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मनरेगा में बदलाव बहाना है
मकसद गुलाम बनाना है

एस.के.एम.एस., नरेगा संघर्ष मोर्चा, जन आंदोलनों का राष्ट्रीय सच

The Movement of India

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After five and a half years of imprisonment without trial, cultural activists Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor were released on bail from Taloja jail on January 27, 2026. Arrested in connection with the Elgar Parishad case—a prosecution widely criticised for criminalising dissent and cultural activism—their release contrasts with the continued incarceration of Surendra Gadling and others.

EDITORIAL

People are resisting everywhere. They are on the streets. They are marching, assembling, and protesting. They are resisting injustice, resisting corporate power, resisting dispossession. They are on the road to save the Aravallis, to reclaim forest rights, to defend livelihoods. They are marching against corporate terror in Odisha, documenting evictions in Bengaluru, fighting destructive “development” projects imposed on their neighbourhoods in Telangana and along the coasts across the country.

The government may believe that changing laws - whether it is the dilution of labour protections, the assault on MGNREGA, or the rewriting of environmental safeguards - will silence people. That people will quietly accept what is imposed on them. They are mistaken.

In just the last month, people have been on the streets everywhere. Even as we write, long marches are underway: one led by the All India Kisan Sabha in Maharashtra, another cutting across Aravali all the way from Gujarat to Delhi by Aravali Jan Virasat Abhiyan. From forests to farmlands, from factories to floodplains, resistance continues - often without media attention, often without permission, but always with fierce determination.

These everyday actions are exposing the deep governance failure and the complete apathy of those in power. Particularly in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, puppet governments and centralised party control have reduced governance to managing headlines, shaping narratives, and protecting corporate interests, while people’s lives are pushed further into precarity.

All is not well. And people know it.

This issue of *Movement of India* documents that reality. It captures not only resistance to environmental destruction - from the Aravallis to Hasdeo, from Odisha to coastal India - but also the battles around labour and livelihoods, including the gig economy and the systematic erosion of workers’ rights. It records how communities are responding to bulldozing, displacement, unemployment, and repression - not as victims, but as organised collectives, resisting.

Despite voting, despite elections, people are increasingly aware that formal democratic processes alone are no longer enough. The credibility of constitutional institutions - most notably the Election Commission - stands deeply eroded. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and other mechanisms have cast serious doubt on the integrity of the electoral process. Yet people continue to resist, to educate one another, to stand in solidarity, and to hold power accountable - often outside formal institutions.

What we are witnessing is not chaos. It is, radical democracy in practice.

Public hearings, jan sunwais, Lok Manch processes, strikes by gig workers, resistance by Adivasi communities reclaiming forest rights, women workers organising in tea gardens, farmers reaffirming historic declarations - all of these are expressions of people asserting control over their lives. They are not waiting for permission. They are acting.

This issue reflects that breadth. From analyses of development and climate justice, to grounded reports on labour struggles and state repression; from reflections on communal violence and shrinking civic space, to accounts of solidarity across regions and movements - *Movement of India* brings together these threads into a living archive of resistance.

Even as authoritarian tendencies deepen, parliamentary procedures are bypassed, constitutional norms are hollowed out, and at times even the judiciary abdicates its responsibility, people continue to repose faith in the Constitution itself. As we marked Republic Day on 26 January, this faith was not symbolic. It was a commitment - to fight for the true Republic, the one imagined and fought for during the freedom struggle.

People are saying clearly: *We love this country. That is why we are defending its values.*

The hard-won freedoms and rights we inherited are not negotiable. Protecting them has become a duty - tragically, often against our own government, which appears determined to dismantle constitutional safeguards through a deep state Hindutva network that shows open contempt for law, norms, and democratic values.

This is not an Indian story alone. Across the world, we see democracies hollowed out from within. The United States itself is witnessing internal decay, institutional collapse, and aggressive imperial posturing that destabilises entire regions. What unfolds globally finds echoes here - unchecked power, corporate capture, and the shrinking of civic space.

Against this backdrop our effort is to bring clarity, give a glimpse of what is unfolding on the ground. Act as a record of struggles that refuse to disappear. A reminder that people's movements are not episodic - they are continuous.

We invite you to read this issue, engage with it, challenge it, and guide us. This magazine remains what it has always been: a people's newsmagazine, rooted in movements, accountable to struggles, and committed to constitutional democracy.

Editorial Team

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Popular Resistance in India and Development

S.G. Vombatkere

Since the economic liberalisation reforms introduced through the 1991 New Economic Policy, people in India have, for several years now, been agitating and protesting on a wide range of issues. A majority of these protests have been directed against initiatives of the Central or State governments that are declared to be in the interest of the people, but are experienced otherwise on the ground. These agitations have largely arisen against the loss, or threatened loss, of freedoms, against laws that have adverse social or economic effects, and in demand of constitutional rights and legal entitlements that have been denied.

We The People

The first three words of the Preamble to the Constitution of India - "We the People" - indicate the supremacy of We the People, which is foremost in the basic structure of the Constitution.

The Constitution was drafted and created by the Constituent Assembly (CA) on behalf of We the People, for We the People. But who are "We the People"?

We the People are the many millions of Indians who were denied Justice, Liberty and Equality by the British colonial regime. After Independence and until the present, We the People are the socially and economically unempowered or disempowered sections of Indians – and in particular, those who were "untouchables" – who were denied Justice, Liberty and Equality, due to the grossly unfair and morally wrong caste-stratification.

Ambedkar

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a luminary of outstanding moral and intellectual courage and stature, with superior education, knowledge and abilities in economics, law and philosophy. He introduced the value of Fraternity into the Preamble, "assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation".

Babasaheb Ambedkar understood well that "outcaste" Dalit people lived in constant fear of "upper caste" people attacking or humiliating them, or forcefully denying them the basics of life. Ambedkar held that India had only succeeded in wresting political freedom from the British, but social and economic freedoms for We the People, were yet to be wrested from within the larger caste-stratified Indian society. Sadly, the situation is almost unchanged for the better, even today.

Governance

Beginning with India's first elected government in 1952, We the People granted power and authority to elected representatives, to govern Indian society.

For many years, phrases in journalistic and common parlance were "ruling party" or "[name of political party] rule". These phrases using the word "rule", reveal acceptance of rule by governments, and may indicate an internalized remnant of British colonial rule until 15 August 1947. Since independence, India has been governed by elected State and Central governments which We the People have appointed. We the People have not relinquished rule over our Republic.

We the People gave the fundamental guidelines of governance, to direct governments to establish social and economic democracy for development of the nation, in the constitutional Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). These are moral duties and responsibilities of state and central governments. Some important points of the DPSP include creation of a social order to promote people's welfare, creation of an economic system that prevents concentration of wealth, creation of a wage structure to enable a decent standard of living, and protection of the environment as well as safeguarding of forests and wildlife.

It is a sad reality that successive governments over decades have neglected, even flouted, most of the DPSP-prescribed duties and responsibilities. This behavior can be traced to the model of development that was formally instituted in 1991 as the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Development

Focusing on national economic development, successive state and central governments have lost sight of the social-cultural and economic development of We the People. With the World Bank-prescribed economic reforms of NEP, the concept of development came to mean economic development of the nation. This was based upon industrialization and year-on-year growth of GDP. Resultantly, We the People are not the focus of development, but are supplicants to governments for the benefits of development.

An important component of the GDP-growth model of development is its reliance upon industrial-scale extraction (mining) of mineral resources for production of goods and services, and money-generation from trading and commerce of these goods and services. The mineral resources are in forested areas of different states, and their extraction involves acquisition of forest land for the mining and infrastructure projects, including roads. These lands are inhabited by Adivasi (ST) and Dalit (SC) families who are forcibly displaced and lose their lands, homes and livelihoods, ultimately suffering social disruption and destitution.

State and central governments are doing this without obtaining due consent according to PESA [Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996] and FRA [Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006]. Forest land acquisition initiatives by the government-corporate nexus, impact the present and future of forest dwelling communities. Their peaceful protests and resistance to these initiatives are often met by police force including foisting FIRs against them.

These project-affected families (PAFs) are the victims of the model of development which is focused upon GDP-growth.

The news reports of the resolutions passed by the ST Panchayats, or the peaceful protests of these PAFs, do not appear in corporate-owned mainstream print or electronic media, and is therefore not known to the country at large. The reason for near-zero or government-dictated news coverage, is because the corporations which are conducting the mining

operations, are in nexus with the state and/or central governments, which strongly dislike publication of news that shows their governance in poor light. Elected legislators usually look away, because their political party leaders are part of the government-corporate nexus, which is focused on profit-over-people.

Journalists who try to meet and interview ST folk and/or report their findings, are prevented from doing so by the state governments. It is small wonder that India stands 151st out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index.

The development model as pursued by the government-corporate nexus almost always works against social and economic justice, and effectively denies equality of status and opportunity. This is evidenced by the economic gap widening – the top 1% of our population owns about 40% of the total wealth, and the top 10% owns 65% (World Inequality Report 2026), making India one of the most unequal nations globally.

Besides PESA 1996 (which empowered Gram Panchayats) and FRA 2006 (which recognized “historical injustice” inflicted upon forest dwellers), there are four other Central Acts which are in keeping with one or more of the Directive Principles, and assert the rights of We the People. These are EPA [Environment Protection Act, 1986], NREGA [National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005], RTI [Right to Information Act, 2005], and LARR [Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act, 2013]. However, governments have diluted these laws by amendments to the Acts or Rules, or (sometimes brazenly) flouted the laws enacted by Parliaments, thus disempowering We the People.

Most recently, NREGA 2005, which enabled rural households to demand 100 days of unskilled manual labour per year, and transformed the constitutional right to work into a legal right, was repealed, and replaced by VPGRAMG Act.

Not unexpectedly, We the People activists have been resisting such disempowerment and have been peacefully protesting to re-assert their rights, and

demand the freedoms that these laws provide.

Resistance and Freedoms

Activists from among project-affected people or from supportive voluntary bodies, or journalists who raise questions or write/speak dissent, are targets of coercive state power acting in favour of furtherance of mining and infrastructure projects. Dissenters are described as obstacles to development and national progress, and trolled as ‘anti-national’, ‘andolanjeevies’, ‘urban naxals’, etc. This criminalisation of democratic dissent results in charging dissenters with serious crimes under IPC (now BNS), or more draconian laws like UAPA or NSA.

Ground realities allow We the People limited options. Activists organize agitations, protests and demonstrations, to articulate their problems and objections. Agitations are under the watch of the intelligence and police authorities. Because the agitations often take place in relatively remote areas, activists hope to attract wider public attention, and draw the attention of governments to their demands. However, successive governments have treated the peaceful agitations as law and order problems, and magnified coercion to suppress the agitations and arrest the so-called ‘ring leaders’.

It is worth repeating that We the People, who agitate peacefully and within democratic norms, are not against development per se. We the People resist and oppose the development model that prioritizes corporate advancement and neglects or adversely affects people’s welfare, fragments their societies, reduces or denies their freedoms, wreaks injustices, and neglects their real-life needs.

In effect, the pro-corporate development model works against social and economic justice and against equality of status and of opportunity for We the People, all guaranteed in the Preamble.

Development as enhancement of freedoms

We the People view development as enhancement of their social, economic, cultural and educational status or condition. Whereas governments and the Great Indian Middle Class view development as human

resource development through training and skilling people for employment in jobs that will produce economic growth.

The poverty suffered by We the People is not restricted to economic poverty alone, it extends to poverty of freedoms – freedom from hunger; freedom to dress and eat as one pleases; freedom to choose friends or marriage partners; freedom from fear of livelihood loss, violence and rape, local mafia, or police action; freedom from violence by ‘upper caste’ people; freedom from fear of loss of home by getting bulldozed; freedom from fear of illness/accident or job loss; freedom from fear of abandonment; freedom from fear of crop loss; etc.

These are the freedoms that will lead to the development which We the People need and want. State and Central legislators, governments and their leaders, and the Judiciary at all levels, need to recognize the legitimate demands for freedom by We the People. We the People must be governed according to the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India.

S G Vombatkete is a retired Indian Army officer and a long time member of PUCL and NAPM.

Understanding Climate Justice Movement in India

Mol Correspondent

The climate justice movement in India is at a moment of profound disjuncture, especially in the light of the shrinking spaces for democratic dissent, financial capitalism and shifting geo-politics. The climate crisis itself is accelerating faster than many movements had anticipated, while the social and political infrastructures through which justice claims have historically been articulated - trade unions, peasant organisations, Left formations, and mass democratic institutions - have been steadily weakened. What is emerging, therefore, is not a linear expansion of climate politics, but a field marked by urgency, fragmentation, creative experimentation, and unresolved tensions.

One of the most important shifts shaping the current conjuncture is the changing nature of the climate crisis itself. The rate of global warming has increased sharply in recent years, fundamentally altering the temporal assumptions on which earlier climate strategies were based. As Nagaraj Adve noted, warming is no longer a slow-moving backdrop but a rapidly intensifying force that “changes almost everything” - including how movements think about planning, prioritisation, and scale. Climate politics in India is now dealing with a moving target, one that will worsen over the next decade regardless of current mitigation promises.

Yet this acceleration is unevenly experienced. In India, warming is partly masked by air pollution, droughts, floods, and local climatic variations, but its impacts are becoming increasingly visible in the everyday lives of working people. Extreme heat, erratic rainfall, floods, and livelihood disruptions are no longer episodic events; they are structural conditions. This has brought new social groups - especially informal and precarious workers - into closer engagement with the climate crisis, not through abstract environmental discourse but through lived experience. As several speakers observed, it was the brutal heat of 2024 that catalysed deeper engagement by worker collectives, women’s organisations, waste pickers, hawkers, and home-based

workers.

This points to a defining feature of climate justice in India: it is emerging less as a single movement and more as a convergence of struggles, many of which did not initially frame themselves as “climate” struggles at all. The challenge is not simply to “add” climate language to existing movements, but to build shared understandings that connect ecological disruption to questions of labour, land, health, and social reproduction.

Climate Justice Is Not Climate Action

A recurring theme in the discussion was the need to distinguish clearly between climate action and climate justice. Prakash Kashwan argued that the frequent conflation of the two has created serious blind spots. Much climate discourse begins by acknowledging that climate impacts disproportionately affect marginalised groups - and then assumes that more aggressive climate action will automatically benefit them. This assumption, he warned, does not hold.

Climate responses themselves can deepen injustice. Large-scale renewable energy projects that appropriate land, energy transitions that displace workers without long-term planning, and technocratic mitigation strategies decided behind closed doors all demonstrate that “radical” climate action can reproduce inequality unless justice and equity is built into the process from the outset. As Prakash put it, climate justice cannot be treated as an afterthought or a corrective; it requires a distinct political imagination, institutional pathways, and a theory of change.

This distinction is particularly important in India, where the state increasingly claims climate leadership - pointing to renewable energy targets and international commitments - while insulating climate policymaking from public deliberation. The absence of democratic debate over mitigation pathways has allowed technocratic and corporate interests to dominate decision-making, with profound consequences for workers, farmers, and forest-dependent communities. In this context, the demand is not only for better policies, but for the democratisation of climate policy itself.

The Missing Centre: Labour, Mitigation, and Long-Term Strategy

Despite growing recognition of climate impacts, several speakers pointed to a persistent gap: the limited engagement of major mass movements - particularly trade unions, farmer organisations, and large women's movements - with the climate crisis in a sustained and strategic way. While these movements recognise climate change as a problem, it often remains one issue among many, rather than a structuring concern.

This gap is especially stark when it comes to mitigation. Adaptation has received increasing attention, partly because it is locally visible and context-specific. Mitigation, by contrast, demands longer-term thinking, coordinated strategies, and difficult conversations about energy demand, consumption patterns, and class inequality. Nagaraj

Adve argued that without a coherent mitigation strategy, it is difficult to speak meaningfully of a climate movement at all.

Crucially, mitigation cannot be reduced to supply-side solutions or technological fixes. Several speakers stressed the need to confront demand - particularly the consumption patterns of the affluent. This raises uncomfortable but necessary questions about how climate movements relate to the middle and upper-middle classes, who are often insulated from climate impacts yet deeply implicated in emissions. The contrast between the political traction of air pollution campaigns and the relative abstraction of climate change underscores this challenge. Pollution feels immediate and personal; climate change is still perceived, wrongly, as distant or manageable through private solutions like air conditioners.

Forests, Work, and the Question of Rights

One of the key questions which is older than climate

politics itself and has been at the centre of several grassroots struggles: who controls land, forests, and the conditions of work, and on what terms. This question is the axis around which multiple injustices converge. Bhargavi Rao's intervention made this explicit by insisting that climate justice cannot be separated from access to land and resources. What is

often presented as a transition or solution - particularly large-scale renewable energy expansion - reproduces familiar patterns of dispossession, now legitimised through green language.

This is not merely a problem of inadequate compensation or procedural lapses. It is a deeper structural contradiction: land is being detached from livelihood systems and reattached to extractive or capital-intensive projects that erase agro-pastoral economies, commons-based use, and collective stewardship. As Bhargavi noted, communities use land "in a very judicious way",

not as a single-purpose asset but as part of a diversified survival ecology. Once land is alienated - whether through leases that cannot be negotiated, purchases mediated by local brokers, or outright coercion - this entire ecology collapses.

The implications extend well beyond rural landscapes. Disha Ravi's framing pushed the conversation away from treating land struggles as peripheral or sectoral, and towards understanding them as central to how climate injustice reproduces itself across rural and urban contexts. Dispossession generates migration; migration produces new forms of vulnerability; and cities, already unprepared, absorb this distress through informal labour, unsafe housing, and exposure to heat, floods, and pollution. Climate injustice thus travels, carrying the imprint of land loss into urban precarity.

Forests sharpen this contradiction further. The Forest Rights Act emerged from a powerful mobilisation that asserted collective rights over forest territories, yet its implementation has been steadily hollowed out even as forests are opened to extractive industries,

Climate responses themselves can deepen injustice. Large-scale renewable energy projects that appropriate land, energy transitions that displace workers without long-term planning, and technocratic mitigation strategies decided behind closed doors all demonstrate that "radical" climate action can reproduce inequality unless justice and equity is built into the process from the outset.

infrastructure corridors, and “green” projects. Defending forest rights, as Nagaraj Adve argued, is therefore not simply about conservation; it is about preserving one of the few institutional mechanisms that recognises collective ecological governance. In this sense, forest struggles are not adjacent to climate justice - they are constitutive of it.

A similar logic applies to NREGA. Often framed narrowly as a welfare programme, it surfaced in the conversation as a critical, if understated, climate institution. Beyond employment, it has functioned as an adaptation infrastructure - supporting water conservation, land restoration, and livelihood buffering. Its dilution, as Nagaraj put it, weakens a rare public mechanism that links social protection with ecological work at scale. When read alongside Bhargavi’s warning about land being appropriated and handed over to corporate actors, the erosion of NREGA signals a broader shift: from collective, rights-based ecological labour to market-led, dispossessive transitions.

Taken together, these threads underline a central claim of the climate justice movement in India: justice cannot be retrofitted onto transitions designed without democratic control over land, forests, and work.

Fragmentation, Generations, and Movement Culture

Internal tensions within the climate justice field also surfaced clearly. One such tension lies between different generations and modes of organising. Younger climate activists often bring digital fluency, creative communication, and transnational framing, while older movements bring deep experience of ground-level organising, institutional engagement, and long-term struggle. Rather than treating this as a divide to be resolved, several speakers argued for embracing it as a productive tension.

As Disha Ravi observed, victories against corporate and state power have historically occurred when movements set aside differences in style and method, combining street protest, legal action, media work, digital mobilisation, and cultural creativity. “It’s okay if we disagree on how to get there,” she argued, “as long as we continue working together.” Climate justice, in this sense, demands an ecology of tactics,

not a single model of activism.

Another tension concerns the relationship between movements and the state. Grassroots environmentalism in India has often been shaped by a deep distrust of state authority, with an emphasis on decentralisation and local control. While this scepticism is historically grounded, Prakash cautioned against romanticising it. Durable justice outcomes, he argued, require an accountable state checked by strong social movements, opposition parties, and institutions - not the absence of state power altogether. The question is not whether to engage the state, but how.

Knowledge, Narrative, and Power

Running beneath these material struggles is also a contest over knowledge - how climate change is understood, who is authorised to speak about it, and which meanings prevail. Several interventions converged on the idea that without sustained movement-led knowledge work, climate justice risks becoming either technocratic or symbolic.

Bhargavi Rao’s reflections on climate awareness in rural contexts highlight this tension sharply. The issue is not ignorance but disconnection: scientific language often arrives unmoored from lived experience. Her insistence that awareness must begin from people’s existing frameworks - patiently building links between everyday observations, scientific explanation, and legal rights - repositions knowledge as a political resource rather than an informational deficit. When communities understand both the science and the law, she argued, they are better placed to defend themselves.

Disha Ravi approached the same problem from a different angle, challenging the implicit hierarchy between “serious” organising and newer, digital or cultural forms of mobilisation. For her, the question is not whether social media, creative formats, or popular idioms dilute politics, but whether movements can afford to abandon any available tool. In a context where adversaries command overwhelming financial and institutional power, the capacity to operate across registers - on the ground, in policy spaces, and in popular culture - becomes a strategic necessity rather than a stylistic choice.

Prakash Kashwan's intervention provided a conceptual frame for these concerns by distinguishing between climate action and climate justice. The conflation of the two, he warned, produces a dangerous assumption: that more aggressive climate policy automatically benefits the most marginalised. In reality, climate responses themselves generate new distributions of harm and benefit. Without a clear theory of change - one that specifies pathways, institutions, and accountability - justice remains aspirational.

This is where narrative power becomes contested terrain. Concepts such as indigenous wisdom, sustainability, and nature-based solutions circulate widely, yet their political content is increasingly hollowed out. As Prakash cautioned, these narratives are easily appropriated, rebranded, and redeployed as greenwashing or rights-washing. The task for climate justice movements, then, is not to abandon these frames but to discipline them - to insist on precision about whose knowledge counts, whose rights are protected, and who bears the cost of transition.

Knowledge, in this sense, is not neutral. It shapes policy agendas, legitimises certain futures, and forecloses others. Reclaiming it is therefore a form of power.

An Unfinished Project

What the conversation ultimately revealed is not a settled movement architecture, but an unfinished and uneven political project. Climate justice in India is expanding in scope and urgency, yet it remains fragmented - across sectors, generations, and strategic orientations.

Disha Ravi articulated this tension most directly by naming the distance that sometimes emerges between youth-led mobilisations and longer-standing movement traditions. Her insistence on unity was not nostalgia but pragmatic: meaningful victories, she observed, have come only when movements set aside differences in method and worked together. In a struggle marked by extreme asymmetries of power, fragmentation weakens everyone.

Bhargavi Rao's emphasis on local governance offers one possible direction for consolidation. By returning

attention to constitutional frameworks on local self governance, she reframed decentralisation as a concrete institutional pathway rather than an abstract ideal. Her provocation - that decentralised, panchayat-led renewable energy could meet national targets without mass land appropriation - points towards an alternative transition logic: one rooted in democratic control rather than corporate concentration.

Across the interventions, a shared recognition emerged that climate justice cannot be built as a standalone sector or single campaign. It must be woven into existing struggles over land, labour, forests, health, and democracy, while also reshaping how those struggles understand climate risk and responsibility. It must operate across scales - from local heat stress to national mitigation strategies - and hold together resistance and construction.

