

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Another reason to stay away from the ecosystem of genetically engineered products is that GMO seeds are not reusable, which makes the farmers from Nepal... who have for generations learnt to preserve seeds for the future, dependent on corporations."
— KATHMANDU POST

How to walk net-zero talk

Bold announcements by India at COP26 need to be backed by concrete steps



SOMIT DASGUPTA

THE DRAFT TEXT of the just concluded COP26 is certainly a disappointment. However, one did not really have high expectations after seeing the statement which was issued after the G20 summit in Rome. The text of the G20 summit did not go beyond making a few perfunctory statements related to the Paris agreement and the development assistance of \$100 billion per year from 2020 to five years. Regarding the target set in Paris, the text just mentioned that one remained committed to the Paris Agreement goal to hold the global average temperature increase well below 2-degree centigrade and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5-degree centigrade above pre-industrial levels. The point is: Could it be anything different once it was already agreed to in Paris in 2015? Similarly, on the issue of concessional finance of \$100 billion a year, all that was mentioned was that the G20 countries recall and reaffirm the commitment made.

As was expected, the draft text of the COP26 meeting has "phased out" through several negotiations and there are vagaries to deal with at every stage. To begin with, gross emissions calculations are not reliable because it is noted that some countries underreport their figures, which in any case, are calculated on a normative basis. Thereafter, we need to calculate net emissions for which we need to deduct the emissions absorbed by forests and the oceans. Barkhater figures say that about 50 per cent of the emissions were absorbed, though there is no definite figure. Next, we need to know the quantitative relationship between carbon dioxide deposits in the atmosphere and the rise in temperature on the earth's surface. Unfortunately, there are several estimates for this and to make things worse, some

studies have even questioned the direction of causality, that is, whether carbon dioxide emissions cause temperatures to rise or is it the other way around.

To come back to the issue of available space, developed countries have already used up much of the space in the past and are at reasonably high levels of energy consumption, at least in per capita terms. In contrast, developing countries (including India) consume much less in per capita terms and it is only natural that they too get the opportunity to enhance their standard of living which would entail higher energy consumption.

On the issue of concessional finance of \$100 billion per year, the calculations were made way back in 2009 during COP15 at Copenhagen. The requirement today, therefore, is much higher and estimated at \$600 billion per year from 2020 to 2050 just to decarbonise the energy sector. The OECD, incidentally, states that about \$80 billion was made available in 2019 and about \$78 billion in 2018. These figures are contested since they include all types of transfers given to developing countries that have nothing to do with climate change.

It may be further added that all this money was mostly committed by middle-income countries rather than the very poor African states and that they were used to finance "mitigation" projects rather than "adaptation" projects. The reason is that it is easier to benefit developed world's not too keen to address the issue of concessional finance of \$100 billion per year which was to be made available by 2020. It also seems to be silent on the issue of the developed world reaching net-zero well before 2050 considering that their carbon emissions peaked long back. The text also mentions that fossil-fuel subsidies will be "phased out" though it seems that it has now been agreed to replace "phase out" by "phase down", apparently at India's insistence. A major gain, however, as far as India is concerned is that old carbon credits earned after 2013 under the Kyoto Protocol can be traded at least till 2025.

