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**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**Analysis Of Mahua Moitra's 2020-2021 Speeches in The  
Lok Sabha**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: Society, Communication and Media

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Year of the defence: 2022

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 31 July 2022

Priyanka Vishwas Padole

## References

PADOLE, Priyanka V. *Analysis of Mahua Moitra's 2020-2021 Speeches in The Lok Sabha*. Praha, 2022. 51 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociological Studies and Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism. Department of Sociology. Supervisor Mgr. Anna Shavit, PhD.

## **Abstract**

Women in parliament long seem to be limited to addressing only certain topics and issues – mostly those that have a ‘female-centric’ focus. This perspective has been backed by the idea that being women, they are more empathetic, compassionate, honest and liberal. This gives them a better insight into what females want and they are therefore better equipped to address these issues compared to their male counterparts. It is my perspective that female politicians should be looked at beyond this limited scope and addressed as legislators who represent the voice of all people and not only a specific demographic. Using the grounded theory through an exploratory case study method, this thesis focuses on Mahua Moitra and the speeches she made in the Lok Sabha in 2020-2021. Through this analysis, the thesis gathers what she has contributed to the developing narrative of female political representation in India.

## **Keywords**

**Mahua Moitra, Speech Analysis, Lok Sabha, Female Political Representation in India, Female MP**

## **Title**

**Analysis Of Mahua Moitra’s 2020-2021 Speeches in The Lok Sabha**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
BADP	Border Area Development Programme
BARC	Broadcast Audience Research Council
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
CAA	Citizenship (Amendment) Act
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSWI	Committee on the Status of Women in India
FCRA	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
GST	Goods and Service Tax
INC	Indian National Congress
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MPLADS	Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme
MSME	Micro Small and Medium Enterprises
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPR	National Population Register
NRC	National Register of Citizens
NSS	National Sample Survey
PM CARES	Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations
PSU	Public Sector Undertakings
RTI	Right to Information
TMC	Trinamool Congress
TRP	Target Rating Points



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Women in politics and the Parliament long seem limited to addressing only specific topics and issues – primarily those with a ‘female-centric’ focus. The main idea driving this is that their being women gives them a better insight into what females want, and they are therefore better equipped to address these issues than their male counterparts. While this perspective is substantiated by the scores of research already done on the impact women politicians have on other women, and therefore it cannot be wholly called off; it is my perspective that female politicians should be looked at beyond this limited scope and addressed as legislators who represent the voice of all people and not only a specific demographic.

In addition, while there is substantial literature on women’s political participation in India - the low numbers in higher offices, the need to increase participation, and the asset it is to the development of other women and the nation – there is a lack of studies focusing on current, individual, women politicians’ contributions. I attempt to add to this scholarship by doing a focused study on a particular contemporary female Member of Parliament (MP) and her contribution to the developing narrative of female political representation in India. I define *contribution* as “the part played by the individual to augment the existing perception”.

Mahua Moitra was elected as a Member of Parliament in the 2019 general election and caught the attention of the media and masses with her debut speech which received varying extents of applause and criticism from both. Since her election to the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament), Mahua Moitra and her ‘fiery speeches’ have been covered by various forms of media. Her words, manner of delivery, and especially her criticisms of the actions and stagnations of the current government in the wake of the pandemic and economic crisis have also gained the attention of the nation’s youth. Many of

them, regardless of their personal opinion of the political party she is affiliated with – the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the party head, Mamta Bannerjee – are avid followers of what Moitra has to say both in the Parliament and her social media platforms.

While her speeches have been noted widely in the global media, and she has been quoted in recent pieces of academia, there is an absence of research based on Moitra and the contribution she is making to the representation and perception of female leaders in India. This is a gap that I aim to minimise.

This thesis analyses Mahua Moitra's speeches in the Lok Sabha between 2020-2021, looking at the issues she raised in these speeches, her opinion on them, and the position she took while making them. The time frame 2020-2021 has been chosen due to its recency and the country's struggle to recover following the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and its consequences. The grounded theory through the exploratory case study method will be applied, and the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Who is Mahua Moitra, and where does she currently stand in Indian society?
2. What was Mahua Moitra's socio, cultural, religious, educational and professional background before joining Indian politics?
3. How many speeches has Mahua Moitra made in the Lok Sabha in 2020-2021?
4. What is the topic classification of the Lok Sabha speeches made by Mahua Moitra in 2020-2021?
5. What are the issues raised by Mahua Moitra in her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?
6. What is the stance Mahua Moitra held when making the 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?
7. How has Mahua Moitra's background influenced her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?

8. What has Mahua Moitra contributed to the female political representation in India through her Lok Sabha speeches in 2020-2021?

The limitation of this study is that the lone subject, as well as the narrow time frame of analysis, produces subjective outcomes and cannot be generalised to the broader concept of female political representation.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Female Leaders: A Perspective**

For a long time, society based on patriarchal values viewed women predominantly as an object or commodity. Her value was determined by a biological function - the ability to provide the male heir. The expectation from her also extended to taking care of the home and providing sustenance to the family by remaining within the four walls of the home (Sexana, 1994; McLaughlin, 1993).

Movements in the 1960s and 70s sought equality for women as a fundamental right, empowering them to shrug off the constraints placed on them by the patriarchy, join political organisations and have an active voice in decisions pertaining to them and their lives (Raman, 2001). Although they were able to move from the private sphere of home affairs to the public sphere of state affairs, the issues women were 'allowed to' endorse were still linked to traditional sex roles. Sexana (1994) remarks, "it is ... true that theoretically women have been granted equal political rights with men as a consequence of their movements. However, despite achieving equality in many spheres, women's equality in the political sphere is yet to be achieved even in the most advanced count". While men were perceived as more capable of handling matters of economy, finance, employment, crime and national security, women were considered more adept at handling matters related to health, education, children and family development (Lawless, 2004).

Existing literature on gender stereotypes "asserts that female politicians are perceived to be more empathetic, compassionate, honest, trustworthy, and liberal than their male counterparts" (Piazza & Diaz, 2020) and attempts to explain the differences between male and female leadership styles and capabilities by arguing that "women are naturally more caring and nurturing and men are naturally more aggressive because of differing

hormone levels, the natural sexual division of childbearing, and attributes required for motherhood” (Spary, 2007).

Criticisms of this perspective are that it is a biologically reductionist outlook that conflates sex with gender and furthermore does not take into account the influence of intersectional differences such as social categories, personal background and development that combine and contribute to inequalities in various ways. This reasoning can be drawn further with the standpoint that there exist as many differences among women as there are among men and women, which influence leadership styles and performance.

Arguments have been made that women make better leaders as they are imbued with a relatively higher moral capital compared to men, supplementing the belief that women are more empathetic, compassionate, honest, trustworthy and liberal. Times of crisis generate demands for greater female inclusion in political positions as the public identifies the stereotyped qualities in women as more desirable, thus expecting women to be relatively effective in handling the situation than men. This mindset is both expanded on and exploited during elections to promote increasing women’s presence in politics through the women’s higher moral capital argument (Spary, 2007). Piazza and Diaz (2020) remark that while public support for female candidates is both necessary and impactful in enhancing women’s political representation, “exceptional environments” or situations that result in plunging public trust such as scandals, conflicts, political corruption and a public health crisis - such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic - can generate increased public confidence in the abilities of women.

Scholars agree that the empowerment of women induces positive social, political and economic changes for society at large. Rai and Spary (2019) have summarised literature arguing for the more significant presence of women in political life into four reasons for its necessity. First, the visible, if not the proportionate, presence of the group enables them to

have some influence over the policy-making or political culture. Second, the competence of existing female politicians can be hampered by constraints placed by real political situations and vice versa, and removing such constraints is crucial for the sustainability of institutional participation. Third, the success strategies women might employ to access and function effectively in political institutions might be beneficial for other women looking to enter these fields. Lastly, to look into the impact strengthening grassroots politics might have on the larger political institution of a country (Rai & Spary, 2019).

The concept of role models is one of the ways how female political representation has been seen to affect positive changes in society. Burchi and Singh (2020), studying the correlation between female political representation and educational attainments in India, concluded that an increase in female political representation has a substantial effect on the probability of children completing their primary education. They also observed that increased female political representation also increased the education attainments in girls more significantly than in boys. Beaman et al. (2012) found that female leadership raised aspirations and educational attainment for girls (reducing the gender gap); through two main channels – “first, by undertaking policies that make it easier for women to succeed, thus changing beliefs on what is possible for girls; and second, by providing a role model of a successful woman” (Beaman et al., 2012).

Gilardi (2015) argues that the more successful female politicians that women can identify with, the more women will revise their beliefs about their qualifications for political office and will be encouraged to stand for political offices themselves. Beaman et al. (2012) also identified the role model effect as an important channel or influencer in changing aspirations in girls.

“It is their presence as positive role models for the younger generation that seems to underlie observed changes in aspirations and educational outcomes of adolescent girls” (Beaman et al., 2012).

Gilardi’s (2015) findings also suggest that while influential, role models have a diminishing effect over time once female political representation becomes a normative part of politics.

An apparent impact of the presence of women in the political sphere can be seen in other women. However, this cannot be the only consequence female politicians can have, and their impact should be looked at through a broader scope without gender-based limits.

## **2.2 Female Political Leadership in India**

The following section looks at the ‘path to politics’ women in India have commonly taken, as well as the hurdles and consequences these routes posed for them. Subsequently, the impact it has on an aspect of their parliamentary performance – participation in debates.

### ***2.2.1 Women’s Access to Parliament***

When analysing the contribution and impact of a political leader, an important aspect to look at is their ‘path to politics’. This aspect adds more value when looking at political players who become elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and especially when examining female MPs. Their personal backgrounds influence the routes women take to access political spaces. The routes taken, in turn, has bearings on their voice in public contexts - in the sense that it determines what they speak about and how. Invariably, other factors may also dictate what women can speak about. These different factors combine to build on how female politicians are represented.

Rai (2012) studied the narratives of 23 women MPs and identified three routes Indian women MPs take to the Parliament (1) family networks; (2) participation in social and political movements; and (3) membership of political parties. She also discusses a fourth route – quotas and reservation, i.e., reserving electoral seats exclusively for women to contest. Spary (2007), seeking to look beyond dynastic succession as the ‘path to power’ for female politicians, augments Hart’s (1998) theory into (1) institutional, (2) cultural transfer and (3) proxy as alternative routes.

**2.2.1.1 Family Networks and Proxy.** A predominant perspective of Indian women joining mainstream politics is through family connections and dynastic succession. The woman is seen as the backbone that is holding the family together, so if she were to get involved with the ‘outside’, she would require the support and backing or ‘the permission’ of the other (male) members of the family. Additionally, she would be expected to balance her roles and duties both domestically and politically. Spary (2007) points out, “generally, as long as their political activity supplemented but did not sacrifice their traditional duties as wives, daughters and sisters, their political activism was encouraged, although several male supporters backed women’s franchise”. This expectation of balancing responsibilities is not typically extended to a male member.

The limitations placed on women in politics by the patriarchal norms are also acknowledged by Goyal (2019), who points out, “starting out as a campaign, or party worker is a well-known pathway to a political career for aspirants that do not come from dynastic or wealthy families. This route has been historically male-dominated in India, ... while female politicians overwhelmingly have had family members precede them in politics”.



Linked to family connections and dynastic successions as a path to politics for women is the concept of male equivalence and proxy. Spary (2007) identifies ‘proxy’ as an alternative route to power, where the “women are elected but act on behalf of her male relations and exercise power in their interests”. Rai (2012) has observed that “a significant number of women continue to access political life with the support, backing and contacts of the family – usually of the father or of the husband – and that as a consequence, they are often influenced in their work by the male members of the family.” Some other women may be encouraged by the male member in their family or social network to stand for an election as they are unable to (because of reasons such as an ongoing investigation, lack of public trust, etc.). Through this act, the male member seeks to have political control indirectly.

A significant example of this case is that of India’s only female Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. It should be noted that one of the reasons that she was considered suitable for this office was because senior (male) members of her political party had viewed her as someone who would be easy to manipulate, referring to her as a *goongi guriya* or a mute doll (Ghosh, 2017; Rai & Spary, 2019). This was additionally an occurrence of dynastic succession since Gandhi took up the mantle following the death of the previous Prime Minister – her father, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Both concepts of dynastic succession and proxy have received massive criticism in India, especially in recent years. The principal objection to dynastic succession is that of the family’s interests being served rather than that of the public. Furthermore, the adverse implication of dynastic succession has not been targeted only at females but also at male leaders who have utilised this route of political access. This has been one of the dominant factors contributing to the decline of the Congress party in India.

Women who used the proxy route of access were viewed as the agent or stand-ins for the male leader; their words and actions were hence scrutinised and deconstructed as not their own and, therefore, not to be subject to as much gravity. Spary (2007) remarks, “the ‘proxy’ phenomenon has emerged as a source of criticism of the legitimacy of both participating women and the system itself.”.

**2.2.1.2 Participation in Social and Political Movements.** In India, women’s participation in the nationalist movements and fight for Independence from the British is recognised as a key factor in determining their political participation in the post-Independence years. While women’s presence and mobilisation in the nationalist fight were viewed as extremely important, especially by leaders such as M.K. Gandhi, antithetically, their role was seen not as prominent members but in roles supportive of the male members in the fight.

