

World celebrated International Mother Language Day amidst concerns for disappearing languages

Newsdesk – The day, Martyrs' Day for Bengalee community all over the world and for Bangladesh was declared by the UNESCO as International Mother Language Day with an aim to safeguard the pluralism of the world and preserve the mother tongue of every individual. This year UNESCO decided the theme: 'Linguistic diversity and multilingualism count for sustainable development'. When UNESCO in the year 1999 made the declaration, at least one language was dying every fortnight. Now it may have increased. Because, the patterns of economic development in various countries, in this age of globalization and technology, are obstructive for the survival of already endangered languages and endangering newer languages with the passing of time. In India, 40 languages are facing extinction now, as the recent media reports mentioned. A language endangered is, in the context of economic development of the country it belongs, the result of development denied to that community on the conditions of its own cultural perspective. Even if not 'endangered', being one of the major languages of a country, pattern of development can threaten it, pressurize the community to ignore their own and adopt the dominant. That is what is happening in India. The central government had advised the states to observe Mother Languages Day on 21st February. Even then people observed the Mother Language Day raising voice against injustice being done to their mother tongue by the same government and its policies..



The Bengalee people in many places all over India raised concerns against the government's education policies, unconstitutional 'favoured' status given to Hindi in the schools, no need for Bengali in jobs and also the apathy of the parents. A demand to accord constitutional status to Rajasthani was raised in Rajasthan. Bagheli (MP) raised voice against apathy of the government. Punjabi, Telegu, Bhojpuri, Tamil, Malayalam and Kashmiri people raised concerns about the apathy of the younger generations in learning their mother tongue. Mother Language Day for their respective mother tongues and also to promote multilingualism was observed in Srilanka, Fiji, Australia, Denmark, Belarus, Newzealand, Pakistan, and many other countries. In Bangladesh, where martyrdom for mother tongue originated the movement for independence of that country and consequently, inspired all the nations in UNESCO to adopt the day as International Mother Language Day, the Mother Language Week was celebrated with all the solemnity associated with it and the grandeur for the victory their

Chomsky: Signs of Hope in a Time of Global Despair

Kozhikode: Renowned intellectual and academic, Professor Noam Chomsky argued that the world has become a far more dangerous and irrational place since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. He added that USA under the leadership of President Trump is driving the world to the brink of nuclear war and the so called 'doomsday clock' was now set at two minutes to midnight. The doomsday clock, maintained by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, is a symbol that represents the likelihood of a man made global catastrophe. He was speaking through video conference with Professor VK Ramachandran of the Kerala State Planning Board at the Kerala Literature Festival in Kozhikode, Kerala. Rise of Anti-Science and Irrationality

- Susana Barria, Benny Kuruvilla
Prof Ramachandran asked Chomsky to elaborate on why, like in India and other parts of the world, the US is also seeing a rise of scientific obscurantism and religious fundamentalism. 'In the US, we had an absurd situation with all the Presidential candidates from the Republican Party for the 2016 elections either denying the phenomenon of climate change or arguing that nothing needs to be done'. Chomsky underlined that while the US was founded as a country with a high level of religious fundamentalism, this later became less prominent for instance during the period of moderate social democratic state capitalism of the 1950s and 1960s. However, under Trump it is once again coming to the foreground of politics and policy. He traced the reasons for this to the sharp swing to the right by both the Republican and Democratic Party. With the beginning of neo-liberal economic policies in the US in the 1980s, real wages of American workers have consistently fallen. This has led to anger, fear and discontent among the working class. The radical right, that has effectively taken over the Republican Party, has successfully used religion to tap into this climate of fear. Chomsky said that even in France and Germany, obscurantist neo-fascists are getting support from a disgruntled and disenfranchised working class. Many of these political movements are being called 'populist' but that is a wrong use of the word and they should be seen as pre-cursors to fascism, argued Chomsky.
On Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and the future of work
Responding to a question on the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and what it could do to the future of work under capitalism, Chomsky said that while it is indeed a new challenge and there are lots of discussions in policy circles, robotics and AI have not really taken off; otherwise there would be

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Jibanananda Das

Born 17 February 1899
Died 22 October 1954



The Cat

All day I inevitably encounter a cat here and there
In the shadow of trees or out in the sun, around
the pile of fallen leaves;
I catch sight of him, deeply engrossed like a bee,
with his own self
Embedded in the skeleton of white soil
Having successfully spotted some bones
of fishes somewhere;
But still, nevertheless, he scratches at the trunk
of the Krishnachura tree
All day he moves about stalking the sun.

