

Chris Bayly

Author(s): Thomas Timberg

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EDITORIAL
edit@epw.in

CIRCULATION
circulation@epw.in

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320-321, A TO Z INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
GANPATRAO KADAM MARG, LOWER PAREL
MUMBAI 400 013
PHONE: (022) 4063 8282
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PHONES: (022) 2887 3038/41
FAX: (022) 2887 3038
epwrf@epwrf.in

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**Safety of Villages
in Manipur Combing Zone**

The war between the rebels in the North East and the Indian Army, which has gone on for more than 50 years, is a reflection of political and economic constraints and the instability in the region. It is known that several innocent civilians are victims of this war.

For decades, many people have been urging those who revolt and those who carry out counter-insurgency to respect human rights. Acknowledging the pain over the killings of either the rebels or the Indian Army and the grievances of the survivor families, many have been demanding an end to this war. It is unfortunate that this call for peace has not been respected by the political leaders who on their part have failed to bring a peaceful democratic solution.

The ambush on the Indian Army by some rebel groups on 4 June 2015 in Manipur's Chandel District and the Indian Army's subsequent combing operation are not new phenomena. These are the manifestations of the never-ending war situation in the region.

It is the concern and voice of the people that unarmed civilians should not be targets and that they should not bear a burden when the two armed groups are in conflict. There have been instances in the past, when the Indian Army killed some rebels in a village and the rebels held the villagers responsible for it.

The ongoing operation in Chandel since 4 June 2015 have laid siege to several villagers and we can feel their fear and grievances. We can understand the emotive sentiment of the Indian Army and the hyper-nationalism circulated in the social media. However, it is advisable that they must not keep the people totally in the dark about the condition of the villagers, but allow the media and respectable civil societies to get access to the villages which have been cordoned off.

The removal of the restrictions on the entry of media and respectable civil society organisations will overcome the fear and grievances of the concerned villagers

whose communication with the outside world has been cut off. We want peace and we need to ensure the security, rights and integrity of civilians during war.

Malem Ningthouja
Campaign for Peace and Democracy
MANIPUR

Chris Bayly

I am thankful for Ajay Skaria's moving tribute to Chris Bayly ("Remembering Chris Bayly," EPW, 23 May 2015). I had not met him for many years but can vouch for his humanity and openness that has been described. And the description of his place in contemporary academic history is useful. But I think one should also highlight the import of some of Bayly's later work for all social thinkers, and particularly for those thinking about the future in India. Though recognising the cultural specificities of each country's path through modernisation, he stresses the commonalities which all modernisations entail. Thus though a modern India and China will retain many unique characteristics as compared to the United Kingdom and the United States, they all will find themselves with institutions that perform quite similar functions, whatever they may be called. This is not so much something which Bayly asserted as what he observed so far in the overall process of modernisation across widely varying cultures. He resembles Alexander Gerschenkron who argued that while the task of capital accumulation was done differently in Western, Central and Eastern Europe—for simplicity by entrepreneurs, banks and the state—the function was ultimately the same.

None of this is determinist, but it resonates in our current debates about how much the retail/wholesale trade structure, the financial and labour market structure, the political regime and land-use patterns will be forced into common patterns or at least to perform similar structures as economies grow.

Thus in Bayly's later works—especially his comprehensive texts on world history—he raises a key meta question in social analysis. To what extent can other societies

and cultures learn from a given society's historical experience? Therefore to what extent do social science conclusions validated by the experience in other countries apply to each other?

Thomas Timberg

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, UNITED STATES

Intolerance of Dissent

On 22 May 2015, in the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM), the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC) was "derecognised" by the Dean of Students following an advisory note received from the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The note from the ministry referred to an anonymous complaint that APSC created "hatred" against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Hindus.

