

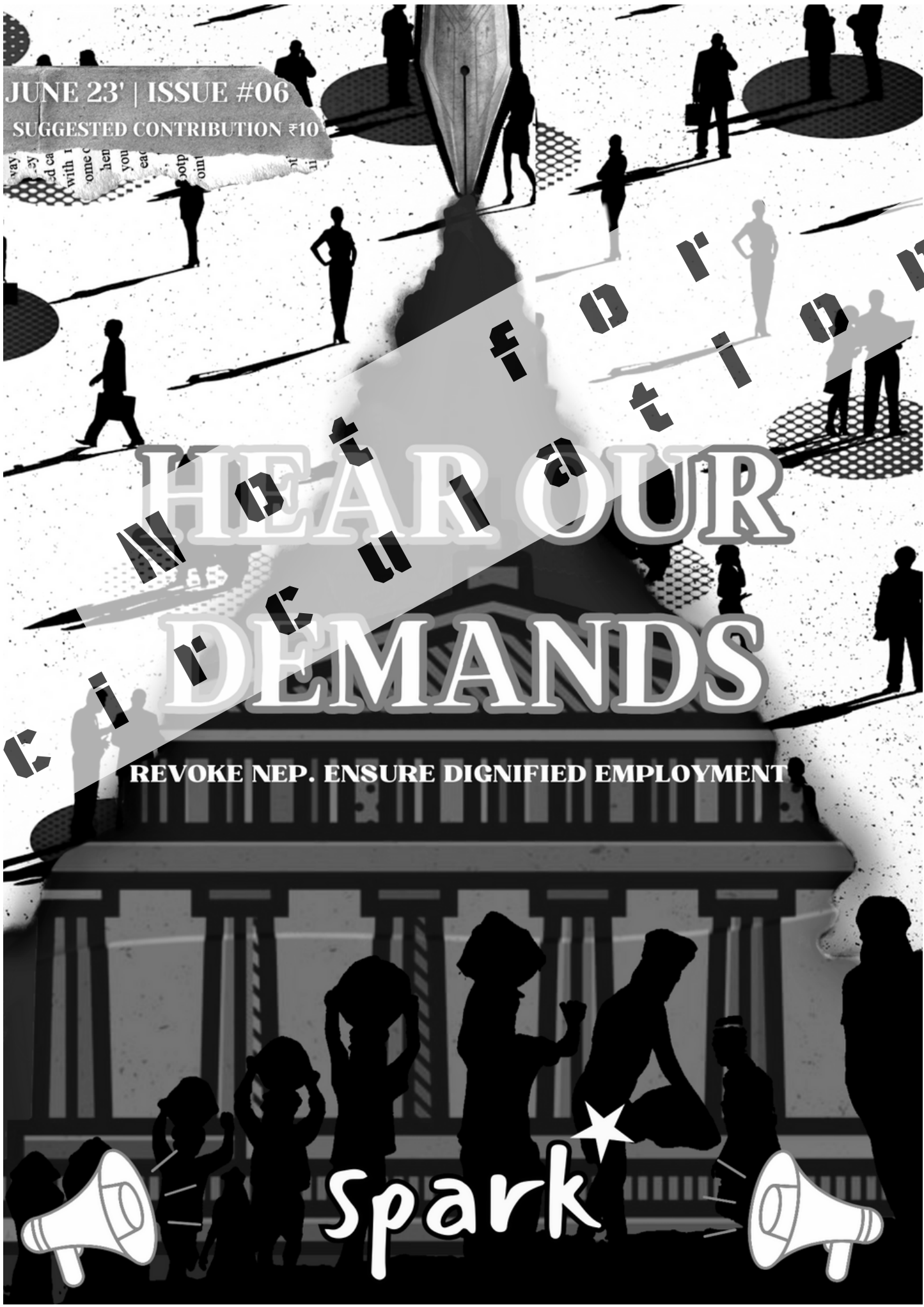
JUNE 23' | ISSUE #06

SUGGESTED CONTRIBUTION ₹10

# HEAR OUR DEMANDS

REVOKE NEP. ENSURE DIGNIFIED EMPLOYMENT

Spark



# UPDATES ON STUDENT MOVEMENTS



## **AISA protests in support of wrestlers**

As a part of the Joint United All India Protest Day AISA students all across India stood in solidarity with the protesting women wrestlers, demanding for an end to sexual harassment in workspaces, taking back the false cases on the protesting wrestlers and the removal of BJP MP Brij Bhushan from the post of WFI chief. AISA Bengaluru Unit as a part of this initiative gave out an open call for protest at Freedom Park on the 3rd of June, the protest was also joined by other student unions and civil society groups.

## **Student wings of 10 parties to step up NEP protests**

The student organisations of about 10 Opposition parties have decided to strengthen protests against the National Education Policy (NEP). At a joint meeting held here on Friday, the leaders of the outfits also formed a sub-committee to develop a charter of demands for the united student movement.

## **Students in Kolkata stand up against the anti-student National Education Policy**

There is strong opposition to the central government's National Education Policy (NEP) in Kolkata, where left student groups have initiated a protest and major figures in the education industry have joined in support. A day-and-night demonstration on Kolkata's College Street to bring attention to the potential long-term effects of the NEP on students was organised by them. The organisation proclaimed, "The state will never allow the central government's New Education Policy (NEP) to be implemented. The NEP severely undermines the education of disadvantaged students across the nation. The four-year degree program is a mere act, and the one-year master's course is inadequate."(sic)

## **FTII students go on hunger strike in protest against anti student administration**

Film and Television Institute of India students from the 2020 batch have gone on a hunger strike since May 15 protesting against the administration's attempt at arbitrarily barring a student from proceeding with their education and repeating a semester. The hunger strike has been called off as of May 26 however 42 students have continued to show their dissent by boycotting classes.



## **Adivasi Student protests for hostel accommodation against the EFLU administration**

Porika Vikas, a BA Italian student at EFLU Hyderabad is protesting in front of the administrative building demanding hostel accommodation, after being repeatedly denied housing despite there being vacant rooms.

## **University of Hyderabad students condemn administration attempts to restrict protests to designated areas**

In a recent notice to the student body University of Hyderabad administration has essentially asked the UoH students to restrict their protests to a few designated spots citing concerns regarding the "disruption of administrative activities" and vague allegations of "damage to University property". In response to this, a section of the students have issued a note appealing to the student body to resist this attempt at curbing student dissent and fight for their democratic rights, "We appeal to the student community to unite and resist this attack on our democratic rights. Rights are not given; they are earned through relentless struggles and sacrifice. We shall keep reclaiming our rights," the note reads.

