



## Looking back: ICWI actions in May 2021

Our **Dalit History month** events have been recorded:

- 1) Hathras Updates and Unique Challenges Facing Dalit Leadership, available [here](#).
- 2) Navayan Mahajalsa: Celebration of Dalit History Month and Ambedkar available [here](#).
- 3) Several members of the Anticaste workgroup testified in and participated in the Santa Clara County Human Rights Commission's hearing on including caste as a protected category in anti-discrimination measures. Santa Clara County is the seat of CISCO, the company implicated in the landmark case on discrimination on the basis of caste. Watch the 7.5 plus hour hearing (!) [here](#).

ICWI continues our work on keeping the [Bhima-Koregaon case](#) alive in public memory

- 1) Our members successfully helped publicize the second Arsenel report that demolished the main 'evidence' put forth by the Indian state against the Bhima-Koregaon 16, and held a Congressional briefing. The workgroup also completed their Congressional Briefing on the case on April 22. [See flyer here](#). See coverage of the briefing in Scroll [here](#). The briefing was successful and has led to multiple meetings with congressional offices, which we are following up on.

- 2) ICWI members also hosted a panel in collaboration with International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India (InSAF) titled Ideas Behind Bars: The Bhima-Koregaon Case of Imprisoned Civic Activists and India's Autocratic Turn can be viewed [here](#).
- 3) The event cosponsored by ICWI titled Protecting the Heart and Soul of the Constitution featuring Rama Teltumbde, Banajyotsna Lahiri, and Rajmohan Gandhi can be viewed [here](#).

We continue to **build solidarity and collaborations**

- 1) ICWI was listed as a partner organization for the EU India People's Summit (website [here](#)). ICWI helped out with some background support and also provided a panelist for their conversation on labor.
- 2) ICWI has extended its support to our allies Indian American Muslim Council, Hindus for Human Rights, and other organizations and individuals threatened by the Hindu American Foundation with a lawsuit for an article in the Al Jazeera on COVID relief going to Hindutva groups. Al Jazeera has refused to take down the article and we are prepared to fight back. See more details on Twitter [here](#).
- 3) ICWI has co-signed multiple

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9. Red Salute Com. Mythili Sivaraman!
10. Lakshadweep under saffron assault

petitions to the Biden administration to urgently provide aid and release supplies, including one led by Friends of India (Texas) and Global Indian Progressive Alliance that you can see [here](#), and another led by South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT).

### India Civil Watch International

[Newswire Archives](#)

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Twitter: [@indiacivilwatch](#)



# Doing “Sewa” for the Sangh: COVID19 Relief Funds and Sewa International

In April 2021, two investigative articles published in Al Jazeera showed how five organizations linked to the RSS and the Sangh Parivar had received Federal funds to the tune of USD 833,000 for COVID19 relief in India, and called for a [Federal probe](#) by the Small Business Administration into these organizations. The five organizations are: Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, Infinity Foundation, Sewa International and Hindu American Foundation (HAF). In retaliation, Hindu American Foundation (HAF), one of the five named above, filed a [libel suit](#) and cease and desist orders against several representatives of Hindu, Muslim and Christian organizations in the U.S., accusing them of libel and defamation. This attempt by the HAF to silence its critics is not new and is, in keeping with its war strategy, cowardly. When it cannot face the facts, it reaches into its deep pockets to sue and cry foul. More than 300 writers, academics, and scholars have condemned HAF’s attempt to silence its critics. See [here](#) for signing the petition

All this makes it important for us to remind readers of a now classic report from 2002 titled “[The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva](#)” (or FxH report for short) that was put out by civil society collectives who had monitored Hindutva organizations in the US and UK for many years. One of the organizations named in the Al Jazeera report is Sewa International which received USD 150,621 for COVID19 relief. The FxH report has many interesting things to inform us about Sewa International - all of which point to the umbilical cord that ties Sewa International to the RSS (and indeed, each of the

fascist five above to the RSS). Interestingly, no one today denies the connections between the RSS and the BJP but this used to be a standard Sanghi rhetoric back in the days. Here are a few examples from the report which is chockfull of citations from the Sangh Parivar organizational websites. Not surprisingly, many of the websites from that report have been taken down by the internet army of the Sangh or buried, but not buried well enough. Here are some choice treats from the FxH [report](#):

