

PEOPLE'S MARCH

Voice of the Indian Revolution

RESIST ATTACKS ON DALITS !

**NOT ONLY A DALIT TASK,
BUT A DEMOCRATIC TASK !!**

Peoples
March
Oct 2003



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C-88771

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Owned Printed & Published by P. Govindan Kutty, Peroor house, Thripunithura, N.F. Ernakulam, Kerala — 682 301, Ph. 0484 3122939
Printed at Chithira Printers & Publishers, 43/848 A, Poruvelil, Kannachanthodu Road, Kochi — 18

The Safety Valve

It is a time-worn policy of the reactionaries to utilize and promote those forms of dissent that are acceptable to it and within its control. Today, in India we find numerous such forces, like the CPM and the NGOs — both of which are the prime constituents of the forthcoming WSF annual event scheduled for January 2004.

Take for example the CPM's outbursts against privatization all over the country. It has been at the forefront of marches and processions shouting themselves horse against privatization being an IMF plot against the employees of the PSUs. True! But what does it do in practice? In end August 2003 it widely advertised the sale of West Bengal PSUs camouflaged in language understandable only to the potential buyer. As reported by the *Economic Times* (Sept. 1 2003) the State Government of West Bengal (WB) called for "joint venture transformation through induction of strategic partners". What is proposed by the CPM is no less than what the BJP or Congress (I) or various regional parties have been doing in the sphere of privatization. The West Bengal government says that it intends to allow the "transfer of equity stake ranging from 51% to 74%, with management control". This is a clear-cut case of privatization. Not only that, the financial advisor appointed for this is no local company but the TNC, PriceWaterhouse Cooper. The govt. goes so far as to state that in the process of 'restructuring' it will not only allow the retrenchment of workers but also a waiver of outstanding liabilities. The WB govt. has already put up a list of 11 companies for sale. So, like any of the other privatizations that have taken place the CPM's offer is anti-worker and allows big-business/TNC take-over of the State PSUs at throw-away prices (by allowing for a TNC as the financial arbitrator, bringing in *strategic partners with management control*, and waiving *outstanding liabilities*). This is only the latest in the West Bengal government's pro-globalisation policies.

Now of course it is the CPM and their trade unions that will play one of the most prominent roles at the Mumbai WSF, shouting against globalisation, privatization, etc. Their intellectuals, like Prabhat Patnaik et al, will wax eloquent on the evils of globalisation, conveniently ignoring the policies of their WB government. With the above clearly stated policy announcements of the WB government can one believe their rhetoric; and is not one forced to consider why words and deeds can be so far apart. Must it not mean that the CPM/CITU leadership merely resorts to a show of opposition to dupe the huge number of workers within their unions and also their rank-and-file? Are they not acting as a mere safety valve to diffuse discontent? It is very difficult to otherwise explain away their diametrically opposite statements from their actual policies.

NGOs too play a similar role, but from a different angle. While the CPM make a pretense of being for socialism, the big bosses of the NGOs vehemently oppose socialism and communism. They have no concrete alternative to globalisation, avoid struggle and concentrate on 'development', are against organised resistance, and are funded by the very promoters of imperialist globalisation. Yet, their anti-globalisation rhetoric attracts large sections of well-meaning intellectuals and grass-roots activists and dissipate their energies in activities that, let alone being against globalisation, actually helps give globalisation a human face. They too act as a safety valve from a different angle.

Yet, on one point the two — i.e. the NGOs and the social democrats like the CPM who are now part of the ruling-class — are strongly united. Both are vehemently opposed to the most consistent fighters against imperialist globalisation and war — the revolutionary Marxists. The NGOs consciously scheme to keep them at arms length and continue a tirade against so-called totalitarianism, statism, class-struggle, etc. The CPM is

of course pre-occupied with arresting, torturing and even killing revolutionaries in West Bengal, just like any other reactionary.

What then constitutes genuine anti-globalisation? What is the touchstone on which one can ascertain whether an organisation or individual is genuinely anti-globalisation or not? The only test is whether their concrete practice matches their words. Globalisation has had such a disastrous impact on the lives of the people in the country; it has become such a blatant and rabid tool of big-business and the TNCs; that no organisation can gain even an iota of credibility without some anti-globalisation rhetoric. Even the RSS fanatics, whose outfits like the VHP are the most rabid pro-US, pro-Zionist force in the country, have their Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Dattopant Thengadis who, off and on, make a show of anti-globalisation, in order to dupe their cadre who have been nurtured on a fake anti-foreign (mostly turned anti-Muslim) 'nationalism', and their union rank-and-file who are badly hit by the pro-globalisation policies of their own government.

So, the touch-stone for anti-globalisation/anti-imperialism is concrete action against it, however limited. And revolutionary forces would be willing to join with any of these forces in concrete activities, but not prepared to give them legitimacy by participating in their debates and discussions on their platforms, which are generally organised to let off steam, without any plan of action. And in the process of joint struggles the genuine forces under the influence of the reactionaries can get attracted to the genuine anti-imperialists.

In today's context, anti-globalisation means attacking any and every manifestation of imperialist policy/action in our country or in the world. The form of struggle may be non-violent or violent. Both are legitimate, as imperialism itself is the most violent, oppressive, hegemonistic and ruthless force in the world today (wit-

ness Iraq). There can be no bar on violent opposition to a monster. The need is for a wide mobilization of the masses of the country to vehemently fight against imperialist control and domination. It is only when the overwhelming masses rise in opposition that the foundations of imperialist neo-colonial rule will get shaken. The attack may be in the form of fighting against the policies of 'economic reforms', boycotting foreign goods or their symbols like Coke and Pepsi, building up mass discontent against the increasing infringement of the sovereignty of our country, etc. Or it could take more violent forms, like blackening TNC advertisements, physical attacks on TNCs and their institutions, publicly parading their 'Indian' agents in tribunals of the people and demanding their money in Swiss/foreign banks be handed over, kicking foreign imperialists out and forcing the closure of their offices (like the FBI in Delhi), etc. etc.

Whatever may be the form of

struggle, what is most important is that all these varied streams must merge into one mighty river of anti-imperialist struggle, whose backbone can only be that of the communist revolutionaries (CRs) who are the most consistent and thorough-going anti-imperialist fighters in the country. It is precisely here that the NGOs and the social-democrats play their negative role as they seek to drive a wedge between the most consistent anti-imperialist fighters and all the others. They, by their aggressive campaign against real socialism and revolutionary communism, seek to put the revolutionary forces on the defensive and isolate them from the mainstream of the democratic movement. In this atmosphere the CRs too often go on the defensive, forgetting that any genuine democrat must respect the views of others, including those of the CRs. The need of the hour is for the revolutionary forces to assert their politics within the democratic move-

ment and not be apologetic about their identity.

Today, there is urgent need to bridge this gap by forging closer links between the revolutionaries and the democrats through an intensification of the struggle against imperialist globalisation and war, and in the process, exposing the fake elements within the movement. In the light of the vast mobilization taking place in the country and the world for the fourth WSF annual event, which will take place in Mumbai in January 2004, People's March will henceforth have a regular article in each forthcoming issue of the magazine on the question of imperialist globalisation and war and the attitude of various forces towards it. One such article was already printed in the April/May issue. In this issue we print an article by Nitin on the NGOs and the WSF, which will appear in two parts.

— Editor

Agitation for the Release of Com. Arvind Intensifies

Nirmal

In the last issue we witnessed spontaneous protests against the arrest of Com. Arvind. These have now intensified and taken a more organised form, with the *Daman Virodhi Morcha* in the forefront.

Protest mobilization and some agitational programmes have been organized in Latehar and Gumla districts against the arrest of Com. Arvind, the Bihar in-charge of CPI(ML) Peoples War. Wall writing was done extensively in the villages of Palamu, Garwa, Latehar and Gumla districts of Jharkhand and Sarguja district of Chattisgarh. Hand written posters have been pasted in many market places and district/block headquarters and torch light processions have been taken out in scores of villages.

On second July, Mahuadand-Ranchi road and Mahuadand Dlatonganj roads were blocked at Banuri (Gumla district) and Baresand (Latehar) respectively. Hundreds of people participated in this roadblock under the banner of Daman Virodhi

Morcha (Forum Against Repression). Police and officials did not turn up anywhere to take the memorandum. At Banari, police came in the night in the village nearby Banari, and beat people alleging that the agitators are sympathizers of the PW. At Baresand people blocked the road till evening. On 5th July hundreds of people jammed the Mughalsarai-Barkakana railway at Hehegada and Kumandih (Latehar dist.) from 4 AM. Police came around 3 PM and took the memorandum. On 8th, more than 300 people blocked Daltonganj-Panki road. On 10th, almost 500 people came at Daltonganj-Ranchi road near Manika (Latehar dist.) at 5AM and blocked the road. About 9 AM police came and resorted to brutal lathi charge. 32 people were arrested and brought to Latehar. There again the police selected the leading persons and beat them mercilessly. Later they were thrown into jail.

On 10th July a total bandh was organized in Sarguja district. The bandh call was given by the CPI(ML)PW.

Major demands in the agitational programmes were: Release of Com. Arvind unconditionally; Lift cases imposed on him; stop police repression campaign in 10 states under the Joint Operational Command.

Again from 20th July to 6th August protest demonstrations were organized in various block HQs and district HQ of Latehar district. On 26th more than 700 people demonstrated in Manika and handed over a memorandum to the CO. These demonstrations were organized at the above places on 29th and 30th July. On 4th August 1000 people demonstrated in Barwadih. On 6th August nearly 5000 people demonstrated in Latehar and handed over a memorandum to the District Collector.

Major demands in these demonstrations were: Release com. Arvind unconditionally; Repeal POTA from Jharkhand; Remove police camps from the schools. Stop police repression campaign in 10 states of India under JOC; punish the officers responsible for the 10th July lathi charge at Manika.

■ ■

Fight Back the Growing Attacks on Dalits

Develop Fusion of Dalit Movement with Revolutionary Politics

Part I

(This is the first part in a two part articles on the growing attacks on dalits throughout the country. In the first part the author recounts details of these atrocities; while in the second part it deals with the further attacks on dalits through the defacto winding up of reservations and the prevention of conversions. The second part also deals at length on the conspiracies of the ruling-classes in co-opting sections of the dalits and the revolutionary way out of casteism and the despicable practice of 'untouchability'.)

Arvind

In Netalpur village, just 20kms from the Guna District Headquarter of Madhya Pradesh, a dalit woman was forced to drink pig excreta dissolved in water after the village declared her a witch..... Report July 22, 03 of The Hindu.

On Aug. 13, 03 in Mayawati-land (Mau district) 70 dalits were injured, seven seriously, when a mob of Thakurs fired on them in the course of a struggle over the dalit's right over a piece of land. Little action has been taken against the Thakurs.

These are just two extreme examples of the daily humiliation faced by dalits throughout the country, particularly in its rural areas. The so-called hi-tech modernity that has come with globalisation has had little impact on caste prejudices. On the contrary the brahminical essence in Hindu fascism (the twin brother of globalisation), has gone to deepen such entrenched feudal values. 'Untouchability', a scourge prevalent in no other country of the world, continues to be deep-rooted. And even where it is apparently not evident, as say in Punjab or in cosmopolitan areas of the larger cities, you scratch the surface and we find it raising its ugly head — some times subtly, at other times with crude venom. The recent caste riots around Jalandhar are said to be the worst ever reported from the Punjab.

The condition of Dalits is part of an even larger problem of caste-based discrimination. There are roughly 150 million dalits in India, or 14 % of the population. That such a large section of the populace should continue to face the scourge of 'Untouchability' is indeed a blot on the country. 'Untouchability' is not merely highly undemocratic; it is inhuman, degrading, revolting and one of the most evil prac-

tices to be witnessed on this earth. Yet, it does not get the attention it deserves from a sizable section of the progressive forces.

The reason often is that real politics, supersedes principle. With over 70% of the population practicing some form of 'untouchability' — though promoted by the upper-castes, it deeply envelops also the middle castes, often the non-dalit lower castes and even in some cases the upper sections of the tribals — it is more convenient to ignore it, in order not to 'hurt' upper-caste sentiment. Even the bulk of the revisionist-dominated trade unions, soaked, as they are neck-deep in economism, prefer to ignore it in the name of not breaking working-class unity.

Unfortunately the dalit political elite too, today have become one of the biggest enemies of the mass of dalits themselves, willing to sell their soul for a few crumbs from the brahminical table.

Real politics demands the interests of the 14% minority can be sacrificed at the alter of the majority. That the unity of the dalits and other oppressed castes must be based not only on the basis of some common economic interests, but also on the removal of casteist prejudices, is a matter of little concern, particularly to those in the electoral game, is now common knowledge. Even for those out of the electoral fray, within their unions/organisations, they often tend to compromise with caste prejudices due to difficulties involved in uprooting casteism from people's (and even activists) thinking and also due to economic and revisionist thinking of the leaders. For decades now, the so-called communists have taken an economic determinist approach to the caste question, pitting 'class struggle' (read struggle for partial demands)

against 'caste struggle', not understanding (or deliberately distorting) the fact that in Indian society caste oppression and exploitation is intrinsically woven into the class struggle for the seizure of political power. Dogmatic and revisionist interpretations of Marxism have caused great harm to the Indian revolution, by not only ignoring (or paying lip-service) to such an abominable practice as 'untouchability', but even on most other issues concerning the Indian revolution.

While this is one aspect of the reality, the other is that dalit politics has become a highly salable commodity, to be traded for money, perks, votes, etc. It is lucrative business for a tiny section of this elite, who have gained knowledge, unavailable to their predecessors, and wield it, not for their emancipation, but as a tool to dupe the gullible dalit masses. The numerous outfits literally operate as petty shops dealing in dalit interests in the political super bazaar of India. Such 'leaders' are rarely to be found at the spot of atrocities, but more particularly in the confines of elite establishments promoting their wares for which they get accolades from the powers that be. With the rulers panic-stricken with the fear that the dalits may turn to revolutionary communism (not the parliamentary type), particularly after the radical Dalit Panther's movement of the early-1970s, one of the chief wares in the dalit political elite's armoury, that attracts applause from all reactionaries, is red-baiting. Notwithstanding the tragedy of the Indian communists {from the revisionist CPI/CPM to even some sections within the CPI (ML)} having neglected the caste question, the reality is that the ruling-classes of the country fear like poison, the fusion of dalit politics with revolutionary Marxism.

It is not that dalit politics is not

hot topic. It is. The point is that it is concerned more with vote-banks, eclectic debates within the intelligentsia (both dalit and non-dalit), 'Ambedkarism' and statue-building, and now even the sanskritization of a section of dalits.

Ofcourse, amongst all this darkness there are signs of a glow on the horizon. At the grass-roots level there are a growing number of small groups fighting back militantly (particularly seen in Tamil Nadu) not in any way aligned to any of the corrupt political shops. Also an attempt to act took place at a *Dalit Virodhi Jati Vyavasta ke Khilaf Convention* (Convention against the Anti-Dalit Caste System), held at Delhi on July 18, 2003, organised by 27 organisations and attended by roughly 300 people. This Convention was organised by a wide spectrum, stretching from revolutionary ones like the AIPRF and student groups, to dalit groups, to women's groups and a host of other civil liberties and democratic organisations. In addition, in Bihar, the rural dalits together with the other oppressed classes are under the influence of the communist revolutionaries, fighting a veritable war against the upper-caste landed gentry.