Now he shows up here
The next moment he is lost somewhere.
I spot him in the autumn dusk playing around
As if, with his white paws, he is patting the supple body
of the saffron sun;
Then he nets up the tiny balls of darkness with his paw
And spreads them throughout the world.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Hindi

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar joined Fort William College in the year 1841 as the head of the Sanskrit department. The Secretary of the college Captain G. T. Marshal, being impressed by the knowledge of Vidyasagar advised him to learn English and Hindi as well. Ishwar Chandra learned and acquired good command on both the languages. When he thought to write 'Betel Panchavinshati' in Bengali as a textbook, instead of selecting Katha Sarit Sagar and other Sanskrit sources as the base material, he chose Betal Pachisi in Hindi written by Lallu Lal, a teacher of Hindi in Fort William College, Calcutta.

Bharatendu Harishchandra, living in Benares, used to visit Calcutta frequently as he had family relations there. He knew about Vidyasagar. During the 70s of 19th century Bharatendu was in his 20s while Vidyasagar was in his 50s. They shared their month of birth. Ishwar Chandra was born on 26th September 1820 whereas Bharatendu was born on 9th September 1850. In their very first meeting they became good friends. Whenever Bharatendu went to Calcutta he met Vidyasagar. Whenever Vidyasagar went to Benares he met Bharatendu; he also went to his home and used his father's library. Bharatendu wrote about Vidyasagar (it is a typical four-liner in popular puzzle style):-

EDITORIAL

सुन्दर वानी कहि समुझावै।
विधवागन सों नेह बढ़ावै॥
दयानिधान परम गुन आगर।
सखि सज्जन नहिं विद्यासागर॥

[He makes you understand in good words, increases his affection for widows, god of kindness and store of sublime qualities – is he just a good man, my friend? No, he is Vidyasagar (meaning Ocean of Knowledge)]

His influence on 'Hindi Renaissance' is an area of research. In the year 1856 Hindu Widow Remarriage Act was passed. During the years 1857-58 whole northern and western India including some areas in the East and South were engulfed in the tumultuous events of the first war of Indian independence. During the same period of two years Vidyasagar opened 35 girls schools in the districts he was working as Inspector of Schools. In 1855 he had opened first teachers' training institute of India, called Normal School those days. Even before that he had modernized the syllabus for education.

In fact, major portion of recommendations of Wood's Despatch reflected the suggestions given by Vidyasagar in his 'Notes for educational reforms' and his discussions with Halliday, which formed the core of 'Halliday's Minutes'. The colonial government changed its policies regarding education after these developments, in which Vidyasagar played a crucial role.

But as it appears, his social reforms, his efforts to modernize education and spread education amongst women did not extend to Hindi area in a linear way. Bharatendu's literary works, influence of Dayanand Saraswati even before establishment of Arya Samaj, influence of enlightened Hindi intelligentsia, as also the social reform by Ram Mohan Roy before him...all mingled to create the wave of enlightenment in Hindi world. Where and in which way the name of Vidyasagar stood in that wave is an area which needs further research.

Finally, if his role as foremost protagonist of rationality, of rational thought remains lost in his image of 'Man of strong ideals', that is not the fault of Hindi world, the Bengalee mind itself did it.

[On the occasion of Vidyasagar Mela at Patna we have published some more materials on Vidyasagar in this issue of Behar Herald]

Vidyasagar Mela

Newsdesk - Vidyasagar Mela was held on 25th February 2018 at Aghore Prakash Shishu Sadan, Khazanchi Road, Patna. It was jointly organized by Vidyasagar Birth Bicentenary – Nandankanan Celebration Committee, Bengalee Association, Bihar and Aghore Prakash Shishu Sadan. Mela began at 10 AM with two rounds of the game of musical chair for the students. Then the competitions in essay-writing, Bengali handwriting, Bengali poetry recitation etc. were held in the hall upstairs while the fair with stalls for various Bengali sweets, snacks, books and other household utensils began to attract crowd. Then there was a power point presentation on Vidyasagar which was shown repeatedly, on the basis of which a quiz was held.

Meanwhile, the fancy dress competition began on the stage outside. After fancy dress, lecture competition was held. Finally, the stage was set for the last event of the Mela, a seminar on 'Vidyasagar and Hindi'. The guests and the speakers, Khagendra Thakur, reknowned hindi critic, Alokadhanwa, famed poet, Dr. N. R. Biswas, Director, IGIMS (our Chief Guest) and Prof. Daisy Narain (main speaker) arrived. The ceremonial lamp was lit by all of them. They were presented a rose each by a student of the school. Dr. D. K. Sinha honoured the guests by putting over their shoulders the 'Uttoriyo' of Bihar Bangalee Samiti. The enlightening discussions on the close relations between Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and the unfolding Hindi renaissance opened the possibilities for a bigger seminar on the subject.

