

SACH

South Asian Composite Heritage

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South Asia : Shared Space of Composite Heritage

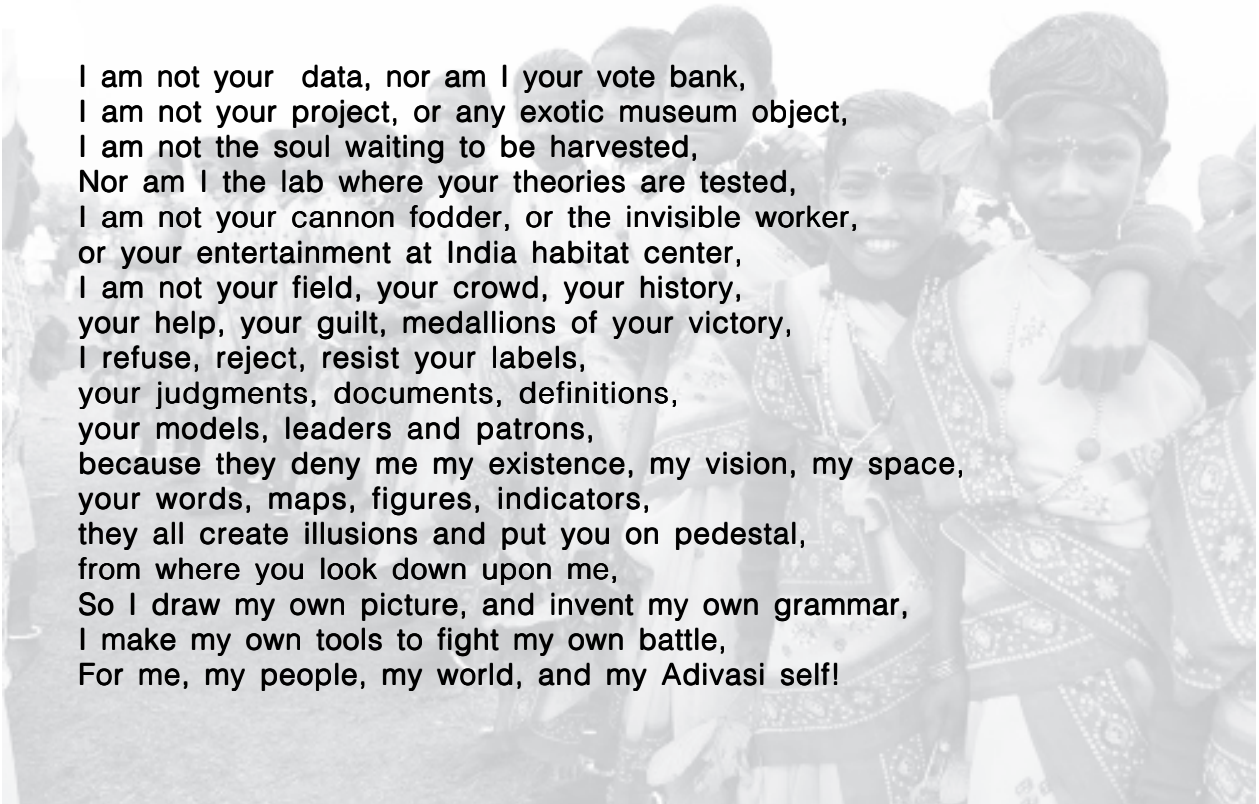
South Asia has tremendous socio-cultural diversity which can be observed within each country of the region. This diversity or divide is age-old and continues unabated. Despite diversities people of the region share social, cultural, linguistic and religious practices across national boundaries. It is a region where several religions are identified with different 'civilizations' that have been interacting and potentially challenging the idea that a region forms a cultural realm. South Asia region has a complicated relationship of religion, politics and nation-building which are often associated with the construction of post-independence nation-state models. Contradictory policies adopted by the British colonisers played an important role. On the one hand, they laid the foundations for mental representation of the region, through its unification policies, and on the other contributed in creating divisions between distinct states and across common cultures at the time of Independence. Perhaps, ever since the emergence of independent nation-states in the region, the nation-building process continued to foster national unity without acknowledging the cultural, social and linguistic commonalities. The political narrative in the region was gradually formed on those lines. People are often repeatedly reminded that they belong to one particular community or religion or ethnic group or nationality which is different from those who do not fall in this category. They are hardly made aware of the fact that they have many things common with "others".

Commonalities in social and cultural practices find their roots in centuries-long cultural encounters. Such commonalities are numerous and varied. They can be found from marriage customs to material culture and culinary habits. South Asia region has huge trans-border population which is spread across different regions of this part of the world. Some genres in music and dance such as qawwali, bhangra, Kathak, and Bharatanatyam have come to acquire a pan-South Asian character. These music and dance forms are practiced and appreciated much beyond the national scale. Some scholars have argued that in everyday construction of the region, platforms like Indian Bollywood offers great opportunities for interaction among artists not only across regions and religions but increasingly across borders as well reflective of close interconnectedness. Some critics say some Bollywood movies directly address the issue of cross-border relations but at the same time, they demonize the "Other". Scholar Manan Ahmed argues that "demonization still 'showcases the capacity to imagine the 'Other'—or they find ways, sometimes amusing ones, to highlight commonalities beyond borders and/or try to erase lines of difference". Social, cultural and historical continuities contribute to the notion of building a common and composite South Asian heritage. Composite heritage, "tangible and intangible." is unique to the South Asia region. It has been a way of living for people. It is called composite because it belongs to everyone and owned by everyone. It brings national boundaries as well as the whole region together. This was very aptly described in the declaration of the 'People's SAARC', a forum composed of a network of organizations from regional civil societies: "We, the people of South Asia, not only share a contiguous geographical space but also a social and cultural history that shapes our lifestyles, belief systems, cultural particularities, material practices and social relationships".

I Am Not Your Data

Poem by ABHAY XAXA, INDIA

We all share spaces, we all share natural resources, we all believe in our Composite Heritages which brings us together, Tribal's or Indigenous people whose Composite Heritages are based on forest and natural resources, whose bonds are based on their totem which they developed through natural resources have always been targeted by the mainstream society. They have been exploited in the name of their exotic image, unique lifestyle and their natural resources. People from mainstream society have developed various research on Tribal's and given them names and identities based on their own observations and assumptions. But now tribal's don't want to be part of this anymore, they have developed in every possible way and as part of their resistance Abhay Xaxa one the prominent leader, activist and academican of Adivasi Rights says Tribals are not a simple data for mainstream researchers we are more than that and we can write our own history.



I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
I am not your project, or any exotic museum object,
I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,
Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested,
I am not your cannon fodder, or the invisible worker,
or your entertainment at India habitat center,
I am not your field, your crowd, your history,
your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory,
I refuse, reject, resist your labels,
your judgments, documents, definitions,
your models, leaders and patrons,
because they deny me my existence, my vision, my space,
your words, maps, figures, indicators,
they all create illusions and put you on pedestal,
from where you look down upon me,
So I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar,
I make my own tools to fight my own battle,
For me, my people, my world, and my Adivasi self!

Abhay Xaxa an Adivasi Rights Activist and Sociologist by training, has worked with grassroots organisations, camaigns, NGO's, media, research institutions in different capacities on the issue of Adivasi land rights in central India.

Basavanna – A Man Who Rebelled Against Sanatana Tradition

By HUCHANGI PRASAD, INDIA

A woman saint-poet, a contemporary of Basavanna called Urilinga Peddigala Punya Stri Kalavve, critiqued the orthodox Brahmanical traditions and the caste system. “The Hindu religion, which stands on the foundation of the caste system,” she wrote, “distinguishes people according to what they eat. Those who eat chicken, sheep and fish are considered middle castes. Those who eat beef are considered outcastes, since the cow

is believed to have given panchamrita to Shiva.” It was the sharana movement — a dramatic development led by Basvanna and others in erstwhile Karnataka — that gave a dalit woman poet like Kalavve the confidence to be a rebel. The sharana movement enabled people from the lower rungs of society to raise their voices against the dominant caste structures.

In our own times, the words of Urilinga Peddigala Punya Stri Kalavve act like an axe to hit at the roots of Manuvadi, and the constant discrimination against dalits and minorities in the name of cow slaughter. The sharana period, and its ideas of equality, still has much to say to us.

The sharana movement encouraged equality, brotherhood and free thinking. It was revolutionary: people of the working class got together to fight for equality, and against inhuman caste and gender discrimination.

They created awareness about superstition by propagating reason. Most of all, the mass movement created by Basavanna and aimed at the root of exploitation by opposing the sanatana traditions of the Brahmins.



Basavanna was, perhaps, the first person in the world who wrote about the novel and revolutionary idea that work is worship. He organized people from the lowest strata of the society to realise this

worthy objective. This leader of the working class became a saviour of the people who had been suffering for centuries. He worked hard to spread the concept of one God. He emphasized the importance of education and insisted on gender equality.