In an era of accelerating ecological breakdown and shrinking political space, the question is no longer whether climate justice will be articulated in India, but whether it can be organised with sufficient coherence, depth, and urgency - without losing sight of justice itself.

The arguments developed here emerge from a collective conversation during a webinar convened by the National Alliance for Climate and Ecological Justice (NACEJ), featuring Bhargavi Rao, Disha Ravi, Nagaraj Adve, and Prakash Kashwan.

अरावली, आजीविका और संघर्ष की कहानी

कैलाश मीणा

अरावली क्या है - यह गुजरात से शुरू होकर राजस्थान, हरियाणा और दिल्ली तक फैली हुई है। गुजरात के तीन ज़िले, राजस्थान के 27 ज़िले और हरियाणा के सात ज़िले होते हुए यह दिल्ली तक पहुँचती है। पूरे उत्तर भारत में गर्म हवाओं को रोकने का काम अरावली करती है। तमाम वैज्ञानिक शोधों ने माना है कि यह पानी के सबसे बड़े रिचार्ज स्रोतों में से एक है। अरावली की तलहटी में छोटी खेती और पशुपालन आजीविका के बहुत बड़े स्रोत रहे हैं। छोटी-छोटी नदियाँ, जो अरावली से निकलती हैं, वहाँ के जीवन और आजीविका को चलाती रही हैं।



अरावली दुनिया की सबसे प्राचीन पर्वत श्रृंखलाओं में से एक है। लेकिन 20 नवंबर के आदेश के बाद पूरा देश उलझा हुआ है। दुनिया भर में इस पर चर्चा हो रही है। हम लोग तो लगभग 30 साल पहले से इसे जी रहे हैं। मैं एक चरवाहे परिवार से आता हूँ। हमारे परिवार की पृष्ठभूमि यह थी कि हमें कभी 'नोटिफ़ाइड क्रिमिनल ट्राइब' कहा गया था। उस पहचान के कारण हमारे बुजुर्गों ने बहुत कष्ट झेले। हमारी

पूरी आजीविका छोटी खेती और पशुपालन पर निर्भर थी।

1995-96 के बाद जब वहाँ खनन का कारोबार शुरू हुआ, धीरे-धीरे लोगों की दिक्कतें बढ़ने लगीं। हमें इस देश की प्रशासनिक व्यवस्था पर बड़ा गर्व था, बड़ा विश्वास था। 1997 से हमने लिखना शुरू किया कि खनन से समस्याएँ हो रही हैं। जब खनन और क्रशिंग शुरू हुई, तो यह सपना दिखाया गया कि गाँव में रोज़गार आएगा, गाँव का कायाकल्प हो जाएगा। लेकिन खनन और पैसे के आने से जो हालात बने, वे बिल्कुल उलट थे। मेरे ताऊ के लड़के - मेरे चचेरे भाई - गंभीर बीमारी की चपेट में आए और बहुत कम उम्र में उनका निधन हो गया। उनकी उम्र सिर्फ़ 23 साल थी। यह हमारे परिवार के लिए बहुत बड़ा वज्रपात था। तभी हमने तय

किया कि गाँव-गाँव जाकर लोगों को जगाना होगा।

1999 में मैंने कुछ साथियों के साथ मिलकर पदयात्राएँ शुरू कीं। अक्टूबर के महीने में हम पदयात्रा करते थे। गाँवों में जो कीर्तन और गीत गाने वाले लोग थे, उनसे संपर्क

किया औ कहा कि इस विषय पर गीत बनाइए। हमारे कुछ साथियों ने ऐसे गीत रचे। पहली पदयात्रा नीमकाथाना से शुरू हुई। वहाँ बागेश्वर नाम की जगह है - अरावली की बहुत सुंदर जगह। वहीं से यात्रा शुरू की। खनन से प्रभावित गाँवों से होते हुए दो दिन की पदयात्रा टपकेश्वर तक पहुँची। एक छोटा सा हैंडबिल बनवाया गया, जिसे पहले मोटरसाइकिल से गाँव-गाँव बाँटा गया - कि हम लोग इस इलाके से होकर आने वाले हैं।

पहले दिन जिस तरह से लोगों ने उत्साह दिखाया, खाने-पीने की व्यवस्था की, हमारी बात सुनी - वह अद्भुत था। रात को दरीबा गाँव में जब हम रुके, तो एक उत्सव जैसा माहौल था। यात्रा टपकेश्वर में समाप्त हुई। जहाँ हमने 40-50 लोगों से शुरुआत की थी, वहाँ अंत तक लगभग 300 लोग हो गए। हम बहुत उत्साहित थे। खनन कारोबार से जुड़े लोग इससे परेशान भी दिख रहे थे।

इसके साथ-साथ हमने पशुपालन और जंगल से जुड़े मुद्दों पर भी छोटे-छोटे काम शुरू किए - पशु चिकित्सा शिविर, नदियों के किनारे कैचमेंट एरिया में पानी बचाने के तरीके, भू-जल संरक्षण, खाद को ज़्यादा उपयोगी कैसे बनाया जाए - गड्डों में डालकर, वर्मी जैसे छोटे प्रयोग किए। अगले साल फिर अक्टूबर में पदयात्रा शुरू की। इस बार उत्साह और ज़्यादा था। पिछली यात्रा की हल्की-सी खबर हिंदुस्तान टाइम्स में छपी थी, जिससे कुछ पत्रकार साथी संपर्क में आ गए। हमने जयपुर तक सूचना भेजी। मोटरसाइकिल से फिर गाँव-गाँव हैंडबिल बाँटे। लगभग 80-85 लोगों ने यात्रा शुरू की। शाम को जहाँ हमारा पड़ाव होता, वहाँ 200-250 लोग जमा हो जाते। मुझे चिंता होती थी कि खाने की व्यवस्था कैसे होगी, लेकिन गाँव वालों ने इतने शानदार तरीके से सब संभाला कि हम सब अभिभूत हो गए। रात को गीतों के माध्यम से संवाद होता।

दूसरे दिन जब आगे बढ़े, तो लोग और बढ़ते गए। उस समय मोबाइल फ़ोन नहीं थे। मोटरसाइकिल से ही संपर्क किया जाता था। हमने अनुमान लगाया कि 500 लोग हो सकते हैं। गाँव वालों ने कहा - "आने दो, सब आराम से आओ।" आधी दूरी पर राजेंद्र सिंह भी हमारे साथ जुड़े - जिन्हें बाद में मैग्सेसे पुरस्कार मिला। रायपुर जागीर गाँव पहुँचते-पहुँचते हम हज़ार से ऊपर हो गए। माहौल ऐसा था जैसे गाँव में मेला लगा हो।

यह सिलसिला चलते-चलते खनन कारोबारियों के लिए बड़ी चुनौती बन गया। क्योंकि ज़्यादातर खनन पट्टे राजनेताओं, प्रशासनिक अधिकारियों, पुलिस अधिकारियों या उनके रिश्तेदारों के पास थे। उस गठजोड़ ने दमन का रास्ता अपनाया - साथियों को धमकाया गया, पुलिस केस की धमकी दी गई।

मैं हाई कोर्ट गया, क्योंकि प्रशासन से न्याय की उम्मीद नहीं रही थी। कोर्ट का अनुभव भी बहुत कड़वा-मीठा रहा। कई बार ऐसा लगा कि हमारी बात सुनी जा रही है, और कई बार ऐसा लगा कि हमें ही दोषी ठहराया जा रहा है। 16 फ़रवरी 2010 को मेरे पक्ष में फ़ैसला आया कि खनन गतिविधियाँ पर्यावरणीय नियमों के अनुसार ही होनी चाहिए। मैंने उस फ़ैसले की 200 प्रतियाँ छपवाई और गाँव-गाँव जाकर लोगों को बताया कि अदालत ने क्या कहा है।

इसके बाद हरियाणा सीमा के पास डाबला गाँव का मामला सामने आया। वहाँ दलित मोहल्ला गाँव के सबसे कोने पर था। खनन और क्रशिंग से लोगों का जीना मुश्किल हो गया था। धमाकों से घर टूट रहे थे, धूल से बीमारियाँ फैल रही थीं। वहाँ की एक बुजुर्ग महिला, शांति देवी, जिनकी उम्र 73 साल थी, उन्होंने तय किया कि अब आंदोलन होगा। वे नरेगा में काम करने वाली मज़दूर थीं। गाँव के लोगों ने मुझसे संपर्क किया और हम वहाँ पहुँचे। हमने आंदोलन की रणनीति बनाई - पदयात्राओं के ज़रिए। इसी दौरान सुप्रीम कोर्ट का एक फ़ैसला आया कि गाँव की कॉमन्स - चारागाह, तालाब - से छेड़छाड़ नहीं की जा सकती। प्रशासन भारी पुलिस बल के साथ आया। हमने उन्हें साफ़ कहा कि हम क़ानून में विश्वास रखते हैं, जो क़ानून सही है वही चलेगा। वे लौट गए।

लेकिन खनन माफ़ियाओं के दबाव में धरने के 30वें दिन 500-600 पुलिसकर्मियों ने आंदोलनकारियों पर बेरहमी से लाठीचार्ज किया। सात दलित महिलाओं को गिरफ़्तार किया गया। एक ही परिवार की दो महिलाएँ जेल भेजी गईं। एक रिटायर्ड सेना के बुजुर्ग को पीटा गया। किसी तरह गाँव वालों ने मुझे वहाँ से सुरक्षित निकाला। इन महिलाओं को "शांति भंग" के आरोप में सात दिन जेल में रखा गया। जब शांति रिहा होकर आई, तो उनसे कहा गया कि अंगूठा लगाकर लिख दो कि "कैलाश हमें बहका रहा था।" उन्होंने साफ़ कहा - हाथ कट सकता है, लेकिन झूठ नहीं लिखूँगी। शांति आज हमारे बीच नहीं हैं, लेकिन वे हमारे संघर्ष की प्रेरणा हैं।

इसी गाँव का एक नौजवान, जयराम सिंह, कारगिल युद्ध में लड़ चुके थे और उन्हें वीर चक्र मिला था। छुट्टी पर आए थे और आंदोलन में जुड़े। उसे भी अपराधी बना दिया गया। यह

कैसी विडंबना है कि देश की सीमा बचाने वाला वीर, अपने गाँव की पहाड़ी बचाने पर अपराधी कहलाता है। इसी दौरान पचेरी गाँव में एक और भयावह घटना हुई। सेना से रिटायर्ड प्रदीप शर्मा, जो स्वतंत्रता सेनानी परिवार से थे, खनन की तस्वीरें ले रहे थे। हाई कोर्ट का स्टे होने के बावजूद खनन चल रहा था। उनकी हत्या कर दी गई। उनकी लाश के पास बैठकर मैंने महसूस किया कि यह संघर्ष कितना महंगा पड़ सकता है।

मुझे भी गिरफ्तार किया गया। ठंड के महीने में, हाथ पीछे बाँधकर, कपड़े उतरवाकर - सिर्फ डराने के लिए। इसका असर मेरे परिवार पर पड़ा। मेरे बड़े भाई बीमार हो गए। परिवार ने इलाका छोड़ने का फैसला किया। लेकिन फिर हमने तय किया कि अगर हर अन्याय पर चुप रहेंगे, तो ज़िंदगी भर चुप ही रहना पड़ेगा। मेरी पत्नी ने साफ़ कहा - हम कहीं नहीं जाएँगे, यहीं जिएँगे, यहीं मरेंगे। गाँव-दर-गाँव यह संघर्ष चलता रहा। मेधा पाटकर, हिमांशु कुमार जैसे लोग आए, उन्होंने हमारा हौसला बढ़ाया। हमने लोगों से कहा कि यह पहाड़, यह नदी "सोने के अंडे देने वाली मुर्गी" है। अगर लालच में इसे एक दिन में खत्म कर देंगे, तो बाद में कुछ नहीं बचेगा।

आज अगर आप अरावली की तलहटी के गाँवों की हालत देखें, तो साफ़ दिखता है कि नदियाँ और जीवन दोनों खतरे में हैं। नीमकाथाना की गिरजन नदी आज भी ज़िंदा है। बीस साल पहले जब संकट गहराया, तो गाँव वालों ने तय किया कि बारिश का पानी बचाया जाएगा और खनन नहीं होने दिया जाएगा। आपसी सहमति से रास्ता निकाला गया। आज यह नदी बुसा बाँध में गिरती है, फिर 'सोता' कहलाती है और पटौदी तक जाती है। इसके दोनों किनारों पर 84 गाँव और 84 ढाणियाँ हैं - खेती चल रही है, पशुपालन फल-फूल रहा है। बाहर से आने वाले लोग कहते हैं कि इतना नीला पानी तो नॉर्थ-ईस्ट में भी नहीं देखा।

लेकिन आज उसी नदी के उद्गम के पास, 180 हेक्टेयर ज़मीन पर, एक बड़े राजनेता के प्रभाव से आयरन माइनिंग की लीज़ दे दी गई है। पिछले कुछ महीनों में जिस तेज़ी से खनन हुआ है, सवाल यही है - नदी बचेगी या नहीं? लोग आंदोलन कर रहे हैं, महिलाएँ सड़क पर हैं, बच्चों पर मुक़दमे दर्ज हो रहे हैं। 82 साल की एक बुजुर्ग महिला पर

रंगदारी माँगने का केस दर्ज कर दिया जाता है - जो खुद ठीक से चल भी नहीं सकती। छोटे-छोटे बच्चों को थानों में बैठाया जाता है। एक टीवी चैनल के स्टिंग में सत्ताधारी दल का नेता कहता है - "गिफ़्ट ले लो, लेकिन हमारा काम ठीक दिखाओ।" यही आज की हकीकत है।

सालोदड़ा गाँव में पिछले एक साल में छह लोगों की मौत सिलिकोसिस से हो चुकी है। सोचिए - जिस परिवार की खेती और पशुपालन खत्म हो चुका हो, और उसके लोग महीनों गैस सिलेंडर पर ज़िंदा रहे हों, उस घर की हालत क्या होगी? मुझे एक 11 साल की बच्ची ने कहा था - "अंकल, आप कहते हो कि आपको क़ानून पर भरोसा है, लेकिन आपका क़ानून मेरे पिताजी को नहीं बचा पाया।" उस परिवार में तीन मौतें हो चुकी थीं। यह सवाल सिर्फ़ मेरा नहीं है - क्या पूरी संवेदना इस दुनिया से खत्म हो गई है?

आज दिल्ली के लिए सहानुभूति है, यह ठीक है। लेकिन मैं पूछता हूँ - दिल्ली, जयपुर और दूसरे शहरों के योजनाकारों ने अपने संसाधनों को पहले क्यों नहीं बचाया? तालाब, नदियाँ, जंगल - इन सबको आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए क्यों नहीं छोड़ा गया? और अब जब पानी नहीं बचा, तो अरबों का पानी का कारोबार चल रहा है - क्या यह सब किसी योजना का हिस्सा नहीं है? सुप्रीम कोर्ट और एनजीटी के साफ़ आदेश हैं - ओवरलोड वाहन नहीं चल सकते, साफ़ हवा और पानी जीवन का अधिकार है। फिर भी 11 महीनों में नीमकाथाना-कोटपुतली इलाके में सैकड़ों दुर्घटनाएँ हो चुकी हैं। लोग मर रहे हैं, लेकिन आदेश कागज़ों में पड़े हैं। सवाल यही है - ज़िम्मेदारी किसकी है?

इस व्यवस्था ने एक अजीब द्वंद खड़ा कर दिया है - घर चलाने और घर बचाने के बीच का। एक तरफ़ वह नौजवान है जिसे रोज़गार की मजबूरी में ट्रेनिंग देकर खड़ा किया गया है, दूसरी तरफ़ वही लोग हैं जो अपनी ज़मीन, पानी और हवा बचाने के लिए खड़े हैं। इस संघर्ष में गरीब को ही कुचला जा रहा है, जबकि वही संसाधन बचा रहा है जिन पर पूरे देश का अस्तित्व टिका है।

अरावली के बहाने यह एक बड़ा मौका है - इस देश के विकास के मॉडल पर पुनर्विचार करने का। क्योंकि गाँव-गाँव में उबाल है, लोग घुट रहे हैं, और उनकी घुटन अब बाहर निकलकर सामने आ रही है। आप पढ़ें-लिखें, लंबे



अनुभव वाले लोग हैं। मेरा आपसे अनुरोध है - उस घुटन को समझिए; उसमें जो पीड़ा है, जो जीवन जीने की इच्छा है, वह टकराव नहीं चाहती। गाँव के लोग शहरी समाज से बस इतना कह रहे हैं - कम से कम आप हमारी तरफ हाथ तो बढ़ाइए। आप उनकी तरफ हाथ बढ़ाइए; उनसे एक बार माफ़ी माँगिए कि हमारी योजनाकारों की गलतियों की वजह से आप पर इतना दमन हुआ है। इससे उनका हौसला बढ़ेगा।

इतने इम्तिहानों के बाद भी उन्होंने इस देश की संवैधानिक व्यवस्था में, न्यायिक व्यवस्था में, और प्रशासनिक व्यवस्था में भरोसा बनाए रखा है। यहाँ तो लोग छोटे-छोटे लालच में ही भरोसा तोड़ देते हैं। कितने पूंजीपति इस देश को छोड़कर भाग गए - ज़रा-सा मुनाफ़ा कम हुआ और देश छोड़ दिया। लेकिन ज़रा देखिए - इतने दमन, इतने उत्पीड़न, संसाधन छीने जाने के बावजूद भी इन लोगों के भीतर आपकी इस व्यवस्था का डर है, और इसी भरोसे पर वे टिके हुए हैं।

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने जो कमेटी बनायी, उसकी बहुत चर्चा हुई - कमेटी ने अध्ययन किया कि अरावली की ऊँचाई क्या है, यह है, वह है। मैं इस देश की सरकार से, इस देश की न्यायपालिका से अपील करना चाहता हूँ - एक कमेटी वह भी बननी चाहिए जो यह देखे कि इस पूरे दौर में कितने लोगों ने अपनी आजीविका खोई, कितने लोगों ने अपने परिवार के सदस्य खोए, बीमारियों या दमन के कारण कितने लोग संसाधनों से वंचित हुए, कितने लोग उजड़ गए। उनके

पुनर्वास की बात भी होनी चाहिए। तब लगेगा कि इस देश में हम उन लोगों के लिए भी चिंतित हैं, जो हमारी गलतियों की वजह से आज यह सब झेल रहे हैं।

काश ऐसा हो - या हो जाए। मैं बहुत उम्मीद में हूँ। क्योंकि जिस तरह गाँव-गाँव से प्रतिक्रिया मिल रही है, और जो नारा गाँव के लोगों ने दिया है - "अरावली बचाओ, जीवन बचाओ" - वह बहुत साफ़ है। अरावली बचेगा तो पूरे देश का ढाँचा बचेगा - आपकी प्रशासनिक व्यवस्था, आपकी राजनीतिक व्यवस्था, आपका विकास मॉडल। यह अवसर है - एक विकास मॉडल पर सवाल उठाने का, और उसके पीछे छुपे एजेंडों के चेहरों से नक्राब उतारने का। इसमें आप सब साथ दीजिए। हम आज भी इसी भरोसे के साथ खड़े हैं कि लोगों की एकजुटता, उनकी समझ और उनका संघर्ष ही इस देश को बचा सकता है।

कैलाश मीणा नीम का थाना, राजस्थान में पिछले तीन दशकों से ज़्यादा से अरावली में हो रहे अवैध खनन के खिलाफ संघर्षरत हैं और NAPM, PUCL जैसे संगठनों से जुड़े हैं।

SHANTI Act 2025: Diluting Nuclear Safety, Socialising Risk

Soumya Dutta

In the last winter session of Parliament, ending on December 19, 2025, the Government of India tabled and rapidly and forcefully passed the mischievously named ‘Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India’ (SHANTI) Bill, 2025, making it an Act. This damaging new Act replaces two key pieces of legislation that had long existed as the backbone of safety and public security in the nuclear energy sector in our country—the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.

The first expressly prohibited ownership and operational control of any facility in the highly sensitive nuclear fuel cycle by any private entity. The second Act on liability was passed by Parliament after extensive debate following the India–USA nuclear deal, and contained a provision that, in the event of a nuclear accident, the operator of a nuclear facility (a Government of India or public sector entity) could sue any supplier for damages if it could be shown that the accident occurred due to defective or deficient supply or service. Now, both these safeguarding Acts are gone, repealed by the new SHANTI Act.

A temporary working group formed by NAPM and Friends of the Earth–India, in which this author played a leading role, attempted to place the text of the Bill in the public domain, analysed the Bill in some detail, and wrote to all opposition Members of Parliament in both Houses. This provided the necessary information for several opposition MPs to critique the Bill in Parliament. However, despite their demands, the government forced the Bill through both Houses on subsequent days.

The SHANTI Act represents a significant dilution and a negative shift in India’s nuclear policy. Almost from the inception of India’s nuclear energy programme—which began in 1969 with the imported-from-the-US

Boiling Water Reactors (BWRs) at Tarapur, Maharashtra—India has maintained a State or public sector monopoly, with NPCIL (Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd) owning and operating nuclear power reactors, and UCIL (Uranium Corporation of India Ltd) handling uranium mining and refining. Even IREL (Indian Rare Earths Limited), which mines and processes thorium from southern beach sands (monazite), is a public sector company.

Over the last 56 years of the nuclear power industry in India, this arrangement has worked well to keep highly sensitive nuclear materials safe from misuse by miscreants. Opening the sector to private and foreign participation may change this for the worse.

While supposedly designed to boost nuclear capacity to 100 GW by 2047, as announced by the

Government, the Act is likely to dilute these critical safety aspects, as pointed out by several scientists and civil society groups, including in a detailed critique by our collective—the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) and Friends of the Earth–India—where we actively worked to build understanding of its risks and shortcomings.

Further, through its unseemly haste in passing this Bill, the Government did not give even Members of Parliament adequate time to thoroughly read and respond to these profound changes in India’s nuclear safety architecture. The Bill was forced through the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in just two days after being tabled, between 16–18 December 2025, and the President was asked to sign it into law on the 20th. Strong critiques from many opposition MPs in both Houses, along with demands to send the Bill to a Parliamentary Select Committee, were completely ignored.

Some of the primary problems of the SHANTI Act centre on the privatisation of a very high-risk sector, dilution of safety liability, and reduced transparency.

Privatisation of a Very Sensitive Sector with Hazardous Technology: The introduction of profit-driven private players into the nuclear fuel cycle—

Some of the primary problems of the SHANTI Act centre on the privatisation of a very high-risk sector, dilution of safety liability, and reduced transparency.

ranging from uranium mining to reactor operations—increases the risks of sabotage, theft of radioactive and even fissile materials, and corner-cutting on safety. The unusually hasty passage of such an important Bill, combined with immediate interest shown by some crony capitalists very close to the present regime, has raised concerns that the legislation prioritises corporate profit interests over public safety. This also represents a deviation from norms in major nuclear energy countries, except the US. In countries such as France and Russia, nuclear power remains predominantly under State control due to its strategic and hazardous nature.

