

Initiate and Participate in Protests against CAA-NRC-NPR

Protests against CAA-NRC-NPR have become a people's movement. RSS-BJP rulers, like all anti-people rulers, had grossly underestimated the strength of the people's resolve. Drunk with power and driven by their fascist Hindu Rashtra dream, they moved to change the very character of India, striking at the very root of identity of the country and its people. Unleashing their anti-Muslim poison to make the country secure for corporate exploitation and oppression of upper caste landlord elite, couching their offensive in the long used tirade against neighbouring Pakistan, they drove the knife into the very heart of the people of this great land. Like many other rulers before them, they mistook the forbearance of the people for their cowardice. People, long accustomed to the anti-people games of the rulers, could no longer identify themselves with the India that these fascists sought to fashion. Like the proverbial strike of the iron smith, the iron rod of this forbearance broke and the lava of the people's anger burst forth.

Students and youth, women and men, from different religious groups, people of all walks of life came out in protest against RSS-BJP conspiracy. Cities, centres of reaction for long, became the centres of protest against reaction. Vast urban India has been up in flames which are being carried to rural India. Intelligentsia rose across India in premier institutions and joined the down trodden to unleash one of the biggest mass movement in the history of India, lighting up the sky over the forces of darkness, ushering a heat wave during the shivering cold weather.

The struggle challenged the RSS-BJP drive but the challenge was not limited to this. They questioned what ruling classes have made India. Poetry of defiance became the sound of the day, youthful enthusiasm and feminine perseverance flavours of the day. Slogans of left and sacrifice lent exuberance to the colour of the day. The movement symbolized the present and is pregnant with possibilities for the future, standing firmly on the ground and looking up to the sky. It has risen to save what we achieved in the past striving for a future for the people.

Besides, thundering over the heads of the fascist rulers, the movement is a search for Indianness. Decades and centuries of colonial brand of

historiography, looking for India in artificially crafted version of the past, excising a comprehensive view of the history, its struggles, victories and defeats, successes and failures, highs and lows, oppressions and fight against them- all bringing the people to the present, truncating it to fit the ruling class narrative to serve their interests. But old civilizations, the cradles in which the factors shaping the present have been rocked and nurtured, have their own way of assertion which the hangers-on of power are hardly expected to appreciate. It is not important that each participant be aware of it, yet they express the underlying necessity, or what one may call as life asserting itself in myriad ways. The present movement has given fillip to this search which is so all embracing that the experts appear novices, those who fancy themselves as drivers are only part of the caravan.

Like all thoroughgoing precursors, the movement has endured all hardships and braved sacrifices. More, it took no cognizance of them, taking them as they came, brushing them off like fleas and moving on as the great purpose needs. Amits (Shah), Ajays (Adityanath) and their ilk are looking on in bewilderment as the country unfolds before them and designs of the Nagpur establishment unravel. They thought they had demolished it long back. Not to underestimate the challenge of the present does not mean not to see the green shoots of the future.

Every great movement brings to life new forms enriching the great repertoire of people's struggles. Shaheen Bagh has not just remained the name of a place of protest, it has become a symbol of the new India rising, of its novelty and vitality. It has become a beacon light of the movement. Shaheen Baghs have been created in nearly 150 centres (and many more unreported). Built on resolve, fired with vision and bringing together people, Shaheen Bagh symbolizes life and the living challenging what is dead and parasitic in Indian life. No wonder it is led and managed by the most creative force in society- the women. People in different parts of India are creating their own Shaheen Baghs. The vast country needs many more of them. It stands for rejuvenation as Baghs have traditionally done, to rescue the country's environment from the RSS-BJP chauvinist devastation.

Shaheen Bagh Tujhe Salaam!

Oppose CAB, Reject NRC-NPR

On December 9, 2019 Home Minister Amit Shah introduced Citizenship Amendment Bill in Lok Sabha which was passed by that house. The Bill seeks to amend the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955. The declared objective of the Amendment is set in the Statement on Equity, Accountability and Innovation as Appendix-II to the Bill, which states, "It will enable the acquisition of Indian citizenship from the date of his entry into India by a person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who was forced or compelled to seek shelter in India due to persecution on grounds of religion or fear of such persecution in his country." For this avowed objective, a proviso is to be added to the Section 2, sub-section (1) Clause (b) of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, "Provided that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st Day of December, 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made there under shall not be treated as illegal migrant for the purpose of this Act."

From both the purpose of the Act given in the statement and the proviso added, it is clear that this amendment is discriminatory as it seeks to keep Muslims migrants out of the ambit of acquiring citizenship in India. In the logic of RSS, Muslims cannot claim to be victims or under fear of persecution in a Muslim majority country and for that purpose, countries chosen are all Muslim majority countries. The Amendment lacks any basis in any historical factor or in the present condition of religious persecution in the neighbouring countries. Afghanistan has been added solely because it is a Muslim majority country. It was never a part of the British empire and hence not part of the communal division of India. There are many countries in India's neighbourhood like Myanmar and Sri Lanka where minorities are facing persecution and which were even part of British Indian empire in the past. These have been kept out because in Myanmar, it is Muslims who are

victims of one of the most heinous religious cleansing. Over a million have been thrown out of that country; of them more than six lakhs are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. But the communal heart of RSS cannot feel the plight of these Muslims though this has become a worldwide issue. Nor has Sri Lanka been included in the list of these countries though minorities including Tamils are facing discrimination and persecution there. Moreover, there are sections among Muslims who face persecution and discrimination even in the countries included in the list but barred from the scope of the Amendment. Everyone is aware of these complaints of Shias and Ahmediyas in Pakistan, just to name a few; the latter today the largest minority in Pakistan. Hence, it is clear that it is not the aim of the Amendment to extend a friendly hand to the victims of persecution, even persecution on the ground of religious beliefs but just to keep Muslims out. The Amendment seeks to further the communal agenda of RSS-BJP and is part of their Hindutva fascist offensive. It should fool nobody that it has anything to do with any victim of persecution. Reference to religious persecution, which is made in the statement of objective appended to the Bill, does not find mention in the text of the Bill. The omission is neither oversight nor accidental. It is a deliberate measure to drive India towards Hindu Rashtra. So it is enough if the said person belongs to any of the communities mentioned therein from these three countries irrespective of any religious persecution suffered by that person, rather it is assumed that all the members of the said communities are facing religious persecution in these three countries.

While introducing the Amendment, Amit Shah referred to religious killings during partition of India and large scale migration of Hindus and Sikhs from erstwhile Pakistan, even referring to Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. L. K. Advani. But he was conspicuously silent on inclusion in that list of Afghanistan which was not part of that partition. Anyway, partition of India carved out by British colonial rulers in connivance with main parties of Indian elite- big landlords and big capitalists- Congress and Muslim League, is now more than 72 years old and new realities have emerged in the sub-continent. In the aftermath of 1947, Hindus and Sikhs were forced to migrate from erstwhile Pakistan and Muslims from several parts of India. The religious background of the migrants was inherent in the partition of the country but it was not incorporated into the constitutional framework of post-British India nor in the laws framed for the refugees. But the Hindutva rulers of the day want to complete their agenda of exchange of population

in their drive to make India a Hindu Rashtra. RSS-BJP leaders of the Govt. do not at all discuss the fact that India was not meant to be Hindu Rashtra and hence the then rulers of the country did not make it basis of any law or of the Constitutional framework.

CAB is being opposed by all progressive, democratic and secular organizations and individuals. CAB is being opposed as it is targeted against a particular community and is opposed to the provisions of the Constitution which grants equality particularly Article 14 of the Constitution.

RSS-BJP, their govts. and their apologists have embarked on confusing the people about the Citizenship Amendment Act saying that it is not against any Indian citizen. In fact it is a brutal attack on Secularism and Indian Constitution. Their selection of the countries is solely with the criteria that these are Muslim majority countries and Muslims have been specifically excluded from those eligible for citizenship. It strikes at the very root of secular principle and is meant to assert that India is a Hindu Rashtra and only Hindus are welcome in this country. RSS-BJP spokespersons are toiling hard to misrepresent and misspeak about the past statements and past Acts. The fact that those who came as a result of the partition of the country were largely Hindus and Sikhs was a fall out of partition of India in 1947 but the religious character of Indian state was enshrined neither in the Constitution nor in the Acts. India was proclaimed as secular. There is a vast difference between majority and majoritarian. Hindus were and are a majority in India but the Indian state did not proclaim itself Hindu, rather a secular state. This is what RSS-BJP have set themselves to undo. They swear by the Constitution but are out to smear it and ultimately tear it into pieces.

Their apologists are claiming that Right to Equality before Law enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution allows classification. But it does not allow any classification but only a reasonable classification which can stand legal scrutiny. In fact the Supreme Court has repeatedly laid down the criteria for passing the test of judicial scrutiny. It should be on reasonable grounds and it should facilitate the constitutional objective. The classification ordained by CAB is arbitrary and not reasonable. The religious basis for selection of the countries is not based in any reason- historical or factual. Further it is not meant for the achievement of any constitutional objective as Hindu Rashtra is not the objective of the Constitution, rather against its basic structure and proclaimed secular character. Their CAB

does not embody such a classification, it is simply and purely an Anti-Muslim piece of legislation, a classification not permitted by the Constitution. It is to degrade the status of Muslims in India in accordance with the teaching of RSS ideologue Golwalkar that Muslims are to live in India at the mercy of the majority community. Nobody is opposing granting citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Budhs, Parsis & Christians; people are opposing exclusion of Muslims. Nobody is questioning the countries mentioned but are questioning the countries excluded which defy any logic or is inimical to any logical classification. RSS-BJP are attempting to confuse the people but people are seeing through their malicious designs.

The Bill is a very sinister attack on the minorities particularly Muslims. Though it targets Muslims, the objective of Hindu Rashtra it is meant to facilitate is being opposed by all the minorities as they rightly apprehend the dangers inherent in the drive towards Hindu Rashtra.

Besides these forces, there is a widespread opposition to the Bill in North-Eastern states where a Bandh, supported by a large number of organizations, is being observed today (December 10) against CAB. These small states fear that a large influx of migrants may change demography of these states.

RSS-BJP has sought to meet these latter's apprehensions in the Northeast because their real target is Hindu heartland, especially in North and Central India. It is there they want to deepen the communal division. The real purpose is to reduce Muslims to virtual non-citizens; they are any way second class citizens, but citizens nonetheless. By deepening the communal division, Hindutva forces want to disrupt the unity of the oppressed people and mobilize the majority community under the hegemony of upper castes. Through these designs they wish to raise the spectre of "national danger" and impose fascist rule over the country in the interest of big capitalists, big landlords and the imperialists. It is not a co-incidence that this offensive has come at a time when economic crisis is deepening, both agriculture and industries are facing stagnation and downturn, people's hardships are increasing, unemployment rising. It is in this situation that the corporate are pushing the Govt. for bounties at the expense of the people and Govt. is pushing communally divisive conspiracies to divide and divert people's opposition to that end. These communal conspiracies in the name of the majority community are in fact against the interests of the common people including those belonging to majority community.

RSS-BJP has 'tactically' left out some regions from the operation of CAB. These include areas under Sixth Schedule and states with Inner Line Permit (ILP). According to the Bill passed by Lok Sabha, after section 6A of the principal Act, the following section shall be inserted namely-

(4) Nothing in this section shall apply to tribal area of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the area covered under the "The Inner Line" notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873."

In Lok Sabha, Amit Shah announced that Manipur will also be included in IPL which hitherto had only Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland under this regime notified under Section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. Citizens of other states require ILP for visiting these three states. This was to douse protests in Manipur which was hitherto provided for under Article 371(c) of the Constitution. Article 371C provided Special provision with respect to the State of Manipur and provided that "...the President may, by order made with respect to the State of Manipur, provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the State consisting of members of that Assembly elected from the Hill Areas of that State, for the modifications to be made in the rules of business of the Government and in the rules of procedure of the Legislative Assembly of the State and for any special responsibility of the Governor in order to secure the proper functioning of such committee." It also provided "The Governor shall annually, or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of the Hill Areas in the State of Manipur and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions to the State as to the administration of the said areas. Explanation In this article, the expression Hill Areas means such areas as the President may, by order, declare to be Hill areas."

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration of the tribal areas in the four northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram as per Article 244. The Governor is empowered to increase or decrease the areas or change the names of the autonomous districts.

Amit Shah had earlier announced the annulment of NRC in Assam whose final draft was made public, though not notified till date. Now Section 68 of the Amendment Bill provides, "(3) On and from the date of commencement

of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, any proceeding pending against a person under this section in respect of illegal migration or citizenship shall stand abated on conferment of citizenship to him." This would mean that with respect to Assam, only Muslims who were left out of the final list, will need to prove their citizenship or be treated as foreigners while other sections will automatically qualify for citizenship. RSS-BJP, who had put astronomical figures on the Muslim migrants to Assam, were shaken by the final list which had only nearly one fourth of Muslims among those excluded from the final draft. Presence of a large number of Bengali Hindus threatened the Bengal project of RSS-BJP to deepen communal division in West Bengal and mobilize Bengali Hindus behind them.

While CAB is patently discriminatory, it becomes extremely dangerous in conjunction with NRC-NPR exercise. Its purpose is to make Muslims non-citizens. In this they are guided by their inspiration- the Nazis of Germany- who had advocated and implemented with respect to non-Germans a category of subjects which was distinct from citizens, who can work and earn their livelihood but enjoy no political rights. And in that the RSS's particular target is the right to vote, the only right whatever its practice, given to the people of the country. They want to disenfranchise Muslims. It will be worth recalling that Subramaniam Swamy had a few years earlier advocated disenfranchisement of Muslims. This is the real bottom line for the Hindutva rulers who wish to perpetuate their rule though such mechanisms- a rule in the service of foreign and domestic corporate and landlords.

(The Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha too with the support of JD(U), AGP, Biju Janata Dal, Akali Dal and YSRCP on December 11 and received Presidential Assent on December 12, 2019.)

