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## AN UNTOUCHABLE MASSACRE

Marichjhapi was the largest government massacre in independent India, yet for thirty years it was forgotten. It involved two of the most venerable politicians in India, Prime Minister Desai and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu. In the 4 decades since then much has been learned but the scale of the massacre and the reasons for the massacre remain unknown. Eventually all the ruling parties were implicated, or failed to investigate what happened.

The attempts to uncover what happened speak to the difficulties of achieving human rights in India. No government agency or NGO investigated it and no government or NGO report in any language exists on the Marichjhapi massacre. What we know results from the efforts of a few individuals to publicize it. Some things have not changed since the 1979 massacre; the deaths continue to be estimated at between 4 and 5 figures, with little progress made in identifying the victims or narrowing the wide range in estimates. The reasons for it are still a mystery, though numerous explanations of varying plausibility have been suggested to explain it.

Though historical interpretations continue to be advanced, the basic events that led up to it are not in dispute. The Mughal conquest of India led to many Untouchables and lower castes converting to Islam. As independence approached religion became a mobilizing force for political change which resulted in partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. Hindus in East Bengal fled to the West while the Muslims in the West fled East. However as the Muslims and Untouchables were in a political alliance it was only when communal feeling turned against the Untouchables that they fled to India. As they did not have the assets of the middle class Hindus and landlords who had fled earlier, they became dependent on government assistance for survival.

The conditions in the refugee camps in central India were considered appalling both by the media and the government's own reports. The Communist opposition in West Bengal took advantage of the refugees' plight to discredit the ruling Congress Party and demand their return to West Bengal, with the undeveloped Sunderbans Ganges Delta as a suitable resettlement area.<sup>1</sup> This presented no problem until the Communists came to power in West Bengal, and the refugees took them at their word and began returning to Bengal, where they set up a settlement at Marichjhapi in the delta on an abandoned government plantation. They had been encouraged to do so by Ministers in the Left Front government who visited the Dandakaranya refugee camps of central India. As the refugees had been subject to hostility from the local armed tribals who did not want encroachment on their land, and camp administrators who exploited them and stole government supplies, the offer was enticing.

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<sup>1</sup> Anwasha Sengupta, "Breaking Up Bengal: People, Things, and Land in Times of Partition", PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2015, p. 228.

What the refugees did not know initially was that while the junior partners in the Left Front government continued to promote resettlement in West Bengal, the dominant Communist Party Marxist (CPM) would come to reverse its position and oppose it. The split in the Cabinet reflected long standing rivalries between different Left parties as they used state power to expand their influence at the expense of each other. As the refugees were geographically separated from West Bengal in Dandakaranya they did not understand the impact this would have on their fate.

### Contested Explanations<sup>2</sup>

There is almost nothing else about the “incident” that is not contested by one or other party. Even the massacre was denied by the state government which claimed only two innocent bystanders had been shot by police. Critics claimed that these deaths could not be hidden as they were local residents unlike the out of state refugees, and the police aim was unlikely to have been so poor as to have killed only residents including one who was killed inside her home. Eye witness accounts would later debunk the government assertions.

What was not contested is that the resettlement was successful in development terms providing schools, health centre, a viable fishing industry, and most significantly total self-sufficiency from government assistance.<sup>3</sup> According to a visitor “We were spellbound to observe how they turned a deserted forestland into a picturesque habitat only with their hands. They had no engineer, no architect and no cement or other building materials - but anyone would have been surprised to see the beautiful village which had come up only by will power and inherent skill. They also established a school and a library in such a short span. The village paths were made of clay, but no dirt or filth could be found there. All the villagers had a dwelling place of their own consisting of one or two rooms made of clay.”<sup>4</sup> None of this mattered to the government, and at some point the Communist Party Marxist in deliberations that have never been revealed decided on an eviction.

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<sup>2</sup> My publications related to the massacre are *Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal since 1977*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalization*, Oxford University Press, 1994, *Development, Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia*, Sage, 1998 and “Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Prasannbhai Mehta MP, Laxmi Narayan Pandey MP, Mangaldev Visharat MP, “Report on Marichjhapi Affairs”, April 18, 1979, mimeographed. CPM MPs prevented the report being presented to Parliament though as it preceded the massacre it was relatively innocuous. Prime Minister Desai’s Janata Party were allied with the CPM at the national level, but the state Janata Party opposed the Left Front, and persuaded the Prime Minister to send a parliamentary delegation. This may have caused the CPM to fear losing the support of the central government on Marichjhapi and change from the slower method of starving out the refugees in a siege to wiping out the settlement with an eviction. It would explain Jyoti Basu’s exasperation with press leaks that forced postponement of the eviction.

<sup>4</sup> Kamala Basu “Marichjhapi in Isolation” in Pal (editor) *Marichjhapi*, English Draft p.11.

Some theories had more evidence to back them up. One internet comment claimed the motivation for the massacre lay in rivalries within the Left Front government. The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) was helping the refugees, thereby threatening its dominant coalition partner, the Communist Party Marxist (CPM). As the RSP allegedly had Trotskyist antecedents, and the CPM was Stalinist, the old ideological rivalries were being played out within the government.<sup>5</sup> Though the RSP which had a base in the Sundarbans did help the refugees, the CPM had far greater party and state resources and could have easily outspent its coalition partner rivals without having to kill the refugees. As the refugees were supporters of the CPM the erosion of this support when the CPM reversed policy and opposed resettlement played into the hands of the RSP, which would have been particularly irksome to the CPM. Given the opportunity the CPM had to support the refugees and marginalize the junior Left Front partners this might seem a secondary motivation for the eviction, though another interpretation implicitly gives the struggle for dominance within the Left Front greater significance. In this view the RSP could use the refugees to become a senior rather than junior partner in the Left Front government thereby undermining CPM dominance.<sup>6</sup> Whether the RSP would be able to achieve such an enhanced position with refugee support is debatable.

The geopolitical explanation which has been repeatedly used, but cannot be verified, is that the CPM on coming to power reversed policy as it then saw the opportunity of establishing a base amongst the refugees in Dandakaranya, a region that was in the hinterland of several strategic central Indian states. From there it could spread its base into neighbouring populations. Though given the cultural and language differences that may have seemed farfetched, it was not without precedent. Before and during the Emergency its cadre had fled to other states where they began to make some headway before being recalled when the Left Front took power. That their Maoist insurgent rivals

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<sup>5</sup> Abheek Barman “How West Bengal’s Left Front government committed genocide on Dalits”, The Economic Times, July 29, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Deep Halder, Sangam Talks, Blood Island, April 17, 2020, Youtube. In a talk by Deep Halder he gives a personal take on the reasons for the Massacre. “Why were women raped and kids thrown in the river? Why did the Left do what it did? What was the reason for the massacre? After having spent almost 5 years on this book, I still don’t have the answer. Funnily Marichjhapi, while it has not mainstreamed, has been spoken about written about in university papers in Oxford and Cambridge. A very interesting paper by Annu Jalais, she and Ross Mallick says it is because of the inherent caste bias of the Left Front government...The Left always talks of a classless casteless society. Their argument is that while they speak these things, most of the leaders of the political left are upper caste and they get to fix[ate] about lower caste Hindus who defy them and get settled in an island. So they argue it is about a caste bias. I am not completely convinced after the book. I think it is a little more. You see after the Left Front came to power in West Bengal, in a Left Front government, it is not just a CPM government, it is a Left Front government, there are other Left constituents. One of the constituents is the RSP, Revolutionary Socialist Party. Now the Sundarbans area was under the control of the RSP, so it is a coalition government, only of Left Parties. Now these refugees who settled in Marichjhapi started hating Jyoti Basu and the CPM because they had gone back on their word, but they were somewhat close to a gentleman from the RSP who were operating in that region and were reportedly somewhat close to them. Now the CPM thought that these are just 1.5 lakh [150,000] refugees. There are many more refugees, suppose they start coming in mass in Bengal and start settling in Sundarbans and other areas of Bengal, and when the election comes next time, they vote not for CPM but RSP, the balance within the Left Front will become a problem. The chances are the RSP which is a junior member of the Left Front will become a senior member”.

made Dandakaranya a major base amongst tribals with some Bengali refugee support indicates it could have been done.<sup>7</sup> However having encouraged settlement in West Bengal which was culturally and ecologically more hospitable to the refugees, the CPM could not evict the refugees who settled in Marichjhapi without ruining their own political prospects both in Dandakaranya and eventually as word got out about the massacre in West Bengal itself. The return of the Marichjhapi survivors meant that Dandakaranya was no longer a potential Bengali base for the CPM. The Party would have been better off encouraging some refugee settlement in West Bengal while developing a base in Dandakaranya. By massacring the refugees it contributed to ending their prospects in both places. There were CPM cadre who wanted to support the refugees in order to enhance their position among the Untouchables in West Bengal, while enabling them to expand their base among the refugees in central India to mobilize further Communist inroads among other groups in several states, but the leadership rejected this approach, deciding to evict them instead, thereby ending their prospects among the refugees entirely. It showed the real nature of the party regarding the poor and powerless. In retrospect the election of the Left Front in 1977 was the high water mark of Indian Communism as thereafter they never launched a social movement let alone a political one, and gradually descended into corruption and terror, rigging elections, and dispensed state patronage to remain in power for decades due to a divided opposition. It is easy to overrate the importance of the massacre in the Communist downfall, but it alienated sections of the Untouchable community which came to turn against it as their grievances were ignored.

The official explanation most often cited for the eviction was the environmental justification. Being in a reserve forest the settlement endangered a fragile ecosystem which included the Tiger Sanctuary. Though the settlement was not in the Sanctuary itself the government claimed it was part of the neighbouring Forest Reserve where settlement was prohibited, though its location in the Reserve is disputed.<sup>8</sup> This claim of a forest reserve was undermined by the development of the government's own plantation on the island, which though defunct, hardly made it a pristine area. The government by abandoning it was probably unintentionally doing what today would be called "rewilding". But that transition was not as straight forward as it seems. "If the refugees are forced to quit, still then, the felling of trees would not stop at the Sundarbans. Unlike this small band of poor people, who do it for mere survival, thugs and corrupt businessmen would go on destroying forest reserves without scruples"<sup>9</sup> As an appeal to Jyoti Basu, Sunil Gangopadhyay is too polite to suggest that the CPM was being paid off by businessmen for timber assess, but this possibility can't be ruled out knowing how the system works. In fact according to the government's own statistics there was ample vacant land for the Marichjhapi refugees to settle on. It was not of the best quality given

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<sup>7</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Aprakashito Marichjhapi, "Unpublished Marichjhapi", Draft English translation. p.24.

<sup>8</sup> U.N. Biswas, a Minister in the post-Communist government (Marichjhapi: Tortured Humanity, Youtube) and the Refugee High Court Advocate Sakya Sen both claim Marichjhapi is outside the Reserve though some maps and observers put it within the Reserve.

<sup>9</sup> Sunil Gangopadhyay, "An Appeal to the Chief Minister", in Pal (editor) Marchjhapi, English draft p.2.

that the high density population had already occupied the most fertile pieces, but the land might have been reclaimed with labour and inputs, had the government been bothered enough to locate it. Marichjhapi being in the tidal salt water flood plain required 5 foot embankments to enable desalination, needing maximum labour input to be fertile. Other places with government assistance could have been provided with much less labour input, and avoided a massacre and its political fallout. Rewilding was nevertheless the best argument for eviction that the government could make. Subsequently however when the government wanted to build a nuclear plant and hand nearby areas to a private corporation for tourist development, the outcry from conservationists led to the abandonment of the idea.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that environmentalism was not the imperative that the government claimed. In fact at the time of Marichjhapi the CPM was settling two thousand of its cadre on the Reserved Forest at Jharkhali, suggesting that politics rather than environment was primary.<sup>11</sup> After the eviction it was said the CPM settled its own supporters in Marichjhapi, though as they are not there now, it may have been a temporary effort to prevent refugees settling there again.<sup>12</sup>

The other strongest justification was the threat of too many people landing up in West Bengal for the government to handle. There had been ongoing infiltration of both Hindu and Muslim Bangladeshis into the state which had to be controlled if not stopped in the government view. The Marichjhapi refugees were not dependent on government resources and had developed the community on their own, giving the state no non-violent leverage available for their removal. When an economic blockade failed to get them to abandon the settlement, despite numerous deaths from starvation and disease, the police in 30 motor launches occupied the settlement and drove them out, with the assistance of “volunteers” variously described as party workers and gangsters. The bodies of the victims were then dumped in the Ganges or in forests. According to local residents dumping the bodies in the jungle habituated the Tigers to becoming man-eaters<sup>13</sup>. The government claimed the settlement had housed between 6 to 8 thousand people, while independent estimates put it around 30,000 and the very highest estimate at 60,000 or in one instance as 100,000. Either way it was a marginal addition to a state of 91 million (2011 census), so the influx does not seem to have warranted the government’s response. As Indian citizens they had a perfect right to remain in West Bengal as had minorities since prehistory, but it was never about law and all about what the CPM wanted.

Partition of Bengal would enable Congress to regain power most effectively if the Namasudra populated districts were given to Pakistan. According to a Partition-specializing professor at a western university who did not respond to a request to be cited

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<sup>10</sup> Amites Mukhopadhyay, “Negotiating Development: The Nuclear Episode in the Sundarbans of West Bengal, *Anthropology Matters*, Vo. 7, No.1, 2005

Annu Jalais, “The Sundarbans: Whose World Heritage Site?, *Conservation and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2007

<sup>11</sup> “The Demand to Declare Marichjhapi as a Refugee Colony” in Pal (editor) *Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihash, Gangchil*. “Marichjhapi: Torn Nation, Torn Histories”, English Draft, p.80.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, S.P. Mallik IAS, Panchayat Secretary, West Bengal.

<sup>13</sup> Annu Jalais, “Dwelling on Marichjhanpi: When Tigers become ‘Citizens’, Refugees ‘Tiger Food’”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 23, 2005.

“The will to break the Namasudra movement can be seen in the insistence of the Congress to divide Bengal in the first place. It was designed to ensure upper-caste hegemony by ‘leaving behind’ the Namasudras in East Bengal.” It was not anticipated that the Muslim communalists would turn on their former Untouchable allies once the dominant Hindu castes had gone. The resulting influx of Untouchable refugees to West Bengal threatened to undo the Congress purpose in dividing Bengal in the first place. The refugees were dispersed to other states by the Congress government to prevent the continuance of what was arguably the most powerful Untouchable movement in India. A “vital reason for these policies was to weaken the strength of the Namasudra [Untouchable] movement. . . . The scattering of these refugees would not only dismember the Namasudra community but also ensure the prevention of the rise of the Namasudras in the tri-caste hierarchy of West Bengal electoral politics.”<sup>14</sup> Partition of Bengal would not achieve its political objective of reestablishing tri-caste Congress control of the state, if a refugee influx enabled the Untouchables and Muslims to re-elect themselves to power.<sup>15</sup> This could most effectively be prevented by caste-based “ethnic cleansing”. The term was not used, but as the higher castes had the political and caste connections to remain in West Bengal, and the Untouchables did not, the effect was the same. Destitute refugees, despite multiple protests, were in no position to prevent the government moving them to other states. Even the distant Andaman Islands which had previously been used as a British penal colony for political prisoners were settled. Usually politicians get rid of their opponents by targeting leaders, but in this novel approach their followers were targeted with mass deportations to unfamiliar lands occupied by tribals. Out of one population of deportees nearly 27,030 families out of 42,000 perished.<sup>16</sup> A medical report from 1966 put the average weight of Dandakaranya men at 83 pounds instead of a more normal 131 pounds, and women at 74 instead of 123.<sup>17</sup>

To achieve this objective the Congress Chief Minister, Dr. B.C. Roy, needed the support of Prime Minister Nehru to whom he wrote “we have...refugees coming in a state of mental excitement which enables the careerist politician to get hold of them and utilise them for various types of propaganda against the Government and the Congress.”<sup>18</sup> He persuaded Prime Minister Nehru to use his influence to persuade other very reluctant states to take the refugees. As Nehru wrote to B.C. Roy “in spite of our efforts, it is

<sup>14</sup> Debdatta Chowdhury, *Marginal Lives, Peripheral Practices: A study of border narratives along the West Bengal-Bangladesh Border*. PhD Thesis, University of Westminster, May, 2014, p.174.

<sup>15</sup> Indrajit Roy, “Transformative Politics” in *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, edited by Uday Chandra, Geir Heierstrad, and Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Routledge, 2017, p.188.

<sup>16</sup> Atharobaki Biswas, “Why Dandakaranya a Failure, Why Mass Exodus, Where Solution?”, *The Oppressed Indian*, Vol.4, No.4, 1982, p.18.

<sup>17</sup> Saibal Kumar Gupta ICS, Chairman Dandakaranya Development Authority, “The Marichjhapi Refugees” in Pal (editor), *Marichjhapi*. English Draft, p.46.

<sup>18</sup> S. Chakrabarty, With Dr. B.C. Roy, p.182, quoted in Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, Cambridge University Press, p.130-1. Dr. Roy had been my grandfather’s physician which would have been polluting for him. As a physician to the Bengali elite he did not have to do this which might suggest his policy was more political than caste based. Much the same argument could be made for a succeeding Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, in the Marichjhapi affair. However as society thought less of Untouchables it created the enabling conditions that allowed the Chief Ministers to implement their policies with no immediate adverse repercussions.

difficult to induce most provinces to absorb more refugees. We have been pressing them to do so for some time.”<sup>19</sup> The underlying political objective of marginalizing the Untouchable movement by forcing an exodus of the most marginalized and poorest people is not stated, but anyone with a basic knowledge of the politics of the Bengal partition could have guessed what they were doing and that it was Untouchables’ leaders he was likely most afraid of. This political calculation was shown on the ground where refugee camps of higher castes with professed allegiance to B.C. Roy and the Congress were spared deportation.<sup>20</sup> Though brutal in causing thousands of unknown deaths during Congress rule it was totally effective in destroying the Untouchable movement. It provided the Communist opposition with an issue to gain support amongst the Scheduled Castes as well. Thereafter the Namasudras became a persecuted minority in India as they had been for thousands of years, and in Bangladesh as a target of Islamic fundamentalists.

I tried to confirm the political motive for dispersing the refugees to other states but it was omitted from academic publications, and it was left to a couple of doctoral students writing in unpublished theses to confirm it. “The upper caste government’s discrepancy and divisive politics was in no way coincidental, but a conscious calculated effort to firstly disintegrate the erstwhile Namasudra political force, and next, to create in Bengal a hegemonic upper caste homogenous leadership”.<sup>21</sup> Leading historians on the subject did not respond to my emails raising the question, though they knew my background and had cited my publications. That history professors would not deal with this issue reflects the silence of the tri-caste academia about human rights abuses. As the politicians responsible for the caste cleansing had died decades before there was even less reason for covering them up than the Bengali intellectuals had with the Marichjhapi massacre.

It would be unfair to single out individual historians, for these approaches pervade the field. Omitting perspectives unpalatable to the elite removes any kind of claim to objectivity. From an Untouchable perspective, human rights was by far the most important reason for studying them, but this silence in the scholarship was a tangible sign of dominant elite influence. Though the intellectual elite come from upper castes that are outnumbered by the Untouchables, the lack of Untouchables in the elite means that an objective perspective on India is almost entirely lacking. The caste cleansing of the Congress Party became in these tri-caste histories a well meaning innocuous program that only failed through poor administration, rather than the manipulative oppression of the poor that it really was. To have said otherwise would have implicated some of the most powerful and iconic politicians in the country in human rights abuses and shown them for what they really were. Of course you will not likely find this committed to paper by leading decision makers, but the intentions can be taken from their actions. The

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<sup>19</sup> S. Chakrabarty, With Dr. B.C. Roy, p.107 quoted in Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*, Cambridge University Press, p.133

<sup>20</sup> Udit Sen, “The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity” *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, 2014, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Debatri Sengupta, “The Marichjhapi Massacre and the Myth of Caste in the Politics of West Bengal”, p.7, Internal Assessment Semester 4, April 19, 2016, University of Delhi, Department of English, in [academia.edu/31518498](http://academia.edu/31518498).

traditional marginalization of Untouchables and particularly their refugees enabled the caste cleaning and their political marginalization to happen with the active mobilization of the tri-caste elite to achieve hegemony in the partitioned state. The idea that this marginalization was some innocuous unintended side effect of a benign policy, is untenable. Elites always pursue their own interests, and it is only to be expected that they would want to resume ruling once partition was achieved. Having done it for thousands of years it was only natural they would want full power back, which partition and independence offered, now that rule by the Muslims and Untouchables had come to an end. Of course elite politicians will never admit to using it to promote the interest of their families and castes, but it would be naive to think otherwise. The Marichjhapi massacre may have been the ultimate outcome of the tri-caste Communists wanting to maintain power, but again no one, least of all the CPM is going to admit it. The Communists are particularly good at concocting elaborate theories to justify their human rights abuses, but in the end it caught up with them all over the world, and no amount of intellectual sophistry could ultimately hide it.

The political effects of this dispersal, however, are not in dispute. “Once a geographically anchored tight-knit peasant community - providing the leadership and the main support-base for the organized SC [Scheduled Caste] movement in colonial Bengal - they were now dispersed across large parts of eastern and central India. It is a strange fact that a large section of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal do not any longer live in Bengal to lend their support for any powerful Dalit movement.”<sup>22</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya alludes to this when he notes that unlike in Bengal, the Dandakaranya refugees have no sense of caste hierarchy which makes them feel equal in a way they were not back home. “I went to Dandakaranya. I saw that no one really cared much about caste. This is a big problem in West Bengal.”<sup>23</sup>

Neither the Congress nor the CPM would ever admit to “caste cleansing” as their goal, but that did not make it so. Ideological or practical reasons prevented them from admitting it, but the facts on the ground indicated otherwise. “Endorsement of the interests of particular caste groups has often provided rich dividends to political parties in other states. But in West Bengal such a strategy has never seemed prudent. The reason for this is the absence of a dominant caste both in numeric and economic terms over a substantial geographic area. This demographic phenomenon has traditionally acted as a significant handicap preventing caste-based mobilization and articulation of demands. This handicap is still in force today as it was during the long rule of the Left Front...Such a demographic situation implies that it is not politically feasible to formulate a caste-based political agenda.”<sup>24</sup> That need not have been the case had the Namasudra refugees been allowed to settle in West Bengal. The political situation as represented today was not inevitable, and only resulted from the dispersal to other states by the

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<sup>22</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, In Search of Space: The Scheduled Caste Movement in West Bengal after Partition. Calcutta Research Group, 2014, p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English Draft, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> Ayan Guha, “Caste and Politics in West Bengal: Traditional Limitations and Contemporary Development”, Contemporary Voice of Dalits, 2017, 9(1), pp.30-31.

Congress and at Marichjhapi by the CPM. There is debate in the Namasudra community as to whether the caste should have moved in an organized mass to West Bengal. Critics however point out that leaving everything, and becoming dependent on the Congress government would have just lead to a larger dispersal as they could have always been starved into submission. It was the danger of recreating a geographically concentrated untouchable caste in West Bengal, that had been the bane of the Congress landlords in the East, that was to be prevented by dispersal. This was the argument that made the most sense and it was shared by both the Congress and the CPM. The Untouchables would only be a threat to tri-caste rule if they were allowed to settle in West Bengal. As it now stands only an inter-caste Untouchable alliance with the Muslims and tribals can remove the Master Castes from power, and they will do everything to prevent this as they showed at Marichjhapi.

The same political reasoning for dispersing the refugees would come to be applied by the Communists as well. Parallel government was thus code for the takeover of the whole state by Untouchables and other minorities who made up the majority of the electorate. It is a plausible argument for the massacre, but if that was the case there were not enough settlers at Marichjhapi to make such a difference. They could have been brought on the Communist side had they been allowed to remain, as had many other Untouchables already resident in West Bengal. There was a section of the CPM who wanted the Marichjhapi settlement to be recognized but they were not the group that controlled policy.<sup>25</sup> What should have been an opportunity for the Communists to expand their base came to be seen by them as a problem to be got rid of. In opposition they had seen the opportunity but once in power they came somehow to see it as a problem. With no Untouchables in their leadership perhaps they could not see outside their traditional upper caste outlook to the possibilities of Untouchable empowerment under Communism.

The refugees faced a dilemma. The CPM wanted them to join their own party refugee organization, but the refugees preferred to maintain their own organization as affiliation with the CPM might result in a second eviction should the Congress Party return to power. The refugees had no good options. As non-residents they may not have been in a position to follow the internal rivalry between the Left Front governing parties, assuming they all spoke with one voice in offering them residence in West Bengal. The leadership of their refugee organization was different from that of the colonial Namasudra movement which was led by aspiring middle class professionals. The leader of the refugees, Satish Mandal, was illiterate though he had been taught to sign his name. He must have been a good organizer and became a successful businessman in Dandakaranya. Other leaders were literate, but basically they were all from the lowest rungs of Indian society, perhaps giving them the resilience to defy the state in the face of rape, murder and starvation. They seem to have had no elaborate ideology, but just wanted land that was productive for farming and their own subsistence.

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<sup>25</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, Marichjhapi in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi, English draft p. 105.

The only description of Satish Mandal I came across states, “An old man, as if from antiquity, with flowing grey beard was making thread from yarn, sitting on the embankment. Poised and at ease. He was Satish Mondal. Age fifty five, an expert in knitting fishing nets. With his feeble hands aided with strong will he built his dwelling place, a hut, and dug earth for the benefit of the community. He had no cooked food for the last three days. ‘Suffering so much! Still why you people want to stick to this place?’ What the saintlike man said in answer in brief goes like this: ‘Living twenty years in Dandakaranya what we lived was nothing but a life of hopelessness and despair. If God of rain blessed, still the yield would not be enough to sustain a family for more than two months. The government officials in charge of rehabilitation were indifferent to pay heed to the problems we faced everyday. We were like footballs. They sent us wherever they felt like stationing us. If we manage to survive here in the Sundarbans for three or four months braving hunger, we would surely make this place a perfect habitat. Enduring all sorts of plight to make the dream a reality. We did starve in Dandakaranya too, for days together, time and again. Surviving there for twenty long years. Don’t you think we can go past three or four month’s ordeal and agony here? And then, after that, nobody will call me a refugee. I’ll get a home of my own’”.<sup>26</sup>

Satish Mandal after his escape from Marichjhapi was able to get a home back in Dandakaranya which he occupied with his wife and three sons. He was visited by the documentary filmmaker, Tushar Bhattacharya, on 27th May 2006. His home “was a two-storied house; one would be easily able to infer that he was living in favourable conditions. ...His eldest son made it clear that he would not let us speak to his father regarding Marichjhapi or any other matter. He turned a deaf ear to all our appeals and requests. Moreover, he also expressed his disapproval when we asked to click a picture of the man....The eldest son was engaged in fishery. His work demanded him to leave early in the morning and he could only return in the evening. Needless to mention, we had to complete Satish babu’s interview before it was evening and his eldest son returned. Satish babu sat in the courtyard, he was visibly unwell, and could not speak properly, His wife handed him a cup of tea. We were present for half an hour, but we could only record an interview that was 15 minutes long.”<sup>27</sup> Though the West Bengal police knew where he was he was not arrested in Dandakaranya, perhaps because it would have attracted unwelcome publicity at a time they wanted the massacre forgotten.<sup>28</sup> Mandal’s son might not have wanted publicity either because it could lead to their arrest. Dr Samanta IPS, reported of the refugee leaders, “Satish Mondal, after cooling his heels for some time, went back to Madhya Pradesh to look after his extensive business interests. Raiharan Barui, with some people, went to Khulna [Bangladesh] and stayed there for several years and then returned to India. Rangalal Goldar surfaced after some time in the Canning area and lived under CPI-M protection. All three of them are reportedly dead.”<sup>29</sup> Goldar’s daughter was the child hidden with Deep Halder’s family and featured in his book “Blood

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<sup>26</sup> Jyotirmoy Datta, “Ten Thousand Robinson Crusoes”, published in Jugantar, July 27 and 30, 1978. Reprinted in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi, English draft p, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, Draft English translation, p.15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi”, in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi, English Draft p.110.

<sup>29</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi” in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi. English Draft p.110.

Island<sup>30</sup>. It was reported that the refugees had become split into two factions, one under Raiharan Barui opposed cooperation with the government while Rangalal Goldar wanted to negotiate a compromise with the government which might explain how he was allowed to remain in West Bengal. Goldar's view was that "Raiharan antagonized the government by making inflammatory statements in the press, by getting mixed up in Opposition politics. When we invited people from the city to visit, he refused to let representatives of the Left set foot on the island. It was a terrible miscalculation. You cannot live in the water and make an enemy of the crocodile."<sup>31</sup> However, the CPM by its actions showed it was not inclined to listen to anyone, and expected blind obedience from the refugees and their return to Dandakaranya. Even accepting affiliation with the CPM, might not have been enough to allow them to stay, as obedience would likely require their evacuation. Even if they had been allowed to stay as CPM followers the return to power by the Opposition, could result in their eviction at that time.

The reasons for the massacre have baffled people ever since. The anthropologist, Partha Chatterjee, argues "government policies of refugee rehabilitation in the 1950s were strongly tilted in favour of upper-caste refugees. Forced migration to Dandakaranya and the Andamans was confined only to SC [Untouchable] refugees. When some of them wanted to return to West Bengal after the formation of the LF [Left Front] in 1977, they were violently repressed at Marichjhapi. But these decisions only show that the upper castes were able to protect and promote their particular interests."<sup>32</sup> This tells us the effect of the policies, but the motivations of the decision makers for the eviction are more difficult to attribute to prejudice against Untouchables. None of them had a reputation for being anti-Untouchable. They did however have an acute understanding of what human rights abuses they could get away with, and would have known that mass murder of Untouchables would carry no consequences unlike more influential minorities. The refugees must have been considered a threat to the CPM but whether this was due to their caste, class or both remains undetermined. Other smaller parties in the Left Front of similar upper caste leadership supported the refugees as did some cadre within the CPM. The difference between these parties in the government may have been ideological or opportunist in seeing a way of undermining the CPM from the Left. None of these governing parties pursued the case after the massacre. The Bengali intellectuals in the

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<sup>30</sup> Deep Halder, *Blood Island*, HarperCollins, 2019, p.117-132.

