



INDIA CIVIL WATCH INTERNATIONAL

NewsWire

#Resign Modi

INDIA CIVIL WATCH INTERNATIONAL

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Congressional Briefing

India's Covid Crisis: What's at Stake for Global Health and the US-India Partnership

US policymakers have an essential role to play in ensuring that key allies respond effectively to the pandemic. This requires honoring basic human rights principles of equity, transparency, and freedom of speech. Join us to hear about what went wrong during India's catastrophic Covid-19 second wave, and what can be done going forward. Hear experts in epidemiology, science policy, and human rights document the Indian government's handling of the pandemic, with special emphasis on the suppression and misreporting of data, harm stemming from misinformation, and widespread curbs on freedom of expression that exacerbated the crisis.



Dr. Bhamar Mukherjee
John D. Kalbfleisch Professor and
Chair of Biostatistics
Professor of Epidemiology
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Dr. Murad Banaji
Senior Lecturer in Mathematics
Middlesex University, London
Expert on Covid-19 Fatality Rate
in India



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Kunal Kamra on New York Times:
Modi Caused a 'Covid Massacre'
https://youtu.be/07WZH-Rle_U

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In Solidarity with Indigenous peoples of Canada!

This May, the remains of over 215 indigenous children were discovered on the premises of a residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. It is yet another reminder of the shameful legacy of the violence and cultural indoctrination that accompanied—were central to—the establishing of settler nation-states in North America. We present two reflections on the subject on page 3. Salman Kureishy channels the voices of the dispossessed, allowing them to speak back from the afterlife to the Canadian government. Rana Khan considers the wider political ramifications of the mass exhumation.

India Civil Watch International

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Casteist BAPS under SCRUTINY!

As an FBI investigation continues, into the BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan) sect's illegal labor practices in the construction of a massive temple in New Jersey, involving wage theft, confinement, isolation, coercion and threats of retaliation against the largely Dalit workforce brought from India, the below FAQ from **Ambedkar King Study Circle** provides useful analytical clarity on the issue. <https://akscusa.org/faq-about-the-baps-case/>

Palagummi Sainath Wins Fukuoka Prize!

<http://shorturl.at/drGIU>



This Month in History

By Mamatha Kodidela

It's a typical village in Andhra Pradesh. Typical in people being segregated by caste lines, typical in one dominant caste holding thousands of acres of land and holding other castes in perpetual servitude, paying starvation wages to farm laborers or deceiving tenant farmers of their hard earned crops. Typical in disregarding the constitutional rights of other castes and in committing atrocities with impunity. However, there is one caste that stood against this typical oppression on several occasions, which culminated in a massacre that shook India.

The village is Karamchedu. Kamma was the only dominant caste in the village. Families from several oppressed castes, along with two Dalit castes - Mala and Madiga - lived in the village.

On July 16th, 1985, a Madiga youth saw two Kamma youths washing their buffaloes by a water tank, the only drinking water source that Dalits were allowed to use. When he noticed that the Kamma youths had washed the buckets that were used to feed the buffaloes in the tank, he confronted them for dirtying the drinking water. The Kamma youths attacked him for confronting them, the people from the dominant caste. When a Madiga woman tried to stop the attack, the Kamma youth hit her with a whip. She defended herself with a vessel used to collect water, and ended up hurting one of the Kamma youths.

Kammas of the village saw this act of self-defence as an ongoing defiance to their caste-based dominance. Madigas have been a thorn on their side on several occasions.

Madigas in the village were experts in stick-fighting and performed martial arts. Regularly, Madigas stood up to Kammas who engaged in teasing women. When Kammas barbarically attacked an activist because he was organizing peasants for a wage hike, Madigas hid him. In a separate attack on Malas, Madigas rescued them from the Kammas. When elections came, Kammas of the village stood with N.T Rama Rao (NTR) who founded the Telugu Desam Party. NTR was a Kamma and also father-in-law of one of the Kamma landlords in the village. Kammas in the village ordered everyone in the village to vote for NTR's son-in-law, but it was apparent that Madigas voted for the Congress. In all these occasions several hundreds of Kammas confronted Madigas, who were able to fend them off.