(continued on page 9)

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1. Updates on Student Movements	...2&9
2. Gentle Reminder to the Newly Appointed Government	...4
3. The Gateway to South India Shuts on BJP	...5
4. The Transport Fiasco: SMIADT	...7
5. Wrestlers Protest: BJP in the Ring Against Women	...8
6. The Burning Hills of Manipur	...8
7. Is there grandeur in this view of life?	...10
8. Casteism in Indian Academia - The Institutional Murder of Prof. Samarvir Singh	...10
9. Viduthalai Part 1: A Spark Review	...11
10. The Kerala Story - Fictionalized or Manipulated?	...12
13. Updates on People's Movements	...13
14. Red Salute to Comrade Rohit	...15
15. In Reminiscence	...15



"We can learn what we did not know. We are not only good at destroying the old world, we are also good at building the new"

**- MAO TSE-TUNG**

“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 majority of population.”

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# Gentle Reminder to the Newly Appointed Government

EDITORIAL

Post the 2023 Vidhana Soudha elections the Indian National Congress(INC) formed the Karnataka state government with a thumping majority. The multitude of factors that pushed the INC towards this electoral victory have a common thread- a large section of the masses have been heavily impacted by the continuing economic and communal onslaught on them. The Sangh parivaar tried to communalise their saffron lab of the South using tropes like Hijab ban, anti-cow slaughter law, restructuring of reservation norms, anti-conversion laws etc. under the 'able' leadership of ex-CM Basavraj Bommai. However, the state witnessed a reverse polarisation as most anti-BJP votes consolidated under the banner of INC resulting in a quantum leap in their vote share. The will and interests of the people have clearly caused an immense face loss for the BJP (detailed election analysis is given in the next article).

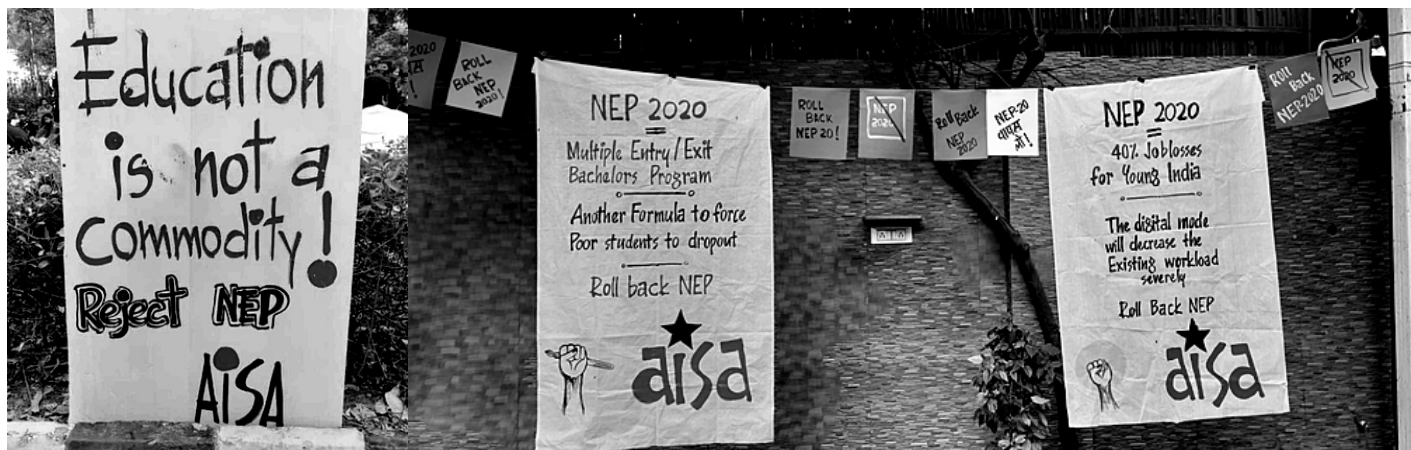
As we congratulate the people of Karnataka for thrashing the local Sangh project, we must also take this opportunity to remind the newly formed INC state government to prove that the promises made to the students and youth in their election manifesto are not just

election time jumlas. It is also the perfect time for the Siddaramaiah-led state government to scrap the horde of anti-people policies implemented by the erstwhile BJP government, many of which pushed people to vote in favour of the INC. The Spark team puts forth a list of demands as an appeal from the students and youth to this newly formed government.

- Scrap National Education Policy 2020 immediately and completely\*!
- Ensure dignified and universal employment!
- Universal and equitable education should be provided.\*
- Withdraw the Hijab ban in all educational institutions. False cases against activists resisting the Hijab ban must be revoked.
- Revoke all government school closures, fill up all teacher vacancies\*, take back all saffronised textbooks through implementing a scientific curriculum\*, and provide protein-rich midday-meals in schools.
- Reservation must be restored for Muslim OBCs.
- Proper implementation of reservation policies must be ensured.\*

- Restore pre-matric scholarship for SC/ST/OBC students.\* Restore full PhD and MPhil fellowships for all minority students. Introduce pre-matric scholarship for students from minority communities.\*
- Bring back student politics through student union elections in colleges and universities of Karnataka.
- Uphold the right to protest in any part of Bangalore. There can be no singly designated or restricted place.
- Ensure proper maintenance of hostels meant for students from the backward classes.
- Revise scholarships for research scholars. Meet the demand of revision of fellowship for veterinary students.
- Repeal the Factory Amendment Bill that introduces 12-hour work shifts and night shifts for women.
- Land acquisition must be stopped at Devanahalli.
- Besides the above two, all demands raised by the Joint Committee of Trade Unions and Samyukta Horata must be met.

*\*Promises made in the INC election manifesto*



# The Gateway to South India Shuts on BJP!

*Comrade Clifton D' Rozario*

*State Secretary of CPIML Liberation Karnataka*

The dust on the Karnataka elections has now settled. A Congress government led by Siddaramaiah is in place. Having delivered to the Congress a comfortable majority in the Assembly, the people of Karnataka now look forward to a stable government for the next five years and delivery of the promises made to them. In 2018, the BJP had emerged as the largest party and it was only through the corrupt “Operation Kamala” that it could usurp power after a year by engineering splits and purchasing MLAs. The government unabashedly pursued its communal, casteist and corporate agenda. Indeed the legacy of this BJP rule is unprecedented corruption, rising prices and cost of living, crumbling infrastructure, anti-farmers and anti-worker laws, skyrocketing unemployment, a crippled state economy reeling from increasing debt, violence against women and their freedom and autonomy, increasing caste discrimination and atrocities, communal disharmony and religious hatred.

