

A sad Nabo Barsho for the Association Are the unemployment rates being quoted, correct?



Newyear - Samstipur

New year - Muzaffarpur

Newsdesk – New Year is New Year. It must be celebrated. As Ravindranath said, "He who has sent this new morning to the world, has sent the new year at our doors, think about this as a truth. Just meditate once, how terrible is the face of that New Year. A fire is burning in its steadfast gaze. ...The human new year is not the new year of comforts. Not the new year of peace, as it is here [he was taking class in Shantiniketan – Ed.]. The song of birds is not his song; the sunlight is not his light. His new year achieves its rights through struggle – it rises after tearing away the veils. "As the God has made sun the king of celestial world by putting the crown of flames on it, he

has, likewise, put the crown of glory on man – unbearable is its affliction. He has given the kingly pride in man through that sublime sorrow; he has not given him an easy life. That's why, man becomes man by pursuit. Quite easily the plants are plants, animals and birds are what they are but man becomes man by efforts staking his life."

Hence, all the branches of Bengalee Association, Bihar and its central office itself were faced with a challenge to celebrate the Bangla Nabo Barsho (which, for the Association was not something about sweets, greetings et al., but an attempt to bring together people of the community, even who are not attached to the association or its other activities) and also to observe condolence and conduct memorial service to their departed leader.

Without saying much we are just giving a glimpse of the activities of the association, through pictures, covering both the responsibilities.



Condolence - Katihar



Condolence - Barari



Condolence - Patna



Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

Born : April 18, 1809, Kolkata
Died : December 26, 1831, South Park Street Cemetery, Kolkata
Profession : Teacher and Poet

Photo: Arijit Bhattacharya

It is not a matter of little wonder how a young man who would live for only 22 years was able to literally take the then orthodox Bengal society comprising the zamindars, the Brahmins and a new class of novorich by storm and leave an indelible mark on the history of the race for generations to come. His tireless vigour to uphold the tradition of reason and logic did have a lasting imprint to draw the roadmap towards the initiation of the Bengal Renaissance. - Samit Kar, (Courtesy: West Bengal May 2008, Derozio Centenary issue)

How beautiful is moonlight on the stream!
How bright on Life is Hope's enchanting beam:
Life moves inconstant, like the rippling rill,
Hope's and the moon's rays quiver o'er them still!
How soft upon each flower is fair moonlight
Making its beauty more serenely bright,
Bringing sweet sighs of fragrance from its breast
Where all its odours are, like thoughts, at rest.
How sweet to sit upon a bank, and mark
The soft moon looking on a little bark,
As if she watched it from her azure sphere,
The guardian spirit of its blest career;
Flinging her melted pearls upon its sail
That swells with infant pride before the gale, -
How speeds the shallop with its fleecy wing,
Like bliss or fancy – quite a fragile thing!
Thus shone the moon upon the hallowed wave
Bright as the wish for freedom in a slave;

(Some lines from 'The Fakeer of Jengheera', a poem by Derozio)

Newsdesk – One esteemed national daily dated 13th January quoted World Employment and Social Outlook report – 2017 released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of the United Nations, "Unemployment in India is projected to increase from 17.7 million last year to 17.8 million in 2017 and 18 million next year. In percentage terms, unemployment rate will remain at 3.4 per cent in 2017-18." Perhaps this percentage rate takes in count the projected increase in the total population of India by that time. Because the Report on Fifth Annual Employment – Unemployment Survey (2015-16) released by Labour Bureau, Chandigarh under the auspices of Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India provides the following chart for the state of unemployment (survey period - April-December 2015):-

Sector	All India (in per cent)			
	Male	Female	Transgender	Person
Rural	4.2	7.8	2.1	5.1
Urban	3.3	12.1	10.3	4.9
Rural + Urban	4.0	8.7	4.3	5.0

Even this figure of 5% is based on Usual Principal Status i.e. the status of 5% households having no one employed is being equated by 5% persons unemployed. Whereas the same Survey mentions that 57.2 per cent i.e. more than half of the regular wage/salaried workers had monthly average earnings up to Rs 10,000. At the All India level 38.5 per cent of the contract workers and 59.3 per cent of the casual workers had monthly earnings of up to Rs 5000. That means that minimum two employments are needed in every household, which makes the unemployment percentage ten, and not five!

Let us note some more interesting facts from the Survey.

- Majority of the employed persons were found to be self employed based on both the UPS and UPSS approach.
- At the All India level, 46.6 per cent of the workers were found to be self employed followed by 32.8 per cent as casual labour. Only 17 per cent of the employed persons were wage/salary earners and the rest 3.7 per cent were contract workers.
- A majority 67.5 per cent of the self employed workers had average monthly earnings up to Rs 7500.
- In case of number of employed persons in the households, it is found that 48.4 per cent of the households had only 1 employed person

followed by 30.6 per cent households with 2 employed persons. Households with 3 employed persons constituted 10.7 per cent and households with 4 & above persons constituted only 5.2 per cent. Remaining 5.1 per cent of the households did not have even a single employed person/earner.

