

Listen, the revolution blooms in silence

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Mural by Bhagwati Prasad at the Majdoor

Library, Faridabad From Faridabad Majdoor Samachar: "On the train, a person was calling out loudly: From tomorrow, all over India, everyone's salary will be 18,000 rupees. Equal. No one will be thief, and no one king. Long live the government." A timely and evocative missive from a monthly workers' newspaper distributed widely in the industrial belt around Delhi. What in your phone is making you laugh? It's a meme: A thief entered my room last night. He was looking for money. I joined him in the search. Lovely one. An accurate, mischievous description of today. On the train, a person was calling out loudly: From tomorrow, all over India, everyone's salary will be 18,000 rupees. Equal. No one will be thief, and no one king. Long live the government. My train has one like him too. He says 15,000 rupees. But he adds that non-compliance will lead to a prison term. Then he claps his hands and repeats this. A different argument is on in my bus. It's on silence. I want to discuss it with you both. Do people in your bus look down on silence? Cowards stay silent and the bold have speech. That so? Something like that. And yet, as arguments proceed, all kinds of qualities of silence start blooming. But then these qualities get blurred by the weight of ideas about cowardice & silence, oppression & silence. This debate is everywhere. The many attributes of silence do have a presence. Take for example, "in silence". In silence. Silently. Yes, they have a leavening quality. Rebellious images get sparked every time I drop them into a conversation. 'In silence'. Silently like a volcano, a forest. 'They ate in silence in the canteen, and did not leave.' 'Silently, they turned the machines off, and sat down. The silence made managers tremble.' 'In silence' is a relationship. It is an action. A subterranean connection between bodies and minds. Quiescence, standstill, lull. These are particular relationships. They cannot be taught. They are not inherited. They do not germinate, nor grow, through exchanges in the market. You mean it's a realm we inhabit everyday? Feel it all around? We make it generative? Make it lethal? We live this edge all the time? Let's agree it is a strength both fragile and fervid. But let's not confuse it with speechlessness. It's a dialect; let's call it an in-silence-dialect. Not a dialect that is in silence. When 15-20 of us go to the manager, and different voices speak out, in speech that is broken and partial and in its fullness, and then the next day again 20-25 of us do the same... and again, and again... a restless milieu builds. Managers fear this. Speech remains scattered between many. Managers fear this form of being in silence. No targets, no speeches, and with words of many. A friend always reminds me, "When hungry, you have to yourself eat." The words of many have velocity. They move between buses, via trains, in parks, to tea stalls, and carry across countless doors and windows. This spread is not visible. It has a technique. It stays difficult to grasp. It has depth of memory, but is not locked in any one head. It swims within common life. This is a translation of the lead article in the October 2017 edition of the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, a monthly workers' newspaper distributed in the industrial belt of Faridabad, Okhla, Gurgaon, NOIDA and Manesar. From Ecologise, translation of a piece published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar