

COLLECTIVE

2022 • NOVEMBER • ISSUE 6 • ₹20

In this issue

- Ukrain War: Non Alignment or compulsion?
- Iranian women fight!
- India's 'Drain of Wealth' today
- Lessons from Chilean referendum
- Student struggles across the globe
- Higher education after Covid-19
- Film Review: *RRR*



Editorial | संपादकीय

1

Drain of Wealth: Part 1 | Four Ways to Loot a Nation

4

Drain of Wealth: Part 2 | 'Free Market' Imperialism continues

5

Flexible Labour | Skill Trainee or Cheap Workers?

7

War in the Ukraine | Military aspects of India's Non Alignment

8

Women in Iran | Resisting Islamic Rule and Imperialist Sanctions

10

Sri Lankan Crisis | Wickremesinghe, stop jailing students!

11

International Report | Student Struggle across the globe

12

Lessons from Chile | Another Constitution rejected

14

Campus Talks | New Normal in Higher Education after Covid-19

16

From Our Comrades

20

Social Justice | Inclusion in elite liberal arts colleges

22

वाद-विवाद | लोक संस्कृति बनाम जनवादी संस्कृति

23

Film Review | RRR

25

Our new website is now online

collective-india.com

Find all our previous publications and web
exclusives in one place

Contact: +919811107835, +918879215570

YouTube: @collectivein

For private circulation | CopyLeft ©

Published by Shambhavi on behalf of the COLLECTIVE Editorial Team.

COLLECTIVE

2022 • NOVEMBER • ISSUE 6

EDITORIAL

संपादकीय

A closer look at the student-youth movement in our country during the colonial era reveals that young people got mobilised into struggles, not for the 'student issues' or 'youth issues' as we understand them today, but primarily inspired by the anti-colonial struggle against imperialism. This reflection into the past is necessary for the revolutionary forces to understand 'student/youth issues' in the present conjuncture. However, it is not a matter of simply copy-pasting. Any such effort will have to first recognise the changes that education and employment have undergone, the decisive shift of the balance of forces in favour of capital globally, the ideological hegemony of capitalism-imperialism in post-colonial countries like ours, and many other such changes.

India is no exception to what is happening across the world with the rise of the far-Right, authoritarian, and fascist forces of our times. Erdoğan in Turkey, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Duterte in the Philippines and, till his recent electoral defeat, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have coupled aggressive nationalist rhetoric with a policy of selling out domestic interests at home. This is to comply with the interest of global imperialist capital—global institutions like the IMF, World Bank, WTO and other geopolitical considerations. Obvious exceptions are the far-Right forces in the USA, consolidated during the presidency of Donald Trump, and a few other powerful countries, where too, their advocacy of 'domestic interest' does not have any pro-people content. 'Domestic interest', in the present context, needs elaboration before we go further. Particularly in the context of India, where two persons, Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, are on the list of the top ten richest people in the world, the 'domestic interest' needs serious attention. Not just in India, the Third World bourgeoisie in general, has collaborated with imperialist interests,

औपनिवेशिक काल के समय के छात्र-युवा आंदोलन पर नजर डाली जाए तो पता चलता है कि इस दौरान वे केवल 'अपने' मुद्दों के लिए नहीं बल्कि उपनिवेशवाद - साम्राज्यवाद के खिलाफ लड़ने के लिए संघर्ष में आए थे। हमारे दौर में झुझारू ताकतो के लिए इतिहास में हुए आंदोलनों में छात्रों-युवाओं की भागीदारी का सही आकलन करना जरूरी है। क्रान्तिकारी धारा से जुड़े साथियों के लिए ये जानना केवल उस समय के आंदोलनों की नकल करने तक सिमित नहीं है। क्योंकि यह बात सही है कि हमारे समय में शिक्षा, रोजगार व बाकि क्षेत्र में पूंजी का प्रभुत्व दुनिया भर में पहले से कई ज्यादा बढ़ा है, इसलिए पूंजीवाद - साम्राज्यवाद के खिलाफ लड़ाई में इन मुद्दों से जुड़े आंदोलनों की भूमिका भी बढ़ी है।

दुनिया भर में दक्षिण पंथी और फासीवादी ताकतों का उभार हुआ है। तुर्की में एर्दोगान, हंगरी में विक्टर ओरबन, फिलीपींस में डुटर्टे और अपनी हालिया चुनावी हार तक, ब्राजील में जायर बोल्सोनारो ने आक्रामक राष्ट्रवाद के नाम पर देश-हित को पूंजी के हाथो बेच दिया है। यह वैश्विक साम्राज्यवादी पूंजी—अंतर्राष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष (IMF), विश्व बैंक, विश्व व्यापार संगठन (WTO) और अन्य वैश्विक संस्थानों—के हितों का अगुवाई करने के लिए किया जा रहा है। अमेरिका में दक्षिण पंथी पूर्व राष्ट्रपति डोनाल्ड ट्रम्प 'देश-हित' की बात की, लेकिन उसमे लोक-हित शामिल नहीं थे। हमारे दौर में 'देश-हित' पूंजीपतियों का हित होता जा रहा है। इसपर गौर करने की ज़रूरत है, खास कर जब भारत देश के दो पूंजीपति अम्बानी और अडानी दुनिया के दस सबसे आमिर लोगो में शामिल हो गए हैं। केवल भारत में ही नहीं, एशिया, अफ्रीका और बाकि देशो के पूंजीपति साम्राज्यवादी ताकतों के साथ हाथ मिला चुके हैं। अब उनके हित

with their huge dependence on the global imperialist system and institutions in multiple aspects. It has no anti-imperialist role, rather it tries to define the 'national interest' in favour of its own and for a 'greater linkage' with global capital. The fascists and far-Right today have only exacerbated this relation in favour of the crisis-ridden capitalist class. Minorities are being made an easy scapegoat for peoples' anger so that a pro-people and welfare agenda can be pushed out from national political debate.

The world today is ruled by international finance capital and its global institutions, which favour the interests of multinational corporations, and politically led by the US state. This schematized description may be questioned given Russia's geopolitical influence, the political and economic rise of China and their block. This aspect is often exaggerated, obscuring the disproportionate supremacy of the US and the G-7 nations in the domains of military strength, technology, knowledge production, capital and other aspects. The arrival of an apparent contender to the US-led alignment of world forces has triggered an aggressive, US-led global propaganda machinery against Russia and China. However, the challenge posed by this block has little to do with any anti-imperialist or pro-people agenda, as both the states have exploitative and oppressive policies on domestic and foreign affairs and are integrated into global capitalism. The apparently 'multipolar' geopolitical scenario has very different implications for the Left today from what it was during the twentieth century, when anti-colonialism and socialism were an axis around which different camps were polarised against imperialism.

It follows that the revolutionary Left in today's world cannot depend either on the domestic bourgeoisie or the 'anti-US' camp and will have to strive to define the 'national interest' through the political awakening of the toiling people. Today, revolutionaries must take anti-imperialist consciousness to the masses with the confidence that, ultimately, it is they who can define 'national interest'. Recent experiences everywhere show that, if forming or retaining power in governments comes at the cost of accommodating the neoliberal status quo, then the Left must remain

और वैश्विक पूंजी के हितों के बीच एक स्थायी संबंध बन चुका है। इस वर्ग से साम्राज्यवाद-विरोधी चेतना नहीं उभर सकती। उनकी कोशिश है की 'देश हित' के मतलब को अपने अनुसार बदलकर वैश्विक पूंजी के साथ 'बेहतर सहयोग' बनाया जाए। फासीवादी और दक्षिण पंथी ताकतों ने इस गठजोड़ को और मजबूती प्रदान की है। देश में अल्पसंख्यकों को निशाना बनाकर जन-पक्षीय और जन-कल्याण के जरूरी मुद्दों से ध्यान भटकाया जा रहा है।

हमारे आज की दुनिया वित्तीय पूंजी द्वारा संचालित है, जिसका राजनितिक प्रतिनिधित्व अमेरिका करता है। वित्तीय पूंजी बहुराष्ट्रीय कम्पनियों के हितों को बढ़ावा देती है। अभी हाल के कुछ सालों में दुनिया की राजनीति में रूस और चीन का दबदबा बढ़ा है, फिर भी ज्ञान, पूंजी, तकनीक और सैन्य क्षमता समेत ज्यादातर क्षेत्रों में अमेरिका और जी-7 के देशों का ही बोलबाला है। रूस और चीन के खिलाफ दुनिया भर में एक तरह का प्रचार तंत्र अमेरिका द्वारा काम पर लगाया गया है। लेकिन यह भी कहना गलत नहीं होगा की रूस और चीन द्वारा अमेरिकी सत्ता को जो चुनौती मिल रही है वो वहां के मेहनतकश जनता के हितों को नजरअंदाज करके मिल रही है। इनको साम्राज्यवाद-विरोधी ताकत नहीं मान सकते हैं। ऐसे में बहुधुर्वीय वैश्विक समीकरण (मल्टी-पोलर जियोपोलिटिक्स) का होना भी वामपंथी राजनीति को कोई फायदा नहीं पहुंचा रहा। बीसवीं सदी में साम्राज्यवाद के खिलाफ एक तरफ जहाँ समाजवादी और मुक्ति संग्रामों की धुरी तैयार हुई थी, अभी के दौर में ऐसी कोई धुरी दुनिया की राजनीति में मौजूद नहीं है।

इसका मतलब ये हुआ कि आज की क्रान्तिकारी वामपंथी अपने देश के बुर्जुवा वर्ग या तथाकथित 'अमेरिका-विरोधी' गुट में से किसी पर भी निर्भर नहीं हो सकती। वामपंथी राजनीति को मेहनतकश वर्ग के राजनीतिक चेतना के माध्यम से 'राष्ट्रीय हित' को दुबारा से परिभाषित करने का प्रयास करना होगा। आज क्रान्तिकारियों को जनता के बीच साम्राज्यवाद-विरोधी चेतना को इस विश्वास के साथ रखना पड़ेगा कि अंततः मेहनतकश जनता 'राष्ट्रीय हित' को खुद के लिए गढ़ पाए। हर जगह के अनुभव बताते हैं कि यदि सत्ता बनाना या बनाए रखना नवउदारवादी व्यवस्था को टिकाए रखने से ही आ सकता है,

agile and come out of such forced agreements in the interest of furthering the project of social transformation. The stability of governments cannot come at the cost of sacrificing people's struggles once in power—the Left must trust that the movements of workers, peasants, and small producers, struggles for economic, political, ecological, and social justice, can become the primary axes for a new, insurgent nationalism. Only this can redefine the 'national interest' outside the boundaries drawn by imperialism today. Such insurgent nationalism, though they bear the symbols and histories of their specific local/national contexts, will be internationalist in content and spirit as the values they strive for are values of equality, freedom, co-operations, justice, and respect for diversity.

Let us return to where we began—'student issues' or 'youth issues'. They tend to remain fixated on the nitty-gritty of dissent emerging from specific issues of education and employment; events of a fee-hike or some authoritarian order violating campus democracy, or employment-related issues of specific sectors of people, or at its most general, demands around some legislation. It is true that with the loss of dreams of structural transformation, political mobilizations have practically been reduced to mobilizations around a partial agenda, issues directly affecting a particular section of the population or organising solidarity actions. Unity of vision among the student-youth and 'social' movements coupling ideological motivation with grassroots demands have receded from the horizon of possibility. With the hegemony of capitalism-imperialism reaching new heights and capitalist propaganda taking the name of 'just the facts', 'common sense' or 'human nature', revolutionary ideas are pushed to the bay. They appear as 'irrational' once common sense has been defined in this way. At such times, ideological work among the students and youth has great importance among revolutionary activities. It would be wrong to assume that our generation is not interested in politics, if presented in a relevant manner. Anti-imperialism, respect for cultural diversity, our conviction in the values of equality and freedom and dreams of creating a better future cannot be snatched from revolutions and revolutionaries.

