



The Power of Truth

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By Moa Jamir

A promise dishonoured?

On Sunday, I went for a haircut. Surprisingly, the lone hair salon near my colony was empty. The barber was busy fiddling with his mobile phone. Thanking my lucky stars, I sat down to get my hair done. Naturally, the conversation veered towards a topical issue—Demonetisation.

Does any barber sit idly on a normal Sunday morning? The Barber curtly replied when asked about the impact of demonetisation on his business.

"I promise to pay the bearer a sum of..." is a crucial feature of the promissory notes that is written in all the legal tender notes in India stipulating a promise—to pay the bearer the sum of the note on demand. A concept which the Bank of England elaborated as, "The note could be redeemed at the Bank for gold or coinage by anyone presenting it for payment; if it was not redeemed in full; it was endorsed with the amount withdrawn."

However, this promise temporarily remains suspended since the announcement of demonetisation process by the Prime Minister on November 8. More than three weeks later, the process looks more and more like the whims of a 'megalomaniac dictator' engineering a social experiment on common people, backed neither by logic nor by groundwork.

An experiment which Nobel Economic laureate, Professor Amartya Sen likened to "despotic action" which "at one stroke the move declares all Indians—indeed all holders of Indian currency—as possibly crooks, unless they can establish they are not."

Putting the general populace on an ethical dilemma, it was unleashed as a 'purge' to wipe-out the 'termites' of 'Black Money' and 'Corruption' from the system.

"War is peace..." George Orwell euphemistically wrote in his dystopian novel '1984'; 'Minor inconvenience' for 'future expediency', the government justifies.

While there is no official confirmation, the 'short-term pain' for a 'long-term gain' has allegedly claimed the lives of over 60 people, including 11 bank officers, according to media reports.

A slew of u-turns in policy and implementation changes following the initial announcement has made people question implementation process. Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in a scathing attack termed the process an "organised loot and legalised plunder" and a "monumental disaster."

With the onslaught of criticism, the Government has now conveniently found a new scapegoat. Law and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Saturday said the decision to scrap Rs 500/1000 notes was taken by the government on the recommendation of the RBI. A similar claim was made by Union Power Minister Piyush Goyal in Rajya Sabha last week. While the country undergoes its biggest monetary restructuring, the RBI Governor, who is mandated to make and execute the monetary policy of the country, had remained conspicuously quiescent till Sunday.

On Sunday, the Prime Minister made an ardent appeal to work towards a 'less-cash' society immediately. If you don't have cash, learn to use e-banking; he seems to be reminding struggling citizen, a cruel reminiscent of the "Let them eat cake" quote attributed to French Revolution.

Rubbing salt to the injury, the ruling dispensation pompously declared that 93% of the five lakh people who participated in a survey on the Narendra Modi App have supported demonetisation. However, grandiosity has been a crucial narrative of the current dispensation and its loyal followers. When everything fails, one's conformity with the dominant narrative is scrutinised often bracketing the nonconformist with 'vilified enemies.'

Those surveyed on the app obviously does not include the tragic father who carried his ailing nine-year-old 30 km through hills and forests in Jammu & Kashmir for want of cash only to take back a corpse; the lives that ended in queues; the overworked bankers; the everyday common person struggling to meet daily needs; the rural populace outside the formal financial ambit; and countless others.

They were all part of 'minor' inconvenience the citizen undergoes for a 'greater good' tomorrow.

LEFT WING |

Vishal Narayan
IANS

Tribals want to get educated, make up for lost time

A feeling of resentment among tribals at being "cheated" by upper-caste Hindus, of being left out in the race to progress, is now giving way to the urge to get educated, to "make up for lost time". At a pan-India conclave of tribals here, many spoke of the need for education to shake off a widespread "inferiority complex". Adivasi rights campaigner Thalko Majhi of the Ho tribe of Jharkhand, who had put up a book stall at the Tribal Conclave 'Samvaad', organised by the Tatas, said that upper-caste Hindus had made God their trustworthily ally in order to keep the tribals chronically subservient.

Majhi spoke to IANS about his lifelong circumspection about the existence of God, which he could never describe for want of a proper idiom, until 2012.

"That year I came in contact with Shishir Varge of the All India Mulnivasi Bahujan Samaj Central Sangh (AIMBSCS). I joined his eight-day camp in Nagpur," Majhi recalled.

"They taught people like me how to reason well; taught us the historical facts about the 'varna vyavastha' or the Hindu caste system that had never reached us earlier," he said. "All this soul/spirit is a lie! Hindus have cheated us," said Majhi, adding, "I always wondered that if God is so benign then why does he allow such gross iniquities in the society? God is a myth."

