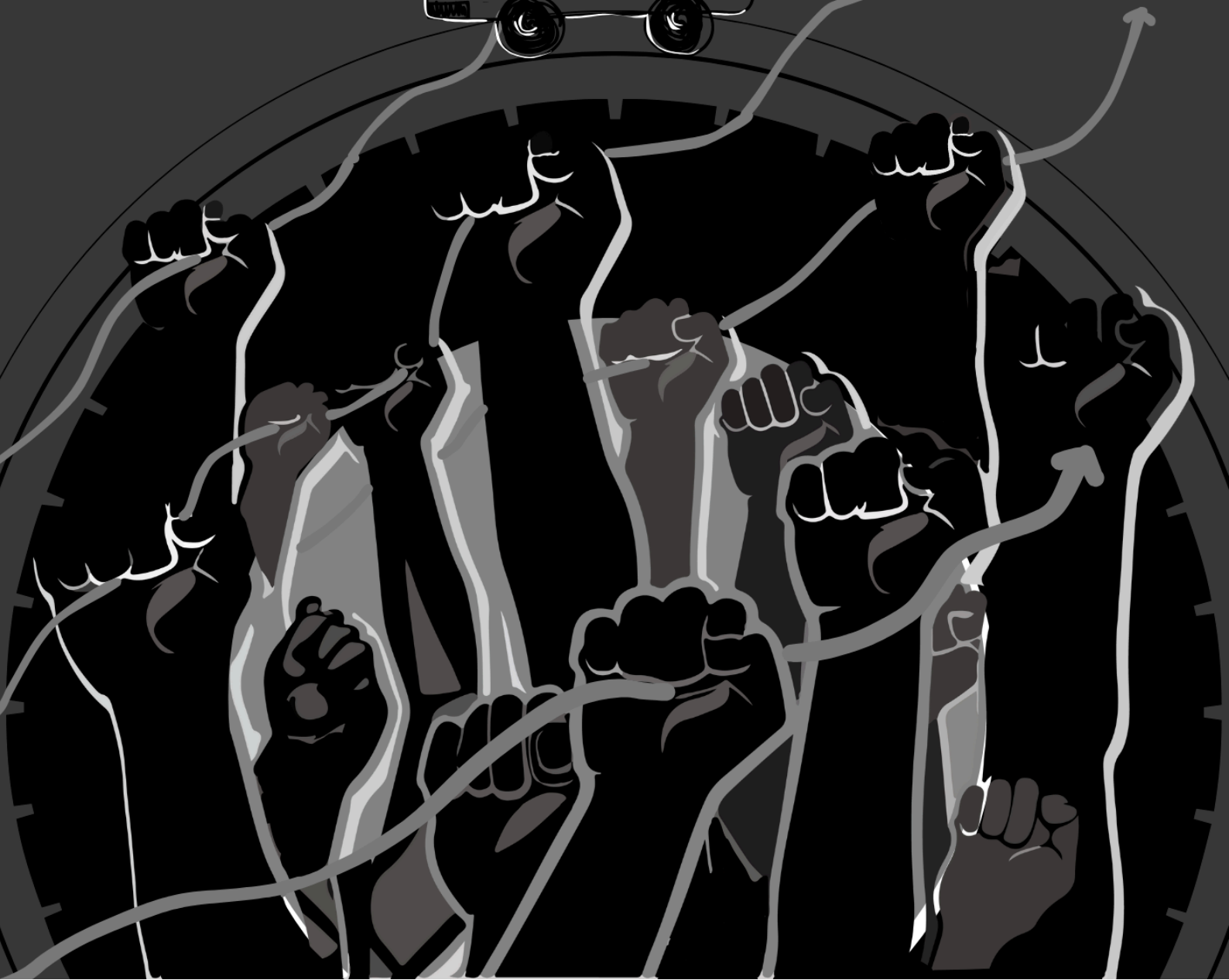




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— UPDATES ON PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS —



Protests against fare hikes in Karnataka

The Karnataka state government has hiked up bus fares across the board by 15%, leading to public outcry and protest. CPI (ML) Liberation and its mass organizations led a major protest in Bangalore against the anti-people fare hike.

Maruti Suzuki workers demand equal pay for equal work

Maruti Suzuki workers in Gurgaon have been protesting for equal pay and against illegal labour practices. Demands of equal pay for equal work have been raised by the workers most of who are working under contracts or temporary basis. Additionally they are demanding the reinstatement of all employees who were wrongfully fired after the 2012 incident of violence at the Manesar factory.

ASHA workers strike against the system

ASHA workers did an indefinite strike demanding a fixed honorarium of Rs. 15000 as well as release of payments that have been held up for months by the Karnataka government. Additionally they also demanded annual health check ups, withdrawal of use of smartphones unless data is provided and recognition as government employees. There are a number of other demands that they have taken up. They achieved a partial victory through this strike with the government increasing their wages from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10000.

Samsung workers struggle bears fruit

After a month-long struggle and a further legal battle the Samsung India Workers Union has been registered by the Tamil Nadu government. A victory for the labour movement against the exploitation of foreign companies.

Stop Human Rights Violations, Extra-judicial Killings and Militarisation of Bastar

The escalated war on Maoists has seen security forces in Chhattisgarh kill at least 47 Maoists within 3 weeks of January 2025, while it is reported that 250 Maoists were killed in Chhattisgarh in 2024. Amit Shah has set March 2026 as the deadline to make India Maoist-free. This means large-scale proliferation of security camps in Bastar, use of advanced warfare equipment including Israeli drones, and unmitigated extra-judicial violence by the state.

Reportedly, since 2019 a total of 290 security camps have been set up in the LWE affected States, mostly in Chhattisgarh and Odisha. In addition to the 48 security camps established last year, the Central security forces and police aim to establish 88 additional security camps in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected States this year.

This alarming militarisation of Bastar has been met with peaceful and sustained protests by Adivasis against the establishment of security camps in Fifth Schedule Areas without any consultation and consent of the concerned Gram Sabhas, and illegal appropriation of their forests, lands and other resources while also demanding proper schools, health facilities and other basic amenities. The Chhattisgarh government has responded by banning a people's rights organisation like the Moolvasi Bachao Manch, in October 2024, under the provisions of the draconian Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act.

In the name of 'Naxal-mukt Bharat' the BJP-led governments have thus unleashed a campaign of complete militarisation of resource-rich Adivasi areas like Bastar and launch an unbridled war on the Adivasi people and all kinds of protests and people's rights campaigns.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation condemns this policy of militarisation and war and calls upon all justice-loving forces to insist on an immediate halt to this war of extermination and guarantee of a democratic space and environment for the deprived and oppressed Adivasis in Bastar and other areas of Adivasi unrest. The policy of extra-judicial violence against Adivasi protests is totally antithetical to constitutional rule of law, and the government cannot be allowed to get away with such a policy in the name of eliminating Maoists. CPIML demands the release of all human rights activists, leaders of people's movements and innocent Adivasis who have been unjustly incriminated and jailed in false cases.

- Central Committee, CPI(ML) Liberation



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CONTENTS

Updates on People's Movements	2
Fare Hike in Bengaluru Adds to the Traffic and Commuter Woes	4
Montfort College and its Nosedive	5
Why is UUCMS a Matter of Concern for Students?	6
Killing of Journalist Mukesh Chandrakar Exposes Press	
Freedom Challenges	6
Manmohanomics	7
Oppose the US Consulate in Bengaluru!	8
Understanding caste	9
This Month in History	12
UGC's War on Higher Education	12
Recent Developments in the Right to Protest Movement	13
Refugee Education in Limbo: Navigating India's Legal Hurdle	13
Primitive Accumulation: Beginnings of Capitalism	14
Updates on Student Movements	16

Spark is a monthly magazine run by students and youth.

Today, the state and the corporate controlled media are constantly propagating lies and fabricated news that suit their interests which makes exposition of the truth an imminent task. The intention of Spark is to provide an alternative perspective on issues that affect the masses.