Besides, the growing assertion of a section of dalits, acts as the seed for a systematic onslaught on the caste system, if given an organised form and a revolutionary vision.

In this article we shall first outline examples of the growing trend of atrocities on dalits, the reasons behind it, the various trends in dalit politics today, the misconceptions within the camp of many a leftist towards this issue, and finally the way out.

A. Growing Attacks Amidst Greater Dalit Assertion

Statistics on the registered atrocities on dalits indicate a consistent rise every successive year. It is pertinent to remember that owing to the dependency relationship of the dalits with the perpetrators of atrocities, not every occurrence of the atrocity gets registered. Rather, it can be safely assumed that behind each registered atrocity over ten atrocity cases go unreported. Still, as per the latest statistics, every day nearly 50 cases of atrocities are registered all over the

country, over three dalit women are raped and six are disabled on each day round the year. The situation had reached such proportions that it was raised in the Lok Sabha, where Advani was forced to admit the growing incidents and make a show of concern. The National Commission analysed the causes of each of the atrocities in a sample of 45 cases. The analysis showed that out of 45 cases, 13 were clearly attributable to economic reasons.⁽¹⁾

The balance of the cases could also be explained as nothing but pure casteist violence on dalits. This has increased due to the growing assertiveness of dalits, their refusal to submit to the casteist dictates of village lords, their defiant demeanour towards discriminatory behaviour, greater aptitude for education, rebellious consciousness acquired through growing assertion of one's self-respect, a process of general awareness and above all the change in their mode of living. This growing assertiveness was found to be intolerable not only to the upper castes but also the middle castes.

Today there is a pattern in the more brutal acts of caste violence being witnessed throughout the country. As long as the dalits remain submissive, meekly accepting their 'untouchable' status, they are tolerated and used by the elite. It is once they show even the smallest assertion that the feudal elite turn mad with rage. Mere taking to education, or raising their economic level, is sufficient to rouse their anger. Most often, in the recent attacks, it has been this that has resulted in the more brutal cases of lynching, murders and rape of dalits. While normal cases of caste discrimination and atrocities go unreported, as they are age-old and accepted as the norm of life, it is only the more brutal acts that come to light — more particularly those acts where the dalits fought back.

Now let us look at just some of the prominent instances of dalit atrocities around the country.

Haryana

Of late it is Haryana that has been in the lime-light for some of the most brutal atrocities on dalits with the Jhajjar incident showing the depths to which the Hindutva brigade can go,

with full complicity of the entire establishment. Atrocities on dalits in Haryana have increased considerably since the last few years. False criminal cases instituted against various dalit organisations; the constant harassment of dalit women and safai workers by police officials; the denial of entry of dalits into the fields of landlords; the crushing to death by a tractor of a dalit Balmiki labourer, Hukam Singh, for organizing a movement against bonded labour in Karnal district; the gang rape of a dalit woman in Kjarkara village of Rohtak district; the beating up of dalits for their entry into temples by Jats and Gujjars in Jalmana village in Panipat — are just a few of the most glaring incidents.⁽²⁾ Jhajjar, being a major incident we shall report this at some length.

On Oct.15, 2002 five dalits were beaten and burned to death by a mob of Jat peasants led by VHP and Bajrang Dal activists right in front of a police station. While three of the victims were dragged out of the police post and burnt to death, two were thrown into a burning hut located on the premises of the police post. The police (mostly Jat) were openly complicit in this gruesome murder. They were accused for cow slaughter. The five were brought to the police station at 6.00 pm and in front of the police a fanatic mob began to swell instigated by VHP activists. For over four hours, with full knowledge of the SP and District Commissioner, the situation began going out of control, yet the police did not intervene. Finally, at 10.10 pm, with mob frenzy at its peak, the five were lynched and brutally killed.⁽³⁾ In North India, cow protection societies have been formed as the major plank of the Arya Samaj movement. The protection of cows became the center-piece of a Jat identity. The VHP, after being ineffective for long in Haryana, used the cow to mobilize Jats. Ironically the promoter of the so-called Dalit Agenda of the Bhopal Declaration, CM Digvijay Singh, has also, of late, been a major campaigner against cow slaughter. In Gujarat another Congress chief, Waghela, lunched an aggressive campaign against cow slaughter by taking out a high-profile Rath Yatra of Kshatriyas in the name of Bhatiji Maharaj — the 'legendry' protector of cows.

The open butchery in Jhajjar is a direct fall-out of such subtle Hindutva campaigns.

In fact the situation, as presented in a report brought out by the AIPRF, was like this: A dead cow had been legally purchased from Farooqnagar and was being taken by dealers in cow-hides to Karnal for sale. As the stench in the van got unbearable they stopped the van to skin the cow at the roadside. Meanwhile a tractor load of young Jats, were returning from Ram Lila celebrations and chanced upon the Dalits skinning the cow.

What is more tragic is that all the institutions of the state defended the lynching of dalits. On Nov.3, 02 Jats organised a Sarvakhap Mahapanchayat in Gurukul, Jhajjar district, where they warned the authorities against holding anyone for murder. The meeting was attended even by Jats of the peasant organisation, the BKU.⁽⁴⁾

Later, two reports were released, both of which defended the Jats, exonerated the police and de facto held the murdered dalits as guilty. One report was of the Inquiry Commission under Banswal, Commissioner Rhotak Range. The other was by the National Commission of SCs and STs. Neither was released to the public. Neither have gone into the conditions that triggered the mob violence nor the role of the police. Both reports specifically gave a clean chit to the VHP and Bajrang Dal. But, official sources say that two of the main instigators were from the VHP. The SC/ST report says that it was not a case of atrocity on SC/STs as it was not known they were SCs (they were initially thought to be Muslims). It also says it was not an attack on minorities as they were not known to be Muslims. The Commission also legitimizes the action, on the basis of respecting "*public sentiment*", and goes so far as to recommend that cows are not skinned like this, keeping in view the sentiment of the majority community. Both reports absolve the police of any complicity.

VHP leader Giriraj Kishore went so far as to openly declare that he had no regrets over the dalit killings. All those arrested were released on bail within two months to a rousing welcome!!

In this case all the five were from middle class dalit families who were

reasonably well off. Four of them were traders in cow-hides, who are traditionally dalits, while the companies that process and export leather are from the upper castes. The fifth was the owner/driver of the van. A few days after the event, 80 dalits, including the relatives of the family of those killed converted to Buddhism at a mass ceremony. With no organised force to retaliate the killings this was all they could conceive of, as a form of protest. With an eye to the dalit vote-bank (Haryana has a 20% dalit population) both the BSP and the Congress handed out cash to the relatives of those killed. The state did not even take this nominal action. At the ceremony, Ajit Dhuiya fulminated "*you value cows more than us, make us rake your latrines and never forget we are lower castes, even if we are educated and well off*".

In yet another major case of dalit atrocity in Haryana 275 dalit families of Harsola in Kaithal district were beaten and driven out of the village by upper caste persons on Feb. 10, 03. This happened in the presence of a large police force and was openly supported by the local MLA, Ram Pal Majra (who was the government's Chief parliamentary Secretary). The dalits returned to the village on Feb. 20, when their attackers were released from jail and were carried in a procession through the village and the dalit neighbourhood. Out of fear they once again left the village. The Deputy Commissioner of Kaithal also supported the upper castes and no criminal case was filed. He informed the media that dalits have not returned to the village as they are indebted to some upper-castes. The dalits approached the village panchayat, it refused to intervene.

The reason for this attack was that the dalits refused to vote for the MLA Ram Pal Majra. They said: "*on Feb. 11 we had quietly assembled to discuss the forthcoming Guru Ravidas anniversary, when hundreds of armed men attacked us. Our houses were ransacked, our shops vandalized, and household goods smashed. More than 20 of us were seriously injured. They were infuriated as these upper castes had asked us to cancel the celebrations of Ravidas Jayanti and we had continued with the preparations.*" Till mid-May the newspapers reported that the entire 275 families were camp-

ing around a "Harijan" colony in Kaithal. They dare not go home. They were wallowing in squalor on the verge of starvation. There were no basic amenities in the area — not even drinking water or power.

In addition there has been a report of a large number of bonded labour in Punjab and Haryana, the bulk of whom are dalits. This was brought to light by the case of the rescue of 37-year-old Bacchan Singh, a Dalit farm worker, by activists of the All India Agricultural Workers Union (AIAWU).⁽⁵⁾ Even more shocking was the attitude of the administration of Fatehabad district in Haryana, which not only refused first to believe the AIAWU members but delayed the rescue process. Cases were filed only after the release of the hapless Dalit, Bacchan Singh, who worked on the fields of Sukhdev Singh and his brothers. Sukhdev Singh, his brother and their two sons owned 150 acres (60 hectares) of land, three tractors and four tubewells. The treatment meted out to Bacchan Singh and his family became particularly cruel recently. Bacchan Singh kept away from work on June 30 to attend the wedding of his niece. On July 3, when he returned to the farm, Sukhdev, his brother and their two sons allegedly brutally beat him up. It has been stated that he was hit on the head and legs and then chained, even made to work with his left hand chained to the left leg. At night his hands were also tied. He was allegedly kept in this condition until he was rescued on July 9.

Some 200 cases have been identified and the affected people rescued by the AIAWU since 1994, when it came into being. They said that the majority of agricultural workers in the district were in debt and it was difficult to find a village where a landless resident was free from debts. Debts in some cases even go up to Rs. 1 lakh. Other villages that faced the practice of bonded labour included Kamana, Bada, Hamzapur, Lamba, Airwa, Ratangarh, Chimon, Burj, Ratahera and Barpur. In one instance 13 persons, including four women, were rescued from a landlord. They had been made to work for long hours in the farms; they were fastened with long chains so that they could move around and work but not escape. The AIAWA claimed that the bonded labour sys-

tem and bonded-labour-like conditions exist in parts of Fatehabad, Sirsa, Kaithal, West Jind, Karnal, Panipat and Rohtak. While the first four districts are characterised by the presence of big landlords and landholdings, the latter three have relatively smaller landholdings. The exploitation of workers, they said, is more in the former, where it is rare to find any worker getting the minimum agricultural wage of Rs.72.12 a day. Women workers are said to be exploited in more than one way. Rural indebtedness is very high in these parts.

The Dalit Mukti Sangathan has alleged that the cases of dalit atrocities had witnessed a spurt in the recent past. The situation has got so bad that even the National Human Rights Commission announced on June 6, 2003 that it would investigate the reports of growing atrocities on Dalits in Haryana.

Jalandhar Episode

Towards end May, early June 2003, Punjab witnessed the worst caste-related strife the State has ever seen. Jalandhar and the surrounding areas were under curfew for a fortnight. And this in the land of Guru Nanak who introduced significant social reforms into an oppressive/casteist Hindu religion. But here, though they faced opposition from the entire establishment (police, bureaucrats, political parties, etc) the dalits fought back violently and threatened greater "direct action" if remedial measures were not taken.

The dispute has been over the shrine of Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Samadhi in Talhan village near Jalandhar, built in the memory of the local Sufi saint. This village has a large dalit population. The problem arose when the dalits entered the annual fair of the Saint organised by the Jats of the village. Assisted by the police the Jat youths launched vicious attacks on dalits and destroyed their property. They tore down the photo of Guru Ravi Das placed in the 'langar' of the shrine. The dalits retaliated and attacked the houses of the managing committee members, the main instigators of the attack. The Jats demanded that the CRPF be called in. Infuriated by the police bias the dalits took to the streets in spite of the curfew smashing vehicles

and shops. Curfew was declared and the police went on a massive rampage against the dalits, who were themselves victims of attacks by Jat youth. In the police firing that ensued one dalit, Vijay Kumar, was killed and a minimum of 24 injured. Many dalit houses were damaged. The clashes spread to over three localities of Jalandhar. Pitched battles took place between the police and the dalits and indefinite curfew was declared. The curfew lasted for a full fortnight.

The problem in Talhan has been festering for years for control over the managing committee of the Shrine, which has been in the hands of the Jats. Dalits began to assert rights over the Shrine as they claimed it was built on common land. The matter went to the court last January. The dalits obtained an order enabling them to participate in the elections to the managing committee. The Jats refused to respect the order. On Jan 14, 03 the dalits, armed with a fresh court order arrived to contest the elections. The Jats walked out. All the 13 elected were dalits. Later a fight broke out at the shrine and the police forced the dalits out of the shrine.

Since the last five years the Jats had declared a social boycott of the dalits for putting forward their demand. Now after the fight, the Jats declared that dalits cannot enter the shrine. On the same they declared an economic blockade of dalits, by refusing to buy their milk, sell them fodder and even denying them access to open fields to defecate. The Chief Minister refused to step in to settle the dispute. The administration and the police refused to implement the court order or even respond to the directives of the National Commission of SC and STs, which ordered the prosecution of Jat leaders.

Dalits mounted pressure with demonstrations and a hunger strike. Still there was no action. On May 27, 03 the Talhan Dalit Action Committee passed a resolution threatening more upfront means — warned of direct (no longer peaceful) action. They blamed the BJP and the Damdani Taksal for the violence. The Congress was silent. The 'left' and BSP, both of whom have a sizable presence in the State, were absent. The Chief minister blamed the violence on "trouble-makers from

outside" — in other word dalit labourers. The 5-member Congress Group of Ministers to investigate the Talhan riots had not even visited the dalit victim's families. So, the dalits stood alone in their battle.

But the problem is not just a localized affair. It is a symptom of a deeper malaise of increasing discrimination against dalits in Punjab. For the past several years the Jat-dominated SAD (Shirimoni Akali Dal) and the SGPC (that controls the Gurdwaras) have sought to exclude Sehajdhari Sikhs — those who do not observe its outward appearances, as unshorn hair — from the faith. Most Sehajdhari Sikhs are dalits and have been fighting efforts to strip them of their right to vote in the SGPC elections.

As there is a deeper cause to the Jalandhar episode, caste riots in Punjab are likely to escalate. And given the SAD's close alliance with the BJP such anti-dalit efforts are bound to escalate. The problem is that all other parties in Punjab are Jat-dominated and would not like to disturb their vote-banks. The BSP was as usual absent in the midst of the conflict, but now seek to use the issue to revive their lost base in Punjab — their only problem is that they were closely allied to the BJP/Akali Dal gang. Of late it has been reported that temples of Guru Ravidas have been selectively demolished by the respective governments in Chandigarh and Delhi.

Tamil Nadu

Since 1995 there has been a virtual war against increased dalit assertion by the police and the upper castes — particularly the Thevars in the South and the Vanniyars in the north. These latter belong to the middle castes and have huge vote-banks. They are also the rising castes in rural Tamil Nadu and the main support base of the two chief parties — the DMK and the AIADMK. In the massive clashes that have taken place both these parties, while trying to use it for their political gain, have taken vehemently anti-dalit positions. These so-called Dravidian parties, with the long-lost Periyar traditions, have been seeking accommodation with the brahminical BJP, betraying their crude anti-dalit bias. The administration, as usual, has displayed

its casteist fangs with venom rarely seen in such an overt manner.

Incidents that occurred in Kodiyankulam in 1995, Melavalavu in 1997 and Tirunelveli in 1999 stand out in the recent record of atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu at the economic, political and social levels.

The police raid on the relatively prosperous village of Kodiyankulam in Tuticorin district appeared to have been motivated by a desire to undermine the local Dalit community economically and thereby strike at what was believed to be the support base of Dalit militants in the region.

