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develop "muscles of iron" and pray, "O Thou Mother of Strength, … make me a Man!"' (p. 244). The European *fin de siècle*, he claims, offered these Asian thinkers a solution to the egotism, cynicism and passivity of a decadent modern culture in radical renewal, 'through a strong will and commitment to superhuman action' (p. 244). European ideas of individualism, efficiency, utility, self-interest coalesced in a nationalism that concealed the profound inequalities and the true origins of suffering within, as *ressentiment* became the 'default metaphysics' of the modern world. Mishra offers, in broad strokes, the plot lines of the career of political Hinduism, from V.D. Savarkar to Narendra Modi.

The other points in this cartography of modernity include Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber as well as new entrants in entities such as the ISIS who come from criminal and violent backgrounds with little or no knowledge of Islam. Mishra takes apart the 'lone wolf' label to locate these men in the socio-political terrain of international radicalism conjoined with globalization. Such men challenge the assumption, according to Mishra, that desires, beliefs and perceived benefits alone motivate a free and willing human. There is no more a vision of alternative political reality on a global or local scale, be it a classless society or an Islamic nation state—'the act of violence is all'—as political and economic life offers no remedy for the emotional and psychological disorders it has unleashed. Individuals find themselves 'entangled in histories they are barely aware of,' notes Mishra, and this generalized discontent, a 'mood of drift, resentment, disillusionment and economic shakiness' is exploited by demagogues with abstract plans of '*doing* something' (p. 343). Uprooted masses, denied the fruits of modernity that have been cornered almost obscenely by elites over generations, 'recoil into supremacism, populism and rancorous brutality' (p. 346). It is an apocalyptic mood, in Mishra's words, in times of privatization, commodification and militarization that calls for some 'truly transformative thinking about both the self and the world' (p. 346).

The *Age of Anger* is an absorbing book: authoritative in its casual breadth of knowledge, it weaves together threads across disciplines from eighteenth century Europe to twenty-first century Asia to offer a compelling narrative about the present. It suggests that the 'present order' offers an opportunity to develop new thinking, but stops short of offering any sort of blueprint for the future. It does not speculate, for instance, on how/if *destituent* power (in Agamben's sense) may render inoperable human work and production and disallow instituting human beings into order (*constituent* power). Instead, Mishra draws out resonances of *ressentiment* inherent in socio-economic and political structures that use formal equality to mask the inherent differences in power, education, status and access to resources. Understandably, this view from above necessitated by the author's choice of methodology disallows the 'little narratives,' the local resistances, which consistently and continually reject and disrupt the grand narratives of globalization and neo-imperialism across geographies and time. It does not permit stories about the making of histories by/of individuals not documented in the narratives the author has accessed, itself a function of the grand narratives that he seeks to detangle and re-tangle.

The undertones of prophecies of chaos and nihilism and a tone of despair notwithstanding, the accessible language and the incisive scholarship make *Age of Anger* a captivating read for a layperson as well as for those more invested in these questions, academically and otherwise.

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Of Bahubalis Of Indian Politics

Sarthak Bagchi

WHEN CRIME PAYS: MONEY AND MUSCLE IN INDIAN POLITICS
By Milan Vaishnav
Harper Collins Publishers India, 2017, pp. 410, ₹1833.00

At a time when Bahubali of a cinematic kind has become the buzz word in India, there is another timely intervention on the topic of Bahubali, but of a political kind. Milan Vaishnav's new book titled *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics*, claims to be the first comprehensive study of the nexus between crime and democracy in India. The book explores the importance, capabilities and interestingly enough the winnability of goondas, musclemen, criminals or as they are also sometimes called, Bahubalis, in Indian politics. The puzzle of rampant success and gradual entrenchment of politicians with criminal backgrounds in Indian politics has been a frequently discussed one in both academic and layperson discussions.

How and why do politicians with criminal backgrounds become relevant in the world's largest democracy? Why do criminals enter politics in India? Why do parties choose to nominate candidates with criminal backgrounds? And why do voters support candidates with serious criminal charges against them? These are some of the most pertinent questions shaping up the debates on the quality of democracy in India. Vaishnav's book throws light on these questions and through his rigorous analysis using both qualitative and quantitative methods, provides some definite answers. Let us begin by examining some numbers to understand the extent of the entrenchment of crime and politics in India.

In the 2014 general elections to the Indian Parliament, 21 percent of the total Members of Parliament elected to the Parliament had serious criminal charges against them. In the 2004 general elections, this figure was around 12 percent. This includes politicians who face serious criminal charges ranging from kidnapping to abduction to threatening, intimidation to even murder. The phenomenon is seemingly more prevalent in the politics of the Hindi heartland in the northern parts of India, however, new data provides more insightful indications in a different direction. The recently concluded Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, a north Indian state of largely rural population has around 401 or 13 percent candidates out of

a total of over 3000, who have serious criminal charges against them. Whereas in the Municipal elections of Mumbai, one of India's largest metros, 9 percent of the 1641 candidates have serious criminal charges against their names. The phenomenon of criminial politicians can therefore be seen as one which transgresses the rural-urban divide.

So why is it that an increasingly large number of politicians with criminal backgrounds are continuously contesting elections and a good number among them winning elections too? Vaishnav brings this down to two important developments in Indian politics over the years. First is the increasing importance of money in elections. On the basis of his research, Milan points out that, 'Political parties prefer self-financing candidates who do not represent a drain on the finite party coffers but instead contribute "rents" to the party.' While many of these candidates might have a criminal record, their vast resources, which enable them to meet the rising electoral expenditure, make them electorally competitive as well.

The second development Vaishnav points to is the wide perception among voters to see politicians with criminal backgrounds as people who can 'get things done'. This is not only from the service delivery point of view, which is a mandatory duty for legislative representatives across the world. In India's 'patronage democracy' (Chandra 2004) a mediated access to the state is a common feature and many times these representatives are expected to facilitate informal mediation to access the resources of the state on behalf of their voters. Politicians who have strong criminal backgrounds are perceived by the voters to be more effective in such forms of informal mediation. This line of argument is similar to the one made by Berenschot (2011) in his ethnographic explorations of muscle politics and goondaism in a Gujarati neighbourhood. The key argument is that criminalization of politics is not necessarily a moral decay or a form of subjugation under fear but rather is a byproduct of inaccessibility of the poorer citizens to various layers of the state. Criminal politicians in this case are able to project themselves as more effective than non-criminals in helping citizens reach out to the state or in other words, 'get things done'. In his research spanning over three parliamentary elections from 2004 to 2014, Vaishnav found that politicians with a criminal background have an 18 percent chance of winning their next election, while candidates with a clean background have only 6 percent chance of a re-election. Vaishnav's argument is indeed an important change in perspective of looking at state-society interactions where rise of criminal politicians is seen as more due to illiteracy among voters and the politicians' ability to intimidate voters (Aidt, Golden and Tiwari 2011). According to him, 'voters aren't ignorant or uninformed; they are simply looking for candidates who can best fill a perceived vaccum of representation. Viewed in this light, the electoral success of politicians associated with illegal activity might in fact be compatible with democratic accountability, albeit of a partial nature.'

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part the author addresses the puzzle of criminality in Indian politics and attempts to contextualize the problem in the larger debate on corruption in India. The second part of the book emerges as the most enjoyable read, as the author undertakes the elaborate process of dismantling the complex process of explaining criminality in politics. From defining the criminal enterprise in politics, to explaining the functioning of money power and muscle power in elections to even explain the demand for criminality in politics, the author shows how in a given context people can actually accept criminality as an advantageous characteristic rather than an impediment in democracy. The third and last section illustrates the idea of an election as a marketplace where criminality in politics is shown as an attribute of certain contingent factors. In this part Vaishnav also briefly engages with the evidence from other developing democracies like Columbia, Nigeria, Jamaica and Pakistan, where the phenomenon of a nexus between crime and politics is very prevalent. With this brief worldview the author tries to give an external validity to his arguments proposed in the book. What makes this read fascinating is that Vaishnav manages to capture the readers' attention throughout the book by keeping the writing style lucid and free of jargon to a large extent. Yet, at the same time, the narrative does not for once appear to be non serious, because of the richness of the accounts that Vaishnav has managed to weave into his narrative. His in-depth field interviews reproduced in the text in a very lively manner makes the book a very engaging read. The specific cases of Anant Singh and Pappu Yadav among others help in establishing the specific contexts in which politicians with a criminal background are able to emerge as successful popular politicians over the course of 'Doing Good by Doing Bad' as Vaishnav calls it.

