so that they are not caught off-guard.

TASKS OF WRITERS-ARTISTS- INTELLECTUALS IN THE TIMES OF FASCISM

**(We are here publishing the address given by Dr.
Shamsul Islam on September 20, 2019 in
Hyderabad at a gathering of Cultural Activists)**

Dear comrades and friends,

Before sharing my views on the tasks of artists-writers-intellectuals in the times of Fascism, let me briefly define Fascism and how it is different from totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is political concept, a dictatorship of an individual, family or group which prohibits opposition in any form, and exercises an extremely high degree of control over public and private life. It is also described as authoritarianism. Whereas Fascism while retaining all these repressive characteristics also believes in god-ordained superiority

of Race, culture, religion and language of the rulers. It is rule of the Aryans over pagans or *malechas*, where the latter belonging to an inferior Race (which Hitler described as “no-Race”) should be eliminated as these corrupt the superior Race, its culture, religion and language.

The capture of the Indian state by the Fascist RSS/BJP rulers should not be confused with the rule of Nazi Party in Germany and the Fascist Party in Italy after the World War I. The rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe was the outcome of a severe crisis of capitalism globally. Since Germany and Italy had powerful working class movements, the capitalists, bureaucrats, military elite and the Rightist political leaders decided to crush the Left and impose totalitarian rules in the two countries.

India, on the other hand, had always been a breeding ground for the totalitarian ideology with Brahmanism or Hindutva Fascism as a favourite ideology of the Hindu high Castes with the arrival of Aryans to Indian peninsula. The Brahmanism is codified into *Vedas*, *Codes of Manu (Manu Smriti)* and *Chanakya's Arthshastra*. These are the fundamental documents of Brahmanism which preach Hindutva brand of Fascism.

What this Fascism amounts to can be understood by glancing over some of the dehumanized elements contained in these documents of Brahmanism. According to VD Savarkar who played an important role in chalking out the modern Hindutva Fascism in India, only those could stay who belonged to a “common Race”, “common blood”, and “common civilization” known as Aryan Race which spoke holy language, Sanskrit.

The Hindutva Fascism's other prominent ideologue, MS Golwalkar, while fully supporting the cleansing of the Jews by Hitler and Mussolini in their countries, went on to declare shamelessly that cleansing of Jews by Hitler and Mussolini was “a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by” for eliminating non-Aryans.

We should not miss the fact that Hindutva Fascism in comparison to the German/Italian Fascism is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and insidious. Whereas in Europe it was Aryans versus Jews, the Hindutva version denigrates adversaries at two levels. On one level minorities, specially Muslims and Christians, have to be cleansed. At the other level Sudras, through imposition of Varna system, have to be enslaved. According to Hindutva ideologues, Hinduism, Hindu nation and Casteism are

synonymous. *Manu Smriti* blatantly decreed that Brahma created the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra from his mouth, his arm, his thighs and his feet respectively. The lord prescribed for Sudras one occupation only, that was to serve meekly the other three Castes. If a Sudra criticizes a twice-born man his tongue would be cut out; for he is of low origin. If a Sudra arrogantly taught Brahmanas their duty, the king would cause hot oil to be poured into his mouth and into his ears. If a low-caste man tried to place himself on the same seat as a man of a high caste, he would be branded on his hip and be banished, or (the king) shall cause his buttock to be gashed.

As per the Manu Code if Sudras are to be given most stringent punishments for even petty violations/actions, the same Code of Manu is very lenient towards Brahmins. Manu decreed:

“Let him never slay a Brahmana, though he have committed all (possible) crimes; he should be asked to leave, leaving all his property to him and his body unhurt.”

The fact is that Hindutva ideology is the original Fascist system and with Modi's coming to power in 2014 India began its journey under the Hindutva Fascist rule. However, it would not be correct that before Modi's becoming PM India was a peoples' democracy. It was an anti-people rule under the garb of democracy. The rulers of all hues despite running the country for the benefit of imperialists, capitalists and feudal rule continued their public affirmation to the so called democratic-secular polity of India. But with Modi's coming to power this facade was abandoned. The RSS/BJP rulers declared Hindutva as their ideology under which India would discard secularism and democracy and convert India into a Hindu rashtra. This current vision of the Hindutva rule is a direct borrowing from Golwalkar who, as early as 1940, while delivering a speech before the 1350 top level cadres of the RSS had declared: “RSS inspired by one flag, one leader and one ideology is lighting the flame of Hindutva in each and every corner of this great land.” This slogan of one flag, one leader and one ideology was directly borrowed from the programmes of Nazi and Fascist parties of Europe.

GLORIOUS LEGACY OF RESISTANCE AGAINST FASCISM BY WRITERS-ARTISTS-INTELLECTUALS

The world history is witness to this amazing fact that whenever the

Fascists tried to suppress peoples' aspirations, crush humanity and impose silence of the graveyard on the society, writers-artists-intellectuals stood shoulder to shoulder with other sections of the society in resisting the march of Fascists. Some of the glorious examples are worth remembering.

OLYMPE DE GOUGES

Olympe de Gouges (1748-93) was a French playwright, activist and feminist whose powerful polemics against racial and sexual injustice won her a wide audience in the years before and during the French Revolution. Her most vital 17 point, ***The Declaration of the Rights of Women and of the Female Citizen (1791)*** was written in response to the revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), highlighting its inherent sex bias and addressing key issues of women's rights that it had failed to cover. For this 'crime' she was beheaded in Paris on November 3, 1793, at the age of 45. Before being slaughtered she roared: **“Since women already have the right to climb the scaffold, they must be given the right to mount the rostrum so that they can speak their minds.”**

BRECHT

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht (10 February 1898 – 14 August 1956), known professionally as Bertolt Brecht, was a German theatre practitioner, playwright, and poet. He was the main proponent of the genre named epic theatre (which he preferred to call “dialectical theatre”). During the Nazi period and World War II he lived in exile, first in Scandinavia and then in the United States. During the Nazi rule Brecht expressed his strong opposition to the National Socialist and Fascist movements in his most famous plays: *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, and many others.

Brecht even today remains the greatest dramatist and poet against Fascism and his teaching can play a great role in fighting the Hindutva fascism. His advice to the artists is “Art is not a mirror held up to show reality but a hammer with which to shape it”. Thus he wanted the artists to use art as a political tool to revolutionize the society. He wanted writers-artists-intellectuals not to be cowed down by the Fascists repression, by telling: “In the dark times will there be singing? Yes, there will also be singing. About the dark times”.

Fascism plays havoc with the truth. Brecht gave a five-point programme to uphold the truth and confront lies. "Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgment to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the running to spread the truth among such persons."

Charlie Chaplin

Charles Spencer 'Charlie' Chaplin was born on April 16, 1889 in London. His childhood was fraught with hardship and poverty. Chaplin was sent to a workhouse at the tender age of seven. At the age of 13, Chaplin began his slow and arduous climb in the world of entertainment and not only became one of the greatest entertainers of the silent movie era but also a great artist who confronted directly through his satires Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, anti-Semitism, and the Nazis. One of his productions, *The Great Dictator* had this long speech, written in lyrics and delivered to perfection by Chaplin, that has surprisingly gone down in history as one of the most inspiring and evocative orations against Racism and Fascism.

