

Indian Currents

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STOPPING MINORITY SCHOLARSHIPS



Eliminating Opportunities

Drop out Rate of minority students will Increase

Modi government vigorously propagates the slogan 'Education for All'; But it has put a spoke in its own wheel of efforts to provide education to children from some of the most marginalized and neglected sections of society by winding up Pre-Matric Scholarship for minority students of Classes 1 to 8.

SUMEDHA

Centre

2003-23

A Don Bosco Institution



New Delhi
(1998/2003-2008)

Jeolikote
(2009-2021)

Jharmari, Punjab
(2022 -)

25

Years of Bosco Psychological Services

20

Years of Sumedha Centre

2023 Programme Schedule

1. (PSGA-1) Post-Midlife Spirituality and Graceful Aging (January 15-29)

This workshop explores the dynamics that affect the post-midlife years and provides approaches and exercises that enable one to age gracefully. (Age limit: 50 -70 years)

2. (EFS-1) Enhancing Formation Skills (May 7-21)

This workshop explores the challenges of religious and priestly formation today and provides formators insights from psychological theories and best practices to understand themselves, their formees, and the requisites for healthy formation and suggests ways and means for this and provides opportunities to learn from one another and be formed to form. (Age Limit- 25-55)

3. (ELS-1) Enhancing Leadership Skills (May 27-June 11)

This workshop explores concepts, styles, functions and challenges of effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership in Religious communities. Useful for current and future leaders. (Age limit: 35 - 55 years)

SUMEDHA SADHANA (A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL WHOLENESS JOURNEY): OUR FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

SS-46. February 12 - May 2; SS-47. July 1 - September 18; SS-48. October 1 - December 15

Sumedha Sadhana is an inner journey in quest of greater healing and wholeness, designed to help participants live more fulfilling, satisfying and productive lives. Participants begin from where they are, looking at what is happening in the current phase of their psychospiritual journey. They then move on to explore the psychological dynamics that affect their wellbeing, get in touch with their restricting emotional, relational and spiritual blocks and seek healing and transformation so that they can live and minister in more joyful, satisfying and fruitful ways. (Age Limit 35 -65)

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A BLOW TO MINORITY STUDENTS



‘Do not cut off the branch you are sitting’ seems to be the best adage to characterize the recent decision of the Central Government to discontinue the scholarship scheme to students, from Class I to VIII, of poor families of minority communities. It has been restricted to students of Classes IX and X from the next academic year. The scheme is run by the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs. On the one hand, the government vigorously propagates with much fanfare the slogan ‘Education for All’, but on the other it puts a spoke in its own wheel of efforts to provide education to children from some of the most marginalized and neglected sections of the society. These scholarships were instituted after the Sachar Committee, which looked into the socio-economic-educational status of the Muslims, came out with the report that children from the community were among the most educationally backward in the country; it further submitted that in many cases they lag behind the children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The data given by the government testify that the scheme had benefitted around 5.20 crore students in the last seven years. This included 3.36 crore Muslims, 53.9 lakh Christians, 35 lakh Sikhs and 12 lakh Buddhists. The scheme enables a day scholar to get Rs.225 and a hosteller Rs. 525 per month. This is apart from the Rs. 750 and Rs. 1000 respectively for buying books per year. Despite the reported loopholes like leak in the system and diversion of the scholarship money to wrong hands in some cases, the scheme has benefitted quite a number of poor families in supporting the education of their children, who would have otherwise dropped out of the education field.

The government’s argument to partially scrap the scheme is technical. It says that since education up to Class 8 is free in government schools, there is no need to give them any scholarship money. Another contention is that the scholarship scheme for Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribe students is only for students of Classes 9 and 10. These are nothing but lame arguments. Free education is available only for students in government schools and those admitted under EWS scheme in private schools. But what about the lakhs of students who are unable to go to government schools for many reasons? What about the students who are left out of admission in private schools under the EWS scheme? How will they reach Class 9 to avail the benefits of the government scheme?

In fact, the scheme was introduced with the avowed purpose of lending a helping hand to the children of the marginalized sections of minority communities; it was meant to lift them to a level-playing field in education; it was aimed at reducing the drop-out rates of students at the school-level. It worked as a supportive mechanism even for those students who were getting free education as there are many other expenses the parents have to take care of. The scheme acted as a booster dose to encourage enrolment and attendance in schools. According to available data, the central and state governments together have to shell out around Rs. 2000 crores per year on the scheme which is nothing but peanuts for them. Watering down the scheme is against the government’s own slogan of ‘Education for All’.

As always, we would be happy to hear your reviews, comments, and suggestions. Happy Reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suresh Mathew'.

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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POWER QUOTES



It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.

Aristotle

• • •



While we may not be able to control all that happens to us, we can control what happens inside us.

Benjamin Franklin

• • •



Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.

Winston Churchill

• • •



You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.

Malala Yousafzai

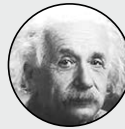
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When you give joy to other people, you get more joy in return. You should give a good thought to happiness that you can give out.

Eleanor Roosevelt

• • •



Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

Albert Einstein

• • •



Find out who you are and be that person. That's what your soul was put on this earth to be. Find that truth, live that truth, and everything else will come.

Ellen DeGeneres

• • •



No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.

Robin Williams

Minority scholarships

Slow Poisoning at Work

The decision to stop scholarships to children, up to Class VIII, from minority communities will curtail child rights and their fundamental right to education

BY JASWANT KAUR

Mohsina (name changed) has been attending an affordable private school ever since she started studying. So have been her siblings. The nearest government school is around 10 kms from their house. It is difficult to commute everyday as public transport is not available. The school they attend is the only one that they can attend. Even though the school charges a nominal fee, it becomes difficult for her father to pay. Being a small farmer, the family has a hand-to-mouth existence.

Every month, Mohsina's father would literally beg for money to pay the school fees, promising to repay in a few months. People have also been kind enough to help him. He has always stood by his words and has been diligently returning the money every year.

To add to their woes, the water level in their village has gone down. Agriculture has become all



the more difficult and non-remunerative. The produce is barely enough for their own subsistence. Lack of irrigation facilities forces the family to keep the land vacant for a few months in a year. There is hardly any source of income during those months. The only work that Mohsina's father gets is

when the village Panchayat undertakes some work under MNREGA.

Many a time, he is unable to get work under MNREGA too. Sometimes, it coincides with the harvest season. Often the panchayat announces MNREGA towards the end of March and it continues even in April when most of the farmers are busy harvesting wheat.

After digging earth for the whole day, he gets something like Rs. 120. Many would ask, why only Rs. 120? Isn't the wage rate Rs. 240? Well, lack of water has made the soil so hard that digging the earth for the desired area is almost impossible? After toiling so hard, he is not able to get his dues, simply because the work assigned cannot be done in a day!

In case a family member falls ill, it becomes a Herculean task for him to manage the medical expenses. The local PHC hardly has a doctor. They have to rush to the district hospital, which is around 70 kms away from their house. He would ask for help from the sarpanch or his neighbours for commuting that far. The private doctors charge a lot of money. Needless to say, he has no option but to skip work during the days spent at the hospital! Clearly, the family has to survive almost a quarter of the year without any income. The MNREGA work is also given for only 100 days per



household. Only one person from one family can get the work.

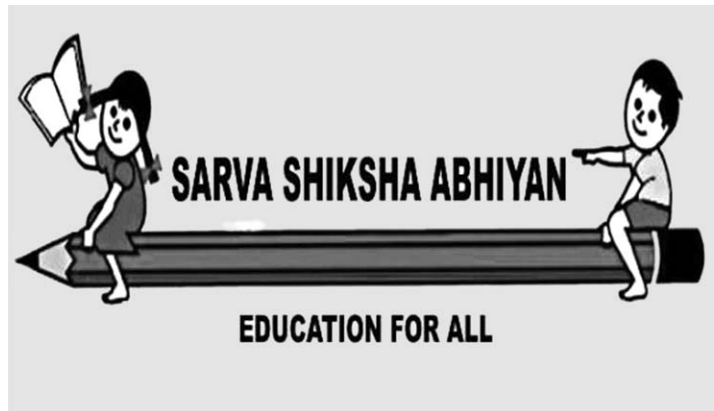
The school authorities have been helping him in availing of the scholarships announced by the Ministry of Minority Affairs. That is how he manages to return the money every year to the people. In their village, it is common to find girls sitting at home as soon as they attain puberty. Many are married off at an early age. Yet, there are a few exceptions, including Mohsina, who continued her education, despite the pressure the family faced from the relatives and other villagers. Her father wants his children to study well and find remunerative jobs so that they can come out of poverty.

Like Mohsina and her siblings, since 2014-15, around 5.20 crore students benefited from the scholarship scheme. This included 3.36 crore Muslims, 53.9 lakh Christians, 35 lakh Sikhs and 12 lakh Buddhists. Typically, a day scholar would get Rs. 225 and Rs. 525 in the case of hostellers on a monthly basis. Besides this, they also got Rs 750 and Rs. 1000 respectively for buying textbooks. The central and state governments have spent Rs. 9,057 crore till last year in a 3:1 ratio.

Now imagine, if Mohsina's family does not get any financial support for education, will the children be able to continue their education? Will the dreams of Mohsina's father come true? Will the family ever be able to come out of poverty? The answer is a big NO.

They don't have the means to pay fees to the private school nor the wherewithal to arrange transport to the government school!

The Right to Education Act does provide for free education till Class VIII but only for students studying in the government schools. Private schools too have reserved at least 25 percent seats for the economically weaker sections (EWS). However, it is an uphill task to get a seat under the EWS quota



Unfortunately, the worst has come true. Last week, the government announced a death knell to the pre-matric scholarships offered to children from low socio-economic backgrounds and minority communities. Many would say, the scholarships are now allowed from Class IX onwards. Yes, that's true.

But how many such students will be able to even complete Class VIII, especially at a time when many schools have been closed as per data shown in the recently released UDISE report?

The Right to Education Act does provide for free education till Class VIII but only for students studying in the government schools. Private schools too have reserved at least 25 percent seats for the economically weaker sections (EWS). However, it is an uphill task to get a seat under the EWS quota.

Many public and private schools have been closed as a result of the pandemic. The number of schools has dropped from 15.09 lakh in 2020-21 to 14.89 lakh in 2021-22. This is official information. Among the schools that have been shut down, 48 percent are government schools, 24 percent are private schools while the remaining are government-aided ones! Of course, some schools might have been merged. However, the report is silent on such mergers.

Not only this, 2.8 lakh teachers have lost their jobs. Until 2020-21, there were 97.87 lakh teachers across the country. The number fell to 95.07 lakh in 2021-22.

Will the government be able to bridge this gap caused due to closure of schools? Will a lesser number of teachers not impact the quality of education imparted in schools, be it private or government?

Without giving any sort of a notice to the parents, the government has asked the nodal officers at the state and district level to reject the pre-matric scholarship applications of students till Class VIII.

Kharge hits at Modi govt for stopping scholarships for minority students

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asked the Modi government what will it gain by "snatching away" the money from poor students, a day after it stopped scholarships for minority students of classes 1 to 8. The government limited its pre-matric scholarship scheme meant for minority communities to students of classes 9 and 10, stating that the Right to Education Act covers compulsory education up to class 8 for all students.

Earlier, the pre-matric scholarship used to cover education for grades 1 to 8 as well as for students belonging to minority communities. SC and ST students are covered from classes 9 and 10 only on a full-time basis under the pre-matric scholarship scheme.

"Narendra Modi ji, your Government has shut down Pre-Matric Scholarship meant for SC, ST, OBC and Minority students of Class 1 to Class 8. What is the point of depriving scholarships to poor students? How much will your Government earn or save by snatching this money from poor students," Kharge asked.

The government, in a notice, justified its decision by underlining that the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 makes it obligatory for the government to provide free and compulsory elementary education (classes I to VIII) to each and every child.

"Accordingly only students studying in classes IX and X are covered under the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Likewise from 2022-23, the coverage under the pre-matric scholarship scheme of the Ministry of Minority Affairs shall also be for classes IX and X only," the notice said.

The decision drew sharp reactions from political parties, with the Congress and BSP accusing the government of a conspiracy against the poor.

"The BJP has been continuously doing such things for the past eight years whether it was cutting the budget of SC/ST/OBC and minorities or it was about atrocities against them or ending their welfare schemes and now this. We do not accept this. We will run a movement against it. Immediately take back this decision," Congress leader Randeep Surjewala said.

BSP leader Danish Ali claimed that the government has found a new way to keep these poor children away from education by stopping the scholarship given to minority students between classes 1 and 8.