- It is estimated that at the All India level a little more than 67 per cent of the surveyed households had average Monthly Earnings not exceeding 10,000 only. In Rural sector such households constituted about 77 per cent whereas the corresponding proportion was about 45 per cent among urban households.
- 60.6 per cent of the persons aged 15 years and above who were available for work for all the 12 months during the reference period were able to get work throughout the year, at the All India level. In rural areas, 52.7 per cent of the persons aged 15 years and above who were available for work for all

the 12 months during the reference period were able to get work throughout the year at the All India level, whereas the corresponding figure for urban areas was 82.1 per cent.

- At the All India level, majority of unemployed persons (33.5 per cent) used more than two methods to seek work, followed by, through friends & relatives (24.1 per cent), application made in response to advertisement (23.7 per cent) and through employment exchange (4.3 per cent).
- At the All India level, 58.3 per cent of unemployed graduates and 62.4 per cent of unemployed post graduates cited non availability of jobs matching with education/skill and experience as the main reason for unemployment followed by non availability of adequate remuneration cited by 22.8 per cent of graduates and 21.5 per cent of post graduates.
- At the All India level, 64.9 per cent of the regular wage/salaried workers, 67.8 per cent of the contract workers and 95.3 per cent of the casual workers do not have a written job

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A shocking report

A study made by Aspiring Minds, a employability assessment company, 95% IT sector engineers in India are unfit for coding jobs. Due to shortage of talent, the majority of them are unfit to pursue any software development jobs. The report by PTI on the basis of which the story was published in <https://m.yourstory.com/2017/04/engineers-india-unfit-coding-jobs-report/> on 20th April, further adds that only 4.77 percent of candidates are capable of writing the correct logic for a programme—which happens to be the basic requirement of any programming job. The report quoted Aspiring Minds CTO and Co-founder Varun Aggarwal, "Lack of programming skills is adversely impacting the IT and data science ecosystem in India. The world is moving towards introducing programming to three-year-olds! India needs to catch up."

Automata—a machine learning-based assessment of software development skills – was operated by over 36,000 engineering students from IT-related branches of over 500 colleges. Over 60 percent could not write code that compiles. And only 1.4 percent can write functionally correct and efficient code.

The study points out that this is due to the gap in educational methods – widespread use of rote learning as opposed to the practical application of concepts and the lack of good teachers for programming.

All engineering colleges promise 100 percent placements at the time of joining. But only a handful of the over 3,000 approved colleges in India draw or attract companies that offer the 'dream job' that every student is promised. The rest of the students are forced to settle for low paying jobs by mass recruiters in the IT sector, regardless of their subject. Even they are seen opting for some totally different fields.

With the mass production of engineers, there is more supply than there is demand. So going by the basic laws of economics, an engineer's value is highly reduced. This is the main reason why most engineers—about 30 percent of the 15 lakh graduates every year— are unemployed (or underpaid), which is a depressingly large number.

Whither gone the race for last two decades of the parents encouraging the young ones to pursue career in engineering and the young ones, after all their labour, craving for placement and package? And whither gone our pride that we are now a country of engineers?

EDITORIAL

Jamshedpur Update

Shyamal Shill, Jamshedpur, 14.4.17 - Poila Baishakh 'Barsha Baran 1424' is being celebrated by the Bengalis of Jamshedpur with ususal rituals, joy and fnew dishes. Several cultural functions are organised by various local Bengalis run clubs and organisations to welcome the Nababarsha 1424. Heavy rush in the mandirs and sweet shops were seen in the morning as usual. Many Bengalis offered puja in their own residences. Pleasantries and good wishes were exchanged among each other in Bengali community.

1) Kadma New Farm Area Durga Puja Committee and Jharkhand Banglabhasi Yuba Morcha

On the eve of Bangla Nababarsa, Kadma New Farm Area Durga Puja Committee and Jharkhand Banglabhasi Yuba Morcha jointly is organising a musical function in the evening on 15th April 17 at Kadma New Farm Area Durga Puja Maidan.

Singer Arijit Chakraborty, and Flute Artist Manab Mukherjee will perform in the function. Dance performance of local children will be there. Sarayu Rai, Minister of Food and Civil Supply, Jharkhand will be the Chief Guest and Sudipto Mukherjee, Social Worker and R.Ravi Prasad, President Tata Workers Union will be guest of honour.

2) Sabuj Kalyan Sangha, Telco To celebrate Nababarsa, Sabuj Kalyan Sangha, is organising a musical function at its auditorium

in the evening on 15th April. Mainak, a singer from Kolkata and Shanta Banerjee, a local singer will perform on the occasion. Function ends with dinner with Bengali food.

3) Milanee, Bistupur

On the eve of Nababarsa Milanee, a club situated at Bistupur is organising a Musical event in its auditorium on 16th April evening in which Kolkata singers Trisa Parui and Tathagata Sengupta will singing performances.

Function ends with dinner with Bengali food.

4) Amal Sangha, Sidgora

To welcome Bangla Naba Barsa, Barsa Baran 1424, function will be held at Amal Sangha, Sidgora on 23rd April evening. A musical team of Kolkata will present their Musical Performance on the occasion.

Dinner will be served at the end of function.

