



Hacked Democracy, Hacked Truth: Fabrications, Forensics, and Fascism

On April 21, the Boston-based digital forensics company [Arsenal Consulting](#), released its [second report](#) on the forensic data from Rona Wilson's computer. That report continued to reveal in devastating detail the fabricated character of the 'evidence' put forth by the NIA and Pune police which has led Rona and 15 others to be incarcerated for over 2.5 years in Indian jails in the [Bhima Koregaon case](#). All 16 individuals are human rights defenders, many public intellectuals, many internationally recognized for their work, some lawyers, all working on issues of development and civil liberties for Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and workers. Their common thread – being outspoken critics of the ruling Hindutva regime.

The entire case against the BK16 rests on a set of files that were purportedly recovered from Rona Wilson's computer. Together, the two Arsenal reports break the backbone of the so-called evidence against the BK16 by showing how the evidence was itself 'planted' in a very meticulously planned manner over several years. That the NIA and the police continue to swear by such evidence raises fundamental questions about how the powerful classes are hacking away at Indian democracy and the Indian national motto of Satyameva Jayate.

A little more than 24 hours after the release of this report, a coalition of Indian-American and

human rights organizations held a public congressional briefing for US lawmakers on the case and the status of democracy in and human rights in India. The briefing was attended by over 50 people representing Congressional offices and human rights organizations. Among the Congressional offices in attendance were those of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer; Senator Tim Kaine; the chair of the



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Rep. McGovern; the US State Department; the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF); and the offices of Rep. Juan Vargas and Rep. Pramila Jayapal. The briefings included testimonies from Govind Acharya (India Country Specialist for Amnesty International), Father Ted Penton (of the Jesuit Conference that has spearheaded the campaign around Father Stan Swamy, one of the BK 16), a spokesperson for Frontline Defenders (an international organization focused on

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defending human rights activists and who have reported on the

Bhima Koregaon case, and Mark Spencer (president of Arsenal Consulting).

All speakers spoke with clarity and concern about the sharp deterioration of India's democracy, the abuse

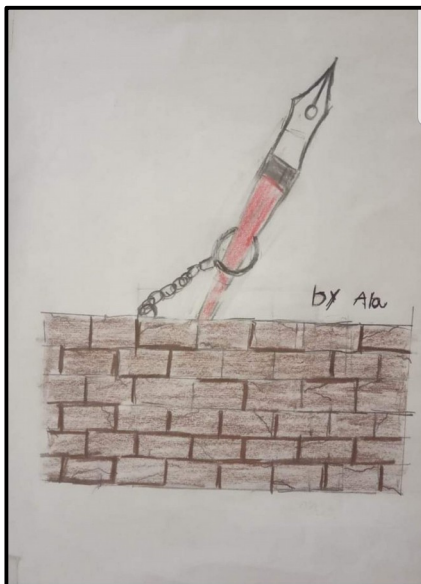
of anti-terror laws such as the UAPA, the way in which judicial process itself becoming a punishment, the crackdown on all forms of dissent.

Mr. Spencer's testimony should be deeply disconcerting to anyone with a modicum of care for democratic values. He provided a detailed account of how the attacks on Rona's computer had taken place, how incriminating documents were planted on the victims' computers, the 'typing activity' of the hackers including how they established control even over their external storage devices like hard drives and pen

drives.

Arsenal has rich experience with forensic evidence, having worked on the Boston bomber case, and the OdaTV & Ergenekon case in Turkey which bears eerie similarities to the BK16 case. Characterizing the findings as "the most serious type of case in digital forensics," Spencer testified that he could say "with authority" that the evidence Arsenal had uncovered left no doubt that the files were planted. He was confident that any competent forensic expert with access to the same copy of the hard drive could draw the same conclusions, as independent experts who have verified the report have done.

Several news reports have now been published in Indian and international media on the Arsenal reports. Not surprisingly, just as the Indian state seems more concerned about burying truths about its malgovernance of the pandemic, the NIA has dismissed the Arsenal reports without engaging with it. It remains to be seen how ordinary people continue to fight for fundamental rights to life, livelihoods and due process in the face of an Indian state that is rapidly shedding all pretense of democracy and unmasking its fascist fangs.



Drawing by Ala, Varavara Rao's granddaughter

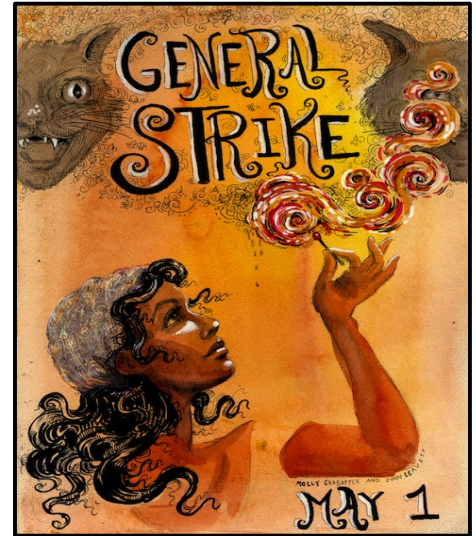
This Month in History

The first of May might have been previously associated with the spring festival of ancient times. But today, May Day is International Workers' Day, and is celebrated in all socialist countries across the world, including Britain and Russia.