"Yes, don't forget that educated children take the country forward irrespective of the community they belong to," Ali tweeted. ©

Will Mohsina's father be able to pay his dues this year as he won't get any money from the government for scholarships? How will he pay the fees for his children in the coming years? Will he be able to move his children to a government school without any means of transport? It is pertinent to mention that the scholarship was available only to those children whose parents' annual income was not more than Rs. 2.5 lakh. Unlike the new definition of Economically Weaker sections, which allows people with an annual income of Rs. 8 Lakhs to get reservations in jobs and higher education!

There are crores of students like Mohsina who are dependent on such schemes for their education. The government's move of restricting scholarships to those studying in Class IX and above will have a ripple effect on the students, who will be forced

to drop out. The cases of child labour and child marriage may increase in the coming years.

It is an attempt to curtail child rights and their fundamental right to education. The government must introspect and review its decision. A country like ours cannot progress with uneducated youth. India cannot become a \$5 trillion economy if its demographic dividend is forced to become a liability due to lack of financial support for education of its children from the marginalised communities. It will undo the work the government has done, over the decades, under various schemes, be it Sarva Siksha Abhiyan or the Right to Education Act. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Minority Victimization

The decision to restrict the pre-matric minority scholarship to students of Classes IX and X is a blow to the poor from the minority communities

BY **DR. PAUL PUDUSSERY**

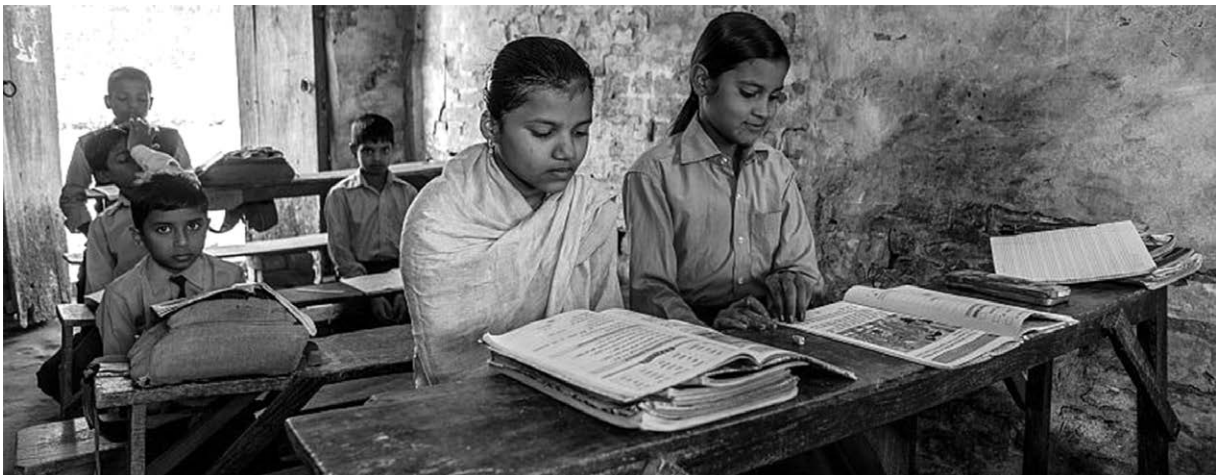
The illusion of establishing homogenous nationalism by provoking the sentiments of religious majority is an emerging trend that is visible and which is detrimental to the religious minority communities. The Central government's pre-matric scholarship to students of minority communities will no longer apply to students from Classes I to VIII, and it will be continued only for students of Classes IX and X starting from 2022-23. This announcement may be construed as a conscious effort to slowly and steadily weaken the minority religious communities especially the poor and the downtrodden among them; this move is not in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution of India.

The country has many religious groups, of which Hindus are a majority, and Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains are minorities. The Constitution of India departed from the existing norms of secularism in Europe and elsewhere, which suggested separation of religion and state. Moreover, freedom of religion is a Fundamental Right guaranteed under our Constitution. With its distinct model of secularism and special provisions for religious minorities, our social cohesion arrangement needs special attention. On one hand, the distinct understanding of secularism in our context has led to the

advancement of religious pluralism. At the same time, it has invited criticism for selective intervention in the affairs of religious communities from governments in power. The selective intervention has challenged the exclusivity of secularism.

A report by the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) 2021-22 states that 18.5% students enrolled from Class I to VIII belonged to the minority communities. The data couldn't be found on how many out of this actually avail the scholarship facilities. The unprecedented hurry to cancel the scholarship will create difficulties for children from the minorities; it is sending a strong negative message about the majority rule which will affect the very fibre and ethos of a secular bounding. A revisit may be required before the implementation of this decision. It will reassure the religious minority communities that they are very much part of this nation and have contributed to the building of the nation.

Our democracy, which was once considered remarkable in scale and duration, has been weakened by the rise of xenophobic nationalism and threats to religious minorities. Although these trends were evident in the past, they have dramatically increased amidst the growth of majoritarian nationalism. The





protection of democracy and religious freedoms are closely inter-twined. In a resolution moved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly on December 13, 1946, unanimously adopted by Constituent Assembly on January 22, 1947, it was decided that a safeguard mechanism will be adopted for minority communities, depressed backward classes and tribal areas of the nation.

Article 29 of the Constitution ensures protection of interests for minorities. Its clause (1) states that any group living within the jurisdiction of India is entitled to preserve and promote its own language, script or literature and culture; Clause (2) of it prohibits denial of admission to educational institutions that are aided by the state on the ground of race, caste, religion or language protection.

The number of complaints received by the National Commission for Minorities, according to its report for the last 10 years, from 2010 to 2020, seems to be gradually reducing. In 2010-2011, it received a total of 2,375 complaints while in 2019-2020 it received only 1,670. This trend can be considered as positive or negative depending on its interpretation and current happenings in the country.

The safeguards for the protection of interests of minorities are mandated in the following provisions of the Constitution and reported by the National Commission for Minority:

(i) Article 15 (1) & (2) - Prohibition of discrimination against citizens on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth;

(ii) Article 16 (1) & (2) - Citizens' right to 'equality of opportunity' in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State, and prohibition in this regard of any discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth;

(iii) Article 25 (1) - People's freedom of conscience

Centre stops Maulana Azad scholarship for research scholars from minority communities

The Union government has decided to discontinue the Maulana Azad National Fellowship (MANF), a scholarship for students from minority communities from this academic year.

Union Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani told Lok Sabha on 8th December that the decision was made since MANF overlaps with various other schemes.

The MANF was launched during the UPA regime as part of implementing the Sachar Committee recommendations.

"Since the MANF scheme overlaps with various other fellowship schemes for higher education implemented by the government and with minority students already covered under such schemes, the government has decided to discontinue the MANF scheme from 2022-23," Irani said.

About 6,722 candidates were selected under MANF between 2014-15 and 2021-22 and fellowships to the tune of Rs 738.85 crore were distributed during the same period, as per the data provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Research scholars from different minority communities across the country have not been receiving MANF for several months.

"Maulana Azad National Fellowship for Minority Students was for candidates who belong to one of the Minority Community i.e. Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist, Christian & Jain in higher education. Modi has discontinued it, by citing strange 'overlaps' with other fellowship Schemes," tweeted VP Sanu, national president of SFI.

"We demand immediate withdrawal of GOI's decision to discontinue #MANF for minorities. Is this how you implement #SabkaVikas? Stopping a fellowship scheme named after Maulana Azad is an insult towards our nation builders too," read a tweet by NS Abdul Hameed, Jamia Millia Islamia student and NSUI leader. ©

and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion – subject to public order, morality and other Fundamental Rights;

(iv) Article 26 – Right of every religious denomination or any section thereof – subject to public order, morality and health – to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, manage its own affairs in matters of religion, and own and acquire movable and immovable property and administer it in accordance with law;

(v) Article 28 – People's freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions wholly maintained, recognized, or aided by the State;

(vi) Article 29 (2) – Non-denial of admission to any citizen to any educational institution maintained or aided by the State, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them;

(vii) Article 30(1) – Right of all religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice;

(viii) Article 30 (1A) – State laws providing for compulsory acquisition of property of minority educational institutions shall ensure that compensation amount to be paid does not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed above;

(ix) Article 30 (2) – Freedom of minority-managed educational institutions from discrimination in the matter of receiving aid from the State.

The Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities as reported by Press Information Bureau on February 7, 2022, has an overarching programme which covers various schemes/initiatives of the participating Ministries/Departments



with an aim to ensure that the under-privileged and weaker sections of six centrally notified minority communities have equal opportunities for availing the various Government welfare Schemes and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the Country.

The programme has the following broad objectives: (i) Enhancing opportunities for education; (ii) Ensuring an

equitable share for minorities in economic activities and employment, through existing and new schemes, enhanced credit support for self-employment, and recruitment to State and Central Government jobs; (iii) Improving the conditions of living of minorities by ensuring an appropriate share for them in infrastructure development schemes; and (iv) Prevention and control of communal disharmony and violence.

Have the programs for the welfare of the minorities remained as programs or have they been translated into reality with a strategy and assessment, measuring the impact on the beneficiaries. The first broad objective is to enhance opportunities for education and if the scholarship is cancelled from Class I to VIII, how will this objective be achieved?

The ebbs and flows in the fate of democracy and minority rights call its citizens to revisit and redefine itself in the context of 21st century, as the country is built on myriad of cross-cutting social cleavages based on religion, ethnicity, language, and caste. We have historically mirrored the system of checks and balances in the political realm but an exclusionary conception of national identity based on religion is threatening our multi-cultural and multi-religious identity.

It is time to expand our understanding of democracy to include social justice and economic redistribution. It means re-understanding religious freedom to mean freedom for all religious communities. It means redefining the terms majority and minority, so that they are not determined by people's religious identities, but a host of other criteria, including class, which are broadly defined. As things stand today, one encounters educational disadvantages, economic subordination, and political under-representation of minority communities at every level of society. The decision to partially cancel the scholarship may further cement the idea of victimization of minorities. ©

The unprecedented hurry to cancel the scholarship will create difficulties for children from the minorities; it is sending a strong negative message about the majority rule which will affect the very fibre and ethos of a secular bounding

Election results

Modi's vulnerability

BY A. J. PHILIP

There was a time when the average Bengali in West Bengal considered the Communist Party of India (Marxist) as a Bengali party. Nothing mattered to them more than the leadership of Jyoti Basu, the quintessential Bhadraklok they looked up to. Many of them did not even know what Marxism was and what the dictatorship of the proletariat, the ultimate objective of Communism, meant. It was sub-nationalism at its best.

This explains why the Left Front led by the CPI(M) was able to rule the state for seven consecutive terms from 1977 to 2011, five with Jyoti Basu as Chief Minister and two under Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Then came Ms Mamata Banerjee, a former Congress leader, who sent the Marxists packing. Nobody expects the Marxists to return to power in the foreseeable future. In many places, the party offices have been converted into BJP offices.

The BJP in Gujarat is in many ways like the CPI(M) in its heyday in West Bengal. In the just concluded election to the Gujarat Assembly, the BJP registered a record victory improving its own record of



127 seats in 2002 and the all-time record of 149 seats achieved by the Congress in 1985. The result is almost unbelievable. It is like Argentina playing against, say, Brazil with half the ground kept out of bounds for Brazil.

In Gujarat, the BJP had virtually no opponents. It took some steps to fight incumbency. They replaced the Chief Minister who, they knew, was a liability. Nearly half the party MLAs were denied tickets so that new candidates could be brought into the field. The party learnt the mistakes from the previous election when large sections of the voters were disenchanted with the party.

In retrospect, the Congress was all set to capture power with the powerful Patels turning against the BJP and the small businessmen upset over the way GST was implemented in the state. That is when Narendra Modi took the campaign into his own hands and unleashed what could be described as a blitzkrieg of Hindutva. No more did he speak about development, as he raised the spectre of terror.

The party managed to get 20 more seats than the Congress and form a government of its own. Over the next five years, it bought the loyalty of over a dozen Congress MLAs. This time, Rahul Gandhi preferred to keep the schedule of his Bharat Jodo Yatra than to campaign, except symbolically, in Gujarat. He thinks that his Yatra will elevate him to a state from where he can challenge Modi in the next Lok Sabha election.

Anyway, his absence from the field and the failure of the Johnnys, who claim that they can lead the Congress out of the woods, to campaign in Gujarat left the field open entirely to Modi. He did all kinds of theatrics but at no time did he mention development. His own deputy and home minister Amit Shah, in fact, took pride in painting a whole community into a corner.