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Fare Hike in Bengaluru Adds to the Traffic and Commuter Woes

COVER

Sachin and Saniya

According to the 2024 TomTom Traffic Index, a report by the Dutch location tech firm TomTom, Bengaluru is the third slowest city in the world. Commuters in Bengaluru spend an average of 30 minutes and 10 seconds to travel 10 kilometers. Amidst this, the Karnataka government has implemented a 15% fare hike for BMTC/KSRTC buses and is set to raise metro fares by 40-45%. This move has angered citizens, as improving public transport and making it affordable is the key to tackling congestion, not increasing fares, deterring the use of public transport. These traffic issues stem from unplanned infrastructure and insufficient public transport, making people rely on private vehicles, worsening congestion. Instead of making public transport affordable and accessible, the government is adding to the burden on the common people with these fare hikes.

Justification for the Hike

The Congress government justifies the bus fare hike by citing rising diesel costs, staff salaries, and maintenance expenses. They also point to the financial strain caused by the Shakti scheme, which provides free bus rides for women. Ironically, the very government that promised these welfare schemes now claims it cannot afford them, pushing the costs onto the public. A key reason for this fare hike is to appease workers demanding higher wages and the release of arrears. The government owes ₹1,600 crore in dues towards the Shakti scheme and another ₹2,800 crore towards employees' provident funds. Retired employees have also been deprived of retirement benefits amounting to ₹400 crore. With KSRTC employees threatening a strike, the government is scrambling to meet these demands but at the cost of ordinary citizens.

Impact on Commuters

The fare hike has already led to a decline in bus ridership. Between December 16 and January 20, the number of daily bus passengers dropped from 38 lakhs to 35 lakhs, a significant reduction in just one month. Despite this, the government seems determined to continue with its fare increases. The minimum fare for non-AC buses has gone up from ₹5 to ₹6, and the maximum fare has increased from ₹30 to ₹32. The cost of bus passes has risen too, making public transport out of reach.

Meanwhile, the number of private vehicles has skyrocketed. From 2017 to 2024, the number of two-wheelers increased from 55.42 lakh to 78.33 lakh, and the number of cars from 17.75 lakh to 25.13 lakh. Yet, during the same period, the number of BMTC buses decreased from 6,677 to 6,340. This imbalance further highlights the lack of investment in public transport infrastructure. It reflects the impact of neoliberal policies in the sector of public transport.

The Push Towards Privatization

BMTC is deemed to be on the path to privatization. The government has already begun contracting electric buses under the Gross Cost Contract system, where private companies own, maintain, and operate the buses, including appointing drivers. The state aims to transition the entire bus fleet to electric by 2030, with 90 electric buses already plying under the Smart City scheme and 300 more planned under the FAME-2 scheme.

As more buses are leased to private players, fare hikes will increase, further alienating those who rely on affordable public transportation.

Private vs. Public Burden

While the government passes the financial burden onto the public,

private companies operating in the state, particularly those in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), continue to enjoy waivers and tax benefits. Bengaluru is home to 30 SEZs, 18 of which are functional. These companies, which profit massively from cheap labour, face minimal taxation and enjoy relaxed labour laws. In contrast, the working-class people of Bengaluru are left to bear the brunt of rising costs in education, healthcare, housing, and now public transport.

Metro Fare Hike: A Burden on the People

Adding to the strain on commuters is the impending 40-45% metro fare hike. With foreign funding making up nearly 50% of metro construction costs, the state has taken massive loans and now seeks to recover them through fare hikes. The already costly metro, is set to become even more expensive.

A research by Gitam Tiwari of IIT Delhi, published in EPW, shows that capital-intensive metro systems in developing countries like India serve only a small proportion of total trips. In contrast, buses and suburban railways, cover the majority of trips. Despite this, the government continues to prioritize metro expansion.

Right to Affordable Transport

Functional and affordable public transport is a basic necessity. Instead of focusing on metro projects, the government should invest in expanding the bus fleet and lowering fares. Public services like transport should be made more accessible with tax-money, if not free.

The Congress government is lucky that people are only rejecting the fare hike. If the public fully realizes their rights and how they are being taken advantage of, there will be much greater consequences.

Montfort College and its Nosedive

A Student from Montfort College

Montfort College, Indiranagar, has a tiny student body (fewer than 300 students enrolled across its Masters and Bachelors programs) which makes it an attractive destination for those who wish for a favorable teacher to student ratio. The flagship program of Montfort College is M.Sc. Counselling Psychology.

The issues at Montfort aren't new. In some ways, the issues started with COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of the college's digital unpreparedness and Bengaluru North University's administrative indolence.

Some decisions by Montfort such as the increased number of admission spots for students since 2023 can even be construed as a good move, were it not for the fact that this change was executed in a very unplanned manner, leading to a resource crunch and a drop in the quality of teaching. For instance, a refusal to get requisite lab equipment to match the needs of the increased class strength.

However, the larger issues began with the change in management at Montfort college in January 2024, when Dr. Molly Joy, former Head of the Department of Psychology at Kristu Jayanti College took over as principal. At this time, a new Vice Principal role was introduced for Dr. Sritha Sandon, and a new Head of Department was named, Dr. Maxim Pereira, both of whom were veterans at Montfort. More importantly, a new board of governors came at the helm of the college and seem to be steering it towards more profit-driven lows.

This change was marked by delays in the approval of the educators' course plan that led to a severely truncated effective semester (Feb-April '24) for the batch of 2023-25 - this after the sem start was delayed from August 2023 to January 2024. In fact, the 2023-25 batch was treated as an experiment in how many semesters can be fit into the academic year and how to get away with providing the bare minimum to its

student body. They are set to complete 3 semesters inside 1 year 2 months. Some record!

Since this management change, there have also been an almost daily unplanned cancellation of classes for administrative and extra-curricular purposes; an increased workload with reduced support for teachers and students alike; malfeasant changes in policies including unaccounted-for fees/charges; the management's suspicious push towards block internships (paid for by the trainee) rather than the free supervised year-long practicum as promised at the time of admission; an abject lack of qualified research supervisors promised on-campus combined with a push to publish ill-supervised research; and a seeming change in the pedagogy and ethics employed on campus.

Since 2024, the college has become a hostile space for students and teachers alike. The management refuses to listen to concerns, insults students & teachers, pushes impromptu unilateral decisions, and then changes their mind again for illogical reasons while expecting everyone to accommodate their whims. One recent whimsical decision by the principal included the change of assigned practicum days for the 3rd semester Counselling Psychology students from Saturdays to Fridays - after these days were finalized, and students had found sites willing to accept them on these days, and some students had even begun practising & accepting future bookings on Saturdays from clients seeking free therapy from the trainees. The whole move was extremely unprofessional but it didn't seem to matter to the management about how the trainees from Montfort would be perceived in the job market as having volatile schedules and requirements.

The management's current whim is the push for 100% attendance. Anything less than 85% attendance for 2nd year masters students will lead to students



being disallowed to write internal exams. Previous makeup classes for attendance have also been discontinued. The reasons for the student's absence can be anything - death in the family, hospitalization with a serious medical condition, ongoing court case to testify against a sexual abuser - all of it is treated with absolute insensitivity and the blanket attendance rule.

The management has also shown insensitivity to bullying on the "non-ragging" campus and hostel. The management and several teachers have actively participated in this bullying and in perpetrating misogynistic, casteist, classist, queerphobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, ableist and anti-mental health ideas. For an Institute teaching mental health, the place is absolutely lacking in propriety around mental health concerns. They have shamed students who have spoken up about these issues.

The almost daily volatile changes in policy, the overwork of faculty, the low pay offered as remuneration, and their disrespectful treatment at the hands of the management has led to a mass exodus of the good teachers who were the reason why students picked Montfort. These invaluable faculty have been partially replaced with inexperienced or unqualified staff. The full strength of the staff hasn't been filled since 2024, which keeps adding to the burnout and attrition of quality faculty who do put in efforts.