To the orthodox Brahmins who said a person was born untouchable because of the karma of the sins committed in previous births, Basavanna said, “Look at the houses of the poor, all the sharanas of Koodala Sangama are champions of self-respect.” This is how he motivated the exploited to strive for self-respect. Basavanna was a pioneer in making people aware of political consciousness, and ideas like equality and freedom.

Again, the sharana movement has a lesson for us about freedom of expression – at a time when free speech and dissent are being curbed. Basavanna built an “Anubhava Mantapa”, a platform to express views without

caste and gender prejudice. Basavanna handed over leadership to the oppressed castes. The Anubhava Mantapa consisted of 770 sharanas, something like the first parliament in the world. Allama Prabhu, a dalit, propagated the philosophy 'attainment of nothingness' was like the Speaker of this parliament, which included women saints such as Akkamahadevi, Gangambike, Neelambike, Sule Sankavva, Dhanamma, Kalyanavva and Aydakki Lakkamma, and others such as Dohara Kakkayya, Ajaganna, Kurubara Bommanna, Holeyara Boganna and Madhuvarasa. All of them, women and men, participated in the discussions on the welfare of the people.

Basavanna introduced an adult education system which led many people from the lower castes to become writers – vachanakaras or writers of vachanas. This led to a boom in literary production; more important, it proved that knowledge did not brook discrimination. These vachanas could be considered the first writings produced by dalits and other lower castes, as well as women.

But a shocking development was in store for the sharana movement. Hundreds of them were hounded and butchered for having thought of, and put into practice, a movement against inequality and human rights violations. One instance of the sharana practice of equality was a marriage arranged between the son of the dalit Haralayya and the daughter of the brahmin Madhuvarasa. As Haralayya's son Sheelavanta and Madhuvarasa's daughter Lavanyavati had become sharanas, there should have been no obstacle such as caste keeping them from marrying each other. But Manuvad did not want this marriage to take place. The conservative Brahmins argued that this marriage was against Hindu tradition and Rajadharma which would eventually lead to destruction of the empire. The conflict was between people who firmly believed in caste hierarchy and who did not. The noteworthy point here is that the sharanas were even ready to sacrifice their lives to fight against the cruelty of Manuvad.

The sharanas decided to face whatever came their way, saying, "Let what is likely to

happen in the far future happen now, and what might transpire the next day, let it happen this minute." Although King Bijjala and the brahmins opposed the inter-caste marriage, the sharanas went ahead with the inter-caste marriage despite death threats. Enraged, the brahmins plucked out the eyes of the sharanas and tied them to the legs of elephants to be dragged along the streets. Then the Sharanas were trampled to death by the elephants. Other sharanas were beheaded and cut into pieces, such as the hatred and cruelty of the "Hindutva elements" of the time. The sharanas martyrs died for the sake of a secular marriage. The remaining sharanas went into exile to save the vachanas.

Literary critic and historian Ramzan Darga notes, "This movement which fought for human dignity on the basis of an idea of 'one path, one tone' witnessed the worst killings in history." He adds, "The counter protest by Manuvadi-s which halted the revolution led by Basavanna and other Sharanas was a huge setback for humanity."

While analysing caste, Babasaheb Ambedkar writes that "Buddha's revolution was followed by the Brahmin's counter attack. This led to the spreading of the roots of the caste system helping spread the cruelty of inequality everywhere." It is a well documented disaster in history that the Kalyana revolution was followed by a counter-protest by Brahmins. Anyway, one should not forget the fact that the revolutionary event of inter-caste marriage was symbolically against the caste system. It is also quite evident that Basavanna and other sharanas addressed the core issues of people's livelihood.

The sharanas' struggle against caste structures through their vachanas is still remembered by the lower castes.

In recent times, people belonging to the Lingayat caste project Basavanna as their leader. It is shameful that few self-proclaimed followers of Basavanna glorify Hindu gods by making use of Basavanna's ideas. There have been thousands of mata-s built in the name of

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Virangana

By HELENA KHAN, BANGLADESH

*Helena Khan, a well-known Bangladeshi writer and educationist, a famous name in children's literature, passed away in the evening of 15 March 2019. As an author, she received many literary awards such as Bangladesh Shishu Academy Purashkar (2001), the Bangla Academy Award (2008) and the Ekushey Padak (2010) for her contribution to literature. Among her many works, *Virangana*, a story set in Bangladesh after a liberation war, depicts the maltreatment of women in ethnic and religious conflict and gives evidence that the discourse around chastity, dishonour, and shame does not differ. The endemic refusal to hear the voices—the sorrows, anger, pain of violated women—is not bound by a historical moment or geographical region. It is a story of a woman trapped in her identity of *virangna* or 'war-heroine'. The story portrays the irony of the *Virangan* who is treated as special in an effort to 'protect' her, while in fact it isolates and destroys her. The injustice of the label lies in the way others behave towards a woman who returns home; as *Virangna*, she is almost too precious to touch, but her embodied shame is never far.*

THE eight-day moon smiled bright. In part light, part shade the world appeared an enchanted place. Still, silent the world waited motionless. The moon smiled. But the smile seemed awry, mysterious and meaningful. Rehana's mind was overwhelmed with that same old feeling, so experienced yet so different. For one brief moment, she was lost in the loveliness of light and shadow. She came out onto the porch in the middle of the night. Her sleepless eyes, like the branches of a tree, stretched out in the sun, seemed to see again that university square, the debate programme, the stage, the musical soiree. . . The singer that evening had been Rehana. Amazing! Her voice was gone, crushed under the weight of her screams and cries. Rehana stood up. She felt somewhat dizzy. Were the crickets droning somewhere in a monotonous voice? Was some bird flapping its wings ceaselessly? Or was she hearing the heavy, concentrated sound of numerous boots gradually coming nearer? She tottered into the house, clasping her head with her two hands and flopped down on the bed. Did the nights of Poush rain fire nowadays?

Her head and forehead became wet with perspiration. The room seemed intolerably damp and sultry. Once again Rehana came out. She scooped up water from the pool and splashed it on her eyes and face. She dabbed her head with the cold water. Her lips moved soundlessly, No, no, no. She rubbed her hair with the corner of her sari. Her short hair barely touched her shoulder. Rehana once had long hair as dense as a forest. In that forest, she had tried to hide her shame. But she couldn't. They had trimmed it short. Oh Lord! Rehana clasped her hair with her hands and pulled it again and again. Despite her intolerable restlessness, she finally lay down. If only she could sleep for a little while. She passed the hours of the night still as death, like a phantom, like the shadow of night. Rehana, companionless, remained lost in thought of the days past. But still she felt thirsty . . . Without her own knowledge; the breath of her will grew warm. She had a mother and two adolescent brothers whose eyes were not inquisitive; whose mouths did not utter any awkward question. They were really glad to

have their Apumoni back. Looking at their sleeping faces,

Rehana was inspired to live. Yes, she would live and why shouldn't she? She would raise her two small brothers on behalf of her father. They would grow up. And she would live to see that with her happy eyes. Ah! What a sweet smell suddenly entered through the open window! The pleasant fragrance of *hasnahena*! In a pleasing drowsiness, Rehana clasped the side pillow. But the sweet fragrance was slowly becoming odorous! The whole room filled with that strong odour. Her brain cells filled with that odour. Everything grew confused. Rehana tossed about all night. The next day she opened her eyes at her mother's call. The way her mother started lowering her voice and kept her eyes alarmingly on her every moment shook the very foundations of her strong will to rebuild her life. Her firm endeavour wavered. "Are you feeling all right? Now, don't try to hide anything from your mother. It will only increase your problems." The wounds of her body had healed. But the swollen wound within her heart still bled. Her mother's eyes grew dim as she looked at the face of her daughter. Rehana came down to the yard quickly. The vegetable garden was shrouded by a curtain of mist. The lanky bean stalk climbed up the tin roof of the kitchen. Rehana had sown with her own hands the crotons, the *rangan* tree and the *sheuli* tree next to the wall. As in the past this year too the trees had flowered. Nature was beautiful and vibrant. She alone was a misfit, a weed that needed to be uprooted. Her cousin Salma had come from Charpara. Salma, who was of her own age, hugged her, "O! After such a long time! We couldn't imagine that you were alive!" It was a completely natural and warm salutation. Still, it stabbed her heart. She was no longer a filled pitcher. Today she was just the lees of an empty bottle. There was an unbridgeable gap between her and Salma. The colours of their two bloods were different. The warmth of Salma was sharp like the edge of a curved sword. The aunts of the neighbourhood came