5) Bengal Club, Sabuj Kalyan Sangha & Milanee

To welcome the Bangla Naba Barsa Bengal Club, Sakchi, Sabuj Kalyan Sangha & Milanee, these three clubs jointly will organise a musical function in the evening on 30th April at Bengal Club auditorium.

Reputed singers from Kolkata, Sourav Das and Sisriya Banerjee will present Bangla and Hindi songs. While no entry fee will be charged for the function, but coupon will be issued on pay to participate in the dinner which will be served at the end of the function.

Silver Jubilee of Geet Vitan Kala Kendra, Bhilai

Prantosh Bandyopadhyay* - Since inception, Geet Vitan Kala Kendra, Bhilai, Chattisgarh propagating Peace and Progress messages of Rabindranath following the guidance of the Poet that "Music and Fine Arts are the highest means of national self-expression, without which the people remain inarticulate." (Centre of Indian Culture).

Rabindranath is the pioneer to introduce dance in the curriculum of an educational institution in South Asia and formed a dance academy at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan. Since Jalianwalabagh plunder, he created a novel Indian classical dance deeply rooted in the folk dances of Bengal. The theme of the dance created by Rabindranath includes world peace, nature appreciation, women emancipation, human rights and value education. The issues are very relevant today. On his call most of the Modern Indian Classical Dances were gradually rejuvenated and appeared since '30s in respective region to keep alight the cultural lamp of different parts of India to illuminate the world.

Being instructed by his dance teachers Guru Jaydev Chattopadhyay of New Theaters and Guru Gopinath, the founder of Delhi Ballet Group (1954) and Rabindranatyam Research and Training Center, Delhi, Guru Valmiki Banerjee, is engaged for

more than sixty (60) years to study the form, method and aesthetics discovering Rabindranatyam. He got the blessings and approval for the cause from Poet's illustrious son Rathindranath Tagore during his stay at Dehradun. He received Honoris Causa from Tagore Research Institute, Kolkata supported by Rabindra Charcha Kendra, Dhaka. He has also formulated the grammar for the dance created by Rabindranath. He duly informed the development to the authorities of VisvaBharati and Rabindra Bharati Universities. During his lecture demonstration at Sangit Bhavan, Santiniketan on 05.01.2007, spectator realized that Rabindranatyam, the pioneer Modern Indian Classical Dance, possesses distinct identity and is completely free from the stains of others. Prof.A.Ganguly and Prof J.Singh of Visva Bharati assured the audience that a fully fledged seminar will be convened on the topic in presence of Guru Valmiki inviting all concerned. The promise is yet to keep. Resonances of Rabindranatyam are recorded in many places of India and abroad Globally, many institutions and individuals are now pro active on the issue. Endeavour of Geet Vitan of Bhilai, Chattisgarh proved that love and labour for the aesthetic training will never be lost. Their Silver Jubilee Celebration will inspire all to create beacon of hope for a better world.

*Co ordinator, Rabindranatyam Research & Training Center, New Delhi 110019

One of the Founders, Rabindranath-Rokeya Primary School, Padma River Island, Murshidabad,



Recently Hon'ble President of India Sri Pranav Mukherjee visited Vikramshila. The representatives of Bhagalpur branch of Bengalee Association were invited in the function. Standing from the left are Nirupam Kanti Pal, Uttam Debnath, Amlan Dey and Amita



The children of Barari Education Centre visited Bhagalpur Durgabari during Chaiti Durga Puja.

Continued from page 1

Are the unemployment ...

contract. 27 per cent of the regular wage/salaried workers and 11.5 per cent of the contract workers had written job contract of more than three years.

• At the All India level, just 20.6 per cent of workers except self employed received paid leave and 21.6 per cent availed social security benefits. A majority 71.2 per cent of workers were not eligible for social security benefits.

Over and above, if we think about the future employment scenario on the basis of this Survey, the projections of a stagnated world economy and increase in unemployment, as also the Government's commitment to assure 'ease of business' to the global investors, we shall have to consider serious aggravation of all the unhealthy trends noted above.

Behar Herald Bank A/c details :-
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70 years back

Behar Herald, Volume 73, No. 24, Patna, Saturday, March 29, 1947 Ed. M.C.Samaddar

The battle of Nawal Kishore Road

Wednesday morning. As fair and bright as a spring morning usually is after a dust layer. The time is about ten. In a quiet and respectable quarter of Kadam Kuan, people were going about on their daily avocations. Children were going to school. Rickshaws were taking their daily passengers to offices and courts. Everything was as peaceful as even Mahatma Gandhi would wish. All of a sudden there were shouts of slogans, common enough these days, followed by a rush of scurrying feet. Some half a dozen persons came running to the Nawal Kishore Road west corner and fled helter-skelter wherever they could think of taking shelter. Immediately following came two truckloads of military (Goorkhas and British). The troops jumped down from their cars and surrounded the corner house and began firing at the house and at a private motor car which was standing on the Salempur-Bakergunj lane waiting to take away its owner. The driver was in his seat and by his side was sitting a young lad, his son. These two unfortunate persons were killed outright and one of the fugitives were seriously injured.