When violence came to the Madigas in the early morning hours of July 17th, 1985, it wasn't just about the water dispute but pent-up frustration at the way Madigas stood their ground in self-respect. Kammas saw the self-defence of a Madiga woman as defiance and it was a matter of caste-pride that would move Kammas from other villages to join them in confronting the Madigas. They spread the word to Kammas in

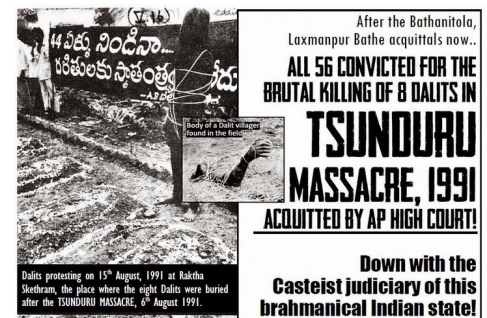


Memorial to the martyrs, Karamchedu, Andhra Pradesh

seven nearby villages. More than 2,000 Kammas attacked the Madigas in Karamchedu. They chased Madigas into the fields, beat them, stabbed and axed them. They raped 3 women and killed 8 men and badly wounded several others.

This massacre laid bare the everyday caste violence meted out to Dalits and how dominant castes get away from any punishment for their inhumane crimes. Twenty-three years after the massacre, the Supreme Court of India delivered their final verdict in the Karamchedu case - one person was sentenced to life imprisonment and 30 others to 3 years of imprisonment.

Within 6 years after the Karamchedu massacre, 21 Dalits were murdered in Tsundur, a village in the neighboring district. This time by people from the Reddy caste, another dominant caste in Andhra Pradesh.



Massacres in Karamchedu and Tsundur, were a jolting wakeup call to Left organizations to recognize caste-oppression in its own specificity and not simplify it as a consequence of class struggle between landlords and peasants. While massacres bring into public focus the atrocities meted out to Dalits, for Dalits every day is a July 17th, and as Yuvaka, a Dalit poet, writes, every village is a Tsundur. The typical village-level everyday violence of caste is unmistakably an integral part of caste society.

Tsundur Dalit massacre: a blood-soaked chapter in modern history
(The Hindu) <http://shorturl.at/rNP37>

What do the thousand bones say to the educators?

No one thought of us. It was as if we did not exist. Surprised! We have waited for years, for you to tell the world: "Look, there were once lives that we banished into the land of the dead". We wanted you, our educators, our tormentors, to say: "We apologize. We are sorry". We waited and waited. You thought souls fly away to their maker; what is left is no more than dust and to dust it was returned, quietly, surreptitiously. But we, bones, we know how to stay alive. We decay, but we can not be destroyed. It was dark and damp down there where we lay forlorn for years. It was not as bad as the dark nights of our souls here above the earth. You put us in hell, so our souls could be saved for heaven. Yes, it was hell while we were alive in your presence. So here we come. Did you think we bones will disappear without a trace?

That would have eased your conscience. You did not care for us, so why should we care for your shame? Do you think we enjoy this public display of our nakedness? We do not. This is our last call. We come as an antidote to the arrogance of your memory. When death and disappearance don't work, a ghastly appearance of skeletons becomes necessary. So here we are to remind you of the following story.

While on a visit in Auschwitz, in 2006, Pope Benedict asked, "Why did God remain silent?". He asked the wrong question. As Eduardo Galeano reminded you, it was the Church that remained silent, the Church that spoke in God's name. But you are an obstinate lot. You don't listen.



July 1st is **Canada Day**. However, one must ask, do we really need to celebrate this day, which also, in a sense, marks the disappearance of the rights of the indigenous peoples of this land?

Canadians are learning more about settler colonialism since the discovery, this May, of the remains over 215 children, at the site of a former residential school, in Kamloops, BC. Indigenous populations have not only been denied a future but even their past.

Most of us know about the infamous residential school system that was part of Canadian state policy from the latter half of the 19th century till as late as 1998. Indigenous children were "snatched" from their parents and put in residential schools, the majority of which were run by the Catholic Church. This was done to deliberately erase the history and culture, indeed the very identity of the indigenous peoples, though the official version was that this done to "assimilate" the young. Children were housed in these schools, run by religious institutions, in very poor unhygienic conditions which led to more than 5,000 deaths nationwide.

The children also suffered verbal and physical abuse. Survivors of the residential school system have spoken of the utter lack of dignity and the humiliation they had had to suffer, and how they were made to feel ashamed of their heritage and identity. All this arose, of course, out of the colonial belief that white culture was superior.