with auspicious wishes. They were not insincere. But their gaze? There was some sort of hidden question in their eyes. Rehana could not bear it any longer. She came inside and sat motionless, holding the bed for support. Her mother finished the incomplete task of preparing tea and served it. There was an embarrassing disquietude in her very own home, her own environment. How could Rehana survive in this environment supported on shame and sighs? "Apumoni, Moyna's mother has just arrived." Babul's voice brought her back to her senses. Moyna's mother! A complicate character whose only satisfaction was to find fault with others. Babul lowered his voice as he came nearer, "Mother says that you should not come out of this room until she leaves." And then, without wasting time, Babul asked, "Why? Why Apumoni? Moyna's mother is not the Khansenas who would shoot you if you came out. Then why is mother forbidding you?" His questions could not be answered. She was unable to face a single Moyna's mother. How would she face hundreds of thousands of Moyna's mothers on her way? She reasoned with herself that there were so many people she could lose herself in the crowd. But the shield of reason was not enough to hide the mean mentality of others and their prejudices. What could she do about that? Rehana had heard that a pearl-studded seat of honour had been prepared for her. But how many had the courage to sit on that seat? The glaring black copper of shame and distress would tarnish the glittering gold of honour. Her eyes filled with tears. "Why are you crying, Apumoni? Is there anything to cry for? You never used to cry before." The naïve Babul could not understand how terribly his words struck his sister. Rehana burst into sobs. No, Rehana couldn't live in this place. She left the suffocating environment for far away Jamalpur, the working place of her maternal uncle. Her mother thought it would be better for her to be away from home. Her uncle and aunt did not know Rehana's unbearable shame. Rehana got to know her neighbours.

The place was new and she met new people. She hoped to renew her life in this new place. The other day a storm had been raised when she was conversing with Shamsheer, a young professor who lived next door. Rehana felt as if the world had grown calm after a storm. There was a deep plea in the eyes of Shamsheer. No, no it couldn't happen! She wouldn't deceive Shamsheer. She would tell him everything. After hearing everything, knowing everything, if Shamsheer still wanted her . . . Rehana felt a great power inside her. And in that power she saw the light of her salvation. She understood clearly that people's attitudes were caused by prejudice. Nothing more. She felt that a weight had been lifted. There were so many answers to so many questions. Before her there was an oscillating string. Her hand raised up involuntarily to break that string in a single stroke. One day, while Rehana sat at the sewing machine on the other side of the partition, Shamsheer's mother said, "My son likes your niece very much. So do I." "Our Rehana is educated, beautiful. And there can be no question about her family. No one can dislike her. But I've heard that Shamsheer's marriage with Lina is fixed. Lina knows from her childhood that she is going to be a member of your family and Shamsheer will be her husband." "No, she can't marry Shamsheer. She can't," Shamsheer's mother said loudly.

"Why, what has happened?" "No, nothing! Shamsheer has announced clearly that he won't marry her any more. We too don't want him to!" She was silent for a few moments. Then she said in a low voice, "Don't you know she was kept in the cantonment for two days? That's why Shamsheer can't marry her." "O! That's what you mean." It seemed to Rehana that she had stumbled on quicksand. Bewildered and agitated, she sank deeper when she heard the inevitable, calm remark of her aunt. The ground under her feet was lost! And there was nothing for her to cling to. Yet Rehana laughed. It was a terrible laugh that bled . . . Now there was nothing for her to tell Shamsheer. She was a *virangana*! What a glorious title! How high she had been raised by this honour! But in what golden box would she hide this diamond-like title? She wouldn't even be able to come out on the street with that title And . . . and if somebody found the trace of this valuable document, her new job at the school might be at stake. "A *virangana*! A *virangana*!" Rehana laughed unabashedly as she uttered these words. She felt as light as the clouds that float in autumn. It was like the last ray of the sun at twilight. It was like the peaceful cessation that comes with the tremulous last sigh after a heart-breaking cry.

Courtesy : "1971 and After selected Stories" by Niaz Zaman

Basavanna

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Basavanna. These have become centres for business. Followers of Manu are against the demand of a separate Lingayat religion. Lingayat leaders have been misled since they have joined hands with the Sangh parivar.

M.M. Kalburgi, who wrote the play "Kettithu Kalyana" (Destruction of Kalyana) based on the killings of Sharanas in the twelfth century, was killed by the Hindu extremists. Similarly, Gauri Lankesh was murdered for spreading rational thought. The followers of Basavanna should worry deeply about the growth of the Sangh Parivar, and the growing intolerance which has led to the killing of progressive writers.

Every Indian should understand that the Indian constitution is replete with the ideas of Basava and his followers. It is the need of the hour to come forward and support these voices to uphold human dignity. We have to try build afresh, for our own times, the Kalyana revolution.

Courtesy : Indian Cultural Forum

Aurat March and its Discontents

By NEELAM HUSSAIN, PAKISTAN

Society takes exception to women's rejection of the authority of the male voice and their daring to speak of things that only men can do and speak about. The march has opened up space for debate on some serious concerns.

MAINSTREAM Pakistan is shocked by the slogans of Aurat March. A nation that is characterised by its free use of sexual abuse that not only targets women with explicit reference to their sexual body parts, but does so with impunity, is shocked by women's demand for bodily integrity and safety. A culture where men — all men — ranging from the highest in the land to the littlest street urchin and the local badmash, freely interlard their speech with language that strips women of their clothes, their autonomy; their self-respect, reduces them to their sexual bodily parts and spells out in explicit detail what they, as men, can do to them — is shocked by the slogans of Aurat March.

The nation which remained silent at Khadim Hussain Rizvi's filthy language targeting women in violent street protests, is morally outraged by women speaking out for their own bodies and staking their claim to agency, autonomy and respect in the home, the street and the marketplace.

Shocking? Yes. Surprising? No!

The Aurat March slogans challenged the status quo and put patriarchal authority thresholds to doubt. The terms and terminology of Khadim Hussain Rizvi's sex-based abuse

did no such thing. Thus while some did take exception to his language, the greater concern of the many was not with Rizvi's hate speech and incitement to rape but with the public inconvenience caused by the protest.



When women came out into the streets of Lahore on February 12, 1983 to protest Zia ul Haq's proposed Law of Evidence, fatwas were passed invalidating their marriages and

declaring their children illegitimate. They were labelled as prostitutes, kafirs and CIA/KGB agents and accused as elitist women who knew nothing about the 'real' lives of 'real' women. This too was not surprising. At a time when mainstream political parties were either silent or colluding with the military government, women were the first to challenge a dictatorial regime and raise their voice for democracy; the first to speak publically for women's social, economic, legal and political rights and the first to openly highlight the gap between ground realities and the complacency of the societal self-image as a culture that accords high status and respect to women. But why the hysteria over the Aurat March in 2019? The 40 or so years that lie between February 12, 1983 and March 8, 2019 should have inured society to the phenomenon of women raising their voices

for their rights. As part of WAF and the larger women's movement, women have turned to the law on issues as disparate as the privatisation of the Women's Bank and the adult woman's right to choice in marriage; they have prevented marriages to the Quran, protested honour killing, marched for joint electorates, minority rights and peace; they have spoken out against religious extremism, discriminatory laws and violence against women in the home and the street and have raised their voice for women's parliamentary representation; for women's right to paid work, labour rights and the rights of landless peasants.

Orchestrating their demands, and in their own right too, writers like Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz have rejected patriarchy through poems like 'Ham Gunahgar Aurtein' and 'Hazaar, yeh siaah chadar meri nahin, aap ki zaroorat hai.'" So why the hysteria now, when a new generation of women voice their demands for respect, safety, agency and autonomy? The answer lies in the shift from the broad outlines of larger public issues to their detailing as experienced and expressed publicly and privately in the daily routines of life. It lies in the irreverent tone of voice; in the appropriation and subversion of gender-based stereotypes and clichés that naturalise male dominance and routinise violence against women. It lies in women's use of satire, humour, aphorisms, inversions, role reversals that challenge power-based privileges. Not only did the Aurat March foreground the personal as the political, it challenged patriarchal authority thresholds by turning language on its head, and joked and laughed while doing so.

Authority takes itself seriously and does not respond well to laughter. And that is the reason why Aurat March slogans were met with howls of outrage, anger, accusations of vulgarity, immodesty and much more and the 'bahaya' slogans of the Minhaj al Quran women's counter-march that calls the Aurat March women 'gali ki kutiya' accepted as civilized expression.

This is not to say that society condones rape, sexual harassment, honour killing etc. What it takes exception to is women's rejection

of the authority of the male voice and their daring to speak of things that only men can do and speak about. Given the furore, there is a need to examine the Aurat March slogans and connect them to their underlying meaning and referential field. 'Apna khana khud garam karo!'; 'Mujhe kia maaloom tumhara mauza kahaan hai!' is not just about warming up the food and lost socks. It is about male privilege and entitlement that take the woman's services for granted and see her compliance as moral imperative. Not a serious issue? Elitist? 'Westernised'? Take a look at recent news reports of the husband who killed his wife for serving a cold dinner even as the March was taking place, and the father who beat his twelve year old daughter to death for not making a 'gol roti', and justified his act with the statement as reported by the media: 'You would do the same if it happened to you!'