- 1) The official history of the [RSS itself proudly claims](#) to have set up Sewa International.
- 2) That [Sewa International was set up by the RSS](#) as reported faithfully by the Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh (HSS).
- 3) That the multi-millionaire Ramesh Bhutada is both the national Vice President of the HSS and Chairperson of the [Sewa International Board](#).
- 4) That the [ultimate objective of the sewakarya](#) (or service work) done by Sewa International is ‘Hindu Sangathan’ (quoting the words of RSS General Secretary H.V.Sheshadri)
- 5) That many times [the final result of Sewa International’s work](#) is an RSS shakha (cell)

## 2.5. Organization Structure of the Sangh Parivaar

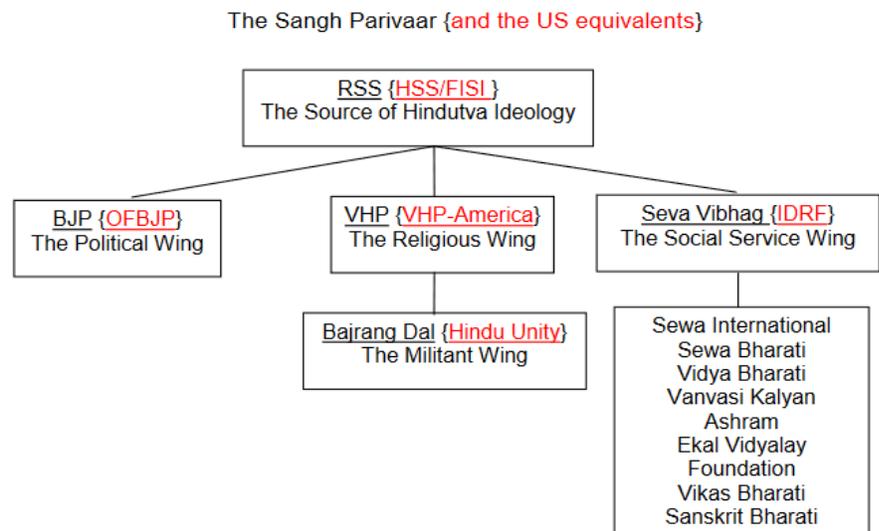


Figure 1 – Organization Chart of the Sangh Parivar

It is quite futile to argue reason and fact with the HAF or its associates. Our task here has simply been to remind readers of the lineage of Sewa International as a key member of the Sangh Parivar. Donating to organizations that have this dubious distinction only serves to promote hatred and discrimination in relief work during the pandemic, thus exacerbating and perpetuating an anti-democratic practices and policies, and Hindu supremacist and casteist ideologies that the Sangh represents.

ON THE NEXT PAGE WE LIST SOME ORGANIZATIONS YOU MAY CONSIDER DONATING TO!

**PLEASE DONATE TO THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS FOR COVID RELIEF IN INDIA:**

[Ambedkar Association of North America](#)

[Save Indian Trans ALLINDIA Lives \(#SITAL\) COVID-19 Relief](#)

[200 Million Artisans](#)

[1 Billion Literates](#)

[Mazdoor Pahal Workers' Initiative \(supporting migrant workers\)](#)

[Doctors for You \(India's largest doctors network for Pandemic response\)](#)

[Pinkishe Foundation](#)

[Vibha \(works with children\)](#)

[Oxygen for India - an initiative undertaken by a team of doctors](#)

[Right Walk Foundation](#)

[Mahila Housing Sewa Trust](#)

[Khaana Chaahiye \(Mumbai based effort\)](#)

[Association for India's Development \(AID\)](#)

[El Shaddai Trust \(provides cooked meals to the needy\)](#)

[PINT \(Network for Plasma donations for COVID patients\)](#)

[SEEDS \(Access to Food and Essentials\)](#)

[IDEA \(Initiative for Development and Education for All\)](#)

[Bharath Abhyudaya Seva Samithi \(BASS\)](#)

[SPHOORTI Foundation](#)

[Women for Women Foundation \(Tamil Nadu\)](#)

[SAVE Life Foundation \(Oxygen and life-saving equipment, Delhi\)](#)

**Readings, analysis, reflection**

[Just How Big Could India's True Covid Toll Be?](#)

[India's COVID-19 Crisis Is Spiraling Out of Control. It Didn't Have to Be This Way](#)

[From Confidence to Chaos: India's Journey to Its Coronavirus Crisis](#)

[Our Bodies As Evidence](#)

# This Month in History

June is the month which saw Emergency being declared in India, in 1975. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced it in the early hours of the 26th (President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed had signed the papers late the night before) and the news came as an absolute shock to an unsuspecting nation.