It is quite fascinating that the history of the labour movement that led to this International Workers' Day actually has its origins in North America. By the late 1800s, the US working class was dealing with extremely long working hours -- it was not unusual to have 16-hour shifts -- and was up in protest. Workers wanted a shorter workday. In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions of the United States and Canada took the decision of observing the first eight-hour workday, through general strikes, on the 1st of May 1886.

Accordingly, the country saw strikes by workers across the states but it was Chicago that was the epicenter of the protest. The action was generally peaceful, but three days later after the unofficial observance of the shortened workday, police action on the 4th of May 1886 turned it violent. The 'Haymarket affair' as it came to be known, saw police firing, arrests, and subsequent hanging of four workers and imprisonment for others. This crackdown saw increased support for a broader labour movement even across the Atlantic, and in 1889, the Second International (an organization for workers and socialists) declared that May 1st would be celebrated henceforth as International Workers' Day.

This call was amplified, and the eight-hour workday eventually became a law in 1916. This was also endorsed by the Communist International,



May Day General Strike,
by Molly Crabapple

and awareness of workers' rights to a safe work environment and eight-hour workday started reaching people even as the First World War unfolded in Europe. Russia's 1917 Revolution led to the establishment of the eight-hour workday, just four days after the fall of Tsarist rule.



J.A. Mitchell, *Appeal to Reason*,
December 29, 1906.



ICWI Salutes Dalit History Month

April is Dalit History month – a month to celebrate Dalit lives, remind ourselves of our task to annihilate caste, strive to live up to B.R. Ambedkar's call to educate, organize, and agitate, and to reflect on the meanings of the term solidarity. This month ICWI launched its series titled "Collective Strength in Collective Voices: Courage in Time of Crisis"



as part of our Dalit History Month celebrations. And all of us were treated to a rich tapestry of practices, provocations, and performances in three events. All events were very well attended and deeply appreciated.

The kickoff event ('practices') was the 'Sacred Circle of Dalit Truths', which introduced listeners to works of prose, poetry, and fiction embodying Dalit cultures and identities. In a special vigil held in the format of the Sacred Circle, a range of speakers drew upon Indigenous American traditions and the richness of Dalit lives as part of a collective testimony to the sacredness of Dalit speech, witnessing, and truth-telling. Organized and introduced by ICWI Board Members, Rev. Dr. Sarah Anderson and Prof. Roja Suganthi-Singh, the event included renowned Dalit Tamil novelist Bama who read from her classic work, *Sangati* which brought alive strong Dalit feminist characters who were defiant and mocking of caste

contempt and privileged caste hubris. Rev. Dr. Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, a scholar, theologian and pastor, offered a powerful reading from her work on Dalit Bodies, conveying the resilience and power that lies within every Dalit woman. A highlight of the event was the reading of poems by Gomathi and



Bhuvaneshwari (young Dalit girls from a school in Tamil Nadu) whose words did rend the air with their clarion call for justice. To them, Ambedkar was not a leader from the distant past but a friend and brother who helped them see the light of liberation at the end of the tunnel of their struggle for human dignity. We were also treated to the ICWI youth brigade - poets and artists Nivedhan, Eklan, Saara, Irene and Christine - who rendered English translations of Bama, excerpt from *Annihilation of Caste*, from Prof. Roja Singh's book *Spotted Goddesses*, and Maya Angelou's rousing poetry.

The second event ('provocations') featured Dr. Ruth Manorama, recipient of The Right Livelihood Award, who gave an impassioned and insightful talk on political representation, being a Dalit feminist activist, and spoke at length about the specific challenges of living under Hindutva and the Modi

regime. This was followed by Ms. Beena Pallical of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, and Abirami Jotheeswaran from All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (National Campaign for Dalit Womens' Human Rights) who provided analysis of the situation of violence against Dalits, especially Dalit women, and gave updates



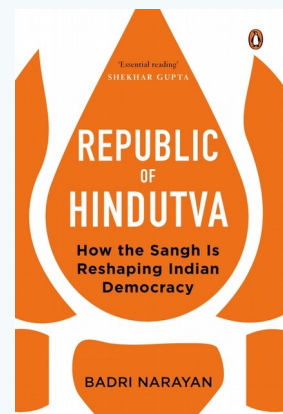
on the now infamous Hathras case - the gang rape and murder (and its official coverup) of a Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh in September 2020.

The final event ('performances') dived deep into Ambedkarite shairi's rebellious and hopeful cultural musical tradition. ICWI Board member Prachi Patankar introduced and conversed with revolutionary balladeers Sachin Mali and Sheetal Sathe of the Navayan Mahajalsa (formerly the Kabir Kala Manch) and filmmaker Somnath Waghmare, who is documenting Ambedkarite songs. We were also treated to short samples of the reverberating poetry and music of the Mahajalsa. In light of the tragedies unfolding in India, one that is disproportionately affecting Dalit and Bahujan communities, this event created a much-needed space to draw on strength, healing, love, and collective care. Video recordings of the events are available on ICWI's [facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/indiacivilwatch).