'I will burn your honour to the ground and walk smiling through the gates of heaven'. Shocking! Only the worst can be said of a woman who defiantly dispenses with her honour! Except that the slogan is not about the woman's honour at all, for the simple reason that society gives her none. It is about male honour and privilege, and the murder and mutilation of women in the name of that honour. About forced marriage and male pride and the denial of women's right to education, paid work, mobility. It is about the objectification of women as property and the male right to dispense with them as they will. It is about the law of Qisas and Diyat that makes murder easy.

In the face of this, should she allow herself to be fooled by the 'ghar ki rani' myth and endorse a value that is the cause of her shaming, deprivation and death? Is this still an immoral statement? If so, whose immorality is it about — the man's, the woman's, or of the society that condemns her for speaking out? The Aurat March has opened up space for serious debate. Moral outrage as refusal to look uncomfortable realities in their face should not deflect attention from what are very serious concerns.

Courtesy: <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/aurat-march-discontents/> via @TheNewsOnSunday

They Peddle Myths and Call It History

By ROMILA THAPAR, INDIA

THE election of Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, or the B.J.P., in 2014 led to renewed efforts to rewrite Indian history so as to legitimize Hindu nationalist ideology. These efforts had begun when the B.J.P. first governed India between 1999 and 2004.

Under Mr. Modi's government and various state governments run by his party, the attempts to change history have taken many more forms, such as deleting chapters or passages from public school textbooks that contradicted their ideology, while adding their own make believe versions of the past.

They have peddled myths and stereotypes through pliant media networks — and have been teaching these versions as history in schools run by the Rashtriya Swayemsevak Sangh, the parent body of Mr. Modi's party, which he served as an outreach worker and organizer for numerous years.

Why is history so important to the Hindu nationalists?

Nationalists are known to construct an acceptable history to identify those they claim constitute the nation; extreme nationalists require their own particular version of the past to legitimize their actions in the present. Rewriting Indian history and teaching their version of it is crucial to justifying the ideology of Hindu nationalists.

Secular anti-colonial nationalism, a primary organization of which was the Indian National Congress led by Mohandas K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, won independence for India by basing itself on the equal and inclusive participation of all citizens as constituents of the nation.

This approach was challenged in the 1920s by two specific and at that time relatively minor forms of nationalism: the Muslim

League, a party established by Muslim landowners and the educated middle class, which claimed to represent Muslim nationalism; and the Hindu Mahasabha, created by upper-caste, middle-class Hindus, which asserted that it represented Hindu nationalism. It later morphed into the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh, also known as the R.S.S.

The Muslim League spearheaded the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The R.S.S. and its affiliates are still waiting to convert India from a secular democracy into a Hindu religious state. Their ideology, which attempts to legitimize the politics of Hindu majoritarianism, goes by the name of Hindutva (Hindu-ness). Both Muslim and Hindu nationalism were rooted in Britain's colonial understanding of India. Policymakers endorsed the two-nation theory proposed by James Mill, author of the influential "The History of British India," published in 1817. He maintained that there have always been two separate nations in India — the Hindu and the Muslim — constantly in conflict.

Linked to this idea was Mr. Mill's division of Indian history into three periods — Hindu, Muslim and British. Both these theories, initially accepted by Indians, were later questioned by historians and discarded half a century ago. However, they remain the bedrock of Hindutva.

To establish a Hindu state, democracy has to be replaced by a state where the fact of Hindus being in a majority in itself gives them priority. The Hindutva definition of the Hindu is that both his ancestral homeland and the Hindu religion's place of origin are within the boundaries of British India. This makes the Hindu distinctly different from those that came from elsewhere, as well as from those of other

religions — Christians, Muslims and Parsis are therefore aliens.

The origin of the Hindus is traced back to Aryan culture. Aryan identifies a language and a culture, not a biological race, whose emergence historians date to the second millennium B.C. But the Hindutva version of history is frantically pushing the date back to include the Indus civilization, a sophisticated urban civilization that preceded the Aryans by a millennium, as part of the Aryan origin of the Hindus. The word is derived from “arya,” which means “those regarded with respect.” If the Hindus are of Aryan origin, therefore, they feel they can claim superiority over all others. This reflects not just the 19th century European obsession with Aryanism, but also the imprint of German and Italian Fascism of the 1930s on the founding members of the R.S.S., easily found in their writings. Whereas historians are exploring the obvious interface between various communities and cultures of the second and first millenniums B.C., Hindutva ideologues insist on a single uniform culture of the Aryans, ancestral to the Hindu, as having prevailed in the subcontinent, subsuming all others.

Recent genetic evidence from archaeological sources has pointed to a mixture of populations in northern India at that time, with people of Iranian and Central Asian origin. Historians see this as evidence of migrations into India, but the idea is anathema to the Hindutva construction of early history.

To assert that the pre-Islamic period of Indian history was a golden age, claims are repeatedly made that this “Hindu period” from 1000 B.C. to 1200 A.D. was so scientifically advanced that Hindus were already using many modern scientific inventions, such as airplanes, plastic surgery and stem-cell research. These statements are applied to the activities of gods and men from the ancient past. The other equally insistent Hindutva argument is that the Hindus were victimized by the Muslims and were slaves for the thousand years of Muslim rule. In demanding a Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu state, they claim to be asserting their historical rights and avenging their victimization. The history of the “Muslim

period,” the second millennium A.D., is seen solely from this perspective and remains a mechanism for fueling hatred.

Historians find no evidence for such sweeping generalizations, but their views are dismissed. There certainly were conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, just as there had been conflicts between Hindus and Buddhists in pre-Islamic times. Some powerful Muslims did attack Hindu temples, both to loot their riches and to direct aggression against the religion. But this again was known in pre-Islamic times when some Hindu kings looted and destroyed temples to acquire wealth. There was more than religious prejudice involved in such actions. The claim to victimization is ironic given that the worst form of victimization — declaring the lower castes to be so polluted as to be untouchable — was practiced by upper-caste Hindus for 2,000 years, including through the period when they were supposedly being victimized.

It is striking that remarkable new ideas surfaced in Hinduism during the period of Muslim rule, such as those developed by its many devotional sects, which enriched the religion and gave it a form that is currently observed by some Hindu devotees. But these are treated as isolated incidents. Nor is there reference to some of the most exquisite religious poems in praise of Hindu gods that were composed by Muslim poets, and that continue to be sung in repertoires of classical the centrality of secularism in Indian society, is a covert way of attacking secular democracy. The antipathy and the effort to diminish the achievements of Mr. Nehru also stem from the R.S.S. not being part of India’s anti-colonial struggle.

The most dangerous aspect of the implanting of the Hindutva version of history across Indian society is that the divide between professional history and the version of the past used to legitimize Hindu majoritarianism is increasing. The latter has the patronage of the government, is well financed, and is popularized in a variety of ways. Those critical of this Hindutva history are already being labeled anti-national in an attempt to subvert historical research.

Courtesy : New York Times

Sri Lanka Blasts: Shattering a Decade of Relative Peace

By **SUNIL KUKSAL**, INDIA

SRI LANKA was less than three weeks away from commemorating a decade of relative peace when co-ordinated series of terrorist suicide-bombings in churches and hotels on the Easter Sunday on 21 April 2019 killed at least 321 people. The goal of the well-orchestrated and synchronised bomb blasts in 2019 – worse than any conducted by the island’s Tamil Tiger rebels in a quarter-century of war – appears brutally to kill innocent people and provoke already existing communal tensions between religious communities. The victims were mainly Christians who perished while attending Easter services in three churches in Colombo, nearby Negombo and Batticaloa on the east coast. At least 36 foreigners were among the dead in three other explosions at five-star hotels in Colombo. More than 500 people were injured in the explosions. The gruesome bombings were a stark reminder of the nation’s violent past which has been largely peaceful in recent years. The bombings may be the latest permutation of violence in the country which shattered a decade-long peace on the island nation.

CIVIL WAR AND LTTE

Sri Lanka witnessed one of the world’s bloodiest and longest civil wars in modern history from 1983 to 2009 when the Tamil secessionist led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam — known as the Tamil Tigers fought for an independent homeland in the north and east of Sri Lanka. During this time coordinated bombings using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were a regular phenomenon. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) extensively used IEDs against an array of targets, including Sinhalese residential areas, high-value targets like lawmakers and heads of state, and financial hubs like the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

On May 16, 2009, the Sinhalese government steamrolled the last stronghold of the notorious terrorist group “The Tamil Tigers.” According to conservative U.N estimates, some 100,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka’s conflict.