Megalomania had reached such Himalayan proportions that Modi told rally after rally that it did not matter who the candidate was so long as the symbol was the Lotus. In other words, the party





did not matter, the candidate did not matter and the ideology did not matter. All that mattered was Modi and in many places, the people responded with “Modi, Modi”!

It was just two months ago that 141 people had a watery grave when a century-old suspension bridge, which was rebuilt and opened to the public, collapsed at Morbi. It was a classic case of government failure. Anywhere else, the ruling party would have suffered a setback but not in Morbi where the BJP candidate won with a massive mandate.

Remember the character who welcomed the rapists of Bilkis Bano and murderers of her foetus saying that they were “Brahmins with good sanskar”. As a member of the Godhra Jail Advisory Committee, he played a leading role in the release of 11 convicts, now under challenge in the Supreme Court. He also won with a massive margin!

The presence of Arvind Kejriwal's party also helped the BJP. It was ridiculous for him to promise that he would organise free trips to Ayodhya and free electricity. He also expounded a great idea to rally the rupee which has been falling against the dollar under Modi's care. Print pictures of Hindu goddesses like Lakshmi on the currency notes! Of course, nobody cared for him but he was able to confuse a section of the anti-BJP voters who voted for him.

If one adds up the vote shares of the Congress and

the AAP, it will reach the vote share the Congress attained in the 2017 election. Kejriwal is a product of the great Anna Hazare project which played a significant role in the BJP's victory in 2014. Neither Hazare, nor Modi and Kejriwal speak any longer about Lok Pal as the panacea for corruption. Nobody also talks about presumptive losses, except the former CPI(M) finance minister of Kerala who calculated that India suffered a loss of Rs 15 lakh crore, thanks to Modi's demonetisation.

Like the average German who became a willing executioner, to borrow an expression from American author Daniel Goldhagen, the average Gujarati seems to believe that Gujarat under Modi is the heaven on earth. That explains why over 50 percent of voters

Kejriwal is a product of the great Anna Hazare project which played a significant role in the BJP's victory in 2014. Neither Hazare, nor Modi and Kejriwal speak any longer about Lok Pal as the panacea for corruption

voted for Modi. Let me quote an article titled Guja-ratification in the latest issue of the London Econo-mist:

“On a development index that accounts for life expectancy, education and income, Gujarat ranks 21st out of 36 states and Union Territories. It is in the bottom half of states for underage marriage, child stunting, infant mortality and school and college enrollment. Last year, its GDP per head matched Tamil Nadu's, but its share of people living in pov-erty, at 14%, was nearly four times bigger.

“This reflects the Hindu nationalist priorities. Gujarat's social spending is the lowest of all Indian states. It also directs a smaller share of its total expenditure to rural development. Many of its rural districts lack basics such as secondary schools as a result.” In contrast, the cities are thriving with ultra-modern buildings, metros and flyovers.

It is with the same Modi magic that the BJP sought to mesmerise the voters in Himachal Pradesh, where it has been holding the fort for the last five years. Modi was the star campaigner in the state. He hopped from one rally to another to cover all the hills and valleys in the state. There, too, he used the same tricks. He told the people to remember him and the party symbol as nothing else mattered.

Alas, the magic did not work. People knew the hollowness of his claims, especially of the BJP government. The Congress was not in the pink of health. Yet, it could trounce the BJP with a comfort-able majority. The BJP's reliance on the Aam Aadmi Party proved a blunder.

The Congress was not in the pink of health. Yet, it could trounce the BJP with a comfortable majority. The BJP's reliance on the Aam Aadmi Party proved a blunder

If the AAP had won, say, 5-10 percent of the votes in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP would have been in power. The Himachalis knew the AAP game. Almost all, if not all, the AAP candidates lost their securi-ty deposits. The party got only 1 percent of the vote. For once, the B team could not help the A team.

A wag has a theory to explain the BJP's fail-ure in the hill state. The BJP cannot raise the spec-ter of Muslim communalism in Himachal Pradesh. The Muslims have a negligible presence in the state. In fact, 96 per cent of the population is Hindu, the single largest minority being the Sikhs.

Arvind Kejriwal claims to be happy that his party has become a national party. No, it was not for this that he contested the election in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat at considerable cost to his party. He does not have anything called an ideology. He can only talk about free electricity and water.

True, he built some school buildings but he also caused the greatest damage to school education when he appointed multinational firms of char-tered accountants to decide how schools should be

run. Corruption has become rampant, as anyone who has anything to do with school education in Delhi will vouch-safe.

Nonetheless, Kejriwal has reason to be proud of winning the Delhi Municipal Corpora-tion. Over the decades, Delhi's character has changed. It was once known as a Punjabi city, particularly after the Parti-tion when tens of thousands of Hindus from what is now Pakistan came as refugees and settled down in Delhi. They dominated the political scene. Small wonder that the Bharat-



tiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of the BJP, held sway over the electorate.

Over the years, people from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the rest of the country began to migrate to Delhi which also began to expand. The Punjabis were reduced to a minority in Delhi. The demographic change began to be reflected in the elections. Delhi was no longer a preserve of the BJP. The Congress which enjoyed the support of the neo-migrants became the dominant party in the Capital.

The emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party and its promise and fulfilment of free electricity and water made an impact on the poor voters. The BJP knew that it would lose the municipal elections. It did everything possible to manipulate the election by first postponing it and then manipulating the ward compositions.

None of this could influence the poor voters who rallied behind the AAP while the BJP did well where the gated communities outnumbered those who lived in the slums. The Congress would have been wiped out if the Muslims had not voted for its candidates. It is no wonder that out of the nine Congress candidates who won, seven are Muslims.

Muslims are not the only ones who were amazed by Kejriwal's stupidity of building a replica of the Ayodhya temple in Delhi at enormous cost so that he and his MLAs could worship there for a day. Afterwards the makeshift temple was dismantled. Can anyone imagine a political leader anywhere in the world constructing a huge temple or mosque or church to worship for a day when there are thousands of temples in his state?

A word about the exit polls would be in order. None of them predicted the kind of landslide the BJP would have in Gujarat. Nor did any predict that the Congress would bounce back to power after a gap of five years in Himachal Pradesh. The media do not want to antagonise the powers that be.

One of the most shocking results came from

The results clearly prove that however invincible Narendra Modi may be in Gujarat, he is no longer a vote-catcher for the BJP in the rest of the country



Rampur in Uttar Pradesh. Azam Khan of the Samajwadi Party used to win this seat, no matter which party ticket he contested on. Last time, too, he won. The moment he was found "guilty" in a criminal case, the seat was declared vacant and a by-election was held. Even the Supreme Court found it necessary to ask why it was necessary to unseat him in such haste.

What is shocking is not that the BJP has won the seat. Only 31 percent of the voters in Rampur voted. How did the voting percentage go down so drastically? The Samajwadi Party candidate claims that 2.25 lakh voters were not allowed to vote. He says that the police and the BJP joined hands to rig the election. The winner has claimed that he ended "half a century of slavery" in the constituency. It is an affront to the Constitution! The minimum that the Election Commission should do is to order an inquiry and take corrective measures.

Samajwadi Party leader Dimple Yadav won the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat which fell vacant on the death of her father-in-law Mulayam Singh Yadav with a huge margin. The BJP lost in Khatauli where also a by-election was held. The Congress and the Biju Janata Dal could retain their seats in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan and Odisha. The BJP had an upset victory in Bihar, about which Nitish Kumar should ponder.

The results clearly prove that however invincible Narendra Modi may be in Gujarat, he is no longer a vote-catcher for the BJP in the rest of the country. Devoid of power, theatrics and empty rhetoric, he is like any other leader "full of sound and fury signifying nothing". ©

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No Merit in Delisting Demand

A debate is gaining momentum on delisting tribal Christians and Muslims from the list of Scheduled Tribes; it is a ploy to deny them the special rights given to them

BY **YACUB KUJUR**

Delisting is a demand from certain sections of the Hindus to remove the converted indigenous people to Christianity and Islam from the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs). Those who support the demand say that the tribals who have converted cease to be Scheduled Tribes. But the Supreme Court judgment says, “By reason of conversion, a tribe does not cease to be tribe.” (SC Case 429 (240), 2004 AIR SCW1064) Article 342 of the Indian Constitution specifies the tribes or tribal communities {read with 366(25)}. The issue is attracting media coverage, especially in the local media.

Why delisting? The main controversy over the issue is reservation and its benefits being given to the converted tribal Christians. The Constitution provides three types of reservations to Scheduled Tribes: 1. In government educational institutions (Arti.15-4); 2. In government jobs and promotions (Arti. 16-4); and 3. On seats and special representation in legislatures. Since the tribal Christians are more educated, they have accessed more jobs than non-converted tribals. The converted tribal people's life is economically better than their counterparts.

But they are still backward in representation in legislatures. The awareness over it is visible among them which rings alarm among political parties.

As it is observed, the tribal Christians bend towards Congress and the Hindu tribals towards BJP. This tendency has infuriated the BJP and the RSS. They have succeeded in brain washing the Hindu tribals. The local BJP and RSS leaders cease to receive homage from tribal Christians. For the loss of respect and gain, they are taking revenge on tribal Christians. Delisting, conversion, “Gharwapsi” are just political games, means of making Hindu Rashtra. It is to be noted the reasons for the conversion of tribals. If the tribals were taken care of in education, health and economic development why would have they been converted? Are these local landlords (belonging to RSS, BJP and even leaders of some other parties) not responsible for this?

What's happening is polarization of tribals for political gain. The BJP and the RSS have polarized tribals in the name of religious conversion. The tribals have been divided into Hindu tribals and Christian Tribals. The Hindu tribals with the support



What is needed at this juncture is that tribals should remain as brothers and sisters as they were from time immemorial, irrespective of creed and political allurements to save their 'tribalness', forest land and water

of the RSS and the BJP are demanding delisting of Christian tribals, while the latter are opposing it. The tribals who are demanding delisting consider themselves first as Hindus and then tribals; they are called Vanvasi by the BJP and the RSS and not Adivasis. Those opposing delisting consider themselves first as tribals and then Christians.

Hindu tribals blame tribal Christians for distorting and not following tribal customs and traditions; on the other hand, the tribal Christians claim that they are the custodians of tribal customs and traditions. They are enriching Christian faith by inculturating tribal belief, customs and traditions whereas Hindu tribals are 'Hinduising' the tribal culture. The tribal Christians have kept up their totem; on the other hand, Hindu tribals have lost their totem and are writing Bhagat, Pradhan, etc. as their surname. Hindu tribals are giving slogans like "Jo Bholenath ka nahi, O Adivasi nahin" (one who does not belong to Bholenath is not a tribal). Uraon tribes call the Supreme Being "Dharnes", not Bholenath. This name is not found in Uraon traditional belief system.

The Constitution affirms that tribals are not Hindus. Patna High Court, in a judgment, confirms that original aboriginals who got converted to Hinduism and are following Hindu religion are presumed that they will be governed by Hindu Laws (AIR 1931 Pat 305: Ganesh Mahto and others verses Shivcharan Mahto and others and AIR 2004 Jharkhand 121: Lakshmi Narayan Tudu/Lakshmi Narayan Manjhi and others versus Smt. Basi Majhian and others).

Rallies and public meetings are being held in favor of delisting and against it. Memorandum are submitted to various authorities in this regard. A competition is going on to prove who is following the traditional customs and customary laws.



What will happen now? Article 244 provides provision for administration of Scheduled Areas and tribal Areas, known as Fifth and Sixth Schedule. The Fifth Schedule Area is declared on the basis of tribal population. Where more than fifty percent of the Scheduled Tribes reside, the area is declared as Fifth Schedule and Constitutional benefits are provided, especially reservation of seats and provision of PESA (Provision of Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996). With the delisting of tribal Christians and Muslims, the number of Scheduled Tribes will decline, and the area will be de-scheduled. For example, Jashpur district of Chhattisgarh is a Scheduled Area comprising 62% of tribal population. Among them, the tribal Christians consist of 22%. If they are delisted the total number will decline to 40% and the area will be de-scheduled. The tribals will lose the benefit of representation and Tribal Sub-plan (TSP).

The allotment of TSP will be less and the area will witness low development works due to lack of money leading to rampant distress migration and human trafficking. The power of Gram Sabha will vanish and there will be rapid looting of tribal land, forest, water and other resources in the name of development. If they protest, they will be labeled as Naxals, anti-nationals and put into jails. They will languish there without framing of charges or trial for long period. The human rights activists who will speak up against the plight of the tribals will be labeled as urban Naxals and put behind bars under UAPA.