Badri Narayan's Republic of Hindutva- A Preview

By Salman Kureishy

To understand our [Age of Anger](#), Pankaj Mishra descended into the heart of darkness of the last two centuries. He reminded us how ethno-religious nationalists and demagogues emerge from the shadows of a crumbling modernist-capitalist-liberal-secular order; and how they create a Vision and Mission that attract the disenchanted, the dispossessed and the wretched of the earth. In [The Republic of Hindutva](#), Badri Narayan decodes and lays bare the operating manual, the nuts and bolts of the Hindutva social machine. The following is a brief overview of discussions seen on YouTube. Links to these resources appear below. From these interviews with Badri, three major themes struck me.



- 1) The language of Hindutva's mobilization is anchored in the 5000-year-old katha traditions. Its appeal is to the emotions and sentiments not reason. The pracharakas are master story tellers. The urban lower class, and rural masses – all those infected with what Nietzsche called 'Ressentiment'- are being brought into the Sangh fold with stories and songs from Mahabharata and Bhagvad Purana. Rivers of the Gunga Jamunculture, carrying anthems of Kabir vani and Faiz's Hum Dekhenge, do not seem to flow there. Put another way: The left has taken to heart the "opium of the masses" part of Marx's broader message. The Sangh family is attending to "the sigh of the oppressed creature" and providing food for "the soul of the soulless world", for the most marginalized, invisible caste groups. For example: The parivar has adopted 40 to 50 of the most marginalized Dalit castes in UP, those 'untouched' by most traditional parties - Mayawati's BSP, Yadavs SP or Congress. What is more, at RSS's and Modi's prodding, Yogi Adityanath, a Thakur, has been persuaded to build houses and temples for some of these groups. Left & other opposition parties need to work hard at the grassroots to have any chance of success.
- 2) The left-secular groupings have been attacking the shadow, not the substance, of RSS; a kind of Quixotic tilting at the windmills. The adversary is a shifty, slippery beast, evolving and adapting to embrace new social groups at the grass root level. Too much focus on the communal-secular binary, opines Badri, hides the more variegated features of RSS. The Sangh parivar has demonstrated remarkable resilience in balancing the contradictions. For example: In an organization widely perceived as misogynist and patriarchal, Dattatreya Hosabale is arguing for accepting transgender and gay communities within the fold. Badri admits the process is not free from tensions, contradictions, and potential rupture. His analysis reflects the complex nature of the beast.
- 3) Unlike its adversaries, who split into factions by adding alphabets to their original names, RSS has stayed united. For it to balance diverse pressures, contradictions, and dissent within its ranks is a remarkable feat. Politics is secondary in RSS's scheme of things. Its focus has always been the social arena and grass root mobilization. For the opposition, however, elections seem to be the main concerns. And it is losing these or these are being snatched from the jaws of its victories. And if election are lost, it doesn't matter what – secularism, socialism, equality, justice- is on its social agenda.

What is to be done? How do we react to Badri's findings? Firstly, do not shoot the messenger, a favorite first response among the diehard ideologues. Let us read the book, reflect, strategize.

Further listening/reading:

1. [The Wire Interview with M.K.Venu](#) (Excellent summary, for English speaking folks)
2. [Satya Hindi Interview - Vijay Trivedi/ Ashutosh](#) (discussion in Hindi)
3. [Decoding: 'The Republic Of Hindutva', TheFederal](#)
4. [Book Discussion on 'Republic of Hindutva' by Badri Narayan](#) Centre for Policy Research

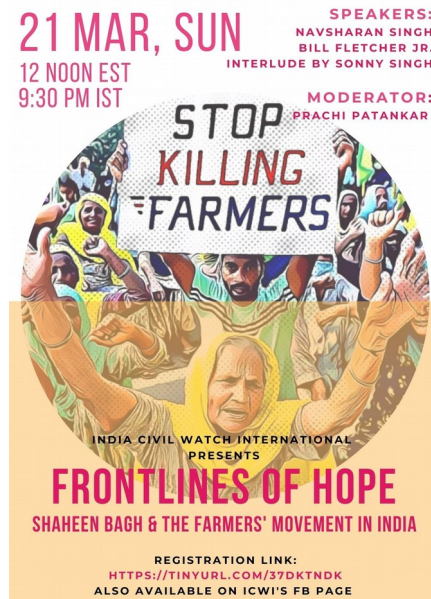
Frontlines of Hope: The Farmer Protests in India

By Ratik Asokan

The Modi government can break laws and criminalize dissent, suppress news and fabricate evidence, shut down the internet and spread disinformation, arrest critics and “encounter” activists, rewrite history and lie about the future, start wars and sell out to multinationals, mismanage a pandemic and dismantle welfare systems, but the one thing it cannot do—though this is not for want of trying—is make a mass movement disappear.