<sup>31</sup> Nilanjana Chatterjee, "Midnight's Unwanted Children: East Bengali Refugees and the Politics of Rehabilitation", PhD Thesis, Brown University, 1992, p. 378.

<sup>32</sup> Partha Chatterjee, "Partition and the Disappearance of Caste", *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, edited by Uday Chandra, Geir Heierstad, and Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Routledge, 2017, p.97 Professor Chatterjee acknowledged receiving the book manuscript and wrote he would get back to me but never did. Whatever his views on it, the fact was he was of the Marichjhapi generation, but took nearly four decades and the fall of the Left Front, even to raise the issue in passing. While at Oxford I took the trouble of visiting the Subaltern Studies founder, Ranajit Guha in Sussex. He had led an international Communist front organization in his youth and had the contacts I needed to study the Communist movement. He brushed me off saying my supervisor Tapan Raychaudhuri had the same contacts, and did nothing thereby wasting my time. My supervisor was no more forthcoming with the contacts I knew they had, and had the laborious effort of creating my own in what made for a much more lengthy process than it would have been had they been forthcoming.

Subaltern Series omitted it entirely from their publications, with the possible exception of the previous quote, perhaps due to family and party ties with those responsible. If the CPM saw it as a threat to its hegemony, it seems too small a settlement to raise such concerns. There was more to be lost by killing them than ignoring them. As 16% of the Indian electorate the Untouchables were not a community the Communists should have wanted to alienate. That they chose to act as a Stalinist hegemonic party of the traditional Master Castes rather than as Communists, reflects their real nature. Though not apparently recognised as such by the dominant high caste elite, it was a pivotal moment in West Bengal politics for it was made clear to the Untouchables that the Master Castes were prepared to kill to preserve their power even when not directly challenged.<sup>33</sup>

Even decades after the massacre the former Left Front leaders displayed an incapacity to comprehend what happened or at least admit it publicly. An Editor at India Today magazine was able to find only one leader prepared to be interviewed on the subject. Kanti Ganguly, the Left Front Sundarbans Minister at the time of the massacre stated less than 10 fatalities occurred despite the Editor saying he had talked to participants and witnesses who claimed there were thousands. Though he conceded encouraging the refugees to return to West Bengal had been “cheap politics” and their campaign to stop computers had been a mistake, that was as far he would go. The former Minister did not make a good impression by occupying an apartment meant for people with Special

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<sup>33</sup> In the revisionist history “The Politics of Caste in West Bengal” which reveals the ongoing presence of caste, the Massacre is only mentioned in passing, seriously understating its significance for Untouchables and inadvertently indicating the gulf that separates elite caste and foreign scholarship from Untouchable perceptions. An even more egregious omission is in Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya’s 2016 book published long after the Left Front was defeated which states the government “took the highly controversial decision to stop the flow of refugees from Dandakaranya” without mentioning Marichjhapi or the massacre, but citing Pal’s book as reference, a book which presents the massacre in all its gory detail. Though the author clearly knew of the massacre from reading this book and my Cambridge University Press book manuscript, no mention of massacre is included despite a whole chapter devoted to the much less violent and widely publicized Singur and Nandigram evictions. Not mentioning it of course makes coming up with a strategy to revive the Left that much easier. But if the truth is already known then the massacre must be taken into account in any strategy that has any hope of reviving the Left, and particularly so among West Bengal Untouchables. The destalinization undertaken in the USSR was never attempted by the CPM so committed were they to him. His portrait was even displayed at the national Congresses. The failure of Bengali intellectuals who knew about Marichjhapi to deal with the massacre long after the defeat of the left is indicative of a refusal to come to terms with the past and their role in the cover up. Even now Bengalis and the Left have difficulty with Marichjhapi and what it says about themselves. Rather than investigate their massacre they continued to cover it up long after it was apparent a cover up would not work, thereby digging themselves deeper in the hole. Too many knew about it for it to be forgotten, and their opponents were only too willing to bring the massacre up. The BJP perspective was posted on Youtube confirming its ongoing political usefulness in the 2021 election campaign. As the post-Communist government had done nothing substantive about it, it was logical for the BJP to promote the matter as it discredited both the left and the secular state ruling party. (VSK Dakshinbanga, Marichjhapi Massacre 24th to 31 January 1979: Leftist Inhuman Atrocity, March 3, 2021 Youtube). The failure of the perpetrators to come forward and confess, discredited the left even more. Not acknowledging what happened only made a leftist rejuvenation more difficult. Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p.12.

Needs.<sup>34</sup> Ganguly denied caste had been a factor in the government decision. “The Namasudra angle wasn’t a factor at all in our decision to clear that island. The Namasudras did bear a lot of anger and hatred towards higher castes, towards Brahminism, but our government had no bias against the lower caste refugees.... Those Namasudras carried a deep-rooted anger towards Brahmins. I am a Brahmin, and have seen this for myself.”<sup>35</sup> By then practically every political conscious person in the state had heard reports of a large scale massacre that were considered credible by Untouchables, so simply denying anything of the kind had happened was not going to solve the alienation problem the Left Front had developed among Untouchables. An investigation might have been a first step towards caste reconciliation, but since nearly everyone knew the government line was false, any credible investigation would only dig a deeper hole for the Communists, hence denial of all the credible reports.

When I consulted a Professor as to the real reason for the massacre the response was; “There are several theories about the CPM acting the way they did, each as ridiculous as the other.” One CPM cadre said his party had dealt with the refugees in a “bureaucratic way” and should have helped them in order to get a “solid base”, however no one on the CPM State Committee had opposed Promode Das Gupta, the party State Secretary, on this issue. According to the Marichjhapi refugee Advocate in the Calcutta High Court case, Shakya Sen, “Why the government suddenly became desperate to send refugees back to Dandakaranya remains a mystery. Jyoti Basu was like a dictator. He probably couldn’t digest the fact that they were disobeying his orders. It was his hurt ego, nothing else.”<sup>36</sup> The internal party deliberations are unknown, but other State Committee members may have known how the decision was arrived at. Those still alive are in some of the most senior party positions and none have been forthcoming so it will probably never be known. Though it was not realized at the time, had they resettled the refugees it would have been their only successful program, as all others failed to help the poor in a better way than any other government would have done. It was remarkable not only for being the longest ruling democratically elected Communist government in world history, but for how little it did to justify that status.

One reason for the massacre is worth mentioning as it is recounted by a survivor, Manoranjan Mondal. “I was not part of any of the committees. I set up a shop. I sold daily ration. I got my supplies from the islands next to Marichjhapi, the Kumarmari islands, it worked perfectly for me....I could not trace my mother after the police firing. I never found her after I left...I know why we were attacked. Everyone was jealous of how, we landless lower-caste people from [East] Pakistan, could manage to live so well, all by

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<sup>34</sup> My own CPM minder showed similar upward mobility when it came to apartments, which was a common form of corruption under the Left Front government. The stealing of property for the benefit of ruling party followers, while poor squatters were murdered by the government as in Marichjhapi was one of the reasons for the demise of the Left Front regime as it exposed the contrast and hypocrisy of the Left.

<sup>35</sup> Deep Halder, Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, HarperCollins, 2019, p.1400

<sup>36</sup> Deep Halder, Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, HarperCollins, 2019, Kindle edition Location 1047.

ourselves”.<sup>37</sup> Though the Chief Minister would not have been jealous, Jyoti Basu did feel threatened in some way, but in the absence of more definitive evidence what the perceived threat was remains largely speculative.

The reasons for the leftist opposition to the massacre should have been obvious to the decision makers. The Untouchables were nearly a quarter of West Bengal and 16% of India’s population. 201 million people were not a constituency any political party would want to alienate. Even the Hindu fundamentalists who doctrinally might be expected to defend Untouchability chose to solicit them as a potential voter base. Having already alienated the Muslims, doing the same to Untouchables would make the electoral road to power much too difficult. It would also further promote their conversion to Christianity and Islam that they hoped to prevent in order to maintain Hindu rule, though their promotion of cow vigilantism threatened to undermine that effort. However if anyone was attracted to Communism, logic would suggest the Untouchables would find it most appealing, so killing them was nonsensical. The Untouchables were largely unorganized and politically divided so the Communists must have thought they could get away with the eviction without any political repercussions. For the next three decades they were proven right. What they did not seem to recognize was that the Untouchables could not be counted on to remain unorganized or ignorant of the massacre forever.

It was well known at the time that the Communists had the backing of the central government as the ruling Janata Party needed the support of CPM MPs in parliament. Prime Minister Desai was therefore motivated to go along with whatever the West Bengal government wanted. “Prafulla Chandra Sen [former West Bengal Chief Minister] announced that he would go to Marichjhapi. The Chief Minister [Jyoti Basu] convened a meeting and stated that Sen should not be allowed onto the island. The exact words he said were “Throw him out.” It is easier to stop someone than throw one out. But how could he be stopped? He could be arrested in Calcutta or en route. Alternatively, a barricade of launches could be made to stop him midstream. Publicity-wise, both steps would be counter-productive. We made our hesitation clear in this matter. The Chief Minister did not press further. He spoke to the Prime Minister who in turn requested Prafulla Sen not to go to Marichjhapi. Instead, Sen launched a satyagraha [Gandhian disobedience] movement in Calcutta in support of the deserters.”<sup>38</sup>

“Prafulla Chandra Sen, a veteran Gandhian, who wanted to go to Marichjhanpi and start a hunger strike in protest against the persecution of the islanders, was barred by Prime Minister Morarji Desai for political compulsion. This is the inherent problem of political parties - in every step one has to go against his or her conscience in the larger interest of the party. I can’t remember the events of that time chronologically but I remember that from London Morarji Desai talked to Jyoti Basu over the telephone regarding the refugee stalemate. Jyoti Basu straightway declined to allow the refugees in Bengal. Then the CPI(M) had twenty-two MPs in Lok Sabha, the Lower House in

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<sup>37</sup> Sumallya Mukhopadhyay, “Thinking of Migration through Caste: Reading Oral Narratives of Displaced Person (s) from East Pakistan (1950-1970) *Journal of Migration Affairs*, September 2019, p.124

<sup>38</sup> Amiya Kumar Samanta, “Marichjhanpi”, in Pal (editor), *English Draft*, p. 106.

Parliament. Morarji could not take the risk of losing their crucial support for the survival of his government. To secure that, some thousands of Bengali refugees would have to be sacrificed. It was acceptable for the greater good”.<sup>39</sup> Jyoti Basu tabled in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly the private correspondence between the Prime Minister and Chief Minister, presumably to pass on more responsibility for Marichjhapi to Prime Minister Desai. Though the content of telephone conversations they had are unrecorded Jyoti Basu released the letters that were exchanged on the subject. The private English correspondence between the Chief Minister and Prime Minister Desai was published in which Jyoti Basu’s public claim of CIA responsibility was omitted but Oxfam mentioned as the only foreign agency blamed, presumably because the Prime Minister was not as gullible as the Communist supporters. More substantively the cordial correspondence revealed the Chief Minister could have inferred that no central government intervention was likely to be forthcoming. In Jyoti Basu’s letter to the Prime Minister of January 24th 1979 he states “We have now decided to take action for containing the situation in Marichjhapi and to make every effort to repatriate the deserters....I should be grateful for your assistance at the political level to tackle this serious problem developing in the Sunderbans.” In Prime Minister Desai’s letter of January 30, 1979 to Jyoti Basu he states “I agree with you in regard to the action that you have taken or prepared to take”.<sup>40</sup> As the Prime Minister put no caveats on this it was probably fair for Jyoti Basu to interpret this as a *carte blanche* to do as he pleased without central government interference. Given the significance of the correspondence some interpretation is useful. While everyone else refers to them as refugees, which usually implies they are in need of assistance, Jyoti Basu refers to them as “deserters” a term normally associated with those who leave an army, and in some wars are liable to execution. This attempt to put them in the worst possible light, when the Chief Minister would have known the condition of the refugee camps they were deserting, since he had taken up their cause when he was in opposition, suggests the action he was planning. Just four years before, Jyoti Basu had invited Dandakaranya refugee leaders to a meeting with him at Bhilai on January 25, 1975 at which he promised to provide government assistance for them to resettle in West Bengal should he come to power.<sup>41</sup> His opposition to the Congress policy was well known and long standing. In 1951 he said “that force should not be used in the matter of evicting refugees occupying other’s premises in an unauthorized manner and alternative accommodation should be found for them.”<sup>42</sup>

As details came to be revealed, the despicable role of Prime Minister Desai appears critical in providing the enabling conditions to allow the eviction and massacre to take place. By influencing his Janata Party not to take up the case at the national and state level, Jyoti Basu was left free to do as he wished knowing there would be no repercussions from the national government and the state Janata Party that the Prime Minister brought to heel. That the prime minister acted as a politician is hardly surprising,

<sup>39</sup> Kamala Basu, “Marichjhapi in Isolation”, in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi. English draft, 2011, p.12

<sup>40</sup> Madhumay Pal (ed) Marichjhapi; Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihas, 2011, p. 87-88

<sup>41</sup> A.K. Biswas, “Memoirs of Chandan Jeevan: An Underdog’s Story”, Mainstream, April 13, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Jyoti Basu, West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, February 22, 1951, p. 290.

but it means he was instrumental in allowing the massacre to proceed and doing nothing to prevent it or bring those responsible to justice.

With the eviction decision made, Jyoti Basu wanted to get the local Left Front leaders in line with the policy reversal and called them to his office in Calcutta. According to Prafulla Mandal, the Panchayat [Village Council] Chief of Kumirmari Island the Chief Minister said:

I called you, because you are supporting the refugees. “We said “No we are not supporting.” Jyoti Basu “Then what are you doing?” Answer “We are neither supporting nor opposing.” Jyoti Basu “Now there is a directive from the Central Government that they should be evicted. I called you, because you are the local Left Front leaders. If you have cooperated with them in the past, don’t do this in future. If you defy my orders I will see you.” I asked “Do you think the Bengali refugees are dogs and goats?” Jyoti Basu “Why are you saying so?” “He was angry.” I said “You see they were driven out of Bangladesh [ie. East Pakistan] and sent to Mana camp, Andaman Islands, and some places like domestic animals. We take them from one place to another as we wish. But they must have been encouraged to come back to West Bengal and who did so?? We the Left Front leaders!! If the West Bengal government had no desire to get them here why they were not pushed back from the Bengal border?” Jyoti Basu “I am not used to listen to such comments from you boys. But one thing I tell you, they are to be evicted. And what you said, I would not deny...Government has made some mistakes.” I replied “But the refugees will have to pay the price with their lives for your government’s mistake, sir.” Jyoti Basu said “There is no place for sentiment in politics. From now on don’t cooperate with the refugees.”<sup>43</sup>

The Chief Minister’s exchange with the villagers diverts the prime responsibility for the eviction to the Central Government even though there is no evidence of a Central Government directive and it was clearly a State government initiative. The villagers could not know that, but Jyoti Basu appears to have made it up to impress the villagers and avoid his own responsibility. The government mistake Jyoti Basu may be referring to could be from a meeting he had with 18 refugee leaders after he came to power at which he said they could settle in Marichjhapi provided they did not ask for government assistance.<sup>44</sup> “The leaders and ministers of the Left Front had invited the refugees to settle

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<sup>43</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, documentary director producer, “Marichjhapi: Tortured Humanity”, Youtube . The reference to the refugees as dogs has historical precedent as the Namasudras refer to their treatment as dogs in an appeal to the Protestant Missionaries, not dissimilar to the appeal to the Communist Jyoti Basu. “We come as representatives of a great, sad class - hated, despised, downtrodden, treated like dogs for centuries. We have at last waked to the fact that we, too, are men: that the same great God who made the proud Brahmin made us too, and we have it in our hearts to rise to a better and bigger life. Will you help us”? Unlike the CPM which killed them, the Missionaries did make a major contribution particularly in the field of education. Quoted by Reverend Dr. C.S. Meade, Baptist Mission Society, 1911 in Dwaipayan Sen “To seek a nobler inheritance” The Namasudra - Baptist exchange of early twentieth century Bengal”, unpublished manuscript 2021, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> Jhuma Sen, “Reconstructing Marichjhapi”, in Partition: The Long Shadow, edited by Urvashi Butalia, Penguin Viking, 2015, p.112.

in Marichjhapi. Jyoti Basu was one of them. Satish Mondal, the refugee leader, along with a group of representatives met the Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, in 1977 at Writer's [Building hq of West Bengal government]. In a meeting that spanned over two days, the Chief Minister assured the leader and his team, after which they returned to Dandakaranya."<sup>45</sup> The location of Marichjhapi was chosen because the refugees had found an indigenous plant growing there that indicated the soil was suitable for cultivation based on their historical experience of clearing the mangrove swamps and jungle of East Bengal.<sup>46</sup> As a defunct plantation it might also have been seen as suitable by government, though who first suggested this specific island is unclear. This government consent helps explain how they could make the settlement in the first place. At some point after that a decision was made to evict them for reasons that remain unknown. The Left Front Minister, Ram Chatterjee of the Forward Bloc has been blamed for going to Dandakaranya to encourage settlement in West Bengal, however he was only following the policy of the former Left opposition and subsequent government. He was not to know the policy would be totally reversed by the CPM. According to Manoranjan Byapari whose father died from complications caused by his ribs being crushed by a police rifle butt at Marichjhapi "The irony is these people had worshipped Basu as their God. They were blind believers of the CPM. They had marched from Dandakaranya on the assurance of that Ram Chatterjee. When Chatterjee visited Dandakaranya and asked them to come to Bengal, they believed he had the support of Basu. If they knew Basu didn't want them there, these people simply wouldn't have responded to Chatterjee's call."<sup>47</sup> The journalist, Sukumar Debnath, sees the policy reversal in the personal character of Jyoti Basu. "Basu swore by Stalin. He had a complete intolerance of dissent. Rapes were rampant in Marichjhapi, too, almost like a weapon of war against dissenters.... They openly defied Basu. And they paid the price."<sup>48</sup> With other issues to occupy him as Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu may have given little thought to refugee resettlement until after they had settled themselves by which time it was too late. He would have had to kill them, help them or drop the matter, and his ego and political beliefs may in his mind not have permitted a climb down.<sup>49</sup>

This encounter with the village leaders could quite possibly be the only instance of "truth being told to power" over Marichjhapi. Over 90% of the cabinet at the time were from the 6% tricaste elite, and with no Untouchables in the cabinet or CPM party leadership, there could be no opposition from Untouchables at that level. The split in the cabinet was reflective of party divisions between the CPM and the rest of the Left Front so Jyoti Basu might have dismissed them as politically motivated. However 236 deaths by starvation, disease, and police firing at three different locations were reported to the central government with the names and ages of the deceased given, and similar reports appeared in the press prior to the massacre. Unless he did not read the newspapers or was not

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<sup>45</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English Draft, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya., Marichjhapi: Tortured Humanity, Youtube.

<sup>47</sup> Deep Halder Blood Island p. 162.

<sup>48</sup> Deep Halder Blood Island, p. 167

<sup>49</sup> For the CPM position see Jyoti Basu's speeches to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in Where the birds never sing, Soumya Sankar Bose, Red Turtle, 2020, New Delhi.

informed by anyone, it was impossible not to know the deaths he was causing. In fact according to Dr. Samanta at a meeting he attended with the Chief Minister and others on May 11, 1979 Jyoti Basu “angrily spoke of the presence of spies in the administration who were leaking secrets to the press. He continued for a few minutes like this though he identified no one. We were feeling uneasy. Then he asked what our next move was. We said we would implement the said plan on 14 May. We clarified that the leaders should be arrested soon after landing. He agreed. Before we broke up, the Chief Minister insisted on secrecy as he had on an earlier occasion.”<sup>50</sup> The eviction had been postponed once due to press leaks so his anger was understandable. However an operation on this scale could not be hidden from local villagers and the Marichjhapi leaders came to realize what would happen and planned their escape. Jyoti Basu and the people around him seem not to have realized that killing poor people, and feeding the dead and injured to tigers and crocodiles while in their power, was not in the long term interests of his Communist Party. Even in an avowedly democratic centralist party, where centralism was the operative word, some information must have reached the decision makers. In his authorized biography “Jyoti Basu”, written by an English Professor, who received an illegal plot at a fraction of market value along with many other notable CPM supporters too numerous to mention, there is no mention of the massacre.<sup>51</sup> His autobiography “With the People”, only claims that “after the state government’s tolerant and sustained efforts” the refugees returned to their previous camps.<sup>52</sup> From this it appears he did not know of the deaths he was causing. However in his leaflet publicly distributed to the refugees he states “Dear Brothers and Sisters, I am grieved for your present unbearable conditions. I have the deepest sympathy for you. In the meantime some of your fellow refugees have passed away. A good number of people have been afflicted with illness, some of them are seriously ill. You people have been going through an unenviable plight....The West Bengal Left Front Government is always with you and would render all kinds of assistance for your establishment there [in Dandakaranya].”<sup>53</sup> When this did not work he instituted a blockade of food, water, and medicine in defiance of the Calcutta High Court injunction causing more deaths and banned journalists from visiting Marichjhapi. The prudent thing would have been to go along with the High Court injunction and quietly drop the matter.

The CPM went to the extent of arresting the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Kashi Kanta Moitra, and 6 other MLAs, 12 Janata party workers and journalists who had accompanied them to Marichjhapi on their return journey to Calcutta. Kashi Kanta Moitra stated “So many people are on the verge of death due to starvation at Marichjhapi. We went there with some food and other materials. The reporters accompanied us. At the time of returning from there we, along with the reporters, were arrested. The ruling of the

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<sup>50</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi” in Madhumay Pal (editor), Marichjhapi, English draft, p.108.

<sup>51</sup> Ananya Roy, *City Requiem*, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Biswajit Roy, “Controversies that dogged the pragmatic chief minister”, *The Telegraph*, January 18, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Jyoti Basu, “To the Dandakaranya Refugees”, Government of West Bengal, April 11, 1978.

High Court was also violated.”<sup>54</sup> The West Bengal Assembly was in an uproar over this to the extent that the speakers could not be heard and the Opposition staged a walkout. “In the pandemonium Chhaya Ghosh of Forward Block took the mike and started to speak. In the beginning she was also not to be heard but after a while, when the floor turned a bit calm she was heard saying - There must be an investigation to ascertain whether women of Marichjhapi had been tortured. If proved guilty the government should punish the guilty police personnel. I am demanding it on behalf of the womenfolk of the state.” Satya Ranjan Bapuli of Congress stated “The incident of Marichjhapi had surpassed the barbarity and cruelty of the imperial British empire”.<sup>55</sup> Marichjhapi had become a problem for the Left Front, which may have led them to desperate measures. Having staked their position so firmly it would become more difficult to back down. Arresting members of the Assembly and journalists was a step too far for the more liberally inclined, and threatened to undermine elite support for the government, and exacerbate the already existing divisions in the Left Front over Marichjhapi. At this point every politically aware person in West Bengal knew about the refugee plight, so covering it up was no longer possible. The slow siege and starvation of the refugees, must have become too time consuming and lengthy forcing them to organize an eviction with the risk of a massacre this entailed. From the refugee standpoint the increased publicity and elite interest in their cause would have given them hope the government would back down, and not cause further division in the Left Front coalition that would undermine the Communists. The adverse attention far from pushing the CPM to conciliation pushed them to eviction and the massacre. This was where the personality of Jyoti Basu and Promode Das Gupta came in for they were not temperamentally inclined to compromise and backtracking. Though considered by some, such as Atul Kohli, to have adopted Social Democratic reformism, the CPM still had its roots in Stalinism, which was the prevailing policy at the time the leaders joined the Party and is still followed to varying degrees in theory and practice. While adopting a “neoliberal” capitalist practice, they operate as Stalinists in dealing with dissent. They most closely resemble China where capitalism is encouraged while the Party elite extort kickbacks from businesses. Dissent is dealt in whatever way the Chinese Communist Party sees fit.

The extent to which Jyoti Basu involved himself personally in Marichjhapi is somewhat surprising. He paid a visit in Delhi on May 9th, a week before the eviction, to the human rights lawyer, Justice V. Tarakunde Secretary of “Citizens for Democracy” and along with Arun Shourie of Indian Express and later BJP Minister, persuaded him not to visit Marichjhapi.<sup>56</sup> The President of organization was Jayprakash Narayan, a very prominent leader of the anti-Emergency movement in which they were all involved. The journalist Niranjan Halder on behalf of Amnesty International had persuaded Justice Tarakunde to visit Marichjhapi. That a Chief Minister would take this trouble indicated how sensitive

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<sup>54</sup> Ananda Bazar Patrika, February 14, 1979, in Pal (editor), Marichjhapi, English Draft, p.77.

<sup>55</sup> Staff Reporter, Ananda Bazar Patrika, February 14, 1979. English draft, p.76-77 in Pal (editor), 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Aprakashito Marichjhapi “Unpublished Marichjhapi”, Draft English Translation, p.20 Arun Shourie has since become a virulent critic of the BJP Modi government. Arun Shourie interview, “Covid Crisis Isn’t Fault of ‘System’ but of Modi’s Systematic Perversion of the System”, The Wire, May 10, 2021.

the issue was, and while the argument they made is unknown, in a letter he wrote Tarakunde that the refugees were breaking the law and cutting down forests. “You do not need to take the pain to come, we are friendly to the refugees.”<sup>57</sup> Considering the politically astute position would have been to help the refugees, that he preferred to let them die, suggests he had an ego problem, preventing him backing down. He was at that time, having recently won a landslide victory in the post-Emergency state elections, free to do what he wanted. He and everyone else could not have imagined that the Left Front would go from a ruling coalition in a decade to not electing a single MLA in 2021.

If the media image of Jyoti Basu is perused one would get the impression of an urbane barrister, quite at home with the urban elite, who on his return from England, found his forte in the Legislative Assembly and electoral politics. He would have been Prime Minister but for his own CPM Central Committee voting against the offer in what he called a “historic blunder”. However, despite his gentlemanly demeanour, those in the know realized there was a ruthless side to him that didn’t get press coverage. When he first came to power in a United Front government as the Minister responsible for the Police, a police officer, Ranjit Kumar Gupta, to advance his career passed on the names of the police informers in the Communist Party, resulting in the murder of about 100 of them. The murders were investigated and those responsible discovered, though no action was taken against anyone and the officer became Calcutta Police Commissioner and Inspector General of Police.<sup>58</sup> In a role similar to that of the Princes in China, in a mixture of sentiment and politics, Jyoti Basu’s son was able to use his government connections to become rich, and despite criticisms even within the party Jyoti Basu did not attempt to stop this corruption. The lack of accountability to anyone may have given the Chief Minister a sense of invincibility that led him to believe there would be no consequences for the massacre, and until after his retirement this proved correct. Such was the standing of the former Chief Minister, that on his deathbed, he was visited by Prime Minister Singh, and the eulogies made no mention of Marichjhapi.

Following the personal instructions by Jyoti Basu given to Dr. Samanta, the 24 Parganas Police Superintendent carried out his orders to evict the refugees. Dr Samanta would later receive internet comment for his role. “Ex-Director General of Police, West Bengal A.K. Samanta will do a great job; if he allows us to have a glance at his monstrous role in attacking in dead of night with police constables packed in 30 motor boats residents of Marichjhapi, Sundarbans, in the Bay of Bengal. That attack was planned by the ruling CPM party in its HQ, Alimuddin Street against socially deprived people. He justifies criminal prosecution but because he was in the good book of the ruling party[escaped justice]. Samanta has to answer it someday. The deaths of countless people cannot [be] in vain.”<sup>59</sup> That was to be wishful thinking as those that are still alive have almost all retired

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<sup>57</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, *Aprakashito Marichjhapi*, “Unpublished Marichjhapi”, Draft English Translation, p.20

<sup>58</sup> Interviews, Sukumar Mullick, ICS, Chief Secretary of West Bengal. Profulla Roy Choudhury, *West Bengal- A Decade 1965-1975*, Calcutta, 1977, p.225.

<sup>59</sup> Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey “Ex-Cop traces lost Rash Behari Bose Records”, *Times of India*, August 17, 2015.

and no investigation let alone prosecution was ever undertaken. Fortunately for the Police Superintendent he did not serve in the colonial period. After the Amritsar massacre the British set up the Hunter Commission which resulted in the Commanding Officer being dismissed from the army. In Dr. Samanta's case he only received promotions. Though he stuck to the official two person death toll, a better defence as more information came out might have been that he could not see far in the dark when the operation was launched and be everywhere in such a large settlement, with the retention of gangsters<sup>60</sup> and CPM party workers to help carry out the eviction making him not totally in command of the forces at his disposal.<sup>61</sup>

Undoubtedly Dr. Samanta was put in a difficult position. Other policemen and Home Guard officers had taken leave en bloc rather than participate<sup>62</sup>, but as the IPS officer on the spot it may have been more difficult for him not to obey the orders given personally by the Chief Minister, even if he disapproved of the policy. Whether he saw this as putting himself in an impossible predicament or as a career opportunity only he is likely to know. His moral dilemma and perhaps remorse and conflicted feelings was hinted at in a speech he gave. "There are cross currents of political interests at play in civil service.... You have to maintain strict impartiality. When we joined the service, it was less

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<sup>60</sup> In a previous publication I had mentioned the recruitment of Muslim gangsters to assist in the massacre and eviction, but given the increase in communal tensions since then was hesitant to include it this time. In the 2021 election campaign a Hindu fundamentalist publication had used my reference to the Muslim gangsters, giving it an unintended communal content, which made my report problematic. (Avik Sarkar, "Revisiting the State-Sponsored Genocide of 17,000 Bengali Hindu Refugee's in Marichjhapi", Swatantra, January 26, 2021). An over two decade old article can have an impact long after it is written, in conditions that were not anticipated at the time of writing. Deep Halder in a lecture mentioned this aspect. "There were instances where the police.... The police told them we can't do this. This is not done. We can't do what you are asking us to do. So they let loose Muslim gangs to carry on rapes and killing children because the police said they can't do that." Deep Halder "The Narrative of Illusions and Conflict" January 10, 2020. Youtube "It is recorded history and also I have not mentioned that when they were getting impatient that this island should be freed of refugees. We can't let these people stay. They thought that someone told somebody in the government you should let out "Muslim gangs" because they hate these people and they will unleash atrocities on Hindu refugees to an extent that even the police can't. So apparently it wasn't just the police who went in to massacre but also the Muslim gangs. I heard it from one survivor, I decided to keep that bit out [of the book]. But there is no [written] order, it was an unofficial order, it was a decision that was taken, someone said don't just let in the police, let Muslim gangs go onto the island, and let them do what they want to do, because perhaps the police will stop somewhere, but these people won't, so hardened criminals were let out to go into the island, to torture these refugees to force them to get out." Halder mentions that some of the gangsters were brought in from Bangladesh, so they may have driven out the Untouchables from there and then were given the chance to do it again at Marichjhapi. Deep Halder, Sangam Talks, Blood Island, Youtube. The nexus between the CPM and criminal gangs at Marichjhapi needs to be investigated.

