

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

The Adivasi will not dance

An Adivasi's view of the new domicile policy in Jharkhand



HANSDA SOWVENDRA SHEKHAR

ON SUNDAY, April 24, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a grand panchayat *sammelan* in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leaders Deepak Birua, Shashi Bhushan Samad, Niraj Purty, and Mangal Singh Bobonga were held in preventive custody, while another JMM leader Champai Soren was kept under house arrest. Reason: The BJP-led government in Jharkhand was apprehensive that these Adivasi leaders would interrupt Modi's *sabha* by protesting against the new domicile policy introduced in Jharkhand on April 7.

The domicile policy in Jharkhand is a contentious issue. There has been such a huge influx of non-Adivasi outsiders into Jharkhand that it is necessary to define who is an actual Jharkhandi and be given preference in education, jobs, etc. in the state. Despite the enormity of the issue, every party that won office in Jharkhand steered clear of formulating a domicile policy. They learned from the experience of Babulal Marandi, the first chief minister of Jharkhand and, at one time, an influential Adivasi leader.

In November 2000, the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre created Jharkhand. To show that the BJP respects Adivasis, Marandi, then with the party, was made the chief minister. This chain of having only an Adivasi as the chief minister remained unbroken till 2014. Right from the inception of Jharkhand in 2000, the Adivasis have been demanding that the *khatiyani* (land records) of the year 1932 be made the reference point to determine who the actual residents of Jharkhand are. This is a legitimate demand. It is obvious that the Adivasis have been living in Jharkhand from before 1932 and would certainly have their names in the *khatiyani* of 1932. The best method to ensure that the Adivasis of Jharkhand get their due and the creation of the state is justified is to formulate the domicile policy of Jharkhand by keeping the 1932 *khatiyani* as a reference point.

In 2002, Marandi, a visionary with liberal views, asked for the *khatiyani* of 1964 to be used as a reference point to determine the domicile policy. This meant people who've lived or owned land in the region as per the land records of 1964 were to be considered residents of Jharkhand. Adivasi leaders could've supported Marandi to create a pro-Adivasi domicile policy. Unfortunately, self-centred and politically myopic Adivasi leaders did not support Marandi. Nor did they demand the 1932 *khatiyani* as earnestly as they're doing now.

The non-Adivasi opposed Marandi's proposed domicile policy. There were violent agitations all over Jharkhand over the issue. The reason was a large chunk of non-Adivasis had come to Jharkhand, mostly from Bihar, after 1964. Marandi's domicile policy and his stand on the Tata Steel lease issue nearly ended his political career. His own party, the BJP, clearly a party for non-Adivasis and capitalists, disowned him. He was removed from the post of the chief minister and the BJP installed another "Adivasi" leader, Arjun Munda, as the new chief minister. Marandi quit the BJP and formed the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM). But he never could be the political force he was in his heyday in the BJP.

After Marandi's fall, every subsequent government in Jharkhand avoided formulating

the domicile policy. All these governments have had Adivasi chief ministers — Munda, Shibu Soren, Madhu Koda, and Hemant Soren — but no one dared to announce a domicile policy. It was clear that though the state of Jharkhand was being led by an Adivasi, the politics of Jharkhand was not in the hands of the Adivasi. Business houses owned and run by non-Adivasis have such a manipulative presence in the politics of Jharkhand that they can topple governments and nullify laws that are not in their interest. So all Adivasi leaders realised their precarious position in their own homeland and pragmatically remained quiet.

After the BJP won the general election in 2014, the non-Adivasi outsiders of Jharkhand demanded a non-Adivasi CM who could do "vikas". Propelled by the thumping victory of the BJP at the Centre and its "sabka vikas" agenda — and because an Adivasi is, apparently, incapable of ensuring BJP-type vikas — the party chose a non-Adivasi, Raghubar Das, for the chief minister's office. Adivasis in Jharkhand protested, but what could be done? Having an Adivasi CM was just a symbolic gesture, not written law.