Question of Alternative Leadership in the Dalit Movement

S.S. Mahil

Dalits are the most oppressed and exploited sections of India's society and stand at the lowest rung. The word Dalit is usually used for the oppressed castes of society in the very rigid division of society specific to the Indian sub-continent. This caste system is social division of society in form but its essence is class division. All the castes generally known as Dalits are that section of society which is devoid of means of production, which, in rural areas, is mainly land. This is the common cord uniting them though they are divided into many castes and sub castes. They are mainly dependent on labour. A small section of Dalits in rural India has attained the status of lower middle class but by and large, they are labourers. It is their class which is the basis of their unity. Among Dalits, caste is the dividing factor whereas class is the uniting factor. Without understanding this crucial essence understanding Dalit question is next to impossible.

But this is also a very important fact that whenever there is some Dalit movement, it is more widespread and more militant on religious and caste issues but not so massive and militant if it is on class issues. So, while discussing the Dalit movement, one cannot ignore the predominant position of caste. But it is equally important to note that on caste issues, reaction of all Dalit castes is not same. For example, we can see two recent movements. Temple of Shri Guru Ravidas was demolished by Delhi Development Authority in Tughlaqabad area of Delhi. In this case, the reaction of the Ravidas caste (Jatav) was more wide spread and more furious and militant while reaction of other castes was not such. In another case there was protest against a serial on Color channel which supposedly was insulting to Rishi Balmiki. Balmikis were protesting on this issue whereas Ravidasias were almost silent. This is a clear reflection of the dividing role of caste. We have to keep both the factors, both the sides in mind while dealing with Dalit movement. Though the concept of Dalit has

come into vogue, but the various castes included in it are divided on caste basis and they are not a consolidated whole. In context of rising movement of Dalits in Punjab, Gujarat, UP and other states, this factor has to be kept in mind and unity of all Dalit castes is a task still to be achieved.

The word Dalit was popularized by a movement called Dalit Panther. This movement emerged in Maharashtra in early seventies and got its name from the Black Panther movement of black people in Africa. Some left forces were also working in this movement, Sunil Dighe, who became state secretary of CPI(M-L) later on, was one of the ideologues of Dalit Panthers. Its project was to unite all oppressed castes on a single platform under one banner. Advocate Santokh Lal Virdi, who has been associated with Dalit Panthers, in his book, "History of Dalits of Punjab" writes "Dalit Panther considers socially, economically, politically and culturally oppressed scheduled castes, backward people, minorities, women, landless labourers, poor peasants, tribals and all people devoid of means of production." (History of Dalits of Punjab) So, the concept of Dalit came into vogue with the Dalit Panther movement and it has wider connotation than any specific caste.

Babu Kanshi Ram, who later emerged as a tall leader of Dalits, built his political project on caste basis and presented the concept of "bahujan" which was much wider than of a single caste. He considered that all castes are oppressed castes other than Brahmin, Rajput and Bania castes. As they constitute the overwhelming majority of the society, so they are bahujan. His political project was to attain power through elections by uniting all the bahujan castes. He was a purely parliamentary politician and was opposed to struggle on the streets. He utilized the statement of Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar that political power is the key that unlocks all the locks, in his own way. He was firm in his conviction that struggles bring repression and hardships for Dalits, so he criticized communists for leading struggles of Dalits and causing repression on them. He tried to unite all bahujan castes but could succeed to some extent in UP, because of special condition there. He could unite a number of middle castes around Dalits and Muslims, who are a large chunk of population in UP, because these were disillusioned with Congress and pinned hope on BSP. BSP could form government there, but it was never stable. This project did not succeed in any other state. His successor, Kumari Mayawati, realized that she cannot attain power and make it stable without coming out of the shackles of

“bahujan”. So she has come forward with the concept of “sarvajan” which is the total negation of Babu Kanshi Ram’s political project. BSP is just another regional ruling class party, its leadership making a big fortune from Dalit politics and hence being afraid of those in power. She has now surrendered before the fascist Sangh government. BSP supported the Central government on crucial bills in parliament including the one on Jammu & Kashmir which dissolved the state into two union territories, rendering article 370 and 35A of the Constitution redundant, which is completely unconstitutional. RSS BJP Central govt. has not only unleashed fascist terror in Jammu & Kashmir but also dealt a big blow to federalism to whatever extent it exists in India. Thus Mayawati has supported the fascist government which demolished the temple of Shri Guru Ravidas in Tughlaqabad of Delhi. In this she completely exposed her anti-Dalit character.

Why could the political project of Babu Kanshi Ram not succeed is a question which the Dalit movement should ponder over. Its main reason is that Kanshi Ram could understand only formal aspect of caste system but failed to understand its essence, that is class. Many of the castes which Kanshi Ram included in the category of Bahujan were those who own means of production, which is mainly land in the rural area, whereas Dalit castes are devoid of means of production and are largely dependent on labour. For example, Jats in north India, especially in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, are a land owning community. Some of them are landlords and some others are rich peasants. Similarly, there are some other castes, such as Patels in Gujarat and Marathas in Maharashtra who are in similar position. Actually, they are the oppressors of Dalits. In Punjab they are resorting to social boycott of Dalits. Dalit women have to face humiliation at the hands of rowdy elements among the Jat community. Dalits stand in contradiction with landlords and rich peasants belonging to Jats in objective life. Any political project of any leader and any party has to conform to the objective reality of life. Life has no compulsion to conform to any political project. Kanshi Ram planned to unite those castes which stand in contradiction with each other in production. Unity between them has only one meaning and that is that Dalits should surrender before their tormentors, and that is impossible.

Dalits are asserting in many states, particularly in Punjab, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh in recent years. More and more reflections of Dalit assertion

are surging forward. In Punjab, the epicentre of Dalit assertion is the Doaba region, a region between river Sutlej and river Beas. Some years back an incident took place in a village named Talhan near Jalandhar which resulted in a flare up of Dalit anger in the entire area. There was a dispute about the management of a religious place which was managed by mainly Dalits earlier. As very large number of people migrated to Europe and North America, a myth circulated that offerings at this religious place result in getting visa. Thus offerings increased hugely, so dominant caste people tried to dislodge Dalits from the management. There were huge protests; traffic was disrupted at many places. Another big eruption of Dalit anger was witnessed when the head of a Dalit dera (a religious centre of Dalits in village Billan, that too near Jalandhar) was killed by Khalistani elements in Vienna, Austria. Protests erupted at many places in Doaba region. It was on quite a large scale. Mainly Dalit youth were active in these protests. This movement spread to the villages, whereas earlier though people from rural areas participated, but centres were cities. Anger was high but there was no leadership to channelize it in proper direction. It was completely a spontaneous movement. Trains were torched, vehicles including private ones, were damaged and shops were attacked. Third big struggle was on the very recent issue of demolition of Guru Ravidas temple in Tughlaqabad in Delhi and after that was one against a serial on Color channel. This struggle was massive but this time Dalits did not resort to damaging property. Total bandh was observed throughout the state protesting the temple demolition. BSP gave a separate call of bandh but the response was very poor. Head of dalit deras (religious places) which are plenty in Doaba, usually called saints, were leading the protests. A dharna at Delhi was also held where people from Haryana and UP also participated, apart from Punjab. Dalit leaders belonging to different parties handed over the leadership to these deredars. These deredars reached an understanding with Delhi police and decided not to step out of Ramlila ground. (Programme was to hold dharna at Jantar Mantar). But Bheem Army leader, Chandra Shekhar and his followers marched toward Tughlaqabad, where force was used and nearly 100 people including Chandra Shekhar were put behind the bars. Thus crisis of leadership came into sharp focus.

When eruptions of anger on religious issues were making headlines, a different type of Dalit movement was emerging in some districts of Malwa region of Punjab, mainly Sangrur, Patiala, Mansa and Barnala, under the newly formed organization named Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee.

This organization was formed in 2014 to focus on the issue of land, a very basic issue of this socioeconomic system. Punjab Village Common Lands Act provides that "in leasing the village common land is to be given to Dalits only." But in practice this Act was never implemented anywhere in the state. Influential people of villages used to take the Dalit share of common land by putting up some Dalit as leasers. As panchayats in Malwa region have large tracts of land, and Dalits in this region were closely linked with agriculture, they were interested in their share of panchayat land. Struggle on this issue started in village Bald Klan and spread to more than a hundred villages in district Sangrur. This class struggle climaxed in village Jaloor where landlords succeeded in mobilizing the upper caste people and attacked the Dalit conclave and injured a number of people, resulting in the death of an aged lady, the mother of a local ZPSC leader. Houses were damaged and Dalits' belongings were destroyed. This struggle also took up the issue of Nazool land (which were given to Dalits' Nazool societies but were under the occupation of influential people of the villages) along with issues of house sites and MGNREGA. Struggles on land issue have come up in some other states too, like Gujarat etc. It should be borne in mind that in several states Dalits are important participants in the struggle for land as a part of general struggle of the landless poor peasants.

These struggles for land by Dalits are confined to the respective states and do not have any viable and meaningful co-ordination. Similarly, apart from the traditional and parliamentary leadership of BSP and various sections of RPI in Maharashtra, Bheem Army and various organizations under the banner of Ambedkarism are active in various states. In this situation of rising Dalit struggles, a viable leadership capable of leading these struggles is the need of the hour.

After RSS coming to power led by Modi-Shah combine, fascist danger is growing day by day, especially after Modi came to power for a second time. It is not simply a growing danger of fascism but the fascist offensive has become crude and sharp. Fascist offensive is not uniform throughout the country but different in selective areas and selective section of populace. There is already fascist dictatorship in Jammu and Kashmir, it is sharp against resistance struggle in tribal areas. Similarly, Muslims and Dalits are the prime target of the Sangh fascist offensive. Dalits are being beaten and killed in the name of cow protection. In this situation, Dalit leadership should be capable of facing the fascist offensive. BSP leadership has

completely surrendered, whereas Athawale section of RPI is already in coalition government with Singh fascists. These forces are not capable of leading the Dalit movement.

In the recent movement on the issue of demolition of Ravidas temple in Delhi, a different type of leadership came forward and that is of so-called saints or Deredars, who are courted by political parties as they have large followings. In this situation they have come to acquire the leadership of these movements. But they are not capable of leading the movements. They are used to very easy and luxurious life, are not prepared to face the hardships of jail life and repression of state. This is crystal clear from their role in the Delhi dharna on temple issue, where they struck a compromise with the Delhi police and betrayed the movement. This incident further brought it into focus the need of alternative leadership.

Where is such leadership? is the question. We feel that such a leadership is not available at present. But there are elements of such leadership in various areas. Bheem Army led by Chandra Shekhar is such an element. Several local organizations in Gujarat and ZPSC in Punjab are also among such forces. There some other elements in other states too. There is no uniformity among these forces as yet, but it can be achieved through interaction and joint and co-ordinated struggles. The first thing is, what is to be the minimum basis for the emergence of such a leadership?

Experience of the past amply shows that Dalit leadership which was confined to the limits of parliamentary arena was co-opted by the ruling classes, right from Babu Jagjivan Ram upto Mayawati. They individually enjoy power, improve the fortunes of their near and dear ones but have hardly done anything to change the lot of Dalits. Mayawati has collected crores of rupees, but has done nothing credible to improve the lot of Dalits. Exclusive dependence on parliament reflects ignorance about the nature of the caste system. That is why Babu Kanshi Ram, who tried to unite all "Bahujan" castes, could not succeed, because he could not understand the typical nature of caste division in India. It is not spatial but is like a ladder, where every caste stands below some caste and above certain caste. This makes their unity just a nearly impossible task. That is why BSP largely remained confined to Ravidasia caste and could not bring even Dalit castes into its fold. Secondly, Kanshi Ram failed to understand the class content of caste. The unity of 'bahujans' was only a figment of

imagination. Does this mean that their unity is impossible? No, there is no such absolute case. Their unity can be achieved and should be achieved, seeing the wider prospective. But this unity can be achieved in the arena of struggle against the feudal and corporate, Indian as well as foreign. Unity can be achieved through united struggles only and for that one has to understand the class content of caste. Any viable alternative leadership must understand this point.

We are not opposed to the struggle in parliamentary arena but it should supplement the struggles on streets. Leadership has to be aware of the limitation of parliamentarism. Unity of castes constituting majority of people i.e. Bahujans, can be achieved through a prolonged struggle and by isolating the feudal and pro corporate among those castes. Alternative leadership has to bear this in mind for the liberation of Dalits.

Secondly, we are living in a situation where forces with fascist ideology have captured power and are in control of executive as well as legislative agenda of the country. Media, which is a powerful weapon of rule and has colossal influence upon the people, is in the hands of corporate houses whom this government is faithfully serving. Hence media is completely in the service of government and has become a propaganda department of the government. Highest judiciary, trampling all the basics of jurisprudence, has completely surrendered before the Sangh. It is evident from its attitude towards petitions filed on dismemberment of Kashmir and downgrading of its status from a state to a union territory and making section article 370 and 35 A, redundant. It has held that individual freedoms granted in the Constitution are subject to national security. This is a decision which reminds us of the decision of Jabalpur court, which was reverted by higher court, later on, and which held that during Emergency even right to life also stands suspended. The Judiciary now has postponed even habeas corpus writs, where delay of one day can be fatal, for weeks. Fascist offensive is in full swing, and its prime targets are Muslims and Dalits apart from communist revolutionaries and national liberation struggles. Other targets are Tribals, women and other minorities. There can be no worthwhile movement without fighting against this fascist offensive. Mayawati has virtually forfeited her claim to leadership of the Dalit movement by surrendering before the offensive of Hindutva fascism.

It is crystal clear that Dalit movements are surging forward, but are facing a crisis of leadership, a void. We have outlined above the conditions

necessary for the leadership to succeed. But the problem is that if in some areassome alternative leadership emerges, efforts are made to discredit that leadership by making of wild allegations by traditional and established leadership. For example, with the emergence of Bheem Army and its leader Chandra Shekhar Ravan in Hindi belt, he was labeled as a BJP agent by Mayawati, but when BJP government put him in jail, and did not release him from jail even when his health condition was serious, this propaganda lost steam. Nowadays a propaganda is going on that he is working for Congress. Such propaganda can be blunted by consistent and militant struggle. Second weapon of ruling class parties is to lure emerging Dalit leaders into parliamentary mesh. They succeeded in luring Jignesh Mevani who emerged as a young and educated Dalit leader in Gujarat after the Una incident. He could not resist the temptation, joined hands with Congress and contested for Vidhan Sabha election with Congress support and became an MLA. But he lost all his relevance in this process and is not seen in the arena of struggle. Ruling classes tried to drag Chandra Shekhar too into the quagmire of parliamentary politics and tried to put him as a candidate from Varanasi constituency in Lok Sabha election, but he could save himself. Emerging Dalit leaders must avoid the allurements of power sharing at the cost of Dalit interests.