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Pics from Vidyasagar Mela



Lighting the Ceremonial Lamp



Mela at noon.



Handicrafts stall by APSS students



The musical chair



Competitions in progress

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Vidyasagar Mela

The Mela ended after the vote of thanks given by Bidyut Pal. He also extended an invitation to all to be at Nandan Kanan, Karmatar (Distt. Jamtara, Jharkhand) on 7th and 8th April 2018 to attend 'Guru Dakshina' programme in which guests from Assam, West Bengal and Bangla Desh will participate.



Book Stall



Prof. Daisy Narayan speaking



Alok Dhanwa, Poet, speaking



Fancy Dress

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Chomsky: Signs of ...

a visible increase in productivity at a macro level. He further said that the idea that work will be outdated due to these developments is outlandish and premature. 'If you look around the US, there is broken infrastructure that needs to be upgraded, the need for better public hospitals, schools, colleges and affordable housing'. There are millions of jobs for the taking. Not just in the US, but across the world there is a massive need for human resources and labour for fulfilling basic needs for a decent life. Chomsky argued that the challenge is not so much with AI and robotics but that the economic system is dysfunctional in that it is unable to put together eager hands that are willing to work.

Signs of hope for new progressive politics

Asked about promising trends in the US, he said, 'The fact that Bernie Sanders, a rank outsider with no funding, condemned by the corporate media, and an avowed socialist, is currently the most popular politician in the US is a startling development'. The rise of Jeremy Corbyn from the margins of the Labour Party to its leadership gives some moral hope that the grim situation in the UK can be reversed. Similarly the May 15 Movement (Indignados) in Spain has resulted in the birth of new progressive politics that are challenging the neo-liberal European Union model. Political formations such as Podemos and Barcelona en Comú are outcomes of this process. 'All these developments give me renewed moral hope for humanity', he concluded.

Published on : 12 Feb 2018

Courtesy : <https://newsclick.in/chomsky-signs-hope-time-global-despair>

More than 40 Indian languages may be heading for extinction: Officials

There are 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled languages in the country which are spoken by a large number of people - one lakh or more, census data reveals.

Press Trust of India, New Delhi According to the census data, there are 1,635 rationalised mother tongues, 234 identifiable mother tongues and 22 major languages in the country. (Satyabrata Tripathy/HT File Photo)

More than 40 languages or dialects in India are considered to be endangered and is believed to be heading towards extinction as only a few thousand people speak them, officials said.

According to a report of the census directorate, there are 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled languages in the country which are spoken by a large number of people - one lakh or more.

However, there are around 42 languages which are spoken by less than 10,000 people. These are considered endangered and may be heading towards extinction, a home ministry official said.

A list prepared by UNESCO has also mentioned about the 42 languages or dialects in India which are endangered and they may be heading towards extinction, the official said.

The languages or dialects which were considered endangered, include 11 from Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Lamongse, Luro, Muot, Onge, Pu, Sanenyo, Sentilese, Shompen and Takahanyilang), seven from

Manipur (Aimol, Aka, Koiren, Lamgang, Langrong, Purum and Tarao) and four from Himachal Pradesh (Baghati, Handuri, Pangvali and Sirmaudi).

The other languages in the endangered category are Manda, Parji and Pengo (Odisha), Koraga and Kuruba (Karnataka), Gadaba and Naiki (Andhra Pradesh), Kota and Toda (Tamil Nadu), Mra and Na (Arunachal Pradesh), Tai Nora and Tai Rong (Assam), Bangani (Uttarakhand), Birhor (Jharkhand), Nihali (Maharashtra), Ruga (Meghalaya) and Toto (West Bengal).

The Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, has been working for the protection and preservation of endangered languages of the country, under a central scheme, another official said.

Under the programme, grammatical descriptions, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, language primers, anthologies of folklore, encyclopedias of all languages or dialects especially those spoken by less than 10,000 people are being prepared, the official said.

Apart from the 22 scheduled languages, there are 31 other languages in the country which were given the status of official language by various state governments and Union territories.

According to the census data, there are 1,635 rationalised mother tongues, 234 identifiable mother tongues and 22 major languages in the country.