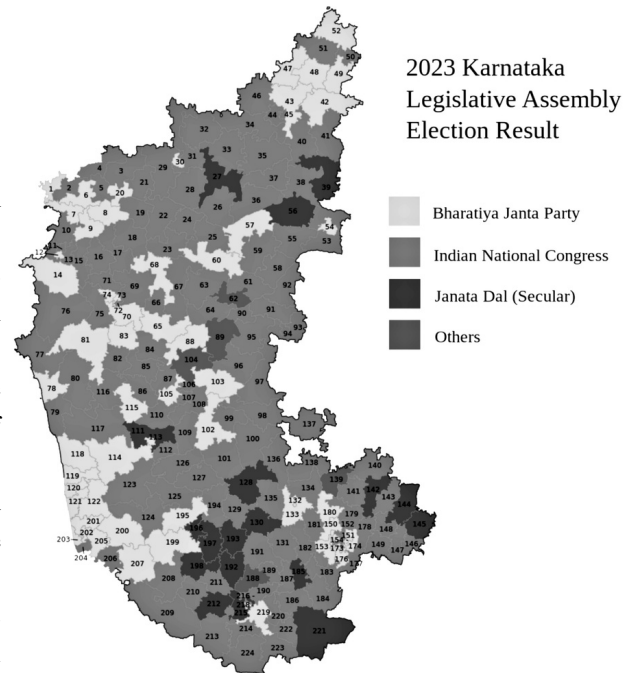
The Congress has won 135 seats with 43% vote share, which are both the largest obtained by any party in Karnataka since 1989. In the 2018 elections the Congress had won 80 seats with 38.1% vote share. Karnataka, where the BJP has enjoyed the best electoral success in South India, is also the only state in South India which has seen a BJP government. This time around the BJP could win only 66 seats with 36% vote share compared to the 104 seats with 36.2% vote share in the 2018 elections. JDS has won 19 Assembly seats with 13% vote share. In the 2018 elections, the JDS had won 37 seats with 18% vote share. This is its lowest tally since 1999.

## Region-wise

**performance:** The territory of Karnataka is divided into six political sub-regions that differ in terms of social composition, economic attributes, and political history. Traditionally these sub-regions have been the bastions of different parties. While Coastal Karnataka and Central Karnataka are seen as BJP strongholds, Congress is seen to be strong in Hyderabad Karnataka, and the JDS is concentrated in Old Mysuru region. Bengaluru, and to a lesser extent Mumbai Karnataka, have seen Congress and BJP battle it out for supremacy.

The Coastal Karnataka is a traditional stronghold of the BJP, where it has enforced its Hindutva agenda on the ground and the BJP has performed strongly by winning 13 out of the available 19 seats. However, the BJP has lost 3 seats from 2018 and its vote share reduced by 3.1%. While the BJP has performed well in their stronghold, we cannot ignore that the Congress has bettered its 2018 performance, both in terms of vote share and number of seats won.

In the Old Mysore region, the JDS has traditionally performed well. However, they lost almost half the seats they had won in 2018, with a tally of 14 seats, compared to 26 in 2018, and lost almost 7% vote share. The Congress performed well by increasing the seats tally to 43 seats and an increased vote share of



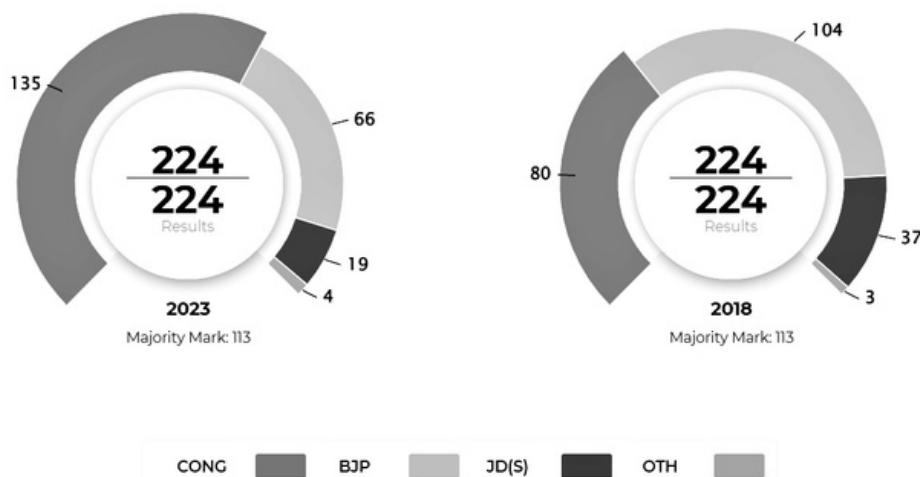
6.9%. The BJP too increased its vote share by 2.8% even with a win in only 5 seats, which was 16 in 2018. The efforts to communalise the Vokkaliga votebank using the concocted story of Urigowda-Nanjegowda killing Tipu Sultan, and the attempt to woo the community with increased reservation quota, has failed.

While the BJP has traditionally performed well in the Kittur Karnataka region, this time they faced a reduced seat tally from 30 to 16 seats, with a dip in vote share by 2.8%. With a vote share of more than 40% for the first time in three decades, the Congress won 33 out of 55 seats in the region, and has shaken the BJP's stronghold.

The Congress increased its vote share in Central Karnataka by a massive 7.5% resulting in an increased seats from 4 to 15! The BJP won 6 seats and lost 10 seats. In their traditional stronghold of Kalyana Karnataka, the Congress increased its vote share by 4.2% and won 26 seats. BJP's vote share dipped

by 3.1%, and reduced the number of North constituency from a Congress seats won from 15 to 10 seats. The Congress has bettered its performance due to the large concentration of Scheduled Caste voters and Mallikarjun Kharge factor.

The BJP made a strong pitch in the Bengaluru region and particularly relied on 'Brand Modi', where a two-day city-wide roadshow was organised. Like Central Karnataka, this region has seen strong tussles between the Congress and the BJP. The Congress' seat tally reduced from 15 to 13 seats, while the BJP increased its tally from 11 to 15 seats. BJP achieved an increase of 5.3% vote share, and Congress by 1%. JDS lost both the seats it won in 2018.



**Reserved constituencies:** Out of the 51 reserved constituencies in Karnataka (36 for SC and 15 for ST), the BJP won 12 seats, while the Congress improved from 12 to 21 seats, and JDS picked up 3. The Congress swept ST constituencies, by winning in 14 and JDS took the remaining 1 seat. BJP's tallest ST leader was defeated. Despite the decision of the Bommai government to increase reservation quota for SC (from 15% to 17%) and ST (3% to 7%) were seen as gimmicks, since the approval of the Union Government was not given.

**Women & Minority Candidates:** With 10 women candidates, including Kaneez Fathima, the lone Muslim woman candidate who won from Gulbarga

ticket, this is the highest tally of women MLAs since 1989. There are 4 women from JDS and 1 independent. There are nine MLAs from the Muslim community and one from Christian community.

**Class matters:** The scale of Congress's victory, both in terms of seats won and vote share, suggests that both its traditional base and poorer voters from other castes have backed the party in this elections. Caste is a major factor in deciding the electoral prospects of the three major parties, but is not the sole defining factor as was seen in this election. Traditionally, BJP has the predominant support of Brahmins and

Lingayats, the AHinDa (Kannada acronym for Minorities, Backward Classes and Dalits) behind the Congress, and the Vokkaligas behind the JDS. Despite this, two exit polls - India Today-Axis My India and Eedina, confirm that economic considerations had a telling influence on voters' decisions. The Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey data revealed that unemployment was the biggest voting issue for voters in the State followed by poverty and price rise. The emergence of a class coalition transcending traditional caste boundaries is a distinctive factor in the Karnataka assembly elections. Thus, BJP's endeavour to communalise the caste matrix while disregarding the severe economic distress faced by the people, has come a cropper.