I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor.

That's not my business.

I don't want to rule or conquer anyone.

I should like to help everyone if possible.

Jew - Gentile (non-Jew) - Black Man, White.

We all want to help one another, human beings are like that.

We want to live by each other's happiness.

Not by each other's misery.

We don't want to hate and despise one another.

And this world has room for everyone, and the good Earth is rich can provide for everyone.

The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate...stepped us into misery and bloodshed.

We think too much, and feel too little.

More than machinery, we need humanity.

More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness.

Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost...

To those who can hear me, I say - do not despair.

The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed - the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress.

The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people.

And so long as men die, liberty will never perish.

You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.

Then - in the name of democracy - let us use that power - let us all unite.

Let us fight for a new world - a decent world that will give men a chance to work - that will give youth a future and old age a security.

By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power.

But they lie!

They do not fulfil that promise.

They never will!

Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people!

Now let us fight to fulfil that promise!

Let us fight to free the world - to do away with national barriers - to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance.

Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness.

Soldiers!

in the name of democracy, let us all unite

Martin Niemöller

Martin Niemöller was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian born in Lippstadt, Germany, in 1892. Niemöller was an anti-Communist and supported Adolf Hitler's rise to power at first. But when Hitler started the

pogrom of cleansing Jews and working class turned against Nazism, he became the leader of a group of German clergymen opposed to Hitler. In 1937 he was arrested and eventually released only in 1945 by the Allies. An excerpt from his long poem which remains one of the greatest anthems against Fascism:

First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Antonio Francesco Gramsci (22 January 1891 – 27 April 1937) was an Italian Marxist philosopher and communist politician. He wrote on political theory, sociology and linguistics. He was a founding member and one-time leader of the Communist Party of Italy and was imprisoned by Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime. He was released from jail few days before his death when Mussolini regime knew that he would not survive.

He wrote more than 30 notebooks and 3,000 pages of history and analysis during his imprisonment. His *Prison Notebooks* are considered a highly original contribution to 20th century political theory. The notebooks cover a wide range of topics, including nationalism, the French Revolution, fascism, civil society, folklore, religion and high and popular culture.

Gramsci is best known for his theory of cultural hegemony, which describes how the state and ruling capitalist class – the bourgeoisie – use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. The bourgeoisie, in Gramsci's view, develops a hegemonic culture using ideology rather than violence, economic force, or coercion. Hegemonic culture propagates its own values and norms so that they become the "common sense" values of all and thus maintain the *status quo*. Hegemonic power is therefore used to maintain consent to the capitalist order, rather than coercive power using force to maintain order. This cultural hegemony is produced and reproduced by the dominant class through the institutions that form the superstructure.

He argued that capitalist power needed to be challenged by building a counter-hegemony. By the need to create a working-class culture and a counter-hegemony Gramsci meant a kind of education that attempted to

help students question and challenge the beliefs and practices that were dominating. In other words, it was a theory and practice of helping students achieve "critical consciousness."

Comrades,

Those of us who are committed to challenging the hegemony of the culture of the Fascism must learn from Gramsci. His message in the note for the editorial staff of *l'unita* (The Unity, official Organ of the Italian Communist Party which Gramsci was editing) at the time of arrest (November 8, 1928) is as relevant for us as it was for Italian comrades in 1928: "It is necessary to think and study even under the most difficult conditions...to keep the risk of intellectual degradation at bay".

At the end I would remind you of words of Comrade Lenin who emphasized that cultural activists must have grasp of politics of the rulers as well as the revolutionary politics. When asked to suggest, he responded by saying:

"We must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter or a fashionable catch-phrase (and we should admit in all frankness that this happens very often with us), that learning shall really become part of our very being, that it shall actually and fully become a constituent element of our social life...In order that it may attain the desired high level, we must follow the rule: 'Measure your cloth seven times before you cut'"

Please learn from this magnificent heritage, do not replicate it only, carry it forward with revolutionary creative innovations added so that we are able to resist the current Hindutva fascist onslaught more meaningfully. Let's hasten its demise, we can do it.

Bolivia : Military Coup for Increasing Exploitation and Plunder

Bolivia has emerged as a new focus in the struggle in Latin America between pro-US economic elite and those fighting against neo-liberal plunder of their countries and standing for redistributive policies which they call as 'socialism'. This struggle is being waged on pan-Latin American stage. There have been many battlegrounds in this struggle. This struggle is also intimately connected with increasing contradictions among the imperialist countries, with China increasing its economic and Russia its military footprints. The dominant power of the western hemisphere as well as the leading economic and military power in the world, US imperialism, has repeatedly struck to keep the rival imperialist powers at bay and people of these countries in check. In this it is aligned to a section of elite of these countries who wish to appropriate the whole proceeds of the natural resources of these countries and the products of its labouring masses. These sections, challenged by the rising movements of the people demanding better lives and by the sections of elite who are against US domination of their country's economic, social and political life, are aligned with Western imperialist rulers particularly US imperialism.

The western imperialist powers call their anti-people military intervention as aimed at bringing about or restoring democracy as the case may be. But this has always been a cover for their imperialist interests and has nothing to do with any democracy. US imperialism depends on the support of the sections of the ruling classes aligned to it as well as military officers who are mostly trained in the US Academy for Americas. The veil of democracy which they throw around their aggression, subversion and coups, has worn out. US imperialism is the biggest enemy of democracy in the world particularly in Latin America. This has been borne out by a series of military coups orchestrated by them in Latin American countries. Bolivia is its most recent example where every tenet of democracy has been violated.

On October 20 this year, Bolivia held its Presidential election in which incumbent President, Evo Morales was declared elected. Opposition disputed the outcome but only to the extent of whether or not Morales had

won by the margin of 10% votes which was necessary to avoid a run-off. For record, there was no dispute that Morales was leading his opponent, Carlos Mesa, a former President. Carlos Mesa, a pro-US politician politically and financially supported by US imperialism, whose political strategy were formulated in the US embassy in Bolivian capital, La Paz, called for open revolt against President Morales. That however, did not bring many people out as most of Bolivians support Morales. To put the issue to rest, Morales acquiesced to a team from Organization of American States (OAS) an organization under the control of US. This team found no evidence of wrong doing yet curiously labeled "clear manipulation" in the counting. Acting on the report, Morales ordered re-election to be held.

The US supported opposition which had till then demanded run-off changed tack and started demanding Morales should not be allowed to contest election. This brought to the fore the real design of the forces behind the anti-Morales campaign. As a part of these designs, police mutinied. Warrant of arrest was announced against Morales. His supporters and leaders of his Movement for Socialism (MAS) were attacked, their houses ransacked. House of Morales and his sister were also attacked. And then came the final blow. On November 10 Bolivian military chief asked Morales to quit, forcing him to quit the country. This was purely and simply, as pure it can be, a military coup against an elected leader. Military chief General Williams Kaliman has been trained like many others, in the infamous School of Americas. Fearing for his life and those of other leaders of MAS, Morales along with some other leaders of MAS left the country. In this he was helped by the new leader of Mexico, Obrador, who had won on the plank of opposing US domination of his country. His flight abroad had to counter obstacles from the pro-US regimes. Columbia refused to allow the plane carrying him to enter its airspace and it had to be routed through Paraguay.