<sup>61</sup> I asked S.P. Mallick IAS for the names of those who actually did the killing but this had never been compiled as there was no investigation. A.K. Biswas IAS asked the Presidency Divisional Commissioner, A.K. Majumdar about the role of the civil administration but he said "It's handled by the police and party cadres. District Administration is nowhere involved." A.K. Biswas, "Memoirs of Chandal Jeevan: An Underdog's Story", Mainstream, April 14, 2013. A Doctor told me the District Magistrate 24 Parganas had ordered the requisition of stretchers from the hospitals for the operation, and I interviewed a civil servant who went on leave rather than take part in the eviction so that response is not accurate.

<sup>62</sup> Kiran Talukdar, Mukunda Behari Mullick: Life and Mission, Calcutta, 2010, p.19.

corrupt, less immoral. The challenge is to retire with dignity and without regret”.<sup>63</sup> With the politicians primarily responsible now deceased, it is perhaps unfair to single out Dr. Samanta simply because he is the last man standing. Unless we are in such a position we never know what we would do (Denial, Film).

Initially Dr. Samanta seemed just to have been in the wrong position as 24 Parganas Police Superintendent at the wrong time when the CPM decided to evict the refugees. As a scholar and published author it did not seem likely to be a position he would have wanted to be in, but had no choice as an IPS officer than to follow orders. However newer research now indicates this placement was no accident. By his own account “I joined as Superintendent of Police, 24 Parganas, on 18 August 1978 and in the afternoon, when I went to call on the IGP [Inspector General of Police], Home Secretary, and Chief Secretary, I was briefed on the deserters in Marichjhapi Island. According to the estimate of the Intelligence there were about 32,000 on the island”.<sup>64</sup> What he does not mention is how he got the assignment in the first place. “He had been able to get his name etched in the good books of Siddhartha Shanker Ray [Congress Chief Minister just before Jyoti Basu who were friends] by dint of being a torturous policeman. A famous journalist had once told me that when Jyoti Basu was worried with Marichjhapi, it was Siddhartha Shankar Ray who had come to his aid and advised him to entrust Amiya Samanta with the task of exterminating the refugees.”<sup>65</sup> He had been involved in the murder of a “large section of [Maoist] youths in 20 days”, aged 14 to 19, in Birbhum. The Vice Chancellor of Santikatan [University] had interceded with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to prevent it to no avail. There is testimony from a torture victim of being beaten by Dr. Samanta with a lathi [standard issue police stick with metal tip] which as an IPS officer he could have delegated to subordinates.<sup>66</sup> “Amiya Samanta had even gone to the despicable extent of attacking Ross Mallick’s works on the basis of his paternal lineage”, though compared with his crimes this was nothing.<sup>67</sup>

The government initially attempted to starve out the refugees by setting up a blockade which was easily done since the settlement was on an island. Bharat Sevashram Sangha and the Ramakrishna Mission which had provided relief were forced out of the area. “Till then Mother Teresa had been sending relief materials to the refugees. The situation had an impact on her. In a message she said that she was sorry not to send any more relief to the refugees. She also added that she was unable to answer the reason behind it.”<sup>68</sup> The refugee advocates took the matter to the Calcutta High Court which ordered that the blockade be lifted, but the government through a pro-government judge, Justice B.C. Basak, successfully appealed the order and continued the blockade resulting in an

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<sup>63</sup> Sudeshna Banerjee, “Words of advice for civil service rankers” The Telegraph, June 17, 2016

<sup>64</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi” in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi, English draft, p.99.

<sup>65</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English draft translation, p.27.

<sup>66</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English draft translation, p. 25..

<sup>67</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English draft translation. p.30.

<sup>68</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya “The Refugee Settlement that Vanished into Nowhere” in Madhumay. Pal (editor) Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihas, 2009, also in Marichjhapi, Tortured Humanity, Youtube, and Ananya Dutta, “Basu and Mother Teresa: A Special Association”, The Hindu, January 17, 2010.

unknown number of deaths from starvation and disease.<sup>69</sup> “One night, someone came and dropped a bottle of poison into the tube well. Thirteen people died the next day. Babies were dying like rats from diseases, and women were afraid to venture out for fear of being raped by policemen. There were several incidents of our boats being hit by police launches and sunk mid-river.”<sup>70</sup> The refugees hoped that the police would not interfere if women went to the mainland for supplies and some women volunteered to do it, but their boats were rammed and sunk by motorized police launches. Some women were rescued by the police and gang raped for several days in prison before being released while others drowned or managed to swim to a nearby island where they were repeatedly raped by the police and party cadre.<sup>71</sup>

With journalists banned from Marichjhapi, the photo journalist Subrata Patronobish from the leading English language Calcutta newspaper, *The Statesman*, had to be smuggled on to the island. “On that occasion, and till date I can’t reason out why the government wanted to uproot them from Marichjhapi. After sunset, heart rendering wailing was heard from a nearby hut. Soon it seemed that the whole locality was lamenting. Endless waves of weeping was rolling down a land of desperation. When asked, we were informed that children were dying of cholera in numbers due to impure water and food. As there was no medical facility in the island, mainly the children were the victims. The leaders told that already more than a hundred children had died. Almost every family had lost a child or two. So many years have gone by, but still now the resonance of the wailing hurts me.”<sup>72</sup>

The government finally launched an eviction using motorized police launches at midnight on May 14, 1979. “At first the Marichjhapi market place was set on fire. Then came the turn of the school, rural hospital, bakery, and boat manufacturing unit. ...Hundreds or more than a thousand refugees were burnt and shot at in an hour’s time and their bodies, some of them still alive, were sent to be thrown at the tiger project, to be fed to the

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<sup>69</sup> Deep Halder, *Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre*, HarperCollins India, 2019, p. 113. The refugee Advocate, Sakya Sen, mentions the role of the Advocate General of West Bengal, Snehangshu Acharya, in representing the government in the Marichjhapi case. After nearly 4 decades I now found a possible reason for Mr. Acharya refusing to be interviewed by me. Acharya was the son of the Maharaja of Mymensingh, and a generous funder of the Communist Party. My uncle, Sukumar Mullick ICS, had phoned him initially to get me the interview and I made several followup phone calls to get an appointment which he eventually refused outright. My uncle was surprised at his refusal. When my uncle was a Cambridge law student, he had got his eldest brother who had a medical practice in London to arrange an illegal abortion for Acharya’s girlfriend. Despite the favour, it was not returned. Given our family background he may have assumed that his role in the deaths from starvation and disease, which would have disproportionately killed babies and children, that resulted from the Marichjhapi blockade might have come up in a interview. A Law College was subsequently named after him which Jyoti Basu inaugurated.

<sup>70</sup> Deep Halder, *Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre*”, HarperCollins India, p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> Deep Halder, *Blood Island* pp. 135-6. According to Deep Halder during the blockade “Women would be picked up in the middle of the night, taken to police stations, gang raped, then they would be let lose in the forests to be devoured by tigers, or to come back to the island with their shame. It was a pressure tactic. But the islanders said we won’t move.” Deep Halder, *The Narrative of Illusions and Conflict*, January 10, 2020. Youtube.

<sup>72</sup> Subrata Patranobis, “The Last View”, Interview by Madhumay Pal. May 23, 2016 in Madhumay Pal, editor, *Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh*, Chhinna Pal, English draft translation, p.5.

Reserved Forest tigers, by a launch controlled by the police. The rest of the corpses were deposited in the Bay of Bengal water, not very far from the holy pilgrimage site of mythical saint Kapil. This is no fiction. The entire episode had been witnessed by the inhabitants of Kumirmari island which is situated not far from the scene of the massacre. The operation went on unabated for two consecutive days, without interruption. The commotion, lamentation and wailing came to a stop at last....Till date, the people of Kumirmari, who had seen the operation standing beyond a stretch of water could not get away from the trauma.”<sup>73</sup> According to the launch driver the injured cried out “We are still alive, spare us from the tigers”.<sup>74</sup> He later absconded fearing elimination as an eyewitness. “The fishermen from Hasnabad did not throw nets as they knew they would get dead bodies with fishes. So many of us have died the number is uncountable. I don’t know if there has been any attempt to count them. The media was not allowed to enter Marichjhapi. Nowhere you will find our records”.<sup>75</sup> The police had hoped to arrest the community leaders on the Chief Minister’s orders<sup>76</sup> but they escaped with the help of the boatmen’s union, allegedly with the community’s funds. A couple of them got into the food processing and transport business. One source put the number killed at about 1700 and claimed children caught in a school were decapitated.<sup>77</sup> While the locals said three quarters of the refugees died,<sup>78</sup> the actual number remains unknown. The locals claimed that the tigers ate the bodies and thus became man-eaters that preyed on them thereafter. Others were eaten by crocodiles making exhumation impossible. As part of the plan approved by the Chief Minister the refugees were sent back in specially ordered trains.<sup>79</sup> “When the refugees were forcibly sent back to Dandakaranya in special trains, they were packed in the compartments as sardines. The trains had no arrangement for food, drinking water or medicines and they were treated worse than animals. In the course of their journey, during sweltering summer many children died.”<sup>80</sup> “Many were separated from their families, many were too ill or infirm to be moved, and children who succumbed to death during the horrendous journey were summarily thrown out of the moving trains.<sup>81</sup> The CPM congratulated its cadre for their participation in the eviction, and the Information Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who was to succeed Jyoti Basu as Chief Minister, announced in the Legislative Assembly that Marichjhapi was now free of the refugees.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Tushar Bhattacharjee, “The Refugee Settlement that Vanished into Nowhere” in Madhumay Pal, Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Pal., English Draft, p.37.

<sup>74</sup> Tushar Bhattacharjee op. cit., English draft p.33.

<sup>75</sup> Soumya Sankar Bose, “Where the birds never sing”, film, vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/517033560>.

<sup>76</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi” in Madhumay Pal (editor) Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Pal. English draft, p.108

<sup>77</sup> Jaideep Mazumdar, “The Forgotten Story of the Marichjhapi Massacre By Marxists”, Swarajya, January 30, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Annu Jalais, “Dwelling on Marichjhapi”, Economic and Political Weekly, April 23, 2005, p. 1761.

<sup>79</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, “Marichjhapi”, English draft, p.98

<sup>80</sup> Itibritte Chandal Jeevan, Vol. 1 by Manoranjan Byapari, Priya Sipla Prakashan, p. 272 cited in A.K. Biswas, “Memoirs of Chandal Jeevan”, Mainstream, April 13, 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Manoranjan Byapari, Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit, Sage 2014, New Delhi, p. 241.

<sup>82</sup> Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), 1982, Rajnaitiyik-Sangathanik Report, (“Political-Organizational Report”) West Bengal State Committee. I had met Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

The refugees that were unloaded from the police launches were picked up by 150 trucks, but none of the injured were given medical attention, and loaded on the trucks regardless of their condition. “The administration did not make provisions of food and drinks to the people chased away by the authority. No medicine was provided to the baby born on the launch and her mother. The authority did not care for medical facility for the boy who fell down from the truck and broke his rib bone. The authorities had one and only duty - to load the trucks with the refugee people and send them off.”<sup>83</sup> The Sub Divisional Officer of Basirhat said “We have completed an operation which could only be carried on by the army. The speed in which we cleared off the refugees from Hasnabad was outstanding.”<sup>84</sup>

In June of 1979 the Dandakaranya Development Authority’s Chief Administrative Officer, Parry Mahapatra IAS, met with Jyoti Basu who said “‘We have taken much effort to persuade these people to get back to you.’ With utter dismay Parry Mahapatra replied. ‘Sir, you tell me that you have ‘persuaded’ the refugees to get back. But, Sir, about five hundred refugees from the lot you sent have been admitted to hospitals of Raipur, Kondagaon and Korapur with various degrees of injury!’ Parry Mahapatra told about this episode to his Bengali IAS friends and commented, ‘Your Chief Minister looked straight at my eyes like a snake does before it snaps and said, ‘How long have you been in the service.’”<sup>85</sup>

The late journalist Sukharanjan Sengupta, investigated “the identity of the persons who set fires on the shacks one after another? The refugees did not see any policemen do the act. Although at that moment of panic and in semi darkness it was not possible to identify the miscreants... The residents of Kumirmari and Bagna woke up by the wildest scream of the refugees before the fire engulfed the dwelling place of Marichjhapi settlers. I myself had the belief that the police did not set on fire. Because, till that time the police force did not come in the grip of CPI(M) in its entirety. Besides that, till then there were some policemen at the helm, who did not hesitate to say ‘no’ to Jyoti Basu right to his face. Two IAS officers and three IPS officers had the knowledge that a leader of 24 Parganas had assembled the cadre for the act of setting fire. They also had the information that the cadre were trained how to do the act in a smooth way. Those IAS officers were the then Home Secretary, Rathindranath Sen Gupta and the District Magistrate of 24 Parganas, Indrajit Chowdhury (both are dead now). And the three IPS officers are still in good health, namely, Amiya Kumar Samanta, Sandhi Mukherjee, and

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when he was Information Minister, and was surprised when he insisted that the interview he proposed required an advance submission of the questions in writing. I wondered if this was also required of journalists, and why a student would so intimidate him that he did not feel confident enough to talk off the cuff. Was he afraid he might deviate from the party line? I declined to do the interview, which I might have done had I known he would become Chief Minister. In fact the Party seemed to have a very poor idea of how to achieve a socialist transition, and the IAS officers who did know what to do, were blocked in their efforts by the privileged interests within the CPM.

<sup>83</sup> “Three Sons and Husband Untraced, How to Go? But they forced Me!”, Ananda Bazar Patrika, May 18, 1979. In Pal (editor) Marichjhapi., English draft, p. 82.

<sup>84</sup> Op. cit., English Draft, p. 83.

<sup>85</sup> Sukharanjan Sengupta, “Karbala of the Modern Times”, in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi, English draft, p.86

Sujit Sarkar. These three were in charge of conducting the operation at Marichjhapi. The ‘informers’ of Intelligence Bureau of the Central government who were positioned at Kumirmari and Bagna, saw the police ferried the fire setters to and from Marichjhapi by their launch. But the ‘leader’ who planned and executed the whole ‘fire-operation’ was a very ‘close one’ to both Pramod Babu [CPM State Secretary] and Jyoti Basu. But he was not a minister at that time. He became a minister only in 1982.”<sup>86</sup>

The joint editor of Ananda Bazar Patrika, Santosh Kumar Ghosh, wrote an editorial on May 19. “Marichjhapi is ‘cleared off’ of the refugees. But even before that the state government had made it a prohibited area! (In a democratic country which constitutional law permit it, we do not know). Still, over three thousand armed police could not handle the situation. About two thousand cadre of CPI(M) had to be engaged to make the eviction drive a success. The presence of the cadres made the people astonished, perturbed and terrified. It is said that these people had plundered and set fire on the dwelling places of the refugees to force them out. ..Why the party cadres had been let loose to torture the hapless people? Were not police equipped to handle the situation? Or did not the government have trust on their ability? Do the cadre consider themselves as a band of mythical bullocks who are empowered to massacre everything around them? Are they the members of the political party’s SS force? To keep a band of goons as reserve is not a sign of democracy for a political party”.<sup>87</sup> The CPM did not bother to conceal the role of its cadre, congratulating them on their successful participation in the eviction.<sup>88</sup>

The initial missing count came when the refugees were returned by the government to the Dandakaranya refugee camps. The authorities there counted the number of families who didn’t return as 4,128 but if and how they died is unknown.<sup>89</sup> Some families who returned would have lost individual members, but these were not counted so the losses may have been higher. They estimated about 3,000 individuals had managed to escape suggesting lower total fatalities but whether this made up for individual losses in families that returned is unknown. Assuming families of four it made for a loss of 17,000. The most recent and definitive report from the official records states 15,243 families did not return from Marichjhapi after departing Dandakaranya, but again some will have escaped, and it is not known how many died from which of the multiple causes.<sup>90</sup> 1,040 Marichjhapi

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<sup>86</sup> Sukharanjan Sengupta “Karbala of the Modern Times” in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi. English Draft. p.88 From the text it seems clear that the author knew the name of the Minister, but perhaps because he was still alive and dangerous chose not to mention his name. If anyone knows his name let me know and I will include it.

<sup>87</sup> Santosh Kumar Ghosh, “Oh Law! Oh Ethics! In Pal (editor).

<sup>88</sup> Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) Rajnaitik-Sangathanik Report, (“Political-Organizational Report”) adopted at West Bengal State Conference 14th Plenary Session, Calcutta, West Bengal State Committee 1982.

<sup>89</sup> Atharobaki Biswas, “Why Dandakaranya a Failure, Why Mass Exodus, Where Solution?” The Oppressed Indian, 1982, 4(4):18-20. The count stated between January and July 1978 14,388 families left with 10,260 returning by October 31, 1978. This figure is therefore of an ongoing desertion and return before the massacre. As it was printed before the massacre we have no way of knowing how many returned after the massacre, or how many more might have gone to occupy Marichjhapi after this count.

<sup>90</sup> Soumya Sankar Bose in Conversation with Salich Ahmed, Experimenter Gallery, Vimeo, April 2021.

families have been recorded as living in West Bengal and other states such as Orissa will have some smaller number so the casualties will be somewhat lower. It is probably fair to say the vast majority of those missing did perish in some way. This latest missing in action (MIA) figure does give a good idea of the scale of the massacre, and puts to rest some of the lower estimates of casualties put forward by Left Front supporters. Some survivors made it to the urban anonymity of Calcutta. A documentary filmmaker tried to interview them but they were too afraid to go on camera. In the over four decades since no better estimate of the casualties has been made. Only a government or major NGO would have the resources to identify the victims. Without such an investigation no accurate estimate of casualties can be made. The highest death count is 40,000 which might come from the highest estimate of 60,000 residents, of whom  $\frac{3}{4}$  died according to local residents. The official count of two is no longer taken seriously. However it points to a major problem of verifying deaths. In East Timor war fatalities have been estimated by comparing expected population growth from the actual population, but in Marichjhapi the disruption and deaths in Danadayarna make no such prediction practical. With the possibility of compensation it may even become advantageous to be listed as a survivor making an accurate count even more difficult. In the media several estimates have been made putting the fatalities in the thousands, but with no sense of where these figures came from, they have been omitted from this account. Though the witnesses will soon largely pass away, it will still be possible to determine the deaths from descendents for quite some time making a body count possible at some politically auspicious time.

Though the runup to the massacre is fairly well documented and includes a partial list of those shot by police, or died of starvation and disease during the blockade, documentation ends with the massacre. The bodies having floated out to sea or been devoured can no longer be examined. After that the only sources of evidence were eyewitness accounts which only started to become available with the decline and fall of the Communist government 3 decades later. These accounts though invaluable are nowhere near providing a comprehensive picture. With no one on the government or CPM side forthcoming, victim testimony has had to suffice. Despite thousands of survivors not more than a tiny fraction have been interviewed.<sup>91</sup> With no authoritative comprehensive investigation likely, this constitutes the best available information.

Why the CPM did what it did remains unclear to this day. "I have no idea why the government took a rigid stand like this - it's a mystery of mysteries. At that time I asked Kamaladi (Kamala Mukherjee of Communist Party of India [rival of CPM]) why the Leftist state government took a brutal stand like this. Had they been accommodated, the whole community would be with them forever. She was as aggrieved and clueless as I. She said, 'Kamala, I don't understand the politics that prompted them to do that'"<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The largest number of academic articles are literary criticisms stemming from Amitav Ghosh's novel, which as a work of fiction doesn't add to the historical record, though providing more publicity than all the other academic works on the massacre. It provided credibility that Untouchables could never have obtained on their own. Debjani Sengupta, "The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities", Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Kamala Basu, "Marichjhapi in Isolation", in Pal, editor, Marichjhapi, Draft English translation, p.9.

## Outing the Whistleblower

For three decades the massacre was forgotten, and those most responsible, Prime Minister Desai, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, and Communist Party Marxist State Secretary Promode Das Gupta, died of natural causes. After the initial flurry of press coverage, the matter was dropped except for some niche Untouchable publications; though it still comes up “often” in local Sundarbans conversations.<sup>93</sup> It was twenty years after the event before my academic article appeared on the subject, and that only after years of publication attempts. According to the editor of the American journal that eventually published it, after it had been rejected by the previous editor without external review, “after all this time ... we have yet to obtain one solid outside referee report on your manuscript. We have solicited several referees and some have even accepted the task, only to have the ms [manuscript] returned to us in a few weeks with a terse statement that they felt unable to provide the promised report.” The editor searched and finally found a couple of favourable reviewers so it could be published. Needless to say the author never found an academic job, though it took many years to fully realize the extent to which academics were on the side of the oppressors. A generation later this article proved more difficult to publish despite more information being available, the Communists being out of power, and those most responsible for the massacre deceased. This should have made finding a publisher easier, but in fact it seemed to have become impossible. Academics resisted human rights exposures that did not conform to their beliefs.

When the massacre topic was included in my Oxford doctoral thesis the examiners, Gopal Krishna and T.J. Nossiter would only recommend an MLitt without allowing a revision and resubmission. Krishna was openly hostile in the oral exam, but Nossiter did not show his beliefs till later. My supervisor, Tapan Raychaudhuri, would not support my attempt at resubmission trying to dissuade people from taking up the case thereby undermining my lobbying efforts, and St. Anthony’s College to which we belonged was unsupportive. However, Neville Maxwell took up the case. The Chairman of the Social Studies Faculty Board, Peter Oppenheimer, promoted my case and Amartya Sen who was on the Board supported my right to resubmit. Tapan Raychaudhuri also changed his mind to supporting referral. I narrowly lost the appeal. Raychaudhuri offered to supervise me in a history faculty thesis as in history unlike in social studies we could chose our own examiners, but the university would not permit me to write another thesis, so I had to write another one at Cambridge to get a PhD. The theses were subsequently published by Oxford and Cambridge University presses. The external examiner, T.J. Nossiter (LSE), wrote that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s reputed statement that Jyoti Basu “was more fit for the role [of Prime Minister], the comment was not only a gracious courtesy but a proper tribute to Basu’s standing.”<sup>94</sup> Nossiter organized Jyoti Basu’s visits to London and public meetings at the London School of Economics where Marichjhapi didn’t get raised,

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<sup>93</sup> Amites Mukhopadhyay, *Living with Disasters: Communities and Development in the Indian Sundarbans*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 40.

<sup>94</sup> T.J. Nossiter, *Marxist State Governments in India*, Pinter, 1988, p.139.

though Nossiter knew about it from the doctoral thesis he failed. Nossiter may have been concerned that exposing the Marichjhapi massacre would damage Jyoti Basu's chances of becoming Prime Minister.<sup>95</sup> However to my knowledge no major Indian politician has been prevented or removed from office solely or primarily for human rights abuses, and being sent to the International Criminal Court is not something that concerns them. My appeal to the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court received a form letter indicating the massacre preceded its jurisdiction, while Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International also did nothing with my appeals. Though the London office of Amnesty viewed Bhattacharya's documentary nothing came of this either.

In retrospect Marichjhapi came at a time in history during the 1970s when the Left was on a roll. The Portuguese colonies were liberated from fascism and gone Marxist, South

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<sup>95</sup> I have been accused of being anti-CPM, but this certainly was not the case in the beginning. I had wanted to be supervised by the CPM leader, Biplab Dasgupta at Sussex University, but he had returned to India permanently, so I went to Oxford. He helped me in my research though there was no formal relationship. Years later I heard he was sympathetic to my case for revision and resubmission of the thesis which surprised me considering how critical I was of the Left Front performance. I enquired of the professor who told me this and his interpretation was that Biplab had been cut out of visits to London with Jyoti Basu as Nossiter had taken over the role, depriving Biplab of visiting family and friends. Based on the data it was impossible to make an empirical case for good governance, and though the data inevitably became dated, no one was able to use empirical evidence to effectively refute it, and a state level empirical analysis of all major fields was never undertaken by anyone since then. I cannot blame them for not attempting this as dealing with the West Bengal bureaucracy is a difficult undertaking, especially before the widespread use of phones where even some government offices did not have them, and the wait time for non ICS civilians could be over a decade. I was fortunate to have my father's cousin, S.P. Mallick IAS, Land Reforms Commissioner and Panchayat Secretary, send his driver with all the latest data to my room, so I didn't have to leave home which is how doctoral research should be conducted. When S.K. Mallick visited obscure government offices that had probably never been visited by an ICS officer before, he got much better cooperation than I would received in collecting the material. He even sent staff to collect data from Shimla which I would not have taken the trouble to collect myself. Even giving my home address was enough for government officials to know who my family was, which surprised me as back home I would not have known the private residences of any top bureaucrats. But analysis was not primarily about data collection, it was about ideology, and if the data did not support it the data would be ignored. My book got short shrift, and certainly less circulation than Kohli's which argued CPM performance was exemplary, though there was little data to back it up, and what there was misinterpreted or inappropriate. But that was how academics wanted to see the regime, so it was naturally promoted. I expected there would be the Indian equivalent of Edgar Snow's Red Star over China, or if the right village were found along the lines of Hinton's Fanshen, but none were forthcoming, though there were a couple of passible efforts. All that was required was narrative writing that was light on statistics carefully cherry picked and use of rose coloured glasses. The West Bengal example never spread to neighbouring states, and without growth academic and journalistic interest was limited. I had earlier travelled extensively in Marxist Mozambique where a civil war was brewing. I could see the transition to socialism was not working out, but kept quiet as I did not want to disillusion or get in an argument with true believers. West Bengal offered access to a socialist transition in much more favourable circumstances, though ultimately it also failed due to the Party not being willing to challenge the relatively privileged in their own support base. Looking back Marichjhapi can be seen as the defining event of Left Front rule at least from an Untouchable perspective, though the Master Castes probably would not see it that way. China at least could look back at its industrial revolution rather than the Tiananmen Square Massacre as the defining event of Communist rule. The Left Front had nothing of the kind in any field of endeavour. Even in areas such as education which was within their power and budget, they undertook no transformative reforms.

East Asia had “fallen” to the Communists, and in India the Left had made its greatest breakthrough in West Bengal. At the time this seemed like a trend, at least in the Third World, rather than the blip it really was. In the end all these regimes embraced capitalism to keep themselves afloat, and did not do much else, except skim off the capitalists for their own private benefit. Angola more closely resembled a kleptocracy thanks to oil revenues, but even poorer states had the same model. At the time the academic study of transitions to socialism was a serious topic, which made West Bengal interesting. With the collapse of the USSR, socialist transitions came to mean transitions from socialism to capitalism, the opposite of what it previously meant. The original meaning seems now to be no longer worthy of consideration. If there is a trend it is towards fundamentalism and the decline in beliefs that both liberalism and communism shared. Marichjhapi came at a time that was not propitious for its exposure, particularly in academia. Today the event looks rather different, and more so in India, where in academia caste has gained greater popularity as a field of study, and the Left is decimated. The residual effects of the Leftist wave continue in academia, in beliefs that have lost popularity in the general public for better or worse.

The American publication of my article was followed several years later with an article by Annu Jalais in the leading Indian social science journal *Economic and Political Weekly*.<sup>96</sup> Considering it was published while the Communists were still in power and bound to be read by them this was really courageous. This grassroots anthropological work complemented my state level research in showing the local reaction and most importantly confirming that the massacre took place with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the refugees perishing, by local accounts. The former Left Front Finance Minister who was in office at the time of the massacre responded that it was massacre “hyperbole” as only 2 people had been killed. “To describe what had then happened as a ‘massacre’ is nothing short of grotesque. Hyperbole does not add to, but detracts from scholarship.”<sup>97</sup> He did not clarify what his own role or position on Marichjhapi was. As it was the first non-Untouchable academic writing, it could not be readily dismissed as self-interested, as my own writing was. Very significantly both these articles were by EU nationals not subject to the same restraints as Indian academics, though all Bengali intellectuals at least seem to have heard about the massacre. None of these Bengalis, including those working abroad and therefore professionally safe from the regime, wrote about it. That it was left to foreign doctoral students to first research it in academia, reflects badly on the profession.

The first book on the subject was published in Calcutta in Bengali only, and included 37 pages listing the names of victims.<sup>98</sup> The author was the son of a Minister in Colonial Bengal and later Law Minister in Pakistan. Perhaps more significantly the author had been in the Communist Party and shared jail space with Jyoti Basu when he was in the opposition. Whether he was spared for his prominence or for old times sake is impossible

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<sup>96</sup> Annu Jalais, “Dwelling on Morichjhanpi: When Tigers became ‘citizens’, and Refugees ‘tiger food’” *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 23, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Ashok Mitra, “Hyperbole about Massacre”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 20, May 14, 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Jagadish Chandra Mandal, *Marichjhapi*: Naishabder Antarale, Sujana Publications, 2002.

to say, but a newspaper book reviewer was fired from his paper for reviewing the book. The reviewer took the case to court where the Judge found he was unlawfully dismissed as he had only done what the Editor had asked of him.

Another columnist was Pannalal Dasgupta. “Promod Das Gupta threatened to cancel all advertisements in the newspaper “Jugantar” if they continued to publish Pannalal Dasgupta’s reports on Marichjhapi. Promod Das Gupta was a founding Politbureau member of the CPIM, its state secretary and a stalwart of the Left Front government at that time and Pannalal Dasgupta was his very own brother!”<sup>99</sup> Jugantar ceased publication of articles on Marichjhapi as did other leading Bengali dailies similarly intimidated by threats to advertising and union disruption. “The Marichjhapi story should have been picked up by the national media and should have made headlines beyond borders, but even the local media did not give it the kind of play it deserved. Why? Debnath takes me back in time again. The most powerful newspaper group in West Bengal, the Anandabazar Patrika, had decided to go anti-CPM. The result? The group’s employees were beaten up outside their office as cops looked away. ‘That, and the threat of withdrawing government advertisement always works.’”<sup>100</sup>

Reflecting on the time Tushar Bhattacharya noted “By the dictat or censorship of Alimuddin Street, the state headquarter of the CPI(M), no news items on Marichjhapi could be published in any leading Bengali dailies. Pannalal Dasgupta’s article on Marichjhapi could not be published in vernacular Jugantar newspaper. The CPI was not part of the Left Front at that time, their mouthpiece Kalantar published a few articles on Marichjhapi. To put unofficial blockade on newspapers in a democratic set up was another exploit of the CPI(M). The severe repression that the Government was to unleash in the future had its beginning in the Marichjhapi massacre.”<sup>101</sup> The use of party cadre and gangsters as enforcers was not new but Marichjhapi set the tone for the regime which was never brought under control.