तो वामपंथियों को हर हाल में नवउदारवाद को चुनौती देते हुए सामाजिक परिवर्तन की राजनीतिक पहल करनी पड़ेगी। सत्ता में आने के बाद ऐसे जनसंघर्षों को दरकिनार करके सरकार बनाए रखना आज हमारा मकसद नहीं हो सकता है। क्रांतिकारियों को मजदूर, किसान और छोटे उत्पादकों के राजनीतिक आंदोलन एवं आर्थिक और सामाजिक न्याय के लिए हो रहे संघर्षों के बीच से एक नए तरह का 'विद्रोही राष्ट्रवाद' पैदा करना पड़ेगा। ऐसा राष्ट्रवाद ही साम्राज्यवाद द्वारा खींची गई सीमाओं के बाहर 'राष्ट्रीय हित' को फिर से परिभाषित कर सकता है। इस तरह के विद्रोही राष्ट्रवाद अपने स्थानीय/राष्ट्रीय संदर्भों के प्रतीकों और इतिहास के ऊपर खड़े होंगे मगर अपने विषय, विचारों, लक्ष्यों, उम्मीदों और भावनाओं में अंतर्राष्ट्रीयवादी होंगे। वे जिन मूल्यों के लिए प्रयास करेंगे वे सही मायनों में समानता, स्वतंत्रता, सहयोग, न्याय और विविधता के मूल्य होंगे।

आइए हम 'छात्र मुद्दों' या 'युवा मुद्दों' पर अपनी चर्चा पर लौटते हैं, जिसके साथ हमने शुरुआत की थी। अगर हम शिक्षा और रोजगार के मुद्दों से जुड़े आंदोलनों की बात करे और उसके भीतर की बारीकियों पर ध्यान दे तो पिछले कुछ सालों में फ्रीस-वृद्धि, कैंपस फ्रीडम, अकादमिक फ्रीडम, निजीकरण या विश्वविद्यालय-उच्च शिक्षा सम्बन्धित नीतियों और कानूनों को लेकर संघर्ष हुए हैं। छात्रों और युवाओं की राजनीतिक लामबंदी कुछ आंशिक मुद्दों के इर्द गिर्द होती रही है। ऐसे मुद्दे जो आबादी के एक विशेष वर्ग को सीधे प्रभावित करते हैं। छात्र-युवाओं के बीच से सामाजिक मुद्दों, वैचारिक राजनीति और जमीनी आंदोलन से जुड़े सवाल गायब होते जा रहे हैं। पूंजीवाद-साम्राज्यवाद की हेजेमनी ने हमारे 'कॉमन सेंस' को पूरी तरह एक तरफा, विचारहीन और स्वार्थी बना दिया है। क्रांति की बात हो तो यह इस 'कॉमन सेंस' से हटकर सुनाई देती है। ऐसे में समाज व इससे जुड़े मुद्दों को लेकर वैचारिक चेतना गायब होती जा रही है। इसलिए हमारे पीढ़ी में राजनीतिक शिक्षा का बहुत महत्व है। ऐसा मान लेना कि छात्रों और युवाओं को राजनीति में कोई दिलचस्पी नहीं है सरासर गलत होगा। साम्राज्यवाद-विरोधी विचारधारा, सांस्कृतिक विविधता का सम्मान, समानता और स्वतंत्रता के मूल्यों में हमारा विश्वास और एक बेहतर भविष्य बनाने के सपने क्रांति और क्रांतिकारियों से नहीं छीने जा सकते।

Four Ways to Loot a Nation

Almost a hundred years back, Dadabhai Naoraji wrote 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India'. Naoraji was the first to prove using statistics that colonialism was not a 'mutually beneficial' interaction between nations, as the coloniser's claimed, but that the British Empire had developed a system of looting surplus value from India to Britain. This was also an important marker separating it from previous invaders who settled down in the Indian sub-continent—the RSS, by claiming '600 years of slavery', first under the Muslims and then the British, seeks to erase this distinction.

The question today remains whether in India after 1947, the drain of wealth has stopped. Here we have attempted to illustrate historically, how the systems of looting surplus value were developed from the time of the East India Company to the present world order.

1. Drain of wealth under the East India Company: There were taxes levied by the East India Company (EIC), majorly through land revenues, taxes on independent producers etc. Taxation effectively meant a 'free' transfer of finished goods to the U.K. apart from collection of taxes.

A EIC trader buys a set of silver-plated kettles from a Kutch artisan for ₹40. This appears as a mutually beneficial exchange between equal parties.

But wait! He has to pay ₹110 as taxes to the Maharaja of Kutch. The king keeps ₹10 for himself and pays the rest to the EIC, who made him sign a 'suzerainty' treaty after being defeated by combined armies of the British and the Gaekwads of Baroda in 1819.

So on average, our Kutch artisan not only handed over silver cutlery to be sold in England for free, he also paid the British Crown ₹70. A massive loot!

2. Loot through 'triangular trade' with China: In 1833, the East India Company's monopoly over Indian and Chinese

trade finally ended, owing to demands from other English manufacturers. To reduce export deficit with China, Britain pumped in opium from India. This solved the problem of 'realization of tribute' and earned huge profits in silver. This also ensured a monopoly for Britain over the international opium market and a steady stream of silver payable to Indians in Pound Sterling.

EIC gains access to Indian opium fields after the War of Buxar (1764). This opium would be traded with China.

EIC agents would earn in silver and issue bills to Indians traders exchangeable in Calcutta or London.

3. Loot through Council Bills

(1861): A long-term solution to the 'realization of tribute' was brought in 1861 through the introduction of Council Bills by the Government through the Secretary of State Account. India, despite having a trade surplus with England from 1833 till the 1940s, would always have almost nothing in its forex reserves as a result. This meant, taken in total, India remained 'in debt' to the British treasury despite having a major trade surplus. This mechanism is explained below.

Bill would be encashed for Sterling in Britain which would balance their trade deficit with China.

A British importer would deposit Sterling or Gold with the Secretary of State in London in return for Council Bills (CBs).

CBs would be sent by post to an exporter in India. This was a mechanism to prevent gold/forex flowing into the Indian treasury.

For British importers, CBs ensured a favourable £ - Rupee ratio decided by the Secretary of State, while Indian producers were paid in a devalued rupee.

The exporter would exchange CBs for rupees to pay the Indian producer.

This was how an apparent 'exchange between equals' in the open market ensured continued plunder.

4. 'Expenditure abroad' from Indian tax/revenue:

- The cost of the Red Sea and Mauritius to Cape Town telegraph lines.
- The cost of maintaining British embassies and foreign officials in a number of countries.
- The cost of importing gold in the 1890s for the reserve requirements of the gold exchange standard.
- Costs arising from Britain's many imperial wars of conquest outside Indian borders
- The sterling cost of suppressing the Great Rebellion of 1857 in India.
- War materials worth £67 million imported from India as forced contribution.
- An additional £100 million (a very large sum, exceeding India's entire annual budget) was transferred as a 'gift' from India to Britain during the First World War, followed by another £45 million 'gift' the next year.

These costs, always in excess of India's fast-rising foreign earnings, were shown as a cumulating debt that India owed. By 1901, the total Sterling debt stood at £135 million, over one-fifth of British India's GDP and eight times its annual export surplus earnings.

This 'drain of wealth', as per calculations by Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik, amounts to ₹9.2 trillion (\$45 trillion) between 1765 and 1938 (taking India's export surplus earnings as the measure and compounding it at a 5 percent rate of interest). India was never credited the equivalent gold in its Balance of Payment account to ever overcome this historical loot. On average, the British rulers siphoned off resources equivalent to 26-36 per cent of the Central government's budget every year.



This sketch by Chittoprasad, depicting the British Empire's closet of skeletons, appeared in the Communist newspaper *People's War* in the aftermath of the Royal Indian Naval Mutiny. It was based on extensive tours of Midnapore district during the Bengal famine of 1943 which is estimated to have killed 38 lakh Indians. British PM Winston Churchill, supported by liberal economists like J.M. Keynes, are now known to have intentionally diverted Indian foodgrains to supply troops during the Second World War. Churchill denied grains, saying that they will always be insufficient for 'Indians breeding like rabbits'.

Travelling by bus, boat and on foot, Chittoprasad reported and drew pictures of hunger, illness, forced prostitution, abandoned villages and uncaring corrupt officials. His close studies of rural life during this avoidable famine, published in the banned book *Hungry Bengal*, captured this suffering with great sensitivity while flooded with raw anger towards an uncaring elite.

'Free Market' Imperialism continues

From the colonial period, now we turn to the Indian nation-state freed from political subjugation after the end of British colonialism. Did the drain of wealth stop after 1947? The contours of imperialism shifted to allow it to continue by advancing new justifications.

The earlier imperialist system centred in Britain was replaced by one centred in the USA. We look at some aspects of this neo-imperialist plunder, particularly, the role of balance of payments, foreign exchange and labour cheapening in the next section, to see how the drain of wealth continues to this day.

Fig. 1: Net foreign investments and net contribution to forex by foreign subsidiaries & foreign-controlled rupee companies

Year	Foreign Investment (in ₹ crore)	Contribution to Foreign Exchange (in ₹ crore)
1948	264	- 21.7
1955	442.4	- 16.8
1961	681	-16.2
1968	1542.8	- 22.6

* Source: RBI Survey (1961), RBI Bulletin (March 1971)

Bourgeois planners in the Indian State have always argued that attracting foreign capital is necessary to release strain on our foreign exchange reserves. Fig. 1 (on the previous page) shows that the net contribution of foreign investment to India's foreign exchange has been negative right from the decades after 1947. Clearly, foreign investors have been tolerated by the State for reasons separate from shoring up forex reserves.

Balance of Payments

Since liberalization and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the US dollar has been the global currency. The net inflow of dollars in dominated countries is always in the negative, while its net inflow into imperialist countries has always been positive.

Fig. 2: Annual net primary dollar inflow in the imperialist core

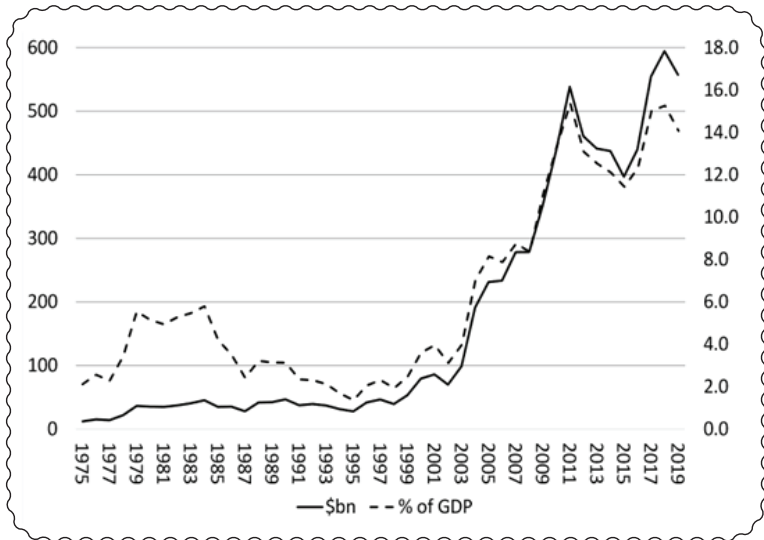
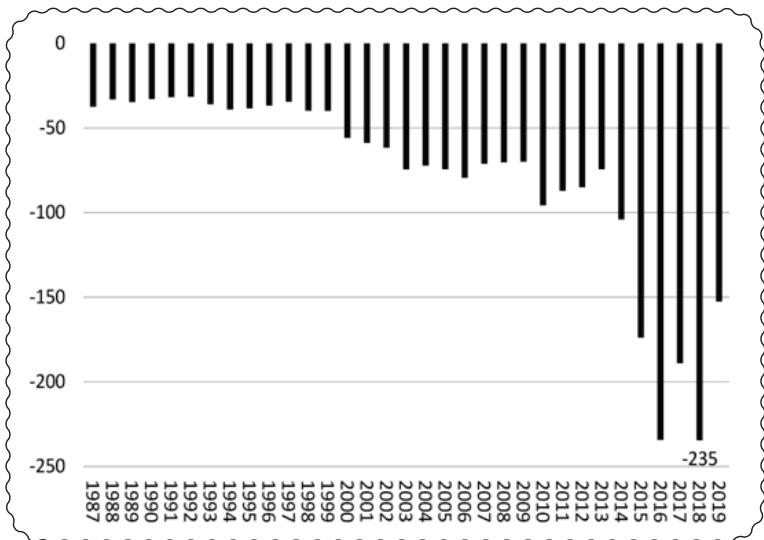
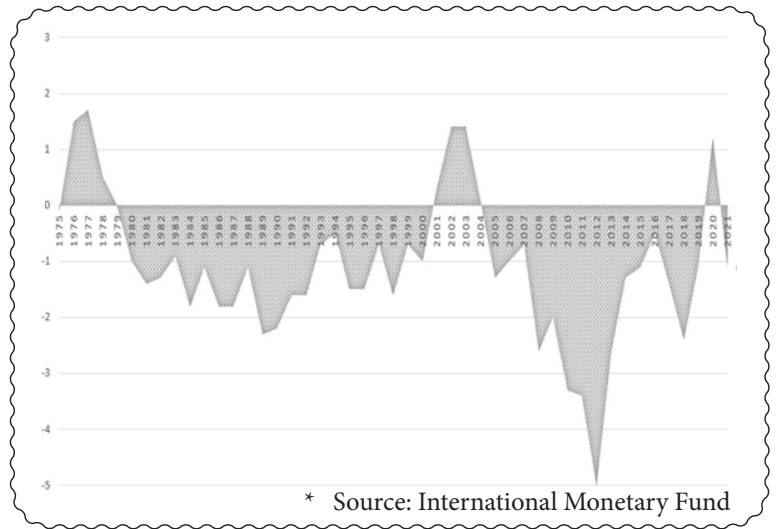


Fig. 3: Annual net primary dollar outflow from dominated blocs



* The graphs above are based on calculations by J. Smith in *Changing Face Imperialism: Colonialism to Contemporary Capitalism* (2018)

Fig. 4: India's balance of payments (1975-2021) (in billion US\$)



* Source: International Monetary Fund

Devaluation of the Rupee

Constant depreciation of the rupee has shifted balance of trade towards the US constantly after the dollar was accepted as the international benchmark currency. US gains more from every kind of trade while India loses its forex reserves with a negative balance of payment. The trend is similar with all other major economies of the world and is a long-term phenomenon. The Indian currency is becoming increasingly cheaper with respect to all major economies of the world, which means we are increasingly losing out in most foreign exchanges.