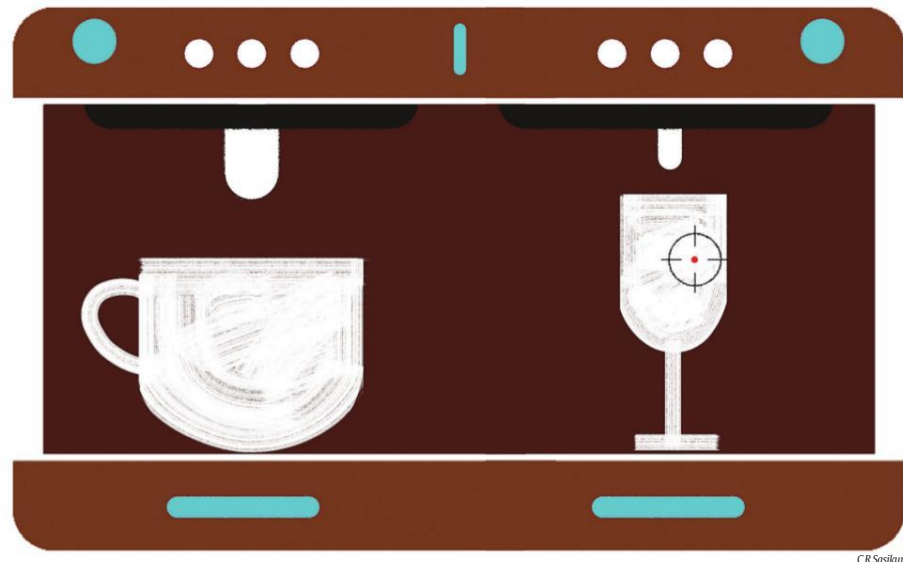
One needs to be practical on how to deal with this climate crisis. Instead of creating a brooha regarding what has emitted how much in the past, one needs to work out a solution on how to allocate the available carbon space henceforth. As far as the available space is concerned, there are several estimates which vary in quantum, though there is no disagreement across the board that available space is limited. To estimate the available space, one has to go through several calculations and there are vagaries to deal with at every stage.

To begin with, gross emissions calculations are not reliable because it is noted that some countries underreport their figures, which in any case, are calculated on a normative basis. Thereafter, we need to calculate net emissions for which we need to deduct the emissions absorbed by forests and the oceans. Barkhater figures say that about 50 per cent of the emissions were absorbed, though there is no definite figure. Next, we need to know the quantitative relationship between carbon dioxide deposits in the atmosphere and the rise in temperature on the earth's surface. Unfortunately, there are several estimates for this and to make things worse, some

This bold action by India has to be backed by commensurate action on the ground and what we need is a sector by sector plan. Let's take the case of solar generation. If we are looking at a massive expansion of solar generation, we can't have states reopening power purchasing agreements, browbeating solar generators to back down, or withholding their payments for months altogether.

We also need to move with alacrity on areas, like, green hydrogen where we seem to have fallen silent after announcing the hydrogen mission a couple of months ago. Unless we take concrete action, we will only add to the list of 100 countries who have expressed the desire to go net-zero, but have done nothing beyond that.

The writer is senior visiting fellow, ICRIER and former, member CEA



Ch Saikumar

Let them have cake

Whether in the anger against a Fabindia ad, or the ban on cutting cake at Kodava weddings, an anxiety about purity is shrinking our social and cultural spaces



SOWMYA DECHAMMA CC

I HAVE BEEN teaching, reading and writing on culture for nearly two decades, but I have never been certain as to how one should understand and explain culture. Indeed, what is culture?

Deliberations on culture by a whole range of scholars seem literally worthless right now. Everywhere "culture" is the most used and abused concept — a realm into which no liberal thought seems to have access. Everyone is clear as to what "their" culture is and what the culture of the "other" is. This clarity comes across as so disturbing and violent that it unsettles all academic nuances of thinking about culture.

I have been thinking about how an advertisement that celebrates Jashn-e-Riwaaz can make or break somebody's fragile culture. But what spurred me into writing this is the decision of the Kodava Samaja in Ponnampeta (a taluk in Ullahatu district in Karnataka) to ban the cutting of cake and drinking of champagne in Kodava wedding ceremonies held in the premises of the Kodava Samaja. The Virajpet Kodava Samaja has followed suit.

Coorg or Kodagu, as it is officially called, is a tourist's darling. Kodavas, an ethno-linguistic minority that operates outside the practices of Hindu culture and is the dominant community in Kodagu, is at the centre

of this issue.

I am a Kodava and am neither a cake cutter nor a champagne drinker. But can our culture be pure once we filter out cake-cutting and champagne-drinking? How much can we filter? Until when can we keep filtering and trying to return to a pure culture? Until the not-so-distant past of Kodava practices that revolved around hunting-gathering? Or, should we return to the recent past, where the economy and culture was based on a semi-feudal paddy economy that most Kodavas have given up on because it is extremely challenging? To the coming of coffee some 150 years ago via the British, which saw an immense spurt in Kodagu's economy in the last 30 years but has remained stagnant after 2005 or so, which has made its turn into a homestay-based tourist economy? What exactly is culture in all these transformations we have seen in our own lifetimes?