**Setback to Hindutva:** BJP entered this elections with the knowledge of the anti-incumbency factor and sought to counter this with Hindutva and the Modi blitz – these were also sought to override the caste equations and coalitions. To this end, BJP cast aside several strong Lingayat leaders, including Yeddiyurappa and gave tickets to as many as 75 new contestants from the RSS stables. The BJP, in its manifesto, promised to implement a uniform civil code (UCC) in Karnataka, introduce a national register of citizens (NRC), and set up a special police unit to probe religious fundamentalism. It also promised three free cooking gas cylinders to all BPL families — one each during the months of “Yugadi”, “Ganesh Chaturthi” and “Deepavali”. On the other hand, Congress went on the offensive against communal politics; its manifesto titled, “Sarva Janangada Shanthiya Thota” i.e. “Peaceful garden of all communities”, promised action against any organisation that breaks the law, spreads religious hatred, religious bigotry and communal violence and went on to name the Bajrang Dal.

When the manifesto was released, a media frenzy was created over this. Modi included, BJP leaders invoked Bajrangbali's name in every rally, a call was given for chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa on 9th May, and efforts were made to equate the Bajrang Dal with Bajrang Bali. All of this failed. The emphasis on “double engine” government, lack of state-centric issues, and handing over of the State to Modi, Yogi, etc. also offended regional pride and aspirations. Is this election a referendum on Hindutva or hate politics? Perhaps for now, it is definitely a setback to the Hindutva agenda. BJP's vote share/number of seats have reduced in coastal Karnataka, where it has put in decades of work to communally polarise the region. Significantly, two of the most prominent faces of the Hindutva brand of politics lost in these elections. CT Ravi, BJP National Secretary, lost in

Chikkamagalur. Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh, instrumental in enforcing the hijab ban, lost the election from Tiptur.

### **The aura of invincibility of brand Modi has worn off:**

Much hype has been created around Modi, as the BJP's most reliable election campaigner and an aura of invincibility was consciously cultivated. This election saw the BJP deploy Modi as the focal point of BJP's campaign, and Modi made this all about himself, diving deep into victimhood alleging that he was abused 91 times. Despite live coverage of Modi's two-day roadshow in Bengaluru, the gamble failed and did little to alter BJP's fate. Two indicators point to its abject failure. Firstly, the voter turnout in Bengaluru was poor. Secondly, there was no major bump in the number of seats won or vote share. The seats won by the BJP increased from 11 to 15 (including those who shifted to the BJP in 2022). The BJP indulged in serious malpractice to steal the Jayanagar seat. Despite hate speeches, calls for votes on religious lines, blatant violation of the Representation of People Act and the Model Code of Conduct by Modi and the BJP, the Election Commission

turned a blind eye. **Role of Civil Society:** The role played by civil society organisations like 'Bahutva Karnataka' and 'Eddelu Karnataka' is noteworthy in impacting the election outcome. For the first time in history, Karnataka has experienced a non-party organisation playing an active role and urging people to reject the divisive, communal and anti-people BJP. Bahutva Karnataka released sector-wise report cards exposing the abject failure of the BJP government, which was also used for various materials to give information to voters. Eddelu Karnataka had numerous progressive thinkers, litterateurs, civil society activists and groups, who took out voter enrolment drives, held seminars and press meets to inform people about the failures and atrocities of the BJP government. Slum Janandolana – Karnataka, Samyukta Horata, Campaign Against Hate Speech were other organisations that helped shape public opinion during the elections. Another contributing factor was the coming together of the various splintered factions of Dalit organisation, who held a massive convention in December 2022, which called for total opposition

to communal forces and was instrumental in reversing the trend of BJP making in-roads into the Dalit vote base, and consolidated the Dalit vote behind the Congress.

**Going forward:** The decisive defeat of the BJP accentuates the trend of the BJP losing power in the states. With Karnataka out of its grasp, the BJP has no government in South India, thus cementing its identity as a North Indian party. The significance of this verdict is the implications it holds for the 2024 parliamentary elections. Without doubt a victory for the BJP would have bolstered its belligerence, while knocking the steam out of the opposition parties. Karnataka was the only State in South India where the BJP was in power – the "Gateway to the South". This door stands shut now and the electoral battle, for now shifts to the upcoming Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana in the lead up to the parliamentary elections in 2024. These electoral battles against the BJP are part of a long protracted struggle to ensure an emphatic rejection of corporate communal fascism of the Sangh Parivar. *(This is an abridged version of the article that appeared in Liberation June 2023 issue.)*

# The Transport Fiasco: SMIADT

## *A Student of SMIADT*

In a bid to cultivate social responsibility among its students, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design, and Technology (SMIADT) has encouraged us to question prevailing norms when creating artworks or designs. However, a sense of contradiction arises when these same students question their own administration, only to find their pleas falling on deaf ears.

The recent issue revolves around the transportation problem resulting from the sudden campus shift in the middle of the academic year. Previously, SMIADT campuses were conveniently located in Yelahanka new town, allowing students, mostly non-locals, to reside in nearby accommodations prescribed by the college. This allowed us to walk or cycle to our classes. However, the recent move

to the larger Manipal, Bangalore campus, approximately 10-12 km away, has created a transportation void. Despite the lack of public transport options, the college administration has shown little concern for the students' plight. Private alternatives prove prohibitively expensive and unreliable, causing numerous students to struggle during the recent Summative assessments, where punctuality was crucial to maintaining grades. The administration's suggested solution of arranging buses only partially addressed the issue, leaving students stranded at Bagalur Cross, still a considerable distance from their residences.

Repeated appeals to the administration have been met with ignorance, even

when faced with the relevant UGC guidelines on the issue. The institution outsourced transportation responsibilities to the aforementioned accommodations that prioritize expensive private vendors, disregarding the students' suggestion of a more affordable BMTC chartered bus service.

This transportation issue has also sparked broader discussions about the utilization of student fees and the lack of transparency and accountability within the college administration. Students are left questioning where their money is going and why the administration fails to address their concerns adequately while not even giving them a platform to participate in crucial decision-making processes.

# Wrestlers Protest: BJP in the Ring Against Women

*Soumya*

On 28th May, the Delhi police cracked down on protestors peacefully marching towards the New Parliament building for the 'Mahila Samman Mahapanchayat'. Merely a few metres away from the pomp and show of the inauguration of the New Parliament building that saw the participation of the accused, WFI Chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, these protestors, including the wrestlers Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and Bajrang Punia, were violently detained and booked for rioting and obstruction of public servants by the police.

The juxtaposition of the images of the inauguration and the detention of the protesting wrestlers has since invited major backlash from the Indian polity. It must be noted that the inauguration of this new building took place despite a boycott by 19 opposition parties who have accused the PM of 'hollowing out' the Constitutional values that the building must symbolise, by deciding to inaugurate the building himself completely sidelining President Murmu.