The coup leaders continued to target leaders of the MAS. To give so-called legitimacy to their coup, they got the legislative assembly to choose his successor. Here the problem was that both the chambers were dominated by Morales party, MAS. MAS had 25 out of 36 members of the upper house and 88 out of 130 of the lower house, a comfortable two third majority in both the chambers. Military, police and cadres of pro-US parties unleashed a wave of violence against them and did not permit them to attend the session. In the empty house, deputy leader of the upper house,

Ms. Aneez proclaimed herself to be the President. On the other hand, people came out on the streets and confronted the police and military. Lakhs of people demonstrated and are continuing their protests in capital La Paz and other cities. More than 30 protesters have been killed and over 400 seriously injured in the firing by police and military. The whole country is witnessing a mass upheaval against this military coup.

Morales has been the first indigenous leader of Bolivia, a country where nearly two third of the people belong to indigenous communities. They are the most oppressed, exploited and their concerns were earlier neglected. After his election in 2006, Morales has implemented redistributive policies spending a part of the income from the natural resources on the welfare of the people which obviously was not to the liking of pro-US elite. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly this year, Morales claimed that his Govt. has reduced poverty rate from 38.2% to 15.2% and has implemented a Universal Health Care System. An interesting development during Morales' rule has been granting land tenures to women; over a million have received such tenures and over 50% of those elected to parliament chambers are women. Morales' model has been only redistribution of the income from natural resources without altering the production relations in the country. However under his rule, indigenous communities received attention for the first time and their conditions improved.

Bolivia, a country of 11 million, is an exporter of natural gas and mainly minerals. It has vast resources of silver, tin and lithium. According to World Bank its economy was 40.58 billion US dollars in 2018 with per capita GDP of 3565 US \$ (more than double on the index of PPP) and a growth rate of 4.2% with unemployment rate of 4%. Its main exports are minerals like tin, zinc, gol, natural gas and soy products. Nearly 30% of its labour force is employed in agriculture while nearly 22% is in industries and 48% in services. Mining, smelting and petroleum are among the main industries in Bolivia. It is the main source of tin and it is home to up to 70% of lithium supply in the world. Its exports are mainly to neighbouring countries with Brazil and Argentina among the top. It imports machinery, petroleum products, vehicles, iron & steel and plastics. China has emerged as the main source of its imports, accounting for nearly 22%. Decrease in the prices of commodities has put a strain on the economy. After he came to power, Morales made at least half of the control of mines with Bolivian national firms as a condition and allotted a part of the profit from mining for

social development (The Forty Sixth Newsletter). Western firms rejected new stipulation and Morales Govt. reached deals with Chinese firms. China has emerged as one of the main trading partners of Latin American countries. This coup is targeted at controlling the mineral resources of Bolivia. US and western firms want to corner bulk of the profits and would like to eject Chinese companies from Bolivia.

Another important aspect of the coup has been its targeting of indigenous people who constitute nearly two third of the people of the country. It is the democracy of the US imperialism which is calling this coup against indigenous majority as restoration of democracy. The Bolivian tribal flag (Pochama signifying mother earth) which used to fly along with Bolivian national flag has been torn down from the Govt. buildings. At Anez declaring herself President, a pastor shouted outside that this was as the second coming of Christ. The new President has remarked, 'I dream of a Bolivia free of satanic indigenous rites. The city is not for Indians; let them go back to the highlands or the Chaco'. Apart from everything, this was a *racist* coup. (The Forty Sixth Newsletter)

The US orchestrated military coup is facing resistance from the people. They fear for the loss of whatever Morales did and their fears are genuine. This people's upheaval in Bolivia is part of the struggles of the people of Latin American countries against US directed neo-liberal regimes. A very sharp struggle has broken out in Chile where millions came out on streets against rising inequality and deteriorating conditions of living. The struggle in Chile was precipitated by a rise in metro fares (transport charges constitute nearly 20% of the expenses by a labouring household). But it has grown into wider challenge to the neo-liberal economic policies. People are out of the streets against what they call thirty years of rising inequality. Conservative billionaire Sebastian Pinera 's Govt. is facing challenge from the people especially working people and this struggle is expanding to draw more and more forces into streets. They are demanding a change in the direction of the country and not merely changes in the Govt. Similarly a sharp people's movement has emerged in Columbia ruled by a pronounced pro-US regime. Lakhs of people demonstrated in the streets and confronted the police. Army had to be called out and curfew was imposed in the capital and other cities which witnessed large demonstrations. Here too the target of people's protest has been rising inequality and declining living conditions of the vast majority of the people. Colombian Govt. had earlier torn down

the agreement reached with FARC by the previous Govt. and this has also created widespread unrest in that country.

In Argentina, Peronist Alberto Fernandez has won the presidency with Cristina Fernandez de Krichner (a former president) as his running mate. He has defeated the candidate supported by US establishment. In the largest country of the continent, Brazil, former President Lula has been released and will now be leading the opposition against Bolsenaro, whose neoliberal regime is getting increasing unpopular. Lula was projected to be the comfortable winner in the last elections before he was jailed on corruption charges and Bolsenaro got elected. Election of Obrador in Mexico has also seen strengthening of these forces in Latin America. Obviously this would decrease pressure on the regimes being targeted by US imperialism- Venezuela, Cuba and Nicargua.

The conflict in Latin America is breaking out on a wider scale for the direction of ruling class politics in the continent. The increasing contradiction among imperialist powers is influencing the developments. Economic role of China is increasing in the continent though China is also trying to increase its strategic footprints in the region. This conflict at present centres around reforms which the section of elite supported by US and other western imperialist powers are determined to thwart and roll back. On the removal of Morales by the military, Brazilian leader Lula remarked, "Latin America has an economic elite that does not know how to live with democracy and the social inclusion of the poorest of the poor." Obviously he meant within the ruling class framework without changing the relations of production.

As the struggle grows deeper and draws wider and wider sections of the working people into its ambit, the very foundations of the present socio-economic structure are being challenged and this challenge will grow. Revolutionary forces have an increasingly fertile ground to work on.

Sabarimala - Equality Will Not Come From Courts

A five judge Review Bench of the Supreme Court, by a majority of three- two, on 14th November 2019, has not only reopened the earlier 4-1 verdict of the Supreme Court allowing entry of women of reproductive age into the Temple. Rather, it has drowned the limited question of allowing entry of women in reproductive years into Sabarimala Temple into the larger questions of gender discriminatory practices, including in various other religions. It has indicated that courts should be willing to consider that gender discrimination can be part of 'core practice' of a religion. This has been done without the majority judgement even uttering a sentence against the fact that political parties, including that ruling at the Centre, openly mobilized cadre and masses to threaten, physically block and later socially prosecute women in reproductive years who dared to try enter the Temple. Thus these parties openly defied the Supreme Court Verdict. That was a 4-1 judgement on the restricted question of a fairly recently installed provision against women in reproductive age group. The review petitions were limited to this judgement and the Supreme Court was expected to deal this limited issue. The BJP-RSS had openly mobilized against that judgement, the Congress followed suit and the CPM led state Govt. dithered in the initial phase. All this the majority judgement has simply overlooked, establishing that might and mob is right in the eyes of the majority of the Bench. It means the strengthening of those who will block women. It will weaken those who wanted implementation of the Court order and those who were trying to get its implementation despite the reactionary powerful opposition and its state backing. It means the earlier Judgement is actually done to dust.