The latest revelation of unmarked graves at the Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan is the result of efforts made by the Cowessess First Nation. There have been ongoing attempts by indigenous peoples and their allies to reclaim their history, and in the process, force the Canadian government and concerned religious authorities to acknowledge their shameful acts. Yes, a formal apology had been tendered by the government in 2008 but it is not enough, and the Catholic Church has remained largely silent. The part played by previous policy makers and prime ministers is now in public domain, and a start has been made by demanding that educational institutions named after perpetrators of injustice like John A. MacDonald and Egerton Ryerson be renamed. Statues in public places are being removed, and there is pressure on the government to follow up on the recommendations made by the report on The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that the latest discovery of the unmarked graves is "a shameful reminder of the systemic racism, discrimination, and injustice that Indigenous peoples have faced."

ICWI stands in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Canada!

Spotlight: InSAF India

By Rana Khan

InSAF India (International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India) was formed in October 2020 by a group of diaspora-based academics and professionals, all with close ties to India, who were deeply concerned about the rising assaults on academic freedom in the country, in particular the attacks on anti-caste academics and scholars from minority backgrounds. InSAF was formed on the premise that it is the obligation and responsibility of diasporic Indians to raise their voices not only to what is happening in India in terms of the infringements on academic freedom, but also to the growing dissemination of anti-intellectual, regressive political thought in the name of Indian culture and history at educational and research institutions around the world.

InSAF India's campaigns are underpinned by the belief that academic freedom is inextricably linked to social justice, and that knowledge production and formation are bound to the fostering of our social selves.

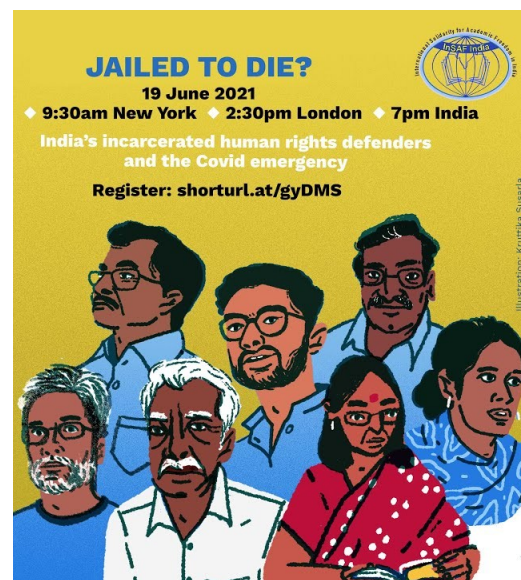
Since January 2021, InSAF India has collaborated with other diasporic organizations (including ICWI), and academic institutions to run a monthly webinar series on critical issues such as the criminalization of student activism and anti-caste research, why academics should care about the farmers' protest, and the first in their "Ideas Behind Bars" series on the Bhima Koregaon case.

Their ongoing "Jailed to Die?" campaign has focused on the urgent need to implement the Covid-19 administrative order and release jailed academics and human rights

defenders and included an online public appeal meeting featuring family members of jailed academics and activists. InSAF India plans to make monthly podcasts as well that discuss the writings of jailed academics and intellectuals.

InSAF India has a website <https://www.academicfreedomindia.com/>, and it offers updates to subscribers as well. Its Twitter handle is @IndInsaf and its statement can be seen on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AbXe7aOx8U>.

InSAF India can be contacted at insafindia@protonmail.com



A poster of InSAF India's recent webinar

Conversation with Pratik Sinha

Rana Khan

Pratik Sinha is the co-founder of Alt News, working on the issue of mis/disinformation in Indian society. Previously, he worked over a decade as a software engineer.

You grew up with activist parents Mukul and Nirjhari Sinha in Ahmedabad, then pursued a career in software engineering. What made you take the decision to start a fact-checking website in 2016-17? Was it a conscious nod to continuing the activist tradition set by your parents?

