

Editorial

Saturday, December 28, 2019

Reality of the dark times ?

Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagrah wouldn't have worked had there been a ruler similar to the present day India government. And we have seen that. From Chanu Sharma's 16 years of fast-unto-death protest against Armed Forces Special Powers Act was made useless by making it into an event of attraction and finally turning it into a mockery. The world had seen it and is seeing peaceful non-violent protests getting foiled when the rulers used shrewd methods. The protests in mainland India at large has remained peaceful, more so in non-BJP ruled states.

In BJP ruled states, the protests have turned violent and people have died. The videos surfacing in social media and new channels reveals people in police union are vandalising and even looting shops. Are they police officers? There are police men without name badges roaming at the roads of Delhi, where the police is not under Aam Aadmi Party government but with Central Government. We have seen protesters who are stone pelting and even firing at the police. Who are these people? Videos from Assam in its initial phases which turned violent showed involvement of right wing forces. The story must be more than that. However, the situation is already fishy. Police denied firing at all in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia Millia Islamia University. However, reports and videos surfaced after the events revealed that police fired at the protesters. Is there a method in this madness? If there is, then that method would be considered a shrewd one.

Loyjumba Sinyen, an ancient written code of conduct of the Meitei Society, tells the rulers of the nation not to utter contradictory things. It writes "Meidingu Anpanba will not utter two irreconcilable statements. The outcome of making two conflicting statements is a national problem." BJP's manifesto and Home Ministers' speech in the parliament clearly reveals that there will be NRC. Now Prime Minister is saying that there was no discussion on NRC. The Chief Minister of Manipur is waiting for instructions on NRC from the Centre. Is there an underlying method to this confusion? Do we see an intention to perpetuate national problem by making all sorts of conflicting claims. Now we see more conflicting claims in NPR and NCR from the ruling party.

Universities have been converted into battleground, students were treated like militants, libraries were vandalized, voices of dissent have no place and any persons who raise voice against the government are terrorist or Pakistani agents. This is about mainland India. If this is the situation in Hindi belt, imagine the situation in a state like Manipur where armed forces are empowered to rule the people. Everything has been silenced. Attempts to mount any mass protest have been crushed with a heavy deployment of armed forces. Even a sigh of dissent is met with repressive measures. When the artists, musicians, film makers and eminent personalities came out on streets for a peaceful protest, it was met with section 144 in Imphal West for two months. Much more malicious measures would be undertaken if mass movements happen against CAA. Even a twitch would not be tolerated. This is an attitude with which people of Manipur are ruled over. While one stops to ask at this moment, the most politically potent question, what is to be done, we see the world slipping out of our hands. But this question must be asked nevertheless.

BJP Manipur, as a part of the all India campaign urging people to support the newly amended citizenship act, is organising a rally on December 29 in Manipur. While all these things are happening, Akhil Gogoi, the tallest of all mass leaders in the political scene of today's North East, became the first person to be charged with the newly amended Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and now he is made to suffer. Maybe it is because he is a man of political integrity and courage.

The CAA will un-make India by poisoning relationships of trust, affinity across religions



By: Malini Sur
Courtesy - The Wire

The spectre of both 'illegal' Bangladeshi Muslim migrants swamping India and India's claims to offer 'refuge' to the persecuted non-Muslims from the neighbouring nation-states have made national citizenship an illiberal device. On December 11, 2019, parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. In carefully crafted legal wording, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party government has offered Indian citizenship to designated 'persecuted minorities' - Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians - who have 'illegally' migrated to India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan on or before December 31, 2014.

Among the officially listed 31,313 applications for long term Indian visas within this date, 81% are Hindus. However, Union home minister Amit Shah has conveyed that crores of people who have been 'illegally' residing in the country will feel empowered to apply. Unsurprisingly, the law does not include persecuted Muslims from these neighbouring states, nor does it have any provisions to include non-Muslim refugees from Sri Lanka.

The BJP's nationwide plans for implementing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a code for legitimising the harassment of Muslims. It will be liable for misuse against Indian Muslims. By now, state repression directed against protesters has claimed 25 lives, along with the arrests and torture of several thousand as I pen these lines.

In 2007, when I arrived at the Northeast India-Bangladesh borderland to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, India was constructing a multilayered border fence along its 2500-mile border with Bangladesh. Indian border commanders boasted that the new wall would end unauthorised Bangladeshi migration - a euphemism for Muslim Bangladeshis, who were assumed to be the cause of Islamic terrorism - and contain political dissidence in Northeast India. The extent and pace of militarisation both spread and quickened in the years that I lived and travelled in these regions, until 2015.

During my fieldwork, migration and settlement stories unfolded in complex and unanticipated ways. Take the case of six-year-old Canteen's arrival in Meghalaya via Assam. A Bangladeshi boy, Canteen had crossed the border from Kurigram district in Bangladesh, travelling through lower Assam on his own and finally arriving in the town of Tura in Meghalaya. At once, a group of people surrounded

him. Canteen claimed that villagers had burnt his home and killed his father, who had a reputation as a bandit.

Construction workers and plumbers from Assam and their Garo indigenous employers took charge of Canteen. No one remembered

its hands off refugee rehabilitation. This co-existence of meaningful exchanges - no matter how uneven - and state militarisation directed at Indian citizens and Bangladeshi suspects, challenged the received wisdom on relationality and strife in social theory.



what Canteen was actually called; his new name was based on his first job as a dishwasher in a roadside food stall. Subsequently, Canteen worked in a biscuit factory in a border village in Meghalaya.

Eight years later, when he broke his leg, Canteen suddenly desired to see his mother. Aided by border-brokers, he crossed the India-Bangladesh border on a bamboo stretcher leaving his extended family completely heartbroken. Much to the dismay of his foster families, he had not even posted them a letter after his return.