Updated: Feb 18, 2018

Courtesy : <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/more-than-40-indian-languages-may-be-heading-for-extinction-officials/story>

Book Review

'Building the nation by National anthem'

Since long, and not very innocently, jibes are being made against our national anthem, and thereby against Rabindra Nath Tagore, who wrote it. In fact, it was a mischief made by some, when the colonial British government finally yielded to people's movement against partition of Bengal, announced withdrawal of partition and in this background 28th session of Congress was going to be held in Calcutta. Someone dared to ask Tagore to write a song in praise of the British king. Tagore was so hurt by the offer that he became restive and that very night wrote a song praising the almighty spirit in various forms who would lead India to its destiny. Written in five stanzas, the first mentions the 'leader of the people's soul', second mentions the 'builder of unity of the people of various religions', third mentions the 'charioteer showing the path to the people', fourth mentions the 'affectionate mother - deliverer from sorrows' and fifth hails 'the lord with the rise of the nation (like rising sun from long dark night). All the five stanzas were sung by him in the Congress session (and never in front of George the Fifth). Yet the very next day, some of the news papers spread the lie that the song was sung in front of the King! No doubt the British Intelligence was behind this.

In the recent years same lie and canard was spread in public statement by some political leaders. Such statements were criticized no doubt in the media, but mostly in English. Few books were there in Hindi. Now, Mr. Hemant Kumar Singh, a patriotic writer from Patna has written a comprehensive critique of the lie and detailed analysis of the song, some biographical note of Tagore, his Shantiniketan and Vishwa Bharati, and his province Bengal. The book also contains a letter written to the President of India in this regard by the writer and an open challenge as well to disprove him! The book should be read, even if some portions may seem already known to the reader.



— Bidyut Pal
['Rashtra Gaan se Rashtra Nirman', Hemant Kumar Singh, Bhavishya Bharti Prakashan, Patna. Price Rs. 150/-]

Breathe deep

[We at Behar Herald had created a space for journalistic or feature writing efforts of the young members of Bengalee Association. But young Rochna made us think about a space for literary endeavors as well. So, henceforth, good, small poems or 'micro' stories (a genre created by the great writer from Bihar, Banophul), are welcome. — BH]

Words Fall Apart

— Rochna Roy
(Katihar, Bihar)

I am growing cheerless these days,
much musing into deep substances.
The ideas that once made sense,
no longer delight me now.
They say good days are about to follow,
they say, the fountainhead is expected
to prosper.
And so I calmly crave for the hours,
by shielding my flights of imagination.
I keep fingers crossed and fuel
my appetite,
with the undiluted aspirations that
have camouflaged my capacity.
I solemnly appeal my mind to be
born again.

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Harichand Thakur

All human beings have equal rights, ... Harichand Thakur was emphatic mostly on this matter. He opposed the system of differential treatment between men and women in the society. "Women are the doors to go to the hell"—this is written in the "Manusanhita", the rule-book of the Vedic religion. But Harichand Thakur says against this, "It is not possible to establish a model household religion without paying regard to the women. Women are the centre of householder. No family is formed without a woman. All the religious practices should be done with one's own wife". For this, he always directed all to emphasize for education, rights and dignity of women.

Harichand Thakur lived only for 66 years. He passed away on the 6th March, 1878.

(From the book "Harichand Thakur and The Matuya Religion", slightly edited)
Courtesy : <http://dalitliteratures.blogspot.in/2017/03/harichand-thakur-english.html>

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A CHALLENGING ...

forcibly displaced, 300,000 more than in the preceding year. Although reliable sex and age-disaggregated data are hard to collect in a refugee crisis, an estimated 49% of refugees were women and girls. Gender norms and expectations, power relations, discrimination and inequality often shape their migration choices and experiences. In addition, women and girls who are forcibly displaced experience a heightened risk of domestic and sexual violence and often lack access to adequate health and other services. This can have fatal consequences. Data show that 60% of preventable maternal mortality deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement and natural disasters.

Courtesy: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=948>

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Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Calcutta

[Ramkrishna Paramhansa's birthday falls on 19th February. On this occasion we reproduce the following section of Ramkrishna Kathamrita]

Vidyasagar's residence

It is Saturday, 5 August 1882, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is going to Badurbagan by carriage on the main road in Calcutta to visit Vidyasagar at his house. Bhavanath, Hazra and M. accompany him.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hooghly district situated near Beersingh, Vidyasagar's the native village. Since childhood, Sri Ramakrishna has heard of Vidyasagar's acts of charity. In the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, he learned of his scholarship and compassionate nature. M. is a teacher in Vidyasagar's school. Learning this, Thakur asked him, "Will you take me to see Vidyasagar? I would like very much to meet him." M. spoke to Vidyasagar, who was delighted and asked M. to come on Saturday at four o'clock. Vidyasagar had asked him, "What kind of a paramahansa is he? Does he wear gerua?" M. had replied, "No sir, he is a unique person. He wears a red-bordered dhoti and a short coat, a shirt and varnished slippers. He lives in a room in Rasmani's Kali Temple. He sleeps on a wooden cot with only a bedspread and a mosquito net. Outwardly there is no sign of holiness, but inwardly he knows nothing but the Lord. Day and night he meditates on Him."...