I worked abroad, in the US and Vietnam, for almost a decade as a software engineer. The projects I worked upon were meant for a certain social class, and I was not entirely happy about that. In 2013, I came back to India, and soon after my father was diagnosed with cancer. I spent the next 9 months with my mother and father, having multitude of conversations before he passed away in May 2014. During this period, my father and I spoke a lot about politics, and those conversations did influence me. I had also helped him in his 'Truth of Gujarat' website that he had founded, and that led to interactions with other people. I continued to be involved with Jan Sangharsh Manch (founded by my parents) and was part of the march from Ahmedabad to Una after the Una incident. It was in 2016, after having played a part in promoting the march on social media, I decided to take a hiatus from my software engineer career and started designing the idea behind Alt News. I had also met Muhammed Zubair (co-founder), and since misinformation had already become a big issue by then, we decided to set up an alternative, to fact-check misinformation on both social media and mainstream media.

At that time, most journalists here

lacked digital forensic skills. Zubair and I both had a tech background and hence we decided to focus on fact-checking.

What are the biggest challenges you face at work? Isn't the lack of media literacy, the sheer volume of work (fake videos), or any political interference disheartening?

There are multiple challenges, especially as our understanding of what we had set out to do initially has progressed as well. The primary challenge is to make an impact, but how does one measure impact? Yes, Alt News has become a known brand, but the impact seems minimal even now, and so we have been strategizing our goal: Presently, we don't just see ourselves as a media organization, but are working towards to the goal of fostering more critical thought in the society, creating a community, inculcating media literacy and education. For example, there are still very few courses on this subject at educational institutions. Besides writing articles on misinformation, we at Alt News are also writing a book on how to fact-check, doing multiple trainings, creating course curricula and more.

The Covid pandemic has seen so much medical and political misinformation. I feel that the more insecure people are, the more polarized society is, the more susceptible it is to misinformation. People with vested interests are taking advantage of this, so now our



brief has become wider. Since misinformation is inherently set in people's minds, our primary challenge is to make an impact at the societal levels.

Alt News is the leader in this field, and now we see a plethora of fact-checking divisions in media houses. Are these effective, or are they biased, in your opinion? Do you see this development as a validation of your organization?

Mainstream media organizations, like *The Times of India* and *India Today* for instance, do have a fact-checking division, but they avoid fact-checking leaders of BJP. We have written a data-based article about how these organizations do not fact-check people who belong to the ruling party. However, it is an important development that they at least acknowledge the issue and we are glad that this trend has become popular, and it can only be good for everyone.

Do you see parallels in Trump's use of "fake news" as a strategic tool, and the Indian government's use of misleading or wrong info to discredit opponents? Does that increase the need for fact-checking political claims?

In India, misinformation is not restricted to one ideological organization (though most come from the supporters of the BJP). Yes, disinformation has been deliberately organized to serve multiple motives: it is designed to set up a narrative, to maintain a certain image, to counteract any criticism of the government.

How long does it take for the Alt team to go through a video/post for a factcheck? Do you only respond to requests for fact-checking or take the initiative yourself? What is a typical day at Alt News for you?

There is no typical day! I wear many hats, as I do the everyday editing of the articles written by my colleagues, carry out the responsibilities of being the organization's spokesperson, do trainings, work on new ideas etc. As for the misinformation, we get many requests, but we are also proactive about monitoring social media and certain accounts from where disinformation is expected. There is an Alt News mobile app in addition to a WhatsApp number and social media through which requests can come.

I feel that the more insecure people are, the more polarized society is, the more susceptible it is to misinformation.

The time taken for fact-checking depends on the request - some videos take only 5 minutes and then an hour to write out the article, some images and videos might take ten to twelve days to investigate and do the research. We generally try to put out the results within 72 hours.

Most of us see the work you and your co-founder do as very brave. How do you cope with threats or intimidation or legal action?

The organization has received multiple legal notices! My mother Nirjhari Sinha who is the Managing Director of the company plays a huge role in dealing with financial and legal issues. She is actively involved in strategizing the course of action when either individuals associated with the organization are targeted with motivated cases and or when legal notices are served on us. What we have done is to keep the financial side very clear and transparent (70% of our revenue comes from donations). We are mindful about using measured language, we do not defame people, and do not use any terms or words that might invite more legal notices.

Do you have any tie-ups, or have membership, with any international fact-checking organizations?

No, we are not on the International Fact-checking Network (IFN) anymore, as we were not happy with the fact the CEO of Dainik Jagran was on its Board. In order to ensure maximum spread of the fact-checks we write, we use a permissive content license called Creative Commons, which means we do not charge for our content, and other organizations can pick up our content while attributing us.