With foreign academics, perspectives on the regime varied widely but the predominant view was expressed by an endowed Chair at Princeton who wrote West Bengal had “good governance”<sup>102</sup> and in fact “under the CPM probably is India’s best governed state”<sup>103</sup>. An LSE Professor, T. J. Nossiter, claimed they had made “a truly remarkable accomplishment” including “indubitably impressive”<sup>104</sup> land reforms. None of my relatives in the government made such claims and in all the decades I never found a shred of evidence to support the claims. The foremost proponent of CPM success Atul Kohli,

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<sup>99</sup> Biswajit Bandyopadhyay, “The Tale of Marichjhapi”, Radical Socialist, February 19, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Deep Halder interviewing journalist Sukumar Debnath, Blood Island, Kindle edition, location 1498. Print edition, p.167.

<sup>101</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, “The refugee settlement that Vanished into Nowhere”, in Pal (editor) English draft p.35

<sup>102</sup> Atul Kohli, “Can the Periphery Control the Center? Indian Politics at the Crossroads.” Washington Quarterly, 1996, 19 (4), p. 121.

<sup>103</sup> Atul Kohli, Democracy and Discontent: India’s Growing Crisis of Governability, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 268.

<sup>104</sup> T.J. Nossiter, Marxist State Governments in India, Pinter Publishers, 1988, p. 184, 140.

stated “Members of the land bureaucracy in West Bengal often attributed the problems of “operation barga” to the “middle peasant” nature of the CPM’s rural support... As such, the argument continued, the party’s own supporters were not backing a program that would undermine their interests. I did not find evidence in support of this argument” “This almost appeared to be the bureaucratic line on “operation barga”. Senior civil servants like D. Bandopadhyay and S. Sarkar, Director of Land Surveys, West Bengal, both stressed it during interviews. It was also repeated at lower levels of the bureaucracy”.<sup>105</sup> The intellectual arrogance needed to dismiss claims by career implementers who worked for decades in the field in favour of the party line on the basis of short visits to the countryside where the party is out to deceive you, required not only a fair measure of gullibility, but suggests an ideological inclination to believe the politicians who were required to follow the party line rather than the better informed and more candid administrators. I had been on tours myself so I knew how this was done, as speakers would be cut off if it deviated from the party line. This suggests a naivety about rural India, that a segregated Untouchable observer would be extremely unlikely to entertain. Caste identify really does make a difference in perceptions, just as segregated Blacks in Jim Crow America or in Apartheid South Africa might have a different take on their society than their white masters. Interestingly neither Nossiter nor Kholi seem to have realized that what they were visiting would have been segregated, and the only other place that did so at the time was South Africa. Even though I knew this I asked about it just to get an idea if my hosts were prepared to tell the truth. If their writings are any indication, asking about it seems not to have occurred to them, or they were misled. For me the situation was rather different, as I had to pass for high caste to use the facilities, but had to be concerned that coming from a prominent Untouchable family, I might be outed if I gave the “wrong” answers. In that event my CPM minder might come in handy. In these circumstances the shorter the stay the better in case personal questions were asked, so as in South Africa I would move frequently. In South Africa it was my accent which might give me away, and not having the required permits made visiting problematic. This gave a very different experience to what other observers who were there legitimately might have, and in India where the Master Caste mob has the first go in implementing “justice”, it is a predicament outside observers might not even realize was possible.

What you seek you will likely find. If you researched Marichjhapi you would find the torture and murder of others, and possibly yourself if you were not careful. I, as the first foreign scholar to study it, was warned by a friendly CPM cadre that being a scholar would not save me from torture by their regime. I was warned by my own relatives that they did not have the connections to protect me, and was told of a journalist who had tried to investigate a murder by a CPM MLA who murdered her as well. There were a number of publicized murders by the CPM which had been put on hold for decades. A cousin introduced me to a former Maoist from the slum adjoining the family house who had been tortured nearly to death by the police and had the scars to prove it. I was told I would not be able to withstand what the police torture could do to me. The implication

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<sup>105</sup> Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 127.

was that since I was bound to reveal my sources under torture, I should not be doing the research, with the massacre remaining forgotten. This was a touching but futile warning to the “innocent abroad” about government methods. However my sources being in the system were even better informed of the consequences than I was, and if they were willing to help I could not easily refuse to publicize the massacre. Knowing police methods, they would have realized any promises of confidentiality were problematic at best. The government should not get to determine the news just because they had the torturers, and one never knows what one can put up with till it is experienced. Of the horror stories told by the cousins about what happened to people who got on the wrong side of the government, my favourite, because it was the only one that couldn't apply to me, was of the foreign tourist who overstayed his visa and spent over twenty years in jail as he was forgotten. Though the senior family members in government service were passing on information to me some of my cousins were discouraging involvement with warnings of torture and death, as they claimed our family did not have the connections to protect me. This difference did not occur to me at the time as I was preoccupied with getting the information without being caught. Mistakes were made in interviewing people who turned out to support the party line on Marichjhapi, but no one apparently turned me in, though for a long time I expected to be picked up at any moment. Unlike in South Africa and Rhodesia where I had moved frequently to avoid getting caught, in Calcutta I stayed with my Uncle in my grandfather's house in hopes it would discourage a police raid. My room had a defunct direct phone line to police headquarters left over from the time my Uncle was Chief Secretary. With no place to hide my banned Maoist insurgent literature I locked it in the cabinet next to the police phone line as I could not ask my relatives where it could be hidden without implicating them, and then just hoped family position would prevent a police search. Having spent my childhood struggling to overcome fear, as an adult I was not going to be put off by warnings about the ultimate penalty. I figured I had put fear behind me, and if not at least would not show it, but I quickly found I lacked the local cultural knowledge to do the investigation safely, a problem I didn't have with my “legitimate” research.

When I interviewed Sukharanjan Sengupta, a prominent journalist and editor who had defied the government ban on journalists visiting Marichjhapi, we were interrupted by a man who entered his home and sat down in his living room uninvited, and listened to our conversation which was fortunately in English as Mr. Sengupta told me he was a police informer who kept an eye on him. The relative who accompanied me had suspected as much, but though having a Bengali background, with a foreign upbringing I had missed the subtleties despite my uncle telling me the police hired informants to watch over persons of interest. I was clearly not the best person to do this prohibited research. Rural research was practically precluded as a professor warned me there were “Communists in every village” and they were bound to report any mention of Marichjhapi.

As the sources included my own relatives in the ICS/IAS I would be highly motivated not to reveal their names and my sources and relatives presumably motivated to use their connections to prevent my torture in case I revealed their identity. Given Jyoti Basu's aversion to leakers and the murder of police informers, this investigation could have dire

consequences if discovered. No one suggested I do it so it was my responsibility. One does not do this type of research if you do not accept the possible consequences, and I kept it from Oxbridge as the supervisors might have objected to it as too risky. Should I be “caught or killed” they could “disavow any knowledge” of my actions (Mission Impossible, TV series). The informers had not only refused to let me name them as sources in my Cambridge University Press book, but no one in India was willing to be even acknowledged in any capacity in the preface, leaving only my doctoral supervisor, Geoffrey Hawthorn, to be mentioned as he was safe in Cambridge. It was unclear by then whether the bureaucrats had the power to prevent the politicians doing what they wanted to me.<sup>106</sup> The politically affiliated gangsters were outside state control entirely and more likely to resort to murder. There was evidence of CPM party leaders who became a Central Committee member, a State Minister, and an MP, murdering two brothers whose mother was forced to swallow their blood, but were never brought to trial, despite the publicity.<sup>107</sup> Media coverage was ineffective in getting any action taken, and as for the many more rural cases there was not even this publicity. Being above the law undoubtedly had short-term political advantages but continuing murder and extortion in the long term eroded electoral support among the people. The party leadership were incredibly short sighted over Marichjhapi, but it was part of a wider incompetence that made them incapable of leading any socialist transition, though to be fair many of their followers were too interested in their own privileges to work for reform, preferring to accumulate privileges instead. Despite this, academia continued to publish nonsense about their “good governance”<sup>108</sup> as if they were in a parallel universe.<sup>109</sup>

When the author phoned U.N. Biswas, a retired Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, turned human rights activist, who subsequently became a Minister in the post-Communist government, about Marichjhapi, a cousin in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) warned me the phone might be tapped. The IAS officer was about to undertake important

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<sup>106</sup> Deep Halder mentions the dilemma of the IAS bureaucrats. “There was a talk I had in the Bengal Club. There were very senior IAS officers, retired now, who served in Jyoti Basu’s government, who stood up and said thank god you wrote this book. We were so helpless that this was happening. We could do nothing. Thank god after 40 years something like this book could come out. So I asked them after the talk. Nobody did anything. No Jyoti Basu said do whatever it takes, get rid of these people.” Deep Halder, *The Narrative of Illusions and Conflict*, January 10, 2020.

<sup>107</sup> D. Bandyopadhyay, *Census of Political Murders in West Bengal during CPI-M Rule, 1977-2009*, *Mainstream*, August 14, 2010. Sainbari Incident, Wikipedia.

<sup>108</sup> I once made the mistake of publicly asking my uncle, S.K. Mallick ICS, whether governance was better under the British or independent India. He smiled and said nothing causing the other government officials to laugh. He later privately said the administration was better under the British but lacked the degree of development orientation of the independent Indian government. Though the British came for profits, colonialism was a liberating experience for Untouchables, and the only issue is whether the British could have done more.

<sup>109</sup> An assumption the Communists must be interested in the humane treatment of Untouchables or the poor in general was disproved by their practices. The slum next to our ancestral home had been created when the owners emigrated to America and squatters occupied the vacant land. When my uncle became Chief Secretary they could have been evicted by the police or informally by his police bodyguards, but he would not do it as it would be “inhumane”. Like the other ICS officers he had no pretensions of creating a “dictatorship of the proletariat” but those politicians that did had no compunction in evicting poor Untouchables.

educational reforms that would give millions of poor children a decent education, and if replicated in the rest of India and the World billions of children would benefit. The teachers would have had their pay based on the test results of their students.<sup>110</sup> If he had to use his political capital to save his cousin, these reforms could be jeopardized. In the end the reforms were halted by the teachers' unions and corrupt politicians, and Marichjhapi had nothing to do with it. It was however the only time I questioned if I was doing the right thing. I subsequently wrote up the failed education experiment, but could not find an academic publisher so put it on the internet.

When I was offered an interview with a police officer who was known for having enjoyed torturing leftist women while under the influence of alcohol, I discovered the man was close to the Chief Minister who continued to rely on his services. I decided not to interview him as I was concerned about being tortured if the interview did not go well, given the policeman's past, and his present connections. One might have thought Jyoti Basu would have wanted to divest himself of the Police portfolio as it inevitably led to a personal connection with human rights abuses, but "plausible deniability" was foreign thinking. The Communists had years before inspired a Police mutiny in Howrah that could only be put down by the army. The mutineers were dismissed but then reinstated when the Communists came to power.<sup>111</sup> The Police union was Communist controlled, and could be counted on to disobey the Courts as at Marichjhapi. There were good reasons for Jyoti Basu keeping the "coercive apparatus of the state" to himself.

As I was a foreign writer living abroad, retaliation had to take a literary form. Oddly enough it came from a police scholar who had also written a book on Indian Communism.<sup>112</sup> The 24 Parganas District Police Superintendent who had taken face to face instructions for the eviction from the Chief Minister, by his own admission, took up the role as massacre denier. However a former University Vice Chancellor condemned the "stunning insinuations" against the writer, by which he presumably meant that the Police Officer, Amiya Kumar Samanta, had outed the scholar as an Untouchable foreigner.<sup>113</sup> Given the prejudices against Untouchables as uncivilized and unclean, and Indian xenophobia it would be a compelling criticism for many Indians.<sup>114</sup> In a criticism that would not be obvious to foreigners and even many Indians, Dr. Samanta described

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<sup>110</sup> The West Bengal Communist government took the opposite approach significantly increasing pay without linking it to productivity in order to help achieve rural party hegemony at public expense, thereby enhancing teacher moneylending and other businesses. (Dayabati Roy, Partha Sarathi Banerjee, "Decentralized Governance Reforms in Primary Education: Some Reflections on West Bengal", Economic and Political Weekly, June 16, 2012, Vol. XLV11, no. 24, p.67) The educational results were dismal by every measure. The teaching of English was stopped effectively hindering significant upward mobility for the lower classes despite strenuous parent objections. The Communist elite continued to send their children to private English medium schools and rig overseas scholarships so they hold coveted academic and other positions despite losing power back home. Foreign universities did nothing to ensure the public and private scholarships were being fairly awarded.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, Sukumar Mullick ICS, then District Magistrate, Howrah.

<sup>112</sup> Amiya Kumar Samanta, *Left Extremist Movement in West Bengal: An Experiment in Armed Agrarian Struggle*, Firma KLM, 1984.

<sup>113</sup> A.K. Biswas, *Mainstream*, April 13, 2013

<sup>114</sup> Stalin K. "India Untouched", documentary film, Youtube

the author as “a Canadian of Indian origin, and scion of a big land owning family of Bagerhat, Khulna, now in Bangladesh”, thereby questioning their authenticity as representative of typical Untouchables and putting them in an unfavourable light as landlords. A more complete history which goes unmentioned would be that the Zamindar’s Factor murdered the author’s great-grandfather to grab the land and the eldest son fled with his mother and four younger brothers (a fifth was posthumous) to the relative safety of Calcutta.<sup>115</sup> The grandfather was reputed to be the first Untouchable university graduate in India and the first in the Bengal Civil Service.<sup>116</sup> He was nominated by Missionary Professors at Scottish Church College, Calcutta, and got the position despite a Brahmin on the interview committee telling him he should be tilling the soil. He used his salary to put his five younger brothers through law school. The size of the property lost in the 19th century is unknown even to the family, though they did know their original surname which showed they had been agricultural labourers and “very low on the social scale” according to a descendant. The family founded the Namasudra Association in 1912<sup>117</sup>, marking the entry of the Untouchables into modern electoral politics, with great uncles who were Ministers in Colonial Bengal. “Even Ambedkar found it difficult to contest the election [for the Constituent Assembly] from his home state of Maharashtra and depended instead on his Namasudra friends in Bengal, mainly Mandal and Mullick.”<sup>118</sup> When Sardar Patel offered Mullick a Congress seat on the Constituent Assembly he refused as it was the landlord party. He went to Pakistan, only to flee back to India in the face of Muslim communal riots.<sup>119</sup> Thereafter the Namasudras became a persecuted minority in both countries, no longer needed as a swing voting bloc by either ruling elites. Two of my uncles were the only Untouchables in the Indian Civil Service (ICS)<sup>120</sup>, one of whom had been the Chief Secretary (top state bureaucrat) of West Bengal which Dr. Samanta retells accurately enough, along with the comment that “Ross Mallick’s father migrated and eventually settled in Canada.”<sup>121</sup> These dog whistle

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<sup>115</sup> Varun Mallik, “A Secret History of the Mallik Family” Museum of Material History, July 19, 2020. Ross Mallick, “Affirmative Action and Elite Formation: An Untouchable Family History”, *Ethnohistory*, Spring 1997.

<sup>116</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, OUP, 2011, p.71.

<sup>117</sup> Amiya K, Samanta in Madhumay Pal (editor), *Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihas*, 2009. J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Politics in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*, University of California Press, 1968, p.158.

<sup>118</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 204.

<sup>119</sup> Interview, S.K. Mallick ICS. Another account says he used an expletive in rejecting the offer but this can’t be verified now. It might not have been out of character however. According to the Bengal Governor Lord Brabourne, Mukunda Behari Mullick was “quite able but he, unfortunately, suffers from a severe inferiority complex which results in frequent outbursts of offensiveness towards members of the Services and people whom he fears are laughing at him behind his back”. ( Lord Brabourne, Governor’s Half Yearly Report on Ministers to Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, 20 June 1939, India Office Library, London, p.125) As the first Untouchable Minister to have to deal with upper caste subordinates least interested in advancing the conditions of the Depressed Castes it was an extremely difficult undertaking.

<sup>120</sup> Wikipedia, *Indian Civil Service (British India)*.

<sup>121</sup> Dr. Samanta may be credited with excellent detective work as I had tried to hide my family background, or perhaps it was just deduction. A Professor I interviewed was able to deduce my background before meeting me. The subject of *Marichjhapi* suggested an Untouchable father. A brother of ICS officers would

political comments discredit the nascent middle class Untouchables as a “creamy layer” unrepresentative of their caste, and therefore legitimizes the rule of the upper caste class who understand Untouchable needs better. This follows common falsehoods used to promote Bengal’s exceptional enlightenment on Caste. While the press claimed how emancipated they were by having India’s first Untouchable Chief Secretary when the Minorities Commission Chairman criticized their caste prejudices, that same press had launched a campaign against his appointment and there was a demonstration against it.<sup>122</sup> Though the senior ICS officer in the state he was appointed only through Jagjivan Ram, who had known the family since colonial times, interceding with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during President’s Rule. The dominant caste campaign continued under the Left Front which had to face constituent opposition for even the innocuous appointment of a token Untouchable as Primary Education Minister. They had been criticized for bad optics in having no Untouchables in the Cabinet, despite being 23% of the population. Dr. Samanta, who became a Law Professor after his retirement as Inspector General of Police (Intelligence), argued that no living sources had been given for the author’s information in his Cambridge University Press book.<sup>123</sup> Considering that his police force conducts extrajudicial killings and routinely tortures people, this is disingenuous.<sup>124</sup> Since he had participated in these crimes himself, he knew the dangers of revealing my sources. He apparently never found out that the writer had relatives in the Dandakaranya refugee camps. They did not go to Marichjhapi, but they knew of people who had. I had seen poverty from growing up on a northern Canadian Indian Reservation, so seeing relatives living in poverty should not have bothered me, but it did.<sup>125</sup> Though Dr. Samanta

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be anglicised enough to give a British first name to me, so though he did not know my father existed, he had figured out my identity with just three words, my name and Marichjhapi. The detective work might have been better spent finding the killers at Marichjhapi than researching my family life.

<sup>122</sup> A.K. Biswas, *Mainstream, End of Misrule by Coterie: West Bengal in Political Cross-Road?* June 28, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Amiya Kumar Samanta in Madhumay Pal (editor), *Marichjhapi: Chhinna Desh, Chhinna Itihas*, 2009, p. 243.

<sup>124</sup> For accounts of police death squads known in India as “encounter specialists” see my cousins, Dr. Monica Sharma, Principal Advisor UNICEF, *Radical Transformational Leadership: Strategic Action for Change Agents*, 2017, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, p. 130 and for a “fictionalized” account see the novel “The Unkindest Cut” by Sumit Mullick IAS, Chief Secretary of Maharashtra. For references to the torture of poor people by the Communist government see Dayabati Roy, *Rural Politics in India: Political Stratification and Governance in West Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.224, 229. A national overview can read at Jeffrey Gettleman and Sameer Yasin, “Hundreds of Police Killings in India, but no Mass Protests”, *New York Times*, August 20, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> The visit was arranged by an IAS relative in Dandakaranya. He would not let me leave his home unless accompanied by him, though whether that was because I might be attacked by Maoist insurgents who frequented the area or because I might try to meet them for my Oxford doctoral thesis on India Communism was never made clear. Under the circumstances a meeting was impossible and had to be done in Calcutta where I was less conspicuous. The refugee relatives lived in a mud and thatched hut devoid of anything of value, except perhaps a parrot which they probably got free from the jungle but would be worth something in a western pet shop. They did have something none of the elite relatives had, a Bengali book about the Namasudras showing photographs of my grandfather and elite family members in their business suits. I could not imagine how they must have felt seeing relatives in positions they could never hope to attain doing things that were impossible for them. An accident of birth had separated the family, and enabled me to do activities they might not comprehend. I avoided probing the issues as I was most

criticized high caste writers, only the Untouchable had his family caste background exposed. In his critique of Amitav Ghosh he writes “little did Amitav realize that there was no police action in Marichjhapi”, and then several pages later details his own role as 24 Parganas Police Superintendent and that of the police forces under his command in the eviction, making it difficult to know what to make of this contradiction. In an academic and media world dominated by a very small percentage of upper castes, and a foreign scholarship sympathetic to India, the Untouchable writer had a major credibility problem.<sup>126</sup> With the Untouchables probably not so much. If the Party wanted to discredit the author with Untouchables, Dr. Samanta was not the best person to do it given his role at Marichjhapi. The fact of the matter was the CPM had no Untouchables with the stature to do this effectively. Though Promode Das Gupta promoted a group of Untouchables to lead the community, adherence to the party line on Marichjhapi undermined their credibility as it required defending the indefensible. Once state power and its patronage was lost, the membership imploded. The leader of the group though saying our family had “humble origins” and had been “like gods” to the Untouchables, would not budge from the party line on Marichjhapi even in private conversations. Though the author had never mentioned Dr. Samanta in previous writings, in gathering police intelligence Dr. Samanta found his Untouchability, and decided to make it personal in a way he did not do for anyone else. According to the Bengal Governor, they were a “loyal and respectable family”<sup>127</sup>, so Dr. Samanta’s police detectives would have failed to come up with any criminality or corruption, making him choose to mention our Untouchability, which we are born with and cannot change.

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uncomfortable with all the implications of a family divided by class. Other commitments prevented me from slumming with them but I had inadvertently done slumming before in an unpleasant though educative experience. On my first visit to India, before I had mastered the art of namedropping, I had been deported from an area prohibited to foreigners without a permit, after being caught by staying in a hotel, and had to find alternative non-hotel accommodation to avoid the police. Another train passenger suggested staying with a relative who was a candlemaker in what turned out to be a slum. The rats and mosquitos kept me awake through the night, and the sleep deprivation made me wonder if the poor were chronically sleep deprived or somehow got used to it. It was a lot less comfortable than hunting from a tent in a Canadian winter. I reached my uncle who arranged with the Chief Secretary of Assam to get me the foreigners permit, but I came down with malaria which was appropriate since I was named after the scientist who discovered its cause. I had bouts of malaria for years afterwards including in places like Oxford where I could have been treated but didn’t bother. When I had a bout while visiting home by father got me tested and cured. I had not even known it could be cured with a drug. The treatment he got when he died was worse. I could not find any doctor who would give an opinion on his treatment, and when the disciplinary body of the profession, the College of Physicians and Surgeons finally gave an opinion the one year statute of limitations, designed to protect the profession rather than the public, had expired. The treatment was called “unscientific”. Had father not been a Surgeon we would never have suspected something was wrong, so who knows how many patients died unnecessarily without knowing anything was amiss. My father’s position had been vindicated, but for some unknown reason the specialists had misled us. Neither the College nor the University of Alberta Hospital would do anything about it. Coverups were not exclusive to the Third World.

<sup>126</sup> Anil Chamadia, “Meaning of being a Dalit in Media”, Forward Press, January 7, 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Sir Thomas Rutherford, Governor’s Half Yearly Report on Ministers to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, 16 September 1943, India Office Library (London), 11.

With no Untouchables in western academia then publishing on human rights abuses, academia becomes the preserve of Indian elites and western intellectuals with similar views of India. The problem of western intellectuals “going native” in India is that their views come to reflect those of the Indian elite, as happened all too often even under colonialism. As the President of the All-Bengal Namasudra Association put it to the Simon Commission in 1929 “It has been seen in more than one case that British members of the Indian Civil Service, on account of their living in this country for a long time, and by coming into contact with only a section of the people, are mentally captured by the ideas of those few people who are in the position of social aristocrats”<sup>128</sup> This influence continues in Indian studies today, with the Indian diaspora supporting it. The upper caste diaspora in Britain fights for a religious exemption so caste discrimination can continue outside the law.<sup>129</sup> It is not that there is no criticism of India, but that it is confined within certain perspectives that hide a more disturbing reality. The distortions were even present at a pinnacle of Indian studies in America when a professor who later was promoted to an endowed Chair at Princeton claimed that in Bengal even in the 12th and 13th centuries “the untouchables could eat with members of cleaner castes” which is the equivalent of saying there was never segregation in the American South.<sup>130</sup> A statement like that about America would not go unchallenged at Princeton, but ignorance about Untouchable segregation is such that it went unchallenged. In his testimony to the Simon Commission, Mukunda Behari Mullick, who later became Minister of Credit, Cooperation and Rural Indebtedness in the Fazlul Huq government of undivided Bengal, states that “children of depressed classes were given back and separate seats in schools, and were badly beaten....There is no arrangement for these children to drink water. I myself had the experience in my boyhood. We have to wait outside the room where water is kept till a caste-Hindu friend comes and puts water in our hands.”<sup>131</sup> One can only imagine the circles one would have to move in not to pick up such information about segregation. One graduate student at Oxford made a similar claim to Professor Kohli about contemporary West Bengal being integrated. He was corrected by another student but it showed how it was possible to live one’s life in Calcutta and be ignorant about fundamental living conditions just outside the city. This reflects elite ignorance and lack of concern about human rights which gets reflected in the media, society, and scholarship as well. When I passed for high caste in rural India to use their facilities I had to worry about being beaten up or worse if caught. Unless the facilities have since been purified by reciting mumbo jumbo and cleaned with cow excrement the customers are still being polluted. Pollution is not a problem high caste or foreign scholars would have to consider so it is understandable why it would not feature in their writings. The situation in rural India is worse than in South Africa under Apartheid, as I found from travelling there

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<sup>128</sup> Mukunda Behari Mullick, Indian Statutory Commission [Simon Commission]: Selections from Memoranda and Oral Evidence by Non-Officials (Part II), Vol.17, 1929, Reprinted 1988. Delhi: Swati Publications, p. 93-94.

<sup>129</sup> “Caste in Great Britain and Equality Law: A Public Consultation”, Government Equalities Office, March 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Atul Kohli, “From elite activism to democratic consolidation: The rise of reform communism in West Bengal,” in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds). *Dominance and State Power in Modern India* Vol.II, Oxford University Press, p. 395.

<sup>131</sup> Simon Commission, 1929, Vol. 17, p.98.

during the anti-Apartheid struggle, though Apartheid got much more adverse publicity. In Apartheid era South Africa rule was based on unjust laws, but in India as the Master Castes are a mob in waiting they are more dangerous to servile castes. The difference meant that apartheid laws were abolished overnight, while Indian attitudes will take generations to change if they change at all.<sup>132</sup>

The most effective criticism both in India and abroad came from another foreign scholar specializing in India who was close to the CPM. In the Economic and Political Weekly he wrote that I was a Maoist. Abroad it jeopardized job prospects which may have been his intention. As the Maoists were in a guerrilla war with the government and both sides tortured and executed each other, such charges could have resulted in it happening to me. In a system where the only protection for suspects are their connections, if they have them, such false dangerous accusations should not be made. Whether for this or my human rights writing, I got on the Indian government computer at immigration, and was only released when apparently nothing was found in the biggest book I had ever seen, that was presumably more secure and definitive, sparing me a “third degree interrogation” which was the Indian euphemism for torture. On previous arrivals I had been met just off the plane by S.K. Mallick ICS, and wasn’t concerned about this. As I was now alone and could disappear without trace, which was the best way to dispose of me given my connections, I was left to wonder if I would be as lucky the next time. Many had been tortured and killed for doing far less than I had done. Coming from a prominent Untouchable family whose castes constituted 23% of the West Bengal electorate, and as a foreign scholar any detention might lift me from obscurity into a “sticky commodity” (Dr. Zhivago, film) for the Stalinists, so murder might seem to be their best option. In their place I would have advocated it as the usual co-option and intimidation would not work for me, so a murder that was untraceable to the party state was best. Therefore on the next and last visit I brought my wife and children along. I would have preferred to use my British passport under a partly different name which might have enabled me to avoid identification, but it would have made my wife suspicious I was up to no good and refuse to accompany me so I used my Canadian passport. If I was to be taken into custody I would tell my wife whom to contact, which would hopefully intimidate the officials and discourage them from doing something to me. However, the children were so disruptive we were put at the front of the queue and the immigration officer was so keen to get us on our way that he didn’t read off his computer. It was an early indication our children were

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<sup>132</sup> The reasons why Apartheid was not as bad as Untouchability are too complex to be examined here, but are rooted in differences between subordinate minority and majority populations, state versus mob rule, and cultural and religious incorporation of dominant beliefs. By way of a personal anecdote to illustrate the difference, while in a segregated South African restaurant with Indians, they complained they had been put in a different room from the whites though the Manager claimed it was an international restaurant and therefore integrated. Despite the obvious segregation the manager stuck to his claim resulting in a futile argument. As I was doing undercover photojournalism for the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa I was worried that someone would call the police and I might get caught so wanted them to keep quiet. One would be crazy to try that in rural India where Untouchables are only 16% of the population and Untouchables are liable to be beaten up or even lynched by a Master Caste mob. Even in Communist West Bengal my CPM Minder freely admitted that Untouchables were not allowed in the restaurant we were using.

autistic, putting an end to my travels and career prospects as the children grew more violent and difficult, making a return to India or visiting anywhere else impossible. After our daughter bit flesh off my mother who lived with us, my wife became too afraid to be alone with our daughter so I was stuck with her, though it only postponed the inevitable institutionalizing when I would become too sick to look after her. The most positive approach was to look at it as akin to a personal martyrdom mission as “there are no happy endings here” (The Americans, TV series, “Sacrifice for the Motherland” 01x06).<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> The personal came to dominate the big issues I had previously worked on and a generation passed before at the end of my life I took one last look at the “big picture” (Casino Royale, 2006 film). As it became clear our daughter was a danger to others, and had been prohibited from using the school bus for attacking other children, and had to study in her own school room, the risks of going anywhere in town became apparent, and I tried to go out in public as little as possible in case she assaulted someone. However she insisted on going downtown at least twice a day, and keeping her locked up at home 24/7 would have made her have a meltdown and turn violent, so I had no choice. She became too strong for me to handle and when she had a meltdown had to rely on bystanders to hold her till the police came. By then I was on half a dozen drugs for physical ailments and my heart attacks, and it seemed most likely I would die in a grocery store trying to tackle her. Till my children become adults I had conducted my last struggle trying to get services they were entitled to but the bureaucrats refused to give. Threatening the government with advocacy groups and pro bono lawyers had got the services I wanted through intimidating bureaucrats with threats of lawsuits, but it helped no one else. Those parents who did not have the time, energy or political acumen to confront the child welfare bureaucracy got shafted. How it came to having children with autism is far from obvious. It is genetic, but this inheritance is not proven to be immutable. Mice through RNA sperm transmission can pass on learned traits. The studies of Concentration Camp (“Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKB55 Methylation” Rachel Yehoda et al, Biological Psychiatry, August 12, 2015) and Indian Residential Schools (“The Impact of Stressors on second generation Indian Residential School Survivors, Amy Bombay et al., Transcultural Psychiatry, 48(4) 2011) is less definitive given the smaller sample size and the ongoing conditions on the Reservations, but is worth further study while there is still time. Oddly enough my political activities began and ended with refugee issues. I had begun by playing war games by stealing gasoline to make molotov cocktails which I smashed on boulders that passed for Soviet tanks in Budapest. The refugees from the Hungarian uprising had been on our flight to Canada which gave me the idea. I took no precautions and could have burned myself or started a forest fire which might have burned down the town. I kept it to myself so never got caught. Before her death I told my mother about it and she denied there was ever a gasoline barrel in the backyard to steal from, so I got out the old slides and proved her wrong. I also showed a photo of the outhouses beside my school to my son, as today there probably are none left in the whole country in use by schools, which is a pity. When I took my family winter camping in Jasper where you need to book a campsite reservation months in advance for summer, the whole campground was empty indicating the descendants of the pioneers had gone soft from easy living, and needed immigrants to do the work. The struggle between these descendants and immigrants for dominance over North America had come to consume politics with colour coding being a major ingredient. After emigrating to Canada, when I was an under 5 preschooler neighbouring children would repeatedly beat me up on orders of their mother who provided the implements in the vain hope of driving us out of town so her babies would not have to be delivered by an East Indian. That would have made the government replace father with what in those days would almost certainly have been a white doctor. Having failed to evict us she had the considerable expense of chartering aircraft to fly her to the city for deliveries. Everyone in the hospital compound knew about this but no one in the community did anything about it, except once when I was being beaten up a passing staffer told them to stop so they ran away. By then they did not need orders to be openly given and tried to catch me on sight. If not for their mother’s racism they might have been friends instead of my potential murderers. I don’t remember how well I understood death between the ages of 2 and 5, but more significantly the older children assaulting me probably did not know how final it was, making them that much more dangerous as there was no limit on what they might do. Their mother was irresponsible for ordering the beatings without knowing if her children would beat me to death. As I was

Writing the exhaustive definitive account of the massacre was no longer possible for me given my responsibilities and health so I had to cut it off with a shorter book, and hope a younger generation would take it up in the future. Most likely the last of the Marichjhapi survivors who were young adults at the time of the massacre would die around the same time I would, leaving further knowledgeable accounts no longer possible. It would then be up to future generations to reconstruct the events. However these would likely be forgotten if there were no contemporaneous movement to give it meaning, and that would depend on favourable political and social circumstances which cannot be accurately predicted at this time. What could be pressed for was inclusion of the massacre in the school curriculum but that was likely to elicit the fiercest resistance as it would put the dominant elite in an unfavourable light. The inclusion of the demand can put the dominant elite in an untenable position with Untouchables and can be pursued for its public education in exposing Master Caste hypocrisy.