Students here have gone from looking forward to studying at Montfort to anticipating the end of their stint there. What a meteoric fall it has been for a once-prestigious institute.

Why is UUCMS a Matter of Concern for Students?

Aratrika

Unified University and College Management System (UUCMS) is a project to digitise the activities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Everything from admissions and examinations to awarding degrees will be done within this portal. It also includes features like class monitoring, lesson plans, and student attendance that are supposed to be managed using UUCMS. Even Faculty management features like performance assessment and promotion are included in UUCMS. In Karnataka, UUCMS was introduced in 2021 under the BJP government as part of the implementation of NEP 2020.

Since its very inception, UUCMS has been mired in controversy as students have found it very difficult to deal with. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the portal is full of technical glitches. Even after more than 3 years of functioning, the glitches are yet to be resolved. It must also be noted that introducing a centralised online portal for students coming from all colleges, be it private or public, both from rural and urban areas, is an exclusionary move.

With regular glitches and lack of access, UUCMS has become a real barrier to get proper marksheets, clearances, etc. for the students. The situation demands urgent intervention given that the 2021 batch students graduated in 2024. The students in Karnataka are facing a delay in the distribution of marks cards to undergraduate and postgraduate students across 22 universities, affecting over 51 lakh students. Even after replacing the NEP with a state education policy that is yet to see the light of the day, students have been unable to obtain either digital or printed marks cards. This has caused serious problems for students applying for higher education, scholarships, and hostel accommodations.

Centralising measures in education, be it in the form of UUCMS or centralised exams, do not serve the interest of the students. These on one hand make education exclusive to a specific section of well-off pupils, on the other hand it ensures a lot of control on students' futures in government hands. Both these problems do not bode well for the education sector in our country.

Killing of Journalist Mukesh Chandrakar Exposes Press Freedom Challenges

Sushant

The murder of Mukesh Chandrakar, a freelance journalist from Chhattisgarh, has once again brought into sharp focus the precarious conditions faced by journalists in India. He worked diligently to bring local governance issues to light. He reported widely on alleged corruption in public construction projects. Chandrakar also ran a popular YouTube channel, Bastar Junction. His videos highlighted stories frequently overlooked by mainstream media - reports of innocent villagers killed or wrongfully accused of being Maoists and imprisoned by the police.

Mukesh Chandrakar went missing on January 1. His body was found on January 3 in a septic tank in the compound of a road construction contractor Suresh Chandrakar. Preliminary reports suggest he had been attacked and subjected to violence before his death. A week before his disappearance, Mukesh Chandrakar worked on a report about the poor condition of a road under Suresh Chandrakar's contract. An official investigation into the contract was opened the day after NDTV broadcast the story on 25th December.

Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan (CBA), Civil Society Organisations, media bodies like the Editors Guild of India and the Press Association have condemned this killing, and called for a thorough investigation and better protection for journalists. The statement by the CBA and its 20+ affiliated organizations have termed Mukesh Chandrakar's murder as an attack on people's journalism that consistently highlighted issues such as the wrongful arrests of tribal people under the guise of crushing Maoism, fake encounters, human rights violations of tribal communities, and conspiracies to hand

over the state's natural resources to corporates. This murder reflects the collusion between corrupt individuals and the politicians and administrators shielding them. Suresh Chandrakar and others involved in this murder have close ties with leaders from both Congress and the BJP.



India: A Dangerous Place for Journalism

Chandrakar's murder is not an isolated case but part of a troubling pattern of violence against journalists in India. At least 13 of the 28 journalists killed since 2014 were working on environmental-related subjects, mainly land seizures and illegal mining for industrial purposes. Media watchdog 'Reporters Without Borders' has said that an average of three or four journalists are killed in connection with their work in India every year, making it one of the world's most dangerous countries for the media. According to the Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, India ranks 159 out of 180 countries (2024). Journalists, especially those working in rural and conflict-prone areas, often face intimidation, harassment, and violence. This danger increases further when a journalist is working on socio-economic and political issues affecting the people.

Mukesh Chandrakar's tragic death is a grim reminder of the risks faced by journalists who stay true to their job and underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to protect journalists in India.

Manmohanomics

Harish

Manmohanomics (n.)

/mʌn'moʊhəˌnɒmɪks/ :

An ideology of an economic system, named after its founder Manmohan Singh, defined by the ruthless oppression of the working masses, the plundering of natural resources, and the selling out of the nation to imperialists and the finance capital gangs, all in the name of "development", while still expecting history to somehow be kinder in the end.

On Theory:

The concept of Manmohanomics and its betrayal of India can be understood by tracing its historical roots to its early stages under the banner of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization). During this period, three key laws were passed under the dictation of the IMF and the World Bank:

The submission of Indian currency to the dominance of the dollar, through the devaluation of the Indian rupee by 25% and its subsequent continuous decline.

The introduction of private sector banks, through the Financial Reform Act of 1991, which allowed private banks with a cap of 74% ownership.

The deregulation of industries.

These are not merely laws; they form a death trap set for India, one shaped by the venomous influence of finance capital. This is characterized by the rapid privatization of sectors and the aggressive promotion of foreign trade, which leads to an increase in cheap exports to imperialist nations. While this boosts the profits of the imperial powers, it leaves dependent nations like India burdened with sky-high inflation rates.

What is crucial here is not just the cheap exports, whether manufactured goods or raw materials, but the systemic exploitation of the working masses and the looting of the country's natural resources in pursuit of these profits.

On Practice:

(i) Republic of Slaves!

Manmohanomics transforms the entire

functioning and resources of the state apparatus into a trajectory of complete obedience and service to imperialists and the comprador capitalist brokers of India. In doing so, the average commoner, both urban workers and rural peasants, is stripped of their dignity and reduced to slavery, bound by the chains of debt and poverty. Their labor is commodified, traded, and profited from by the greedy capitalist elites at the top of the chain. This is clearly reflected in the following data.

Wage to Profit Ratio: The wage to profit ratio, an indicator of economic prosperity distribution, has drastically fallen from 2.73 in the late 1980s to 0.25 in 2012, reflecting a significant 10-fold decline in the rate of exploitation of the industrial working class in the post-reform era.

Informal Workforce: In 2011-12, out of 472 million workers, 92% were informal workers, employed either in the informal sector (83%) or as contingent workers in the formal sector (58% of the total organized sector employment). These workers do not receive legal minimum wages (which are barely enough for subsistence) or other essential facilities like health, education, housing, sanitation, or safe working conditions.

Focus on Organized Sector: The push for labor law reforms mainly targets the organized manufacturing sector, which employs only 3% of the total workforce. The argument is that these workers, benefiting from labor laws, enjoy high wages and job security, which justifies large-scale contractualization and capital intensification in manufacturing. This has led to an increase in capital intensity across industries, even in labor-intensive ones.

Wages vs. Productivity: Despite high productivity, real wages for organized sector workers have grown slower than per capita income. From 1981-82 to 2011-2012, real wages grew at 0.82% per annum, while per capita income grew at 3.6% per annum. Non-wage benefits in the organized sector declined at a rate of 0.18% per annum.

Farmer Suicides: India has seen alarming levels of farmer suicides, with

296,438 farmer suicides since 1995. These suicides are primarily linked to debt, rising input costs, water crises, price volatility, and crop failures due to pests and disease. In 2011, the suicide rate among farmers was 47% higher than the general population.

Rural to Urban Migration: Between 1991 and 2001, over seven million people dependent on farming as their main livelihood left agriculture. The following decade, 2001-2011, saw one of the largest rural-to-urban migrations in India, driven by distress, causing significant disruption in the lives of migrants, uprooting their families and lifestyles.

Impact on Poverty and Morbidity: Despite the hardships faced by migrants, their higher earnings, even amidst urban squalor and distress, are recorded as a reduction in poverty. However, this is contradicted by rising morbidity rates, which have increased over the last two decades, with urban areas seeing significantly higher rates than rural areas.

(ii) Wreckage of Jal-Jangal-Jameen and its Inhabitants !