Finally, what would you like fellow allies to do, and how can diaspora organizations (like the ICWI) help in this regard?

Lots of people are sympathetic and supportive of Alt News in India, as the donations prove, and we are working towards self-sufficiency in this regard.

Moreover, many independent media portals are also very open to using our work on their platforms, and that is very helpful. Ravish Kumar of NDTV initially featured us in 2017.

As for organizations abroad, one of the main reasons why we are not working with anyone as yet is because we cannot have any financial transactions from outside India

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Fact-checks by Alt News encompass a wide variety of false information including:

- Political fact-checking: Scrutinising claims made by political parties, leaders and other persons in positions of authority across the political spectrum.
- Social media rumors: Debunking the misinformation and disinformation that circulates on social media and
- Mainstream media misinformation and bias: Examining inaccurate or misleading information disseminated by mainstream media, either inadvertently or with an objective of shaping public opinion in favour of a political party.

For a bit of Dignity

Kalekuri Prasad (Yuvaka)

I don't know when I was born, but
I was murdered thousands of years ago on this very land
I don't know the doctrines of karma
about the cycle of death and birth, but
I am being born, again and again, in this same land

My body melted away in this country
And became the grasslands of Ganga and Sindhu
When my tears flowed from my eyes
life giving rivers rippled through the country
When essence of life dribbled from my veins
This country became fertile and was drenched in riches

I was Sambuca in Treta Yuga
Twenty two years ago my name was Kanchikacharla Kotesu*
My birthplace is Kilavenmani, Karamchedu, Neerukonda
Now Tsundur is the name that vicious landlord's cruelty has tattooed
on my heart with ploughshares
Now Tsundur is not a noun, but a pronoun
Now every heart is a Tsundur, a raging canker

I am the wound of the multitudes, I am the multitude of wounds
For generations I am the captive in an independent country
After being abused, exploited,
raped, and tortured
I am the one who raised my head just for a bit of dignity

In this reign of the blinded rich and conceited casteists
I am the one living as if living itself is a protest
I am the one dying again and again, to live
Don't call me a victim
I am a martyr, I am a martyr, I am a martyr!

I am the one who swallowed famine so this world is left with riches
I am the one who kicked the sun on his head
To make him stand upright
I am the one who is raising slogans in the firepit of raging hearts
I am not a victim, I am a martyr
I am the flying flag of defiance

Don't shed your tears for me
If you can, cremate me in the heart of this city
I shall blossom as a bamboo forest that sings the songs of life
Print my dead body as the front page of this country
I shall pervade into the pages of history as beautiful future
Invoke me into your hearts
I shall be born again and again in this very country
like fiery fires of unrelenting struggles

**translated by Mamatha Kodidela*



Yuvaka is the pen name of **Kalekuri Prasad** (25 October 1962 – 17 May 2013), a revolutionary Dalit poet. He was an active member of Radical Youth League, Dalita Mahasabha and Bahujan Samaj Party.

Siddalingaiah

Ratik Asokan



Siddalingaiah, the great Dalit Kannada writer, passed away from coronavirus-related complications on June 11 at the age of sixty-seven. A poet, dramatist, academic, folklorist, political activist, and member of Karnataka Legislative Council, he was one of the most extraordinary public intellectuals of modern India. Along with his friend and comrade Devanur Mahadeva, Siddalingaiah is considered a pioneer of Dalit-Bandaya (or “Dalit resistance”) literature. With B. Krishnappa, they founded the Dalit Sangharsa Samhiti, the first statewide political organization of Dalits. Narendra Modi, whose lack of shame is only matched by his cultural ignorance, had the gall to post a tweet of condolences at the news of Siddalingaiah’s death.

If our prime minister could read, he would be burnt by the ferocious critique of the caste system and Hinduism to be found in this indomitable writer’s work.

Born on February 1954 in Magadi, Ramanagara district, Siddalingaiah grew up in a poor Dalit family. (In his autobiography, he recounts upper-caste landlords forcing his father to till the fields with a plough like a cow.) With the help of relatives, his family moved to the Srirampura slum in Bangalore, when he had finished his secondary education. He took an interest in literature and politics from a young age, and eventually became a lecturer at Bangalore University.