Ostensibly, the Emergency was declared necessary because of a 'threat' to the country. According to the Prime Minister, the country faced "internal disturbances" and it was thus necessary to control it. Therefore, for the entire duration of the 21-month long Emergency, citizens had their constitutional rights suspended along with their freedom of speech. Activists, journalists and political critics of the government found themselves arrested and jailed, the free press was muzzled, and other draconian measures put in place to safeguard the so-called national interest.

Political issues had been troubling the central government since 1973. A students' protest, against high college fees, in Gujarat had devolved into the NavNirman movement against the chief minister of the state, and by 1974, the Government had been forced to impose a President's rule in that state, with elections slated to be held in June of the following year. In 1974, the call by socialist leader George Fernandes for a railways' strike had led to a large-scale participation by railway employees and had rattled the government into retribution through arrests and job sackings. And in Bihar, another movement led by a charismatic leader had begun to put pressure on the government.

Officially, three main reasons were given as justification for the Emergency. The popular movement launched in Bihar by Jayaprakash Narayan (or JP as he was known) was held to be dangerous to India's stability; there was of course the danger of India's enemies in foreign lands taking advantage of the situation to try and destabilize the country; and lastly, economic reforms were required to lift the country to prosperity and help the poor.



Cartoon by Satish Acharya. Via Twitter.

It is interesting that the main event which seemed to have triggered the Emergency didn't find mention in the list of official reasons. This was the High Court judgement against Mrs. Gandhi, and in favour of her political rival, in the constituency of Rae Bareilly. The socialist leader Raj Narain had filed a petition, after the elections in 1971, that Mrs. Gandhi had won through unfair and illegal means. On 12th June 1975, Justice Sinha of the Allahabad High Court upheld his plea and declared her election victory null and void. She was given 20 days to appeal to the Supreme Court, which issued a stay order on the 24th June with some provisions. The earlier verdict intensified calls for her resignation. A day after the Supreme court ruling, an ordinance was drafted and signed by the President. India was now under Emergency rule for the longest period in its history.

# Beginning of an End?

ICWI

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine that started in 1948 continues till today. Israel continues to commit crimes against humanity with impunity. Israeli army continues its killing spree in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. While the UN and the advocates of international law still continue to push for a 2-State solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, some very important and mainstream human rights groups have taken a radical turn in their perspective.

concluded in its report published earlier this year that Israel is "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid". Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) binary seems to have evaporated all of a sudden. The biggest human rights organization in the world the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its report published last month clearly states that

The report that investigates the treatment by this single ruling authority of Palestinians concludes "that Israel officials have committed the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution". The emphasis in the report is a call on Israel for ending the system of apartheid and persecution and not the usual rhetoric urging for the pursuit of a 2-State solution.

In a webinar held in May 2020, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had said that Israel has 'destroyed the 2-State solution'. It is ironic that exactly one year later HRW has this recommendation for the PLO: "Adopt an advocacy strategy centred on the immediate attainment of the full human rights of Palestinians, rather than one that puts attainment of human rights in favour of a particular political outcome". In other words, the recommendation is to fight to dismantle apartheid à la South Africa.

The ongoing courageous resistance of the Palestinian people in the face of Israeli oppression has been and continues to be a source of inspiration to all people struggling against colonialism, occupation and racism across the globe. Their struggle has been able to build a huge international solidarity movement. There is lots for us to learn from this struggle. It is an inspiration for all of us and the people of India in their fight against the forces of Hindutva fascism.

**Support the Palestinian Struggle!**

Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions  
<https://bdsmovement.net/>



**We will return.** By Palestinian Artist Imad Abu Shtayyah

They no longer see the State of Israel as an entity distinct from the territories it occupied in 1967. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem

"A single authority, the Israeli government, rules primarily over the area between the Jordan river and Mediterranean Sea".

