

## EDITORIAL

- Fifty Years of Independent Bangladesh

## COMMENT

- Economic Cost of Gender Gap

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

- Politics of Populism

## ALTERNATIVE STANDPOINT

- Ethics of Reading Ambedkar's Text

## COMMENTARY

- A Performance Appraisal of the Inflation Targeting Regime
- COVID-19 Vaccines: Legal and Consumer Issues
- The Smallholder in the Agriculture Market Reforms in India
- The Need for Saving Livelihoods for Saving Lives

## BOOK REVIEWS

- *Gender, Power and Identity: Essays on Masculinities in Rural North India*
- *Tribals and Dalits in Orissa: Towards a Social History of Exclusion, c 1800–1950*

## INSIGHT

- News Hunters or Ad Gatherers? Precarious Work of Rural Stringers in Print Media

## SPECIAL ARTICLES

- Farmers' Politics in West Bengal: Left Front and Post-Left Front Period
- Farmer Suicides in India, 1997–2013
- Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme in Kerala

## CURRENT STATISTICS

## Precarious Work in Print Media

Rural stringers constitute the most vulnerable and invisibilised category of print media journalists whose work helps the media firms minimise news production costs while the work conditions remain deplorable. [page 36](#)

## Vaccines and Legal Issues

A robust and equitable No-Fault Compensation System for COVID-19 vaccine injury would pre-empt product liability complaints against the government, and could build trust among citizens about government-initiated immunisation programmes. [page 17](#)

## Agrarian Politics in West Bengal

The nature of the dependence of small and marginal farmers on the local elite and the dynamics of decision-making at the gram panchayat are analysed. [page 42](#)

## Urban EGS in Kerala

The Ayyankali Urban EGS is viewed as a last-resort welfare programme for the poorest of the poor and has not succeeded in achieving its objectives on the lines of MGNREGS. [page 57](#)

## Strategy of Monetary Policy

The RBI's *Report on Currency and Finance, 2020–21* is reviewed with a focus on its analysis of the flexible inflation targeting regime. [page 14](#)

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ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER

**KAMAL G FANIBANDA**

GENERAL MANAGER & PUBLISHER

**GAURAANG PRADHAN**

EDITORIAL: edit@epw.in

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GANPATRAO KADAM MARG, LOWER PAREL  
MUMBAI 400 013  
PHONE: (022) 4063 8282

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DIRECTOR

**J DENNIS RAJAKUMAR**

C 212, AKURLI INDUSTRIAL ESTATE  
KANDIVALI (EAST), MUMBAI 400 101  
PHONES: (022) 2887 3038/41  
epwrf@epwrf.in

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**Liberal Democracies and Farmers' Protest**

On 7 March 2021, the farmers' protest in India surpassed the 101-day mark, making it the largest general strike in world history with 250 million participants, and the longest sit-in in modern Indian history, exceeding the 2019 Shaheen Bagh protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have responded by becoming increasingly anti-democratic. They remain entrenched in their vision of a Hindu nation wedded to free-market capitalism. The outcome is devastating. Minorities are politically, economically, and socially excluded from the nation while the political and civil rights of all citizens are eroded.

During these 101 days, the central government has responded to the protests with escalating state-sanctioned violence, unlawful detention, and censorship. Militarised borders have been erected around the protest camps. Water and electricity were cut off in an attempt to vacate the camps.

Meanwhile, the farmers' protest is providing an alternative vision for the future of Indian democracy. As the Indian state takes an increasingly anti-democratic turn, the protesting farmers are responding by establishing democratically governed communities within these protest camps. In the face of an increasingly illiberal state, the protesters are embracing democracy as a way of life that is learned and lived in civil society and religious community, in public spaces and in the streets.

The farmers' protest is religiously diverse, including Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists. Yet, it is rooted in the Sikh faith. Protesters have done the work of building democratic communities by aligning Sikh principles of radical egalitarianism with Sikh practices, such as communal kitchens and service. The farmers embrace a radical egalitarianism that is inclusive of minorities and values the livelihood and dignity of workers.

The protesters have forged contingent solidarities across differences, including caste, gender, religion, class, age, and language, to create a space of democratic

equality. A key slogan in the protest movement is "Long Live Farmer-Labourer Unity."

The farmers have provided public services in these democratic communities, such as libraries, schools, and medical camps. They have also provided access to arts and music. Through communal kitchens, they have fed hundreds of thousands of people, irrespective of caste, religion, gender, or class.

Sikh temples coordinate people and supplies for the ongoing protest. Villages send villagers in rotating batches to the protest sites. Villages also send essential goods, including wood, flour, rice, vegetables, and milk. There have been ongoing efforts within the farmers' movement to demonstrate how the very labour that sustains the movement is itself gendered. Harinder "Bindu" Kaur says that the labour of the 40,000 women at the camp may not be visible in the fields, but it is visible in the protests. During these 101 days, the Indian government has cracked down on free speech while protesters created their own newspaper, *Trolley Times*, to share information with one another and the world. They did so while forging solidarities across languages, publishing the paper in both Punjabi and Hindi.

As a scholar of democracy, I am in awe of the farmers' protest. They have created a progressive political opening. And in doing so, they have transformed how we think about progressive movements in liberal democracies. They have shown us that progressive movements are not always located in the West or amongst the urban. They have also shown us that progressive ideas are not necessarily secular. The farmers' protest makes visible the democratic potential of religious practice in liberal democracies.

**Natasha Behl**

ARIZONA

**Are Labour Law Reforms for the Labour?**

The government has made a strong claim that the recently passed Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020 are pro-worker and will