THE COMMUNAL DIVIDE

Clearly, Sri Lanka’s minority Christian community was the main target of this terror attack. While there have been scattered incidents of anti-Christian harassment in recent years, there has been nothing on the scale of what happened on 21 April 2019. Christianity is a minority religion in Sri Lanka, accounting for less than 10% of the total population of 21.4 million. The religious tensions have grown in recent years, with the emergence of radical Islamist groups on the one hand and a surge in ultra-nationalist Buddhism led by the Bodu Bala Sena on the other. The attacks were not thought to be carried out by Buddhist extremists. They broke from previous patterns of violence. With the growing fault lines between the Sinhalese Buddhist and Muslims, the key question remains: why was the Christian community the target of the attacks on Easter Sunday? Now global narratives are seemingly influencing Sri Lanka’s local conflict. The exact motivations of the attackers are still not known. But they may have targeted churches in part because these spaces are powerful symbols of the West. Fairly or unfairly, Sri Lankan Christians have long been associated with colonial power; today, connections to global missionary networks and massive institutions like the Roman Catholic Church compound that association. While Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka do not have a history of mutual hostility, the general atmosphere of religious repression may have contributed to the attackers’ desire for violence.

TARGETING MUSLIMS

There is also no history of violent Muslim militants in Sri Lanka. However, tensions have been running high more recently between hard-line Buddhist monks and Muslims. The trend began around 2012, barely three years after the Sri Lankan armed forces defeated the LTTE, bringing the country's three-decade-long war to an end. Extremist Buddhist groups, emboldened by the LTTE's defeat in the civil war, began targeting Muslims, even though most Muslims supported the state against Tamil separatism. Reactionary groups among Sinhala Buddhists campaigned against the Hijab and then sought a ban on Halal certification, forcing shops to stop selling meat labelled according to Islamic guidelines. A few Muslim-owned chains were attacked. In 2013, a Buddhist mob attacked a mosque in Colombo, injuring 12. In 2014, mobs attacked homes and properties of Muslims living in the southern town of Aluthgama. Muslims account for 10 per cent of the population and are the second-largest minority after Hindus. To many, it seemed that Muslims had emerged a new adversary to hard-line sections of the majority Sinhala-Buddhists. The Muslims had not retaliated in any of those instances.

EMERGING THREATS OF MILITANT ISLAM

According to Sri Lankan government officials, all seven of the suicide bombers in the attacks were Sri Lankan citizens associated with National Tawheed Jamaath (NTJ), a local militant Islamist group with suspected foreign ties. The National Tawheed Jamaat had been an offshoot of the Tawheed Jamaat, often known for its rabid speeches against non-believers. Sri Lanka's defence minister said there were nine suicide bombers in total. Eight have been identified, though Sri Lanka has not formally named them. One was a woman. Investigators have been trying to determine the extent of any connections between ISIS and the attack cell, looking at whether ISIS mostly provided violent inspiration or whether its members or former fighters helped coordinate the attacks.

The Wahhabi aligned NTJ has a significant presence in India's Tamil Nadu state particularly

in districts close to the maritime border with Sri Lanka. It appears the NTJ has links to jihadists outside Sri Lanka, including the Islamic State, or ISIS. If that attribution bears out, the attacks are likely to inflame tensions between the country's Buddhist majority and its Muslim minority and destabilise an already febrile political situation. Moreover, if this case of home-grown terror with transnational links is established, it would point towards the dangers of growing religious extremism and radicalisation not just in Sri Lanka but in the South Asian subcontinent at large.

POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Government dysfunction and intelligence failure have been blamed for the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka despite early warnings of possible attacks in the intelligence sector. The Sri Lankan government admitted to a "lapse of intelligence" after officials failed to act upon near-specific information received from foreign agencies. The government's dysfunction is being traced to simmering divisions between the president and prime minister after a week's long political crisis that crippled the country in October 2018 when the latter abruptly sacked the former and installed Mahinda Rajapaksa, the country's former president, as the new premier. Though Rajapaksa was ousted less than two months later when the Sri Lankan courts overruled Sirisena's move. The crisis ended, but the division and disarray went on. Now, there are fears that the political feuding could have provided a window for a catastrophic security lapse that could reverberate across the region.

The bombings and the government's failure to thwart the bombings could cast a tremendous influence on the future leadership of Sri Lanka. According to its constitution, the next presidential election of Sri Lanka is due in December 2019, with parliamentary election to follow in 2020. In the meantime, the attack also constitutes an earthquake in the economic sense, and the consequences could last for a longer period. Since 2015, Sri Lanka's economy has been on the decline. It remains to be seen whether Sri Lanka's politicians will unite in the face of the attacks, which threaten to destabilise the country politically and further hurt its economic growth.

Transcending Borders Through Melody: A New South Asian Symphony?

By LEKSHMI PARAMESWARAN, INDIA

Former Indian top diplomat Nirupama Rao's attempt to unite South Asian nations through a South Asian Symphony Orchestra (SASO) and concert, 'Chiragh,' has sparked debate on whether cultural diplomacy remains the most powerful medium to forge people to people links

THE image of a woman standing before a crowd in Khartoum, Sudan singing revolutionary songs while protesting against the reign of President Omar-al Bashir struck a chord with people across the world. The woman, Lana Haroun has come to symbolise the kind of hope that can only arise when cries of despair become loud and painful. Through her songs, she made people across borders empathize with the plight of Sudan and root for her country. Such is the power that music has always had on the psyche of nations in transcending boundaries and bringing about unity in times of adversity.

In South Asia, that was witness to one of the most diabolical acts of devastating fundamentalism on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, the invisible lines of ideological warfare have been drawn. The choice of Sri Lanka for the dastardly attacks, which killed over 250 people, sent messages at multiple levels that it is war that has just begun, and the region will have to fight many more battles in the coming days.

The signs that South Asia is becoming



the new terror hub after the fall of Islamic State (IS) in Syria first emerged when a Pentagon report two years ago stated that Afghanistan may have around 4000 IS fighters after they were forced out of their territories in Syria and Iraq. The

multiple devastating attacks that followed on institutional establishments made it clear that the threat of Islamic State is real and South Asia is faced with a challenge that it was ill prepared to address.

The symbolism of the church attacks in Sri Lanka on a day when the world was celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not lost on anyone. It was a stark reminder that in a region that is already battling weak democratic structures and power struggles in many of its nations, there was a space for disruptive forces to wreak havoc. The rising Chinese and US influence in the region is yet another reminder that South Asia is becoming a pawn in the great power play of international politics.

At a time like this, former Indian top

diplomat Nirupama Rao's attempt to unite South Asian nations through a South Asian Symphony Orchestra (SASO) concert 'Chiragh' has again sparked debate on whether cultural diplomacy remains the most powerful medium to forge people to people links. Her choice of forging links through music should be seen in the context of history where music has played a powerful role in helping communities and nations express their anguish as well as their hopes for a better tomorrow.

It was during the Cold War era that music as a medium for expression began to gain prominence. After the end of World War I, then US president Woodrow Wilson stepped away from the pressures of traditional back-channel diplomacy and announced the start of open diplomacy. Much before Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in the late 1980s, the world was introduced to a method of diplomacy where artists could take centre stage. The US State Department organised a series of jazz concerts across the world in the 1960s, intended to spread the values of freedom and liberty. Coming at a time when the world was divided between stringent state control and liberalism, the concerts helped bring those differences in sharp focus.

Since then, music has remained an important component of world events. The fall of the Berlin Wall is even today remembered by the iconic song by Scorpion, "The Winds of Change". That IS in Libya had released videos of musical instruments being burnt in 2015 was a clear indication that the group understood the power of music in bridging cultural gaps. In later years, when it was losing control of its territories, it used musical propaganda in a desperate attempt to attract young fighters. It recorded battle hymns and disseminated these online, realising that music is perhaps the only medium where language is no barrier.

Today, when IS has claimed responsibility for the Sri Lanka attacks, it is evident that South Asia is not battling a conventional terror outfit. IS works to erase the heterogeneous nature of

societies. It is no longer a question of forces protecting the borders, but also of saving vulnerable minds from radically destructive thoughts and ideals. It is here that South Asia can come together and unleash the power of music as a calming force. It should be seen as a medium that will open up dialogue between the nations in understanding the culture and commonality that have bound people of this region together for millennia. While music from individual countries are popular, there have been no concerted efforts made in South Asia to form a collective identity. The shared civilizational values should have ideally paved the way for such an identity, but internal conflicts and inherent animosities between nation states have always been a barrier in artists and people coming together for a greater cause.

Rao, a former foreign secretary and also ambassador to the United States, in an interview to News18 said, "People are the same in all these countries. If there is climate change in one part of South Asia, it affects the other part. If pollution levels go up, we all suffer. These things know no borders and we shouldn't have the illusion that we are safe within our borders and what happens outside that is none of our concern. We share one atmosphere, one South Asia and one Earth. So, I thought that while we cannot solve the border tensions at our level, each of us can cultivate a sense of empathy for one another and move beyond hatred, suspicion, ignorance and prejudice. I think we must have a sensible approach to these issues, and how we communicate with each other. Music to me is a great way to start such communication."