Removal of Supplier Liability (“Right of Recourse”): A central criticism of the new Act is the removal of the operator’s “right of recourse” against equipment suppliers for defective equipment or negligent services. The 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) allowed this, but the SHANTI Act removes it, shielding both foreign and domestic vendors from accountability. This is likely to lead to reduced due diligence, as many suppliers may calculate the benefits of saving on very expensive best-in-class safety measures and instead opt for lower-cost safety equipment. This is how profit-driven private industry typically operates, at the behest of shareholder interests.

Dilution and Very Lowly Capped Operator Liability: The Act caps operator liability at a maximum of ₹3,000 crore (for large reactors), and as low as ₹100 crore for smaller ones (supposedly SMRs, or Small Modular Reactors). This is woefully inadequate when compared to the massive costs of potential accidents such as Fukushima, where damages exceeded the cap by over 700 times. As of today, the total cost of the Fukushima nuclear disaster exceeds USD 186 billion (or about ₹16,74,600 crore).

Nuclear (fission) power is neither clean nor affordable for a low- to medium-income country like India, and that it carries a host of very serious problems that remain unaddressed despite over 70 years of costly international research. The most critical unresolved issue is the generation of large quantities of highly radioactive waste that remain extremely hazardous for tens of thousands of years.

Shifting Liability to the Public Exchequer: The elimination of supplier liability and the low capping of operator liability shift the maximum liability to the public exchequer, or taxpayer risk. By severely limiting private liability and having the government (public money) assume liability beyond the cap, the Act socialises the risks of a catastrophe while privatising the profits.

Undermining the “Polluter Pays” Principle: The new Act, by reducing the financial and legal consequences for safety breaches, weakens the “polluter pays” principle, which is essential for hazardous industries. Under the new SHANTI Act, it is effectively the “polluter profits and the public pays” principle that comes into force.

Reduced Transparency and Accountability – Undermining the RTI Act: Section 39 of the Act allows the Central Government to classify wide categories of nuclear information as “restricted,” removing them from the purview of the Right to Information Act, 2005. Combined with other attempts to dilute the public-empowering RTI Act, this takes away affected people’s right even to know what kinds of dangerous developments are taking place in their areas.

Reduced Public Oversight: The Act is problematic in that it does not provide for mandatory public hearings, environmental impact assessment disclosures, or community consent mechanisms.

Restricted Legal Recourse: The Act limits who can initiate criminal complaints for nuclear-related offences, excluding affected communities and civil society groups from directly approaching courts.

Occupational and Environmental Concerns – Weakening Worker Safety: Section 42 of the Act

overrides general occupational safety and labour laws for nuclear facility workers, thereby jeopardising worker safety in this high-risk industry.

Environmental Risks: The Act weakens environmental oversight, particularly with regard to the handling of radioactive waste, decommissioning of reactors, and thermal pollution.

Despite these valid criticisms, proponents of the SHANTI Act argue that the reforms are essential to attract the necessary capital and technology to meet India's clean energy targets, claiming that the new regulatory framework, including statutory status for the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), will maintain safety standards. This crooked logic ignores the fact that nuclear (fission) power is neither clean nor affordable for a low- to medium-income country like India, and that it carries a host of very serious problems that remain unaddressed despite over 70 years of costly international research. The most critical unresolved issue is the generation of large quantities of highly radioactive waste that remain extremely hazardous for tens of thousands of years. This Act risks turning large parts of India into a radioactive wasteland.

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Breathing as a Right: Politics of Air in Delhi

Mol Correspondent

Delhi's air has long ceased to be a seasonal inconvenience. It has become a chronic public health emergency - predictable, deadly, and yet politically normalised. Each winter, the city slips into a familiar script of emergency measures, school closures, and advisories that arrive late and fade early. What remains unaddressed is not just pollution, but the deeper failure of governance that treats breathable air as a temporary privilege rather than a fundamental right.

It is against this backdrop that Delhi SSANS - *Swasth Saans Adhikar Nagrik Samiti* - has emerged as a collective assertion of citizenship itself. Formed after two months of public anger and mobilisation around toxic air, the forum brings together environmentalists, doctors, lawyers, trade unionists, students, and residents directly affected by pollution. Their intervention is political in the most basic sense: insisting that the state be held accountable for protecting life.

At a press conference at the Press Club of India, the forum released a detailed *Citizens' Charter of Demands*, arguing that Delhi's environmental crisis must be recognised as a year-round public health emergency, not a winter aberration. As the charter notes, short-term responses like GRAP and episodic Heat Action Plans have failed precisely because they avoid confronting structural causes and permanent solutions.

From Emergency to Structure

A central intervention of Delhi SSANS is to shift the frame - from episodic crisis management to institutional responsibility. The charter calls for permanent, enforceable mechanisms for air-pollution control, heat-wave response, urban flooding, and sanitation, with clear timelines, budgets, and accountability. The emphasis is not only on what needs to be done, but how governance itself must change.

Grounding policy in scientific source-apportionment studies is one such demand. Repeated studies, including IIT Kanpur (2023), have shown that vehicles, dust, construction, waste, and industrial

emissions are the dominant, year-round drivers of Delhi's air crisis. Yet public discourse continues to fixate on stubble burning, often turning farmers into convenient scapegoats. SSANS explicitly rejects this narrative, arguing that vilification distracts from chronic urban failures and delays effective action.

Equally significant is the demand to align India's air-quality standards with WHO norms. This is not a technical adjustment; it is a political choice about whose lives count. Lower standards institutionalise harm, particularly for those who cannot afford air purifiers, private transport, or healthcare.

Health, Labour, and Inequality

What distinguishes the SSANS intervention is its insistence that pollution is not an abstract environmental issue but a lived, unequal experience. Resident doctors have highlighted the burden on public hospitals. Gig workers, waste-affected communities, and residents near Waste-to-Energy plants describe exposure that is constant, not seasonal. For them, pollution is embedded in work, housing, and survival.

The charter therefore calls for specialised OPDs in government hospitals to monitor and treat pollution-linked illnesses, alongside real-time, credible air-quality data accessible in multiple languages. The emphasis on accessibility reflects a broader concern: data that exists but cannot be trusted, understood, or used by ordinary people is another form of exclusion.

Transport emerges as a key fault line. While EV promotion and BS-VI norms are often presented as solutions, SSANS argues that they are insufficient without confronting diesel dominance, private vehicle expansion, and induced demand. Proposals such as scrapping non-BS6 diesel vehicles, imposing diesel taxes, expanding non-AC electric buses, and introducing congestion pricing are framed not as punitive measures, but as necessary corrections to a system skewed in favour of private mobility at public cost.

The Politics of “Green” Solutions

One of the sharper critiques in the charter targets the rebranding of harmful practices as green solutions. Waste-to-Energy incinerators are a case in point. Despite their toxic emissions, they are increasingly

exempted from environmental impact assessments and classified as low-risk. SSANS calls for a ban on new WTE plants and a rapid phase-out of existing ones, arguing that “green” branding cannot substitute for health and environmental accountability.

This critique extends to the weakening of environmental standards more broadly - from redefining forests to diluting hill protections. What is at stake is not only pollution control, but the erosion of regulatory institutions themselves.

Citizenship, Protest, and Democratic Space

Perhaps the most political demand in the charter is also the most basic: that peaceful protest be met with dialogue, not intimidation. SSANS explicitly condemns threats, detentions, and arrests of citizens raising public-interest concerns. In doing so, it links environmental governance to democratic practice, refusing to separate clean air from civil liberties.

The forum's call to reject divisive and religious narratives around pollution is equally significant. It recognises how environmental crises are often instrumentalised to deflect responsibility, fragment solidarities, and delay action.

Reclaiming the Right to Breathe

Delhi SSANS does not present itself as a substitute for the state. It presents itself as a reminder of what the state is obligated to do. Its charter is demanding precisely because the crisis is already severe - and because incrementalism has failed.

By bringing together doctors and students, workers and lawyers, scientists and residents, the forum makes visible a truth long denied: that pollution governance is not a matter of expertise alone, but of power, priorities, and political will.

In insisting that breathing clean air is a right, not a concession, Delhi SSANS reclaims the language of citizenship itself. Whether the state listens remains uncertain. But the contours of a people-centred, justice-oriented response to Delhi's pollution crisis are now clearly on the table.

Corporate Terrorism and Assault on Democracy in Odisha

Prafulla Samantara

I want to be clear at the outset. My opposition to the current model of development in Odisha is neither new nor opportunistic. For decades, those of us engaged in people's movements have challenged a development process that plunders natural resources, destroys livelihoods, and excludes local communities from decision-making. We have consistently argued for alternative paths of development rooted in justice, sustainability, and democracy. If political parties are willing, these questions remain open for public debate.

What compels me to write now is not an ideological disagreement alone, but the alarming and dangerous situation created by the state administration and the police. Across Odisha, we are witnessing an undemocratic regime of force, where laws meant to protect people - such as the Forest Rights Act, the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, PESA, and constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Areas - are being systematically violated. What has emerged is nothing less than a reign of state-sponsored corporate terrorism, deployed to facilitate forced land acquisition and forest transfer for private companies.

This assault is directed squarely at the democratic and constitutional rights of Adivasis, Dalits, small farmers, and landless villagers. In two regions of the state in particular, thousands of people have been forced to live under constant fear so that mining interests can proceed unhindered.

Land Grabs in Sundargarh: Law Reduced to Paper

For the past seven years, villagers from six Gram Panchayats in the Kutra block near Rajgangpur in Sundargarh district have resisted limestone mining leases granted on their agricultural land. In 2018, a

public hearing for environmental clearance was held during an Adivasi festival. Widespread protests forced its suspension. Yet, without holding a fresh hearing, the State Pollution Control Board later declared that the suspended hearing was valid and went on to grant environmental clearance.

This directly violates the Land Acquisition Act, 2013. The mandatory Social Impact Assessment was never approved through Gram Sabhas. No consent of 80 per cent of landowners was obtained. On the contrary, Gram Sabhas at the Panchayat level unanimously rejected land acquisition for mining. Still, the administration claims - without producing evidence -

that landowner consent has been secured. Whenever movement representatives demand to see these documents, the administration has nothing to show.

The irony is cruel. For over seventy years, companies like Dalmia and OCL Cement have already devastated hundreds of acres, leaving behind hollow pits, polluted water, poisoned air, and ruined soil. While these companies earned thousands of crores, local communities lost livelihoods and health.

Instead of compelling these companies to restore damaged land, the state has granted leases for mining on an additional 2,000 acres of fertile farmland. This will push Adivasi communities across six Gram Panchayats into deeper ecological and economic ruin.

Midnight Mining and the Criminalisation of Resistance

The administration's actions reached a shocking low point on the night of 13 December. After failing to take possession of land during the day due to public resistance in Lanjiberana Panchayat, the company returned at midnight under heavy police protection. Over 30 JCB machines were deployed to destroy 37 acres of farmland where standing rabi crops were

How much should be extracted, and how much must be preserved for future generations? Why is there no transparent policy that balances ecological sustainability with social justice? And why, instead of democratic consultation, do we see police repression, administrative manipulation, and an atmosphere of fear manufactured to silence dissent?

being cultivated. By morning, the land lay ravaged.

Since that night, Adivasi men, women, and youth have been holding continuous *Gana Dharana* and *Satyagraha* to reclaim their land. On 22 December, thousands formed a human chain, reclaimed the destroyed fields, and demanded restoration of the land and withdrawal of the acquisition process. This was only the first phase of 2,000 acres.

Witnessing this, I could not escape the feeling that a government - ironically led by a tribal Chief Minister - was providing administrative and police cover to corporate violence, executed with the precision of a military ambush. If this is allowed to continue, Odisha will lose not only its natural resources but also the civil liberties and democratic rights of its people.

Sijimali: Fear as Governance

A similar climate of terror prevails in the Sijimali region between Rayagada and Kalahandi. Here, Vedanta has been granted a bauxite mining lease, Adani has been allotted Kutrumali, and Aditya Birla has already mined Baphlimali for two decades. More hills - Sasubohumali, Majhingamali, and parts of Karlapat forest - are lined up for auction.

Two hundred villages, predominantly Adivasi and Dalit, now live under the threat of displacement. The administration has consistently submitted false reports to facilitate forest diversion, bypassing every legal safeguard. Peaceful protests are met with fabricated criminal cases, mass arrests, and prohibitory orders - even on days like World Environment Day, the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, and Birsa Munda's birth anniversary.

People are being picked up from roads, markets, and riverbanks and jailed under serious charges designed to deny bail. Their only "crime" is defending their land, forests, and water.

Human Rights Trampled, One Arrest at a Time

The cruelty of this repression is not abstract. It has names and faces. Narangi Dei Majhi, an activist with the Sijimali Suraksha Andolan, was arrested inside a hospital while assisting her daughter-in-law during

childbirth. She was jailed on false charges. Even after securing bail in one case, new cases were immediately filed. Eight Adivasi and Dalit villagers remain imprisoned today.

A shopkeeper, Lavanya Nayak, was arrested and had his belongings destroyed. Padaman Nayak, a TB patient, was jailed on his way to hospital. Movement leader Kartik Nayak was kept in jail for seven months, released on bail, and then re-arrested. His wife has been threatened and assaulted by police in plain clothes.

Is non-violent resistance within one's own village now a "great crime"? Since July 2023, ordinary villagers have lived in fear - afraid to go to hospitals or markets, unsure when they might be arrested next.

Development Without Democracy Is Violence

These developments compel me to place two fundamental questions before the political leadership of this state and the country. Is it justifiable to exhaust Odisha's natural resources - especially bauxite, iron ore, chrome, and coal - within the next two or three decades in the name of development? Can such extraction be called progress if it destroys the ecological foundations of the future and demands the sacrifice of the lives and livelihoods of those who have protected these resources for generations? If development is to proceed at this cost, whose future is it really securing?

If resource extraction is to continue, there must be serious public debate on timelines, limits, and safeguards. How much should be extracted, and how much must be preserved for future generations? Why is there no transparent policy that balances ecological sustainability with social justice? And why, instead of democratic consultation, do we see police repression, administrative manipulation, and an atmosphere of fear manufactured to silence dissent? These are not marginal concerns; they go to the heart of what kind of society we are becoming. Political parties cannot evade these questions. They must clarify their positions in their policies, programmes, and actions.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for all political

parties to clearly articulate their stance on mining, industrialisation, and large infrastructure projects. They must confront the reality of what I have described as “corporate terrorism” - a development model enforced through intimidation, dispossession, and the criminalisation of resistance. Will political parties take responsibility for examining the facts on the ground? Will they stand with those who depend on land, forests, and water for survival? Development may generate profits and capital for a few, but why should Adivasis, Dalits, small farmers, and workers be made to endure punishment, incarceration, and dispossession without having committed any crime?

Finally, I appeal for an honest investigation into the midnight land grab in Lanjiberana and the continuing reign of suppression in Kashipur and Sijimali. Fact-finding must replace false reports, and accountability must replace impunity. Political parties must urge the government to take immediate action to halt repression and forced land acquisition, and to restore land and dignity to the affected communities. Democratic processes exist for a reason. Land and forests can only be acquired through lawful, transparent, and participatory means. Anything less is not development - it is an assault on democracy itself.

Prafulla Samantara is with Lok Shakti Abhiyan and NAPM and winner of the Goldman Environment Award.

LABOUR AND LIVELIHOOD

Jobs, Justice, and the Gig Economy

Shaik Salauddin

The debate around gig and platform work in India has increasingly become polarised. On one side are those who celebrate the sector as a major engine of employment, pointer number of workers engaged. On the other are voices calling for bans, shutdowns, or the dismantling of the model altogether, citing exploitation and unsafe working conditions. Both positions, when taken in isolation, miss the lived reality of gig workers.

Gig workers are not arguing that these platforms should disappear. Nor are we willing to accept the claim that the existence of jobs alone is proof of progress. The real question is not whether the gig economy creates livelihoods, but whether it creates dignified, sustainable livelihoods.

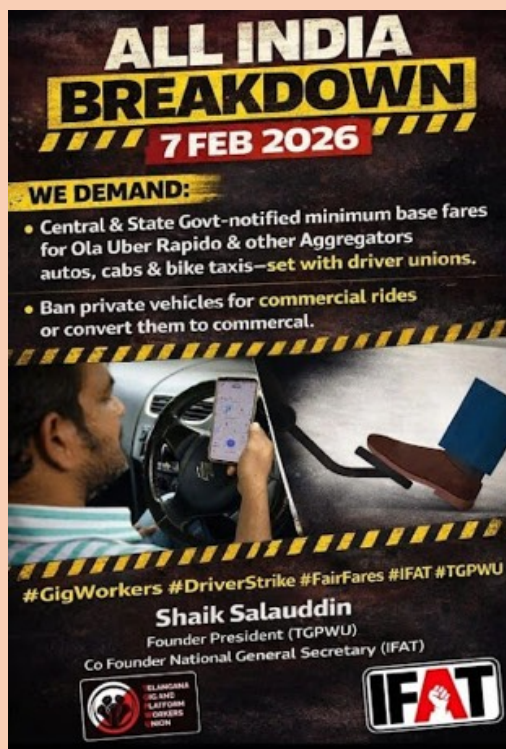
Much has been made of headline statements such as certain company’s claim that delivery platforms have paid out ₹5,000 crore to workers in a year, or that the gig economy has become India’s “third pillar of livelihood.” These figures sound impressive, but they obscure more than they reveal. Gross payouts do not reflect what workers actually earn after fuel costs, vehicle maintenance, toll charges, penalties, waiting time, and algorithmic deductions. They certainly do not capture the insecurity that defines everyday life for most gig workers.

It is also often argued that gig work offers flexibility, making it especially attractive to students, migrants, and households seeking supplementary income. Flexibility, however, exists largely on paper. In practice, algorithms decide who gets work, incentives change without notice, and workers are compelled to stay logged in for long hours simply to earn enough to survive. When ratings determine income and sudden ID deactivations can cut off livelihoods overnight, flexibility becomes a fragile illusion. Hunger does not allow for choice.

Another recurring argument is that gig work may be harsh, but it is still better than the alternatives available in an economy struggling to generate jobs. This line of thinking is deeply troubling. It echoes historical justifications used to normalise exploitative labour

arrangements - arguments that suggest workers should accept unsafe or unjust conditions because something is better than nothing. India does need employment, but employment cannot be built on permanent insecurity, constant fear, and the absence of basic protections. Jobs that leave workers one accident, illness, or algorithmic penalty away from ruin cannot be celebrated as development.

The structure of platform work makes accountability especially elusive. Companies insist that there is no employer–employee relationship, yet they exercise near-total control over how work is assigned, how performance is judged, and how workers are punished. Algorithms decide earnings, routes, and incentives, while penalties and deactivations are often imposed without explanation or a meaningful right to appeal. This is not neutral technology; it is a system of control without responsibility.



The recent controversies around quick commerce and 10-minute delivery promises illustrate these contradictions sharply. Speed-driven models place enormous pressure on workers, encouraging unsafe riding and long hours. It was not corporate goodwill but workers’ protests and government intervention that forced platforms to reconsider these timelines. Removing a marketing label, however, does not

resolve the deeper issue. As long as speed is rewarded and safety remains secondary, workers will continue to bear the risk.

The nationwide strikes by gig and delivery workers on 25 and 31 December 2025 were not spontaneous disruptions. They reflected accumulated frustration over falling real incomes, arbitrary penalties, unsafe working conditions, and the complete absence of social security. When workers organised across cities and platforms, delivery services were disrupted despite threats, intimidation, and attempts to weaken collective action. These strikes revealed a simple truth: behind the convenience economy lies a workforce that is deeply dissatisfied and increasingly unwilling to remain invisible.

There are other, less discussed burdens as well. App-based drivers regularly spend thousands of rupees each month on tolls while using public highways for



livelihood. Existing toll policies do not recognise gig workers as a distinct category, offering neither concessions nor effective grievance redressal. Here again, public infrastructure becomes a private cost borne entirely by workers.

None of this is an argument against innovation or technology. Nor is it a call to shut down platforms. It is

Achievements: Collective Action in Practice

The growing power of organised gig workers became visible through coordinated national action. The Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU), along with the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT), called for a National Flash Strike on 25 and 31 December 2025. The outcomes marked an important moment in the struggle for platform workers' rights

- TGPWU and IFAT jointly called a National Flash Strike on 25 and 31 December 2025.
- Over two lakh delivery workers across India participated, making the strike a significant success.
- Ordinary citizens stood in solidarity, amplifying workers' voices across social and digital platforms.
- Platform companies were compelled to issue public explanations and justifications on social media.
- Companies such as Zomato and Blinkit were forced to publicly clarify their positions.
- Members of Parliament and State Labour Ministers took cognisance of the issue and raised it formally.
- The collective voice of workers and unions reached the CEOs of major platform companies, demonstrating the growing power of organised gig workers.



a call to confront uncomfortable truths. An economy that celebrates innovation while denying workers social security, fair wages, safety, and the right to organise is not modern - it is extractive.

If the gig economy is truly here to stay, then the responsibility of the state and platforms is clear. Regulation must be strict and protective of worker's rights and not cosmetic. Wages must be transparent and fair. Safety cannot be optional. Social security cannot remain a promise indefinitely deferred and private corporations have to shoulder their responsibility as employers and held accountable. Most importantly, workers must have a voice in shaping the systems that govern their lives. India cannot build its future by asking workers to be grateful for survival. Development must mean dignity, not just numbers on a balance sheet.

Shaik Salauddin is the Founder President of the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU) and the Co-Founder and National General Secretary of the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT).

मनरेगा का अंत: एक क़ानून नहीं, एक नई चेतना पर वार

कामायनी और आशीष

बिहार के एक ग्रामीण इलाके में कुछ युवा सामूहिक रूप से पढ़ रहे हैं। किताब का नाम है- **उपभोक्तावादी संस्कृति का जाल!** वे उपभोग और उपभोक्तावाद के अंतर को समझ रहे हैं। समाजवादी कार्यकर्ता और चिंतक सच्चिदानंद सिन्हा द्वारा लिखी इस पुस्तिका को पढ़ते नौजवान गहरी बहस में हैं। यह कौन युवा हैं?

पहली पीढ़ी के पढ़े-लिखे दलित-बहुजन युवा-युवतियों की किसी टोली का साथ बैठकर ऐसी पुस्तिका को पढ़ना और फिर उस पर चर्चा करना एक असामान्य दृश्य है। यह टोली यहाँ तक कैसे पहुँची?