All these took place in broad daylight under the nose of a civilized and professedly NON-VIOLENT Government in a quiet residential part of the city just within our eyesight. We immediately phoned to the Prime Minister's* residence but were told that he was too busy consulting with his fellow ministers and no time to attend to the insignificant matter of the murder of the innocent and absolutely inoffensive citizens and the indiscriminate shooting at private houses in the name of LAW and ORDER. So far as we know, neither the Prime Minister nor any of his colleagues have thought fit to visit the place of the tragic occurrence. But curfew has again been enforced and the unhappy inhabitants of Patna have now again to look forward to a spell of shutting their shops and closing their business soon after sunset.

In 1942, a firing on a number of school lads, bent upon hoisting their flag on the Secretariat led to a widespread conflagration, the after-effects of which still continue. Today an Indian Ministry, backed by the mighty influence of the Congress might think that they are safe from the inevitable consequence of frightfulness. If people in authority were not like the provincial ostriches, they should realize the feeling of sudden rage and bitter hostility that has spread to the length and breadth of the city as the result of the battle of Nawal Kishore Road.

Defenders of the Ministry might find a parallel in the battle of Sidney Street, White Chapel in London, staged by Churchill when he was Home Secretary under the Liberal Government (1910). But the Sidney Street affair, which every right-thinking man in England has since then condemned, is not at all on all fours with what happened here on Wednesday. There, a number of foreign anarchists armed with machine guns had entrenched themselves inside a building and were firing on everybody attempting to rush it, with the result that there were several casualties among the police. Even then Churchill before calling out the military to blow up the gangsters' lair, had the whole neighbourhood vacated and gave residents and passers-by every possible opportunity to leave the danger zone. Here, nothing like that was done, there was no counter firing against the troops.

It may be a tragic necessity to shoot mad dogs but in all civilized countries even such shooting has to be done with extraordinary precautions. We do not know if the persons chased by the troops were worse than mad dog. If they were fugitives from justice, the law lays down a procedure for searching and breaking into houses where they may have been hiding. There is, so far as we know, no procedure provided by any law, even those framed to meet grave and sudden emergencies, justifying the shooting at houses of ordinary citizens against whom no suspicion of a charge of any kind exists. An Englishman's house is said to be his castle. In India, with freedom waiting round the corner to pounce upon us, every private citizen is trembling in what he has been deluded into thinking, by long of association with English ideas, to be his sanctuary. Had the fugitives turned to the left instead of to the right at the crossing of Nawal Kishore and Kadam Kuan Roads, we might not have been living now to write these lines. No citizen's life is safe when shots are fired indiscriminately in crowded streets.

*Before independence, under the provisions of the act of the British Raj the provincial governments formed had Prime Ministers and not Chief Ministers

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Q & A



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200th Birth Anniversary of Pundit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar Preparations going on. Contribute to develop Nandan Kanan, Karmatand as a pilgrimage (Bhasha Teertha)

The World Health Day - 7 April 2017

Depression: Let's talk about how we address mental health

There is a need of a shift in investments in mental health, from focusing on "chemical imbalances" to focusing on "power imbalances" and inequalities - Dainius P. ras, Special Rapporteur, UN

On the occasion of World Health Day, I welcome the opportunity to address its theme: depression.

It is fitting that depression has been chosen as this year's theme. Mental health more broadly has begun to enjoy increasing attention as a new global health priority, now recognized in the 2030 Agenda as a human development imperative.

The human right to health is understood to inclusively guarantee the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. There can be no health without mental health and everyone is entitled to an environment that promotes health, well-being, and dignity.

As a global community, we have now accepted that people experiencing poor mental health, including depression, should receive treatment and support. There is growing international recognition that increased investment and political attention is necessary to achieve parity between physical and mental health. Concurrently, civil society and other actors are increasingly using a human rights lens to scrutinize legal, policy, and service level responses to mental health.

Millions of people across the globe, from all walks of life, are affected by depression and other mental health conditions and cannot access appropriate treatment or support. Consensus has been reached that this situation is not acceptable and that this gap must be seriously addressed and reduced. However, hard talk is needed to discuss and decide about the "how" - which interventions should be prioritized.

Evidence and the experience of rights-holders now tells us that the dominant biomedical narrative of depression as a "burden" on individuals and societies is shortsighted and insufficient for developing appropriate responses in policy and in practice. This is a widespread and systemic public health and human rights issue which demands urgent reconsideration of how we invest in mental health and how we manage conditions such as depression.

The right to health includes entitlements to both healthcare services and certain pre-conditions which support mental health—social and underlying determinants. The longstanding biomedical tradition of medicalizing various forms of psychosocial distress and human suffering has cast a long shadow over the importance of addressing the social and underlying determinants of health. This not only undermines the right to health, it also ignores a rapidly growing evidence base.

For example, there exists compelling evidence that higher prevalence of depression is strongly linked to early childhood adversities, including toxic stress and sexual, physical and emotional child abuse, as well as to inequalities and violence, including gender based inequalities and gender based violence, and many other adverse conditions which people, especially those in vulnerable situations such as poverty or social exclusion, face when their basic needs are not met and their rights are not protected.