The minority Judgement has pointed out just this, that a limited question of review of the earlier Judgement has been taken into a totally new arena. It has also spoken sternly against the impunity with which that judgement was violated.

The days that have followed the review judgement have borne out just this impunity. Within weeks of it the Sabarimala Temple was thrown open for limited days for worship, as per its practice. The Kerala Govt. led by

CPM promptly threw up its hands saying that while the majority judgement did not expressly say so, by implication there is a stay on the original judgement. Hence it would stop women of reproductive age groups from proceeding to the shrine. The women devotees of this group who had applied for a visit were refused permission. Those that came were stopped by the police at the enroute camps. This included a group of devotees among whom were the petitioners of this case. This position of the State Govt, did not change even when the Court rather belatedly announced there was no stay.

In the course of these events, the Dalit woman who had earlier visited the temple after the first judgement, came to meet the women preparing to enter and maybe to revisit the temple herself. She was attacked by a leader of a Hindutva outfit using a pepper spray can which are used to defend themselves with. The mob with him shouted the temple chant. The attack point summarizes the situation- outside the Police Commissioner office.

The review majority judgement was firstly, widely expected. It came in the atmosphere current in the country where the highest judiciary has been taking positions upholding a majoritarian narrative. In terms of women's rights it denotes defending a patriarchal narrative too. Just months earlier this same Court cast aside the basic premises of its judgements on sexual harassment at workplace. And so on in Sabrimala, where the entire issue of whether gender discriminatory practices can be part of essential aspects of a religion, are going to be entertained. The next step is caste discriminatory practices getting similar sanction.

A downright patriarchal practice, that too one which the God concerned ordained only about seventy or so years ago, was being questioned by women including believers in that God. The question rises starkly, that without strong social movements for democratic values, strong movements against patriarchal values, are Courts going to strike down gender discrimination? That too when an ideology openly espousing patriarchy has acquired open dominance? The question of entry of Dalits into various temples too needed massive mobilizations of Dalits. Without women's strong movements against Patriarchy, without their organized assertion on the streets against such practices, no right can even be defended. There are no shortcuts.

Dalits, Land, Law and Government

Dalits' struggle for their share in Panchayat land in some districts of Malwa region of Punjab, particularly district Sangrur and some pockets of Patiala, is in the news in Punjab. This struggle has left a deep impact on political and cultural fields. Feature and documentary films have been produced, plays have been written and staged. Poems and lyrics have been composed and sung and stories have been written about this struggle. Not only that, writers, actors, dramatists, singers and artists came on the streets of Sangrur in support of this struggle at the time of brutal repression in village Jaloor. This struggle became a problem for all ruling class parliamentary parties. These were stunned. Bahujan Samaj Party which has its vote bank among dalits was severely opposing this struggle on social media; on the other hand was forced to include this demand in its demand charter during its march in Nawan Shahr. Congress, another party having its vote base among dalits, tried to destroy this struggle by resorting to all sorts of cheap propaganda against the Zameen Prapti Sangarash committee, the organization spearheading this struggle and tried to wean Dalits away from the path of struggle. Aam Aadmi Party whose leader Bhagwant Mann was the member parliament from Sangrur seat, did not utter a word in support of Dalits even at the time of barbaric attack on dalits in village Jaloor. All revolutionary organizations came out strongly in support of the struggle. Revisionist CPI(ML)-Liberation tried to take mileage from this struggle by separately holding a small rally at Lehragaga block headquarter after Jaloor episode but stayed away from a prolonged and pitched struggle on the issue. But no party could simply ignore it.

Communist organizations and mass organizations under their influence strongly supported this struggle but the struggle also intensified debate on the question of mode of production in Punjab. Punjab was the first state where imperialist model of agriculture misnamed as Green Revolution was implemented. Punjab is considered to be a model of green revolution. It was considered that mode of production in agriculture in Punjab is largely capitalist and land question is resolved and scope of land struggle is nil. But this struggle on issue of land after the struggles on land in Gurdaspur

and Amritsar districts, particular the struggle on land in Khanna Chamara village in Gurdaspur where two peasants were killed in a clash, kindled a debate on mode of production in agriculture and there being no scope of struggle on land was proved to be a myth.

Indian sub-continent is the only region in the world where society is in the iron shackles of caste system. This is the basis of socio-economic system. Eras have changed, rulers have changed over the period of centuries but caste system has not changed. Baba Nanak, Bhagat Ravidas, Kabirji and many other saints of bhakti movement raised their voice against caste system but this could not impact it much. The religion which is in the name of Guru Nanak is itself enmeshed in the caste system. There is not only caste system prevalent in Sikh community, they have separate gurdwaras (religious centre) on the basis of caste where devotees belonging to that specific caste pay respect. In certain Deras run in the name of Sikh religion there are separate utensils for dalit castes in the langar (common kitchen) which was started by Guru Nanak to eliminate caste and people belonging to all castes were mandated to sit in single row on the ground for eating langar. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Savitri Bai Phule, Periar Swamy, Baba Mangu Ram, Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar and Babu Kanshi Ram tried in their own ways to change this predicament but their efforts bore little fruit and caste system could not be eliminated. Ambedkar achieved constitutionally guaranteed reservation in place of separate electorate as a result of compromise with Gandhi, who was deadly opposed to separate electorate for Dalit castes (Depressed Classes) and went on fast unto death in Pune jail demanding the scraping of separate electorate. Reservation in education and jobs has helped a section of dalits to improve their lot to some extent and has resulted in emergence of a middle class among the dalits. But this is limited only to a small section of dalits. Large majority of dalits in rural India are still living in hellish conditions. Even Dr. Ambedkar realized late in his life that he could not do anything effective for dalits residing in rural India. He repentantly said this at Agra in his speech in 1956. Dr. Ambedkar had this realization but Ambedkarites of today refuse to recognize this hard fact. These Ambedkarites represent the class interests of newly developed middle class among Dalits which rose as a result of reservation and their whole concern is reservation and filling of backlog. They are unable to grasp the importance of land in elimination of caste system. To understand the importance of land and Dalit struggle for land, one has to scientifically understand the caste system.