This is why the historic farmers’ protests, which have been going on since last August, remain a thorn in a side of the Hindu fascists. The farmers, largely from Punjab and Haryana, are opposing a [slate of legislations](#), collectively known as the “Farm Bills 2020,” which together amount to a mass deregulation of the agricultural sector. The government plans to suspend state-regulated markets (*mandis*), where farmers presently conduct business; do away with Minimum Support Price (MSP) guarantees, which protects farmers from market fluctuations; and set up a network for contract farming, which will give corporations greater sway over harvest decisions. All of this will exacerbate the [long crisis](#) of chemical-intensive, capitalist agriculture in Punjab, which was set in motion by the Green Revolution.

Recognizing these bills as an existential threat to their way of live, farmers from across north India have mobilized in unprecedented numbers. Since November, over three hundred thousand farmers have camped out at the Singhu Border outside Delhi, and a further two hundred thousand have blocked two other key highways into the national



capital. These [campsites](#) have been furnished with makeshift libraries, community kitchens, informal schools, stages for political speeches and cultural performances, and even open-air film screenings. At the same time, there have been wildcat strikes and demonstrations across much of Punjab.

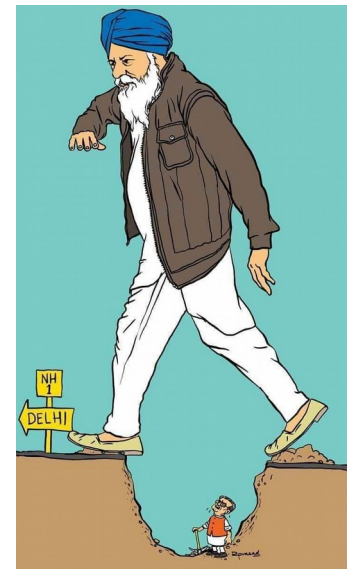
Heroic and inspiring as these protests are, they remain riven by contradictions, most prominently along the lines of caste. The popular slogan that has emerged, “No Farmer, No Food,” elides the harsh reality that a vast majority of those in the agricultural sector are in fact landless: either working as wage laborers, sharecroppers, or—most common—attached laborers in bondage to landlords. Unsurprisingly, a vast majority of this landless population is Dalit. For instance, in Punjab, Dalits make up 32% of the population but own only 3% of the land. As across rural India, relations between Dalit laborers and upper-caste landlords (in this case, Jutts) are characterized by oppression,

marginalization, and violence.

As the protests have grown in size and developed, these contradictions have become more evident. To the credit of the unions powering the farmers’ movement, there has been much discussion of “farmer-laborer” and cross-caste unity. Yet for now, any such solidarity remains “[contingent](#),” in the words of ICWI member Navyug Gill, who delivered a lecture on the subject as part of a series on the protests organized by the Ambedkar King Study Circle. A scholar of rural Punjab, Gill has written several articles and on the ongoing protests, which can all be accessed [here](#).

At our General Board Meeting, on March 21, ICWI also hosted a long conversation on the farmer protests between scholar Navsharan Singh, labor activist Bill Fletcher Jr., and writer Prachi Patankar. You can watch the whole discussion [here](#).

Do check out this author’s [article](#) about [a documentary](#) by the Dalit filmmaker Randeep Maddoke, which depicts caste relations in rural Punjab.



Embers of the Paris Commune

By Sumanta Banerjee

This year we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune of 1871 - the biggest urban insurrection of the nineteenth century, that led to the setting up of a grass roots based popular government in Paris, albeit for only about two months, before it was crushed by the Versailles troops at the end of May that year. But during that brief period of popular sovereignty, that government - known as the 'Commune', meaning the smallest unit of local governance - laid the foundations of a model of decentralization of power, that has continued to inspire generations all over the world.

Historical accounts of the Paris Commune have generally highlighted it as the 'Festival of the Oppressed', the term used to describe the mass demonstrations in the streets, where the people broke out in a festive mood to celebrate the end of an oppressive regime, and welcome the inauguration of a popular government. There were street concerts, and the ceremonious demolition of monuments of the imperial past, like that of the Vendome Column on May 16, 1871, or the public burning of a guillotine to express the popular rejection of the death penalty, on April 6 that year. While these spontaneous demonstrations might appear as unplanned, unguided and formless, there were in fact politically committed agencies behind them which were attempting to give them a coherent frame in the shape of social measures that they introduced during the two-month interregnum (March 18 - May 28, 1871) that the Communards enjoyed in running the administration in Paris before being crushed. These measures added a momentous historical

dimension to the Paris Commune, that was to have a lasting impact on the shape of popular uprisings, both urban and rural, that were to follow in different parts of the world.

In fact, the Commune raised fundamental socio-economic issues that challenged the ruling socio-economic order. It opposed : (i) inequality in wage payment in the manufacturing sector; (ii) control over the educational system by a religious order ; and (iii) official censorship of dissident views expressed in works of art and literature.

Economic, social and cultural measures to decentralize power

In order to reverse this inequitable and oppressive order, the Commune announced and implemented a number of measures. They impacted not only on the citizens of Paris during that brief period, but they still carry lasting historical relevance for the present times.