Integrating this evidence and securing human rights entitlements requires a new approach that balances population-based interventions with individual care and support.

For example, at the population level, an effective and rights-based approach to address depression requires scaling mental health across policies and services in general health, education, poverty reduction, violence prevention, etc. so that major risk factors are reduced, while protective factors and the resilience of individuals, families and communities is strengthened.

At the individual level, rights-based mental health services must secure a wide range of cost-effective, psychosocial interventions available in the community for anyone who may be facing emotional and social distress. Importantly, delivering these interventions in most cases does not require psychiatric specialization. For example, in lower income countries, where a specialized mental health workforce is scarce, cost-effective psychosocial interventions may be provided by general care workers – family doctors, community nurses, home visitors. For a large proportion of people with mild and moderate depression, cost-effective specialized or non-specialized interventions based on human interaction and on talking and listening, starting from "watchful waiting", may be all that is required and must be understood as frontline treatment interventions.

Regrettably, recent decades have been marked with excessive medicalization of mental health and the overuse of biomedical interventions, including in the treatment of depression and suicide prevention. The biased and selective use of research outcomes has negatively influenced mental health policies and services. Important stakeholders, including the general public, rights holders using mental health services, policymakers, medical students, and medical doctors have been misinformed. The use of psychotropic medications as the first line treatment for depression and other conditions is, quite simply, unsupported by the evidence. The excessive use of medications and other biomedical interventions, based on a reductive neurobiological paradigm causes more harm than good, undermines the right to health, and must be abandoned.

Biomedical interventions will remain as an important treatment option for severe depression and other mental health conditions. However, we should not accept that medications and other biomedical interventions be commonly used to address issues which are closely related to social problems, unequal power relationships, violence and other adversities that determine our social and emotional environment. There is a need of a shift in investments in mental health, from focusing on "chemical imbalances" to focusing on "power imbalances" and inequalities.

"Let us talk" – is a very good slogan chosen for this World Health Day of 2017. People need to talk about their depression, about what they think might be behind feeling sad or happy. Those who make policy decisions need to talk about what went wrong with addressing mental health of individuals and societies, and how things need to be different now. It may be a hard talk – but even more so it is important that we need to talk.

Courtesy: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21480&LangID=E#sthash.YPVVQWzf.dpuf>

Listen To Champaran's People

The voices of Champaran's peasants have been drowned in the white noise of history since 1917. Their testimonies are now being transcribed at the Sabarmati ashram.

- **Shahid Amin**

The Champaran centenary is upon us. And, as with the centenary and a half of 1857 a decade ago, it is going to be celebrated with high-handed gusto. In August 2007, a large-scale cut-out of an ailing Bahadur Shah 'Zafar' was manipulated, akin to a Javanese puppet, from the spacious lawns of Red Fort. The week, beginning April 10 this year, is to mark the yoking of the remembrance of Champaran as a pro-peasant metaphor to the cleanliness drive of our present times. Its lofty aim: removing all the stink, dirt and garbage that is now so much a part of our public space. Closer home, in north Bihar, where the drama and upheaval of Champaran was enacted years ago by an intrepid Mohandas K Gandhi and even more daring indigo-growing peasants, a set of mock re-runs of those heady times is planned — fair enough, for historic events (PR razzmatazz aside) are tied to particular locales and places. The official Bihar mascot for the year-long festivities has an aged, heavily-draped Gandhi, keeping a paternal hand over the shoulders of two school-going boys and a girl, rising, so it appears, above the swirling currents of the here and now.

But where are the indigo-growing peasants of Champaran in all these proposed festivities? These were the (so far) nameless Bhojpuri-speaking kisans who grated under the yoke of European plantations that dotted the fertile north Bihar landscape. The peasants of Banbirwa, Murli Bharbharwa, Mahrani Bhopat and such other villages did the nilhe saheb's bidding, by laying aside 3/20th part of their best lands under oppressive supervision and onerous contracts. Crop ready, they carted it to the kothi, sorted it, loaded large vats with the indigo plant, and then, standing waist-deep in large tanks, beat the steeped indigo with sticks into shape. Contemporary photographs show bare-backed peasants toiling under the humid Kuar or mid-September sun, with white-trouser-ed Englishmen in their sola-topis and their desi myrmidons, also bare-backed, but with the comforting attire of a white turban and the regulation lathi. The last stage was the cutting of large slabs of indigo cakes into smaller bits, which were then used as the dyeing agents for cloth.

This system of production of the crucial dye in the cloth trade the world over, first in Bengal and, post 1860s, in north Bihar, specially Champaran, was a British colonial monopoly. It had begun to be challenged in the rapidly-industrialising Germany, where chemical advances had led to the production of a perfect substitute for Indian plant-indigo. A pressing desire of a new nation to make things in Germany, which did not have its own indigo-plant producing colonies made German chemists do the next best thing: they, and specially one Adolf von Bayer (winner of the Chemistry Nobel, 1905), produced a synthesised substitute. It brought down the price of Bihar indigo and the profitability of its European plantations. World prices of plant indigo fell, and the nilhes (as the gora-planters were derisively called), put the squeeze on the peasants. Either the prices at which they had to part with the indigo crops were slashed, other crops such as sugarcane and oats were sought to be procured under indigo-like contracts, a sharah-beshi (additional or higher rent) was charged from indigo lands pledged to factories, or tawaan (high compensation) was demanded for earning the freedom to be rid of the indigo obligation.