That none of the writers were tortured or killed suggests they may have had little to fear from the government. If that was the case the silence of the Bengali intellectual class becomes less excusable. They could not have it both ways and maintain credibility. Whether it was fear, ideology, or self-interest that kept the intellectuals quiet for 3 decades, their silence was deafening. Some of these academics had international reputations, others tenured foreign jobs, but all were “good Germans” (Spotlight, film) in keeping quiet. That it was foreigners who exposed the massacre in academia did not speak well of tri-caste intellectual “progressivism”, and showed their conduct to be disgraceful.

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the only leverage she had over my parents killing me would have been counterproductive, though I doubt the children would have realized this. Even then the mother of the children who attacked me could have been charged with assault under Canadian law. A phone call to the RCMP could have got her a visitation which for someone like that might have intimidated her to stop the campaign. The campaign against us had the support of one to my knowledge. When the government had father transferred the Natives petitioned to prevent it so it did not have community support. I don't know if any of the abuse came to affect my children. I put it behind me, and it rarely crossed my mind as I kept busy avoiding having to think of it. If I reflected on it at all I would probably have thought it toughened me up and the adversity made me a better person, but I never thought this at the time, and it is probably just wishful thinking for an end of life rationalization of things I had no control over. The experiences had to be beneficial or my life would be a tragedy. I had already far outlived the life expectancy of my contemporaries on the Reservation, perhaps because I never indulged in the vices that shortened their lives. However with a history of heart attacks I was unlikely to live as long as my parents. It was only in old age with no future that it came back to haunt me. (Comijs et. al. “Childhood abuse in late-life depression”, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, May 2013) I don't know if my childhood experience enabled me to research Marichjhapi. Certainly others did it too, but I don't know their life history enough to make a judgement in their cases. It was risky and perhaps ended my career prospects. Would I have done it without my childhood experience is impossible to say. However a plausible argument can be made that I was inadvertently trained to do it and without that experience I would not have attempted it. With the research not leading to justice, the only solution was to put the massacre in my Will so it might never be forgotten. If Masada could be kept alive for two millenia based on a single source there was no reason the Marichjhapi massacre could not be preserved based on multiple sources and with a global information technology that prevented even a government eradicating it from history.

In sending out versions of this article to prominent Indian public intellectuals with national and even international reputations, the almost complete lack of response suggests either hypocrisy or fear of retribution. Some had made their reputations in part through advocacy work, but their undoubted connections that might have facilitated publication were not offered. At the very least it suggests a lack of interest in Untouchable human rights that makes the ignorance of ongoing atrocities understandable in light of the silence among public opinion makers. Where every group can only get incensed over violence to their own, influence and money determine whether justice will be done.

The fact of the matter was that with very few exceptions in the dominant intellectual elite, all either acquiesce in or are apologists for the caste-class they come from. Those who acquiesce omit facts and perspectives that might challenge their views, thereby taking the discourse in deceptive directions. Caste is the most philosophically and practically exploitive, oppressive system devised by man existing on such a large scale to the present day, but you would never realize that from reading the literature intellectuals produce. That the majority of Indians live this way, was not apparent from media or academic representations of the nation. Marichjhapi was not an exception except in scale and top level political involvement, but the methods used are a fairly typical example of Indian culture and society, and its political system, and the hypocritical intellectuals in India and abroad who are complicit in it. With only an estimated tenth of human rights violations against Untouchables being recorded, Marichjhapi despite incomplete information, was probably the most documented and publicized atrocity. A couple of academic journals rejected this article for lack of documentation, but by that standard all human rights violations against Untouchables would be unpublishable in academia. With this excuse plenty of other research subjects would be unpublishable as well including most of antiquity.

### The Communist Downfall

In the end none of the publications on the massacre seem to have made the slightest difference when they were published. They only became salient when the opposition successfully mobilized against the government, and used Marichjhapi to discredit it with Untouchables. A documentary on the massacre was shown in the election campaign and on television, the articles circulated on the internet, and the massacre again came to public attention. With Communism on the defensive the literature on the massacre again found itself in the mainstream media. Most of it was derived from earlier work but significant details were now being added. There was very little by way of investigative journalism, though with the fall of the Communists the obstacles to it had been largely removed. There was surprisingly little reflection on why the people who now exposed it had kept quiet earlier when those politicians responsible could have been brought to justice. "Trusting the leftist leaders, who had once promised them rehabilitation in Bengal, that brave endeavour soon ended in frustration and death in the muddy fields of

Marichjhapi. After a long contrived silence that story is just coming to light with all its morbid details.”<sup>134</sup>

A couple of the largest circulation newspapers did report on meetings of survivors commemorating the event, but these were mainly anecdotal. The Hindustan Times interviewed a woman who had first lost three children in Dandakaranya and her last three at Marichjhapi.<sup>135</sup> Estimating the scale of the losses was beyond the resources of reporters or any other individuals. From the evidence it seems that a disproportionate number of babies and children died from starvation and disease while most of those shot dead were adults.

The resurfacing of the story appears to be a classic case of elite mobilization of the masses for its own ends. The Communists could only be removed through a democratic election for which the 23% Untouchable electorate would be virtually essential. How to mobilize the Untouchables without letting it get out of hand was difficult for the various elite parties that competed for their votes. The Communists had done this electoral mobilization through a judicious use of state patronage, terror and vote rigging which was common among all major parties before the Election Commission had closed some loopholes.<sup>136</sup>

The bedrock on which the Communists had remained in power for 34 years was the rural vote. At the beginning of their rule they had gained control of village councils which dispensed state development aid, jobs and other patronage to the villagers. This required many recipients to be effectively followers of the ruling party. As these councils were controlled by traditional ruling elites with some up and coming additions, the elites were able to supplement their own personal patronage resources with those of the state, creating a hegemony of elite control that extended from the villages all the way up to the Cabinet.<sup>137</sup> “While the political battle was largely won during the 1980s, the dominance of higher and middle castes remained, the latter becoming the actual social basis of Left Front parties. The Reservation policy of the early 1990s initiated a change which was, however, more formal than real throughout the decade.”<sup>138</sup> Dayabati Roy’s village level study during the declining years of the Communist rule detailed the continuance of

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<sup>134</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest, and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 274.

<sup>135</sup> Snigdhendru Bhattacharya, “Ghost of Marichjhapi returns to haunt”, *Hindustan Times*, April 25, 2011.

<sup>136</sup> To my knowledge there is no systematic book length examination of vote rigging in India, but anecdotal evidence certainly exists. A Calcutta prostitute showed me her finger where acid had been applied to remove the indelible ink mark used to prevent repeat voting. They were escorted to different booths to repeatedly vote for the ruling Congress party, with a box of chocolates as a reward and a beating by the brothel owners if they refused. The brothel votes were insufficient to win that election and the Emergency ended with the Left Front being elected to power a few weeks later. Thereafter Congress blamed the Left Front for vote rigging the elections.

<sup>137</sup> Dayabati Roy, *Rural Politics in India: Political Stratification and Governance in West Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Mario Prayer, “The Social Context of Politics in Rural West Bengal (1947-92)” in *Changing Identity of Rural India: A Socio-Historic Analysis*, Elisabetta Basile and Ishita Mukhopadhyay editors, Anthem Press, New Delhi, 2009, p.28.

traditional caste dominance with superficial Untouchable participation.<sup>139</sup><sup>140</sup> The largesse for ruling party hegemony could only be adequately funded through deficit financing, but the central government continued to fund what would have been a bankrupt state, as the support of the Communists was important to their own survival. The Communists knew they were too big to fail. Those voters who supported other parties, or even did not provide extortion money could be denied access to state funding, beaten up or worse. During their rule there were 55,408 political murders and about 72,600 political rapes that were protected from prosecution by the ruling party.<sup>141</sup> When you have murdered that many it is easy to make it one more (Once upon a Time in the West, film). Problem was there was no definitive line separating those who could be murdered and tortured from those whose status and connections made them untouchable. This ambiguity made the silence of the middle class understandable. There were more murders than those guillotined during the French Revolution, though it received far less media coverage. As it happened to poorer rural people it was beneath the radar of the state media and academia. It was not class war but turf war for ruling party hegemony against all rivals. The Communists were scrupulous in not killing capitalists, or public figures which could have created difficulties and adverse media coverage for themselves. At their worst they were a regime of Stalinist “reason backed up by murder” (The Godfather Part 111 film) operating as a protection racket that extorted money and interfered in people’s personal lives.<sup>142</sup> At best they provided state-elite patronage all the way down to the village level with an unknown percentage reaching the poor. While annually large sums of central government funding for Untouchables and Tribals were left undisbursed, the Communist Party Marxist misappropriated state funds for party purposes indicating where their real priorities lay. Under the present post-Communist government the allocation of funds for Scheduled Castes and Tribes continues to be spent elsewhere.

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<sup>139</sup> Dayabati Roy, *Rural Politics in India: Political Stratification and Governance in West Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>140</sup> Interviews, S.P. Mallik IAS, Land Reforms Commissioner, Panchayat Secretary, Government of West Bengal. S.P. Mallik was point man for rural reform during many of the initial years of the Left Front government when it was still thought it might do something. He said he put a lot of work into it but the political parties were unwilling to do their part, which could not be done by the administration. When the Left Front unexpectedly came to power they were thin on the ground in rural areas so traded quality for quantity and brought in relatively privileged rural classes. Rationalised at the theoretical level as a multi-class alliance it effectively gave the power to the relatively privileged who then used the state to advance their own interests. S.P. Mallik invited the author on a tour of the Sundarbans aboard the 24 Parganas District Magistrate’s launch where government officials discussed the massacre bringing it to the attention of the author. S.P. Mallik’s cousin Sukumar Mullick ICS said taking me along violated government regulations but he would know what he was doing. To this day I don’t know if I discovered the massacre by accident or if it was set up for me to discover it. Sukumar Mullick had said that because of his position the police would consult him first and he would assure them I had only an academic interest in my thesis topic. Adding on Marichjhapi though only a thesis chapter, put the research in a whole other problematic category. But once exposed to the facts of the massacre it would have been very difficult to turn away when there was something I could do about it, and the less the consequences were thought about the better.

<sup>141</sup> D. Bandyopadhyay, *Mainstream*, August 14, 2010

<sup>142</sup> Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 103.

That the Communists could be voted in resulted from the recruitment of rural elites in exchange for state patronage which reenforced the elite control over lower classes rather than any mass movement of autonomous subaltern participants. The vanguard party required submission to the dictates of at most a handful leaders who determined policy over the objections of party members who thought differently. Over time this policy became more explicitly business oriented, but in practice it had been that way right from the beginning, as the threat of capital flight precluded a confrontational industrial policy. Any popular movement outside party control as in Marichjhapi could be treated as a threat.

Though no massacre approached Marichjhapi in scale during their regime, it was a harbinger of how the Communists would conduct themselves. The eviction of agricultural labourers from land wanted by capitalists, though causing only 18 deaths served as reminders of what they had already done, and were still doing on a smaller scale. This eviction was found by the Supreme Court years later to have been illegal, but by then the Left Front was out of power. It has been argued that Marichjhapi did not get the attention it deserved at the time due to the prohibition on journalists visiting the island but more importantly on the state of the media. Only government radio and television existed, and in the pre-internet days only newspapers were relatively free to report on events in a highly illiterate society. The subsequent deaths and evictions at Singur and Nandigram occurred with widely utilized electronic media including private television channels, the internet, and social media circulating the information. With the terror and corruption already eroding its reputation the Communists were on the back foot. Though the fall of the Soviet bloc undoubtedly rattled the intelligentsia, its voter bloc remained intact, and domestic issues finally brought it down. Their support for the Tiananmen Square massacre and North Korea however was not likely to gain them the new generation of students who were brought up in a post-Stalinist world. How the Communists thought their methods would consolidate and expand their base over the long term in an electoral democracy is a mystery. Perhaps it was like the fable of the scorpion and the frog, and it was just their nature. In any event their loss in West Bengal left them in an existential crisis of their own making, a considerable decline from their days as India's leading opposition party.

### The Aftermath

In the election campaign of 2011 the Opposition put up posters saying “Remember Marichjhapi”. On coming to power that year the new government reneged on its promise to investigate the massacre. Even assistance to the 1,040 surviving Marichjhapi families then recorded as residing in West Bengal was not given.<sup>143</sup> An Untouchable Minister who advocated for an investigation was blocked by cabinet colleagues. “The complete silence about the incident in the landscapes of upper-caste memory for three decades raises serious questions about the constitution of civil society and the complete collective

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<sup>143</sup> Letters from Additional District Magistrate, North 24 Parganas to Deputy Secretary, Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal, Subject “Information on refugees once lived at Marichjhapi”, Ref No. C/390/L&LR and Ref No.1086, Dated 29-05-2011 and 15/07/2011.

privileging of the bhadrakok [tricast] memory over others. The interrogation of caste in the post-partition memory-building project did not find a place in non-Dalit [Untouchable] writing in those three decades – a massacre at the beginning of the Left regime went largely unnoticed, but towards the end of the same government’s rule, Marichjhapi came into circulation in public and largely privileged memory. Was it then appropriated by the bhadrakok to oust a government they didn’t want?”<sup>144</sup> With the government ousted the matter was dropped by the new regime. Though never officially explained, the reasons for this can be surmised by the circumstances of the new government. As the old government fell it took on defectors from the Communist Party Marxist, including one Marichjhapi operative who was named on Facebook. The police who had conducted the massacre being part of the new government now supported them, so they would have had to be investigated, as well as any gangsters and cadre who may have switched sides. This would have been less of a problem initially but as months turned to years and the government got re-elected in 2016 an investigation was no longer to be expected. A 2017 appeal was ignored. Subsequently the Chief Minister promised to erect a memorial without bothering to identify the victims or their murderers suggesting the commemoration had more to do with embarrassing the Communist opposition, rather than obtaining justice.<sup>145</sup> Commemorative condolences from the Chief Minister meant nothing considering no one was being brought to justice. A more profound reason for doing nothing can be deduced from the nature of the society. The tiny tricaste political elite were related to each other regardless of ideology and party affiliation, so justice would be detrimental to their own friends and relations.

Though the Untouchable caste was described in the Laws of Manu as the “lowest of mankind” and the Upanishads imply they are lower than animals<sup>146</sup>, they had acquired a greater asset base than most other Untouchable castes.<sup>147</sup> “Unlike in many other parts of India, the work of the Chandalas [Namasudras] of Bengal was not restricted to the

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<sup>144</sup> Jhuma Sen, “Reconstructing Marichjhapi” in *Partition the Long Shadow*, edited by Urvashi Butalia, Penguin Viking, 2015, p.123-4.

<sup>145</sup> “Mamata govt to build memorial at Marichjhapi where Bengali refugees were killed in Left rule”, *Newsmen*, July 26, 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Though I intended to leave the theological issue of whether Untouchables were human alone as it seemed so obvious, I later changed my mind when Prime Minister Modi stated at a Scientific Conference that ancient Indians successfully transplanted elephant heads on to people. That he wasn’t laughed out of office, and the writer who reported it in *Time Magazine* had his Overseas Indian Passport revoked, indicated the issue needed to be addressed. Prejudice and superstition meant the issue was not out of the realm of Indian popular thinking. As I wasn’t going to return to India revoking my Overseas Indian Passport would have no practical effect. Though I did not know enough scripture to enter a theological discussion, a scientific approach proving their humanity could be undertaken. The DNA analysis is definitive but not well understood by the public. However it shows that caste endogamy only started shortly before the Christian era about the time the Laws of Manu were written around 100 BC, and before then there was widespread interbreeding of castes and tribes. (Priya Moorjani et al, *Genetic Evidence for Recent Population Mixture in India*, *American Journal of Human Genetics*, September 5, 2013, Vol.93, Issue 3, pp.422-438.). Untouchables have been able to successfully reproduce with all other humans which is a definition of the human species. Furthermore not even the most advanced non-human could have written this book. QED.

<sup>147</sup> Nilanjana Chatterjee, *Midnight’s Unwanted Children*, PhD. dissertation, Brown University, 1992, p. 65.

disposal of corpses”<sup>148</sup> and became diversified into other menial occupations. During the colonial period they had cleared the jungle and acquired land which gave them more autonomy than was usual for Untouchables.<sup>149</sup> Their large population size and concentration enabled them to take state power in alliance with the Muslims, excluding the traditional tricaste elite from power during the late colonial period. “The alliance between the Muslims and the scheduled castes worked so well that from 1927 till independence the upper caste dominated Congress Party was effectively excluded from political power”<sup>150</sup> This history gave the Marichjhapi refugees the skills and attitude to defy the government and set up a successful development community without government assistance. However this history which was still in living memory, was a potential threat to the continued rule of the tricaste elite which had dominated both the government and opposition ever since independence. An alliance of Untouchables and Muslims if repeated would give them a bare majority and if the 8% Tribals were added a substantial one.<sup>151</sup> As the dominant Hindus were multiply divided along different party lines significantly less than a majority was required to form a government. History could repeat itself if these three groups could get their act together. Multiple divisions within the Untouchable community prevented this from happening but it became a topic of popular and academic discussion.<sup>152</sup>

The government had a powerful incentive not to investigate something that would ignite Untouchable caste passions that with the right seat adjustment with Muslims and Tribals could remove them from power, and result in the minorities using state power for themselves. It was something the government had to be very careful about least the 6% tricastes which had monopolized power for their own benefit in the 70 years since independence, were outvoted. Electoral politics in other states had already removed similar elites from office as power moved down the caste-class pyramid. West Bengal was an outlier in having been able to prevent this.

Electoral politics was of no small consequence. The tricastes were so aggrieved by their loss of power during the late colonial period that they opted for the partition of India even though it would mean the loss of sometimes substantial properties in the East.<sup>153</sup> Having regained power through partition it would not be easily relinquished. Even with partition

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<sup>148</sup> Sipra Mukherjee, “In Opposition and Allegiance to Hinduism: Exploring the Bengali Matua Hagiography of Harichand Thakur” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 25 April, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2018.1445400.

<sup>149</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2011, p.21-22.

<sup>150</sup> Abhijit Dasgupta, “In the Citadel of Bhadrakol Politicians: The Scheduled Castes of West Bengal,” *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, July-December, 2000, p.245.

<sup>151</sup> Dennis Walker, “Matua Untouchable Writers in West Bengal: Between Islam and India’s Changing Upper Caste-led System”, *Islamic Studies* 28:4, 1999, p.586.

<sup>152</sup> Praskanua Sinharay, “Dalit Question in the Upcoming West Bengal Assembly Elections”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 27, 2016. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay, “Caste and Politics in Bengal”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 3, 2012. Dwaipayan Sen, “An Absent-Minded Casteism?” in *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal* edited by Uday Chandra, Geir Heierstad, and Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Routledge, 2017, pp.118-120.

<sup>153</sup> Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

they were still only 6% of West Bengal, too small a political base to be elected using caste as a mobilizer. Secular ideologies such as Gandhianism and particularly Communism hide the class-caste basis of their rule under a cloak of secularism and lower class poverty alleviation. More primal identities had to be ignored if they were to rule. That they accumulated class privileges through that rule by corruption and nepotism, had to be hidden behind a rhetoric of proletarian and peasant empowerment. This view of their hidden class interests was espoused by a Secretary of the West Bengal government who was over zealous in implementing the Communist program but attributed their failure to “the middle class fetishism of the Communist Party led by the urban middle class elite. With all their pretensions of being “declassed” they remain to their salt and to their class interests.”<sup>154</sup> There was no end of intellectuals and academics who believed the rhetoric instead of examining the facts on the ground. While studying rhetoric and theory was easy the facts were hard to find. To use a phrase from the Soviet era these “useful idiots” had not learned from the western intellectual experience with the Soviet Union and other left totalitarian regimes, and failed to absorb the critical thinking required to find out what was really going on. At worst they put their ideology before their conscience, at best it was credulity and ignorance. By covering up human rights abuses, in the long run they did the Left no favours, and eventually it was uncovered making a Left comeback all the more difficult. After the collapse of West Bengal Communism they made no confessions or reappraisals as to how they came to get it all wrong, as everyone had by then quietly left the field for other subjects.

Given the reluctance of the state elite to investigate the massacre the only authority left to do so was the central government, which the state government could not have prevented from undertaking. Before the massacre Prime Minister Desai had sent a parliamentary delegation of three MPs to investigate the situation in Marichjhapi despite the objection of the state government.<sup>155</sup> It was to prove the only government report ever made though as it preceded the massacre it could not report on what was to happen. After the massacre the central government’s national Commission for Scheduled Castes and Tribes stated in its Annual Report that there had been no atrocities against Untouchables in West Bengal. However the Commission was well aware of the massacre as a reading of their internal Marichjhapi file proved. It even contained a partial list with names and ages of 236 people who had died of starvation, disease and police shootings before the massacre, as well as official correspondence on the matter and press clippings.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> D. Bandyopadhyay quoted in Dayabati Roy, *Rural Politics in India*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.191.

<sup>155</sup> Prasannbhai Mehta MP, Laxmi Narayan Pandey MP, and Mangaldev Visharay MP, “Report on Marichjhapi Affairs”, April 18 1979, mimeographed.

<sup>156</sup> Interviews, S.K. Mallick ICS, Member, national Commission for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While I was making notes from the Commission Marichjhapi file on my uncle’s office coffee table, business continued around me. I was brought into it when one man complained that the Commission was keeping him waiting, so uncle pointed to me saying he was keeping a foreigner waiting so he could be talked to which satisfied him. In those days I would get escorted by security in and out of the country with my uncle present in case I had security problems, until he was not in a position to provide it any longer. He left money in his will for my children’s education as I could not bring myself to tell him they were autistic. The only time I was ever asked if I had permission to do the research was at the Home Ministry in New Delhi. I

It is not known what percentage of the national political elite were aware of the massacre, but some certainly were. At a graduate seminar in Oxford, Salman Khurshid, whose father was a central government Minister commented on my presentation about the massacre. He later became Law Minister and External Affairs Minister in a Congress government allied to the Communists. The Gandhian Congress Party and the Stalinist Communist Party formed an electoral alliance in an unsuccessful attempt to regain power in the 2016 elections. The grandson of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and MP of the ruling BJP, a successor to Prime Minister Desai's Janata Party coalition government, Varun Gandhi, wrote "After decades of penury, the refugees left for Marichjhapi Island in the Sunderbans. The State government responded with forcible eviction, economically blockading them and conducting police firing on a random basis."<sup>157</sup> Both these dominant ruling parties, though not directly implicated in the massacre certainly did nothing to

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lied confidently and no further questions were asked, perhaps because I was with an IPS officer. I did not apply as the topic would not likely have been approved. I would have had to pull strings to get approval or fake a topic. I just decided to wing it, and hope for the best. I had learned from hard experience to follow the advice of Kim Philby, son of an ICS officer who went native by converting to Islam, who told the Stasi never to confess to anything which must have been useful advice when the Berlin Wall came down. When I was in primary school, in what was arguably my greatest contribution to humanity, I had organized a petition against one of the teachers for giving too much homework and confessed to it, which I soon regretted. As I knew the corporal punishment would likely far exceed any possible benefit to me, the petition was crazy, but I did it anyway. I still don't know why I didn't do the sensible thing and let fear get the better of me. The petition was so pivotal to me I wrote a whole chapter on it in my draft memoir, however the high point came when Principal "Skinhead" called an assembly to denounce it is a speech that was typical of every tyrant who said he was in the right because he said so, and even at that age I knew was nonsense. That everyone had assembled because of me gave an incredible high which the fear and dread of what would happen when the speech ended only enhanced. Confession also plays a major role in Indian justice. When I was on tour in Assam with S.K. Mallick examining money losing public enterprises of which there were many, a police officer came in late for a meeting. He excused himself saying that he had been pursuing robbers and they had now confessed to their crime. My uncle showed no interest in the confession but wanted to know if the goods had been retrieved. When I later asked my uncle why the confession did not seem sufficient, he said it would have been tortured out of them. That a top government official would take torture for granted and admit to its routine practice shocked me. The District Magistrate tried to mollify my obvious concern by saying the confession would have to be confirmed by the defence at trial. The problem was it was obviously routine before the trial, so why could it not be used again afterwards if the criminal did not uphold the confession in court. My uncle with my position in mind assured me foreigners were not tortured if they overstayed their visas. That government officials seemed the least bit bothered by the practice was even more disturbing. The problem with torture was its unreliability, which may be part of the reason it was abolished in the West. I thought of it as a medieval practice that had long ago been abolished in civilized countries, with the exception of children who have since been included in the prohibition. For a first time visitor India seemed extraordinarily violent. My uncle had been beaten up and once nearly assassinated for being Bengali. I found out about our Untouchable ancestry the first day of my first visit to India when my cousin mentioned it thinking I knew already. My father had told my mother we were of a warrior caste. After father found out I knew the truth, he admitted that once when he was a child he had to pick up Dr. Ambedkar from the train station and take him home, as his father had other commitments. He admitted to being impressed by Dr. Ambedkar, but for obvious reasons chose to keep his caste secret from his own family. I did the same with my children, which is easy to do when you live abroad and avoid Indians, but impossible in rural India where children have to be told.

<sup>157</sup> Feroze Varun Gandhi, "The State of the Stateless", The Hindu, November 25, 2016.

investigate it. Congress had created the refugee diaspora and the BJP precursor, the Jana Sangh Janata government gave the green light for the eviction. This was typical as no ruling party in India has ever attempted rural desegregation of Untouchables, making them, after the ending of Apartheid, the last segregated population in the world. It would have been political suicide to attempt desegregation which indicates the unique true nature of India. Finding exposure of this Indian exceptionalism in the literature would be challenging as I have hardly ever come across it. The omission means a balanced and realistic portrayal of the country is not being made.

This attitude went beyond the coverup by governments and ruling parties. To gauge public opinion amongst the English speaking middle and upper class readership of the Indian Express, I put in a comment about the massacre to measure the likes and dislikes on the internet. “Just because the Maoists do it does not absolve the government of human rights abuses. Take for instance just one massacre at Marichjhapi. Nothing to do with violent resistance, but it was done to unarmed refugees. It implicated all major ruling parties in the act itself or its subsequent cover-up. The anti-Sikh massacre got 9 government inquiries but the Dalit refugees have yet to get a single government investigation despite the film, articles and books that have been written about it.”<sup>158</sup> The dislikes of this comment outnumbered likes by 3 to 1. Considering that an investigation would be de rigueur in an advanced democracy<sup>159</sup>, this view reveals the attitudes of this

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<sup>158</sup> R.K. Vij, “Maoists’ use of IEDs reveals true nature of their projects”, Indian Express, May 18, 2016. The Sikhs were only about a 9th of the Untouchable population but had far more clout. They not only got multiple investigations but a body count and compensation. However even they were unable to defend themselves when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated. The mobs in Delhi got residence records of Sikhs in the better neighbourhoods, and went on the rampage. My relatives in New Delhi hide the neighbouring Sikh family, and when the mob arrived S.K. Mallick ICS and his son in law confronted the mob and convinced them their record was outdated and they now owned the property. It was the only Sikh property in the neighbourhood that was not pillaged. The Sikh neighbour was a top government bureaucrat and Freemason, but dozens of phone calls got him no help. The neighbours were unhappy because they felt it endangered themselves. The boys were dressed up as girls. My uncle used his military contacts to get them to the safety of air force base. Oddly enough a Congress MP accused of inciting a mob, was a very close friend of one of my relatives. He had been spotted by reporters in the mob that killed Sikhs but claimed to the Nanavati Commission that he was trying to stop the mob violence. For lack of evidence, and quite possibly a less than thorough investigation, he was let off for lack of proof. In any case it did not hurt his political career as he later became a national Minister and a State Chief Minister. Another relative who tried unsuccessfully to stop the killing of a Sikh in their train compartment ended up in therapy.

