

# *Bhopal Festival*

Join the Celebration of Diversity, Reason and Resistance in Bhopal

26-28 November, 2017

**Protest**

the unmaking of India

**Celebrate**

its diversity

After independence, our constitution declared that India should be a diverse nation, with all its people equal as citizens. Seven decades later, this fundamental goal enshrined in our constitution faces a grave threat. The very existence of India as a nation welcoming of all people, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, gender or caste, is in jeopardy. At the same time, economic policies favouring large corporations and foreign capital deny millions their means of livelihoods, jobs, shelter and even basic amenities. Bullet trains and 'smart' cities take precedence over education, healthcare and freedom from hunger.

Freedom of speech, freedom of the pen, and the freedom to protest may be constitutionally guaranteed; but are perceived as a threat by our rulers. A false debate on 'nationalism' that seeks to divide the working people and define the nation on the basis of religion, rather than on economic sovereignty, has been consciously foisted on us under the garb of 'Hindutva'. More and more, any dissent, any criticism of the government, is considered anti-national. Critical thinking, opposition to the current pro-corporate model of development, creativity and reason are punished or discouraged. This is what the toxic ideology of Hindutva has done with its agenda of hatred and unreason: lynch mobs target religious and ethnic minorities; caste oppression reasserts itself in both old and new ways; science is replaced by fact-free myths; rationalists are assassinated. The murder of Gauri Lankesh follows similar heinous killings of social activists Dhabolkar, Pansare and Kalburgi. History, science, books, art, films: no area of knowledge is safe from attack. The hyper

nationalism of the current government calls for war. Hate can only speak in the language of violence, exclusions and erasures.

The people of India have repeatedly rejected attempts to divide them on the basis of religion, caste, language and ethnicity. This was the history of India's national movement. India is a tapestry of different people: our food, our clothes, our architecture, our songs, our poetry, our books are testimony to the shared heritage of Indians. We speak different languages; some of us pray in different places of worship, our food and our customs and our dresses are different. But we are all Indians because we have built this country on the foundation of inclusive people's struggles; and the idea of equality. In his last speech to the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar reminded us that without social and economic equality, equality in political life will not survive.

Contrast this vision, and critique of continuing inequality, with the present-day hyper nationalists' plans for India. The official and unofficial forces of Hindutva are rapidly eroding the idea of a diverse but equal – at least before law -- India. More communities, more people, are excluded from the "homogenised mainstream". A small elite has grown immensely wealthy, particularly in the last few decades. The Parliament has never had as many crorepatis as it does now. The pro-corporate agenda of the current government is combined with sharp attacks on public education, research, public infrastructure; and, most of all, working people. The poor, the workers, the farmers: all are under siege. Women are being squeezed out of public spaces, and the workforce. And as resistance grows to these attacks, the rightwing need to stifle dissent, and crush resistance in the name of "the nation", increases.

Many of us are deeply worried about these increasing attacks on the fabric that holds our country together. We have seen rising resistance from farmers, dalits, workers, students and women. They show us the way. Instead of fighting a defensive battle, we need to build our alternate vision of India, bringing together reason, cultural diversity and equality.

India needs a different kind of nationalism -- a nationalism that values all people and their ways of life; a nationalism that privileges the poor and workers over the rich and the elite; a nationalism that raises its voice against all forms of injustice and social exclusions. Mobilisation is taking place to defend diversity and to demand for justice.

We invite organizations and individuals to lend their voices at a Festival of Protest and a Celebration of Diversity on 26-28 November, 2017 at Bhopal. Come to share your views on how we can defend our livelihoods, our heritage of science and reason, and our cultural diversity. Come with your songs, your poetry, your paintings, your plays and skits, your films. Share the call from Bhopal with diverse organizations representing people's science movements, cultural movements, writers' movements, movements striving for social justice, feminist movements, and movements representing working people, teachers, students and youth.

***Join us in Bhopal in different spaces – spaces for debate and proposals for alternatives and action; spaces for exhibitions; spaces for songs and skits; spaces for poetry reading; spaces explaining scientific rationality. From these spaces, let us bring together our voices to call for reason, social justice and economic freedom. Let our voices grow loud and clear across the nation.***

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## Organising the collective space in Bhopal

In Bhopal, arrangements will be made for people who request accommodation to stay in dormitories. There will be food stalls at the programme venue and meals will be provided at reasonable cost.

At the programme venue, separate spaces will be dedicated to different activities, including:

**Seminars and lectures**

**Rationalist exposition of 'miracles'**

**Film Shows**

**Poetry Reading**

**Skits, Plays and Songs**

**Exhibitions**

An opening session on 26th afternoon will combine cultural performances with talks by eminent social activists, scientists, and cultural activists.

On 27th and 28th activities will be organized in the different spaces. You can propose an activity in Bhopal on any of the areas outlined above or register your participation by writing to [bhopalfest@gmail.com](mailto:bhopalfest@gmail.com). More details about the Bhopal programme are available at [www.bhopalfestival.in](http://www.bhopalfestival.in)

The festival will culminate in a march in the city on 28th evening.