

# Indian Currents

## Christian Response to Allegations **Divinity in Action**



## **INIMITABLE SERVICE**

Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS Supremo, while accusing missionaries unwittingly accepts great services rendered by Christians in the country. Those who raise allegations of conversions must pay visit to centres of love where destitutes are well taken care of.

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## INIMITABLE SERVICE



“The truth, it has the habit of revealing itself,” thus goes a memorable quote. Yes, one such truth has slipped through the lips of RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat. Speaking at an event in Madhya Pradesh he said, “We don’t see our own people. We don’t go to them and talk to them. But missionaries....come and live there, eat their food, speak their language....” Yes, therein lies the truth. Christian missionaries, inspired by the values taught by their Lord and Master, do things inconceivable by those whom Bhagwat refers to as ‘we’.

People do convert to Christianity when they are convinced of the values practiced by Christians. Those values are reassuring for them, especially Dalits, Tribals and the marginalised. On one side, they feel the suffocation of caste-ridden society; on the other side, they get to see a religion willing to accept them as they are, without the shackles of caste or colour. As Bhagwat rightly pointed out, the missionaries go to them, talk to them, preach the good news and take them into their fold. They see the caste barriers falling apart, though there are exceptions.

The RSS chief made yet another confession. He said missionaries run various institutions, schools and hospitals, but the service rendered by Hindu spiritual gurus is more than done by the former. Though he wanted to highlight the point that the services done by Hindu seers are not known to the world, yet he unwittingly accepted the services and work done by Christians. His remarks are an acceptance of the good works done by missionaries and their impact among people.

Though the Hindutva proponents spread canards and impute *mala fide* intentions to the social works and charity services by various Christian denominations, the unstated fact is that they are aware of the impact of the humanitarian works by various Churches. The services rendered by Christians touch the lives of Dalits, Adivasis and the neglected. It is not surprising that some of them turn to Christianity as they see a new light in their life. It is irreligious to term it as luring people to convert to Christianity. Apart from their widely known works in education and healthcare, they run institutions and homes for the mentally and physically challenged; for those who are continued to be ostracised by society, like leprosy patients; for the destitute; for the discarded new-borns; and many more.

An incident from the life of Mother Teresa would put the issue in the right perspective. Once someone complained to the Calcutta Police Commissioner that the Mother was indulging in proselytisation and she should be thrown out. The Commissioner decided to investigate it and went to the convent. He saw the Mother was caring for a poor sick man. Worms were crawling out of his wounds. The smell was unbearable, but she was patiently applying medicine to the man’s wounds. The Commissioner went inside to do further investigation. Later, as he was leaving the hospice, he met many people who were hostile to the Mother. To the pressing queries of the people, the Commissioner replied: ‘I have just one condition before I throw her out. This woman is taking care of sick people; if you can get your mother and sisters to take over her work, then I will throw her out.’

“Any good work will be challenged, but if the work is genuinely good it will survive such criticism and carry on to be God’s true work.”

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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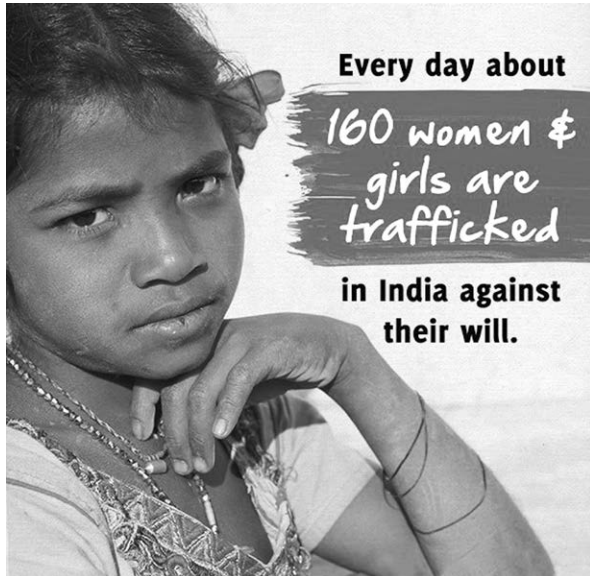
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# POWER QUOTES



It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome.

**William James**

• • •



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

**Albert Einstein**

• • •



Nothing is impossible. The word itself says 'I'm possible!'

**Audrey Hepburn**

• • •



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

**C.S. Lewis**

• • •



Try to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud.

**Maya Angelou**

• • •



Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment, until it becomes a memory.