What is needed at this juncture is that tribals should remain as brothers and sisters as they were from time immemorial, irrespective of creed and political allurements to save their 'tribalness', forest land and water. Fighting against one another brings ruin for them, and prosperity to enemies. Knowing one's friends and foes is the need of the time. ©

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Insights from Bharat Jodo Yatra

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra can restore and reassert one of the basic foundations of the Indian nation - Unity in Diversity

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

Rahul Gandhi started Bharat Jodo Yatra on September 7, 2022 with the plan of covering a distance 3500 km from Kanyakumari to Srinagar. According to the Congress party, the yatra is the biggest Mass contact programme where the concerns of people will be raised. Although the main purpose of the yatra is to revive and rejuvenate the Congress party, people belonging to different ideologies, walks of life, professions and members of civil society organizations have joined the yatra because they appreciate the idea of knitting India, an India that is being divided on the basis of religion and besieged by soaring unemployment, price rise and widening economic disparities. Presence of a large number of ordinary people is the specialty of the yatra, besides participation by many social activists and film celebrities.

By observing and analysing the yatra, the kind of people who participate in the walk and the issues raised during the walk, one can draw some spiritual insights.



Personal Transformation, a Prerequisite for Social Transformation: Mahatma Gandhi has said, "You be the change you want to see in others". The Bharat Jodo Yatra has certain specific objectives, which Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party have clearly articulated.

While the yatra entered Madhya Pradesh in the last week of November, Rahul Gandhi said that he feels some changes in himself during the yatra, especially more patience and the ability to listen to others. "Now I don't get irritated even for eight hours, if someone pushes or pulls me. It doesn't affect me, whereas earlier I used to get irritated even in two hours," he said. "If you are walking in the yatra and experience pain, then you have to face it, you can't just give up", he added.

Relevance of Tapasya: During the yatra, Rahul Gandhi often repeated that for him, Bharat Jodo Yatra is a *tapasya*. In a conversation with Darshan Mondkar, a Pune-based entrepreneur, who joined the Bharat Jodo Yatra's Maharashtra leg, Rahul Gandhi explained what he means by *tapasya*. "*Tapasya* comes from the word *tup*. When you



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do *tapasya* you generate heat; the energy which consumes you. It hurts you; it pains you. And, then, you achieve,” Rahul said. He further explained: “Yes. Sure. I do not want to achieve anything without putting in an effort, without doing *tup*. Unless it hurts me, it pains me, any achievement is not worth it. This Bharat Jodo Yatra is my *tapasya*.”

“It is like an expiation, a cleansing of the soul. It is no easy task to walk even a single day in the Bharat Jodo Yatra. The physical stamina has to match a personal, political and an emotional commitment,” commented one of those walked with Rahul Gandhi in Karnataka.

The crucial question is how many of our political and religious leaders are ready to do *tapasya*. How many of them are ready to leave their comfort zones and walk to see and experience the problems and difficulties of people? On the contrary, often, they make provocative statements sitting in their comfort zones and adopt controversial policies to divide people. They want to attain power and remain in power by polarizing people. Rahul Gandhi’s Bharat Jodo Yatra challenges these comfort-seeking, power-hungry and manipulative leaders.

Ability to Listen: The root cause of many conflicts is the failure on the part of individuals and groups to listen to others. Very often divorces take place in families, and many families are disintegrated due to the failure of the members to listen to each other.

Many failures in governance happen because the rulers are not ready to listen to people. In the case of India, two mammoth protests -- one against the three controversial farm laws and another against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) -- took place because of the stubbornness of the ruling party to listen to people. Without listening to people, the ruling party imposed the two laws on the people of India. The tendency to impose laws without consulting people, who have to bear the consequence of the laws, is found among the religious leaders also. Often, they too behave like dictators.

Because Rahul Gandhi was ready to listen to people, many individuals and groups met him during the yatra and presented before him their problems and views. They include children, unemployed youth, women, students, farmers, weavers, intellectuals and social activists. A government, which is deeply committed to a majoritarian ideology that is exclusive, divisive and discriminative, is not willing to listen to people and their elected representatives.

Getting Rid of Fear: A constant theme running through Rahul Gandhi’s speeches during the yatra is the need for getting rid of fear. The root cause of hatred is fear. RSS and BJP have fear and that is why they spread hatred. He spoke why and how we need to overcome the fear within us so that we can become strong voices against the fascism of BJP/RSS. He showed the courage to speak against Adani

and Ambani without mentioning their names, as they have cornered huge wealth of the nation due to the pro-corporate policies of the BJP government, neglecting the interests of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Yogendra Yadav, President of Swaraj India, in an interview with Karan Thapar said that the tide is turning. "The climate of loneliness and fear has cracked but not shattered." A few months ago, people were afraid of speaking against the government because of the fear of ED and CBI pouncing upon them. Now, thousands of people are walking on the streets along with Rahul Gandhi and it is making a dent in the fear.



Suzanne Furtado, an entrepreneur and writer from Bengaluru, who took part at the Mysore phase of the march, shared her experience in the following words. "Today's India, where people's voices, freedoms, lives, are being silenced, snatched, snuffed out, is not where I grew up. What I love most about my country is our incomparable diversity, and my heart grieves at what is happening to our people, our homeland. To me, Rahul Gandhi's simple call to all to join him on this mission of unity, to come together to conquer the violent politics of hate, feels like Satyagraha. The Satyagraha of today's India."

Courage, the courage to stand alone and speak truth to power, is a significant quality of a spiritual person. A combination of courage and compassion makes a person spiritual. Rahul Gandhi has been consistent in his strident criticism of the dangerous ideology of the RSS-BJP combine. Even when the yatra entered Maharashtra, he had the guts to criticize the ideology of V D Savarkar, one of the protagonists of Hindutva. At the same time, because of his compassion for the people of India, he has been

constantly focusing on the issues of the people -- unemployment, rising prices and growing economic inequality. How many of our political and religious leaders have the courage to criticize the misuse of power by the ruling dispensation? Many religious leaders, despite knowing the dangerous virus that is infecting the whole nation, keep mum because of fear. Cowards can never be spiritual.

Mahatma Gandhi has said, "Non-violence and cowardice are contradictory terms. Non-violence is the greatest virtue, cowardice the greatest vice. Non-violence springs from love, cowardice from hate. Non-violence always suffers, cowardice would always inflict suffering."

Unity, Love and Fraternity: One of the proclaimed goals of Bharat Jodo Yatra is to replace division and hatred with unity and love. While addressing people at Hingoli in Maharashtra, Rahul Gandhi said, "We will reach Srinagar and hoist tri-colour and spread a message that this country can neither be divided nor can hatred and violence be spread in this country." As an example of defeating hatred with love, Rahul Gandhi gave flying kisses to people who had gathered at the BJP Jhalawar office's rooftop to catch a glimpse of the march. Later Rahul Gandhi wrote on Facebook: "No malice, no anger, no resentment -- none of this is in the hearts of Bharat yatri. What they have is a desire to unite India, compassion for the sufferings of Indians and love for all citizens."

The unity that Rahul Gandhi wants to promote is not the ruthless uniformity imposed by the RSS-BJP combine; it is a unity rooted in brotherhood and diversity. Imposing uniformity is totally against the spirit of India. While addressing a gathering in Kerala, Rahul Gandhi admired the people of Kerala for fostering unity in diversity. "Kerala is the symbol of unity in diversity and model for the entire country. The people of the state do not allow hatred to spread among them and encourage mutual respect. This was the reason that the state has a good education system and most compassionate nurses."

One of the basic differences between religiosity and spirituality is that religiosity divides people whereas spirituality unites people. Religiosity is based on rituals, dogmas, rules, pilgrimages and devotions. These aspects generally differ from religion to religion and often people fight because of the overemphasis on these aspects. On the other hand, spirituality is based on the practice of humanitarian values, ideals,

morals and ethical principles. These are more or less common to all religions. Because of the overemphasis on rituals and dogmas, fundamentalism and fanaticism flourish in religions. Fundamentalists always insist on uniformity and they impose uniformity by force. The result is conflict, division and enmity both within the religions and between the religions.

Unity in diversity is the millennial heritage of India. Unity of India consists in accepting, appreciating and celebrating differences, especially with regard to religion, culture and language. The great leaders of India, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Babasaheb Ambedkar etc., believed and practiced it. That is why secularism/pluralism is included as one of the core principles in the preamble of the Indian Constitution. Ever since the BJP came to power at the Centre under the leadership of Narendra Modi, this principle is being ridiculed and blatantly violated. Rahul

Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra can restore and reassert one of the basic foundations of the Indian nation.

India has a long history of foot-marches by spiritual gurus and political leaders. Saints like Adi Shankaracharya, Lord Buddha, Guru Nanak and Sree Chaitanya had embarked on foot-marches to communicate their spiritual messages and bring about transformation in individuals and in society. Mahatma Gandhi led the longest foot-march as part of the national freedom struggle, which gave the final push to the independence struggle. Bharat Jodo Yatra, being political and spiritual, can lead to an urgently needed socio-political transformation of India. ©

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Christians seek police protection to sing carols

A Christian group in Karnataka has sought police protection for the minority community during the Christmas season.

The Akhila Bharatha Christha Mahasabha (All India Christian Forum), a Protestant body, in a written communication to the Director General and Inspector General of Police requested to ensure a peaceful Christmas as Christians are reeling under attacks "since the enactment of the anti-conversion law."

Prajwal Swamy S, founder member of the organization, said they wanted the police to provide security cover to churches across the southern state during the festive season.

"Christians are apprehensive of participating in carol singing and visiting the houses of church members during the night for good wishes as they may face attacks," Swamy told The Hindu newspaper.

He cited two recent incidents of Hindu nationalists disrupting Christian prayer meetings in Channapatna and Maddur, both located around 60 kilometers from the state capital Bengaluru, by alleging religious conversion activities. The Bharatiya Janata Party government in Karnataka criminalized forced religious conversions through an ordinance on May 17. However, Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore told UCA News on Dec. 6 that he is aware of a group seeking police protection but does not think it was needed.

"We have full faith in the city police as well as the people of Bangalore and I don't see if it is (police protection) required," he said. Archbishop Machado though agreed that Christians in Karnataka are fearful about being targeted during the festive season.

"Yes, there is some kind of fear among the Christians after the state government passed the anti-conversion bill. But as far as Christmas celebration is concerned we hope that it will be peaceful in the state," he said. Father Faustine Lucas Lobo, a spokesperson of the Karnataka Catholic Bishops' Council, told UCA News that the request for protection may be a precautionary measure in the wake of repeated attacks on minority communities in recent times.

"Carol singing groups will be moving around house-to-house and there is a possibility that some people may mistake this as part of conversion activities, thinking they might even visit houses of Hindus, hence the precaution," the priest said. A survey by the rights group, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), reveals that Karnataka reported 39 incidents of hate crimes against the Christian community in 2021. Ganesh Karnik, the BJP state spokesperson said the government does not support or promote violence and only wants to stop forced religious conversions in the state. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Twisted Views on Conversions

A wrong narrative has been floated and spread in India regarding its demography and charity activities of Christian organizations

BY **LANCY LOBO AND ALWYN D'SOUZA**

Ashwini Upadhyaya has filed a suit in the Supreme Court alleging Amazon has funded money to Baptist church in North-East for conversions; it further says that conversions all over the country are a threat to national security. Obviously, given the RSS ideology of Hindu Rashtra, the danger to it comes from conversions, affecting their numerical superiority. The RSS mouthpiece 'organizer' even carried an issue titled 'Amazing Cross Connection.'

In India, nationalism has been increasingly tied to religious demography. More than 80 percent of India's population are Hindus, 14 percent Muslims



and 2.3 percent Christians. However, in recent years, certain hysteria is being created that the Hindu population is going down and by 2050 the Muslims will outnumber the Hindus. Its implication is that in a 'one man, one vote' electoral system, the Muslims will capture power and Hindus will be reduced to a minority, thereby facing the threat of being treated as second class citizens.

It might appear that the targeting of Muslims and Christians is undertaken by the Hindu extremists every other day, as these two minority groups stand as two major enemies in their pursuit of Hindu Rashtra.

Data on Christians

Mapping State-wise demography (29 states and 4 UTs) of Christians in India according to the 2011 (latest) census shows that Christians are less than one percent in most states. And this is after two thousand years of Christianity in India!