The carriage stops at the gate to Vidyasagar's house. It is a two-story building of British taste. The building sits in the middle of the plot and has a wall on all four sides. The gate and the front door are on the western side of the house, the gate to the south of the door. Between the western wall and the two-storied building are flowering trees and plants. One climbs upstairs after passing through the western ground floor room. Vidyasagar is on the upper floor. At the top of the staircase is a room on the north, to its east a hall. Vidyasagar's bedroom is to the southeast of the hall. There is another room on the south. All the rooms are full of precious books. Most of the books are beautifully bound and artistically arranged in bookshelves that line the wall. On the eastern side of the hall are a few chairs and a table. Vidyasagar sits there facing west when he works. When he has visitors, they also sit around the table. There is stationery visible – paper, pen, inkpot, blotting paper, several letters, a bound cashbook, files, and a few books Vidyasagar is reading. Exactly to the south of the wooden divan is a bedstead where he sleeps....

Thakur descends from the carriage. M. leads him to the house. Walking through flowering trees on the way to the house, Thakur touches the buttons of his shirt and asks M. in a childlike manner, "My shirt is unbuttoned. Is there any harm in it?" He is dressed in a broadcloth shirt and a red-bordered dhoti with one end over his shoulder. He has varnished slippers on his feet. M. says, "Please don't worry about it. You will not offend anyone. You needn't button your shirt." Just as a child feels reassured after an explanation, Thakur's mind is at peace.

Vidyasagar

Having climbed the staircase, Thakur enters the first room with the devotees (the room just to the north). Vidyasagar is seated at the north end of the room facing south. In front of him is a long rectangular polished table. On the east side of the table is a bench with a back. A number of chairs have been placed to the south and west of the table. Vidyasagar is talking to some of his friends.

As Thakur enters, Vidyasagar stands up to greet him. Thakur stands near the eastern edge of the table facing west with his right hand on the table. Behind him is the bench. He looks at Vidyasagar as though he were a former acquaintance. He laughs in ecstasy.

Vidyasagar must be sixty-two or sixty-three years old. He is sixteen or seventeen years older than Sri Ramakrishna. He is clad in a white-bordered dhoti, a short-sleeved flannel shirt, and is wearing slippers. He has an Orissacut hairstyle. His gleaming white false teeth show when he talks. Short in stature, Vidyasagar has a very large head and a broad forehead. He is a brahmin, so he wears a holy thread around his neck. ...

Vidyasagar's adoration of Sri Ramakrishna – their conversation

Entering into an ecstatic mood, Thakur stands quiet for quite some time. To control his ecstasy, he now and then says, "I want a drink of water." The boys of the household, relatives and friends of Vidyasagar, quickly gather around.

Thakur is about to sit on the bench, still absorbed in ecstasy. A boy of seventeen or eighteen is already sitting there. He has come to Vidyasagar to ask help with his studies. In such a spiritual mood, with the insight of a rishi, Thakur is able to understand what the boy is thinking. He moves away a little and says, in ecstasy, "Mother, this boy has great attachment to worldly life, your world of ignorance. This boy belongs to the world of ignorance."

Does Thakur mean that it is ironic for the boy to study to make money instead of to acquire the knowledge of Brahman?

Vidyasagar anxiously asks somebody to bring water. He asks M., "Will he take some refreshments?" M. replies, "Yes

sir, please bring something." Vidyasagar leaves hurriedly and returns with numerous sweets. He says, "These are from Burdwan." Some of them are offered to Thakur. Hazra and Bhavanath also take some. When M. is offered them, Vidyasagar says, "He is a child of this house. There is no formality with him." Thakur speaks of a particular young man who has been sitting in front of him. He says, "This boy possesses good sattvic qualities. Inwardly he is full of pith and marrow. He is like the Phalgu river with a bed which appears dried up – but dig a little and you find an active current of water underneath."

After taking some sweets, Thakur talks with Vidyasagar, a smile playing on his face. Soon the whole room is full of people. Some are seated, others stand.

Sri Ramakrishna — Today I have come to the ocean. Until now I have come across canals, lakes, and rivers. Now I see the ocean. (All laugh.) [Thakur is referring to the literal meaning of Vidyasagar, which is the 'ocean of knowledge'.] Vidyasagar (laughing) — Then, sir, you are welcome to take some salt water. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear sir, you are surely not the salt ocean. You are not the ocean of avidya. You are the ocean of vidya, the ocean of milk! (All laugh.)

Vidyasagar — Sir, you may say so if you like.

Thakur speaks while Vidyasagar remains silent.