**Dr. Seuss**

• • •



The most wasted of days is one without laughter.

**E. E. Cummings**

• • •



You must do the things you think you cannot do.

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

• • •



It is never too late to be what you might have been.

**George Eliot**

• • •



Some people look for a beautiful place. Others make a place beautiful.

**Hazrat Inayat Khan**

• • •

# Divinity in Action

## Bogey of Conversion

BY A.J. PHILIP

**W**e decided to go to Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh to visit the Little Servants of Divine Providence centre at Dodrajpur, Khajuva P.O. in Nagina taluk for three reasons. One was to find out how the children, whom we met 11 years ago, were doing now. The second was to know more about the police “raid” on the Providence Home to find out how many of the children had been converted to Christianity.

The third was to celebrate my wife’s 70th birthday with the children and the sisters taking care of them. I had heard claims that under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the roads in Uttar Pradesh had become as smooth as Hema Malini’s cheeks.

To be fair to the BJP, it was the then Bihar Chief Minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav, who had promised that the roads in Bihar would become as smooth as her cheeks. She was India’s “Dream Girl” at that time and had not joined the “party with a difference”.

Nonetheless, I have seen Adityanath claiming that there were roads in Uttar Pradesh on which aircraft could land and take off. Incidentally, his predecessor



Akhilesh Yadav had also built a road at a much lesser cost which was as good as the runway of an international airport. Alas, the road to Bijnor was in a dilapidated condition. Fortunately, our car was new and we had a driver, who took extra care of the occupants.

True, most of the roads were under construction, either in full or in patches and it took more than seven hours to reach the place. We thought we would have lunch on the way but we did not find any restaurant worth the name to have food. And by the time we reached Dodrajpur, the sisters had already had their food which consisted of rice and butter milk curry with pickles. Unluckily for us, there was not even a morsel of rice left in the vessels.

The building, situated in a walled compound with an imposing gate, an impressive driveway and a garden that had plenty of flower-bearing plants, looked familiar. No change has been made to the building and that is why we really felt at home. I remembered the story of how LSDP was able to build the home for the destitute and the abandoned, about 40 km from the Bijnor district headquarters.

No, the money had not come from the Vatican or from the US or from Europe, as many seem to believe. A Catholic priest in Kerala was from a rich family. When his father’s property was divided among his children, he also got a share. It was a prime property. The priest had no use for the land, as he had taken a vow of poverty and chastity.

He had heard about the need of Mother Dr Mary Litty, who set up the congregation called LSDP, for a substantial sum of money to set up the Bijnore Centre. He sold the property and handed over the proceeds of the sale to the Congregation to build





the Home. That is how the sisters of LSDP could construct the two-storied building which has several wards, rooms, prayer halls and recreation facilities on two floors.

When we pressed the bell, it took a while for Sister Helen, who was in charge of the centre, to open the door and allow us to enter. She led us to a corner from where I could get a good view of the whole building. I could see girls and women looking at us from a distance. When the bell rang, they knew someone had come.

I asked Sr Helen about a boy whom I met 11 years ago. He could not get up from the bed, as his head was growing bigger and bigger. It was already as big as a basketball when I met him. Although she is new to the centre, she knew about him. When she told me that he was no more, I was not shocked. I knew that he would not live long.

Sr Helen had come from Kunnathanam, near Mallapally, in Kerala where the LSDP is headquartered. Suddenly, I remembered a young, smart boy there, who did not have both legs and hands. He spoke with confidence and answered all my questions. He did the same thing to a foreigner who visited Kunnathanam.

The foreigner was so impressed that she ordered for him an electric-engine scooter on which he enjoyed moving about. She knew whom I was inquiring about. "He is there. He has become a young adult. He could not be kept along with girls. So, he has been shifted to another facility where he is doing well as a student."

I told Sr Helen that I was lucky enough to shake hands with three Catholic saints. I told her that they

were Saint Teresa of Kolkata, Saint John Paul II and Mother Litty, the founder of her congregation. "She has not been declared a saint," said the sister.

I told her about my visit to Kunnathanam one afternoon when I met Mother Litty and interviewed her. I was simply amazed by the kind of work that she, a medical doctor, had done and I am sure that if there is anyone worthy of being declared a saint it was she.

Although Sr Helen was the superior, she had no airs about her. I asked her about her experience when a group of people, including the local Station House Officer, barged into the Centre one afternoon. They were there as they had received a complaint that the sisters were busy converting the children.

