

# Behar Herald

SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY OUR MOTTO

Vidyasagar Chetona Yatra  
from Nandan Kanan,  
Karmatar to Birsingho,  
Medinipur and back. From  
26th Sept'18 to 5th Oct'18.  
Interested persons  
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Estd. 1874

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## Car fuel from plastic wastes

Newsdesk – Recently the media has published claims from scientists that waste plastic may be used tomorrow to produce car fuel. They are researchers from Swansea University of United Kingdom who claim that if light-absorbing material is added to the plastic and then, after placing it in an alkaline solution exposed to sunlight, it begins degrading itself by producing hydrogen. That hydrogen may be used in fueling hydrogen cars.

And mind it! Not only PET (polyethylene terephthalate), which is a high-grade plastic. Now, a small fraction of even PET can be recycled because recycle needs cleaning the waste which is costly process.

But this new process of degrading by producing hydrogen can be used on any plastic and does not need cleaning first. So, in the coming days all sort of plastic can be recycled this way.

Only sigh is - it may take some years to go for this process on industrial scale. Presently, it is just laboratory news.

## Children of Shibpur colony

Newsdesk – Krishna Byapari reported from Shibpur colony of Ramnagar block of district Batiya, West Champaran that on 9th of September 2018, on the occasion of Rashtriya Poshahar Diwas the school children of the village made an awareness march of the village. News gains significance as there are 245 Bengali speaking students in the Rajkiya Madhya Vidyalaya in the colony who have been denied printed text books by the agencies of the state government this year as well. Yet the children, the students showed their awareness. The children were accompanied by the Anganbari Sevika.

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## Learn language and keep your brain young

Newsdesk – Oh! What a world! When we here in India are fighting with the government and our contemporaries both to emphasize the need of including mother tongue in primary class syllabus and go for a real trilingual exposure for the children, the Britishers are struggling to be bilingual, leaving their cozy monolingual environs of English! European Commission surveyed that nearly two-third of the Britishers do not know nothing other than their mother tongue.

Whereas several studies over the years have suggested that becoming proficient in at least one language other than mother tongue is good for the brain, especially in terms of boosting recall, attention span and concentration. Learning a new language not just boosts our conversational prowess but also wards off dementia!

Studies were made but experiments attempting to prove it were few, until now.

The Daily Mail of UK recently published a story by Pat Hagan about the first episode of a new series of Trust Me, I'm a Doctor on BBC2, in which a doctor oversees the effects of just four weeks of learning Spanish on a group of 20 people who didn't know any language other than English and not a single word of the Spanish language to start with.

The aim was to confirm whether the learning of a language improved brain function. Scientists running the experiment also expected to find that younger volunteers would fare better because their brains have greater plasticity!

Although all the volunteers improved their mental performance and thus proved the studies. However, contrary to the expectations of the doctors it was the older age group which improved the most! After all, they will have to fight dementia in near future!

## Identifying Linguistic minorities

Newsdesk – Few months back The Karnataka High Court did ask the Union government to consider a report submitted in 2007 on granting recognition to linguistic minority communities in Karnataka and issue a notification. The issue arose when a petition filed by an educational institution was being heard as to why it was not being accorded linguistic minority status. We commonly know that Karnataka speaks Kannada. We do not bother to know that it speaks Konkani, Tulu, Kodava and other languages as well.

Karnataka speaks several languages apart from Kannada, including Konkani, Tulu and Kodava.

They are native to it. So far as language speaking population are concerned, Karnataka have sizeable populations of Tamilians, Malayalis, Telegus and Marathis as well.

This High Court order came two days after representatives of 22 native languages from across the country passed 'Bengaluru Resolutions', urging the Union government to confer equal status for all scheduled languages and take steps to protect endangered languages.

The seminar where this resolution as passed noted among a number of native language-centric developments that Tulu is being offered as a school subject in the state.

We quote from the news item published in The News Minute (<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/who-are-state-linguistic-minorities-karnataka-hc-asks-centre-76900>), “While there are 22 languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, there were discussions about recognising 38 other minority languages too. The government should take steps to protect these endangered languages, including Tulu in Karnataka,” said Anand G,

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## WhatsApp News

### Branch Visit

Newsdesk – On 3rd September 2018, central vice president of Bengali Association, Bihar Madan Banik visited Purnia from Batiya. He made a tour of 4/5 villages and had detailed discussions with Association members about the condition of Bengalees in Purnia district and about developing the organization. In Purnia he met Anup Pal and Tara Shankar Chatterjee. In Satsang Colony he met Swapan Ghosh. In Gud Miiki he met Sanjay Das and in Lalganj he met Narayan Chandra Das. In Hasda he met Bishwajit Deb.



## NRC update from Citizens for Justice and Peace

### Assamese groups ask for Error-free and Transparent NRC Left Democratic Manch and FACAAB make unanimous demand

The Left-Democratic Mancha, Assam—a common platform of 11 Political Parties—and the Forum Against Citizenship Act Amendment Bill (FACAAB), a forum of informed citizens, have voiced a unanimous demand for an error free NRC.

In a joint memorandum presented to the State Co-ordinator, NRC the two organisations have expressed their anguish with regard to the on-going process of update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. The Memorandum has alleged various irregularities, which has led to the dropping of large numbers of women, children and other Indian Citizens from the final draft of the updated NRC.