Communists have been debating whether this caste system is phenomenon of structure or of superstructure? Most of them considered it to be a phenomenon of superstructure. But the fact of the matter is that caste system has its roots in structure and is spread in the superstructure. What does it mean? Its roots in structure means that dalits are devoid of means of production. Main means of production in rural area is land. Dalits being landless is at the root of caste system. Essence of its expansion in super structure is endogamy. Edifice of caste system stands on two pillars, one is the dalits being devoid of means of production i.e. land in countryside and the second is endogamy. Caste system cannot be destroyed and caste cannot be eliminated without removing these two pillars. For destroying caste edifice it is essential to dig out its roots, means dalit getting their share in means of production i.e. land in rural area. Cutting the roots is the immediate task whereas struggle to end endogamy will be complete with the revolution in culture. Thus Dalit struggle for land is the most essential and immediate task for elimination of caste. Because this struggle hits at the very root of the system, so all the protectors of this system, Congress, Akali Dal and all ruling class parties, government, police and civil administration jointly pounce upon this struggle to suppress it. But, if society is to advance forward, if people of India are to progress, this struggle must succeed.

Is this struggle a revolt against the system? No, yet it is a struggle within the legal sphere and within the system. In Punjab this is perfectly within the parameter of Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Rules, 1964 and Punjab Panchayat Raj Act. Panchayat land is given on lease for cultivation. Punjab Village Common Lands Act provides that one third of the Panchayat land will be reserved for leasing out to dalits. But in reality the practice was that rich belonging to upper caste lease this land in the name of some poor Dalit generally employed with them on yearly or half yearly basis. Law of land was openly flouted. But, dalits of village Balad Kalan started struggle to have their share in Panchayat land on lease. They faced severe repression. They were lathi charged and were injured badly. Forty three of them, including the leadership of organization, were put behind bars for more than three months under serious provisions like section 307, attempt to murder. But organization fought stubbornly, got the land and also got the arrested released unconditionally. Next year this struggle spread to almost fifty villages. In village Jhaneri landlords attacked agitating dalits with fire arms but were resisted and rebuffed. In year 2016

clashes and confrontation took place in many villages. In village Jaloor landlord mobilized on caste basis and attacked the Dalit homes. Houses of leaders were destroyed, people were injured. An old lady, mother of a local leader, was injured so badly that she died in the hospital. This attack was with active connivance of police and civil administration. But dalits finally succeeded in getting their share of land. This struggle and organization has spread to nearly a hundred villages. Now first phase of this struggle is over as dalits in most of the villages are cultivating their share of land though upper caste people are resisting in some villages. Supporters KMPU were attacked and injured in village Mimsa. They are fighting for the same demand. But first phase is by and large complete.

Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee moved on and tried to develop this struggle further. In village Tolewal of Malerkotla tehsil of Sangrur district, sarpanch and one panch were elected who were supporters of ZPSC. In three villages, named, Tolewal, Dhandiwal and Mulloval, dalits demanded that their share of land be leased out for thirty three years. But administration rejected this demand terming it as illegal. Dalits in these three villages took a different course. Gram sabhas in these villages were called which, beside transacting other business, adopted a resolution giving dalit share of panchayat land for thirty three years on lease at a reduced rate. Administration even without rejecting this resolution formally, tried to auction dalit share as usual, for one year. In Tolewal, Congress and Akali landlords joined hands and tried to get auction held. But dalits stubbornly resisted this effort and a clash took place where more than a dozen Dalits including women were severely injured. Police, openly siding with landlords, refused to take statements of injured dalits being treated in the hospital. Court also supported landlords and granted bail though case was registered under Prevention of Atrocities (SCs & STs Act and sections which were non bailable. Whole state machinery is openly siding with landlords and standing against dalits. They assert in media that this struggle is illegal. But this struggle is perfectly legal. We shall examine the legal position.

Land vested in Panchayat is governed under Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act 1964. According to section 6, sub section 1, part A, "One third of the cultivable land to be leased out, shall be reserved for scheduled castes only." (*translated from Punjabi original*) Government revenue officials argue that it does means that land shall be leased out for more than a year but why do Dalits ask for a lease of 33 years? Punjab

government issued a land lease policy on May 9th 2014. Section 1 of this policy says "This policy shall be called village land lease for 33 years land leasing policy. In brief, it shall be known as village land lease policy." Article 6 of this policy provides for leasing Panchayat land for 33 years. "Where land is to be given for public welfare and social security like cow shelters, de-addiction centre, old age home etc. land can be given on lease for 33 years." Thus policy clearly says that land can be given on lease for 33 years for the purpose of "public welfare and social security". True it gives some examples of such purposes but it does not mean that it restricts the concept of public welfare and social security to the examples mentioned there.

Now the question here is, does leasing land to dalits for 33 years fall within the sphere of public welfare and social security? Dalits are a section of population which has been forced to live in slavery like conditions since so many centuries as they are devoid of any means of production, particularly land. They have to face oppression and suppression. Generally, dalits rear milk cattle to supplement their income, as labour is not assured for whole of the year. They need fodder and grass etc. for the cattle. They have to get it from the fields which are owned by upper caste people as dalits are landless. Generally, Dalit women have to go to the fields for getting grass and they have to face humiliation, sexual harassment and are even raped sometimes. Abuses to dalit women in the fields are common. Hence, land for Dalits, particularly Dalit women, is a question of social security. As it is not for one or few individuals but for a large section of population which is one third of total population, so it is also a matter of public welfare. So leasing dalit share of Panchayat land for 33 years comes perfectly within the preview of land leasing policy issued by Punjab government in 2014.

Thus it is clear that decision of Gram Sabhas of three villages is not illegal and certainly not a revolt or rebellion as is being portrayed by civil and police administration. It is perfectly within the scope of law. Government and local administration should have taken it with open mind and deeply consulting concerned legal provisions, accepted the resolutions of three gram sabhas. But government is bent upon not accepting the genuine demand of dalits. Government is trying to push auction with brutal force. As a result dalits in Tolewal had to suffer. Old ladies and many others are suffering in hospital without proper treatment, police is not doing the needful.

Young among the Dalits are forced to stay away from their homes in fear of attack by landlords and being arrested under false cases foisted on them by police. What is the reason for the adamant attitude of government on this issue? It seems that government wants to quell any type of resistance by Dalits. For that purpose it is trampling the law under foot and going out of the way to mobilize people on caste basis.

Are Dalits demanding something in violation of the law? Does the law provide auction of Panchayat land only for one year and not otherwise? As earlier stated, Dalits are demanding only that which is provided by the land lease policy of Punjab government issued on May 9, 2014. Apart from that there are provisions in the Act itself which provide for leasing panchayat land for more than one year. Section 6, part 2 of Punjab Village Common Lands Regulation Act provides "Common land of village cannot be leased out for more than three years and uncultivated land having shrubs etc. in it cannot be leased out for more than seven years". It means that land under cultivation can be leased for three years and land not under cultivation and needing reclamation can be leased for seven years. Why is the government insisting on leasing for one year only. It is nothing but anti dalit bias of state machinery. Further, part three of section six of the same Act stipulates that Panchayat land, "can be given for ten years for setting up an industrial unit". Now the question is, if land can be given to a Capitalist for purely earning personal profit, why it cannot be given for the benefit of the people standing at the lowest rung of the ladder in society for centuries together, and which can be a catalytic agent for radical progressive change in the society. Further part four, section six of Punjab Village Common Lands Act provides that "Panchayat common land can be leased for 15 years to the fish farming agency and a person sponsored by it for ten years." In the face of these provisions, government insistence on auction for one year is clearly unjustified. This whole episode reflects the anti dalit bias inherent in the whole state machinery.