Majhi said that until he was acquainted with the teachings of Bhimrao Ambedkar he had no idea about the "exploitative system" of the Hindu religion, which he conceded has made deep inroads into possibly every Indian culture through sophisticated propaganda.

"Did Hindus not eat beef? They very much did," he said.

AIMBSCS is an organisation formed to spread the ideology of Ambedkar and Birsu Munda, among other such progressive personalities. Munda, a 19th century warrior, was an Adivasi and as far as can be gathered from his calls to his fellow men, was a confirmed sceptic. He was known to have urged tribals not to make animal sacrifices to appease any deity and not to indulge in idol worship. Sukhmati of the Ho tribe, who too had a book stall at the conclave, had attended the eight-day AIMBSCS workshop in Nagpur as Majhi.

"I just want my future generation to be educated. I think this is the best way to wean them off their inferiority complex. Otherwise, they will just go on drinking and doing nothing as they have been doing for years," Sukhmati told IANS. Jharkhand has, among others, three main tribes -- Ho, Santhal, and Munda. Although Mundas have of late come into the mainstream, the other two remain backward, with many of their youths unemployed.

COMMENTARY

Natalia Duarte
openDemocracy

Beyond Blood Diamonds: The violence behind the gold route

Illegal gold exchanges between the global North and South are fuelling violence and exploitation, but most consumers are oblivious

While the violence and exploitation associated with the illegal diamond trade is now widely known, there is far less global awareness of the violence associated with gold extraction. In 2014, an investigative journalism piece documented the illegal gold exchanges between some South American countries and those in the global North—on the one side Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, and on the other Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Falkland Islands, Panama, and several European countries. This report found that not only does illegal gold mining adversely affect a country's tax revenues, it is also directly related to human trafficking—particularly of children—and the perpetuation of conflict by funding armed groups.

While mining in general creates various problems (e.g., contamination of water sources, displacement of local populations), these problems are magnified when mineral extraction is done outside the legal regulatory framework. At this point it is necessary to make a distinction between illegal and informal mining because these tend to be confused. The first cannot be formalized due to certain characteristics (for instance, it violates environmental laws or has unsafe labour conditions) that lead to criminal mining. Informal mining, however, is defined by the lack of legal mining titles and often can be formalized eventually. The problem with illegal mining is that the lack of mining titles facilitates gold trafficking.

In any case, neither type of mine pays any taxes. These lost tax revenues impede the government's ability to protect citizens' human rights—especially economic and social rights—but tracking them down is next to impossible because most illegal and informal gold can be easily mixed with legal gold. Bolivia has determined that in 2011, rather than receiving 30 million dollars for gold mining royalties, the country only received \$500,000 (USD). In Brazil in 2012, official gold production was 70 tons, but estimates concluded that illegal production increased this figure to more than 91 tons—a 30% increase that translates into a corresponding loss in tax revenue. Finally, in Peru, illegal gold production is believed to reach 40 tons annually, which would create \$257,618,358 (USD) of income tax if such production were legal.

An even more direct violation of rights due to illegal mining is human trafficking. According to the International Labor Organization, in Bolivia and Peru 13,500 and 50,000 children respectively worked in small informal mines in 2005. Moreover, in Peru, approximately 4,500 people were sexually exploited in 2012 around the Madre de Dios region (a region where 97% of mining activities are illegal and/or informal) and 78% of these victims were minors. According to the 2016 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, many women and minors are deceived by false employment offers or are re-



cruited by intermediaries who offer them employment in illegal mining camps as cooks, store clerks, or waitresses. Once there, women are forced to provide sexual services in restaurants, bars, or mining camps. Of course, sexual and labor trafficking of people is produced under conditions of extreme labor insecurity, since women, children and miners do not receive labour protections and their remuneration is extremely low.

Compounding this problem is the fact that many armed groups traffic gold to fund their operations. For example, Colombia's guerrillas and neo-paramilitary groups, or Brazilian drug traffickers, are known to displace people and launder money in gold exploitation zones. This criminal mining also leads to high homicide rates. A study in Colombia found that the rise in international gold prices increases the profitability of illegal mining activities, leading to increases in homicide rates and the number of massacre victims perpetrated by illegal armed groups. Notably, many of these armed groups known to exploit gold are also known to recruit and exploit children.

Conflicts over land are also prevalent. For instance, in Brazil, garimpeiros (small, informal miners) encroach on indigenous lands looking for gold. The garimpeiros have even trespassed into neighboring countries including Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Guyana, where violent conflicts have resulted and indigenous leaders have been murdered. The garimpeiros also coopt indigenous peoples to work in mines, which creates community internal conflicts. On the other hand, land traffickers in Bolivia invade, take possession of and trade lands where the state has already granted use rights, such as forest concessions and primary or plantation forests.