Following Independence, women formed organisations and associations that focussed on concerns of women’s interests, oppression and marginalisation. Spary (2007) notes that women’s participation in politics manifested largely through their involvement in these movements. These organisations started aligning with political parties, and political parties, in turn, started giving tickets to women to contest constituencies and appropriating women’s issues to make themselves appear more sympathetic towards women and capture their votes (Saxena, 1994; Spary, 2007).

**2.2.1.3 Reservation of Seats for Women.** Increasing the representation of women in important decision-making bodies in order to obtain a congruence between what the masses want and political decisions is a strategy much debated among scholars. A strategy for doing so was to reserve a certain number of seats for them in the

Parliament. Those who argue for reserving seats for women feel that doing so will lead to a greater awareness of women's needs, increasing female political representation will ensure that these needs are better represented (Lindgren et al., 2009), and the inclusion of more women in the political machinery "may have the effect of changing the style of governance within these institutions" (Spary, 2007). Those critical of this argument state that an increase in numbers will not necessarily have a significant impact in addressing all such groups' agendas and make little difference to institutional and political culture (Clots-Figueras, 2011; Lindgren et al., 2009; Spary, 2007).

### ***2.2.2 Women's Performance in Parliament***

Following the navigation of the barriers in their path to the Parliament, once there, women's performance in the Parliament is very often shaped and hindered by various forces such as the "institutional and personal gendered histories of Parliament, political parties, individual MPs and their families, constituents, and citizens of different identities and experiences" (Rai & Spary, 2019). Besides ranking lower on the hierarchy of speaking rights due to seniority norms, female MPs in India additionally have to endure what Puwar (2004) calls the 'burden of representation' as a marginal and minority group in Parliament. In other words, what women choose to speak about is rather constrained, and further, their performance is scrutinised more closely not only by their colleagues but by the media and the public as well. They, therefore, have to fight not only to be allowed to speak but also to have what they have to say taken as valued. The following sections examine one aspect of women's parliamentary functions – their participation in parliamentary debates.

**2.2.2.1 Participation in Debates.** Women’s election to the Parliament is not meant to be only symbolic; therefore, “participating in debates is arguably the most visible work women MPs perform in Parliament” (Rai & Spary, 2019). In various fields that are considered the ‘public sphere’ or ‘male-dominated’, while the presence of women is now being considered mandatory or necessary (for diverse reasons), a pessimistic expectation is that they remain mute spectators, meant only to ‘fill a quota’ or ‘prettify the room’. Likewise, while their presence in the Parliament is necessary (to gain the female votes or present the picture of a non-gender biased front), the expectation or preference is for the women to be those who do not speak much. When they do speak, what they say is critically analysed to see whether it adequately represents women’s interest in the Parliament “despite being elected to diverse constituencies and subject to the same obligations of party loyalty and party discipline as male MPs” (Rai & Spary, 2019).

As identified earlier, after female MPs have striven against the challenges and gained a seat in the Parliament, they have to face the existing biases and hierarchies that throw hindrances in their parliamentary performance. Not only do female MPs have to work harder to be heard, but they also have to employ distinct communication strategies for what they have to say to be ‘heard’ as something of vital importance and grave concern to the populace. The political field has long been male-dominated and steeped in structural gender bias that can impede the career progression of women and limit their strategic choices. Women who enter this arena are therefore expected to “look like a lady, (and) act like a man” (Spary, 2007).

**2.2.2.2 Issues Raised and Addressed by Female MPs.** Since women’s political participation emerged largely through women’s movements, the matters female MPs

raised in Parliament were predominantly those that the movements had taken up – the specific and pervasive nature of women’s oppression and marginalisation.

Various movements tackled diverse issues “such as dowry, arrack, violence (including rape), equal economic and employment opportunities, ecofeminism and anti-development protests opposed to displacement in the Narmada valley and similar state-sponsored developmental projects” (Spary, 2007). Matters in *Towards Equality*, the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), authored by the educated middle-class women in 1974, focussed on “the overall and increasing marginalisation of the masses of poor and rural women in the post-independence years ... the declining sex ratio, increasing gender gaps in life expectancy, mortality, and economic participation” (Raman, 2001).

Arguments in favour of increasing women’s representation in policy-making have presented that women are not only better equipped to represent certain types of interests and views but also that they approach policy-making differently than their male counterparts. This is by virtue of women as a group, sharing experiences and having views differing from men. Furthermore, their prevailing role as care-takers make them more community-oriented and attuned to anticipating and meeting the need of others (Lindgren et al., 2009). Therefore, women bring to the forefront issues that were previously overlooked during policy decisions, consider the voice of those subjugated or ignored, and matters that have an overall societal impact.

Kalra and Joshi (2020) found that women MPs, despite being a token representation in the House, were more candid about speaking up on behalf of women and children than the male MPs. They confirmed that women were more inclined to speak up on Bills dealing with violence against women and children. Rai and Spary (2019) gathered that women MPs face hindrances in terms of speaking

time and opportunities in debates related to gender-responsive topics in Parliament. Furthermore, women MPs have also shared that male MPs are reluctant to participate in debates on topics conventionally considered to be ‘women’s issues’.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The factors discussed above raised and contributed to the understanding that women are best suited to participate in women-related legislations while ‘harder’ political issues such as finance, defence and foreign policy are better handled by male MPs. Moreover, women MPs in general and especially those who speak out of topic of the purview of their ‘considered’ gender-based expertise usually face disruptive parliamentary behaviour from their colleagues in the House – unruliness, interruptions, heckling, uproars, sexist remarks...etc.

This raises questions such as are women elected only to be representations of their gender and so limited to only raising certain issues? Do only women MPs raise women-centric issues in Parliament currently? What matters do contemporary female MPs raise in Parliament? How do women MPs raise other matters that they perceive to be of urgent public concern?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

Adding to the scholarship of female political leaders, this thesis is a focused study on Mahua Moitra and her contribution to the developing narrative of female political representation in India through an analysis of her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches. *Contribution* has been defined as “the part played by the individual to augment the existing perception”.

### 3.1 Method

The methodology used is that of Grounded Theory Through the Exploratory Case Study Method. Using Bogdan and Biklen’s definition of a case study - “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Lune & Berg, 2007, p170) – this thesis focuses on Mahua Moitra and her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches. Through an examination of Moitra’s path to politics and its influence on what she had to say during the parliamentary debates in this period, as well as the socio-political situation in the country at the time, the thesis theorises on what she contributed to the developing narrative of female political representation in India.

The speeches have been analysed first by classifying them based on *what topics she spoke on* and *what opinions she expressed on the topics*. Following that and building on this classification, the opinions conveyed on the issues raised have been systematically examined.

### 3.2 Research Questions

1. Who is Mahua Moitra, and where does she currently stand in Indian society?
2. What was Mahua Moitra’s socio, cultural, religious, educational and professional background before joining Indian politics?

3. How many speeches has Mahua Moitra made in the Lok Sabha in 2020-2021?
4. What is the topic classification of the Lok Sabha speeches made by Mahua Moitra in 2020-2021?
5. What are the issues raised by Mahua Moitra in her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?
6. What is the stance Mahua Moitra held when making the 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?
7. How has Mahua Moitra's background influenced her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches?
8. What has Mahua Moitra contributed to the female political representation in India through her Lok Sabha speeches in 2020-2021?

### 3.3 Sample

#### 3.3.1 Case Selection.

The data for analysis are the speeches made by Mahua Moitra in the Lok Sabha between 2020-2021. The corpus of the speeches is obtained from the official sites of the Lok Sabha and the Parliament Digital Library. The debate search was filtered by 'Member Name' and 'Date from' by selecting the options for *Moitra, Ms. Mahua* and the dates ranging from *2020 to 2021*, respectively. The resulting search produces 12 records.

**Table 1**

#### *Typology of Speeches Analysed*

Year	Session	Date	Type of Debate
2020	Budget	3 February	Motion of Thanks on the President's Address
		17 March	Special Mention (Zero Hour)
		19 March	Special Mention (Zero Hour)



		20 March	Submission by Members
	Monsoon	15 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill
		17 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill
		19 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill
		21 September	Government Bills
2021	Budget	8 February	Motion of Thanks on the President's Address
	Winter	1 December	Special Mention (Zero Hour)
		2 December	Short Duration Discussions (Rule-193)
		8 December	Special Mention (Zero Hour)

### ***3.3.2 Time Period***

The period 2020-2021 has been selected for analysis for three reasons – the first, due to its recency; the second, for being the term following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic where in addition to discharging its regular legislative functions, the Government also had to deal with the repercussions from the global crisis; and third, being the year following 2019 when the current Government took what many deemed contentious legislative actions.

### ***3.3.3 Source***

Lok Sabha official website

<https://loksabha.nic.in/>

Parliament Digital Library

[https://eparlib.nic.in/full-text?handle=123456789/7&lok\\_sabha\\_no=17](https://eparlib.nic.in/full-text?handle=123456789/7&lok_sabha_no=17)

## Chapter 4: Subject Profile and Country Context

### 4.1 Mahua Moitra

Mahua Moitra was born on 12 October 1974, in the Cachar district of Assam in India, to Dwipendra Lal and Manjoo Moitra (Lok Sabha, n.d.). She hails from an upper-middle-class Bengali Brahmin family and has an older sister. Her father was a tea planter, and she spent her childhood on a tea estate in Assam. She was married briefly to a Scandinavian of Danish origin; however, not much about this aspect of her life is publicly known.

Moitra attended school in Kolkata in West Bengal and obtained her undergraduate degree in 1998 from Mount Holyoke College South Hadley in Massachusetts, United States, studying Economics and Mathematics (Feuerstein, 2019; Lok Sabha, n.d.).

Describing herself to students at a school event she was invited to give a talk, she said, “when I was in school, I really fit the straight and narrow path. I used to always study, ...I was always very keen... I was very committed, and I was always what, unfortunately in slang, was termed a ‘smartass’” (Brut India, 2020).

After obtaining her degree, Moitra worked as an investment banker at JP Morgan Chase in New York and London. She rose to the position of vice-president in their London office before leaving the company to join Indian politics in 2009. In various interviews, she has maintained that she always intended to enter public life, looking up to Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher as her role models.

“Even as a child, I wanted to enter public life, and I wanted to do it in India.”

(The Wire, 2020)

Her decision to switch from a lucrative career as a financier to one not as remunerative as a politician was cemented at her 10-year college alumni reunion, where she found that most of her batchmates had also become successful bankers. Keen on wanting to

make a difference; she resolved not to attend the 20-year college alumni reunion as “just another managing director”.

Moitra desired to affect change at the grassroots level and began her political journey with Rahul Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (INC) as a Youth Congress leader in West Bengal. However, in 2010 she switched her alliance and joined Mamata Banerjee with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) (De, 2019; Express Web Desk, 2019). Moitra was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in 2016 from the Karimpur Constituency in West Bengal. In 2019, Moitra was announced as the TMC candidate for the 2019 General Elections from the Krishnanagar Constituency. She won this election and took the oath of a Member of Parliament (MP) on 18 June 2019. She has since been an active participant in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, the Lok Sabha.

Elected as a first-time MP in the general elections of 2019, she has steadily gained a reputation as one of the most vocal opposers of the current Government. In her debut speech in the Lok Sabha, Moitra attempted to “deconstruct and condemn the alleged fascist ways of the BJP” (Tiwari & Chanda, 2020). She presented “certain comments in parliament as ‘seven signs of fascism’ as her debut speech” (Das, 2019) and related it to the actions of the BJP since their election. Along with plaudits and being hailed as the “speech of the year” on social media (Pandey, 2019), this speech had brought criticisms and allegations of plagiarism her way, stating that she had lifted chunks of her speech “from an article on ‘12 early warning signs of fascism’ in reference to Donald Trump's America” (Das, 2019). Moitra defended herself, stating that plagiarism is not crediting the source which she had done (Press Trust of India, 2019; Ghosh, 2019). This 2019 Lok Sabha speech gained her a lot of attention and admiration nationally and globally. Since then, she has actively participated in multiple parliamentary debates, speaking on and opposing various contentious legislations, and

sharing her opinion on the BJP Government's choices and the social and economic impact it has had on the people of the nation.

The adjectives 'fiery' and 'passionate' are frequently employed by journalists when writing about Moitra and her speeches, especially those made in the Lok Sabha (Bilal, 2020; Tiwari and Chanda, 2020). In addition, she is also admired for her dressing style, which distinguishes her from the conventional expectation of how politicians in India look. Most often, she chooses to wear Bengali silk saris made by the weavers in her district. In an interview with Karan Thapar, he described her as "the most un-*neta* like politician I have ever seen" and "the lady sitting in front of me is so obviously *avant-garde*, strikingly dressed, extremely confident and very cosmopolitan..." (The Wire, 2020).

Due to her candour about the Government's policies and practices, in both the Parliament and on her social media platforms, Moitra has often been termed 'aggressive' and finds herself mired in controversies. She has also moved the Supreme Court on Government legislations she perceived as unjust and unlawful, such as social media monitoring, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the PM CARES Fund. In one of her parliamentary speeches, she remarked, "each time I speak in this august House, my hon. Colleagues from the BJP tell me in the Central Hall कि आप अच्छा बोलती हैं, लेकिन आप इतनी अग्रेसिव क्यों हैं? शांत होइए, शांत होइए।" (that you speak well, but why are you so aggressive? Calm down, calm down.) (Lok Sabha, 17 September 2020)

Regardless of her opposers, Moitra endeavours to use her agency as a Member of Parliament to speak on issues the people of the country encounter and opinions they have on legislations but are unable to say aloud.