"It was soon after I arrived here. I was new to the place. I did not know the names of all the residents. There were in all 63 persons whom the seven LSDP sisters were taking care of. The police officer wanted to see the register and meet each of them," she said.

She took them to each person. The inspecting team wanted to ask each of the residents her present name, and her original name when she reached the centre. Initially, they wanted to do the job themselves. They would go to each child and ask her previous name and present name.

Most of them could not tell their names as they were either mentally challenged or were hearing or speaking impaired. Finally, the police officer had to seek the help of the sisters to know their names. He realised that whatever name was mentioned in the register remained the name of the child.

None of the children was converted. In fact, conversion was meaningless for the children, many of whom were bed-ridden. They did not know





anything other than the need to have food and water. They defecated in the bed and all their needs were taken care of by the sisters.

The police officer would have cursed himself for the task he was given of verifying whether the children were converted. I wish the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, who said the other day in Madhya Pradesh that the missionaries were employing different strategies to convert people, had visited this place and seen the kind of work that the sisters have been doing.

## Hindu saints do more service than missionaries: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat

**R**ashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has said Hindu saints do more service than missionaries. Stressing on the importance of education, Bhagwat also said ills plaguing the Indian society must be eradicated. "We have to eradicate ills in the society and bring prosperity," he said.

Bhagwat was in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur city to participate in various programmes, including unveiling of a statue of Jagadguru Shyam Devacharya Ji Maharaj at Narsinh Temple. He also spoke at a lecture series at Manas Bhawan in the city. 'Nowadays missionaries are dominant, but our saints do more service than them. I am not saying this as a matter of pride, but that is the truth,' he said at the lecture series while quoting a survey. The RSS chief said India is going to become a 'Vishwa Guru' (teacher or knowledge-giver), but it should attain the position with harmony. Bhagwat maintained educating the Hindu society will be good for the entire world.

When I visited the centre in 2012 I asked them why they were doing the work. What they told me was that they saw Jesus suffering on the cross when they saw a child struggling to get up from the bed or unable to turn her head. "I will not be able to do this job for money. I can do it only for Jesus".

The sister took us to the wards. The first ward she took us to had only two residents. One is a boy (see picture). Om Ashok is eight years old. He does not talk to anyone other than the sister who takes care of him. If she is accompanied by another person, he won't even speak to her. He wants privacy to speak!

He has an ulcer on his back which despite all the medication has not been healing. He has to sleep on his stomach. There is only one more boy at the home. He is Harish. He is also bed-ridden. Ashok has a roommate Tashi who had multiple blocks in her brain. She also needs constant care. One of the seven sisters looks after the two on a full-time basis.

The sisters did not take us to the first floor of the building because there were some mentally challenged children. Some of them have an aversion for clothes and won't wear them. That is why we were not taken there. There are also some children who are violent by nature. They have a liking for things that are sanguinary. That is why we were not taken there.

Come to think of it, they are the kind of children whom the sisters had allegedly converted. It is easy to make allegations and tarnish the image of the great work the sisters have been doing. All the children there are orphans and they have no other place to go to. I wish the RSS had run such a facility and looked after the children in the same manner the sisters did.





## Missionaries take advantage when people lose faith in society: RSS Chief Bhagwat on religious conversions

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has accused missionaries of taking advantage of people who feel isolated from society, in reference to religious conversions. Speaking at an event in Madhya Pradesh's Burhanpur district, he called for efforts to strengthen the roots of 'sanatan dharma' and remove deviations & distortions of Indian traditions & faith.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has said missionaries take advantage of the situations wherein people feel the society is not with them, in an apparent reference to religious conversions. He was addressing an event on Sunday in Madhya Pradesh's Burhanpur district, where he dedicated to the people the samadhi of Govindnath Maharaj. "We don't see our own people. We don't go to them and ask them. But some missionary from thousands of miles away comes and lives there, eats their food, speaks their language and then converts them," Bhagwat said.

Over the course of 100 years, people came to India to change everything, he said. They have been working here for centuries, but failed to gain anything as our roots remained strong thanks to the efforts of our ancestors, Bhagwat said. "Efforts are made to uproot them. So, the society should understand that deceit. We have to strengthen the faith," he said. Deceptive people raise some



questions about religion to waver the faith, he said, adding, "Our society never faced such people earlier, so people get sceptical...We have to remove this weakness." "Even after this, our society doesn't waver. But people change when they lose faith and feel that the society is not with them," Bhagwat said.