To start with, one of the Commune's first step was the setting up of a new body called the Commission of Labour and Exchange, to propagate 'social doctrines' and 'find ways of equalizing labour and the wage paid it.' On April 16, it issued a decree that allowed trade unions to take over any closed down factories, and renew production. As a result, some ten factories were taken over and run by workers' cooperatives which prioritized items of production according to their own needs, instead of the earlier system of production dictated by the capitalist owners. The Commune also guaranteed an increase in wages, and equalization of conditions between male and

female workers.

The other major social sphere that the Commune sought to reform was that of education. It set up the Commission for the Organization of Education, which aimed at providing state-funded compulsory education, freed from the domination of the religious clerics, and which would balance the courses of traditional humanities with those that would provide a useful technical training. It encouraged local efforts to free the prevalent schooling systems from the control of the orthodox religious clergy. A Jesuit school, with its well-equipped laboratories, was taken over by the local people and turned into what the Commune claimed to be the first 'professional' school established by it.

But it was in the area of culture that the Commune set up a model that offered freedom to creative talents in the fields of theatre, literature and painting - and released them from the threat of censorship. Under its auspices, the artists of Paris formed the Artists' Federation with the famous French painter Gustave Courbet as its chairman, on April 13, 1871. According to its announcement, its aim was the free development of art without government protection or special privileges. It stated that the realm of the arts would be controlled by the artists, who were urged to (i) conserve the heritage of the past; (ii) facilitate the creation and exhibition of contemporary works; and (iii) stimulate future creation through art education.

Later attempts to replicate the Paris Commune: The 'soviets' in Russia, 1917

Despite its destruction, the ideas and the model of the Paris

Commune continued to inspire future generations in different parts of the world aspiring for decentralized administration at the grassroots level. One of the first experiments was the organization of 'soviets' in Russia, in 1917, under the leadership of Leftist forces. The word 'soviet' meant a council in the Russian language. But in the course of the tumultuous months of the revolution that year, the term 'soviet' came to represent the autonomous self-governing bodies that sprung up in different sectors of the economy - that was at that time reeling under total administrative chaos. Besides the local Soviets, elected in every city and village in Russia, there were the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, and even Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies operating among the army ranks. There were the factory-shop committees, created by the workers themselves in order to run the factories and control production of goods to meet popular needs. Leading among these soviets was the Petrograd Soviet which played a prominent role in the November revolution of 1917 that led to the formation of a government representing all the soviets from different sections of the people - to be known later as the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. The famous American journalist John Reed, who was an eye-witness to the historical events in Russia in those days, in his 'Ten Days That Shook the World' (1919) gives a blow-by-blow account of the emergence of the 'soviets', how they asserted their autonomy, and to a large extent determined the course of the Bolshevik revolution. It is not a coincidence that John Reed in the introduction to his book, recalled the Paris Commune as the source of inspiration for the Petrograd 'soviet': "Just as historians search the records for the minutest details of the story of the Paris Commune, so they will want to know what happened in Petrograd in November 1917,

the spirit that animated the people, and how the leaders, talked and acted."

The Shanghai Commune of February 1967

Exactly fifty years after the establishment of the first 'soviet' in Petrograd in Russia, the spirit of the Paris Commune was revived in another city - this time in China. On February, 1967, in Shanghai, factory workers along with radical students and rebel Communist activists, set up the Shanghai Commune to seize power and overthrow the old bureaucratic power structure.

While the communards in Paris and the soviets in Russia fought against state authorities that were imposed upon them from outside, in an ironical twist of history, the members of the Shanghai Commune were forced to fight against a local oppressive bureaucracy that was an agent of their own government in Beijing - the People's Republic of China - which they themselves had put in power in 1949. There is an interesting background to the rise of the Shanghai Commune.

In the face of popular complaints of corruption and exploitation against his own Communist party's official bureaucrats who were running local administration, Mao-Tse-Tung reached out to the masses in 1966 by urging them to overthrow this bureaucracy, with his famous slogan: "Bombard the headquarters!"

Responding to Mao's call, all the workers' groups in Shanghai got together, held a mass rally on January 5, 1967, denounced the city's ruling officials, and in a universal verdict, removed them from their positions. In order to fill up the administrative vacuum created by this decision, the Chinese Communist Party sent Zhang

Chunqiao to suggest a way out. He proposed the introduction of a model of local administration on the lines of the Paris Commune. Thus was formed the Shanghai Commune on February 5 1967, with Zhang as its head. During its brief spell, it embodied the seeds of a novel state structure that empowered the masses by relegating to their representatives some of the administrative powers. New organs of power with widespread ground roots support were emerging.

Fearing a backlash that might threaten the very political power structure at Beijing, Mao soon beat a retreat. Originally, his call "Bombard the Headquarters," was a directive to his party cadres to raid the party offices and throw out the corrupt and bureaucratic party leaders who were spoiling the image of the ruling Communist Party of China. It was a part of the factional fights that were going on in the CPC during those years - that were to erupt a few years later in the ugly murderous warfare between Mao and the Gang of Four. The Shanghai Commune's activities were threatening to go beyond the confines of the party's factional fights, and were encouraging non-CPC political elements from the grassroots to take over the local administration. Mao therefore soon directed Zhang to announce the end of the Shanghai Commune, and reorganize it as 'Revolutionary Committee' on February 24, 1967.