# Spotlight: South Asia Solidarity Group

By Rana Khan

## Organization

South Asia Solidarity Group (SASG) is an anti-imperialist, anti-racist organization based in Britain. It is committed to supporting, publicizing, and building solidarity with people's struggles for justice and democracy and against fascism and corporate power, gender and caste based oppression, in the countries of South Asia

## Details & Outreach

We are involved in developing links between these movements and similar struggles in Britain. Our activities and analysis make the links between the global, US-led, plunder of the people and resources of South Asia, India's current neoliberal Hindu-supremacist fascist regime and the ruthless policies of 'austerity' and intense racism and Islamophobia of the British state. We aim to develop and project an understanding of the resistance to these processes taking place in South Asia, Britain, and globally from a revolutionary left perspective.

SASG has always been organized as a collective without a hierarchical leadership structure. This is also why there are no names of members and the number of people in the collective is small, ranging from 10 to 15. Its reach on social media is currently between 22,000 and 23,000. This includes Facebook, Instagram, You Tube and Twitter @SAsiaSolidarity.

SASG does not ask people for membership since it believes in inclusion and would not want to exclude those who may prefer not to pay. It also does not accept funds from any government or NGO or any political party.



SASG was set up in the mid-1980s by a group of South Asian anti-racist activists in the UK who felt that it was increasingly necessary to engage with the growing neoliberal, repressive and communal policies in South Asia - particularly India and Sri Lanka.

## Campaigns

SASG has consistently protested against, and exposed Hindutva fascism from the mid-1990s on. In more recent times its largest protest was a march against the CAA on the eve of India's Republic Day in 2020. It brought together Indian community organizations and students in the UK and was attended by some 3000 people. It has also organized public meetings some in the House of Commons and staged cultural events, and street theater.

After lockdown, only a few protests have been organized, but online activities have increased. It held two online events including cultural events as fundraisers for the migrant workers and for the victims of the Amphan cyclone. It has also held some extremely well attended webinars titled for example Resisting Corporate Power and Fascist governments - bringing together speakers from India, the US, Bolivia and the UK; Women Resisting Fascism in India and From the Fields to the Frontlines Women in the Farmers' Protests in India. It also launched a report on one year after the revocation of Article 370 by the Kashmir Reading Room, and these are available on its You Tube channel.



**Links**  
[Website](#)  
[Facebook Page](#)  
[Twitter](#)  
[Instagram](#)  
[YouTube](#)

Each month ICWI will spotlight one progressive South Asian organization active in North America.

# Conversation with Satya Sivaraman

Rana Khan

Interview with Satya Sivaraman, a public health activist and journalist. He has traveled extensively in India and participated in seminars and conferences in Latin America. He is currently based, as he put it, "out of his laptop," and is involved in Covid Response Watch, an initiative hosted by Countercurrents.

**Could you give us a brief background about yourself? Where are you headed now as regards the work that you want to do?**

I used to be a journalist for a decade and a half with several mainstream newspapers and also television till I started working on public health twenty years ago. I still do mostly communication work in the field of health and also occasionally write on politics too for some non—mainstream media.

I am not sure whether I am headed in the right direction but my aim is to make public health a political issue and results in new policies that benefit the well-being of the Indian population in terms of nutrition, safe habitats and occupations and ability to live with dignity.

**As a public health activist in India, do you think there is an inextricable link with politics, especially in the current pandemic? If so, why? Is your task made more difficult by this factor?**

There is nothing above politics and health, which ultimately deals with the well-being of human bodies, is a very political field indeed. The biggest problem in the field of health though is not that it is political but that this fact is very well hidden. There is a great pretence all around that health is a technical subject involving science, medicine, pharmaceutical knowledge etc. and not about the politics of sharing of resources, caste, gender, ecology etc. My role as a public health activist is to expose the political factors

that have resulted in India having one of the most abysmal health systems in the world direction.

**You have written several sharp pieces on the state of affairs (published in countercurrents.com). Have your insightful articles gotten the attention of policy makers? Why is writing so important, especially under the current dispensation which has clamped down heavily on independent thought?**

I don't think any of my articles have made any impact on policy makers, which is one of the simple reasons why I am not in prison today. Writing anything in English, however critical, and that too in the non-mainstream media rarely invites persecution. The reason I write though is to help formulate my own growing and changing ideas on what is happening around me and also to help strengthen and deepen the larger debate in Indian society on social and political problems confronting it. Writing or expressing one's thoughts in any form possible is essential to prove that one is still alive and is the minimum act of resistance everyone should participate in. Though important, it is however inadequate to bring about change, which can come only through actual social and political movements of different kinds.