The high-handedness of the nilhe sahebs became even more oppressive as they tried to cut and transfer their losses on to the peasants: physical assault, punitive fines, forced grazing of fields, forcible affixing of thumb-impressions on to blank pieces of legal paper. It was a remarkable heightening of oppression in the dehats (villages), figuratively "owned" by the planters, where their writ ran hard and large. Even the richer peasants of Champaran began to feel the oppression of the sahebs as an everyday occurrence. It was on the persistent cajoling of one such money-lending-peasant, Raj Kumar Shukul, that a young Gandhi arrived in Champaran to do some independent fact-checking. There was tension in the air enough. As far as the local British officials were concerned, for them, "Blue Champaran", with its white agro-capitalists, was a foreign country, even for such a well-known "public man" of South Africa as the Gandhi.

Testimony of poor Champaran farmers

It was 100 years ago on April 18, 1917 that, standing in a Motihari court room, a young Gandhi stood up to disobey conscientiously the orders passed against him under section 144 of the Cr.P.C. By refusing to vacate Champaran, this 48-year-old novice to Indian

politics denied the right of the King Emperor's Government in India to "sanitise" the poor indigo-growing Bihari peasants from the contagion of speaking truth to power that he had brought along in his wake. Gandhi displayed a willful persistence to stand firm by the truth of his conviction — "to help the raiyats (peasants)" by making them study the indigo question, "with the assistance, if possible of the administration and the planters". The rest, as that hackneyed phrase has it, is history. The colonial state relented. Gandhi retained his freedom to inquire, but his was not a sarkari inquiry that we in independent India have got used to, where only the report matters, and the voices of the concerned citizens (statements, depositions, submissions) are digested (if that is the right word!) in the interest of the end product — the official report.

What mattered in Champaran in 1917 and enabled Gandhi to gain victory for the indigo peasants, was that thousands of peasants defied the nilhe sahebs to seek Gandhi and his lieutenants, and deposed in native Bhojpuri their woes. Their depositions were written up under Gandhi's strict instructions about verification and cross-examination (often in the presence of the CID). And now, untouched so far by historians, what we have are nine volumes running into 5,200 pages in handwritten verbatim English translations by Rajendra Prasad, Brajraj Kishore and others, of the testimonies of some 4,000 peasants who came to Motihari or the spacious Dharamshala of Hazarimal in Bettiah.

The testimonies of poor peasants and charwas like Afdar.

For instance, we have Musammam Jhunia, 80, widow of Dhodhai Rai, whose original rent of Rs 16 had been raised after sharah-beshi to Rs 26. "I had deposited [the original rent] in Court. I have a son who is a simpleton. The kothi has instituted a suit against me. But, while the suit is pending, the factory servants – Ramji Rai and others, went to my house and asked me to give them ghee and dahi. The garad [guard] sipahis were also there with them. They beat my son and the jildar threatened to put a henga (harrow) on his breast. I wept before them and paid Rs 27 there. I sold my land to Matuk Singh who paid the money to the kothi. I sold it for Rs 49. Out of the Rs 27 paid to me, they credited Rs 24 to my account; Rs 3 was taken away by the sipahis and others. Sadhu Saran Lal [the village Patwari] has taken away from me the receipt of the deposit of money in Court". Consider this statement, detailing the systematic looting of even things of regular use, from the house of one Phadi Miyan, 51, the tenant of Babu Lomraj Singh, an important local opponent of the Jagirah factory establishment. "I discovered some of the things they had taken away from my house in the lohar (smithy) of Parhoo Lohar where they were sitting under a Pakar tree. They returned two paseris (roughly 10 kilos) of rice which they had taken. I could not get anything else. The things taken away were: two lotas, one chhipa (a thali-like flat salver), 1 janani (woman's) dhoti, 2 kurtas, 2 gamchas". And, from the neighbouring house of Gharib Mian: 2 gilafs (a doubled sheet) in addition to his mother's and daughter's dhotis.

Finally, here's an unadulterated testimony, dated April 24, 1917, of Afdar, age 11, son of Shakur Jolaha, who spent the day functioning as the charwaha (grazier) of his 23 heads of cattle, in return for a set quantity of grain every year. "One day after Phagun, I was grazing cattle in the parti-pasture [of village Murali Bharbharwa] with Dost, Yusuf and Tulsī. Devraj Singh... of the Kothi came to us and asked us to take our cattle [for forcible grazing of the field of Raj Kumar Shukul, the man who had brought Gandhi to Champaran]. We fled away. Masuri (lentils) and tisi (linseed) were growing [in that field]. The number of cattle must have been more than 100. The following day the Sipahis again came, asked us to take our cattle to the same field again. We refused. They abused us. Then they drove the cattle and grazed in his field". And, in an obvious answer to a cross-examination and verification by Bindyabasi Prasad, who had come to lend a helping hand in gathering and translating testimonies all the way from Gorakhpur: "It is just about 12 o'clock. Three o'clock would come after it".