Ironically, Das is not from Jharkhand but from Chhattisgarh. He migrated to Jharkhand (then Bihar) to work with Tata Steel. Das has stated that all people living in the state for the last 30 years or more would be considered residents of Jharkhand. By creating a vague timeline like "30 years" instead of adopting a more solid parameter like the *khatiyani* of 1932, Das has accommodated every non-Adivasi outsider including himself. If the *khatiyani* of 1932 is made valid and it is proved that Das is not a resident of Jharkhand, he would not be able to contest a vidhan saba election anymore.

The major influx of non-Adivasi outsiders into Jharkhand happened quite recently. In

ONE OF 800 MILLION A VOICE, UNDER 35

In the 1970s and 1980s when industries prospered, non-Adivasis from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, and elsewhere came to Jharkhand to work in the factories, bought property, and settled down. Today, the situation is such that an Adivasi student, despite having his family land registered in the 1932 *khatiyani*, wouldn't be considered a resident of Jharkhand if he hasn't passed his matriculation from a school in the state.

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The BJP did separate Jharkhand from Bihar, but its intention in doing so is showing only now. The Adivasis, the real residents of Jharkhand, are being sidelined, while non-Adivasi outsiders are taking over the state. Munda said a few days ago that the present domicile policy is against the Adivasis. Did he really mean it? Because, by some design, every Adivasi leader in the BJP who could've challenged Das — like Munda — lost in the 2014 Vidhan Sabha elections and cleared the way for Das and the non-Adivasi lobby in the party. If Munda and all Adivasi MLAs in the BJP are against this domicile policy, can they be expected to withdraw support for the Das government?

Today, the BJP has launched an anti-Adivasi domicile policy. Tomorrow, it might repeal the pro-Adivasi Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act to legitimise the act of non-Adivasis grabbing Adivasi lands in Jharkhand. So, this fight has to continue.

Shekhar, 33, is a novelist and works as a doctor in Pakur, Jharkhand

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"With every passing year, alarms about the underfunding of struggling hospitals grow louder... The solution to the state's health care pricing dilemma, whatever it might be, can only be found under the bright and cleansing light of a public process." — THE BOSTON GLOBE

Losing the past

Government policies have become an assault on Delhi's architectural heritage



A G KRISHNA MENON

OUR SOCIETY has an ambivalent attitude towards the protection of architectural heritage. On the one hand we are justifiably proud of the diverse and abundant evidence of our ancient civilisation, on the other we often prevaricate unjustifiably when it comes to protecting it. The most common rationalisation against conservation pits the imperatives of development against those of conservation, but there are other, more insidious, prejudices rooted in majoritarian political or cultural ideologies that determine which buildings should be protected. Of course, one could argue that in an economically developing and culturally transforming society such contestations are to be expected, but in the last year in particular, the anti-conservation attitudes have hardened and government policies have become a veritable assault on architectural heritage. Given our past commitment to conserving our historic monuments and the plural nature of what was conserved, this was hardly expected.

In May 2015, the Central government summarily withdrew, without consulting the project proponents, the government of Delhi, the application it had submitted to nominate Delhi to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Cities. The state government had viewed the nomination as a strategy to boost tourism and strengthen the economic base of Delhi while simultaneously enhancing its image as the iconic capital of India. The newly elected Central government, however, viewed it, naively, as anti-development. Perhaps the withdrawal also addressed other unstated political agendas like demonstrating the primacy of its political powers to the provocative posturing of the state government while appealing its electoral constituency by overtly opposing the historic significance of the two particular sites that were identified for nomination, the Mughal city of Shahjahanabad and the colonial imperial city of New Delhi.

Since the withdrawal of the nomination, the Central government has reinforced its opposition to the significance of architectural heritage of the city by introducing three policy initiatives in the guise of promoting "development".

First, it instructed the Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) to review the protection mechanism of the erstwhile imperial city, the so-called Lutyens Bungalow Zone (LBZ) and propose fresh guidelines for its re-development. This initiative catered to the sentiments of both the anti-colonial and the pro-development lobbies to justify what would otherwise be considered an act of vandalism anywhere else in the world. The new DUAC guidelines have been cleverly

formulated with a nod to legal procedure but following the ubiquitous bureaucratic traditions of opacity in decision-making. These guidelines would effectively transform the architectural heritage of the LBZ that professional bodies of architects, urban designers, landscape architects and conservation architects had strongly petitioned the DUAC to protect.

