

The Voice of the **Working Woman**

Monthly Journal of the AICCCWW(CITU) • Volume 41 • No.2 February 2021 (Price: Rupees 10)



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Monthly Journal of the AICCWW (CITU)

Total pages 28 (including cover)

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Comrade Raghunath Singh

CITU is shocked and deeply grieved on the untimely demise of Comrade Raghunath Singh, CITU national Vice President and General Secretary of Punjab State Committee, on 20 December 2020, after sudden illness and post Covid-19 complications, at the age of 66 years. He was a Punjab State Secretariat member of the CPI(M) till his death.

Born in a political family in Hoshiarpur district of Punjab, his father being a well-known communist leader and freedom fighter giving shelter to underground Party leaders like Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Pandit Kishorilal and others, Comrade Raghunath Singh became active in mass movement at his young age. As SFI's district leader he organised movements and was jailed for 3 months. Immediately after his student days, he joined CITU as a whole timer and became its district president in 1982 and led many struggles of the factory workers in the district. He was elected as the CITU State General Secretary in 2003 and was also elected as CITU national Vice President. He tirelessly worked moving across the State for the success of all national and state movements including 26 November 2020 General Strike and in support of the ongoing peasant movement.

CITU paid respectful homage to the departed leader; dipped its red flag in the memory of Comrade Raghunath Singh and conveyed condolences to his comrades and family members.

EDITORIAL

INTENSIFY UNIFIED STRUGGLES

The farmers demanding repeal of the three anti farmer Farm Acts and withdrawal of the Electricity Bill 2020 have shown amazing resoluteness in their struggle. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the joint platform of around 500 farmers' organisations leading the struggle stands united till today that the farmers would go back only after the BJP government led by Modi repeals the Acts and withdraws the Electricity Bill. While participating in the discussions with the government they made it clear that 'ghar wapsi' (return to home) will happen only after 'law wapsi'

However, the BJP government remains adamant, afraid that conceding to the demands of the farmers would anger its corporate masters, within and outside the country. All its machinations to malign, divide and disrupt farmers' unity, and mislead, and create confusion among the mass of the people in our country fell flat. Support to the farmers' struggle, from all sections of our people, particularly from the working class continues to grow across the country. The joint platform of central trade unions and independent national federations called upon the working class to extend active support and solidarity to the demands of the farmers while asserting their own demands of scrapping the labour codes and stall privatisation etc. Workers across the country are getting ready to join the farmers' parade on the Republic Day on 26th January, to convert it into a Day of joint assertion by the workers and peasants, of their determination to defend national interests as well as the rights and livelihood of all sections of the toiling people.

It is in this situation that the Supreme Court is apparently trying to come to the rescue of the BJP government. The Supreme Court bench headed by chief justice SA Bobde stayed the implementation of the three farm laws and appointed committee, which none of the petitioners has asked for, to go into the issue. The committee was directed to

submit its report within two months. In fact, the farmers' organisations have, during discussions with the government, rejected such an offer. All the four members of the committee are known advocates of the so called 'reforms' in agriculture, i.e. implementation of pro corporate neoliberal policies in agriculture. One member has now resigned. The court did not even think that it should consult the farmers' organisations while forming this committee. What the committee would recommend is predetermined. Naturally the Supreme Court will accept the recommendations made by its own committee and lift the stay on implementation of the farm laws. The entire exercise is nothing but yet another attempt to mislead and confuse the people.

Besides, the remarks of the chief justice of India about participation of women in the protests at Delhi border are highly objectionable indicating a patriarchal mindset. Asking 'why are women and elders kept in the protest', he advised that they should be persuaded to go back. In addition, through its response to the allegation of infiltration by Khalistani elements in the protests, the Supreme Court has also given scope for the government to act against the protestors on the pretext of being 'anti national', which the government has already tried and failed. In the face of this stubborn attitude of the government and one sided Supreme Court judgment, the farmers' struggle has entered a crucial phase. It is the responsibility of the working class and the entire toiling people of the country to stand in their full strength by the farmers.

CITU cadres at all levels have to ensure that the call of the joint trade union movement for active and physical support and solidarity to the ensuing 'Mahapadav' and the farmers' parade in the national capital and all state capitals on 26th January is effectively implemented. Strengthening the bonds of solidarity and united struggles of workers and peasants, the two sections who produce the wealth of our society, is the most urgent need of the hour. It is through such united struggles alone that the anti worker, anti peasant and anti national policies of the BJP government be defeated.

Supreme Court stays Farm Laws, but Appoints Committee of Government's Yes Men

Ashok Dhawale

The Supreme Court of India (SC), after hearing a clutch of petitions on the farmers' struggle, but completely ignoring the ones that challenged the very constitutionality of the three Farm Laws criticized the central government for its handling of the farmers' struggle on January 11 and suspended the implementation of the Farm Laws 'until further notice' on January 12. But all this was effectively nullified by its constitution of a four-member committee which comprises government lackeys, all of whom have publicly supported the Farm Laws and are clear votaries of neo-liberal policies and corporate invasion of Indian agriculture. The four infamous individuals are: Ashok Gulati, Anil Ghanwat, P K Joshi and Bhupinder Singh Mann. What recommendations such a committee will make can be surmised even before it begins its work.

This made it crystal clear on which side the SC really stood. This was hardly surprising, given its record over the last few years. Crucial cases challenging the constitutional validity of the CAA, the abolition of Article 370, the withdrawal of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, the crony corporate issue of electoral bonds, are all kept on the back burner for years. Bail for the Bhima Koregaon detenus is denied for years, while Arnab Goswami gets bail in double-quick time.

SAMYUKTA KISAN MORCHA REJECTS COMMITTEE EVEN BEFORE ITS FORMATION

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which is leading the farmers' struggle, declared in a press release on January 11, even before the SC announced the names of the committee, that it is "not willing to participate in any proceedings before a committee that may be appointed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court." On January 12,

after the announcement of the committee, the SKM while reiterating that it would not participate in any such committee process, said, "One of our apprehensions about such a process got validated in the very constitution of the committee. It is clear that the court is being misguided by various forces even in its constitution of a committee. These are people who are known for their support to the three Farm Acts and have actively advocated for the same. It is not out of place to remind that the farmer unions have rejected a committee proposal from the government too. Our dialogue is basically with an elected government about its policy directions and concomitant laws."

The SKM in its statement then hit out hard against the central government and its three Farm Acts, "Farmers have explained in detail to GOI(government of India) that the three laws will lead to corporate control over agricultural production, processing and markets. It will lead to high cost of inputs, higher debts on peasants, lower the crop prices, increase farmer losses, decrease government procurement, end PDS, raise food costs, increase farmer and agricultural worker suicides, hunger deaths and eviction from land due to debts. The government has hidden these hard facts from the people and the courts." It then reiterated its future programme of a nationwide struggle given below.

Earlier, on January 7, a rehearsal tractor march of over 5,000 tractors with tens of thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, UP, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and MP was held on the KMP bypass road near Delhi. It was a truly magnificent sight.

SIGNIFICANT KERALA ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

A major political development was the resolution unanimously passed by the Kerala Assembly on December 31. Kerala chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan moved a resolution in the state assembly against the three farm laws, which was unanimously passed by the house with the ruling LDF, opposition Congress-led UDF and the BJP supporting it. BJP's lone member in Kerala Assembly, O Rajagopal, supported the resolution seeking scrapping of the three contentious farm laws.

The BJP Government has also misled the Supreme Court that the protest is restricted to States like Punjab, Haryana etc., and specifically mentioned that there were no protests in Kerala and Karnataka.

- Kerala has been having indefinite sit-in protests at all District Headquarters since 14th December, 2020 and has had numerous protests across the State.
- Karnataka had a total Bandh on 28th November, 2020 and has had a continuous sit-in in Bangalore and all Districts from 16th December, 2020 onwards.
- In Bengal Jathas have taken place in more than 20,000 villages and are still going on. Tripura has been having protests in all Districts despite extreme repression and attacks.
- Tamil Nadu has had massive protests across the State and massive rally at Thanjavur and all central protest calls have been implemented with an unprecedented response.
- Bihar witnessed militant rally conducted successfully at Patna braving police Lathicharge.
- In Andhra Pradesh, massive tractor rallies took place at Vijayawada and Tirupati.
- Telangana is having a Bus Jatha through all districts with massive protests against the BJP Government.



Over thousand Kisan activists from Kerala are reaching Delhi Shahjahanpur border to join the struggle front. Thousands of Kisans, agricultural workers, share-croppers and Adivasi farmers from Rajasthan, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Bengal are already part of different struggle fronts at Delhi's borders. The working Class is mobilized in a large way in borders as well as in states at all levels.



STRUGGLE TO BE INTENSIFIED WITH THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE MASSES

The Mahila Kisan Diwas on 18th January will be organized with processions at Village, Block and District level. Much criticism has come on the views that women and old persons in the protest should be asked to go back. This is an obvious attack on women's equality and freedom and should be countered effectively. Slogans on this aspect and the role and rights of women, their contribution in agriculture, their role in democratic and patriotic struggles will be highlighted.

As per the call of the AIKSCC, a 3-day 'mahapadav' will be held in front of governor houses in states from 23-25 January 2021. Accordingly preparations are on for this 3 day Mahapadav & Mazdoor-Kisan Parade on 26th January, 2021 in various states. Mahapadav before Governor Bhawan is planned in WB from 20 to 22 Jan, in Maharashtra from 24 to 26, in AP, Telangana and Kerala from 23 to 25, in Odisha for one day on 23 January. The Kisan Parade with National Flag after the official programme on Republic Day at New Delhi and Mazdoor-Kisan Parade in all the districts across the country will take place. The Joint platform of Central Trade Unions has also decided to actively join these struggles. This is expected to be the largest ever mass protest mobilisation in post Independent India.

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF NATIONWIDE STRUGGLE

On New Year's Day, January 1, the SKM held its meeting at the Singhu border and decided on the future programme of nationwide struggle. From January 6 to 20, a fortnight-long nationwide campaign to counter the government's propaganda, called 'Desh Jagruti Abhiyan' will be conducted through rallies, meetings, conferences and dharnas. Lohri on January 13 will be marked as 'Kisan Sankalp Divas' by burning copies of the three Farm Laws. January 18 will be celebrated as 'Mahila Kisan Divas' to underline the role of women farmers.

'Azad Hind Kisan Diwas' will be marked on Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's birth anniversary on January 23 by large protests outside the governor's official residences in all state capitals. On Republic Day, January 26, lakhs of farmers at the Delhi borders will march into Delhi with thousands of their tractors, trolleys and other vehicles.

This historic 'Farmers Republic Parade' will take place in Delhi after the official parade. Similar farmers' parades will take place that day in all state capitals and district centres throughout the country. A call will be given to the working class and all other sections of the people to join these parades across the country.

CITU For Intensifying Class Struggles To Push Back Corporate Regime

A.R.Sindhu

“This struggle by the working class against the anti worker Labour Codes and anti national privatisation will complement the struggle of the peasants against the anti farmers Farm Acts and the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020. These simultaneous fronts of struggles, by the peasants and workers alone can push back the pro corporate neoliberal regime. Thus it is of the utmost importance for the working class to intensify the struggles on its specific demands along with the demand to repeal the Farm Acts”.

This is the resolve of the extended meeting of the CITU Secretariat held on 21-22 December at P Ramamurti Bhawan, New Delhi. This was the first physical meeting held since lock down. The meeting took up different programmes of action in the direction of the CTUs decision to step up struggles in different forms leading to multiple days' strike.

CITU IN INCREASING SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLING FARMERS – THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

Since the promulgation of the three farm ordinances, CITU has been in the forefront of the struggle against these along with AIKS and other peasant organisations. The joint calls of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU on 23 July was observed in 86422 places throughout the country. Our joint call to observe 'Save India Day' was joined by all the central trade unions and AIKSCC and was observed in nearly two lakh places and households. One of the major demands of the 26 November 2020 was the repaling of the three farm acts. Joint Platform of central trade Unions has decided to support all the calls by the AIKSCC and the Samyukta Morcha of Farmers. CITU activists throughout the country worked

with much class consciousness to make each and every call of AIKS/AIKSCC/SKM whether it is 3rd December, 5th December or 8 December Bharat Bandh. The call for boycott of Ambani and Adani products, free toll plazas etc were made successful in the cities by the working class.

30 DECEMBER 2020 – NATIONAL PROTEST DAY

Taking up the solidarity to the next level, on 30 December 2020, workers under CITU had observed national Protest Day in more than one lakh workplaces. In many states protests were organized in front of Ambani/ Adani companies. Unorganised sector workers organized protests in village/block levels. In industrial townships and collieries in states like MP, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh where along with privatization, the question of land take over is also a big issue, massive protest action were held.

AT DELHI BORDERS

CITU activists were actively helping the Punjab farmers in breaking the police barricades in Haryana on 26/27 November 2020. Construction, Electricity, Transport and other unions were active in filling the dug up roads, help removing the concrete blocks and barbed wires. In different places in Haryana, langars (free food supply centres) were organized by the CITU/SKS units for farmers from Punjab and Haryana on their way to Delhi.

Medical camps were organized and being run by FMRAI units at various borders with the help of Doctors organizations and Jan Swasthayan.

MASSIVE CAMPAIGN AND FUND COLLECTION FOR FARMERS' STRUGGLE

Various units of CITU have been continuously organizing massive campaign against these farm acts and its impact and help AIKS mobilizing the farmers in different states. Anganwadi Federation has taken up one week campaign from 14-21 December among the beneficiaries. As per the call of AIKS, various CITU unions, state/district committees and Federations are collecting struggle fund as well.

SOLIDARITY RALLIES AT BORDERS

In addition to these activities, CITU, has given a call for solidarity mobilisations of workers at the various struggle points at the borders of Delhi.

On 8 December, at Gurgaon CITU state President Surekha and Vice President Satvir Singh and CWFI President Sukhvir Singh along with hundreds of workers were arrested while trying to block the NH. On 13 December, Nearly 150 anganwadi workers and helpers from Punjab under the leadership of Usharani, President AIFAWH and R Karumalaiyan, Secretary CITU were in the forefront of the blocking of Jaipur Highway at Shahjahanpur.

Different CITU committees near Delhi have been actively participating in the protests in Delhi borders. In Palwal, CITU state President Ramvilas Goswami and GS Pramod Pradhan led various delegations of workers from MP from the very beginning. UP and Delhi NCR committees are continuously mobilizing at Gazipur border, Haryana and Punjab committees are mobilizing at Palwal, Singhu, Tikri and Shahjahanpur borders. CITU State President and GSs- Surekha and Jaibhagawan, Haryana, Ravi Mishra, Premnath Rai, UP, Virender Gaur, Anurag Delhi NCR are leading the delegations regularly. Rajasthan CITU under the leadership of Ravindra Shukla and VS Rana mobilized workers from 13 December onwards.

On the New Year day, Comrade Tapan Sen GS, CITU had flagged off the first rally of scheme workers at Singhu border. These series of rallies in which hundreds of Scheme workers, ASHA, Anganwadi and MDM workers participated, were held at various borders - on 1 January 2021 at Singhu and Gazipur, on 4 January at Palwal, on 5 January at Tikri and Shahjahanpur on 7 January. The marches were led by leaders of Anganwadi, ASHA and MDM workers federations Usharani, President and A R Sindhu, General Secretary, AIFAWH and secretaries CITU, Surekha, President Haryana CITU and Leader of AICCAW(CITU),





Jaibhagwan, GS CITU, Haryana and MDMWFI, Subhash Rani, Harjeet Kaur, Shakuntala, Sunita etc .A R Sindhu and Usharani , Jaibhagwan and Surekha addressed the farmers in various borders. On 6 January hundreds of construction workers under the leadership of Sukhbir Singh President CWFI, marched in solidarity at Shahjahanpur.

7 AND 8 JANUARY 2021 MASSIVE JAILBHARO

CITU had also given a call for massive gheraos/ jailbharo at DM office throughout the country on 7/8 January 2021. The call for massive Jailbharo/ courting arrest/gherao of DM offices was undertaken by the CITU committees in a massive way. Hundreds of leaflets were distributed in massive campaign. In more than 400 districts the programmes were held successfully. In many places, the programmes were held in front of central government offices and malls/ showrooms of Ambani/Adani. The anger against the four labour codes and the attitude of Modi government to the struggling farmers was reflected in the large mobilizations. In Tamil Nadu massive courting arrest programme was held on 6 January 2021. In Haryana, the programme was held on 12 January.