## **4.2 India in 2020-2021: A Socio-Political Picture**

### ***4.2.1 The Political Structure***

The Indian Parliament is bicameral. The more powerful (Rai, 2012; Kalra & Joshi, 2020) lower house or the Lok Sabha can have a maximum of 552 members who are elected by a direct general election. The house is presided upon by the Speaker of the House. The upper house or the Rajya Sabha can have a maximum of 250 members who are elected by the members of the Lok Sabha. This house is presided upon by the Chairman of the House. The President of India is the head of the Parliament and has the power to dissolve the lower house and call for an election. The Vice-President is the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, which cannot be dissolved. Every second year, one-third of the Rajya Sabha members retire and are replaced by newly elected members. Members of both Houses are referred to as Members of Parliament (MP). Lok Sabha MPs are elected for a term of 5 years and Rajya Sabha MPs for a period of 6 years. Typically, three sessions of Lok Sabha are held in a year: the Budget session from February to May, the Autumn or Monsoon session from July to August and the Winter session from November to December.

In 2019, general elections in the country were held, and members of the 17th Lok Sabha were elected. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) won the majority with 303 seats. Narendra Modi was the elected Prime Minister of the country and the leader of the party in the House. None of the other political parties in the country were successful in obtaining the minimum required 10% of seats to form the opposition. The 17th Lok Sabha, therefore, does not have a leader of the opposition. While the Indian National Congress (INC) obtained the second highest number of seats (52), they fell short by three seats and were therefore ineligible to form the opposition. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) party won 22 seats.

The membership in the 17th Lok Sabha was unprecedented. For the first time since independence, the Lok Sabha had the highest number of women MPs at 78 (Khanna, 2019; PTI, 2019; The Hindu Net Desk, 2019). Forty-eight women were elected for the first time (Lok Sabha, 2021), while 30 were re-elected to the House.

#### ***4.2.2 Events in the Year***

Although a lot more has happened in the year 2020-2021, only the events and incidents addressed in and related to the speeches analysed are recounted in the following section. Media accounts, reports and press releases have been referred to when recounting the events during this period.

In addition to facing the outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic, the changes brought into effect by the Government starting from the tail-end of 2019 had a rather incitive effect on the year 2020-2021. The year can therefore be termed a tumultuous time.

On December 11, 2019, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 was passed by the Parliament of India. This amended the Citizenship Act of 1955 and created a pathway to Indian citizenship for people of persecuted religious minorities (Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian) from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014. The new law (CAA), which excluded Muslims, also reduced the number of residence years for naturalisation for these migrants from “not less than eleven years” to “not less than five years” (Narayana Raju, 2019).

The enactment of the CAA sparked massive protests across the country, which manifested to violent communal riots in the national capital and the north-eastern states of India. Those protesting recognised the law as discriminatory against Muslims and, in conjunction with the Government’s decision to implement a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR), as violating the right to equality

granted by the Constitution as well as an attempt to deprive Muslims of Indian Citizenship. The CAA also gained international attention and was viewed as a threat to religious freedom in India (The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020).

The protests and violence due to the CAA continued amid and despite the Covid-19 pandemic, which was confirmed to have spread to India on January 30, 2020 (Andrews et al., 2020; Jahan et al., 2021)

An inflammatory speech by Kapil Mishra, a politician from the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), triggered communal violence in Delhi from February 23 to 27, 2020. Reports on the incident record mobs of around 100-1000 people selectively attacked Muslim individuals, vandalised and destroyed their houses, businesses and other property, mosques and religious symbols; victims reported that the police patrolling the area were apathetic, inactive and complicit to the violence that resulted in the death of 55 people, caused loss and trauma for the other victims (Delhi Minorities Commission, 2020; Foundation the London Story, 2020).

On March 19, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation and announced the 14-hour '*Janata Curfew*' (public curfew) on March 22, 2020, from 7 am to 9 pm to combat the daily rise of Covid-19 cases. In his address, he also encouraged the people to come out onto the balconies of their houses at 5 pm on March 22 and clang utensils for five minutes to acknowledge and salute the efforts of the emergency service providers. On March 24, 2020, Modi announced the nationwide lockdown for 21-days from midnight of March 25 to April 12, 2020, to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (Press Information Bureau, 2020). A sudden spike in cases towards the end of March was blamed on the congregation of the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary movement held in Delhi earlier that month (Slater et al., 2020; Web Desk, 2020).

The lockdowns were extended in phases through the months of April and May 2020. Due to the sudden announcement of the lockdowns and public curfew, the migrant labourers across the country faced the loss of their jobs and incomes, food shortages, homelessness, and mass panic caused by fake news being circulated in addition to the spreading virus. Faced with the uncertainty of their future and compounded by the hopelessness of their situation, they chose to return to their home States. Men, women and children in all stages of life walked hundreds of kilometres from State to State due to the unavailability of transport. Hundreds of migrants lost their lives from exhaustion, dehydration and hunger during this exodus (Express Web Desk, 2021).

On May 5, 2020, Indian and Chinese troops engaged in a stand-off at a disputed border area clashed; this resulted in injuries and casualties on both sides (Press Trust of India, 2020; Khalid, 2020). Amid rising tensions between the two countries following the border clash, the Indian Government banned 54 Chinese apps in June 2020, stating that they pose a threat to India's security (Agarwal, 2022).

On June 5, 2020, the then President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, promulgated three ordinances initiating agricultural reforms aimed at helping farmers trade more freely and fetch better prices for their produce (Press Information Bureau, 2020). In September 2020, these ordinances were proposed as Bills and later passed as Acts in Parliament amid vehement protests from Opposition parties and farmers throughout the country. Farmers perceived that the Farm Bills 2020 (also called the Farm Laws), contrary to the promised price protection, would, in actuality, leave them at the mercy of big corporations. The protestors' demand was for the immediate repeal of the Farm Bills 2020.

The protests against these agricultural reforms began in small scales in August 2020. After its introductions as Bills and subsequent passage as Acts, the protest gained traction and continued well into 2021, receiving nationwide support and global attention. The year-



long campaign saw farmer unions across the country joining together, marching onto and camping outside the national capital, New Delhi, for months, calling on the rest of the nation to observe a '*Bharat Bandh*' (India Shutdown) in solidarity, stopping trains and blocking highways in certain States, clashes between the police and the protestors where water cannons, *lathis* (sticks) and tear gas were used, farmers and opposition leaders sitting in *dharnas*, a tractor parade at the Republic Day celebration on January 26, 2021, creation of Twitter toolkits on the farmers' protests, charges of "sedition", "criminal conspiracy" and "promoting hatred" being filed against supporters of the protesting farmers, arrests, detentions, deaths and riots as well as the Supreme Court stay on the implementation of the Farm Laws. Meanwhile, rounds of talks between the Government and representatives from the farmer unions continued without resolution or compromise (Express Web Desk, 2021).

On January 2, 2021, two domestically produced coronavirus vaccines - AstraZeneca and Oxford University's 'Covishield' and Bharat Biotech's 'Covaxin' - were approved for emergency use, although there were concerns about the "hasty approval" and efficacy of the vaccines (Dwivedi, 2021; Special Correspondent, 2021). Mass vaccination for Covid-19 began on January 16, 2021, with the vaccines Covishield and Covaxin being administered (Press Information Bureau, 2021).

Around this time, 500-pages of WhatsApp conversations between Arnab Goswami, the founder and editor-in-chief of Republic Media Network, a pro-BJP media network, and Partho Dasgupta, the former CEO of Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), the organisation measuring television ratings leaked on social media. The leaked conversations implicated Goswami in his dealings, such as his proximity to the Prime Minister's Office and other members of the ruling party, his possessing classified information on an airstrike three days before the strike was carried out on February 26, 2019, and using his influence

with the Government to manipulate the Target Rating Points (TRP) for his channel (Singh, 2021; Scroll Staff, 2021).

On February 2, 2021, Rihanna and Greta Thunberg posted tweets on the ongoing farmers' protest in Delhi (Thunberg, 2021; Rihanna, 2021). Thunberg tweeted her support and shared a Twitter toolkit of the farmer's protest. The Delhi Police cited this toolkit as the reason for the protests taking a turn towards violence. They arrested a 22-year-old environmentalist, Disha Ravi, on charges of sedition, criminal conspiracy and promotion of hatred for editing and sharing the toolkit (Joshi, 2021; India: activist arrested over protest 'toolkit' shared by Greta Thunberg, n.d.).

April to May 2021 had the highest number of covid deaths, many due to the shortage of oxygen supply in hospitals. Official sources stated that the death toll was around 200,000. However, this was suspected to be underreported, with the actual number being much higher (Special Correspondent, 2021; Reuters et al., 2021).

On November 19, 2021, Prime Minister Modi apologised to the farmers and announced that the Farm Laws would be repealed. On November 29, 2021, the three contentious Farm Laws 2020 were negated by the Government passing the Farm Laws Repeal Bill 2021. The manner in which the Bills were repealed and the Government's reason for doing so was seen as suspect by members of the Opposition (Chaturvedi, 2021; Special Correspondent, 2021). With the Government acceding to their demands, the farmers called off their year-long protest on December 9, 2021 (Saha, 2021; Sharma & Chadha, 2021).

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Results

### 5.1 Types of Debates

Mahua Moitra made twelve speeches in the Lok Sabha between 2020-2021 as she participated in various parliamentary debates. The debate classification used in the present work is the same as the one used on the official site of the Lok Sabha and is indicative of what the MP could speak about at the time. The following section looks at the types of debates Moitra participated in and elaborates on what matters can be addressed during them.

**Table 2**

*Types of Debates Participated in and Number of Speeches*

Type of Debate	Number of Speeches
Motion of Thanks on the President's Address	2
Special Mention (Zero Hour)	4
Submission by Members	1
Statutory Resolution and Government Bill	3
Government Bills	1
Short Duration Discussions (Rule-193)	1

#### *5.1.1 Motion of Thanks on the President's Address*

The President of India can give a 'Special Address' to both Houses of Parliament assembled together "at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the Lok Sabha and at the commencement of the first session of each year" (Constitution of India, n.d.; Indian Kanoon, n.d.). This is usually the Budget session. This Address is the Government's statement of policy; drafted by the ruling Government and approved by the cabinet, it is a review of its activities and achievements in the previous year and itemises the policies and projects related to national and international issues they wish to pursue and also

indicates the main items of legislative business that will be proposed during the sessions held in that year.

After the President's Address, a Motion of Thanks is moved by one member and seconded by another (selected by the Prime Minister), following which members of the House deliberate on matters referred to in the Address for the days allocated for the discussion (generally 3-4 days). Speaking time is distributed among various parties based on their strength in the House. The scope of the discussion on the Address can be very broad, and members are free to speak on all national and international issues, even those not explicitly mentioned in the Address. The only items members cannot bring up are those that do not fall under the responsibilities of the Central Government. Additionally, the President's name cannot be brought up during the discussion since the Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address. The debate concludes with a response from the Prime Minister or any other minister from the Government (who cannot be the mover or seconder). After that, the amendments are disposed, and then the Motion of Thanks is put to the vote in the House. If any of the amendments are accepted, then the Motion of Thanks is adopted in the amended form. After the Motion of Thanks is adopted, it is conveyed to the President by the Speaker through a letter. The President also acknowledges the receipt, which is read to the House by the Speaker (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2019).

### ***5.1.2 Statutory Resolution and Government Bill***

Statutory Resolution refers to “resolution in pursuance of a provision in the Constitution or an Act of Parliament” (Pande et. al., n.d.). If such a resolution is adopted by the House, it “is binding on the Government and has the force of law”. Ministers or private members (MPs who are not ministers) can give notice of such resolutions (Motions and

Resolutions in Parliament, 2019). Government Bills are initiated by Ministers, and those introduced by MPs who are not ministers are known as Private Members' Bill. Based on their contents, Bills can be broadly classified into various kinds, such as Amendment Bills that modify or revise existing Acts, Repealing Bills that repeal existing Acts, Original Bills that incorporate new policies, etc. The discussion on the President's Address can be postponed in favour of a Government Bill.

### ***5.1.3 Raising Matters of Public Interests***

The following parliamentary procedural devices enable MPs to raise matters in the House that are not in the listed order of business but those they discern to be of urgent public importance.

**5.1.3.1 Special Mention (Zero Hour).** In the Lok Sabha, with the permission of the Speaker, members have the opportunity to raise matters of urgent public importance in the House (generally known as 'Special Mentions') during the 'Zero Hour', which is the hour immediately following the Question Hour. The Question Hour is the first hour of every sitting of the House, which avails the members the opportunity to ask and answer questions. It lasts from 11 am to 12 pm in every sitting, with a few exceptions. This is done before any listed business is taken up in the House (Lok Sabha, 2019). The matters raised during this time are forwarded to the concerned Ministry/ Department, who are then required to send replies to the MP, raising the issues expeditiously as possible. (Manual of Parliamentary Procedures in the Government of India, 2019).

**5.1.3.2 Submission by Members.** Another parliamentary procedural device that enables MPs to raise issues that are not points of order but they believe are matters

relating to the general public interest is 'Matters under Rule 377'. Members who wish to raise such issues in the House have to provide written notice and can speak on the matter after receiving the consent of the Speaker and at the appropriated date and time.