Apart from engaging with the ever increasing importance of crorepatis and criminals in politics, the book also raises pertinent questions about the external factors which aid this rise like weak rule of law, legal loopholes, nature of party finances, ethnic attachments, indirect elections, to name a few. The book triangulates data from the thousands of affidavits submitted by the candidates prior to every election over the time period from 2004-14, survey data of the voters from different states as well as field interviews with bureaucrats, civil society members, politicians, police officers among others. The arguments extended in the book have therefore benefited from such multilayered analysis. However, while a proven criminal background certainly seems to give an edge to politicians in a highly competitive election, they also have to resort to certain emotional and personal appeals as well. I witnessed two such instances over the course of my fieldwork in Bihar. Bihar happens to be one of the significant states in India, which Vaishnav also studied rigorously for its rampant crime and politics nexus. In the capital city of Patna, an erstwhile dreaded criminal politician, Pappu Yadav, warmed up to two young boys in a very humble stance and greeted them asking, '*aadesh kariye, kya sewa karoon*'*?* (Please order, how may I help/serve you?). These two boys were from his constituency of Madhepura, which Yadav represents in the parliament. They had come to offer their services for his election campaign ahead of the State assembly elections. Surprised at the warmth and affection shown to them by a strongman politician, the boys ended up taking a selfie with their 'leader' and also joined his election campaign team. This small gesture had touched a chord with the boys and gave them a sense of close proximity to the leader, even if on a momentary basis.

In another instance, from Mokama, in Bihar, the incumbent MLA, who is known as '*chote sarkar*' (young lord), and who successfully contested the assembly election from the confines of a prison, making his wife canvas for votes with a picture of him in handcuffs. Even young kids in the constituency were seen running on a freshly constructed cement road in a village, and accrediting the road and the incremental *vikas* (development) to their leader, '*chote sarkar*'. These instances indicate the various ways in which politicians with criminal backgrounds try to find legitimacy in electoral politics. This points to the new facets through which the quality and functioning of democracy in India needs to be understood.

While the cinematic Bahubali is now more in the news, because of its conclusion, Vaishnav refrains from writing any conclusion for his account of the political Bahubalis. In fact, Vaishnav's parting thoughts on ma-

jor implications that such an entrenchment of crime has on the quality of democracy in India is indicative of the fact that this book is perhaps a starting point for more research on this crime and politics nexus and can be used as a benchmark for future researchers who wish to undertake this endeavour. It thus becomes a must read for students, researchers and scholars who want to understand the crime and politics question better among other puzzles of Indian democracy.

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History From Below

Sabyasachi Dasgupta

THE CRISIS OF 1974: RAILWAY STRIKE AND THE RANK AND FILE
By Ranabir Samaddar
Primus Books, 2016, pp. 186, ₹850.00

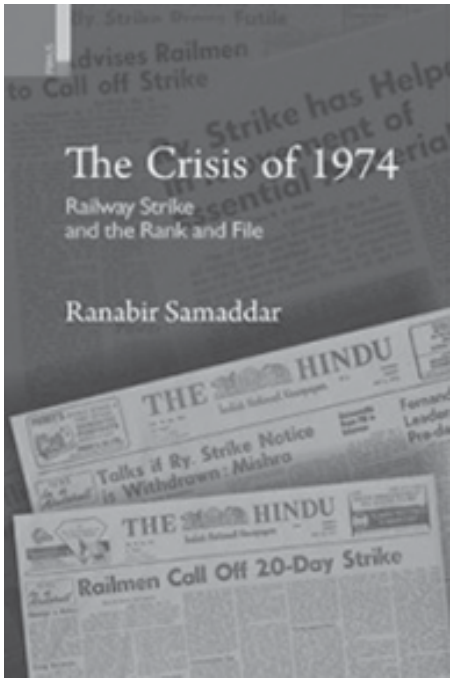
May, 1974 in India was a time of fervent activity and excitement. The air was rife with talk of an impending All India General 'Railway Strike'. The strike was due to start on 8th May, 1974 and both the state and the railway unions braced for the event. The railway unions sought to organize themselves under an umbrella organization called the National Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS). The demands of the Railway men revolved around notions of bonus, wages, working conditions, the need to define work hours, safety standards, the right of all railway men to be treated as industrial workers with trade union rights including the right to negotiate and other such demands.