In this regard, the US has a special advantage with the dollar being the currency of international trade. The US balance of trade has been negative for the last fifty years and has been decreasing constantly. However, dominated countries like India cannot afford to have a permanent and steeply declining balance of payment like the US, as India cannot accrue profit, just by issuing currency through international trade.

Fig. 5: Indian ₹ versus other major currencies (1997 - 2021)



* Source: Google Finance

Exploiting Cheap Labour

Neoliberal restructuring of the world has led to off-shoring of the manufacturing base of the world to the dominated countries because of the cheap cost of labour. In the present world scenario, where multinational corporations deploy almost the same level of technology in the dominated nations as in the imperialist nations, it is absurd to say that the productivity of a garment worker or a *iP-hone* manufacturer is substantially lower in China, India or Bangladesh to that in Germany or US. So there can be no explanation than the transfer of a huge amount of surplus from the global South to the global North. This is why wage differentials become crucial.

Let us take the example of the companies which manufacture apparels for international brands like *H&M*, *Haggar Clothing*, *GAP* etc. in Delhi-NCR. They use labour at a rate \$0.46 per hour (assuming ₹12,000 per month minimum wage for 12 hours of work per day and 26 paid days in a month—this is the upper limit as export demand fluctuations lead to periodic retrenchment in the garment manufacturing sector). The hourly minimum wage in the imperialist core include 12€ (\$11.92) in Germany, £9.5 (\$10.75) in the UK and \$7.25 in the US. Multinational apparel brands sell their products without owning any physical assets in Indian or Bangladeshi sweatshops and without any legal obligations towards the garment workers. They accrue huge surplus-value just by controlling the means of distribution and by spending on marketing their brand (that is, their so-called ‘brand value’).

The discussion in this section has touched upon some aspects of contemporary imperialism. We have argued that certain types of foreign investment and export made in the name of the ‘national interest’ have been nothing but detrimental to it. Rather, these bear continuity with the type of colonial plunder and forced drain of wealth we discussed in the preceding section. The Indian State has not succeeded in breaking from such forms of plunder but it has tremendously benefitted a tiny section of the Indian elite—they have no reason to change the way things are.

The question that arises then is not whether we have enough ‘development’ taking place in the developing world but about the nature of this development itself. Development on terms dictated by international finance capital is a disaster that has to be overcome by toiling people as part of the struggle to transcend capitalism - imperialism.

Skill Trainee or Cheap Workers?

Four Labour Codes passed by the RSS BJP-led union government during the Covid-19 lockdown, ratified by several non-BJP state governments, have been justifiably criticised for eliminating 40+ labour protections won by over a century of struggles. **Reading them together, they justify a labour regime that is ‘flexible’ to the needs of international finance capital as the only path to economic progress.**

These changes have been in the air for some time now, even before they were legally sanctified. For instance, the new Industrial Relations Code normalises ‘hire-and-fire’ by allowing employment on a Fixed Term basis for as low as three months. Such highly contractualised employment has been practised for some time now in Special Economic Zones such as the Manesar - Bawana - Neemrana in Haryana and Rajasthan, ‘NEEM Trainees’ have been performing jobs earlier done by permanent workers. In the name of vocational education, the AICTE’s National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM), set up under UPA 2 in 2013, pushes workers as young as 16 years old into gruelling labour in the name of technical education. It is a bonanza for corporates—not only are ‘trainees’ and ‘apprentices’ not covered by labour protections, the government also pays half their wages to encourage ‘skill development’. A 2017 notification by the Modi regime lowered the turnover criteria for private firms to sign up as NEEM ‘facilitators’, increased the ‘training period’ to three years and massively increased the presence of NEEM workers in industrial belts. The National Education Policy 2020 prepares workers for such a ‘flexible’ job market through ‘multiple exit options’ in Class VIII to choose a vocational stream. What is this if not dropping out of studies?



800+ Ashok Leyland ‘diploma trainees’ who worked without pay in its Rudrapur plant for 3-5 years protested for jobs in 2021. The student-workers agitation forced the automaker to regularise some students.

Military aspects of India's Non Alignment

India has repeatedly avoided taking sides in the Russia - Ukraine war. In February, India, along with China and the UAE, abstained from voting on a UN Security Council resolution on Ukraine sponsored by the USA and Albania. This has been a consistent approach, with the latest silence in October when disputed referendums in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine to accede to Russia came up for discussion. Over the months, however, Indian foreign service officials have started voicing out against particular acts of Russian aggression, such as the alleged killing of civilians in the Bucha region in April.

Taking sides is challenging when both are this formidable. On one hand is Russia, which is India's second-largest supplier of crude oil and the source of nearly 60% of all military imports. The other is Ukraine, the last frontier in Eurasia of the USA-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). If its military firepower is not convincing enough, the USA has also reiterated that it will not distinguish between friend and foe in applying economic blockades for siding with Russia—a domestic law to this effect is named, rather tactlessly, Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). This is particularly threatening for India's ruling regime, which seeks to remain the USA's loyal 'strategic partner' in South Asia. This is why India continues its doctrine of strategic silence, also known as Non Alignment. Is Non Alignment nimble foreign policy-making? Or rather, are we being forced our hand so that the Indian ruling class can remain in bed with the neoliberal dream? The military dimensions of this question are summarised below.

QUAD Goals

In the post-liberalisation era, defence preparedness failures during the Kargil War were used to justify private participation in strategic sectors like defence manufacturing. 100% FDI was allowed in certain hi-tech areas of defence production in 2005 and, in 2007, 12 Indi-

an-origin firms were given the status of 'Raksha Udyog Ratna' to bring them on par with Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFs). In the name of 'Make in India', in 2015, the Modi government allowed foreign military giants (called OEMs) to bid for making submarines, fighter jets, helicopters and armoured vehicles, in alliance with Indian-owned 'strategic partners'. To sweeten the deal, DPSUs were barred from bidding on fighter jets and helicopters while OFs were ordered to stop producing 87 items. Like in colonial times, even customs and tax exemptions to Indian DPSUs and OFs were withdrawn to provide a 'level playing field' to foreign firms and their Indian partners.

Still unsatisfied, a consortium of 400 major American corporations including Boeing, Airbus and Lockheed Martin pushed back against a 'technology transfer' clause where OEMs would have to share proprietary know-how and software as part of military

From a German War Primer

by Bertolt Brecht, 1937

**Those at the top say: peace and war
Are of different substance.
But their peace and their war
Are like wind and storm.**

**War grows out of their peace
Like a son out of a mother
He bears
Her terrible features.**

**Their war kills
Whatever their peace
Has left over.**

manufacturing projects. Ultimately, the Defence Procurement Policy by the NDA regime adopted, what commentators describe as, a vague definition of ‘indigenous’ technology. A foreign OEM can claim indigeneity by tying-up with a wholly-owned Indian subsidiary as its strategic partner or source only component parts from Indian markets while retaining control over source codes and critical technologies. Such deals harm Indian self-reliance rather than bolster it. Even this has not been enough for those seeking mega-profits from war. In the Rafale deal, the union government was arm-twisted into accepting 36 fighter jets at a cost of \$8 billion, without any transfer of technology, instead of the originally proposed 126, where 18 would be bought from the French aviation giant Dassault and the other 108 manufactured in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. So much for Make in India!

Ever since the Indo-US Nuclear Deal and the first India-US Defence Framework adopted in 2005, Indian elites have repeatedly bowed down to American interests for private gain. The Modi regime quickly solidified this merger with the USA between 2016-20. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA, 2016) allows the American military to use Indian defence facilities and logistics on credit and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA, 2018) provides for sharing encrypted military communications. Together with the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement on Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA, 2020), these three agreements enable almost total interoperability between the American and Indian military, as it has with its NATO allies. The USA, which operates 750 known foreign military bases in 85 countries, has bombed 14 countries since 1980 and accounts for 38% of the world’s military expenditure (almost three times that of the next biggest military power, China) is now pushing to set up another base in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The takeover will then be complete.

India is the only QUAD country, which also includes Australia, Japan and USA, that shares a border with China. Indians will face collateral damage from any unprovoked American aggression in the South China Sea, as already witnessed by Chinese takeover of close to 1,000 sq. km. formerly-Indian territory in Ladakh’s Depsang Plains, Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso

and Chushul regions in 2020. American guns are being fired on our shoulders.

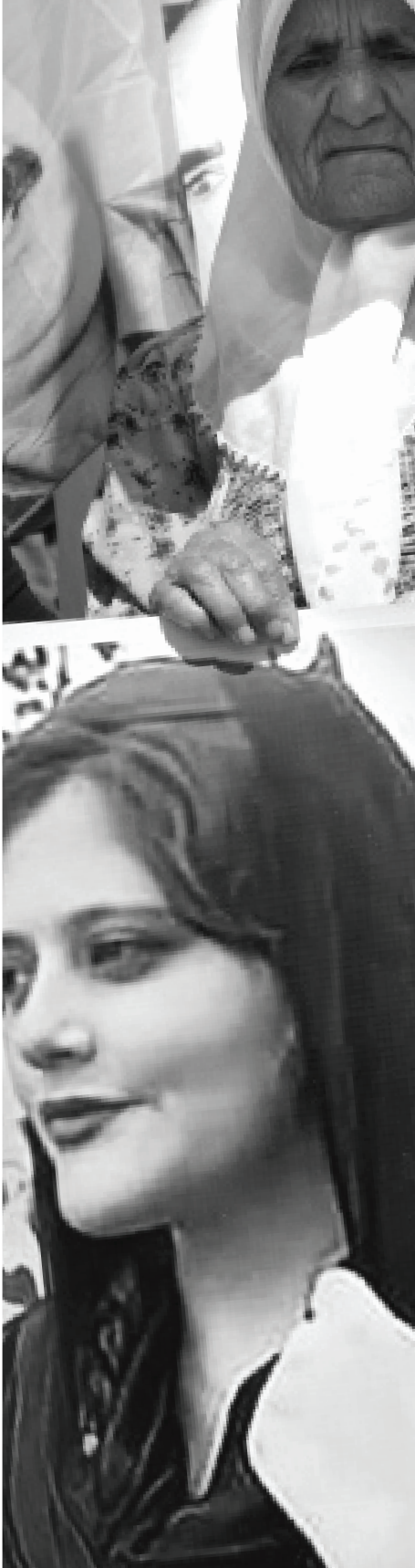
Russian Bears

Apart from its dependence on the USA, India is also the world’s largest arms market for Russia, spending \$5.51 billion on Russian weapons, out of a total military import budget of \$12.4 billion between 2018-21. A separate deal worth almost an equal amount was signed for the S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems. This deal set off alarm bells in NATO because this technology uses the powerful Russian radar system and transmits sensitive airspace data. The USA has repeatedly threatened the stick for going ahead with this deal—it is deliberating CAATSA sanctions on India, as it imposed on Turkey earlier—along with \$500 million defence ‘aid’ carrots.

This raises a serious question regarding the feasibility of an import-dependent defence strategy. The telecom industry remains a perfect example of such failures where in spite of 100% FDI, local industry with intellectual property rights within the country has less than a 3% share and close to 90% is imported. Even in relatively low tech sectors like automobiles and telecom, any real transfer of technology is almost non-existent, and the Indian big bourgeois remains dependent on foreign capitalists.

In this context, major strikes by DPSU and OF workers have challenged the ‘nationalist’ credentials of the RSS BJP regime. They underline that technological sovereignty in strategic sectors like defence can only be built by strengthening the public sector. The success of Godavari guided missile frigates, Vikram offshore patrol boats and submarines, including nuclear-powered ones, built indigenously and inducted into the Indian Navy as well as INSAS rifles are proof of this. But beyond building defence capacity, the aims and priority of defence and foreign policy must be reoriented on a sovereign basis. Non Alignment, instead of hiding the inability of the Indian leaders to go beyond the dictates of the big imperialist powers, must become reoriented in an anti-imperialist direction against the NATO-led ‘unipolar’ world order as well as the ‘multipolar’ forms imperialism may take on with the rise of China and Russia. Peace and the survival of future generations depends on this.

Fighting Islamic rule and Imperialist Sanctions



The world is witnessing a historic struggle in Iran. Feminists and workers are fighting for “Women, Life, and Freedom” following the State’s murder of Mahsa Jina Amini, a Kurdish woman who was beaten and found dead in police custody after being accused of improperly wearing her hijab. This is a mass movement against attacks on women and the working class, and against police violence towards oppressed communities such as the Kurdish Saqqez that Amini herself was a part of. Coupled with the outrage against Amini’s custodial death, the protests have also been fuelled by dissatisfaction over exploitative economic conditions which have been worsened by anti-people policies at home, along with imperialist sanctions against the Islamic regime in Iran.