**Secularism, along with liberalism, has become a much-abused term in today's India. What is your**



**take on the concept of secularism on which India's identity was based as per its constitution? Should we now hold a requiem for it, or is it an ideal still worth fighting for?**

Secularism or liberalism are ideals that emerged over a long period of struggle between the forces of reason, independent thinking, universality of human rights and dignity against obscurantism, authoritarianism and racism/colonialism. They are still very much relevant though under severe attack because the world has turned the clock back to the early twentieth century when fascist ideas and forces emerged to counter the march of the socialist movement.

The Indian constitution itself was born amidst the global victory against fascism. However the mere writing of terms like secularism in a document does not guarantee its practice on the ground. In Indian society fascist forces have taken over power at different levels and it is only through a battle against them through public mobilisation that secularism or liberal democratic values can be established again. Instead of lamenting about the demise of secularism there is a need to work on the organization

And mobilisation of Indian people against fascist, racist and authoritarian forces. It will be a hard battle but nothing good is achieved without taking some pain and inflicting some too.

**What advice would you give diaspora organizations like the ICWI in this fight for human and civil rights? How can organizations abroad be more effective in their solidarity?**

I would first observe that the Indian diaspora still seems to be attached to this concept of the 'nation-state'. So even though based outside the country of origin, there is a tendency to be rooted in the original culture. This amounts to an extended nationalism....in my opinion, Indian diaspora need not be only focused on Indian issues. Having an internationalist outlook is key here. Why not advocate for the local issues, wherever they are based?

The Indian diaspora is well placed to be internationalist, it is by and large an educated, highly- educated community with good communication skills, and present in most 'first-world' countries. I feel that their focus should indeed be on the humanness of human rights, because it seems to me that right now even human rights are too partisan an issue. So the diaspora can help by responding to issues based on relevance to all, not just to the country of origin(in this case, India). I truly feel that it has a role to play in international affairs as much as in Indian affairs, and should speak to the local issues, when living in US or Canada or Britain, and not just be focused on issues back home.

There are nuances too. The diaspora also cannot function with the assumption that it understands India better. It has to be careful in how it views

India. Local perspectives have to be taken into account, and it has to be kept in mind that even local perspectives are not necessarily hundred percent right.

**So what can the diaspora do that is helpful, in what ways can it be effective?**

It can be most effective as a connecting point. It can help in connecting the dots. It can follow the money trail, for instance, it can try to deconstruct the global finance infrastructure from which most inequities flow.

The second way it can be effective is by connecting the Indian population with global struggle movements. There is so much to be learnt from the BLM movement, as well as the many movements in Latin America particularly or struggles in the Western world for social justice. South Asia in general is still very much a feudal society, with distorted priorities. We can't put food on the table for the majority of the people, and yet dream of global superiority. The Brahmanical culture operating in India means policy makers do not have feet on the ground. There is a weak colonial elite(s) which always looks for endorsement from those in the west.

Take my field, for example. There are very few political groups involved in health directly, when there is clear evidence of health being linked to human rights. In Canada for example, there is a movement towards recognizing the social determinants of health, but in India its only the North-East states, as well as Kerala and TamilNadu who are moving towards recognizing health rights of the poor. That is because social hierarchies in these places have been successfully challenged, and

literacy rates are high. In India, we need to learn how to resolve conflicts without war. We need to recognize that the West had religious intolerance of barbaric proportions, but challenges led to a difference. In India, the religious institutions have not faced any sustained challenges.

I feel that organizations like the ICWI can learn from where they are, and make people aware of the importance of strong local organizations. They can help towards better levels of political awareness and political realization and can play a pivotal role across the globe. In short, diaspora organizations have to be careful in not underestimating nor overestimating their India role. As I said earlier, they can be the connecting point towards global movements.