The police attack on an all-party procession at Tirunelveli on July 23, 1999, held in support of the striking Manjolai tea estate workers, led to the drowning in the Tamiraparni of 17 persons, 15 of them Dalits, who were beaten up and chased into the river. Indications of a design to put down any Dalit attempt at political mobilisation were evident in this.

The most shocking among the three incidents was the murder of six Dalits, including the young president of the Melavalavu panchayat in Madurai district, Murugesan, allegedly by a group of persons belonging to the Thevar community. These incidents marked the beginning of a determined offensive by vested interests among casteist social groups in the State to frustrate efforts at Dalit assertion at the grassroots level.

From the day the State government notified in June 1996 elections to local bodies after a gap of over a decade and announced that the Melavalavu panchayat would be reserved for Dalits under the amended Panchayat Act, sections of caste Hindu people of the village began campaigning against the move. The threat of social and economic boycott was held out against Dalits, who are dependent largely on upper caste land-holders for a livelihood. When elections came, Dalits who had filed nominations had to withdraw in the face of upper caste terror and the election was rendered infructuous. When elections were held later with fresh nominations, booth-capturing necessitated a repoll. In the repoll Murugesan was elected the panchayat president but was reportedly prevented by upper caste people from discharging his duties. On

Murugesan's representation to the Chief Minister, armed security was provided to him at the panchayat office. He was, however, slain along with five others - one of them his brother and another the panchayat vice-president - while returning to the village after a meeting with the Collector in Madurai. Forty-three of the 44 persons, whose names figured in the first information report relating to the multiple murders, were arrested and released on bail after a month.

Dalits, mostly landless agricultural workers, complain that they are denied work by local land-holders. With upper caste landlords in neighbouring villages also refusing to employ them upon pressure from their Melavalavu counterparts, many Dalit youth are said to have left the village in search of livelihood.

The Dalits complained of lack of access to shops and wells in the upper caste areas and also of non-availability to them of essentials such as rice and kerosene in fair price shops. Three years after the murders, a memorial for the slain Dalits was raised at Melavalavu at a cost of Rs.5 lakhs, making use of free labour from Dalits in and around the village. Dalits of the village, however, continue to be victims of social boycott by upper caste people.

In Feb 2002 the police have been charged, yet again, with perpetrating excesses against Dalits at Sankaralingapuram and Challochettipatti villages in Tamil Nadu's Thuthukudi district. The indictment of the police came this time from a six-member panel headed by Justice H. Suresh, former Judge of the Bombay High Court. The committee held a "public hearing" into charges of police excesses against Dalits at Sankaralingapuram and Challochettipatti villages in Thuthukudi district in November 2001. The "hearing" was arranged by a joint struggle committee. Although the immediate provocation for the police action was the death of a constable while handling a road blockade agitation by Dalits of the two villages on November 16, 2001, the genesis of the trouble lay in the panchayat elections held a month earlier. In a swoop on the villages following the policeman's death, at least 180 persons, including a large number of

women, children and even infants were arrested and allegedly beaten up. With virtually one-fifth of the Dalit population in police custody, the rest left the village fearing police repression.

In this particular case, during a local elections on November 15 2001, when a caste Hindu youth complained against Ponraj, the police registered a case. When Dalits of Challochettipatti protested against the police bias, caste Hindu groups threw stones at Dalit women and damaged houses. A Dalit and his young son were assaulted. When Dalits complained, the police intervened only to arrest the Dalits. Around 300 Dalits then blocked traffic on the nearby Vilathikulam-Pudur road to protest the police discrimination. A team of policemen from Pudur arrived and resorted to a lathi-charge. When a constable beat a Dalit youth, some of the demonstrators came to his rescue. Murugan, a Special Branch constable, who alighted from a bus, joined the police. The Dalits are said to have retaliated by throwing stones. In the melee Murugan and another policeman were injured. Angry policemen chased the Dalit demonstrators into the village and over 150 Dalits were rounded up. The age of those arrested ranged from 30 days to 90 years.

What followed was large-scale destruction of property in the deserted Dalit colony. Houses were damaged and ransacked. Almirahs, fans, mixies, grinders, television sets, tape-records, cassettes, bicycles, sewing machines, cooking vessels, wooden furniture, steel cots and bedding were damaged. Dalits who returned after a few weeks complained of property loss amounting to nearly Rs.45 lakhs. Even certificates and mark-sheets of students, employment exchange registration cards, land pattas and other important documents lay strewn. Gold jewellery and silverware were also missing, the locals complained. Four months after the incident, the Dalit houses in the villages bear tell-tale marks of the rampage. The police continue to patrol the area.

From the mid-1990s Tamil Nadu has witnessed a massive growth in the number of vicious attacks on dalits, with the upper castes and the entire state machinery ganging up. But what is encouraging is that they have not

taken these attacks meekly and have been fighting back. An example of the State's vehemence against the dalits was its attitude to a procession held in Chennai in August 1998. Several dalit organisations had decided on a procession to the Raj Bhavan to present a memorandum to the Governor "*highlighting the sufferings of dalits in Tamil Nadu*". It was organised by the Devendrakula Vellalar Federation (DVF). The then DMK government came down brutally on the procession. The procession was banned and roughly 1 lakh dalits were arrested in a preemptive scoop. Though permission was finally got through a writ petition to the courts, the judge passed such stringent conditions that it made a mockery of the 'permission'.

The main conflict in South Tamil Nadu has been between the middle-upper caste Thevars and the rising Devendra Kula Vellalar (DKV) dalit community. Rising economic status has resulted in greater assertion, which has led to resentment from the land-owning Thevars, on whose farms the bulk of the dalits have to eke out an existence. Demanding equal treatment in temple festivals, the refusal to carry out ritually demeaning tasks, claiming an equal share in public goods, etc have become the new mode of assertion. The Thevars have responded by clinging more resolutely to their caste status as a way of affirming their superiority — so, the increasingly violent conflicts. As we go to the press reports of atrocities on dalits continue to come in.

While the AIADMK fully backed the Thevars, the DMK gave them tacit support. The so-called left felt it better to ignore the conflict. **So the dalits were left to fight on their own with the only support coming from the weak revolutionary groups in the State. Today there is a proliferation of dalit groups at the local level, fighting militant battles, with one, the Dalit Liberation Party of Coimbatore, even calling for armed struggle.**

Rajasthan

In Rajasthan, even in traditional marriages the upper-castes have vehemently objected to dalits conducting the ceremony in the style of the caste Hindus with the bride-

groom on horseback. Numerous incidents of attacks on such ceremonies have come to light. An example was on May 4, 03 in village Eklara of Rajasthan. Five dalits were injured when the upper-castes objected to the bridegroom of the Jatav community riding a horse. A huge crowd of Jats and Rajputs thrashed the members of the marriage party and prevented it from proceeding to the bride's house. They forcibly dismounted the bridegroom, snatched the ceremonial garland, the gold chains, etc. The police remained passive observers. A similar case was reported against the family members of the Bairwa caste in March in the Tonk district of Rajasthan. Many other such cases have been reported, as also the right of dalits to bathe in the public tanks/lakes.

In August 03, the State Government closed down a premier institution for the coaching of SC and ST students for competitive exams. This Centrally-funded *B.R. Ambedkar Pre-Exam Coaching Centre* has been lying in disarray for the past three years. Its 20 odd dalit students remaining in the hostel were evicted.

In March this year a memorandum was submitted demanding the tabling, on the floor of the Assembly, the report of the Justice K.S. Lodhi Commission of Inquiry, which had probed the infamous Kumher carnage. About 20 dalits were lynched and their property and houses set on fire in Kumher, near Bharatpur (stronghold of Congress spokesperson, Natwar Singh) in June 1992. Dalit organisations have been demanding since 1996, when a report was submitted, that it be made public, so that the accused be identified and punished. The Rajasthan High Court had even directed the state government in Sept.02 to table the report in the Assembly as early as possible.

The CDHR has been active in bringing issues of dalit atrocities to light. In Sept. 2002 they took out a 2-day rath yatra to Chakwada, where the dalits continue to face acute social and economic boycott. Chakwada has a history of revolt by dalits against untouchability — as far back as 1935 they revolted against a ban imposed on them by upper castes on the consumption of 'desi ghee'. On March 22, 03 activists of the CDHR staged a demonstration outside the Rajasthan As-

sembly to protest against the increasing atrocities and caste-based discrimination on dalits and against upper-caste bias.

Maharashtra

It is ironic that in Maharashtra, while on the one hand there has been a spurt of attacks on dalits, on the other a number of dalit leaders and intellectuals are flocking to the Shiv Sena at the call of Bal Thackeray for the unity of *Shiv-shakti* and *Bhim-shakti*. Forgotten are the facts that in the past the main battles for dalit assertion was with the Shiv Sena.; from the days of the Panthers to the Namantar issue to the issue of the movement against the banning of the '*Riddles in Hinduism*' book of Ambedkar.

In Maharashtra the recent sitting of the Assembly was rocked by the presentation of 27 cases of dalit atrocities. An example was the dispute over the use of common water in a village in Aurangabad district; the victims being the Matang community. After all recourse to justice failed the Matangs went on a rampage. Ironically the dalit organisations were silent, as they primarily represent the Mahars, who are considered slightly higher in the caste hierarchy — though both are dalits.

To take just some examples:

- * On Feb 9, 03, RSS hoodlums burnt free books distributed to dalits at the government student hostel in Aurangabad.

- * In April 2003, in a land dispute 22 dalit houses were burnt to ashes.

- * In Nadurbar district a dalit youth was burnt alive.

- * In Kolhapur, when dalit youths entered a temple they were attacked, a case foisted on them and one was beaten to death.

- * In Konkan district, in dalit-OBC clashes, over taking water from public wells/lakes, there has been a social boycott on dalits and poison thrown in the dalit wells.

In a recent fact-finding report by the CPDR (Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights) entitled "*Violence against Dalits in Marathwada — the Caste Cauldron of Maharashtra*", outlines details of the growing attacks of dalits in the region. It investigates three gruesome examples, of the 46 cases of atrocities

against dalits in Marathwada in just the first six months of the year. According to the report there is a pattern in the attacks: they are primarily against those dalits who have bettered their living conditions and tend to be more assertive; there is invariably an upper-caste police nexus, wherein the victims become the accused; the main political parties side with the upper-castes; and the dalit parties are invariably silent or offer mere lip sympathy. On the three examples the flash point was against the dalits asserting the right to common water.

In Bhutegaon village a dalit, Dilip Shengde, was attacked by a mob of upper-castes when he fought for his right over water at the hand-pump; the entire family was beaten and, in front of all, kerosene was poured on Dilip and he was set afire. On 14, May 03, the dalit youth was burnt to death and his mother suffered serious burn injuries. The person leading the mob was the most 'educated' man in the village and a professor of the local Jalna college!! In the other incident investigated by the CPDR, in Sonna Khota, one Dadarao Dongre, the most well off dalit in the village was hacked to death. For the last few years they were being continuously harassed and over a minor dispute over water the entire family was savagely attacked by a mob of Marathas. The attack went on for three hours with Dadarao being killed and other 13 of the Dongre family seriously injured.

The list is endless. These mentioned are just a few which have come to light in rural Maharashtra. But it gives a picture of the growing intolerance of dalit assertion throughout the State.

Dalit Atrocities across the States

In those states where feudal oppression is strong, like UP, MP, Rajasthan the bulk of such cases go unreported. Even in other states where there is no major conflagration and the humiliation continues to be meekly accepted there is no notice taken. It is only when dalits cease to accept the centuries-old humiliation of untouchability that it becomes an issue. Yet numerous cases have come to light in the Hindi belt of young girls and boys

being lynched and brutally killed when a dalit marries a higher caste.

In Mayawati homeland in February of this year the police brutally lathi-charged the dalits in Meerut. Over 100 dalits got together and formed a "Police Atank Virodhi Samiti". In another case in the same district two upper-caste elements stripped a 35-year old dalit woman naked and paraded her around the village, while 40 people watched. Her crime: upper-caste resentment against her for using the lake. For two days the police sat on the compliant; later she was threatened and even beaten to withdraw the case. Yet again in March this year panic struck 6 villages, just 50 kms from Aligarh, where a mob of upper-castes killed two dalits, with the police looking on.

In Madhya Pradesh, on Sept 2, 02, the police fired on a crowd of dalits protesting against a government doctor who refused to do the postmortem on a dalit youth killed under suspicious circumstances. The doctor even abused the people. In the police firing 3 dalits were killed and 20 injured.

Thousands more cases exist around the country, but the above-mentioned cases would sufficiently reflect the gravity of the situation of increasing caste discrimination with full complicity of the powers that be.

But, before ending this section we present one more insidious example of this degrading phenomenon called "untouchability".

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

Caste discrimination has its limits. It is being inculcated in tiny children by the parents in a most crude form by opposition to the mid-day meal scheme. This has come to light in Rajasthan and Karnataka; and probably also exists elsewhere, either subtly or overtly.

During a recent survey of the mid-day meal scheme in Rajasthan by the *Centre of Equity Studies*, it was discovered that dalit children have been asked to drink from different pitchers. The report says: *Upper-caste parents were often skeptical about the scheme and even tacitly opposed it. Or they did not allow their children to eat that food. More important, there was strong resistance to the appointment of dalit cooks. In fact, it was noticed,*

that dalit cooks were confined to schools with no upper-caste children.

In 'hi-tech' Karnataka the situation was even worse. The Government's ambitious mid-day meal scheme, which has spread throughout the State, has come under increasing attacks from the upper-castes. One head cook and two assistants have been appointed for the over 30,000 kitchen centers in the 20 districts. Of the three jobs, one post is reserved for the SC/STs. Parents of the dominant Vokkaliga caste would simply not allow their children to eat food cooked by a dalit woman. Several villages in Mandya district even went so far as to boycott the programme, protesting against the appointment of dalit cooks. In many places only dalits eat the food. In one incident even the non-dalit assistant cook refused to work, as the head cook was a dalit. In another village the dalit cook was kept out of the kitchen and only made to do the cleaning work — here, the school-in-charge stated, "*our teachers have assured the village that there will be no caste contamination*".

So, we see that in spite of all the 'modernity' that comes with globalisation, feudal practices like casteism remains entrenched. The only reform that comes in this atrocious practice of 'untouchability' is when the dalits themselves resist; it is never from the top. From the powers that dominate this system at best one hears condescending pity for the plight of dalits, at worst, their venom-spouting hatred. When VHP chief Giriraj Kishore said he values the cow more than a section of human beings — the dalits — he reflected the views of all brahminical/feudal thinking, which is widespread in the country. Intricately woven with the caste system and Hindu religion itself, such inhuman values get a halo of respectability. Kishore may crudely state it, others may not state it so frankly, but, often, the thinking is the same.

(to be continued)

Notes

- 1) *Globalisation, assessing the impact on dalits in India*, by Anand Telumbde
- 2) *The Hindu*: Nov. 18, 02
- 3) *Frontline*: Jan. 17, 03
- 4) *Outlook*: Nov 18, 02
- 5) *Frontline*: July 25, 2001

Police Brutality in AP goes beyond all Bounds

Bhaskar

Not only was the PW AP state committee member and a deputy commander mahila comrade killed in a false encounter, but the writers and lawyers who went to claim the body were brutally lathi-charged, beaten, abused and arrested. Such is the 'democratic space' offered by the Naidu government in Andhra Pradesh.