**5.1.3.3 Short Duration Discussions (Rule-193).** Under Rule 193 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, members can draw the Government's attention and raise a discussion on matters of urgent public importance by giving notice of the matter they wish to discuss in writing to the Secretary-General. The notice should be accompanied by a note explaining the reasons for raising discussion on the matter and should be supported by the signatures of at least two other members. The Speaker of the House then, at their discretion, determine the urgency and importance of the matter raised, admit it and allot a time for its discussion and prescribe a time frame for the speeches. There is no formal motion before the House nor voting. The minister giving the notice makes a short statement, and the concerned minister responds. Other members who have previously mentioned to the Speaker may participate in the discussion.

## **5.2 Speech Analysis**

The analysis of the twelve speeches Mahua Moitra made in the Lok Sabha between 2020-2021 has been done by first classifying them based on *what topics she spoke on* and *what opinions she expressed on the topics*. The subsequent section builds on this classification and provides a more detailed exploration of the opinions conveyed on the issues raised. The final section evaluates the stance Moitra held while making these speeches.

### ***5.2.1 Topic Classification of Speeches***

This identification has been made based on *what topics she spoke on*. The topics addressed by Moitra in her speeches between 2020-2021 can broadly be placed under economic and welfare matters. The economic code has been attributed since she speaks on concerns and Bills relating to the state of the domestic economy, development and taxes. The welfare code has been attributed as she addresses issues concerning the populace's health, comfort, safety, well-being and protection of their rights.

### ***5.2.2 Opinion Classification of Speeches***

This identification has been made based on *what she expressed on the topics*. In line with this frame, a classification of Moitra's 2020-2021 speeches can be made based on the following:

**5.2.2.1 Remarking on Government Actions.** The aspects looked at under this category include Moitra's address of the Bills introduced and passed in the House, the Government's handling of social, political and economic matters in recent times, as well as the responses the Government provided as an explanation for its policies and practices. The Government at the time is formed by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Moitra's remarks are therefore directed toward the BJP.

**5.2.2.2 Highlighting Public Welfare Issues.** Under this category, Moitra points out issues that the populace is facing that are causing an impediment to a smoother existence or keeping them from a benefit that is due their way. The matters addressed here are ones that have a direct and immediate impact on the people.

**5.2.2.3 Indicating Environmental Impact Issues.** Under this category, Moitra draws attention to development infrastructures and concerns that are and will adversely impact the environment.

While the first category illustrates Moitra's discernment of the Government's dealings (past and continuing actions), the other two categories indicate issues that Moitra brings to the attention of the House and provide a recommendation on the action the Government should take on them.

**Table 3**

*Opinion Classification of Speeches*

Year	Session	Date of Speech	Type of Debate	Opinion Classification	
2020	Budget	3 February	Motion of Thanks on the President's Address	Remark on Government Actions	
		17 March	Special Mention (Zero Hour)	Highlight Public Welfare Issues	
		19 March	Special Mention (Zero Hour)	Highlight Public Welfare Issues	
			20 March	Submission by Members	Indicate Environmental Impact Issues
	Monsoon	15 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill	Remark on Government Actions	
		17 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill	Remark on Government Actions	
		19 September	Statutory Resolution and Government Bill	Remark on Government Actions	
21 September		Government Bills	Remark on Government Actions		
2021	Budget	8 February	Motion of Thanks on the President's Address	Remark on Government Actions	
	Winter	1 December	Special Mention (Zero Hour)	Highlight Public Welfare Issues	
		2 December	Short Duration Discussions (Rule-193)	Remark on Government Actions	
		8 December	Special Mention (Zero Hour)	Indicate Environmental Impact Issues	



### **5.2.3 Opinions Conveyed in the Speeches**

The following section builds on the opinion classification outlined earlier and elaborates on the opinions Moitra expressed in her 2020-2021 speeches.

**5.2.3.1 Remarking on Government Actions.** Seven of Moitra’s speeches made between 2020-2021 can be placed under this category. For clarity, consistent points made in different speeches have been grouped.

**5.2.3.1.1 Promise Versus Practice.** In many of the speeches made during 2020, Moitra pointed out that when the current Government came to power after the election in 2014, they promised accountability and transparency. This was an inciting promise that many in the country were enthused about since it came close on the heels of multiple exposures of corruption by various members of the previous Government. Moitra frequently calls to attention the current Government’s failure to deliver on this promise. Her speech at the first session in 2020 (Budget session) opens with the statement, “I rise against the betrayal of the body polity that this Government has been responsible for” (3 February 2020). This theme of ‘betrayal to the promise of accountability and transparency’ is consistent in many of the speeches she made in 2020-2021.

“You came to power because a very large section of ordinary people... believed you when you said *sabka sath, sabka vikas* which they took to mean development for a united India. They believed in your alternative narrative of merit, of transparency, of a world without nepotism, and the entitlement of the *bhavalok*. ... You have betrayed the ideals of transparency and a better governance that you claim you were wedded to and your betrayal has gone much further than that.” (3 February 2020)

“Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, per capita consumption, according to the National Sample Survey, dropped in real terms. This is unprecedented in modern times. Moreover, all of that drop, according to the same data, happened after 2014. This data was first made public, but then as the bad news started to go around the Government suppressed the 2017-18 NSS Survey, complaining that it was unreliable. There was no credible explanation given though this very data had been used to tom-tom poverty reduction in the past.” (3 February 2020)

“This was the Government that came to power on the back of accountability and transparency. In the past six years, we have had very little of that from the Government.” (15 September 2020)

“First you are raising funds on the basis of public office. The very name – the Prime Minister's Fund – makes people think that this is a Government authority. So, by saying it is not open to RTI, you are running away from the spirit of transparency you claim to be wedded to.” (19 September 2020)

“To this Government, I say stop lying to us all the time about growth rates, about migrant welfare, about expenditure and the laughable delusion that the PM Cares. Please stop marketing Rs. 20,000 crore packages as relief measures when in truth it comprises money already spent and money to be given as loans, and imaginary money that will never reach the people that it is supposed to.” (19 September 2020)

On 15 September 2020, Moitra spoke on the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020 and requested that the Government reinstate the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). This scheme which is entirely funded by the Central Government enables MPs to recommend development projects for communities based on locally felt needs. Moitra points out the MPLADS is one way in which MPs can be held accountable by their constituents and also demonstrates the “accountability and transparency” the Government promised when they were elected.

**5.2.3.1.2 *Hidden Motive Actions and Deliberate Inactions.*** In response to certain policies instituted by the Government and its forethought, Moitra identifies the actions and mandates as having illusionary aspects. She comments on the Government having hidden motives behind some of its actions, referring to certain Bills being pushed despite and amid protests and oppositions, as well as its deliberate inaction on other matters (keeping mum) – both designed to serve a separate and distinct purpose.

“This is the courage to use the official channels of the Ministry of External Affairs to respond to social media posts by an eighteen-year-old climate activist and an American pop star where not even one single ministry has been deputed by this Government to try and look out for food, water, and basic sanitation needs of the farmers and their families who have been camping at the border for almost ninety days. And finally, this is the courage to bring in three farm laws when the Opposition, farmers across the country,

as well as the Government's oldest ally warned it was unacceptable." (8 February 2021)

In certain speeches, concurrently while she points out that the Government is being furtive about its objectives in instituting certain legislative changes, and she also infers what the expected outcomes from these actions are for the Government.

"When I saw the List of Business approved for discussion during this truncated Session, what stands out is that behind every single new Bill or every Bill replacing another Ordinance is the singular sinister motive of this Government to destroy federalism, to undermine the authority of the States, and encroach illegally on every subject included in the State List." (17 September 2020)

In the 19 September 2020 speech, she purports the duplicity of the Government by commenting on the non-transparency of the PM CARES Fund. She emphasises the government accentuation of some contributors to the Fund while maintaining an elective silence on Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) contributions that exceed their corporate social responsibility allocations, donations from banned Chinese companies and the conflicts of interest these raise.

"I hope, you remember that the Prime Minister's Office, in response to an application seeking disclosure of the incorporating documents of this trust, had said that this is not a public authority; hence, it is not open to RTI. But the very legislative intent behind Section 135 of the Companies Act was to encourage companies to use CSR funds for local welfare activities for local communities in areas of operation. But the PM CARES Fund diverts those

very funds away from local communities into this dark hole where not even a speck of light can enter.” (19 September 2020)

Moitra’s speech on 21 September 2020 addresses the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill 2020. On this day, she seeks clarification on the “dichotomy” and “hypocrisy” in the matter of NGOs receiving foreign contributions being increasingly scrutinised under FCRA while foreign companies registered in India are permitted to purchase electoral bonds without undergoing the same. She raises the point as the discrimination was increasingly impeding the work these NGOs had been doing.

When the FCRA was originally enacted in 1976, it prohibited foreign contributions to the Indian political system. When the current Government introduced the electoral bonds scheme in 2018 to “cleanse the system of political funding in the country” (Press Information Bureau, 2018), it amended the FCRA and exempted political parties from the prohibition on accepting foreign funds.

This discrimination indicates the Government’s belief that NGOs receiving foreign funds would make them subservient to foreign agendas; however, political parties receiving these funds would not succumb to the same. It also violates the Government’s promise of transparency and accountability by concealing the source of its funds while cutting off the resources of other organisations.

**5.2.3.1.3 Government Deeming Itself an Extra-Constitutional Authority.** In two separate speeches made a few months apart, Moitra identifies and accuses the Government of setting itself up as an ‘extra-constitutional authority’. After making

this charge, she goes on to list the Government's dealings and use it to substantiate how she makes this inference.

The first time she makes the charge is in her speech on 3 February 2020 at the Budget session, where she critiques the activities of the Government since its election in 2014.

“You got only 23 crore votes out of 1.3 billion citizens. So, despite the fact that you might have had the largest majority in several decades, do not arrogate to yourself an extra-constitutional authority over every citizen and do not go beyond the tenets of democracy.” (3 February 2020)

Moitra themes this speech made during the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address debate on the Government's betrayal of the citizens who voted for them; voters who were not only those that believed in the BJP's Hindutva ideology but also ordinary people who believed in their mandate of equal opportunities, better economy and development. She establishes these promises were broken, and the voters were duped by the Government enacting demonetisation, displacing tribals to build a statue, questioning the citizenship of people and through the schemes of the National Population Register (NPR), National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), in addition to building false narratives and lying about the actual state of the nation's economy. These actions, in essence, put or rather threw the livelihood and identity of the citizens into jeopardy.

The second time Moitra accused the Government of thinking of itself as an 'extra-constitutional authority' in her 17 September 2020 speech opposing the Farmers Produce (Trade and Commerce) Promotion and Facilitation Bill, 2020 (commonly referred to as the Farm Bills 2020). The identification made in this case

is because the Government was attempting to pass a Bill that violated a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.

“Once again this Government is doing what it does best which is arrogating to itself a constitutional authority it is not vested with.” (17 September 2020)

Moitra vehemently opposes this Bill and outlines five reasons she identifies it as a problematic piece of legislation with ambiguous phrasing. She substantiates how the Bill violates the (federalism) structure of the Constitution by cutting into the State’s jurisdiction and threatening the State’s revenue system. Furthermore, the problematic phrasing in the Bill creates uncertainty among farmers about the areas under the Bill and price protection. Based on these facts, she requests that the Farm Bills 2020 be repealed.

**5.2.3.1.4 Handling the Covid Crisis.** While references to the Covid-19 pandemic and the problems related to it were made in her other speeches made during 2020-2021 as well, Moitra’s speech on 2 December 2021 is focused on this subject. In this interrupted and incomplete speech, she is very critical of the Government, structuring her argument on its inadequate and deceptive handling of the crisis.

In her prelude, Moitra quotes Bob Dylan and employs it to mock the Government:

“So, let me again begin by repeating that ‘the times are indeed a-changin’’. From starting out as the ‘Ironman Government’ which prided itself on never budging from its position, the past 18 months have seen India transform itself into the land of the u-turn. The BJP Government has finally realised that they better start swimming or they will sink like a stone.” (2 December 2021)

In the first part of the speech, Moitra draws out “the key errors that the Government made in COVID management”. Among the errors, she highlights the Government’s incompetent management of vaccine supplies and vaccine policy despite having the foresight “that this was a double-dose vaccine and to vaccinate an adult population of 940 million, India would need about two billion vaccines”. Moitra asserts that India faced a supply crunch as a result of the Government being unwilling to obtain foreign vaccines even though the domestic production of vaccines and the demand were highly disparate. Moreover, she credits the billion doses that were administered to the citizens till that time (of the speech being made) to the ramped-up vaccine production by the (domestic) producer rather than the Government.

Regarding the problem in the rate of vaccination and administration of the second doses, she brings up the Government’s lack of forethought on the socio-economic diversity among the Indian populace and the seasonal time activities.

“The problem is that when we took down the names of people who were getting the first dose, we took only their phone numbers. The Government did not take their addresses. Now, we have a vast rural population, urban slums and migrant labour. With the harvest season going on and poor rural connectivity, when you are trying to contact these people to chase up on double dosage, you are not getting much success.” (2 December 2021)

Another failure Moitra faults the Government with is the “easily preventable” shortage of the oxygen supply that resulted in the deaths of 700 patients between



April and May 2021. She goes on to point out that despite the seriousness of the matter, the members of Government was preoccupied with other concerns.

“In early April, it was clear that there was a problem. Numbers were exceeding 2,70,000 a day, yet the Prime Minister was lauding a huge crowd in a Bengal election rally; the Shahi Snan at the Kumbh by lakhs of people continued; and the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand said that ‘we have faith in God and in Mother Ganga’.”