Perhaps, it is contextually appropriate, that these thousands of peasant testimonies, unheard of so far since 1917, are being transcribed at this very moment at — where else but — Babu's Sabarmati Ashram. To gloss over these peasant voices of Champaran is, in a very real sense, to undercut the ground from under the feet of the Mahatma at the very moment of his making.

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Published: April 16, 2017

Courtesy: <http://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/champaran-indigo-peasants-testimonies-anthology-mahatma-gandhi-sabarmati-ashram-4614689/>

Let's use prayers to build bridges rather than create gaps

- Renuka Shahane

As a kid growing up in Hyderabad, right in front of my house was a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu (Lord Venkateshwara). Every morning at exactly 5 am the Lord & us would be woken up with M S Subbulaxmi's magical rendition of "Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam". There were many around us who were disturbed by the volume of the loudspeaker because it was truly loud. But for kids like us who had school very early in the morning it did the job of our alarm clock. I still listen to it (now privately on my headphone) while walking in the morning. Personally I am very tolerant to high decibels. As Indians I feel we are happiest when we are noisy. Check our festivals, weddings, celebrations, victories; they are not complete without noise and frankly, without causing some amount of inconvenience to others. So blocking the road for a baraat, firecrackers being burst in front of the terrified mare on whom the bridegroom is ensconced with scores of cars honking behind the baraat knowing full well that उनके कानों पे जू नहीं रेंगती; and uncles & aunts dancing breathlessly as the out of breath trumpetwala tries to produce some notes हवा में से. All in all its not a happy onslaught on the ears or any other sensory organ but the baraat has a life of its own. वे उन पलों के लिए इस दुनिया में नहीं होते. The baraat is also confident of your भलमनसाहत। All the rest of us can do is either enjoy the baraat or listen to fm on one's own personal car radio or sigh & look down at our most trusted companion these days, our smart phones. Some good samaritan might just appear out of nowhere to regulate the cars that are piling up behind the baraat. This is a typical day in the life of us Indians. This is India, beauty in chaos, multiculturalism, acceptance, noise!

Where I live, a Church close by has started playing the church bells on the loudspeaker, every morning at 6 am and evening at 7 pm. There are many senior citizens in our society who are genuinely disturbed by their loudness. Sometimes there's a clash between the notes of the church bells and the muezzin's call at the nearby Masjid. The Sai and Ganesh Mandir comes alive usually during festivals like Ganesh Utsav, Ram Navmi & Navratri. Many people living around these places of worship I'm sure must be very disturbed by the noise levels. If you ask me we do not need to use loudspeakers at all. God can hear even our silences.

But then how will we prove how much we love God without making a noise & show of it?

When we have very important things to do which require waking up very early, do we wake up the whole building? No! We set an alarm and wake up without disturbing even the other members of our family. Isn't praying very important for all those offering prayers at determined times of the day? Is it so difficult to set an alarm for that time? It isn't! If one wants to be civil & civic one doesn't need any loudspeakers for any celebration.

But our Indianness is not complete unless we make a loud show of everything.

We, as a nation, have to decide what is important for us. If we are to adhere to the civic norms & decibel guidelines then it should be uniform for each and every prayer, festival, Shaadi, celebration etc.

If we are to retain our ethos and the kind of people we are, we must learn to indulge all occasions of noise & invest in Bose headphones that cut the noise completely (just kidding); just a good old pillow on the ears in the morning or cotton wool in the ears to plug out the noise will do. But if you can hear only loud noise in even the music of religions other than yours & if the cacophony of your own religion is music to your ears, then it is more a problem related to the ill-feelings in your heart rather than the decibels in your ears!

For me, since I love music and I believe in the adage "Live & let live" these musical (sometimes cacophonous) notes in the morning are most welcome if they are legal.

I would definitely exhort the authorities to be strict with any noise pollution that is illegal. I do not condone anything that is illegal. Because if we don't follow rules, the next step would be anarchy. There can be no harmony in anarchy.

Here's a request to all the people who pray early in the morning, let's not make prayers a contentious issue where politicians & the regular right, left & centrewalas gain publicity & votes on the basis of this. Prayers are very personal aren't they? Let's use them to build bridges rather than create gaps. [FB post by Renuka Shahane on 18th April; made in response to Tweets by famous singer Sonu Nigam which created much furore. The last para contained direct references to the Artist which has been omitted.]

On V. I. Lenin's Birth Anniversary

One may or may not be a follower V.I.Lenin or for that matter an admirer of Russian Revolution of 1917. But its accomplishments were acclaimed worldwide. One such was in the field of education. As it is said that some British interviewer said to Lenin that British people have Shakespeare! Lenin replied that Soviet people have highest number of readers of Shakespeare! Given below is an excerpt from Lenin's speech in which he is speaking about the importance of education and its urgency for the Soviet people. Just after that is given an excerpt from the Letters from Russia by Rabindranath Thakur.