[The derecognition has since been withdrawn]

APSC is a duly recognised independent student body, of about 100 individuals, formed on 14 April 2014 on the birth anniversary of Ambedkar. The group has been facing threats and intimidation from upper caste right-wing groups within the campus and administration from the very beginning. Earlier in June 2014 and again in September 2014, the Dean of Students had asked APSC to change its name as both Ambedkar and Periyar were political leaders. The immediate provocation was the lecture organised by APSC on 14 April 2015 by R Vivekananda Gopal of Kuppam University, Andhra Pradesh on the topic "Contemporary Relevance of Dr Ambedkar." In his speech Gopal had accused the National Democratic Alliance government of favouring big business and criticised its policies on land acquisition, labour, etc.

APSC strongly believes that caste discrimination is very much prevalent, even in current times, and is particularly pervasive in these "premier" academic institutions. APSC aims to make a common platform for all students irrespective of caste and creed, so as to dismantle the evils of caste barriers. Emphasising the direct linkage between the hierarchical caste structure and conditions of peasants and labour, they have been organising talks, discussions, debates, movie

screenings on labour policies, language politics, communalism, land acquisition ordinance, beef ban and *ghar wapsi* programmes, etc.

IITM is notoriously infamous for its casteist/Brahminical and right-wing ideology and dominance. Making a mockery of the government policies on reservation, the institute had never implemented the policies resulting in very dismal representation of Dalits and tribals among both faculty and students. According to W B Vasantha Kandasamy, Assistant Professor in the Mathematics Department, of the institute's entire faculty numbering 460 a meagre 0.86% are Dalits, about 50 are from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and the rest belong to the upper castes (2007). Even at present, the number of Dalits among faculty members is less than 1%. In 2008, IIT Delhi was also in the news for terminating 12 Dalit students citing "poor academic performance." There are many such instances of discrimination and persecution of Dalit students and faculty in the IITs which are never covered by the mainstream media. A recent survey among first-year students (2013–14 batch) belonging to various Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and OBC categories at IIT Mumbai has revealed that an alarming 56% of them feel discriminated in a very subtle manner. Even basic freedoms like having food of their choice in a common space is frowned upon by the administration which wanted separate mess halls for students who are vegetarian.

The incident at IITM is not an isolated one. It is part of the overall strategy of right-wing forces to stifle democratic spaces in educational institutions. In June 2014, nine students including editor, subeditor and advisory members of the college magazine of Sree Krishna College in Kerala's Guruvayur University were arrested for publishing "objectionable

and unsavoury" language against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a crossword puzzle in the magazine. Around the same time seven polytechnic students along with their principal in Thrissur were arrested for including Narendra Modi in a list of "negative faces" along with Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, George Bush and a few others in their college magazine.

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) expresses deep concern over growing intolerance shown by the Modi government which is going for an all-out offensive against every form of dissent. We strongly condemn the efforts of the government to stifle democratic voices in educational institutions, thus violating the constitutionally-guaranteed right to free expression.

Sharmila Purkayastha, Megha Bahl

PUDR,

NEW DELHI

Toothcomber's Lack of Clarity

I am writing this to say that I am in profound sympathy with Samares Kumar Das's predicament ("Some Clarity Please," EPW, 30 May 2015). As in his case, so in mine: Toothcomber tends to pass over my head too. And when he (Toothcomber) writes out of the blue about Euclidean spaces and Cobb-Douglas production processes, I too fail to understand. In fact, I have not the slightest idea of what he means. Having said this, it may be fair to speculate that Toothcomber is writing pure drivel; and it may be the case that he *intends* not to be understood: after all, how can one be challenged if one cannot be comprehended? By the way, I mean it when I say that I have not the slightest idea of what Toothcomber means. I should know. I am Toothcomber.

Toothcomber

Web Exclusives

The following articles have been published in the past week in the Web Exclusives section of the EPW website. They have not been published in the print edition.

- (1) The New Sino-Russian Partnership: Ukraine and the Logic of Market Capitalism—*Himani Pant*
 - (2) Here and Now: Narrative of South Asian Migrant Workers in Malaysia—*Anindita Dasgupta and Neeta Singh*
- Articles posted before 6 June 2015 remain available in the Web Exclusives section.