However, for all of its many faults, the ruling party, at the very least, cannot be accused of being inconsistent.

Since 2014, they have consistently and often simultaneously, characterised their term with laws and policies that have been fundamentally brahmanical and patriarchal. Protests against sexual harassment in the past decade have been met with brutal state repression and apathy. We need to go back only as far as 2020 to see the complicity with which the state acted in the Hathras rape case, going as far as charging journalists such as Siddique Kappan with Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for reporting on the gang rape, murder and the forceful burning of the corpse of a 19 year old Dalit woman.

The recent allegations against the BJP MP are spread out over the last decade accusing him of groping, sexually assaulting and intimidating women wrestlers who resisted his advances. The wrestlers have also allegedly received death threats and promises of bribes if they dropped their allegations. However, despite several allegations of harassment and FIRs with the Delhi Police, Singh has not seen the face of a jail yet. The lack of an arrest in the case even with charges under the Protection of Children



from Sexual Offences Act, can only be attributed to an arrogant and authoritarian government. The government is not guilty of inaction here but rather of a vulgar display of power, strongmanship, apathy and an utter disregard for democratic values, both inside and outside the Parliament.

The wrestler's protest has been successful in mobilising people against this authoritarianism regime and holds promise for sustaining it until Brij Bhushan is adequately punished for his atrocities against these women. The wrestlers have constantly reiterated that this protest is not just for the Olympic medalists or the athletes representing India on an international platform but for all of those girls in India who dream of growing up to make a career in sports and all those who have been made to give up on these dreams by men like Brij Bhushan.



## The Burning Hills of Manipur

*Priyambada*

On 3rd May 2023, Manipur saw an eruption of brutal clashes between the dominant Meiteis and the tribal Kuki, Hmar and Zomi people which has claimed almost 100 lives and has resulted in more than 26,000 people being temporarily displaced; the violence continues to this day. The districts worst affected have seen the most severe crackdown by state

machinery with shoot-on-sight orders being issued by the government to 'maintain peace' amidst 'extreme cases'.

The Meiteis and Kukis have had a significant history of ethnic clashes since the incorporation of the state of Manipur into India. The 2023 violence is not a one-off incident but in fact an explosion of the building up of tensions over

decades. While the nature of the clashes is mostly ethnic conflict, there are communal (Hindu vs Christian) and tribal versus non-tribal aspects to the violence as well.

However, friction over land use and ownership with respect to Manipur's demography and immigration is at the core of their conflict.



The Meiteis are dominant Hindus who live in the Imphal valley and the Kukis who have scheduled tribe (ST) status live in the hill districts of Manipur. The Meiteis as per the state's Land Reform Act are not allowed to settle in the hill districts where the tribal groups such as Kuki, Hmar and Zomi people stay. This is in accordance with the policies of Scheduled Tribes' rights to protect their autonomy in the north-east of India. In reaction to this, the dominant Hindu Meiteis have been demanding for ST status for the last two decades and as Prof Thongkhohal Haokip from JNU says, "the demand for ST status is a ploy to attenuate the fervent political demands of the Kukis and Naga in, as well as a tacit strategy of the dominant Valley dwellers to make inroads into the hill areas of the state."

This coupled with the fact that Meiteis are already in the majority, calling the shots in Manipur's politics, are more educated and thus more affluent, and with greater representation in the state assembly, there is substantial resistance to these demands. Tribal groups have also complained that government spending is unfairly concentrated in the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley.

This resistance saw its peak when the Manipur High Court on 20th April asked the state government to consider the Meiteis' demand for ST status within four weeks and directed that the recommendation be sent to the Centre for consideration. The All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) took out a 'Tribal Solidarity March' to protest this decision. The violence began spiralling after this with Meiteis hunting down Kukis in the Valley and attacking them. Kukis in retaliation attacked Meiteis in the hill districts.

Videos of the violence were showcased by the news and circulated by social media leading to fake videos of older incidents being added to the gamut as well, to increase hatred and panic. In the first three days, the hospitals of three districts were overburdened with injured people and the morgues were at capacity. The Indian Army was flown in and along with the CRPF, Manipur Police and the Assam Rifles they killed over 33 people in security operations.

Manipur's porous border with Myanmar enables immigration into India which saw a spike during the 2021 coup d'état in the border nation, and these people are said to have been living in the reserved forests. The BJP government in an anti-immigrant move started an eviction drive in the forests in February 2021 with the support of Manipur Forest Rules that empower the government to evict any 'encroachers' on forest land. While the Manipur government is using the word 'encroachments', the tribal communities term it 'settlements.' The eviction drive is anti-tribal in nature as it is an attempt to deprive the tribal communities of their ancestral lands. According to Meiteis, the eviction drive is the reason behind the ethnic clashes and not their demand for ST status, thus somewhat legitimising their demand.

Local students from Manipur have alleged that the Chief Minister of Manipur, who is a Meitei himself provided his community with arms during the violence. The number of tribals killed by Meiteis as well as State machinery is disproportionately more than the fatalities on the other side and the crackdowns, curfews and checks have been taking place more strictly in the hill districts of Manipur.

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum also said that valley underground cadres (armed members of Meitei community inflicting violence on tribal people) who were disguised in Manipur police uniforms were the perpetrators. Article 355 of the Indian Constitution that allows for the Union to take any steps to protect the states from internal disturbance as well as Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to not let an assembly of more than four people take place were issued in Manipur. Statewide internet suspension took place for a week, and this has continued sporadically in different areas of Manipur leading to patchy communication between people and their families. The government has said that a compensation of ₹10 lakh will be given to the families of the ones killed however, as it is a continuing state of emergency in a region mostly neglected by the mainland – the doubt remains whether the people affected will receive adequate justice. There have been widespread killings, destruction of property and displacement of people in the thousands – about 46,000 people have been relocated and are living in refugee camps.

The Manipur violence started on 3rd May, the army was deployed almost instantly however, the Home Minister arrived in Manipur for peace-keeping meetings only on the 29th of May. Karnataka elections can be cited as a weak example for slow reaction of the central government, but the results of BJP's loss came about by 14th May. A deliberate delay in an attempt to let the brutality kill the marginalised or an abject failure of the State is a question that is consistent with this government's authoritarian oppressive politics.

*(The author is a student researcher in the development sector)*

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## Students occupy schools and universities across Europe in climate protest

A wave of student occupations has shut down schools and universities across Europe as part of a renewed youth protest campaign against inaction on climate breakdown. Twenty-two schools and universities across the continent have been occupied as part of a proposed month-long campaign.

# Is there Grandeur in this View of Life?

Anu

Darwin Dropped by NCERT

In a new swath of so-called “rationalisations” aimed at “reducing burden on students” NCERT has omitted sections on ‘Evolution’ from the syllabus of class 10th Biology. The dropped topics include Origin of life on Earth, Molecular Phylogeny, Evolution, Evolution and Classification, Tracing Evolutionary Relationships, Evolution by Stages, and Human Evolution.