Shepherds, who had come to graze their sheep were witness to the fake encounter that took place on May 23, 2003 at Chairbanda, Cuddapah district of AP. As deputy commander, Sandhya was taking out water in a pitcher from a streamlet she was spotted by the Greyhound police and shot at. She collapsed there itself. Two others were also injured. The police said they will take them to hospital and asked them to descend the hill. But the shepherds soon heard shots again. These two were also shot dead. The next day the police announced that four naxalites were shot dead, including AP state committee member, Karumanchi Prasad, Sandhya and two shepherds.

It is clear that all four were killed in fake encounters. Two shepherds who received bullet injuries testified to this. They informed the press on the 24th and again on the 31st. The two shepherds who were an eye-witness to the killing of an unarmed Sandhya were silenced. Prasad, who it is believed was ill and not in a position to use the weapon, was probably arrested and then shot dead in cold blood.

Comrade Prasad was a member of the Revolutionary Writers Association from 1982 to 85 when he went underground. He had attended the inaugural conference of the AILRC in 1983 in Delhi. Not only did he actively participate in the cultural activities of Prakasham district, but firmly on the side of the Karemchedu dalits. Later, while leading the revolutionary movement in the Nallamalla forests, he continued his writing of poems, short stories and critiques.

In 1998 when landlords and armed gangs attacked the weaker sections and dalits, several intellectuals took varied stands on that incident. In a reply to them all he wrote an explanatory piece in the daily newspaper 'Vartha' under the name Yadanna. In 2000 he developed this into a socio-economic and political analysis of the carnage. This was published by Dikchuchi Publications in the name of Guravaya, who had taught him politics.

In his 20 years of political life he continued as a member of the RWA till the end. So, it was no wonder that to wrap his immortal body in the RWA's red flag, members of the RWA, including its general secretary, Pinaka Pani, and Cuddapah district convenor, Ravi, received the body in front of the mortuary.

Draped in the red flag the procession came towards the gate of the hospital raising slogans. They had not even reached the gate when they were brutally lathi-charged. Many were caught, thrown to the ground and

beaten. They were abused in the most filthy language. Those beaten and arrested included APCLC joint secretary Advocate Kranti Chaitnya, APCLC state treasurer, Shameer Basha (lecturer in Cuddapah Polytechnic College), and district representatives, Murali Krishna, Bhaskar, Jawhar, Ravishankar and others. Six from the APCLC, three from the RWA and another student were kept in the police station, made to sit on the floor and beaten again and again on the existing wounds. Shameer Basha's right hand was broken and left eye injured. Kranti Chaitnya's whole body was bruised and foot severely injured. Pinakapani, Ravi, Shafi, and Murali Krishna, were in severe pain, had blood clots and were unable to walk for many days. All were hospitalized and the doctor advised them three weeks rest.

Not only did the SP personally partake in the beating he threatened Basha that he would be encountered. He abused and kicked the injured Kranti Chaitnya. Obviously he had orders from the top to terrorise the intellectuals. In fact just a few days earlier the police had publicly threatened to arrest all the leading comrades of the APCLC under POTA. Such is the fascist terror in AP, where not only are revolutionaries no longer arrested, but tortured and killed in fake encounters, but intellectuals to are being harassed, beaten, arrested and even killed. The crimes of the Naidu government surpass that of any tin-pot dictator.



Demand the Immediate release of Com. Gaurav

Chandraprakash Gajural (Polit bureau member of CPN (Maoist), Nepal) was arrested on 19/08/03 at Meenambakkam airport, Chennai. He was arrested during the immigration check by the Meenambakkam airport police, Chennai for allegedly possessing a fake British passport. It was reported that the police subjected him to mental torture by way of interrogation for more than 12 hours. Thereafter he was produced

before the Judicial Magistrate, Alandur at midnight at the residence of the concerned judge. The magistrate, Alandur, Chennai, remanded him to Judicial custody till 04/09/03. A case has been registered in Crime No: 145 of 2003 for the alleged offences under section 468 (Forgery for the purpose of cheating), 471 (using a forged document as genuine) of the Indian Penal Code. read with section 12(1)(n)(d)(e) of P.P Act.

Comrade Gaurav stated that when

the red corner notice on the Maoist leaders of Nepal have been withdrawn by the Nepal government, the Tamilnadu Police ought not to have arrested him. But the fascist Tamilnadu government is notorious for incarcerating people on the most flimsy charges.

People's March demands the immediate and unconditional release of this senior and respected citizen of Nepal.

Report:

Holding of the Fifth South Asia Regional Conference of the Parties and Organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement

The Fifth South Asia Regional Conference of the parties and Organisations of RIM was concluded in July 2003. The Conference was called and led by the Communists of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and both full and candidate participants of RIM from the region participated.

The Regional Conference was held in a red area, a guerrilla zone located in the Bihar-Chattisgarh-Orissa-Jharkhand Special Area in India. It was held in a warm and conducive atmosphere protected by a company of the newly formed People's Liberation Guerrilla Army led by the Maoist Communist Centre, India. It began with the hoisting of the red flag. The martyrs of the world proletarian revolution in South Asia and all countries were commemorated by garlanding a memorial column and observing two minutes silence. The sessions were held in the specially constructed Yenan Hall decorated with slogans and illustrations reflecting the tasks and political orientation of the Conference. At the front of the hall were portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. A revolutionary cultural team performed a program in many languages in honour of the conference, in which the delegates joined, singing songs in their languages.

The conference hailed the growth of the revolutionary movement in the various countries of South Asia and the growing trend of unification between the Maoist forces in India. "The comrades from Nepal presented a

vivid picture of the earth shaking advances of the People's War, which have threatened not only the Nepalese ruling class but also Indian expansionism and US imperialism. The parties and organizations participating in the Regional Conference resolved to fulfill their internationalist duty to develop a powerful mass movement against any direct or indirect military intervention against the People's War led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) under the leadership of Comrade Prachanda. The Regional Conference endorsed the slogan "Hands off Nepal!!" and called on the revolutionary masses of the world "look the Himalayas, a better world's in birth!"

In addition, the Communiqué released said:

The Regional Conference denounces the increasing military co-operation between the US and the reactionary regimes of the region, especially efforts to set up bases and sinister plans to utilize the reactionary armies of this region in the service of US imperialist aggression and occupation in West Asia and elsewhere.

The Regional Conference hailed the importance and timely formation of the Coordinating Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). The Regional Conference hailed the formation of the Communist Party of Bhutan (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist). The Regional Conference discussed the problems of the Maoist movement in

Bangladesh and called upon the comrades of that country to redouble their efforts to forge a unified single party on the basis of correct Marxist-Leninist-Maoist line. The Regional Conference supported efforts to strengthen the World People's Resistance Movement in South Asia.

As comrades dispersed to their respective trenches of combat the fighters of the PLGA and revolutionary masses gave an inspiring send off to the delegates.

The Conference ended with slogans like: Down with US Imperialist Onslaught Against the Peoples of the World!, Hail the Emerging New Tide of World Proletarian Revolution!; Down with revisionism!; Long Live People's War in Nepal, India, Peru, Philippines and Turkey!; Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism!; Long Live Proletarian Internationalism! etc.

The Communiqué was signed by: Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Naxalhari), CPI(ML) (NB); Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), CPN(Maoist); Maoist Communist Centre India, MCCI; Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla Central Committee, PBSP CC; Proletarian Party of Purbo Bangla Maobadi Punargathan Kendro, PBSMMPK;

Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), RCCI (MLM); Bangladesher Samyobadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist), BSD (ML); Communist Party of Bhutan (MLM), CPB (MLM). ■ ■

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WSF, NGOs and the Revolutionary Standpoint - Part I

(From this article we print a series of articles in all the coming issues of the magazine on the WSF and related events which will seek to expose the real character of some of the fake 'opposition' to globalisation which dupes a section of the intellectuals and even a part of the revolutionary camp. In the process we shall seek to bring out what it really means to be against imperialist globalisation and war. This is a two-part article. The first part deals with the NGOs and the second part will deal with the WSF)

Nitin

In the first week of January last, Hyderabad witnessed a massive gathering of various organizations and individuals from different countries of the world who were supposed to be opposing Globalization. The event was organised by the World Social Forum (WSF) under the banner of Asia Social Forum (ASF). The chief sponsors at the local level were the revisionist CPI(M) and CPI. And some organizations belonging to the broad ML camp too took part in the ASF jamboree.

However, some revolutionary organisations, progressive organisations and individuals boycotted the event and exposed the hollowness of the slogans of the WSF and ASF such as "Another world is possible!" "Another Asia is possible!". A parallel rally was organised by the Forum Against Imperialist Globalisation (FAIG) in the same week (January 4th) in Hyderabad which showed how another world and another Asia is possible only through the complete elimination of imperialism. It brought out the link between the imperialist funds and the WSF, the dubious stand of the ASF and its parent organisation, the WSF, towards Globalisation, and exposed the hypocrisy of the organisers of the ASF in trying to project it as an alternative before the people.

There were heated debates in the progressive and revolutionary circles about the stand to be taken towards the ASF.

Initially, there was some confusion even among the genuine revolutionary forces regarding the standpoint to be adopted. Though it was clear to everyone that the WSF and ASF provided no real solution for Globalisation and the basic issues of the people, some felt that participation would help in putting forward our views before a larger audience. Some others felt that

we would be isolated by not participating in the event since a large number of progressive organisations and individuals were taking part in it. There were also opinions that the WSF should be regarded as a friend, that we should seek to forge a united front with it, that we should use it to focus attention on the ongoing state repression in AP and elsewhere, that one can interact with the various organisations and individuals by participating in it, and so on.

The confusion in the understanding regarding the nature of the WSF, its purpose and aims, its impact on the people's revolutionary movements and class struggle was reflected in the various stands taken by the revolutionary and progressive organisations and individuals. This is also due to the lack of proper understanding regarding the role of the NGOs and the relation between the ongoing Globalisation, the various imperialist agencies such as the World Bank-IMF, and the NGOs. The active participation of the CPI and CPI(M) in organising the ASF had also lent a "Left" image to the WSF and created illusions among some intellectuals and progressive sections in society. The facts regarding funding by the TNCs and imperialist agencies to the WSF are being glossed over and even hushed up by the organisers and the revisionist parties. And with some prominent intellectuals in the forefront in organising the ASF (and now WSF), the event gains more credibility.

Since the bulk of the constituents of the WSF comprise NGOs, it is very essential to have a clear-cut understanding regarding the role of NGOs, the philosophy, politics and the aims of the WSF, and adopt a correct Marxist-Leninist stand. This is all the more important and urgent for the revolutionaries as the WSF is now planning to hold its next Conference in India in January next year and the city of

Mumbai is chosen as its venue. This is the first time that the WSF is holding its conference outside Brazil and one must also understand the reasons behind choosing India for the event.

Globalisation and the NGOs

Ever since the onset of the present phase of Globalisation and Liberalisation in the late 1970s, and particularly since the collapse of the bureaucratic capitalist states in the Soviet Union and East Europe in the late 1980s, a new propaganda campaign with fashionable, radical terminology is being unleashed by international capital in the subtlest of ways. The vehicles of the new vocabulary are the so-called Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that have proliferated on a massive scale.

The new vocabulary of the NGOs is 'empowerment' of the deprived sections, 'civil society', 'anti-statism', 'social justice', 'human rights', 'identity movements', 'sectional movements', 'self-help', 'community development', 'sustainable development', 'participatory democracy', 'environmental protection', and so on. It is not surprising to see the same vocabulary in the documents of the World Bank, ADB, and other UN agencies and UN-sponsored World Summits. It may look paradoxical that the very same imperialist agencies that vigorously promote liberalisation and globalisation all over the world are also the ones promoting the concepts of grassroots democracy, empowerment, human rights, and so on.

But if one analyses the strategy of the exploiting classes we find that it is the most common thing to resort to both repression and reform simultaneously. While letting loose the worst type of massacres on the struggling masses, the same fascist governments also dole out funds for so-called welfare schemes, development activity, and so on, at least for a tiny section of



the population. Worse still, they even talk at times of human rights violations by their own mercenary forces and set up human rights commissions.

And we have seen the worst massacres unleashed by the US imperialists in Afghanistan and Iraq recently while at the same time distributing food packets and other humanitarian "aid" to the victims of their inhuman bombardment. The same UN that authorises the use of brutal force to bombard territories in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq also sends humanitarian missions through its "aid agencies" supplying water, food, medicines, and so on. The same World Bank that displaces lakhs of people making them homeless and landless by constructing large dams, sets up organisations to fight for compensation and build homes for the displaced people. The same imperialist agencies that degrade the environment through incessant felling of the forest through various projects also set up NGOs demanding protection of the forests. And precisely in the same way, the imperialists who ravage the entire world through their policies of liberalisation and globalisation, also set up organisations like the NGOs to provide relief to the people affected by these policies. (The main purpose of course is to depoliticise and demobilise the oppressed masses). Even political parties are established by the imperialists among the struggling masses in order to provide a "safety valve" for people's wrath as in the case of the Congress party in 1885 by the British colonialists.

However, the pace of forming the so-called NGOs has increased since the beginning of the 1980s coinciding with the phase of imperialist globalisation. The reasons are not hard to understand.

Globalisation as we all know is a policy of the imperialists intended to maximise their plunder of the world's oppressed people, particularly in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is sought as a way out of their deepening crisis that had set in since the mid-1970s. The imperialists are aware that the process of globalisation is bound to be accompanied by mass impoverishment, unemployment, starvation deaths, debili-

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tating diseases and environmental degradation at unheard of levels. It is bound to give rise to massive anti-imperialist movements on a global scale and armed resistance to the imperialist onslaught. The unity of the oppressed classes that inevitably follows can spell doom for the authors of globalisation—the imperialists and their comprador stooges in the Third World. The ongoing Maoist people's wars will further intensify and will spread to new regions in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The working class struggles in the imperialist countries will deepen and a revolutionary crisis is bound to develop in these countries. The oppressed masses all over the world will look towards socialism as the only alternative to the present system of capitalist greed and exploitation that alienates human beings, and pushes them into the most miserable conditions of existence. It is this spectre of socialism being resurrected that is haunting the imperialists and all their running dogs ever since the collapse of the bureaucratic capitalist regimes in the former Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe.

In fact, with the collapse of these regimes, the entire imperialist camp was overjoyed and the reactionary media under their control wrote stories after stories on the totalitarian nature of "communist regimes", about the "crimes" of Stalin, and endless accounts of atrocities under the Communists that were supposed to have been dug up from hitherto hidden archives. This temporarily unfavourable situation for the revolutionary forces is sought to be utilised to the maximum by unleashing vicious propaganda that communism is dead, that Marxism has become outdated, that there is no basis for working class

unity as the workers are divided and subdivided into various sections, nations, sexes, religions, and so on. Post-structuralism, post-modernism etc became fashionable trends particularly since the early 1990s among several left intellectuals who had lost faith on class struggle and working class dictatorship. The ideological offensive of the imperialist capital went on throughout the decade of the 1990s but began to fizzle out towards the end of the decade. The theoreticians and ideologues of the new theories trumpeting the "final triumph of capitalism", "end of history", "demise of Marxism and communism", "Identity politics" in place of class politics, and so on, began to be discredited as the crisis and the inherent contradictions of the world capitalist system deepened further with the brutal onslaught of globalisation.