States below 1% of population:

J&K, HP, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, UP, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal = Total 13

Border conflicts with China have been relegated to the background but conversion issues have been proffered as troubling India. In fact, it is troubling, if at all, to the Hindu nation and not Indian nation



States above 1%, but below 2%:

Punjab, Karnataka, Diu and Daman, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh= Total 6

States with 2% to 5%:

Odisha, Jharkhand, Tripura, Assam= Total 4

States with 5% to 10%:

Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry Sikkim= Total 3

States with 10% to 25%:

Andamans, Kerala, Goa=Total 3

States with 26% to 40%

Arunachal, Manipur=Total 2

States above 41%:

Meghalaya 74.5, Nagaland 87.87, Mizoram 87.2=Total 3

**The false narrative**

The differential growth rate of religious communities has been a contested issue for a long time. Usually, the following causative factors are cited: 1) fertility rate and birth control; 2) female education; 3) sex-ratio; 4) consumption rate and the class phenomenon; 5) emigration and immigration; and 6) conversions.

One may say that despite Christianity being in India for 2000 years it appears to be a demographic and statistical failure. Despite its insignificant population in many states, yet a false narrative has been floated and spread. As per the official data, the Christian population has not risen from 2.3 per cent from 2001 census to 2011 census. In an insightful article in the magazine “Outlook” (June 10, 2022) Tony Joseph (a self-proclaimed atheist intellectual) poses the following narrative being spun by the Hindutva right-wing:

“Christianity is posing a growing and serious demographic threat to Hinduism by converting large numbers of Hindus through aggressive proselytising. This effort is heavily funded by Christian organisations in the West that see India as being ripe for large-scale conversions.

Since proselytising and conversions are not part of Hindu tradition, or that of any religion that originated in India, the playing field is tilted against Hinduism, and this is causing serious societal friction. This sometimes leads to spontaneous and violent reactions.”

The insinuation of the threat to national security made by the Hindutva has nothing to do with the security of India but proposed to be with the security of Hindu Rashtra. Border conflicts with China have been relegated to the background but conversion issues have been proffered as troubling India. In fact, it is troubling, if at all, to the Hindu nation and not Indian nation.

The Constitution of India grants freedom of professing, practicing and propagating a religion of one's choice. Hindu Rashtra is hell bent on denying this freedom. On the contrary it wants to bring the converted Christians back to Hinduism even those who converted centuries ago.

The regime has kept a strict audit over NGOs especially faith-based NGOs getting foreign funding for benevolent and humane activities. In many cases, the FCRA has been terminated and not renewed. However, the Hindutva NGOs have hardly been touched

What is the real threat?

The separatist Khalistan movement by some Sikhs was rightly declared as a threat to the integrity and security of India. In the same bargain, Hindu Rashtra too is dangerous to the integrity and security of India as professed in the Constitution of India.

Come elections, the conversion debate raises its head routinely to polarise people based on religion, pitting Hindus against Muslims and Christians as other religions such as Judaism and Zoroastrianism are too few in numbers.

The regime has kept a strict audit over NGOs especially faith-based NGOs getting foreign funding for benevolent and humane activities. In many cases, the FCRA has been terminated and not renewed. However, the Hindutva NGOs have hardly been touched. It must be noted that it was the faith-based NGOs that rose to the occasion during Covid-19 even before the Prime Minister appealed to them to assist the victims.

An added argument aimed at the Christians is that they are appendages of colonial rule. They distance from Indian culture and propagate western culture. It is difficult to convince the RSS that since the Vatican II there has been a concerted effort to inculturation: To profess and practice Christian faith through Indian (Hindu) symbols, signs, rituals, as well as dialogue of religions. One is Christian by faith, but Indian in Culture. Commendable efforts have been made by Christians in India to shun western garb, diet, dress and demeanour. They have largely been Indianised, i.e., ceased to be outsiders and become insiders.

However, lately the efforts to inculturation by the Church have been seen as another ploy to attract converts through copying Hindu names, symbols, signs, rituals, dances, and colours. This puts the Christians in India into a catch 22 situation, viz., 'damned if you inculturate and damned if you don't!' In fact, Christians in India have let go some of their identity markers to appear more Indian. And yet this phenomenon as perceived by Hindutva appears to be schizophrenic.

Education and health services of Christians are seen as conversion-oriented. Inculturation instead of being appreciated has been seen as a threat to Hindus by the Hindutvavadis. The pluralistic and multi-religious ethos of India is being distorted in a systematic manner.

The anti-conversion laws euphemistically named as Freedom of Religion laws in around ten states have targeted the convertors by heavy fines and penalties. Those who wish to convert must seek the permission from DC and others. These laws are used to harass and criminalise Christians who gather for prayer services by being falsely accused as conversion exercises. These conversion laws make it difficult

for people to exercise their right to freedom of religion. Free will of people is curbed.

In a multi-religious society conversion from one religion to another is bound to happen as the Constitution gives every citizen the right to profess, practice and propagate one's faith. Data reveals that people from every religion have converted to some other religion. Similarly, inter-religious

marriages are a fact of life. Therefore, anti-conversion laws, that seek to ban religious conversions and inter-religious marriages, go against the spirit of the Constitution.

Every citizen has the right to change one's job or occupation, change one's residence and even change one's political party, as is being witnessed now during the election season. If that be the case, why is a change of religion an anathema for Hindu extremists? Unfortunately, the reality is that they see Hinduism, not as a religion, but as a political constituency that can be used for political mobilisation. Therefore, they need to generate this political constituency by creating a culture of hate against minorities. It has been proved many times over that the conversion bogey is an attempt to serve political ends and has nothing to do with religion, Hinduism or Christianity. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nine Bishops denounce Vatican appointee Archbp Andrews' actions

Nine bishops of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church in India have expressed displeasure over the style of functioning of an apostolic administrator appointed to settle a liturgical dispute in one of its archdioceses.

Nine bishops in a confidential letter to Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Oriental Church based in Kerala, have urged him “to do everything possible to stop this crisis with a pastoral solution.”

The Nov. 28 letter, which was leaked in the media, blamed Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, the apostolic administrator of the Ernakulam-Angamaly arch-



diocese, for derailing a peace process to settle the nearly five-decades-old liturgical dispute amicably.

The nine bishops are natives of the parishes of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese.

Archbishop Thazhath had made an abortive bid to force his way into the St Mary's Cathedral Basilica on Nov. 27 to offer Mass in the uniform mode as approved by the synod in 1999 requiring the priests to face the altar during the Eucharistic prayer.

This angered the priests and laity in the archdiocese who are opposed to the uniform Mass and want to stick to their traditional mode in which the celebrant faces the congregation throughout.

The archbishop's actions led to a street fight that ultimately resulted in the Basilica being closed and kept under police watch.

“We understand that the Basilica Vicar and curia members had informed him [Archbishop Thazhath] of the grave law and order situation there and

requested him not to come. We regret to say that his visit was unfortunate and it worsened the situation,” the prelates stated in the letter.

They said the archbishop's actions were “an improper act” as a three-member panel appointed by Cardinal Alencherry had initiated a dialogue with the priests and laity on Nov.25.

“The provocation will only strengthen the protest; violence breeds violence is a proven truth,” the prelates said. The priests and laity in the archdiocese have been on a war path since August last year after the Synod of the Oriental Church instructed its 35 dioceses to adopt the uniform Mass.

While the other dioceses complied after initial resistance, the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese stuck to their stance and demanded their traditional mass be accorded a “liturgy variant status.”

The Vatican appointed Archbishop Thazhath on July 30 to settle the dispute

The bishops in their letter said the protracted liturgical dispute and subsequent developments “has tarnished the image of the Church and put the credibility of the Synod at stake.”

They have appealed to Cardinal Alencherry to address the situation with “a father's heart,” take the dissenting priests into confidence and facilitate the opening of the basilica for worship.

The Syro-Malabar Media Commission though expressed its displeasure at the confidential letter being leaked to the media and has backed Archbishop Thazhath saying he was merely complying with the mandate given by the Vatican.

Archbishop Thazhath reaffirmed in a clarification on Dec. 4: “I have no authority and option other than to implement” the uniform Mass.

He appealed to the priests to refrain from protests as they “will be considered as a protest against Holy Father and the rejection of his decisions.”

The signatories to the letter include Archbishop Antony Kariyil, Archbishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Bishop Thomas Chakiath, Bishop Gratian Mundadan, Bishop Dominic Kokkat, Bishop Jose Chittooparambil, Bishop Sebastian Adayanthrath, Bishop Ephrem Nariculam, and Bishop Jose Puthenveettil. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Plague is the new Name for Development

Certain things happening in the country in the name of development is nothing but a 'plague'; human beings are pushed into an absurd living condition

BY PAUL THELAKAT

Gabriel Garcia Marquez published "Love in the Time of Cholera" which he calls a novel of two people's love, thwarted in their youth, finally flourished when they are aged. Love is the life-breath of any and every one. But the air we breathe is infected by plagues of different hues and natures. Does the author spell out what the plague is in his novel? It is called cholera, but what is it in reality? He seems to say the Western concept of development is the plague. Development is domination. Camus spoke of the plague which is nothing but fascism and war. There was an insomnia plague in "One Hundred Years of Solitude." Sophocles speaks of two plague infecting Thebes. "A Journal of the Plague Year" by Daniel Defoe is one of my favourite books on plague. Plagues are like imponderable dangers that surprise people. Black plague caused the death of 75-200 million people, peaking in Europe from 1347 to 1351.

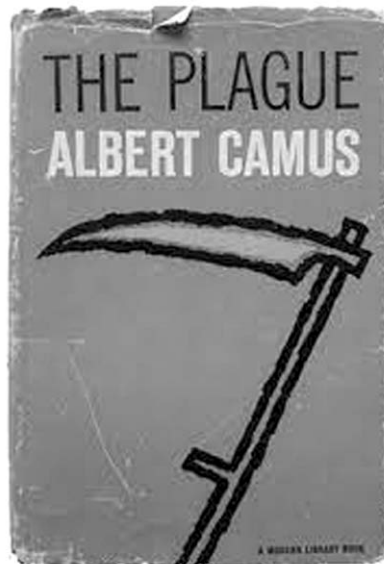
"Books are written on Florence and Athens. These cities have what it takes to entice or exalt. They appease a certain hunger of the soul whose nourishment is memory. But no one would have an idea to write on a city where nothing tempts the mind, where ugliness has taken on a measureless part, where the past is reduced to nothingness. And yet sometimes this is very tempting ... Oran is one of these cities." These are Camus' opening words of *The Plague*. While speaking of middle-eastern countries affected by the plague, it leads us into an allegorical tale about the relationship between man and his environment. Oran is personified

in *The Plague* and becomes a collective protagonist in its own right. Rieux, the narrator, does not provide political, socio-economic, or statistical information. The leaders and administrators remain anonymous both in name and function, referred to only as "the authorities," "the municipality," or "the administrators."

The first step is the much-delayed realisation of the plague, where the administration finally calls It's Life, That's All. Plague ends with the administrative order of quarantine or a lockdown -- "Proclaim a state of Plague. Close the town." There is a sudden disruption in the city's activities, a work stoppage. When freedom is curtailed do the citizens ruminate about the availability of real choices. The next part sees mass-death in the city which is personified to highlight the suffering of the city-dwellers, whilst the penultimate part describes the gradual departure of the plague. The last part becomes a mirror-opposite of the first, the closing is replaced

by the opening and the moroseness by a certain impression of victory. But what strikes immediately is - a victory against whom? What was the city protected against, or rather, what weapon did the city have that had to be contained and not let out into the rest of the world? Sophocles' Oedypus is concerned with the crime and the criminal which causes the plague. Purging the enemy is the only way of salvation from the plague.

The drama of Oedypus Rex opens with a prayer service at the very entrance of the palace of the king Oedypus. The priest and the

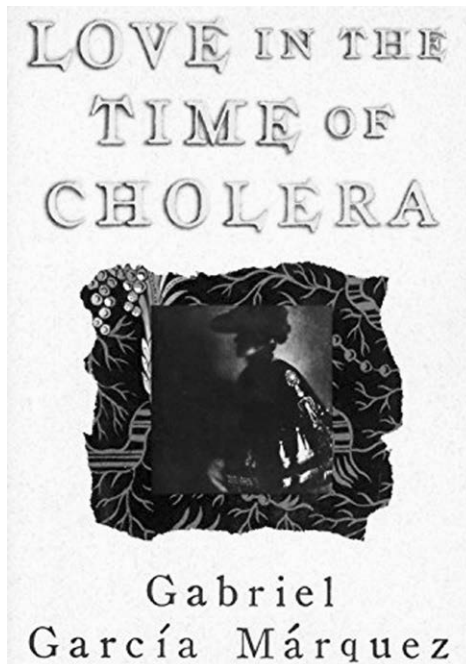


people are praying to the king to save them from the plague. Oedypus asks the question, why is there a plague at all? The accepted answer is, there lives in the country the killer of the king. The regicide is parricide as well. The father of the nation is killed. The killer has to be hunted out. Oedypus starts the investigation and ends with the sharp words of the prophet of the country Tiresias pointing the accusing finger at the king, telling him "You are the killer you hunt".