Various other sectors like, electricity, transport etc had also had come in solidarity actions at the borders. The Electricity Employees Federation of India is planning for one day nationwide Strike against the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020, the three farm acts and four labour codes. The Coal Workers Federation has been organizing protest and mobilizing people against the acquisition of tribal land and privatization of coal sector.

The farmers have decided to intensify the struggle. The joint platform of Central Trade Unions have decided to support these actions declared by the farmers and "join in thousands to the three days Mahapadav in the state capitals on 23-25 January 2021 and the Farmers Republic Day on 26th January converting it to workers-peasants assertion against the destructive, anti-people and anti-national policies of the Modi Government."

The unity of the working class and the peasantry emerged during the struggle and the united actions have the potential to push back this corporate regime. To quote the CITU secretariat:

"Today, workers and all sections of toiling people are coming out in spontaneous struggles. As Lenin, the great teacher of the working class, has explained, these will certainly encounter many problems and difficulties, unforeseen by those who start the struggles; as a class oriented trade union with a clear perspective, we should be ahead of these movements; we should be able to provide the correct direction to these struggles enabling the working class to effectively address all the difficulties and obstacles created by the ruling classes in the course of these struggles. We must be able to elevate these spontaneous struggles to the level of conscious struggles not only through our active participation, but also by developing the political ideological consciousness of our cadres. That is one of the most important and urgent tasks before us today."

Trade Unions Viewpoint On Issues To Be Considered For Framing Budget For The Year 2021-2022

Excerpts from the views expressed by the Central Trade Unions in the Pre Budget Consultations on 12 December 2020 by the Finance Minister on Budget 2021-2022

1. **Minimum wage and deliberate depression of Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Industrial Workers:** The national minimum wage should be fixed at not less than Rs 21000 per month for the entire country. Need based minimum wage should be considered as an essential part of social security.
2. **Employment generation:** Massive public investment in infrastructure, social sectors and agriculture would generate employment. Allocate the necessary funds for each person outside the income tax net, to be given Rs.7500/- per month and 10 kg per month free ration for six months. All vacant sanctioned posts in the different government departments, railways, PSUs and autonomous institutions should be filled up through fresh recruitment. The ban on creation of new posts and mandatory reduction of govt. posts should be lifted.
3. **Skill development:** Regularise the apprentices' working years together on regular production lines as workers. Intervene to ensure placement in regular jobs, of those getting trained in those agencies.
4. **Increase budgetary allocations for the social sector** and basic essential services like health, education, food security etc in the Union Budget. Abdicate NEP to guarantee Right to Education.
5. **Effective measures against deliberate tax and loan repayment defaults:** Firm measures should be taken against deliberate tax default by the big business and corporate lobby to curtail the huge accumulation of unpaid taxes, which have been continuously increasing. Further, wilful default in repayment of bank loans should be made a criminal offence, the list of wilful defaulters should be made public and stringent measures such as fast track Debt Recovery Tribunals should be implemented for speedy recovery of loans.
6. **7th Pay Commission:** Resolve demands of the Government employees regarding 7th Pay Commission, which remain unresolved even though half the duration of this Commission is about to be over.
7. **Price rise:** Govt. should contain price rise and ban speculative forward trading in essential commodities, take strong measures to curtail hoarding and strengthen the Public Distribution System, making it universal. Stop the system of cash transfer to beneficiaries' accounts in lieu of PDS. Take immediate steps to reduce the price of medicines including life saving drugs.
8. **Repeal farm laws.** Additionally, taxes on petrol and diesel be reduced throughout the country.
9. **Stop disinvestment and strategic sale of public sector units:** The public sector has to be strengthened and expanded.
10. **Prevent dumping:** The increasing import of industrial commodities including capital goods should be contained and regulated to prevent dumping. Protect and promote domestic industries. This will also help in preventing job losses.
11. **Extend MGNREGA:** Expenditure on MGNREGA should be increased to cover all rural areas and expand to urban areas with a guarantee of employment for a minimum of 200 days with statutory minimum wages. Immediately clear all arrears.
12. **Contract and casual workers:** No contract/casual workers should be deployed on jobs of perennial nature. Regularise them in PSUs. The contract and casual workers doing same and similar work as the permanent workers should be paid the same wages and benefits as paid to

regular workers as directed by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in 2016.

- 13. FDI:** FDI should not be allowed in the crucial sectors.
- 14. Defence:** Privatisation and/or outsourcing of the defence sector production should be stopped.
- 15. Scheme workers:** Regularise the workforce employed in the various schemes of government of India including the ICDS, NHM, Mid-day Meal Programme, National Child Labour Project, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan etc. Till this is done, at least immediately implement the recommendation of the 45th ILC that these scheme workers should be recognised as 'workers', they should be paid minimum wages and provided social security benefits including pension. Increase budgetary allocations to these schemes and stop privatisation of these schemes in any form.
- 16. Domestic workers:** The government should ratify the ILO Convention 189 and enact a central law and create support system for domestic workers. Financial support to those worst affected during the pandemic.
- 17. Unorganised workers:** The Budget allocation for National Fund for Unorganised Workers to provide social security for all unorganised workers including construction, agriculture, contract workers, daily wage and self employed workers, forest workers, street vendors, casual & migrant workers, small shoppers, domestic workers, self employed and others should be enhanced. Ministry of Finance should ensure proper cess collection for all welfare boards.
- 18. Passing of Labour Codes:** Repeal the Labour Codes. No labour law amendment should be undertaken without the consent of the trade unions and workers.
- 19. EPF:** There should not be any threshold limit for coverage under EPF scheme. Government and employers' contribution should be increased

to provide a minimum pension of Rs. 6000 per month and make it sustainable.

- 20. ESIC:** The share of employers and workers should be raised to earlier level again and the adequate services be provided to insured persons and ESI service must be extended to all yet-uncovered geographic locations with adequate infrastructure.
- 21. Pension for all:** Pension should be construed as deferred wage and all workers who are not covered by any pension scheme should be ensured a pension not less than Rs 6,000/- per month and the Government should give budgetary support for this.
- 22. New Pension scheme:** NPS should be withdrawn. All central and state government employees recruited on or after 01.01.2004 should also be covered under the Old Pension Scheme under "defined benefit system".
- 23. Railways:** Adequate financial resources should be allotted to the railways to ensure more effective, accessible and affordable transport to the common people, particularly the poor. The capabilities of public sector production units should be utilised fully, further developed and strengthened. All measures taken to privatise the railways should be scrapped and abandoned. The decision to allow 100% FDI in railways should be withdrawn. All the vacancies in the railways should be filled up. The long pending demands of the railway employees like enhancement of ceiling in respect of running allowance for tax exemption, housing scheme etc should be addressed positively.

We regret that none of the suggestions of the central trade unions, made in the earlier pre-budget meetings were given any consideration in the previous budgets. We urge upon you yet again that the points raised by us will be given positive consideration while framing the budget for 2021-2022.

**INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC
TUCC SEWA AICCTU LPF UTUC**

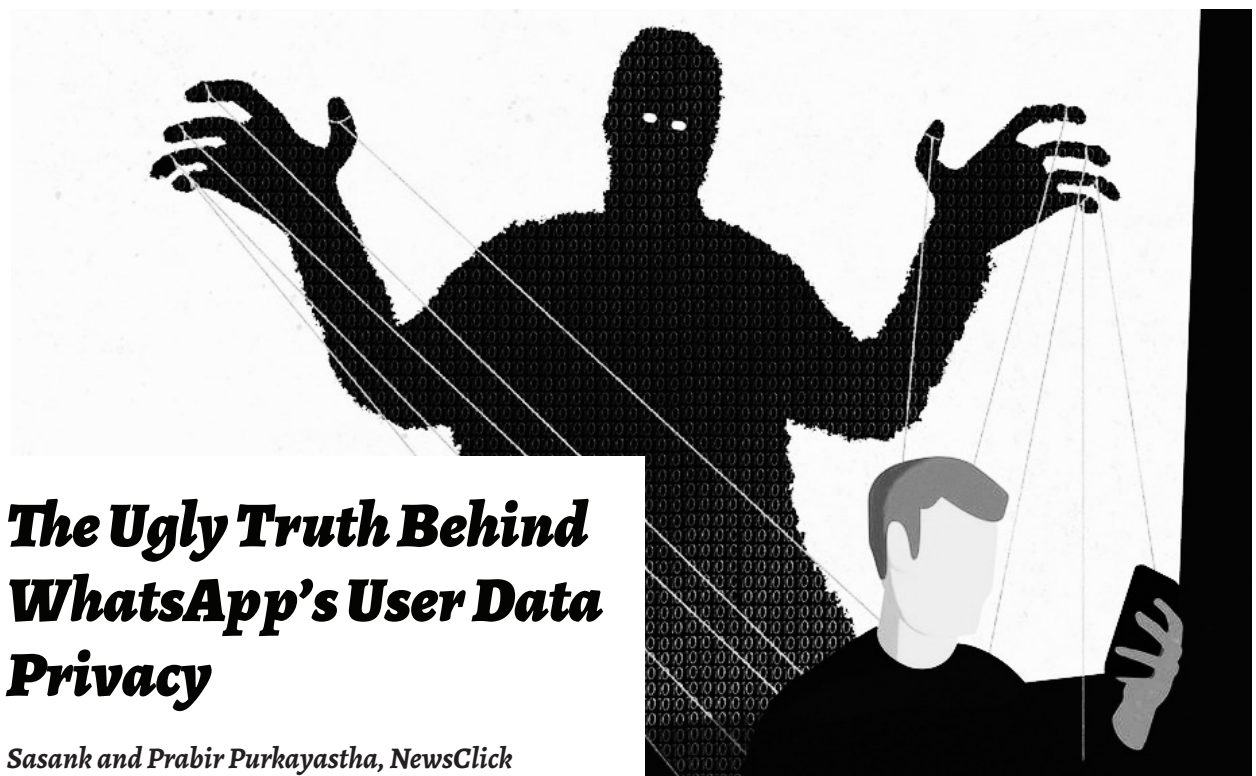


Image Source : TechInfoBIT

The Ugly Truth Behind WhatsApp's User Data Privacy

Sasank and Prabir Purkayastha, NewsClick

WHATSAPP, a company owned by Facebook since 2014, has issued a new privacy policy changing its data-sharing rules, which will come into effect by February 8, 2021. In this new policy, WhatsApp has declared that it will share data with Facebook, its parent company, about users' chats, connections, location and device information, transactions and payments. It will also share data of our interactions with other businesses that use Facebook as a platform. The public outcry over the new privacy policy has prompted an exodus to much safer alternatives like Signal. The weekly downloads of Signal and Telegram, another popular messaging app, has increased by millions, coupled with a significant drop in WhatsApp's new downloads.

WhatsApp started sharing its user data with Facebook in 2016, violating the assurance it had given its users in 2014 when Facebook acquired the messaging platform. In 2016, it changed its policies of not sharing its users' data with Facebook and gave its then-existing users a very narrow 30-day to opt-out. Since then, anybody joining WhatsApp has to read its 8,000-word user agreement and find the clause on sharing their

data, and then opt-out of sharing their data with Facebook. As is well-known, virtually nobody goes through this tortuous exercise. The overwhelming number of its users have their data shared with Facebook. However, there was at least a provision for users to opt-out. The proposed policy obliterates even this choice. Brian Acton, a co-founder of WhatsApp, left Facebook following the 2016 change of policy and the violation of Facebook's assurances to WhatsApp users. He founded the Signal Foundation, a non-profit, to create the Signal app. Signal is now emerging as an alternative to WhatsApp on encrypted messenger services.

In India, Facebook has secured clearance for its payment app—WhatsApp UPI—in November last year. It was soon after Facebook pumped 5.7 billion dollars(US) in Reliance Jio platform. The Indian regulator—NPCI (National Payments Corporation of India)—had asked that WhatsApp data be kept separate from Facebook. It does not appear from its App store declaration that Facebook followed this regulatory requirement and its new policy of sharing data with Facebook is an explicit violation of the NPCI's direction.

Interestingly enough, under pressure from the EU and UK regulators, WhatsApp data is not shared with Facebook, a provision which Facebook says it will still follow. For the rest including the US, it is data enclosure on a massive scale. And as we know, data is the lifeblood of the digital economy.

Spooked with the mass exodus from WhatsApp, Facebook is in damage control mode. It has assured its users that WhatsApp en-crypted message content will not be read or shared with Facebook or other businesses. In an attempt to stem the tide of WhatsApp departures, WhatsApp has taken the costly route of taking out full-page advertisements in major newspapers in the country. It is reminiscent of its failed attempt to sway the people with misleading information at the time of Free Basics. What it forgets to mention is what it does with the whole host of data apart from the content of its messages. This data, as its app policy indicates, is shared with others including its parent company, Facebook.

Before we check its other claims, let us see how WhatsApp de-scribes its sharing of data policies in the Apple App Store. In other words, WhatsApp has officially declared that it collects your personal data, and as per its new privacy policy, will be shared not only with Facebook but also with other businesses that use the Facebook-WhatsApp platform.

WHATSAPP-FACEBOOK'S CLAIMS, A REALITY CHECK

What are the claims that Facebook has made and what is the reality?

- 1. WhatsApp cannot see your private messages, therefore it cannot share them with Facebook or any other third-party:** WhatsApp claims that as the content of the messages is end-to-end encrypted, only the sender and receiver can see them. Then the grand fudge: they collect information used to 'personalise features', 'show relevant offers and ads', 'make suggestions' etc. So, they use a range of meta-data as declared in their App Store declaration. Meta-Data is as crucial as the real data because it monitors our behaviour on the app and violates our privacy.
- 2. WhatsApp cannot see your shared location:**

This is another bla-tant lie. Even if you do not give WhatsApp the location permission, it will estimate your geographical location by using an IP Address and then share it with Facebook.

- 3. WhatsApp does not share your contacts:** According to WhatsApp, the contacts' phone number and your phone number are stored in the form of a 'cryptographic hash'. In theory, it means that they are not stored in the raw form but in a format that makes it difficult to identify the phone number. However, this is a duplicitous declaration because your phone number is part of your account information which is stored by WhatsApp and shared with Facebook. So, even if the phone numbers of your contacts are stored in hashed form, WhatsApp can still identify the person, as their account information isn't encrypted. Moreover, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp accounts running on the same device are linked as soon as you install those apps on your phone.
- 4. WhatsApp groups remain private:** This claim rests on the proposition that phone number and any associated information used to identify individuals is stored only in the form of a cryptographic hash. We have seen that this is not the case and that personally identifiable information is being shared with Facebook. We have recently seen that the group invitation links were used to extract group membership information and made accessible to search engines.
- 5. Sharing data of our Business interactions:** WhatsApp claims that only the interactions with business accounts will be affected by the new privacy policy. This confirms that not only will WhatsApp collect and store information about our interactions with these business accounts but it will also share them with Facebook. Even sharing an article to somebody by clicking a WhatsApp share button on a news site is counted as interaction. It separates 'chats with friends and family' and 'chats with businesses' and deems the former to be 'private' and the latter not. This betrays the thinking of Facebook, it considers all your data to be fair game for surveillance and making money.



Image Source : AccessNow

INTERACTIONS WITH 'BUSINESS ACCOUNTS'

The Supreme Court of India has affirmed privacy as a fundamental right of all the citizens of India. Unfortunately, a new data protection Act that will enable this fundamental right is yet to be framed by the Modi government. It is worth reiterating that even the interaction we have with any business is just between the two parties and unwarranted access to such information is a violation of privacy.

By monitoring our interactions with business accounts, WhatsApp aims to collect not just our chats but all the related information about our activity on various third-party apps/sites. For example, if a ticket booking site sends you confirmation about a movie, or if you buy something from an e-commerce app which sends you an invoice, it will be collected by WhatsApp. All this data will also be shared with Facebook and then be used to show you related ads when you're on WhatsApp or Facebook. WhatsApp will be the sole entity in deciding which businesses are permitted to show ads. In doing so, WhatsApp will be able to force these businesses into sharing our data with Facebook and enable Facebook to capture even more data about us.