Different forces are active in different parts of the country which have potentials of providing capable leadership. Those forces should persist in militant struggle, keeping doors open for uniting maximum forces that can be united on a particular issue. They must understand the class content of caste, understand the limitation of parliamentary activities and fight against the fascist offensive of fascist Sangh. These forces should not remain confined to the issues emerging from time to time but should fight for share in the means of production, taking it as a basic issue. Such forces should co-ordinate their struggles, support each other in struggles, and come forward for joint struggle on the basis of issue based minimum understanding. Such forces in process can come into a position to provide leadership of emerging Dalit movements.

Supreme Court on Kashmir Lockdown

Sermons Galore But No Relief

Continuing abdication of its duties to uphold the Constitution and rights enshrined therein, Supreme Court on January 10, 2020 delivered a judgment on the petitions filed before it against the shutdown of internet and other means of communication and its relation to the freedom of Press which is part of the Fundamental right to Expression. Supreme Court had refused to hear these petitions including Habeas Corpus petitions citing security concerns. Nearly 160 days have elapsed this lockdown but even such a long period has not been enough for the highest Court to say enough is enough.

For over months (since August 4, 2019) there has been complete suppression of civil liberties in Jammu & Kashmir. Life of the people has been completely disrupted and even basic rights totally negated. All these facts have been vividly brought out by a number of reports by different teams who managed to spend some time there and by news agencies (obviously not of the country).

Delivering its judgment Supreme Court reiterated principles of liberty but upheld the concerns of security. It soporifically outlined the liberties in the Constitution, even referred to Constitutions of other countries, but failed to uphold in practice those in India's own Constitution. Govt. was accorded a carte blanche to annihilate the democratic rights of the people, with the only rider being that this be done only for seven days at a time, without prescribing any limits as to how many seven days may there be. The restrictions imposed will remain in place.

It was more like a sermon by the Bench, delivered more from like a pulpit. Expected to adjudicate, they chose to pontificate. Supreme Court is a Court of Justice and not a mere enunciator of principles of jurisprudence. Constitution is not a mere moral code which it is made to appear, but embodiment of the guiding principles including rights of the citizens. It is probably reminiscent of the dilemma of the colonial period Supreme Courts that they could not function under their original mandate lest they endanger the colonial rule. One does not know whether the Highest Court has come

to the similar conclusion with regard to their mandate i.e. Constitution of India. For in that case the long sermon can be understood in the light of not what it says but what it wants not to say.

Such an approach of the apex Court sends a very disturbing signal to the lower judiciary including High courts. They too make appropriate noises but when the question of giving relief to the people arises, the line of the govt. is followed and relief refused. This approach ignores that the judicial system is judged by the quality of justice and not the flowery language employed in drafting the judgement.

The restrictions, according to the Constitution, sought to be imposed on the fundamental freedoms must be "reasonable restrictions". It has two parts- firstly it is only a restriction and not complete annihilation of the right. With this long denial of freedom of expression (including press and internet), assembly and other freedoms, it is more like complete negation rather than any restriction. The distinction between the two is well settled in jurisprudence. Secondly, this restriction has to be reasonable i.e. limited in time and scope and based on some tangible criteria. Supreme Court itself has laid down that such restriction cannot be indefinite but failed to prescribe any time frame or any objective criteria by which such time frame can be evolved.

More importantly, the Supreme Court has given the right to review these restrictions to the very executive i.e. authorities which are impugned to be guilty of perpetrating them. They are made a judge in their own cause.

Supreme Court did not pass any order for the restoration of rights which have been negated since August 4 last year. It only asked J&K Govt. to review the need for such prohibitory orders within seven days. This time frame is the only place where SC has been specific albeit only on a procedural aspect. Supreme Court has also decided to take up the contention of the Govt. on whether prohibitory orders are privileged communications.

Supreme Court judgment once again highlights the warning given at the time of framing of the Constitution of empowering the legislature to restrict the fundamental freedoms. While participating in the discussion in the Constituent Assembly on provision providing for the restriction of the fundamental freedoms under Article 19 (numbered later), Hukum Singh had

made a profound observation, "Freedom of assembling, freedom of the press and other freedoms have been made so precarious and entirely left at the mercy of the legislature." Subsequent history proved that leaving this right to the legislature has placed this right at the mercy of the Executive. The conduct since then has vindicated the apprehensions that the restrictions placed on the exercise of these rights may leave them at the mercy of the Executive which may totally annihilate them in the name of restrictions. Issue of democratic rights in J&K is a clear example of such negation. Supreme Court was tasked to uphold the rights but it chose to sacrifice them.

So blatant has been the ruling of the Supreme Court that even the major newspapers have expressed their dismay at the judgment. The Hindu editorially commented, "The disappointing aspect of the verdict is the Court's failure to give a ruling on the validity of the Govt. actions." "It fails to hold the Govt. to account for the manner in which it exercised its powers." (January 11, 2020)

Indian Express also editorially commented in a similar vein. It said "After such an elaborate statement of principles, it is surprising, not to say disappointing that the Court did not apply them to provide relief to the two petitioners... by striking down as illegal the clearly indefinite ban on the internet, now fully five months old ..." (January 11, 2020)

Editorial of The Hindustan Times also articulated the two concerns on this judgment on what the paper admitted to be the "longest internet blackout" in the world. It says the Court took "over five months to lay out these principles. This reflects a certain degree of abdication of responsibility." "Sc judgment does not provide any immediate relief. SC should have built on its own principles to provide for immediate restoration of rights." (January 11, 2020)

It is obvious that this judgment has come as a dampner for those who have been looking towards the apex Court to uphold their democratic rights. The judgment follows the pattern which has become the running thread of kowtowing to an Executive with enormous power to punish and reward.

Besides not applying the principles that the apex Court outlined in its judgement to provide relief to those who had approached the Court, even what it held in principle has left much to be desired. The Court could have

at least differentiated between restriction of a right and its annihilation and was expected to lay down certain yardsticks with which to differentiate between the two. Not doing so has laid the Judgement open to criticism of even being bad in law. Further, while the apex Court waxed eloquent on the issue of internet shutdown it did not take the logical step to uphold this as a part of fundamental right.

Those who thought that the ghost of ADM Jabalpur case (the infamous case in which the Supreme Court had held that Fundamental rights cannot be enforced during the Emergency) had been laid to rest with the Supreme Court recalling that judgement in the impugned case were wrong. The ghost has got bigger and now the apex Court denies civil liberties and fundamental rights even without Emergency. This is more than apparent from the refusal to hear petitions for months together against denial of democratic rights including habeas corpus petitions.

Supreme Court has once again failed the people. In fact the apex Court has been bending before the Executive power now held by RSS-BJP who are bent on suppressing people's rights and ushering in Hindu Rashtra in the service of imperialists, corporate and domestic reactionaries. One should not forget that Nazis had come to power in Germany through elections and they faced little obstacle from the judiciary in that country. What appeared as judicial independence, even sometimes branded as judicial over-reach, was rooted in the era of coalition governments leaving little traces in the present period. Different organs of the state including judiciary are not to be expected to stand up to the blatant trampling of the rights of the people, even those enshrined in the Constitution which they are sworn in to uphold.

Struggle of the people is the only way to secure, protect and exercise these and for that matter any rights of the people. Other fora come into play only when people's struggles prepare the ground for such an intervention. Struggles of the people in the country are a pointer. People are showing that they do not and will not accept this negation of people's rights. This course is the only correct course. And this is being amply demonstrated in practice.

16th December 2019

Fast Judicial Process, Responsive Policing, Civic Facilities, Workplace Security Must For Security of Women Against Sexual Abuse

A spate of incidents related to sexual violence against women in the last few weeks has turned the spotlight firmly on the need for fair, speedy trials and fast track courts. Focus has been missing on the need for accountable policing which reflects lack of state intent. Corporate media and ruling class politicians and Govts. have fanned public hysteria to deflect the issue from answerability of governance i.e. of state and judicial institutions, to baying for street punishment. People, frustrated with lack of punishment in the cases of brutal sexual assaults on women and increasing recurrence of such incidents, are falling prey to this propaganda. Those who are responsible for long delays in meting out justice to the accused, if at all this happens due to very low rate of conviction, turn the attention of the people away from their own culpability and accountability. We must rise for speedy trial and meting out justice to the survivors and victims of rape and rape-murders and maximum punishment in such cases.

However there is a careful distinction in the targets rulers create for people who are simply fed up of the poor justice delivery and rotten governance. MLAs and Ministers and Judges, generally the mighty in the present system, who misuse power to sexually abuse, ruin both survivors and the families and even murder for covering up sexual abuse by them, are never the targets of media and rulers' created hysteria. Not even Senegar nor Chinmayanand, who have openly and blatantly used the might of the state to subvert their victims' quest for justice.

Despite a massive struggle on the issue of sexual violence that erupted after the Nirbhaya gangrape and murder, speedy trials, fast track courts, responsive police promises then made, have not been delivered. Nirbhaya funds lie unused and govts are not in the spotlight for not putting streetlights even in big metropolitan cities leave alone villages. Why are the funds not

used to set up fast track courts? In the case of the Unnao -2 victim, she was shifted from UP to Delhi to deflect attention and everyone knows that a person with 95% burns has no chance of survival in this country. Yet her death is being presented as an unfortunate occurrence by the corporate media and rulers. These incidents also serve the purpose of serving as a warning to other survivors who are fighting for justice.

We must demand immediate arrest of policemen who do not file FIRs in cases of missing women or sexual violence complaints. This is the instant justice we should demand. We must demand immediate arrest of the policemen who defend rapists or lodge false cases against the kin of survivors or the survivors themselves, like in the cases of both Unnao survivors or even the Chinmayanand case. We must demand immediate dismissal of public prosecutors in cases of sexual violence who do not appear in courts for more than one date in the entire trial. We must demand that investigation in all cases of sexual violence be time bound and that too in a short period and a short period be fixed in which these cases go through fast track courts and appeal process. There should be a maximum period for the entire process, the honouring of which should be the responsibility of Law Ministers of States and Centre. These are the real causes of public frustration and let us unitedly bring these issues for direct action to the fore. We should build a broad-based militant mass movement on this so that ruling classes' design to selectively channelize the public anger against accused from weaker sections and lead astray a principled movement against violence against women and the patriarchal mindset which is at the root of it, fails.

This has been a bitter year for women's struggle against sexual abuse. From the alleged involvement of the CJI himself to the flaunting of every fair procedure to prove him right; to heinous cases of Ministers and MPs of BJP Govts who were accused of sexual abuse succeeding in really harming the survivors even though the cases against them continue to survive; to the fake encounter in Hyderabad in the name of women and the attempts of the Telengana police and Govt. as well as corporate media to push the discourse away from accountability of state institutions to brutal street punishment of suspects. So does the RSS lynch Muslims, so are women targeted as witches or for relationships of love outside caste and religion, so are Dalits targeted by ruling class elements in villages and small towns for public lynching. And now police fake encounters are sought to be given

public sanction in the name not only of women's safety but on women's demand!

Let us, on 16th December 2019 strengthen our collective fight to expose the patriarchal state institutions and rulers, to demand accountability of courts, police and govts in all cases of sexual violence against women, and for speedy and certain punishment to those guilty of sexual assaults.

Fight Patriarchy!

Fight for Women's Safety!

Defeat the rulers, attempts to divert our struggle and thereby to defeat them.

Telangana: Strike of RTC Workers

B. Pradeep

The RTC workers' strike in Telangana that began on 5th October 2019 ended with the Chief Minister, KCR, declaring that there would be no privatization, that there will be no victimization and that wages for the month of September and for the strike period will be paid. While the JAC of the unions had formally called off the strike on 25th November, workers were not allowed to join work till the CM announced the above in a meeting in his Pragati Bhavan on December 1st with five representatives each from the 97 depots, thus bypassing the JAC of the unions. This 52 days long strike of the RTC workers was the longest one in the history of transport workers struggles in the state. It has exposed the despicable role of the state government in dealing with the legitimate struggle of the RTC workers. The strike has thrown up questions and challenges that need to be addressed by the working class movement at large.

After the bifurcation of AP, Telangana state RTC has a workforce of

around 50,000 with 97 depots and over 10,000 buses. Its assets are valued at Rs. sixty thousand crores. Wage revision was due from 2017 and the JAC of the unions put forth some 26 demands among which one was the merger of the corporation in the government as was done in the neighbouring state of AP. While there was no progress in the negotiations due to the negative stance of the management and the government, discontent was brewing and pressure on the unions leaders began mounting. The issues were before the concerned 'authority' at the labour office and joint meetings were held but to no avail. In this backdrop, the JAC of the unions served strike notice and the legitimate strike began on 5th October, which was close to the Dushhera festival season when people commute to their native places.

The entire RTC was completely shut down from day one and the CM of the state issued a warning that if workers did not report for duties by 6th night, they would be deemed dismissed or what he foolishly called "self dismissed". None bowed to this warning and the strike continued. Again after a month the CM set a deadline, 5th November, by which time workers should report to duty, otherwise there would be no RTC and that it would be privatized. This warning also failed in forcing the workers to break the strike. The way in which the KCR government was dealing with this successful strike was despicable and can be likened to a feudal lord responding to the unrest of his subjects. During this period the CM made several statements that reflected the utter arrogance of a lord in question who issues threats to force the subjects into submission. He issued a warning that 'none can save the RTC now', that the government cannot pay September month's salary as it does not have money, that the state cabinet decided to handover 5100 buses to private players etc. Such irresponsible and unilateral statements by the CM played their own role in pushing some workers to committing suicides and some dying of heart attacks. In all some 38 workers died during this period.