Much of what Kodavas understand as culture is from the settled times of paddy cultivation, combined with residues of hunting and gathering around which our clan-based patrilineal cultures, rituals, ceremonies and festivals are based. Is there any way to get back to that time?

What is this pure culture we aspire for? Where is this anxiety for pureness coming from? At times, I am able to come to terms with the minority's anxiety around language and their practices, which are increasingly threatened by, and assimilated into, the dominant Hindu culture. Therefore, there is a need to assert, and this assertion for Kodavas has been possible because of their education (thanks to a history of European administration and missionaries) and because of their relative prosperity. But then, do we also purge ourselves of this education that is not "ours"? Do we let go of coffee

brought in via Europe? Do we let go of our ancestor-nature worship, meedi Kombaras, kaimadas, and bring in Hindu gods to newly built rooms? Do we stop having wedding ceremonies at Kodava Samajas since "traditionally" weddings took place at the bride's and the groom's houses for five days? It bothers me because most of my extended family in Kodagu, small-scale farmers, find it difficult to make ends meet with their paddy and coffee cultivation, but do not take this up as much as they take-out of culture, a fact even more true for the yet-to-Kodagu, city-based families.

Much has been said about culture not being stagnant, that it is an evolving concept. Of course, but evolution is not filtering out. Evolution is working towards harmony and some semblance of equality. If Kodavas have been well-educated, reasonable with their assertion of identity, and relatively peaceful thus far, it is because of our openness to change and not because we harped on purity, a gift that a caste-based society has bestowed on us.

There is also another problem that seems unresolvable to me. All these aspects of culture are of the extraordinary, not of the everyday. Borrowing this term from the late social scientist MS Pandian, what is ordinary, what is day-to-day, seems beyond our comprehension of culture. Can culture be restricted to occasional celebrations, festivities or is our everyday part of our cultures? What is ours on a day-to-day basis and what is not? Once the wedding ceremony — where the cake has not been cut and the champagne not served — is done, can we go back home and bake cakes and say cheers and revel in our cultures? Well, I am not sure.

The writer is professor, University of Hyderabad

The legend of Birsu Munda

On his birth anniversary, let's remember Adivasi contribution to freedom struggle



L MURUGAN

AS INDIA CELEBRATES Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, one name stands tall among the galaxy of stars who fearlessly worked for the freedom of the motherland against the oppressive British Raj — Bhabganu Birsu Munda. Birsu Munda lived a short — just 25 years — but valiant life. His life story, full of gallant efforts to fight injustice and oppression, represents a strong voice of resistance against colonialism.

Born on November 15, 1875, in Ullihatu village in present-day Jharkhand, Birsu spent his childhood in abject poverty in a tribal Munda family. This was the time when the exploitative Raj started penetrating the deep jungles of Central and Eastern India, disrupting tribal living in harmony with nature. The Britisher introduced a feudal zamindari system in the Chhota Nagpur region, destroying the tribal pride. "Khuntkati" agrarian system. The Raj brought in the outsiders — moneylenders and contractors, as well as feudal landlords — who added the British in their exploitation. The unrelenting missionary activity continued with the active support of the Raj, insulating and interfering with the religious-cultural ethos of Adivasis.

Young Birsu grew up watching all this and began to understand how these colonial forces and the dikus (outsiders, enemies) worked against the interests of the local people. This fired up his resolve to fight this unholy nexus.

During the 1880s, Birsu closely witnessed the Sardari Lalai movement in the region,

which demanded the restoration of tribal rights through non-violent methods like sending petitions to the Raj. However, the oppressive colonial regime paid no heed to these demands. The zamindari system soon reduced the tribals from the status of landowners to that of labourers. The feudal setup intensified the forced labour (*vech bijari*) in the forested tribal areas. The exploitation of tribals now reached a breaking point.