2008 में, इस टोली के माता-पिता जब अपनी पंचायत में काम के अभाव से ग्रस्त थे, तब इनका संपर्क जन जागरण शक्ति संगठन (जे. जे. एस. एस.) के कार्यकर्ताओं से हुआ, जिन्होंने इन्हें रोज़गार गारंटी क़ानून (मनरेगा) के तहत काम माँगने के लिए प्रेरित किया। यहाँ से शुरू हुआ एक सिलसिला, जिसमें इन मज़दूर साथियों ने काम के अपने अधिकार को हासिल करने के लिए सामूहिक संघर्ष किए - अमूमन अपने ही पंचायत के बिचौलियों और भ्रष्टाचारियों से भिड़े, कभी अपने मुखिया (सरपंच) से लड़े, कभी ब्लॉक पर धरना-प्रदर्शन किया और कभी पटना-दिल्ली में बड़ी-बड़ी रैलियों में शामिल हुए।

अपने संघर्षों से उत्साहित मज़दूरों ने सिर्फ़ मनरेगा पर ही दखल नहीं दिया, बल्कि इन्होंने संघर्षों के कई द्वार खोले। कहीं राशन, पेंशन, आंगनबाड़ी में मिलने वाली सुविधाओं पर आवाज़ उठाई, तो कहीं जातिगत हिंसा को लेकर इकट्ठा हुए, तो कहीं बसोबास की ज़मीन के लिए स्थानीय ज़मींदारों से भी भिड़ गए। इन सामूहिक संघर्षों के साथ-साथ एक नई सामाजिक और राजनीतिक चेतना का विकास हुआ। मनरेगा में काम करने वाले मज़दूर साथी, जो संगठन में आते-जाते थे, उन्होंने अपने बच्चों को पढ़ाने के प्रयास बढ़ाए। उन्हें युवा शिविरों और कार्यक्रमों में भेजा। एक तरफ़ इन मज़दूर साथियों में खुद एक नई चेतना का विकास हो रहा था, दूसरी तरफ़ वे अपने बच्चों को भी एक नया मौका दे रहे थे।

हमने मनरेगा पर यह लेख इस क्रिस्से से इसलिए शुरू किया कि आम तौर पर मनरेगा के खात्मे को लोग मज़दूरों के जीविका के अधिकार तक सीमित रख रहे हैं, पर इस क़ानून ने एक नई सामाजिक-राजनीतिक चेतना के विकास के लिए नए दरवाज़े खोले थे। ग्रामीण क्षेत्र के मज़दूरों के लिए पहली बार एक साथ इतने बड़े पैमाने पर आने का मौका मिला था। इस मौके ने उन्हें संगठित होने का अवसर दिया। असंगठित क्षेत्र में आने के चलते इन्होंने कभी स्थायी काम या स्थायी “मालिक” का अनुभव नहीं किया था। इनमें कई महिला मज़दूर भी थीं, जिन्हें सचमुच पहली बार खेत के बाहर कोई काम मिला था। अब पंचायत में ही काम का मौका मिला, जहाँ इन्हें सरकारी मशीनरी और अपने ही चुने हुए प्रतिनिधियों से काम लेना था।

इन्हीं मज़दूरों ने देश के सुदूर इलाकों में मज़दूर संगठनों का निर्माण किया या उन्हें ताक़त दी। जे. जे. एस. एस. जैसे कई संगठनों को इससे बल मिला और वहाँ एक नई सामाजिक-राजनीतिक चेतना का विकास हुआ। आप पाठक अपने आप में असाधारण हैं, गंभीर चिंतन और सामाजिक बदलाव में कार्यरत संगठनकर्ता हैं। ऐसे में यह समझना कि मनरेगा की समाप्ति एक नई चेतना के विकास पर हमला है, और भी ज़रूरी हो जाता है। इसलिए लेख का शुरुआती क्रिस्सा और भी प्रासंगिक हो जाता है।

पर हाल में केंद्र सरकार ने मनरेगा क़ानून को वापस ले लिया और VB-ग्राम-जी नाम का एक नया क़ानून ला दिया। हर रोज़ हिंदी दैनिक अख़बार इस नए क़ानून की तारीफ़ के पुलिंदे बाँध रहे हैं। पर आइए जानें कि इस क़ानून की हक़ीक़त क्या है। 18-19 दिसंबर 2025 को VB-GRAM-G (विकसित भारत – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act) को लोकसभा में पारित कर मनरेगा क़ानून को वापस ले लिया गया। शुरू में सबको लगा कि यह केवल नाम बदलने की कवायद है - एक ऐसी रस्म, जिसमें नाम तो बदलता है, पर जगह और चीज़ें पहले जैसी ही रहती हैं, और जिसकी हमें आदत-सी पड़ गई है। अब तो मुग़लसराय याद करना पड़ता है, धीरे-धीरे DDU ही जुबान पर चढ़ गया है।

ऐसे में मनरेगा संघर्ष मोर्चा की सामूहिक समझ और हमारे ज़मीनी अनुभव से यही समझ में आता है कि इस बार सिर्फ़ नाम नहीं बदला गया, बल्कि पूरे क़ानून के बुनियादी स्वरूप

को ही बदल दिया गया।

हक़ नहीं, अब सरकार का 'रहम'

मनरेगा की मूल भावना है कि मज़दूर अपनी ज़रूरत के हिसाब से काम माँगे और उन्हें साल में कम से कम 100 दिन का काम सरकार देगी। मनरेगा क़ानून की आत्मा में "काम का अधिकार" है। इस भावना को कुचलते हुए नए क़ानून में केंद्र सरकार को यह अधिकार दे दिया गया है कि वह हर राज्य के लिए एक बजट तय करेगी। इससे केंद्र सरकार को राज्यों को दी जाने वाली राशि की मात्रा मनमाने ढंग से तय करने का अधिकार मिल गया है, और इसी के आधार पर यह तय होगा कि किसी राज्य में कितने दिनों का रोज़गार दिया जा सकता है। यह मनरेगा की मूल सोच को पूरी तरह पलट देता है, जहाँ राशि आवंटन मज़दूरों की माँग के अनुसार होता था, और उसकी जगह एक ऐसी आपूर्ति-आधारित व्यवस्था ले आता है, जिसमें रोज़गार की माँग को पहले से तय बजट के अनुसार ढलना पड़ेगा।

राज्यों पर 40 प्रतिशत वित्तीय बोझ डालना

मनरेगा के तहत मज़दूरी का 100% और सामग्री लागत का 75% वहन करने की ज़िम्मेदारी केंद्र सरकार की होती है। व्यवहार में इसका अर्थ है कि केंद्र और राज्यों के बीच खर्च का अनुपात लगभग 90:10 रहता है। अब ज़्यादातर राज्यों को हर 100 रुपये के खर्च में 40 रुपये देने पड़ेंगे। यह प्रावधान न केवल राज्यों पर भारी वित्तीय बोझ डालता है, बल्कि ग़रीब राज्यों और उन राज्यों पर भी असमान रूप से असर डालता है, जहाँ से बड़ी संख्या में लोग रोज़गार के लिए पलायन करते हैं और जिन्हें ग्रामीण रोज़गार की सबसे अधिक ज़रूरत है। बढ़े हुए वित्तीय बोझ के कारण राज्य सरकारें खर्च कम करने की नीति अपनाने पर मजबूर होंगी और मज़दूरों की काम की माँग को दर्ज ही नहीं करेंगी।

60 दिनों तक काम बंद रखने का प्रावधान

जीवन के अधिकार का उल्लंघन: नए क़ानून के मुताबिक अब एक साल में 60 दिनों तक काम बंद/स्थगित रहेगा। यह ग़रीबों के जीवन एवं आजीविका के अधिकार का स्पष्ट उल्लंघन है। बेरोज़गारी, महँगाई और ग्रामीण संकट के समय में इस तरह का प्रावधान योजना के मूल उद्देश्य को

निष्प्रभावी कर देगा तथा लाखों परिवारों को भुखमरी की ओर धकेलने वाला सिद्ध होगा।

कैसे रोज़गार दिया जाएगा, यह तय करना - मज़दूरी की गारंटी के खिलाफ़

मनरेगा काम का एक कानूनी अधिकार स्थापित करता है, जो माँग-आधारित और सार्वभौमिक है - "जिस भी व्यक्ति को काम की आवश्यकता है, उसे माँग के आधार पर रोज़गार उपलब्ध कराना।" नए क़ानून में केंद्र सरकार उन क्षेत्रों का चयन करेगी, जहाँ इस क़ानून के तहत काम दिया जाएगा। यह भेदभावपूर्ण है तथा संविधान के अनुच्छेद 14 एवं 16 के विरुद्ध है। यह केंद्र को अत्यधिक शक्ति भी प्रदान करता है। रोज़गार का अधिकार आवश्यकता के आधार पर होना चाहिए, न कि प्रशासनिक या राजनीतिक चयन के आधार पर।

ठेकेदारी को बढ़ावा

मनरेगा में ठेकेदारों और बड़ी मशीनों पर पूरी तरह से रोक



लग

ी थी, पर नए ग्राम-जी क़ानून में क़ानून के भीतर ही ठेकेदारों को जगह दे दी गई है, जिससे बड़े पैमाने पर ठेकेदारी पर काम होने की संभावना बढ़ गई है। काम को पीएम गति शक्ति के तहत बड़ी योजनाओं की ओर मोड़ा जा रहा है, जिससे ठेकेदारों और पूँजीपतियों को फ़ायदा होगा।

ग्राम पंचायत की स्वतंत्रता और शक्ति को कमज़ोर करना

मनरेगा क़ानून में ग्राम पंचायत को बहुत अधिकार दिए गए

हैं। कौन-सा काम होगा, यह ग्राम सभा द्वारा तय किया जाता है और उसी के अनुसार काम होता है। नए क़ानून में ग्राम सभा द्वारा पारित कार्य ग्रामीण इंफ़्रास्ट्रक्चर स्टैक में शामिल किया जाएगा और उसी स्टैक के हिसाब से काम खोले जाएंगे। इस स्टैक में अन्य विभागों का भी दखल होगा, जिससे कौन-सा काम किया जाए - इसकी स्वतंत्रता ग्राम पंचायत की नहीं रहेगी। राज्य सरकार तय करेगी कि कौन-से 60 दिन काम बंद होंगे, न कि ग्राम पंचायत। इस तरह ग्राम पंचायत के अधिकारों को सीमित किया गया है।

मनरेगा को हटा कर यह नया क़ानून वही सरकार लाई है, जिसके शीर्ष नेता श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी ने दस साल पहले (वर्ष 2015) लोक सभा में अपने भाषण में कहा था - "मैं लगातार यह चर्चा सुनता रहता हूँ कि सरकार मनरेगा को ख़त्म करने की योजना बना रही है, या पहले ही ऐसा कर चुकी है। मेरी राजनीतिक समझ मुझसे कहती है कि मनरेगा को कभी ख़त्म मत करो, क्योंकि मनरेगा आपकी असफलताओं का जीवंत स्मारक है। और मैं गाजे-बाजे के साथ इसका ढोल पीटता रहूँगा। मनरेगा रहेगा, आन-बान-शान से रहेगा और गाजे-बाजे के साथ दुनिया को बताया जाएगा।"

फिर मोदी जी को किस मजबूरी या किस दबाव में यह बदलाव लाना पड़ा? क्या वे भूल गए कि उन्होंने दस साल पहले क्या कहा था? या फिर जिन कॉर्पोरेट घरानों से उनकी नज़दीकियाँ हैं, उनके लिए अब इस तरह के 'काम के अधिकार' की बात स्वीकार्य नहीं रही - क्योंकि इसमें उनके मुनाफ़े का कोई इज़ाफ़ा नहीं होता? उन्हें तो चाहिए सस्ते दर पर मज़दूर!

कारण जो भी हो, यह साफ़ है कि एक जनपक्षीय क़ानून को हटाने के पीछे सरकार की जन-विरोधी मंशा साफ़ दिखाई देती है। और जो आज मनरेगा के साथ हुआ है, वह हमने पहले भी देखा है - जब इस सरकार ने CAA लाया, किसान-संबंधित क़ानून लाए और अब चार लेबर कोड लाए। हर बार सरकार को कड़े संघर्ष का सामना करना पड़ा है, और इस बार भी जन-संघर्ष जारी है। अब देखना यह है कि क्या लोकतंत्र पर विजय होगी, या तंत्र लोग (आम जन) को अपनी सत्ता की ताक़त से रौंद डालेगा।

कामायनी और आशीष जन जागरण शक्ति संगठन-NAPM से जुड़े हैं और कई वर्षों से बिहार में कार्यरत हैं।

मनरेगा: रोज़गार नहीं, हक़ की लड़ाई

ऋचा और सुरबाला

हम दोनों साथ बैठे हुए थे और यही सोच रहे थे कि इस अनुभव को कैसे कहा जाए। हम वही कह सकते हैं जो हमने जिया है, देखा है, और महसूस किया है। और सच कहें तो मनरेगा हमारे लिए सिर्फ़ रोज़गार की एक योजना नहीं रहा। वह उससे कहीं आगे चला गया। उसने लोगों की ज़िंदगी को, खासकर महिलाओं की ज़िंदगी को, गहरे स्तर पर छुआ। उसने सोच बदली, रिश्ते बदले, और सत्ता से बात करने का तरीका बदला।

मनरेगा ने यह अहसास पैदा किया कि सरकार कोई दूर बैठी हुई चीज़ नहीं है, बल्कि ऐसी व्यवस्था है जिससे सवाल किया जा सकता है, जिससे काम माँगा जा सकता है, और जिसे जवाबदेह ठहराया जा सकता है। बहुत सी महिलाओं और गरीब परिवारों के लिए यह पहला मौका था, जब वे ब्लॉक दफ़्तर गए, अफ़सरो से बात की, काम की माँग रखी, काम क्यों नहीं और समय पर मजदूरी भुगतान क्यों नहीं - इसका जवाब माँगा। यह सब सिर्फ़ काम के लिए नहीं था - यह एक राजनीतिक अनुभव था, जिसमें लोगों ने पहली बार अपनी ताक़त पहचानी।

अगर देखें तो महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण पर काम नया नहीं है। 70-80 के दशक से ही महिलाओं को संगठित करने, उन्हें बोलने, सोचने और अपने जीवन को लेकर फ़ैसले लेने की प्रक्रिया चल रही थी। हम खुद 1991 के आसपास इस काम से जुड़े। गाँवों में लोग एकजुट होने लगे, बैठकों का दौर चला, महिलाओं में चेतना आई। लेकिन मनरेगा ने इस पूरे सशक्तिकरण के साथ एक ऐसी चीज़ जोड़ दी, जो बहुत सी दूसरी पहलों में नहीं थी - सीधा और तुरंत आर्थिक सशक्तिकरण।

उत्तर प्रदेश के हमारे अनुभव में, खासकर सीतापुर जैसे इलाक़ों में, मनरेगा के शुरुआती दौर में महिलाओं का काम पर निकलना बिल्कुल आसान नहीं था। कई जगह महिलाओं को काम के स्थलों से भगाया गया। समाज का यह मानना था कि अगर महिला घर में काम करे तो ठीक है, लेकिन अगर वह तालाब खोदने जाए, चकरोड काटे, मिट्टी ढोए - तो यह उसके और उसके परिवार के "सम्मान" के खिलाफ़ है। यह सम्मान भले "झूठा" था, लेकिन समाज में उसकी पकड़ बहुत

मज़बूत थी।

एक डर यह भी था कि अगर महिलाएँ बराबर काम करेंगी और बराबर मज़दूरी पाएँगी, तो खेतों में भी उन्हें बराबर मज़दूरी देनी पड़ेगी। दूसरा डर यह कि अगर उनके हाथ में पैसा आ गया, तो वे ज़्यादा बोलेंगी, सवाल करेंगी। इसलिए महिलाओं को बाहर निकलने से रोकने की पूरी कोशिश की गई।

लेकिन हालात बदल रहे थे। ग्लोबलाइज़ेशन के दौर में महँगाई बढ़ रही थी, ज़रूरतें बढ़ रही थीं, संयुक्त परिवार टूट रहे थे, खेती की जोत छोटी होती जा रही थी। खेती से अब घर नहीं चल पा रहा था। ऐसे में मनरेगा ने एक दरवाज़ा खोला। हर जगह नहीं, लेकिन जहाँ-जहाँ लोग थोड़ा भी संगठित हो पाए, वहाँ यह सवाल उठा - क्या चोरी करके, उधार लेकर, अपमान सहकर जीना बेहतर है, या फिर खुलेआम मेहनत करके, तालाब खोदकर, सड़क बनाकर रोज़ी कमाना?

महिलाओं ने खुद कहा - हम चोरी नहीं कर रहे, हम मेहनत कर रहे हैं। और जैसे-जैसे यह उदाहरण बनता गया, वैचारिक सशक्तिकरण और आर्थिक सशक्तिकरण साथ-साथ चलने लगे। यह कोई चमकदार सशक्तिकरण नहीं था, बल्कि बहुत ज़मीनी, बराबरी वाला सशक्तिकरण था। आज भी कई जगह यह कमजोर है, लेकिन जहाँ यह जुड़ पाया, वहाँ महिलाओं की ज़िंदगी सचमुच बदली।

इसके साथ गाँव और प्रशासन के रिश्ते भी बदले। पहले योजनाओं के नाम पर लोग हाथ जोड़ते थे। यह सदियों पुरानी आदत थी - साहब के सामने हाथ जोड़ो, शायद कुछ मिल जाए। मनरेगा ने पहली बार यह एहसास दिया कि हम अधिकार से माँग सकते हैं, हम सवाल कर सकते हैं। हालाँकि यह भी सच है कि कई जगह मनरेगा को प्रधान की योजना बना दिया गया - लोग कहने लगे कि प्रधान अच्छा नहीं है, इसलिए योजना नहीं चल रही।

लेकिन जहाँ लोग थोड़ा भी संगठित हुए, वहाँ अचानक यह समझ बनी कि हम प्रधान से, सचिव से, रोजगार सेवक से बात कर सकते हैं। शिकायत कर सकते हैं। आरटीआई और दूसरी प्रक्रियाओं का भी योगदान रहा, लेकिन मनरेगा ने मज़दूरों और महिलाओं को एक जबरदस्त ताक़त दी। पहले जिन अधिकारियों के स्वागत में गाँव सजता था, वही अधिकारी अब गाँव वालों से पूछने लगे - काम कहाँ होना चाहिए? कौन सा रास्ता ठीक रहेगा? तालाब कहाँ बने?

मनरेगा ने यह अहसास पैदा किया कि सरकार कोई दूर बैठी हुई चीज़ नहीं है, बल्कि ऐसी व्यवस्था है जिससे सवाल किया जा सकता है, जिससे काम माँगा जा सकता है, और जिसे जवाबदेह ठहराया जा सकता है। बहुत सी महिलाओं और ग़रीब परिवारों के लिए यह पहला मौका था, जब वे ब्लॉक दफ़्तर गए, अफ़सरो से बात की, काम की माँग रखी, काम क्यों नहीं और समय पर मज़दूरी भुगतान क्यों नहीं - इसका जवाब माँगा। यह सब सिर्फ़ काम के लिए नहीं था - यह एक राजनीतिक अनुभव था, जिसमें लोगों ने पहली बार अपनी ताक़त पहचानी।

इससे लोगों को यह एहसास हुआ कि यह उनका गाँव है, उनकी योजना है। वे नक़शा देखते, अनुमान समझते, सवाल पूछते। डर कम हुआ, नज़दीकी बढ़ी। योजना बनाने का हक़ धीरे-धीरे लोगों के हाथ में आने लगा।

हम अपने इलाके का एक उदाहरण देते हैं - एक दलित गाँव है जहाँ 60-70 के दशक में उन्हें सरकारी पट्टे मिले थे, लेकिन ज़मीन ऐसी थी - नदी किनारे, बलुई, झाड़-झंखाड़ से भरी - कि कागज़ में ज़मीन थी, हक़ीक़त में खेती नहीं थी। मनरेगा के ज़रिये वहाँ ज़मीन का समतलीकरण हुआ। आज उसी ज़मीन पर गेहूँ की फसल है -

कमज़ोर सही, लेकिन फसल है।

पहले जब अनाज नहीं होता था, तो लोग मजबूर होकर दूसरों से उधार लेते थे - एक क्विटल लेकर डेढ़ क्विटल लौटाते थे। यह एक तरह की बंधुआ मज़दूरी थी। जैसे ही मनरेगा से ज़मीन ठीक हुई, अनाज आया, यह सिलसिला टूटा। आज वही लोग कहते हैं - आज हम अपना बोएँगे, कल तुम्हारा बो देंगे। यह बदलाव सिर्फ़ रोजगार का नहीं, रिश्तों का भी था।

इसी के साथ गाँव की सत्ता संरचना भी बदली। पहले प्रधान, सचिव - ज़्यादातर ताक़तवर जातियों से होते थे। मनरेगा ने

पहली बार कमज़ोर तबकों के हाथ में भी ताक़त दी। दलित प्रधान बने, दलित महिलाओं ने सवाल उठाए। इससे गाँव का समाजीकरण बदला - धीरे, लेकिन गहराई से।

हमारे लिए मनरेगा सिर्फ़ काम का कानून नहीं था। यह लोगों को यह सिखाने वाला अनुभव था कि अधिकार माँगे जाते हैं, कि संगठन से ताक़त आती है, कि पैसा सिर्फ़ पेट नहीं भरता - वह इंसान को थोड़ा मज़बूत भी बनाता है। आज जब इस क़ानून को कमज़ोर किया जा रहा है या ख़त्म किया जा रहा है, तो सिर्फ़ रोज़गार नहीं छीना जा रहा। वह पूरा राजनीतिक अनुभव, वह आत्मविश्वास, वह सामूहिक ताक़त भी छीनी जा रही है। लेकिन यह भी सच है कि इस प्रक्रिया में लोगों ने यह सीख लिया है कि संगठित होकर बोलना ही रास्ता है। यह सीख आसानी से मिटने वाली नहीं है।

ऋचा और सुरबाला संगतिन किसान मज़दूर संगठन-
NAPM से संबद्ध हैं और सीतापुर, उत्तर प्रदेश में दशकों से सक्रिय हैं।

मनरेगा: रोजगार से कहीं ज्यादा, आजादी का एक अनुभव

सुरेश राठौर

मनरेगा केवल रोजगार उपलब्ध कराने वाला कानून नहीं था। यह ग्रामीण भारत में रहने वाली महिलाओं के जीवन में आजादी और आत्मसम्मान लेकर आया। हमारे जैसे लोग, जो जमीनी स्तर पर महिलाओं के साथ काम करते हैं, उनके लिए मनरेगा किसी वरदान से कम नहीं रहा। मनरेगा से जुड़ी महिलाओं को संगठित करना अपेक्षाकृत आसान था क्योंकि इस कानून ने उन्हें न केवल काम दिया, बल्कि सार्वजनिक जीवन में खड़े होने का हौसला भी दिया।

मनरेगा कानून आने से पहले, खासकर उन इलाकों में जहां मनरेगा मज़दूर यूनियन काम करता है, महिलाओं का घर से बाहर निकलना आसान नहीं था। बैंक जाना, ब्लॉक या जिला कार्यालय तक पहुँचना, यह सब लगभग असंभव जैसा था। मनरेगा ने महिलाओं को घर से निकलना सिखाया। महिलाएं बैंक तक पहुँचीं, ब्लॉक और जिला कार्यालयों में जाकर अपनी बात रख सकीं। जरूरत पड़ने पर काम के दिनों की संख्या बढ़ाने और मजदूरी दर बढ़ाने की मांग को लेकर राज्य और केंद्र सरकार तक अपनी आवाज़ पहुँचा सकीं।

शुरुआती दौर में मनरेगा ने पलायन को भी रोका, लेकिन जैसा अक्सर सरकारी योजनाओं के साथ होता है वही हाल धीरे-धीरे मनरेगा का भी किया गया। रोज-रोज के तकनीकी बदलावों, ऑनलाइन प्रक्रियाओं और प्रशासनिक अड़चनों के कारण लोगों को काम मिलने में दिक्कतें बढ़ती गईं। नतीजा यह हुआ कि लोग मनरेगा से धीरे-धीरे दूर होने लगे।