In the second part of this speech, Moitra begins to build her argument on how the Government’s majoritarian narrative that was continuing to be propagated through illustrative statements that the Prime Minister has ‘reined in’ and ‘gained control of’ the pandemic by its intermediaries has begun to fall apart. Since Moitra is interrupted and not permitted to complete the speech, adequate conclusions cannot be derived from the points she brings up.

In her 8 February, 2021 speech, Moitra criticises the Government’s snap decision to lock the country down in an effort to curtail the spread of the coronavirus without deliberation on how it will play out or reflection on how a majority of the populace will be affected.

“This is the courage to announce the national lockdown at only four-hour notice causing untold misery, countless deaths, the sight of thousands walking for hundreds of miles with no food or money.” (8 February 2021)

**5.2.3.1.5 Economic Issues.** Moitra has routinely been scathing about how the Government addressed the economic concerns of the nation in her 2020-2021 speeches.

The 8 February 2021 speech is one that she themed on the Government's cowardly actions cloaked as courageous. The speech made during the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address debate is a response to the Government's actions in the previous year.

“India was the single worst performer among developing countries in the year 2020.” (8 February 2021)

In this speech, Moitra calls out the Government's “brazen audacity to announce the economic rebound”. She brings up facts such as the Government spent less than 2 per cent on social transfers in the previous year, projected an economic growth in the year ahead (2021) that would, in actuality, mean that there has been no economic growth in 2 years (2019-2022), the K-shaped recession impacting the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector and providing the citizens with economic aid through the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme only to take it back by hiking the petrol and diesel prices.

“We are not a nation that is growing and sharing its wealth, we seem to be a nation that is only finding ways to share our poverty.” (8 February 2021)

Moitra's 19 September 2020 speech addresses her party's position on the Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provisions) Bill, 2020. Calling the Bill “deeply problematic”, she breaks it down into two

consequences and explains how this Bill (too) would cut into the State's resources and funds.

Her first point addresses the amendment to clause 7 of the Central Goods and Services Act 2017, which would allow the Government to "extend the time limit for completion of actions under the Act in events of force majeure such as an epidemic with retrospective effect". Moitra infers this will allow the Government to "retrospectively validate its failure and extend the time limit indefinitely while disbursing compensation to States". She demonstrates how this takes away the assurance that was given to the states to address revenue shortfalls caused by the transition to GST when the Act was passed and also enables the Government to shirk its responsibility.

"Stop cheating the State Governments of their dues, made through a constitutional promise, stop wasting funds on vanity projects when the State Governments who actually make a difference in people's lives are deprived time and again." (19 September 2020)

The second consequence of the Bill she raises is that it gives "a blanket clearance with no accountability whatsoever to the PM CARES Fund". She remarks on the non-transparent and discriminatory nature of the Fund, elaborating on both aspects.

On the matter of discrimination, Moitra points out that the Government issued a notice on 20 March 2020 that contributions to the PM CARES Fund are eligible under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), while contributions to the State Relief Funds, which were earlier considered the case, are not. This would mean that corporate contributions would be made to the Centre rather than the State. This, in

essence, will have a debilitating impact on the States' ability to deal with crisis situations.

“Unfair treatment of identical contributions to the PM CARES Fund and to the State Relief Funds is against public interest and against public policy... It creates an unfair, unjust and discriminatory distinction against the State and Chief Minister's Relief Funds in favour of the PM CARES Fund.” (19 September 2020)

On the matter of non-transparency, she raises the fact that the Government declared that the PM CARES Fund is not a public authority and therefore not open to Right to Information (RTI). As a result, an audit of the Fund and disclosure of incorporating documents will not be done.

The RTI is an Act that empowers citizens of India to request information from public authorities and government bodies. The organisations are required by law to provide the requested information within 48 hours or 30 days. The Act was brought into effect in 2005 to promote transparency and combat corruption in government bodies.

“The PM CARES Fund diverts those very funds away from local communities into this dark hole where not even a speck of light can enter.” (19 September 2020)

She also brings up the matter of contributions that companies under Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) were making – contributions that were well above their CSR allocations – contributions that were not being announced by the Government, unlike others made to the Fund. Furthermore, the PM CARES Fund is exempted from

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) regulations even though it does not meet the pre-requisites. Regardless, donations by banned Chinese companies were being accepted even when the Government had labelled China an enemy.

Moitra establishes how all these donations and contributions raised conflicts of interest that could not be addressed or resolved since the Government would not allow an audit of the Fund.

**5.2.3.2 Highlighting Public Welfare Issues.** Three speeches made between 2020-2021 can be classified under this category. In the speech made on 17 March 2020, Moitra raises a request for a survey of panchayats in her constituency that are within 10 km of Bangladesh so that they can apply for Border Area Development Programme (BADP) funds that they are currently unable to take benefit of.

In her speech on 19 March 2020, she directs attention to the 5% Goods and Service Tax (GST) placed on wheelchairs, braille paper and other implements used by differentially abled people. She calls this out as unfair and pushes for the removal of this tax, illustrating her point with the statement, “for people who cannot walk, this is like a tax on walking”.

In her speech on 1 December 2021, she demands immediate definitive action on the matter of a villa being illegally constructed on a site protected under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and within the limits of a church. She appeals that the structure has to be demolished since just revoking permission for the construction is an inadequate action.

**5.2.3.3 Indicating Environmental Impact Issues.** Two speeches made between 2020-2021 can be classified under this category. Both speeches were made when the Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change was present in the House.

In her speech on 20 March 2020, Moitra raises the matter of bio-medical wastes from hospitals being dumped in forest areas. She attests that “obviously” hospitals have given contacts for the efficient dumping of these wastes, and it is the contractors who are shirking from this task. She specifically mentions this happening in a forest area outside the nation’s capital and requests that the Minister create a Task Force to deal with this “matter of urgent public importance”.

In her speech on 8 December 2021, she urges the House to rethink infrastructure projects in forests in the state of Goa as projects that have already been completed have resulted in many trees being cut down and existing biodiversity harmed. She advocates that the projects be given another thought so that “Mollem Reserve Forest in Goa which is one of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots”, can be preserved.

#### ***5.2.4 Stance in Speeches***

Elected MPs have a responsibility towards their constituents, the Parliament and their political party. In her speeches, Moitra has positioned herself as representative of all three with the use of the personal pronouns ‘I’ ‘we’ and ‘us’; in conjunction with positioning herself speaking as one of the citizens of the country.

“So, I, as a Parliamentarian, garbed in parliamentary privilege, now choose to use this platform that the people have given me to ask the questions that the people want to ask and to give voice to their thoughts so that this Government may know that arresting, attacking, and repressing voices will not hold.” (8 February 2021)

“Today, I rise to speak of betrayal. This betrayal is not just to myself. I was not part of the 31 per cent who voted for you in 2014 and I was not part of the 37 per cent who voted for you in 2019. This is not about people like me. I was sceptical about

you, your ideology, and your rhetoric right from the word go. In a sense, you owe me little, but the truth is that you have betrayed the very citizens who did vote for you.” (3 February 2020)

“I come from a rural constituency and a source of migrant workers.” (8 February 2021)

“We are not ...\*(interruption) today because we point this out. We are paheredars, guardians of our soil and our Constitution.” (3 February 2020)

“...very many of us have mustered the courage to tell the Government ‘कागज नहीं दिखाएंगे।’ (we will not show our papers)”. (8 February 2021)

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Mahua Moitra comes from a non-political, middle-class family. While she always intended to join political life, her decision to become a banker, in her words, “basically just happened” (The Wire, 2020). Leaving a lucrative decade-long career as a financier, she joined politics aiming to make a difference starting at the grassroots level. She made the career switch from an investment banker to a politician while in her mid-30s, taking this decision once she felt she was financially and mentally prepared for it. In an interview, she expressed, “I wasn’t a burnt-out banker. I had a great time as a banker” (The Wire, 2020). Through this, we see Moitra deviating from the more prevalent route of political access for women in India – through family connections. Her path to Parliament can be viewed as independent and through the membership of a political party.

As discussed earlier, their personal backgrounds influence the routes women take to access political spaces. The routes taken, in turn, influence the matters they speak on. The influence of Moitra’s educational and professional background before joining Indian politics can be seen in her 2020-2021 speeches in the Lok Sabha. The issues she raised in these speeches are classified as economic and welfare matters. Her degree in Economics and Mathematics and subsequent profession as a financier give her an insight into comprehending the Government’s fiscal policy and decisions on developmental policies. Through this insight, she endeavours to break down Government Bills and matters of economic consequence, realising their intended impact and how they would, in actuality, reflect on the lives of the populace.

Another aspect of Moitra’s preceding career that influences the current one is her training to do research and know the substance of the matters she speaks on. In an interview, she has indicated that she draws on this aspect, especially when speaking on Government



Bills in Parliament, highlighting the importance of “going into the technicalities” and “doing a clause-by-clause dissection” (The Wire, 2020).

These traits can be observed in Moitra’s speeches in 2020, addressing the Government Bills: Salary Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill 2020 on 15 September 2020, Farmers Produce (Trade and Commerce) Promotion and Facilitation Bill 2020 on 17 September 2020, Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provisions) Bill 2020 on 19 September 2020 and Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill 2020 on 21 September 2020.

Moitra’s opinions on the matters she addressed in her speeches are distinguishably ‘non-female centric’. In fact, in all the twelve speeches analysed, not once has she presented a matter for discussion that specifically addresses or benefits only women. Rather the issues raised in the speeches can be viewed as concerns that do or will affect the citizens of the nation at large. In this aspect, Moitra has positioned herself as one raising issues of general public interest in the Parliament and not those that only impact a specific gender.

Most of the speeches analysed have been placed under the opinion classification ‘Remarking on Government Actions’. Through the seven speeches under this classification, Moitra has frequently employed a ‘remind and review’ technique to systematically deconstruct the plans, policies and decisions of the Government and present how it has failed the people of the nation. Through the various speeches under this category, made during different types of parliamentary debates, she points out the times the Government had promised to be transparent and accountable and enable ample opportunities for collective progress and development. However, since being elected, it has proved otherwise, as can be observed from the Bills it has gotten passed in Parliament despite the public’s disfavour and protests against them, such as the CAA and Farm Bills; displayed inertness in matters where it should have acted such as looking out for the basic needs of the protesting farmers and

migrant labourers suffering as a result of the sudden lockdown; presented inaccurate and misleading data about the economic growth rate. In this aspect, Moitra has positioned herself as one exposing the duplicity of the Government's flaws in the guise of its efforts toward the public's benefit.

Moitra comes across as very outraged and reproachful of the Government's actions and decisions during this time, as evidenced by the scathing tone she maintains when addressing it. The theme of the Government's betrayal of its promise of transparency and accountability and having failed the populace is consistent in many of the speeches. Two events that dominated the 2020-2021 period in India were the Farmers' protest that was ongoing and the covid crisis. Moitra is very censorious of the Government's handling of both.

Moitra details how the Government's management of the covid crisis was counterproductive, despite it being cognizant of the diverse population in the country, the number of vaccine doses that would be required for them all, and being provided with advance knowledge about the oxygen supply that would be needed for patients in the upcoming months. The Government's ineffectual management starting with the abrupt announcement of the lockdown, resulted in the tragic situation of the migrant exodus, preventable deaths due to a lack of oxygen supply and vaccine supply shortage. Moreover, its permitting gatherings for election rallies and the *Kumbh Mela*, a Hindu pilgrimage and festival, enabled the daily rise in infected cases even more. Despite these resultants, members of the Government were more concerned with pushing through with their objective and propagating the Government's majoritarian narrative.

On the matter of the farmers' protest, Moitra criticises the Government for passing the Farm Bills even though it was discerned to take away the safeguards farmers were given through previous legislations, placing them at the mercy of corporations as well as cutting

into the State's jurisdictions and financial resources. She censures the Government for using official channels to respond to Rihanna and Greta Thunberg's social media posts about the issue and various other means to squelch the protest while remaining unconcerned about the needs and welfare of the protestors.

The five other speeches Moitra made in this period, placed under the opinion classifications 'Highlighting Public Welfare Issues' and 'Indicating Environmental Impact Issues', indicate issues that she observes as requiring the Government's immediate attention and action. The issues raised in these speeches have specific impacts and affect particular groups of people in the country. However, the specific impact is not on gender-based matters. The speaking time for these speeches is not very long, so Moitra is very precise in conveying why these are matters of burgeoning concern and the recommended resolution.

The first speech in the 'Public Welfare Issues' category raised a matter that was affecting people within Moitra's constituency, the second speech addresses an unjust tax being imposed on differentially abled people for their situation; and the third matter sought to protect not only a part of the country's cultural heritage but also the religious sentiments of some citizens.

Environmental issues and climate change have become growing matters of concern globally. The two issues Moitra addresses under 'Environmental Impact Issues', while occurring in particular geographic locations, have a more significant impact on the rest of the nation. The matters she raises in these speeches – the negligent dumping of bio-medical wastes by contractors given the contracts by hospitals to see that these wastes are efficiently disposed of, and one of the few remaining biodiversity hotspots in the world being destroyed in favour of infrastructure projects – are incredibly crucial and require immediate action.

Using the definition of *contribution* as "the part played by the individual to augment the existing perception" and the analysis of her 2020-2021 speeches in the Lok Sabha,

Mahua Moitra's contribution to the developing narrative of female political representation in India can be summarised as that of a young, contemporary, female, first-time-elected Member of Parliament breaking from existing perceptions limiting female politicians. She joined politics independent of family connections and male influences, utilising the insights and experience gained from her previous career as a financier to speak on matters relating to the nation's economy and public welfare in Parliament. In addition, when addressing her colleagues in the House, she situates herself as representing the populace and speaking as one among the citizens. By doing so, she aims to ensure that members of the House are made aware of not only how Governmental decisions are impacting the populace but also the sentiments the populace has on these matters.