Sattvic actions of Vidyasagar – "You, too, are a perfected man"

"Your actions are sattvic by nature. It is the rajās of sattva. Sattva makes one do works of compassion. When a work is done out of compassion, though it is rajās, it is the rajās of sattva. There is no harm in it. Shukadeva and others were compassionate in order to teach humanity – to teach about God to humanity. It is good that you are giving food and education.

These charitable acts lead to God-realization if undertaken selflessly. They who act to earn a name or religious merit are not selfless in their actions. But you deserve to be called a perfect man."

Vidyasagar — How is that, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Potatoes and rice aren't tender until they're siddha (well-boiled).

Your kindness for others has made you soft and tender of heart. (Laughter.)

Vidyasagar (laughing) — But kalai pulse when siddha (well-boiled), gets harder! Is that not so? (Everybody laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are no such thing. You are not a mere pundit – dry and hard and good for nothing. A vulture soars high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel pits where the carcasses of animals are burned. They who are pundits due to learning are scholars in name – but they are attached to 'lust and gold' – they look for decomposed corpses, just like a vulture. Fondness for the world is avidya; compassion, devotion, love of God, non-attachment, are the wealth of vidya.

Vidyasagar listens to Thakur silently. Everyone gazes fixedly at the blissful personage and drinks the nectar of his words.

[From English translation of Ramkrishna Kathamrita]

From page - 4 A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

high toll on women and girls in developing countries.

Slow economic recovery, social hardship and rising inequalities provide the breeding ground for growing social discontent. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Social Unrest Index, which measures citizens' discontent with the socio-economic situation in their countries, indicates that on average global social unrest increased between 2015 and 2016 and 8 out of 11 regions experienced increases in the measure of social discontent. Manifestations of discontent vary but are apparent across countries and regions and have led to political instability, polarization and the resurgence of populist right-wing nationalisms of various stripes. In many cases, this has fuelled expressions of intolerance and sometimes violence, both of which tend to be directed at groups that already experience discrimination and marginalization, such as immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities.

While movements defending justice, tolerance and human rights exist almost everywhere, their actions are increasingly being met with state violence and restrictions. In many countries, democratic spaces for civil society participation are shrinking. During 2015, the global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, documented serious violations of the freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly in 109 countries. Growing conservatism and extremism of all kinds also threaten the activities of civil society organizations, including those working on issues such as violence against women, environmental protection and reproductive and minority rights that the 2030 Agenda clearly recognizes as important.

Conflict, violence and persecution, as well as hardship and poverty caused by economic, political and environmental crises, are forcing unprecedented numbers of people to leave their home countries or regions. Illicit financial flows and global militarization hinder peace-building efforts, take away much-needed resources from sustainable development and can lead to a cycle of instability. Global military expenditure came to almost US\$1.7 trillion in 2016, an increase of 0.4% in real terms from 2015.

By the end of 2016, a total of 65.6 million people had been

The Cultural Bomb*

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o

[On the occasion of International Mother Tongue Day 2018 we publish excerpts from the Introduction of 'Decolonizing the mind' by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, famous Kenyan writer who in the year 1977 bade farewell to English language and began writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu only.]

The study of African realities has for too long been seen in terms of tribes. Whatever happens in Kenya, Uganda, Malawi is because of Tribe A versus Tribe B. Whatever erupts in Zaire, Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia is because of the traditional enmity between Tribe D and Tribe C. A variation of the same stock interpretation is Moslem versus Christian or Catholic versus Protestant where a people do not fall into 'tribes'. Even literature is sometimes evaluated in terms of the 'tribal' origins of the authors or the 'tribal' origins and composition of the characters in a given novel or play. This misleading stock interpretation of African realities has been popularized by the western media which likes to deflect people from seeing that imperialism is still the root cause of many problems in Africa. Unfortunately some African intellectuals have fallen victims – a few incurably so – to that scheme and they are unable to see the divide-and-rule colonial origins of explaining any differences of intellectual outlook or any political clashes in terms of the ethnic origins of the actors....

My approach will be different. I shall look at the African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinational and of course the flag waving native ruling classes. The economic and political dependence of this African neo-colonial bourgeoisie is reflected in its culture of apemanship and parrotry enforced on a restive population through police boots, barbed wire, a gowned clergy and judiciary; their ideas are spread by a corpus of state intellectuals, the academic and journalistic laureates of the neo-colonial establishment. The resistance tradition is being carried out by the working people (the peasantry and the proletariat) aided by patriotic students, intellectuals (academic and non-academic), soldiers and other progressive elements of the petty middle class. This resistance is reflected in their patriotic defence of the peasant/worker roots of national cultures, their defence of the democratic struggle in all the nationalities inhabiting the same territory. Any blow against imperialism, no matter the ethnic and regional origins of the blow, is a victory for all anti-imperialist elements in all the nationalities. The sum total of all these blows no matter what their weight, size, scale, location in time and space makes the national heritage....