“An Appeal Against Exclusion of Evolution from Curriculum”, signed by over 4000 scientists and intellectuals argues that evolutionary biology is key to our understanding of the biological world, furthermore that these lessons have immense application in areas of medicine and drug discovery, epidemiology, ecology and environment, to psychology, and it also addresses our understanding of humans and their place in the tapestry of life.

However, we must look beyond the merely scholastic critique, we must also look at the larger socio-economic implications of this and the other

“rationalisations” of syllabus over the years in the BJP milieu. These syllabus reductions, in the face of ever increasing complexity and rigour of the competitive exams, something NEP serves to promote with its introduction of CUET, in turn brings colleges earlier outside the purview of the competitive exams, into it. This in turn only serves the interests of the coaching institutes, with the minimum enrollable age in these institutes falling by the year, NEP and it’s proposed changes to the syllabus, college admission exams and course structures, bolsters the expansion of coaching institutes, wherein coaching institutes become essential, and not an additional help in cracking these exams.

Such changes in turn will only seek to further disenfranchise students from marginalised backgrounds from educational access, as these spaces, with their high fees and savarna dominance, are completely hostile and inaccessible to these students.

These removals coupled with the

increased push for the Indian knowledge system also show a worrying trend parallel to that seen in the USA in the Christian Right’s crusade against science. This along with increasing fund cuts to basic science and research show the divisive and anti-rationalist agenda of the fascist forces.

It is then of utmost importance to understand the political character of these changes made in the name of “academic creativity”. The NEP is yet another attempt at shrinking the public sphere, it is also an out and out assault on the integrity of education, with it being twisted to serve the Hindu nationalist agenda of this fascist Sanghi government, and it also seeks to widen the gap in access to these educational institutions of the marginalised, firmly seeking to make them Savarna spaces.

We, the students must then come together to fight back these changes with our entire might. We must ensure that our educational spaces work for our interests and not those of neoliberal Hindutvavadis.

## Casteism in Indian Academia: The Institutional Murder of Prof. Samarvir Singh

Surya

**(TW: Mention of suicide)**

*“How can they be so cruel? How can they just throw out someone who has been there for years? Do they know the struggles of a person who loses their livelihood? Do they even care? I had to give up my flat in Mukherjee Nagar and move in with my cousin. Do they know what it does to their psyche? I have not slept in days. Do they know what it does to their kin? My mother’s health has deteriorated. She has lost her eyesight. How can they be this insensitive? How?”*

-Professor Samarvir Singh, shortly before his death.

The death of Delhi University Professor Samarvir Singh has once again shed light on the deeply rooted issues of caste-based discrimination prevailing within the Indian academic system. This shameful incident serves as a grim reminder that despite pretensions of progress in various aspects of society, abject casteism continues to persist, impeding the growth and inclusivity of our educational institutions.

The oppressive caste system that is still very much alive in modern India, assigns individuals to hierarchical positions based on their birth, perpetuating social and economic inequality. In theory, educational institutions should serve as catalysts for social change, challenging such prejudices. The oppressive caste system that is still very much alive in modern India, assigns individuals to hierarchical positions based on their birth, perpetuating social and economic inequality.

In theory, educational institutions should serve as catalysts for social change, challenging such prejudices. However in practice, caste-based discrimination seeps into the very foundations of academia, creating an environment that perpetuates inequality and denies opportunities for marginalised communities. The profit-driven model of education only infringes on these existing forms of disparity, and uses it further to suppress wages, maintain the hegemony of the affluent, and the upper caste, and suppress resistance. Exclusionary policies like the NEP which make no attempts at introducing and strengthening caste-based affirmative action are complicit.

The untimely death by suicide of Professor Samarvir Singh serves as a heartbreaking example of the consequences of caste-based discrimination within academia. Reports indicate that Prof. Samarvir faced persistent discrimination and humiliation from colleagues and authorities, which ultimately led to this tragic decision to end his life. Such incidents expose the dark underbelly of higher education institutions, where caste-based prejudices fester and deprive deserving individuals of their right to education and dignity.

Prof. Samarvir came from a small town in Rajasthan, and belonged to the OBC community. It was after immense struggle that he had made it to where he was, and that bears testimony to his dedication. Casteist discrimination prevalent in academia was a central cause behind the institutionally-coerced suicide of the scholar and activist Rohith Vemula, who has inspired an entire generation of radical youth to fight firmly against the casteist and Brahminical institutions in our country, and build a democratic future. In February this year, Darshan Solanki from IIT Bombay took his own life, after facing caste-discrimination and receiving absolutely no support from the university authorities. He was a first generation learner, who had shown the audacity to assert that he too will find a place in our great educational institutions. Alas, this too wasn't allowed to the young man.

Prof Samarvir's colleague recalls, "Samarveer was teaching in the Department of Philosophy for six years. He was a favourite among students. He loved teaching, he loved writing. He spoke passionately of Camus' and Kafka's works."



Despite there being 4 vacant positions in his department, Prof Samarvir remained an ad hoc teacher. This system of precarious work allows the administration to extract labour from the faculty, without having to bear any responsibility for their well-being, with no concern for leaves, or basic and minimal social security. It is the experience of ad hoc faculty across the country that they continue to be exploited while being treated disrespectfully.

The Delhi University management has conveniently brushed this incident under the bright carpets of the college fest where the Vice Chancellor was seen dancing and partying the very next day, after Prof. Samarvir's death. The struggle to fight against institutional casteism and to democratise our educational institutions, goes on. Let us intensify this struggle.

## Viduthalai Part 1: A Spark Review

Fionn

Within the vast and hilly forests of a scenic village, *Viduthalai* (meaning "liberation" in Tamil) paints a scathing portrait of the villagers' struggles as a result of the establishment of a mining corporation in the district. An armed resistance group by the name of "Makkal Padai" (People's Army) laid down its defiance to the setting up of the mine, which later grew into constant clashes between them and the state forces. Throughout the film, we can see recurrent examples of labour and resource exploitation, police brutality and custodial violence, along with how

the media is used as a tool to push state propaganda.

It is widely known that, for far too long, imperialist nations and corporations have pursued the relentless theft of resources from developing countries across continents. In the Indian subcontinent, Adivasi populations in various commodity-rich locations are among the most significant victims of these thefts, and have expressed fierce resistance to these capitalist plunders.

Through the decades, they have fought

for their rights over jal-jangal-jameen (water, forest, land) and have thrown numerous tough battles at the state in tenacious spirits. Through its unflinching portrayal of the pursuit of profit at the expense of endangering the natural resources of the forests, *Viduthalai* serves as a stern indictment of the exploitative practices perpetuated by powerful institutions and corporations in this world plagued by imperialism.

In the beginning of the film, the state government justified its approval of the

mining corporation by assuring the villagers that jobs would be provided with the establishment of the mines. This is an example of how the tokenistic state uses deceptive assurances to gain the trust of the masses (usually adopted in the form of reforms).