In the strike period the role of the High Court also needs to be assessed. In the initial period, responding to petitions pending before it, it advised the government to negotiate with the union and resolve the problems as people are facing immense hardships due to the strike. It said that the government should act as a 'model employer' and treat the employees as 'children'. The striking workers nurtured some hopes and were expecting that the court would come to their rescue in the face of the negative and dictatorial

stance of the government. But the final outcome in the Court was disappointing as it said it cannot do much in the issue and in regard to the Cabinet's decision to privatize certain routes. In fact it made comments on the supposed virtues of privatization.

As far as the strike proper is concerned, there can be no two opinions that workers participation in it was almost total. The workers stood ground in the face of threats from the government. They struck work but at the same time could not stop buses driven by drivers on contract. This task was left to the organizations supporting the strike. A series of programmes were taken up during the strike period at the local levels that saw good participation. Two major programmes were held in Hyderabad in which the participation was commendable. Some thirty thousand turned up for the public meeting held on 29 October despite restrictions imposed by the police. The chalo 'Tank Bund' programme on 10 November was also a success with workers breaking police cordons and marching on the bund and facing the lathis & teargas shells. Many workers were injured in police violence. Prior to this programme, on 19 October a state bandh was called with the help of mass organizations & political parties. It was during this bandh that Ranga Rao, Asst. Secretary of CPI(ML)-New Democracy in Telangana state, sustained injury on his thumb.

The strike reached a point where it had to either move to a higher level by way of active support from different sections of people in the face of the government's adamantly negative position or make an honourable retreat. The few buses that were plying needed to be stopped. The strike needed the support of the government employees which did not happen. When KCR was making statements against the very notion of workers' unions, against trade unions in the RTC, different sections of the working class should have come out on the streets which did not happen. The workers of different sectors, particularly in the government sector, need to realise that their failure to rise in support of this strike was a contributing factor in pushing the strike to a defensive position. These short comings apart, there were some illusions that the Court would come to the rescue of workers and that some relief would come out which did not. Pinning hopes on the Central government and the BJP here proved to be entirely wrong.

Despite these shortcomings and weaknesses of the 52 days RTC workers strike, it was a successful one with a wonderful show of unity of the workers inspite of all the hurdles erected by the government.

US assassination of Iranian General a threat to peace in the Region

Killing of powerful military leader of Iran and head of Quds Force of Revolutionary Guards of that country, Major General Qassem Soleimani, in a missile attack carried out by US at the Baghdad Airport has escalated conflict in the Middle-East. US imperialism and its allies, mainly Zionist rulers of Israel and Saudi royal family, are locked in a no holds barred struggle with Iran which has forged close relations with Russia and China. This conflict is playing out in the situation where US led front has faced sharp division in the Middle-East with Turkey and Qatar adopting different approach towards Iran and Russia in the Greater Middle East. Another important fissure in the US led camp has surfaced in Europe where European powers have adopted varyingly different approach from the US Admn. towards Middle-East, particularly in relation to Iran and especially to the P5+1 agreement with Iran on its Nuclear Programme. This assassination carried out by US imperialism is also related to growing contradictions in post-the Saddam Hussein ruling dispensation in Iraq.

The assassination by US imperialism of military commander of Iran, Soleimani and deputy chief of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, is obviously against international law. US is not at war with Iran. Hence, Iran's military commander cannot be killed in targeted killing. UN official has confirmed that US action lacks any basis in international law. But US imperialism has never bothered about international law; under Trump it does not even pretend to bother about it. US Admn. has claimed that the assassination was carried on the orders of President Trump and it was to prevent the attacks on US forces that General Soleimani was allegedly planning. US Admn. has made a convoluted claim that the assassination was carried out to prevent war and not to start war with Iran.

Resort to this attack also proves that the "maximum pressure" tactic so trumpeted by Trump Admn. has been a failure. Trump Admn. had withdrawn

from the Nuclear Agreement with Iran and had imposed severe economic sanctions on Iran. It has prohibited sale of Iranian oil and has blacklisted companies for doing business with Iran. A number of countries have succumbed to US pressure and stopped or scaled down purchase of oil from Iran and stopped business dealings with that country. Thus far, Trump has been boasting about the efficacy of his sanctions which he called as “maximum pressure” but through this act, Trump Admn. has admitted failure of its tactics.

General Soleimani was mainly in charge of implementing Iran's policy in the Middle-East relating to extending military support to different organizations and forces in the region. He played the main role in co-ordinating Iran's military support to Assad Govt. in Syria and to Hezbollah in Lebanon. He also became the face of Iran's military efforts against Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) came into existence in the war against IS when the US trained Army retreated in the face of advancing IS forces in 2014. PMF has since been absorbed into Iraqi armed forces as paramilitary force. PMF was mainly supported by Iran and Soleimani has been the main co-coordinator of this support.

Since overthrow of Saddam Hussein Govt. through military occupation by US and its allies in 2003, political power in Iraq has been wielded mainly by groups having base among the majority Shia population of that country. To get some support for their military occupation, US imperialist rulers befriended the Shia clergy. With their proximity to Shias of Iraq and their long time conflict with Saddam Hussein Govt. with whom they fought eight year (1980-'88) long war, Iranian rulers saw in this an opportunity to increase their influence in Iraq and systematically worked to build their support in that country. Forced to rely on the Shia leaders, US grudgingly allowed some Iranian influence in that country. However, alarmed by its growth, US Admn. under Obama sought to use military campaign of IS to ease out from power the then Prime Minister Maliki, known for his proximity to Iran rulers. War against IS provided Iran an opportunity to further expand its support in Iraq and the position of US was undermined for using that occasion to further their political objective in Iraq i.e. of easing out Maliki.

There has been sharpening contradictions in the ruling establishment in Iraq which should be viewed in the background of growing conflict between Iran and US & its allies which is related to and reflective of growing contradictions among the imperialist powers. The open allegiance of different

ruling groups with either Iran or America, military presence of US in that country and allegiance owed by some military formations to Iran makes Iraq an open battleground between US and Iran. This contradiction is set to further intensify in the aftermath of General Soleimani's assassination. However, Iran would most likely use this situation to further increase its influence in Iraq and US military presence in Iraq will come under increasing pressure. Iran is unlikely to respond with all out war against US imperialism in Iraq or in other parts of Middle-East. Iraqi Govt. has condemned the assassination while a number of important figures in the ruling establishment have advised caution in dealing with the situation.

The events immediately before this assassination started unfolding after attacks on a US facility in Northern Iraq killed an American contractor on December 27. Two days later US struck at Kotaib Hezbollah camps killing 25 of their leaders and cadres. This was followed by an angry demonstration at US Embassy in the Green Zone in Baghdad, a heavily fortified area where thousands of protesters marched to the Embassy building and set on fire parts of its outer structure. US had blamed Iran for this demonstration which they had termed as an attack and vowed retaliation. Attack on Soleimani and others followed two days later. The events show escalating conflict between Iran and US in which US is taking increasing recourse to military means. While US is undoubtedly the much stronger military power compared to Iran, it is losing the battle of influence over Iraq. Trump Administration has chosen a very high risk measure in targeting General Soleimani. While Trump Admn. has obviously taken the step for its stunning effect, it is the type of stuff imbecility is woven of. According to New York Times report, Trump chose this step, the most deadly one, from the menu offered by Pentagon. Whatever the intention or calculation of Trump Admn. they cannot overcome the difficulties they and their allies face in the Middle-East. Their time worn tactics of carving out Shia-Sunni divide has run its course, their linen of 'democracy' just does not wash here as they rely on monarchs and dictators for influence in the region.

US imperialism has taken a very dangerous step which threatens peace in the region. Whatever be the pace of retaliation, Iran and its allies will not rest. It will have repercussions in the entire region and US assets and allies may have to bear the brunt. US imperialism cannot shoot its way out of the increasing isolation in the region. Rather its isolation will only increase both in the Middle-East as well as in the rest of the world. The choice of

timing and selection of the step taken by Trump Admn. has been influenced by the domestic troubles being faced by Trump, particularly his impeachment by the House of Representatives and impending trial in the Senate. However, it is also a pointer to the increasing troubles of US imperialism and its drive for hegemony in the world.

There is growing anger of the people of Iraq at their deteriorating conditions, growing unemployment and declining civic amenities. This is particularly noteworthy in a country which is one of the largest exporters of oil. People blame the ruling politicians' rampant corruption for this state of affairs. They raise slogans against influence of US and Iran in their demonstrations. Nearly four hundred protesters have been killed in these protests in which the South of Iraq, the main areas of majority Shia concentration, has emerged as the main centre of these protests. Both Iran and US are trying to influence the course of these protests which have brought a large number of youth and unemployed on to the streets. While provocative acts of US imperialism endanger peace in the region, people of Iraq are in the immediate firing line.

The outburst of anger of the people of Iraq against their deteriorating conditions of life, with South Iraq as the main centre of this eruption, has deepened the fissures in Iraq's ruling establishment. While the Govt. is blaming Bathist elements for this outburst, the different ruling factions are taking contradictory and vacillating stands, aimed at both maintaining the present ruling structure as well as using this anger of the people for increasing their share in power. The outburst of people's anger has already led to the resignation of Prime Minister Mahdi but different sections of the ruling establishment do not want the present ruling arrangement to collapse which is the man demand of the agitators. This agitation is playing out in the backdrop of rising contradictions between US and Iran which is influencing the course of these protests with both US and Iran and forces owing allegiance to them trying to use them for increasing their sway over Iraq.

Jharkhand Assembly Elections

Tribal Anger Defeats BJP

In the elections to Jharkhand state assembly, BJP has been decisively defeated. It secured 25 seats while its main challenger, an alliance of JMM-Congress & RJD has secured 47 seats in an assembly of 81. Even the incumbent Chief Minister has been defeated.

These elections were held during the period which saw mass protests against CAA-NRC in the different parts of the country. In fact some of the brutal attacks on the protesters were made during the course of this campaign. And RSS-BJP leaders tried their utmost to deepen communal polarization and paint these protests as anti-Hindu and anti-national, even invoked the name of Pakistan whose games the protesters and opposition parties are allegedly playing. RSS-BJP leaders promised that Ram Mandir in Ayodhya would come up in four months, patted their backs on virtual abrogation of Article 370 and annulment of Article 35A in relation to Kashmir. In brief, they fought these elections in Jharkhand on communal jingoist platform obviously to cover up failures of their Central and State Govts. and to divert the attention of the people from their growing hardships and increasing attacks on their means of livelihood including employment opportunities.

People's anger has been building up on many issues but the most potent factor in Jharkhand has been the mounting anger among tribals. State of Jharkhand had been carved out of the erstwhile state (united) of Bihar in response to a long running struggle of Jharkhandis, mainly tribals, for a separate state. But the formation of separate state has not fulfilled the expectations of the tribal people as the ruling class parties which have ruled the state since its formation, mostly RSS-BJP, have been serving the interests of corporate and exploiting sections at the cost of tribals who have been at the receiving end of their policies. Even when the Govt. is headed by tribals except during past five years when RSS-BJP chose a non-tribal to be the Chief Minister, the Govts. have not fulfilled the expectations of tribals and other exploited sections of Jharkhand. Tribals are mostly peasants and their rights over land and forest produce are under threat while their rights to exercise self-rule and protect their culture are not respected in practice. Tribals provide most of casual and now contract labour in the state and there is growing attack on the wages and

rights of these workers.

RSS-BJP which formed the Govt. in the state in alliance with AJSU after 2014 elections went far in the direction of openly attacking the tribal people of the state. They amended longstanding Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SPTA) to allow commercial use of tribal land to hand over tribal land to corporate. Moreover tribals were subjected to severe repression and their struggles for land and means of livelihood were suppressed with brute force. When the tribals rose to defend their land and their traditional rights in the form of Pathalgarhi movement they were fired upon, arrested and severe police repression let loose against them while they were only demanding and defending what are their rights under PESA. Nearly ten thousand tribals were included in the FIRs filed in the course of Pathalgarhi movement. In fact though there are several laws to safeguard some rights of tribals, these are seldom implemented, even when implemented it is not done properly. Same fate has fallen to Forest Rights Act 2006 whose implementation is quite tardy. A large number of claims are still pending while they are uprooted from their traditional habitat.

RSS-BJP Govt. also sought to divide the tribals by making anti-conversion law which was targeted against Christian tribals. This divisive step of the RSS-BJP further convinced tribals of the sinister designs of the Govt. against them.

Tribals of Jharkhand have been one of the main victims of the 'development' policies followed by the successive govts. They were amongst the worst sufferers of forcible displacement when big PSUs were built in the region and they were displaced without any proper recompense. Their old world was taken away without giving any new in return. Now they are being subjected to another run of displacement for the corporate houses for the exploitation of this mineral rich region.

Tribal anger was much in evidence in these elections. Of the 28 seats reserved for STs, BJP could secure only 2 while the opposition alliance swept 25 of these. Of the twelve seats' loss suffered by the BJP as compared to last elections, nine seats were lost in these areas. BJP could win only where tribal leaders were with BJP and alternative social leadership was not there with other ruling class parties. Anger was so palpable even before the elections that AJSU parted company with RSS-BJP though they had been ally of RSS-BJP in running the Govt.

People of Jharkhand have rejected the communal, sectarian and chauvinist platform of RSS-BJP. They have rejected the attempts of RSS-BJP to divert their attention from growing problems like increasing destitution and unemployment.

Jharkhand has a large working class employed in heavy industries and small industries catering to these large enterprises. Large enterprises are Central Govt. enterprises and private sector enterprises. Jharkhand has vast mineral resources and huge deposits of coal, uranium, copper and other minerals. Central Govt. has opened coal mines to 100% FDI and has systematically suppressed the trade union movement in public sector enterprises while police has intervened in favour of capitalists in the private sector industries. There is growing attack on the workers' organizations.

However, the ruling class parties which have come to power have ruled earlier as well and do not represent any alternative policies. These too are representatives of exploiters and oppressors of the tribals and other oppressed sections. Tribals and oppressed sections will have to build their struggles for their rights, their land and means of livelihood. These struggles alone can advance them towards fulfillment of their basic rights.