Ranabir Samaddar's fine book *The Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File* deals with the dynamics surrounding the Railway strike, especially the rank and file who according to him were singularly responsible for lending the strike an air of extreme militancy. Samaddar argues that the 'Ralilway Strike' of 1974 portended a revolutionary crisis in the state structure. The Indian State had been lurching from one crisis to another since the late 1960s.The victory in the Bangladesh war had temporarily put the lid over the deep faultlines which had crept into the state structure. The cleavages which had appeared in society had a revolutionary potential to it. All it needed was a conjecture for mounting a revolutionary challenge to the state and the ruling elite controlling it. The railway strike of 1974 was potentially the moment for such a conjecture to arise. The ruling elite realized that it was no longer possible to rule in the old style which had provided for a parliamentary democracy based on one party domination, huge public sector and bureaucracy. Now it was no longer possible to rule in that style. The alternative was either privatization of resources or to invent a more authoritarian style of rule where class conflict and the explosive disquiet of the toiling masses would be clamped down with a heavy hand. The elite chose the latter option. And yet as Samaddar shows this moment would pass by and the strike would end in a colossal defeat.

The reasons for such a catastrophic defeat were manifold, as Samaddar argues. For one, the leadership leading the strike which counted among them George Fernandes declined to read the pregnant possibilities of the situation. They failed to realize that the impending strike was really the culmination of a long unfolding structural crisis in the state. The situation called for a paradigm changing general strike which would operate beyond the legalities imposed by the bourgeoisie state and bring it to a standstill by employing planned violence, sabotage, arson and other subversive measures. A revolutionary crisis would emerge which had the potential of changing the nature of the Indian state. Samaddar seems to believe that the situation contained the seeds for a truly revolutionary change in the state polity.

Samaddar though rues the fact that the leadership failed to grab the bull by the horns. For the leadership including Fernandes, the strike was just a tactical weapon to be deployed for a limited length of time to cajole the leadership towards the negotiating table. The leadership hoped to gain some limited gains at the negotiating table following which they would proclaim victory. Samaddar argues that this was natural on the part of the union to an extent as they had for long become bureaucratic organizations which functioned as agencies to curb workers' militancy and served to water down such workers' demand which possessed the potential to disrupt the status quo.

Yet the strike was lent an insurrectionary nature by the actions of the rank and file workers. Despite the difficulties posed by the presence of multiple types of skilled workers and their multiple unions the workers achieved admirable levels of unity. Some categories of workers showed extra felicity such as the loco-drivers and firemen, they functioned as the vanguard who led the way. Lines were uprooted, signal systems were disrupted, stations and trains were occasionally set ablaze, loyal workers were beaten up and humiliated, all the tell tale signs of an insurgent situation having the capacity to challenge the hegemony of the ruling class and mount a serious challenge to the existing state structure seemed to be there. All these were interspersed with more parliamentary modes of protests like picketing, sit-ins, processions, rally etc. The families of railway workers often lent a helping hand in picketing and other more benign modes of protest.



The leadership tried in vain to limit the rank and file to the more tame modes of protest. The workers seemed to be in no mood to listen. For a time the country seemed to be moving towards paralysis. The economy seemed to be grinding to a halt. Railway towns particularly seemed to be a fuse away from unmanageable explosive situations. The situation was such that massive state repression was inevitably around the corner. And as Samaddar so vividly portrays, it did come. Railway workers were dismissed, arrested, tortured, at times even family members were arrested and railway colonies soon became a site for state terror with the state committing rampant atrocities. By the 20th of May, the strike was officially over with the most of