THREAT TO PRIVACY AND DEMOCRACY

Facebook's acquisitions—Instagram, WhatsApp—has built a social media monopoly. It had done this by exploiting the data of individuals and

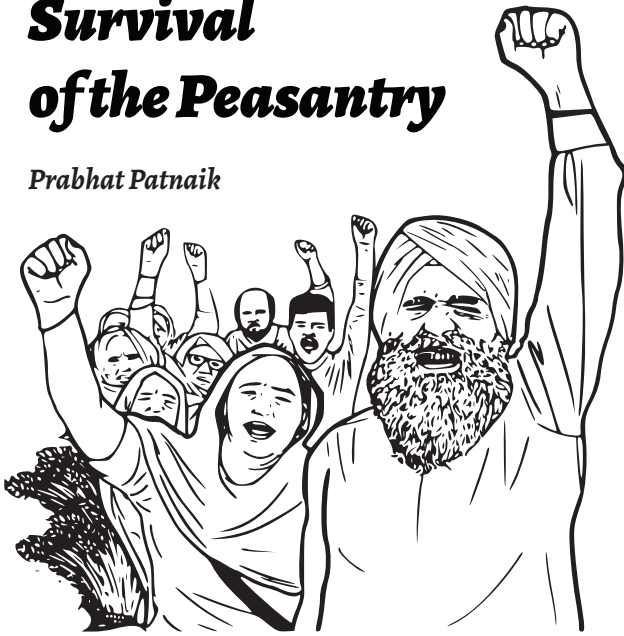
communities for profit. Its growth is directly proportional to the systematic erosion of the privacy of its user base. Linking WhatsApp data with Facebook for no apparent reason than monitoring our social media behaviour and controlling it, would further strengthen this monopoly. It will also allow Facebook to exploit our data for micro-targeting. Weakening users' privacy is the major ground of the anti-monopoly lawsuits filed by the Federal Trade Commission and 46 state governments against Facebook.

We have also seen significant data leaks from Facebook (Cambridge Analytica) and WhatsApp (Pegasus) individually. Linking all the users' data only increases the risk of these leaks even more so. This data sharing between WhatsApp, Facebook and other businesses only increases the threat manifold. Once linked, it will set in an irreversible process and there would be no way to decouple the data.

By using peoples' profiles, interests and conversations to categorise them into micro-targeted groups and then suggesting content for behavioural modification, Facebook is already subverting our democratic process. Along with the US elections, Brexit campaign, Facebook data has been used to disrupt elections in India too. If WhatsApp data is coupled with the existing data that Facebook has, it would create an even bigger threat to our sovereignty and national security.

A Matter of Survival of the Peasantry

Prabhat Patnaik



The *kisans* gathered around the Delhi border have unerringly put their fingers on the real issue confronting them, namely their very survival as peasants. Till now there was an arrangement in the country which, though crumbling under the impact of neo-liberalism, still kept the peasantry alive. The three laws brought in by the Modi government are meant to remove this life-line altogether. This is also why there can be no meeting ground between the protesting *kisans* and the government, within the ambit of these laws; they simply have to be repealed.

These laws for the first time since independence would allow encroachment into agriculture by unbridled capitalism, of which, naturally, the big players, i.e., corporates like Ambani and Adani and multinational agribusiness firms will be the main beneficiaries. To see this point, a distinction needs to be drawn first. There was much talk in the seventies about the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture; and one may wonder why so much fuss should be made of encroachment by capitalism now if a tendency towards capitalist development had already manifested itself nearly half a century ago.

If the peasantry has not disappeared despite the appearance of capitalism so long ago, then why should one worry about its disappearance now? That

capitalist development, however, had been internal to the agricultural economy; it consisted of an admixture of peasant and landlord capitalism that was developing within a regime that actively discouraged the encroachment of capitalism into agriculture from outside. This regime included the MSP, procurement operations, public distribution at subsidized prices, and so on. The government in short interposed itself within that regime between the peasant producers on the one hand and the outside capitalist sector and the world capitalist market on the other. The development of capitalism in agriculture occurred then within a universe where there was such an interposition by the government, where agriculture was insulated from the outside capitalist sector.

The chief mechanism of such encroachment from outside is by drawing peasant agriculture into the ambit of commodity production. Rosa Luxemburg who had theorized about capitalism destroying the peasant economy, had emphasized the introduction of commodity production as a means towards this destruction. But it is important to be clear about what commodity production means. It does not mean any production for the market, not even production that is exchanged for money under the C-M-C circuit. Commodity production in the full sense occurs when the product which is both a use-value and an exchange value for the buyer, is only an exchange value, just so much money, for the seller; and this amount is determined by the spontaneous operation of the market.

An important feature of commodity production, namely that it leads to a swallowing by big producers of small ones, which in the present context means a swallowing of peasants by the corporates, manifests itself fully only when commodity production in this true sense binds both the peasant and the capitalist economies. Within the regime of MSP and procurement there were restrictions on the spontaneity of the operation of the market; in fact, the MSP itself was a restriction of this kind which prevented such swallowing. The introduction of a neo-liberal regime was aimed at re-establishing such a spontaneity of the operation of the market. This demanded the dismantling of the arrangement that had prevented the swallowing of peasant agriculture by corporate capital; but while several parts of the earlier regime were dismantled, making peasant agriculture

increasingly unviable and giving rise to a spate of peasant suicides, a central feature of it, namely the system of MSP, procurement operations and the public distribution system, remained intact. The MSP was kept for long below what it should have been, but was not given up. No government had till now been so brazen in its insensitivity towards the peasantry that it could dismantle the whole system. The Modi government, however, has beaten all previous governments in its insensitivity; it has decided to dismantle the regime that stood as a bulwark against the corporate takeover of agriculture where the peasantry would be reduced to the status of labourers or de facto tenants-at-will.

In fact, exposing agriculture to the full blast of commodity production, with the State not interfering in the functioning of the agricultural markets, will bring about at least three fundamental changes. First, it would open up the country's land resource to the dictates of the world market, which means in effect the dictates of imperialism, since the superior purchasing power of the advanced countries would then determine the pattern of land use. Second, since in the present context the demand of the advanced countries is for tropical crops other than foodgrains, full-fledged commodity production would mean a diversion of land away from foodgrain production, i.e., a substitution of other crops and other ways of using land for foodgrain production, which would mean India's becoming food-import-dependent in the event of domestic food demand exceeding domestic production. Third, as already mentioned, it would mean leaving the peasantry to the mercy of the corporates, and a loss in the economic status of the peasantry. There are many ways in which this would happen. By way of illustration, we can think of one possible way as follows: peasants producing cash crops at the behest of the corporates to meet world demand, would get indebted to the latter in a poor crop year or in the event of a crash in the price (whose effect is invariably passed on to the peasants irrespective of what the original contract price was); once they are trapped in debt, they would lose their lands and become labourers.

All this should be familiar from the experience of the colonial days when the peasantry was thrown to the mercy of the market with no government intervention in the form of MSP and procurement prices. The distress to which it was reduced has found heart-rending

expression in virtually every vernacular literature of the country during the thirties and the forties; and yet so many intellectuals appear unaware of the implications of leaving peasant agriculture to the untrammelled operations of the market. It is as if they do not know the history of their own country. The BJP's being innocent of any knowledge of history is understandable; but several non-BJP intellectuals being starry-eyed about commodity production without government intervention is surprising.

These implications of full commodity production will necessarily mean an increase in the pauperization of the peasantry; and since any worsening of the peasants' material condition brings about a synchronous movement in that of the entire working people, there will necessarily be an increase in absolute impoverishment of the working people as a whole. To see this let us assume deliberately that employment per acre remains unchanged because of the shift from food to cash crops. (If it does not remain unchanged but declines instead, then the increase in impoverishment is obvious). Let us even assume that the per capita income of the peasantry and of agricultural labourers remains unchanged by the shift from food to cash crops. Even so however, if there is a single year of price-fall for the cash crop, the incomes of the working people, i.e., peasants and labourers, would drop, necessitating borrowing on their part.