The story focuses mostly on Kumaresan, a new police constable with a friendly temperament and compassionate personality. During his time working with the special task force that was designated to prevent further activities of the Makkal Padai, he eventually learns that he is powerless and helpless in the system. The rest of the constables, indifferent to the plight of the oppressed, aimlessly follow the orders of the superior officers and perform operations that directly hurt the masses.

Through this, Director Vetrimaran attempts to highlight how the police system works in true fashion. This can be understood further using the concept of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). According to French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, the RSA consists of the army, the police, the judiciary, and the prison system. In their function, they “operate through violence”, which includes non-physical forms, and act to repress any individual or group that does not adhere to the existing status quo.

The police brutality depicted in this film is barbaric, and it exposes the lengths to

which the police will go to enforce their authority and will over the subjugated masses. Custodial violence has become increasingly common in recent times, and the police don’t fear any repercussions. The manner in which the police officers in the film use their unrivalled power to intimidate and harass the ‘suspects’ in the name of interrogation is an accurate display of the boundless crimes that they commit. However, the reality is far more cruel and inhumane, and most of the cases go undocumented.

Furthermore, it is essential not to overlook the role of the media in circulating narratives that aided the state in constructing a false image of the Makkal Padai (who were considered enemies of the common people) and portraying the police in a heroic light (as saviours of the common people). These narratives were crucial in their attempts to weaken the support of the Makkal Padai and to strengthen their own agenda by claiming they serve the interests of the masses. The media often presents a biased perspective that favours the dominant group and reinforces existing stereotypes and prejudices about the marginalized group. We must critically examine every bit of information we receive from mainstream media outlets.

After watching the film, one can question the exaggerated and misleading reports about uprisings and rebellions



led by marginalized people in our country's villages, which continue to receive attention in ordinary discussions. One can also recognize how the police, the military, and the state as a whole are able to avoid accountability for their crimes through media narratives that appraise the “patriotic” massacres of the rebels.

When the police chase Vaathiyaar, the locals in the vicinity put their bodies on the line to protect him, symbolizing how the fight was imposed on them by the system and the Makkal Padai were the only ones fighting for them. As much as we would imagine that rebellions are motivated primarily by an urge for retaliation, it is important to bear in mind that the oppressed masses fight back in order to survive; and to live with dignity.

To end with a quote by Mao Tse-Tung: *“As far as our own desires are concerned, we do not want to fight even for a single day. However, if circumstances force us to fight, we can fight to the finish.”*

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## The Kerala Story - Fictionalized or Manipulated?

*Saniya*

The Kerala Story is a recently released right-wing propaganda film which claims to expose large numbers of ISIS recruitments consisting of brainwashed and forcefully converted Hindu and Christian women from Kerala. The movie revolves around three girls from Kerala who were coerced into converting to Islam and joining ISIS.

The film has been heavily promoted by the BJP and the RSS, encouraging free screenings in colleges and theatres to ‘make young and vulnerable Hindu girls beware of such traps set by perverted Muslim men’.

The Kerala Story has been called out for its false statistics, mistranslations, false

tropes, and its attempts at furthering communal disharmony by vilifying Muslims. The trailer description of the film was changed from the story of 32,000 women to that of three after questions were raised regarding its accuracy. The teaser also cited a former Kerala CM’s interview, where his words were translated wrongly. Tropes like

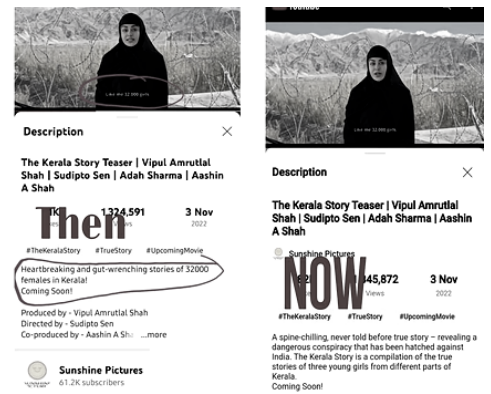


'Love Jihad' not only portray Muslim men as lustful manipulators but also show Hindu women as easily brainwashed. An investigation conducted by the NIA in 2018 examined cases of religious conversions in Kerala and concluded that there was no angle of 'Love Jihad' in these conversions.

On facing legal challenges, the director acknowledged that all the figures in the movie were inauthentic and confessed that the film presented a "fictionalized account" of real-life events. The term "fictionalised account" suggests that there are factual events that serve as a basis, but the film dramatizes them in a

way that deviates from specific details but aims to capture the essence of those events. The film hence presents not a fictionalised account, rather a manipulated account of an isolated event, depicted as a trend. Data from various sources like the Bureau of Counter-Terrorism and the Observer Research Foundation show that the extent of ISIS involvement in India has been very minimal compared to other countries, despite the large Muslim population.

It is important to note that the ruling class uses many such propaganda methods to divert the attention of the



public from issues that plague them, instead, such films divide them on the lines of identity. We must collectively fight against such propaganda that aims to divide the people for the benefits of the ruling party.

## UPDATES ON PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS



### No Land, No Vote Movement in Karnataka

Before elections around 200 people came together March 28 to March 30 in New Tamil Colony, Mandya district of Karnataka to demand land deeds for their homes. They are protesting for 165 families to get title deeds, for housing projects to be undertaken, and for basic amenities such as water, electricity and roads to be provided. Local officials had to concede to the demands.

### No Country for Women

Since April, India's Olympic medallists Phogat, Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, have been staging a dharna at Jantar Mantar. They have alleged that Brij Bhushan Singh, the WFI chief, sexually assaulted several female wrestlers, including minors, a charge that the politician has denied. The wrestlers have been charged with rioting and disorder by police in New Delhi after their arrests during a march to the new parliament building following its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The wrestlers and their supporters were arrested on Sunday after scuffles broke out in front of parliament as they intensified their protests demanding the arrest of the MP. The wrestlers have threatened to immerse their medals in Ganga if no action is taken by the government.



### Farmers in Support of the Wrestlers

Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on 3rd June announced a nation-wide agitation program in support of the women wrestlers who are protesting against the BJP government's inaction on the sexual harassment allegations against WFI President and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Saran Singh. The Morcha said it has given the call for the nationwide agitation "to secure the democratic right to protest by the Indian wrestlers" and to "demand the arrest of BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh".

## Workers in Support of the Wrestlers

Joint Committee of Trade Unions on 2nd June held a protest in Freedom Park in support of the women wrestlers who are protesting against the BJP government's inaction on the sexual harassment allegations against WFI President and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Saran Singh. The protest was also joined by women organisations .



## All India Adivasi Congress for the President

Protesting against Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the new Parliament building, the All India Adivasi Congress held a day-long protest at Gandhi Bhavan, in retaliation against the government for not inviting the President, Draupadi Murmu, for the inauguration.