Similar prayer services take place in two places in Kerala: in the capital city, the priests and people are praying to the king to save them from a plague.

The same thing happens in Ernakulum where the priests and people are praying to their king to spare them from legal domination. Any demonstration or protest is a linguistic expression and the essence of any such discourse is prayer. The plague they plead to remove may take different names, in both places it is development, one is seaport construction and another is ritual uniformity. They are legal dominations in the name of development. They say law is the will of God or the Father. Who is the Father or God? Let us ask Karl Marx. For him God is the alienated idol of their own power and money. They also want to imprint their names in History. "We are not only makers of law but we make truth". They will not hear the prayers for they are more sophisticated for they know they shall not commit the blunder of Oedypus. If you listen, they will end with the prophets raising the accusing fingers against them.

At the very end of *the Plague* of Camus, the meaning of *The Plague* is stated as denial of the values that the city stands for. Civilization fell apart, and the survivors, scattered as in a primitive world, had to fight for survival, echoing Darwinian theories: Civilization was crumbling, and it was each for himself. Everything is commodified and de-personalised. The God of the globalised market is money. Money power creates vicious hate campaigns in the community by truth departments of communal forces. We wait for barbarians. It was an amaz-



ing loss of communication with the world. It was exactly as if the world had ceased, been blotted out. Corporates rule by capital. Man is a worm. The city is always linked to the plague. It can never be entirely free of this association. "All the world is topsy-turvy, and it has been topsy-turvy ever since the plague," says *The Scarlet Plague*.

The Plague also provides for a rigorously cerebral experience of "Pandemic Literature", although the term is not a standardised one related to the texts written about disease. Camus' allegory of the plague continues to resonate worldwide today, and reaf-

firms the importance of literature in both articulating and reclaiming the state of humanity. Boccaccio, in the Introduction, chronicles the devastation he writes on the first day in *The Decameron*: "In this sore affliction and misery of our city, the reverend authority of the laws, both human and divine, was all in a manner dissolved and fallen into decay, for (lack of) the ministers and executors thereof, who, like other men, were all either dead or sick or else left so destitute of followers that they were unable to exercise any office, wherefore everyone had license to do whatever pleased him."

Albert Camus's *The Plague* is an allegory of fascism in France and the novel presents no anger or bitterness but just immense spirit of forbearance and pity; it presents the capitalist and ideological agenda petrified and humiliated before the power of pandemic. His meaningful act in the face of the absurd human living condition that human beings are pushed into because of capitalism, fascism and totalitarianism. And he comes to the conclusion: "Each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in someone's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter." ©

Cyber Attacks Better Safe Than Sorry

By using various tactics, cyber criminals exploit individuals, steal personal information, disrupt computer and security networks. 95 percent of cyber breaches result from human error. It's better to be safe than feel sorry afterwards

BY AARTI

About a fortnight back, that is on November 23, several patient-related e-services like appointments, registrations, smart billing, admission, discharge, report generation, etc., were reportedly affected at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi. The good news is that effective December 6, while some e-services in AIIMS have resumed, others are said to be operating in the manual mode.

What we know so far is that the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, Delhi Police Cyber-crime Special Cell, Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre, Intelligence Bureau, Central Bureau of Investigation, National Forensic Sciences University, National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre and the National Investigation Agency are investigating the cyber-attack. The Intelligence Fusion & Strategic Operations of the Delhi Police, a specialised unit that handles all complex and sensitive cases of cybercrime, have registered a case. It is suspected that the problem may have been caused

by a "ransomware" attack. The ongoing investigation is expected to unravel what went wrong.

Cyber-attacks, a cause for concern globally, as various reports suggest, relentlessly seem to target both public and private sector networks. As many as 78 percent of organisations globally are said to be hacked by successful cyber-attacks. The perpetrators reportedly use various tactics to exploit individuals, steal personal information, disrupt computer and information security networks. Commonly, criminal hacking, or the act of gaining unauthorised access to data in a computer or network, has been found to happen by exploiting weaknesses in such systems and infected it with malware, that is malicious software, designed to interfere with a computer's normal functioning. A more sinister attacker, or ransomware, typically infiltrates via email, luring a user to click on an attachment or visit a website that infects their computer with malicious code. Once it gains access to systems, it makes them unusable to its legitimate users, either by encrypting different files on targeted systems or locking the system's screen unless a ransom is paid mostly in crypto currency.

Using phishing, a type of social engineering (psychological manipulation of people into performing actions or divulging confidential information), cyber crooks can send fraudulent messages designed to trick an individual into revealing sensitive information to the attacker.

Besides targeting critical infrastructure like health, transportation, energy, financial services as well as individual users, holding personal information, photos or other records, over the past few years, globally, what is more worrisome is that cyber criminals have increasingly begun to target the healthcare sector. More so because valuable



personal health insurance information can be used fraudulently to obtain expensive medical services, devices, prescription medications and also acquire various government benefits. Most of the time, hackers are believed to make their entry into computer systems through a phishing email.

In the UK, data related to over 1.5 lakh patients registered under its publicly funded healthcare system – the National Health Service -- was hacked and shared over a three-year period by cyber crooks. Having penetrated into the IT systems of Anthem, the second largest health insurer in the US, hackers gained access to personal data of as many as 8 crore of its members that included their names, addresses, birth dates, Social Security numbers, medical ID numbers, income data, etc. Similarly, in a targeted cyber-attack, the Singapore government's health data base was compromised and information of 15 lakh patients got accessed by hackers. Not long ago, the University College, London, was hit by a major ransomware attack, bringing down its shared drives and student management system besides infecting a number of hospital trusts closely associated thereof. Fortunately, emails were immediately shut down as a precautionary measure to restrict a new outbreak.

There have been 16 major cyber-attacks in Australia this year and more recently the medical records of its 97 lakh citizens, hacked from Medibank, the country's largest health insurer, was released by hackers after the ransom demand was not met.

Last year, Kaseya, an IT solutions developer headquartered in the US with its presence in 10 countries, was attacked by ransomware and Rs 500 crore was demanded as ransom. With thousands of organisations worldwide using at least one Kaseya software solution, some 800 to 1500 small to medium-sized companies using the said software were affected. Notably while some 800 Coop supermarket chain stores in Sweden had to be closed temporarily, an estimated 1,000 companies have had servers and workstations encrypted. An authentication bypass vulnerability in the remote monitoring and management software package developed by the company, namely the VSA (Virtual System Administrator) was compromised. Major meat producer JBS, which supplies over a fifth of all the beef in the US, paid Rs 78 crore ransom in bitcoins to regain access to its computer systems after cybercriminals temporarily knocked out plants using ransomware. Similarly, the



US's largest national fuel pipeline, Colonial Pipeline, paid Rs 31 crore to ransomware hackers after they locked the company's systems, causing days of fuel shortages and paralysing the East Coast.

That close to USD 600 billion, or nearly 1 percent of global GDP, is lost to cybercrimes, causing business disruption, affecting government operations and reputational harm across the globe each year shows the costs associated with such criminal activities are enormous. According to estimates, malicious cyber activity cost the US economy between USD 57 billion and USD 109 billion in 2016. With over 300 percent increase in reported cybercriminal activities over the past year, several organisations have been taking various initiatives to safeguard themselves.

The AIIMS cyber attack is surely a wake-up call. At a macro level, organisations ought to pay heed to various advisories issued by government and cyber security experts and put in place a unified cyber security policy. It needs to be appreciated that, primarily, cybercrimes including ransomware attacks happen because of human error and as a consequence the resultant impact for the entire organisation is simply horrendous. So, at an individual level, while surfing the borderless cyberspace, one can take away the power of a cyber-attack from the attackers by being vigilant. Therefore, there is need for digital hygiene. Some of the simple ways to stay protected include having an updated operating system, adopting multifactor authentication, backing up one's data either on the cloud or hard disk, using protection software to detect viruses and malware on one's computer.

The phishing email could look authentic to an unsuspecting individual but that can be the beginning of ultimate chaos and avoidable infiltration of ransomware into computer systems.

Better watch out. 🕒

Fr Abraham Adappur

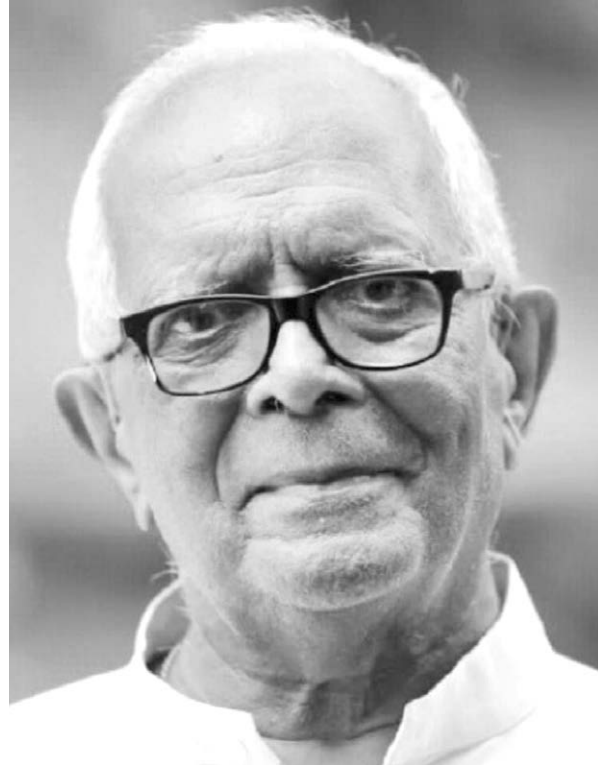
He Wore Humanism on His Sleeve

BY ANAND KOCHUKUDY

A. Adappur is a familiar byline in the Malayalam literary circles for almost six decades now. At a time Left-leaning writers dominated Kerala's rich literary universe, it was uncommon for a Christian clergyman to engage on a regular basis with the secular world. For Fr. Abraham Adappur, however, writing was his way of bearing witness to Christ. And despite his image as a Communist baiter, Adappur critiqued the positions taken by the Church with utmost fairness, and went on to be counted among the finest public intellectuals of Kerala in his prime. He was averse to using prefixes such as 'Fr.' or 'Dr.', as he preferred his writing to do the talking than such labels.

Fr. A Adappur passed away at the age of 96 on December 3 in Kozhikode. Born to a middle-class family in Arakkuzha near Muvattupuzha, Adappur had his tryst with faith while studying at Infant Jesus School in Vazhakulam, and went on to join the Society of Jesus in 1944. After graduating from St. Aloysius College in Mangalore, he got ordained in 1959, at the height of the 'Vimochana Samaram' (Liberation Struggle) in Kerala. That same year he also made his debut as a writer, in the prestigious *Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly*, with a detailed article on Mother Teresa titled 'Ezhakalude Thozhi' (The Friend of the Destitute). Along with familiarizing the Kolkata-based 'Missionaries of Charity' to Malayalis, Adappur was also inspired to imbibe the values of Mother Teresa in his life while researching on his subject.

His opposition to the Communists was an extension of his inherent belief that any 'ism' that restricted personal freedoms was akin to fascism. But that didn't stop him from striking up friendships with those from the Left



Adappur's life-changing mission was only to follow. In the early 1960s, he was deputed to the Jesuit headquarters in Rome as a young priest when the Second Vatican Council got underway. He reported extensively on the deliberations and wrote a series of articles in *Mathrubhumi* as well as other publications. That stint also served as his probation as a journalist, which went a long way in shaping the sharp writer in him. Back in Kerala in 1966, *Mathrubhumi Literary Weekly's* legendary editor N.V. Krishna Warrior offered Adappur regular column space, impressed by the priest's ability to logically make his arguments in literary Malayalam. Although Adappur mastered English, Latin, French and Italian over the years, it was his command of Malayalam and ability to make sense to the secular reader that made him stand out from the rest.

Krishna Warrior often turned to Adappur for a counter narrative to the Marxist worldview in the

weekly. Years spent abroad had made Adappur skeptical of Communists, and he had predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc as far back as the 1970s, knowing how it rested on a shaky edifice. It was only natural that Adappur's writings would result in several run-ins with the Marxists. But he was opposed to any dispensation that restrained liberty and free speech, as demonstrated in his association with the Marxists at the height of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi (as testified by eminent Malayalam critic M. K. Sanoo).