Over 4 million people have been left out of the NRC final draft! Most of them belong to socio-economically backward communities and live in rural areas. Many of them are women and children! Now CJP, drawing from its previous experience in providing legal aid in Gujarat, will step in with a multi-faceted team of lawyers and volunteers to ensure that these people receive a fair chance while filing claims across 15 of the worst affected districts. Your contribution can help cover the costs of a legal team, travel, documentation and technological expenses.

The two organisations, have, once again clarified what they have been demanding all along: An error-free National Register of Citizens now being upgraded under strict supervision and guidance of the Supreme Court of India. What they mean by 'error-free' is the inclusion of all the names of Indian citizens residing in Assam and the non-inclusion of the name of any person who is a foreigner in the upgraded final list of NRC. This is, of course, an arduous task but if achieved, can actually fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the people of Assam. Both organisations have alleged that “gross anomalies” in

the preparation and publication of the final draft of the NRC that was published on 30 July 2018. The names of hundreds of thousands of citizens have been left out in the final draft without any reason. The names of large number of people belonging to all castes, communities and ethnic groups are found missing in the final draft although they have submitted proper legacy data and all other relevant documents at the time of application for inclusion in the NRC.

There are also reports of the large scale exclusion of names belonging to both religious and linguistic minority communities in some places.” In the Memorandum it is alleged that “the bureaucratic bungling or inept handling of applications, coupled with high-handed and arbitrary action, by a section of LRCRs have led to exclusions of names in large numbers.

The names of thousands of married women and children who had submitted legacy data and linkage certificates could have easily been verified with the help of 'Family Tree' formula and spot verification in their respective localities before any arbitrary exclusion. Repeated hearings in such cases were quite unwarranted.

The names of applicants who had submitted legacy data of their mothers or grandmothers were also excluded in some cases. Such actions amount to brazen assaults on the dignity and equal rights of women.

The Migration Certificates issued in 1964-65 period have also been rejected while claiming for inclusion in the NRC. This would certainly be a great injustice to the people who have migrated and settled in Assam or elsewhere in the country before March 24, 1971 with valid documents issued by the concerned authorities of the Central Govt.

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## Teacher's Day

Newsdesk – On Teacher's Day the Purnia Branch of Bengalee Association, Bihar has wished its best to two teachers of Purnia and shared on WhatsApp. One is President Awardee Archana Deb who after retirement has taken a mission. Every day she walks two kilometers in the morning at 6 AM to reach a Mahadalit basti. There she gives tuition to more than 100

poor students. Not only that, she also pays for their books, school dress etc. Other teacher is Tilottama Das (Merina). Presently she is a teacher in Bengali. Before getting the job, she taught Bengali without taking any fees to so many children in Purnia town and in Mado Para village of Lalganj and thus, kept the language teaching alive. Even after getting the job she wanted to continue but could not due to lack of eager students.



## Nandlal Basu - Haweli Kharagpur



Newsdesk- Members of Bengalee Association, Munger Branch, visited Haweli Kharagpur to observe the maintenance of statue of Nandlal Bose.



Madan Banik also discussed with the Association members of Purnia the possibility of holding the provincial General Body Meeting of the Association in Purnia in the year 2019.

## Bhagalpur Durgabari Centenary

Newsdesk – On 24th August 2018 Bhagalpur Durgabari, Masakchak, observing its centenary, donated two tin shades to the burning ghat at Barari. The tin shades are painted and the valuable messages for donating blood, eyes and the body are written on it.





## Need for a Bahirbanga portal

Organisational coordination and communication structure of the Bengali speaking population living out of West Bengal is very poor. Bengalees in Bihar do not know what is happening in other states and they in other states also do not know about Bengalees in Bihar. There is no portal on the internet or mail service or even any open community in social media dealing with this. What events were organized by Bengali speaking people during the last one month in Raipur, Bilaspur and other places of Chhattisgarh? Or, for that matter, in Ranchi, Dhanbad, Jamshedpur in Jharkhand? In Jabalpur, MP? In Uttarakhand? In Betul? In Lucknow? In Mumbai? In Delhi or in Jaipur or in Ahmedabad?

You cannot know. Nothing is available through which you may access those events, except of course the local editions of Hindi newspapers. We must be thankful to them that at least for the sake of the local market, they provide space for the small news of events organized by Bengalee populace. English newspapers never care a bit. Bengali newspapers do not need to go beyond their exclusive market which is quite big and profitable. The languages of other vernacular newspapers we do not understand! Media, the local channels have so poor reach that you cannot even get them on your TV if you are out of that state.

A Bahirbanga portal is highly needed. All India Bengali Association should think about it. We want to know when the Bengalees in Indore are organizing some welfare event in Mahakaleshwar Mandir or when the Bengalees in Jharsuguda preparing for Rabindra Jayanti. The portal, if created, may reach the small-town individuals and communities through social media. The only an All India spectrum of peoples' efforts to preserve and advance Bengali language and culture can be visualized.

## Asian Games

### Comments

This one was the most memorable Asian Games for India. 2018 Asian Games at Jakarta, Indonesia brought for India 15 gold medals which is comparable to the tally of 1951, the first Asian Games or first Asiad held in New Delhi. But the overall tally of 69 medals was the highest ever. Of the gold medals, highest (7) was from Athletics, including one in Heptathlon – that historic win by Swapna Burman of West Bengal. She was suffering with her shoes as she is having six toes and yet this girl from a poor family brought tears of joy and empathy in the eyes of million Indians.

But she was not alone. Meagre number of provisions for the different items in athletics including tracks and fields and also the rising costs could not prevent laboring athletes from small towns and villages of India to come hugely in the events and in the medals tally. Salute to sporting Indian youth!

## Striking down Section 377 of IPC

In a landmark judgment the Supreme Court of India decriminalized same sex consensual relations between adults striking down Section 377 of the IPC. This constitutes a historic victory for the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) communities who have suffered humiliation, bigotry and even violence at the hands of retrograde forces.

There is a space for meaningful discussion on the 'nature' as referred in the beginning of clause 4 of the judgment defining 'natural identity of an individual' – "The natural identity of an individual should be treated to be absolutely essential to his being. What nature gives is natural. That is called nature within."

We may also discuss the absence of correspondence between 'gender identity' and 'sex assigned at birth' as was stated in an earlier celebrated judgment and quoted in the present one – "Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth,..."

But not now. Even a person despising all the identities under LGBT and assuming high moral ground cannot and must not be allowed to defend criminalization of their sexual attitude and behaviours by a penal code instead of having sympathy.

The learned judges rightly said that history owes an apology to the LGBT communities for the wrongs done against them in past (not for decades but centuries as the section 377 of IPC is 157 years old). They also stressed that majoritarian morality cannot dictate constitutional morality.

And finally, it would be worth quoting the opening lines of clause 3 of the judgement -

"The overarching ideals of individual autonomy and liberty, equality for all sans discrimination of any kind, recognition of identity with dignity and privacy of human beings constitute the cardinal four corners of our monumental Constitution forming the concrete substratum of our fundamental rights..."

## Extension of AFSPA in Assam

The government of Assam has extended operation or rather re-imposed Armed Forces Special Powers Act on the state for six months! Against whom these 'special powers' will be used? Leaving crores of people groping in the first draft of NRC, then, due to all round pressure, reducing it to 40 lakhs in the final draft, declaring, on further public pressure to scrutinize those left out, that more than one crore have made entries in the NRC fraudulently... preparing for huge detention camps and the coordinator issuing new and changing orders every day... Every one know who will be targeted and dumber and dragged to camps and jails by 'special powers'. Government of compromise is playing double foul by compromise. Excluding the Bengali speaking populace either by raising ambiguity of residential identity or by dividing on religious identity.

We are more concerned about Assamese identity. Will its proud heritage and culture be able to protect and nurture itself after being party or remaining silent to such nefarious political games?

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## Assamese groups ....

What is most disturbing, when people went to their respective NSKs to inquire about the reasons for exclusion of their names, a large number of such people were informed that they were marked as 'D' Voters and hence their names were dropped. As a matter of fact, these so called 'D' Voters never knew that they were marked as 'D' or their cases were referred to the FTs for disposal. They have been enjoying the right to franchise since long and had even cast their votes in the 2016 Assam Assembly election without being scarred as 'D'.

What is really appalling is the fact that some people were informed that they were 'Declared Foreigners' by the FTs even though they never knew that cases against them were pending in the Tribunals and no notices were ever served on them regarding such cases. When inquiries were made to know the case number and other details, no one could provide required information. The concerned authorities expressed helplessness and reportedly stated that they too, were in the dark on this matter.

It is the considered opinion of the two platforms – the Left-Democratic Mancha, Assam and the FACAAB – that fresh marking of 'D' Voters and references of such cases to the FTs at this stage, while the process of up gradation of the NRC is in progress, should be stopped at least until the publication of the Final NRC."

The Memorandum said, "We have reasons to express such an opinion since the process of the up-gradation of the NRC too is a legal process and it is being monitored by the country's highest judiciary and documents of the applicants are being screened thoroughly.

We also demand that the list of 'D' Voters and the names of DFs are to be made public and displayed in the concerned NSKs with details of case number etc. in the interest of maintaining full transparency.

With regards to the scope of Objection Against Inclusion, the Left-Democratic Mancha, Assam and the FACAAB express its apprehensions that "a chaotic situation may arise if any person can make an objection for inclusion in the draft NRC and if there is no restriction on the number of filing any number of objection and no requirement of his being a local resident of the NSK. The disruptive forces may take full advantage of the SOP and raise objections in large numbers only to delay, disrupt and nullify the whole process.

The two organisations have therefore, urged the State Co-ordinator, NRC, to consider this aspect with all the seriousness at his command. They demand that the objector should be restricted to raise objections within his own NSK areas against inclusion of any name in the draft. Any further extension of areas beyond his NSK will, undoubtedly, create an anarchic situation.

The cases of a stream of people who entered the country from the 'Specified Territory' (present day Bangladesh) between 1966-1971 should be sympathetically and carefully dealt with. They should

not be harassed due to ignorance or procedural lapses of certain provisions of the Assam Accord." Finally the memorandum concludes saying that, "We, therefore, earnestly request you to consider our opinions and observations with due diligence and seriousness with a view to publishing a flawless final NRC as per schedule fixed by the Supreme Court of India."

The Memorandum was submitted on August 28 and was signed by eminent thinker and Chairman of FACAAB, Dr. Hiren Gohain, Harekrishna Deka, IPS (Retd); Prof. Udayaditya Bharali (Retd. Principal, Cotton College); J.P. Saikia, IAS (Retd); Dr. Dinesh Baishya (Retd. Principal, B Barooah College); Haidar Hussain (Eminent Journalist); Dr. Haren Das (Sr. Advocate, Guwahati High Court); Debabrata Das (Literature); Prof. Abdul Mannan (Former Prof. Guwahati University); Dr. Dilip Bora (Prof. Guwahati University); Holiram Terang (Former Minister and Tribal Leader); Jiban Goswami (Retd. Sr. Bank Executive); Dr. Navanil Barua (Renowned Surgeon); Abu Nasar Sayeed Ahmed (Literature); Deben Tamuli (Journalist); Santanu Borthakur (Advocate, Guwahati High Court); Kishor Kumar Kalita (Advocate & Columnist); Dhiren Ingti (Tribal Leader); Manoj Sarma (Social Activist); Krishna Gogoi (Advocate) and Rasel Hussain (Entrepreneur), Manjit Mahanta, Convener, FACAAB.

The All Left-Democratic Mancha, Assam comprises of 11 political parties, namely CPI, CPI (M), CPI (ML), Samajwadi Party, Janata Dal (S), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Aam Admi Party (AAP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Asom Songrami Mancha (ASOM), RCPI, AIFB.

Published on : 30, Aug 2018

Courtesy: <https://cjp.org.in/assamese-groups-ask-for-error-free-and-transparent-nrc/>

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## In Memoriam Uttam Kumar



Pic courtesy: Wikipedia

Native name: Arun Kumar Chattopadhyay

Born : 3 September 1926 Aahiritola, Calcutta, Bengal, British India

Died : 24 July 1980 (aged 53) Bhowanipur, Calcutta, West Bengal

"I must say working with Uttam turned out to be one of the most pleasant experiences of my film-making career. I found out early on that he belonged to the breed of instinctive actors. I have worked with the other kind too, the cerebral one, the one that likes to take a part to pieces and probe into background, motivations, etc., in order to 'get beneath the skin of the character'.

"But the fact is, there is no guarantee that a cerebral actor will make a more substantial contribution than an instinctive one. I hardly recall any discussion with Uttam on a serious, analytical level on the character he was playing. And yet he constantly surprised and delighted me with unexpected little details of action and behaviour which came from him and not from me, which were always in character and enhanced the scene. They were so spontaneous that it seemed he produced these out of his sleeve. If there was any cogitation involved, he never spoke about it.

"I understand Uttam worked in something like 250 films. I have no doubt that well over 200 of them will pass into oblivion, if they have not already done so. This is inevitable in a situation where able performers outnumber able writers and directors.

"Even the best of actors loses his edge and languishes without a

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## Through Hindi portals

### Barkakhana branch committee of Jharkhand Bengalee Association organized

Newsdesk – As reported by Dainik Bhaskar portal on 7th August, a meeting of Bengali speaking people of Barkakhana was organized at Barkakhana Dakshineshwari Kali Mandir on 6th August 2018 by Jharkhand Bengalee Association. The meeting was presided by District President of Ramgarh D. C. Poddar. The Barkakhana Committee elected in the meeting has seven senior leaders as patrons. Rupa Barua was elected president of the committee and Shikha Chatterjee was elected Secretary. Jaya Dhar was elected treasurer. It was heartening to note that a good number of women were present in the meeting and were elected as committee members and other office bearers as well.

### Ranibagh Vikas Nagar committee

Newsdesk – As reported by Dainik Jagran portal on 12th August, Jharkhand Bengalee Association

Ranibagh Vikas Nagar was formed on 11th August 2018 in a meeting held in Yadav Complex. Unanimously Rakesh Dutta was elected President, Subhash Chandra Saha was elected Secretary and Prakash Das was elected treasurer. Other office bearers, a committee and a team of patrons were also elected.

### Bangla Bhawan, Bilaspur

Newsdesk – As reported by Dainik Bhaskar portal on 1st September, Chhattisgarh Bangali Samaj would be inaugurating Bangla Bhawan at Bilaspur on 2nd September 2018. The programme would also include Sawan Utsav and felicitations of eminent persons. Children and women would be presenting songs and dance performances. State General Secretary of Chhattisgarh Bangali Samaj Pallab Dhar and other members were making the preparations. Though the news after inauguration is not available it is hoped that everything has gone well and the Bengalees of Bilaspur now have their own Bangla Bhawan.



# Dimensions of praxis of Bidyasagar vis-à-vis our celebration of his Birth Bicentenary

- Bidyut Pal

Even before considering the greatness of the contributions of Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar in the area of social reform, language, literature, scientific outlook, education, female education et al, his towering figure in the whole stretch of Bengal Renaissance awes us due to his simplicity, his stoic purposiveness and principled life.

Now, that we are marching forward to celebrate the 200th Birth Anniversary of this great soul we may think about the dimensions of his praxis situating it in the critical contexts of contemporary Indian society.

First let us take the set of issues related with primary education. We have our 'Education for All' or Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' providing free education, free textbooks etc. to all children at the primary level. I am not going to deal with the paradox inherent in the campaign itself – right to education somehow obfuscating the duty (legally enforceable, so to say) of the state to provide education to all. Even as it is, we face the growing concerns, particularly at the primary level, about the (a) quality of education, (b) inclusion of mother tongue as first language in a rightly themed three-language formula, (c) common school system, (d) resistance to privatization and commercialization. Percentage of girls at this level is needed to be improved, improvement is required in the percentage of children from deprived communities, there are the issue of drop-outs etc. but of these, first and second may be dealt with other issues. The last one invokes the liability of the state to provide gainful employment (farming included) to its people.

Now, what Bidyasagar did? In a situation where there was no scope for general education for all in vernacular language Vidyasagar did (i) rationalize the letters of his language and write a primer which is still the best primer available in that language, (ii) write some text books for that language including one to learn about moral courage and one to have glimpse of the world through scientific eyes and with scientific outlook, also a easy grammar for the classical language Sanskrit, (iii) prepare a syllabus which at that time revolutionized the concept of education for orthodox minds, (iv) persuade the British government to open schools in villages and himself took initiative to open more than 200 schools, (v) same again, to open girls' schools and himself opened more than 40 girls' schools (with government sponsorship; later he founded on his own expenses a girls school in his mother's name at Birsingha and also formed a girls school in Karmatar), (vi) open 'normal school' for training the teachers i.e. opened India's first teachers' training school in present day vocabulary, (vii) establish a college, Metropolitan Institution, on his own, which is the first private college in India established by Indian, and in which all the teachers were Indians, (viii) persuaded the British government official to recommend aid and recognition to the schools privately established, which later helped founding of so many schools (Wood's Dispatch recommended inter alia that the government should establish schools in each and every district, privately established schools should be aided by the government and the government should always support female education), (ix) open the right to get admission in the college in which he worked for all castes, and lastly (x) begin adult education for the first time in India while he was at Karmatar.

We find that for the popular discourse and campaigns related with all the concerns about education, particularly primary education today, Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar's works and efforts get a valuable inspirational significance. Vidyasagar Birth Bicentenary – Nandan Kanan Celebration Committee, while holding seminars, symposiums, lectures on present day issues related to education and encouraging researches keeps this significance in mind.

Let us take another set of issues, related with women's liberation and empowerment. Whatever said above about writing of primers and text books, preparing new syllabus, opening girls' schools, normal school for teachers' training and persuading the government as reflected in the recommendations of Wood's Dispatch are related to female education as well. And that is important because before him, we do not find any notable educationist in Bengal advocating same education for girls as for boys. Added to these, was his work in Bethune School or what presently is Bethune college. His conscientious efforts to make the institution an ideal girls school yielded results and we find twenty years later that a student of that school, Kadambini Ganguly, becomes the first lady doctor in Asia.

Then comes in count his celebrated endeavors to introduce widow remarriage and prohibit child marriage. Later, some detractors were made that since higher caste Hindus formed only 24 percent of the population in Bengal Presidency and rest 76 percent had no problems with widow remarriage hence his endeavors were confined to his 'caste mindset'. Same type of critics criticize him that his opening of admission to Hindoo College for all did not include the Shudras. Not including the Shudras should be considered keeping in view the state of urban society those days. I haven't read anywhere that admissions in the schools

opened by Bidyasagar in the villages of Bengal were prohibited for Shudras.

Introduction of widow remarriage, even if for higher castes had a deeper cultural significance. We know the hegemonistic nature of Brahmanical culture and its impact on lower castes. Of course, widow remarriage might not be a religious issue for them at that time, just as they did not suffer the evils of Sati earlier, but had these evils persisted, these would have taken the lower castes as well in their reach. British period is full of stories where lower castes or its segments would hold congregations and demand recognition as higher castes. Observing all the orthodox Brahmanical religious rites by the lower castes, specially among the affluent segments is rampant even now.

So far as child marriage is concerned, marrying a small girl to an aged man, rather an old haggard, might have been a specific feature of Kulin Brahmanas, but the marriage between under-aged children were prevalent in all the castes of Hindu community. Bidyasagar eagerly endeavored to stop this inhuman practice with all his zeal.

If we consider the issues related with liberation and empowerment of women at present, all the three aspects of Bidyasagar's engagement with women's issues are directly relevant. In spite of much development in this regard, in education women are still lagging behind. Adult education has given place to adult literacy, and literacy often means just the ability to put her signature on the documents of bank, SHG or government schemes. Drop outs rates are higher at primary stage and perhaps except for few urban segments motivating people on women education is still a burning issue.

Widow remarriage when widow is quite young and victim of some untoward occurrence (early death of husband, early separation or whatever) has become quite common but what about widows who are not that young? Or, middle aged? Or, old? The curse of remaining widow generally continues for them of course, with modifications/liberalizations in dress or food codes. No one is there to quote/misquote shastras, but the society still stigmatizes them.

And child marriage is still so rampant, particularly in rural areas that a Chief Minister finds the issue comfortable to campaign for when surrounded by his failure to tackle some other issues! No satire is intended. The point is that, prohibition of child marriage is an important issue connected with empowerment of women.

Even those issues, which are directly not referable to Bidyasagar's endeavors e.g. discrimination in employment, wages and service rules, stigmas related to physical nature of women, and general issues of oppression and violence including molestation and rape, can be raised while commemorating 200th Birth Anniversary of this great soul. I would suggest the leaders of Vidyasagar Birth Bicentenary – Nandan Kanan Celebration Committee to raise these issues as well in their events to be organized for coming three years.

Moreover, education, full [stigma]-free options for women to remarry at all ages and ground-level stoppage of child marriage will release a huge strength which will accelerate the liberation of women and empower them.

(To be continued)

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## Uttam Kumar

reasonably steady supply of worthy material to keep him on his mettle. It is even worse with 'stars', whom circumstances have brought to a pitch where they must stick to their 'image' or topple. And this usually means doing the same thing over and over again.

"An artiste, however, must always be judged by his best work. On that basis and within the gamut in which his talent was best revealed, Uttam's work shows rare virtues of grace, spontaneity and confidence. Such a combination is not easy to come by, and it is hard to see anyone taking his place in the cinema of West Bengal in the near future".

Satyajit Ray on Cinema, Satyajit Ray, Edited by Sandip Ray, In association with Dhritiman Chatterji, Arup K. De, Deepak Mukherjee, And Debasis Mukhopadhyay. Foreword By Shyam Benegal, Columbia University Press, New York

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## Identifying Linguistic...

President of Banavasi Balaga, a Bengaluru-based organisation working for promotion of native language rights."

So, we have a situation where a prominent recognized language of the state cannot just eat up other languages claiming that they are just tributaries, dialects, sub-languages or up-bhashas, so common feature in the states of northern India, and seen in consecutive census data on languages.

With best compliments from -

**Dr. Supriyo Mukherjee**

Secretary

Samastipur Branch, Bengalee Association, Bihar

## Bihar : Hindu refugees from East Pakistan want land, living, identity

-Vijay Swaroop, Hindustan Times, Bettiah

Many of the Hindu refugees from East Pakistan settled in Bihar are yet to be granted land and have no source of income. In a state in which caste plays a major role, these Bengali-speaking people are struggling for recognition.

Seventy-eight-year-old Anil Havildar is disconsolate. He points to his field, which had once won him the badge of a successful farmer from the Bihar government. He had grown a record 492 quintals of rice in one acre, in 1977.

But for this man, who resettled at Biranchi tola number 3 colony -- one among 46 other East Pakistani Hindu refugee colonies in west Champaram -- life is not the same. A flooded Manihari river left piles of sand on his farm and destroyed his fields and his pride. Havildar, who made his way here in 1956, is a broken man after losing four acres of land which are either filled with sand or have been eroded by the river. "Nobody from the government has come here. I am virtually landless," he says.

Havildar is not alone. Shyamal Prasad Saha (70) and nonagenarian Rabindra Nath Poddar too lost huge chunks of land to sand, making them virtually landless. Saha, one of the educated Bengali refugees grew rice, wheat and sugarcane in the four acres of land he got from the government as part of the rehabilitation policy. He has now shifted base to one of the refugee colonies situated in Bettiah town.

Poddar, who earned name and fame for his treatment of snake bites, lives with his extended family. Nearly 55 families out of 113 families rehabilitated in Biranchi no 3 in 1956, have lost nearly 121 acres of agricultural and 69 decimals of housing land. They now live on the edge of poverty.

### Land for settlement

Many Bengali speaking Hindus were forced to leave East Pakistan and take shelter in India.

The Centre arranged for their rehabilitation in West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar, Assam and Tripura.

In Bihar, these Bengali speaking refugees were first set up in a camp near Paschim Hazari area. They were then relocated to the 46 refugee colonies spread across West Champaran. Bihar has 115 refugee colonies. West Champaran has the maximum, followed by 38 in Purnia and 13 in East Champaran.

Each of the displaced families were given two types of land -- five acres for farming and 18 decimal to build a house, or four acres and 18 decimal land. They were given voting rights only two years back in 2015.

Not all refugees were lucky. Nearly 24 families -- 14 of whom are from Myanmar and living at Paschim Hazari camp set up in 1956 -- are still to get any land. "It is not the issue of citizenship. They all have voting rights," said Dr (Capt) Dilip Kumar Sinha, former vice-president of Bihar Minority Commission and president of Bihar-Bengali Samiti. He did not address the issue of non-allocation of land.

"We never visited our relatives who stayed back.... But nobody cares for our plight," said Girija Lal Sahu, a refugee, who came to Hazari camp in 1974. Sahu makes do plying a rickshaw. Other refugees left out in land settlement either work in fields as daily wagers or are into petty business.

While some still do fight for land, at Majaharia, another refugee colony, situated near the Udaipur ox-bow lake, encroachment of their land by locals resulted in a bloody fight in 1997.

### Caste Recognition

In a state where caste plays a major role, these Bengali speaking people are also vying for a caste identity.