Destruction of Soil and Agriculture

India faces massive soil degradation, with about 1 millimeter of topsoil lost annually, equating to 5,334 million tonnes. Nearly 97.85 million hectares of land have already been degraded, 2.5 times the size of Rajasthan. Nutrient depletion is widespread, with losses of 74 million tons of major nutrients every year. The use of chemical fertilizers, hybrid and GM seeds, and deforestation contribute to desertification and soil erosion. The agricultural inputs industry, primarily controlled by foreign corporations like Monsanto, exacerbates the situation, resulting in long-term environmental harm and diminishing land fertility.

Deforestation and Forest Loss

India's forest cover is a severe concern, with 63 football fields of forest lost daily between 2014-2017, pushing the official cover down to 21%, far

below the necessary 33% for ecological balance. However, the real forest cover is closer to 10-15%. The government has permitted large-scale deforestation, as seen in Karnataka where two-thirds of forests were denotified. Further government policies legitimize development projects in protected areas, accelerating forest loss. This destruction directly impacts weather patterns, leading to rainfall scarcity and flooding, worsening climate conditions and environmental degradation.

Water Crisis and Pollution

India faces a severe water crisis, with 80% of its surface water polluted, including major rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna. Despite efforts like the Namami Ganga project, water pollution remains rampant. Groundwater, which supplies 63% of irrigation and 80% of rural and urban domestic water, is over-exploited, with 65% of India's irrigation relying on it. Over 1,000 regions are water-stressed, with many major cities expected to run out of groundwater soon. Water scarcity is compounded by a booming bottled water industry, highlighting the government's failure to address the crisis and improve water access for citizens.

Adivasi/Dalit displacements: Since India's independence, between 60 and 65 million people have been displaced, largely due to development projects, with around one million displaced annually. Over 40% of the displaced are tribals, and another 40% are Dalits and rural poor, many of whom face repeated displacement, with only 20-25% ever resettled. Violence and armed conflicts further contribute to displacement, with 526,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2013. The actual number of IDPs is likely higher due to underreporting once official camps are closed. IDPs often lack access to basic resources like clean water, shelter, food, and healthcare.

(iii) Who are the benefactors?

Growing Wealth Inequality

Since 2000, India's wealth inequality has deepened, with the top 10% holding over 75% of total wealth. The top 1% now controls 53% of the country's wealth, up from 36.5% in 2000. Between 2000 and 2015, the top 1% claimed 61% of the \$2.284 trillion wealth increase in India.

Rapid Growth of Billionaires

India's billionaire population has grown significantly since the 1990s. In the mid-1990s, there were just 2 billionaires with a combined net worth of \$3.2 billion. By 2014, this number increased to 55 billionaires, with a combined net worth of \$191.5 billion, reflecting the rapid concentration of wealth.

Surge in Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals (UHNIs)

The number of ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNIs) in India rose by 16% to 1.17 lakh in 2013-14. Their combined wealth grew by 21% to Rs 104 trillion (\$1.3 trillion), and is expected to quadruple to Rs 408 trillion (\$5 trillion) in the next three years, highlighting increasing wealth concentration.

Illicit Wealth and Its Impact

India's wealth disparity is further exacerbated by illicit money flows. Between 2003-2012, India lost \$439.59 billion (Rs 28 lakh crore) to illegal wealth transfers abroad. This



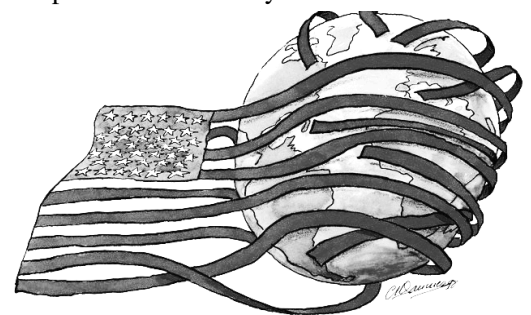
unaccounted wealth, largely controlled by the super-rich, further entrenches the country's wealth gap and undermines economic equity.

This is Manmohanomics: the theory and practice of stripping the common toiling masses of their right to exist peacefully. While the Manmohanomics model demonstrated extreme loyalty to imperialist forces, it was still deemed insufficient. Thus, it was updated into a newer version—the Modinomics model, an upgraded variant of Manmohanomics, now infused with saffron characteristics. In this nation, various 'development' models present themselves, each era touting its own vision as the 'Amrit Kaal.' Yet, despite the claims, it remains, in essence, a Republic of slaves!

Oppose the US Consulate in Bengaluru!

The U.S. and Indian governments dedicated a new U.S. consulate site in Bengaluru on 17th January. The consulate became a point of contention between the Congress and the BJP as both claimed to be the force behind 'getting' a US consulate to be set up in the city. The consulate does not have its own office yet hence the services available are also of limited nature. However, one must ask, what is the real reason for USA to take Bengaluru under its wings. An excerpt from the press release by the US government exposes itself, "Bengaluru is the sister city of San Francisco, California, and Cleveland, Ohio, and a key link with U.S. defense, technology, and aerospace companies." Companies in the city are also involved in manufacturing drones that are deployed in Palestine with US support. Moreover, US companies also siphon cheap labour from Bengaluru for the IT sector and other allied industries.

Thus, the setting up of the consulate should be seen as part of the US imperialist project of strengthening foreign investment and exploitation in the city.



Understanding Caste

Prof. Anand Teltumbde

Caste has been a defining feature of Indian society for millennia. Understanding it does not require delving into speculative debates about its origins, as caste has continually evolved. What castes are today is not what they were at their inception, or even during the transformative periods of Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar's movements. Recognizing this evolution is crucial, as caste has undergone profound changes under the impact of political and economic shifts before and during colonial times and the early post-colonial decades. These changes, however, are often overlooked in contemporary sociological and political discourse.

While classical caste was rigid, religiously sanctioned, and occupationally defined, the contemporary form operates as a socio-political and economic category with more fluid boundaries. Yet, the persistence of caste discrimination, endogamy, caste-based violence and its pivotal place in politics demonstrates its enduring power in Indian society.

To understand caste's constitutional and structural development, the perspective provided in Marc Galanter's seminal book "Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India" (1984) may be useful. It describes three modes of manifestation of caste:

Sacral Mode: Refers to the traditional, ritualistic, and hierarchical understanding of caste, rooted in religious and cultural norms. Castes are viewed as part of a unified Hindu religious order, hierarchically organized according to varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra). This mode, often invoked by courts and colonial authorities, relied on scriptural doctrines and notions of purity and pollution to classify castes, with personal laws applied differently to "twice-born" (Dvija) castes and Shudras.

Sectarian Mode: Represents caste as a community-based identity, often aligned with shared social practices, kinship, and endogamy. Castes function as independent religious communities with distinct doctrines and practices. These self-contained units operated autonomously, independent of broader Hindu religious principles.

Associational Mode: Highlights the evolution of caste as a political or organizational identity, where caste groups mobilize for economic, political, or social advantages. Castes act as self-governing social units, not necessarily tied to religion but organized around shared cultural and social functions. This mode extends beyond Hinduism to include caste-like structures among other religious communities, such as Muslims, Christians, and Parsis.

The colonial state applied these modes variably to suit its purposes. While it recognized caste's role in local governance through sectarian and associational frameworks, it relied heavily on the sacral mode for personal law governance. This sacral framework reinforced a colonial schema that conceptualized India as a land of religious communities,

influencing social and political discourses, including the anti-caste movements.

Ambedkar, for instance, heavily critiqued Hindu scriptures (Dharmashastras) in his efforts to annihilate caste, reflecting the dominance of sacral conception of castes in his thought process. His ultimate act of conversion to Buddhism also underscores sacral conception of caste.