Within a week of the lifting of the Emergency in March 1977, ailing state minister T. V. Thomas of the Communist Party of India passed away; Adappur's revelation that the veteran Communist wished to receive viaticum, the last sacrament, blew up into a huge controversy. His dispatches from Europe in 1978 coinciding with the naming of Pope John Paul hailing from Poland also saw a series of exchanges in *Mathrubhumi Literary Weekly* with former Chief Minister C. Achutha Menon, with rebuttals and counters.

Rather than as a response to the Marxist regime in Kerala, Adappur's anti-Communist stance was shaped by his lived experiences abroad. Perhaps that explains his aversion to liberation theology, introduced by Left theoreticians in Kerala, despite being originally conceptualized by the Jesuits in South America. His opposition to the Communists was an extension of his inherent belief that any 'ism' that restricted personal freedoms was akin to fascism. But that didn't stop him from striking up friendships with those from the Left. In fact, his large circle of friends in Kochi where he spent five decades of his life encompassed people from every persuasion.

Adappur also established a monthly debating club at the Lumen Jyothis, the Jesuit house in Kochi, which conducted intellectually stimulating discussions on varied topics. Fr. Paul Thelakkatt, editor of *Light of Truth*, recalls how Adappur's presence in *Sathyadeepam* (mouthpiece of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese) weekly editorial advisory board meetings played a role in shaping it as a voice of the Church. And despite holding firm views on the tug-of-war vis-à-vis liturgy in the Syro-Malabar Church, he always kept a distance from the politics of it.

Adappur never wavered in his convictions and always advocated his positions from a Christian worldview, but that did not stop him from taking on the Church in Kerala in his latter days through

If one were to ask, what Adappur's lasting legacy would be, it is doubtlessly his engagements with the wider society in secular publications, lending a human face to the Church in the process. A strong adherent of Christ, he demonstrated what it meant to live in the true spirit of his faith, as an embodiment of a good Christian

his writings. He once recalled how extensive reading in youth shaped his stance on 'clericalism' in the Church. When a fellow Jesuit headed the Roman Catholic Church for the first time in 2013, it wouldn't have come as a surprise to Adappur that Pope Francis repeatedly spoke out against clericalism.

Adappur openly took on the hierarchy when the Newman College authorities terminated the services of Professor T. J. Joseph, who was mortally attacked by the now-outlawed Popular Front of India (PFI) cadre accusing him of blasphemy. He didn't take the Church line when large swathes of the Western Ghats were notified as Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in 2013, preferring to take a more judicious approach.

He was also at the forefront of the efforts of redeeming Syro-Malabar Church mouthpiece (and Kerala's oldest daily) *Deepika* from the clutches of vested interests in the mid-2000s when people higher up in the hierarchy failed to act on it. His sharp writings finally forced the Church's hand.

Looking back, if one were to ask, what Adappur's lasting legacy would be, it is doubtlessly his engagements with the wider society in secular publications, lending a human face to the Church in the process. A strong adherent of Christ, he demonstrated what it meant to live in the true spirit of his faith, as an embodiment of a good Christian. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANAND KOCHUKUDY is a Kerala-based Journalist and Columnist

Fishermen call off anti-port protest for now

A marathon protest by fishermen led by a Catholic archdiocese against an upcoming international seaport has been temporarily called off after a consensus was reached with the provincial government.

Father Eugene Pereira, vicar-general of the Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum and convener of the 140-day-old protest, made the announcement after meeting Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Dec. 6.

"For now we are calling it off. Protests do not always come to an end only after achieving their objectives. Each protest has several phases. One such phase of the protest has ended in a consensus," Pereira told reporters.

Father Pereira though looked upset and said the decision did not mean "they were satisfied with the steps taken or promises made by the state government" while adding that "it's only a temporary truce."

The government has promised to meet most demands of the protesters. It agreed to pay a monthly rent of 5,500 Indian rupees to families of fishermen who have lost their homes due to port construction activities, compensate them for the loss of livelihood, grant fuel subsidies for their fishing boats, and expedite the ongoing rehabilitation work.

The fishermen had demanded 8,000 Indian rupees as rent and the government assured them the rest, 2,500 Indian rupees, will be paid by the Adani group, which is constructing the port. But the protesting fishermen declined to accept money from the private corporation.

A government committee under the state chief secretary, the chief of state's administrative officials, will be set up soon to look into the concerns of the fishermen. The government, however, refused to accept the original demands of the protesters which included halting the port's construction for three months and allowing their representatives in an official panel of experts to study the environmental and human impact of the project.

The fishermen have concerns over the erosion of the fragile shoreline, which could adversely impact their lives and livelihood, and appointed a separate panel of experts to study the damage.

Construction activities so far have rendered homeless around 500 fisher families whose homes were destroyed, the protesting fishermen claim.



Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, reportedly played the mediator between the protesters and the government after violence flared in the last week of November. A mob attacked Vizhinjam police station which was followed by violent clashes that left 90 protesters and 36 police officers injured.

The fishermen accused the Communist-led Kerala government of orchestrating the violence to tarnish their peaceful protest by portraying them as "traitors" who were "anti-development."

The government registered six criminal cases against Archbishop Thomas J Netto of Trivandrum or Thiruvananthapuram – who was not even present where the violence took place. Cases were also filed against Auxiliary Bishop Christudas Rajappan and some priests, besides some 3,000 protesters including women and children.

The charges registered against them included hatching a conspiracy, incitement to violence, attempted murder, and trespassing in a protected area in violation of a high court order among others.

The unexpected and violent turn of events put the clergy and fishermen under pressure to end the protest, a priest said on the condition of anonymity.

The indefinite protest against the multi-billion dollar Adani Vizhinjam International Seaport in Thiruvananthapuram district commenced on July 20, due to the adverse impacts of the construction activities started in 2015.

Fishermen's leaders said the government did not pay heed to their demands. As Father Pereira told reporters, the discussions did not produce a satisfactory resolution with regard to the fishermen's seven original demands, they said.

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Giving Life to Many from Death Bed

BY P.A. JOSEPH

14-year-old Jyotiraditya Khanna was reading in Class IX. His ambition was to serve in the Army. He wanted to donate his organs to needy people. Being under age, he was waiting to turn 18 to fill up the pledge form. But he fell from the 3rd floor of his house in Haridwar. He was brought to the Apollo hospital on November 8, and the doctors found that due to severe injuries his brainstem reflexes were absent, and he was brain-dead. His parents were counselled regarding organ donation, and they gave their consent. Mr. Vivek Khanna, his father, while signing the consent, said that his son was very keen to donate his organs.

All his organs were retrieved by doctors. His corneas were donated to Dr. Shroff Charity eye hospital; one kidney to a 44-year-old woman at Apollo hospital; another kidney to a woman in Jaipur; his liver to an eight-year-old boy; his lungs to a man in Punjab; and his heart to a retired army man who was on death bed owing to an extremely weak heart (Courtesy: Times of India, Nov.18/2022).

All the lucky beneficiaries live healthy, and we can say that Jyotiraditya now lives in many people. We should appreciate Mr. Vivek Khanna for being so responsive and highly sensitive to his son's desire which he had expressed some time back. Also, we can presume that all the beneficiaries were selected from the urgent requests poured in. In all certainty, we presume that most needy people were helped without looking into their religion, caste, etc. Further, to allow the doctors to operate different parts of the body of his son, Mr. Khanna showed great courage and suffering. Ordinary parents would not allow such procedure. May God bless the

We should educate the public on the need to be donors. Doctors say that it is healthy to donate blood occasionally. There are generous people who have donated one of their kidneys

Dead teen's organs save 6 lives, among them a retd Armyman

Anuja.Jaiswal@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: A 14-year-old boy from Haridwar, who was declared brain dead by a panel of doctors at Apollo Hospital on Thursday will metaphorically continue to live six lives as his vital organs, including the heart, were donated to six people.

His heart will now beat in the chest of a 44-year-old retired Armyman, who was on his deathbed as his heart wasn't able to pump blood properly.

The boy died due to severe brain and chest injuries after falling off the third floor of his house. "My son, Jyotiraditya Khanna, was a student of Class IX. He wanted to donate his organs. Since he was underage, he was waiting to turn 18 and fill the

pledge form. But we never knew that his desire would be fulfilled by us in an untimely manner. My son wanted to join the Army," said Vivek Khanna, who works as director of operations in a private company.

Dr Rajesh Chawla, pulmonary and critical care specialist at Apollo Hospital, told **TOI** that the boy was injured on November 15 and taken to Metro Hospital at Haridwar. He was brought to Delhi on Wednesday morning. "After investigation, it was found that his brainstem reflexes were absent and he was declared brain dead. His parents were counselled regarding organ donation and they gave their



Jyotiraditya Khanna

consent," he added.

All organs of the boy have been retrieved by doctors from various hospitals. "Three green corridors were created for transporting the organs to three hospitals. His corneas were

donated to Dr Shroff Charity Eye Hospital," said Chawla.

While one kidney will be transplanted in a 44-year-old woman at Apollo Hospital, his second kidney will save the life of a 43-year-old woman admitted at Jaipur Golden Hospital. His liver will be transplanted in two people, including an eight-year-old boy and 54-year-old man, and lungs into a 37-year-old man from Punjab at Medanta Hospital.

parents for their courage and generosity. They can be assured that their son now lives in many people. By his death he has given life to them. By this kind of generous action, one becomes immortal.

In this context we should educate the public on the need to be donors. Doctors say that it is healthy to donate blood occasionally. There are generous people who have donated one of their kidneys. One of the bishops in Kerala, Jacob Murikkan, donated one of his kidneys. It seems that the client, belonging to a different religion, was not even known to the donor. The patient was in an emergency need and Murikkan came forward to donate the kidney. It was highly appreciated among the media circles. Now he has resigned from his position as auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Pala and lives a simple life in a remote place in Kerala. This is a great challenge and a luminous witness to the affluent hierarchy especially in Kerala.

In the reflections of Dr. Abdul Kalam, he says: "The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of men/women. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but its men/women are great and good".

Always listen to your heart,
It may be on your left,
but it is always right. ☺



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

The Liquor Cabinet..!

A friend of mine sent me a forward today, purely in jest I think, which got me thinking. It went like this, 'When someone asks, 'Where is your festive spirit?' ... Is it wrong to point to the liquor cabinet?'

I felt sad, that the true meaning of the festival he was talking about had been lost but decided today, to talk to all of us, about the contents of that liquor cabinet:

Social drinking is increasing by the day, and there is not a party I attend that does not serve liquor, and with this comes the making of alcoholics. The man who drinks once a week, starts enjoying the daily

Knock off the 'a' and the 'bit' remains!

Replied the wise wife, "when you finally decide to run away from the 'bit' you will find that 'it' is still remaining!

Sir William Osler, eminent Canadian Physician, was lecturing on alcohol. "Is it true," asked a student, "that alcohol enables people to do things better?"

"No," replied Sir William. "It just makes them less ashamed of doing them badly!"

Mukund: "Why do you drink so much?"

Raj: "I'm trying to drown my sorrows."

Mukund: "Are you succeeding?"

Raj: "No, I guess I've learned how to swim by now!"



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tipple, first with friends and then by himself and finally fights a losing battle with the bottle.

This was what an addict said after a session at an A.A. meeting.

*"Alcohol first gave me wings to fly,
Then took away the sky."*

Another quoted the Japanese proverb:

*First the man takes the drink,
Next the drink takes the drink
Then the drink takes the man.*

Once a man returned home stone drunk. His wife was furious because just a week earlier he had promised to break the habit bit by bit. "What about your promise," she asked angrily. "Aren't you trying to discard it?"

The man answered that he was trying his best, but he was proceeding in stages. It was just like chopping off the very word 'habit,' he explained: when you cut off the initial 'h' from the world, 'a bit' persists.

And here's a warning in old English, read it carefully:

*Drink not the third glass, which thou canst not tame,
When once it is within three; but before
Mayst rule it, as thou list: and pour the shame,
Which it would pour on thee, upon the floor.
It is most just to throw that on the ground,
Which would throw me there, if I keep the round!*

So, dear friend, 'If someone asks, 'Where is your festive spirit?' ... don't point to the liquor cabinet, point instead, to the Babe in the Manger..!' ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT CLEMENTS is a Newspaper Columnist, with an estimated readership of 6 million. He also conducts a short-term Writer's Course. Contact him on bobsbanter@gmail.com for more details

Enlightened Leadership

By **Jacob Peenikaparambil**

The world today looks desperately for enlightened leaders in the midst of mushrooming popular leaders who speak the language of hatred, revenge and exclusion. The urgent need of humanity today is building enlightened leaders with vision, character and competence, and schools play a pivotal role in building leaders. The book, 'Enlightened Leadership' will be a great help to the teachers and principals in the task of training leaders.