## Palestinian Struggle for Liberation

Israeli forces have used live fire and tear gas against Palestinians who joined a demonstration on the besieged Gaza Strip's eastern border with Israel, injuring several Palestinians, as far-right Israelis held a so-called 'flag march' in occupied East Jerusalem's Old City. Hundreds of Palestinians joined the protest, which was called for by Palestinian factions in

response to the Israeli march. The Gaza demonstration condemned the 'flag march' in Jerusalem, and called for an end to Israeli attacks in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

## France Protests

France has been rocked by nationwide strikes and protests against Macron and his pension reforms since mid-January. It was the first time since 2009 that France's top eight trade unions had backed calls for a protest. On May 1st, hundreds of thousands took part in May Day demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms that raise the state pension age from 62 to 64. The CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail - General Confederation of Labour) union said there were 2.3 million protesters across France, including 550,000 in the capital. "The page is not going to be turned as long as there is no withdrawal of this pension reform. The determination to win is intact," said CGT leader Sophie Binet. Protesters were calling not just for an end to the reform, but actually for a lowering of the retirement age, back to where it was before 2010, when it was just 60. Police in Paris have clashed with protesters after the French government decided to force through pension reforms without a vote in parliament. Police used tear gas and water cannon, and protesters used petrol bombs and fireworks. 291 people have been arrested during the unrest. These reforms were passed in the parliament by invoking Article 49:3 of the constitution - allowing the government to avoid a vote in the Assembly, minutes before MPs were scheduled to vote on the controversial bill, and there was no guarantee of winning a majority. The move caused fury among opposition politicians. A no-confidence motion was filed against President Emmanuel Macron's government by a group of opposition parties. The reforms are expected to come into force by September. After the reforms passed in the parliament without voting, thousands of people came out on the streets of Paris and other French cities to reject the move, singing the national anthem and waving trade union flags, refuse collectors went on strike in several cities, with Paris seeing thousands of tonnes of uncollected rubbish on the streets.





After the Russian Revolution, bourgeois countries brought reforms to keep away revolution, but post neoliberal reforms, these switched from Welfare Capitalism to rising fascism oppressing the working class. Hence, the only way to get workers' rights is through struggle.

## Red Salute to Comrade Rohit

Comrade Rohit who was a member of CPIML Liberation and also associated with AISA and AICCTU passed away in Bengaluru on May 20, 2023. As part of AICCTU, he was working amongst migrant workers in Bengaluru, and was instrumental in organising the struggle of Yazaki workers who were retrenched. He was also a convening body member of AISA Bengaluru and was part of the editorial board of Spark playing a leading role in bringing out this monthly. He was working as a researcher in National Institute of Advanced Studies and was studying migration of workers from Bihar and Jharkhand for construction work in Bengaluru. As part of his research, Rohit travelled extensively in Bihar and Jharkhand in the past year, where he stayed at CPIML Liberation party offices and met many party comrades. Rohit was originally from Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand where he was one of the founders of 'Aarambh' study circle. His funeral was conducted in Bengaluru, in the presence of his family members. He will always stay alive in our memories.

### In Reminiscence

*Debjani*

*A Tribute to Comrade Rohit*

You came down the hills like a quiet rain on a parched city  
You left like fingerprints on a glassdoor  
You carried the weight of the world on your shoulders  
Walking like a sailor on high seas  
Waging war against the weather

You sang long before the world knew music  
You spoke when all we could do was mumble  
You gave like your riches were endless  
And you asked like no one could hear

An epoch and a little while back  
We choose to walk together  
Towards the end of misery  
Before the world spirals crashing down with stock market crash  
Before consumerism reinforces itself in the hollow of our eyes  
Before the genocide of our dreams of a free world

And yet, you boarded the train like a hurrying passenger  
Reminded of something of utmost urgency

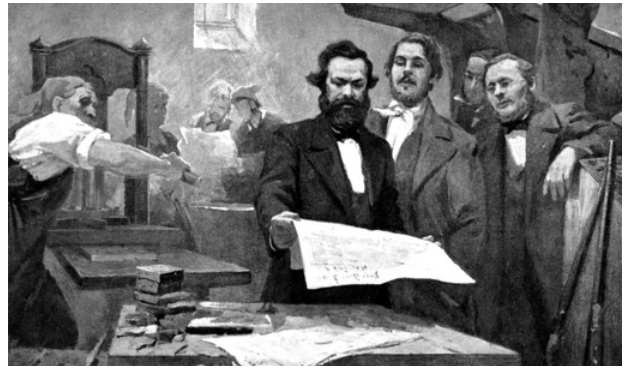
And so, let us march forward  
In dreams and every waking moment  
In response and in solidarity  
In your remembrance and reminder of the  
Promise of a new world  
Where we wish to meet you again

Your presence ever fragrant around us  
Like sunflowers in the daylight



# ON THIS MONTH

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Marx and Engels in the printing house of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, E. Capiro, 1895.



**June 1, 1848** - Revolutionary newspaper "Neue Rheinische Zeitung" founded by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and the Communist League in Cologne.

**June 9, 1900** - Marks the death anniversary of anti-British rebel Birsa Munda. The icon of India's Independence struggle died at the age of 24 in jail during his trial in 1900. He spearheaded a movement for Adivasi rights that arose in the Bengal Presidency (now Jharkhand) in the late 19th century, during the British Raj. The slogan of the freedom movement introduced by Birsa was 'Abua raj seter jana, maharani raj tundu jana' which means 'End the kingdom of the queen, create our kingdom'.

**June 13, 1971** - The New York Times began publishing the Pentagon Papers, a collection of top secret documents exposing U.S. strategy in the Vietnam War.

**June 14, 1928** - Birthday - Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna, commonly known as 'Che', was born on this day in the year 1928. Comrade Che led multiple revolts against imperialist forces in many colonised nations of the world.

**June 16, 1963** - Valentina Tereshkova, 26, became the first woman in space as her Soviet spacecraft, Vostok 6, took off from the Tyuratam launch site. She manually controlled the spacecraft completing 48 orbits in 71 hours before landing safely.

**June 25, 1975** - Indira Gandhi-led Congress government declared a state of emergency in India on 25th June 1975. Emergency was lifted only after nearly two years on 21st March 1977 after massive and persistent protests all across India.

**June 28, 1969** - The Stonewall riots, also known as the Stonewall uprising, Stonewall rebellion, or simply Stonewall, were a series of spontaneous protests by members of the queer community in response to a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Lower Manhattan in New York City. Patrons of the Stonewall, other Village lesbian and gay bars, and neighbourhood street people fought back when the police became violent. The riots are widely considered the watershed event that transformed the gay liberation movement and the 20th-century fight for LGBT rights in the United States.

**30 June, 1855** - The day was marked as a declaration of *Hul*—literally meaning “revolution”—when about 10,000 Santhals gathered at Bhognadih village of Sahibganj under the leadership of two brothers Sidho Murmu and Kanhu Murmu. The other four siblings of the two prominent leaders named Chand, Bhairo, Phulo, and Jhano also joined hands in rebellion.