Siddalingaiah announced himself to Karnataka’s literary world in 1975 with his debut collection *Hole Madigara Hadu* (“The Song of the Madigas”). Over subsequent decades, he exposed Savarna barbarism, while expressing the joys of Dalit resistance and creativity, in a series of formally experimental poems and plays. “My People,” a poem from his 1990 collection *A String of Pearls*, runs:

*Who, treated to fiery speeches, are scorched
and burnt to ashes,
Who, for those who feast on sweets with God’s
name on their lips,
Stitch sandals and shoes, these victims of
usurers,
These, these are my people.
Who excavate gold but go without food,
Who weave fine fabrics, but go themselves
bare,
Who do what they are told, who subsist on
mere air,
These, these are my people.
[Translation K. Narasimha Murthy]*

Yet it would be a disservice to simply paint Siddalingaiah as a “resistance” writer. In fact, one of the most remarkable aspects of his work is its humor, wit, and sheer delight. *Avataragalu* (Incarnations), his classic 1982 study of non-Brahmanical folk deities, abounds in gentle mockery of the gods—who in turn mock worshippers into giving bigger donations! Nowhere is his talent for comedy put to greater effect than in his magnificent autobiography *Ooru Keeri* (translated into English as “A Word With You, World,” by S.R. Ramakrishna). While confronting caste-oppression and violence with courage, the book is filled with achingly funny incidents of childhood mischief, and sarcasm-laden portraits that expose the absurdity of the caste system. Of a college lecturer, he writes:

A lecturer used to feel thirsty in class. He would give me the key to his Godrej almirah and ask me to fetch water. I would do as told. He was very orthodox. Why he still chose me to fetch water became a subject of discussion in class. He had mistaken me for a Lingayat. I was liberated from the task of fetching water after he came to know my caste.

Again and again, the book shows Siddalingaiah outwitting foolish Savarnas by outplaying them at their own game. As his friend, the great Kannada critic D.R. Nagaraj noted, *Ooru Keeri* “resounds with the poor man’s laughter.” “This is writing that makes rage pleasant. Here, anger becomes sarcasm. Ire is translated into a mischief that grasps the subtleties of life.”

Alas, not all Siddalingaiah’s writings have been translated into English. It is to be hoped that this is rectified as soon as possible. In closing, I would like to recall something Pablo Neruda said of the

Argentine novelist Julio Cortazar: "Anyone who doesn't read Cortázar is doomed. Not to read him is a serious invisible disease which in time can have terrible consequences. Something similar to a man who has never tasted peaches. He would quietly become sadder, noticeably paler and, probably,

little by little, he would lose his hair." Yes, this is true of Siddalingaiah too. Whether or not his books will topple the caste system is an open question. But what's certain is that anyone who doesn't read him is doomed.

Untouchable Love

Kalekuri Prasad (Yuvaka)

Though wounds were throbbing with pain
I carried your footprints on my heart
Though death is enveloping me
I wished for a life with you
Though I could not live just to love
I wanted to at least die for love

My love!
Morsels of curd rice that you have fed me
As my witness
Shall I tell the real reason for my death

My love!
Did you know
How much my heart, blood and language
Have struggled to call you that way all the time that I am alive
Even when our bodies entwined
In the shadows of darkness
I could only call you as 'ammagoru'* (*addressing high caste woman)
But my wish was never fulfilled while I lived

When your people dragged me to the village council
And tied me to the pole of a shed
And thrashed me as if I am an animal
I was laughing in myself
How pity I felt for
my people who hung their heads in shame?
If your people asked me what I have done
I wanted to scream that I am in love with you
But the village council has accused me of theft
And aren't you the witness to my crime?

I have heard of burning only dead bodies
But your people have lit me on fire while I was still alive
"Father, forgive them,
For they know not what they do"
I was remembering words of the Lord
That the priest has told me

The sleepless nights that we have spent together as witness
I would forgiven them all
Had I seen one drop of tear in your eyes
The fire you have lit in my heart
The gasoline fire your people
Have lit on my body
If I am asked which is more painful
I can't tell the difference now

My love!
When these fires are engulfing me
It feels like you are hugging me



In this nation of casteist bigots blinded
by wealth,

I am someone who lives to register life
itself as a protest.

- Kaleikuri Prasad

*Kanchikacherla Kotesu, a Dalit youth from Kanchikacherla, was burnt at the stake for falling in love with a high caste woman. "Untouchable Love" was written for Kotesu.