And once they have got into debt there would be no stopping their downward slide towards destitution because of a very simple fact associated with commodity production, namely that while the effects of price-falls are fully passed on to the peasant producers by the corporates mediating between the peasants and the market, the effects of price increases are not. So, the chances of debt incurred, when world market prices fall, being paid back when world market prices increase, are non-existent. The debt, therefore, would remain like a millstone around the peasantry's neck, resulting in its pauperization; and since many peasants would migrate to cities in search of jobs, swelling the reserve army there, such pauperization will impoverish the working people as a whole including even the organised workers. The issues involved in the peasant protests, therefore, go far beyond this or that clause of the three bills. They concern the very survival of the peasantry.

CJI's Remarks on Women Farmers are an Assault on Human Agency and Constitutional Rights

Satarupa Chakraborty

By asking why women and the elderly are being 'kept' at the protest sites, the country's top judge has done a great disservice to the contribution of female farmers to agriculture.

Chastising the Centre for its handling of the farmers' protest, the Supreme Court on January 11 observed that it will not pass an order that "citizens should not protest". This was encouraging. But subsequent remarks made by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) S.A. Bobde, have given cause for concern. He asked: "Why are women and elders kept in the protest?" [Emphasis added]

He also asked advocate H.S. Phoolka to 'persuade' the women and elderly protesters to go back from the protest sites, indicating that an order may be passed by the court later to this end. On January 12, the CJI pronounced in the court, "We want to place on record our appreciation for this stand (about elders, women and children not participating in protests in future)."

These remarks irk the question – who is considered a citizen and who isn't? Can there be a 'guardian' at a given protest site to decide who should be 'kept' there and who should not be? Such a stance is not only an attack on human agency, but also puts the custodian of law in a questionable position.

The CJI's statement takes women for granted and endorses infantilisation of labour by women. That he would seek women and elders to be sent back by 'persuasion' is condemnable, as his stance portrays either ignorance or a deep sense of prejudice on the role of women in farming.

THE 'INVISIBLE' CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN FARMERS

It is a fact that women contribute as much to farming as their male counterparts. They walk miles to fetch water, collect and carry animal fodder. They sow, transplant, harvest, thresh and transport crops, process food, clean sheds and milk cattle. Yet, their labour remains unseen.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research highlighted the gender gap in land ownership in 2018 and mentioned, "Women comprise over 42 per cent of the agricultural labour force in the country, signifying increasing feminisation of agriculture, and yet they own less than 2 per cent of its farm land."

A People's Archive of Rural India (PARI) report found that nearly two-thirds of the female workforce is engaged in agriculture, "either as cultivators or agricultural labourers". While the labour of women farmers may not be visible, they are remarkably visible in protests – be it those against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the farmers' movements, workers' movements or students' movement.

During the great long farmers' march from Nasik to Mumbai in 2018, PARI penned a story on women farmers, titled 'They run the farm, they made the march.' This was one of the few instances when stories of the 'invisible' women labour force in India was in focus. If women farmers 'made the march' in 2018, they are writing history today along with their male counterparts – showing up in the thousands to protest against the three Central farm laws. The CJI may have failed to see women and elder farmers as leaders of the movement. But farmers' unions themselves hold a different position. The

vice president of the All India Kisan Sabha, Amra Ram – camped at the Shahjahanpur border on the Delhi-Rajasthan highway – said on the eve of Christmas, *“Women farmers are fighting the battle at the threshold, and we are here to follow them.”*

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmers’ unions, released a press note on 13 January which also found fault with the court’s observations. It said:

“During the Supreme Court hearing, it was said ‘Why are women in this strike? Why are women and elders kept’ in this strike? They should be asked to go home’. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha condemns such statements. The contribution of women in agriculture is incomparable and this movement is also a movement of women. It is shameful that women’s agency is being questioned. We strongly condemn this.”

The CJI’s observation also adheres to the centuries-old feudal caste order and its regressive practices. It is appalling to see such positions emerging in the Supreme Court, from none other than the Chief Justice of India.

SELECTIVE APPROACH?

So far as ‘humanitarian grounds’ are concerned, it appears that the court is selective in exercising its powers. Only recently, the Supreme Court was mum about the plight of millions of migrant workers – many of them women, children and elderly – caused by the imposition of the sudden and unplanned lockdown in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Or indeed, the government’s harsh policy measures such as demonetisation, which caused the deaths

of many Indian citizens, including, but not limited to, women, children and old people. A comprehensive list of 90 deaths that was reported by CatchNews in late 2016 is evidence of this. We are witnessing a historic movement by the farmers of India. They are on the streets today because they were forced to do so. The government has shown nothing but apathy towards them. Hundreds of kilometres away from their homes, they are battling not just the extreme conditions in Delhi today – a cold wave and the harsh winter rain, but also attempts by the BJP and Union ministers to malign them as ‘Khalistanis, Naxalis and Maoists’.

Their firm protest gives courage and inspiration to millions of Indians. The movement against the three farm laws and the Electricity Amendment Bill is inherently a peaceful and democratic movement. Despite coercive measures taken by the government – tear gassing them, using water cannons, lathis and even digging up roads – the farmers have remained democratic and disciplined. To participate in the movement is well within the rights of every Indian citizen, which is guaranteed under Article 19 of the Indian constitution. The constitution does not impose restrictions on participating in a protest on the basis of a person’s age or gender. The Honourable CJI also has no right to do so.

An apology in the court, therefore, is a must. Taking a stance that denies any Indian citizen of her or his constitutional right to protest is a grave violation of the provisions of the constitution. And as responsible Indian citizens, we must register our voice of protest against such feudal, Brahminical and patriarchal values which fail to see all citizens as equal.



Image Source : Shradha Agarwal, PARI



Scheme Workers in Education Observe Civil Disobedience in West Bengal

Employees working in various sections of the human resources development have been on continuous struggles in West Bengal for their basic demands of regularization of work and other benefits. In continuation of these protests, a big struggle of the para teachers under a joint platform was started in November 2020. Even to hold demonstrations, they have to get a court order.

Employees under various schemes including para teachers, employees of SSK, MSK, NCLP, Vocational Teachers And Trainers, Special Educators and Sikshabandhus and Non Teaching Staff under SSA Schemes under the banner of Manab Sampad Unnayan Sahayak Kormi Union under CITU started a mass movement for a long-term sit in demonstration from 28th December 2020. On 7th January 2021, they decided to go on a civil disobedience struggle.

A rally was organized on that day at Kolkata. Hundreds of workers broke the law and courted arrest in a jail bharo programme. In addition to their demands of regularization they have raised the demands of withdrawal of new National Education Policy (NEP) as well as the labour codes and farm acts.



Widespread Protest Against the Brutal Gang Rape and Murder of Anganwadi Helper in a Temple in Badaun, UP

In a shocking incident, an anganwadi helper in Ughaiti police station area in Badaun district, UP was brutally gang raped and murdered in a temple by the priest and his assistants on 3 January 2021. The 50 year old anganwadi helper went to the temple on Sunday evening and did not return till late. Later that night, at around 11:30 pm, the priest of the temple and his henchmen dumped her mutilated body outside her home and fled. When they approached the police station, they were turned back by the police. The police as in case of Hathras incident, refused to file FIR. There were efforts to avoid post mortem and cremate her. The postmortem was again delayed for more than 18 hours.

The post mortem revealed 'Nirbhaya' like cruelty of insertion of iron rod in the woman's private parts and severe injuries in her ribs, lungs, legs etc. An FIR was filed only after the postmortem report. According to the victim's family, the three men were temple's priest (mahant) Baba Satyanarayan, his disciple Vedram and driver Jaspal. Two of them are arrested later, but the main accused, the Priest (Mahant) went missing and was arrested only after two more days. He was found by the villagers and handed over to the police who were making no efforts for the arrest.

It was due to the protest by CITU and women's organizations etc that the SSP was forced to announce suspension of the SHO and the DM declared compensation to the victim's family. But given the track record of the Adityanath Government of UP, of cases like Unnao, Hathras and Badaun (2014) etc, there is rare chance for its implementation.

The BJP government in UP led by the RSS has been continuously promoting the 'manuwadi' anti women ideology. It has been preventing any form of resistance or dissent and was not allowing any protests by trade unions or women's organizations. Even then, instead of having a fast track enquiry, the DM has ordered an enquiry into the leakage of the postmortem report!