<sup>159</sup> By contrast in advanced democracies abuses often get investigated and punished eventually. For example in Canada the “cultural genocide” employed to civilize the Natives through physical and sexual abuse of aboriginal [tribal] children at government funded Church run Indian Residential Schools, which I attended, resulted in convictions, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an apology by the Prime Minister in Parliament, compensation, and inclusion in the current school curriculum. A schoolmate got the Order of Canada for exposing the abuse (Garnetsjourney.com). Though I worked for Native organizations, I never got around to writing about it. The statistics and the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) index indicate most students will have passed away prematurely from suicide, drug and alcohol addictions funded in part by government compensation and welfare payments in a Reservation with up to 70% unemployment. I had thought of writing a book about the Reservation with a working title of “Paradise Destroyed” but I had too much baggage, and later family responsibilities that prevented it. The ACE indicated a 20 year life reduction of upper middle class children to 60 years, and it would be even lower for Reservation children. While governments can take remedial action to compensate for past injustices it can’t

class and the chasm that must be crossed if caste reconciliation is ever to be achieved. That this influential class was hostile reflects the divinely ordained inequality inherent in the “peculiar institution” of Hinduism that pervades all the major religions in India. It is not written about this way because it insults India’s self image, but this culture is so pervasive that it affects all aspects of human development. It is a reason why it lags behind China and now even Bangladesh by various measures of poverty alleviation, despite its much vaunted economic growth.<sup>160</sup>

With the decline of the Communists a considerable literature has emerged dealing with the massacre. A documentary film by Tushar Bhattacharya<sup>161</sup> was made and a well known writer Amitav Ghosh<sup>162</sup> wrote a novel about it. However most remained available only in Bengali. Three historical books remain untranslated as are the Bengali novels. The

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micromanage all the repercussions. Nevertheless the government did what it could, with some notable exceptions. Marichjhapi got none of this type of remedial action though it was well within the government’s means to do so. When I attended the local Indian Residential School, if you left its compound which I did without getting caught, the punishment was being “bent over a chair and whipped on the bare bum. The other boys were forced to watch. During these strappings and whippings, the boys’ supervisor would yell profanities and make derogatory remarks about our racial background. His remarks were always about our elders and our parents being savages and about them being ignorant.”( Florence Kaefer and Edward Gamblin, *Back to the Red Road*, Caitlin Press, 2014 p.58). For all the progress that has been made it was very uneven. Though schools have become benign institutions and the abuses of Residential School are now part of the high school curriculum, a poll found 60% of Canadians did not want to learn about it. I recently talked to a parent at a children’s mental health clinic who wanted the Indians treated like the extinct Beothuks. When I pointed that was genocide he agreed. I kept quiet after that because I did not know how or if I should debate a genocide advocate. There was a rumour in town that a death squad funded by local businesses was murdering homeless Natives, which I didn’t believe entirely, but that it was circulating was significant for race relations. In the big picture individual actions by powerless people rarely make a difference. The School sexual abuse was one where it could have. The abused child who as an adult exposed his abuser and got him convicted, and got the Order of Canada for it, remembered my father and I, though I could not remember him which was understandable as my family were an anomaly in the community. For children to approach my father who was Zone Director of Indian Health Services and Coroner, would have been too much to expect and father’s interaction with children given his busy schedule would only have been on the operating table. But they could have told me, and I could have passed it on, and perhaps ended a practice while it was still happening. By the time it was exposed the Residential Schools were closed in favour of the one or two room local community schools which I also attended and had competed in providing the worst education in the country. By then the now adult victims had difficulty getting a full measure of justice. In my childhood there was no one we could easily talk to so you had to solve your problems in your own head. The next time I could have done something substantive was with the Marichjhapi massacre which I did by publicizing it. However I did not fully realize the lack of empathy for Untouchables by the Indian government and society, and it achieved nothing. Had I not done it, others would have done it later. When it came out, it eventually helped to bring down the government but it was not of my doing, though the few had become the many it was not the major cause of the Communist downfall.

<sup>160</sup> Amartya Sen, “Why Is the Penalty of Inequality so High in India?”, Lecture, Brown University, Published September 20, 2013, Youtube.

<sup>161</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya “Marichjhapi 1978-79: Tortured Humanity”, Vimeo, Youtube www. In 2021 a documentary of eyewitness interviews with survivors from Marichjhapi was posted on Vimeo. The director, Soumya Sankar Bose has also published a photography book “Where the Birds Never Sing” with the same title as the film <https://vimeo.com/517033560>.

<sup>162</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2004.

historical books were by unilingual Bengali activists who put the “professionals” and their mostly useless research to shame, while the English speaking Bengali intellectuals who could have published for a national and international audience kept quiet, with the sole exception of Amitav Ghosh. This despite the academics having far greater protection from torture or assassination than most of the activists. The massacre did not catch the imagination of the national public let alone an international one. The occasional academic and newspaper articles had no tangible result. However, its reemergence in the campaign to defeat the Communists provided enough information to leave the politically committed deniers isolated. Though without an authoritative government investigation, debate was bound to continue over the details, no one could seriously deny it happened and maintain their credibility.

The massacre was the result ultimately of the tri-castes attempting to maintain political control of the state. The problem was created by the then ruling Congress Party exiling the Untouchable refugees to non Bengali states, where they would not be a political threat. The Communists ultimately did the same thing in a policy reversal, but with even more fatal results. It proved the hollowness of the Communist propaganda about empowering the poor. As possessors of “the truth” they could remove all threats to their power real or imagined, and maintain power for themselves in a tiny tri-caste elite that felt entitled to rule as their ancestors had done through religious indoctrination, exploitation and oppression since the beginning of the caste system thousands of years before. “India’s traditional caste system was the most closed society known”<sup>163</sup> and the descendants of the elite castes continued to reap the benefits of their inheritance.

Time was however not on the side of the tri-caste elite. If “demography is destiny” in electoral politics, the 6% could not rule indefinitely. The Untouchable population of West Bengal increased to nearly a quarter of the population today. The Muslims had a similar increase and are now slightly larger giving the two historical political allies a slight majority. These minorities along with the Scheduled Tribes now have a substantial majority, and could topple any government if they got their seat adjustments in order. As the former political strategist for the ruling Trinamul Congress in the 2021 election admitted, “Both the Left and the Trinamul have broadly been upper-caste-led parties and did not pay specific, or enough, attention to other groups that make up a significant vote bank. The Namasudras, the Rajbanshis, the Bagdis, the Bauris, there are many such groups.”<sup>164</sup> This is why the government would not want to raise caste feelings by investigating Marichjhapi. In other states in India both dominant and subordinate populations have been mobilized on caste lines for political advantage, but the dominant castes in West Bengal are too small to be politically relevant as an electoral base. They may be ruling on borrowed time. With Gandhianism and Communism largely discredited with the electorate, there is no all encompassing ideological justification for their rule, which has become more manipulative than transcendent. Only the multiple divisions within and between the minorities enabled them to stay in power. The tri-caste

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<sup>163</sup> Metta Spencer, “Foundations of Modern Sociology”, Prentice-Hall, 1981, p.269.

<sup>164</sup> Prashant Kishor, “the Bengal election is critical to whether India will become a one-nation one-party state”, The Telegraph, Calcutta, May 7, 2021.

intelligentsia with very few individual exceptions, covered up the abuses, preferring to adhere to their class and caste rather than promote human rights. The Untouchables and human rights activists who researched and publicized the massacre were used by the anti-Communist elite, who appropriated the material for their own political purposes to remove the Communists from power and dropped the issue when this was achieved. The Communists ended up following the same policy as their Congress predecessors in evicting the Untouchable refugees, though the Communists, perhaps due to their self-avowed Stalinism were even more ruthless about it. Marichjhapi was a continuation of the Congress policy by the Communists, both of whom coming from the same background, wished to keep autonomous Untouchable empowerment at bay.

The policies of the Congress and CPM did have some not so subtle differences. “In 1961 when Dr. Roy [West Bengal Congress Chief Minister] ordered the despatch of the camp refugees to Dandakaranya and when 10,000 of them refused to move he did not use force to transport them there although he suspended the payment of cash and dry doles and withdrew the amenities enjoyed by the camp refugees. He did not also force them out of the camps. The refugees continued to live at the ex-camp sites and to fend for themselves without any government help and finally got themselves integrated into the economy of the region. But the Marxist Government had no compunction in driving out precisely those refugees who, according to their own statistical evaluation of the amount of surplus land available in West Bengal, could have been absorbed in West Bengal.”<sup>165</sup>

While the Congress almost certainly killed more refugees through neglect and starvation than the CPM did at Marichjhapi, Congress was not prepared to evict them through a large scale massacre. Perhaps it was the difference between a Gandhian and Stalinist approach. Here is where the personalities of the key decisionmakers may have come into play. The Left Front was sharply divided, but still acquiesced in the CPM leaders decision. Dr. Roy was prepared to let it go, Jyoti Basu was not, despite opposition within his own party. “I only told you to scare them. ‘People scare better when they are dying.’ Then can you tell me what good was your stupid massacre?” (Once upon a time in the West, film). When scaring them did not work, they were massacred which did work. None of the CPM leaders responsible expressed any regrets, or gave it a second thought apparently. But the consequences would quite possibly outlast them.

Initially the CPM boasted of their success in evicting the refugees, but as reports of a massacre trickled through from survivors, the approach changed to ignoring the event. Assuming three quarters of the refugees died, that still left a lot of survivors. A better strategy might have been to kill every last refugee while they had them surrounded on the island so there was no one left to tell tales. However the neighbouring village heard the screaming, there were perpetrators who might talk, and a total disappearance given the numbers known to be on the island would have been hard to explain. By the time the survivors had scattered across several states tracking them down and killing them would have been difficult in areas beyond CPM jurisdiction. In a normal democracy killing

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<sup>165</sup> Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*. Kalyani, West Bengal, Lumiere Books, 1990, p.434.

every last eyewitness would have been essential to avoid investigation and justice, but in India everyone would have known that this was unnecessary and counterproductive, as no one that mattered would listen to the survivors, given who they were, so the perpetrators need not fear punishment. The CPM might have taken the high ground since it was their only totally successful programme, and undertaken tours of the island to prove the success of their rewilding program for environmentalists. Instead of maintaining a decade prison sentence for anyone who visited, ecotourists could have been shown the island. An internet search on Marichjhapi just reveals information on the massacre with no mention of a rewilding programme. The Left Front didn't bother to put up an account of their success in rewilding which only required nature to take its course, so it could hardly fail. The site was naturally shrub land with short trees and not mangrove or tall forest so would be visually unappealing to tourists. Given the association of Marichjhapi as a massacre site, even an attempt at rehabilitation on the internet would be overwhelmed by massacre history and draw attention to it. The Communists chose to just keep quiet and did not normally even give interviews on the subject.

The Left Front programmes were more or less on par with other states, so there was nothing exceptional they could boast about that was factually verifiable. The only exceptional programme was Marichjhapi as they killed more people than any other state government had done, but this was not something they could promote. Nevertheless this made it the programme most likely to be remembered long after their mediocre performance in other fields was forgotten. Human rights, or rather the lack of it, was the hallmark of Communists regimes, so it was hardly surprising a Stalinist party would undertake a massacre. What was more surprising was the lack of uproar about it, and that had a lot to do with the subaltern condition of the Untouchable victims.

The failures of the Left Front and ruling Trinamul Congress to prosecute the massacre perpetrators, gave the BJP an opening to solicit amongst the Untouchables, where they now have majority support.<sup>166</sup> Other issues such as the right of refugees to citizenship also may have played a part, but the fact that the Namasudra vote was similar to non-refugee Untouchable castes means the trend was universal among Untouchables. With the minorities unable to organize as a group for themselves, but reliant on parties that don't have their interests as paramount, indicates a weakness in their own organizational abilities. The BJP by following an inclusive strategy of accepting Untouchable and Tribal folk idols and traditions as part of the greater Hindu pantheon, enabled it to appeal to a wider electoral base than its caste/class interests would suggest was possible. Thanks in

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<sup>166</sup> Centre for Studies in Developing Societies, 2021, "OBCs, Adivasis and Rajbanshi Dalits moved significantly away from the BJP compared to 2019". Despite the title there were huge increases in BJP support from Dalits compared to 2016. Polls indicate Namasudra support for the BJP increased from 10% in 2016 to 58% in 2021, while for the slightly larger Untouchable Caste of non-refugee Rajbanshis it went up from 9 to 59%. The Untouchables had shifted allegiance from secular parties to a Hindu fundamentalist one. This was major change just in the time it took me to research and write this book. Clearly my views were out of step with the community, but no political allegiance can be counted to last forever as the Left Front found out, and Communists in general found out after a lifetime in power.

large part to the scapegoating of Muslims who formed the largest electoral bloc they were kept from power in the 2021 West Bengal elections. However communal animosity perpetuated by the BJP now makes an electoral alliance between the Muslims and Untouchables unlikely though they are the majority, and could take state power themselves if that alliance could be achieved.

### Sharing the Blame

Over the years shorter variations of this article and book were sent to all the western academic journals likely to deal with the subject, and some others as well, without eliciting a single positive review. One reviewer for *Past and Present* stated there were ways of presenting the massacre but the draft article in which the personal was omitted, was not one of them, though the way to present it was not indicated, thereby being unhelpful.<sup>167</sup> While there may have been better ways of presenting it, the purpose was to expose the massacre, and whatever the reasons for rejection, the effect was to prevent this, and therefore make the reviewers complicit in rape and mass murder. Some journals could argue that they didn't deal with human rights, but that was not the case with Indian journals where it was very much within their coverage. Most notable was the *Economic and Political Weekly* which had published an article by Annu Jalais on the Marichjhapi massacre. When Professor Gopal Guru was appointed its Editor, making him the first Untouchable Editor of a major Indian publication, I thought I might now have a chance, but three submissions received no acknowledgement. After being forewarned I then sent out appeals to prominent Untouchable intellectuals and their supporters to see if he could be influenced into accepting the submission, but to no avail. I pointed out to him that he had to take a position on Untouchable human rights which by failing to acknowledge my submission he was doing. He had made his career in part through the study of Untouchable humiliation, and now it was his turn.<sup>168</sup> He had to choose between being a token Untouchable appointed to give the appearance of media diversity or someone who was prepared to take a stand on Untouchable human rights. Pointing out that he had to find the courage of the previous Editor who published on Marichjhapi did not move him to act. He had chosen the side he was on. The elite intellectuals who selected him as an Untouchable almost certainly knew what they were doing when they provided the Untouchable community with their very own Clarence Thomas figure.

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<sup>167</sup> How atrocities should be presented is a problem in itself. Proving the existence of them presents marginalized people with issues of credibility, media access, and fitting them in world views elites can appreciate. Whether outrage should be expressed and in which forums and to what degree has no definitive answer for all venues. The Untouchable Bengal Information Minister, Pulin Behari Mullick, stated in the Bengal Legislative Assembly "We know what sort of treatment we are receiving in our daily life. We know the treatment that we receive from Caste Hindus; we know that and that has been our experience and the sum total of our experience for generations together. It is no use talking of that, for one is apt to lose one's temper when one thinks of the sum total of grievances and difficulties and the insults and assaults committed upon us - the Scheduled Caste. Therefore, I refrain from going into the matter lest I should be apt to lose my temper." Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, August 16, 1938. For the context of this debate see Dwaipayan Sen "Representation, Education and Agrarian Reform: Jogendranath Mandal and the Nature of Scheduled Caste Politics", *Modern Asian Studies*. January 2014, p.19.

<sup>168</sup> Gopal Guru, editor, *Humiliation*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Even niche Untouchable publications were no more forthcoming. Pramod Ranjan of Forward Press refused to publish it. Like everyone seeking Untouchable support from left to right they embraced Dr. Ambedkar, but as a friend of my family it is hard to imagine Ambedkar would have opposed its publication given his beliefs and writings.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps the police ransacking of the Forward Press office and death threats against its Hindi editor from Hindu fundamentalists had influenced them not to publish.<sup>170</sup> Manohar Biswas editor of the Calcutta based Dalit Mirror whom I talked to did not respond to my article or three emails despite being a refugee from the same caste and district as our family. As the Marichjhapi documentary filmmaker, Tushar Bhattacharya, puts it “Dalit leaders in West Bengal are mostly intellectuals! Most of them live a luxurious life with the help that the government provides to the Dalit class. They generally start thinking about Dalits after their retirement. The meeting committee conducts seminars on Marichjhapi while many refugees from Marichjhapi are living in dilapidated huts on the sides of the railway lines just a few minutes away from the houses of these leaders. In truth, no one really bothers about them. It is really not that difficult to understand that these so-called leaders are able to gain prominence with the help of these very wretched people on whom they turn a blind eye.”<sup>171</sup> The lack of solidarity is reflected at the national level as well. A national Untouchable website noted that when Sardar Patel saw to it that Ambedkar was not elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bombay Presidency, the Namasudras got him elected from Bengal. “The Namasudra problem also poses a big question for the Dalits and (Dalit movement ) living in other parts of the country about whether they are willing to fight for the rights of their fellow community people who, unfortunately, paid the ultimate price for sending Babasaheb Ambedkar to the Constituent Assembly.”<sup>172</sup> The fact of the matter is that today the lack of collective action means that the Untouchables are unable to bring their numbers to bear in the

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<sup>169</sup> These days everyone seems to invoke Dr. Ambedkar, as drafter of the Indian Constitution, but in his lifetime his role was not without controversy. When Gandhi went on a “a fast to the death” to prevent Untouchable emancipation which the British were willing to concede, Ambedkar buckled to his demand and compromised on the Poona Pact effectively making them politically dependant on the dominant castes to this day, as the Untouchables had to be elected by the dominant majority. Our family and other Namasudra leaders opposed the concession realizing its consequences, but Ambedkar fearing genocide capitulated. (Sarbani Bandyopadhyay, DalitCameraAmbedkar, Youtube Part I and 11). The Untouchable politicians in dominant parties are living examples of that legacy, but compliant Untouchables as a persecuted minority can be found in every occupation, including the media and academia. M.K. Gandhi was the greatest enemy the Untouchables ever had, but many have been indoctrinated into thinking the opposite. The incident is well known amongst India hands but few have dared to suggest that in effect Gandhi was blackmailing Ambedkar with the threat of genocide. Meghnad Desai, “Modi’s support was across caste Hindus and Dalits, but not Muslims” Indian Express, July 14, 2019. Joseph Lelyveld, Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2011 p.230. Oddly enough government offices hang both portraits, while following neither.

<sup>170</sup> Pramod Ranjan, “Hindi Editor of Forward Press, Receives Death Threats”, Countercurrents.org, May 31, 2018.

<sup>171</sup> Tushar Bhattacharya, Aprakashito Marichjhapi, Calcutta. English draft translation, p.16.

<sup>172</sup> Anoop Kumar, Ajay Hela and Nilesh Kumar, Marichjhapi and the Revenge of Bengali Bhadrakok, Round Table India, July 20, 2012.

electoral process, and forfeit their potential power to parties that do not have their interests in mind.

This means that exposing the Marichjhapi massacre was effectively pursued by a handful of activists in isolation from a mass movement. My original article along with the one by Annu Jalais was published in a Tamil Untouchable periodical and both were reproduced in a Bengali book on Marichjhapi. When rights activists were arrested on trumped up charges of being “urban Maoists”, there was media criticism of the harassment, but though the charges would almost certainly not stand up in court it was a favourite government tactic to silence dissent.<sup>173</sup> Even before this the failed attempts to publish this article in India indicated the degree to which self censorship had taken its toll. A Professor I corresponded with had his home raided and charges filed by police so the draft article can be assumed to have come into their possession<sup>174</sup>. That “one of the most important writers and intellectuals of his generation”<sup>175</sup>, an IIT Professor, Ex Corporate CEO, and husband of Dr. Ambedkar’s granddaughter, could be charged, indicated that class and lineage no longer provided protection, and all government critics were fair game for politically motivated prosecution.<sup>176</sup> That may have been the intention and the muted reaction indicated the use of baseless prosecutions against political opponents had become an accepted norm in Indian politics. It had previously been commonly used against rival politicians but had now spread to the intellectuals and there was no one with enough clout to effectively defend them outside the judiciary, which recent Supreme Court cases suggest is not willing to stand up to the government. “The cowardly lack of outrage amongst India’s legal luminaries and elites”<sup>177</sup> against egregious court rulings meant there was no more avenues for effective resistance outside the streets and ballot machines. The Supreme Court refused bail though it is well known that those awaiting trial in jail often spent longer there than the maximum sentence if they were found guilty. Scholars I had previously communicated with stopped responding. I found myself self censoring communications with India or cutting it off entirely depending on the persons being corresponded with in case they became associated with the “foreign hand”. “It is difficult to have a dialogue, never mind a difficult one, when so many of Dalit and progressive scholars inside India are harassed and jailed, and foreign scholars have to be mindful of their future visas into India”.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Michael Safi, “Protests in India as rights activists placed under house arrest”, The Guardian, August 29, 2018. Niha Masih and Joanna Slater, “They were accused of plotting to overthrow the Modi government. The evidence was planted, a new report says”, The Washington Post, February 11, 2021.

<sup>174</sup> Anand Teltumbde “I need your support”, January 15, 2019. Academia.edu. Apoorvanand, “Police Action Against Anand Teltumbde is further proof of Modi Govt’s Arrogance” The Wire, January 22, 2019.

<sup>175</sup> Pavan Dahat, “Pune Court Rejects Anand Teltumbde’s Bail Application” HuffingtonPost.In, February 1, 2019.

<sup>176</sup> Priyamvada Gopal and Salil Tripathi, “Why is India targeting writers during the coronavirus pandemic? The Guardian, April 16, 2020.

<sup>177</sup> Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “Covid lockdown is seen as a cover for Jammu and Kashmir”, Indian Express, May 16, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> Amarjit Singh, Discussion comments on Owen M. Lynch Review Article “Untouchables in India’s Civil/Uncivil Democracy” Ethnos, Vol. 66:2, 2001. June 9, 2021.

This article had become untouchable even for Untouchable publishers, who through self-censorship, could not be assumed to represent the views of their community. The writer, Arundhati Roy, who had taken up controversial issues including Untouchability in the past, did not respond to my emails. Likewise with Ramachandra Guha. He had earlier responded to a request from my cousin to write the forward to his novel to which Guha replied that he did not read novels. He did not have that excuse this time, so that may be why he did not respond at all. Presumably there are personal calculations on what causes to pick up, but that Marichjhapi did not elicit a single “celebrity” endorsement and the work was left to those only known in their own circle, is significant. More trivial issues even on Untouchability may be taken up but the biggest government massacre is not to be exposed. All celebrities have to pick and chose the causes they take up so these issues say a lot about themselves. Both Roy and Guha took up Untouchability, but their support was for the issues in it that concerned them. As long as the issue promoted themselves and their views, Untouchables would be supported, but once this did not match their agenda, it was dropped. Marichjhapi was precisely the issue that must be ignored as it exposed the hypocrisy of the intellectual elite. Untouchables need to be made aware of this least they fall into the same illusions that brought them to Marichjhapi in the first place. All politicians and their intellectual supporters use Untouchables for there own personal agendas, but Untouchables are particularly vulnerable to being misled by these people, and need to be warned about them. Those Indians with international reputations have some explaining to do. That the massacre did not have a Zola who took up the Dreyfus case is significant, and even if there had been the society would not have cared enough to bother. Intellectuals, public or otherwise made no difference to policy, and certainly not on human rights. The policies were determined by politicians with genuine or bogus criminal charges against them, and by others who should have been charged.

There seemed to be a narrowing of what was publishable both in the West and India. When articles on the destruction of a mosque by a local government in the BJP ruled Uttar Pradesh appeared in the Guardian no such coverage appeared in the Indian press that I could find.<sup>179</sup> When I asked an Indian who followed the Indian media more closely than I did, if it had been covered they replied “I don’t think so. Guardian updates us on this and that in India.” I had found my uncles knew more of what was happening than appeared in the press, though whether it was because of their inside knowledge, or a reluctance of the press to cover it is less certain.<sup>180</sup> In the West it was more likely due to an increased interest in not giving offence to minority students, colleagues and nationalities, while in India legal and extra-judicial threats were increasingly used to

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<sup>179</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “Officials take police action against leaders of bulldozed mosque in India”, The Guardian, May 21, 2021.

<sup>180</sup> This is hardly unique to India. When I lived in Ottawa I found what was fairly widely known in government circles never appeared in the supposedly free press. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, father of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, was widely known in Ottawa to be actively bisexual but it never appeared in the Canadian press, in his ex-wife’s memoir, or from the Opposition, however a cousin in India knew this from reading the Indian press. What was known internationally apparently wasn’t known by most Canadians including myself.

intimidate critics. The result is a distortion of Indian realities that can't make it into print. The right wing Hindu fundamentalist government was making the same mistakes regarding the treatment of Untouchables that the Communists had made. In attempting to achieve party hegemony they attacked Untouchables between elections on the assumption that all would be forgiven and forgotten on election day. This only accumulated grievances and made their reelection more difficult, whatever the immediate advantages of repression may have seemed at the time. The trend towards turning India into "a Hindu version of Pakistan" should be alarming for the minorities.<sup>181</sup>

With virtually no acknowledgement of receiving the draft article, let alone commenting on it, public intellectuals and academics seemed to have chosen discretion over valour. I was too far from the scene to assess the risks of responding to the draft, as this would vary over time and between states, as well as with the status of the individual intellectuals. The overall trend however was unmistakably in the direction of self-censorship, both in India and abroad. It raised the question of whom I could safely initiate communications with without endangering them or at least their careers. The implications for the "world's largest democracy" are apparent. While Untouchables were understandably afraid to publish the article, mainstream Indian, and especially foreign periodicals had far less to worry about. That so many knuckled under to perceived threats indicated the vulnerability to free expression in the media that is a hallmark of democracy. The editors proved surprisingly craven and apparently took their positions as jobs rather than a calling, conforming to dominant conventions rather than being provocative.<sup>182</sup>

These Editors were not the only ones covering up mass murder; virtually all of the intellectuals did. The foreign ones arguably had little comprehension of India, and therefore could feel no compassion for the victims. Considering the problem of comprehending minorities in their own countries, understanding the Untouchable plight in a universe too foreign to be appreciated makes sense. They may have felt themselves to be good persons but whether they realized they were covering up mass murder is unclear. That the editors all held the positions of gatekeepers for their universities, associations, and memberships indicates that the people they answered to felt the same way. Their covering up of atrocities reflected badly not only on themselves but on the

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<sup>181</sup> Tavleen Singh, "The idea that there is a Muslim conspiracy to prey on Hindu girls and convert them to Islam is ludicrous", Indian Express, December 20, 2020.

<sup>182</sup> It was not practical for me to call out every Editor and Board over their record in exposing human rights abuses, but in the case of the Association for Asian Studies, as the premier scholarly Asian studies group in America, an exception was made. As the Editor of the Journal of Asian Studies, Vinayak Chaturvedi, had stated an intellectual affinity for the Subaltern Studies group some of whose Bengali members had Party and family ties with those responsible for the massacre and coverup, I requested that he be recused from considering the article. The Board refused and when the article was submitted he rejected it without sending it for external review, which could have provided him with some cover. A complaint about this was rejected by the President of the Association, Thomas Rawski, and no response was received from the other Board members. Past Presidents were sent the correspondence but none intervened. This was then communicated to many Untouchable intellectuals and their supporters in case they had dealings with the scholarly community.

universities and associations in which they held prominent places as journal editors. The western intellectuals were not open to the exposure of human rights violations that did not fall within their prejudices. All specialist rejections were essentially rationalizations for obstructing justice. That Indian studies academics are so inimical to the exposure of human rights abuses is indicative of the state of Indian studies abroad. The diversity policies of western universities have perpetuated an Indian diaspora view that is even less critical of India than found among people having to live out their lives in Indian conditions without the money the diaspora has to overcome many obstacles. This idealization of India perpetuates myths that the dominant Indian elite have promoted for thousands of years, with self-serving updates. Exposure to the West and its Enlightenment by the diaspora has not led to a fundamental reconsideration of their country of origin, but rather its idealization. The journals' obstruction of justice for Untouchable victims, even when presented with restrained criticism, shows their limitations as sources of knowledge. The universal obstruction by reviewers and editors of human rights exposure makes them participants in the ongoing coverup of the massacre. It raises the issue of what nonsense they presumably teach students about India, for without including these topics an accurate presentation of India cannot be made. It suggests that informal censorship in western academia about India may be as extreme as the censorship in India. This can be seen in the academic literature published in the West about Untouchables which conforms to what the dominant castes would consider acceptable.<sup>183</sup> Nothing is published anymore that would be considered really

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<sup>183</sup> A whole study could be made of this but a recent example of the genre can be seen in "Dalit Studies", Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, editors, Duke University Press, 2016, which provides an unintended guide on how to write within the parameters acceptable to the Master Castes. Of nearly 300 submissions only 10 were published but as no information is given on the overwhelming number of rejections we will never know if any of these wrote substantively about human rights and outside the Master Caste envelope. All we know is that none of the published chapters did. The Editors in what could be taken as a criticism of me, write that the Dalit contributors "do not have PhDs from English institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, which is characteristic of Indian academia. Another crucial feature of this group is that for the majority of them English is not their first language; they learned it in college." p.3 The problem is dependency does not make for authenticity in writing, quite the opposite. I have a freedom of expression they may not have, and particularly so if they are dependent on the master castes for employment and favours and are resident in India. Strictly speaking, there is one substantive research piece in the book on human rights, but it is not what one would expect in a book on Untouchables. Sambaiah Gundimeda dwells on the divisions between smaller Untouchable castes and those larger ones with more political and economic influence, that tend to dominate the Untouchable movement. The BJP mobilizes the smallest and most marginal castes as a base in competition with the more independent and politically active Untouchable castes who tend to follow Ambedkar. The BJP adopts the symbolism of Ambedkar while discarding everything he believed in as a means of exercising control. While research on the internal divisions in the Untouchable movement should be included in the book, the exclusion of other human rights issues in a book meant for a western audience, makes it come across as a playbook for the BJP Hindu fundamentalist strategy. Individually the papers appear innocuous but put together in a book, they distort Untouchable conditions into how the dominant castes wish to see them. There have been cases of academic research into minorities being used to further outsider agendas, such as by the Americans in the Vietnam and Angolan wars, but in this case the BJP understood their society well enough not to have relied on academic research to point the way to their divide and rule policy. I am sure it was not the intention to produce a BJP playbook, but that it follows what a BJP approach would look like is disturbing and revealing of academic perceptions of the Untouchable problem from a Master Caste perspective. The introduction notes many Black Americans showed up at the conference, but if they expected information on

offensive to their Master class/caste. In not being prepared to publish the truth for fear of offending the Masters' culture and religion they abrogated their pretense of enlightenment and free expression. When Untouchables cannot get to publish their plight and criticism of their Master castes, academics forfeit their claims to moral and academic integrity. They have abandoned the principles of the Enlightenment and sided with the oppressors of Untouchables. They are so imbued with the dominant discourses of the Master Castes that I suspect they are not even aware of the Untouchable perspective, or recognize their personal role in covering up abuses in their writing, editing, reviewing and teaching. For foreign editors, most would have only connections through colleagues of Indian origin who in their academic circles would come from the Master Castes, least likely to be objective about India. Foreigners are unlikely to know the baggage that academics of Indian origin bring with them and the degree of scepticism that is required in evaluating their input. Even if outside reviewers are sought these have limited contact with Untouchables, who in any case prefer to be invisible and are hardly likely to share feelings with outsiders. Academic incentives in this milieu are with getting India wrong. Realistic portrayals will antagonize colleagues in the field, the Indian government and public, marginalizing those who write "inconvenient truths". They are probably too set in their way of thinking to change. What Untouchables should do about this is up to them to decide. There are indications of a rupture in scholarly relations already taking place, with push back by Untouchables. It could come to the point as in North America where the Native American default position is non-cooperation.