Second, the Central government has become adamant in wanting to demolish the Hall of Nations in Pragati Maidan to build a "world-class" convention centre. The Hall of Nations is internationally recognised as an extraordinary example of modern Indian architecture. It is among the buildings that the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has proposed to the DUAC and the Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) for recognition as the modern architectural heritage of Delhi. All over the world there is a realisation that if significant examples of modern architecture are not protected then the modern segment of the historical narrative of architectural development would be lost to future generations. In India, INTACH proposed that the important examples of modern Indian architecture of Delhi should be protected, particularly because Delhi has been a fertile site of post-Independence architectural development, critically appreciated not only in India but internationally. Sixty-two buildings, including Akbar Bhavan, Sri Ram Centre for Performing Arts, Crafts Museum, Bahai Temple, Hall of Nations and Nehru Pavilion, were on the proposed list. Both the DUAC and the HCC, who are answerable to the Central government, are however dragging their feet, perhaps as a disingenuous strategy to enable the development of the new convention centre at Pragati Maidan to become a fait accompli.

Third, the Central government now proposes to bypass all existing processes and civil society actors who are involved in conserving the architectural heritage of Delhi by empowering the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), an institution unambiguously controlled by the Central government, to take charge. The DDA issued a public notice on March 30, 2016, in which it announced that it has set up the Delhi Urban Heritage Foundation to "recommend for alteration, modification or relax provision of existing regulations..." on matters related to Delhi's architectural heritage thus making it the final arbiter on the subject.

Independently, each policy initiative does not appear threatening, but seen together a pattern emerges that is an assault on the architectural heritage of Delhi. Perhaps in the context of the many other important issues confronting the city and civil society, this assault does not grab the attention of the media or the stakeholders, but the point I would like to highlight is it is symptomatic of the larger absence of public discourse in the formulation of public policy that has become worrisome. And as far as architectural heritage is concerned it makes official our society's incipient ambivalence towards its protection.

The writer is convener, INTACH Delhi Chapter

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LET US CHOOSE

THIS REFERS to the editorial 'Pause and listen' (May 13). Political parties think of bans as an easy solution to vexed issues. No party is ready to draw lessons from experience. We continue to believe that by sweeping things under the carpet we can clean our house. Banning books and films at the drop of a hat is a worrisome trend. In the name "hurting sentiments", some political scores are being settled. Let pragmatism and prudence take over and government leave choice to the public.

Ashok Goswami, Mumbai

BANNING BANS

ADI GODREJ surely knows that "You cannot wake up someone who's only pretending to be asleep." The government, unfortunately, feels it's duty bound to implement an unrealistic agenda. Hinduism prescribes neither a beef ban nor wholesale prohibition, Jain scriptures advise a monk to accept all alms, including fish and meat. The Buddha died of food-poisoning after eating stale pork. Non-violence originally meant avoiding intentional injury and hurt, not abstinence from meat or fish. Subsequently, it was also found profitable to be a vegetarian, since stocking grains and pulses was cheaper than maintaining a herd of animals. As for prohibition, one reads how Indra and Balaram and other gods often got drunk and were not embarrassed.

V.P. Joshi, Nashik

WHY HER CASTE?

KUDOS TO Tina Dabi for topping the

LETTER OF THE WEEK

SILLY POINT

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has unnecessarily waded into a huge controversy with an odious comparison of poll-bound Kerala with Somalia. To make it worse for his online apologists, the PM made no attempt to clarify his remarks that has triggered a strong reaction in the social media. A storm of criticism swept the social media after #PoMoneModi hit Twitter. Malayalees from across the world joined the hashtag mocking, satirising and rejecting Modi's comments. They have taken to social media with one-liners. This unwanted rhetoric at a time when BJP is at its lowest ebb with so many missteps is definitely going to cost the BJP.