However, in reality, castes conformed more to the sectarian and associational modes. They operated as autonomous quasi-religious communities with distinct practices and cultural systems, often independent of scriptural mandates. This cultural embeddedness made caste a deeply internalized part of Indian society. Associational characteristics, such as self-governance, were also evident, particularly in pluralistic settings where diverse communities coexisted harmoniously. One may identify these three modes being associated with the varna hierarchy from the Brahmin downwards. While Brahminic castes followed the sacral mode in ordering their hierarchy as per the religious scriptures in a diminishing manner, the Shudras and A-varnas reflected sectarian and associational modes. This corresponds to the empirical reality that in the rural areas the practitioners of caste, viz. Shudras and a-varnas do not have an iota of scriptural sense behind their conduct but the caste contradiction between them unfolds in the most pronounced manner, often taking violent forms.

Caste among the upper varnas was ritually ordained. However, as their urban dwelling strata entered capitalist networks during colonial times, the ritualistic rigidities loosened within it, influenced by the logic of minimizing transaction costs. The spread of capitalist modernity among its western educated segment also had a significant share in loosening the ritualistic relations. The castes within these varnas for all practical purposes show up as a single cluster; their manifestation scarcely noticed as the innocuous cultural practice. They influenced de-ritualization across their castes.

Post-independence, the sacral framework faced some challenges, notably through the passage of the Hindu Code Bill and the constitutional abolition of untouchability (Article 17). Yet, the broader constitutional framework retained sacral elements, such as in Article 341, which defined Scheduled Castes (SCs) within a Hindu framework (later extended to Sikhs and Buddhists, assumed to be sects of Hinduism). This approach perpetuated caste and communal identities, facilitating their continued exploitation by political forces.

The Constitution's sacral underpinnings, coupled with the ruling classes' manipulations, ensured the preservation of caste structures under the guise of social justice. This became evident in the abolition of untouchability and the subsequent extension of reservations beyond the Scheduled Castes, a category specifically created to implement reservations as per the last colonial constitution vide the Government of India Act, 1935.

If reservations—understood as an extraordinary measure for

an extraordinary issue— had been restricted to this exceptional category, caste itself could be abolished. By creating the closed ‘Schedule’ as a quasi-class for the erstwhile untouchable castes, the connection of the entire untouchable caste cluster representing the worst manifestation of caste discrimination with the Hindu caste system was technically severed. This could have allowed the caste structure at large to be abolished without affecting reservations for this specific group.

However, the ruling classes, unwilling to relinquish caste—their providential weapon for dividing people—chose a different course. To reinforce their logic and maintain the caste structure, reservations were extended to the Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Castes, an amorphous category potentially encompassing all in the backward country as India. While it may be acknowledged that the Scheduled Tribes faced both social stigma and physical exclusion similar to the Scheduled Castes, this issue could have been addressed by merging them with the Scheduled Castes for reservation purposes. A mechanism could have been easily devised to ensure their proportional share within the quota system.

The remaining groups, however, did not suffer social stigma or exclusion based on caste identity. The extension of reservations to these groups fortified the caste system rather than dismantling it, serving the interests of the ruling classes under the pretext of promoting social justice.

The abolition of untouchability without the abolition of caste was both theoretically and empirically meaningless. Dr. Ambedkar himself understood this, yet found himself unable to address it in the constituent assembly. Reservations, while a measure to redress historical injustices, were not a panacea for the entrenched caste hierarchy. However, they were projected as such, potentially casteizing society, fragmenting solidarity, and fostering divisive politics.

Reservations, moreover, allowed the ruling classes to evade the responsibility of implementing universal measures such as free education, healthcare, and livelihood security—fundamental inputs required for the minimal empowerment of all people. Without these universal provisions, it may be argued, even the reservation system could not achieve its intended efficacy.

Since reservations have become a significant prop for caste identities and electoral politics, their primary beneficiary, castes today may be seen as “constitutional castes.” The classical caste system, left to contend with the forces of capitalism, might have gradually withered away. Instead, it was transplanted into the modernist framework of the Constitution, rendering it nearly indestructible. Since the Constitution has privileged the sacral mode, restricting the Scheduled Castes to Hindus, the associated notion of hierarchy also is inherited by the contemporary castes.

Castes do remain a deeply hierarchical system, with the varnas forming a notional meta-structure and sub-castes and sub-sub-castes creating intricate nested hierarchies. Colonial attempts to codify castes through census exercises failed to capture

their fluid and evolving nature. New castes have emerged, while others have dissolved over time, illustrating the dynamic adaptability of caste. This ever-changing structure continues to reinforce caste as a pervasive ideology of superiority and inferiority, internalized by individuals at subconscious levels.

The caste dynamics was significantly boosted by the political-economic policies of the government during the 1950s and 1960s. The Congress Party government was obligated to fulfil promises made during the freedom struggle. Foremost among these was land reform. Accordingly, land reforms were implemented through various land-ceiling legislations of the states. While these reforms sounded good on paper, they embedded a political objective of the Congress—to create a class from among the most populous Shudra caste band that would serve as its agent in rural areas, where it lacked organization. Excess land was distributed to Shudra caste tenants, whose names appeared in land records. However, many Dalits and Adivasis, who might have been actual tillers of land as sub-tenants of these Shudra caste tenants, were excluded on the plea that their names did not figure in land records. This created a land-owning class of Shudra farmers in rural areas.

When the Green Revolution was implemented soon thereafter, huge productivity gains accrued to these land-owning farmers, enriching them significantly. The Green Revolution, a capitalist strategy to boost agricultural productivity, created many markets—markets for input, output, credit, money, implements, services, etc.—which provided business opportunities to a section of these farmers who amassed considerable surplus from untaxed agricultural income. They even expanded beyond village boundaries as petty businessmen (transporters, food processors, contractors, etc.), interfacing with political power structures and germinating political aspirations. While they initially served as Congress agents in rural areas as planned, their increasing demands could not be accommodated by the Congress, leading to the rise of regional parties. It made electoral politics increasingly competitive.

As the Congress's aura of the freedom struggle faded, accentuated by debacles like the Chinese war and Nehru's demise, political parties sought to woo caste and religious communities, inaugurating vote-bank politics. Dalits, organized under the Ambedkarite movement, emerged as an important vote bank with Ambedkar as their icon to mobilize them.

While this process strengthened the Shudra castes through their ties to the class of rich farmers metamorphosed into political leaders, it made Dalits correspondingly vulnerable in rural settings. The spread of capitalist relations in rural areas destroyed traditional interdependence in villages, reducing Dalits to rural proletariat, utterly dependent on the rich farmers for farm wages. While the agrarian economy turned capitalist, old feudal relations came handy in suppressing

wages. The resulting contradictions between Shudra capitalist farmers and Dalit farm labourers manifested through caste faultlines, leading to a new genre of atrocities first seen in Kilvenmani in Tamil Nadu in 1968.

It is vital to understand that these changes in the caste complexion of society were primarily caused by political-economic transformations, not cultural or psychological processes.

Politics based on caste identity, particularly for the emancipation of lower castes like Dalits, needs careful strategic consideration. On one hand, it provides a platform for the historically oppressed to assert their rights and challenge entrenched hierarchies; on the other, it risks perpetuating caste as a defining social and political factor rather than dismantling it.

Caste-based politics often fragments marginalized groups, as seen in the Dalit movement. It addresses symptoms like representation and policy measures rather than structural causes such as economic inequities and land ownership patterns. Political parties claiming to represent Dalits or lower castes are sometimes co-opted by dominant caste or class interests, diluting their emancipatory agenda. For instance, Dalit leaders in mainstream parties may prioritize party loyalty over community interests.

The essence of caste itself—hierarchy-seeking, divisive, and prone to splintering—makes it incompatible with building radical emancipatory movements. This simple understanding is often overwhelmed by the upsurge of caste identities.

What then are the alternatives? The obvious answer lies in class-based coalitions. Since caste oppression intersects with economic exploitation, addressing broader socio-economic inequalities can strengthen Dalit emancipation. Movements with emphasis on land reforms and workers' rights have sometimes complemented caste-based struggles.