हमें वह दौर भी याद रखना चाहिए जब कोरोना संकट के समय लोगों को घरों में बैठने के लिए मजबूर कर दिया गया था। उस समय मनरेगा ने न केवल लोगों को काम दिया, बल्कि उनके परिवारों का सहारा भी बना। लोग यह समझकर काम मांगते थे कि मनरेगा एक कानून है। काम नहीं मिला, तो बेरोजगारी भत्ते की मांग करते थे। पहली बार लोगों को यह अहसास हुआ था कि सरकार उनकी बात मानने के लिए बाध्य है।

इससे पहले यही लोग जब किसी काम से ब्लॉक कार्यालय

जाते थे, तो कर्मचारी उनसे ढंग से बात तक नहीं करते थे, लेकिन मनरेगा से जुड़ी महिलाएं जब जाती थीं तो वही कर्मचारी उनसे सम्मान से बात करने को मजबूर होते थे क्योंकि उनके हाथ में कानून था और उस कानून से जुड़ा संगठन खड़ा था। मनरेगा के तहत काम मिलने से महिलाओं के हाथ में पैसा आया जिसे उन्होंने स्थानीय बाजारों में अपनी जरूरतों के लिए खर्च किया। इससे स्थानीय अर्थव्यवस्था भी मजबूत हुई।

यह कानून 2005 में जब संसद से पास हुआ और 2006 में पहले 200 जिलों में, फिर 2008 में पूरे देश में लागू हुआ, उसके बाद आम चुनाव हुए और यूपीए दूसरी बार सत्ता में आई। इसका सीधा अर्थ यह था कि लोगों ने मनरेगा से मिलने वाले रोजगार को देखकर सरकार चुनी। इसके बाद से आज तक हम देखते हैं कि किस तरह पार्टियां चुनाव जीतने के लिए लोगों को बरगलाती रही हैं, लेकिन मनरेगा जैसे ठोस कानूनों को धीरे-धीरे कमजोर करती चली गई।

यह कहना ग़लत होगा कि मनरेगा में खामियां नहीं थीं, लेकिन इन्हीं खामियों ने हम जैसे संगठनों को खड़ा होने का अवसर दिया। शुरुआत में जॉब कार्ड बनवाना ही एक संघर्ष था। कर्मचारियों का मानना था कि अगर सबका जॉब कार्ड बन गया तो काम कैसे देंगे। अपने लोगों का कार्ड बन जाता था, बाकी लोगों को रोज चक्कर लगवाए जाते थे। जॉब कार्ड बनने के बाद काम के लिए महीनों इंतजार। लोगों को यह भी नहीं पता था कि मनरेगा में काम मांगने पर ही काम मिलता है। किसी तरह काम मिल भी गया, तो मजदूरी मिलने में समस्या। काम के दौरान रोजगार सहायक द्वारा जरूरत से ज्यादा काम करवाना- इन तमाम शिकायतों ने संगठनों को मजबूत करने में बड़ी भूमिका निभाई।

मुझे याद है, एक बार दिवाली के समय मजदूरों की मजदूरी उनके खाते में नहीं आई। मनरेगा मजदूर यूनियन ने "घेरा डालो, डेरा डालो" के तहत तीन दिनों तक ब्लॉक कार्यालय का घेराव किया। उसके बाद मजदूरों की मजदूरी तुरंत खातों में डाली गई। संगठन की ताकत के बल पर हमने दर्जनों बार ब्लॉक की तालाबंदी कर मजदूरों के लिए काम और मजदूरी हासिल की।

मनरेगा में सामाजिक अंकेक्षण का प्रावधान भी था, जो स्थानीय हाथों में था। शुरू में जब सोशल ऑडिट होता था तो

कर्मचारी डरते थे, लेकिन समय के साथ यह व्यवस्था कमजोर होती गई और मनरेगा, जो लोगों के लिए खुशियां लेकर आया था, उसे भी भ्रष्टाचार का अड्डा बना दिया गया। फिर भी लोगों ने यह सीख लिया था कि सरकार से कैसे, किस मुद्दे पर और किस तरह लड़ना है। इसलिए लोग बार-बार अपने अधिकारों के लिए आवाज उठाते रहे हैं और आगे भी उठाते रहेंगे।

मनरेगा कानून के खत्म होने से निश्चित रूप से मजदूरों के काम के अधिकार की गारंटी समाप्त हो गई है, लेकिन एक जन संगठन के रूप में हम मजदूरों के अधिकारों के लिए संघर्ष करते रहेंगे। मनरेगा भी मजदूरों को उनका पूरा हक दिलाने में पूरी तरह सफल नहीं हो पाया था, लेकिन मजदूरों को यह समझ आ गया है कि संगठित होकर आवाज उठाने से ही उनकी बात सुनी जाएगी। हमें भरोसा है कि अब संगठन की जिम्मेदारी और बढ़ गई है, जिसे हमारे युवा साथी पूरी गंभीरता के साथ निभाएंगे।

नए श्रम क़ानून हों या यह नया रोजगार क़ानून- दोनों ही पूँजीपतियों को फ़ायदा पहुँचाने के लिए लाए गए हैं। मनरेगा रहने के कारण मजदूर लगातार मजदूरी बढ़ाने की मांग कर रहे थे। कई इलाकों में साल के सौ दिन का काम भी मिल जाता था, जिससे पलायन कम होता था। इससे कंपनियों को सस्ते मजदूर मिलने में परेशानी हो रही थी। इसलिए सरकार ने लोगों के हाथ से काम के अधिकार को ही छीन लिया। अब लोग मजदूरी में कंपनियों की ओर जाएंगे, जहां उन्हें औने-पौने दामों पर रखा जाएगा और वे मालिकों की शर्तों पर काम करने को मजबूर होंगे।

इन क़ानूनों के बाद मजदूरों का सरकार से विश्वास टूटना स्वाभाविक है। यही टूटा हुआ विश्वास आने वाले समय में एक बड़े मजदूर आंदोलन में बदलेगा- हमें इस पर पूरा भरोसा है।

सुरेश राठौर, मनरेगा मजदूर यूनियन-NAPM से सम्बद्ध हैं और वाराणसी और उसके आस पास के क्षेत्र में सक्रिय हैं।

Bulldozing Bengaluru's poor

Ritash

“Many of us have been living here for over 20 years. We have government identification documents issued in Karnataka. Most adults and children here speak Kannada, Telugu and Hindi while hardly anyone here knows Bengali. How can they say that we are unlawful migrants from Bangladesh?,” asked Salman, a 33-year old resident of Bande Road, Fakir Colony situated in Kogilu Layout, a suburb of north Bangalore.

This is an area housing around 750-1000 persons that was bulldozed on a cold winter morning in December 2025. Almost all the residents are socio-economically marginalized persons and belong to the Fakir community, who largely survive by seeking alms and have minimal possessions. “Suppose we hail from Bangladesh, we would need money to obtain visas and tickets to travel to and fro. If we can afford all that, why would we live here?,” questioned Mehboob, a 45-year old, also from Fakir Colony.

“Before the break of dawn, on 20th December 2025, multiple bulldozers accompanied by over 200 police personnel arrived here and asked us to vacate our homes immediately. Then our houses, many of which are small, were mercilessly and quickly razed to the ground. We had no way of going anywhere all of a sudden especially when it was cold and dark,” observed 64-year old Baba Khader Pasha, a Fakir Colony resident and a respected elder of this closely knit community.

Apart from destroying people's homes, the bulldozing also irredeemably and inhumanly damaged some of the vital movement aids of persons having disabilities as well as their furniture, storage items et al. In addition to this, the destruction also introduced dust and dangerously sharp pieces of stone, wood, glass, metal, ceramic, plastic and other hazardous materials into the surroundings of the residents. This makes it unsafe especially for children and elders to move around. Further, most girls and women are confronted with an absence of basic privacy and safety.

Silent testimonials

While showing the local 2-acre burial ground with its well maintained gate and boundary wall, Salman said, “We have no place to live at present, but the resting space for our mortal remains and souls is intact”. The bitter irony of this fact was not lost on anyone. In fact, the local English, Urdu and Kannada schools also remain intact but the children are absent as many of them are unwell after the demolition owing to exposure to dust and rubble. Various ministers, politicians and MLAs who visited prior to and after the demolition completed, promised houses to the affected community but none of that has materialised till now.

Incidentally, nearby colonies populated by persons of other religions seem undisturbed. This reveals the outrageous, dangerous, unacceptable and increasingly widespread anti-Muslim rhetoric (or Islamophobia as it is termed in many other parts of the world) - even in areas of the country that are presumed to be more tolerant (although not necessarily accepting) towards religious minorities.

[C]overt Islamophobia

It is sad but partly unsurprising that the exaggerated sentiment of the existence of “Bangladeshi infiltration” continues to prevail in Karnataka - a state where the Indian National Congress (INC) returned to form the government with a majority in 2023. While it is well known that the INC has historically been considered a party that supports all minorities especially as a political strategy, I say “unsurprising” because the undercurrents of Sanghi loyalties have been felt in Karnataka even if the BJP is not in power. Another widely known fact is that Karnataka has been the hotbed of Sanghi supporters in southern India for more than two decades now. Of course, labelling someone as an “unlawful Bangladeshi migrant” has become a common euphemism for the wider and deeper anti-Muslim attitudes that now exist openly across the country. Actually, this shameful reality aligns with a broader Hindutva political discourse that is obvious throughout India except probably in small pockets of the north east and the south, irrespective of which party is in power. Further, the migration of working class persons from West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh to urban spaces in the south for livelihood has been one of the reasons that

the narrative of the “illegal Bangladeshi infiltrator” has spread.

There’s also an important but usual political dynamic at play locally in Bengaluru (and definitely elsewhere) - with the opposition criticising the governing party and vice versa after demolition drives like the one undertaken at Fakir Colony. And as always, the working class and other marginalized communities are caught in the crossfire going by the evidence of almost all the demolitions that have taken place periodically over the last ten years and longer in Bangalore. In fact, more than a decade ago, on a windy and chilly Saturday afternoon in January, over 1200 designated Economically Weaker Section (EWS) houses were demolished in Ejipura in south central Bangalore (to build yet another mall apparently owned by a family member of a former top ranking police officer of Karnataka). At that time, local residents and supportive activists were injured and around 22 of them were detained by the police for over 24 hours. Till date, some of the Ejipura EWS residents have still not been satisfactorily rehabilitated by any of the governments that have been in power in Karnataka.

Sadly, the lives of the poor are tragically disposable although they are the ones who relentlessly subsidise and safeguard the lifestyles of the wealthy whose greed and gumption is boundless. Needless to add, it is rightly believed that keeping the vulnerable on tenterhooks serves the interests of many. Therefore, this demolition isn’t an isolated incident in Bengaluru. Around 3 weeks after the bulldozing of Fakir Colony, houses were demolished in Saraipalya near Thanisandra despite the locals producing identification and ownership documents. As always, diverse human rights defenders and organisations stepped in to provide immediate relief to the survivors of the brazen bulldozing and are campaigning for their rehabilitation and justice. Nevertheless, this may not be the last of such unjust actions despite the government stating otherwise.

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RIGHTS AND REPRESSION

Reading Against the Grain

Prof. Janaki Nair

As a modern Indian historian, I am accustomed to reading the records produced by the colonial state ‘against the grain’. This means reading them for purposes they were not intended to serve. This means retrieving, from the condemnations and indictments of the colonial record, some sense of the persons who would, in our times, be seen as the heroes of the independence we enjoy, the liberties we take for granted. This is as true of the peasants of 1830s Mysore who rose in rebellion, as it is for those who took part in declaring freedom from British rule in 1942, in a small village of Issur, also in Mysore. They all paid the price so that we might be free.

So it is the historian in me that hopes that the Supreme Court’s decision to deny bail to both Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid as a document will be read ‘against the grain’ perhaps in the not too distant future. One must today divorce hope from reason in order to this. Such an action is vital to our sanity today.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be in the Delhi region in late 2019 early 2020, such as myself, were able to witness, if not participate, in one of independent India’s most creative, sustained, non-violent and therefore powerful movements against the Indian state’s intention to restrict definitions of a hard-won citizenship. The movement brought onto the streets, quite literally, large numbers of Muslim women who had rarely participated in public political life, and who sustained their movement for weeks, with little or no overt political support.

Is it any wonder that young people were mesmerized by the hopes of that moment, that site, which experimented with new styles and repertoires of protest and communication? Is it any wonder that Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid, given their interest in historical research and their political awareness, were drawn to the movement, like many of their age and background?

Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid were no bomb-throwing revolutionaries. I taught both of them, and they impressed me with their intelligence, diligence

and capacity for thinking differently. I did not always agree with the ideas they had. I was often irritated by their style of learning, which bordered on the irreverent. But like most JNU (and CHS) students, they were passionately attached to argument, driven by the elemental hunger to read, write, argue, and speak boldly, sometimes even giddily, of many things that had come into their grasp.

JNU's mission was to provide that intellectual space where the young could take the risks of thinking, arguing, and arriving at conclusions, even dreams that may remain unrealized. This happened not only in our classrooms, and seminars, but in our canteens, messes, open spaces, and in the wonderful 'philosophy of the night' that went on into the wee hours in all our hostels, night after night.

Can we fault Sharjeel, Umar, Natasha, or Devangana for dreaming of a better world than the one our generation had left him? Many students from CHS were similarly gripped by the desire to build a new future. Our students enjoyed and appreciated the chance of framing questions, reading sources, and assessing ideas on their own. Some of these were harebrained, some shot through with brilliance. But CHS/JNU fostered spaces where these, and other contrary, ideas could be tried out, adopted, defeated in argument, or abandoned, without fear of reprisal.

Instead, Sharjeel and Umar have been incarcerated for five-plus-one more years of the most creative, productive years of their lives - all because of words they chose to use in public.

In this 75th year of our Republic, we must commemorate figures like Sharjeel and Umar who are paying a heavy price for their speech acts, ideas. We must never forget that legions of others, who openly called for violence against other Indians, continue to enjoy their freedoms today, and even occupy public office - because they have the right names, and have the right political patrons.

We have become acutely aware of the contradictions that BR Ambedkar had warned us about. He had known that democracy was just top dressing in India. He knew that violent contradictions would erupt when the social structure of our inherently

hierarchical, unjust society, undermined the Republic's hard-won political freedoms and liberties.

As the insightful literary scholar, Rahamat Tarikere, has pointed out, India has a long history of producing some of the loftiest ideas, whether religious or not, but our social practice has never matched these ideals. What chance of a less inequitable world – I hesitate to use the more decisive 'just' and 'equal' - when the very people who are capable of dreaming that possibility, our young, are forced into a form of social death?

But I am confident that Sharjeel and Umar will emerge from these trials with all their ideals intact. In fact, I am sure that even behind those prison walls, they think, read, dream, and survive, perhaps even transforming the oppressive space to which they have been condemned. Here I can do no more than cite the brilliant words of Mahmoud Dervish, the Palestinian poet:

It is possible
 It is possible, at least sometimes
 It is possible especially now
 To ride a horse
 Inside a prison cell
 And run away....
 It is possible for prison walls
 To disappear,
 For the cell to become a distant land
 Without frontiers
 What did you do with the walls?
 I gave them back to the rocks.
 And what did you do with the ceiling?
 I turned it into a saddle.
 And your chain?
 I turned it into a pencil.
 The prison guard got angry.
 He put an end to my dialogue.
 He said he didn't care for poetry,
 And bolted the door of my cell.
 He came back to see me
 In the morning,
 He shouted at me.
 Where did all this water come from?
 I brought it from the Nile
 And the trees?
 From the orchards of Damascus
 And the music?

From my heartbeat
The prison guard got mad;
He put an end to my dialogue.
He said he didn't like my poetry,
And bolted the board of my cell.
But he returned in the evening:
Where did this moon come from?
From the nights of Baghdad.
And the wine?
From the vineyards of Algiers.
And this freedom?
From the chain you tied me with last night,
The prison guard grew so sad...
He begged me to give him back his freedom.

Be with us again, in freedom, Sharjeel and Umar.

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Bail, Conspiracy, and the Architecture of Pre-Trial Punishment

Mol Correspondent

The Supreme Court's 5 January decision in the Delhi riots "larger conspiracy" case offers relief and unease in equal measure. Five accused - Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa-ur-Rehman, Mohd. Saleem Khan and Shadab Ahmad - have been granted bail after years of incarceration. At the same time, the Court rejected the bail pleas of Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, reaffirming a legal framework that treats prolonged pre-trial detention as compatible with constitutional norms under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

What emerges from the judgement is a dangerous precedent which reaffirms the declining protection of rights and life, and how the law is continually expanding the understanding of conspiracy, dissent, and liberty.

At the heart of the Court's reasoning lies Section 43D(5) of the UAPA, a provision that erects a high statutory barrier to bail if the accusations are found to be "prima facie true". The Bench underscored that delay and long incarceration do not automatically override this embargo. Even years spent as an undertrial, the Court held, do not operate as a "trump card". Instead, courts must ask whether detention has crossed the threshold of "constitutional impermissibility", assessed against the nature of allegations and the prosecution's narrative.

This formulation has profound consequences. It reframes incarceration not as an exception awaiting trial, but as a condition that can persist indefinitely, so long as the prosecution's story remains internally coherent and untested.

The Elasticity of Conspiracy

The judgement's treatment of Umar Khalid is especially revealing. The Court accepts, at the bail stage, a prosecution narrative that places him at the "centre" of a trajectory that allegedly moved from protest mobilisation to terrorist violence. Meetings, speeches, WhatsApp groups, and calls for chakka jams are read together as components of a single, unfolding

design.

The Court explicitly rejects arguments that Khalid's absence from riot sites, his opposition to violence, or the lack of recoveries dilute the allegation of conspiracy. A conspirator, the judgement reasons, may publicly invoke non-violence while covertly engineering escalation. Questions of protected speech, political intent, or evidentiary reliability are deferred to trial - a trial that remains distant.

Bail is granted, but under an architecture of control: restrictions on movement, speech, association, electronic communication, and political participation. The accused may step out of prison, but they remain tightly regulated subjects. Freedom is restored partially, provisionally, and revocably.

In doing so, the Court entrenches an expansive conception of conspiracy, one in which political strategy, protest coordination, and rhetorical leadership can be retrospectively woven into a criminal design. The danger is not only individual to Khalid or Imam, but structural: dissent is being extrapolated to the law primarily as latent violence.

Differentiated Roles, Conditional Liberty

Yet the same judgement also draws distinctions within the prosecution's own narrative. In granting bail to Gulfisha Fatima and others, the Court acknowledges a hierarchy of roles. Fatima is described as an "executory" actor - involved in mobilisation and local coordination, but not vested with strategic command over the alleged conspiracy.

This distinction allows the Court to invoke parity with

co-accused such as Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal, who were earlier granted bail on similar allegations. It is not that the Court rejects the prosecution's story; rather, it accepts it in full and then differentiates degrees of agency within it.

The result is a form of conditional liberty. Bail is granted, but under an architecture of control: restrictions on movement, speech, association, electronic communication, and political participation. The accused may step out of prison, but they remain tightly regulated subjects. Freedom is restored partially, provisionally, and revocably.

As the Campaign to Free Gulfisha Fatima notes, this relief matters deeply. "Bail does not erase what has been endured," the statement observes, but it restores "presence, touch, and the possibility of rest". Years of incarceration without trial have already extracted time and life that cannot be returned.

At the same time, the campaign refuses to celebrate without qualification. The conditions attached to bail underscore that liberty here is not presumed; it is rationed.

Punishment Before Proof

What binds the rejection of bail for some and the grant of bail for others is a shared legal logic and Supreme Court's stamp on it: pre-trial detention is not treated as an aberration, but as a legitimate tool of governance in cases framed under national security.

The Court's refusal to treat prolonged incarceration as inherently unconstitutional normalises what the campaign aptly describes as the "slow violence" of undertrial imprisonment. Delay ceases to be a failure of the system; instead, it becomes something the accused must endure unless it crosses an exceptionally high threshold.

More troubling still is the judgement's treatment of political speech. By holding that speeches, slogans, and protest calls can be read as preparatory steps towards terror - even in the absence of direct violence - the Court affirms a jurisprudence where dissent is persistently shadowed by suspicion.

This is not a marginal doctrinal move. It shapes the future terrain of protest in India. When intent can be inferred from association and articulation, the space for democratic mobilisation contracts sharply.

Relief Without Reckoning

The campaign's statement captures the uneasy coexistence produced by this judgement. Relief and repression sit side by side. Some are freed, while the legal reasoning that justifies prolonged incarceration remains intact. Bail arrives without dismantling the narrative machinery that enabled these prosecutions.

"Relief, here, is conditional," the statement notes. "It is extended without dismantling the ideological premises that keep others incarcerated."

This is the crux of the moment. The question is no longer only who is granted bail, but what conception of justice survives when freedom depends on how closely one can be positioned to or distanced from a prosecutorial story of conspiracy.

Until that framework itself is challenged, bail will remain a fragile concession rather than a recognition of rights. And as long as dissent is treated as a precursor to terror, every release will remain shadowed by those still inside.

Justice, as the campaign reminds us, cannot be measured only by who walks free today, but by whether the law relinquishes its impulse to criminalise politics itself.

INSTITUTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Lok Manch: Reclaiming Democratic Accountability in Mumbai's Slums

Medha Patkar

As Mumbai witnessed municipal elections once again, the city's working-class neighbourhoods, where nearly 60 per cent of its population lives on barely 10 per cent of its land - were reminded of a familiar paradox. While electoral campaigns flood the city with promises, the voices of slum dwellers, informal workers, women, migrants, and the urban poor remain largely absent from formal political debate. It is in this context that the *Lok Manch* was organised in Mumbai by the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan (GBGBA) and the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM).

The *Lok Manch* is not a stand-alone event, nor is it an innovation of the moment. It is a democratic format developed and practised over many years by people's movements across India - particularly in situations where there is no institutionalised system of public debates among candidates. In the absence of structured accountability mechanisms, people's movements have evolved *Lok Manch* as a forum where candidates from all political parties are brought onto a common dais, not under party banners, but under the *tiranga* - national flag, and made to listen to the people's demands, respond publicly, and commit themselves in front of those they seek to represent.

This process has been used effectively by movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, NAPM, and several urban and rural struggles across the country. It shifts the centre of political discourse, from party manifestos to people's lived realities, from abstract promises to concrete commitments.

In Mumbai, the *Lok Manch* was organised by GBGBA Andolan, a movement of slum dwellers that has been active since 2005. The movement represents communities that are monetarily poor but immensely rich in their contribution to the city - through labour, skills, care work, construction, services, transport, sanitation, and the everyday functioning of urban life.

These workers – women, men, youth, children, and the elderly – build the city’s roads, bridges, drains, homes, offices, and markets, yet are forced to live in self-built, precarious settlements without secure housing, basic services, or legal recognition.



testimony to resilience, collective struggle, and the refusal to surrender constitutional rights.

In this Lok Manch, candidates from the Congress, BJP, and the Shiv Sena (Thackeray group), along

Mumbai, often described as India’s financial capital, is also one of the starkest sites of inequality. The city’s development plans consistently ignore the constitutional promise of equity and justice. Despite clear provisions under the Municipal Acts and Articles 243 and 244 of the Constitution that mandate participatory planning and decentralised governance, slum communities are excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

Over the years, Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan has raised fundamental questions around the *right to life*, which includes the right to housing, water, sanitation, electricity, education, health care, livelihood, and social security. Through sustained mass mobilisation, legal interventions, and people’s politics beyond party lines, the movement has challenged brutal evictions, arbitrary cut-off dates, builder-driven redevelopment models, and the prioritisation of profit over people. It has consistently asserted that those who build the city cannot be rendered homeless in the process of so-called development.