In socializing with academics their real perspectives are not usually revealed. The autonomous reviews bring their prejudices out and reveal the extent they adhere to the dominant elite view by being willing to cover up mass murder. Their socialization within the elite indicates that by the stage in their careers when they do reviews they are past the point when they will change their minds and appreciate an Untouchable perspective. S.K. Mallick ICS refused to be interviewed by Professor T.V. Sathyamurthy, but this is not usually an option for Untouchables needing to maintain a livelihood or career.<sup>184</sup> For rural

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the deplorable discriminatory situation of Untouchables, the book suggests they would not have received this. Rather they would have got background papers better used to formulate a BJP strategy of containment and control. As an introduction to a western audience the editors could have done something far more useful in exposing the atrocities Untouchable are subjected to every day in the past and present. Participants in the conference may not have known what they were getting into, but with publication, the content needs to be critically examined. None of the book reviews I came across mentioned this criticism, and my book review for the Economic and Political Weekly was refused, so I appear alone in raising this issue. It is possible it never occurred to anyone involved there was a fundamental problem with the book in representing Untouchables. With a 10% submission acceptance rate, it could have been written differently, but that it was presented this way is significant for exposing the dominant thinking in a field that underrepresents or omits exploitation and oppression, in favour of more trivial issues and internal Untouchable divisions. As the book was aimed largely at a western audience, the best analogy I can think of, is if the Lost Cause writers employed literate ex-slaves to write for them, selected the work that supported their position, and then passed it off as authentic Black literature.

<sup>184</sup> When I came across an article by Inderpal Grewal, an Emeritus Professor of Women's Studies at Yale University, in *Modern Asian Studies* on the Indian Civil Service, I sent this article thinking she might be interested as my uncles were the only Untouchables in the ICS, with the ulterior motive that she might get my article published. The reply came back wanting to know if they had written any memoirs which she was

Untouchables where opposition can mean torture and death, the options for resistance by this persecuted minority are quite limited. Barring evidence of commitment to Untouchable human rights, academics should not receive voluntary cooperation. The test for this is whether they include the atrocities in their research and publications. Without inclusion of human rights, the research is of little or no use to Untouchables. Out of nearly 300 submissions, Dalit Studies selected 10 compliant contributors and rewarded them with publication and a free trip to America. The resultant book must have required extensive vetting and censorship to exclude the atrocities. Such is the norm in this academic field. The servile position of Untouchables means only puny measures of resistance are currently available to them, but their absence from the academic literature in an authentic presentation does not mean these views are non-existent. The universal rejection of this article indicates the lengths to which academics will go to exclude human rights atrocities and sanitize Untouchable voices. This reflects badly not only on the

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collecting on the Indian Civil Service. The request did not include any offer of reciprocation, so apparently an implicit appeal to Untouchable vanity would do the trick. My uncle had refused Professor Sathyamurthy because he did not feel he was genuinely interested in the poor, and unless Professor Grewal could prove otherwise in her writings there was no reason to share a confidential memoir. I suggested she send an article of hers on human rights, which might convince the family to share it with her. No return correspondence was forthcoming. Redirecting her research to something really useful might have convinced me to share the memoir. Instead of publishing on the career complaints of elite and relatively privileged women about harassment and job promotion, why not write about the gang rape and mass murder of Untouchable women at Marichjhapi. As she graduated from West Bengal she would be familiar with the state and now that the Left Front was long out of power it would be as safe as the rest of India. There were plenty of people who could have done it, but after all the decades there was still no study on the politicized rape that occurred in Marichjhapi or for that matter in the rest of the state under Left Front rule. There had been an outpouring of rage over the rape and murder of a single woman in Delhi, leading to the hanging of Untouchable men. The mass rape and murder of women at Marichjhapi by police, CPM cadre and gangsters did not even get an investigation, let alone any hangings. According to the Psychologist at Tihar Prison the rapists there excused themselves as the rich could fulfill their desires with money, while they had to do it with their courage. This view indicates the mindset of men, but also a deeper societal problem. Unless the women's movement reaches out to Untouchables, their campaign will just be seen as another attempt by the Master Castes to exercise their hegemony over Untouchables, and Untouchables will see no reason to obey the law which serves to oppress rather than protect them. There are striking parallels with the White southern American attempts to protect White women from Black men, and the issue of caste purity which underlies this case. DNA testing shows that historically upper caste men had access to Untouchable women but Untouchable men had no access to upper caste women, making the case particularly obnoxious to the upper castes. (Analabha Basu, Neeta Sarkar-Roy, Partha P. Majumder, "Genomic reconstruction of the history of extant populations of India reveals five distinct ancestral components and a complex structure", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, February 9, 2016, 113 (6) 1594-1599) Though the media does not raise this caste question to my knowledge, the lack of equality in the treatment of master caste and untouchable victims is all too obvious. Untouchable women had been raped for thousands of years as indicated by genetic testing, but virtually no one had done a thing about it. The moment relatively privileged women get raped, everyone but the Untouchables are in an uproar. The women's movement had done nothing about Marichjhapi, though researching it would have been a helpful endeavour for justice that normally only applies to people that matter. The women's movement had a lot to answer for when it came to Untouchable women, and it could help redeem itself by attempting to rectify this through demanding an investigation of the rapes and massacre. However their personal experience was not that of Untouchable women, and though they lived in the same country, that was the extent of their commonality. It was natural they took the course they did because the personal was very different for them, so the political took a turn that effectively excluded Untouchable women.

editors and reviewers but on their universities and associations as well. Ultimately this article showed which side they were on and no amount of excuses and sophistry could hide it. The appropriation of Untouchables to advance careers without giving much back to the community was a common practice when dealing with subalterns, but the lack of alternative outlets meant reality was effectively sanitized for the convenience of careerists.

The machinations behind the Dalit Studies book are not known so their analysis can only go so far, but one case where more is known concerned submission to the *Journal of Genocide Research*. The editorial requirements before acceptance for publication indicated a fundamental disconnect between how Untouchables viewed the world and those of foreign and Indian editors. Gandhi had gone on a fast to prevent Untouchable emancipation, but in their view “we can’t publish such an excessive interpretation” as this did not amount to a threat of genocide against Untouchables and could not be mentioned even in passing in the article.<sup>185</sup> In the 1930s Gandhi’s status was unequalled by any other Indian, and should he die or his life become endangered a genocide against Untouchables was the expected outcome, at least by the Untouchables themselves. Had the Untouchables not capitulated it cannot be predicted just how many would die but it at least had the potential to be the largest genocide in world history given the numbers involved and their complete vulnerability. That editors will not allow it to be published shows just how out of touch with Untouchable reality they really are.

Representing a small minority of about 16% in almost every village they were completely defenseless against whatever the Master Castes decided to do to them. Such was the propensity to violence that when Gandhi’s own non-violent non-cooperation movement turned violent he had to call it off. A few years later the violence of partition showed the possibilities for genocide. In this case both sides could fight back but this was never the case for Untouchables. That the fast was problematic for progressive intellectuals but potentially genocidal in the Untouchable view shows how different perceptions really are and how difficult it is for Untouchables to get their views in print. That a journal devoted to the exploration of genocide would prohibit the mention of it as a possible outcome of Gandhi’s fast suggests losing sight of their mission under the influence of Indian elite perceptions and Gandhi’s puffed up international celebrity status. It indicates a coverup of an Untouchable interpretation of a seminal event in Indian history.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Dirk Moses and Subhashish Ray, editors, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Email 9 September 2020.

<sup>186</sup> For the academic study of unrealized historical possibilities see Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, 1991. Something close to my position is stated by Sankaran Krishna who states that “Ambedkar saw the fast for exactly what it was: blackmail of the worst sort”. Sankaran Krishna “A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Construction of the International”, in *Race and Racism in International Relations, Confronting the Global Colour Line*, Routledge, New York, 2015, p.149. Rupa Viswanath states that “Given Gandhi’s enormous stature as a national hero his illness or death would have meant massive retaliation against Dalits across India” which I take to suggest possible genocide (Rupa Viswanath, “Silent Minority” *Routledge International Handbook on Diversity Studies*, Steven Vertovec editor, 2015, p. 145). The Untouchables were too poor to have valued assets that could be worth destroying or seizing so could only pay for any harm to Gandhi with their lives. The British army was too thin on the ground to protect

The Gandhi fast was somewhat tangential to Marichjhapi but the involvement of Saint Theresa was not. The Journal refused to allow an adverse comment concerning her involvement. Though the filmed interview with a colleague who spoke to her directly about it is available on Youtube this evidence was not enough.<sup>187</sup> No one would dispute that Saint Theresa knew about it, as every politically aware person in Calcutta would have known about it at the time. She had been providing aid to the refugees until, like other aid organizations, she was ordered to stop by the Left Front government. She complied without protest. She was not alone in this, but unlike the other providers she was in a far better position to protest to the government or national and international media. It was obviously more important to her to keep on good terms with the government. This made her complicit with what happened, which I argued should be exposed, but to no avail.

That the Journal was willing to expose gang rape and mass murder but criticism of India's two most iconic international figures was taboo, indicates the mind set of international and national scholars. The Untouchable view of these leaders was to be censored.

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more than a token number and the Indian Sepoys had already "mutinied once" (The Bounty, Film). The Indian army might just as easily have participated in the atrocities as they now do in Kashmir. Post-colonial civilian governments are perfectly aware of how undependable their armed forces are and often have to act accordingly. When my uncle in Delhi received a bag of rice from a friend in the Indian army, it was much appreciated. The colonel got so much free food from the government he had to distribute it to friends. The dwindling cadre of ICS officers got nothing, and saw the steady erosion of their living standards after the British left. I asked my uncle why this inequity occurred, and he explained that the armed forces were the only institution left that the government could depend on. The Pakistani Army which was an offshoot of the Indian army, had already diversified into much more lucrative business interests, and called the shots either directly or through influencing the civilian governments. According to the spouse of an IAS officer many in the service "pull strings, purse or clout to get a posting in the Defence Ministry. Especially procurement division", perhaps because India is sometimes the world's largest procurer of armaments. These postings may be pursued because "that is where the money is" (attributed to American bank robber). The most in your face military privilege I came across was in Marxist Mozambique in Cabo Delgado. I found a shop with consumer goods displayed in the window that were unobtainable elsewhere in town, but when I tried to enter was told it was exclusively for the army. Despite being the most ostentatious display of military privilege, it was no different from the Indian army, and was provided by the governments for the same reason, to keep the armed forces happy and loyal, as they could never really be counted on. Anyone who thinks the Indian army could prevent Gandhian genocide has not confronted an Indian mob when the natives are restless. My first confrontation with the mob came on my initial visit to Calcutta when my uncle was taking me to visit my relatives for the first time. There was not enough space in the car so he left his police bodyguards behind, leaving us unarmed. A cyclist made the dubious claim our car had bumped him though I could find no evidence of damage. Nevertheless an angry native mob gathered in no time, and my Uncle had to confront them and calm them down. It was a glimpse of how a thousand ICS officers had ruled a fifth of humanity in the world's first global empire. My uncle said it was really class envy as he had a car and the cyclist didn't. A few weeks later the Communists took power and I decided to do my doctorate on them. That a journal devoted to genocide would not even consider the possibilities of Gandhian genocide shows how hegemonic Indian nationalism can be, though Aung San Suu Kyi who has parallels with Gandhi has come in for more criticism over the Rohingyas than Gandhi ever did over Untouchables.

<sup>187</sup> Marichjhapi Tortured Humanity, Youtube.

Celebrity criticism was not the only thing that was taboo. An unfavourable comparison with Apartheid was also not permitted. Though I had lived in both countries, undercover as a non-white in Apartheid South Africa and as an serial polluter in rural India, experience does not count for comparison though I found South Africa the safer of the two. While South Africa had repressive laws and often violent police force it operated as part of a state machinery. In rural India an Untouchable would be confronted by a mob, often turning into a lynch mob of the Master Castes with the state arriving after the fact. Significantly only India can now be used to recreate this comparison as Apartheid unlike Untouchability is no more.

The Editors further complained it was inappropriate to use the term “atrocious” for Indian governance though the survivors of Marichjhapi might have thought differently. I have relatives all the way from the ICS/IAS to the lowest rungs of society but cannot recall them saying positive things about Indian governance.<sup>188</sup> Those without connections from all classes who have to bribe to get the services they are entitled too might not use the exact word but will likely be of a similar view. That Editors could think otherwise shows an isolation from the real world of the poor and powerless. When writers are expected to censor their work to conform to the views of editors it is usually best to go elsewhere.

The Editors mentioned the political affiliations of some of my sources which I did not know. The writers had publicized Marichjhapi accurately and while the Editors told me these affiliations I was not in a position to verify them. I myself had been falsely accused of being a Maoist and outed as an Untouchable in print, and there were probably other comments that circulated privately, so I was not about to reveal the affiliations of authors on the Editor’s word for it. As there was irrefutable evidence of the Massacre itself, the best way to undermine the struggle for justice was to impune the reputations of the authors, a strategy I had watched for decades. The difficulty in getting anyone to even mention the massacre in print, meant that those who did, in my estimation deserved not to be criticised in petty academic disputes, but commended for their courage.

To support the evidence for better Left Front governance than I claimed they said I should include a work that I had not mentioned, *Sonar Bangla*.<sup>189</sup> The book in question had come out decades before in the formative years of my generation. I had talked privately with some of the authors and others with similar outlooks. What they told me, which was never mentioned in the book or elsewhere, was that they required permission of the then ruling CPM, which selected the villages for them. Micro studies of villages always face a fundamental question as to how representative the villages are of the region as a whole. When the ruling party selected “model villages” for you this problem is greatly compounded. I waited in vain for the criticisms they made to me to appear in print but they never did. To do so would endanger their access to the community and their careers which by then had already been set up. This does not mean you learn nothing

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<sup>188</sup> For what could be considered the family position on Indian governance see Sumit Mullick IAS, Chief Secretary of Maharashtra, *Seducing Pain*, 2007, 429 pages.

<sup>189</sup> Ben Rogaly, Barbara Harriss-White, Sugata Bose, editors, *Sonar Bangla?* Sage Publications, 1999.

from model villages. That the violence, corruption and segregation does not appear in the work might mean it never happened in these villages, or they were not covered for fear of being expelled by the ruling party. Eventually researchers found that the villagers were familiar with foreign scholars which may have made fitting in and finding accommodation easier, but sending too many scholars to the same village while enabling comparisons over time, made multi-village comparisons more difficult and dubious. With the fall of the Left Front more critical micro analysis was forthcoming, but whether that was due to a letup in surveillance or an ideological generational change in scholars is difficult to determine. This does not mean typical villages were never selected. One McGill professor who asked to see a village with an active social movement to research found the village had no such movement.<sup>190</sup> It seemed local party officials had tried to enhance their reputations by claiming great activity and the party higher ups had not bothered to check it out before sending the professor there. The threat of violence and the sunk costs involved in research may have resulted in the omission of what was really going on. "Endemic violence in certain districts has become a strong deterrent for scholars wishing to conduct field work, for which the government's prior approval and support has often become necessary."<sup>191</sup>

The most egregious demand was to omit my criticism of Hinduism. Though the caste system is integral to its philosophy and the vast majority of Hindus and many South Asian Christians and Muslims implement the caste system, a blanket criticism was not warranted. Whatever world the Editors inhabit it is not that of the Untouchables, and denying the right of Untouchables to criticize their religion is totalitarian. Why the Hindu religion or any religion should be placed beyond such criticism and be given the special privilege of not being criticized because it might offend believers, places Untouchables in the position of not being able to complain about their religious based exploitation and oppression. This Untouchable view may be found objectionable to scholars but it should at least be open to debate on its merits. Not allowing it in academic publications means the world view of Untouchables can not be allowed to see the light of day. As an example the Untouchable caste that is not allowed outside in daylight should not be allowed to complain about being condemned to eternal darkness because it would offend true believers. This is the position that editors find themselves in when they decide not to give offence to privileged beliefs. They then abet the presentation of quasi hegemonic views as that of Untouchables. By publishing only what readers want to know, critical writing is excluded for fear of giving offence. The idea that Hinduism is more than its practice, has inspired reformers for generations to limited effect. One has only to pretend to be Untouchable in rural India and demand access to segregated areas to find out how it is practiced. This is of course too dangerous to be undertaken, but urban experiments with

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<sup>190</sup> Suraj Bandyopadhyay and Donald von Eschen, "The Impact of Politics on Rural Production and Distribution: A Comparative Study of Rural Policies and their Implementation Under Congress and Left Front Governments in West Bengal", Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, San Francisco, 26 March 1988. Interview with Donald von Eschen.

<sup>191</sup> Mario Prayer, "The Social Context of Politics in Rural West Bengal (1947-92)" in *Changing Identity of Rural India: A Socio-Historic Analysis*, Elisabetta Basile and Ishita Mukhopadhyay editors, Anthem Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 27.

matrimonial ads show that caste is indeed alive and well amongst the classes intellectuals come from. The persistence of endogamy amongst the vast majority of the upper and middle classes indicates these barriers will not change in the foreseeable future.<sup>192</sup> That academics can think otherwise shows the bubble they live in and incomprehension of the Untouchable view.<sup>193</sup> As one Untouchable who read this draft put it they were “shallow” but the extent to which this was the result of limited life experience and/or lack of reflection is difficult to determine without knowing them personally. Whatever their personal traits they are cowards.

The difference in perceptions by Master Caste scholars and Untouchables does not appear in the literature because deviance from the dominant position will not find a publication outlet so all that appears with few exceptions is sanitized Untouchable writings and those of the dominant intellectual elite who determine what gets published. I could have made the deletions to get published in order for more exposure of the massacre itself. However most scholarly journals have limited circulation and the people who subscribe probably won't do anything, and at \$265 per issue even I would not have bought my own article. The draft article got more readers on the internet than anything else I posted, so the difference that more obscure academic journals could make was unclear. Still deciding not to publish and go for a book that would take years, even if completed, was a difficult call and I don't know there is an obviously right answer. When I first wrote about the massacre, as the only one doing so, getting out information was more important than the implications, which only became fully apparent as more people came to know about it and did nothing. That after over four decades nothing had been done now implicated more people and raised questions about the nature of India which now needed to be addressed. Not being able to do so meant it was easy to say no. There is a obligation to the victims to get their story out but there was also an obligation to say what the Untouchables thought of their Masters, but dare not. Untouchables who need jobs, promotions, and tenure with families and relatives to support don't have the options I have. An illustration of how “progressive” Master Caste intellectuals censor Untouchable writing with the acquiescence of foreign scholars who don't know better or are influenced by them, shows the difficulties of getting authentic Untouchables views across in a media dominated by an intellectual elite who feel threatened by the truth which would undermine their ideology and nationalism. For them exercising their intellectual dominance through censorship of Untouchable views unpalatable to themselves is an easy and almost inevitable outcome. The readers remain unaware of the machinations and compromises that make the writings unauthentic Untouchable views.

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<sup>192</sup> Diane Coffey, Payal Hathi, Nidhi Khurana, Amit Thorat, “Explicit Prejudice”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 6, 2018, p.50.

<sup>193</sup> After an unobjectionable lecture series on Untouchables at Cambridge by Andre Beteille, his friend Geoffrey Hawthorn privately noted to me that Beteille lacked an appreciation of the Untouchable predicament. That hadn't come across in the lecture and I wondered how Hawthorn, who as far as I know did not realize my caste background, could have reached that conclusion. However those most knowledgeable can have blind spots for those outside their own life experience. For an evaluation of Beteille on Untouchability see Sankaran Krishna, “A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order: Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Construction of the International”, in *Race and Racism in International Relations*, edited by Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shillian, Routledge, 2015, p. 151.

It is significant that while there is now a somewhat sufficient English literature on the massacre itself, the enabling conditions that allowed this to happen get little mention, for it puts the nature of India, and perhaps human nature itself into play. Gang rape and mass murder can be covered, but not the nature of Hinduism or Indian icons which seem to be out of bounds in academic publications. One would have thought it would be the other way around, with the nature of India which has received considerable coverage, being uncontroversial while the massacre would be prohibited. But the fact of the matter was that the massacre was of no consequence to the powers that be, while challenging the role of Hinduism and national icons was taboo. The existence of Untouchables are an insult to the nation and an international embarrassment. Intellectual elites who bother about such things try to sweep it under the rug in various ways. Reviewers of submissions often have the tendency to want the author to write what they want to see, and not necessarily how they are or how the author wants it presented. For Indian intellectuals, though vastly outnumbered by Untouchables, having a near monopoly in their professions, are in place to prevent any discordant notes from Untouchables. The line on what can be printed is not absolutely clear, so Untouchables judging what they can get away with in print means determining what the dominant elite are likely to permit. There is little scope for publication in taboo areas, and comments unpalatable to the elite are not likely to get very far. Criticism of icons, Hinduism, and the nation are more unacceptable than even atrocities, it seems.

The icons, Gandhi and Saint Teresa, might not seem to have much in common coming from different religions, but in regards to Untouchables and those in similar circumstances their attitudes were similarly inegalitarian. This approach is not original. A Congress leader complaint about how much it cost keeping Gandhi in poverty has been oft repeated. It was also been repeatedly mentioned that while Saint Teresa was admitted to the best private hospital in Calcutta, her clients received sub-standard medical treatment even by what was available to the missionaries. This reflected their iconoclastic views on poverty. For Gandhi poverty and untouchability should not be stigmatized but untouchability preserved without its negative connotations. In other words the rest of society should change its attitude, and impossible task, while the untouchables should be kept in their place, even if it meant threatening them with genocide. Saint Teresa on the other hand from a different religion talked of the nobility of suffering and its potential to bring one closer to god. That both had rather eccentric views on poverty, did not prevent them being sanctimonious hypocrites when it came to imposing their views on others. The poor and Untouchables should accept their condition passively and the Master Castes would inevitably maintain their dominance, a view they shared with the BJP. They in different ways threatened the lives of Untouchables. Saint Teresa by obeying Caesar without protest, and Gandhi with his fast to prevent their emancipation even at the cost of their lives. Both had views that were quite similar in regards to the poor and compatible with elite dominance so it is quite understandable why in India they should have risen to the celebrity status they obtained, and intellectuals are so reluctant to criticize. That Untouchables should be their target is understandable given their vulnerability, so elites

can have their way with them. Both icons eulogized on poverty and its godliness rather than fight against those that maintained them in that position.

The prominent American scholar of India, Myron Weiner, pointed to the caste system as the underlining reason why child education was so far behind other countries at similar levels of development.<sup>194</sup> The same reason applies to Marichjhapi and the other atrocities committed against Untouchables. But such frankness is relatively rare in scholarship. Neglect of the poor is practically universal, but in India the majority religion is perfectly amenable to poverty and attempts at alleviation derive from foreign influence and the imperatives of electoral democracy. Their exposure to colonialism and modernity was insufficient to propel poverty alleviation and prevent discrimination against minorities. The statistics on backwardness in health, education, or any other measure of poverty is overwhelming for India, and the cultural and religious basis for this is all too rarely examined for fear of giving offence. Marichjhapi is an extreme example of this attitude.

As a journalist from Jugantar put it, “the refugees of Dandakaranya are...mainly cultivators, fishermen, day-labours, artisans, the exploited mass of society. If it is a matter of any body of the family of a Zamindar, doctor, lawyer or engineer, the stir is felt from Calcutta to Delhi, but in this classified and exploited society, we do not feel anything for the landless poor cultivators and fishermen. So long as the state machinery will remain in the hands of the upper class elite, the poor, the helpless, the beggar, the prostitutes and the refugees will continue [to be victimized].<sup>195</sup> Though they did have a family in the “elite” I was unable to do anything constructive, and neither was anyone else. The system in society and government was too entrenched and inimical to human rights for there to be justice. All that could be done was record history for a time when a successful outreach became possible.

Part of this reluctance to expose mass murder can be attributed to ideology and nationalism, but the influence of cowardness should not be underestimated. Even when not faced with torture, death, or job loss, the avoidance of controversy by not covering Untouchable human rights atrocities is the best option for cowards. Naming editors and board members who will leave their positions in due course, gives only a temporary impression, but their journals could go on for generations till a time when Untouchables may be in a position to do something about it. The journals will then have to deal with their complicity and coverup of mass murder. Someday they will be judged. This is already happening in America where institutions are having to deal with their involvement in slavery and genocide.

The editors and board members can best be described as being in positions of privilege. In America this is sometimes referred to as “white privilege” but in India it could be described as Master Caste privilege. The only significant thing they share with the lower classes is a common language but though this enables communication they live in two solitudes. Few of this group have substantive experience of deprivation and

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<sup>194</sup> Myron Weiner, *The Child and the State in India*, Princeton University Press, 1991.

<sup>195</sup> Ranjit Kumar Sikdar, “Marichjhapi Massacre” *The Oppressed Indian* 4(4), 1982. p.23.

discrimination. By the time they have reached their occupations they are in a position to exploit the temporary sessional lecturers which can be proved by the wage disparities. They have learned to accept this situation and become accustomed to it. From a publication perspective white privilege when combined with the Master Caste privilege makes the obstacles to the exposure of Untouchable atrocities appear insurmountable. While this would be understandable in Indian studies, one would have thought that those journals devoted to human rights would have space for Untouchable atrocities but this proved not to be the case. The size of their population and unique segregation today made no difference. This is particularly inexplicable when considering the number of inconsequential articles that appear in the journals indicating they have become lost in their ivory towers.

Few Untouchables are in a position to evaluate scholars, and particularly so on their home turf at universities. As a stress test this article illustrates just what an anathema the exposure of Untouchable human rights are for scholars. Nationalism and ideology trumps justice and good scholarship itself. How Untouchables should channel hatred is a lot less clear given their lack of resources and access to institutions. However the onus is on scholars to show their good intentions and this can be judged by Untouchables according to what is written about them. So far scholars with few exceptions have failed spectacularly in this. The neutered journals are not going to change in the foreseeable future.

In my experience “it’s a case of ostracization and generally being ignored”<sup>196</sup> but I was not the only one. According to the writer, Sajeed Sanyal “I have on many occasions brought this [Marichjhapi Massacre] up in literature festivals for example, and it is quite extraordinary, someone in the panel will very very quickly shut me down, so it is not that it is just people know about [it], those who need to know, but it is a systematic effort to wipe it out from our memory.”<sup>197</sup> As Bibek Debroy puts it “All Bengalis, not just on the left, all Indians in one fashion or another are complicit in the guilt”.<sup>198</sup> More specifically scholars who are in a position to publicize it but obstruct exposure are complicit in gang rape and mass murder. Marichjhapi is different from other Indian massacres such as in Gujarat under the BJP or the anti-Sikh massacre under Congress in that the CPM politicians have no wiggle room, no excuses that can separate them from legal jeopardy. They do not even try, they only downplay the extent of the killings. But they did not have to as the victims were of no consequence, and could be counted on to be forgotten because that was just the way India was, and the Master Castes could be counted on with a few individual exceptions to go along with this travesty of justice.

The massacre can be used to support nearly every political position from “fascist” to Maoist and most positions in between. My research on Marichjhapi has been used to

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<sup>196</sup> Bibek Debroy, Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Book Discussion/Blood Island : An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, Youtube.

<sup>197</sup> Sanjeev Sanyal, Principal Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Book Discussion/Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, Youtube.