While representation is vital, dismantling the material basis of caste—unequal land distribution, limited access to education and healthcare—is essential for true emancipation. The failure of customary politics of representation should make us realize that true representation necessitates universal empowerment. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision, wherein educated Dalits would act as a protective umbrella for the Dalit masses, has unfortunately not materialized.

Towards the end of his life, Ambedkar lamented that educated

Dalits had betrayed his expectations. His disillusionment extended to the political representation he fought so hard to secure through reservations; he later demanded their annulment out of frustration.

These experiences teach us a vital lesson: unless the entire population is empowered with fundamental provisions such as free healthcare, universal quality education through a common school system, and basic livelihood security via land or jobs, the concept of representation will remain hollow and often counterproductive. Over the last seven decades, we have seen so-called representatives of the people evolve into some of the worst oppressors.

Radical politics requires a broader force, one that cannot emerge from fragmented caste identities. The clichéd idea of Bahujan, conceived as a coalition of all oppressed castes and even religious minorities, may occasionally secure electoral victories under the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system. However, it cannot advance any radical or emancipatory project. The electoral success of the Kanshiram-Mayawati duo and similar attempts at showcasing the unity of the oppressed castes might yield momentary gains, but it falls short of achieving lasting transformative change. Only the broad class unity of people sans caste can achieve annihilation of caste. As I have been always saying, the task is entwined with the revolution in the country: Annihilation of caste is not possible without a revolution, and the revolution also is not possible without annihilation of caste. I use revolution with a line concept; a process of leading to structural overhaul of the production relations in society, and not the culmination of it.

The challenges lie in how to bring this about against the onslaughts of the revivalist right wing forces in recent times in the post-neoliberal era marked by multi-dimensional crises of liberal democracy and consequent spread of fascist tendencies in all spheres. It has left few degrees of freedom for the coming generation to think of such issues. Young people who were expected to shoulder this challenge are turning individualistic and apathetic to any collective issue. The hope is small groups of youth like you. They exist across the country, possibly without communication and coordination with each other. You may have to think creatively to devise a viable solution and then scale it up to the level of the country. I do hope it is doable.



Scan this to listen to Prof. Anand Teltumbde's lecture on caste. Follow us on YouTube @SPARK_MAGAZINE

Prof. Anand Teltumbde



S P A R K | 1 1

UGC's War on Higher Education

Sreeganga

The University Grants Commission's (UGC) Draft Guidelines 2025 are a direct assault on academic freedom, inclusivity, and social justice in Indian higher education. Marketed as reforms aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, these changes aim to corporatize academia and transform universities into factories for producing compliant workers instead of critical thinkers.

One of the most alarming proposals is the redefinition of faculty recruitment and promotion through arbitrary 'notable contributions.' Candidates must meet four of nine vague criteria, such as 'Innovative Teaching Contributions,' 'Community Engagement,' and knowledge of 'Indian knowledge systems.' These metrics overwhelmingly favour privileged individuals with access to institutional resources, further marginalizing those from underfunded backgrounds and marginalized communities.

The guidelines also seek to casualize academic jobs by removing the 10% cap on contractual appointments, falsely framing this as "flexibility." In reality, this will create a precarious workforce with no job security or academic freedom. Without tenure, faculty members will be discouraged from challenging exploitative university policies or voicing dissent, reducing them to disposable employees at the mercy of administrations.

The introduction of the 'Professor of Practice' (PoP) role is equally dangerous. It allows professionals from non-academic backgrounds to teach, opening the floodgates for corporate or RSS interference in education. These positions, often handed out as political or corporate favours, undermine academic expertise, bypass traditional recruitment processes, and weaken collective faculty representation.

Adding to the erosion of academic integrity is the centralization of power in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors (VCs). The guidelines grant Chancellors or Governors control over appointments, attacking the federal structure and undermining their ability to implement education policies suited to regional needs.

These measures align with NEP 2020's broader agenda of privatization and saffronization. By legitimizing contentious reforms like the four-year undergraduate programme and inviting corporate players into academia, the UGC reduces students to mere consumers and faculty to expendable labour.

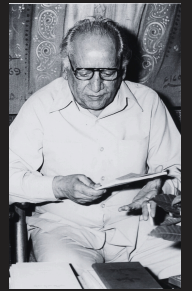
The UGC Draft Guidelines 2025 represent a deliberate effort to dismantle the democratic and inclusive foundations of education in India. If implemented, they will leave students and educators powerless, and education itself will serve only corporate and political interests. United resistance by the stakeholders is the need of the hour.



THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

February 10, 1898- Birthday- Faiz Ahmad

Faiz was a Pakistani poet, and author of Urdu and Punjabi literature. Faiz was one of the most celebrated Pakistani Urdu writers of his time. Outside literature, he has been described as "a man of wide experience" having been a teacher, an army officer, a journalist, a trade unionist, and a broadcaster.



February 18, 1946 - The Royal Indian Navy mutiny or revolt, also called the 1946 Naval Uprising, was an insurrection of Indian naval ratings, soldiers, police personnel, and civilians against the colonial British government. From the initial flashpoint in Bombay, the revolt spread and found support throughout British India,

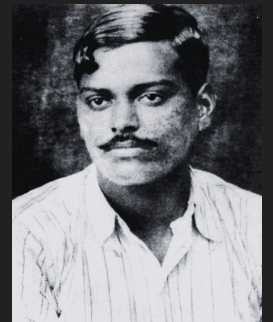
from Karachi to Kolkata, and ultimately came to involve over 20,000 sailors in 78 ships and shore establishments. It was repressed brutally by the British.

February 23, 1991- The Kunan Poshpora incident occurred in Kashmir's Kupwara district, where Indian Army personnel raped at least 23 women during a cordon-and-search operation. Despite survivors' testimonies, the incident faced cover-ups and denials, symbolizing the state violence and struggle for justice in Kashmir.

February 25, 2024- U.S. Air Force member Aaron Bushnell, 25, self-immolated outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., protesting U.S. support for Israel during the Gaza conflict. He livestreamed the act, declaring he would "no longer be complicit in genocide" and shouting "Free Palestine!" as he burned.

February 26, 1848 - The Communist Manifesto pamphlet was published by two young communists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It advocated the abolition of all private property and an economic system in which workers own all means of production- land, factories and machinery.

February 27, 1931- Chandra Shekhar Azad killed himself with his last bullet on being surrounded by the British in Alfred Park in Allahabad. He was an Indian revolutionary who alongside Bhagat Singh, reorganized the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) into Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) after the death of its leaders.



February 28, 2002 - The 2002 Gujarat violence, was a three-day period of anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat under the behest of the then CM Narendra Modi.

Recent Developments in the Right to Protest Movement

Saniya

The expression of dissent forms the very fabric of social change in any society. Protests have played a crucial role in shaping the course of history. It is through social movements that people have secured their basic rights and dignity. However, the suppression of dissent in India through various means exposes the farce that the Indian democracy is. The “Licensing and Regulation of Protests, Demonstrations and Protest Marches (Bengaluru City) Order, 2021”, that came into effect in January 2022 bans all protests outside the boundaries of Freedom Park (which used to be the Central Jail, ironically). It is a direct assault on the democratic voices of the masses. From the arrest of Devanahalli farmers rallying against forceful land acquisition to the violent detention of activists gathered in Frazer Town to discuss the genocide in Palestine, the state government with the support of Karnataka High Court has been using this order to restrict any public political gatherings in Bengaluru and curtail the rights of workers, farmers and students.

Recently, the Secret Santa fiasco in Cubbon Reads gained a lot of public attention, where a security guard confiscated a bunch of books that readers had brought to exchange. A TheNewsMinute article reveals many instances where the police and the Horticulture Department restricted readings and gatherings in Cubbon Park, stated their lack of permission and asked them to go to Freedom Park. In the 20th century, this very place was a freely accessible space that saw militant protests and rallies by Dalits, farmers, and trade unions demanding accountability from the government.