SHOCKING REMARK BY NCW MEMBER

Smt Chandramukhi Devi , a member of the National Commission for Women nominated by the BJP government apparently visited the family of the raped and murdered anganwadi helper in Badaun and said that had the woman not gone out on her own and been accompanied by a (male) child of the family then the incident would not have occurred. It is totally shocking and shameful that a women's commission which is supposed to uphold women's rights taking such a public stand condoning the criminals and putting the onus on the victim in order to make light of the terrible insecurity of women in the BJP regime. CITU as well as the women's organizations demanded immediate removal of her from NCW.

AIFAWH-CITU DELEGATION VISITS BADAUN

A delegation of AIFAWH and CITU consisting of AIFAWH national President and General Secretary and CITU national secretaries Usharani, A R Sindhu, AIFAWH Secretary and UP anganwadi union President Dr.Veena Gupta, general Secretary Chaman Ara, Adv. Niger Parvern, CITU met the family members of the Anganwadi helper who was brutally gangraped and murdered and conveyed condolences. The delegation assured all

solidarity and assistance in getting justice to the murdered anganwadi helper. The deceased woman has five children including two minor girls who are studying and an unemployed son. The delegation condemned the attitude of the Minister and department of Women and Child Development which is yet to even condemn the heinous act in spite the murdered woman was a government servant in this department.



The delegation felt that given the total insensitivity by the police in handling the case, delays in postmortem, filing FIR, arresting the main accused who was found in the same village, there is all chances that the culprits will get off scot free. The delegation met the ADM and submitted a memorandum with the demands:

- Adequate Compensation to the family and government job to her dependents
- Ensure safety of the family of the woman
- Ensure speedy trial in the case. Proper legal assistance to be provided to the family
- Exemplary Punishment to all those in Police and administration who are guilty for the delay in dealing with the case.
- Gender sensitisation of the Police and administration of UP must be undertaken immediately.

The other members of the delegation were UP state anganwadi union leaders Zainab Jahan, Mithilesh, Manoj Madhuri, Alka and Rajeev Shant and Sharif.



PROTEST THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

UP State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (CITU) will organise protests throughout the state on 7 January 2021 and give memorandum to the DMs.

All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and helpers (AIFAWH) gave a call to all its state units to write to the Chief Minister of UP on the demands. Anganwadi workers and helpers throughout the country came out spontaneously in protest against this gruesome crime. Protest demonstrations were held in AP, Telengana and many other parts of the country.

CITU and AIFAWH resolved to undertake massive campaign and action against the violence against women and children and also against the anti women retrograde ideology of hindutva regime, involving all progressive sections of the society.

Press Release

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Union Organisations term the so-called tripartite consultations by the Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India, as Farce. They again demand physical meetings with adequate duration.

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Union Organisations have written a letter to the Minister for Labour and Employment, responding to yet another invitation for video conference proposed for 12th January on framing of rules on the Code on Social Security and Code on Occupational Health and Safety and Working Conditions.

The government has failed to take cognizance of our previous letter addressed on 22nd December demanding physical meetings for discussion on such a serious matter which would have long lasting adverse impact on the lives of more than 50 crores work force of our country and the negation of collective bargaining as a core fundamental right of workers.

We have been critical of adoption of labour codes by flouting all Parliamentary norms without discussion in absence of the entire opposition from the Parliament and without Tripartite consultations. Instead of taking our objections seriously, the government is trying to create a farce of Tripartite consultations by setting up this kind of video conference when we know that the physical meetings of the government at various levels are taking place including the negotiations with the farmers as well as the election preparation rallies in various states etc.

One can understand if along with the physical meeting a few of those who find it difficult to travel due to special circumstances could be provided online facility also. But to deny the serious exercise through physical meetings smells of willful anti labour instance on the part of the Government. We reiterate that we do not want to be a part of this farce. Nor the CTUs and the workers in general are going to accept the Codes as well as the rules lying down.

**INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC
TUCC SEWA AICCTU LPF UTUC**

AND SECTORAL INDEPENDENT FEDERATIONS & ASSOCIATIONS

Breaking the Barriers of Gender & Age in Politics



The victory of the Left Democratic Front in the recently held panchayat elections in Kerala has made many milestones. In this election women won more than fifty percent of the seats bagging many general seats in addition to the fifty percent seats reserved for women. Many women from the working class - scheme workers, MNREGA workers, Cashew and Coir workers, Construction workers and part time sweepers became people's representatives this time as well.

But what made Kerala in the headlines of the mainstream media this time is not the broken gender imbalance achieved through the fifty percent reservation. It is the conventional patriarchal notion of 'maturity' linked to age, that too of women. The Left and Democratic front, especially the CPI(M) compelled the corporate media even to the headlines by electing the youngest Mayor, youngest Panchayat President and many young Panchayat Presidents that too women in our country where half of the population is under the age of 25.

ARYA RAJENDRAN, 21, COUNTRY'S YOUNGEST MAYOR FROM THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

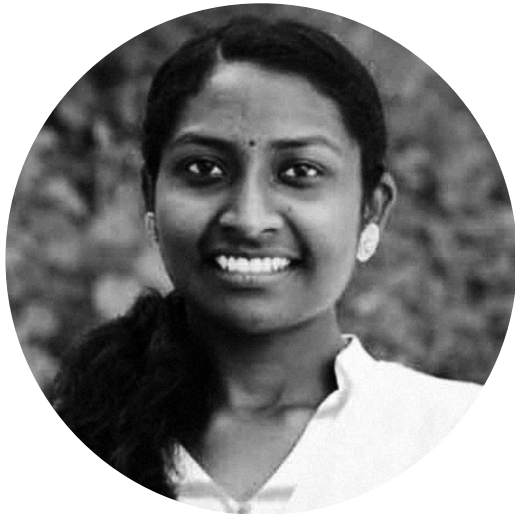
The second year B.Sc Mathematics student of the All Saints College -Arya Rajendran (21) was elected as the Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram (capital city) Corporation. She is the youngest Mayor of the country.

Arya is the daughter of an electrician K Rajendran and LIC agent Sreelatha. She became a member of Bala Sangam, a children's organization at a very young age and now is it's state president. She is also a member of the state committee of Students Federation of India (SFI). In Thiruvananthapuram, in fact, women have actually led the LDF in the elections. In Thiruvananthapuram municipal corporation, 66% of the candidates from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) were women, five being below 25 years of age.



RESHMA MARIAM ROY, 21, COUNTRY'S YOUNGEST PANCHAYAT HEAD

Reshma Mariam Roy, elected as Gram Panchayat President, Aruvappulam panchayat in Pathanamthitta district is the youngest among the entire list across the state. The panchayat had been a United Democratic Front stronghold for the last 15 years. A BBA degree holder, she aspires to continue her studies through distance education. She is a member of the CPI (M) Oottupara branch, DYFI district committee and SFI district secretariat member. She filed her nomination on the day she just completed 21 years.



In Wayanad's Pozhuthana gram panchayat, **23-year-old Anas Rosna Stephy**, who won on an LDF ticket, is the party's choice to head the local body. A graduate in Zoology from Providence College in Calicut, she is from a tribal community and won from a general seat. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Disaster Management.



The LDF has given the reins of Olavanna Grama Panchayat to a final year law student, **22-year old Saruthi**. The LDF won 17 seats out of the total 23 in Olavanna panchayat. She was preparing for her final semester exams on December 29.



In Kollam's Ittiva panchayat, **23-year-old Amritha** will be at the lead. She is a graduate in Sociology, who also has a diploma from ITI.



Malampuzha panchayat in Palakkad district will have **23-year-old Radhika Madhavan** as the panchayat president. A postgraduate degree holder in Malayalam Literature from Victoria College, and an activist of SFI. She worked as a gazetted teacher at the Elphinstone Tribal School before entering the election fray.



The Argentine Women Fought For Legal Abortion – And Won

Natalie Alcoba, Al Jazeera

On December 30, 2020 the Argentine Senate voted 38 to 29 in favour of legalising elective abortion until the 14th week one abstention. The road to legalising abortion in Argentina is paved with the sweat, tears and devotion of women who spent much of their lives fighting for change.

They are revered as “las historicas” – the pioneering activists, lawyers and doctors who occupied the lonely space on street corners in the 1990s, waving placards that demanded women have the right to determine the fate of their bodies. Some of those warriors did not get the chance to see their labour bear fruit: like Dora Coledesky, an activist, lawyer, and longtime champion for women’s rights who is signalled out as the main driver behind the campaign in its early days. She passed away in 2009.