<sup>198</sup> Bibek Debroy, Book Discussion/Blood Island; An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, Youtube.

support causes across the political spectrum through the careful selection of facts that suit the authors. Most are subtle selections of information to support the personal views of the authors. An illustration of this is a blog article based on this draft which was given sole credit as the source.<sup>199</sup> None of my criticisms of Hinduism were included, but the role of Mother Teresa was mentioned. As not a central figure in Marichjhapi events this might seem unworthy of mention but from the political perspective of the blog it made sense. By keeping quiet about the blockade, “Saint Teresa of Calcutta” had gone along with government orders to cut off relief supplies, and became complicit in the deaths by starvation and disease of hundreds or thousands of babies and children along with their parents. As one of the very few people with the national and international influence and connections which could have been used to prevent the blockade and massacre, or at least publicized it, she deserves mention, but not to the exclusion of the role of Hinduism in creating the enabling conditions for the massacre. Saint Teresa had a good working relationship with Jyoti Basu and would not have wanted to jeopardize this by bringing pressure to bear on him. Given Saint Teresa’s solicitation of dictatorships such as in Haiti, this is entirely in character.<sup>200</sup>

Time is now running out to interview participants in the massacre as most are now retired or deceased. The refugee leaders have passed away and those massacre survivors still alive can be expected to have a lower life expectancy given their poverty (Untouchables have a life expectancy of 48 compared with 60 for Indians and 80 for Americans).<sup>201</sup> With this in mind the author funded the filming of interviews with massacre survivors and the translation into English of Bengali books on the massacre to reach a larger audience and provide material for future resurrection of the subject at a time more conducive to human rights investigation. This required my funding of the defence of Dr. Samanta, with my further public humiliation through dissemination of the insinuations against me to a wider English readership of his book chapter, but there was no principled way around this as the book was too important not to be published.<sup>202</sup> Finding a translator would be no problem

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<sup>199</sup> Wandering Rani, Marichjhapi - A Despicable Saga of the Leftist bloodbath in Sunderbans. Anonymous.

<sup>200</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, Verso 1995.

<sup>201</sup> Ramesh Venkataraman, “Undoing injustice against Dalits requires upper caste support”, *Indian Express*, January 9, 2019.

<sup>202</sup> Publication of these books will not end the debate over whether myself or Dr. Samanta is the more convincing. As an eyewitness and operational leader Dr. Samanta has information I cannot obtain, and he remains the only organizer willing to go on record, so is an important source of information on the events, which as someone coming to the massacre years later I cannot match. Hopefully someday Dr. Samanta will make a full and free confession. This now seems overly optimistic as he refused to be interviewed for Deep Halder’s book, claiming only one person had died through an accidental miss fire. “[Left Front Minister] Ganguly, seventy-five, is the only CPM leader or police official who has agreed to talk to me on the subject. Amiya Kumar Samanta, the superintendent of police who spearheaded Operation Marichjhapi that allegedly left thousands dead, flatly refused to even meet me, saying he knew ‘what people like you will write about me and the incident. I have read many biased, blatantly distorted narrations of the happenings.’ This was despite repeated assurances that all I wanted was his version of the events that took place on Marichjhapi between January and May 1979.” *Blood Island*, Kindle 1323 In a Facebook debate his version was found more convincing by at least one reader. “What did really happen at #Marichjhapi? Who can tell me? I want neither the Ross Mallick account nor the Wikipedia version of it, much of which, I believe, is mostly based on hearsay and deliberately manufactured. ...[Dr. Samanta] seems to be rather convincing.”

at the going rate given the author's connections, or so I thought. Scholars he had corresponded with on Marichjhapi and had cited his work didn't respond to his emails asking if anyone might translate it. Professors who had cited my publications on the massacre failed to respond to requests to find a translator, even though their intermediary role was unlikely to be discovered should they have wished to keep it confidential. The academics who had cited my work were unhelpful, while the non-academics, though taking my money, didn't do the work. The necessity of having to do this long distance made the project difficult, but I did what I could under my circumstances. According to Amitav Ghosh Marichjhapi was "widely discussed in the Calcutta press, English as well as Bengali. Today [2004] the only historical treatment available in English is an article by Ross Mallick".<sup>203</sup> "The incident had disappeared from history until it was recovered by Ross Mallick".<sup>204</sup> Keeping it a part of history would need to involve subsequent generations lest it again be forgotten. The recovery may have cost me a career and I certainly got nothing from it, while the victims have got nothing as well. Keeping it posted on the internet or other communication channels in itself is not enough to get it consumed and acted upon. It needs to be part of the Indian school curriculum, just like the Indian Residential Schools became part of the Canadian school curriculum as a way of understanding the past, and achieving some measure of reconciliation.

It should not end with this however. With road improvements Marichjhapi could be just a one hour drive from Calcutta. A museum on the massacre should be built on the island and the survivors and their descendents resettled there so visitors to the museum can meet them face to face and find out first hand what happened. If not allowed on the island Kumirmari across the channel where the first massacre took place could be the location with survivors as interpreters, or in the more accessible Calcutta area. This is not without precedent. At an Alaskan museum I met an elderly pioneer who recounted her experiences as a young homesteader to any visitors who would listen. The museum should display the names and photos of the perpetrators, and also those intellectuals, journals, and institutions, who were complicit in the massacre and its coverup. These are readily available on the internet, unlike the victims who died unknown deaths. Instead of the government spending vast sums on vanity projects for "dear leaders", a museum dedicated to the Untouchable plight would be much more constructive. It has been done in other countries including even America where there are museums dedicated to ethnic

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Sowmen Mitter October 10,2013. On the other hand Joy Kar takes the opposite view. "I just finished reading this piece by Ross Mallick - "Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre" - oh so many questions and the intent of people in power and the power of the state to crush, quell and treat my fellow Bengalis in a manner akin to animals. I am outraged - after so many years to read about it. I am ashamed that it could have happened in a state that is my home. History needs to uncover this truth and the dead deserve an unqualified apology from us all". Deep Halder in his book described my article as "one of the most definitive papers on the massacre" so he did not accept Samantas' or the CPM version of events. Deep Halder, *Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre*, HarperCollins, 2019, p.7.

<sup>203</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, Ravi Dayal Publisher, Delhi, 2004, p.402.

<sup>204</sup> Omendra Kumar Singh, "Nation Within the Nation: Revisiting the Failed Revolution of Marichjhapi in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", *South Asian Review*, Vol.32, No.2, 2011, p.241.

groups subject to slavery and genocide. In Canada at the international Expo 67 exhibition on the centenary of independence the government provided funding to build a pavilion on their Indigenous peoples which the Natives used to embarrass the government for its treatment of them in front of all the international visitors. As a child at that time, even though I had experienced this myself it made an impression on me seeing it written up with photographs on the walls. My father who was in the Canadian government Northern and Indian Affairs Department at the time liked it as well. He had headed an expensive expedition to the Arctic to report on deplorable health conditions there, but his report ended up in the “circular file” which he had to explain to me was the garbage can.<sup>205</sup> I had a similar experience when I headed a research project funded by the Canadian government Department of External Affairs and conducted by the Native Council of Canada which ended in the same place due to divisions in the interests of Native organizations, and government indifference to international precedents that empowered Natives. I could not get a publisher for the multi-volume report and ended up putting pieces of it on the internet. In the former GDR high school students were required to visit a Concentration Camp where the “girls all cried and the boys stopped talking”.<sup>206</sup> This is needed for Marichjhapi as well. The Indian constitution abolished Untouchability and the lack of implementation and desegregation since then needs to be exposed to the public so the constitutional mandate can be fulfilled with the public support necessary for politicians and their parties to do it.

After writing this, on the 40th anniversary of the massacre, the journalist and Executive Editor of India Today magazine, Deep Halder, published the first English book on the subject, but it remains to be seen if publication by the world’s largest international book publisher will result in remedial action or the massacre will be forgotten.<sup>207</sup> Though the book was listed by the International Book Authority as one of the “51 Best Slavery Books of All Time” and got universally positive reviews in India, none suggested investigation and prosecution, as if the reviewers knew it would be futile and perhaps even naive to suggest this. Nevertheless this book represents probably the last and best chance for getting a conviction before the perpetrators pass away. The lack of a public outcry in response to the book indicates that not only does India have atrocious governance, but the culture promotes this indifference to suffering. While in the past non-Bengalis could claim that the bulk of the literature was in Bengali and therefore “inaccessible, the last excuse for doing nothing had gone. Now that “people who mattered” (The Rugrats, film) could read enough of the relevant details, the Indian middle class and elite had no excuse for their complicity.

Deep Halder’s father had been one of the social activists who had helped the refugees in Marichjhapi and hidden a Marichjhapi child after the massacre, when the author was five.

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<sup>205</sup> Sushil Mallick, Memorandum to the Regional Superintendent (Medical Department of National Health and Welfare) April 16, 1963, cited in Frank James Tester et. al.”Structural violence and the 1962-1963 tuberculosis epidemic in Eskimo Point, N.W.T.” Inuit Studies, 2012, Vol. 36, No. 2, p.177.

<sup>206</sup> AVVBA Presents Jack Barsky - (KGB Spy), July 10, 2018, Youtube.

<sup>207</sup> Deep Halder, Blood Island: An Oral History of the Marichjhapi Massacre, HarperCollins, New Delhi, May 2019.

“The stories that he heard as a child were of blood, violence and human cruelty, and the horror tales were unfortunately real. “When he grew up, those stories kept haunting him. He set out on a search to find the truth, which unfortunately was gory, gruesome and devastating.”<sup>208</sup> Like Jhuma Sen’s father, Shakya Sen, who had won the Calcutta High Court Injunction against the government, this continued family social activist tradition, while passing engagement on to a new generation, raised disturbing questions about a lack of activist effectiveness due to public indifference. “Although I have to admit that even when the issue came to light, there wasn’t an outpouring of support from the general public. Some people fought for the refugees, but they were too few in number. It was a failure, not only of the legal system but of a generation - my generation - then in their twenties and thirties. We lacked a collective conscience. We destroyed Marichjhapi - all of us.”<sup>209</sup> A handful of activists could keep writing to no effect for a public that was indifferent to human rights that were not their own. The governments meanwhile felt no need to fulfill their responsibility to investigate, knowing the public indifference. With the Communists not electing a single MP, there was no longer a political party advantage to discrediting them as they were moribund in West Bengal, and little to be gained from the government prosecuting a spent force. With a fundamentalist central government espousing a Hinduism that was antithetical to human rights the prospects for justice were bleak. Halder’s book apparently got no more response than previous publications, indicating the ongoing isolation and vulnerability of the Indian human rights community, in country where a universal conception of human rights hardly exists and rights are

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<sup>208</sup> Despite the research being done after the Communists lost power, Halder found “It was difficult tracking down Marichjhapi’s survivors. It was more difficult making them trust me enough to revisit a tragedy that destroyed their lives 40 years ago. They would break down while retelling their stories, sometimes turn hostile or even question my intention behind interviewing them. It took me five years to write the book. It was mentally draining to search for them, make them agree to talk to me and go back again and again.” Naina Arora, “Author Deep Halder: It’s important to revisit tragedies that have been glossed over” Hindustan Times, June 21, 2019. If hiding an innocent child seems an over the top reaction to the massacre it should be remembered that Mini Munda, a resident of Kumirmari across the river from Marichjhapi, who hid a Marichjhapi survivor family, had her home broken into by police who fatally shot her in the head and took away the family. Despite the execution of a non-Marichjhapi resident she is considered one of its martyrs. (Blood Island, p.172) Tushar Bhattacharya’s account provides the context of her death. “Children and the aged living on Marichjhapi started dying owing to the crisis. Desperate to help the helpless, a handful of restless youngsters from Marichjhapi tried to make their way to Kumirmari in search of food. They were promptly shot dead. Meni Munda, an adivasi [tribal] woman, was killed in the firing; her corpse was also piled up in the big boat along with the others. Since she was a local in the area, the police had been unable to get rid of her body. The people expressed their grave discontent against the police by means of a public demonstration. In an effort to hush up all kinds of protest and dissenting voices, a sum of Rupees five thousand was given to the Kumirmari panchayat via the Block Development Officer so that it could be handed over to the family of Meni Munda. The panchayat bought Meni Munda’s family a piece of land with that money” Tushar Bhattacharya, Unpublished Marichjhapi, English draft translation, p. 28. Sukharanjan Sengupta provides more information “It was alleged that in the police firing of January 31 [1979], 30 refugees had died. Out of those nine bodies came up at the water surface at Kalagachia. The other twenty corpses were taken to Sandeshkhali. The local woman, Meni Munda, who was killed by the police firing had her infant baby with her. The infant was also killed by police firing. Meni Munda’s son, aged nine, was pulled up to the police launch that carried the woman’s dead body. When a policeman was on the verge of shooting him, another policeman restrained him. So he was spared his life. But he was shoved into the water.” Sukharanjan Sengupta, “Karbala of the Modern Times” in Pal (editor) Marichjhapi.

<sup>209</sup> Shakya Sen quoted in Deep Halder, Blood Island, Kindle edition, Location 1038.

almost exclusively to be practiced for one's own identity group. The thin veneer of civilization represented by social activists in a society that does not believe in or practice civilized behaviour, could disappear very quickly given the right conditions.

Without a coalition Untouchables did not have the resources or influence to make Untouchability a national let alone international issue that could lead to boycotts and sanctions for law enforcement that other more influential movements could muster. The lack of public interest was made manifest by the massacre and the passage of decades since has shown no indication this will change.

Another last attempt to influence public opinion for an investigation will come from a different media, a feature movie with a love story. The Director, Bauddhayan Mukherji, stated "I was introduced to Marichjhapi during my [Calcutta] college days in the mid-1990s. When I researched on it, I found out not many people around me knew about this incident. Some didn't even hear of Marichjhapi. That very moment I decided to do a film on it."<sup>210</sup> "I wish to awaken the 40 year old ghost of Marichjhapi, let the world know of it"<sup>211</sup> The Director asked if I knew the distance between the huts at Marichjhapi which I didn't with the excuse that the information needed by a doctoral student were different from those of a movie director. That information would likely have been erased in the flames that showed a red glow in the sky which was witnessed from miles away, and burned some inhabitants. When I passed nearby on the launch of the 24 Parganas District Collector years later there were government officials on board who might have reported any visitation by us as the island was then uninhabited. Though the Director had recruited the actor from *The Life of Pi* and had directed other movies I was sceptical the \$800,000 could be raised. However on a virtual visit to the Cannes Film Festival a Co-producer was found and shooting on location in the Sundarbans was scheduled for 2022.

The photographer Soumya Sankar Bose published an photo art book completing the range of media platforms presenting the massacre.<sup>212</sup> It included a mix of original and recreated photos as well as archival documents. A compilation of faded photographs of a few of those killed or missing collected from surviving relatives indicated the official claim of two dead was unsustainable.<sup>213</sup> He could only photograph the island from afar as there is a 10 year prison sentence for landing on the island. In the five years he spent tracking down survivors, sometimes in remote locations, he found many had already died, often quite recently, making some of the trips futile.<sup>214</sup> The Left Front and

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<sup>210</sup> "Bauddhayan's 'Marichjhapi' to explore love amidst pain", Times of India, Entertainment Times, July 1, 2019.

<sup>211</sup> "Suman Ghosh and Bauddhayan Mukherji's new films at Busan's Asian Project Market", Rutwji Nakhwa, On Global Screens Magazine, August 16, 2019. Naman Ramachandran, "Busan: India's Adil Hussain Boards APM Project 'Marichjhapi' (Exclusive)", Variety, October 7, 2019.

<sup>212</sup> Ashley Okwuosa, "Representing Migration: Two photographers creating new ways to see history and sanctuary", The Revealer, August 9, 2019.

<sup>213</sup> Soumya Sankar Bose, *Where the Birds Never Sing*. Red Turtle, Calcutta, 2020. "Photos: Revisiting West Bengal's Marichjhapi Massacre in a new Photobook", The Hindustan Times, 17 September 2020.

<sup>214</sup> IGTV Soumya Sankar Bose internet video.

governments were running out the clock, whether by design or neglect. What effect these individual investigations have remains to be seen.

The governments had apparently ended attempts at coverup, leaving it to intellectuals to do the job. Unlike in more recent democracies where governments at least attempt a coverup of their actions<sup>215</sup>, the Indian government ignored Marichjhapi knowing there was nothing that would make them do anything. It was left to the intellectuals to cover it up which they did long after there was ample evidence of the massacre.

That a feature film could be made reflects a change from Left Front rule, but some were not so easily convinced it now safe to work on Marichjhapi. The request for translation to one Bengali Calcutta resident with an American doctorate who did professional translation work, was that “being the author of the books you have published, you are protected, and no one will get to you. I might not be as safe. It is an important document and should be published. The government now in power [in West Bengal] is doing atrocious things and a document like this would only empower them.” The influence of writing is exaggerated, or something would have been done about the massacre by now. But the fact that politically connected murderers and rapists are roaming around the state unpunished, does not give confidence and security for those involved in the project. Even if a politician does not order retaliation there is nothing to prevent lower level cadre and gangsters taking the initiative, which is the norm.

Whether exposing rights abuses only when it is politically expedient, or revealing them whenever they occur should be an easy decision.<sup>216</sup> In choosing to expose the abuses, regardless of those involved, a lot of criticism was made over a wide political spectrum. Had there been institutional constraints preventing the massacre and subsequent human rights abuses, the Left in West Bengal and elsewhere wouldn't likely be in its present debacle, and secularism in India would not be so threatened. Though it is argued that provincial level transitions to socialism are very difficult given their limited local powers, in the West Bengal case the federalized Indian system gave the Communists too much power, which they used without any apparent ethics. Power had given them the opportunity to showcase their shortcomings to the public. Eventually the public tired of this corruption.

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<sup>215</sup>Anabel Hernandez, *A Massacre in Mexico*, Verso, New York, 2018.

<sup>216</sup> Deep Halder gave a personal take on the writer's dilemma. The first publisher he submitted to wanted the role of the Left Front excised which was impossible given the nature of the massacre. “Several of my friends, childhood friends, friends I had gone to school and college with, they unfriended me on Facebook, they unfriended me on Twitter, saying how can you do this. So I said but you know I have been researching the book 5 long years, we have discussed this. You are from Bengal, you know this happened. Yah but to bring it out like this, then at a time like this. The Modi government is in power, they will use it against us. Bigger things are happening. I said sure bigger things are happening. These stories have to be told too. But its a story I have invested so much time in. It is a great story. Nobody has told it. No no, you should not have written the book.” Deep Halder, *India's Hidden History*, How Storytellers have kept India hidden from Indians. Youtube.

The author had waited decades for a government or NGO to do something substantive, but it was becoming clear it was unlikely to come in the lifetime of any survivors, if at all. The flurry of coverage which came with the decline and fall of the Left Front government ended, though significant questions remained unanswered. That it was left to an unemployed scholar from the other side of the world to expose this when so many with far greater resources and influence said neither a word nor lifted a finger speaks volumes about Indian human rights and Indian studies. The refusal to respond raised questions of character and conscience, as virtually everyone who knew chose to do nothing. Like the British ICS officers who went Native before them, the current crop of foreign India hands are as one with the dominant Master Caste intellectuals. Their failure to realistically portray the uniquely benighted country, leaves them, with very few exceptions, in league with the interests of the dominant elite rather than the Untouchables. The pernicious influence of Hinduism on the subcontinent, which is antithetical to human rights and civilization, makes the public immune to humanitarian appeals that do not affect their own identity group. The attempt to investigate the massacre had been a waste of money and effort as the society and government were not interested, which was hardly surprising for anyone familiar with India. However, beneath the elite discourse, in folk culture amongst Bengali Untouchables, shrines and songs commemorating Marichjhapi continue to influence opinion and electoral outcomes.<sup>217</sup> On the literature analysing the downfall of the Left Front government I can recall none mentioning Marichjhapi as a factor. It escaped the attention of the pundits, which does not make them wrong but shows a disconnect between how intellectuals see things and the thoughts of those outside the elites. There is not even a pretense of doing justice, in the absence of which revenge becomes a popular objective. With no effective international institution for justice, and national ones covering up the massacre, the folk memory is disconnected from dominant beliefs and reconciliation becomes increasingly difficult.

The idea of a government investigation now seems more remote than ever. All the major ruling parties were implicated in the massacre, whether the central BJP government whose Janata Party constituent gave the green light to the West Bengal government for the eviction and covered up of the massacre, the Congress Parties who created the problem in the first place and also covered it up, or the CPM which conducted the operation and the Left Front which ultimately went along with it, bear responsibility. Without the backing of ruling politicians the national and state Human Rights Commissions will ignore the gorilla in the room and pursue more trivial matters. With the passing of the survivors there will soon be nothing more that can be researched or uncovered. The elderly perpetrators are unlikely to be forthcoming and as the

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<sup>217</sup> Carole Erika Lorea, "Religion, Caste, and Displacement: The Matua Community", Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Asian History, Oxford University Press, 2020, p.13. Soumya Sankar Bose came across Marichjhapi from watching local theatre. I came across it from conversations with government officials on the launch/yacht/barge of the 24 Parganas District Magistrate. Annu Jalais found out from talking to villagers for her doctoral thesis while Deep Halder found out from his father and the refugee survivor they hide. There were just too many sources for the massacre to be completely erased. The CPM should have thought this out before they organized the massacre.

communications were done verbally without being recorded many questions will be unanswerable.

The massacre presented a problem for the Left Front and particularly the CPM. It was covered up fairly effectively during their rule, but too many people knew about it to disappear entirely from history. It could not have been otherwise considering the scale of the operation, and the number of survivors. Once the Left Front decline and fall began it was bound to resurface given the opportunity it presented to the opposition. Even when out of power and marginalized to fourth place finishes in state elections, no acknowledgement of the atrocity was made or internal party investigation undertaken. Blanket denials bordered on the absurd and only served to alienate them from the electorate, and particularly the Untouchables whose votes they needed more than ever to stage a comeback. Even a full acknowledgement would not reverse their decline, so perhaps it made sense in their current predicament to deny the massacre ever happened, knowing the last of the survivors would soon pass away and perhaps be forgotten. Problem was there were almost certainly bound to be people who keep bringing it up and coming to unflattering conclusions. “That’s what Communism is. Preach about the poor and hungry in public so that you can keep your privilege in private. And then count on left wing myth makers, posing as historians, to whitewash history for you.”<sup>218</sup> The title of the article from which this quote is taken is “Jyoti Basu is the mass murderer India Forgot”. Changing this to the mass murderer India remembers, will take some doing. For the Untouchable refugees his transformation from a God into a mass murderer in just a few months is not something that can be undone. There will be an abundance of research and filmed testimony available on the world wide web for future generations to refer to. They will have different agendas but it will provide a ready source of materials to keep bringing it up. There is probably no way it can be made to look good, particularly for the CPM. Changing name, leadership, or policies can only go so far and it is bound to resurface to their detriment, and there is nothing they can do now that is likely to be effective. They could of course rejoin the Communist Party of India which supported the Emergency, but was not involved in Marichjhapi, however their ego won’t let them, just as their ego would not let them stand down at Marichjhapi when they had ample opportunity to do so.

Public disillusion with the communism has become universal, and particularly so after they came to power. There was no model that worked within its principales, and despite some favourable circumstances West Bengal was no exception. The Left played its role in perpetuating the illusion long after it should have been obvious, and now it pays the price. No amount of theorizing about subalterns can escape this fact, and in the absence of a mass base becomes academic irrelevance. Their coverup of the massacre illustrates this and shows how attached to their master caste backgrounds they really are, despite their disavowals of a class identity. Until they can recognize the limitations in themselves and their theories they cannot hope to convince the subalterns of their good intentions.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Abhishek Banerjee, “Jyoti Basu is the mass murderer India Forgot”, OpIndia, July 8, 2020.

<sup>219</sup> Simon Tisdall, “From Cuba to Palestine, when revolutionaries end up as dictators, the people pay the price.”, The Guardian, July 18, 2021.

It is not inconceivable that some future synergy will bring the massacre to national attention. The 100 year anniversary of the Tulsa Massacre coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement, resulting in national commemoration that would have been inconceivable in earlier decades, and is unlikely to be erasable. That it took a century indicates just how long a view is needed to come to definitive conclusions about remembrance. The Nandigram and Sangram agitation is often seen as a defining movement in the fall of the Left Front, but in fact the Front had been in decline for years, and this was more like a final blow. Marichjhapi far exceeded it but happened at the beginning of the Left Front government so it retained its legitimacy for decades to come, making Marichjhapi appear as a triumph of good governance. With time Marichjhapi may come to be seen as the defining moment of the Left Front government which gradually succumbed to the temptations of office. Looking back on the Left Front, it was Marichjhapi that stands out more than anything else, and the single event most likely to be remembered in the long term at least by an important segment of the electorate. Perhaps had the Left Front achieved some measure of good governance and expanded their base it might have been more easily forgotten, but instead it stagnated with no successful programmes to offer, while the rest of the country moved on with economic development. The massacre marked the end of any ideals or illusions about the Left in India though it was not realized as such at the time. Massacres to be remembered need a constituency, which Marichjhapi has in the Untouchables, but should the Left Front stage a comeback, their opposition will bring it up as well. It may fall out of fashion for a time but it is difficult to see how it can't prove useful to some interest group or other. As other facets of the Left Front government recede in memory, Marichjhapi is likely to endure providing material for generations to come long after any real justice can be obtained for the actual victims. By then the Left can only claim there was no one left alive who took part or ordered the massacre.

There were long and deep historical roots that enabled the massacre to take place without any consequences for the perpetrators. Over two thousand years ago castes became endogamous and a hierarchy emerged that relegated Untouchables to their present position. Exposure to the West under colonialism did open up Hinduism to reform movements in competition with other religions of which Gandhi was the foremost proponent, and certainly the one with the most political influence. He used that power to threaten Untouchables with genocide if they did not comply with his dictats, and the Untouchables fearing this capitulated. The Poona Pact meant Untouchable legislators became dependent on the Master Castes to be elected as the voters in the seats reserved for them were in the majority middle and upper castes including their worst exploiters and oppressors. This produced a group of elected supplicants from the Untouchables who did their masters bidding, and only very secondarily helped their communities when their masters allowed it.

These are the unpalatable facts, which are born out by the caste cleansing and massacre that did not lead to any elected Untouchable politicians resigning from the Parties responsible. Without the Pact such people would not have been elected to office and that

determined their silence in the face of mass murder, which exposed their representation as token Untouchables for the Master Castes. However coopted Untouchable politicians were not responsible for ordering the human rights abuses. That was left to the Chief Ministers and enabling Prime Ministers. These four politicians followed each other in their roles first as Chief Ministers ordering the cleansing and eviction, then as Prime Ministers making it possible for them to do so.

B.C. Roy ordered the dispersal but could not have done so without states willing to take them and that was due to the influence of Nehru. Likewise Jyoti Basu would not have dared to evict them had Moraji Desai been willing to oppose the move instead of facilitating it by discouraging opposition to it. The killers and enablers worked together to make the dispersals a success and were oblivious to the suffering and deaths it caused. Today a plausible case could be made for crimes against humanity, but in those days nothing much was heard along these lines. The Prime Ministers though the principal enablers, had plenty of followers who did nothing. Others who could have done something chose not to do so for various reasons and became complicit. This is the category many academics and other intellectuals fall into.

When the first Untouchable was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council a century ago, Nirode Behari Mullick, Vice President of the Bengal Namasudra Association, stated there that “The interests of the depressed classes are not safe in the hands of so-called high-caste officers” as they are “antagonistic to the aspirations of the depressed classes.”<sup>220</sup> The history especially since the partition of Bengal, continues this central theme of which the massacre is an extreme example. Whatever their often antagonist differences the tri-caste elite maintained their dominance through partition in a remarkably long self-interested rule despite being vastly outnumbered by Untouchables and other minorities.

Our family had been arguing the case for Untouchable human rights for over a century now, with no end in sight. In that time an Untouchable middle class had emerged but the fundamental issues remained the same. In America it is well over a century since the civil war and only now is a bare majority willing to accept equality before the law. If an advanced developed democracy could take so long to begin to accept their past and present, the possibilities in a country like India with an inherently inequalitarian philosophy and practice were so much less for the foreseeable future. The national ruling BJP was much more in tune with Indian culture and religion than the Communists ever were and represented an even greater threat to democracy. When the British abandoned their civilizing mission and went home, the state was taken over by a westernized elite which attempted modernization, but failed to change attitudes at the grassroots sufficiently to prevent a return to the dark ages. If the BJP is defeated it will be because of incompetent governance and alienating too many minorities, rather than a change in culture and religion.

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<sup>220</sup> Dwaipayana Sen, *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p.45.

That the reasons for the massacre remain speculative and the fatalities unknown shows a disinterest from the government and society. Some members of the CPM and the State Committee who might know are still alive but they are in some cases senior party officials unlikely to testify as to the real reasons for the expulsion. The major questions that remain, aside from the casualties, can probably only be answered by the perpetrators who are unlikely to talk in the absence of an official investigation. Whether the massacre will fade from history or be significantly remembered will depend on the politics of India and in particular the trajectory of the Untouchable movement. If it is remembered it will probably be by the Untouchables as an example of heroic resistance against an oppressive state. For them it could achieve the status of a Masada or Wounded Knee. Soon all the participants will have passed away, and there may come a time when the subject will be resurrected to serve some social or political project that cannot now be known. That it came to implicate so many parties, prominent people and elites in a coverup will only serve to discredit them amongst the Untouchable electorate. The highly discriminatory access to justice based on wealth, connections, and caste that Marichjhapi illustrates, and intellectuals were complicit in, will not be easily overcome. The massacre, like so many other atrocities against Untouchables, does not bode well for improving caste-class relations in India.

Postscript: Following the passing of Tushar Bhattacharya who filmed the first documentary on Marichjhapi, his friends set out to translate his book and post it on a website devoted to Marichjhapi. This would be followed by other translations and materials dealing with the massacre bringing the topic to a new generation who should continue the project for the ages. With the chance of a meaningful investigation fast disappearing with the passing of the participants, it will then become a historical legacy that the Left Front and all the major ruling parties, intellectuals, and publications will not be able to undo by providing justice for the victims. It will then be a historical event to provide fuel for caste and class conflict.

**Ross Mallick** is an independent scholar of British, Canadian, and Overseas Indian citizenship. My publications of relevance to the Marichjhapi massacre are *Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalization*, Oxford University Press, *Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal since 1977*, Cambridge University Press, *Development, Ethnicity, and Human Rights in South Asia*, Sage, and *Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre*, *Journal of Asian Studies*.

The current draft article is an attempt to update my previous work with new information provided by other writers, and a reassessment of observations that were made when less was known about the massacre. As the author has relatives in Dandakaranya, I wish to call attention to the massacre so that the refugees can achieve some justice. The author can be reached at [Amiklake54@gmail.com](mailto:Amiklake54@gmail.com).