For these patriotic defenders of the fighting cultures of African people, imperialism is not a slogan. It is real, it is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects. ...Imperialism is total; it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today. It could even lead to holocaust.

The freedom for western finance capital and for the vast transnational monopolies under its umbrella to continue stealing from the countries and people of Latin America, Africa and Polynesia is today protected by conventional and nuclear weapons. Imperialism, led by the USA, presents the struggling people of the earth and all those calling for peace, democracy and socialism with the ultimatum: accept theft or death.

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is farthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependant sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Theft is holy'. Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie in many 'independent' African states.

The classes fighting against imperialism even in its neo-colonial stage and form, have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle. These classes have to wield even more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures. They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the song: 'A people united can never be defeated'.

[*Title added by us – BH]

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Outreaches of Bengal renaissance – towards the people

Harichand Thakur

- Sudhir Ranjan Halder

Harichand Thakur was born in an agriculturist family of Safaladanga village in the district of Faridpur in East Bengal (now Gopalganj district in Bangladesh) on 11th March in 1812 AD. His family was Namas in race, then called as 'Chandala' or 'Charal' who were untouchables to the Hindus in those days.

His father's name was Yashomanta Thakur and mother's name was Annapurna. His original name was Haridas. He had four brothers namely Krishnadas, Vaishnabdas, Gouridas and Swarupdas. Harichand was the second son of his parents.

The name of the wife of Harichand Thakur was Santibala, who is known to us as Santimata. Her father's house was at Jikabari village in Faridpur district, now in Bangladesh. Her father's name was Lochan Pramanik.

The family of Harichand Thakur lived under the zeminda system of Suryamandardar. The family obtained a decree in a case against the Thakur family and occupied their land property with dwelling-houses. After that event, being compelled, the Thakurs shifted from Safaladanga village to Ramdiya in Faridpur district. At Ramdiya, they took shelter in Sen's house and then in the house of Bhajaram Chowdhury at neighbouring village of Orakandi.

Harichand Thakur had no opportunity to get systemic education from any school. In that period, the Namas were named as Chandala and were untouchables. For that reason they had no right to get education in the Brahmnical system. So, he could not go to school and had no formal education. But he had very sharp intelligence and power of good memory. His friends and companions knew this and always remained around him. He used to solve all the problems and answered all their questions.

The medical facilities at the time were not good. In the villages it was more pathetic as there were no doctors and medicines, especially in the villages where the Patit [fallen, meaning lowest castes – Ed.] people were living. The Ojhas were the doctors. To wear amulets, experience exorcise by Ojhas and on God were the only treatment available to the villagers.

Harichand Thakur began to treat the sick and patients of neighbouring villages with the natural empiric medicine using his own intelligence.

A great number of patients got cured by his treatment and mostly for that reason he gained a good standing as a deliverer of the poor and the Patit people. So, superstitious

people of that time, influenced by the Vedic religion regarded him as an Avatar of so-called God.

Not only he played the role of a medical practitioner, but he took up the leading part in all types of social works too. He led the expedition of the Jonasur indigo factory at Gopalganj, pleading against the oppression of the farmers by the indigo planter. During this period he did various types of works to maintain his family. For some time he hawked various type of grocery in the villages. Once he engaged himself in oil business too. Then he started to plough the uncultivated fields and got bumper crops. By these, he also showed the way to the villagers to maintain their families and improve their lives.

The real fight of Harichand Thakur was against the inhuman situation such as inequality, discrimination etc. and baseless imaginations of the Vedic religion or the Hinduism. His fight was against the self-seeking rules given in the religious books, like the Vedas, the Puranas, the Manusmriti etc. He fought against superstitions and tried to establish rational outlook. He said, "I am ready to eat the remaining food after eating by a dog, but I will not show respect to the rules of the Vedas."

At last he introduced a new religion opposing the Vedic religion for the Patit people of the country. That religion was established as "Matuadharm".

Harichand Thakur and his followers were 'Matua' (absorbedly engaged) with 'Haribol' to do practices of virtue abandoning the Vedic conducts and behaviours. Seeing those practices by them, the opposition of Harichand, especially the Brahmins and the Kayasthas were taunting them as 'Matto', 'Mautta', then 'Matua'. Harichand Thakur had accepted this name. He said, "Bhinna sampraday mora Matua akhyan" meaning 'We are separate community namely 'Matua'. Now, those who obey or honour his non-Vedic directions, visions and philosophy, they are called the Matuas.