The RSS chief said an entire village in Madhya Pradesh became "sanatani" 150 years after locals got converted to Christianity as they got help from Kalyan Ashram (an RSS-backed voluntary organisation). "We don't need to go abroad to spread our faith as 'sanatan dharma' doesn't believe in such practices. We need to remove the deviation and distortion of the Bharatiya traditions and faith here (in India) and strengthen the roots of our 'dharma'," he said.

It is not easy to run the institution. The licence has to be renewed periodically. The poor sisters have to visit government offices multiple times to get the paperwork done. The government does not provide any services to the children there but it creates roadblock after roadblock for them.

If the facility is closed, there will be no one to look after the children. As many of them have become adults, this creates its own problems. I remembered a child whom I lifted up. No, there was no way I could identify the child. They were all there except those who had been called to eternal rest.

Many of the children born with deformities of the kind they have do not live long. They are also susceptible to seasonal diseases. While we were there, most children had a cold. "When one catches a cold, others also catch it. That is what I have noticed," said a sister.

Medical treatment is one major problem that the Centre faces. Most of the money they get is spent on providing medical care to the children. Luxury is something alien to the sisters of LSDP. They need

about Rs 1 lakh per month to meet the basic needs of the centre. They depend on the goodwill of the people.

Last time when I wrote a column in the *Indian Currents*, a senior government officer started paying a monthly amount from her salary. It is now 11 years since she started paying. There are some regular contributors like her.

They need support in terms of money or provisions like rice, sugar, wheat flour, pulses, oil, tea, sanitary napkins, bedsheets, diapers for children, pillow covers, etc. I request all those who can afford to spare some money for these hapless children to send it at the following address:

**Name:** Little Servants of Divine Providence Charitable Society  
**A/c No:** 716110110003206  
**IFSC Code:** BKID0007161  
**Bank of India, Nagina Branch**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Celebrating Murder

The coldblooded murder of Atiq and Ashraf while they were being taken in a police cordon and its justification by those in power and a section of people expose the depth of communal rot in the society

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

People generally do not speak ill of a person after his death, however bad he/she was during life-time. But celebrating the coldblooded murder of individuals by a section of people shows that something horrible is happening to our society. In the words of social activist and academician Apoorvanand, “It is a symptom of a deep disease that has taken root within that section of society. A disease of bloodlust. Is the rest of Indian society worried about it? Are the sick even aware of their sickness?”

When the TV channels flashed the gruesome murder of gangster-politician Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf in a police cordon in Prayagraj on the night of April 15, some people celebrated it. It was reported in the media that the members of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s youth wing celebrated it by bursting crackers. My neighbour with whom I go for morning walk appreciated the way the murder was systematically planned and meticulously executed. “It is good that he is killed”, he said with a lot of satisfaction. He could be representing the views of many who are brainwashed by the Hindutva ideology. The so-called educated people swallow what is being dished out by the *godhi* media without any critical thinking.



The response of two ministers of Yogi Adityanath Cabinet to the horrible murder raises suspicion. One of them has called it the result of “karma”! Another minister termed it divine justice. The Chief Minister has ordered a judicial enquiry by a three-member team. Will an enquiry committee ordered by the Chief Minister bring out the truth and bring the real culprits to book? Since 2017, as many as 183 encounter killings or extrajudicial deaths have taken place in UP, and the list includes the son of Atiq Ahmed and his associate who were gunned down in Jhansi two days before the killing of Atiq and his brother. A few days ago, the UP Chief Minister made a statement in the Assembly that he would bring the mafia to the ground. Against this backdrop, the gruesome killing of Atiq and Ashraf needs a thorough and impartial investigation monitored by the Supreme Court.

The cold-blooded murder of the two from a point-blank range, in the presence of armed policemen, leaves many questions unanswered. First of all, there are two different versions regarding the reasons for medical check-up. According to one version, the two brothers were taken to hospital

**The cold-blooded murder of the two from a point-blank range, in the presence of armed policemen, leaves many questions unanswered**



for medical check-up as per the legal requirement. An arrested person in police custody is to be taken for medical check-up before being produced in the court. But in this case, the two brothers were taken for medical check-up at an odd time, 10 pm on April 15. It is quite unusual to take the accused persons for medical check-up at night. Atiq and Ashraf were on a four-day police remand in the Umesh Pal murder case.