On the one hand, the collapse of the bureaucratic capitalist regimes could not provide any worthwhile succour to the imperialist capital. And, on the other, in almost all these countries the old discredited revisionist parties came back to power rejecting the new dispensation of the Western variety. Intense struggles against imperialist globalisation began to take root in several countries and these began to acquire a global character. Further advances were made in the ongoing people's wars under the leadership of the Maoist parties in Nepal, Philippines, Peru, India, Turkey, and elsewhere. Capitalism became further discredited in the eyes of the vast masses though socialism did not yet become the dominant ideology in the eyes of the world people who are yet to understand the full implications of the setback to socialism.

Growing working class unity and the birth of new Marxist-Leninist parties in several countries of the world shattered the myth of identity movements being the dominant theme in the contemporary world and that unity of the class was a thing of the past. All these developments unnerved the reactionary ruling classes in the imperialist countries and their comprador henchmen in the Third World.

Thus it was in such a background of all-round crisis of imperialism, the upsurge in the people's movements



worldwide, and the loss of credibility for the capitalist ideology, that the need for depoliticising the masses and diverting their struggles into peaceful channels became a pressing one for the imperialists in order to carry out their globalisation offensive smoothly. NGOs were perceived as convenient tools for fulfilling this need. Globalisation thus provided the basis for the mushrooming of the NGOs during the decade of the 90s and the beginning years of the new millennium.

It was in Latin America where globalisation was first thrust on the countries during the 1980s and where the people's struggles against it became quite sharp that the proliferation of the NGOs could be seen the most. In Chile, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru the policies of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation played havoc with the lives of the people. Most of the assets were privatised resulting in massive unemployment and poverty. The scrapping of subsidies and welfare programmes brought mass revolts against the ruling classes by the middle of the 90s. The IMF riots in Venezuela, the general strikes of workers in Bolivia, the Zapatista rural rebellion in Mexico, the indigenous people's revolts in Brazil, the urban uprisings in Caracas and cities of Brazil and Argentina, and, most particularly, the Maoist movement in Peru, made the imperialists jittery. They began to increase their so-called aid to these countries and also promote the setting up of more and more NGOs besides simultaneously unleashing the most brutal repression on the rebellious masses. For instance, as noted by James Petras, while there were about a 100 NGOs in Bolivia in 1980, they increased to 530 by 1992. They received an amount of \$738 million in 1991 from the World Bank and the various imperialist governments with the claim of eradicating poverty that had reached horrendous levels due to globalisation.

According to a report released by the OECD (The organisation of the richest 24 countries in the world which had later admitted Mexico and Turkey too) in 1989, there were 4000 NGOs in the member countries. They spend about \$3 billion (around 15,000 crore) every year. There were some 50,000

NGOs in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America according to an estimate in 2000. The annual budget of these NGOs is around 40,000 crores of rupees. These are actually underestimates. The number of NGOs actually runs into lakhs.

For instance, in India alone, as on March 31, 2001, the number of NGOs registered under the FERA were 22,924, **which again is a gross underestimate of the actually existing number.** They received an amount of Rs. 4535.23 crores of foreign funds increasing by more than 15% over the preceding year. The NGOs in Delhi received the highest amount followed by Tamilnadu and AP. The highest share in these grants was contributed by the US followed by Britain and Germany. Besides, the Indian government too had allotted funds to the tune of a few hundred crores in consecutive Five Year Plans to the NGOs with the claim of promoting social services and micro-level planning. And the various state governments have been using the NGOs for carrying out their so-called reform schemes in their respective states. As a result thousands of NGOs have cropped up in some states like Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Tamilnadu, AP, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi and so on. In fact, it is the World Bank that is directly instructing the governments to implement the welfare and development schemes through the NGOs. And most of the World Bank-aided projects in the Third World have the involvement of the NGOs. This fact was brought out in an official document of the World Bank itself. Entitled "*The World Bank and Civil Society*" (September 2000), it states: "*More than 70% of the projects supported by the World Bank that were approved in 1999 involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society in some manner.*"

A Brief Outline of the NGOs


The term Non-Governmental Organisations is actually a misnomer. The NGOs are financed and directed by the various imperialist agencies, the imperialist governments and the comprador regimes. They act as the liaison between the people and the

governments. They are the vehicles through which the exploiters seek to influence the opinions of 'civil society'. They are the servants of imperialist capital. Almost all the NGOs are directed by the invisible hand of the imperialists who set them up or fund them in accordance with their strategic goals. Huge funds are thus poured into the coffers of the NGOs in the name of development, social justice, human rights, grassroots democracy, etc. In the past decade the World Bank and other UN agencies have been insisting that funds should be utilised through the NGOs. So do the various governments. With such huge funds at their disposal the NGOs act as elitist organisations completely divorced from the masses. Yet they focus themselves as benefactors for the people. It is estimated that hardly 10-15% of the allocated imperialist funds reach the needy people while most of it goes for the maintenance of the NGO establishments and the running expenditures of the so-called volunteer workers.

There are three categories of NGOs according to the type of functions they perform. The first category of NGOs are those that provide immediate relief to the victims of war, natural calamities, accidents, etc. These were the most prominent form of NGOs until the time of European reconstruction in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The second category of NGOs focus their concentration on long-term social and economic development. These came into prominence in Europe from the 1960s. In the Third World countries these NGOs are engaged in imparting technical training, in the construction of schools, hospitals, toilets, etc. They claim to promote self-reliance, development of local productive resources, development of rural markets, people's participation in development activities, etc. They encourage self-help groups, micro-credit societies, and so on.

The third category of NGOs concentrate on social action. They talk of strengthening people's capacities, releasing their inherent potentialities, enhancing the social awareness of the masses, overcoming the influence of pre-capitalist social systems, etc.



These NGOs negotiate with the World Bank, IMF, WTO, and other UN agencies and suggest reforms, mobilise people peacefully and build pressure on these imperialist agencies and the governments to bring reforms and changes in policies.

The first category of NGOs comprise mainly of Christian religious institutions like the Churches, though these are also present in the second and third categories of NGOs. Broadly, we can characterise the first category of NGOs as charity organisations; the second category as developmental organisations; and the third as participatory and globalist organisations. The first category of NGOs characterise the period of direct colonial rule, the second dominated the period of the 'cold war', and the third are active in the period of globalisation. Though there is an overlapping of functions in the case of some NGOs, their categorisation is made basing on the dominant activity.

It must be kept in mind that the functions of the NGOs in different periods are decided by, and accord with, the changing needs of the imperialists in different periods.

NGOs came onto the scene mainly in the 20th century though a handful existed in the 19th century. There were 344 NGOs in the West at the time of the First World War. The main purpose for which NGOs were formed was for propagating and spreading the culture and values of the colonial powers in the colonies along with collecting the necessary information and indulging in espionage activities. Hence they received the support from the colonial governments. The Missionary institutions like the Church were the main form assumed by the NGOs at that time. And these extended all sorts of support to the colonial rulers.

In the next phase following the end of direct colonial rule, i.e., the phase of neo-colonialism, there was a spurt in the number of the NGOs throughout the world. The role of American NGOs surpassed that of the European ones during this period. Since America did not have colonies, barring the Philippines, and since there was generally hatred for the other colonial powers in their former colonies, America could easily penetrate

The imperialists who ravage the entire world through their policies of liberalisation and globalisation, also set up organisations like the NGOs to provide relief to the people affected by these policies

into these countries after the end of direct colonial rule. The strength of the US vis-à-vis the other imperialist powers that got weakened during WWII was an advantageous factor for the American imperialists. Hence along with American capital the NGOs too entered almost every country of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The most important factor that had acted as a catalyst for the proliferation of the American NGOs was the need to contain the 'threat of communism' that seemed to loom large over several countries. The ideological, political and military leadership to counter the 'communist threat' was taken over by the US imperialists. It may surprise us to hear that America had sent its NGOs to the Soviet Union during the famine in 1921 supplying food, clothes, medicines, etc. worth over half-a-billion dollars. The American Relief Administration (ARA) was the NGO most actively involved in relief work in post-revolutionary Russia. This was done after all the efforts of the American imperialists to quell the Russian revolution by supporting the counter-revolutionaries failed miserably. The American NGOs had also supplied food grains to Austria and Hungary after WWI to check the advance of revolutions in those countries and to wean them away from Bolshevism. The aim of the imperialist aid passed on through the NGOs in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe was to strengthen the capitalist forces, push those economies toward liberal economic policies, and to create a good impression about US imperialism. There was, of course, the economic factor. For instance, the 5,40,000 tonnes of American foodgrains that were shipped to Rus-

sia by the ARA helped stabilise the prices of foodgrains in the American market while acquiring the label of philanthropy in exchange. The American NGOs also served as important vehicles for transferring the surplus foodgrains of the US to the Third World countries through such schemes as 'Food for Work', 'Mid-day Meals', etc.

There was a proliferation of the second category of NGOs in the US especially since the time of John F Kennedy. He declared that socio-economic development and political democracy were the two pillars of US foreign aid, as he considered these to be the real guarantee against communism in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Hence programmes of self-help, community development, technical training to the youth, literacy programmes, agricultural development schemes, etc were initiated. The success of the Cuban revolution in 1959 in the very backyard of American imperialism and its tremendous influence on the countries in Latin America gave a sense of urgency to this task. The American ruling classes on the one hand unleashed fascist repression in Latin American countries through the existing military dictatorships and despotic regimes or installing them where necessary, while on the other initiated several reform programmes. The then Pope too called upon the Church in Europe to send at least ten per cent of the missionaries to Latin America to "help the people overcome poverty and misery" so as to counter the spectre of communism.

The way the NGOs operate in the countries invaded by, or attacked by the imperialist powers, that makes a mockery of the humanitarian aid, should open anyone's eyes. In Vietnam, for instance, even as the US dropped bombs and napalm creating death and destruction on a massive scale, it deployed its NGOs such as CARE (Co-operative Assistance for Relief Everywhere), CRS (Catholic Relief Services), WV (World Vision), IVS (International Voluntary Services), American Red Cross, Vietnam Christian Service, and so on to provide relief and rehabilitation to the war victims in Vietnam. And in Afghanistan and Iraq we have seen how the most savage bombing by the US-led impe-



rialists was accompanied by humanitarian aid. Bombs and bread were dropped simultaneously. As soon as a country is ravaged and people are killed, maimed and uprooted from their homes, the NGOs would step in giving the 'healing touch'.

What is more ironic, the US Congress had amended its Act concerning foreign assistance in 1975 stipulating that aid can be stopped in countries where human rights were being violated. It was a time when the most notorious dictators were being nurtured by the US imperialists in almost every continent—a Pinochet in Chile, a Marcos in the Philippines, a Suharto in Indonesia, a Mobutu in Zaire, to cite a few. And the US itself was guilty of the worst violations of human rights through acts of direct aggression. The direct offshoot of this new policy was the rise of human rights NGOs which talk of human rights even as their masters impose fascist dictatorships.

The American NGOs act as subcontractors for the government projects in the Third World. They serve as tools of American policy when compared to their European counterparts, the simple reason being the huge funding they obtain from the government, which has been more than 80% of their total spending. They work to spread the American influence, the American world outlook and the Western ideology in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America through education and training. Charity is the smokescreen under which funds from the Fords, Rockfellers, Carnegie and other TNC foundations flew to these regions. As the increasing dependence of the NGOs on government funds posed the danger of the latter losing their credibility, the US Congress had tried time and again to enact laws that at least 20 per cent of the funds should be procured by the NGOs from private sources by 1985. Later it extended the date by a few more years. However, even this clause had to be given up as most NGOs failed to procure the stipulated 20 per cent of private funds.

In the phase of globalisation, particularly after the collapse of the regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the NGOs have taken up as

their main task the neutralisation of the ill-effects of globalisation and liberalisation. They are not against globalisation but want it to be implemented by involving the people or 'participatory globalisation' as a UN official put it. They campaign for globalisation with a human face, sustainable development, and so on. They create the illusions among the people that it is possible to reform the imperialist agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, ADB and others. Thus they try to dilute the wrath of the masses against imperialism and veer them to reformist ideology.

The main aims of the NGOs

These can be stated as follows:

1. They channelise the popular discontent along constitutional, peaceful and harmless ways by acting as 'safety valves'.

2. They seek to divide the oppressed people into sections and identities thereby preventing the development of class unity of the oppressed classes.

3. They further seek to obliterate and obfuscate the class divisions and distinctions within the social groups and sections by advocating the unity of the oppressors and the oppressed on the basis of identity alone such as gender(women), caste (dalit), ethnic (adivasi), nationality, etc.

4. They try to instill the false belief among the oppressed that there is no alternative to capitalism and that capitalism has finally triumphed. They proclaim that Marxism has become outdated and communism is dead, and hence one should strive to improve the contemporary world by democratising civil society and promote 'globalisation with a human face'.

5. They take up an anti-state stand, which looks outwardly attractive to progressive circles too. However, they try to accomplish privatisation at the micro-level what their masters do at the macro level. That is, while international capital lashes out at the role of the state in regulating the economy and wants the market to operate freely without state intervention (how false this is in reality is a different thing), the NGOs talk of self-help, co-opera-

tion, community development, and so on. The state is thus absolved of all its social responsibilities towards the people in matters such as providing education, health care, clean drinking water, sanitation, irrigation, employment, etc that are placed in the hands of individuals and private groups. Thus the NGOs make common cause with the imperialists with regard to privatisation. And they concentrate particularly among the poverty-stricken masses in the backward rural areas and urban slums. The backward areas inhabited by the adivasis are given priority for their so-called charitable work and development schemes. Through this they strive to neutralize the wrath of the deprived masses.

6. They seek to depoliticise the masses by talking in terms of non-Party activism. They claim that they are apolitical and call upon the masses to stay away from all political parties; that they should solve their problems themselves through self-help, cooperation etc. Thus, by advocating such a seemingly apolitical strategy the NGOs actually work to preserve the status quo and to retain the influence of ruling class ideology and politics on the masses. They pose themselves as alternatives to the political parties and try to replace the revolutionary parties by projecting themselves as the champions of the poor.

7. They seek to demobilise the masses by diverting them from the path of struggle and coopting the best elements into the establishment and reformism. They have succeeded to a large extent in rallying the left intellectuals to the side of capital while maintaining a progressive and even radical posture. With huge funds at their disposal, the NGOs have been able to attract and coopt the left intellectuals by funding them for attending seminars, workshops, conferences and involving them in projects and Institutes for research and policy studies. Hundreds of projects and Institutes are set up by imperialist capital all over the world that manufacture theses as per the requirements of the imperialists. By associating themselves with these projects intellectuals lend credibility to them and create illusions among the people.



8. NGOs serve as a medium to mould the opinions of the people, to create the ideology and illusions needed for the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation. They can influence the ideas of the people in a way that the state and the ruling class parties directly cannot. By trying to project themselves as selfless philanthropists and committed to people's welfare, they seek to win the sympathy of the people. Their radical, anti-imperialist rhetoric and talk of development, modernisation, and grassroots democracy, democratisation of the civil society, social justice, anti-statism, humanitarianism and human rights, empowerment and so on, can dupe the progressive and even some revolutionary sections. Thus they create ideological mystification among the masses and pave the way for the smooth plunder by imperialist capital.

9. They act as tools of international capital for the colonisation of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. They prepare the ground for the penetration of imperialist capital into these countries and create the conditions for the smooth operation of capital and extension of the market. By selecting the most backward areas for their work, the NGOs have succeeded in introducing market relations in these areas in the name of community development, promoting self-help groups, etc and actively promoting the imperialist-aided development schemes. They are actively involved in so-called development projects in almost all the countries of the world and particularly in backward tribal areas.