Leaders are needed not only in politics, but in all fields, and all individuals are expected to play leadership role in their family and profession. Realizing the urgent need for building leaders, Fr. Jacob Peenikaparambil has written the book, Enlightened Leadership. Besides highlighting the qualities needed for a leader, the book presents many examples of ordinary individuals who have displayed extraordinary leadership qualities. As Dr. George Arickal has pointed out in the foreword of the book, "The different chapters in the book are not theoretical treatises on leadership, but they are referring to actual happenings in life. The background is real, the message is authentic and clearly articulated. Qualities, attitudes and capabilities needed for an enlightened leader are described in this book".

Since 2014 Fr. Jacob has been part of the USM team that facilitates one-week Enlightened Leadership Training for students. On the basis of his experience of interacting with young people he has written short articles on leadership since 2020.

This book will be an appropriate gift to students and teachers. It also can be a significant part of resource items for value education.

Varghese Alegaden

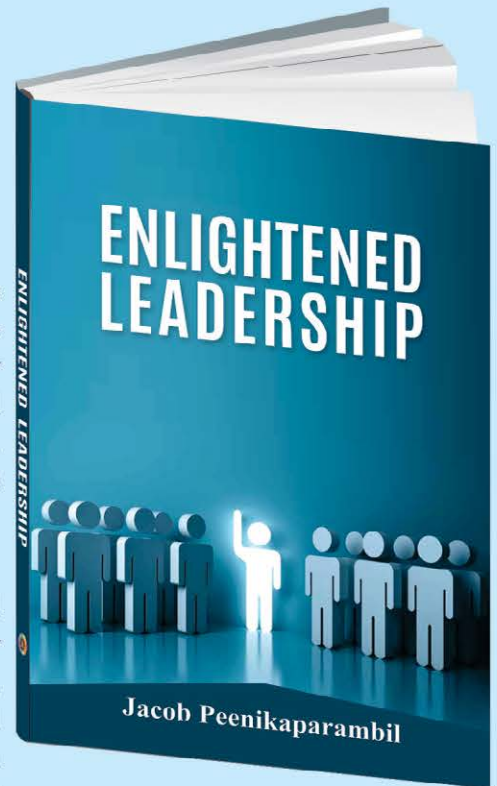
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'External Hand' in Goa Crime Scene

For the increasing crimes in Goa, the role being played by those coming from outside the state cannot be discounted

BY PACHU MENON

In response to the deteriorating law and order situation in Goa, the Chief Minister has repeatedly said that external elements are solely responsible for the rising crime graph in the region.

Despite reports of criminals from outside the state indulging in nefarious activities emanating from every corner of Goa, the state police force has been an epitome of efficiency, thoroughly meticulous with its policing ways, comments and opinions from various quarters to the contrary notwithstanding.

Monitoring criminal activities in the state, for that matter, has come with its own share of pitfalls for the men in uniform.

Besides the expertise shown by the criminals in evading arrest by the police, their ingenuity at carrying out some of the more sophisticated crimes has cast the force in the mould of perpetual losers who are outsmarted at every turn by the goons.

Despite a track record which maintains the crime detection rate in the state at an exceptional high, the Goa Police seem to flounder every time they are



confronted by criminals who are seemingly adept at employing the latest of techniques while commissioning crimes.

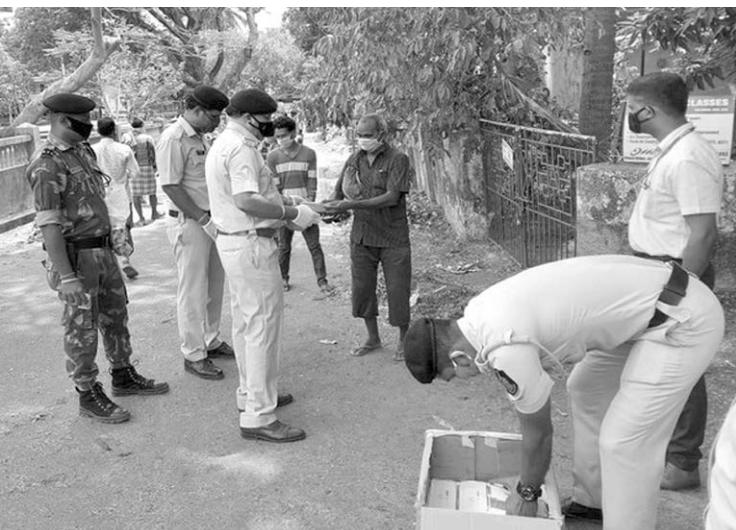
But the Chief Minister's claims on the crime scenario in Goa is just a generalization on the state of affairs prevalent and without actually 'familiarizing' oneself with the nuances of crime that has the state in

its throes, it would be difficult to understand the state's predicament vis-à-vis the ever-escalating crime rate.

The unchallenged presence of foreign cartels operating from Goan shores is a truth the local police have to come to terms with. Besides the 'professional' approach to their clandestine activities, the syndicates are known to have infiltrated police ranks thus compromising preventive actions being planned against them.

As a criminal business 'enterprise' which is said to thrive on the corruption existing within the system, it becomes difficult to tackle organized crime with the meagre resources available with the state police. Criminality within the system is indeed a serious problem. The underworld-politician-police nexus which is clearly visible, and 'visibly ignored', could well be attributed to the helplessness of the law enforcement agencies when confronted by typical situations.

Maintaining very low profiles, foreign cartels operating in Goa have made headlines only when some drug-related crime or death has been reported. But investigations into such matters usually hit a roadblock and are shelved for want of concrete evidence



With a setting that reminds one of the dismal situation in Punjab where disillusionment with life has driven many youngsters to drug addiction and indulging in petty crimes to sustain the dependence, will Goa too witness a similar scenario in the near future?

With the criminals always managing to stay a step ahead of the police, this argument gains more credence. Moreover, the detection of crime largely depends on an efficient network of informants developed by individual police officers.

Nevertheless, personal egos and professional rivalry have hampered the smooth functioning of police departments across the country and at times senior officers have been at loggerheads with their political bosses over a number of issues.

Classic examples of criminals evading the long arm of justice and cocking a snook at the incompetent ways of the cops are legion.

Moreover, with splinter gangs operating along the fringes of the syndicates, local criminals and gangs find an inevitable place in their larger designs by default. It is rumoured that Goa is a principal hub of international drug trade, apart from being a known centre of consumption. So, it is obvious that the 'established' hubs will have local players being drawn into the 'business' as 'carriers' and 'pushers'.

Maintaining very low profiles, foreign cartels operating in Goa have made headlines only when some drug-related crime or death has been reported. But investigations into such matters usually hit a roadblock and are shelved for want of concrete evidence.

Petty crimes and thefts are just not up their alley! Yet, gang wars and murders have become the order of the day in Goa.

While the CM's "External Elements" implication is rather too vague a definition, it is understood that he is referring to those who come from outside the state and indulge in criminal activities here.

Goa is a highly favoured global tourist destination and while welcoming visitors who are equally in awe of the splendour and serenity of the place, it has also

inadvertently thrown the doors open to those with a criminal bent of mind. The ease of moving across the country has also had a detrimental effect on the peaceful ambience of the region.

Feliciting criminals to give shape to their reprehensible plans and moving out of the state in 'the next train available', a spate of criminal activities has been sending shockwaves across the state for quite some time now. Ignorant about the antecedents of those suspected to be involved in the crime, it is usually the modus operandi that has helped police crack seemingly impossible crimes.

Amidst the tumult over these rampant cases, the law enforcement agencies have also had to contend with a case now-and-then attracting a lot of attention and involving influential personalities.

Barring a few stray incidents where they have been conspicuous by their complicity in some sensational crime, the locals by and large have preferred to stay on the right side of the law.

This then brings us to the most relevant question in this context! Is Goa falling prey to the fast-paced development it has been experiencing the last few years! If the mega-projects which have invited unprecedented presence of a large contingent of men and machines at various sites in the state are not scenes of alarm in themselves, the ever-increasing population of migrant labourers employed in the industrial estates in the state have not been anything less shocking.

However, with a few gruesome murders reported in the state in the recent past bearing the distinct stamp of 'local' involvement, many are of the opinion that these disturbing instances have explicitly bridged the 'outsider-insider classification'.

While citing reasons to justify the rising trend in crimes in the state today, very few will sit back and think of the reasons which lead to lawlessness in the society. A price-hike of essential commodities which has never shown a logical pattern to it and unemployment among the youth are some of the sure recipes for disaster.

With a setting that reminds one of the dismal situation in Punjab where disillusionment with life has driven many youngsters to drug addiction and indulging in petty crimes to sustain the dependence, will Goa too witness a similar scenario in the near future? ©

Fr. Alfred Roche OFM CAP **Epitome of Humility**

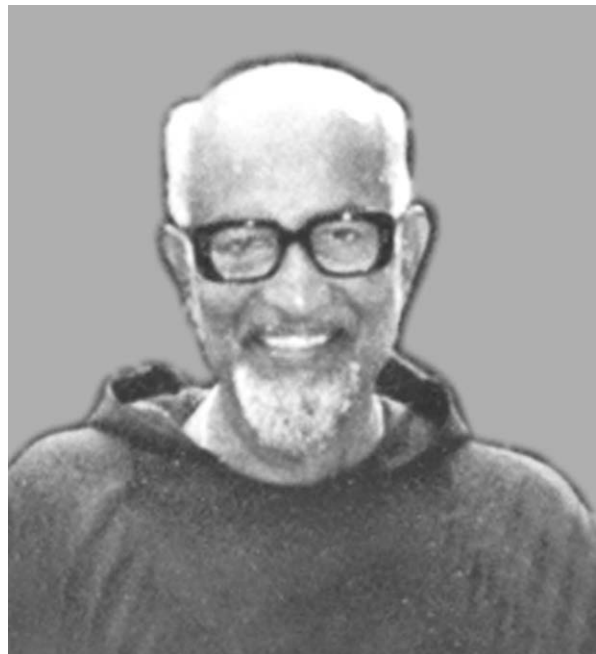
BY JAMES SEQUEIRA

Humility is the foundation of all virtues. If it is not there, pride overtakes us and down we fall. St. Augustine said: “The essential thing in the religion and discipline of Jesus Christ is first, Humility, second, Humility and third, Humility.” We have to have Humility before God, before nature and before one another. Humility is the virtue that removes all obstacles to faith. It removes one’s pride and makes a man/woman subject to and also a fit recipient of grace as St. James rightly says: “God resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble.” (James 4:6).

The Servant of God, Fr. Alfred Roche, understood from the beginning of his childhood the value of humility. He was talented, he was learned; but never showed up. He was humble enough to freely mingle with all people: rich or poor, specially the down trodden. He entered and sat in their dilapidated small houses or huts without considering himself being superior to them. He shared their joys and sorrows, learned from their simple way of life. He appreciated the goodness in them and their contentment even in deprivation. He acknowledged his limitations and shortcomings. In humility, he knelt down before the tabernacle and in all humility asked for this grace in prayer.

St. Paul exhorted in his letter to the Philippians: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” (2:3-4). Likewise, Fr. Alfred appreciated the strength of others, gave credit where it was due, and highlighted the success of others. He was ready to listen, learn and lead. He shared the joys and sorrows of the people. He appreciated whatever was given to him, even a glass of water in all humility and gratitude. He understood that the Saints were ordinary people sanctified by the grace of the Risen Lord all-through their spiritual journey.

The Servant of God, Fr. Alfred, used the five God-given gifts for the benefit of others with all humility. First, he used his face to smile at others.



This had amazing effect on others. Second, he used his eyes to look at others with a gaze full of love and goodness. Others felt happy to see these kindly and loving eyes. Third, with his mouth and tongue, he spoke well of others. Thus, he built up their personality. It spread joy. Fourth, he used his heart full of love to wish happiness for others, and touched their lives. Lastly, with his God-centered personality, he did much good to the weak: the sick, elderly, and needy especially with his kind and sympathetic words and guidance in their spiritual, moral and material needs. He was able to do all this precisely because of his closeness to the Lord, the Vine, whose branch he was (Jn 15:1-11).

In conclusion, I wish and pray that the humble Servant of God is bestowed with the honour of the altar for the greater glory of God and for the spreading of the Gospel. I also wish that people pray through him in their necessities, make pilgrimages to his grave, come forward to give testimony of miraculous favors received, and pray that he may be a Saint at the earliest. ©