*Satya can be contacted at [sagarnama@gmail.com](mailto:sagarnama@gmail.com), and his Twitter handle is [@satyasagar](https://twitter.com/satyasagar).*

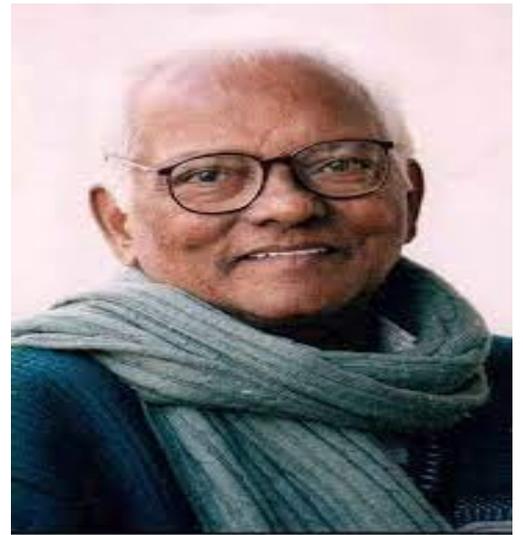


## *Handfuls*

By Sivasagar

I brought the sunrise in handfuls  
Come! Let us share the sun!  
I brought the moon in handfuls  
Come! Let us brighten up the moon with moonlight  
I brought the stormy ocean in handfuls  
Come! Let us decorate the shore with waves  
I brought tears in handfuls  
Come! Let us dig up the smile in those tears  
I brought the sunrise in handfuls  
Come! Let us share the sun!

*(Sivasagar (1931-2012) is the pen name of K.G.Satyamurti, a revolutionary communist leader and an inspiring Dalit fighter).*



## *Art and Change*

By Sadaf Rathod

Sometimes I think  
by writing  
How will I bring any change?

My poems have no melodies of love  
Nor they focus on heart breaks  
My poems are just about everyday life  
A few questions  
That talk about the system.  
I am no Akhtar or Gulzar  
To have my poems be recited by the masses  
Then how will I bring change?

But then again, I think  
if reciting of songs/poems could change the public opinion  
then Ashfaq Bhagat Singh would not have laid their life.

For change,  
You need people who  
understand this system  
and can give wings to new ideas  
a group of people that envision a new society,  
beyond communalism, casteism, nationalism.  
and create that new world,  
we need comradeship like that

If we work together,  
we can carve new roads,  
so bring your courage and talents,  
Change will come along  
when people like us will take initiatives, and use our skills,  
Change will come along  
Change will come along

## *Rising Sun! Love Me*

By Sivasagar

*You are the rising sun  
I am the sunset  
The love between us, a forever*

*My love! The fight for freedom and  
beauty  
brought us together  
Yours is the beauty of struggle  
Mine in the war song for freedom  
The love between us is laden with  
clouds*

*In the dawn  
And in the dusk  
There is only one sun that shines in  
both  
And only he is the banner of our love*

*"The fight that begins for beauty  
Ends with the promise of love  
The fight that begins for freedom  
Remains forever as a blood  
relationship"  
The love between us is the smile of a  
grass flower.*

*Rising Sun!  
I am the sunset  
Love me  
Love me deeply  
Love me with mystery  
Love me  
Love me*

# Remembering Professor Aziz Choudry



Professor Aziz Choudry  
(23 June 1966 - 26 May 2021)

It is with a deep sense of grief that we convey the devastating news of Prof. Aziz Choudry's passing. We are still in a state of shock and trying to comprehend the enormity of this loss. Aziz had many dear friends, comrades, colleagues and family around the world. We know that all are stunned and are trying to process his passing. We are thinking of you all and hold everyone close to our hearts. We ask you to reach out to all who knew him and support each other emotionally in this difficult time.

Aziz arrived from McGill University to join us as a full-time staff member of our Centre in February this year after a number of years as a visiting professor with our Faculty. He enjoyed a longstanding scholarly relation with all of the staff and expressed a profound affinity with our work.

Aziz was the quintessential scholar-activist and was deeply sensitive to injustices wherever they occurred. He made significant global contributions to social movement learning, knowledge production in community organisations, activist archives, immigrant workers' education, anti-racist/anti-colonial education and related fields.

He will also be remembered for his unstinting and selfless devotion to the students he supervised and taught as well as the many academics and movement activists he mentored throughout the world. He was also an untiring international solidarity activist supporting indigenous, Palestinian and anticolonial struggles.