"Education is one of the component parts of the struggle we are now waging. We can counter hypocrisy and lies with the complete and honest truth.

"The more cultured the bourgeois state, the more subtly it lied when declaring that schools could stand above politics and serve society as a whole. In fact the schools were turned into nothing but an instrument of the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

"...We say that our work in the sphere of education is part of the struggle for overthrowing the bourgeoisie. We publicly declare that education divorced from life and politics is lies and hypocrisy.

"The working people are thirsting for knowledge because they need it to win. Nine out of ten of the working people have realised that knowledge is a weapon in their struggle for emancipation, that their failures are due to lack of education, and that now it is up to them really to give everyone access to education. Our cause is assured because the people have themselves set about building a new, socialist Russia. They are learning from their own experience, from their failures and mistakes, and they see how indispensable education is for the victorious conclusion of their struggle....All who really sympathise with the people, all the best teachers will come to our aid, and that is a sure pledge that the socialist cause will triumph. (Ovation)"

Lenin, Speech at The First All-Russia Congress On Education, August 28, 1918

Aboard S.S.Bremen, Atlantic, 3rd October, 1930,

"I am on my way to the American shores. But today my mind is filled with memories of Russia. The chief reason is that the other countries I have visited have never so wholly stirred my mind..."

"...Nowhere else had I come across such a splendid phase of education, because in other countries the fruit of education is for him alone who receives it. There one's education is a matter of everybody's education. The want of education in an individual affects everybody equally, because they want to fructify by combined education the entire mind of the community and for service of the humanity." – Rabindranath Tagore, Letters from Russia

"I saw with my own eyes how the Russian peasants have left the Indian peasantry behind in less than a decade. Not only have they learnt to read books: they are transformed mentally..."

P57, Tagore, Letters from Russia



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March participants interested in both promoting, defending science

[It was news. Millions of people in 600 cities over the world marched for science, to protest against cuts in science-budget, to highlight the issues of earth and environment on the occasion of Earth Day etc. We have study conducted by University of Delaware days the before event. Here it goes.]



A crowd gathers for the March for Science in Washington, D.C. on Sat., April 22, 2017. AP

Encouraging science-based policies and defending science from political attacks are strong motivators for March for Science participants, according to a new University of Delaware Center for Political Communication survey.

The study, conducted from March 31 to April 18, surveyed 1,040 members of March for Science Facebook groups or pages about their reasons for marching in April 22 events across the United States and around the globe.

Fully 93 percent of respondents said "opposing political attacks on the integrity of science" would be very important to them as a reason for participating in a March for Science event. At the same time, 97 percent of respondents said that "encouraging public officials to make policies based on scientific facts and evidence" was a top priority, and 93 percent said the same for "encouraging the public to support science." Other reasons that most respondents rated as very important included "protesting cuts to funding for scientific research" (90 percent), "celebrating the value of science and scientists to society" (89 percent) and "promoting science education and scientific literacy among the public" (86 percent).

Fewer respondents ranked "encouraging scientists to engage the public" (70 percent) and "encouraging diversity and inclusion in science" (68 percent) as highly. Nevertheless, solid majorities said these reasons were very important.

The survey also asked respondents why they had joined or followed March for Science pages, groups or hashtags on social media. Not surprisingly, the top reason (93 percent) was "to learn about March for Science events." A majority (54 percent) also said they joined "to connect with people who share my views."

Other common reasons for joining or following included "to become more involved in politics or policy-making" (45 percent), "to learn about other online advocacy and activism opportunities" (41 percent), "to learn about issues facing scientists and scientific institutions" (36 percent) and "to learn about other offline advocacy and activism opportunities" (32 percent). Only a small percentage of respondents (12 percent) said they joined or followed "to learn about science."

When asked whether their experiences with March for Science social media pages, groups or hashtags had made them more likely to participate in science advocacy, 78 percent of respondents said yes for online advocacy and 74 percent said yes for offline advocacy. In addition, large majorities said their experiences had made them more likely to like or share (76 percent), read (70 percent) and write (64 percent) messages about science on social media.

Almost two-thirds (64 percent) said their experiences with March for Science social media had made them more likely to contact public officials about science. Majorities also said their experiences had made them more likely to discuss science with people they knew (59 percent) and to follow news about science (55 percent).

About the study

The study was supervised Barbara Ley, a professor in the Department of Communication and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Delaware, with support from the University of Delaware Center for Political Communication.

The survey was conducted online from March 31 to April 18. The 1,040 respondents were recruited from 81 different participating March for Science Facebook groups and pages (see full list below). The study did not use probability sampling to select respondents; as a result, no sampling error for the study can be calculated, and the results do not necessarily generalize to all March for Science Facebook group and page members. Of the respondents, 82 percent were residents of the United States and 18 percent were residents of other countries. A large majority (81 percent) identified as women, with 18 percent identifying as men, and 1 percent as other. Half (50 percent) of the respondents said they considered themselves scientists.

Published on: Date: April 20, 2017

Story Source: Materials provided by University of Delaware. Original written by Peter Bothum.

Courtesy:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/04/170420090238.htm>