

WHAT HAS JEREMY CORBYN DONE?

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When Jeremy Corbyn first decided to enter the UK Labour party leadership contest two years ago, he didn't have the support of 35 nominations required to stand.

He notably managed them in the final few minutes before nominations closed. Some of his nominators, including the current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, backed him not because they necessarily supported him, but because they wanted to "broaden the debate", while some others did so as "a token of gesture".

His prospect of getting elected seemed so insurmountable that you could get £100 if you bet £1 on him. However, soon afterward, Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) realised, to their horror, that some of their mates unwittingly made a grievous mistake by supporting Corbyn for the sake of supporting, because it became clear that Corbyn had the backing of grassroots activists and organisations such as Momentum.

Indeed, the PLP tried, but it proved too late to put the genie back in the bottle.

Despite repeated victories for the post of Labour leader, he has been unpopular among the general voters until recently. His performance against the two PMs –

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David Cameron and Theresa May – was not highly acclaimed. "He's quiet, reserved, serious, he's not a performer," observes Professor Noam Chomsky. And you never take a bicycle-riding bearded grandpa seriously.

Yet, this man ended up claiming one of the greatest political feats in British history last week. In the recently concluded general elections, he defied those pundits and commentators who had drawn a foregone conclusion and written him off.

He has cheered up a whole nation awaiting a grim future following its departure from the European Union. With an ambitiously pro-Left manifesto, Corbyn pledged to stand up "for the many, not the few".

It's a wonder that it took the British public so long to back Jeremy Corbyn, given the fact that they regularly complain of politicians protecting the vested interests of those at the top.

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lowest for a British MP. Perhaps the most rebellious MP of the British history, he has voted against his own party over 600 times. He has every quality the citizenry could imagine an ideal representative to have.

However, his virtuous political career makes sense of the fact that he has been an outcast within the Labour party and has never placed in the frontline of the Parliament despite having been elected eight times as an MP.

Sky News, a private news TV station, recently compiled some of the speeches he has made throughout his career starting from the 80s. It shows that he has consistently stuck to his steadfast principles.

What has changed, however, during the course of the general election is that Jeremy Corbyn has transformed himself from an introvert activist to a humorous and charming politician.

In 2011, he was a politician urging his small number of followers to push his Facebook page over the 1000 mark. Now, he has millions of followers not only in Britain, but also abroad. His high-profile foreign fans include powerful German Social Democrat Martin Schulz and Bernie Sanders, the famous former US presidential

exaggerating and utilising security fears. Yet, he managed to direct, rightfully, the obvious blame towards Theresa May, who had crippled the police while at the helm of the home ministry.

He has been an "almost-ever-present" face at demonstrations and marches and a tireless peace activist. Now he is a politician poised to make it to 10 Downing Street with views similar to those he had held, say, 10 years ago. He did not retract anything; he just managed to make people understand that he has been on the right side of the history all along.

Corbyn has altered the dynamics of British politics. He mobilised an army of youths, who tend to stay out of politics more than their parents did. Now, Sanders is calling on Democrats to follow suit if they want to evict Donald Trump from the White House.

In the face of the upsurge of the dangerous ultra-right populism that arose from discontent among ordinary people fed up with income and wealth inequality, Corbyn and Sanders have offered legitimate and genuine alternatives. Their lifelong commitment to keeping the planet free from nuclear weapons and not getting involved in unnecessary wars abroad, and their



Jeremy Corbyn

PHOTO: AFP

candidate who admittedly ran a similar campaign to Corbyn's.

In the face of Theresa May's robotic phrase – "Strong and Stable Leadership" – Corbyn has given some of the most exhilarating yet natural public speeches and witty responses this election cycle. The public has seen a side of him most people were not familiar with.

When two terrorist attacks took place in the UK, many feared it would benefit the Conservatives – a chauvinistic political ideology notorious for

willingness to give priority to diplomacy over conflict may prove instrumental in preserving world peace.

It remains to be seen what the duo at both sides of the Atlantic might accomplish once or if they are elected to top office because they are likely to face staggering attacks from the opposite sides of the political spectrum – the far rights as well as the neo-Liberals.

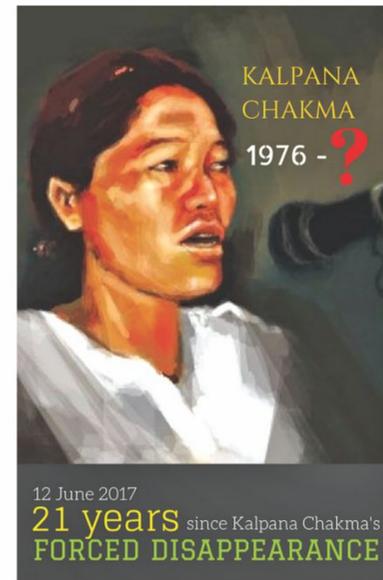
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INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS

Kalpana Chakma, the Organising Secretary of the Hill Women's Federation, was abducted by security forces from her home 21 years ago on June 12, 1996. She was a college-going young woman who was compelled to become an activist by state-led repression. Military occupation, counterinsurgency, violent eviction of her community's people through development and transmigration, rape of Jumma women and state impunity had been the reality she grew up with as a Jumma woman. This reality made her become an activist for the self-determination of the Jumma peoples and the liberation of Jumma women from all forms of domination.