10. They seek to stall the advance of revolutions in the subtlest of ways and, where revolutions are victorious, seek to destabilize the working class regimes and restore the capitalist system. Hence the NGOs select the most backward, strategic regions that are the potential storm-centres of revolution for their work besides concentrating on the basic classes in the urban slums.

Post-modernists, who believe more in individual enterprise than the collective, talk in terms of identities such as gender, caste, ethnic and national entities and reject the very con-

cept of class unity. And, having succumbed to political defeatism, they advocate the view that we have come to the 'end of history', that 'there is no alternative to capitalism', that reforming capitalism from within is the only recourse left to us in the given circumstances, and thus provide the ideological basis for the modern-day NGO phenomena. As several post-modernists were one-time Marxists, they lend credibility to the NGOs as progressive, and even radical, organisations.

To sum up, the NGOs are apologists for imperialism who cloak themselves in attractive language. They trade in people's dire poverty and secure funds from imperialist donors or individuals abroad by showing the poverty-stricken masses from the Third World. Like parasites they live on funds acquired in the name of the impoverished women, children and disabled people; in the name of development, in the name of empowerment, and so on. They serve as ideologues for imperialism by justifying the penetration of imperialist capital into the countries of the Third World, and promote the vice-like grip of the imperialists over the economies of these countries. That is why the imperialists, selfish blood-suckers as they are, pour in huge amounts to form and nurture these organisations. Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie Foundation, Heinrich Boell Foundation, and a host of other imperialist institutions pump in millions of dollars every year to maintain these NGOs. They fund every type of project, institute, study etc. For instance, the Ford Foundation has granted funds to numerous organisations and projects in almost every country in the world that had reached an astronomical figure of \$ 8 billion (almost 40,000 crores of rupees) since its formation in 1936. It had commissioned research scholars and intellectuals to undertake studies on subjects that are of relevance for the imperialists. Also known as Non-Profit Organisations, these NGOs actually work for increasing the imperialist profits. Without a consistent and relentless struggle against these disguised imperialist agents and apologists, revolutionaries cannot bring the masses out of reformist and constitu-

tional illusions. Lack of vigilance will lead to the weakening of the revolutionary parties and movements as witnessed in several countries especially in Latin America. These NGOs played no less a role in subverting the working class dictatorship in the former socialist countries and later the bureaucratic capitalist regimes in the Soviet-bloc countries by doling out Western capital, funds and ideology.

While the above is our basic assessment regarding the NGOs, we should also keep in mind that the NGOs have been able to attract a large number of progressive and anti-imperialist elements that are genuinely interested in social change. These elements have joined the NGOs attracted by the latter's radical rhetoric and also due to the weaknesses of the revolutionary forces.

Some NGOs who work at the grass roots among the deprived sections of society have to necessarily take up the people's issues and initiate struggles. Though these struggles are watered down ultimately there is potential to give these struggles a correct orientation through our active orientation. The limitations and the role of the leadership of the NGOs should be exposed through such intervention.

The outwardly anti-imperialist standpoint of some of the NGOs is actually directed not against imperialism as a whole but against a particular imperialist power or powers. The NGOs in Europe, for instance, adopt a radical posture towards the rapacious and aggressive policies of US imperialism; the NGOs in the US often adopt an approach directed against the European imperialist powers; the NGOs belonging to different countries in Europe adopt standpoints supporting their own respective governments and exposing other countries within the EU, and so on. A particular TNC within a country too can employ or fund an NGO to expose its rival TNC in the same country. Hence we should be extremely conscious when making an assessment about the NGOs and not go by their rhetoric or their proclaimed objectives that are quite often radical-sounding. Inter-imperialist contradictions are invariably reflected in the operations of the NGOs.



Liberia Under Siege

G.Fellow

Lying on the far Western edge of Africa, Liberia suffers from another onslaught of one of the most rapacious and dominant imperialist powers of the earth. Its elected president, Charles Taylor, has been forced to abandon the country. Instead, a US backed and Nigerian led ECOWOG military force of more than three thousand army men has taken control of the country. This ECOWOG army has been constituted by six West African nations that constitute an economic block known by the name of ECOWAS. The US marines are providing overall leadership to the interventionist forces. The US forces entered Liberia to 'teach' the black race on how to govern itself. The wise white man has again assigned to itself the task of taking up "the burden of the beasts and brutes" that have "proved unable to manage their affairs".

As far as Liberians are concerned, the imperialist press allege, the ex-slaves could not learn this 'civilized art' in the last one hundred and fifty or so years. The US imperialist masters are back with a bang though they had never left the Liberians to govern themselves ever since Liberia was established in 1847. The country was established by the US imperialists who dumped in this country 16,400 ex-slaves, after slavery was abolished in the US, and some six thousand "rescued" slaves who were being taken to the North American hemisphere. This was done to get rid of the excessive labour power of 'dangerous men' whose presence in America was considered a threat to the profit-making huge capitalist machine, which was emerging in the US. So, the white man dumped the fiery 'black cattle' on an enclave on the eastern coast of the Atlantic from where they had been originally huddled into ships and were brought to America to work on the land that was snatched from the red Indians by Columbus's robber cohorts after exterminating them on a massive scale. The enclave presently known as Monrovia, the capital of Liberia,

was named after the US President James Monroe and was gifted to the ex-slaves as a 'land of freedom.'

But it was never free and was under constant pressure from the adjoining colonies possessed by the British and French colonialists. And to safeguard its 'independence' from the threats of rival colonial powers, the US maintained a special relationship, including military, with it, which literally made it tutelage of the US imperialists.

The robbers

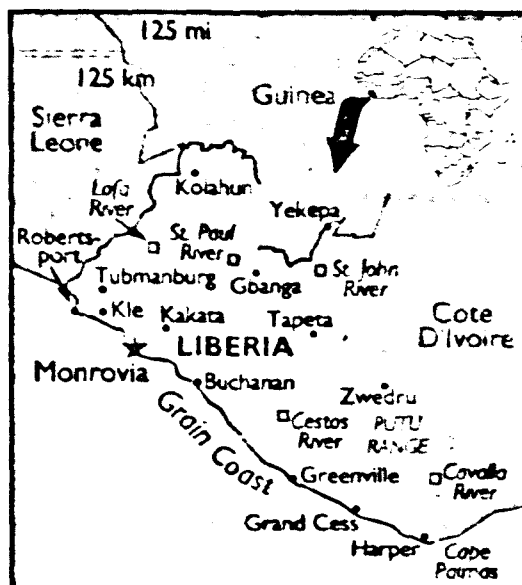
Now again, when the US and its British/Israeli allies are on a worldwide exterminating campaign, the US has sent its armed forces to occupy the country. It is taking the services of local Liberian and other reactionaries from the adjoining African neo-colonial rulers, who are not difficult to find as they abound in numbers. The regional bully Nigeria was too eager to be left aside from the troubled waters. It has served well its own and British interests in neighbouring Sierra Leone where British armies are managing the so-called peace in "the failed State." Now it is serving US interests in Liberia, which in the words of the Christian Science Monitor (CSM), "is a shell of a state...for more than two decades." It is an irony of the situation that Liberia has remained under the boots of pro-US rulers ever since its inception. More than two decades ago a US puppet Serg. Major Samuel Doe

started ruling Liberia with an iron hand to serve the cold war US interests in North-western Africa to counter the Russian influences in the region. His tyrant methods gave rise to many rebel movements including the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF) led by Charles Taylor who ultimately became president in 1997 through a ceasefire arrangement, and then got elected in a universal suffrage. The CSM warning points that in the future arrangement no opposition groups should be allowed to take up the gun to challenge the current pro-US dispensation. It wants the US intervention to make way for unchallenged control of the country in the name of establishing "a poster child for post-conflict restoration in Africa" where "with UN (read US) and US (read UN) support and financial backing, they would have to commit and recruit troops, for security; police for the next level of security; experienced administrators, to train their successors; judges, to reintroduce the rule of law and to train their successors; educators, physicians, and technicians. The UN (read the US) would have to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate the combatants."

Beautiful words indeed! A blueprint for unchallenged US imperialist control over Liberia from where it can challenge the French interests in Guinea and contend with the British for influence in Sierra Leone and also other neighbouring states.

Local thugs are there alright, but the imperialist robbers call the shots.

Doe and his cabinet colleagues were killed in a coup in 1990 in the same way as he had killed the previous ruler in 1980 in a CIA inspired coup. But Liberia remained in a state of continuous civil war as different factions supported by various imperialist powers and regional thugs continued to intervene in the resource-loaded and diamond rich region. Taylor too was supported by the US as were his predecessors like Doe. And who has been plundering the people and natural resources of Liberia? From the nineteen twenties onward it was the



Firestone Plantation Company, a US monopoly, that plundered Liberia's natural wealth. Not only the local thugs but more than this, their imperialist lords who let the local chieftains to decide among themselves that who would have most of the local share. Thus local feuds arose and various rebel groups formed all of whom were prepared to strike independent deals with the imperialist robbers.

Whereas Britain resented Taylor's intervention [for diamonds and pearls] in the Sierra Leonean civil war (in the form of the militarily supporting the rebel forces of Foday Sankoh) and called for his overthrow, the US had supported Taylor saying that he was an elected president. But after the British entrenched themselves in Sierra Leone through direct military intervention in 2001, the US let Britain have its way only waiting for an opportunity to tighten its grip over crisis ridden Liberia where Taylor's rivals had never stopped their fight against him and who were supported by the French imperialists.

All these years the Liberian state under Taylor has been intervening in British-dominated Sierra Leone, French dominated Guinea and other neighbouring countries. The situation in the region has been that of continuous intervention of various imperialist interests and local reactionary forces in each other's country and territorial domain. But the imperialist press has been talking only of the local thug forces while portraying themselves as saviours of the black people who are said to be "*unable to govern themselves*." Even the direct American intervention has come after a spate of 'criticism' of the US administration, that the US is not doing much for the black people of Africa as it has done for the white people of the crisis-ridden Balkans in Europe. This was another contemptible way of preparing the ground for and justifying the US intervention in Liberia. And the UN and the ECOWAS have come to the aid of the Bush administration by hailing its intervention as an attempt to establish peace in black Africa. And the world has a black African in the chair of the Secretary General of the UN when this crime is being done! Liberia is being set for more loot and plunder by the US imperialists.

The New Leaders

The newly appointed president of Liberia, Moses Blah, who has taken over from Taylor has been a close associate of his. He is supposed to preside over the country for three months to pave the way for an interim ruling dispensation where rebel movements and Taylor's party-men will share power for two years. After that, a façade of elections will be held to convince the Liberians that now it is their own chosen rulers who are at the helm. Even Doe had integrated the opposition underground leaders in his cabinet and termed his coup as a revolution for redemption. The day he carried out his reactionary coup was declared the day of freedom, but the lives of the people were only further brutalized. The US was behind him. He was abandoned by the US when his role as a strongman against Russian influences was no longer needed. He was left to be executed by his rivals. Taylor too was a pro-US president. When cornered by the rebel forces he himself invited US military intervention to save the situation, in June this year. The US intervention has saved Liberia for the US and Taylor is sent into exile in Nigeria where he would be looked after for the rest of his life in lieu of his services for the US. As he could not stem the advance of rebel forces, and three fourths of the country passed into rebel hands, the US stepped in to make a smooth transition in the name of establishing peace and at the same time accusing the rebels and the Taylor government for aggravating the woes of the Liberian people through a useless and fratricidal war. The master accused servant Taylor of not running the country properly and now the US intends to stay there "*as long as it takes*," as the CSM says. It is another way of saying that "*colonialism is in*." And there is no dearth of such kinds, who air their dislike for any kind of war and seek peace to carry on their business of exploitation in an atmosphere of stability. They were the first to welcome the US interventionist forces. The US-forced stability only means more intense exploitation and oppression of the people. The whole history of Liberia is a testimony to it. From the time of establishment of Liberia right up to the present times it has been under US domination, and it

has its constitution exactly on the lines of the American constitution. For America Freedom means freedom to exploit while in Liberia freedom means 'freedom' to be exploited. And when instability and a continuous civil war situation makes it impossible for the imperialists to exploit Liberia, they come to actively intervene in its internal affairs to set the equation right and try to unite the feuding groups through bargaining deals, that are usually known in political parlance as peace talks. In the end Taylor was characterized as a source of instability in the region. Had he been successful in crushing his rivals he would have been hailed as a great leader. As he could not, he is a culprit and must be replaced with someone else. Moses Blah has been his right arm for years. A few years back he fell from grace and imprisoned but was soon reinstated.

The leader of the opposition, Sekou Conneh, had been a former tax collector and a trader of used up cars and has an interest in the lucrative diamond mining. His movement, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) has French backing through Guinea and the Ivory Coast. He has good connections with the Guinean president. Another rebel group is being propped up by British-backed Sierra Leone. In fact the whole of North-West Africa is a play-ground for the contention of various imperialist powers, and local lords play second fiddle to the imperialist interests of their masters to get an added share from the exploits in other's lands. The English have armies in Sierra Leone, the French forces are in the Ivory Coast and back Guinea, the US has marines in Liberia, while Nigeria acts as the regional lord, extracting commissions from imperialists by providing mercenary forces for them, and for this or that rebel group. Its role as a broker and a direct exploiter of diamond mines in Sierra Leone is a well-established fact.

The question stands as ever

Why has Liberia remained one of the poorest countries of the world, in spite of being run with the help from, and dictates of the "kind of white saviours" who "owned" their burdens for hundreds of years and always promised prosperity, wealth and freedom? Why is it that the local leaders who

led rebellions of the poor masses against oppression always get tagged with the imperialist robbers in the end, after coming to power? Why does it always happen that freedom and liberation from oppression evade the people, time and again? The answers, of course, are not far to seek; yet they seem to be evading resolution for decades and decades. The movements in the region have no such programme

Continued From Page 28

among the village women and children, he drew them into revolutionary struggles as he went along. That is why, whenever the history of NMS is to be written, the first leaders of the women's movement remember him fondly and say that his name has to be engraved in golden letters!

Structure of NMS

According to the NMS manifesto, the structure is thus: A State Executive Committee (called *Rajya Parishad*) is elected in the State Conference. A State Body comprising President, Secretary, Joint Secretary and a Treasurer (called *Rajya Karyakarini Committee*) is to be elected from the *Rajya Parishad*. Then there is the district Executive Committee (*Zilla Parishad*) that is elected in a district Conference and a district body is elected from the executive committee. The same procedure is followed for the next layer i.e., the '*Anchalik Committee*.' (This comprises the street or ward committees in the cities/towns or gram panchayats.) At least 3 of these committees can form a *Anchalik Committee*. The basic or fundamental unit is elected in a basic level conference if there are at least 15 members.

For now, they could form up to district committees only. The efforts to hold a State Conference and elect a State Body & EC are on. They also want to form a Central Executive Committee combining the units of NMS in Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Orissa, West Bengal etc.

In the basic (village) committees and *Anchalik* committees there are village women (part-timers) but the leading district committee members are whole timers and a fulltime worker of the organisation also leads the *anchalik* committee. The organizers and PRs form the core leadership of

that can deliver their people from imperialist exploitation. There is no genuine revolutionary movement that is directed towards achieving a total break with imperialism. Hence nothing positive comes out of years of rebellion and revolt by the people who are only used as cannon fodder by various local vested interests and imperialist powers. The salvation of poor nations lies only in a revolutionary break

the NMS and are the backbone of the organization. They are women dedicated to building up a revolutionary women's organisation and spreading the revolutionary women's movement not only in Jharkhand but in other parts of the country as well.