Thus ended an experiment with the ideas of the Paris Commune in Shanghai - thanks to the authoritarian policies of Mao, who felt that any autonomous local administration would crack the hegemonic centralization of his party that ruled over China.

Echoes of Paris Commune in India

Although not directly inspired by the political ideas of the Paris Commune, freedom fighters in

India in 1942 in different parts of the country, set up parallel governments, in opposition to the ruling colonial administrative establishments. This followed the launching of the 'Quit India' movement by Gandhi in 1942. In December that year, in Tamluk in western Bengal, Congress workers under the leadership of Ajoy Mukherjee and Satish Samanta, established the 'Tamralipti Jatiya Sarkar', under which were set up parallel police stations, courts, and a system of revenue collection that side-stepped the official machinery. It undertook cycle relief work for distant villages, and gave grants to schools. The 'Jatiya Sarkar' lasted till August 1944, when it was dissolved under the explicit directions of Gandhi who felt that its purpose was over as the Quit India movement had ended. Yet another example of how popular grass roots efforts for self-administration are suppressed by a centralized political leadership.

The next struggle to establish a counter-government to give voices to the local people - as opposed to the imposition of authoritarian colonial rule - took place in Talcher in Odissa in eastern India. From August 31, 1942 onwards, freedom fighters took over the area, and announced the objective of what they called 'Mazdoor Raj' or Workers' Rule - set up on the basis of adult franchise in each village. They also formed a militia, and tried to implement some developmental projects. Their experiment lasted till October that year.

One of the most interesting and historical experiments in 'Jatiya Sarkar' (national local government) during the 1942 Quit India Movement, was that of Satara. From August 1943 till May 1946, in Satara in Maharashtra, a dynamic leader called Nana Patil (1900-76) led a popular guerrilla-type movement that targeted rural treasuries and armouries, and took over some 150 villages.

Here under his leadership his followers set up 'Prati Sarkar' (parallel government) which established public utilities like a market system, supply and distribution of foodgrains, and a judicial system to settle disputes. They also formed a parallel army called 'Toofan Sena' to resist their enemies.

Although, under severe colonial police repression these Commune-type experiments in decentralization of power were crushed, their spirit still remains alive. Even in post-Independence India, it has re-asserted itself again and again - in the 1970s in the struggle of the tribal peasants who carved out a liberated zone for themselves in Srikakulam in south India to set up their own government for a few years, or now in the Bastar region in central India where armed tribal guerrillas have established what they call 'janatana sarkar' (people's government).

One common thread that runs through all these experiments - from the Paris Commune, Russian Soviets, India's 1942

'jatiya sarkars' and today's Naxalite 'janatana sarkar' - is their stress on providing health care, education, and other essential needs through alternative people's institutions - as different from the corrupt bureaucratic apparatus. An interesting glimpse into such developmental activities by Naxalite cadres in a tribal area Lalgurh in West Bengal in 2010 can be had from the book: 'Letters from Lalgurh' (Sanhati. Kolkata. January, 2013), where they describe how they built schools, primary health centres and other facilities for the villagers.

But like the Paris Commune, these brave efforts were doomed to be destroyed by the ruling powers. Yet, let us remember the speech of Karl Marx which he delivered on May 27, 1871: ".....if the Commune was beaten, the struggle would only be deferred. The principles of the Commune were eternal and could not be crushed; they would assert themselves again and again until the working classes were emancipated." - (The Eastern Post No. 139)



Conversation with Devanshu Narang

Rana Khan

Devanshu Narang is an activist, writer, performer and consultant based in Toronto

What issues are important to you?

Any type of discrimination, injustice, ignorance, hate, falsehood that I see in this world makes me want to act to stop it from spreading. I have written and spoken about a wide range of issues be it against discrimination based on color, caste, class, creed, gender, race, religion, body forms, political views and even against how the powerful have used God and religion to spread hate and division.

You mentioned that you went to India to express your solidarity with the Shaheen Bagh movement. Can you relate your experiences and your understanding of this movement?

I had to go to Shaheen Bagh as it had become the Ground Zero of Anti-CAA struggle, emerged as a representative of the angst of people against BJP's divisive politics and became a mecca for the members of resistance, like the Sindhu border of a later struggle.

I gave a speech at Shaheen Bagh. That and other speeches and articles on the movement can be seen on my [website](#).

The Indian diaspora has been affected by the recent changes in the OCI rules. What are your thoughts on the impact on overseas activists?

We all are witnessing the transformation of India into a theocratic dictatorship which enables total thought control and the current changes to the OCI rules is in line with that ideology. The requirement for getting a

special work permit to enable the OCI card holders to work in missionary, journalistic or Tabligh activity is to enable Indian government to keep dissenters out and continue their iron-clad control on media. Just to add, as we all know Modi is a coward and an egoistic and he is also afraid and averse to any international criticism. It is clear that he feels that international activists of Indian origin who bring forward the truth of India to a larger world audience, need to be stopped from entering India and this is a step in that direction.