Assuming that a certain amount of mining is necessary to fulfill the needs of the technology sector and other crucial industries, a stronger state presence in the gold sector is imperative, in particular along countries' borders where illegal mining is concentrated. Clearer legislation that differentiates be-

tween types of mining and their impacts is critical, as are stronger regulations to guarantee mining in environmentally and socially sustainable ways. Venezuela, for example, differentiates between informal and illegal mining, and has also prohibited extraction of gold from national parks. And Colombia was one of the first Latin American countries to codify illegal mining as a crime.

Enforceability, however, is another complex problem entirely—especially where armed groups are involved. Let's take the Colombian case as an example. A journalistic research project documented the close collaboration between some Colombian armed forces and illegal armed groups (especially the ones known as Bacrim or criminal gangs). As a result, although there are laws against illegal mining, which the government is supposed to enforce, it remains unenforceable despite several military operations: the police, for instance, take bribes and even impose extortions to let the miners work. In these cases is where funding, advanced training for law enforcement, and more human resources for protecting territories are direly needed.

Local, national and transnational authorities should also strengthen collaboration between countries and create systems—as has been done with diamonds—to track where gold is coming from. When international trading companies conveniently fail to check for proper documentation of the gold's origin, the final consumer may be purchasing gold produced under unjust and violent circumstances. Finally, consumers themselves must demand stronger regulations and documentation, becoming conscientious about what they buy. People may try to avoid "blood diamonds", but if they pay no attention to where their gold comes from, they are still supporting the same types of violence and exploitation.

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CITIZEN, IMMIGRANT, MIGRATION: The Many Challenges of Being Nepali in Northeast India

Snehashish Mitra

"So where does your son work?" I asked; 'Hajirabad', replied Ghanshyam Thapa, a Nepali elder from Bhutanekhuti village falling under Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Confused initially, I said that it's Hyderabad, in vain though. "Yes, that place - Hajirabad" replied Ghanshyam. Later it dawned in my mind that the apparent linguistic travesty of Ghanshyam Thapa inadvertently represented the stark reality of Bhutanekhuti along with most of the villages of the region falling under Baksa district in Western Assam. Hajira in Assamese roughly translates in English as labour, hence as Hyderabad hosts a large number of migrants from northeast India, it becomes 'Hajirabad' to Ghanshyam Thapa. Bhutanekhuti is the last village in India before the Bhutan border; lying 21 km north of the National highway 31. A random interview in the households of the nearby villages, across the different communities would provide similar narratives of out migration.

According to the Census of India, the total number of migrants from Northeastern region to other parts of India has increased from 0.6 million in 1991 to 1.1 million in 2001. More people are leaving the Northeast than ever before, and the heightened scale of migration is relatively new, especially since the second half of the 2000s. According to National Skill Development Council 14 million labourers are to move out from northeast between 2011 and 2021, as 2.6 million more jobs to be generated against 17 million labour demands.

While livelihood challenges are main catalyst of outmigration, in Northeast India the communities

Roundtable series on Migration on December 3
Photo Exhibition on December 3-4
Time - 10:00AM
Venue - Hotel Acacia, Dimapur



without a clean chit over their indigeneity face different kinds of hurdles over their claim to existence; Nepalis

with tribal communities with regards to control over land resources. In Bhutanekhuti, alternate livelihood like agriculture is characterized by limited access to technology, credits, and market, along with raids by elephant and wild boars. Lack of adequate income generation opportunities therefore creates out-migrants, who migrate to nearby Meghalaya to work in the timber and coal enterprises, as well as to faraway places like Bangalore and Chennai to work as security guards

and wage-labourers. The migrants outside northeast India would return to home once in one/two years during the Durga Puja. While the labour migrants are exclusively male, there have been cases of female-trafficking to the Middle East via Nepal.

The narratives of the Nepalis in Bhutanekhuti suggests a contested existence within the BTC. While recounting the victimized experiences of the Bodo Movement (1985-2003), the Nepali respondents alleged ethnic favoritism in recruitment in local government institutions by the BTC. While there has been several instances of inter marriage of among the Nepali and Bodo community the collective psyche of the Nepali community is still apprehensive of the Bodo hierarchy in the region with which they have to negotiate at both micro and macro level. Such experience suggests that centuries of assimilation within the social milieu of the region, capped with legal provisions like the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 barely act as lip service to the validation of the Nepali community's citizenship in Northeast India.

With the foray of new forms of capital in Northeast India for infrastructure and logistical expansions under the pretext of India's 'Look East Policy', the resources of the region are being increasingly chased by the different forces of capital. While such developments make the natural resources of the region more precious, it also places communities like the Nepalis with contested identities in front of precariousness.

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All letters (including those via email) should have the full name and Postal address of the sender.

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