Raja Kumar Das, a student of class 10 at Swatantra Senani Kedarnath Motani High School, has been trying to get a caste certificate to apply for his board examinations for the last eight months.

The Bihar School Examination Board has announced the schedule, but Das is still struggling to get the caste certificate that is mandatory.

"It has been proved that more than 65% of them belong to Scheduled Castes (SC) but they are shown in the list of backward castes and extremely backward caste list in Bihar. This is making it difficult for them to get caste certificates. This deprives them of different welfare projects of government," said Madan Banik, vice president (zone 4), central committee, Bihar Bengali Association.

A study conducted by Asian Development Research Institute's Centre for Economic Policy and Public Finance (CEPPF) reveals that 36.2% people fail to find their caste in the state list, whereas 66% have been placed in extremely backward class. The survey reveals that 97.1% people claimed themselves to be SC, of which 49% and 38% are in

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# Disappearing ponds destroying Bihar

- Mohd Imran Khan

when there's a focus on conserving and creating more water bodies for rainwater harvesting and climate resilience across India, many ponds in the eastern province of Bihar are disappearing, and others are being encroached upon or filled with waste.

Thousands of ponds — essential to store rainwater during the eight dry months of the year — have disappeared across Bihar in the past two decades due to government apathy and increasing real estate activity. Till the early 1990s, there were 250,000 ponds in Bihar, official records show. Locally known as talaab or pokhar, the number of these water bodies has declined to a little over 93,000 today, a slump of more than 70%.

Ponds have become victims of increasing human neglect and for vested interests to gain something if they dry up or are filled, according to Ranjeev, an activist working for over three decades for the conservation of water bodies in the flood-prone Koshi and Mithilanchal regions. "In the last two decades, we have filled ponds with waste, soil and other things, and they have died," he told indiaclimatedialogue.net. "This is set to hit natural water harvesting during the monsoon, its ability to easily recharge groundwater and provide water security."

Even according to official records, 12,027 water bodies (including ponds) out of 199,000 have been encroached upon. This was revealed in May last year after the Patna High Court pulled up the state government in this regard.

## Disaster risk reduction

The government had in 2016 launched a campaign to free water bodies of encroachments to help rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge that would help tide over droughts, floods and recurring drinking water crises in the state. This drive was part of the much-hyped Disaster Risk Reduction Roadmap 2015-2030 of Bihar, which mandates action for water conservation by concerned agencies. It was then claimed that water body conservation will focus on removing encroachment from ponds, lakes, canals, ahar and pynes (traditional water harvesting systems), drains, water drainage channels and rivers.

"Bihar has been facing drought and drinking water crisis owing to the irregular and scarce rainfall over the past few years," Vyas Ji, Vice Chairman of Bihar State Disaster Management Authority (BSDMA), told indiaclimatedialogue.net. "The main purpose of the campaign is to store rainwater and conserve groundwater to tackle such conditions."

However, the ground reality hasn't changed much. Hundreds of ponds have disappeared in Patna, Gaya, Darbhanga, Motihari, Muzaffarpur, and Bhagalpur districts in recent years, and many others are encroached upon.

Narayan Choudhary, convenor of Talaab Bachao Abhiyan (Save Lakes Campaign) in Darbhanga district, said it is difficult to save a pond due to direct involvement of powerful and influential persons and apathy of the local administration. "I have been fighting for years to protect ponds, conserve them and to free them from encroachment. But the fact is that I have not able to save a single pond so far," says Choudhary, who has been on forefront to save ponds in Darbhanga, once known as the land of talaabs.

There were 350 ponds in Darbhanga town till 1960 as per the district gazetteer, but the number went down to 250 by the early 1990s, he told indiaclimatedialogue.net. Now, there are less than 100 ponds, as per the records of Darbhanga municipality, he said.

## Nexus of powerful people

"It is a nexus of powerful people who have been encroaching and filling ponds in full public view without any problem," Choudhary said. "Ponds are being destroyed in a very well-planned manner. Ponds are part of public utility that is directly connected with environment and ecology. It is a criminal act to fill ponds."

Chandra Shekhar Singh, the District Magistrate of Darbhanga, said the administration has begun a process to free ponds from encroachment. "Yes, ponds have been encroached upon but the process is underway to free them from encroachment," he told indiaclimate dialogue.net, adding that the administration would act against encroachers of water bodies as per the government's commitment for their conservation.

Choudhary says that a large number of water bodies have been converted into homestead and commercial land, mostly illegally. Others have been turned into dumping grounds for municipal garbage, medical waste and reservoirs for sewage, leading to serious pollution of surface water and groundwater. "The courts have repeatedly directed removal of encroachment from ponds," he added.

## In the name of development

"Ponds have become victims of people's greed. In the name of development and beautification, they have been encroached upon and filled. That naturally led to their deaths. All this is going on in full knowledge of the concerned government departments," said Ravinder Pathak, founder of

Magadh Jal Jamaat, a network of activists working to save water bodies and revive the neglected traditional water harvesting and irrigation system in drought-prone Magadh region that comprises Gaya, Aurangabad, Jehanabad, Arwal and Nawada districts of southern Bihar.

He pointed to the case of Bodh Gaya's Maya Sarovar that was once spread over seven hectares, but was filled up in 2003-04 and turned into Maya Sarovar Udyan (park). What is now left of this big lake is a small pond, he said.