According to the manifesto, the *Zilla Parishad* should meet at least thrice in a year and the *Zilla Karyakarini Committee* should meet at least once in a month; the *Anchalik Karyakarini Committee* should meet at least once in a month and the basic level units (committee) should meet at least twice in a month.

ISSUES TAKEN UP BY NMS:

As mentioned earlier, women took active part in all the anti-feudal struggles and in the struggles against the jungle *thekedars* (contractors). Now, let us see how they have been tackling women's issues and problems.

(i) Child Marriages:

Among adivasis, girls do not get married at a very young age but in some areas they are married off by 13 to 15 years. Among the non-adivasis and other castes in the plain areas this is widely prevalent. And in Bihar in some districts there is a custom called '*Rasgaddi*'. A girl is married off between 9 to 12 years of age but the boy just puts sindoor on her head and leaves her at the parent's home. This is popularly called first marriage. After she grows up, say, at the age of 18 or so, again a ceremony is conducted and the girl is sent with the boy. At the time of the first marriage itself they decide when to conduct '*Rasgaddi*'. The girl's family has to spend a lot of money both times.

The NMS has done a lot of propaganda against child marriages and has created an atmosphere against it. So they get prior reports of child mar-

riages, which are going to be conducted. The NMS didis go there and after a long discussion convince the family that physically and emotionally also it is not good for the children to get married at such a young age. The people get convinced and stop the marriage. Then a bond is written that they will not get their children married for another 9 to 10 years. And when they want to marry them off they ask the permission of the NMS. If all the conditions are fulfilled then the NMS promptly gives the permission.

Over the years the NMS stopped many child marriages and carried on political propaganda also. As a result, in Jharkhand where NMS is strong, child marriages have stopped and girls are married off only after 18 years of age. Even among the non-adivasis it has increased to 18 years age. But in the plains of Bihar they could not achieve much success in this regard, but propaganda work is going on.

(ii) Dowry & dowry related deaths/harassment:

The practice of taking dowry is not prevalent among the adivasis, but it has reached an unprecedentedly high among the non-adivasis. Harassing women for dowry and later murdering her is also prevalent. Often, the in-laws and the husband just try to get rid off her and have a second marriage.

NMS has done a lot of propaganda against giving and taking dowry. (propaganda of NMS on any issue includes postering, wall writing, rallies, demonstrations, songs, plays and village level meetings). When NMS comes to know that a marriage is being conducted with dowry they go and tell them that '*this is not allowed in the (NMS) area*.' They educate all the village people. A bond will be written by the groom and his parents that they will not take dowry nor will they demand it in future and that they will look

after the girl and will not harass her in any way. The NMS also educates them not to spend lavishly at marriages and if they agree conducts a 'shibir vivah'.

After continuous efforts from NMS now the situation is that no one openly takes or gives dowry. But yet the give and take goes on clandestinely. Definitely the practice has come down in the areas where the NMS is strong but to completely eradicate the evil requires more effort at changing people's attitudes and a complete economic change in the society. And the NMS is actively trying for both these changes.

When the NMS comes to know that a woman is being harassed for dowry or is being thrown out of her in-laws house they conduct a jan adalat (people's court). The husband is summoned and asked to come forth with the reason for abandoning her. Usually what they get is a lame answer. So they argue with him against it. If he still insists on leaving her, they just calculate how many years she has toiled in their house and how much she should get for it and also make a list of all items she had brought into their house from her parents and the dowry amount is also calculated. They tell the man that she has spent half her life serving him and now at her age she can't remarry so easily, with the children and so that he should just cough up the whole amount which is her due. Obviously, the man fails to do so. If he has land, they demand a share in the land also. Then he is reprimanded for all his wrongs. Normally he takes his wife back. A bond is written by him promising to look after her well. If the man is ready to give back the money or a share in land, some times a divorce is given to them. Usually the woman wants to live with him and only wants him to 'change'. So NMS tries to fulfil the woman's desire.

Now, in the Jharkhand NMS strong areas dowry harassment has come down a lot. If a girl is killed for dowry, NMS conducts a *Jan Adalat*. Once the husband had to return the dowry and also a compensation of Rs.50,000 to the girl's parents. He is usually beaten up as a punishment and made to write a bond that he will not remarry without the NMS's permission.

(iii) Shibir Vivah:

The NMS conducts propaganda

against feudal marriage customs and lavish marriage expenses. People influenced by the propaganda ask NMS to conduct a Shibir Vivah. In this there is no dowry. It is a simple get together of all the people and relatives. They all have meals and the marriage is solemnised in a public meeting. The bride and the groom, mass organisation leaders and of course the NMS didis speak on marriage and the relations between men and women, how they are in feudal society and how they should be democratic. The bride and groom wear new clothes garland each other, shake hands, eat sweets and the marriage is over. Such marriages give the people a glimpse of the new culture coming up in the struggle areas and have definitely saved the girl and her parents a lot of expense and trouble. When the boy and girl love each other or when they are from different castes, they approach NMS and a Shibir Vivah is conducted.

The people look after the NMS didis as one of their own family and NMS gets a lot of invitations to attend marriages. It is interesting to note that in Chattisgarh NMS tells them straight away that they won't attend a marriage where dowry is taken, whereas in Jharkhand they attend the marriages wherever possible or at least send them their best wishes (*sandesh*).

(iv) Sexual harassment, rape:

Sexual harassment cases and rape incidents have come down in NMS areas. When a rape incident occurs NMS conducts a *Jan Adalat*. They enquire and if they find the boy is from a poor family and has come under the influence of imperialist culture of TV, cinemas and if he accepts his crime, he is warned severely and let off. Obviously, having to face the *Jan Adalat* is in itself a big punishment for such boys. If the rapist is a goon or has done it before then the punishment is severe. He is beaten up, his head is shaved, *chuna-tikka* (spots of lime) is applied on his head, a garland of *chappals* placed around his neck, and he is paraded in the villages. Some times a hand or leg is cut off in serious cases.

Once a boy had relations with a girl. When he came to know that she was 5 months pregnant he fled. The girl had no father. A complaint was lodged with NMS and the people

searched for the boy and within 2 days arrested him and brought him to the Jan Adalat. The boy's parents complained to the police. And they landed up just when the Jan Adalat was going on. Women questioned the police - "we did not invite you, why have you come? You have no work here!". When the police said they came to arrest the rapist, women just said, 'what evidence do you have that he raped, just get away from here' and they had to flee. The boy was given a piece of their mind and a shibir vivah was conducted without any dowry or poojas and a bond was written in which the boy stated that he will look after her well throughout his life.

In Bihar in 1994 when a girl named Meena was raped there was a big agitation and NMS ensured that the culprit got punished though the police and government tried to protect the boy from a landlord family.

As mentioned earlier due to anti-feudal struggles, the sexual exploitation of women by landlords has completely stopped. In both Bihar and Jharkhand there have been struggles against the sexual exploitation by forest range officers and contractors and several of them were beaten up. Now this has also stopped completely.

(V) Anti-liquor struggles & wife beating

Lot of propaganda work was done against arrack. The adivasis brew as well as sell arrack. In some villages NMS conducted raids on arrack shops and brewing centres and have broken the pots. In a few places they even raided some shops nearby and destroyed whisky and brandy bottles also. But this struggle has not taken place in a big way, so only in a few areas it was controlled and propaganda is under way - against drinking, brewing liquor and the increasing violence on women due to this. It is interesting to note that in the Jan Adalats conducted on wife beating, the wife is asked to give the unheeding husband a beating, which immediately brings him to his feet, and he promises the '*behenjis*' to look after her well. But the NMS tries to solve the problem amicably as far as possible between wife and husband. In the feudal / adivasi society a wife who speaks up or beats her husband is considered to be a very bad woman, but

people accept it when it is done in a *Jan Adalat* conducted by the NMS. The participation of village women in the political arena has increased their self-esteem in the family and reduces violence on them.

(vi) On Health problems:

The public health centres in the villages and forests are in a very poor state and the people never get any medicines or proper treatment in them. The NMS has taken up the issue in a big way and every year conducts campaigns and organises rallies against the Health Dept. Especially during monsoons all kinds of diseases spread and NMS makes it a point to mobilise people at this time every year. The people go in a rally to the Health department offices in the nearby towns and hold demonstrations/ dharnas till the officials agree that they'll come to their villages and distribute medicines on such and such a date. The nutritious food, which was to be given to the pregnant women, was also ensured due to these struggles. Epidemics were controlled and vaccines like polio are being administered properly. NMS does propaganda also on the double standards of the government in giving medical facilities to the rich and the poor. Through songs, doctors are requested to give treatment to the poor. Apparently some doctors were beaten up in *Jan Adalats* for not treating the poor people. But NMS realizes that only when there is struggle the officials are coming and a continuous process of treating the poor is yet to begin.

(vii) Polygamy:

NMS strongly opposes polygamy. Formerly when a man used to get a second wife for himself either by abandoning the first wife or without, there would be no opposition from any quarter of the society. But NMS has taken it up as an issue for propaganda and agitation. In the *Jan Adalats* both the man and his second wife are brought to justice and punished. The people in the *Jan Adalat* oppose polygamy, but say "it's wrong, but once it's done. What can we do?". If possible they ask them to separate and he is advised to look after his first wife well. Both of them are paraded in the villages in the belief that it will deter people from do-

ing such things. But on this issue they are relying more on propaganda than agitation.

(viii) Equal wages for equal work:

One of the demands on which the NMS vows to fight is equal wages for equal work. In feudal Bihar - Jharkhand, it goes without saying that women are paid much less than men. So there were agitations for increase in wages and the demand for equal wages to women is also put forward. Now, in NMS areas women get equal wages and the wage rates for all have also increased considerably.

10 years back they used to be given Rs. 4 or 5 for a sekda (100 leaves) of Tendu Patta (Beedi leaves) over the years it increased to Rs. 50-55.

(ix) Superstitions & witchcraft

One of the major problems of a backward society is the prevalence of numerous superstitious beliefs that make women the worst victims. The backward villagers especially the adivasis believe in witches and ghosts. Not knowing the scientific reasons for illnesses, if somebody dies or falls ill they feel some witch has done something. They go to the *Ojha* (witch-doctor) who for his own ends points out to some women indirectly. The 'victims' then go and beat her up and ostracise her family or even kill her. Many poor women have met such a fate for no wrong of theirs. It's only natural for the women's organization to take up this issue seriously. A lot of propaganda work is being conducted and *Jan adalat* held whenever they come to know that a woman had been named a witch. The witch doctor and the persons who blame her are brought to book. In cases where she had been beaten, she is asked to beat the ones who tortured her. They are made to pay all her medical expenses. On this occasion NMS educates the people on the landlords' interests behind propagating such superstitions among poor people and also explains the medical reasons for illnesses. (Usually widows become victims. In order to confiscate their lands this witch business was started by the exploiting classes and the men of the poorer classes also followed suit and many poor widows were killed in this name and their land confiscated.) Ear-

lier, the victims used to go to the police for justice. But they used to demand money. Now they have stopped going and look to NMS for support. The practice of killing and beating women in the name of witches has come down

(x) Saving the forest (Jungle Suraksha)

Women have not only resisted the forest contractors who stopped them from collecting forest produce, but they have also apprehended forest officials who were smuggling teak or were assisting those who smuggle. The women lay waiting and caught them red-handed. They were beaten up and a bond was written not to do such things again. The carts carrying illegally felled wood were caught by NMS women. NMS takes upon itself the responsibility of stopping this smuggling and does jungle-suraksha.

(xi) August 15 & Elections:

Every year on August 15th NMS goes to the schools in the areas and propagates among the children about fake independence and the children boycott the function organised in the schools. They even hoist black flags where possible. There is this interesting incident of a 3rd standard boy, who got inspired by NMS 'didis' & led all his school students (including his seniors) to boycott the function. They took out a rally shouting slogans on top of their voices. The police came, arrested them and each boy was made to stand on a bench and given one blow and warned not to do such things again. And the missionary school authorities dismissed this boy for leading the students! (he started to move around with the NMS didis and has now become a good organiser).

The NMS boycotts elections because they are of the firm opinion that the lives of people are not going to be changed through this corrupt electoral system and a revolutionary change is necessary. Hence it conducts propaganda along these lines. In one village in West Bengal the women were so fed up with CPM goondaism that they did not want CPM candidates to get elected and wanted to burn down the polling booths. The police guessed something was wrong and stopped the women. The women said,

'we want to cast votes, why are you not allowing us' and barged into the booths in 3 places and brought the boxes out. The candidates who come to campaign are also questioned by the women on women issues. The NMS just conducts propaganda on this question.

Celebrating March 8th As A Struggle Day Of Toiling Women:

99 percent of the work of NMS is based in the rural areas. But the NMS leadership is very conscious of the fact that without the support of the intellectuals and the middle class sections in the cities it will be difficult to carry on. Though they have not deployed any organizers to work in the towns and cities, it determinedly celebrates March 8th in big cities every year and propagates its ideology among the city dwellers. So since 1990, March 8th was being celebrated in the cities of Bihar and Jharkhand by mobilizing thousands of women from the countryside. A month long campaign is conducted by volunteer teams of NMS and Jharkhand Abhhiyan (the cultural front) in the villages and in the city. On March 8th a rally and public meeting is conducted.

Since 1997, in various ways the authorities have been trying to stop the NMS from celebrating March 8th in cities. But the NMS women with a single minded purpose of celebrating March 8th have been overcoming all obstacles by fighting militantly and have been literally celebrating March 8th as '*the struggling Day of toiling women*'. The only reason the police could cite was that '*NMS propagates MCC ideology*'. The NMS strongly condemns this and pins them down on the question of whether women have a right to celebrate the International Women's Day or not. They have had experiences when permission was not given or if it was given it was cancelled at the last minute or they were permitted to hold the meeting but not the rally, if nothing else they are asked to stop for at least half an hour before taking out the rally. And police stop NMS women from the villages from coming to the meeting.

The village women try to find various ways to enter the city but the po-

When we look at the local, district and state level leadership of the NMS in Jharkhand one striking feature is that they are all adivasis. They are mostly from poor peasant background and learn reading and writing after joining the NMS. Even the one or two who are educated, are below the high-school level. It is they who are now at the various levels of leadership in the NMS. Today, looking at their leadership qualities we can never imagine that they were once the ordinary illiterate women of the village.

They tell politics to the people, make them activists, teach them songs, involve in the peoples' courts, and show the people how to resist the police. They learn very quickly how to read and write. They also write very beautiful reports to magazines.

lice do succeed in limiting the numbers. Once they have reached, they argue their way out and conduct the programme as planned. Now-a-days to avoid police interruptions the women are woken up at 3 am and all the proceedings are preponed by a few hours. By the time the police get wind of it it's too late to stop. NMS also has alternative arrangements made to conduct the programme in some other place but till now they have not had to use them for March 8th.

Campaign teams and their leaders are also being arrested, but press statements are released and the demand to release them is also made a part of the propaganda campaign.

In 1997, when six district conferences of NMS were arranged, police tried to stop each one of them. NMS had made alternative arrangements to conduct them in a different place. So when the police blocked all the roads and tried to disrupt the Conferences, NMS just went and conducted the Conferences in the alternative places exactly as they had planned. Big processions were taken. And to the ire of the police immediately posters were put all over that they had successfully conducted their district conferences!