Political Turmoil and Economic Trajectory

This is not the first time the people of Iran are rising. In fact this follows a long history of political turmoil beginning with the 1953 removal of then-Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. The subsequent entry of the US-backed Shah regime began a period of imperialist intervention, anti-people politics and a devastating rise in reactionary forces across the country. While Western propaganda painted the regime as one of freedom and peace, in reality the Shah’s government served imperialist forces and spelled a life of economic hardship for the Iranian masses. The 1970s were witness to several protests by varied sections of the population, including workers, students and teachers. While some sections consisted of secular, progressive elements, some were led by Islamist groups. Ultimately this culminated in the 1979 Iranian revolution, as the Islamist groups seized power after the Shah was ousted. Though the Islamic regime portrayed itself as anti-imperialist, its rule has been one of absolute repression. Economic policies adopted by the regime have benefitted the elite sections of society and any space for dissent has been violently crushed. Coupled with this there has been curtailing of women’s freedom as the authoritarian regime has strengthened a patriarchal order.

The 2010s have seen a series of upheavals against economic conditions and corruption in Iran, which have had varied stakeholders from teachers to railway workers to oil workers along with women’s groups. While many of these protests have been restricted to urban centers, the pivotal moment came in 2019-20, when several regions saw militant uprisings which were responded to with brutal repression resulting in the deaths of over 1,500 protestors. The immediate trigger for the protests was a rise in fuel prices as well as oppressive taxation policies which favored the elite. Yet significantly, groups have also highlighted how the rapid adoption of neoliberal policies in the form of privatization of state-owned enterprises, rise in subcontracting firms, short term contract jobs etc., have played a role in contributing to political and economic unrest.

Feminist Resistance in Iran

All the while, feminist groups in Iran have opposed Islamic fundamentalism along with imperialist and neoliberal policies in the various struggles from 2010 to the present moment. Strikes against compulsory veiling have been held repeatedly in schools as well as universities, with progressive female students expanding demands to combat fee hikes and government corruption. As women across the country gather to burn their hijabs and cut their hair in public, it is important to recognise that this is not merely a fight for or against a piece of clothing. The fight is against patriarchal oppression, the Islamic regime, and western domination all at once.

In November 2021 for instance, the Iranian government passed a ban on abortion, greatly curbing access to birth control. This action was taken to encourage “Rejuvenation of the Population”, given that Iran is facing a rapidly increasing aging population and significant drop in fertility rate to merely 1.8. [cont. on pg. 13]

Sri Lankan Crisis

Wickremesinghe, stop jailing students!

Inter University Students’ Federation (IUSF), a confederation of more than 70 students’ unions, played the crucial role of coordinating between universities in various cities during August’s #GotaGo-Home uprising. On 24 August, the Convener of the IUSF, Wasantha Mudalige and two other student leaders were issued detention orders under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) by the new Wickremesinghe government. **Mudalige and Galwewa Siridhamma have been imprisoned for 75 days as this goes to print.** PTA is a draconian law that has been used since the early days of the *Tamil Eelam* independence movement by the State to indefinitely detain and extract confessions through torture. It allows the state to label anybody a terrorist, without even clearly defining what ‘terrorist activity’ is. Though the law does not permit for those detained under it to be in custody for more than 18 months, many of those arrested have been held on remand for years on end. PTA has specifically been used to target, silence and threaten minorities, and Left activists.



Nov. 3 | Thousands of Sri Lankans marching in Colombo to demand President Ranil Wickremesinghe release student political prisoners were stopped by the military.

Since the start of the protests, around 3,400 protestors have been arrested, most under charges that would never hold up in courts. Many of them still remain in the custody of the police. They have been kept in deplorable conditions, denied access to lawyers and threatened. The police have attacked, and used tear gas and water cannons on people protesting for the release of activists and students detained under the PTA. The protests are picking up again, as the people have realised that the same neoliberal capitalist system that led to the cost-of-living crisis, with any amount of loans from the IMF, will never lead to improvement in the situation of the working masses in the country. We demand that the Sri Lankan government release all protestors who have been detained, repeal the draconian PTA, and uphold the human rights of all the protestors in the country. **From COLLECTIVE, we once again affirms our solidarity with the protesting students and workers of Sri Lanka in their fight against their authoritarian government and the neoliberal capitalist system.**

Student Struggle across the globe

Asia

Bangladesh (August)

Dhaka students took to the streets for weeks against PM Sheikh Hasina government's record fuel price hike. Heavy police brutality injured many students. The price of petrol was raised by 51.1% while diesel and kerosene were increased by around 42.5%, severely affecting middle and lower-income families. [Read | Interview with Com. Dileep, Biplobi Chhatro Moitri, on our website.]



Protesting students in Bangladesh forced the government to announce a cut in bus fares.

Occupied Palestine (September)

School students organised a strike to protest the forceful imposition of the Israeli curriculum. Around 1,15,000 students study in about 280 Palestinian schools in Jerusalem. The new curriculum is set to remove chapters related to lack of medical aid and the Israeli government's role in the water crisis of the occupied territories.



2,000+ protestors on climate strike in Sydney, which faced high flooding.

Australia (March)

Hundreds of school students, workers and indigenous tribes took to the PM's residence Kirribilli House demanding decisive action on climate change after floods killed 20 in and displaced thousands. Climate change is a prominent political issue in Australia which is among the world's biggest per capita carbon emitters.

Africa

Nigeria (February - ongoing)

Students joined public university lecturers on strike for seven months, the longest in several years. They are calling on the Md. Buhari government to fulfil the terms of a wage agreement with lecturers signed in 2009.



Europe

United Kingdom (September)

British Petroleum and Exxon faced sit-ins organised by university students during placement drives in Oxford and Sheffield, calling for a ban on fossil fuel corporations on campuses.

France (October, 2022)

Students and trade unions protested against the rising cost of living and fuel crisis. France is currently witnessing their highest inflation rate in decades. A nationwide transport strike took place, inspired by British railworkers.

North America

United States (May - October)

School students on the streets after a shooting in Uvalde, Texas killed 19 children. Thousands protested across Virginia against discrimination of transgender learners in public schools. Harvard and MIT students protested an ExxonMobil recruitment event on campus.

Canada (October)

Hundreds of students from the University of British Columbia protested by walking out of classes after the funding for their food security programs was heavily reduced. This significantly increased the financial burden on students as their tuition fees were also increased post-pandemic.

South America

Uruguay (August)

Youth demanded an increase in the budget for education and greater participation in decision-making institutions, following which many were evicted.

Brazil (October)

Student-teachers showed strength across the country against the huge budget cut by the Bolsonaro government, demanding 'Education, Transportation, and Democracy'. This was reflected in the elections next month when the far-Right regime was ousted. A victory for people's struggles everywhere!



[from pg. 11] ... This in turn has been brought about partly due to massive rates of unemployment and hunger, with thousands of families in Iran simply unable to afford childcare. The fight for right to abortion in Iran thus becomes one against not only the patriarchal order of society and moralistic impositions of the Islamic regime, but also against steadily worsening economic conditions brought about by imperialistic policies.

International Solidarity

As the world looks on, the question of international solidarity, its role and nature, remains pertinent. The current moment of upheaval is also being used by the United States to impose more sanctions on Iran. These new measures have been placed on Iran's "morality police" who killed Mahsa Amini and are ruthlessly attacking protesters. This institution certainly deserves no sympathy from the progressive forces. However, the nature of sanctions means that even when this economic warfare is supposedly placed on just one institution, it disproportionately hurts workers, women, and oppressed communities like Kurdish people,

a point which has been argued by several organizations in the movement which are battling western propaganda alongside a repressive regime at home. Groups have cautioned against the policy of interventions in the name of encouraging human rights, citing unequal harm of such interventions. Imperialism directly strengthens patriarchal control and weakens progressive struggles. The current movement has also seen the introduction of revolutionary imagery in protests, chanting of revolutionary slogans and anti-imperialist songs and iconography, which is a new and promising development, according to groups on the ground. Moreover, workers councils (*showrahs*) have also been mobilised again, with oil workers threatening to strike with potentially grave effects on the Iranian republic. Today, there is a need for those forces struggling for equal and dignified conditions of life to intensify their own struggles against imperialist forces in true solidarity with the struggling people of Iran. The real struggle today is not for reinstating a US-backed puppet regime, or simply against the Islamic rulers. Protestors have declared "No Mullahs, no Shah, just Democracy".

Another Constitution Rejected

Student protests called the Chilean Winter of 2011 had set off a whirlwind of change in the tiny South American country, known as the 'birthplace of neoliberalism'. Over the last decade, what began as student protests against fee hikes, transformed into a national uprising against skyrocketing social inequality and, in 2021, led to the election of a new Constituent Assembly. The previous document had been drafted in 1973, after a US-backed coup in Chile murdered and toppled the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende and installed the brutal corporate-military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet which implemented economic 'reforms' prescribed by the IMF and World Bank. President Gabriel Boric, a socialist and former student leader now leading the Apruebo Dignida coalition, put the new draft Constitution to vote in September this year. The new draft was widely hailed for enshrining universal primary education and healthcare as rights, declared Chile a 'plurinationalist' state and protected the 'rights of Nature'. In an outcome equal parts puzzling as it is disheartening, the draft was rejected.

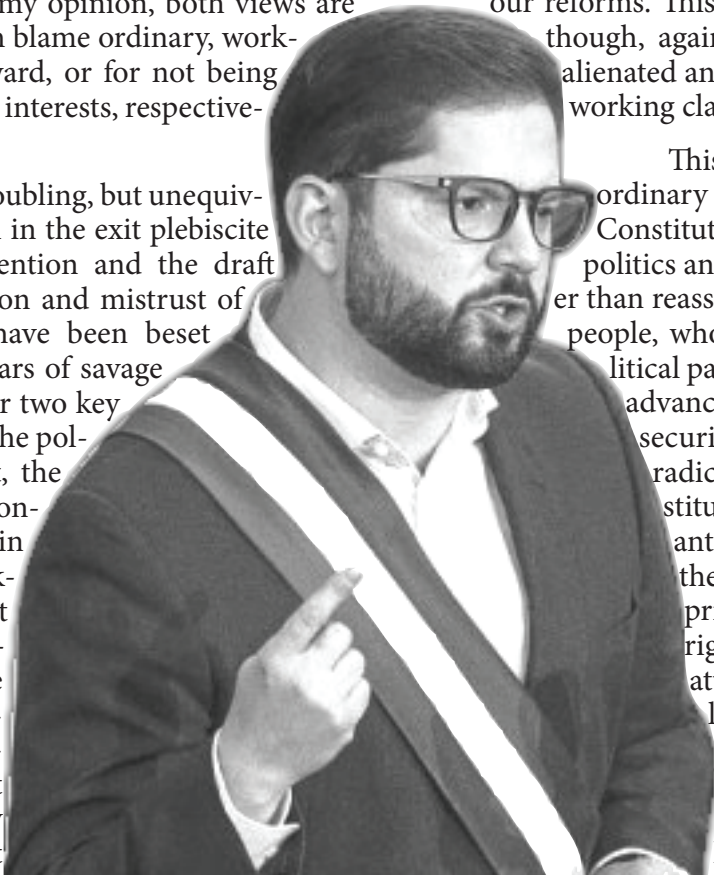
Dr. René Rojas from Binghamton University, New York (USA) analyses what went wrong.

Most explanations of the September 4th defeat of the proposed constitution point to either the engrained conservatism of ordinary Chileans or the effects of elite and Right-wing propaganda. The former contend that average Chileans could not accept progressive measures included in the draft like gender freedom and indigenous autonomy; the latter claim that fake news and disinformation promoted by social and traditional media confused or outright misled Chileans and prevented them from evaluating that the new constitution was beneficial. In my opinion, both views are wrong. In significant ways, both blame ordinary, working Chileans—for being backward, or for not being able to confidently discern their interests, respectively.

Instead, I think that a troubling, but unequivocal, 62 percent voted rejection in the exit plebiscite because the Constituent convention and the draft itself exacerbated the disaffection and mistrust of working-class Chileans who have been beset by insecurity for over thirty years of savage neoliberalism. This occurred for two key reasons, one directly related to the politics of the country's New Left, the other brought upon by institutional changes, specifically changes in electoral rules. I will work backward. In the spirit of the great 2019 rebellion, delegates decided to expand the electorate significantly, by adopting automatic registration and mandatory voting. This meant that for the first time since the early post-dictatorship years, turnout

was bound to be very high, reversing low participation rates which had fallen to under fifty percent. It also meant that layers of the most disengaged and detached Chileans would be casting a vote for the first time in decades. On the Left, we typically believe that reaching the most disaffected, the disproportionately poor and marginalised sectors without connections to organised politics or activism and who tend to stay home for elections, enhances our chances at the polls since these are people who stand to benefit the most from our reforms. This was an expectation in Chile, although, again, we are talking with the most alienated and atomized sections of the working class.