Those who were able to witness history are now legends to the “marea verde” – or green wave, as the young pro-choice masses are known. They have the lessons of struggle imprinted on their bodies. Their collective experience, the alliances they fostered and the manner in which they built consensus offer clues into how to sew a feminist revolution.

“My children when they were younger would say, the only thing you talk about is abortion. Can’t you talk about something else?” recalled Alicia Cacopardo, 83, laughing. *“Well, we got here.”* The retired doctor formed part of the commission for the right to abortion in 1988. She had just moved her practice out of a hospital in Buenos Aires and into neighbourhoods where she saw first hand the way illegality hit poor women harder.

Cacopardo would attend twice a month gatherings outside El Molino, a famous and since shuttered coffee shop within eyeshot of the National Congress in Buenos Aires. There, women would hand out pamphlets about their proposal and how the issue was treated by other countries.

“There were those who were in favour and those against, and debates would break out there on the street corner. Of course, it was nothing like the green wave that you see now, but there were a lot of people who supported us,” said Cacopardo.

STREET PROTESTS

The street is without question a protagonist in the Argentine feminist struggle. The women who searched for their disappeared children and grandchildren during the last military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, known as Las Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, famously held weekly marches in front of the government house, demanding answers from a regime that silenced its critics. The symbol of their struggle was a white scarf worn around their heads; for the legal abortion campaign, the symbolic scarf has turned green. So too have been the National Gatherings of Women held every year since 1986 in a different city in Argentina. They feature 70 odd workshops on a rainbow of topics. Those who cannot afford somewhere to stay are given space to camp, or put up in schools. Some 600,000 people attended the last one in the city of La Plata in 2019.

"That's where we formed all the networks, all the alliances, because women came from all walks of life and across the country," said Brugo. "There's someone who doesn't know how to read next to someone who has a doctorate – their voices have the same value in the workshops. That has been marvellous." It was at one of the gatherings, in the coastal city of San Bernardo in 1990, that Brugo was approached by Coledesky, who was gathering signatures in favour of legal abortion. *"They wanted to equalise the freedom of the womb with the right to abortion,"* Brugo said. *"That impacted me."* After that, she sought out Coledesky and added her signature to the cause.

SETTING STRATEGIES

Marta Alanis started to feel and call herself a feminist around 1991, when she met Brazilian feminist theologian Ivon Gebara and the social justice group Catholics for the Right to Decide in Uruguay. Alanis went on to co-found the Argentine chapter and occupy a central role in the abortion legalisation campaign. *"Not all women were in favour of the right to abortion in the gatherings of women – the debate was there,"* recalled Alanis. *"I remember that in the year 1997, in the national gathering in San Juan, that was the first time Catholic women were sent by the church leadership to block the debate and it generated a great unease,"* she said. In 2003, they held the first assembly on the right to abortion in order *"to define strategies"*.

When the women who had been sent by the church arrived, they were told that if they did not have strategies to contribute they were not welcome. That 2003 gathering is where the green scarf was born. In 2005, the campaign to legalise abortion was officially launched. It presented its first project, with the signature of one legislator, in 2007, and eight times after that.

It was debated by the National Congress for the first time in 2018, marking a turning point for a society that had spent so long looking the other way. It passed the lower house of deputies, but failed in the Senate that time – a devastating loss, but one which did not deter, and if anything fuelled, the conviction to be back. *"The campaign, like all things that are human, has had tensions,"* said Alanis. *"But we have never split. And that speaks to a form of building collectively as feminists. It's building in a way that is horizontal, where all the voices have space, and without a hierarchy. It's very different from a political party or a syndicate."*

It was a cacophony of voices on the night of the Senate vote, as tens of thousands of people – young women, in particular – poured into the square around the National Congress, decked in green. It was a far cry from the clutch of women who stood outside El Molino, all those years ago. *"The square has become for me a place of great emotion,"* said Nelly Minyersky, 91, a lawyer and fixture in the movement. She heads up a masters programme at the University of Buenos Aires law school. *"Although it's a great mystery to me, I've turned into someone that young people really love,"* she said.

Knowing that, and considering the dangers of COVID-19, she stayed away from the square for the final vote, watching it instead from inside the Senate alongside Alanis and Dora Barrancos, a renowned historian and adviser to President Alberto Fernandez. For Minyersky, like for so many of her friends, approval does not mean the work is done. Making sure people know about the law – and making sure it is enforced – are on her to-do list. *"One thing that really fills me with emotion is the way we found such a beautiful reflection in young people,"* said Minyersky. *"That is a great satisfaction. That the ideas that you generate do not stay in you, but that future generations keep developing and perfecting them. They are taking the baton."*

Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions & Independent Federations/Associations Reiterates Active Solidarity to Ongoing Determined Struggles by the Farmers

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Federations/Associations while continuing to extend their active solidarity to the ongoing farmers' struggle countrywide, conveys hearty congratulations to the farmers and their organizations for their determined struggles and more than a month long continuous stay-in demonstration by lakhs of farmers around the borders of Delhi braving cold, rains and inclement weather and also confronting police atrocities in certain areas. The Joint Platform also conveys their homage of respects to those brothers and sisters who lost their lives while participating in the struggle and embraced martyrdom.

The Joint Platform of CTUs and Federations/Associations also denounces the central government for their utterly negative and egoistic approach in the matter of repealing the draconian farm laws, the Electricity Bill (which is not even a law) and also ensuring a legal guarantee for MSP for all crops along with government procurement. The Joint Platform also condemns the vilification campaign against the struggling farmers and their organizations by the Govt. branding them as Khalistanis, terrorists etc using the godi media and their paid Troll Army. It is heartening that such lie-campaign by the Govt. had no impact at all and everyday more and more people from all over the country are joining the farmers' stay-in brigades around the borders of Delhi and simultaneously solidarity agitations are taking place in all the states countrywide. The workers are playing a frontline role in such solidarity actions.

The United Platform of Farmers' Organisations have now decided to intensify the struggle and spread it countrywide. The All India Kisan

Sangharsh Coordination Committee has decided a series of programmes of grass-root level campaign converging in three days' mahapadav in all the state capitals on 23-25 January 2021 and a parallel republic day parade on 26th January 2021 after the official parade is over.

The AIKSCC, while acknowledging the continuing solidarity support by the workers and trade unions in their struggle, has requested the Central Trade Unions and Federations to extend their active support to the agitation programmes adopted by them vide their communication to all Central Trade Unions dated 4th January 2021.

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Federations/Associations calls upon the working class and their unions countrywide to extend active solidarity support while asserting their own demands to scrap the Labour Codes, stall privatization etc., to all the programmes taken up by AIKSCC in all the states and join in thousands to the three days Mahapadav in the state capitals on 23-25 January 2021 and the Farmers Republic Day on 26th January converting it to workers-peasants assertion against the destructive, anti-people and anti-national policies of the Modi Govt. and in stout defence of the national interests as well as the rights and livelihood of the toiling people.

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Federations/Associations demands that the Central Government take cognizance of their own allies deserting them over these laws, instead of sticking to false arguments and delaying tactics in the hope of tiring out the toiling masses, accept the just demands of the Farmers graciously at once.

**INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC
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AND SECTORAL INDEPENDENT FEDERATIONS & ASSOCIATIONS

Postal Regd. No. DL(C)-01/1199/2021-23 Delhi, Licensed to post without prepayment under License No. U(C)-07/2021-23, Posted on 26-27 (Advance Month) at NDPSO, ND-110001 RNI 37025/81.
(Date of Publication - (Date of Publication - 24 January 2021)

7 & 8 January 2021, Jail Bharo



Andhra Pradesh



Gujarat



Haryana



Himachal Pradesh



Tamil Nadu



Karnataka

Printed by K Hemalata and published by K Hemalata on behalf of AICCWW (CITU), 13-A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110002. Ph. No. 011-23221306, Fax: 011-23211284, Email: aiccww@yahoo.com.

Website: www.citucentre.org. Editor: K Hemalata

Printed at : Progressive Printers, A-21, Jhilmil Industrial Area, GT Road, Shahdara, Delhi - 110095