Read and Subscribe

CPI(ML) Organs

New Democracy	English
Pratirodh Ka Swar	Hindi
Voice of New Democracy	Telugu
Biplabi Ganaline	Bengali
Inquilabi Sada Rah	Punjabi
Sangrami Ekta	Oriya

Punjab - Changaliwala Incident: Some Glaring Questions

S.S. Mahil

Changaliwala is a sleepy village in a corner of Sangrur district of Punjab. Here, a Dalit named Jagmel Singh alias Jaggu was brutally tortured by a landlord named Amarjit Singh, his son Rinku and a friend of Rinku. There was some quarrel between Jagmel and Rinku some time back, but it was sorted out and a compromise was reached between the two parties. But after sometime, Rinku along with his friend caught Jaggu and dragged him to his farmhouse. He was tied to a pillar and beaten mercilessly there. The flesh was pulled out from his legs and acid was poured on his wounds. His cries fell on deaf ears. When he cried for water they urinated into his mouth. He was in a very bad condition when they released him. He went to the police station at Lehragaga, but the police did not register any case and did not record any first information report (FIR). He then went to the local Civil Hospital but doctors there did not take him seriously and did not give proper treatment. Later, when his condition worsened, he was admitted to the Civil Hospital at Sangrur. From there he was referred to PGI Chandigarh. His leg had to be amputated, but his condition worsened and he died in PGI. When this news spread, it was most shocking. It was hard to imagine that in 21st century, in a place like Punjab, such brutality can happen!

It was not a case of brutality against an individual but a case of class brutality. Amarjit Singh hails from a landlord family. His grandfather, who was a real brother of the father-in-law of Smt. Rajinder Kaur Bhathal, a Congress leader and ex- Chief Minister, was known for his brutal behavior. Teenagers of 15 to old persons were his victims. His brutality did not even spare animals. He fired upon one Bachan Singh and dragged him to his farmhouse, there he cut his body parts one by one and feed it to his dogs. He used to unleash his dogs on Dalit women, who went for cutting grass and on youngsters who went for grazing cattle on his fields. He forced the Dalit youngsters to eat cowdung. He shot at a he-buffalo and enjoyed his painful death. He was caught by a group of Naxals, who shot him dead and took away his gun. This group was led by Shamsher Singh Sheri. The family remained subdued for some time, but his grandson Amarjit and great

grandson Rinku have started behaving in the same way, and murder of Jagmel is the result.

But the situation is not the same as in the past. Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee has emerged as a fighting organization in this area. An Action Committee of various mass organizations led by ZPSC was formed. It refused to allow the postmortem and cremation of body till the demands formulated by the Action Committee in consultation with the aggrieved family were met. These demands included speedy trial and severe punishment for the guilty, Rs. 25 lakh compensation for the family of deceased and a government job for one of the family members of Jagmel Singh. Delhi Ludhiana highway was blocked indefinitely at Lehragaga. Government invited the representatives of ZPSC and family members for discussions at Chandigarh. An agreement was reached which included 20 lakh rupees to be given to the family as compensation- six lakhs at the time of cremation and fourteen lakhs at the time of last rites of Jagmel. One lakh and 25 thousands rupees will be given to the family for construction of their house. Whole expenditure of cremation and last rites shall be borne by the government. As none of the family members is a matriculate, so his widow will be given a class four job. Apart from this, trial of the accused will be completed within two months. After this agreement was signed, blockade was lifted.

This incident stirred the political waters of Punjab. Sadhu Singh, a Dalit minister in the Amrinder Singh Cabinet, met relatives of Jagmel at PGI and assured them that government will give six lakh rupees to the family, but the family refused to budge. Another Cabinet ranked minister of Congress along with Vijay Singla, a Cabinet minister from Sangrur, went to village Changaliwala and met the family of the deceased there. Akali Dal member of parliament, Chandumajra, along with Parminder Singh Dhindsa, Group leader in Assembly, along with other leaders met the family and Deputy Commissioner of Sangrur, demanding justice for the family of Jagmel Singh, condemning the incident as unfortunate. BSP condemned this incident, demanded justice and its President and area Incharge went to meet the family. Aam Aadmi Party local MLA joined the protest and its lone member of Lok Sabha, from Sangrur, raised the issue in parliament but his whole attack was focused against the Chief Minister and his absence from Punjab. Revolutionary forces were in forefront in the fight against this atrocity.

The incident at Changaliwala was not the first incident of atrocities against Dalits and it is not going to be the last one. Since so many years phenomena of atrocities against Dalits is on the rise. In Malwa region of Punjab alone many such incidents have happened. In Sangrur district itself, Dalits of villages Bald Kalan and Jhaneri were beaten by police and were put behind bars with broken ribs for months together and were released only after a prolonged struggle. Their only crime was that they were demanding their one third share in Panchayat land, granted by Punjab Village Common Lands Act 1961 and 1964. Similar struggles and repression happened in Kheri and some other villages. This year, Dalit sarpanch belonging to ZPSC of village Tolewal, called a general body meeting of Gram Sabha, which adopted a unanimous resolution on giving one third share of land on lease for 33 years. Similar resolution was adopted by Gram Sabhas in village Dhandiwal and Mulowal. But district administration, trampling all legal provisions, rejected the resolution of Tolewal village and forcefully tried to auction Dalit share for one year but people resisted the effort. A local Congress linked landlord, in connivance with administration, attacked the Dalits. Nearly two dozen Dalits were injured, some of them, including women, were injured seriously. Not only in Sangrur district, in village Jawahrewala in Muktsar district two Dalits, a man and a woman, were shot dead by the landlord and a Congress leader. Some other cases of atrocities against Dalits were reported from the same district. These details underline the fact that this is not the first case of atrocities on Dalits, nor is it going to be the last one, because Dalits are becoming conscious of their rights and their present inhuman plight and rising in struggle against oppression and suppression.

The parliamentary parties did not respond to earlier incidents in the way they responded in this case as described above. The question arises, why have these ruling class parties responded so quickly in Changaliwala and why did they remain aloof and silent in earlier cases of repression and atrocities? In this particular case, even the state Government has acted promptly and tried to solve the issue and reach an agreement as soon as possible. Why did the government prove to be deaf and dumb towards the cries of Dalits in earlier cases? In earlier cases in Sangrur, the state was clearly siding with the landlords belonging to the upper castes. In those cases, Dalits became conscious of their plight, organized themselves and fought for their rights, facing repression in this process. Dalits became an organized force, daring enough to challenge the undeclared state power at

local level. The entire parliamentary political class saw this force as a very dangerous element for their class rule. But in the present case in Changaliwala, the victim was not a part of any organized force but was simply an individual, so they did not see any danger from the victim's family. What danger this political class felt was that if they showed a little slackness, the forces from whom they feel real danger may get leverage. These ruling politicians were competing with each other to turn Dalits into their vote bank for the future through their fake sympathy. This became clear when a central delegation of BJP visited that village. They loudly declared the danger of Naxal upsurge on the basis of some books in the village library, which are books published by Rationalist society. This is reason behind the change of attitude of the ruling politicians, including Bhagwant Mann of AAP.

Secondly, oppression, exploitation and suppression of Dalits is very much ingrained in the present political, social and economic system. All parliamentary parties of the ruling classes are defenders and conductors of this anti Dalit and anti-people system. That is why their attitudes on this issue are the very same, despite the differences in their names, flags, leaders and seemingly in their political line. Long history had confirmed this fact. Few kilometers away from Changaliwala village but in the same Block is village Jhaloor. As mentioned earlier, Dalits in that village, demanding their legal share in Panchayat land, were brutally attacked, dozens were seriously injured including women and elderly, while an old lady, Mata Gurdev Kaur, succumbed to her injuries in PGI Chandigarh. Dalits' houses were broken and household material was damaged. Cases were registered only after a prolonged struggle and some of the accused were arrested. But the main culprits, Harjinder Mangoo and Gurlal, are still at large, enjoying their normal life. Despite the fact that their bail plea was rejected by Punjab and Haryana High Court, police is not arresting them. If they had been put behind bars perhaps the gruesome incident in Changaliwala would not have happened. But police connivance with criminals in Jhaloor has conveyed a message that landlords of upper caste can go scot free even after killing Dalits, as the lives of Dalits have not more value than that of dogs. Similarly, in Tolewal village, Dalits attacked by a Congress leader were in hospital and their medico-legal reports shows broken bones and cuts, which means that cases should be registered under 326/325 of Indian Penal Code for which accused has to go to jail. But the police is neither recording the statements of the victims nor considering

the medico-legal reports. Police has registered cases under section 323/324 of IPC and culprits are enjoying freedom. Such attitude of this system gives the message that culprits of atrocities against Dalits need not fear the law.

This incident in Changaliwala has once again unleashed the debate on Dalit question in the form that why such incidents continue to happen even in 21st century. Some self styled intellectuals and university type academicians assert that it is a certain anti Dalit psychology and anti Dalit thinking that is responsible for such atrocities. But they stop here and don't raise and answer the question that what is the source of such thinking or psychology. This shows the hollowness of intellect of such university intellectuals. We have been explaining this time and again that the whole edifice of caste system rests upon two pillars and caste cannot be eliminated without smashing these two pillars. These two pillars are, one, the structure and second, the super structure of this society. The Structural pillar is that all Dalit castes are devoid of any means of production, which, in rural India, is mainly land. The second pillar is in the super structure and is Endogamy. The task of removing the second pillar is a long term task, which may be taken as principal task after the completion of new democratic revolution, though propaganda and campaigns on this issue need to be taken in contemporary situation as well. But, smashing of the structure is the first and main task immediately. Struggle for share in the means of production, which means share in land, is the most immediate and important task for all those who are really interested in annihilation of caste.

In Sangrur and some other districts Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee is trying to lead the struggle to a higher phase by fighting for Dalit share in Panchayat land for thirty three years, apart from struggle on nazool land. Now this struggle for thirty three years is just a small step, but this struggle must culminate in one third of Panchayat land being giving on a permanent basis. This is also a first phase of struggle. Real issue is that land ceiling must be implemented strictly, and surplus land should be given to Dalits and other landless. Not only this, this land ceiling was fixed by 1972 Land Reform Act. Productivity of land has increased many times over, hence there is urgent need for lowering the land ceiling from 17 acres to 10 acres. ZPSC has been demanding this. This organization has identified some cases where landlords have land much beyond the prescribed ceiling limit. Struggle should culminate in occupation of surplus land if this hated caste system is to be eradicated.

Resolution of CPI(ML) New Democracy AP State Committee on 3 Capitals proposal for AP

(YSRCP Govt. in Andhra Pradesh has announced the trifurcation of the Capital i.e. offices of the State will be located at three places namely Amrawati, Vishakhapatnam and Kurnool. This is called as 3 Capitals proposal. This decision has generated a lot of discussion in the state. In fact it has become the main topic of public discussion since the decision was announced. We are here publishing the Resolution of AP State Committee of the Party on the issue.)

In 2014 New Andhra Pradesh was formed with three different geographical regions namely Central Andhra, North Andhra and Rayalaseema. With the experience of erstwhile United Andhra Pradesh, our party took a stand on the issue of Capital for New Andhra. Mainly on one side in development and on other side in administration, Hyderabad had become as centralized capital of erstwhile AP and gave some negative experiences. So that in New Andhra Pradesh it should not create differences among the regions while deciding on the capital, we should have an approach of keeping balance among regions to achieve maximum unity among people. It was our approach in 2014. As such we decided not to stand for a centralized capital like Hyderabad had been. We also decided to take an approach of decentralized development and administration.

With the above said approach we opposed the proposal of centralized capital in Amaravati by Chandrababu Government. We also proposed alternative clearly in development and execution. In 2014 general elections also we released our approach in election manifesto. We also published 4 pages pamphlet with this approach in 2015 and they were distributed in Amaravati area. Economically, politically dominant sections in that area provoked some people to attack our team.

The decentralization of Capitals proposal made by the Jagan Government is not same as what our party proposed in the spirit of decentralization. The Government is proposing Amaravati as legislative capital, Visakha as executive capital and Kurnool as judicial capital. Though it resembles opinions and feelings of Rayalaseema and Uttarandhra people, but it has some vested political interest. On one side this government took up the task to destroy the economic and political system built by TDP party in Amaravati in centralized manner. On the other side it also decided to build economic and political centre along with decentralized Capitals proposal. Our party is in favour of decentralization. Based on that, our party decides to add some demands to solve the long term and wide problems of the people.

By keeping unity among people, class unity can be achieved. Regional conflicts, differences among people should not damage once again the unity of the state. Based on that, unity among the state people principally can be maintained for the people's problems and feelings of backward regions namely Uttarandhra and Rayalaseema shall be given priority and prominence.

Whatever decision would be taken about the Capital can not satisfy all the 5 crore people of the state. It is not possible to fully satisfy all the three regions' people and to get unanimous decision. Some decisions may satisfy some regions for whom they are pleasant and convenient. But they become unpleasant and unwarranted to the people of other regions people. So the decision should be in a manner to bring maximum unity among people. Principally to keep the unity of AP state people, we formulated our demands with view of the decentralization:

1. ON STATE CAPITAL

- A. Amaravati should continue as legislative capital. But in Visakha and Rayalaseema legislative assembly meetings should be held once a year. State Governor's Head quarter should be at Amaravati.
- B. Kurnool should be continued as judicial capital, but benches of High court should be provided at Amaravati and Visakha.
- C. Visakha should be continued as executive capital. Sub-offices of executive capital should be provided at Amaravati and Rayalaseema.

- D. In the name of capital building peasants should not be displaced.

2. ON PEASANTS STRUGGLE OF AMARAVATI REGION

In the name of Capital, Chandrababu tried to build a corporate empire in Amaravati. To that end his Govt. undemocratically handed over the lands from the peasants which gave three crop yields into a land pooling policy. Those fertile lands were mainly intended to be used as commercial lands rather than for the purpose of the Capital. It encouraged commercial feelings the people. But they should not be made scapegoat of the new proposed decentralization policy. So, our party demands the following:

- A. When it is not possible to hand back to peasants already used lands for Capital, 2013 land acquisition act would be implemented, and 4 times compensation would be paid.
- B. Assignment lands would be given to the real Dalits. If these lands were also already used, the compensation would be paid as above said.
- C. If any constructions have not taken place, the land should be made ready to be used again as agricultural lands and 5 lakh compensation shall be given to the owner peasants of the land.