This is this spirit that needs to be imbibed by South Asia if it has to fight rising fundamentalism in the region. Where the minds are open and fearless, there is seldom space for external agencies to infiltrate and take control of nation states.

Courtesy : South Asia Monitor

<https://southasiamonitor.org/news/transcending-borders-through-melody-a-new-south-asian-symphony>

Redress Gender Injustice, Include Women in Afghan Peace Process

By ZARIFA SABET, AFGANISTAN

The absence of women and their voices in the process casts doubt on the type of peace that these talks would bring to the country.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted by the UN Security Council on October 31, 2000 to recognize the importance of women at the decision-making table and their positive contribution to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and promotion of peace and security, especially in war zones and in post conflict contexts around the world. UNSCR 1325 recognizes that women and children constitute the majority of victims of armed conflict and that women and girls are affected by conflict differently from men and boys.

Afghan women have paid a high price for decades of war in the country and are primary victims of war and conflict. The agenda for women's peace and security is new and barely accepted in Afghanistan, which has the highest rate of gender inequality. The role of women in conflict resolution and the peace process has been ignored and women don't have any influential role in the country's peace and security process.

Peace and conflict are all men's business in Afghanistan. They decide the fate of



women in the country. Women are at the forefront of insurgency, violent extremism and radicalization in Afghanistan; they have defended peace within homes/community, but within society at large, they remain

unheard, their efforts unrecognized.

The Afghanistan Peace Council, which was established in September 2010 for peace negotiations, has 70 members of which nine are female. This council has limited influence on the overall peace process and women, specially, have limited influence in the council, which has a more symbolic than effective role in the peace process.

Afghanistan adopted its National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan in 2015, responding to UNSCR1325. In spite of this, the role of women and their inclusion in addressing peace and security concerns remains unclear. In 23 rounds of talks held between 2005 and 2014, there were only two occasions where Afghan women were directly represented at the negotiation table; the 2010 talks in the Maldives and the 2011–12 talks in France.

In July 2015, in peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban, not a single representative was a woman.

“We are concerned and unhappy that we have not been consulted. They have not been very transparent with women about the peace process,” said Hasina Safi, director of Afghan Women’s Network (AWN). Sadly, this is not unique. In most post-conflict peace processes, women have only been given piecemeal roles.

Not only are women unrepresented in the peace process, their agenda is largely absent in peace talks, meaning that men decide the fate of the women who have no role in determining their future. Afghan women paid a very heavy price during Taliban oppression and they do not wish to return to those dark days. Peace talks do not make any sense for Afghan women unless their voices are heard and their demands are included in the peace process. The aim of a peace process should not only be to end violent conflict but also to build a lasting peace where everyone has a voice. The absence of women and their voices in the process casts doubt on the type of peace that these talks would bring to the country. A growing body of evidence shows the positive correlation between women’s participation in peace negotiations and durable peace.

In recent peace talks, in Moscow early 2019, women were under-represented; among 40 men, there were two women and they did not have any active role. The key speakers were only men.

The chief Taliban negotiator in Moscow promised women’s rights based in Islam once they come to power. “Islam has given women all fundamental rights such as trade, ownership, inheritance, education, work and the choice of partner, security and education, and a good life.” But Afghan women have not forgotten

that they were denied even basic fundamental rights during the Taliban regime. It remains unclear if there is any real change in Taliban’s approach toward women.

If they come to power they will justify their oppressions and deny any modernizations and women rights in the name of Islam and seek legitimacy through it. Afghan women are unhappy with Taliban sayings and are not hopeful of any change in their approach toward women. Afghan women are concerned that peace with the Taliban should not be at the cost of women’s rights in the country.

Over 700 Afghan women from all 34 provinces participated in February 2019 in a National conference to demand inclusion in any peace talks with the Taliban. They stressed the importance of preserving women’s rights and upholding Afghanistan’s democracy. Activists and other women’s rights advocates came together to draft a document demanding that their rights should not be compromised even for peace.

The document titled ‘Afghan Women’s Six Point Agenda for Moscow Peace Talks’ brought together women from urban and rural areas. This document emphasizes the importance of human rights, women’s rights, law and order in peace talks with the Taliban.

The exclusion of women in peace processes has serious repercussions for women’s rights in post-conflict settings, particularly in Afghanistan, where women’s rights remain precarious. Failure to consistently address women’s rights will reinforce gender injustice. Including women at the negotiating table for consultations beyond formal talks is a necessary step towards a lasting and legitimate peace in Afghanistan.

Courtesy : South Asia Monitor

<https://southasiamonitor.org/news/redress-gender-injustice-include-women-in-afghan-peace-process>

Innocent Until Found Protesting

By **SUSHMITA PREETHA**, BANGLADESH

IN December 2018 and January 2019, workers from Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry went on spontaneous mass protests and strikes around major industrial belts in Dhaka. They were agitating against what they deemed insufficient wage increases, announced by a government-appointed wage board in September 2018, that would go into effect three months later. Garment-factory owners and the Bangladesh government responded with a tried and tested strategy: repression and attack.

As a result, more than 11,000 workers have been terminated from their jobs – many without termination benefits – and thousands more have had criminal cases filed against them. So far, over 50 workers have been arrested and many more live in fear of imminent arrest. At least one worker has been killed, while several others have been assaulted, tear gassed, and shot with water cannons and rubber bullets – sometimes in their own homes.

Unlike past struggles by garment workers, these protests were not organised by the major trade union federations. The government's crackdown on labour activists in 2016, and its handling of the movements for quota reform and road safety ahead of the December 2018 general elections, had sent out a clear message to potential dissidents. Unions got the memo loud and clear. The workers could not, however, be so easily appeased.

With the RMG sector earning over 80 percent of Bangladesh's export revenue in 2017, the government has used rhetoric of external 'infiltration' and 'instigation' to dismiss the legitimate grievances of garment workers. Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi has claimed that, "A certain quarter infiltrated the garment workers' movement and instigated anarchy... to damage the RMG sector." Meanwhile, in the absence of strong trade unions and in the face of brutal repression, workers have had little choice but to take to the streets.

OLD DEMANDS

Bangladesh's garment workers are some of the worst paid among workers in major

garment producing countries. Even with the pay increase in September 2018, to USD 95 per month, the country's garment-sector minimum wage lags behind those of its competitors China, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Pakistan and the Philippines, for all of whom the figure ranges between USD 120 and 170. According a 2018 report by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a Dhaka-based think-tank, at least 17 percent of the country's garment workers sleep without a bed at night, 16 percent do not have ceiling fans in their homes, 86 percent have to share toilets with other families, and 45 percent are unable to save anything from their earnings. Another survey of 200 workers conducted in 2018 by Bangladesh Garment Sromik Samhati, a Dhaka-based labour-rights group, found that an average garment worker has the ability to spend BDT 1110 (USD 13) per person per month on food. However, the study found that a worker must spend at least BDT 3270 (USD 39) per month to meet the calorific needs, as determined by the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science at Dhaka University. This caloric requirement excludes food with higher nutritional value, like meat or fruits.

In light of these factors, garment workers and unions have been demanding a minimum monthly wage of BDT 16,000 (USD 190) for at least three years.

LONG MARCH

In December 2016, tens of thousands of workers in the manufacturing hub of Ashulia, an area near Dhaka, protested and went on strikes demanding a fair living wage. In the repression that ensued, at least 1500 workers were fired and 38 workers and union leaders were arrested. Nine factories – six of which were suppliers for the multinational clothing-retail company H&M – filed criminal charges against union leaders and unnamed workers.

The government, too, acted in the interests of the factory owners, filing cases against workers under the draconian Special Powers Act (1974) – which allows for detaining a person if the government simply 'suspects' them of carrying out an act deemed detrimental to the interest of

the state. Thanks to coordinated international pressure from labour-rights groups, national federations and a global union, nearly all the factories agreed to withdraw their cases. However, the cases filed by the state under acts such as the Special Powers Act, which includes charges such as sabotage, which have provision for imprisonment up to 14 years, are yet to be dropped. This means that the accused have to appear in court every month, incurring expenses they cannot afford, and also live in fear of re-arrest.

That these cases were filed to harass union activists after the 2016 strikes was obvious. The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), a US-based labour-rights monitor, concluded that most of the complaints made by Ashulia factory managers were against unnamed people. Some of those arrested in connection with these incidents were not even working in Ashulia, where the strikes happened. Instead, they were detained in neighbouring Gazipur and Chittagong for incidents that occurred months, or even years, prior to the December 2016 protests. Members of unions and labour-rights groups were harassed; their offices were surveilled and, in some cases, forcibly shut down by security forces in Ashulia, Savar and Gazipur. For instance, the office of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, labour-rights non-profit, was forcibly evacuated, and its doors locked, by the police on 29 December, 2016. On 20 January 2017, an International Labour Organisation-funded training programme in the Gazipur office of the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation was halted so that law enforcement could question and photograph the participants.