In 2001 Hill Women's Federation published a compilation of her diary



I think it is natural to expect the caged bird to be angry at those who imprisoned her. But if she understands that she has been imprisoned and that the cage is not her rightful place, then she has every right to claim the freedom of the skies!

function in parallel. She talked about it in this speech given to representatives of the Hill Women's Federation at the first national conference on 21 May 2005:

On the one hand is the steamroller of rape and torture by the military and the Bengali settlers and on the other is societal discrimination, systematised living and the disparity between men and women. And then there are the brutal killings and ethnic persecution... we will have to continue our political struggle through a fire test... we already know

that without the liberation of the masses and the society's oppressed class there cannot be liberation separately for women. An exploited community cannot give rights or security of life to another community. Therefore, my sisters, we must give the utmost importance to our national movement [for self-determination] in order to advance equal rights for the women. We have to bring radical changes in our social arena. We are not going to deny our threatened social system, our patriarchal social

to play with. They are not even just baby-producing machines, women are human beings. They must have the same dignity as human beings. We will no longer silently tolerate this oppression.

She frequently infused her feminist thoughts with her belief in a socialist solution to all forms of discrimination. At the women's conference on January 15, 1995 she disclosed her thoughts thus:

We want such a social system where there will be no rich poor class divisions. There will not be a hierarchy between

men and women and there will be no discrimination between them. A class of people will not be able to exploit another class of people.

HANA SHAMS AHMED

system. In our objective, the Hill Women's Federation's struggle is not only political, it is at the same time a struggle against male domination and oppression in our family and society.

While she was an activist for Jumma people's rights she was also critically following world events including the US war on Iraq and the South African apartheid. She admired the work of international revolutionaries and feminists. She wrote down notes about the lives and teachings from South African leader Nelson Mandela, Jumma leader Manabendra Narayan Larma, and feminist writers Begum Rokeya and Taslima Nasrin. Nasrin seems to have had a strong influence on her thinking. In "Taslima Nasrin hotey Udhruti" she noted down her thinking on how religion and society repressed women. Reading from feminist writers and her own experiences influenced her to write and speak very critically about gender inequality. In this article titled 'Do not keep me in the dark any more, let me see', she wrote:

There is a natural difference between men and women but this does not make someone strong or weak. It does not make them worth or unworthy. The idea of this worthiness or unworthiness has been constructed through society's laws, customs, food and work evaluation. A patriarchal society does not acknowledge the different existence of women. In this society women more or less perform the role of a slave in her husband's home. Exceptions can never be examples.

At the first women's conference in Khagrachari Town Hall on January 15, 1995 she was heard talking about feminist challenges against capitalist commodification of women:

Women are not commodities, they are not objects that can be consumed, they are not objects to be used, they are not dolls

"WE WILL BE SOLDIERS IN A BATTLEFIELD" KALPANA CHAKMA AND HER FEMINIST THOUGHTS

In 2001 Hill Women's Federation published a compilation of her diary entries, letters to her comrades, news articles about her abduction and fact-finding reports by groups about the circumstances around her disappearance. The issues that she talked about in her diary and in the public speeches centre around class, self-determination movement, militarisation and gender discrimination faced by Jumma women.

Kalpana was taken away in the dead of night. Both her brothers who were witnesses to the abduction have been repeatedly telling their story for 21 years. The writings in her diary give a glimpse into the kind of person she was and her feminist and political views that made her feared by the state. The state has little patience or compassion for someone who challenges its authority, especially a young woman whose popularity and mobilisation powers through her mere words were spreading far and wide. Consequently, even after 21 years of investigations from various sources the state has failed to find her abductors and make the circumstances around her disappearance public. An investigator ironically said that since Kalpana Chakma is the victim and the main witness in the case the investigators cannot complete their work or "take a final decision about her whereabouts", until she [Kalpana] comes and gives her witness testimony. Through her abduction, the failure of government investigations to come to any conclusions despite the overwhelming evidence and the Kafkaesque process of justice, Kalpana has proven that the cliched saying "the pen is mightier than the sword" is not so cliched after all, especially if the pen belongs to a fearless feminist woman who overcame her marginal gender, ethnic and religious position and made it the greatest source of her strength and courage.

Translations from Kalpana Chakma's Diary are by the author of the article.

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