3. On Regional Development Councils

- A. Government should allot necessary funds to the 4 regional councils. For them duties should be properly be declared. Their autonomy should be maintained. They should be given powers for enactment with legislature. Special funds should allocate to Rayalaseema and Uttarandhra councils as like Bundelkhand and Koraput.
- B. In government 40 departments are there. On priority basis, head offices, HODs, Commissionerates of departments would be decentralized and regional balance should be formed.

4. Other Demands

- A. Struggle must be taken up on special status for AP and to demand for implementing the bifurcation promises. On this in AP assembly to take once more a resolution to put pressure on Central

Government.

- B. As per previous treaties and promises river water should be allotted to Rayalaseema.
- C. At the time of building regional capitals, people should not be displaced. Agriculture lands should not be acquired.
- D. Along with decentralization of administration there should be decentralization of development which should be people-centric.
- E. If any executive centers are constructed to maintain regional balance, they should be modernized to avoid travel burden on areas' people.
- F. To establish Agro based industries, problems of agriculture sector should be solved. Concessions should also be given to such industries.

Apart from the 3-capital demand and with other demands one more important political task was taken by AP party state committee. When the nation-wide people's movement is coming up against CAA-NRC-NPR, bringing up these 3-capital demands is not accidental. Our party formulated approach and political tasks.

Before the elections both YCP and TDP raised voices on special status to AP and for implementation of bifurcation promises which created federal feelings among people. Afterwards those two parties left those demands in air. Apart from that these two parties unconditionally supported Modi and Shah govt. on annulling Article 370 which gave spirit to special status. After Modi and Shah government came to power a second time, they introduced 25 undemocratic bills in parliament which were supported by these two parties. For the past 7 months they both supported the actions of Central Govt. to change the basic character of Indian democracy. The attacks on parliamentary democracy, secularism, federalism, social justice and sovereignty are getting support legislatively, administratively and judicially. On this they maintained silence particularly they supported at the time of attacks on autonomy of states. Both Jagan and Chandrababu vied with each other to please the Centre to curry favour from the rulers of the Central Government who are implementing the fascist agenda. Very important is the fact these two parties strongly supported the bill on CAA

in parliament without any hesitation. At the time when people's upsurge is coming up all over India the proposal of three capitals diverted the attention of the people. Our party feels there is this hidden political strategy of these parties.

Though RSS is weak in AP, the people's upsurge against CAA, NRC, NPR not extending to our state is not an accidental occurrence. This Capital issue has prevented the people's upsurge in AP unlike other southern states Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. Our party feels this is a political strategy of the ruling classes. These two parties are giving chance to RSS Hindutva to intrude into our state, though BJP did not win a single seat. The fascist forces used TDP and YSRCP as per their strategy and both have already left the demand of autonomous and federal spirit to the states.

At this juncture students in Delhi revolted against CAA and NRC. Within 48 hours of that upsurge Jagan government made proposal of 3 capitals. Thereby the mood of the people got diverted. Behind this, RSS BJP strategic political design may be there. It is a fascist offensive which is going to make the people of the country as scapegoats. It is the historical responsibility of the party to expose this scenario. The party should take the responsibility to build militant people's resistance as a political task to face the fascist attack. Already our Central Committee conducted state level general body to explain the RSS BJP Hindu fascism which is coming in our country. Our party should take responsibility to expose this strategy of political deceit. This task should be mingled with the demands on Capital issue. That's why apart from taking up propogand and building of movement on above demands, we should also take up propoganda to expose the fascist design.

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India's Women at Forefront Against This Muslim Hating and Manuvadi Fascism

Aparna

Will the history of this period be written non-patriarchally, fairly? If yes, it will be written in the name of women- those girls flooding out of the universities at the head of the outpouring of students, the women cramming the streets with colour, the old, wizened ones leading mammoth blockades of streets through nights after night; Muslim housewives running both continual dharnas and their homes; women and young girls mounting the barricades apart from also breaching them. It will also be written that the issue they moved out on was not of women's rights specifically, but the issue of defining- defending the Idea of India for themselves and their children against the Manuvadis' onslaught to create a "Hindu" Rashtra.

Thus, their ideas are quite opposing that of the RSS which is in power. They are also a nightmare for all casteists, for patriarchal norms and of fundamentalists of all hues. FIRs are being filed against women for leading massive assaults against the ubiquitous Section 144, they are targets of barbaric police violence. When the girls speak of their protest they speak of the right to diversity, the women say they are saving the future of their children.

Police violence by the RSS Govt. unleashed on students and on protestors in different parts of Capital city Delhi, not only brings out hundreds of women protestors, but women making videos, women in media and young women lawyers who leave tiny children at home and spend the night at police stations in new forms of legal activism to defend the rights of protestors. The Hindutva assault, armed with state power, subservient judiciary, compromised institutions, black laws, the Enforcement Directorate and servile taxmen, thought they had covered all sources of obstruction enroute to both sale to imperialism and establishment of a Hindu Rashtra. But it does seem that they overlooked the fightback from students in institutions of higher education. And especially, they have overlooked the

country's women.

Women with their tenacity, organizational and administrative skills tested to limits daily in crores of homes, with the capacity to suffer, to fight for what is dear, to invent, to bring in colour and to innovate. Women who have been fighting at so many levels against different expressions of patriarchy. Now seeing a Manuvadi casteist, communalized and patriarchal society being sought to be openly reiterated by upturning even lip service to equality of all citizens and equality of gender. No way!

Women are adding to the clarity and maturity of the protestors as also to their endurance, cheek, creativity, tirelessness and refusal to overawed. Probably those are the qualities women brew in their continual struggles in everyday life. Political parties, religious leaders, democratic organizations are all supporters and it is the people who are in the centre stage. It should surprise no body to find that the masses in the centre stage are ringed and thus protected by hand holding women, who further hold ropes around the crowd to do their own "crowd controlling".

The astonishment at the courage and outpouring of women and girls against CAA and NRC overlooks that their emergence at the forefront began with the abolishing of Article 370 and the crackdown on the people of Kashmir. The first teams from outside the Valley to quietly enter Kashmir and spend time among people in the Valley's villages, were of various women's organizations. They did not announce dates of their going unlike the mostly male parliamentary leaders. These women and girls spent time in the Valley's villages and brought back the experiences of the people and especially of the women and children. Among the first street programmes in the Capital and elsewhere against the attack on Article 370 and the rights of the people of Kashmir, were those organized by women organizations and activists. The programmes slowly became more general protests. The women on these teams were mostly of various progressive and democratic ideologies and certainly not only drawn from minorities. This is a contribution often missed in the eulogies being rendered currently to the participation of girl students and women.

For these organized women and also students, at least in the Capital city, the immediate precursor to the Kashmir issue was the frustrating fight for justice in the reported sexual harassment case by the erstwhile Chief Justice of India and also the struggles for justice to the survivors of sexual

violence backed by state support in the cases of the survivors of Chinmayanand and Senegar, both belonging to the RSS-BJP ruling apparatus in UP.

Over the years, women, especially in India's metropolises and bigger cities have been hitting the streets in big mobilizations. They were remarkable in the 1980s for demanding laws against dowry, for changes in rape laws. In 2012, young women and men astonished the country by pouring out into the streets against sexual violence as personified in the terrible Nirbhaya gangrape and crystallizing in all aspects of governance and society which enshrine patriarchy. Maybe seen in this context the current scene can be rationalized.

The epicentre of the current upsurge among women is definitely Delhi, where two events ran concurrently since early December 2019, marking the two faces of Hindutva- establishment of Hindu Rashtra and service to corporate. On the one hand was the struggle of JNU students against the raise in hostel fees. This hike became the active face of the bid to forcibly commercialize higher education and take it out of the scope of common people's children. The students fought back. Alongside, the CAB was introduced on 9th December 2019 in the Lok Sabha and a few days later in December it was an enacted law. Declarations resounded on all India NRC by the Home Minister and NPR with new questions became an immediate question. In this scenario the Central Govt. run Delhi Police ran amuck on the students of JNU, barbarically beating them up at metros after putting off streetlights and calling forth protests from students of other similar universities in the Capital. Simultaneously started protests against CAA as rallies by democratic sections and a mass meeting at Jantar Mantar. Alongside, while serious protests began in Aligarh Muslim University, the students of Jamia began gate protests from 13th December 2019.

In this situation was let loose barbaric police cruelty on the students of Jamia including a frenzied attack on the Library. Students, women, democrats poured out at the police Head quarters the same night keeping vigil till the last student was released from police custody. New forms of police violence were also inaugurated with this- apart from putting off lights before beating, police stopped even senior lawyers of the highest courts from meeting injured and beaten students stuffed into police stations, police were captured on camera systematically wrecking lines of motorcycles

and two wheelers to allege student violence, police forcibly entered the Jamia University while the University administration was on national television, shaken and angry, denying that they had allowed police to enter. Students trained in the Mass Communication dept of Jamia ensured that graphic images of bruised students including tearful girls emerging into the night from the Library and hostels, hands held up in the air like POWs and also like POWs being prodded by police lathis if they stumbled, flooded smartphones of students countrywide. Women students from Delhi's institutions of higher learning and totally irrespective of the faith they were born in, ascended the barricades at ITO. Images of Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar rubbed shoulders with the Preamble of the Constitution, which went on to become the article of faith of the subsequent days throughout the country. Mothers of students of Jamia, infact mothers from different parts of Delhi whose children were students of any of Delhi's colleges were in good number at ITO through that night in horror at the attack on the students and the vigil ended only when all students were out of police stations. News percolated of police firing on students at Jamia and of students with bullet injuries.

From then on, there were daily protests in Delhi and the gate of Jamia University became a Centre of protest. In course women at Shaheen Bagh, at some distance from Jamia, began a dharna and they continued it. They created a form that worked for them; they found it difficult to go to central protests what with household chores, small children, school kids who returned home for lunch etc.etc. and so they just decided to sit down at a common spot outside their homes. They were angry mad at the treatment meted out to the students by the police, several homes had children studying in Jamia and for them the CAA and NPR NRC was immediate and living as the situation in Assam had been followed in all homes with anxiety. They came to say typically, "My name is Hindustan, yes I wear a burkha and have kept a roza for my country's safety today and this is my land. We fought against the British for it and those who didn't fight are asking us to prove our citizenship? The preamble says we are all equal. I am fighting for my children." The brutal beating of students and teachers of JNU at the hands of RSS goons backed by police on the issue of the fight against commercialization, helped to make the fightback against the NRC CAA NPR of the RSS Govt more encompassing while also showing how "non communal" was this govt in crushing protest against its agendas for the country. And gradually Shaheen Bagh became the name of a model which

has got established in city after city in whichever areas there are large concentrations of Muslim women.

Initially, in Delhi, central night protests at India Gate or ITO were also a feature, more at the former point. The form adopted at India Gate was later to become a pattern; separate groups within one huge space. Some shouting slogans, some singing, some merely exchanging experiences while older citizens and activists stood on the outer rim of the gathering of students of all the universities. Taking turns to walk up to the memorial, light candles, read the Preamble and maybe sing a song or two. Here were regularly present parents of children studying at Jamia; parents of ex students who drove them by repeatedly calling from anywhere between outer Delhi to Bangalore to Los Angeles and threatening to descend if the parents did not represent them in the protests. It is worth remembering that 40% of Jamia students are non minorities. Thus did the bruised citizenry linked to the beaten up, violated and angry students heal itself, it was here that democrats and progressive elements also got a chance to interact with them and hear them pour out their experiences, it was here that groups of students from universities in and around Delhi got the place to join the protests. At any time of the night, half the gathering here were women and girls.

It is not only Muslim women who are in the fight, but in the areas of permanent dharnas they are the bulk. Around them gather hundreds and hundreds of students and women from different sections. Apart from that women are at the head of and even evenly mixed into student marches, citizens' rallies, protests in different institutions. They are on the streets of Indian cities everywhere, in so many places they are sleeping on the roads night after night after night- these women, many of whom have never put a foot unescorted outside their threshold. In the countrywide horror against this imposition of Hindu Rashtra, the outpouring of democrats, progressives, Dalits, minorities has mingled seamlessly and in this so many patriarchal norms have been just cast asunder in the storm of the movement. When the police come, bruised girls hold out roses or threaten the police by wagging fingers at them or simply sing the national anthem to stall them. Women hold hands and ring assemblies to hold police at bay, or they are simply beaten up while resisting, or cases are heaped on them for organizing protests.

What explains why this has happened. The continued economic crisis,

the failure of polices which involve open sale to imperialism and the growing joblessness and price rise are leading to the fading of bright orange tinge of the saffron rule and also of the RSS Govt's ability to sound convincing. The RSS Govt has also moved fast on its social agenda. Muslim women were silent when their petitions to the Supreme Court against triple talaq were used as a weapon by the RSS Central Govt to demonize men; the Court had already extended protection to the women by setting aside the practice. For Muslims apart from many democratic sections, the ground slipped under their feet at the brutal subservient one sidedness of the Supreme Court on the Babri Masjid issue, a subservience which flew in the face of the constitutional edicts quoted in the Judgement. The CAA and the reality of the Assam situation and the violation with impunity by RSS Central Govt's police of Jamia and of the students there, has made issues immediate for Muslim women. While the VC of AMU called in the police against his own students, the VC of Jamia promised her students that the University would move the courts for lodging FIRs against the police- there is difference in response though both VCs were handpicked by the RSS Central Govt. and both have seen equal police barbarity against their respective students.

In the same economic milieu see what is happening to all students and all women. Everywhere there is turmoil in higher education, against contract teachers, commercialization and privatization and both students and teachers are fighting. The experience of the Supreme Court staffer in her complaint of sexual harassment by the Chief Justice has been mentioned. Women in the country seethed against the situation in UP where functionaries of the RSS had state support in cases of sexual violence against young women. In the Senegar case especially, the impunity of the RSS Govts came vividly alive as the young upper caste survivor fought for life in hospital and her cases were transferred to Delhi due to the anger of women's protests. The impunity of the RSS matched its display of the same in the Kathua rape case of a little child. Sexual violence against women continues countrywide and all that remains of the mighty outbursts of 2012 are rulers'generated hysteria for hanging and very little changed in the anti women routine justice delivery system despite promises. These practical issues along with the continual harping on 'Hindu' rashtra brings out clearly to women the life of bahu beti izzat designated for them, and what such a feudal ideology means for all women even apart from the Dalit

women- 'dhol aur nari' future being perfectly visible. In cities they are coming out in numbers along with the Muslim women; the students, the intellectual and middle class working women, even the mothers of students.