It is to be remembered that, the actual intention in introducing the Matua religion by Harichand Thakur was to tie the 'patit' in a bond of religion, to uplift them with peaceful household lives and to abolish the inequality of the Namas and other downtrodden communities and to establish the sense of universal brotherhood.

The main directions of the Matua religion are as follows—

1) to speak the truth, 2) to respect to parents, 3) to look upon women as mothers, 4) to love the world, 5) to be liberal to and honour all religions, 6) to deny in caste differences, 7) to establish the Hari Mandir [a house of worship], not to make up as a saint, 8) to pray daily, 9) to be self-sacrificing to God, 10) to not fake sainthood, 11) to be careful from six enemies [(i) lust/desire, (ii) anger, (iii) greed, (iv) arrogance, (v) attachment and (vi) jealousy], 12) to engage hands in work and mouth in saying Hari.

Harichand Thakur said, "He, who uplifted someone, is his God". Uplift means to be raised to prosperous life in all respects from the downtrodden state and obey the directions, visions and philosophy of self-sacrifice to God.

With the preaching of his religion, Harichand Thakur advised all to get education for prosperity of the community. Though he could do nothing for education for the backward communities in his short-lived existence due to the situation and environment of that time, he advised all, and he also directed his elder son Guruchand Thakur to fulfil his wishes and undone works.

To introduce the Matua religion was to begin a religious movement against the Vedas, Brahmanas, Yajna (Jagya), caste and classes etc. in India, the country of Brahmanism. It was a declaration of war by Harichand Thakur against the creators of disunity. All Matuas, men and women are soldiers of that war with equal dignity.

Harichand Thakur took up a great role to preserve the rights and dignity of women. He always spoke for equal rights to men and women.

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A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

[A chapter from the report of UNWomen titled 'Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development']

With the countdown to 2030 well underway, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is up against an unprecedented set of economic, environmental, social and political challenges. After a decade of crisis, recession and subsequent austerity measures that have wreaked havoc on people's livelihoods, the global economy remains volatile and its prospects for long-term recovery uncertain. The global unemployment rate—standing at almost 200 million people in 2016—is expected to remain elevated in the coming years and unlikely to fall below pre-crisis rates in the medium term as the global labour force continues to grow. Vulnerable forms of employment remain pervasive, particularly among women, undermining the ambition to create decent work and sustainable routes out of poverty.

While many countries enacted fiscal stimulus plans in response to the 2007/2008 crisis, these have been followed by the near-universal prescription of fiscal consolidation. By 2011, a first wave of budget cuts had affected 113 countries globally. This was followed by a second major expenditure contraction starting in 2016. In 2018, 124 countries will be adjusting expenditures in terms of GDP and this number is expected to rise slightly in 2019 and 2020. This is a daunting scenario and at odds with the enormous injection of additional resources that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is expected to require.

Aggressive fiscal consolidation has not only failed to produce the promised economic recovery, it has also caused social hardship and disrupted access to essential social services for many. Available evidence shows that women tend to bear the brunt of austerity measures. With less access to labour market earnings, land, credit and other assets, women are more likely to rely on public services and social protection to meet their basic needs. The unequal sharing of family and household responsibilities means that when public services such as health, childcare, water and sanitation are cut back or become less affordable, it is usually women and girls who fill the ensuing gap, spending more time on unpaid care and domestic work. Finally, because women are more likely to be employed in the public sector, they are particularly affected by staff and wage cuts in this sector.

Women who are already disadvantaged are often hit hardest. In the United Kingdom, the Women's Budget Group has repeatedly denounced the regressive nature of fiscal consolidation, which is based on spending cuts rather than tax increases, and quantified the toll that budget cuts take on the most disadvantaged women and girls in the country. In 2017, the organization warned that black and Asian single mothers stood to lose about 15 and 17 per cent of their net income, respectively, as a result of planned freezes and cuts to in-work and out-of-work benefits.

While inequality has been recognized as a key impediment to sustainable development, the trend towards the growing concentration of income and wealth has been difficult to reverse. Following a temporary interruption in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the incomes of the richest 1% of the world's population have started to grow again at a rate considerably faster than those of the rest of the population. It is estimated that in 2016 the richest 1% of the population owned more than 50% of global wealth—an increase from 44% in 2009. According to the World Bank, inequality within countries is higher today than it was 25 years ago.

The same model of growth that underpins economic volatility and rising inequalities is also premised on unsustainable consumption and production patterns, including the large-scale extraction of natural resources, that drive climate change and environmental degradation. The world is seeing increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and the loss of biodiversity. In recent years, these trends have triggered environmental stress and disasters such as floods, cyclones and droughts with devastating effects on the livelihoods and security of people around the world and taking a particularly

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