The *Lok Manch* held in Ambujwadi – a large slum settlement that has faced repeated demolitions and continues to struggle for in-situ rehabilitation – became a powerful expression of this people’s politics when it was demolished in 2005. Ambujwadi today houses over 10,000 families with shops, livelihoods, and community networks, despite facing renewed demolition threats as recently as 2024. It stands as a

with elected representatives including an MLA of Congress, shared the dais. Representatives from Ambujwadi and several other slum communities across Mumbai articulated their demands with clarity, emotion, and political vision. Women, elders, youth, and workers spoke not as beneficiaries seeking favours, but as citizens asserting rights.

The memorandum presented to all candidates drew upon years of collective struggle and concrete demands of GBGB Andolan. These included recognition of all slum settlements, protection from evictions without rehabilitation, in-situ housing, access to clean drinking water, sanitation, drainage, electricity, schools, anganwadis, health services, ration shops, livelihood security, and environmental protection. The demands also emphasised democratic accountability – regular *basti sabhas*, transparent governance, action against corruption, and adherence to constitutional guarantees.

All candidates publicly acknowledged the two-decade-long struggle and achievements of the GBGBA movement. They responded affirmatively to the demands, committing themselves to unity beyond caste and religion, addiction-free communities, environmental protection, and the rights of slum dwellers in Mumbai and across Maharashtra. These commitments were made in front of the people – recorded, witnessed, and remembered.

What distinguishes *Lok Manch* from conventional

electoral events is precisely this: it is not about who wins the election, but about ensuring that whoever is elected remains accountable to the people. It reclaims democracy as a continuous process, not a five-year ritual.

As people's movements, our struggle does not end with elections. Our united, non-violent resistance along with constructive work of rebuilding lives and communities will continue. We will remind elected representatives of the promises they made, the rights they acknowledged, and the responsibilities they accepted.

In a time when party politics has become unstable and increasingly detached from people's realities, *Lok Manch* offers a glimpse of another political culture rooted in dialogue, accountability, constitutional values, and collective power. It reminds us that democracy does not belong to political parties alone; it belongs to the people who build, sustain, and imagine the future of this city. The struggle continues. The *Lok Manch* remains open. And the people will continue to speak.

Medha Patkar is with Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan and NAPM.

SIR – A Violation of the Spirit of Universal Suffrage

Arundhati Dhuru and Sandeep Pandey

When India became independent, its people were granted universal suffrage as a fundamental right, thanks to the visionary leaders of the freedom movement. Under foreign rule, only the privileged could vote. After independence, this right was expanded to cover the entire adult population. Before the process of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) began, an effort was made to enrol everyone living in India as a voter. People were encouraged to vote using alternative identity proofs if they did not possess Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC), provided their names were on the rolls. It was assumed that foreigners would not vote unless they had lived in India long enough to acquire Indian citizenship. Hence, everyone who considered themselves an Indian citizen had the right to vote. This was the essence of universal suffrage.

With the arrival of SIR, however, this concept has been disrupted. It is not a mere revision, as its name suggests. It is, in effect, a fresh preparation of voters' lists. The stated purpose of SIR is to remove dead, duplicate, and permanently shifted voters. But in reality, it is eliminating several other categories of people who would have remained on the rolls if a simple revision had been carried out.

Take the case of Uttar Pradesh, which has an adult population of 16.1 crore. The state has just concluded a revision of its voters' list for the upcoming panchayat elections through a door-to-door survey by Booth Level Officers (BLOs), resulting in 12.7 crore voters - this figure covers only rural voters. However, under the SIR process undertaken across the entire state - rural and urban - by the Election Commission of India, enumeration forms were to be filled by 15.4 crore voters whose names appeared on the electoral rolls. Only 12.6 crore forms were returned. This implies that the total number of voters in the entire state after SIR is less than the number of voters listed for rural panchayat elections alone. How does one explain this anomaly? Beyond dead, duplicate, and permanently shifted voters, several other categories of voters failed to return enumeration forms to their BLOs.

Some voters filled their forms online, despite the process being extremely tedious. The voter's mobile number must be linked to their Aadhaar card and EPIC, and the name on both documents must match exactly. One may ask why voters are compelled to disclose their Aadhaar number - an option available in the manual form - but without which the online process cannot proceed. When voters later check the status of their enumeration form on the ECI website, the link often opens a fresh form instead of showing submission status. Those who submitted forms through BLOs and whose forms were uploaded later receive a message stating that their forms have already been submitted. A complaint regarding successfully submitted online forms failing to generate a "form already submitted" message was filed with the Chief Election Commissioner on 18 December 2025. No response was received.

There are also voters who possess valid EPICs but find that checking their EPIC status on the ECI website returns a "no result found" message. It appears that their names have been removed, either accidentally or deliberately. Technically, possession of a valid EPIC should mean their names are on the electoral rolls. The serious question is: why did such voters not receive enumeration forms? Since they did not receive the forms, they could not submit them, and their names are likely to be missing from the draft rolls.

Then there are voters who do not possess EPICs but whose names - or those of their parents or grandparents - appear in the previous SIR list of 2002-03, indicating that they have already met the ECI's citizenship criteria. However, as they did not receive enumeration forms, they too could not submit any, and their names will not appear in the draft rolls.

Another category includes voters whose names were on the current electoral rolls but who were displaced en masse by government-led development projects, such as residents of the former Akbar Nagar in Lucknow. Their BLOs refused to issue enumeration forms, claiming they had permanently shifted to another Vidhan Sabha constituency. The correct procedure would have been to issue enumeration forms and simultaneously get Form 8 filled for change of address. As this was not done, these voters too could

not submit forms and will find their names missing from the draft rolls.

All voters in the above categories, whose names are deleted from the draft voters' list, are now being asked to fill Form 6, which is meant for first-time voters. This form requires an undertaking stating that the applicant's name has never appeared in any electoral roll. In effect, the authorities are asking existing voters to lie. This raises serious doubts about whether genuine voters - possibly close to three crore whose names were eliminated during the SIR process - will ever be able to re-enter the electoral rolls. The most affected will be vulnerable sections of society: the poor, Dalits, tribals, women, and minorities.

It is evident that instead of conducting a simple door-to-door revision, as was done for the panchayat elections, the SIR process of collecting enumeration forms has eliminated around 18 per cent of voters, many of them genuine. A basic question also arises: why were two different methods adopted simultaneously in Uttar Pradesh for revising voters' lists at two levels of elections, resulting in sharply divergent lists for the same adult population? Can there be a more striking example of bureaucratic insolence, inefficiency, and waste of public time and resources - not to mention the toll on BLOs, some of whom lost their lives during this exercise? Does this not violate the very spirit of universal suffrage?

Arundhati Dhuru is with NAPM and Sandeep Pandey is with Socialist Party (India).

In Solidarity with MP Minister, Mr Kailash Vijayvargiya

Anand Mazgaonkar

This satirical piece follows the Indore water contamination tragedy and the public exchange between MP minister Kailash Vijayvargiya and journalists, raising uncomfortable questions about power, media, and accountability.

Indore is supposed to be India's cleanest city – of course, according to Central Government data, and given its track record of transparency, accountability etc. on data matters it must be considered totally reliable. Therefore, any news about water contamination deaths must not find its way into media outlets. What are 13-14 deaths? BJP Governments have brazened out so much more, whether it was demonetisation, Covid tragedy, Oxygen, Farmers' deaths, Dalit rapes, mob lynchings, Ajay Mishra Tennis, Kuldip Sengars, Brij Bhushans et al.

Anurag Dwary, the journalist who insisted on pushing the Minister to answer questions about children's deaths and forcing him to lose his cool is completely at fault. Journalism cannot be about burning issues, poor people's life and death. It ought to be about whether the PM cuts his mangoes or licks them (remember that doyen of journalism, Akshay Kumar? आम काटके खाते हैं या चाट के खाते हैं?) If the offending journalist Anurag forgot Akshay Kumar's shining example he should have at least have been conscious of the fact that he's an employee of Lala Sheth Adani's NDTV. If Anurag Dwary is going to defy post-2014 journalistic norms he better be stripped of his microphone, just as policemen are stripped of their belts wherever they don't have political patronage.

The Nation ought to be told what's happening to journalistic ethics and norms. One day Arnab suddenly turns on the Government on Aravalli and Sengar and Ankita Bhandari. The next day Anurag Dwary is concerned about deaths in Indore? Where is all this headed? Why is it spiraling out of control? Journalists today, Courts tomorrow. And, who knows, Gyanesh Kumar may suddenly discover his spine too! What ideas will that give to M/s Nitish and Naidu?

All journalists who got their journalism degrees before Kangana Ranaut's India achieved independence in 2014 ought to be derecognised and thrown out of their jobs. They can take Smriti Irani's help (remember that Dainik Bhaskar journalist in Amethi?) if they don't know how to do it. Or, why haven't they yet thought of the bright idea of sending a bull dozer to Anurag Dwary's residence. They should just bring themselves to believe that Anurag Dwary is actually Altaf Hussain Dwary. Only those who have a degree in Entire Journalism or Entire Journalistic Science should be given jobs by Godi Media Houses.

Being only a State Minister, poor Vijayvargiya doesn't even have the luxury of engineering distraction, diversion, Balakot, Pulwama etc. If these double-engine governments are unable to take any of the steps listed above they should at least give Mr Kailash Vijayvargiya the same privilege as PM Modi, i.e., no journalist-interface, no press conference etc. If they're unable to do that they should at least give Vijayvargiya Z+ paramilitary protection. And, if the Z+ guys are busy with Modi, Amit Shah and Jay Shah, they should at least give him 3-layer security of Bajrang Dal goons. It ought to be Mr Vijayvargiya's Constitutional right and privilege of equality-before-law that the Modis and Shahs enjoy.

Amen.

Anand Mazgaonkar is with Paryawaran Suraksha Samiti, Gujarat and NAPM

COMMUNALISM AND PEACE

Mobocracy Overtakes Wisdom

Sandeep Pandey and Mir Shahid Saleem

Shri Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, a conglomerate of Hindutva groups, has succeeded in shutting down the MBBS programme of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Katra merely because 42 of the 50 students admitted on the basis of their NEET performance happened to be Muslims. While the interference of Hindutva ideology in more subtle forms has been visible in academic institutions since the Modi government came to power, this is by far the crudest example.

The argument advanced by Hindutva groups - that donations from Mata Vaishno Devi devotees were used to set up the institute and that it therefore hurts donor sentiments if a majority of Muslim students benefit from it - is only partly true. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has clarified that the J&K government allocated around 80 kanals of land to the institute and has provided regular annual grants for its functioning. Last year, it received ₹24 crore, and in the current year ₹28 crore has been allotted by the Union Territory government.

The National Medical Commission, which had approved the institute to offer an MBBS programme barely four months ago, conducted a surprise inspection with just 15 minutes' notice on January 2 and decided to revoke its own approval. This decision appears to have been driven more by pressure from ongoing protests by Hindutva groups than by the farcical inspection report produced thereafter. The students were asked to return home and are to be adjusted against supernumerary seats elsewhere, but faculty members have been left to search for jobs afresh.

As an afterthought, BJP Leader of Opposition in the J&K Assembly, Sunil Kumar Sharma, stated that devotees wanted their donations to be used for the propagation of Sanatana Dharma. It would be interesting to actually ask the donors whether they would prefer their contributions to support a medical institution where their children could study to become doctors, or instead be used to set up a Vedic Research

Centre or Gurukul, as claimed by Sharma.

Hindutva organisations are setting a dangerous precedent. They are effectively arguing that Muslim students cannot study in an institution that has received part of its funding from Hindu devotees. Were these medical students, after becoming doctors, expected to treat only Muslim patients? The next claim might be that Hindu doctors should treat only Hindu patients, and Muslims should seek out Muslim doctors. If one of these Hindutva activists or a member of their family were to need a blood transfusion, would they insist that only blood from a Hindu donor be used? Such arguments can be stretched to ludicrous extremes, especially when these organisations are appeased by the ruling dispensation.

And how does one segregate Hindu and Muslim donations in a mixed society and syncretic culture? That would be an exercise in hair-splitting. Consider the lone Hindu family living in Manjakote tehsil of Rajouri district in J&K. They run a general store, and all their customers are Muslims, as there are no other families in the neighbourhood. Would the income earned from their Muslim clients be categorised as Hindu or Muslim?

Pilgrims travelling to the Vaishno Devi cave shrine themselves depend heavily on Muslim porters, who provide essential services ranging from carrying luggage and people to arranging ponies and palanquins - without whom the 13-km climb would be an arduous task. Imagine if a demand similar to the one recently raised by the Ganga Sabha in Haridwar, seeking to ban non-Hindus from the Kumbh area, were enforced along the Vaishno Devi trek. Devotees would find the journey nearly impossible without the physical and moral support of Muslim porters.

One must also consider the psychological impact this incident will have on the 42 students. They will go on to become doctors from other institutions, but the knowledge that their admission was unacceptable to some purely because of their religion will remain etched in their minds. They will be forced to make an extra-human effort to rise above religious divides in situations that may provoke bias.

What purpose the success of Hindutva groups in

forcing the closure of the institute - clearly with the tacit approval of the RSS–BJP combine - will serve is unclear. One thing, however, is certain: mob culture has acquired legitimacy. In 2019, when Feroze Khan was appointed Assistant Professor in the Sanskrit Vidya Dharma Vijnan department of Banaras Hindu University, students protested, asking how a Muslim could teach Sanskrit. Although religion should not have mattered as long as the professor was competent - and he clearly was, since he secured a position in another department of the same university - students should never have been allowed a say in his appointment. Yet the authorities gave in, following cues from the RSS–BJP. Had the government taken a firm stand, this would not have happened.

In 2024, when police resorted to a lathi charge against Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad-backed student protests at Shri Ramswaroop University in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh, over admissions to an LLB programme despite Bar Council of India recognition having lapsed in 2021, the Yogi Adityanath government responded by suspending four policemen and bulldozing an illegal structure on the university campus to appease the ABVP. What has happened in Jammu is worse: people on the street have decided the fate of an entire institution. We can expect greater interference by the Hindutva brigade in the functioning of academic institutions in the future.

Matters such as institutional recognition, student admissions, curricula, and the appointment of faculty and vice-chancellors may now be decided on the streets. We are drifting towards a Taliban-like model that bars girls from education beyond primary school and removes books by women authors from libraries, as seen in Afghanistan.

Once religion has been weaponised, the next targets will inevitably be caste, gender, and ethnicity. Those opposed to reservation policies - who dominate the RSS - are often heard mockingly asking whether one would want to be treated by a doctor admitted through the reserved category. The doors to professional courses may soon close to SC, ST, and OBC students, with decisions again taken on the streets. Of course, Dalits, Adivasis, and backward communities will protest, but their demonstrations will be crushed. Judges, instead of defending the constitutional rights

of deprived sections, may quietly welcome the dismantling of reservations. Women, too, could be barred from leadership positions; in Iran, for instance, no woman can become President. Here, such decisions may be imposed by Hindutva men on the streets. Spaces like hostels and residential areas could soon be shut to citizens from the Northeast and Kashmir.

We can then bid farewell to wisdom, knowledge, merit, and reason. Examinations, interviews, and selection committees will become redundant. Decisions will be taken in RSS offices and enforced on the streets by Bajrang Dal and ABVP cadres. The rest of society will be expected to fall in line.

Sandeep Pandey is Secretary General and Mir Shahid Saleem is Vice President of Socialist Party (India).

STATE UPDATES

National: SKM Announces Nation Wide Resistance On 16 January

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), at its National Council meeting held at HKS Surjeet Bhawan, New Delhi, on 11 January, issued a strong warning to the NDA government against signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States that would open India's agriculture and dairy sectors to corporate and imperial interests. The Council cautioned that such an agreement would undermine farmers' livelihoods and national food sovereignty, and resolved that any move in this direction would be met with widespread and militant resistance, exceeding even the scale of the historic 2020–21 farmers' movement.

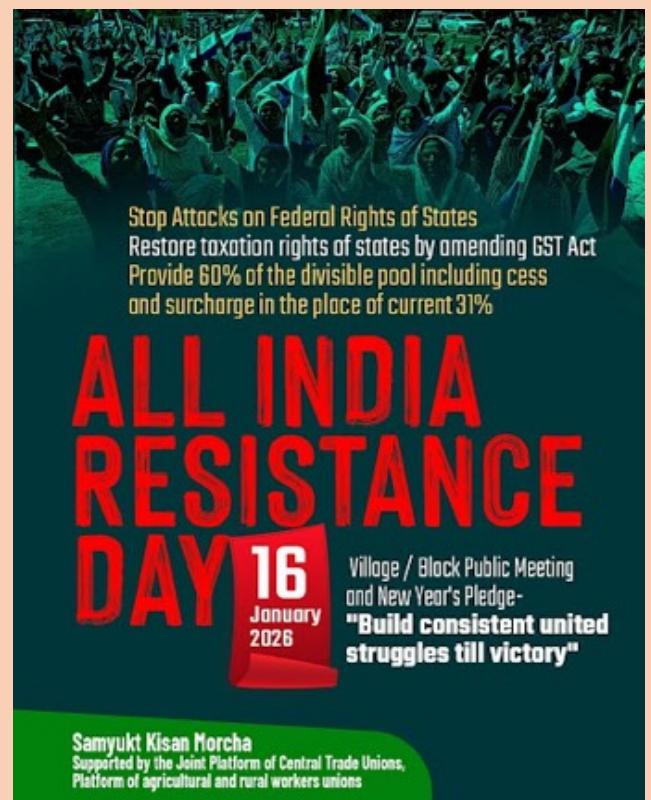
build a continuous, united, pan-India struggle. Core demands include a legal guarantee of MSP at C2+50%, comprehensive loan waivers, full implementation of the LARR Act 2013, and restoration of states' fiscal rights through amendments to the GST framework.

On 26 January 2026, SKM will mark Republic Day with a People's March to defend democratic rights, including the right to protest, while opposing authoritarian laws such as the UAPA. The actions will include tractor and vehicle rallies and mass demonstrations, organised without disrupting the official parade. The Council also demanded the release of political prisoners, including Sonam Wangchuk of Ladakh, and undertrials held for years without trial.



The meeting also called for immediate nationwide protests if the Electricity Bill 2025 is enacted during the Budget Session of Parliament. SKM reiterated its demand for the repeal of the Electricity Bill 2025, the VB GRAMG Act 2025, the Seeds Bill 2025, and all four Labour Codes, describing them as a coordinated corporate attack on farmers and workers.

SKM resolved to observe 16 January as All India Resistance Day, with district-level demonstrations, block and village meetings, and a collective pledge to



The meeting endorsed the 12 February 2026 General Strike, announced a public meeting at Lakhimpur Kheri on 19 January, and called for intensified grassroots mobilisation ahead of the next National Council meeting on 24 February 2026 in Haryana.

National: Aravali Virasat Jan Abhiyan Announces 700-km Aravalli Sanrakshan Yatra

Activists under the banner of Aravali Virasat Jan Abhiyan announce the launch of a 700-kilometre, 40-day Aravalli Sanrakshan Yatra at a press conference held in New Delhi on 22 January 2026. The yatra is being organised to defend the Aravalli range from mining, ecological degradation, and policy dilution, and to assert the rights of communities dependent on India's oldest mountain system.



Addressing the media, activists expressed serious concern over recent legal and policy developments that could weaken protection for the Aravallis. They criticised exclusionary decision-making processes that ignore voices of mining-affected communities, farmers, pastoralists, and conservation workers who have long safeguarded the region. Speakers reiterated that the Aravallis are central to groundwater recharge, climate regulation, forest regeneration, biodiversity, and livelihoods across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and the National Capital Region.

The yatra will begin on 24 January 2026 from Gujarat, travel through three districts in Gujarat, 27 districts in Rajasthan, and seven districts in Haryana, and culminate in Delhi. Through village meetings, public dialogues, and mass outreach, the campaign aims to expose decades of destruction caused by legal and illegal mining, real estate expansion, waste dumping, and weak enforcement of environmental laws.

Organisers emphasised that the yatra is not merely a protest but a people's education and mobilisation

effort, especially directed at youth, to reclaim the Aravallis as a shared ecological and cultural heritage. Calling for the declaration of the Aravalli range as a Critical Ecological Zone / Ecologically Sensitive Area, they asserted that there is nothing "sustainable" about mining in the Aravallis.

The Aravalli Sanrakshan Yatra seeks to re-centre conservation around communities, accountability, and ecological justice - affirming that protecting the Aravallis is inseparable from protecting water, air, livelihoods, and future generations.

Bihar: Koshi Flood and Erosion Survivors Submit Charter of Demands

Survivors of the devastating 2025 floods and riverbank erosion along the Kosi river submitted a detailed charter of demands to the district administration in Supaul, calling for urgent relief, rehabilitation, and long-term solutions for communities living within and around the Kosi embankments. The demands were placed by the Kosi Nav Nirman Manch (KNM), a long time NAPM member, representing flood- and erosion-affected families from across the region.

The memorandum highlighted that the 2025 disaster was among the worst in Kosi's history, yet many affected families have still not received house damage compensation, rehabilitation support, or full flood relief assistance. Despite a central government policy and budget for resettling riverbank erosion victims, displaced families continue to live precariously on embankments and temporary sites, while vacant rehabilitation land is leased out for farming.

KNM pointed to serious gaps in disaster response, including inadequate community kitchens, lack of safe drinking water, submerged handpumps, absence of bleaching and sanitation measures, and minimal health and veterinary camps within the embankments. Many eligible families were denied flood relief grants due to technicalities such as ration card requirements.

Key demands included immediate payment of house damage compensation as per norms, rehabilitation of all erosion-affected families on available resettlement land, payment of pending flood relief grants,

comprehensive surveys of embankment residents for resettlement, and provision of basic facilities - safe shelters, schools, anganwadi centres, hostels, health sub-centres, and drinking water - until permanent rehabilitation is ensured.

The charter also called for reviving the Kosi Victim Development Authority, stopping forced evictions without rehabilitation, waiving land revenue and cess, simplifying land surveys, resolving the Kosi flood problem through scientific and community knowledge, and protecting the rights and dignity of embankment residents.

The organisations urged the administration to act with urgency, warning that continued inaction would deepen humanitarian distress in one of Bihar's most disaster-prone regions.

Chhattisgarh: Historic Rally in Ambikapur Against Forced Mining Projects

On 16 January 2026, a historic rally and public assembly was held at the BTI Ground in Ambikapur, Surguja, bringing together nearly 5,000 people from villages and the city to oppose forced mining projects and defend jal–jungle–zameen(water, forest and land). The mobilisation reflected growing resistance across Chhattisgarh against environmental destruction, displacement of Adivasi communities, and violations of constitutional safeguards.

Speakers from Hasdeo Aranya Bachao Sangharsh Samiti highlighted that the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly had unanimously resolved in July 2022 to cancel all coal mines in Hasdeo, and that the Wildlife Institute of India (2021) had recommended keeping the entire region mining-free to prevent human–elephant conflict. Despite this, new mining projects, including the Kente Extension, have been pushed forward, allegedly using forged Gram Sabha resolutions - findings also confirmed by the State Scheduled Tribes Commission.