How concerning is it that many in the Indian diaspora seem to enthusiastically support the Hindutva movement (and the ensuing religious discrimination against all minorities) in India, while living abroad as minorities themselves in various countries and very mindful of their rights there. How do we explain these double standards?

I have always believed that Modi/Shah and the likes are not just "creators" of hate but also the "products" of hate which has been brewing in a section of Hindu minds for decades, if not centuries. When Muslims at the time of partition created an Islamic state, a large section of Hindus felt cheated that they could not claim India to be a Hindu state as it had accepted secularism as its guiding principle under the leadership of Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and the progressive Indian leadership of the past. Sometimes I feel that we have let our forefathers down by what we have turned out to be and where we have allowed India to go.

Coming to the Indian diaspora, it is that feeling of religious pride and pseudo-nationalism that BJP has used to spread hate amongst the herd which has spread like wildfire and crossed Indian borders. For long they have looked for a leader who could revive the so-called Hindu pride and make the minority see their "desired" place as the second class citizen of a Hindu India and in Modi they find such a leader – a Hindu Ram who could kill the Muslim 'devils' in Godhra in 2002 and could get away with it and go from strength to strength. A warrior king who would not give even a token acceptance to secularism and let the Hindus rule India and let a true Aryavrat emerge.

It is human nature that even the most cursed, crushed and humbled soul in the outside world would like to come home and feel valuable and important in the four walls of his home where people could look up to him and serve his ego.

The Indian Hindu diaspora is no different and the more racism, hate and "ghettoism" they face in their adopted lands, the more they feel they should rule in their own lands. It is a classic case that has existed for decades when a Brahmin dark-colored scientist facing racism in USA/Canada goes home and serves the same dish to a lower caste individual or Dalit. Modi has just made hate go bigger and made a bigger "Rakshash" or devil to hate than lower castes-Muslims. I know of many people in Canada, old friends who I refuse to call friends anymore (just fellow beasts I guess), who show such traits and are "proud" of Modi and "hate" Muslims and unfortunately this could continue to build for years as tomorrow Modi could be replaced by Yogi or some other divider-in-chief. Yet we have to continue to express ourselves and fight this hate with education and interaction with people.

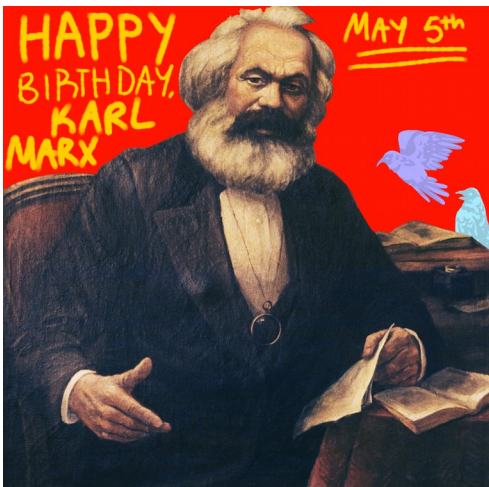
What practical suggestions do you have for allyship and cooperation amongst various organizations and activists in North America?

This is the most important aspect for today's resistance. There is a large section of people who are fed up of hate and divisions in societies worldwide. The right wing is having its day and on the ascent worldwide. America politics enabled the right wing to gain a stronghold and a monster like Trump gained power. And yet when the resistance united and media stood firm, America and American values emerged shining even under a mediocre but united leadership.

The problem in India when fighting fascist forces is that a mindset of TINA or "There Is No Alternative" emerges. We need to fight that narrative and stay together and remember that history has proved that movements are more important together than leaders.

The current pandemic has changed the narrative in a huge way. It made the strong grass- root Anti CAA/NRC movements (including Shaheen Bagh) and now even the farmers struggle die down due to fears of the virus, but it has also enabled people to look at alternative means of connection on video chats and social media.

The organizations and people of resistance have to realize the same and also understand the needs and psyche of the modern man and shun some ways of the past and accept newer ways. Some of the practical messages include →



*The philosophers
have only
interpreted the
world, in various
ways. The point,
however, is to
change it.*

1. Please resist narrow community or religion-based organizations and resist personal ambitions (and designations and labels). Join together, make it BIGGER and focus more on the mission to spread the message to ordinary people. Sometimes the messaging is limited, or is centred around particular communities or countries which leaves others out. The resistance should CONNECT and join forces together to make it a larger group fighting injustice and discrimination worldwide.
2. Focus more energies and resources on social media, as online and virtual meetings become the norm. We can have a connect with WIDER AUDIENCE worldwide by using technology rather than just being limited to a local act. We should make it a permanent part of our strategy.
3. Social media has also enabled people to spread hate without fear. The right wing uses that to the hilt to prevent people from speaking out. One thing that I have realized is not get bogged down due to trolling and messages of hate, death threats or extreme abuse. There are fears of personal safety but we have to stay strong against the trolls.
4. Last but not the least, we are not in this alone. If the right wing is strong, there are also many people who are ready to stand for truth. Hopefully we can work together to bring real positive change in this world.