Aziz helped activist work around opposing surveillance and repression, unfair trade, and supported activism around food sovereignty and climate justice. He was a strong advocate of education as a public good and championed the struggle for a decommodified and decolonial academy.

Prof. Choudry wrote prolifically and is the author and co-editor of the following ten books between 2009 and 2020: *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice* (2012); *Activists and the Surveillance State: Learning from Repression* (2019); *Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production* (2010); *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (2015); *Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada* (2016); *Fight Back: Workplace Justice for Immigrants* (2009); *NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects* (2013); *The University and Social Justice: Struggle Across the Globe* (2020); *Just Work? Migrant Workers' Struggle Today* (2016) and *Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements: History's Schools* (2018).

Aziz's praxis and vision for a kinder and humane world will always inspire and remain with us.

To honour his memory, an initial virtual meeting will be held on 5 June, 7:30pm SAST, 6:30pm UK time, 1:30pm Montreal, Canada, 5:30am Christchurch, New Zealand.

Here is the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86266955439?pwd=NFAyMUx3MkIHVGk0TUwrN1hnL0pRdz09>

Meeting ID: 862 6695 5439

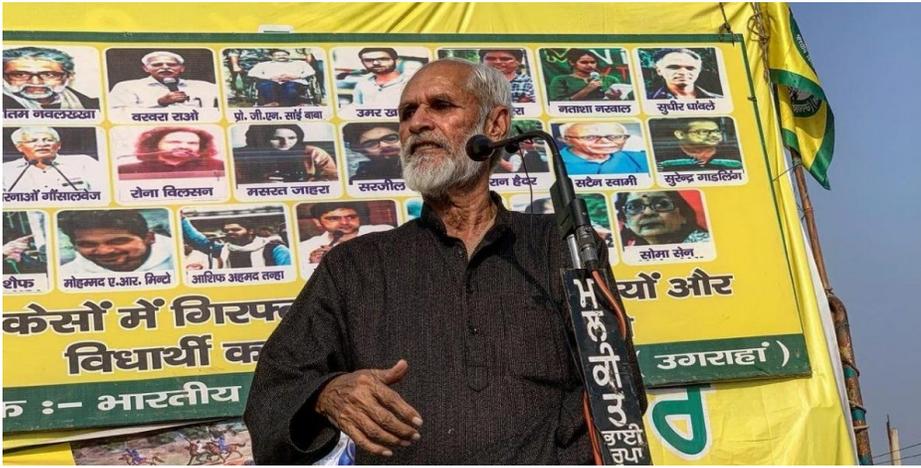
Passcode: 564376

Please feel free to share this announcement with all who knew Prof. Choudry.

Issued by the staff and students of the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) and the SARChI Chair in Community, Adult and Worker Education (CAWE).

# Rest in Power, Comrade Mahavir Narwal!

By Mamatha Kodidela



It was a cold night in November, 2020, when I first watched a video of Mahavir Narwal speaking about his daughter Natasha Narwal. Natasha had been in jail for six months by then. He speaks of happy times, of being so close to her - to know not only the results of her exams but where to find her. He says with twinkling eyes, "Wherever there is suffering, she will be there." And he knows what happens if someone stands up to suffering, especially in these dark times that India is going through. "Jail is nothing to be fearful of. Natasha will be fine" he says, "I have been there". He was in jail for 11 months during emergency for being a student leader. And today, in this undeclared super emergency, his daughter has been there for 12 months. There is no romanticism in going to jail. "I am proud of her. I am very proud of her" he says with a quiver in his voice that reverberated in my heart.

Being an activist and a single mother to a 13 year old daughter, what he spoke was very personal to me. I don't subscribe to the thought that I should not rub my ideas and ideals on my daughter but to let her find her own way in this world. This is the world that awaits in every corner of life flexing its tentacles, to teach how

to be selfish, greedy, and oppressive. I have always been confronted with a parental question: How do I protect her from that corruption, how do I impart in her the consciousness to recognize and fight injustices and to have courage to stand with the oppressed? That night as I heard Mahavir Narwal speak, I thought, "I don't know if my little one will become a Natasha (how proud I will be!), but I want to be a parent like him."