According to another version given by the police, Atiq and Ashraf complained of uneasiness and a team of policemen, headed by SHO Maurya, took them to Moti Lal Nehru Zonal Hospital for medical check-up. A question arises how both brothers complained of uneasiness at the same time. The story appears to be unbelievable.

**The killers fired as many as 20 rounds, but not a single bullet was fired by the policemen. Atiq and Ashraf fell to the ground. The visuals show the shooters closing in raining bullets on them. Still, not a shot was fired by the cops**

As reported in the media, there was enough space before the hospital for parking the police vehicle in which the accused were taken. But instead of taking them till the hospital entrance in an ambulance, they were paraded to the hospital on foot. It was a serious lapse on the part of the Police to make high-profile criminals walk, exposing them to high risk. What was the need for allowing the journalists to take bites from the accused? The assailants, because of the police's lapse, were able to disguise themselves as journalists and could shoot at the duo from a close range.

Another security lapse from the part of the Police was their failure to check and verify the ID of the



Arun Maurya  
S/o Deepak Kumar

Sunny Purane  
S/o Late Jagat Singh

Lavlesh Tiwari  
S/o Yash Kumar Tiwari

journalists while allowing them to interact with the accused. The three assailants had false IDs of journalists and a camera.

Yet another security lapse pointed out by many is that the police force of 20 was quite inadequate, taking into account the serious threats Atiq Ahmad had faced. Secondly, the killers fired as many as 20 rounds, but not a single bullet was fired by the policemen. Atiq and Ashraf fell to the ground. The visuals show the shooters closing in raining bullets on them. Still, not a shot was fired by the cops.

It is to be remembered that Atiq Ahmed himself had pleaded in the Supreme Court for security, apprehending his own murder. The SC refused to hear him. It said that he was under the protection of the state. The fear of Atiq turned out to be true on 15th April night. The state miserably failed to protect him.

The video of the murder circulated on social media shows that the murderers -- identified as Arun Maurya, Lovelesh Tiwari and Sunny Singh -- were shouting the slogan, "Jai Shri Ram". The three assailants, after completing their task without any resistance from the police force present on the spot, surrendered to the police.

Invoking Lord Ram's name has become a shield for criminals these days, especially if the victim of the murder is a Muslim. The violence committed against Muslims is usually condoned if the perpetrators of the crime shout the slogan "Jai Shri Ram". Were the killers, by identifying themselves with this slogan, communicating the message that they committed the twin murder on behalf of those who believe in this slogan, asked Apoorvanand in his article in *The Wire*?

Some political observers are questioning the timing of the murders. According to them, the

murder was organized to divert the attention of the explosive expose by Satya Pal Malik, the former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, on the negligence and security lapses regarding Pulwama terror attack. In an interview with Karan Tapper for *The Wire*, Malik said that the Home Ministry refused to give planes to transport jawans, forcing them to go by road. When he brought this issue to the attention of the Prime Minister, he was told both by the PM and the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval to keep quiet.

What has happened in the murder of Atiq and Ashraf is killing



**There is no doubt those who commit crimes are to be given punishment as per the law of the land. But no government has the right to eliminate anyone accused of crime**

the rule of law. The rule of law states clearly that it is not the task of the government to judge and punish a person; it is the task of the judiciary. The role of the government is to prosecute a person who has committed a crime by following the due process of law and to bring him/her before the court.

The encounter deaths or extra judicial killings taking place in UP are a blatant violation of the rule of law. The UP government has the responsibility to arrest a gangster like Atiq Ahmad and present him before the court, but it has no right to eliminate him. "Eliminating crime does not mean killing criminals. The court is there to provide justice," Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejaswi Yadav said, reacting to the gruesome incident. One of the terrorists, Ajmal Amir Kasab, who was caught in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, was punished only after the due process of law that took about four years.

Rule of law says that no one has the right to take other's life without recourse to due process of law.

Unfortunately, in India, law is applied differently to different groups of people. Criminals, gangsters and even persons who are falsely accused of crimes, belonging to a particular community, are eliminated without following the due process of law.

Equally worrying is the change in the mindset of a large section of Indian society. Hate speeches against Muslims and Christians and taking revenge against them for the presumed crimes committed by their forefathers centuries ago are not only justified but also celebrated.

The two communities, particularly Muslims, have become the object of hatred by a large section of Indian society brainwashed by the Hindutva forces. Any violence on them is justified and celebrated and the masterminds of the violence are glorified. Celebration of the ghastly murder of Atiq and Ashraf is the dangerous sign of fascism.