On 31st December 2024, All India Students Association, as part of Horatadaa Hakkigaagi Janandolana (People’s Movement for the Right to Protest), submitted a memorandum with 1,761 signatures from students across Bengaluru to the Education and Home Departments, demanding to revoke the ban on protests. Public spaces like Cubbon Park, Town Hall, Mysore Bank Circle which have a rich history of people’s resistance belong to the people. As concerned citizens, we must come together to reclaim our public space and resist the efforts of the government to silence our voices.

Refugee Education in Limbo: Navigating India’s

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Legal hurdle

Faryal Fatima

Sana, a nine-year-old Afghan refugee living in New Delhi, is caught in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. Forced into begging by a local gang that preys on vulnerable refugee children, Sana’s daily life is marked by uncertainty and danger. She should be in school, learning and playing with children her age, but the legal and systemic barriers in India have kept her—and thousands of other refugee children—out of the classroom. This is the stark reality facing refugees in a country that, despite hosting a large refugee population, lacks a formal legal framework to support them. India is home to refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and other neighboring countries. Despite this, India has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, which means refugees in India are not granted specific legal protections. Instead, refugees are governed by immigration laws such as the Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Indian Passport Act of 1920, which treat them as foreign nationals, often without distinguishing between refugees and illegal immigrants. This legal ambiguity prevents refugees from accessing several essential services, including education.

Three key legal barriers prevent refugee children from receiving an education in India: the lack of documentation, discriminatory policies, and the absence of a legal framework that specifically addresses their needs.

Most refugees flee their countries under extreme conditions, often without proper documentation. This absence of identification, residence proof, and academic records makes enrolling in schools nearly impossible. Educational institutions typically require documents such as birth certificates and proof of prior education for admission, which refugee children cannot provide. As a result, many are

excluded from even basic education, perpetuating a cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

For older refugee students, this lack of documentation creates additional hurdles. Without proper identification, they cannot apply for entrance exams, scholarships, or higher education opportunities, severely limiting their future prospects. Discrimination compounds the challenges faced by refugees in India. Classified as “foreigners” or “non residents,” refugees are often charged significantly higher tuition fees than local students. Without access to financial aid, these costs force many refugee students to drop out or forgo higher education altogether. In addition, language barriers pose a significant challenge for refugee children. Many refugees come from countries where the primary language is different from the languages spoken in Indian schools. However, there are few programs to support non-native speakers, leaving refugee children unable to keep up with the curriculum. Without adequate language support, many children fall behind, eventually dropping out.

Social discrimination within schools further exacerbates these challenges. Refugee children often face prejudice from both peers and teachers, who may treat them differently or exclude them from certain activities. This environment of hostility discourages refugee children from continuing their education, leading to higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment.

India’s legal system does not differentiate between refugees and other foreign nationals, leaving refugees in a precarious legal situation. The absence of a specific legal framework means that refugees have no guaranteed access to essential services such as education. The Foreigners Act of 1946 allows for the detention and deportation of non-citizens, creating a climate of fear for refugees who are often classified as illegal immigrants.

Moreover, without legal recognition, refugees are excluded from government programs designed to support marginalized communities. Programs that provide free textbooks, midday meals, and financial assistance to disadvantaged students are not available to refugee children because of their non-citizen status. Even when technically eligible, refugees face bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of awareness about their rights, further limiting their access to education.

The consequences of these legal barriers are severe. Deprived of education, refugee children are often forced into child labour, begging, and other forms of exploitation to survive. Without access to school, children like Sana become prime targets for traffickers and gangs.

Girls are particularly vulnerable. Deprived of education, they are at high risk of being trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation. The absence of formal education leaves these girls defenseless against exploitation, robbing them of their futures.

Social exclusion and discrimination compound these challenges. Refugee children are often ostracized in schools, leading to emotional distress and alienation. This hostile environment pushes many children to drop out, further limiting their chances of building a better future.

Judicial interventions have provided some relief to refugees in India, but these are rare and case-specific. In 2012, the Delhi High Court ruled in favor of a Burmese Chin refugee, allowing her children to attend school despite lacking documentation. However, such interventions are not a substitute for a comprehensive legal framework that guarantees refugee children the right to education.

Primitive Accumulation: Beginnings of Capitalism

Anagha Shyam

Most of us have come across the term primitive accumulation numerous times, especially while reading Marxist literature. Intuitively, we understand it as the process where the gentry or capitalists accumulate various resources, primarily land, often through nefarious means, which is then converted into capital. Marx himself dedicates several chapters at the end of the first volume of *Capital* exclusively to this topic.

But when, where, how, and why did primitive accumulation begin? Unsurprisingly, the roots of this phenomenon trace back to Europe, specifically England.

The transformation of rural England during the late medieval and early modern periods marked one of the most significant shifts in European, and eventually world, history. This era witnessed the widespread displacement of rural communities, the rise of urban centres, and an irreversible transformation in political economy and its accompanying social structure. Central to this upheaval was the privatisation of public lands, church lands, and the commons — the process of primitive accumulation of capital — and the decay of feudal relations.

The political economy of England was rapidly changing in the late medieval period. This naturally necessitated a change in the social order. For centuries, England's rural communities thrived under the open-field system, where peasant families cultivated strips of fertile (arable) land for crops like cereals

The proposed Asylum Bill, 2015, introduced by Indian parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor, represents a critical step toward addressing this issue. The bill seeks to establish a clear legal framework for refugees, distinguishing them from illegal immigrants and granting them specific rights, including access to education. If passed, the bill would establish a National Commission for Asylum to oversee refugee cases, ensure timely decisions, and protect refugees from deportation.

This bill also emphasizes the importance of education for refugees, recognizing that education is a fundamental human right. By guaranteeing refugee children access to education, India would not only fulfill its international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also invest in its future. Education provides refugees with the skills and knowledge they need to rebuild their lives and contribute to their host communities.

Sana's story is just one of many that illustrate the silent crisis facing refugee children in India. Without a legal framework that guarantees their right to education, thousands of children are left vulnerable to exploitation, poverty, and social exclusion. Addressing these challenges requires legislative reform, including the passage of the Asylum Bill, 2015, and the creation of supportive policies that ensure refugees have equal access to education.

India has the opportunity to not only protect the rights of refugee children but also invest in its own future by fostering social cohesion and stability through education. By providing refugee children with the tools they need to succeed, India can ensure that these children grow up to become active and contributing members of society.

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and vegetables. Surrounding these fields were the commons, shared lands used for grazing, gathering firewood, and sourcing essential resources. The commons were a fundamental part of the rural social and economic structure and ensured the survival of the rural poor, particularly smallholders and landless labourers. Even peasants and relatively well-to-do classes, such as the yeomanry, depended on the commons for sustenance. These relationships and structures began to crumble with the introduction of the Enclosure Acts. Starting in the 17th century and intensifying in the 18th and 19th centuries, these laws allowed wealthy landowners to privatise the commons, fencing off the lands for exclusive use. However, fertile arable lands were already being converted into pastures for sheep farming as far back as the 12th century, forcing those who depended on these lands to migrate as wage labourers with the rise of the wool industry in England.

The creation of the proletarian class, or the working class, was very systematic. It began with the dissolution of the feudal retainers — vassals who once managed lands and provided military service to feudal lords in exchange for protection. Think of knights, bailiffs, and the like. Standing armies were uncommon in medieval England, so it was these military retainers who fought for feudal lords during wars. By the 15th century, however, centralised royal power and the rise of standing armies rendered retainers obsolete. The lands used by retainers for farming were privatised, even though the feudal rights to these lands were

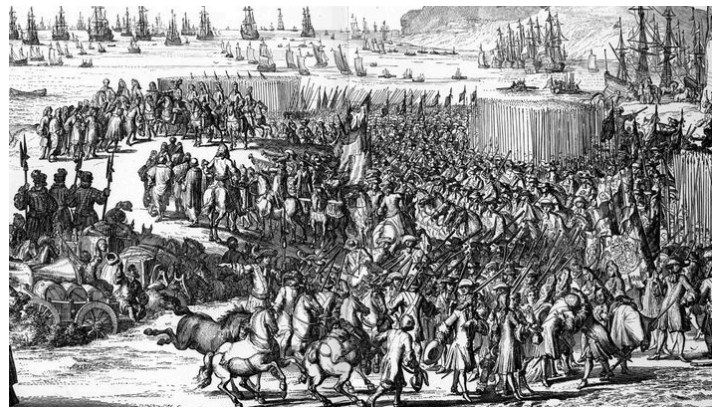
reciprocal and not solely the lords' to claim. These retainers were then forced to work as wage labourers for the same wealthy landlords.