### **Limitation of Study and Future Scope of Research**

The limitation of this study is that the lone subject, as well as the narrow time frame of analysis, produces subjective outcomes and cannot be generalised to evaluate how the broader concept of female political representation in India is evolving. To do so, research on how other contemporary female MPs are approaching the existing perceptions and challenging limitations placed on female politicians is required. Scope for future research on the topic can be a comparative study between Mahua Moitra and other female MPs elected for the first time in the 2019 general election. The current study can be expanded by quantitatively evaluating the impact of the issues Mahua Moitra raised in her 2020-2021 Lok Sabha speeches on the public's perception of her.

## Appendices

### Text of Speeches Analysed

***Date of Speech: 3 February 2020***

***Type of Debate: Motion of Thanks on the President's Address***

Madam, I rise today to oppose the motion and in support of the amendments moved by our Party.

More importantly, I rise against the betrayal of the body polity that this Government has been responsible for. I sincerely hope that the Treasury Benches will have the patience to hear me out. Even if they lack that instinct for self-preservation, that will actually make them listen. So, if they have got express instructions today or the express intent today to shout me down, I say to them to do so at their own peril because people of India today are on the streets and their voices are beyond their power to silence.

As a Member of the Opposition, I have the unquestionable right to tell you that as a Government, you lack humility. You secured approximately 37 per cent of the 67 per cent of votes cast out of a pool of 900 million voters. That is only about 230 million people. You got only 23 crore votes out of 1.3 billion citizens. So, despite the fact that you might have had the largest majority in several decades, do not arrogate to yourself an extra-constitutional authority over every citizen and do not go beyond the tenets of democracy.

Today, I rise to speak of betrayal. This betrayal is not just to myself. I was not part of the 31 per cent who voted for you in 2014 and I was not part of the 37 per cent who voted for you in 2019. This is not about people like me. I was sceptical about you, your ideology, and your rhetoric right from the word go. In a sense, you owe me little, but the truth is that you have betrayed the very citizens who did vote for you.

The truth is that you have betrayed the very citizens who voted for you. You did not come to power on the vote of the Hindu-right alone; you came to power because a very large section of ordinary people, the aspirational middle of the road voters cast aside whatever reservations they might have had about your past and believed you when you said *sabka sath, sabka vikas* which they took to mean development for a united India. They believed in your alternative narrative of merit, of transparency, of a world without nepotism, and the entitlement of the *bhavalok*. It is this section of people, these middle of the road voters that you owe your historic mandate to. These were not the hardcore believers the *Sanghis* as it were, but they still believed you and they still voted for you. But you have betrayed the

young voter who was eagerly looking forward to his first job. You betrayed the small businessmen by your foolish decision of demonetisation, killing his market, and ruining his business for no fathomable reason.

You betrayed thousands of tribal people in Gujarat whose land you took to build a statue and to whom now you have given jobs as toilet cleaners. You have betrayed them by questioning the citizenship of the very citizens who voted you to power. It is your middle-of-the-road voters who today cannot recognize the India that they are living in. They cannot recognise the images they see on their television screens. They cannot identify the hate-filled venomous invective that they see members of the Ruling Party spew out publicly.

A week ago a meeting of holocaust survivors was convened in Poland to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> liberation of the dreaded Auschwitz Camp. Only 200 people are still surviving. The one resounding message, perhaps the last in their life time, that they gave to the rest of the world was this: “Auschwitz did not fall from the skies. Auschwitz happened because people were indifferent to the plight of others who professed a different faith from them.” All holocaust memorials today serve as one reminder, not that it happened but it could happen again. We need to remember that it happened not only because of those who pressed the switch of the gas chamber but also of those who sat back and watched when their neighbours were first marked out systematically and then dragged from their homes. The NPR, the NRC and the CAA are all tools in this Machiavellian design to first mark out, then disenfranchise, and finally annihilate. This is your biggest betrayal of those who voted for you. Nobody wanted to be part of this ‘US’ versus ‘THEM’ debate.

My friends who voted for you in 2014 are horrified at what is happening in their name under your watch. As every election comes and goes, your members demonise dissent, exhorting your supporters to shoot people who stand up to you.

Today, you have let a person who was banned by the Election Commission from speaking for 36 hours to come to the floor of the House and present the manifesto of the Ruling Party for the Delhi Assembly elections. You have the executive authority to do so. But your Government remember depends on a higher authority, moral authority. You speak of Ram and Yudhishtar and you speak of *Dharmputras*. You speak of dharma. Have you forgotten that? You build false narratives where our *dadis* become your terrorists, and our children become *desh drohis*. But today the citizens are finally standing up to these bullies and they echo Ram Prasad Bismil’s words. These are not my words.

देखना है ज़ोर कितना बाजु-ए-कातिल में है,

सर जो उठा एक बार, वह झुकते नहीं ललकार से,  
हाथ जो उठा, वह कटते नहीं तलवार से ।

You have betrayed your mandate. You have broken your promise to put the economy first and to put development first. My words will be incomplete if I do not highlight the abysmal state of the economy, of the arcane jugglery that this Government practises, where the Finance Minister is fearful of putting out the real GDP growth target. The Finance Minister, on the floor of the House, says that nominal GDP target is 10 per cent. In the month of December, the Consumer Price Index was at 6.70 per cent. Does that mean that the real GDP growth rate today is 3.30 per cent? That is what the Government is saying.

Remember, when there is no integrity in statistics, little else remains. Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, per capita consumption, according to the National Sample Survey, dropped in real terms. This is unprecedented in modern times. Moreover, all of that drop, according to the same data, happened after 2014. This data was first made public, but then as the bad news started to go around the Government suppressed the 2017-18 NSS Survey, complaining that it was unreliable. There was no credible explanation given though this very data had been used to tom-tom poverty reduction in the past.

There is perhaps even worse news. The GDP numbers are disputed partly because of disagreements about the right measure of inflation. A bigger problem may be that our way to compute the GDP of the informal sector is crude and backward looking. So, we overestimate the GDP when the informal sector is shrinking.

You have a tendency to rubbish every economic expert who does not agree with you. But your very own Chief Economic Advisor, whom you selected, has gone now on record to say that all the more reliable measures of macro statistics, such as growth in exports, import and credit, investment, vehicle sales are mostly negative. This is more similar to a recession year like 1991 than the moderate growth year that you say we are having.

Then there are unemployment numbers, high and growing which the Government denies. If we are really in a crisis the Government is doing this country a huge disservice by trying to suppress data and denying the correctness of the data that exists.

You have betrayed the ideals of transparency and a better governance that you claim you were wedded to and your betrayal has gone much further than that. You have betrayed the history of this Republic; you have denounced the very ideals on which we fought and gained our freedom which is so peaceful and non-violent descent.

You have tried time and again to rewrite the past and create a grotesque singular version of India with false history. But as Agha Shahid Ali said, “my memory comes in the way of your history.”

Three things - a majoritarian Government, a subservient Media and a ...(*pliant*) \* Judiciary – anyone alone cannot destroy a nation, as we know it. But a combination of all three can prove deadly....(*Interruptions*)

We are not ... \* today because we point this out. We are *paheredars*, guardians of our soil and our Constitution.

‘जिन्हें नाज है हिंद पर, वे कहाँ हैं?’

कहाँ हैं - यहाँ हैं, यहाँ हैं, यहाँ हैं ।’ ...(*व्यवधान*)

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***Date of Speech: 17 March 2020***

***Type of Debate: Special Mention (Zero Hour)***

Sir, through you, I would like to bring to the attention of the House one of the problems under the BADP which is the Border Area Development Programme. For constituencies that have a border with Bangladesh, blocks are marked as BADP blocks and they get funding from the Central Government under the BADP for infrastructure such as roads, schools etc. This is vital for border constituencies. However, there are certain Panchayats which are within 10 kilometres of the border, but do not fall within the BADP block, for example, Hanspukuria Gram Panchayat in Tehatta II Block which is under my constituency. I would request if the Home Ministry could do a survey where they see which Panchayats are there which are within 10 kilometres, but do not fall within BADP blocks. This would allow the district administrations to apply for BADP funds without delay.

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***Date of Speech: 19 March 2020***

***Type of Debate: Special Mention (Zero Hour)***

Thank you hon. Speaker Sir for allowing me to speak. I would like to bring to the attention of the House a serious issue concerning differently abled people. The GST tax on wheelchairs, on braille paper and a lot of implements that differently people use is at five per cent. Now, in keeping with global standards, I really request the Government to remove this because for people who cannot walk, this is like a tax on walking. When this had happened and when this had been brought up in the GST Council in 2017, the then Revenue



Secretary had said that they will be able to claim input tax credit and wheelchair prices will come down. But now we see in the past three years that wheelchair prices have not come down. So, you could please tell the Government to revisit this and to remove the five per cent GST on wheelchairs, braille paper and implements for differently abled people.

\*\*\*

***Date of Speech: 20 March 2020***

***Type of Debate: Submission by Members***

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing me to raise a matter of urgent public importance. The hon. Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is here. I would like to draw the attention of the House and the Minister to the issue of dumping of biomedical waste in forest areas. There is a big forest outside Delhi called the Shahdara Forest where a lot of hospitals in the Vasant Kunj area are continuously dumping biomedical waste. We are all waiting for the M.C. Mehta case to go on in the Supreme Court and the directions of the Supreme Court. But I would urge the Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to please take strong cognizance of this issue. Obviously, hospitals are giving contracts to contractors for, what they think as, efficient dumping and they are absolving themselves of their responsibilities. But these contractors are using forest area to dump this. So, if we could set up a Task Force to deal with it immediately, I would be grateful.

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***Date of Speech: 15 September 2020***

***Type of Debate: Statutory Resolution and Government Bill***

Thank you, hon. Chairperson Sir, for allowing me to speak on the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020. I have just got two very quick points.

This was the Government that came to power on the back of accountability and transparency. In the past six years, we have had a very little of that from the Government. I would like to point out one thing that the MPLADS is perhaps the only thing where MPs are directly accountable to their constituents. When we are voted in, we promise certain things. Each time we go back to our area, and if we do not deliver, people ask us. We get two and a half crores for the first six months, and it is only after we produce the utilisation certificates for the work done that the other two and a half crores are released. So, there is no bigger or greater example of accountability and transparency than this, and by taking this away, I

think, the Government is doing the country a great disservice. It not only owes answers to us but also all the constituents of ours are owed answers by the Government.

So, I would request the House to speak in one voice, which we have already done, and I would request the Government to take heed of that voice and reinstate MPLADS. Thank you.

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***Date of Speech: 17 September 2020***

***Type of Debate: Statutory Resolution and Government Bill***

Hon. Chairperson, Sir, I speak today in vehement opposition to the Farmers Produce (Trade and Commerce) Promotion and Facilitation Bill, 2020.

Each time I speak in this august House, my hon. Colleagues from the BJP tell me in the Central Hall कि आप अच्छा बोलती हैं, लेकिन आप इतनी अग्रेसिव क्यों हैं? शांत होइए, शांत होइए । But I have not been elected by the 1.2 million people of Krishnanagar, a predominantly agricultural area to be *shant* while this Government with its brute majority stamps out cooperative federalism from every single aspect of governance.

When I saw the List of Business approved for discussion during this truncated Session, what stands out is that behind every single new Bill or every Bill replacing another Ordinance is the singular sinister motive of this Government to destroy federalism, to undermine the authority of the States, and encroach illegally on every subject included in the State List.

This Bill is particularly dangerous because it seeks to encroach on State autonomy on a sensitive topic like agriculture which is not only the main source of income for a majority of Indians but also feeds this entire nation.

19.00 hrs

Let me now go into the Bill itself and dissect the most important parts. This Bill is in direct violation of the federal structure of the Constitution, namely Article 246 (3) read with Schedule VII, List II, Items 14, 18, 30 and 45. It squarely puts agriculture, items relating to agricultural land, rents, revenue assessment and collection on the State List. Once again this Government is doing what it does best which is arrogating to itself a constitutional authority it is not vested with.

The second point is that the Bill creates two distinct areas with a single geography. Section 2 (m) of the Bill, the definition of trade area includes all other areas

excluding the principal and sub-market yards and market sub yards which are notified under the State APMC Acts and managed by the regulated market committees and private market yards, sub yards, private market consumer yards. Now, there is going to be two areas. One trade area according to this new Bill, and another area comprising of market yards notified under the West Bengal State Act.

*(Interruptions)* ...

So, there is going to be two areas. One trade area according to this new Bill and another area comprising of market yards notified under the State Act along with private yards. The current provisions of the State APMC Act define the whole revenue district to be under the jurisdiction of the State. So, if this Bill is defining a new area, it is unnecessarily creating ambiguity among farmers and curtailing the jurisdiction of the State.

The third point is this. Section 5(2) of the Bill empowers the Central Government to specify procedure, norms, code of conduct etc. with respect to electronic trading and transaction. If agriculture is a State subject, then surely trading and transacting cannot be taken over by the Centre.

The fourth point is this and it is the most dangerous. It is a direct assault on the States' revenues. Section 6 of the Bill lays out that no market fee, cess or levy under the State APMC Acts shall now be levied on farmers and traders by the State Government for trading in a trade area as defined in the new Bill. However, under the existing State Acts, this market fee will be payable. So, this is going to lead to a substantial loss to the State exchequer because now any area outside the notified area will *de facto* be treated as a trade area where no State revenue can be realized. One farmer or trader trading in a trade area and another being charged across the road by the State is going to create a ridiculous rural divide.