He had always been in the forefront of people's struggles. He was a student leader himself, and then a senior member of CPI (Marxist). He was associated with the People's Science Movement and Gyan Vigyan Andolan. By being a fighter himself, he instilled in his children not to be bigots and misogynists. He gave them the foundations to think beyond themselves. And the result is a fearless Natasha who is inspiring so many young activists.

Mahavir Narwal worked tirelessly to get Natasha and other human rights activists released from jail, but fell ill due to COVID and passed away on May 9, 2021.

*"I'll say dissent is a decent act.*

*It is a matter of rights of individuals.*

*You should be worried about a future in which dissent is not your right anymore."*

*- Mahavir Narwal  
(1950 - 2021)*

This regime has been reigning with such cruelty towards marginalized communities and human rights activists. The unjust regime did not let Natasha see her father before his passing. She was let out for 3 weeks to perform last rites.

Here is Natasha, reporting back into Tihar jail. She stands tall and laughs in the face of this sadistic regime. They may put her behind bars, but we feel the wind under her wings. We raise our daughters and sons in the shadow of her raised fist, and in the warmth of her father's courageous smiles that shall never fade from our hearts!



# Red Salute Comrade Mythili Sivaraman!



Com. Mythili Sivaraman  
(Dec 14, 1939- May 30, 2021)

ICWI salutes the memory of Comrade Mythili Sivaraman, veteran CPI(M) leader and pioneering feminist. In the aftermath of the 1968 Keezhvenmani massacre where upper caste landlords brutally murdered 44 Dalit agricultural workers and their families including 5 elderly men, 16 women and 23 children, as revenge against efforts by the latter to organize themselves under the communist flag and demand higher wages, Com. Mythili led the effort



to bring to light the atrocity through numerous writings, many of which were compiled in the book *Haunted by Fire*. Comrade Mythili co-founded the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and for decades led the call for the rights of women, particularly women of the most marginalized and oppressed communities of India. Her work with the Center of Trade Unions (CITU) and the CPI(M) for decades brought to the foreground the courageous struggles of Tamil Nadu's Dalit and Adivasi women, for rights, dignity and justice in the face of incessant violence by landlords and police, often in cahoots, to crush the political awakening that was underway across the state. She founded AIDWA's journal *Mahalir Sindanai* (Women's Thoughts), and through her writings and public speeches was an outspoken critic of dowry related crimes, sex-selective abortions, and other forms of violence against women. A documentary about her remarkable life is available here <https://psbt.org/films/fragments-of-a-past/>

## Lakshadweep under saffron assault

Writing more than 2000 years ago, the Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu appraised war in terms of five factors - morality (or justice and righteousness), weather (natural effects), terrain (whether open or restricted), command (or leadership qualities such as wisdom and courage), and doctrine (or organization of armed structure). Having shown itself to be bereft of all morality, unable to exploit the weather conditions, alienated from the people on the terrain that voted it into power, and having its supreme leader cut to size and without a halo despite the attempt to appear sagely, the Hindutva brigade fell back on the only factor it has left in its armory - its hate doctrine (and its indoctrinated army). This time it seeks a terrain far-away yet clearly significant for attempting to salvage itself - Lakshadweep islands off the coast of Kerala.

Having suffered a crushing defeat in the recently concluded elections in multiple states (including Kerala where it lost all 113 seats it contested), the BJP has now desperately turned to this largely Muslim-dominated archipelago where Malayalam is the official language (along with English) in order to make it the new laboratory for Hindutva politics. Breaking protocol, it deployed Praful Khoda Patel, a non-IAS officer as Administrator of Lakshadweep - a post usually reserved for IAS officers. Patel is one of Hindutva's dyed-in-the-wool believer and bhakt, whose experience as home minister of Gujarat (where he held all the portfolios vacated by Amit Shah since 2007) is matched only by his neoliberal contempt for any form of equitable and sustainable development. With this move the BJP has made it clear that it will leave no stone unturned to reap the harvest of hate that it has sown over the last several decades. Read more [here](#) and [here](#) about the horrors already underway in Lakshadweep ranging from the all-too-familiar beef ban and attempt to impose

vegetarianism, cracking down on protestors and dissenters as anti-national, ushering in ecologically destructive development policies, preparing the ground for the sale of land, and much more.



Defend  
Lakshadweep!