The Resolution for giving land to dalits for 33 years was passed by a general body meeting of Gram Sabhas, whose two meetings in a year are mandatory, but that does not invalidate the Resolution, because Gram Sabha is a higher institution than gram panchayat. A panchayat has to submit its report on a development project before Gram Sabha and get it passed. If rejected by gram sabha, it has to prepare a fresh report. Panchayat has to present its budget before the Gram Sabha and get its approval. Panchayat

is responsible before Gram Sabha. Failure to call a session of Gram Sabha within time limit earns disqualification for a panchayat. Relation of panchayat and Gram Sabha is like relation between executive and legislature, envisaged in the constitution. Gram Sabha is legislature and panchayat is executive, government. As legislature is above the executive similarly Gram Sabha is above the Panchayat and its decisions (resolutions) have more sanctity and legal authority.

Section 199 of Panchayat Raj Act empowers the Director of Panchayat department to reject any decision or resolution of panchayat, but it has no right to reject the resolution of Gram Sabha. In fact none of the provisions in Panchayat Raj Act empowers any authority to reject the resolution of Gram Sabha. Block development and Panchayat officer has sent the resolution to District Panchayat Officer and he in turn has forwarded it to Director, Panchayat department. The Director has rejected the resolution of Gram Sabha of village Tolewal in complete disregard of the law. He has exercised a power which is not vested in his office by any provision of law. This episode exhibits one thing very clearly, that the baton of the Law is only for poor and labouring masses; it is completely toothless at the doors of ruling classes at all levels, including the ruling classes at village level.

Government and district administration are well aware of the fact that resolutions adopted by Gram Sabhas at villages Tolewal, Dhandiwal and Mullowal are perfectly within the law but they are trying to suppress this struggle with brute force. Why? Because they clearly understand that with this struggle for lease for 33 years, this dalit movement is advancing to the next phase of the land struggle. They are perfectly clear of the direction of this movement. This struggle is ultimately moving towards getting land with permanent possession and further, ownership right. It is for the redistribution of land and share of Dalits in means of production in rural Punjab.

This fact, which the Government understands very clearly, Dalits should also grasp. Their struggle cannot remain confined to their share in panchayat land. A year or so before, Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee issued a list of landlords around Sangrur who have land much beyond the ceiling limit provided by the law. There will be many more in this district only. Dalits should identify those and initiate struggle for capturing the surplus land, beyond the ceiling limit. This is also struggle within the parameters of law, because keeping land beyond the ceiling limit is a violation of Law.

Kartarpur : A Corridor of Hope

S.S. Mahil

A corridor to Kartarpur town of Pakistan was opened by Prime Minister Modi on the Indian side and by Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, at Kartarpur on 9th November. This corridor links Dera Baba Nanak in India and Kartarpur in Pakistan. Kartarpur is the town where Guru Nanak, first guru of Sikhs and founder of Sikh movement, spent 18 years of his life. Guru Nanak spent a large part of his life touring different parts of India and centres of intellectual life in whole of Asia including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Tibet etc. But returning from his great journeys, he settled at Kartarpur and took up agriculture as his occupation and means of livelihood. Baba Nanak's taking to agriculture was very important and had ideological implications because his father, Mehta Kalu, was a Patwari which was quite an influential post at that time. The husband of his sister was in charge of modikhana, a sort of provision store, and the family was not even remotely linked with the occupation of agriculture. Then why did guru Nanak choose agriculture as his occupation? Sikhi was a movement of peasantry against Muslim and Hindu feudal formations so this may be seen as an effort to further integrate with peasantry. However, the matter of fact is that Guru spent a considerable time in Kartarpur, especially in the later part of his life.

Kartarpur is situated in Pakistan now, just four-five kilometer from the international border between India and Pakistan. At the time of partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, Punjab and Bengal were divided. Many places related to Sikh Gurus and Sikh history situated in west Punjab went into Pakistan and Sikh devotees had been longing to visit these places freely and frequently. In the Ardas (prayer) performed daily in gurdwaras and in social functions, they beg the Guru for free visits to the religious places left in Pakistan. This issue is closely linked with the religious sentiments of the Sikhs.

Kartarpur being just four kilometers inside Pakistan is visible from the border. People go to border to have just a glimpse of Gurdwara at Kartarpur. Seeing this, Border Security Force (BSF) fixed a telescope on its observation tower, so that devotees can see the gurdwara more clearly. Allowing this depends on the BSF officer there. An estranged leader of Akali Dal led by Parkash Singh Badal, Kuldeep Singh Wadala, who came out with Badal when he split from Akali Dal led by Surjit Singh Barnala, the then chief minister, took up this issue when he was sidelined by Badal. He formed "Ravi Darshan Abhilashi Sangat" demanding a corridor to Kartarpur. He along with his followers used to go to the border and pray there for a corridor to Kartarpur Sahib. But this was a low key affair and not much importance was given to it in political circles. This issue picked up with the visit to Pakistan of ex-cricketer, a minister in the Congress government at that time, Navjot Singh Sidhu.

After last elections in Pakistan, Teriq-e- Insaf party formed by Imran Khan, ex-captain of Pakistani cricket team, won the election and Imran Khan was to be sworn in as Prime Minister of Pakistan. He sent an invitation to his friend during his cricket days, Navjot Singh Sidhu, apart from to Prime Minister Modi and others for his swearing in ceremony. Sidhu accepted the invitation whereas others did not because the whole politics of Sangh rests on the hatred towards Pakistan and Muslims. Sidhu attended the swearing in ceremony. Warmly hugging Imran Khan and General Bajwa, Commander-in-chief of Pakistan army, he asked for opening the Kartarpur corridor as this was the collective desire of whole Sikh fraternity. Both Imran Khan and General Bajwa responded positively to this request of Mr. Sidhu. Sangh, its ally Akali Dal and Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amrinder Singh vehemently attacked Sidhu, branding his act of hugging General Bajwa as treason. This virulent propaganda cost Sidhu his TV show. Congress Chief Minister of Punjab propagated that this corridor will open the flood gates for terrorism and ISI intrigues, echoing the RSS propaganda. But once Pakistan set the ball rolling this whole opposition had to fall in line. Akali Dal, alliance partner of BJP and claiming to be sole arbiter of Sikh interests, could not afford to oppose as it is an issue concerning the religious feeling of Sikhs. Sikhs are not confined to Punjab only but are in considerable number in Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and terai region of Utrakhand. Opposing this corridor means annoying this Sikh population, BJP also could not oppose it. So the Indian government grudgingly had to

go along.