NEW WAGE BOARD

Following sustained pressure by the trade unions, in January 2018, the Bangladesh government finally appointed a wage board to decide new wages for the garment sector. The board consisted of representatives from the government, owners' associations and workers. To the frustration of activists and workers, the worker representative appointed, Shamsunahar Bhuiyan, was a member of the Jatiya Sramaki League, which is affiliated to the ruling Awami League. In an interview with the *Daily Star*, Bhuiyan said that as sympathetic as she might be to the workers' cause, she could not suggest a wage that "might harm the state economy and tarnish the party's political image."

After months of deliberation, in September 2018, the wage board announced that the monthly gross minimum wage for Grade 7 RMG workers – the lowest paid category of garment labourers – would increase by 51 percent, from BDT 5300 (USD 63) to BDT 8000 (USD 95). Workers and activists assumed that Grades 1 through 6 would receive wage increases of similar proportions. However, another announcement in November 2018 made it clear that the proportion of increase was lower for the higher grades.

To make matters worse, workers realised that their basic wage – the portion of their total wage which is used to calculate benefits such as overtime and a five-percent yearly increment, which was introduced in 2013 – had actually *decreased* as a proportion of their gross wage. For some workers, once the yearly increment was accounted for, the new basic wage was either an insignificant increase or an outright decrease. For example, workers in Grade 3, who were earning BDT 4075 per month as basic wage in 2013, would anyway be entitled to BDT 5204 in basic monthly wage by 2019, under the five-percent annual increment rule. But the new wage structure set the basic wage for Grade 3 at BDT 5160 per month, which is BDT 44 lower than it would have been without the change.

Even including the increased percentage of allowances (for food, housing, transport, etc) in the new gross wages, it is unclear on what basis these wages were calculated as they did not in any way reflect the spiralling cost of living in Bangladesh. The government's own Household Income and Expenditure Survey, conducted in 2016, stated that the average household expenditure per month was BDT 15,715 (USD 186). A 2018 CPD survey found that the average monthly expenditure for garment workers was BDT 22,435 (USD 270). It also showed that that the average monthly expenditure for a garment worker increased by a whopping 86 percent from 2013 to 2018, with inflation figures hovering around six percent over these years. These findings highlight that there is no way for a worker to support his or her family on the new minimum wage, unless another member of the household also holds a job with an equal or higher wage.

When protests began in December 2018 in response to the newly implemented wage structure, some factories retaliated with terminations, threats and violence. For instance,

in Abanti Colour Tex, one of the first factories where workers demanded higher pay, the management reportedly fired 1043 workers. Workers claim that since they brought forth the demands for fairer wages to their management, they have been subjected to beatings, harassment and even threats of ‘disappearances’ by management and local goons, to say nothing of the disproportionate violence of the police, as evidenced from the use of rubber bullets, water cannons, tear gas and batons, on what began as peaceful protests. In other factories, the management reportedly appeased workers with the promise of reconsidering an increased pay in consultation with the government.

The factory owners argue that no ‘innocent’ worker needs to be afraid of retaliation. Yet, thousands of workers – who insist they did not partake in any violence but merely participated in strikes, and who urge the authorities to check CCTV footage before finding them guilty – have not only lost their jobs but are unlikely to find another one in this sector after being branded as ‘troublemakers’. According to IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC), the national coordinating body of affiliates of IndustriALL Global Union, biometric data linked to employment records are now being used to identify workers involved in trade-union activities and deny them employment. Active union members and vocal workers in Worker Participation Committees – which mediate grievances between workers and employers – are also being targeted through cases. The police have the option of listing ‘unnamed’ perpetrators in their case files, allowing law enforcement to make arbitrary arrests. Unions claim that at least half of the workers picked up were not specifically mentioned in the case documents.

There are also multiple instances of workers from one factory being picked up in cases filed by another factory. In one case filed by A R Jeans Producer, for instance, union leaders of FGS Knitwear – which shares the same ownership as the former – have been charged, even though the two factories are separate entities and the case document does not cite the involvement of outsiders in the alleged vandalism that took place. Similarly, workers from Saybolt Textiles have been arbitrarily picked up in a case filed by Mahmud Fashion.

STRUGGLE AHEAD

It is no secret that most factory owners dislike trade unions. The state, too, irrespective of which party is in power, has supported the owners, be it through laws such as the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 – which makes it difficult for unions to organise within factories and facilitates arbitrary denial of union registrations – or by ignoring management’s violent retaliation against trade-union activists.

Weakening of the labour movement – partly due to the fragmentation of trade unions along party lines, and partly due to an unhealthy competition among the major federations – has made collective organising a dream of the past. It hasn’t helped that more and more unions are embracing the ‘NGO model’, whereby they receive foreign funding for organising trainings, workshops and seminars. This in itself may not have been problematic if such programmes did not take precedence over radical collective action, such as the physical occupation of the streets or civil disobedience that Bangladesh witnessed in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In its pursuit of unsustainable economic growth and eagerness to facilitate capital, the state has created apparatus like the Industrial Police – whose self-described mission is to “ensure safety and security of industries” and “take necessary measures to prevent any labour unrest in the industrial area” – and continues to conflate workers with criminals and factory owners’ profits with national interest. Every major workers’ protest in the last decade has been met with violence, with many resulting in one or more deaths of workers. None of these deaths have ever been investigated properly.

In the aftermath of the 2018-19 strikes, a ten-member committee, with five representatives each from trade unions and factory owners, was formed on 8 January 2019 to review the wage structure. As the protests continued, less than a week later, the board decided that wages would go up by BDT 15 for workers in Grade 6, BDT 20 for those in Grade 5, BDT 102 in Grade 4, BDT 255 in Grade 3, and BDT 786 in Grade 2. Given how insufficient these increases are, it is hardly surprising that the state-business nexus has had to resort to bullying and violence to scare the workers into submission. But for how long can a disgruntled workforce be kept in check?

Courtesy: HIMAL South Asian

The Psyche and Phantasy

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**

...Continued from previous issue



IMAGINE, therefore, the first sub-man leading his almost solitary life of the instincts in his nearly private world of reality, dreaming like the dog of the simplest actions that answer his desires, and faced by reality with the need for

making that dream more real, more full of content, more useful.

His solution we have already recorded when we dealt with the birth of poetry. Man made a tremendous stride forward when he injected the dream into waking life, which forced it to answer the categories of waking reality.^a

But it was essential that he should do this without losing the very quality that made dream useful, its plasticity. Now if consciousness is faced with the demand of completely coinciding with external reality, it then becomes indistinguishable from perception – perception of things round-me-now, perception of feelings inside-me-now.

Hence the joints of this waking consciousness had to be somehow loosened. Imagine the “I” located at a point in the solid crystal of space-time. So far as the “I” is conscious of its relations with space-time, they are simply a perceptual glowing network running from the “I” out into infinity.

Two ways of “loosening” are possible:

(i) One involves a separation of the subject from the object. This in itself gives rise to the possibility of two further subdivisions-

(a) It is possible to concentrate on the reality of feeling-tone, and dissolve the crystal

of external reality. This does not mean that external reality disappears; it means that external reality is manipulated not primarily according to its own laws but according to instinctive and subjective laws. Hence the plasticity of dream is retained, but the waking reality of subjective consciousness is injected into dream to enrich it. This gives us the field of the illusory Mock World (but real common ego), the world of art.

(b) Or it is possible to concentrate on the reality of the object and dissolve the nucleus of internal reality. This does not mean that the “I,” the observer, disappears; it means that the “I” is manipulated not according to its own desires but according to the necessity of external reality. Once again the plasticity of dream is retained, but the reality of the waking environment is brought into the world of dream to stiffen it. This gives us the real perceptual world of the impersonal, omnipresent, unemotional Mock Ego, the world of science.

(ii) It is possible, besides separating subject from object, to separate space from time, like from unlike, and quantity from quality. This does not mean that space or time disappears, but that one or the other is the manifold in which distortion takes place.

Spatial organisation gives us the classificatory sciences and poetry.

(b) Temporal Organisation gives us the evolutionary sciences and the story.

The classificatory sciences, of which mathematics is the queen and physics an important sphere, deal with space-like orderings which are independent of time. Time enters only as a homogeneous oscillation in which no new qualities emerge except that of

entropy. This is the field of timeless order, of quantity, of mechanical materialism.