This culminated in Birsu taking up the cause of Adivasis. He shed new light on the religious domain. He stood firm against missionaries who were belittling tribal life and culture. At the same time, Birsu worked to refine and reform religious practices, discouraged many superstitious rites. He brought in new tenets, prayers and worked to restore tribal pride. Birsu impressed upon the Adivasis the importance of "*simare firun raja jai*" or "victory to the ancestral king" — thus invoking the sovereignty of the tribals' ancestral autonomous control over the land. Birsu became a mass leader and began to be considered as Bhagwan and Dharti Aba by his followers.

Birsu knew who the real enemy was — in addition to the dikus, it was the oppressive Raj. He was clear that "*abua raj setaj jana, maharani raj tundu jana*" (let the kingdom of the Queen end and our kingdom be established).

Bhagwan Birsu ignited the minds of the masses. The Mundas, Oraons, other Adivasis

and non-Adivasis responded to his call and joined the "Ulgulan" or revolt against the colonial masters and exploitative dikus. Birsu asked the people not to pay any rent, and attacked the outposts of feudal, missionary and colonial authorities. With traditional bows and arrows, the tribals of Central and Eastern India waged an effective armed resistance against the British. In doing so, however, Birsu was careful that only the real exploiters were not attacked, and the common people were not troubled. Birsu became an image of vitality and divinity. Soon, he was captured by British police and lodged in jail, where he died in captivity on June 9, 1900. But Bhagwan Birsu Munda's spirited struggle did not go in vain. It compelled the British to take cognisance of the plight and exploitation of tribals, and bring in the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 for their protection. This Act restricted the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, giving Adivasi a huge relief and became a landmark legislation for the protection of tribal rights. The British regime also took steps to abolish *Vechi* or forced labour.

Bhagwan Birsu Munda continues to inspire millions of Indians, 121 years after his death. He is an icon of valour, courage and leadership. He was a leader who took great pride in his rich culture and great traditions, but at the same time, did not shy away from reforming his own faith wherever necessary.

He is one of the tallest icons of our freedom movement. India's freedom struggle was strengthened by several tribal communities such as Mundas, Oraons, Santhals, Tamars, Kols, Bhils, Khasis, Koyas and Mizoos, to name a few. The revolutionary movements and struggles organised by tribal communities were marked by their immense courage and supreme sacrifice and inspired Indians all over the country.

However, established historians could not do justice to their immense contribution to India's freedom struggle. Our visionary Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to all Indians to celebrate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and to study and understand the valour and sacrifice of many such unsung heroes in India's freedom struggle. Under his dynamic leadership, for the first time, tribal pride and contributions are being given a fitting tribute by celebrating Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, on November 15 — the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsu Munda.

On this Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, let us remember and recognise the efforts of India's tribal people for the preservation of their cultural heritage and the promotion of Indian values of valour, hospitality and national pride.

The writer is Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FALSE EQUIVALENCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Shashi & Kanganu' (IE, November 13), referring to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Congress MP has rightly said that he has done no wrong by wishing L K Advani on his birthday, while opposing him politically. Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, supported by the government, propagates a political agenda to tarnish the image of the nation and to disgrace our freedom fighters and soldiers who sacrificed their lives to get the nation liberated from the British. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should back his silence and let the nation if he endorses her views.

SS Paul, *Nadia*

DIVERSITY & NEHRU

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Dear Nehruji' (IE, November 13). The writer has very cogently described the system of caste in "new India". On the fundamental rights of people, so dear to Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime minister of the biggest democracy of the world. He was a libertarian to the core and set store by unity in diversity. Nehru also hated chauvinism and fundamentalism and that is why he was considered a statesman by his leaders. His love for the country and his people moved from his priority of having IITs, dams and AIIMS. To his credit, unlike most of the leaders, he was neither a charlatan nor a pedagogue.

Tarsem Singh, *Mahipur*

nary diversity which has been contributed to by the travellers from Central and Western Asia; or the architectural luxuriance brought about both the foreigners (like Taj Mahal) and the indigenous natives (like the Dravidian and Nagara temples). Its cornucopia of eclectic faiths and traditions has always been a point of attraction for the scholars and ambassadors who visited India and have written tomes exemplifying its grandiose. To fry and strip these layers is both a folly and is impossible. Our leaders should focus on preserving our rich culture and showcasing it abroad rather than trying to subjugate it.

Vinay Saroha, *Delhi*