This corridor got added importance as this year, 2019, is the year of 550th birth anniversary of Sikh guru Nanak Dev and Kartarpur is associated with him. This fact accelerated the pace of completion of this corridor. When it became clear that construction of the corridor cannot be stopped, then war of words started for taking credit. Daughter-in-law of Prakash Singh Badal and a Minister in the Union cabinet, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, gave whole credit to Modi and her husband, Sukhbir Singh Badal. When she found her propaganda ineffective she started finding fault with \$ 20 processing fee levied by Pakistan. Meanwhile most Congress people in Punjab gave credit to the Chief Minister, while some ministers and President of Punjab Congress acknowledged the important role played by Sidhu. During this credit controversy, the corridor was completed and was duly opened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Indian side on November 9th and by Imran Khan on Pakistan's side on the same day. Imran Khan invited Sidhu on this occasion of opening of Corridor, though he was unwanted on Indian side by Central and State governments headed by main contending political parties. In Pakistan Sidhu profusely showered praises on Imran for showing the guts to take this brave decision and courted controversy in India for this.

In the present political situation in India, this is a Corridor of Hope. The Sangh government under the leadership of Modi has launched a fascist offensive against the Indian people. Target of this offensive are communist revolutionaries, democratic and progressive forces, minorities, Dalits, tribals and women. Among all these, Muslims are their immediate and prime target at present. They are being targeted under the pretext of "Ghar Wapsi", "love jihad" and "cow slaughter". Mob lynching engineered by Sangh cadres has become the order of the day. Fifty intellectuals, including historians, writers, film personalities wrote a letter to the Prime Minister protesting the mob lynching but instead of hearing their voices, they were booked for sedition. An atmosphere of terror is being created in the name of implementing National Register of Citizens throughout the country. Sangh is making Pakistan as a symbol of Muslims. Whole political campaign of Sangh and BJP is against Pakistan and Muslims, an anti Pakistan frenzy is being built. War scare was widely spread in the border belt. In Lok Sabha election, whole campaign was directed against Pakistan. Even in recent Vidhan Sabha election in Maharashtra and Haryana, BJP campaign centred

around Pakistan. In this political situation opening of Kartarpur corridor is a ray of Hope.

But BJP and its ally, Akali Dal, were not ready to adjust with this fact of opening of corridor. They made an issue of pictures of Bhinderanwale and his associates in a promotional song released by Pakistan on the occasion. Lies mongers of BJP were hoarse about the intentions of Pakistan of promoting cross border terrorism. Akali Dal also joined the chorus. But the fact is that pictures of Bhinderanwale and other Khalistanis are in Harmandir Sahib Amritsar. Not only that, a Gurdwara is built in the Golden Temple in the memory of these Khalistanis. This Gurdwara was built and pictures were displayed by none other than Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee (supreme gurdwaras' management Committee) which is controlled by none other than Akali Dal which is ally of BJP. Badal's daughter-in-law is a Cabinet minister in the government led by Modi. This reveals the hollowness of Sangh propaganda on this issue.

Punjab being a border state had to pay the price of war with Pakistan in the past. So whenever clouds of war seem to be thickening, people feel a war coming down on them. Punjab people are opposed to war with Pakistan. Otherwise also, people on both side of the border are Punjabis, speaking the same language, have similar culture, so they don't see an enemy in them. Opening of this corridor has given a hope for more friendly relations with their western neighbour. People also feel that they can benefit much from trade across the border. Despite the vicious propaganda against Pakistan, Imran Khan and Sidhu have emerged the heroes of the Corridor. Punjabis see a friend in Imran Khan. Wall of hate built by Sangh fascists is falling brick by brick. This is a blow to Sangh fascist offensive and their anti-Pakistan rhetoric.

JNU : Students Agitation against Fee Hike

Within days of the Modi government ascending to the throne of Delhi in 2014, an editorial column was written in Pioneer on 2 June 2014 by K G Suresh, a senior fellow of the Vivekananda Foundation, affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Suresh made the case with reference to JNU that it was time to clean the Augean stables “of those who masquerade as Left-liberals” but “in reality” promote divisive, anti-national agendas. This quintessentially ‘Sangh’ style cleaning of Augean stables has thrown one of the better-known educational institutions of India, New Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University, into a state of perpetual turbulence since at least 2016. The turbulence is as much on account of the exertions by its students and teachers to resist the destruction of their university, as much as it is due to the dogged attempts of right-wing Hindu majoritarian government of Mr Modi to destroy JNU’s liberal democratic ethos. Till now there have been many rounds in this tug of war, but the government’s quest for subduing the fighting spirit of the students and teachers of JNU remains as firm as ever.

For close to forty days now (Since October 28) Jawaharlal Nehru Campus has been rocked by student protests, with the students observing a total strike at the university which got provoked by the arbitrary and exorbitant increase in the hostel charges in the university. In an IHA (Inter-Hall Administration) meeting held in contravention of statutory norms, the university administration led by the Vice-chancellor, M Jagadish Kumar, promulgated a new Hostel Manual, which besides imposing a huge increase in the hostel fee also introduced arbitrary conditions like curfew timings (time within which hostel inmates should be within the hostel), imposition of a dress code for hostel mess and an arbitrary structure of huge fines imposed for a variety of ‘proclaimed’ offenses. Implementation of the new fee structure would imply an increase in charges from around Rs 3000 per month as of date to around Rs 9000 per month, and if the deputy Dean of student welfare at JNU is to be believed, then there shall be a 10 percent increase in this fee every year. What is sought to be put in place is that hostels should be run entirely on self-financing mode, wherein the students

pay for the salaries of the hostel staff, maintenance of the building, charges for water and electricity apart from the mess charges. In order to befool the people at large, the university administration has justified this increase by claiming that the hostel fees has not been revised for last forty years, which is factually incorrect, given the fact that some of the charges have already been revised twice during the tenure of this Vice-chancellor.

The implications of this fee structure become starkly clear when seen in the context of the harsher realities of the socioeconomic background of these students as acknowledged by the JNU administration itself. The 2017-18 annual report of JNU states that 40 percent of the students studying in the university belong to families with monthly family earning of Rs 12,000 or less. This ought to be seen without any prejudice to the fact that Rs 12,000 is way too less a demarcation for drawing any difference between the privileged and non-privileged. Moreover, a family cannot be expected to spend its entire earning on the education of just one child. These facts make it evidently clear that the move by the university administration to hike the hostel fees does not pose an imagined threat to these students for the future, but carries an immediate prospect of their having to wind up their studies. In this sense, these students are fighting for their survival in higher education with their backs to the wall.

This hike in hostel fees is but a symptom of the malaise that has since long been nurtured in the higher education system in the country. Universities like JNU are some of the last outposts where students coming from the under-privileged sections of the society and the vast under-developed areas of the country can still hope to get quality higher education from which they would otherwise be excluded, were they to manage it with their own resources. There has been a consistent attempt by governments formed by the various ruling class parties at the Centre and in the states to privatize and commercialize higher education. However, being the most reactionary section of the ruling class, the present BJP led government is carrying out this mission with vengeance, with JNU, self-professedly, being their special target.

The present move by the administration to hike the hostel fees comes in the background of a series of attempts by the university administration to stifle and finish off any form of democratic functioning at JNU. After the RSS affiliated bodies like the ABVP failed to capture JNUSU despite brazen

interference by the administration, the JNU administration has adopted the tactics of totally side-lining the democratically elected bodies like the Students Union and the JNUTA (JNU Teachers' Association). The students were first denied participation in university bodies like the Academic Council, the Board of Studies of various Schools in the university and the IHA (Inter-hostel administration); later, since past two years, the administration has not even recognized the elected students union representatives of JNU students after the ABVP lost the elections miserably. In the last two years, not a single meeting has taken place between the university administration and representatives of JNUSU or JNUTA. As of date, there is not a single platform where the JNU students can air their grievances and seek their redressal. While the JNU administration has left no leaf unturned to malign the struggle of JNU students, it has not cared to have direct talks with the students even once during the course of this agitation.