This had crucial consequences when ordinary Chileans had to evaluate the new Constitution. This is where the New Left's politics and discourse came into play. Rather than reassure broad layers of working people, who already distrust and resent political parties, that the Left was working to advance their interests and give them the security and protections they long for, radicals in charge of drafting the constitution and then campaigning for it antagonised and alienated them further. Chile's new Leftists did this by prioritising special identity-based rights and adopting a moralising attitude. In 2019, and in the years leading up the uprising, Chileans mobilised for core material guarantees in terms of pensions, healthcare, education, wages and labour protections, and educa-



tion. In other words, ordinary Chileans have spent a decade demanding class-wide, universal rights and public services.

Much of this universalist social provision made it into the draft, but it was drowned out by a far more vaunted and strident defense of more particularistic defenses of marginalized groups suffering special forms of oppression, like sexual and gender disidencias (dissidents) and indigenous communities. Ample evidence shows that ordinary Chileans are not opposed to rights and justice for oppressed identity-based groups. But the histrionic behaviour of the radicals in the convention and overwhelming particularistic language in the draft failed to persuade masses frustrated by decades of social exclusion and insecurity that the new Constitution and the entire reform process would promote their wellbeing. In many ways, because they eclipsed universal rights and protections, these ended up adding to their uncertainty and discontent.

In the end, the pro-reform vote declined, but only slightly. Overall, almost the same number of Chileans who voted for a new Constitution in the 2020 opening plebiscite voted in favour this time. The big shift came from the nearly 6 million new voters, enfranchised by changes in electoral rules, the vast majority of whom voted against the proposal. In other words, Chile's new radicals failed to engage and win over the millions of working Chileans who are disconnected from organised politics or social movements. In fact, their moralising identitarianism did the exact opposite.

Fight again tomorrow

The first task is to recognize and take stock of the magnitude of the defeat. The plebiscite did not only reject what would have been a very progressive charter, replacing a privatising, commodifying and anti-labor constitution imposed under Pinochet's dictatorship. It amounts to a defeat of the recently elected New Left government of Gabriel Boric and a massive setback for the broader reform process underway. Since the 2019 uprising [Ed.: Estallido Social, a series of protests in 2019-20 in major cities around Chile, sparked by students' civil disobedience to metro fare hikes finished with the ousting of billionaire-politician President Sebastián Piñera]. Chile has undergone a veritable political revolution that essentially toppled the democratic neoliberal regime in place since the 1990 transition [after the end of General Pinochet's junta rule]. Importantly, it carried the potential to adopt anti-neoliberal reforms that not only would have improved the material well being of Chile's popular sectors, they also stood to enhance their power vis-à-vis the ruling class. The government is close to being dead in the water, just months after its inauguration; radicals and social movements are demoralised and disoriented; and new forces on the Right, including pragmatic populists and reactionary revanchists, are emboldened and making inroads into popular sectors. In short, the plebiscite is not a one-time, momentary defeat after which we just have to regroup. It has

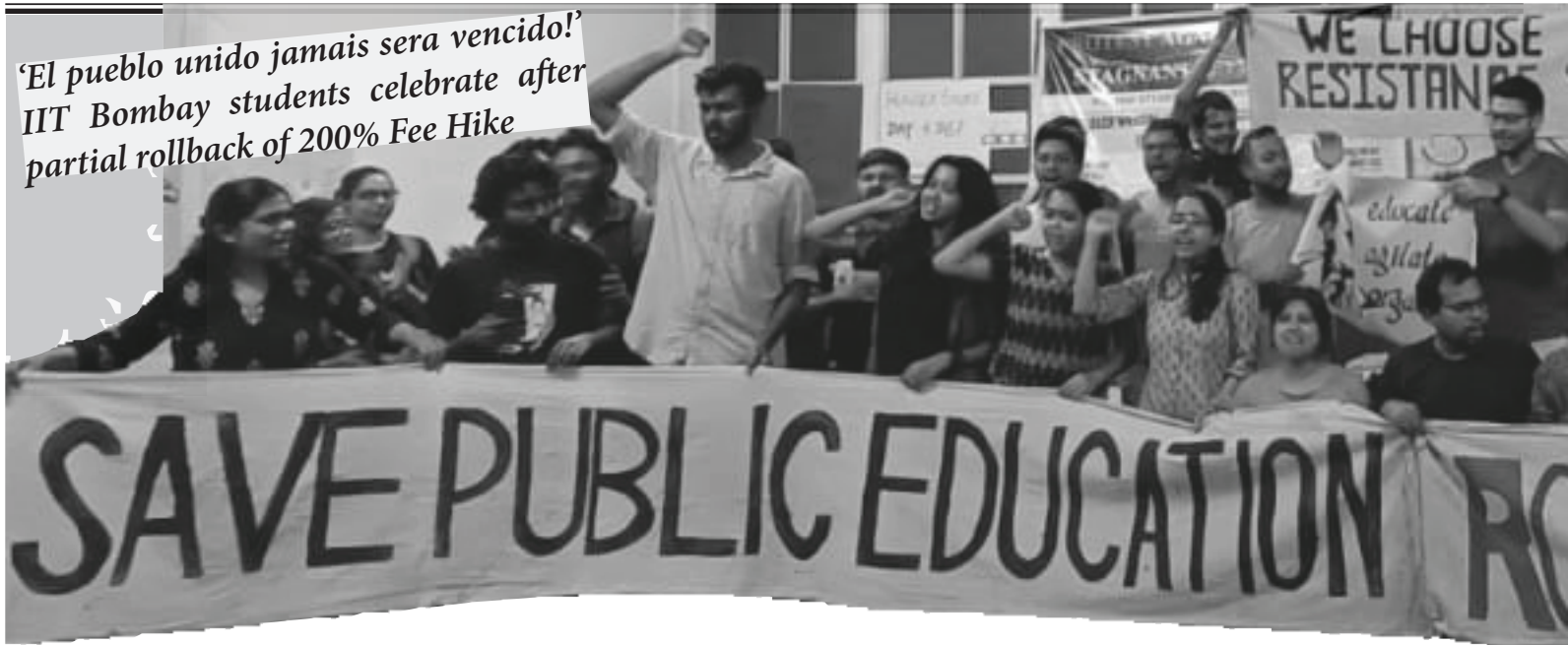
wiped out years of growth and achievements.

But of course, it is not a permanent defeat. Chilean neoliberalism will continue to cause havoc in the lives of working people, intensifying their insecurity and throwing the country into turmoil. Leftists must oppose the restoration of progressive neoliberalism, not via performative obstructionism but rather through a steadfast defence of vigorous state regulation of markets and public social provision. The Left must use the positions in power it has painstakingly won since 2013 to relentlessly press for this policy agenda. At the same time and crucially, radical reformers must dispense with narrow social justice orientations in favour of universalist politics and protections. This does not mean abandoning the rights and equality of groups suffering particular forms of oppression. It entails placing class-wide demands at the forefront and demonstrating that, rather than competing with sectoral injustices, the fulfilment of the former provides the strongest foundation for addressing the latter. If the New Left does not lead with universalism, it will aggravate the resentment of masses of working Chileans who, denied basic rights under three decades of progressive neoliberalism, will rationally conclude that prioritisation of identitarian causes comes at the expense of their security and wellbeing. Nothing will promote the rise of Chile's new revanchist Right as effectively as this.

President Boric and the 'democratic socialist' Left now faces some very hard questions.

While the plebiscite tells us what went wrong, it also offers glimmers of where to press forward. In spite of the confusion and resentment, the neighbourhoods and worksites where the most advanced sections of Chile's working sectors live and toil upheld their votes for reform. Santiago's large working-class townships delivered massive support. The same goes for Valparaiso, and San Antonio, Chile's largest ports, as well as key industrial and mining centres in the North and Central regions. These sites represent the millions of workers—women and men, indigenous and non-indigenous—who more than any other reason voted to approve the Constitution in pursuit of universal social provision and systemic change. Relative to the elevated hopes nursed by the rebellion and rapid ascent of Boric's Apruebo Dignidad coalition, these outcomes offer scant consolation. But they represent a solid foundation on which Chile's Left must reorganise into a universalist, democratic socialist movement. Not only will these sections fight for class-wide reforms, when organizationally connected to New Left parties and movements, they will discipline it so that increasing layers of working Chileans are drawn to, rather than alienated, by radical politics.

*'El pueblo unido jamais sera vencido!'
IIT Bombay students celebrate after
partial rollback of 200% Fee Hike*



*After the Covid-induced silence, Indian universities are again standing up to the RSS BJP regime's anti-student, pro-corporate policies.
Can you hear our laughter on the streets?*

IITs and IISERs

Public technical institutes have seen remarkable student unity in recent months, including the first of its kind anywhere in the country after Covid-19. IIT Bombay was the first, where students struggled against a 200% tuition fee hike. A two-month long protest led to partial reduction in fees. It inspired similar successful movements against fee hike in IIT Delhi and over rise in student suicides in IIT Kharagpur. A similar agitation after another student suicide in IISER Kolkata earlier also won administrative changes. These movements shatter the notion built by the corporate media and administrations that 'only Arts students protest' or that 'All is well!' among career-minded students in elite engineering colleges.

Tuition Fees/Sem (Session 2022-23)	MTech	PhD
IIT Delhi	₹ 17,500*	₹ 7,500*
IIT Bombay	₹ 15,000*	₹ 3,750*
IIT Madras	₹ 5,000	₹ 2,500
IIT Kanpur	₹ 5,000	₹ 2,500
IIT Kharagpur	₹ 5,000	₹ 2,500
IIT Roorkee	₹ 5,000	₹ 2,500
IIT Guwahati	₹ 5,000	₹ 2,500

**Revised fees after Students Protest*

Savitribai Phule Pune University

SPPU, Maharashtra has imposed heavy fee hikes up to 223% which will affect over eight lakh students, justifying it saying that 'normalcy' has returned to campuses. This raises the question of whether such fee hikes will become the 'new normal' after Covid-19. Several student organisations united to resist this fee hike and to demand fair allocation of hostel rooms to PG and PhD students. A committee has been set up to review the matter within eight working days, with students prepared to re-launch the agitation in November if demands are not met.

Calcutta Medical College

The campus-based Medical College Democratic Students Association (MCDSA) has launched a major agitation for the right to unionise. CMC has historically been a centre of revolutionary politics, opposing the dismantling of public healthcare in West Bengal. Several doctors produced here have joined people's health movements. The MCDSA-led protests have taken on the goondaism of TMC-affiliated student groups in campuses like Calcutta University and Alia by pushing the Mamata Bannerjee-led state government to announce union elections in February 2023.

New Normal in Higher Edu. after Covid-19



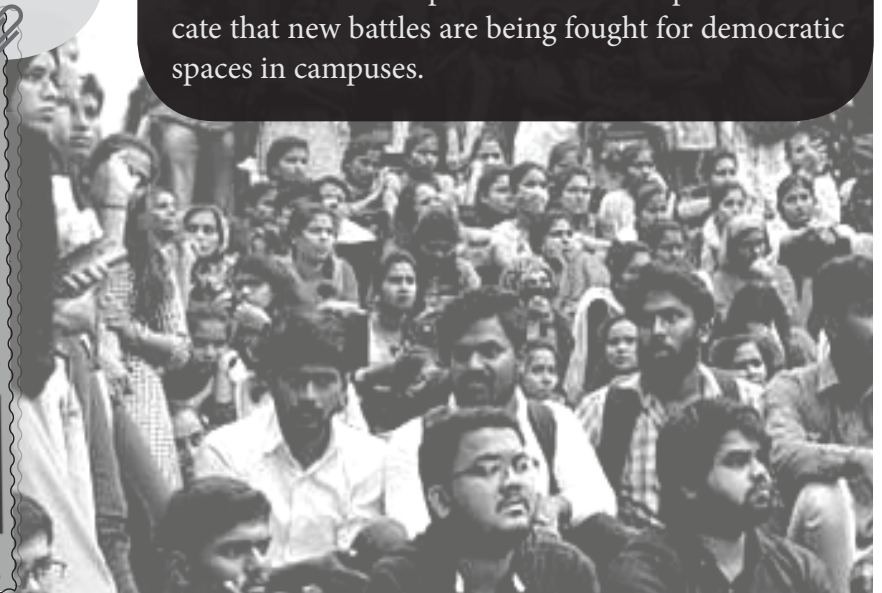
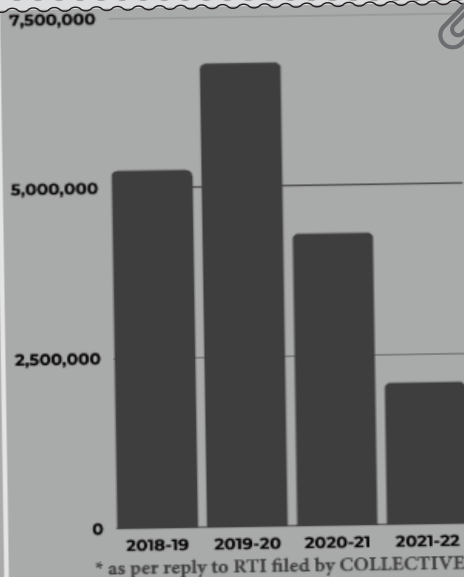
Jawaharlal Nehru University

To see that our public universities are falling apart, one need not look further than JNU's hostels and libraries which are literally crumbling from fund cuts. Water shortages, seepage from heavy rain and salary dues to contractual staff are a direct result of over 60.4% decrease in infrastructure spending since UGC's fund grants were replaced by a Rs 455 crore HEFA loan in 2020. The burden of these loans is being passed on to students through fund cuts, delayed scholarships and more self-financed courses. Meanwhile, police impunity to ABVP which led armed attacks on students in January 2020 has emboldened goons to commit more violence on campus, be it over the issue of 'non-veg' food during Ram Navami this year or vandalism of offices in the past semester. Students have united on JNUSU's calls against these changes but delayed union body elections have affected the ability to build a sustained struggle.