In a remote Bangladeshi border village with six enormous subdivisions, I searched for Canteen. I had promised his foster families I would. Here, villagers took me to other adolescents - two with broken hands and one with a twisted ankle. Although Canteen's whereabouts still remain unknown, I have detailed field notes about how his foster parents - Muslims, Hindus and Christians - came to feed, employ, protect and shelter him from police raids. They procured identity papers for him. At every police checkpoint in Assam and Meghalaya, where daily-wage workers are asked to furnish identity documents, Canteen produced documentary evidence.

The affinities that revolved around making a living in a militarised zone, constantly spanned national and religious boundaries. Villagers - Indian and Bangladeshi, Muslim, low-caste Hindu, and indigenous Christian - negotiated with the state and security forces. Ironically, it was precisely at the very edge of India, which established the territorial limits of citizenship, that questions of interdependence extended far beyond received exchanges among kin and families to include strangers. Yet, it was also here that India's long history of indifference directed towards refugees triggered tensions. Against this landscape of loss and betrayal, informal land grants that village headmen in Assam and Meghalaya made available to shelter refugees and exiles co-existed with bitter stories of refugee land-grabs, led to a great extent by the policies of the Indian state that had washed

Bangladeshi is without exception Muslim, in Assam it is not. The pan Indian Hindu-Muslim divide does not apply here. The NRC however, spiralled insecurities and dispossessions. As my participant observation in Assam's two Foreigners Tribunals made evident, people lived anxiously through cycles of police surveys, court summons and trials. People faced aggressive state prosecutors. While many were unable to provide identity papers to establish their claims to legitimacy as Indian citizens, in several other instances, the tribunals held that the documents produced were fake.

The human costs of this massive exercise unfolded through harassment, detentions, and distress, also leading to suicides. The BJP's CAA provides a back door to legitimise the Hindus who were left off the NRC, as the BJP feels that no Hindu can be a foreigner in India.

Narendra Modi's political signalling will leave dangerous imprints on whatever is left of Indian democracy. The CAA will further disrupt the everyday lives of ordinary people. It will impinge upon questions of livelihood, housing, safety, and community. People will fear to have



language and cultural identities as well as protect indigenous rights. In post-colonial Assam, the resettlement of Hindu refugees has been fraught with issues surrounding land loss, and language. For instance, in March 1950, the enactment of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act which conferred on the Government of India the power to conduct deportations in Assam, it left a significant clause of exception. The Act did not apply to those who were persecuted or feared for their lives in areas that were placed in East Pakistan. The Act did not spell out a list of religions, unlike the CAA, but broadly meant Hindu Bengalis from East Pakistan could easily arrive in Assam and seek shelter on grounds of religious persecution.

In the 1950s, the Assam state government gave temporary leases of cultivated land to Hindu Bengali refugees with the intention of saving what was officially listed as "abandoned" land and harvests. Although temporary land transfers were made under the condition that land must be relinquished following harvesting, Hindu Bengalis violated this clause.

Unlike the rest of India, where the imagination of the unauthorised

relationships of trust and affinity across religions - relationships that have historically enabled marginal communities to cope with endemic poverty and political distress.

The implications of the CAA will continue to unfold through the enduring persistence of statelessness across the nation, and not just at India's militarised border zones. It will reinforce Hindu nationalist discourses on the cultural otherness of Muslims, as well as their supposed connection with terrorism and criminality. Legislative twists and turns function as clever bureaucratic devices to persistently mark states like Assam as hot spots of rebellion. The BJP's CAA is now targeting Bengal and Bengali sub-nationalism, in the run-up to the 2021 assembly elections in West Bengal. The BJP's brutal quelling of dissent across the country make evident its increasingly autocratic credentials; in this case, granting 'refuge' functions as a smokescreen to proactively justify undermining the values of secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution.

Malini Sur is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Culture and Society, Western Sydney University.

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Sd/-
Elangbam Manorama Devi
Sagolband Kangabam Leikai, Imphal West

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By Raju Vernekar Mumbai Dec 28

Over 800 delegates from 24 states and 50 dignitaries including ex-Ministers, attended the rally organised by the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) at Azad Maidan in South Mumbai on Saturday. Many dignitaries including MLA Vinod Nikole, CITU State secretary and AIKS President Dr Ashok Dhawale, AIDWA President Malini Bhattacharya, AIDWA General Secretary Mariam Dhawale, addressed the rally.

The rally was organised as part of the three day national conference based on the theme "Safeguard our Constitution, Uphold Women's Rights - All Together, Fight Together, Forward Together" being held at the Saboo Siddik College of Engineering Hall at Byculla in South Mumbai. It was inaugurated by renowned actor Swara Bhaskar, who is also an ex-student of JNU and known for her commitment to the democratic movement.

The conference will discuss the problems faced by the women as citizens, as workers and as women. The focus will be on social and caste oppression faced by them and their struggles against this oppression which are going on all over India. Some of the survivors of atrocities from West Bengal, Tripura, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra will be felicitated in the conference.

AIDWA has more than 10 million membership spread over 23 states of India and is known for struggles for women's rights, equality and safety. Earlier this week, the AIDWA members in large number had participated in an CAA/NRC rally. AIDWA seeks to defend rights of the people of the North

East, defend secular character of the country and safeguard women's rights. In the meanwhile a rally in support of CAA was organised by the "Samvidhan Sanman Manch" at historic "August Kranti Maidan in South Mumbai on Saturday. Former Maharashtra Chief Minister and the present leader of the Opposition Devendra Fadnis and other leaders participated in the rally. They joined the march from August Kranti Maidan to the statue of Lokmanya Tilak located at Girgum Chowpatty in South Mumbai.

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