This is not an isolated case. Several lakes and ponds were filled and levelled in the name of beautification in and around Gaya. In Gaya town, Magadh divisional commissioner's office was constructed by filling in Dighi Talaab. "It is in violation of the government's directive to revive all water bodies after removal of encroachment," Pathak told indiaclimatedialogue.net. The government itself (district administration) allegedly used pond land for the construction of office buildings, schools and other things."

Gaya has been facing a water crisis for long. Dozens of lakes were dug in colonial times to combat the scarcity but they are now rapidly vanishing. Ram Sagar Talaab in the heart of Gaya town was encroached upon and filled in 2010-11 to transform it into prime real estate. Another pond, Kathokar Talaab, was filled and levelled and a market was constructed there by Gaya Municipal Corporation. "It is not only in Gaya," alleged Pathak. "Similar work has been done in other cities as well."

However, the local administration denies any encroachment. "I don't have any such information. Right now all water bodies are free of encroachment," Gaya District Magistrate Abhisek Singh told indiaclimatedialogue.net. He said the administration would not allow anyone to encroach upon any water body. "In Gaya town, half of the ponds have disappeared," Pathak said. "There were more than two dozen ponds but now there a little over one dozen exist."

## Floodwater management

Ranjeev said ponds have been playing an important role in floodwater management for centuries. In times of drought, these ponds used to solve the drinking water crisis in Mithilanchal. "North Bihar have had a rich tradition of ponds," he said. "They have played a flood-moderating role by storing excess flow during monsoons and provided water security. In Darbhanga, ponds were inter-connected."

"Ponds were an ecological bank and lifeline for the local people. The government had taken over most of ponds but different agencies responsible for maintaining them hardly work for conservation. For government departments, ponds have become source of collecting revenue, issue tender for fishing and all that," Ranjeev told indiaclimatedialogue.net. "The government departments are interested in revenue collection only and they are not doing anything to save the talaabs."

Ranjeev said nearly 500 water bodies, including 50 talaabs in Bhagalpur, have dried up in the recent past. Similarly, there are 2,146 water bodies in Banka district, of which 117 have dried up.

"A large part of Bihar is facing an acute drinking and irrigation water scarcity. As per Met department record, the state has been receiving less rainfall compared to the last decade. As ponds disappear, the people are forced to depend on deep bore wells, resulting in declining groundwater levels," Ranjeev said.

## Patna not spared

He said that even in state capital Patna, hundreds of ponds have disappeared. The Patna branch of All India Institute of Medical Sciences was constructed after filling in 35 acres of lakes, he said. Similarly, many parks have come up after filling lakes and ponds. "There were nearly 1,000 lakes in Patna but their numbers have come down to a little over 200. Several residential localities have been

developed after big ponds were filled," he told indiaclimatedialogue.net.

Some of Patna's ponds, including Kachchi Talaab, Sachivalay Talaab, Manikchand Talaab and Adalatgannj Talaab, are facing difficult times and may not survive for long, according to Ranjeev.

Bihar Pollution Control Board Chairman A.K. Ghosh said there would be a drinking water crisis in Patna by 2030 because the sources of groundwater recharge have been covered with concrete. "There is an urgent need to save water bodies, including ponds, and the stress should be on recharging groundwater," Ghosh told indiaclimatedialogue.net.

Bihar's Revenue and Land Reform Minister Ram Narayan Mandal admitted that water bodies are soft targets for encroachment but added that the government is determined to preserve water bodies. "We have directed concerned district officials to ensure encroachment-free water bodies and take action for water conservation," Mandal told indiaclimatedialogue.net.

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<https://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2018/08/08/disappearing-water-bodies-hamstring-climate-resilience-in-bihar/>

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## Bihar : Hindu refugees from ...

East and West Champaran districts respectively.

"The same people find place in SC list in neighbouring West Bengal. Does change of place change the caste also?" wondered Banik.

"This has happened despite the state general administration department issuing instructions (letter no 20810, dated 16.6.2009) to district authorities to issue caste certificate."

The association's Bettiah chapter president, Radhakant Debnath, had written a letter in October 2017 to the district magistrate to consider the state directive, but has not had a response.

## Socio-Economic Conditions

The CEPPF study reveals that only 16.2% Bengali speaking refugees have passed matric or taken to higher education; 11.2% refugees can read in their mother tongue Bengali with difficulty, while just 23.6% can write in Bengali.

The economic condition of these refugees has not changed either with only 3.3% of their population in government services.

While 43.7% are wage labourers, 28.7% are self-employed, mostly in agriculture. More than half their population, 56.6% have shown their income below Rs 3000 per month. Over 30% of the population does not have ration cards and only 15.2% have concrete shelter.

The demand for the formation of a Refugee Development Authority is long pending. In 2011, Bihar government announced the constitution of Tharu Development Authority for the development of Tharus living near the borders with Nepal and gave them the status of scheduled tribes. The Bengali Association has also demanded that they be included. The government has, however, been found lacking.

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Courtesy: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/bihar-hindu-refugees-from-east-pakistan-want-land-living-identity/story-WUinXFN2BbAiAPJmOclMSI.html>

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