The fifth point is in relation to ambiguity about price protection. Nowhere in this new Bill has it been explicitly mentioned that the Minimum Support Price mechanism will be respected. The hon. Minister says it will be; well, then explicitly put it in the Bill and do not keep it ambiguous.

There is another very important gap. Nowhere in this new Bill is the requirement for a license mentioned for trading in the trade area. ...*(Interruptions)* but as per most State Acts, a trader must have a license issued by a Regulated market/State Marketing Board for trading in scheduled agricultural commodities. If a State has no control, then farmers are open to unscrupulous, unlicensed traders.

In conclusion, this Bill has absolutely no interest in furthering the cause of farmers or farm traders. It is just another blatant attempt at blanking out federalism. But remember, no amount of ...\*..for ever. So, all these monsters that you are creating by removing constitutional safeguards will come back to bite you. Beware of that day! So, I request the hon. Minister beware of that day and keeping that day in mind, be fearful. Please withdraw this Bill. Thank you.

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***Date of Speech: 19 September 2020***

***Type of Debate: Statutory Resolution and Government Bill***

Sir, I symbolically stand to oppose the Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provisions) Bill, 2020 on behalf of my Party, the All India Trinamool Congress.

This Bill is deeply problematic because it further weakens the rights and resources available to the States by taking away the statutory promises made under the new GST regime and on the other hand, it corners public funds for PM CARES to the direct detriment of State Relief Funds.

Sir, Clause 7 of the Bill seeks to amend the Central Goods and Services Act of 2017 allowing the Government to extend the time limit for completion of actions under the Act in events of force majeure such as an epidemic with retrospective effect. This will permit the Government to retrospectively validate its failure and extend the time limit indefinitely while disbursing compensation to States.

Does the hon. Finance Minister conveniently forget that GST was only made possible because the States ceded almost all their powers to levy local level indirect taxes? The underlying promise made to the States while accepting this was that revenue shortfalls arising from the transition to GST would be made good from a pooled GST Compensation Fund for a period of five years ending in 2022. This corpus was to be funded by a compensation cess levied on so called 'demerit goods'. The mechanism for this is spelt out in Section 7 of the GST Act, 2017 which you now seek to destroy.

This quantification was to be done annually by projecting a revenue assumption on 14 per cent compounded growth on the revenue of the base year, 2015-16 and calculating the difference between that and the actual GST collection of any particular year. Applying this formula for the year 2020-21, the anticipated shortfall is Rs. 3 lakh crore. The compensation pool, however, has only Rs. 65,000 crore but the Centre cannot shy away from its

responsibility and must cover the shortfall of Rs. 2.35 lakh crore by borrowing. I ask myself, in such a situation, a question. Is incompetence force majeure? Is criminal negligence force majeure?

The second insidious objective of this Bill is to give a blanket clearance with no accountability whatsoever to the PM CARES Fund. The origin of the PM CARES Fund is steeped in non-transparency, and is inherently discriminatory in nature. I was among the first citizens to petition the Supreme Court of India against the discriminatory nature of this fund. But the Bench, in its wisdom, while not dismissing my petition on merits, asked me to bring it up in Parliament. So here I am, moving from the corridors of judicial review to the *Janata ki Adalat*.

The Government issued a circular on March 28, 2020, notifying that all contributions to the PM CARES Fund qualify this eligible CSR contribution under Item 8, Schedule VII of the Companies Act. But it also disqualified contributions made to the State Relief Funds from being treated as valid CSR activities. But this was earlier expressly permissible under Schedule VII of the Act of 2013. So unfair treatment of identical contributions to the PM CARES Fund and to the State Relief Funds is against public interest and against public policy. It completely disincentivizes corporate contributions which the State Governments would otherwise have got. It creates an unfair, unjust and discriminatory distinction against the State and Chief Minister's Relief Funds in favour of the PM CARES Fund.

The hon. Minister, while introducing the Bill yesterday, read out a long list of school children and pensioners who had apparently readily and happily given away their meagre savings to the PM CARES Fund but the hon. Minister was strangely silent on the 38 PSUs that have donated more than Rs. 2100 crore to the Fund. Almost 70% of the funds' corpus comes from the 38 PSU donations. These are public sector undertakings, and share capital subscribed to by the Government of India out of public money. Without an audit, the conflict of interest is writ large for anyone to see. I hope, you remember that the Prime Minister's Office, in response to an application seeking disclosure of the incorporating documents of this trust, had said that this is not a public authority; hence, it is not open to RTI. But the very legislative intent behind Section 135 of the Companies Act was to encourage companies to use CSR funds for local welfare activities for local communities in areas of operation. But the PM CARES Fund diverts those very funds away from local communities into this dark hole where not even a speck of light can enter.

Coal India has committed Rs. 221 crore to the Fund while it cannot contribute to the State Relief Funds of Bengal and Jharkhand where it has 90% of its operations. ONGC has mentioned that it has offered funds from its CSR budget for the year, even though the allocation is not yet determined. The Power Finance Corporation contributed Rs. 200 crore to the PM CARES Fund, even though its entire CSR allocation is only Rs. 150 crore. It is almost like the courtiers of the Emperor competing with each other to give gifts to the Emperor with public funds. If these improprieties were not enough, then please consider the massive donations made by Chinese companies. This is horrific. Xiaomi, a Chinese company accused of snooping on people gave Rs. 10 crore. TikTok, which was currently banned by this Government only a few weeks ago, gave Rs. 30 crore. Huawei, which is banned all around the world for its well-documented links to the Chinese Army gave Rs. 10 crore. Why did you take this money from our enemies? Why do you not return this tainted money? I am sure, no dying Indian would want to be on a ventilator paid for by the enemy money at this time. I ask you; would they?

You say you have put Rs. 2,000 crore towards the purchase of 50,000 ventilators. Please lay on the Table of this House how many ventilators have been physically delivered to which hospitals and to which States. Also tell us the manner of procurement. The way airwaves and the way Airports are sold in this country to crony capitalists, I hope this procurement was not done via those same individuals. This is a question that we need to ask. The dangers of these unverified foreign donations are amplified by the fact that the PM CARES Fund is exempted from FCRA regulations, even though it does not meet the precondition of a body whose funds are audited by the C&AG. You are bringing the PM CARES Fund under the ambit of the same clause that governs the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund, the existing fund. What is the need to institute a new fund when one exists? Prime Ministers will come and go but the existence of a fund is not up for discussion. What is the need to name everything after one individual? We need to remind this Government that this is a democracy; it is not an elected autocracy. ...(*Interruptions*)

First you are raising funds on the basis of public office. The very name – the Prime Minister's Fund – makes people think that this is a Government authority. So, by saying it is not open to RTI, you are running away from the spirit of transparency you claim to be wedded to.

Second, Cabinet Ministers are trustees administering the funds. So, you are impermissibly expanding the scope of your Ministerial Office in excess of the mandate determined by the Constitution.

Thirdly, you are commandeering resources and donations are done by default. A circular issued on 17<sup>th</sup> April by the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance told every officer and staff of the Government of India to contribute one day's salary till March, 2021 to the PM CARES Fund. This would be deducted from their salaries. If they wish to not donate, they should put this in writing. Tell me in this atmosphere of fear and vengeance currently prevalent in this country, which bureaucrat, which public officer will say that they do not wish to donate?

Sir, I have only a few minutes left, and so, bear with my bluntness. To this Government, I say stop lying to us all the time about growth rates, about migrant welfare, about expenditure and the laughable delusion that the PM Cares. Please stop marketing Rs. 20,000 crore packages as relief measures when in truth it comprises money already spent and money to be given as loans, and imaginary money that will never reach the people that it is supposed to. Stop cheating the State Governments of their dues, made through a constitutional promise, stop wasting funds on vanity projects when the State Governments who actually make a difference in people's lives are deprived time and again.

So, I end by saying that today's India reminds me of Hans Christian Anderson's story, the Emperor's New Clothes, where the emperor was cloaked in nothing, yet his sycophantic courtiers could not tell him so. The Bengali poet Narendranath Chakravorty in his poem Ulongo Raja said that only one little innocent boy in the entire kingdom had the courage to stand up and ask the naked emperor, 'Raja, *tor Kaapor Koi?* Today, I ask the same question, Emperor, where are your clothes.

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***Date of Speech: 21 September 2020***

***Type of Debate: Government Bill***

Thank you, hon. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to ask a clarification.

I would like to ask this from the hon. Minister. When the law came into effect in 1976, the main legislative intent of this law was to stop foreign funding to Indian political parties and Indian political system. However, this Government, in 2018, amended the FCRA to make foreign funding to Indian political parties exempt from scrutiny with retrospective effect till 1976.

As regards the electoral bonds that are there, any foreign company registered in India can now buy electoral bonds without scrutiny under FCRA. So, the main intent was not there, and you are going after the small fry and going after NGOs that are doing good work. We do not understand the dichotomy here. Why this hypocrisy? Thank you.

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***Date of Speech: 8 February 2021***

***Type of Debate: Motion of Thanks on the President's Address***

Hon. Chairperson, Sir, I rise to speak against the Motion and in support of the amendments moved by my Party to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

Far too many of our fellow citizens today languish in jail or bear the burden of judicial and police harassment simply for asking questions of this Government or choosing to voice an opinion on the state of affairs in our country. So, I, as a Parliamentarian, garbed in parliamentary privilege, now choose to use this platform that the people have given me to ask the questions that the people want to ask and to give voice to their thoughts so that this Government may know that arresting, attacking, and repressing voices will not hold. I trust my hon. colleagues in the Treasury Benches will not shout me down and you, hon. Chairperson, Sir, will let me speak for the entirety of my allotted time and that the Lok Sabha TV, paid by my taxpayers' money, will not turn the screens off.

The American journalist, Elmer Davis's words about the United States are just as relevant for the celebrations of the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the birth of our Republic that this Republic was not created by cowards and cowards would not preserve it. Today, I speak of cowardice and courage, and of the difference between the two; of those cowards who hide behind the false bravado of authority, of power, of hate, of bigotry, of untruth, and dare to call it courage. After all, this Government has turned propaganda and disinformation into a cottage industry.

The biggest success of the Government is the recasting of cowardice as courage. I will lay out various instances where this Government has demonstrated courage.

The Government claims that it has shown courage to bring in a law that questions on arbitrary parameters who is or who is not an Indian. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act was passed in 2019 in this House on the pretext of granting citizenship to persecuted Hindus and other minorities in the neighbouring countries. At the same time, it threw into an abyss of insecurity millions of Indians who have been living in this land for generations. But the rules by which this Act will be implemented were not yet prepared by December 2020 according



to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The deadline has yet again been extended till April 2020. If indeed this Government cares so much for those persecuted in neighbouring countries, why does it miss the deadline after deadline to notify these rules? Meanwhile, very many of us have mustered the courage to tell the Government “कागज नहीं दिखाएंगे ।“. Trying to exert Central influence over Shantiniketan, Tagore’s heaven, is not enough to change their colours. Only a small portion of *Jana Gana Mana* was adopted as our National Anthem. I urge the Government to read the rest of it. Maybe, it will help them understand Tagore as they call him and Bengal a little better. My colleague, the respected floor leader of the Congress Party happened to also quote these very words. But I do not think repeating them over and over again would do our nation some good.

“Ohoroho Tobo Aahbaano Pracharito, Shuni Tabo Udaaro Baani Hindu Bauddho Shikho Jaino, Parashiko Musholmaano Christaani Purabo Pashchimo Aashey, Tabo Singhaasano Paashey Premohaaro Hawye Gaanthea Jano Gano Oikyo Bidhaayako Jayo Hey. ‘Hail Unity, Hail Religious Diversity’.”

This is the courage to make India the world’s greatest democracy into a virtual police state whereby a single dubious complaint under which both an eminent Member of this House and one of India’s most veteran journalist are charged with sedition. This is the courage to try and take over every State Government by hook or by crook whether they have won the popular mandate or not. They claimed they were wedded to constructive cooperation and cooperative federalism. Instead of partnering with the State Governments, they try and muscle them out at every opportunity. Does the Ruling Party wish that its legacy be that it governs the largest democracy in the world or that it imposed a one-party rule in India? They should ask themselves. This is the courage to announce the national lockdown at only four-hour notice causing untold misery, countless deaths, the sight of thousands walking for hundreds of miles with no food or money.

This Government spent less than 2 per cent on social transfers in contrast to OECD countries which spent 20 per cent and 6 per cent was spent by middle income countries. This is the courage, no! This is the brazen audacity to announce the economic rebound.

India was the single worst performer among developing countries in the year 2020. Even if we believe this Government’s *Economic Survey*, the economy lowered by 7.7 per cent in 2020 and will rise by 11 per cent in 2021. So, in effect, by 2022, i.e. over a two-year time span, the economy will be flat just as the 2019 GDP number. This Survey proclaims

that the growth is the biggest poverty alleviator. Hon. Members of this House, we are going to have no growth for two whole years. I do not understand the celebration.

I come from a rural constituency and a source of migrant workers. The distress in the MSME sector is real. This rebound is one where large and strong enterprises have become stronger. It is not V-shaped, it is K-shaped. One per cent of rich and successful citizens have become richer and the pains of the MSMEs have only increased. The Government had the courage to say that it gave Rs. 1,13,000 crore via the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme only to take the same money away from those very same people and the middle class in the way of increased cess on petrol and diesel. We are not a nation that is growing and sharing its wealth, we seem to be a nation that is only finding ways to share our poverty.