Bangalore University

BU affiliated colleges are hit by haphazard implementation of NEP 2020 this year and granting of 'autonomous' status to private colleges. Jnanabharathi Campus has also remained on the burner, with PG & PhD scholars protesting for campus safety, demanding libraries and hostels instead of a proposed Ganesh Temple on campus and participating in state-wide agitations against the removal of Dr. Ambedkar's portraits in Raichur. Karnataka faces a three-decade-old ban on student politics but recent protests indicate that new battles are being fought for democratic spaces in campuses.

JNU Infra Fund Cuts after HEFA Loan in 2020 in rupees spent per year



Allahabad University

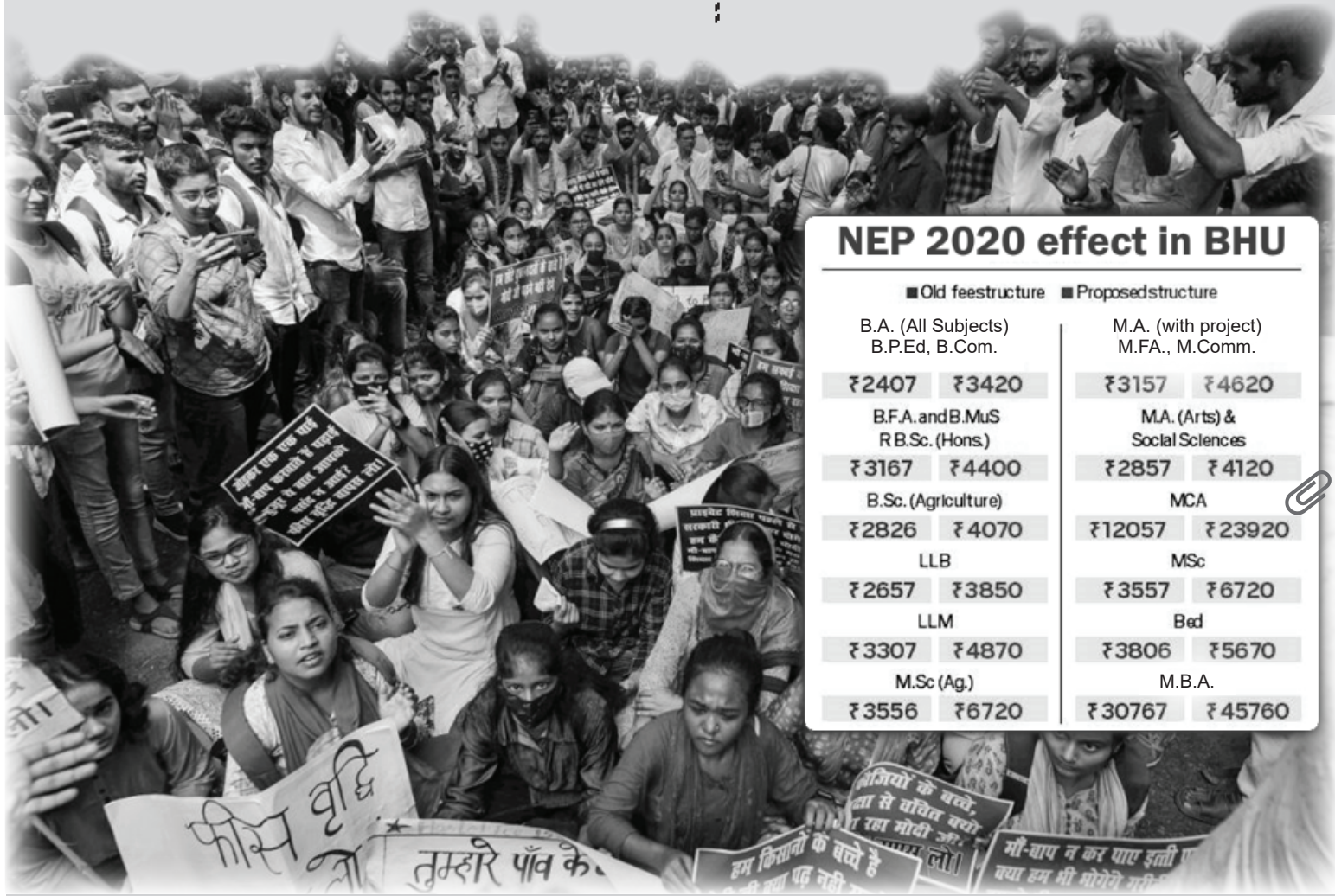
Working class and agricultural families in Poorvanchal have looked towards AU for a better future—this may no longer be so if the RSS BJP regime succeeds in imposing up to 400% fee hike in various courses. AU students have been waging an inspiring struggle against commercialisation of education and hostel shortages since September, despite the 96-year-old AU Student Union being disbanded in 2019 to prevent such resistance. AU VC was forced to admit to reporters that the central Edu Min has indicated that universities must ‘raise their own funds’ and fee hikes are a direct effect of the National Education Policy 2020. Even with eight students on hunger strike hospitalised and police lathi-charging protestors within campus, booking 15 students on criminal charges, a solidarity team from COLLECTIVE that visited AU found the movement gaining strength [watch our video report on YouTube.com/@CollectiveIN]. While the administration has postponed the fee hike, the struggle will not die down quietly.

Banaras Hindu University

Students in BHU started protests in October against a move to increase fees across UG/PG and hostel charges, leading to fees almost doubling in several courses. The BHU administration, which faced headline-grabbing protests in 2015 against sexual harassment on campus, has tried to diffuse the situation by saying that the move will only affect the incoming batch but students have reiterated that this is a fight against privatization of education, which has been intensified under NEP 2020.

Panjab University

PU students mobilised in large numbers, joined by democratic voices across Punjab, in raising how granting ‘central university’ status to PU will dilute its regional character, lead to illegal appointments of RSS functionaries and cause fee hikes as seen in other central universities recently. Students showed that this was an example of the anti-federal character of RSS BJP’s NEP 2020.



NEP 2020 effect in BHU

■ Old feestructure ■ Proposedstructure

B.A. (All Subjects)
B.P.Ed, B.Com.

₹2407 ₹3420

B.F.A.andB.MuS
R.B.Sc. (Hons.)

₹3167 ₹4400

B.Sc.(Agriculture)

₹2826 ₹4070

LLB

₹2657 ₹3850

LLM

₹3307 ₹4870

M.Sc (Ag.)

₹3556 ₹6720

M.A. (with project)
M.F.A., M.Comm.

₹3157 ₹4620

MA. (Arts) &
Social Sciences

₹2857 ₹4120

MCA

₹12057 ₹23920

MSc

₹3557 ₹6720

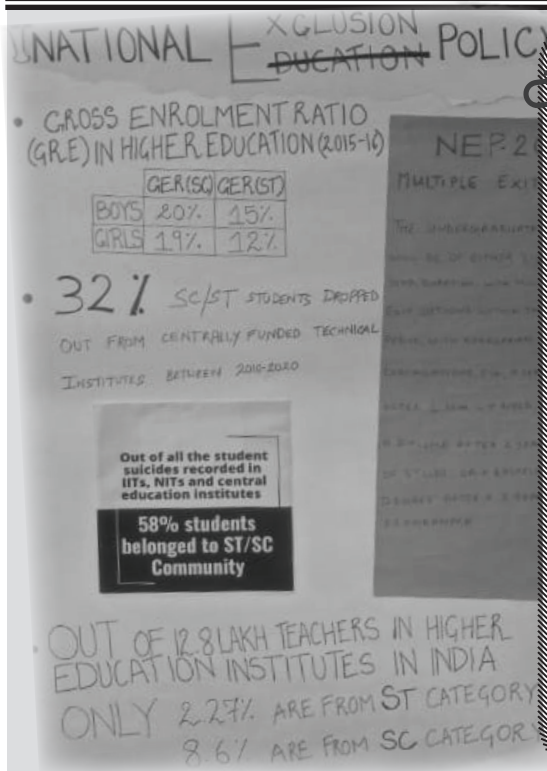
Bed

₹3806 ₹5670

M.B.A.

₹30767 ₹45760

(In photo: Significant presence of women first-generation learners in the protests at Allahabad University.)



Delhi University

As DU celebrates 100 years of its foundation, the public university has become an experiment lab for privatisation. While CUET promised a level playing field for non-CBSE/ICSE students held back by DU's notorious '100% cut-offs', only one out of 103 CUET toppers (and <15% of all students) selected for DU have come from state boards! Predictably, expensive coaching mafias have mushroomed around this exam instead. Amid protest by students and teachers, DU also continues to push through the anti-student FYUP-UGCF policy in the name of promoting 'choice'. Instead of preparing for struggle against these changes, DU Student Union (DUSU) elections, expected to be held after three years, brings back money - muscle politics in white SUVs and lipstick-alcohol distribution 'fests' organised by ruling class parties such as ABVP-NSUI-CYSS. It is the need of the hour for progressive students - teachers - staff in DU to unite for the kind of anti-FYUP struggle seen in 2013 which had held back these changes close to a decade earlier.

South Asian University

Students from across the sub-continent have united for restoration of scholarships/freeships in SAARC-run South Asian University, Delhi. Five students were suspended/rusticated by the SAU administration to end the historic upsurge demanding increase in scholarships at PG/PhD level, leading to an indefinite hunger strike ongoing at the time this issue goes to print.

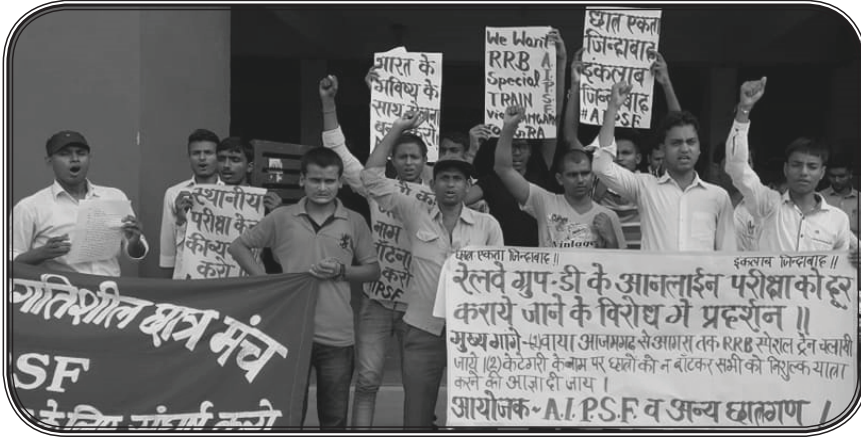
Jamia Millia Islamia

As the epicentre for the anti-CAA movement, JMI students have been targeted by the State. Be it the arrest of student leaders or the militarisation of campus, progressive student politics is in the RSS BJP regime's target. An unprecedented two month long curfew was imposed on the entire Jamia Nagar area after the ban on PFI, using it to paint all Muslim students as terror suspects. Despite this, on Nov. 3, students marched in hundreds for re-opening hostels, forcing an otherwise-arrogant administration to look into their demands.



From Our Comrades

COLLECTIVE presents revolutionary greetings to all fraternal organizations!



A delegation from **All India Progressive Students Federation (A.I.P.S.F.)** represented Railway Group D exam candidates' grievances to the Collector's Office in Azamgarh, U.P. After images of students packed into trains on the way to exam centres shocked the state, AIPSF demanded special trains, free rail passes and other services for students.

On 6 October, **Parivartankami Chhatra Sangathan (Pachhas)** participated in a rally in Bageshwar, Uttarakhand against mass recruitment scams in Uttarakhand SSC. Comrades were also active in raising the demand for justice to Priyanka, a young receptionist murdered by BJP state minister Vinod Arya's son, along with women's organisations.



On 21 October, comrades of **Progressive Democratic Students Federation (P.D.S.F.)** marched in Kolkata against violent attacks by West Bengal Police on protesting TET-qualified teachers denied employment for a decade. The TMC government and its student wing's lumpenism in Presidency College, Aliah University and Vishvabharati University has been fought back by PDSF and other revolutionary organisations.

The first state conference of **Karnataka Vidyarthi Sangathane (K.V.S.)** was successfully held in Ganga-vati, Karnataka on 27 September. The newly elected secretariat includes: Com. Sarovar (President), Com. Durgesh (Secretary), Com. Bhuvan (Social Media Secretary), Com. Gurubasava (Cultural Committee Secretary) and Com. Santosh (Treasurer).