There is always the alternative of celebrating March 8th in villages in a decentralised manner. But the impact a massive rally of toiling women in a city can have is altogether different. So NMS is determined to carry on the struggle to celebrate March 8th as far as possible in the cities only.

The following is the brief summary of the resolutions passed in the meeting arranged on the occasion of March 8th this year:

1. Against POTA: along with many others, NMS activists were also arrested under POTA.

2. Against the barbaric police repression: the police and the para-military personnel's repression on the people of Jharkhand is increasing day by day. In the months of November & December of 2001 the atrocities perpetrated by the State Police, BSF & CRPF on the women like gang rapes, beating, mass atrocities and murdering people through beating etc. in the name of Operation Eagle, Operation Shikhar and Operation X crossed the limits of barbarism even of the middle ages.

On 18/2/02, the leading comrade of the propaganda team of the March 8th programme, Com Lalitha Marandi was arrested while returning from a programme by the police of Devri PS, Giridih Dist. And she was sent to jail under POTA.

NMS appealed to all the toiling masses and progressive and democratic forces to build a democratic movement.

3. Against social restrictions and evils: NMS resolved to fight against the evils of dowry, bride killings, Sati, child marriage etc and to wage an unending struggle for widow remarriage, equal wages for men and women, women's right over property and to establish equal respect and position for the women in society.

Here is a vivid description of how March 8th was conducted this year by the NMS.

MARCH 8TH CELEBRATIONS IN 2003:

The first phase of the propaganda

programme was started from 2nd February and went on till 20th Feb. In every team the number used to be from 70-80. Wall writing, postering, street meetings, street plays, cultural programme of songs and dances were performed. The importance of March 8th was explained in the general meetings. Propaganda was done in villages, towns and cities. Funds were collected for the programme.

The second phase started from 24th February and the main aim of this was to propagate in Patna where the March 8th programme was arranged. About 100 members of the NMS reached Patna on 20th February. This Central Team did propaganda work till 6th March. Thousands of people used to attend the meetings. There was a lot of political propaganda as well. On hearing about the atrocities of the police, people used to respond and condemn.

During this campaign Com. Jatin Marandi, Secretary of Jharkhand Avon was arrested. The final programme was celebrated in Miller School Grounds, Patna in which about 14-15 thousand people attended including from Kolkata, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Ranchi, Patna, North Bihar, Central Bihar and Jharkhand. And women were more in number.

The programme started in the morning at 10 with the hoisting of the NMS flag. After singing songs the martyrs' column was garlanded. Songs were sung and slogans were shouted in the memory of martyrs

A procession was started in the afternoon at 2 PM and went through the main streets of Patna city finally reaching the School grounds. A steering committee was selected to conduct the meeting. Various speakers spoke about the importance of the day. The programme concluded in the night at 9 pm.

Celebration of March 8th in such a manner in the midst of police repression and foiling the police attempts to obstruct the meeting was a great achievement.

MEETING AGAINST THE ARREST OF COM. LALITHA MARANDI:

On 18th February, 2002 Com. Lalitha was arrested by the police of Devri PS, near Bhelvdhali while returning from the propaganda programme of March 8th. She was beaten up during interrogation and later sent to Giridhi Jail. This news spread like wildfire throughout the district. Immediately wall-writing & postering was done and pamphlets were distributed in the villages and towns of Giridhi, Dhanbad and Hazaribag districts. Protest rallies and public meetings were conducted in various places from 25th to 30th March. She was released recently.

Repression & Resistance:

From 1990 itself, arrests of the activists had started. Restrictions began to be imposed on public meetings.

Revolutionaries can withstand the repression when they are among the people. Similarly NMS activists live among the people and conduct their programmes secretly and openly according to the necessity.

Though there was some repression on NMS from its very inception, 1997 was the turning point. Till now there are no killings or firings but women have been arrested, tortured, booked under false cases, beaten up during the combing operations and interrogated. In many districts village women have also been raped as part of operations conducted against the Party and the squads platoons. In Jharkhand, women have also been booked under POTA (though except for one woman all have been conse-

quently released). In some villages arrested women have been paraded to deter other women from joining organizations.

The women did not take all this lying down and NMS was instrumental in organising the resistance of women. Many are the instances where women have rounded up the police and beat them up. In many villages the women (some times the whole village) gheraoed the police stations to get the arrested persons released. In one village in Jharkhand such was the anger of the women that they made the police lick their own saliva! Some times there were firings on people gheraoing the stations.

In Jharkhand the adivasis beat the drum (called nagaara) whenever the police attack. Hearing it, all the people from neighbouring villages will gather and resist the police. They also take their bows and arrows along and sometimes use them. Women take any household implements they can lay their hands on or else pelt stones. Many such battles with these militant people have left the police helpless. And in almost all incidents, the police are made to write a bond in which they apologize for their ill deeds and promise not to come again. Indeed, they did not enter such villages after that!

There have been some heroic instances of resistance by women under the leadership of NMS. In one instance, 3,000 women did a 24-hour rasta roko against rape by police. The men stood guard. The rapist policeman was fully beaten up. The DSP apologised and wrote a bond that they will not do so again.

One Santhi of Jharkhand was arrested when campaigning for March 8th in 2002, severely tortured, booked under POTA, sent to jail and was released in 2003. Some women who were

The NMS is working in the extremely backward rural adivasi areas. Women activists speak their language, wear similar clothes. They go around the villages, stay in people's houses, take part in production, and the household cores, and mingle with them as their own family members. The small children stick to these "didis" and learn to sing and talk politics. At a very young age they desire to mend their lives. Even though they may not have much clarity in their tiny brains, they understand that their "sisters" are showing them the path to their liberation. They come out of their gloomy home-centred life, with no education, knowledge or medicine, and catch hold of the light of knowledge spread before them by the NMS. From a very young age they start going around with the sisters full time. In the beginning the parents were against it and frightened. But, later when they saw how their children were growing knowledgeable and becoming political leaders, they themselves encourage their children. In the past two decades a significant number of children have taken to the revolutionary path through NMS.

tortured and raped had gone back. But the majority stayed, continued to work or at least support the organization.

Some girl children who work in Jharkhand Abhiyan have also been arrested while campaigning for March 8th. They were threatened not to give programmes. Due to people's pressure they were released the next day.

Publications of NMS:

1. NMS ka Aahvan (Call of NMS), 2. Krantikari Nari Andolan ki disha (Direction of the revolutionary women's movement), 3. NMS manifesto, 4. Mahilaon ka lal sena dal (women's Red Armed Squad), 5. Chamakta lal Sitara (Glowing Red Star) 6. Stree swatantrata aur communist naitikata par Lenin ki vichar (Lenin's views on women's liberation and communist values).

The first three books form the theoretical base of NMS. All the members are educated on the first 3 books. Classes are held and combined study undertaken in committee meetings. NMS doesn't have a magazine of its own and all its reports are published in the magazine Jan-Jwaar (which in fact carries the reports of many other mass organizations).

All the three basic books stress on the relationship between class struggle and women's liberation. The NMS flag has 5 stars in it which respectively indicate – independence, democracy, equal rights, women's liberation and socialism. NMS stands firmly in the camp of the socialist women's movement. It stresses that women's movement needs the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to develop in the correct direction. It also says that we should strive for socialism after the victory of the New Democratic Revolution and realizes that even under socialism the class struggle for women's liberation must go on.

Political Education:

The NMS has given importance to educating women who come into the organisation to work full time for the movement. Since many of the women and girls who are coming are from poor peasant families, many of them are not even literate. They are encouraged to become literate as soon as possible. Then apart from the three basic books, classes are also being conducted for the organisers on the following sub-

jects like grammar, geography, history, Marxism, and history of revolutions in the world in the 20th century and new economic policies.

Three editions of an audiocassette of songs have also been released by NMS over the years.

Once an NGO named 'Jago Bahan' (ironically it has only men in it) called NMS to the meeting in which the topics were 'consumerism & women: globalization and women etc. NMS was not given a chance to speak! So they contented themselves by singing songs, which depicted their ideology. Actually it was a foreign-funded organization. NMS innocently invited them for its March 8th programme but they didn't turn up. Later they took the stand not to go into fronts with such NGOs.

Thus through hard work and revolutionary zeal, through a conviction that women's situation can be changed only by organising the mass of poor and peasant women, through patient and determined effort and learning-through-doing has the Nari Mukti Sangh grown over the years. It has grown and spread along with the spread of the revolutionary movement in North and East India. But being a rural based organisation it is little known in other parts of the country. Yet the organisers and leadership of the NMS have set their sights far beyond the tribal women of Jharkhand.

As the President of the NMS Sheila said in an interview :

"So long as feudal and imperialist exploitation of women persists, so long as the discrimination against women continues, so long as women live like animals and slaves, so long as women are deprived of economic and political rights, burnt to death for the dowry, become victims of the atrocities of the police, mafia and goondas, so long as export of girls for prostitution and the male domination exists – struggle has to be waged for the women's liberation (nari mukti ke liye) which is possible only with the establishment of socialism in the country. Even after establishing a socialist society there will be necessity of women's organizations as we understand from the discussion of Com. Lenin with Clara Zetkin.

"Adivasi women had lesser restrictions and have been active members of NMS. But the non-advasi (the

'mahato' caste who spoke khoria) women face many restrictions at home and so have not been very active members of NMS. Though some have joined, comparatively their number is very less. Some women have had to face a lot of 'repression' from home after they joined.

"Adivasi woman have a double burden. She takes part in production outside the home and the whole domestic burden is borne by her. She does the cleaning, cooking, washing and also looks after children. Both share bringing of water and firewood. She works in the fields (women don't plough) and also forages the forest. She collects mahua seeds, wood for fuel, leaves for making plates etc. Kendu Patta is also collected by women in the season. They also make rope. They even go to the nearby towns to work as daily labourers. They have no right on land traditionally.

"In the earlier days, the organizers of the NMS had to struggle a lot to mobilize women. In the villages men did not allow their women folk to attend meetings in the night which is the only free time they have after the daylong toil. So, NMS organizers had to adopt methods like also calling men for the meeting and speak about general problems of the village. Finally the meeting would end up as a general meeting of the village. But still NMS organisers were able to propagate their ideas.

"Only after the general revolutionary atmosphere created through the revolutionary struggle grew could women come to the meetings on their own.

"In the beginning NMS work started in three districts – Dhanbad, Giridih and Hazaribagh. Later it expanded to Dumka, Devghar, Jaamthad Goda, Sahebganj, Bokaro, Ranchi, Simdega, East & West Singhbhum, Chatra, Palamu, Lathehar, Lohardagga, Garhwa, Gumla, Kodarma.

"Till now NMS units have been formed from village level to district level and we are in the process of forming a State level Committee. Apart from this we are planning to form the committees of NMS in the States of Bihar, UP, Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Punjab, Orissa, Delhi etc."

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Movement of Jharkhand Adivasi Women

(This article is based on an interview with com. Susheela, the founder member, president and one of the leading comrades, who developed the NMS to its present strength. Because of the severe repression on Com. Susheela, she is leading the movement from the underground)

Rajashree & Amrita

The women of Jharkhand have a long history of heroic struggles against the British colonial rulers and the comprador-feudal rulers of post-British India. The Santhal rebellion of 1857-58 has made an indelible imprint on the history of India.

Women played an active role in that rebellion and formed a good chunk of the 30,000 that set out to march to Calcutta. They participated in the raids on the houses of the enemies. Many women were killed or arrested during the *Santhal hul* (rebellion)

Women were also active during the Munda uprising at the end of the 19th Century led by Birsa Munda. The Puritanism and revivalism of Birsa's religion with its opposition to the worship of spirits (*bongas*), the drinking of rice-beer (*haria*), the *giti ora* (the dormitory for youth), the *akhara* (the dancing ground) and stress on equality between sexes had a positive impact on the women who participated as armed fighters in the uprising.

Women also participated in large number in the campaigns taken up by the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)* in the late 1960s and 1970s. Those campaigns were for the seizure of land, harvesting of paddy and land appropriated by the moneylenders, for recovery of pawned articles and so on. Women also led the anti-liquor and anti-wife-beating campaigns and campaign against witch hunting. In spite of these campaigns, patriarchy remains quite strong though not as strong as in the feudal-dominated plains. The *JMM's* programme was more and more oriented to train the women as housewives by teaching them domestic chores such as cooking, stitching, embroidery etc. though the women have a role in the village councils no role in the higher institutions that take real decisions. Thus political participation of women has not really improved over the past century also. Wife beating, witch-hunting, sexual abuse by outside exploiters (*dikus*) etc. are still quite conspicuous.

It is against such a backdrop that

the *Nari Mukti Sangh (NMS)* commenced its activities in the early 1980s. The NMS emerged after the tribal peasants in Jharkhand started getting organised under revolutionary leadership against the feudal oppression of Rajput landlords and the harassment of officials and contractors of the forest department. It first started in the district of Giridih, a district in which the majority of the peasantry belongs to the Santhal tribe. It is a women's organisation in which almost all the activists and leaders are drawn from the adivasis – from Santhals, Mundas, etc.

Anti-Feudal Struggles:

Women were first organised in the anti feudal struggles. Women faced intense exploitation both economically and sexually. They had to slog 12 hours with only a meagre allowance of food. If they didn't go to work for some reason the goons of the landlord used to come to their homes and drag them to work. The Rajput landlords did not treat the adivasis as human beings. The newly wed bride had to spend the first night with the landlord. They kept some of these women as concubines also. The whole family, including children, had to do forced labour (*bandhua majduri*). Verbal abuse was also routine and common. They could not wear chappals, and they could not sit on a chair in front of the landlords. Rural Bihar served as a model of feudal exploitation. It is from the darkness of this condition that the people, including women started getting awakened in the late seventies.

Women organisers spoke against this exploitation and organised women. But they did not fail to mention the social customs among the peasants which oppressed women and also about male supremacy at home. At first, men opposed NMS and women's participation in organizations. Later when the peasant movement against the landlords gained momentum and as men and women began participating in them in large numbers, their attitude gradually changed. They could

see how women were exploited. Women's resistance opened their eyes and NMS got a strong foothold.

Verbal abuse stopped completely and now they are addressed as '*Bhai*' & '*Behen*'. They wear chappals and are invited to sit in chairs!

The struggles against the forest department followed, asserting the rights of adivasis on the forest (produce). The *thekedars* cruelly exploited the innocent adivasis. The girls were in addition exploited sexually. All this came to an end with struggles. Wages increased. Right to forest produce was won.

The change in society did not stop there. It entered the homes of the poor. Old customs changed. Especially the role of women in changing society got full recognition. Now the political arena is open to women. They easily attend meetings. Now the situation in struggle areas is such that if the husband is in the Krantikari Kisan Committee, the wife is in the NMS. When one goes to the meeting the other stays at home to look after children!

After the women firmly established their role in society, NMS began taking up 'women's issues' extensively. A whole generation (or two?) has grown up witnessing this '*Vaicharik Sangharsh*' (cultural change) in the countryside, which changed the fate of the women in these regions forever. And changed the feudal thinking of men too.

Repression became severe from 1997. But it has only boomeranged and the NMS emerged stronger than ever. It brought forth the ingenuity and creativity of women and their leadership qualities have shone brighter.

This brief introduction of the history of NMS will not be complete without mentioning Comrade Bhakthida. He was the mentor and father figure for NMS. An elderly man worked in Dhanbad district and was a strong defender of women along the first, young women organisers along with him and trained them in their work. Extremely popular

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