And so Hindutva fascism is being confronted in cities by a democratic upsurge by students, youth, citizens and by a huge number of women. The Muslim women especially have created the Shaheen Bagh model, democratizing protest by innovating a form conducive to allowing continual and mass protest by whole families. This is the most creative act in an atmosphere of general outburst of people's creativity and innovation in both forms of struggle and of coping with repression. To be there is to get a sense of being in a festival; the veritable 'festival of the people'. The women in these protests are exhibiting mind blowing sagacity, grace, wisdom and courage; Society forgets that they have just blown up their everyday skills in running homes and families onto a social scale. These protests are also thus consigning so many patriarchal notions of society, families and communities into the historical dustbins; equations cannot possibly go back to the old in families and communities, such a shake has been given to them by the practical movement. For the women who are participating, it is liberating but they see it as inevitable- it is for their children, it is to assert this is their motherland.

The symbol for the movement in general has become the Preamble (not just the Constitution though it too is in focus) and it is the basis to assert an Idea of India. Some discussion must be there on why that has caught the imagination of such an upsurge and is satisfying the aspirations of this movement. The Constitution has contradictory strands, even the RSS Govt. manages to quote from it to justify some steps. The Preamble of course is the statement of intent, so it is more valid. It is also a document written in the spirit of the years after the defeat of Hitler at the hands of the Red Army, when a third of the world was red and egalitarianism was the aspiration of the people worldwide including India. India, with the immediacy of the naval mutiny, of the Telangana Armed Struggle upholding the promise of a new democratic India, and other such. Thus the promises of Justice and Equality- social, economic and political, capture the imagination of India today just as much as does the acceptance of India's diversity and promise of equal place for all.

The outpouring is doubtlessly democratizing society, is bringing many

many sections of women, especially Muslim women, into the movement debating the Idea of India. Some new icons have been mainstreamed, like Savitri bai Phule, while some continue, like Gandhi and Ambedkar. Songs of progressive poets have become the anthems, songs and slogans speak of social and economic equality and of the concerns of common people. It is the people's challenge to Fascism; the ruling class political parties are mainly relegated to supporting from outside and they definitely neither lead it nor can control it. The flavour of the movement is progressive, Left; for all people, against social stratifications and economic ones too. The revolutionary movement has a massive challenge before it. This movement has possibilities and is pregnant with opportunities.

About the women and especially the massive number of ordinary Muslim housewives out fighting, there is need for comprehending the potential of what is on. Women have this massive burden of feudal patriarchy to fight, but for them, complete liberation from patriarchy will be synonymous with communism and the end of private property. Their stakes in the struggle against Hindutva Fascism, which wants to rejuvenate feudal patriarchal relations and casteism besides exterminating minorities, are very high. The women's outpouring must become part of the torrent of movements needed to go beyond just fighting back Fascism and bring genuine or new democratic revolution. The place of revolutionary women and organizations is within this current movement and the direction is towards strengthening it by strengthening own initiative and abilities .

Union Budget 2020-'21 : Attacks on the People Intensified

Union Budget presented by the Finance Minister for the year 2020-'21 bears all the marks of a crisis ridden economy and the Govt.'s attempts to put the burden of the crisis on the people. With grim faces on Treasury benches, Finance Minister laboured for nearly two and a half hours to search for any announcement for the galleries. Failing to find one, she sat down after over two and a half hours. The whole Budget exercise was a brazen attempt to not acknowledge the dire straits in which the economy finds itself. It is equally brazen in its prescriptions of the very measures which are responsible for the downslide of the economy and increasing hardships of the people.

Over the years the present govt. has perfected the art of statistical jugglery to the extent that every statistic has become suspect. RSS-BJP Govt. has dished out suspect figures and prohibited publication of uncomfortable ones. A whole two months before the end of the financial year, Finance Minister presented the figures for the whole year which could only be a guess work. This Govt. has changed the very method of calculation of growth and even this changed method could not and has not been able to hide the dark tidings of economic slowdown with the growth rate numbers plummeting to lowest over past seven years and that too the doctored numbers. Finance Minister did not even acknowledge the highest ever unemployment rate with CMIE putting it at 7.3%, highest for over half a century. Given the hardships faced by the people, declining consumption in the rural areas, declining wages in both rural and urban areas and declining sales of essential commodities, any growth is inconceivable.

RSS-BJP Govt. is loath to admit the very fact of economic slowdown, leave alone the deepening economic crisis engulfing the country and permeating all sectors of economy to varying degrees. Such admission would demand analysis of its causes and redressal of the same which the corporate masters-foreign and domestic- would not permit. They have turned a blind eye to the basic cause of economic slowdown- the decline in demand- which is the result of declining purchasing power of the people, whose overwhelming majority consists of peasants and workers. There is not a single measure addressing this situation, no step in the direction of increasing the purchasing power of

the peasants, agricultural labourers and industrial workers.

Rather the Govt. in the service of the foreign and domestic corporate and protecting the big landlords, has gone on to rob the people. It has cut the expenditure on the social sectors and chanted the *mantra* of privatization to address all the problems of the people. Even in the year gone by, the Govt. robbed the public sector banks including RBI and also public sector enterprises, went on divestment of PSEs, cut the expenditure on the social sector which is any way abysmal and yet the fiscal deficit rose and this rise is due to service of the corporate and not measures for the people.

Budget proposals of RSS-BJP Govt. continue on the same track of divestment of public sector enterprises, adding financial sector enterprises to the kitty and cut in the social sector expenditure while increasing the burden on the people through increase in indirect taxes on different commodities. This Budget marks the biggest attack on the people in the recent past. Sector after sector has been denuded of financial support while freebies are being handed to the corporate in the form of tax cuts.

The Govt. has targeted dis-investment of Rs. 2.11 lakh crores of which Rs. 1.20 lakh will come from the sale of Public Sector Enterprises and Rs. 90 thousand crores from the public sector financial institutions including PSBs and LIC. The latter is to be divested through floating an IPO. Sale of PSEs like Air India, BPCL and Concor is being undertaken. There is also announcement of a plan for monetization of highway projects, thereby increasing toll taxes. Privatization of Railways is being implemented with increasing sectors being given to private players. And all this money will fill the coffers of the corporate friends of RSS-BJP.

A very important aspect of the Budget is total neglect of the Agriculture and rural areas. Over two thirds of the people live in rural areas while agriculture employs nearly half of the work force of the country. There is effective deduction in the allocation for Agriculture, Irrigation and Rural Development. While agriculture and irrigation have been allocated Rs. 1.60 lakh crores, Rural development was allocated Rs. 1.23 lakh crores. This allocation is only 2.5% higher than last year and is lower than inflation rate which makes it effective deduction. Regarding agriculture, in the 16 point plan there is not a single measure addressing the agrarian crisis. On the other hand there is a cut in the fertilizer subsidy (nearly 11%) which means increase in the prices of fertilizers thereby further increasing the cost of production while taxes on diesel resulting

in its high prices further increases this cost. But there is no mention of any increase in MSP for agricultural produce or increase in its coverage. This Budget is out and out anti-peasant. The only measure the Govt. announced is increase in the allocation for Credit- a bane for the already indebted peasantry.

RSS-BJP Govt. has attacked the most oppressed sections of society the most. There is a cut of Rs. 9,580 crores (13%) in the allocation for MNRREGS (as compared to RE for the year 2019-'20). There is gigantic cut in the allocation for Food Security Act which has been substantially reduced. Despite all talks for the oppressed castes, RSS-BJP Govt. has continued cut in the plan outlay for the Scheduled Castes. This cut has become particularly serious over the last two years. There are similar cuts in the other schemes meant for the poor and oppressed.

Despite its chant of Make in India, there is no measure to revive industrial growth. The measures for the MSMEs are mostly cosmetic and will have no effect of spurring growth. The only measure alluded to by the Finance Minister is increasing contractualization through her averment to strengthening Contract Labour Act. Sector after sector is facing decline or stagnation but no measures were announced for overcoming that. The only measures are increasing privatization which cannot but have more deleterious effect on the conditions of the working class, particularly its organized sections. Unorganized workers any way do not enjoy any rights.

Finance Minister talked of Aspirational India but hit the aspirations of the common Indians the hardest. The allocation on Health (nearly 67 thousand crores) was only 3.8% higher than last year which does not even cover inflation. Allocation for much touted Ayushman Bharat has remained stagnant which means effective reduction despite low coverage of this repackaged scheme. Allocation for Basic sciences has not been enhanced while allocation for Medical sciences has been reduced. Finance Minister announced a novel scheme for the private medical colleges utilizing govt. district hospitals. The whole health sector is being driven on to PPP mode. The total allocation in the Union Budget for Health sector represents 2% of the Budget and only 0.3% of the GDP.

Similar treatment has been given to Education with only roughly 3% of the Budget and roughly 0.45% of the GDP marked for it. The Govt. has announced increasing privatization and has come down heavily on the Higher education particularly on Social sciences. There has been a sustained attack on the

higher education and institutions of Higher education over the past few years aimed at taking it out of reach of the common people including bulk of middle classes. In short Education has been given a shabby deal in the Budget.

Despite all attempts Union Budget could not hide the grave situation of the economy and the people. Indians are the hungriest people in the world as shown by World Hunger Index. We are on the top in the prevalence of communicable diseases which have been eradicated in the major part of the world. In face of such high unemployment rate no measures have been announced to increase employment and provide relief to the unemployed, show scant regard for the youth of the country.

On the direct taxes, there has been juggling with rates without any real benefit to the middle classes and well paid workers. Lowering of rates while doing away with exemptions will in fact mean increase in the burden for the needy. On the other hand, corporate taxes have been reduced probably learning from the last year when the Govt. had to beat a retreat barely days after announcing increase in the taxes on the corporate. A charter for the rights for tax payers (middle classes) has been announced which is another name of squeezing them further and increasing their harassment.

There has been increase in the custom duties but a perusal of the items on which taxes are increased shows that these are mainly imports from China. Coming after Modi Govt. refusal to be part of RCEP, it only demonstrates that the Govt. is targeting China in its international trade practices.

One of the most glaring aspects of the Budget proposals is sharp increase in the allocation for internal security. Budget for the Home Ministry has been increased from Rs. 1,19,025 crores (last year) to Rs. 1,67,250 crores this year, an increase by over a third. On the other hand, the allocation for the defense forces has not been increased. This demonstrates, Govt. protestations notwithstanding, that the RSS-BJP Govt.'s main thrust is to suppress the people of the country. They raise the bogey of foreign threat but they know that the main threat to their rule comes from within the country i.e. from the people of the country. Their fascist drive is facing resistance from the people and increased allocation for the Home Ministry means further increasing the security apparatus to suppress the people of the country. They have already further strengthened the repressive laws which have been in existence. They consider the people of the country as their main enemy. This is the department whose allocation increased so sharply and people should know the future

direction of the RSS-BJP Govt.

RSS-BJP Govt. has systematically eroded the financial powers of the state govts. which is line with their continued attack on the federal structure. While imposition of GST has eroded the power of the state govts to raise resources, there has been reduction in the states' share of taxes. Though this reduction is only marginal at present but it shows the direction. This is on top of the with-holding of the states' shares in taxes. Further, the share of the South Indian states in under strain. This reduction is also important in view of the fact of most of the social sectors including Health and Education being primarily state subjects.

The whole Budget is anti-people and must be opposed. It clearly shows that the RSS-BJP Govt. is determined to increase the burden on the people to serve the interests of corporate- foreign and domestic- and landlords. It is devoid of all considerations for the people. It will further suppress the purchasing power of the people.

The Budget speech of Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman was not totally bereft of new content. She deciphered the Indus Valley script, besides naming that ancient civilization as Saraswati-Sindhu Civilization gladdening the hearts of the powers behind the throne, the mandarins of Nagpur.

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Union Budget 2020-21

Betrayal of Peasants and Rural Economy

Bhalachandra Shadangi

The Union Budget 2020-21 presented by the Finance Minister on Saturday is in continuation with the disastrous policies of Modi led BJP-RSS Govt and has offered no relief to the common people reeling under severe unemployment, steep rise in prices, agricultural distress and crashing of rural wages. The Budget speech is full of jargon and rhetoric and even failed to announce any concrete measures to address the declining purchasing power of the people and particularly rural consumption. It has missed the opportunity to address the economic slowdown by failing to put money in the hands of people ensuring income to the peasants, workers and other labouring masses.

Though the FM in her Budget speech has repeatedly mentioned the Govt's target of doubling peasants' incomes by 2022 with 2015 as the reference year, but she failed to present any roadmap to achieve this much propagated target. Ultimately without any policy support and budgetary allocation, this seems like a mere rhetoric and there is very little possibility of realisation of it in the coming two years. Rather the Budget proposals will increase agricultural distress.

In the background of economic slowdown, it was quite expected that the Govt will spend huge money in the Budget outlays for rural job scheme, food subsidies, assured irrigation and the minimum support price for farmers to kick start rural demand and consumption. But the steps announced in the Budget will not lead to any improvement of peasant incomes, savings, food security or employment. Figures show that there is a sharp reduction in rural spending. As per data, in comparison to 2011-12, the Monthly per Capita Expenditure in rural consumption has come down by nearly 8.8% in 2017-18.

Corporate 'Development' of Agriculture

The FM has announced a 16 point programme which is nothing but a continuation of liberalization measures in the Agriculture sector paving the way further for big corporates to take over Agriculture and agricultural lands.

The budgetary speech of FM not only failed to announce any concrete measures to overcome agrarian crisis, but also proposed to increase the penetration of MNCs and Corporate investment in agrarian economy. From input supply, to procurement of crops, storage, agro-processing, insurance and marketing of crops, Govt has allowed corporate investment in every aspect of our agriculture. It could not give any relief to our peasant community from high input costs, low crop prices, indebtedness, distress sale, crop losses and lack of agricultural infrastructure.

In the Budget, the FM has assured help to the states which enact the three Model laws relating to Land leasing, Farmers' Produce and Live stocks and Contract farming and for investments in marketing, food processing, storage and transport. It has proposed single crop clusters in each district for marketing and exports. Apart from this dry land is to be given to commercial companies for solar farms. This is nothing but pushing peasants to the mercy of corporates. It will increase their exploitation by companies through leasing of their land, indebting them, buying their crops at cheaper price and earning huge profits in food processing and marketing. The much publicized Kisan rail and Kishan Udan will do nothing to help the peasant in increasing their income as crops once sold by the peasants are no more under their control; rather it become a commodity of the businessman or company and it is he who decides whether to dump it or export it. It totally depends on him and is not related to peasants' income. So the so called Kishan Rail and Kishan Udan, though they seem to be lucrative, but will in no way be helpful to our peasants.

There is no concrete proposal in the Budget about increasing the peasants' income, rural wages, social security pension, irrigation and subsidies for inputs like diesel, electricity, seeds and fertilizers or on any worries of the landless peasants, agricultural workers and share croppers. Rather the cut in the fertilizer subsidies will certainly increase the input cost of peasants.

Another big problem ignored by the FM is that of monoculture leading to

ecological and environmental imbalance. Private companies never safeguard safety of the environment because safety of their profit is their only motive. Another related aspect is the erosion of seed security and biological diversity. On this the FM spoke of 'Dhanlakhsmi', to promote Women's SHG to store and market seeds. With the govt itself promoting GM seeds and subjugating India's interests to the seed MNCs, obviously this is diversionary.

Budget for Agriculture and Rural Development

The decline of budgetary allocation in the Agriculture and Rural development sector has shown the Govt's lack of understanding of the seriousness of the situation. The allocation for Agriculture, allied sectors and irrigation for 2020-21 is Rs 1.58 lakh crore which is 5.2% of the total budget of Rs 30.4 lakh crore, while the same sectors in 2019-20 had been allocated Rs 1.52 crore or 5.45% cent of that year's total budget. When combined with the allocation for Rural development, the total outlays for the rural economy for 2020-21 make up about 9.3% of the total budget compared to 9.8% in the last year.

The Govt has budgeted Rs 2.83 lakh crores for Agriculture, Irrigation and Rural Development, which is an increase of only Rs 15,000 crores or 5.6% over last year's Rs 2.68 lakh cr. This increase is also less than the rate of inflation. Even allocation for various flagship schemes under the rural development department were marginally reduced to Rs. 1.2 lakh cr from last year's Rs.1.22 lakh cr.

Rather the 11% cut in the fertilizer subsidy, reducing the amount to Rs 71,309 crores will certainly increase the input costs of peasants. Fuel subsidy has been allocated Rs 40,918 cr., a rise of 6% from Rs 38,568 cr, much lower than the inflation rate. Rise in cost of all these will further burden agriculture inputs and domestic life and will also restrain rural aspirations.

Govt's callousness towards rural unemployment and rural economy can be clearly understood by its heavy cut in the allocation for MGNREGA. In the context of declining rural wages and demand, Govt could have pumped more money to rural area through MNREGA so that it would have generated more employment and more money can go to the people. Even the wages under MGNREGA, which have been very less for years in comparison to

the market wage, could have increased so that it can be lucrative for rural workers and check their distress migration. But unfortunately the Govt, displaying its insensitivity, has reduced allocation for this scheme by a huge 13%. Allocation under MGNREGA has reduced from the revised estimate of Rs. 71,002 crores in 2019-20 to 61,500 crores. Even while the total demand from states for MGNREGA this year is nearly Rs 1 lakh crores, the Govt has allocated only 60% of it in its latest budget proposal.

Another agri-based scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), which the government had focussed on in the previous years, has failed to get much attention this time. Though the Govt has done a small increase in its allocations, it has not addressed the issues which ail the scheme. The scheme is of limited benefit to peasants as payments for claims are delayed by months. During last 3 years private companies have earned Rs 18,830 crores from this crop insurance scheme, while peasants have suffered a lot.

Responding to the nationwide peasants' agitations, the Govt in the past had started PM-Aasha scheme which sought to compensate peasants when they sold their produce at less than MSP. Though implementing this scheme would have costed Rs 75,000 cr, Govt spent only Rs 4,100 crore in 2018-19 and slashed its allocation to Rs 1,500 crore in 2019-20 and to Rs 500 crore in the 2020-21 Budget. It is quite surprising that when the Govt is ready to spend Rs 4,000 crore on the futile and unnecessary National Population Register (NPR) exercise, it has allocated just Rs. 500 crores towards crop price to crores of our peasants.

Peasant organizations have been demanding since long to waive off all kinds of farm loans of peasants to provide them some relief from indebtedness. But the Govt, instead of doing this, has simply increased the farm credit to Rs 15 lakh crores in the budget. This will never be helpful in increasing peasants' incomes, rather will promote the sale of costly inputs and machinery of the Companies. One should remember that only recently the Govt had waived off more than 2 lakh crores of bad debts of corporations and had given them additional Rs. 1.45 lakh crores in the form of tax and surcharge concession.

There is no announcement to increase or even improve the implementation of PM-KISAN scheme which gave all 3 instalments of Rs 2000 to only 26.6% of the 14.5 crore peasant families, while 48% got no money at all.

Agricultural input costs have risen by 33-100% in the past five years and cost of living has more than doubled. In 2019-20, the Govt expected to spend Rs 54,000 crore till March 2020 against an allocation of Rs 75,000 crore. However, it has again allocated Rs 75,000 crore under the income support scheme. The scheme has started last year and has been able to achieve only about 50% of its targets. The Budget speech has not addressed the issues which are plaguing the scheme.

This Budget symbolises how little the Government is committed towards ensuring a dignified right to life for its people with food security and nutrition for all. Though in the 2019-20 Budget, it had allocated Rs 1,84,220 cr towards food subsidies, it could spend only Rs 1,15,569.68 cr. While a large number of poor people are reeling under acute poverty and food prices are sky rocketing and at a time when starvation deaths and malnutrition are growing, the Govt has preferred to reduce Rs.70,000 cr. on food security spending. Even the UNICEF Report of 2019 clearly stated that more than half of India's children are facing some form of malnutrition which includes 35% stunted and 17% wasted children. In the recently released Global Hunger Index, India has fallen from 95th to 112th among the 119 countries. In 2020-21 Budget also, it has reduced this allocation further to Rs.1,08,688.35cr which is 37% less the amount allocated in the last year's Budget. This amount is not enough to provide subsidized rations to the estimated 79 crore people in households across the country that rely on the public distribution system for their daily food needs. At a time when food inflation has increased over the past six months, it is disappointing to see this cut being proposed.

Similar is the story of Mid Day Meal Scheme. As part of National School Meal Programme which is designed to better the nutritional standard of school going children, there is no increase in allocation for this scheme. As of last year this year's allocation was Rs.11,000 crores which is in real term decreased if we take inflation into account. Last year also the Govt had spent only Rs. 9,912 crore which was quite less than the allocated amount of Rs. 11,000 cr.

Like many other pro people schemes, in Anganwadi service allocations also we can see a drop of 10.7% of the budgetary allocation i.e from Rs.19,834 to Rs.17,704 cr last year. In this year's Budget we can see a mere increase of 3.5% which is less than the inflation rate..

NSAP provides a monthly pension to 33 million individuals but the Centre's contribution is capped at Rs 200. The amount was hiked from Rs.150 to Rs.200 in 2006 during UPA rule and since then it remained unchanged till today. This amount seems ridiculous for a scheme which supports the most vulnerable people of our society like old people, widows and disabled people. In stead of declaring an universal Old age pension of least Rs.5000 per month, the government is more interested in pushing contributory schemes with a very meagre amount.

The expenditures on Central Sector Schemes in 2019-20 has been slashed by 11 per cent and Centrally Sponsored Schemes by 4.5 per cent – covering areas like food subsidies, agriculture and allied activities, Development of the North-East, Social Welfare, Energy, etc. Even the flagship schemes like PMJAY-Ayushman Bharat, Swachh Bharat and PM-Kisan have suffered major cuts. When there is an acute urgency to invest much more in the rural economy to increase purchasing power the Govt has preferred to cut allocations in comparison to previous years.

Even allocations for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, already way below the statutory requirements, have been cut in 2020-21. The Gender Budget allocation for 2020-21 is not encouraging. Women's budget allocation in this year's budget is Rs 1,43,461 crores which is a negligible increase compared to the revised estimate of last year i.e Rs 1,42,813 crores. An increase of only just 0.45% is well below the rate of inflation. Even the share of women's budget allocation has been further cut to 4.7% of total expenditure as compared to 4.9% in last year's budget and 5.1% in 2018-19.

At the end of the day one can conclude that this Budget of Modi Govt has failed to address the urgent need of rural people and the acute crisis prevailing in the rural economy. It is completely in line with the disastrous and anti-people policies of this Govt.

Call For 8th March 2020

Intensify Struggle for Gender Equality Enshrined in Constitution!

Despite over 72 years since 1947, what is the situation of gender equality in India? The question begins with sex selection operating before birth, misusing scientific advances. It continues into unequal opportunities to survive, as economic factors coupled with social bias lead to unequal distribution of family resources between children of different sexes. The issue of inequality continues into the entire structural violence by society against women, wherein conditions operate in which the vast majority of women are denied equal access to nutrition, to education and to health care. Women continue to be denied right to equal wage for equal work in practice in all types of work, while for agricultural labour there is an accepted difference in the official minimum wage announced by most states without specifying any difference in type of work. Land pattas are in the name of men alone in the maximum cases. Despite changes in laws of inheritance, women hardly ever assert the right to a share in the father's property due to patriarchy dominant in society. Domestic work falls to the share of women unremarkably, even if she is an equal breadwinner in the family. Widows have just no position in society whereas widowers are unremarkable from others. Divorced women continue to be stigmatized whereas there is no such marker on divorced men. The equal right to work is unenforceable for women without state support, some of which labour laws assure in theory in the form of creches at place of work, ESI facilities with paid maternity leave. These laws remained unimplemented in practice except in sections of organized and white-collar workers among whom women were certainly not half of the workforce. Women have also consistently had to fight for the right to safe workplaces and it took years and years of struggle to enact the Law Against Sexual harassment at Workplace. Even after enactment, each enforcement requires a new struggle. While women have breached all prejudices and barriers to enter every field of activity, it is unsurprising to see their poor representation in higher posts in any profession. In order to exercise the theoretical right of equality of opportunity, women have to be helped by society in the caring of children, and the question of providing good creches at state expense has hardly ever been addressed.

The situation steadily deteriorated post 1990, with the policy framework shifting to liberalization and privatization and open service of corporate. The falling away of regular jobs and shift to contractualization has affected women the worst. They are also the worst victims of the dumping of all labour laws by the current RSS-BJP Govt at the Centre. Women are the majority in the masses of unorganized 'voluntary' workers who do regular work without being entitled to a wage. The end of regular jobs is leading to end to enforcement of Provident Fund which economically empowered women workers and denying women access to ESI and to maternity benefits which accompanied the same. The end of regular jobs, the coming of fixed term employments and the casualization of labour leaves women that much more vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence at workplace. Job loss will be inevitable if they complain or protest. The Manuwadi Central Govt. has also disposed off the entire Equal Remuneration Act to just one sentence in the Wage Code. The issue of land reforms has fallen off the agenda and with it the right of women to have the pattas written in the name of both husband and wife.

The six years of the Modi Govt at the Centre have also seen the peaking of joblessness. This has led to general depression of actual wages and in turn has affected women's wage more. The push of this Govt. for even more privatization and commercialization of all services like Health and Education impacts the right of girls to access education more than that of boys in any given household. In any given economic strata, the women will hesitate to seek medical aid until only when no option is left, if health services are privatized and commercialized. All this is being done to facilitate the loot of the people and country by the looters of the people.

The deteriorating economic conditions of the people have deepened all social inequalities. In this situation, the RSS Govt. of Modi has also embarked on the agenda of establishing a 'Hindu Rashtra'. The RSS upholds a Manuwadi understanding of society, where all women have a secondary status and Dalit women are at the absolutely lowest step of the social strata. Additionally, the place of all minorities is visualized as of second class citizens and thus of the women concerned as even lower. In this situation, the recent policy package of CAA—NRC-NPR announced by this Govt. will worsen the position of women in any given section since they are the institutionalized migrants in the country, moving from parental homes to integrating into another family.

The situation of ensuring security to women in society has emerged from under wraps as a big question as women are daring to speak up against sexual violence. As governments fail to ensure women's security with lack of safe transportation to and from workplace, lack of adequate safe public transport, adequate street lighting, responsive policing, and also continue to stand by patriarchal values in practice, sexual violence against women has emerged as a major question to restrict equal right to participation in all walks of life. Despite so many big movements, the experience with sexual harassment at workplace repeats itself. There is total lack of attention to ensuring safe environments, unresponsive policing, absolute inattention to fast tracking justice delivery and speedy fair trials though huge amounts of Nirbhaya funds lie unused in most states.

This year, 8th march has come in a milieu in which thousands upon thousands of women and girls are on the streets, asserting the Constitution of India against the communal conspiracies of the RSS-BJP Govt. which seeks to establish a pro Corporate 'Hindu' Rashtra based on its anti minorities, casteist and patriarchal convictions. People of India are fighting to uphold the diversity of the country, right to practice religion of their choice. Women are in the forefront of these protests; they are strengthening them with their colourful courage, songs, slogans and creativity; they are braving police repression, storming barricades or climbing them; they are asserting the Idea of a multihued India.

The struggle of women in India for the right to equality with men in all spheres has been on over the years, both as a general issue and in specific manifestations. Today, women and girls are leading people of the country who are out on the streets in struggle to assert the rights to equality, justice, fraternity and liberty promised to all the people by the Constitution of India. This same Constitution promises no discrimination on the basis of gender and equal rights to men and women. Let us make 8th March 2020 an occasion when we strengthen the struggle against the attack on India's Diversity, on the Constitution which enshrines this Right, against the imposition of a 'Hindu' Rashtra. Let us assert our right to equality under the Constitution.

(Issued by POW, PMS and Istri Jagriti Manch Punjab)