Punjab Students Union (P.S.U.) remembered the martyrs of the Regal Cinema Police Firing on the 50th anniversary of the Moga student uprising in a large gathering of student-youth on 8 October. Students spoke against fascist policies of the Union government, unemployment in Punjab, the anti-student NEP, attacks on federalism and demanded release of all political prisoners. PSU has led several successful agitations in government state colleges recently.



The **All India Revolutionary Students Organisation (A.I.R.S.O.)** held a public meeting in Rajasthan University and actively participated in protests in Jaipur against the judicial remission given to 11 gangrape convicts in the Gujarat 2002 Bilkis Bano case.



On 29 June, **Bhagat Singh Chhatra Yuva Sangathan (B.S.C.Y.S.)** joined student-youth organisations marching against Agnipath contract soldiers scheme. They were stopped by armed police on the way to the Patna Vidhan Sabha, exposing the role of the Bihar government's violence in flaring up protests elsewhere.

Progressive Democratic Students Union (P.D.S.U.) organised state-level political education classes in Suryapet, Telangana on 25-26 July. Discussions focussed on anti-student NEP and the anti-people neoliberal policies of KCR-led Telangana government and Modi-led Union government. The role of the revolutionary students' movement in winning pro-people policies was emphasised.



On 1 October, **Punjab Students Union (Lalkaar)** rallied students in Punjabi University, Patiala against drinking water shortage in hostels. The VC was forced to admit to administrative negligence and assured that action will be taken. Apart from raising issues in various schools and colleges, comrades have also built student struggles in Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Inclusion in elite liberal arts colleges

The institutional murder of Rohith Vemula in HCU sparked discussions nationwide on the exclusionary nature of public higher education. But a new story emerges outside government-funded universities. MHRD data shows that 78% Indian colleges were already privately-owned, as of 2015-16. Privatization always hits the marginalised hardest. Instead of Constitutionally-mandated reservations, a new language of 'diversity' and 'inclusion' is being propagated in private and aided universities. This updated edition of the Manusmriti deserve ruthless exposure.

• 'Including' women in the sciences •

Only nine out of a hundred IITians were women in 2017. The experience of 'including' women in IITs shows that the terms on which parity is attained are significant. IITs have a long history of resisting reservations, on grounds of preserving 'merit'. Seats were reserved for SC/ST candidates only in 1972 and for OBC in 2006, leading to a situation where almost half of all students now come from marginalised groups while, as per RTI replies in 2021, 95% faculty come from upper castes. This has led to a unique language of 'inclusion' and meritocracy being promoted on campus, which affects gender dimensions as well.

Since 2020, IITs reserved 20% 'supernumerary' seats for women, over and above existing capacity. Several MNCs have also adopted women and queer inclusive policies to remarket themselves in the face of attacks from the women's liberation movement. However, women students in IIT report that they feel like they have to work 'extra hard' to prove that they deserve to be in the classroom now. Studies show that, on average, women students in IIT are also from economically better-off families than their male counterparts—class distinctions also take on sexist forms. Branches like Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering, which have better career prospects, are seen as 'hard sciences' and tend to have lower gender ratios due to a gendered mis-association with physical labour compared to, for example, the 'softer' biosciences. Moreover, women who can afford private engineering colleges have even found that, paradoxically, they have greater choice of streams and class provides some cushioning from these sexist pressures. However, be it JEE tuition costs or fees in IITs or private colleges, such technical courses are beyond reach for the majority of women. The story of gender inclusion in IIT shows how the 'merit' - market nexus in education operates today.

• 'Diversity' in APU, Ashoka •

The top-tier of the emerging private higher education ecosystem is giving rise to different forms of discrimination. These institutes have been built on heavily subsidised land with tax concessions, such as the Special Education Zones recommended by NEP 2020, with the aim of gradually replacing the few premier public-funded central universities functioning today. Liberal arts universities like Ashoka in Sonapat, Haryana and Azim Premji University near Bangalore seek to provide an 'Ivy League' education to the Indian elite, charging upward of ₹11 lakhs per year at the UG level for the full experience. Diversity is a heavily-publicised affair in their prospectus documents. This takes in the form of sliding-scale fee waivers and stipends offered to 'needy' students on a discretionary basis.

The dehumanisation faced by students taken in through such 'diversity quotas' is different from what we have seen in public universities and deserves attention. This distinction is widely-reported across campuses, whether well-meaning or otherwise. It is institutionalised in APU, where students with at least three years of 'work experience' receive a 50% fee waiver and need-based stipends. In most cases, the elaborate admission process itself is beyond reach for students from marginalised backgrounds and a handful of Ambedkarite NGOs assist several students who reach APU through the 'work experience route'—an unofficial name for their diversity quotas. However, once inside, the classroom learning environment is alienating and divided. Students on such scholarships are dependent entirely on the faculty's discretion for additional attention, remedial classes, writing training etc. to survive alongside their better-off counterparts. A PG student in APU, describing his experience of studying under such a fee waiver scheme, said, "I feel like a circus animal in class. Everyone listens to me with 'extra-sensitivity' at all times, I also play the part. I have been brought in to speak of my experiences and illustrate the reality of caste and class for my more privileged classmates." It is not for the benefit of those who make it through such exceptional waivers, rather it is for their paying peers to get a more 'holistic' education.

Do not bless us with this weaponized diversity!
We do not want to be 'included' in your oppressive machine. Our struggle is against oppression itself.

लोक संस्कृति बनाम जनवादी संस्कृति

मानव इतिहास के प्रगति के साथ विकसित 'लोक संस्कृति' में रोज़मर्रा के ज़िन्दगी के गति की प्रतिच्छाया ढूँढ पाना वाज़िब है। भाषा, शैली, आचरण, रीति-रिवाज़ और वेश-भूषा हमारे सामाजिक ढाँचे को बनाये रखने के ज़रूरतों के हिसाब से कई बदलावों से गुज़रते हैं। इतिहासकार पाते हैं की अफ्रीका से अमेरिका लाये गए नीग्रो गुलामों ने मालिकों के मौजूदगी में एक-दूसरे से बातचीत करने के लिए ऐसे बोली को ईजाद किया जो ना अंग्रेजी और ना ही किसी एक अफ्रीकी भाषा से पूरी तरह मिलती हो। उसी प्रकार, असम और दार्जीलिंग के बागानों में चाय पत्ता तोड़ने वक्त महिलाएं कदम-से-कदम मिलाकर अपने गीत गाती हैं तो कृषि से जुड़े समुदाय वैशाखी, ओणम और बिहू जैसे त्योहार मनाते आये हैं। यह हमारी विरासत है और इन्हीं में श्रम, उत्पादन और समाज के विभाजन के सबूत छिपे हुए हैं।

यह भी सच है की इस लोक संस्कृति पर वैश्विक पूंजीवादी व्यवस्था निरंतर वार करती रहती है। विविधता को खत्म करना, हर संस्कृति, हर पद्धति के विशिष्टता को मिटाना 'मास प्रोडक्शन' के दौर की ज़रूरत है। ऐसे समय में लोक संस्कृति को बचाना एवं उसके उत्थान पर ज़ोर देने की ज़रूरत है। इस परिवर्तनकामी परियोजना में जुड़े साथियों के लिए

काँ. निलेश पराग (देवास, मध्य प्रदेश) के कुछ सवाल।

लोकगीत, लोक जीवन के दर्पण होते हैं। किसी भी लोक संस्कृति को समझना है तो उसके लोकगीतों को सुनना चाहिए, चूँकि यह लोक संस्कृति है तो सिर्फ मौखिक रूप में ही उपस्थित रहती है। छत्तीसगढ़ के लोक जीवन में पंडवानी लोकगीत गाया जाता है जो महाभारत के कई अतार्किक पहलूओं का महिमामंडन करता है, जैसे उदाहरण के लिए: तीर से पुल बना देना, मृत बच्चे को शक्तियों द्वारा जीवित कर देना और ऐसे कई अनेक। कुछ अन्य लोकगीतों में कहा गया है: 'चमके माथे ऊपर चंदा, गले में नाग भुजंगा जिनके सर पर बह रही गंगा।' ऐसे लोकगीत समाज को एक काल्पनिक, अतार्किक और अंधविश्वास वाली दुनिया से जोड़ते हैं। कुछ वैवाहिक लोकगीतों में महिला-विरोधी कृत्यों का जश्र मनाया जाता है, जैसे एक गीत के शब्द इस तरह हैं:

रामा लखन चारो भैया, लखन चारो भैया
दूल्हा बने भगवान, बिटिया पराए घर की हो गई
लेलो कन्यादान, बिटिया पराए घर की हो गई।
सखियां गाए मंगल गान, बिटिया पराए घर की हो गई।

पहली बात तो लड़की कोई दान देने की वस्तु नहीं है दुसरी बात लड़की पराए घर की हो गई तो सखियां मंगल गान क्यों कर रही है? क्या वह परिवार पर बोझ है? माता-पिता के घर जन्म लड़के-लड़की दोनो लेते हैं। लड़का अपने घर का रहता है और लड़की उन्ही माता-पिता द्वारा पैदा हुई लेकिन वो पराए घर की क्यों? देश के लगभग सभी लोक संस्कृतियों में सिर्फ महिलाओं की वेशभूषा ही जटिल रूप में बुनी गई जिसमें वे मर्दों की तुलना में

कम सहज रह पाएं, ऐसा क्यों? इसके अलावा कई लोकगीतों में देवी-देवताओं को खुश करने के लिए व्रत, पूजा-पाठ व धार्मिक अनुष्ठान का बखान मिलता है, साथ ही संतान प्राप्ति के लिए भी देवी देवताओं को रिझाने की परंपरा है। जैसे बिहार समेत देश के कई क्षेत्रों में छठ लोकपर्व मनाया जाता है जिसमें महिलाओं के द्वारा मनोईच्छा की पूर्ति हेतु व्रत रखा जाता है, जिसका जिक्र इसके 'पहिले पहल हम कैली छठी मैया व्रत तोहार' जैसे लोकगीतों में भी मिलता है।

लोक जीवन में उपस्थित विभिन्न धर्मों और समाज में बढ़ती विषमताओं और अंधविश्वास को समाप्त करने के लिए निर्गुण भक्ति धारा के के ज्ञानमार्गी और प्रेममार्गी कवियों का उदय हुआ। जिनमें कबीर, रैदास, मीरा, बाबा फरीद, दादु दयाल, जायसी, रहीम जैसे कवि हुए। लोक जीवन में बढ़ते शोषण और असमानताओं के बीच निर्गुण भक्ति धारा ने चेतना स्त्रोत का काम किया। धीरे-धीरे लोक जीवन में निर्गुण भक्ति धारा के पद और दौहे गाने का प्रचलन बढ़ा। निर्गुण शैली के गीतों का महत्व इसलिए भी अधिक है क्योंकि स्वयं शोषित वर्ग ने छूआछूत, भेदभाव और जातिवाद के खिलाफ अपने ही वर्ग को सशक्त और जागरूक करने के लिए संगीत द्वारा अपनी आवाज को बुलंद किया। आज भी लोक जीवन में निर्गुण शैली उसी उद्देश्य के साथ मुख्यतः दलित, पिछड़े व आदिवासियों के द्वारा गाई जाती है। आगे जाकर निर्गुण लोक संस्कृति कुछ हद तक भारतीय अभिजात संस्कृति में भी प्रचलित हुई।

निर्गुण शैली में सबसे ऊपर नाम आता है कबीर का। कबीर अपने युग से आज तक के सबसे महान और सबसे क्रांतिकारी कवियों-समाज सुधारकों में से एक हैं, जिन्होंने पाखंडवाद, सामाजिक कुरीतियों, छुआछूत व बाह्य आडंबरों पर करारी चोट पहुंचाई। उन्होंने अपने समय के धार्मिक कट्टरपंथियों, और धर्म के बीच भेद पैदा करने वालों के खिलाफ भी बेबाक लेखनी चलाई जो आज के संदर्भ में भी प्रासंगिक हैं। उन्होंने लिखा कि:

**मूंड मुड़ाए हरि मिले, सब कोइ लेय मुड़ाय।
बार बार के मूंडते, भेड़ न बैकुण्ठ जाय।।**

इसका भाव यह है कि माला जपना, व्रत करना, गेरुआ वस्त्र धारण करना, तिलक लगाना, और नाना प्रकार के पाखंडों से ईश्वर की प्राप्ति संभव नहीं है। अगर सिर के बाल मुंडाने से ईश्वर मिलता तो भेड़ कबके बैकुण्ठ चले जाते। उन्होंने अपने समय के धार्मिक कट्टरपंथियों और धर्म के बीच भेद पैदा करने वालों के खिलाफ भी बेबाक लेखनी चलाई, जो आज के परिपेक्ष्य में भी प्रासंगिक है, जैसे:

**हिन्दू कहें मोहि राम पियारा, तुर्क (मुसलमान) कहें रहमाना
आपस में दोउ लड़ी-लड़ी मुए, मरम न कोउ जाना।।**

यानि, दोनो धर्मों के लोग अपने धर्म को बड़ा बताने में, और अपने धर्म की श्रेष्ठता साबित करने में खुब लड़े, धार्मिक हत्याएँ की मगर दोनों ही ईश्वर के मर्म को, सार को समझ नहीं पाए।

वहीं कबीर ने छुआछूत और जात-पात के खिलाफ भी आवाज उठाई। इसी संदर्भ में उनका एक दोहा इस प्रकार है:

**जो तू ब्राह्मण, ब्राह्मणी का जाया
आन बाट काहे नहीं आया।**

इसमें कबीर का भाव है कि, जो लोग अपने जन्म के आधार पर ही बड़े होने का दावा करते हैं, अपनी जाति के नाम पर अभिमान करते हैं, वे भी उसी रास्ते से पैदा हुए हैं जहाँ से बाकि सब, तो फिर ये ऊंच-नीच, जात-पात का भेद क्यों?