Former ST Commission Chairperson Bhanupratap Singh emphasised that Chhattisgarh is a Fifth Schedule state, where the Forest Rights Act and PESA Act must be implemented in letter and spirit, and that no land

acquisition can occur without Gram Sabha consent. Speakers from mining-affected regions across Surguja, Balrampur, Manpat, and Hasdeo warned of forced surveys, police intimidation, large-scale tree felling, damage to sacred and archaeological sites, and looming water crises.

Following the assembly, a massive rally marched to the Collector's office to submit a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister. As the Collector was absent, the memorandum was submitted to the SDM, along with a clear warning that failure to act would lead to an intensified, indefinite mass movement.

The mobilisation was jointly organised by multiple people's organisations, reaffirming unity, constitutional resistance, and Adivasi stewardship over land and forests.

Jharkhand: Swami Vivekananda Remembered

On Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, a public statement issued in Ranchi recalled his progressive, pluralistic legacy and contrasted it sharply with the growing erosion of minority rights in India today. Remembered as a Hindu monk with a deeply humanist and inclusive worldview, Swami Vivekananda consistently advocated respect for all religions and rejection of hatred, caste discrimination, and coercion in matters of faith.

At the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Vivekananda powerfully articulated India's civilisational ethos of religious pluralism. He rejected the idea of a single "true" religion, opposed conversions through force or inducement, and upheld freedom of belief. His nationalism, speakers recalled, was cultural and ethical - not sectarian - rooted in self-respect, social reform, and universal human values. His words, "That religion which teaches hatred is not religion" and "Truth is one, the sages call it by various names", remain profoundly relevant.

The statement expressed grave concern that present-day realities stand in stark contrast to Vivekananda's ideals. It pointed to the demolition of mosques, incidents of mob violence against Muslims, and repeated obstruction of Christian religious celebrations

by right-wing groups. The promotion of a “Hindu Rashtra” ideology was described as fundamentally opposed to Vivekananda’s vision of harmony and pluralism.

Addressing fears around religious conversion in Jharkhand, the statement noted that allegations of forced or induced conversions - especially among Adivasi communities - remain unsubstantiated. Conversions, where they occur, were affirmed as acts of informed, voluntary choice.

The Sajha Kadam group reaffirmed its commitment to communal harmony, cultural pluralism, and equal respect for all faiths, calling these values the truest tribute to Swami Vivekananda’s legacy.

Karnataka: Nagarahole Adivasis Reclaim Ancestral Rights Through a 15-Day Padyatra

A historic 15-day foot march by Adivasi communities of Nagarahole concluded on 2 January 2026, marking a powerful assertion of ancestral rights, dignity, and self-determined conservation. The padyatra began on 21 December 2025 from Thitimathi Aiyrasuli village in Kodagu district and passed through 29 villages across Kodagu and Mysuru districts, covering nearly 70 kilometres through the forests that have long been home to the Jenu Kuruba, Beta Kuruba, Yerava, and Paniya communities.

Organised under the banner of the Nagarahole Adivasi Jamma Paale Hakku Sthapana Samiti (NAJHSS), the march was both a reclaiming of territory and a reclaiming of history, memory, and worldview. Participants repeatedly emphasised an Adivasi understanding of forests, animals, and people as equals - an ethic fundamentally opposed to the militarised, exclusionary conservation model enforced by the forest department.

Throughout the padyatra, Gram Sabhas were convened in dozens of villages under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. Discussions focused on the Act’s systematic non-implementation, forced evictions, rejection of forest rights claims, and the declaration of Nagarahole as a national park and tiger reserve without community consent. Strong opposition was also voiced

to the Tiger Safari project, which communities described as illegal and imposed without Gram Sabha approval.

The march was widely described as resistance to “colonial conservation” - a framework that criminalises Indigenous presence while opening forests to tourism and corporate interests. Speakers asserted that Adivasi custodians do not require an armed forest bureaucracy to protect landscapes they have nurtured for centuries.

The padyatra concluded at Bavali in H.D. Kote taluk with a mass gathering and submission of demands to district authorities. NAJHSS gave the Kodagu and Mysuru administrations one week to initiate action on community forest rights, halt evictions, and stop projects imposed without consent. For Nagarahole’s Adivasis, the march reaffirmed a clear principle: real conservation begins with power to forest peoples.

Karnataka: Right To Health Jatha Begins On February 2

A statewide Right to Health Jatha will travel across all 31 districts of Karnataka from 2 to 17 February 2026, mobilising people against the privatisation of government hospitals and asserting health as a fundamental right. The rally is being organised with organisations working closely with socio-economically marginalised communities.

The Jatha comes amid concerns that while the Karnataka government has announced a halt to certain Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects in healthcare and medical education, it has not committed to a legally enforceable Right to Health. Organisers argue that without such a law, public healthcare remains vulnerable to future privatisation.

Every year in India, over 10 crore people are pushed into poverty due to healthcare costs. In Karnataka, activists point out that instead of strengthening the public health system, moves to privatise district hospitals threaten access for poor and underprivileged communities. Even in government facilities, free and reliable treatment remains elusive, with 60–70 per cent of treatment costs spent on medicines.

A 2024 survey by Savatirika Arogya Andolana Karnataka (SAA-K) across 12 districts found that 568 people spent ₹4,05,140 on medicines, averaging ₹713 per treatment. Separate studies show that a woman spends an average of ₹8,442 during pregnancy, highlighting the burden of out-of-pocket expenses.



Through public meetings and local outreach, the Jatha will demand: an immediate end to hospital privatisation, free and quality medicines in all government health facilities, a Right to Health Act in Karnataka making healthcare a guaranteed right, and regulation of fees in private hospitals.

Madhya Pradesh: 28th Martyr Farmers’ Memorial Convention Reaffirms Mulatapi Declaration

The 28th Shaheed Kisan Smriti Sammelan was held on 12 January 2026 in Mulatapi, continuing a tradition observed every year since the 1998 police firing that killed 24 protesting farmers during a peaceful agrarian movement. Organised annually by the Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, the convention honours the martyrs and renews collective commitments to farmers’ rights

and social justice.

This year’s conference, attended by farmers from across the region, was held in the presence of Tushar Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Justice Kolse Patil. The gathering unanimously adopted the Mulatapi Declaration during the 28th Memorial Convention and the 337th Kisan Panchayat.

The declaration reiterated long-standing demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (C2 + 50%) for all crops, complete farm loan waivers, and recognition of the Right to Employment as a fundamental right. It called for restoration and expansion of MGNREGA (200 days of work at ₹600/day in rural areas and an urban employment guarantee), opposition to land acquisition without Gram Sabha consent, strict implementation of the Forest Rights Act and PESA, and an end to privatisation of public sector enterprises and dilution of labour laws.

The convention also raised concerns over corporate control of agriculture, natural resource extraction, unemployment, inequality, environmental destruction, and the erosion of democratic institutions. It expressed solidarity with ongoing struggles of farmers, workers, Adivasis, women, youth, and minorities across India and globally.

Reaffirming 28 years of resistance, participants pledged to strengthen united mass movements for democracy, livelihood security, ecological protection, and constitutional justice.

Madhya Pradesh: Campaign Intensifies Against Chutka–Kinderai Nuclear Projects

Over the period of Makar Sankranti, organisations and communities opposing the proposed Chutka and Kinderai nuclear projects intensified their campaign to protect the river Narmada, combining public outreach, collective pledges, and city-wide mobilisation.

Under the joint banner of the Chutka Nuclear Resistance Committee and the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Raj Organisation, project-affected communities reached Gwarighat, where hundreds of

devotees had gathered for the holy dip. Through conversations, leaflet distribution, and street meetings, campaigners highlighted the irreversible ecological and social risks posed by nuclear installations along the Narmada.

Speakers emphasised that while technologies exist to treat sewage entering rivers, no technology anywhere in the world can remove radioactive contamination from water. They also pointed out that both Chutka and Kinderai are located in the Son–Narmada seismic fault zone, one of the most earthquake-prone regions in central India. With Jabalpur just 45 kilometres away, participants warned that any nuclear accident would have catastrophic consequences for the city and surrounding areas.



At Gwarighat, devotees and residents took water from the Narmada and pledged to defend the river, framing the struggle as one to protect not only water, but livelihoods, cultural memory, and future generations. Community members recalled earlier displacement caused by the Bargi Dam and firmly rejected the prospect of being displaced once again in the name of “development”.

Religious leaders, including Mahant Naga Shyam Das Ji, publicly expressed solidarity, stating that the destruction of the Narmada would amount to the destruction of civilisational and spiritual heritage.

Building on these actions, the organisations announced a public outreach campaign across Jabalpur, to continue until Narmada Jayanti. Teams from the Chutka region have begun door-to-door engagement, public meetings, and neighbourhood conversations, urging residents to recognise that saving the Narmada

means protecting water, Adivasi communities, nature, and the future itself.

The mobilisation reflects a growing resolve that the Narmada will not be turned into a testing ground for nuclear projects, and that decisions affecting the river must be revisited through democratic and ecological accountability.

Rajasthan: National Meeting of Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) Held in Jaipur

The national meeting of constituent organisations of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) – All India was held in Jaipur on 25 November 2025. The meeting was jointly presided over by representatives of the Rajasthan Kisan Mazdoor Naujawan Sabha, Grameen Kisan Mazdoor Samiti, Rashtriya Kisan Sabha (Madhya Pradesh), Organic Natural Kisan Union (Kerala), Adivasi Parivar, and the Kashmir Tribal Front. Farmers, workers, and Adivasi leaders from across the country participated.

The meeting held in-depth discussions on the growing push towards corporate control and policies that threaten the livelihoods, lands, and rights of farmers, workers, and Adivasi communities. Strong opposition was expressed to the Electricity Amendment Bill 2025, with KMM resolving to launch statewide and district-level protests if the Bill is introduced or implemented, including symbolic actions against the central government.

The Seeds Bill 2025 was also sharply criticised as a threat to agricultural research, farmers’ seed sovereignty, and traditional farming systems. Participants further condemned the proposed replacement of the MGNREGA scheme with the so-called “Viksit Bharat Gram Yojana”, describing it as a deceptive move and a direct attack on rural workers’ livelihoods, and agreed to plan nationwide resistance.

The meeting also took note of widespread land acquisition, corporate mining in agricultural and Adivasi regions, displacement of fishing communities, destruction of forested areas, and attacks on Adivasi and tribal communities in several states, including Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Jammu &

Kashmir. Recent developments in Sirohi (Rajasthan), including mining permissions in fertile agricultural areas and damage to the Aravalli range, were strongly opposed.

The gathering reaffirmed KMM's resolve to build a united, nationwide struggle against anti-people policies affecting land, water, forests, agriculture, and the rights of farmers, workers, and Adivasi communities.

Telangana: People's Resistance Forces Withdrawal of Ethanol Factory in Mominpet

In a significant victory for people's movements against environmentally destructive projects, residents of Mominpet mandal in Telangana's Vikarabad district compelled a private company to withdraw its proposal for a large ethanol manufacturing unit. Following sustained public opposition, Suvira Bio Fuels Private Limited announced on 30 December 2025 that it would drop plans to establish a grain-based ethanol factory at the mandal headquarters.

The proposed project involved a ₹100-crore unit spread over 10.33 acres, with a production capacity of 60,000 litres per day. A public hearing on the proposal became the decisive moment, as villagers, local residents, scientists, civil society groups, social activists, and representatives of all political parties - including the ruling Congress - voiced unanimous opposition. Faced with overwhelming resistance, the company publicly declared its withdrawal in the presence of senior district officials, including the District Collector.

Opposition to the project was rooted in concrete environmental and livelihood concerns. Residents highlighted that ethanol factories emit toxic substances such as formaldehyde and methanol, contaminating air, soil, and water. Producing 60,000 litres of ethanol daily would require nearly three lakh litres of water, threatening groundwater in an agriculture-dependent region. The factory would also consume around 1.5 lakh kilograms of rice per day, raising serious concerns about food security and farmers' livelihoods.

The mobilisation was strengthened by timely interventions from civil society organisations -

including the Telangana People's Joint Action Committee, Rythu Swarajya Vedika, Scientists for People, and the Progressive Organisation of Women - which exposed serious flaws in the Environmental Impact Assessment. The EIA's claim of zero wastewater discharge was widely criticised as misleading and company-driven.

The Mominpet victory is part of a broader resistance in Telangana, where nearly 30 ethanol projects have been proposed under the Ethanol 20 blending policy. Similar people's struggles have earlier forced the cancellation of projects in Dilawarpur and Pedda Dhanwada. Mominpet stands as a reminder that informed, united community action can still force accountability - and win.

Telangana: Public Hearing Exposes Gaps in Implementation of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

On the eve of Republic Day, National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) Telangana, along with grassroots organisations, organised a day-long Public Hearing in Hyderabad on 25 January 2026 to review the implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 in the state over the past decade.

Public Hearing

on Implementation Status of SC & ST
(Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 in Telangana

Experiences & Challenges of the Past Decade and Ways Forward

Date & Time
25th January, 2026, 10 AM - 5 PM

Venue
Ilamma Hall, Sundarayya Vignana
Kendram, Baghlingampally, Hyderabad

Organised by
National Alliance of People's
Movements (Telangana)
And grassroots organizations

Jai Bhim! Jai Samvidhan!

A seven-member jury comprising retired judges, senior advocates, legal scholars, sociologists, and anti-caste activists heard testimonies from Dalit and Adivasi survivors across more than 20 districts of Telangana. Around 90 cases were documented in preparation for the hearing, of which 30 cases from 22 districts were presented directly by victims.

The testimonies revealed a disturbing pattern of caste-based violence and systemic neglect, including honour killings, sexual violence, police torture and custodial deaths, land encroachment, social boycott, denial of temple entry, workplace harassment, and violations of forest rights. Survivors repeatedly pointed to delayed or denied FIRs, pressure to compromise, lack of compensation, and extremely low conviction rates, despite clear provisions under the Act.

Jury members underscored that victims should not have to become activists to access justice and noted the failure of police, district administrations, and courts to enforce the law's mandatory provisions, including punishment for neglect of duty by officials. Several speakers highlighted the intersection of caste and gender, stressing that women bear the brunt of caste atrocities.



The jury called on the Telangana government to urgently strengthen implementation of the Act, including regular reviews by the Chief Minister-led monitoring committee, functioning district vigilance committees, and timely compensation to victims. A detailed report with recommendations will be submitted to the state government.

The hearing forms part of a year-long Constitutional Justice Campaign launched by NAPM Telangana from 26 November 2025 to 26 November 2026, aimed at

defending constitutional rights and standing in solidarity with marginalised communities across the state.

Uttar Pradesh: Khudai Khidmatgar Celebrates Frontier Gandhi's Death Anniversary In Lucknow

On 20 January 2026, members of the Khudai Khidmatgar gathered in Lucknow to commemorate the 38th death anniversary of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, widely known as Frontier Gandhi, and to observe the 16th Revival Day of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement in India.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, was remembered as an uncompromising leader of the freedom movement who stood firmly for non-violence, national unity, and brotherhood at a time when divisive ideologies were tearing society apart. Through the Khudai Khidmatgar - "Servants of God" - he built a powerful non-violent mass movement that played a significant role in the struggle for independence. Although the movement became inactive after his death, it was revived in India on 20 January 2011, inspired by the ideals and moral courage of Frontier Gandhi.

The Lucknow gathering reflected on this journey of revival over the past sixteen years. Participants recalled how the movement has sought to take forward an ideology rooted in peace, justice, human values, and ethical public life. People from different walks of life across the country, especially young people, have continued to associate with Khudai Khidmatgar, seeing in it not just a historical legacy but a living political and moral practice.

The programme was presided over by eminent socio-political activist and thinker Prof. Ramesh Dixit. The gathering reaffirmed a shared commitment to the values of Gandhi and Frontier Gandhi, underlining that this heritage of non-violence, courage, and service must be actively protected and renewed in today's deeply polarised times.

West Bengal: Women Tea Garden Workers Win in the Dooars

After two days and nights of an open-air dharna in freezing winter conditions in the Dooars region of West Bengal, nearly 200 women tea garden workers secured a partial but significant breakthrough late on the night of 6 January 2026. The protest was organised under the banner of the Chai Shramik Ekta Andolan, with workers demanding payment of long-pending wages.

Close to 11 pm, Prakash Chik Baraik, Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament, accompanied by Gopal Biswas, Joint Labour Commissioner, Alipurduar, met the protesting women and handed over a written assurance from Merico Agro India Industries Limited. The notice committed the company to clear all pending wages and salaries by 31 January 2026, along with the immediate release of one fortnight's payment. The workers were also assured of a second meeting in February to discuss their remaining demands. After collective deliberation, the women agreed to lift the dharna by 12 noon on 7 January, once the notice carried the official signature and seal of the Joint Labour Commissioner.

Even as this assurance brought limited relief, the struggle exposed the deep vulnerabilities faced by women workers who raise their voices. Earlier on 6 January, Apsara, a permanent worker at Birpara Tea Garden, was removed from work without any written order for participating in the movement. When she questioned this illegal action, the garden manager allegedly assaulted and sexually harassed her, including verbal abuse directed at her deceased son. In the absence of any Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) mechanism or Internal Complaints Committee, Apsara was compelled to approach the police to file a case under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The dharna drew wide solidarity from Adivasi organisations and trade unions, including the Rajipadha Sarna Prarthana Sabha, Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad, All Bengal Adivasi Santhal Association, and the Bharatiya Cha Mazdoor Sangh, alongside workers from multiple tea gardens. Sustained logistical support was provided by the

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, with solidarity from activists of the All India United Trade Union Centre and other Left unions. Congress representatives and Youth Congress leaders in the district also extended support.

The convergence of solidarity across organisational and political lines strengthened the struggle and reaffirmed a central lesson: when workers unite beyond party divisions, collective pressure can force concessions. Most notably, the dharna underscored the leadership of women workers, who sustained the protest through harsh conditions and collectively shaped its course - demonstrating once again that women lead from the front in union struggles.

ALLIANCE UPDATES

Resist Unjust Extension of Work Hours in the Name of ‘Ease of Doing Business’

29 December: The National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) strongly condemned recent amendments to factory and labour laws by several state governments that extended permissible working hours beyond established limits. These changes, introduced in the name of “ease of doing business”, “investment promotion”, and “industrial flexibility”, were seen as a serious rollback of hard-won labour protections and an assault on the rights, health, and dignity of workers - particularly migrant and informal factory workers.

NAPM pointed out that the Factories Act, 1948, clearly restricted adult workers to 9 hours per day and 48 hours per week, with mandatory rest intervals. However, states including Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Goa, and Rajasthan amended their laws to allow 10–12 hour workdays, longer continuous stretches without breaks, higher overtime limits (up to 144 hours per quarter), expanded night-shift work including for women, and, in some cases, weekly caps raised to 60 hours.

These amendments were situated within a wider context where corporate leaders had openly advocated 70–90 hour work weeks. NAPM recalled that the International Labour Organization had consistently documented Indian workers as among the most overworked globally, and that joint research by the World Health Organization and the ILO had established clear links between long working hours and increased risks of heart disease, stroke, and premature death. Despite this evidence, governments had chosen to dilute protections rather than strengthen enforcement.

NAPM emphasised that for migrant and informal workers, so-called “consent” provisions were largely meaningless, given precarious employment, weak enforcement, and lack of alternatives. The organisation warned that these state-level changes aligned with the thrust of the four central Labour Codes, normalising extended work hours and weakening collective bargaining.

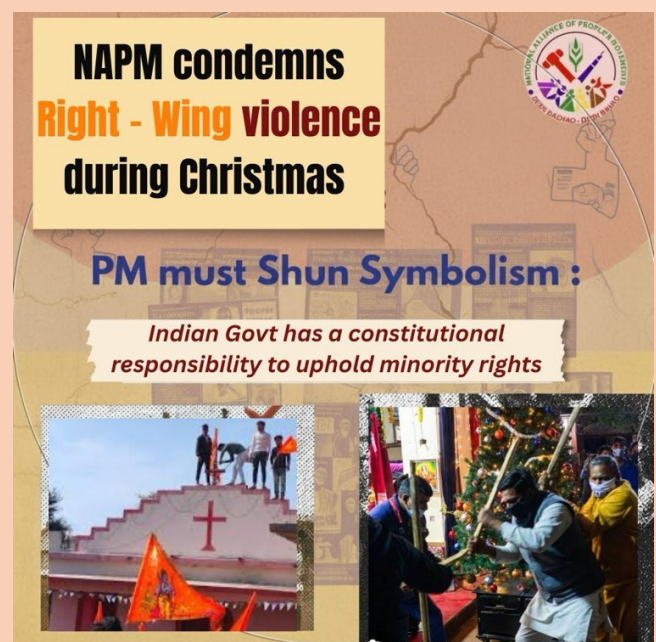
NAPM asserted that “flexibility” had been used as a euphemism for forced overwork and called for an immediate rollback of these amendments. It urged trade unions, workers’ collectives, and democratic movements to unite in resisting these regressive changes, reiterating that workers’ rights were the foundation of a just and sustainable economy.

All-India Workers Forum & National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM)

Right-Wing Hate and Violence During Christmas, Unacceptable

4 January: The National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) and Sadbhav Manch strongly condemned the spate of right-wing attacks, intimidation, and hooliganism that targeted Christian communities during the recent Christmas festivities. These incidents were seen as part of a disturbing and escalating pattern of hate violence against religious minorities - particularly Christians and Muslims - across the country.

While the Prime Minister and other constitutional functionaries publicly engaged in symbolic gestures of religious harmony, violence on the ground continued



largely unchecked. This contradiction exposed the hypocrisy of the ruling establishment and reflected a deeper failure of the State to uphold its constitutional responsibility to protect the rights, safety, dignity, and

freedom of faith of minorities, as guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19, 21, and 25–28 of the Constitution of India.

December 2025 witnessed multiple incidents of targeted harassment and violence. In Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, authorities denied permission for Christmas carol singing, citing alleged conversion threats - an order quashed only after intervention by the Indore High Court on 18 December. In Jabalpur, a Christmas lunch for visually challenged children was disrupted on 20 December following baseless allegations of forced conversion. In Palakkad, Kerala, a children's carol group was verbally abused and assaulted on 21 December, while in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar, women and children wearing Santa caps were harassed on 22 December. Similar intimidation of street vendors occurred in Bhubaneswar, and threats were issued in Pune over employees wearing Christmas hats.

The escalation of violence in Kanker district, Chhattisgarh - where a burial dispute led to mob attacks, arson, and injuries among Adivasi Christian families - was particularly alarming. Disruptions were also reported in Nalbari, Assam, and the cancellation of the official Christmas holiday in Uttar Pradesh sent an exclusionary message to minorities.

NAPM and Sadbhav Manch reiterated that these incidents, driven by Hindutva groups and enabled by the misuse of anti-conversion laws, pointed to a systemic erosion of constitutional governance. They reaffirmed their solidarity with all victims of hate crimes and their commitment to pursuing democratic and legal remedies until justice and the rule of law were restored.

Sadbhav Manch – National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM)

ALIFA Urges Intervention Against Arrest Of Priyanka Varun For Manusmriti Protest

6 January: The All-India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA), a constituent of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), submitted a formal appeal to the Uttar Pradesh State Women's Commission demanding the immediate withdrawal of criminal proceedings against 22-year-old Priyanka Varun, who was arrested by Agra police for a three-year-old video showing her burning the Manusmriti.