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Fighter, My Fellow Traveller

By HRK

You,
the one who laughed at the edge of the bayonet
that the enemy has aimed at you
for keeping your head straight
over your backbone
for questioning the world
and raising the fist of burning truth
for mobilizing every hamlet like a bayonet
to wage the inevitable war over injustice
for taking back the red flag
that the traitors drowned in Bay of Bengal
and planting it on the forehead of this country
you,
fighter,
my fellow traveller

You,
the one who dared to rip your heart strings
gave fresh blood, saying 'here, take this'
and stood up as a blood bank
when dirty waters of hopelessness and depression
Were Rippling through
the blood vessels of my country
you,
fighter,
my fellow traveller

You,
the one who Drapes on the entire being
the heat that is boiling under the society
to melt away the ice block of foul middle class mentality
that just holds a piece of cloth against nostrils,
to block intolerable and disgusting rot that was accumulating around
and lived on as if it is enough to be alive
you,
the one who blew up like a dynamite as a call for a unified struggle
fighter,
my fellow traveller

You,
the one who brought me back my dream
that was being broken into pieces
like a kite stuck in a windy tree
And tied it to the principles of revolution
And inspired me to bravely play with it
you,
fighter,
my fellow traveller

*"It's best to state this simply:
Narendra Modi needs to go.
Amit Shah needs to go. Ajay
Mohan Bisht aka Yogi
Adityanath needs to go. The
bunch of integrity-free
incompetents Mr Modi has
gathered around him as his
ministers all need to go. In
order for the country to
launch the mammoth
operation of recovery and
repair needed for our
survival, the departure of
these people from positions
of power needs to happen
immediately — tomorrow is
too late, yesterday would
have been better."*

Ruchir Joshi in the
Telegraph, April 28, 2021

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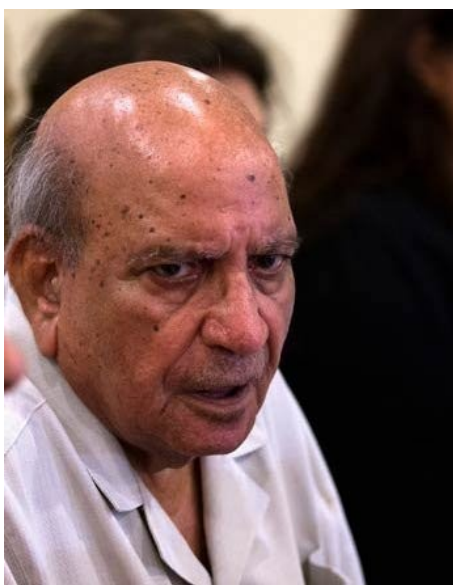
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I.A. Rehman: Tribute to a Great Peace and Human Rights Activist

By Catherine Pappas



"I've been working to defend people's human rights all my life, and, I will continue to do so."

It is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of long-time comrade and human rights activist I.A. Rehman in Lahore on April 12, 2021.

Mr. Rehman, a veteran communist, was a co-founder of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) where he served as Director and Secretary General until December 2016. In 1993, he also helped found the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) to support citizen-led peace efforts in India and Pakistan and promote a more sustainable vision for relations between the two countries.

A veteran journalist for 65 years, Mr. Rehman served as editor of the *Pakistan Times*, *Urdu Daily Azad*, and *Viewpoint*,

and as a regular columnist for the daily newspaper *Dawn*, exposing human rights abuses in Pakistan.

Highly respected by South Asian civil society and the international human rights community, I.A. Rehman has won numerous awards and honors, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award (2004) and the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award (2003).

He will be remembered for his passionate thirst for social justice, his dignity, his courageous writing and his integrity. Throughout his life, I.A. Rehman walked the talk to safeguard human rights, peace and democratic values in his country and the region. As the great rights activist Salima Hashimi said at the announcement of his death, "Today, it is not a man, but a movement and an entire era that is passing away."

Canadian Cities Support Farmers Agitation in India

Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum's motion asking council to "stand in solidarity" with farmers in India, who have been protesting against what they say are repressive laws brought in by the Indian government, was passed without debate on Monday.

The City of Victoria stands in solidarity with Indian farmers and directs the Mayor to write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Provincial Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat and ask them to support Indian farmers in their right to peaceful protest, a dignified living, and to accelerate this message to the Indian government

Delta City Council voted unanimously in favour of a motion from Mayor George Harvie resolving that the city "stands in solidarity with the Indian farmers, and supports their rights to speak out against these laws and any repressive measures against Indian citizens and their rights to expression and liberty."

Burnaby City Council expresses its solidarity with farmers and farm workers of India and calls on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to impress upon the government of India to immediately dialogue with the aggrieved farmers to finding a solution to their grievances.

New Westminster City Council stands with the Indian farmers, and asks the federal government to continue to speak out against these regressive laws, and to accelerate the message of concern to the Indian government up to and including imposing economic sanctions against India.

City of Port Coquitlam proclaims April 27, 2021 as a "Day of Solidarity with India Farmers" in the City of Port Coquitlam.