Peasants, on the other hand, usually owned some land and comprised about 30–50% of the population by the 16th century. They relied heavily on the commons for resources. The privatisation of the commons stripped them of these essential resources, forcing many to abandon agriculture altogether. Similarly, the yeomanry, comprising around 15–20% of the population, experienced a sharp decline. Idealised in literature as the backbone of rural England, these independent farmers found themselves displaced as industrial-scale farming consolidated smaller plots into larger estates.

This systematic erosion of self-sufficient agricultural communities created a large population of landless labourers. Former peasants and smallholders were thrust into precarious wage-labour markets, where they faced uncertain employment and worsening living conditions.

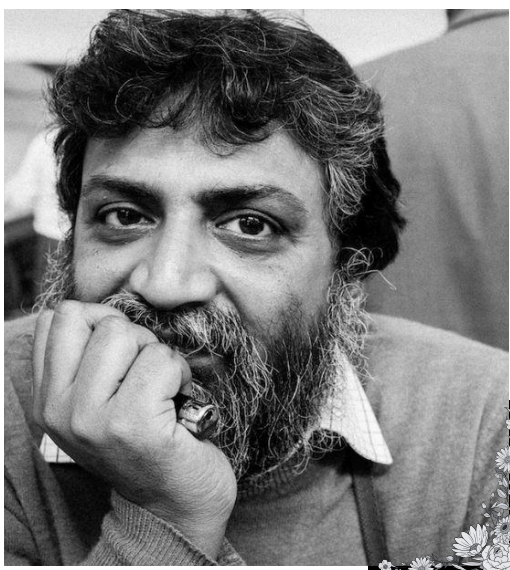
Throughout this process, the State played a crucial role, favouring the gentry more often than not. The Statute of Labourers, the Reformation of the Catholic Church, and the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 are glaring examples. The Statute of Labourers (1351) capped wages and restricted labour mobility. At the time, there was a shortage of workers in England due to the Black Plague. As a result, able-bodied workers could demand higher wages. When this happened, the capitalists turned to the state for help, and the state, naturally, passed the Statute, criminalising demands for higher pay. This law remained in effect until as late as 1863.

The Reformation of the Catholic Church is another example of the state collaborating with the bourgeoisie. Catholic monasteries, which were significant landowners, had traditionally provided charity and communal access to land. The poor depended on this for their livelihood. But when King Henry VIII dissolved these institutions, their lands were gifted to capitalists loyal to him, who often enclosed and privatised them. Adding to this, Protestant ethics considered individual 'hard work', wealth accumulation, and capitalist consumption as virtues rather than sins. These ideals focused on individual faith and personal responsibility, aligning perfectly with a capitalistic worldview.



The **Glorious Revolution (1688)** marked a shift of power from the monarchy to a parliament dominated by the gentry (newly formed capitalist class). This 'revolution' led to large-scale sales of Crown and Church lands to wealthy landowners. The proceeds financed wars and colonial expansion but deepened rural displacement. During this time, the Bank of England was established. The state waged wars- both colonial and otherwise- to benefit the bourgeoisie by extending markets and acquiring cheap or free raw materials from colonies. To finance these wars, the state borrowed money from the bourgeoisie via the Bank of England. As state debt increased, it sold off more public lands to the same bourgeoisie at nominal rates. These lands had been essential for the rural population's livelihood. Many displaced individuals migrated to urban centres in search of employment, contributing to the rise of industrial cities. There, they faced chronic low wages and deteriorating living standards.

The enclosure movement and the broader privatisation of land in late medieval and early modern England led to the displacement of a massive rural population, who then became wage labourers. This dismantled a centuries-old rural economy rooted in communal resources and small-scale farming, marking the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. These landless wage labourers formed the basis for Britain's colonialism, serving as soldiers, workers, and settlers. This process of primitive accumulation was then replicated in countries like France and Germany of Europe and then in the colonies like India.



**Rest in Power People's Filmmaker
Mr. Tarun Bhartiya**

'I wish to leave you with a story from the land where I live and work – The Khasi-Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. In the Western part of these hills, there is a village of seven households called Domiasiat. Domiasiat sits atop India's largest Uranium deposits which the Indian State covets. Kong Spelity Lyngdoh Langrin, 90 year old matriarch of Domiasiat, for many years has refused to move away from her land to allow the Indian state to mine the Uranium because she experienced the radio-active pollution created by test mining in the village. She has been offered millions in lease fees by UCIL, but she is happy in her hamlet cultivating tympew and sohmarit. I have been doing a documentary on Uranium mining issues in Meghalaya for sometime. One day when Kong Spelity was tired and complaining, I asked her why doesn't she just give up her land and with the millions being offered to her move away to modern comforts? She looked at me and smiled, "Give up my freedom? Can money buy me the freedom which this land gives?" And Sir, I want to have my freedom back, unencumbered by any recognition from the Indian state.'

– Excerpt from the letter he wrote to the President while returning his National Film Award

—UPDATES ON STUDENT MOVEMENTS—

Students Gather to Demand Enactment of ‘Rohith Act’

Multiple students and organisations gathered on January 19th in Bengaluru to discuss the enactment of ‘Rohith Act’. Named in memory of PhD scholar Rohit Venmula, the act aims to prevent institutional violence and provide support to students from backward caste communities. The event highlighted the lack of adequate legislation to protect underprivileged students from discrimination in educational institutions.

Ashoka University (AU) Students Protest Against Invasive Security Measures

Earlier in January, the AU administration announced their new “security” protocol which included restricting all student entries to Gate 2 and making it compulsory for all students to have their belongings checked through baggage screeners. The announcement was met with protests that began on 20th January, raising concerns on privacy and invasive surveillance. At present, the protesters have achieved a partial victory where the admin has decided to mandate scanning only for ‘large-bags’ and constitute a special committee to deal with substance abuse.



Students Across India Protest Against Proposed UGC Guidelines Draft 2025

Protests erupted in many parts of the country throughout January in response to the draft UGC regulations, 2025 with the draft being burned by protestors in some locations. The proposed regulations allow individuals from non-academic backgrounds to be appointed as vice-chancellors (VCs) while taking away the power of state governments to appoint VCs. Protesting students emphasised that these changes go against federalism and pave the way for politically-motivated VC appointments which could increase privatisation and saffronisation of education.

Students Protest Against Undemocratic Rules Set by SPPU

In December, the Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) administration made it mandatory to seek prior approval for any meetings, gatherings or protests on the campus premises. This sparked multiple protests in January, where the students emphasised on the undemocratic nature of the decision and its potential to target students who voice out their concerns. The students of SPPU have demanded that the decision be revoked.

Students of Central University of Jharkhand (CUJ) Protest Against Bad Quality of Food

With two students being hospitalised and many others experiencing vomiting, students of CUJ held a protest on 28th January against the bad quality of food served in the mess despite past complaints. The *dharna* was sparked by a particular incident where a student found a “rat-like something” in their food. In addition to the food quality, the students highlighted the lack of doctors and ambulances past 4pm.



NLUO Students Begin Indefinite Protests Against Arbitrary Policies by the Admin

The students of National Law University, Odisha (NLUO) began their indefinite protest on January 24th. This comes in response to recent measures taken by the admin to close classrooms from 7PM-8AM and impose evaluation for tutorial classes without consulting students. Additionally, protesting students have also raised several issues including damaged washroom facilities, unchecked powers of librarians and wardens to impose disciplinary action and dysfunctional facilities for differently-abled students.