Priyanka Varun was arrested on 30 December 2025 after the resurfacing of a video recorded in December 2022. An FIR was filed under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act. She was later released on bail by a magistrate. ALIFA termed the arrest arbitrary, unconstitutional, and an abuse of police powers.

In its representation, ALIFA argued that burning the Manusmriti is a well-established Ambedkarite political and cultural act, commemorated annually as Manusmriti Dahan Diwas since Dr B.R. Ambedkar publicly burnt the text in 1927 to reject casteist and patriarchal social codes. The alliance stated that the Manusmriti promotes gender and caste hierarchy and has no constitutional standing in modern India.

ALIFA emphasised that the arrest violated Priyanka Varun's fundamental rights to equality, dignity, freedom of expression, and freedom of conscience under the Constitution. It also highlighted the troubling delay of three years between the recording of the video and the police action, raising concerns of selective targeting.

The alliance called on the Women's Commission to ensure quashing of the FIR, provide legal support to Priyanka Varun, and initiate action against the police officials involved. ALIFA reiterated that dissent against casteist and misogynist traditions is constitutionally protected and cannot be criminalised in the name of "hurt sentiments."

All-India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA)-NAPM

Nyay Abhiyan: Narivadi Yuva Sangharsh Samvad Saptah

3-9 January: As part of the ongoing Nyay Abhiyan, feminist, youth, and people's movements across the country came together to observe Narivadi Yuva Sangharsh Samvad Saptah from 3rd January to 9th January 2025, marking the period between the birth anniversaries of Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh.

The week was called in remembrance of two radical educators and social revolutionaries whose lives have continued to inspire struggles for equality, dignity, and liberation. Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh were remembered not only for opening schools for girls and

**Strengthening Feminist - Youth Solidarity for Social Transformation
In Defense of Socio-Ecological, Cultural Justice & Democratic Struggles**

Awake, Arise and Educate, Smash Traditions, Liberate!

**As part of the Nyay Abhiyan: Join the Narivadi Yuva
Sangharsh Samvad Saptah in the remembrance of
Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh**



3rd January 2026 to 9th January 2026

**Appeal to Individuals and Organisations across India, to
organize diverse on-ground and online actions, in your city /
district, to celebrate the**

**Savitri Fatima Narivadi Yuva
Sangharsh Samvad Saptah**

Get in touch for more details:
Instagram: @aliysa.napm @najarjusticeforum
@alifafeministalliancenam @napmindia

Co-Organized by:



oppressed communities, but for challenging entrenched caste, patriarchal, and religious hierarchies, and for asserting education as a political act of emancipation. Their legacy was invoked as deeply relevant to the crises of the present.

Across India, young people - especially women, queer persons, students, workers, and marginalised communities - were confronting intensifying social inequality, shrinking democratic spaces, attacks on

constitutional rights, and deepening socio-ecological injustice. In this context, Narivadi Yuva Sangharsh Samvad Saptah was envisioned as a collective space to strengthen feminist-youth solidarity and to renew commitments to social transformation grounded in justice, equality, and resistance.

During the week, individuals, collectives, organisations, student groups, unions, and people's movements organised diverse on-ground and online actions in cities, towns, campuses, neighbourhoods, and districts. These included discussions, readings, public conversations, cultural programmes, poster campaigns, social media actions, study circles, and inter-generational dialogues. Together, these initiatives helped deepen feminist political consciousness and connected local struggles with wider movements.

The observance was rooted in a shared commitment to defend socio-ecological justice, cultural dignity, and democratic struggles. At a time when oppressive traditions were being revived in new forms, dissent was being criminalised, and young people were being pushed into precarity and silence, the guiding slogan of the week remained urgent and radical:

Awake, Arise and Educate. Smash Traditions. Liberate.

USA's Imperial Attack On Venezuela's Sovereignty, Illegal

8 January: The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) unequivocally condemned the illegal and imperial aggression of the United States against the sovereign nation of Venezuela and its people. NAPM stood in unflinching solidarity with the Venezuelan people and progressive forces worldwide in opposing this brazen violation of international law. It demanded the immediate and unconditional return of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores to their country, and reaffirmed that all decisions regarding Venezuela's governance, resources, and future rested solely with its people.

On the night of 2 January 2026, the United States launched a unilateral military attack on Venezuela, killing at least 80 people and abducting the sitting President and elected representatives. Following this act of naked aggression, the US President publicly



violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter and reflected a long history of US-led regime-change operations across the Global South. The aggression followed Venezuela's assertion of popular sovereignty since 1998, when oil revenues were redirected towards social welfare and poverty reduction under the Chavista project.

Claims of "narco-terrorism" and "stolen oil" were rejected as baseless, with available evidence - including the US Drug Enforcement Administration's 2025 Threat Assessment - failing to substantiate them. The attack also followed months of regional militarisation and years of crippling sanctions.

NAPM criticised the Indian government's feeble response and called upon political parties, people's movements, and democratic forces in India to condemn US aggression and uphold principles of sovereignty and international law. The future of Venezuela, it asserted, must be determined by its people alone.

National Alliance of People's Movements



Credible Environmental Action Needed, Not Intimidation

16 January 2026: The National Alliance for Climate and Environmental Justice (NACEJ–NAPM) condemned the raids, searches, and intimidation carried out by Indian enforcement agencies against climate activists Harjeet Singh and Sanjay Vashisht. NACEJ demanded an immediate end to all coercive action against them and the withdrawal of all charges, while calling for a halt to the misuse of regulatory laws and enforcement agencies to silence climate justice and civil society voices.

NACEJ noted that recent actions by the Enforcement Directorate and allied agencies - citing alleged foreign exchange violations, vague claims of threats to "energy security," and unsubstantiated intelligence inputs - were undertaken without transparency or credible evidence. Reliance on anonymous briefings and speculative allegations, with officials unwilling to go on record, amounted to harassment and intimidation and violated constitutional freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful advocacy.

declared intentions to control Venezuela's governance and transfer its oil sector to US corporations. With Venezuela holding 17 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves, the extractive and imperial motives behind the attack were unmistakable.

NAPM stated that the assault constituted a gross

The alliance affirmed that the public work of Harjeet Singh and Sanjay Vashisht on climate justice, fossil fuel accountability, and just transition pathways had been transparent, lawful, and evidence-based. Their advocacy strengthened democratic participation and



environmental protection in India and the Global South. Peaceful climate action, NACEJ stressed, could not be equated with illegality or threats to national interest.

NACEJ situated these actions within a broader pattern of shrinking civic space, where investigative mechanisms were used to deter criticism of fossil fuel expansion and environmentally destructive development. At a time of escalating climate risks, such actions undermined democratic institutions and effective climate governance. Despite renewable energy plans, coal remained central to India’s power system. The National Electricity Plan, 2023 projected a decline in coal’s share but an increase in absolute capacity, including proposals to add around 80 GW by 2031–32 and directions not to retire thermal plants until 2030 - imposing severe social, environmental, and health costs.

NACEJ reiterated that the state must regulate major polluters, protect environmental defenders, and enable open democratic debate - not criminalise those

demanding accountability. The alliance called upon the government to reaffirm that peaceful climate advocacy and international collaboration for environmental justice are legitimate, protected democratic activities.

National Alliance for Climate and Environmental Justice (NACEJ – NAPM)

NAPM Tamil Nadu Holds State Level Meeting

8 January, Chennai: A meeting of the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) in Tamil Nadu was held on 8 January to revive and strengthen the alliance’s state-level engagement after a period of dormancy. The meeting brought together activists, researchers, and representatives from diverse movements to discuss urgent social, labour, environmental, and climate justice concerns in the state.

Participants reflected on NAPM’s earlier presence in Tamil Nadu since the 1980s and agreed that the alliance should function as an umbrella platform - offering solidarity, legal, technical, and political support to ongoing local struggles rather than replacing existing movements. The climate crisis emerged as a central concern, particularly its impact on informal workers through heatwaves, unseasonal rainfall, floods, cyclones, basti fires, and coastal radiation exposure, including in Kanyakumari.

The meeting strongly opposed the four central Labour Codes, highlighting their adverse impact on unorganised workers, dilution of minimum wages through the “floor wage”, erosion of welfare boards, and excessive centralisation. Participants discussed environmental degradation linked to quarries, SEZs, waste management around airports, and industrial pollution. The lack of official recognition of heatwaves as a disaster at the national level was flagged as a major gap denying workers relief and compensation.

It was agreed to reconstitute NAPM Tamil Nadu through a temporary working group, with monthly meetings and improved communication, as a step towards a future state convention. A call will be issued inviting wider participation in the process.

NAPM Gujarat Holds Meeting To Revitalise Its Activities

19 January, Ahmedabad: The Gujarat state meeting of the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) was held at St. Xavier’s Loyola Hall, Ahmedabad, with the objective of introducing NAPM to new members and discussing ways to revitalise the Gujarat forum. The meeting brought together grassroots activists, researchers, lawyers, students and social workers engaged across labour, urban, environmental and civil rights issues.

Participants reflected on the long presence of diverse people’s struggles in Gujarat and the need for a stronger collective platform to connect these efforts at the national level. The discussion highlighted NAPM’s role as a bridge between local movements and national advocacy, offering solidarity, knowledge support and wider visibility to struggles that often remain isolated.

Several speakers underlined the fragmentation of civil society in the state and the urgent need to rebuild coordination, documentation and public discourse, especially in emerging areas such as climate justice and urban governance. There was broad agreement that NAPM Gujarat should focus on a few strategic issues to carve a clear identity, with climate change and urban issues emerging as common priorities.

The meeting also emphasised the importance of research, communication and outreach, including better use of social media, to strengthen people’s movements. Participants agreed to hold regular monthly meetings and form a volunteer-based coordination group to take the process forward.

Two immediate initiatives were discussed: an online introductory interaction with NAPM’s thematic forums, and a proposed action-research project on heat stress and urban vulnerability in Ahmedabad. The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to rebuild NAPM Gujarat as a vibrant, inclusive platform for people’s struggles in the state.

Appeal To Join The Rashtriya Swasthya Adhikar Morcha (NAPM)

26 January: Across India, healthcare costs continue to push over 10 crore people into poverty every year, while public hospitals are weakened through privatisation, Public–Private Partnerships, and shrinking budgets. Medicines alone account for 60–70% of treatment costs, making even basic care unaffordable for the poor, women, workers, Adivasis, and marginalised communities.

एक 'स्वस्थ गणतंत्र' की ओर:
जहां सबको स्वास्थ्य व सम्मान मिले!




स्वास्थ्य हमारा संवैधानिक अधिकार है!

राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य अधिकार मोर्चा (एन.ए.पी.एम) से जुड़ने का आह्वान
ज़मीनी स्तर पर जन स्वास्थ्य आंदोलन को मज़बूत करने की दिशा में...




अपील पढ़ने और
गुगल क्रॉस भ्रम के लिए
QR कोड स्कैन करें।

निजीकरण, भेदभाव, और सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य पर कॉर्पोरेट कब्ज़े के खिलाफ़..
समता, लोगों की गरिमा और स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्थाओं की जवाबदेही के पक्ष में..
संचर्ष, एकजुटता और व्यवस्थागत बदलाव के द्वारा..

The Rashtriya Swasthya Adhikar Morcha, a national forum of the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM), brings together people’s organisations, health workers, researchers, and activists to defend the Right to Health as a legal, universal, and enforceable right - not a temporary scheme. The Morcha works through fact-finding, public campaigns, policy interventions, state-level mobilisations, and collective action against hospital privatisation, exclusionary health policies, and corporate control of healthcare.

We invite individuals and organisations to join this growing platform to strengthen people-led health struggles, share experiences from the ground, and collectively push for free, quality, dignified healthcare for all. The fight for health is inseparable from the fight for justice, equality, and democracy.

OBITUARY

Justice (Retd.) Panachand Jain (1937–2026)

The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) notes with deep sorrow the passing away of Justice (Retd.) Panachand Jain, fondly known to all as Kakaji, who breathed his last on 27 January 2026 in his hometown of Jaipur, at the age of 88. His passing marks the loss of a rare judicial conscience - one that chose, with clarity and courage, to stand with people's movements, ecological struggles, and the most marginalised sections of society long after his formal retirement from the judiciary.

Justice Jain was not merely a retired judge of the Rajasthan High Court who sympathised with people's causes. He was an active participant, a moral anchor, and a guiding force for several historic people's tribunals and independent justice processes across the country. From the People's Tribunal on the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the Narmada Valley, to inquiries into the coal-ravaged region of Singrauli following police firing that claimed the lives of two protesters, and later tribunals addressing the deepening climate crisis, Kakaji consistently lent credibility, constitutional wisdom, and humane compassion to people's struggles.

His legal engagement spanned a wide range of concerns - ecological justice, constitutional interpretation, and questions of public policy. In 2014, while interacting with the media, he raised serious constitutional objections to the legality of the Fees Regulation Act, 2013, which sought to regulate fee structures across all private schools. Across such interventions, he brought together judicial rigour and an ethical sensitivity that was rooted in social realities. A prolific writer on constitutional and legal issues, Justice Jain continued to contribute syndicated columns well into his nineties. Many of these writings were later compiled into important books on constitutional law and democratic accountability, reflecting a lifelong commitment to public reasoning and debate.

Beyond national boundaries, Justice Jain was also a steadfast advocate for the establishment of an International Climate Justice Tribunal. He raised this demand repeatedly at global climate conferences

(CoPs), arguing that climate injustice required binding legal and moral accountability - though this vision, regrettably, never materialised.

Alongside Justice Lodha, Justice Jain delivered a landmark judgment striking down Section 19 of the Rajasthan Sati Prevention Act, which had exempted existing temple practices of Sati. Through this historic decision, the practice of Sati was banned in all temples across Rajasthan. For taking this principled and courageous stand, he faced sustained and indirect attacks from Brahmanical and upper-caste Hindu lobbies - attacks he bore with his characteristic calm, dignity, and gentle smile.

For Kakaji, justice was never confined to statutes and courtrooms. It was grounded in the lived realities of communities defending their jal, jungle, zameen, and the intricate web of life that sustains both humans and animals. By explicitly linking environmental protection with the rights of people and non-human life, he embodied a holistic and deeply people-centric ecological vision.

Justice (Retd.) Panachand Jain remained a constant source of inspiration and quiet support for people's movements across the country. He also served as the senior-most Trustee of MAUSAM, continuing his engagement with ecological and social justice work till the very end.

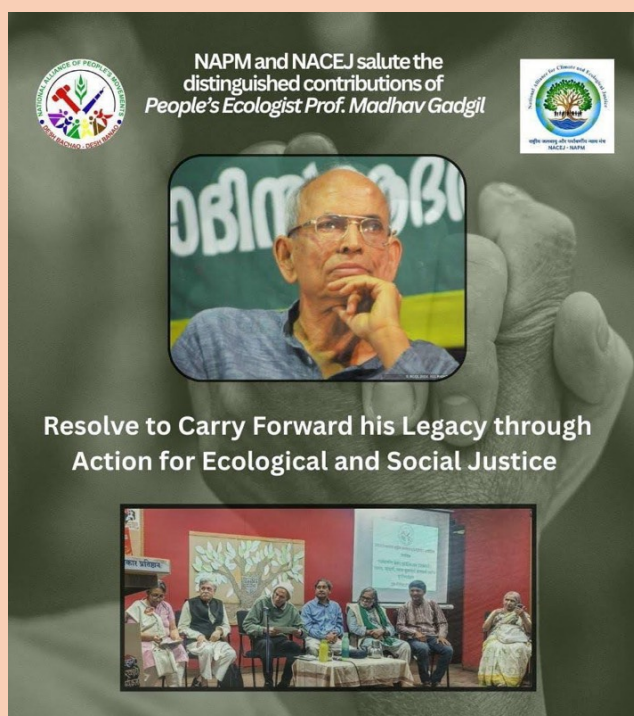
With his passing, people's movements have lost a gentle giant - a jurist whose moral clarity, constitutional faith, and humility left an enduring imprint on struggles for justice.

NAPM pays its respectful homage to Justice (Retd.) Panachand Jain - Kakaji - and solemnly resolves to carry forward his legacy of justice, compassion, and unwavering commitment to people's struggles and ecological responsibility.

Madhav Gadgil (1942–2026)

A People's Ecologist Who Walked With Movements

With the passing of Professor Madhav Gadgil on 7 January 2026, India lost not just one of its foremost ecological scientists, but a rare public intellectual who consistently stood with people's movements against ecological destruction and democratic erosion. At a time when environmental governance is increasingly shaped by corporate interests and technocratic authority, Gadgil represented a different tradition - one



where science served society, and ecology was inseparable from justice.

Gadgil was a people's ecologist in the truest sense. He refused the false divide between conservation and livelihoods, insisting that forests, rivers, and biodiversity could only be protected through democratic participation and community stewardship. Across decades of work, he demonstrated that ecological collapse is not merely a technical failure but a political one - rooted in the exclusion of those who live closest to nature.

In 1982, he founded the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, nurturing

generations of ecologists who learnt to see landscapes as social-ecological systems rather than empty "wilderness". His early field-based research in the Western Ghats, grounded in close engagement with forest communities, contributed to the recognition of the Nilgiris as India's first biosphere reserve in 1986. These efforts foregrounded traditional ecological knowledge long dismissed by official science.

Gadgil's influence extended decisively into policy and law. He was a key architect of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and a strong advocate of People's Biodiversity Registers, which enabled gram panchayats to document and protect local biological resources. His ideas deeply shaped the spirit of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, particularly its emphasis on community forest rights and decentralised governance.

His most far-reaching intervention came as Chair of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) in 2010–11. The WGEEP - popularly known as the Gadgil Commission - recommended that nearly 64 per cent of the Western Ghats be declared Ecologically Sensitive Areas, with strict curbs on mining, large dams, and destructive construction. Crucially, it proposed gram sabha veto power over environmentally harmful projects, placing democracy at the heart of conservation.

Though the report was fiercely opposed by powerful lobbies and later diluted by the Kasturirangan panel, its warnings proved prophetic - anticipating floods, landslides, and ecological breakdown across the Ghats, including the Kerala floods of 2018. The report continues to inform struggles and court battles across the region.

Gadgil's relationship with movements was not merely advisory - it was deeply participatory. The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) drew extensively on the Gadgil Commission report to challenge the Lavasa Hill City project in Maharashtra, exposing its ecological violations and undemocratic clearance processes. Across Kerala, NAPM and allied movements mobilised using Gadgil's framework to resist dams, illegal mining, unregulated construction, and the ravages of mass tourism in the Western Ghats. Gadgil did not remain distant from these struggles. He attended NAPM conventions and meetings, joined

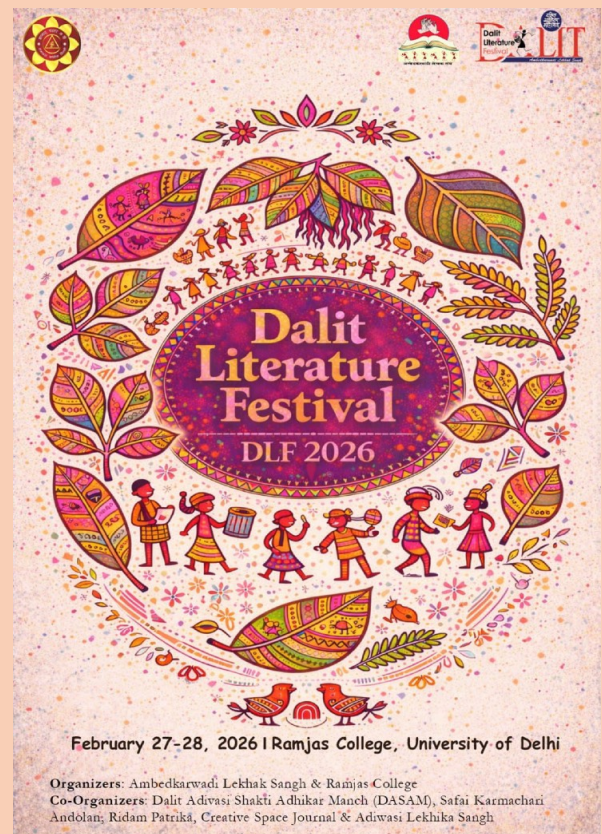
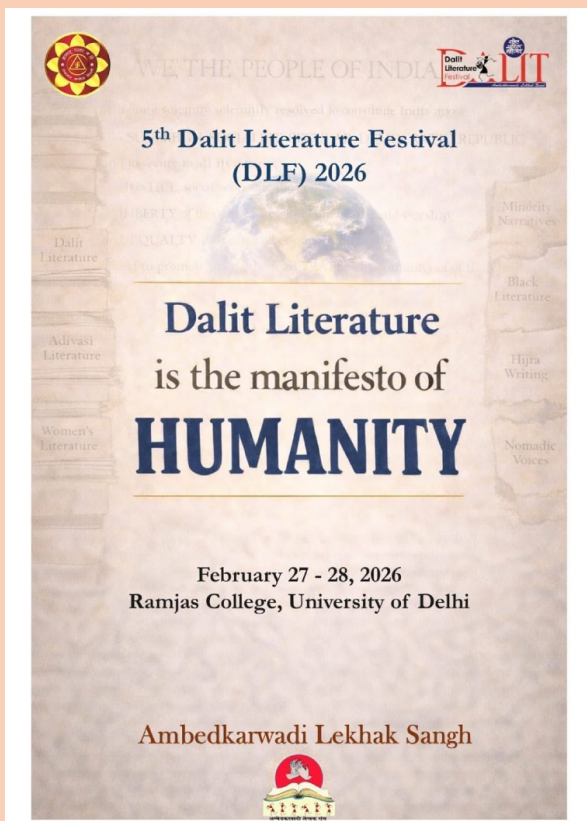
movement-led discussions, and was always available to assist campaigns with clarity, evidence, and moral conviction. Whether engaging with Adivasi movements, anti-mining struggles, or community conservation initiatives, he stood firmly on the side of those resisting displacement and ecological violence.

In his final years, Gadgil remained an unflinching critic of top-down governance. Speaking shortly before his death, he warned that governments often misuse scientific institutions to suppress inconvenient truths. Reflecting on mining in the Aravallis and Surajgarh in Gadchiroli, he spoke of how data is manipulated to justify extraction while silencing local opposition. His last book, *A Walk Up the Hill: Living With People and Nature* (2023), powerfully summed up his life's philosophy: development imposed on people is not progress, and conservation without democracy is coercion.

For movements across India, Madhav Gadgil was more than an ecologist - he was a comrade in struggle, a mentor who showed that rigorous science could be an ally of resistance. As the National Alliance of People's Movements and the National Alliance for Climate and Ecological Justice join communities across the country in mourning his passing, there is also a shared resolve to carry forward his legacy.

In times of deep ecological crisis, Gadgil's life reminds us that protecting nature requires courage, honesty, and an unwavering commitment to people's rights. His ideas continue to walk with us - through gram sabhas, courtrooms, classrooms, and movements - pointing towards an ecology rooted not in control, but in coexistence and justice.

NAPM-NACEJ





**NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF
PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS**

जन आन्दोलनों का राष्ट्रीय समन्वय

National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) is an alliance of progressive people's organisations and movements, who while retaining their autonomous identities, are working together to bring the struggle for primacy of rights of communities over natural resources, conservation and governance, decentralised democratic development and towards a just, sustainable and egalitarian society in the true spirit of globalism.