The hype today is that post budget, the sensx jumped. In a country where only six crore people pay taxes, only 4.6 per cent of the total population, how many do you think are the investors in the sensx that they should jump for joy when the sensx jumps? This is the courage to use the official channels of the Ministry of External Affairs to respond to social media posts by an eighteen-year old climate activist and an American pop star where not even one single ministry has been deputed by this Government to try and look out for food, water, and basic sanitation needs of the farmers and their families who have been camping at the border for almost ninety days.

And finally, this is the courage to bring in three farm laws when the Opposition, farmers across the country, as well as the Government's oldest ally warned it was unacceptable.

I wish to remind this Government that India under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri committed three things to Sant Fateh Singh, the Akali leader - the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State, open-ended public procurement, and an assured return on agricultural produce. These farm laws threaten to snatch away two of these guarantees. These laws were arrived at without consensus, tabled without scrutiny, and rammed down this nation's throat with the brute force of the Treasury Benches. They have firmly established this Government's motto of brutality over morality. And everyone else in this country has been portrayed as a coward or a terrorist – from the farmers, to the students, to the old ladies of Shaheen Bagh.

You say you have courage! You claim you have done so many things that no other Government before you has done. Yes, that is true! In true fascist fashion, you have made every act of pettiness, of vengeance, of hate, of bigotry, a part of your narrative of courage.

The reason no one has done it before you is not because no one had the courage, but simply because it was not the right thing to do. Has that thought ever struck you?

And India's tragedy today is not just that her government has failed her but that her other democratic pillars, the media and the judiciary, have failed her too. Lord Hain, the Labour Peer, said in the House of Lords, "What is the point of being a Member of Parliament either in the Commons or in the Lords if you do not discharge your responsibilities and where appropriate use the privileges that you have in order to promote justice and liberty?"

So, today, like a true child of Bengal, I will stand here and be courageous. Trust me Mr. Baalu, we have not lost the fighting spirit. Even though the Government's spin factories will later portray it as cowardice or even plagiarism, I will lay out a few home truths by using my Parliamentary privilege that guards me from charges of sedition and contempt for anything I say in this House. And Mr. Law Minister, Sir, if you are present on the premises, with all due respect, this time you have neither the right to shut me up nor to try and get my words expunged from the record.

... \*The judiciary stopped being sacred when it chose to squander the greatest opportunity that any bench of the highest court of this land has ever seen to reinforce the founding principles of our democratic republic and to uphold the rights enshrined in Part 3 of our Constitution. ...(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Chairperson Sir, it is extremely important that I not only not avoid them, but I bring them up because I did not accuse the hon. gentleman ... \*\*Let me put it on record that it is a great ... \*\* I did not do it. ...(*Interruptions*) Instead, it let our migrants walk to their deaths; it let our greatest activists and modern writers rot in jail. ...

... (*Interruptions*)

Sir, let me continue my speech. Instead, the judiciary stopped being sacred when it chose to squander the greatest opportunity that any bench of the highest court of this land has ever seen.

... (*Interruptions*)

Sir, the Judiciary stopped being sacred when it chose to squander the greatest opportunity that any Bench of the highest court of this land has ever seen to reinforce the founding principles of our democratic republic and to uphold the rights enshrined in Part III of our Constitution. Instead, it let migrants walk to their deaths. It let our greatest activists and modern writers rot in jail. It now sits back as a mute spectator when our young are prosecuted for cracking a joke. The Judiciary seems to have forgotten the Constitutional

principle of separation of powers that Parliament and Parliament alone can legislate. If something is bad in law, then the courts can strike it down or stay it on grounds of unconstitutionality. But unless it is so, the courts must do nothing. The Government alone must face the consequences. If the Government has brought in the farm laws which are not acceptable to people, then either the Government will repeal the laws or the people will vote the Government out. We urgently need the sagacity and courage shown by the High Courts during the Emergency when they delivered the ADM Jabalpur and like decisions. The Supreme Court, unfortunately, is failing the common citizen and is being perceived as protecting the privileged and ironically only itself. A very large section of the Indian media has plummeted to new depths both in terms of lack of factual reporting as well as the total absence of journalistic ethics. Yet, even when the bar is so low, the WhatsApp chat leaks detailing correspondence between a large Government leaning media channel and the head of the TV ratings agency expose the utter filth and the crony capitalism that ironically this Government claim to be saving us from. What is left of the resolute media is being targeted with the provisions of the UAPA and other draconian laws. You keep taunting the Congress about the Emergency. But India today is in a state of undeclared emergency. But the Government has miscalculated. There is a fundamental difference between cowardice and courage. The coward is brave only when armed with power and authority. The truly courageous can fight even when unarmed. Do not forget this. Do not forget this when you tell the authorities in Ghaziabad to clear the protest site overnight when the help of the police and the bureaucracy. You are not being courageous. You are a ... \*wielding power. The truly brave came in droves from villages wielding nothing, but they believed that their cause is just. They were propelled by the spontaneous tears of their leader, not by the force of their water cannons. Do not forget this when you block the roads and cut the internet off in 17 of Haryana's districts. You are not being brave. You are a ... \*wielding power. The State of Haryana gives 10 per cent of India's Air Force and contributes to 11 per cent of the total strength of the Indian Navy. Its people can neither be turned anti-national, nor terrorist, nor *gaddars*. Do not forget this when a peaceful 60-day movement is insidiously hijacked and then you slap FIRs on Punjab's farmers. You are not being courageous. You are a ... \*wielding power. Baghel Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, leading their misls, captured Delhi way back in 1783 from the Mughals. Their descendants do not need a lesson in courage from those who captured Delhi only in 2014.

Tagore in his poem 'Bandi Bir', the captive warrior, an ode to Sardar Banda Singh Bahadur, wrote: "Eseche se ekdin, jibon mrityu payer bhritto, chitto vabonahin, eseche se ekdin". That momentous day has arrived.

In the 125<sup>th</sup> year of Subhas Chandra Bose's birth, the Central Government has made every attempt to hijack Netaji's legacy and weave it into their own fake, narrow narrative of courage. But this nation needs to know that Netaji had two clarion calls, both embodiments of his courage and his spirit. One was the salutation, 'Jai Hind'. Today, this Government has replaced this national greeting with a narrow, religious chant that it uses as war cry to heckle, to bully and to always, always remind the minority about who is in charge. Netaji's second call was 'Dilli Chalo'. This Government falls over itself to pay lip service to Netaji. But in truth, you blocked the borders in Singhu, in Ghazipur, in Tigris with walls and spikes for all those who actually want to come to Delhi to tell you that much like Subhas Chandra Bose, they too will not accept any halfway house. Netaji told us, never to lose faith in the destiny of India. And it is not India's destiny to be ruled by cowards. The time has come for us to show courage.

गिरते हैं शहसवार ही मैदान-ए-जंग में,  
वो तिफ़ल क्या गिरे जो घुटनों के बल चले ।

Repeal or nothing. Thank you.

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***Date of Speech: 1 December 2021***

***Type of Debate: Special Mention (Zero Hour)***

Sir, I would like to bring to the attention of this House a very important issue which is happening in the State of Goa right now.

There is an ASI protected site next to St. Cajetan Church in Old Goa and within the precincts of the Church, inside the protected site, there is an illegal construction of a luxury villa of 840 square metres. The Chief Minister, under pressure, has said that he is revoking permission.

Sir, it is not enough to revoke permission but the illegal structure must also be demolished.

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***Date of Speech: 2 December 2021***

***Type of Debate: Short Duration Discussions (Rule-193)***

Thank you, Sir.

*Come gather 'round people  
Wherever you roam  
And admit that the waters  
Around you have grown  
And accept it that soon  
You'll be drenched to the bone...  
For the times they are a-changin'*

Hon. Chairperson, Sir, my esteemed colleagues, it is probably the first time that Bob Dylan has been quoted in this august House. But in these changing times, popular culture can sometimes do what great poetry and great prose can't, that is, to strike a cord.

It is unlikely that in this Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva-driven myopic environment most people will have listened to Dylan. So, let me again begin by repeating that the times are indeed a-changin'.

From starting out as the 'Ironman Government' which prided itself on never budging from its position, the past 18 months have seen India transform itself into the land of the u-turn. The BJP Government has finally realised that they better start swimming or they will sink like a stone.

I stand here today to speak in a discussion on the COVID pandemic. It is a pandemic whose official death toll is 4.7 lakhs, but all realistic unofficial records put the number at ten times of that or four million people. This Government only yesterday told us that it had no data on farmer deaths. Previously, it has told us that it lacks data on migrant deaths and it has no data on deaths due of lack of oxygen. So, frankly, we would much rather go with unofficial figures than the official figures.

The pandemic started off on almost a celebratory note where the Prime Minister exhorted us all to gather outside, bang *thalis* and light *diyas*. When the Government should have been ordering vaccines, it was actually propitiating the Gods. The key errors that the Government made in COVID management were along the following lines.

First, I come to vaccine supplies. The Government always knew that this was a double-dose vaccine and to vaccinate an adult population of 940 million, India would need about two billion vaccines. Foreign vaccines had not been approved by India. Domestic production capacity was nowhere near what we needed. In May and June of 2020, we should have been ramping up production, but we did not. When the UK, the USA and the EU were investing in vaccines which had not yet been cleared and placing orders, these were obviously high-

risk investments, India did not make these investments. So, they did not get advance allotments and we had a supply crunch.

Half-way through the year, in May-June, the Government said that we would have 900 million vaccines by year end, but when they went to the Supreme Court and submitted an affidavit, they said that they would have only 500 million vaccines. I am very glad today that this Government administered a billion doses, but that is not due to the Government; it is due to the fact that Covishield alone has ramped up production to 240 million doses a month.

The next error was in the field of rate of vaccination. The Government claimed that it would fully vaccinate all adults by the year-end 2021. However, as of today, we have given a double-dose only to 48 per cent of the adult population, which is not even half, and a single dose to about 83 per cent of adults. To reach this target by the year-end, that is, in another 30 days, we would have to vaccinate 18 to 19 million people a day while today, we are doing only nine million people a day.

What is the problem in increasing double-dose coverage? The problem is that when we took down the names of people who were getting the first dose, we took only their phone numbers. The Government did not take their addresses. Now, we have a vast rural population, urban slums and migrant labour. With the harvest season going on and poor rural connectivity, when you are trying to contact these people to chase up on double dosage, you are not getting much success. So, we need physical teams to go house to house.

In India, now we are busy playing catch up. There is a complete silence on third booster shots for the vulnerable as well as vaccines for children and under-18s.

There is a battle outside and it is raging. It will soon shake your windows and wreck-in your walls for the times are changing. These changing times cause the Government to do three rapid u-turns in vaccine policy. The Government's original vaccine policy required people under-45 to pay for their vaccines. The Supreme Court called this arbitrary and irrational and it also breached the Fundamental Rights of Indians as provided under Article 14 and Article 21. The Centre first said that States should pay more than the Centre and then they backed down. Then, they first said that the private hospitals have the right to fix prices and then they backed down. 'The line it is drawn, The curse it is cast.'

The second wave of the pandemic laid bare how grossly unequipped our healthcare systems were. When several factors were responsible for the pandemic, not all of which can be blamed on the Government, an easily preventable dimension of this was that oxygen

shortage should never have happened in India. Independent researchers have documented that between April and May, 2021, over 700 patients died due to oxygen shortage alone. In early April, it was clear that we had a problem.

In early April, it was clear that there was a problem. Numbers were exceeding 2,70,000 a day, yet the Prime Minister was lauding a huge crowd in a Bengal election rally; the Shahi Snan at the Kumbh by lakhs of people continued; and the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand said that ‘we have faith in God and in Mother Ganga’.

Let me point out a very brief timeline of who said what. On 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2021 at World Economic Forum in Davos, hon. Prime Minister declares ‘India has succeeded in containing corona effectively’.

On 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2021, the BJP passes a resolution glorifying the Prime Minister and stating that India has defeated Coronavirus solely due to him. On 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2021, the Health Minister said, “We are in the end game of the COVID-19 pandemic in India.” Then, Parul Khakhar said:

देख लपटों को फ़िडल बजाते वाहे रे बिल्ला-रंगा,

साहेब तेरे रामराज में शब वाहिनी गंगा ।

Watching the flames play the fiddle, Wahe re badla-ranga,

Saheb Tere Ramraj Mein Shab Vahini Ganga.

The majoritarian narrative that this Government was propagating through its intermediaries and via its power is slowly but surely disintegrating. The first of these is the office of the PMO. In a democracy one should be able to fairly criticise the highest elected office. ... (*Interruptions*)

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***Date of Speech: 8 December 2021***

***Type of Debate: Special Mention (Zero Hour)***

Sir, I thank you very much for allowing me to speak. It is very apt that today while we are discussing climate change and environment, I bring up the issue which has been brought up by my esteemed colleague as well.

The issue is that of the Mollem Reserve Forest in Goa which is one of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots. Over there, three projects have been done which are responsible for felling 52,000 trees or more. One is a double tracking of a railway line from Castle Rock to Vasco, the second is a power plant, and the third is the extension of the National Highway 4A.



We understand that all these are infrastructure projects but the Supreme Court Empowered Committee gave a Report saying that none of these need to be done through the forests.

Therefore, I would really urge the hon. Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to rethink on this issue and see how we can preserve the Mollem Forest for future generations.

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