J.S. Acharya, Hyderabad

UPSC exams. But highlighting her stupendous feat against the backdrop of her Dalit background is uncalled for. She never flaunted her caste card. She was never discriminated against till date. Why is the media bent upon garnering insincere sympathy for her on the basis of caste? Because we still secretly want to perpetuate the obnoxious caste system.

Sumit Paul, Pune

The river challenge

Cleaning the Ganga will need sustained effort, constant vigilance



JUSTIN ROWLATT

IT IS clear that Narendra Modi sees cleaning up the Ganges as nothing less than a mission from God. "Maa Ganga is screaming for help", he told the crowd at a celebration rally in the hours after his landslide victory two years ago. "She is saying I hope one of my sons gets me out of this filth."

But fulfilling his promise to clean the holy river may be one of his greatest challenges because if anything speaks of the lack of governance in India it is the terrible state of one of India's mightiest rivers, as I found while investigating for BBC World News.

You don't have to be a scientist to know there is a problem. In Kanpur, the centre of India's huge leather industry, Rakesh Jaiswal, a veteran environmental campaigner led me to a filthy stream that flows into the river.

I am totally overwhelmed — disabled — by the warm, oily stench coming from the water. The smell is impossible to describe. There's human waste in there, and something very rotten indeed. But that's just what a wine buff would call the "top notes". Behind them are other awful odours that I can't even begin to identify: Meaty, acidic and very wrong.

Instinct takes over. I begin to retch uncontrollably. And each time my body convulses I suck in another great lungful of that fetid air. It is only with great effort that I manage to avoid vomiting. Once I get my breath back, Rakesh tells me the last time he tested the water it was contaminated with numerous pollutants including heavy metals and pesticides.

He says in 20 years of campaigning he has only seen the river deteriorate. "All hope is dead for me now", he says in despair. But we should not give up on the Ganges. Just two years into Modi's "Clean Ganga Mission" and it is too early to judge progress, but during the making of our BBC World News documentary on the subject we found encouraging signs.

For a start the government now openly acknowledges that corruption has been a problem — an important step toward dealing with the issue. It has tightened up the rules on pollution and has improved enforcement, it says more than 100 tanneries have already been closed down.

The government is also open about sewage treatment, or the lack of it. At one of the huge effluent plants in Varanasi, the chief

engineer acknowledges that only a third of India's holiest city is actually connected to a sewer, "the rest goes straight into the Ganges", he says. And, the figures outside the cities are even worse. Just 20 per cent of the sewage from the 450 million who live within the catchment area of the river is reckoned to be treated.

Recognising just how big a challenge cleaning up the Ganges will be is an important beginning, but now the hard work starts. Back in the eighties, Rajiv Gandhi's government spent millions on muscular infrastructure to clean the river, yet pollution only got worse. So why does Modi's government believe it can do better?

"Because we have learned lessons from their mistakes," says the environment minister, Prakash Javadekar with a confident smile. He tells me Modi is leading from the front: "There is tremendous focus and therefore we are very confident we will achieve our targets". The government has set itself tough targets and, to be fair, assigned a decent budget — almost \$3 billion — to the world's biggest river cleaning project — but for the moment it is dwarfed by the sheer

scale of what it is attempting to do.

"We are not saying that the whole Ganga mission will be complete in five years, no. Five years will ensure there is a marked difference but this is a long project," says Javadekar. "The Rhine and the Thames were in the same dirty state 50 or 60 years ago and it took nearly 20 years to change the overall ecology of that, and we will also achieve it within 10 to 15 years' time."

If the government is to succeed and clean up this mighty river it will require sustained effort and constant vigilance. But Modi has an important asset: The fact that so many Indians want him to succeed. And if India can clean up one of the dirtiest rivers in the world, who knows what else this great rising nation can achieve?

The writer is South Asia correspondent for the BBC. "Our World: Killing the Ganges", Rowlett's documentary on the effort to clean India's greatest river will be broadcast on BBC World News this weekend at 5pm IST on Saturday (May 14) and at 10am and 11pm IST on Sunday (May 15)