Needless to say, that this has added to increasing frustration among the students and seems to have convinced them that this government is bent upon restricting their access to already receding opportunities for higher education for the poorer sections.

Resultantly, even as the JNU administration went about organizing the Convocation of the university on 11 November, 2019, much in a self-congratulatory manner, the students chose to give a befitting reply to the university's administration by turning up in huge numbers outside the convocation venue – the AICTE campus on Nelson Mandela Marg, demanding that the Vice-chancellor come out to address their demands. Pitched battles were fought between the students and the police when the latter tried to forcibly disperse the students by resorting to use of water cannons and lathi charge. Even as the Vice-chancellor, Prof Jagdish Kumar, refused to talk to the students, the student union representatives forced the police authorities to arrange for them to meet the Union Human Resources Development Minister, Mr. Nishank Pokhriyal, who had been invited to the Convocation as guest of honour. The Minister, who was stranded at the venue for more than 3 hours, later left the venue under police protection. Even though the students stayed put at the protest site till late in the evening, the Vice-chancellor failed to make an appearance. The next day the Vice-chancellor announced that the students belonging to BPL (below poverty line) families shall be exempt from the fee hike. This was clearly an eye wash, for one may rightly wonder, which and how

many of the BPL category students are actually able to make it to the university level.

In face of the university administration's and government's reticence, the agitating students of JNU gave a call for a 'Long March' to the Parliament on the 18th of November 2019, to assert their opposition to the 'New Education Policy', which the government plans to table in the current session of the Parliament. This was in order to announce their outright rejection of commercialization and privatization of higher education, of which the present fee hike at JNU is but a part.

On 18th morning as one tried to make one's way to the JNU campus, there were obstructions galore to forbid any movement in the direction of JNU at various points, far removed from each other. The police had heavily barricaded all roads from all directions leading to JNU. Indeed, the number of men and women in khaki, and green fatigues appeared far superior to any that have been seen around JNU in the past. It was even more than the deployment during the heady days of orchestrated "Nationalist" onslaught on JNU students and teachers, in 2016.

Later in the day, one saw the courageous defiance by the students of JNU in face of the state's coercive might. Despite the heavy police blockading, the students took down barricade after barricade to finally make their way right up to the Safdarjang tomb on Sri Aurobindo Marg, less than half a kilometre from the Prime Minister's residence.

The Government's design behind the heavy police 'bandobast' was, apart from intimidating and settling a hopeless chill among the students', to turn their call for the long march into the quintessential 'storm in a tea cup' by keeping the students confined within JNU campus; but, what the government ended up having instead was a situation of JNU students managing to reach out to the entire country with their message that privatization and commercialization of publicly funded higher education shall not be tolerated. The Government shall also have to live with the ignominy of brutally assaulting the students not once, but at least in three different instances of lathi charge against the agitating students within the same day. The dastardliest one, at the end of the day, was at Safdarjang tomb wherein they turned off the street lights and turned upon the students who were peacefully sitting on the road. Thankfully, the electronic media, for a change, showed it all on the screens.

During the course of the day around three hundred students were arrested and sent to four different police stations in custody, and scores were injured throughout the day in various assaults, including many women and physically challenged students. Visually challenged student counsellor of School of Social Sciences, Shashi Bhushan, had a fall during the late evening lathi charge at Safdarjang tomb. The policemen trampled upon his chest with their boots resulting in blunt injuries necessitating admission in AIIMS Trauma Centre. Though the exact number remains to be compiled, several students suffered blunt injuries, including head injuries with profuse bleeding and had to be taken to the Safdarjang hospital casualty at different times of the day. There was a steady stream of students with injuries since that afternoon. The police however denied any acts of assault on its part.

This determination on part of the students won them the first concession from the Government, which set-up a three membered High Powered Committee (HPC) consisting of a former Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC), Secretary of UGC and the Chairman of AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) to facilitate what it described as “restoring the normal functioning of Jawaharlal Nehru University through dialogue with all stakeholders and to advise the university administration for resolution of contentious issues.”

It is remarkable that while this HPC met with the students and the teachers of JNU on the campus, the Vice-chancellor refused to see the members of the Committee and deputed his deputies instead to deal with the Committee. Secondly, almost as if to pre-empt the recommendations of the Committee, the Vice-chancellor announced another token decrease of thousand rupees in the increased hostel fees, which still left the overall fees out of bounds for a majority of students.

The HPC committee constituted by MHRD has since submitted its report to the ministry. As reported in the press, and also communicated to JNUSU by ministry officials, the HPC has recommended roll back of the increased fees and that any revision of fees ought to be done in consultation with all stakeholders. However, not only has MHRD not made the recommendations of the Committee public till the time of writing, but has stonewalled attempts by students and teachers in this direction.

The Government perhaps feels that giving in to the demands raised by the students might put its entire project of privatizing / commercializing

publicly funded higher education in jeopardy and hence is shamelessly holding on to its unjust stance. The university administration meanwhile is trying its best to arm twist the students to take the end semester exams, failing which it has threatened the students with expulsion from the rolls of the university. The students on their part, led by JNUSU, have decided not to take the exams unless and until normalcy is restored at the university, for which immediate withdrawal of the fee hike is a necessary condition.

Meanwhile, JNU teachers have stood by their students in supporting their demands which could not have been more justified. Many reports of demonstrations and marches in support of JNU students by students in universities and colleges in different parts of the country lending have come in. Not in the least though, the struggle of JNU students against commercialization and privatization of higher education has won the hearts and minds of the progressive student movement even in Pakistan, who have said that the JNU struggle is a source of inspiration for them to fight against their own rulers for making education affordable to the poor in that country. Just as the JNU students have lent their voice to the inspiring lines of Faiz in furthering their struggle, the Pakistani students raised slogans of ‘Sarfarooshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai; dekhna hai zor kitna bazua-e-katil mein hai’ – the famous lines immortalized by Indian revolutionary Ram Prasad Bismil. This one achievement of JNU’s student movement belittles the RSS supported Modi’s government, which despite its brute power and all the resources of the Indian state at its command, has done nothing but spread hate and enmity towards India’s neighbours.

While the students are still engaged in this struggle, one thing is clear that the struggle of the JNU students has given ample assurance to the government that not only these students know how to articulate their views on issues vital for the interests of India’s poorer sections, but they are eminently willing to make the sacrifices these ideals necessarily entail. They are fighting a battle not only for themselves, but for all those without means who aspire to get higher education. For the students across the country, the point to be noted is that if your cause is just, and your vision clear, it is possible, even if it is just one university, to take on an insensitive government, howsoever powerful. What shall be the fate of the oppressors were the students across the length and breadth of India rise together as a massive tide?