The evolutionary sciences, which develop later, are historical in their approach. They deal with reality as a process, as the emergence of new qualities. Sociology, biology, geology, psychology, astronomy and physiology are all sciences which are interested in time, which roam about through time and therefore abstract by telescoping, condensing and generalising time, just as the classificatory sciences telescope, condense and generalise space. Obviously these fields penetrate. Only mathematics is purely classificatory and dialectics purely evolutionary. The rise of the evolutionary sciences from 1750 to 1850 was what altered the mechanical materialism of Condillac, d'Holbach and Diderot to the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels and made it capable of including all the active side of the subject-object relation developed by idealism.

The same division in the field of art gives rise to a similar distinction. In literary art the novel is evolutionary and the poem is classificatory. As this distinction is of fundamental importance, it must be considered in detail later.

Obviously the brute-man did not evolve these externalisations of dream, as we have done, by taking thought. They were generated by his struggle with Nature, by the need for association in that struggle, and by the development of vocal and visual symbols which that association made necessary. The real world discovered with the aid of the mock ego, and the real ego explored by means of the mock world are the conscious world and the conscious ego and, therefore, the social world and the social ego.

In the dance and the chant man retires into a half-sleep by dismissing the world of immediate reality. This enables him to play fast and loose with the world of external reality, to build and unbuild it. But not arbitrarily and lawlessly – there would be no point or object in such an occupation. He builds it according to the laws of the social ego, and he does this because in the dance and the chant, while withdrawing from the world of external reality, he maintains in touch with the subjective world of his fellows by moving his body in rhythm,

by repeating the same words in unison, by weaving between them an emotional network of common feelings evoked by socially common objects, such as notes of music, animals mimicked in the dance, words denoting socially recognised entities or experiences. Thus the items of the common perceptual world are selected, organised, blended and reorientated round the social ego, the “god” of early Greek ritual who descended into his worshippers and who was nothing but the symbol of the heightened common ego formed by the dance.

Of course, as society develops, poetry detaches itself from the common festival. Civilised man more easily secures physiological introversion – the rhythm of poetry is sufficient to achieve it – and the collective subjective significance of words keeps him in touch with his fellows without the need for that collective festival which has been out-moded by the division of labour, a division reflected in the wider range and greater content of language itself.

Such art is timeless, for man himself is still timeless, still lives entirely in the Now from age to age, with only a fabulous past and future. This ideal timelessness reflects the fact that man's division of labour itself has not extended into time, that he lives from hand to mouth, that he does not, like modern man, inherit all the capital, the congealed labour, the technique and cultural achievements of changing generations of men. He has only the barest social relations with the dead and the unborn. A few tools, a limited technique and an unwritten language he has certainly, and this commonness with the past is reflected in a few time-myths – about heroes and a golden age and a Prometheus or Moses, bringers of knowledge to barbarous men. But, in general, the timelessness of poetry matches his own childish simplicity which thinks, like Traherne, that the wheat was golden and immortal, corn that had never been sown or reaped.

But as history develops, man's interplay with his changeful past is reflected in towns and temples and states and irrigation and finally in *stories* – in images of men's changing lives organised in time. So a new art emerges which reaches its height – the novel and film – exactly in that era from 1750 onwards when

the evolutionary sciences rise to notice. All this new insight is in turn a product of the terrific historic changes in Nature made possible by industrialisation.

In the story, man is young and grows old, and we are interested in watching how in this process of maturing his external world and his own heart change. This distortion, organisation, condensation and selection of the subjective contents of the psyche and its real environment in relation to a temporal life-line distinguish the story from the poem.

This in turn reveals the greater sophistication of the novel. In the undifferentiated tribe it is easily and always possible for all men to be in one mind in one time in one place, and for a universal and timeless ego to emerge from this congress, speaking for all with one voice. But the more differentiated life of modern society is *contrapuntal*; men's lives blend and overlap and interweave in a complicated tapestry, and the moments rarely arrive when all their minds and emotions are gathered together in one public universal "I." Hence the hero of the novel is not like the "hero" of poetry, a universal "I," but a real concrete individual.

How is the "collectiveness" of the novel assured? It inheres in the real environment that always figures in the novel – the realism of the actions, of the other characters, and the events considered as one social plexus. Thus external reality, dismissed by introversion from the immediate attention of the reader, returns in another guise – not as reality-now, not as the room in which "I" am sitting reading, but as the external reality which has been or may be; and this is only possible precisely because the novel is plastic in the time dimension. Hence the immediate reality of the reader is pushed out or blanked off by the verisimilitude of the mock world of the novel, which is therefore much more realistic and factual than the shimmering, dream-like mock world of poetry.

In this the novel resembles the day-dream. As compared with the ordinary dream the day-dream has more reality, it remains in the field of the possible, it does not contain the extravagances or abrupt transitions of the dream. It is more orderly and less primitive, and this is necessary because in the day-dream we

are awake and therefore the phantasy has to have this material coherence, this stiffening of objects ranged in a real order so as to screen out the everyday environment and draw the mind to it. This quantity of "matter" in the day-dream and the novel makes necessary their temporal organisation, because without such an organisation the narrative would become overloaded and confused and would finally bulk out to coincide with the slow unwieldy movement of perceptual reality itself – at which point it would lose all value, or possibility of affective organisation. Dream by its sensory introversion, and poetry by its rhythm and concentration, escape the need for so great a stiffening of reality and so marked an "organisation" in time. Theirs is an organisation in space.

The day-dream is characteristically a more "civilised" form of phantasy. It is the expression of man as an individual plastic in reality, just as the dream is the expression of reality plastic in the man. One expresses man's power over Nature derived from altering himself: the other man's power over himself by altering Nature. In the day-dream, man experiments with adapting himself to reality; in the dream, with adapting reality to himself; both these characteristics are carried over into their respective arts.

Science in its dichotomy reveals the same parentage. In the classificatory sciences man does not introvert himself from present reality by interposing thoughts of another precedent or subsequent reality, but by spreading over present reality categories derived from himself. This is precisely what the field of order or quantity really is. Just as man derives from rhythm certain instinctive commonnesses, so he derives from perception certain perceptual commonnesses. Three cows, three sticks, three apples, when bare of subjective aspects (the cow appearing as one thing to one man, the apple as differently valued to another), yet have a perceptual commonness among men which is "threeness," number, quantity. All these qualityless categories of classification, by robbing the present of its peculiarities, enable man to "abstract," to blend, select and combine all reality in a timeless way. By purging from the common ego all those qualities which are

peculiar to one man in one place, it becomes possible to give man a phantastic and flexible grasp of the whole field of reality. The process robs reality of the time in it – the emergence of new qualities.

It is for that reason that in man's daily life, counting, the herdsman's science (India), and geometry, the agriculturist's science (Egypt), emerge before the more qualified historical sciences. In a more primitive community men have much the same experiences in common from day to day, and it is easy for them, meeting together in a group, to make of their experience a bundle of world-perspectives from one point of spare-time, a bundle bare of quality, of feeling-tone – which is just what mathematics is. It is easy for them to "abstract" themselves from those surrounding by abstracting from the surroundings all feeling-tone and therefore all quality. Because they perform tasks in common it is easy for them to abstract the commoriness in all tasks – the quantitative element in them, the number of cattle tended, of acres planted.

Thus dream becomes mathematics when, for the introversion of sleep shutting out all sensory stimuli from the environment, is substituted the introversion of mathematics, which shuts out all sensory qualities and so is able to extend its grasp beyond present reality to all reality. In sleep the rhythm of breathing and the flow of blood draw the perceptual world into the ego; in mathematics the rhythm of breathing and the flow of blood push the ego into the perceptual world.

It is only later, when civilisation becomes contrapuntal, and men's labours, aspirations and aims cross and interweave, that the evolutionary sciences arise. Here introversion from present reality is secured, not by abstracting all quality from consciousness but

by substituting an ego whose appreciation of quality is limited, distorted and organised in time. This mock ego is not like that of mathematics, the ego gazing everywhere and nowhere seeing quality, but the ego gazing everywhere yet seeing only one particular type of quality, the qualities that demarcate the particular sphere of science in question. Hence, with the rise of the evolutionary sciences, science necessarily splits up into different spheres each with their own distinct qualities – the spheres of chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, etc. These spheres do not contradict each other; they are selections from the one universal movement of qualities which is reality, but which without this division of labour would be beyond man's grasp.

The spheres are not arbitrarily selected, they are determined by the nature of reality and of man's active relation to it, and mark his successive concern with dead nature, with himself as body, with his own mind and with the society that is the matrix of their mutual relations. Because of the fullness of quality even in any one sphere, it is still necessary to organise and condense them in time, just as man organises in retrospect his own experience – by a condensation, blending and fusing of the qualities that emerge in this sphere in the process of reality.

Just as the hero of the novel is an individual surrounded by those very events and persons which will actively call forth the subjective reactions for which the novel is written, so the hero of an evolutionary science is a particular sphere of quality observed by just that mock ego or one-sensed man whose peculiarities of sight will call forth the relations which the science is evolved to organise and study.

to be continued...

Courtesy : Illusion and Reality

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