इसी क्रम में रैदास भी बहुत प्रासंगिक हैं, जिन्होंने अपने दर्शन में 'बेगमपुरा' संकल्पना की बात पर जोर दिया। बेगमपुरा एक ऐसा आदर्शवादी देश है जहाँ कोई जात-पात, ऊंच-नीच, चिंता-भय और कोई उलझन नहीं हैं। उस देश में समानता और प्रेम के अलावा कुछ भी नहीं। रैदास के कई पद निर्गुण लोक संस्कृति का अभिन्न अंग हो गए, जिसे निर्गुण लोक शैली में ही गाया जाने लगा। रैदास ने अपने एक पद में धार्मिक पवित्र स्थलों के सम्बन्ध में कहा कि:

**का मथुरा, का द्वारका अरु का कासी हरिद्वार,
रैदास खोजा दिल अपना, तउ मिलिया दिलदार।**

यानि मथुरा, द्वारका, कासी या धार्मिक स्थलों पर भटकने से सत्य

की प्राप्ति नहीं होगी, बल्कि सत्य मंदिर-मस्जिदों की बजाय स्वयं के अंतर्मन या दिल में है। आज के परिपेक्ष्य में बात करें तो क्या हम रैदास के बेगमपुरा देश में पहुँच चुके हैं या नहीं? वह लड़ाई जो निर्गुण धारा के कवियों और समाज सुधारकों ने जिस लक्ष्य की प्राप्ति के लिए शुरू किया था, क्या वह लक्ष्य प्राप्त करने में हम सफल रहे? या नहीं? मुझे लगता है नहीं, अभी बहुत कठिन है इंगर पनघट की।

दुसरा सवाल, क्या हमें पुरी लोक संस्कृति को बचाने की या जीवित रखने की जरूरत है? मुझे लगता है जिस लोक संस्कृति में जात-पात का भेद है, असमानता व हिंसा है, अन्विश्वास है या जिसमें ब्राह्मणवादी विचारों का महिमामंडित किया गया है उन तमाम विचारधाराओं पर गहरा आघात कर उन्हें समाप्त कर देने की आवश्यकता है। बेशक लोक संस्कृति में बहुत सी चीजों को संभालने की जरूरत है जैसे उसकी लोक कलाएँ, वसंत और ऋतु गीत, लोक बोलियाँ, लोक नृत्य और अंततः निर्गुण शैली के वे गीत जो तार्किक भी है और वैज्ञानिक भी, ये लोकगीत मानवीय भेदभाओं को दूर कर मधुर मानवीय संबंध स्थापित करने में अहम भूमिका निभाते हैं।

अतः लोक संस्कृति में से आवश्यक तत्वों को विवेक से चुन कर, छान कर अमल में लाने की जरूरत है। जिस प्रकार किसी भी अभिजात या चालित संस्कृति को निर्विरोध स्वीकार नहीं किया जा सकता, उसी प्रकार लोक संस्कृति के अवगुणों को सेनीटाइज किए बगैर स्वीकार नहीं किया जाना चाहिए। ठीक उसी प्रकार जिस प्रकार माता सावित्री बाई, ज्योतिबा और बाबा साहब ने निर्गुण लोक संस्कृति से प्रेरणा लेकर बहुजनों और शोषितों का मार्ग प्रशस्त किया। जिस दिन हम निर्गुण लोक साहित्य के लक्ष्य को प्राप्त कर लेंगे उस दिन तुम भी कबीर, मैं भी कबीर और हम सब कबीर हो जाएंगे।



Film Review

RRR

Martin Scorsese, reflecting on superhero blockbusters, had said, “Marvel movies are closer to theme parks than cinema.” According to him, such movies, with their larger-than-life ensemble of superheroes create a world where nothing is at risk. The world of *RRR*, a Rajamouli creation, evokes a similar sentiment. From a police officer braving a furious mob and a tribal warrior trapping a tiger to both of them coming together to take down the mighty British Empire, every scene becomes a well-choreographed spectacle and commentary on India’s Independence struggle. Behind this fast-paced thriller is an attempt to place the legendary figures of Alluri Sitarama Raju (played by Ram Charan) and Komaram Bheem (Rama Rao) within the saffron pantheon. The film blends episodes of anti-colonial struggle with the mythical semantics of Indian epics, especially Ramayana, with such grace that it becomes impossible to sift fact from fiction.

Hindutva Fascists have taken movies seriously. Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan*, which consciously incorporated RSS talking points on Ram’s earthly birthplace, set new records for Doordarshan in 1987. BJP appointed filmmaker Pahlaj Nilhani as chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) who brought out strict film certification guidelines to ‘capture the Indian ethos’. Thereafter, in 2017, TV actor and BJP member Gajendra Singh Chauhan was chosen to head FTII. Films remotely critical of the government or starring Muslim actors have faced #Boycott campaigns. Suraj Pal Amu, who offered a bounty of Rs. 10 crores for beheading *Padmavat* actor Deepika Padukone has been appointed the BJP’s Haryana spokesperson. Films like *Uri*, promoting a masculinist nationalism, or *The Kashmir Files*, an overt propaganda project demonising Muslims have enjoyed State patronage. However, each of these endeavours were blatant about their objective and limited in their reach and artistic content.

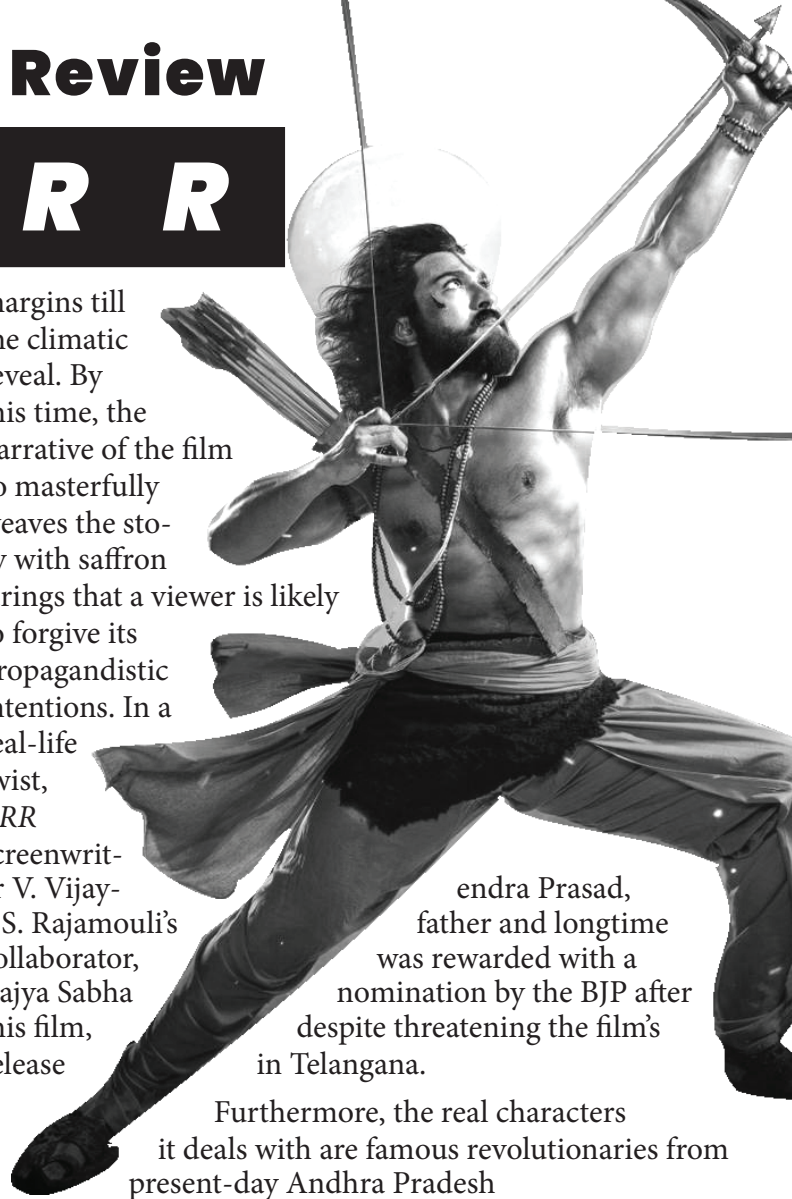
Unlike those experiments, *RRR* never limits its audience. Instead of dividing the crowd, the first half largely dwells on a fictionalised crossing of paths of two real revolutionaries who made veritable contributions to the Indian freedom struggle. Moments of Hindu-Muslim unity crop up and so do instances where kind hearted relatives of the evil Governor Scott seem to sympathise with the Indian cause. The latter half reveals that Alluri Sitarama Raju harbours a secret mission to steal a consignment of guns to fuel the revolutionary uprising against the Britishers. [Hindutva spoilers ahead:] In the grand finale battle, Sitarama Raju’s character resuscitates in the avatar of Lord Ram—very close in resemblance to Ramanand Sagar’s popular Hindutva depiction—to save the day. Aiming to reach a wider audience the filmmaker keeps such theatrics in the

margins till the climatic reveal. By this time, the narrative of the film so masterfully weaves the story with saffron strings that a viewer is likely to forgive its propagandistic intentions. In a real-life twist, *RRR* screenwriter V. Vijay-S.S. Rajamouli’s collaborator, Rajya Sabha this film, release

endra Prasad, father and longtime was rewarded with a nomination by the BJP after despite threatening the film’s in Telangana.

Furthermore, the real characters it deals with are famous revolutionaries from present-day Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Sitarama Raju led the Rampa Rebellion, in 1922, against colonial forest-grabbing laws and Komaram Bheem organised the Gonds with the famous call of ‘*Jal, Jangal, Zameen*’. When the film alludes to this war cry in the end, it comes as a patronising reference to Bheem seeking *shiksha* from Raju, by now in the familiar avatar of Ram, who blesses his Adivasi disciple by writing this slogan for the first time. Bheem’s own agency as well as his real-life association with Communist ideas is conveniently erased. *RRR* masterfully co-opts our radical history and repackages it with Hindutva iconography. In doing so, the Adivasi warrior Komaram Bheem gets subsumed under Alluri Sitarama Raju, a well-educated Kshatriya. He is depicted in the form of Hanuman, promising to bring together Ram and Sita, Alluri Sitarama’s fictionalised wife, in a cameo by Alia Bhatt.

Saffronisation of progressive figures, as the Sangh brigade continues attempting with Babasaheb Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh, finds its fullest expression in *RRR*. It retells the story of India’s past within the parameters set by the Hindutva project, imagining a new Hindu-nationalist basis for unity. We must expose this unity that wants to wipe out the secular, anti-imperialist heritage of our sub-continent.



Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison

— Nâzım Hikmet

If instead of being hanged by the neck
you're thrown inside
for not giving up hope
in the world, your country, and people,
if you do ten or fifteen years
apart from the time you have left,
you won't say,

“Better I had swung from the end of a rope
like a flag” —

you'll put your foot down and live.

It may not be a pleasure exactly,
but it's your solemn duty
to live one more day
to spite the enemy.

Part of you may live alone inside,
like a stone at the bottom of a well.

But the other part
must be so caught up
in the flurry of the world
that you shiver there inside
when outside, at forty days' distance, a leaf
moves.

To wait for letters inside,
to sing sad songs,
or to lie awake all night staring at the ceiling
is sweet but dangerous.

Look at your face from shave to shave,
forget your age,

watch out for lice
and for spring nights,
and always remember
to eat every last piece of bread—
also, don't forget to laugh heartily.

And who knows,
the woman you love may stop loving you.

Don't say it's no big thing:
it's like the snapping of a green branch
to the man inside.

To think of roses and gardens inside is bad,
to think of seas and mountains is good.

Read and write without rest,
and I also advise weaving
and making mirrors.

I mean, it's not that you can't pass
ten or fifteen years inside
and more—

you can,
as long as the jewel
on the left side of your chest doesn't lose
its luster!

Nâzım Hikmet (1902 - 1963) was a Turkish poet and writer. He spent 15 years in prison for his association with the Communist Party of Turkey. His last years were spent in exile in the USSR.

Free all political prisoners!

Repeal UAPA, AFSPA, NSA

and all draconian laws!

Our new website is now online
collective-india.com

Find all our previous publications and
web exclusives in one place