There is no question of justifying the crimes committed by Atiq Ahmad and his family members. According to the UP police, about 100 FIRs are registered against him. There is no doubt those who commit crimes are to be given punishment as per the law of the land. But no government has the right to eliminate anyone accused of crime. If the government becomes the prosecutor and the judge, surely it is a safe road to fascism. ©

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# ***Andh Bhakts Abound***

There seems to be only three national parties now - the BJP, the Congress and the AAP. All three apparently suffer interminably from the 'blind follower' syndrome

BY **CHHOTEBHAI**

**F**or the benefit of those not familiar with Hindi let me clarify that "Andh Bhakt" (AB) means a person who is a blind follower of his/her idol.

Election season is upon us again; for the State Assembly in Karnataka where political analysts claim that the Congress has a possible edge because of the corruption charges and dissent in the ruling BJP. The latter seems to be imploding with desertions. We also have municipal elections in U.P., the country's most populous State. It is said that the gateway to Delhi is via Lucknow, and the gateway to the south is via Bangalore.

Hence these are not ordinary elections and merit serious attention. There seems to be only three national parties now, the BJP, the Congress and the AAP. All three seem to suffer interminably from the AB syndrome.

The BJP has been ruling at the Centre for nine years now. I have no intention to do a detailed analysis of its functioning as there are far more competent persons than me to do so. I shall just touch on a few points. Sometimes at the micro level as they have touched me, or some at the macro level that impact all of us.

I begin with a statement in the Hindustan Times (15th April) by Purshottam Rupala, Union Minister for Animal Husbandry and Dairying. He said, contrary

**One can safely say that over time dairy owners will stop rearing cows and switch over to buffaloes that fetch a remunerative price from abattoirs after they have gone dry. Short-sighted policies for short term electoral gains will backfire in the long run**



## **THE ANDH BHAKT**

to media reports, the country will not be importing dairy products. The previous day's paper claimed that from 2022, though milk production was up 3.1%, milk powder was down by 8.2% and butter by 10.8%. The reports claimed that this was because of loss of 300,000 cattle in 2022 from lumpy skin disease.

On the other hand, there is a report in *India Today* dated 17th February from Gujarat, a state that accounts for 7.75% of the country's milk production. It now has an excess of non-productive bovines and has decided to immediately castrate 50,000 bulls as stray cattle have surged by 17.5%, while milch cattle have gone down by 3.5% since 2012. Gujarat is synonymous with Amul and the White Revolution ushered in by Padmavibhushan Dr Verghese Kurien. India then prided itself as the world's largest milk producer. Today we are talking of importing milk!

Why blame lumpy skins? Why not blame the lumpen elements, the cow vigilantes who threaten and kill livestock owners? One can safely say that over time dairy owners will stop rearing cows and switch over to buffaloes that fetch a remunerative price from abattoirs after they have gone dry.



Short-sighted policies for short term electoral gains will backfire in the long run. As Prophet Hosea says, “Those who sow the wind shall reap a whirlwind” (Hos 8:7). Do the ABs see this?

Let me give another example. The Government talks of attracting foreign investment, to make in India that is *atmanirbhar* (self-reliant). But the Minister for External Affairs, Dr S Jaishankar, recently made a statement in Rajya Sabha that the number of Indians surrendering their citizenship went up from 163,370 in 2021 to 225,620 in 2022, a 38% jump. Is this not a mockery of the government’s claims and propaganda?

Another little experience. I will be going on a family vacation next week so I sent my man to the bank to withdraw Rs 25,000 in Rs 2000 currency notes. The cashier reluctantly gave 12 notes as a personal favour saying that though the bank receives Rs 2 crore in cash everyday, it gets just about 200 notes in the Rs 2000 denomination! So where has all the high value currency gone? Remember how we were told that demonetisation would be the death knell of black money. Now that it is election season, the next time my man goes to the bank he may not get any high value currency notes. A note of caution to the ABs.

Also remember how somebody said “Na khaoonga na khane doonga” (I won’t take bribes and won’t allow others to do so, either). That’s the joke of the season. Ask anybody about the ease of doing business or interacting with government agencies. The going rates have shot through the roof.

About a month ago a young man, known to me, was arrested for alleged “forcible conversion” to Christianity. His mother informed me that he finally got bail after the family coughed up Rs 70,000. Another poor young man, who fills air at the petrol pump, told me that he too had been arrested for becoming a Christian, but got off “cheaply” by paying a bribe of Rs 5000 to the cops. “Na khaoonga na khane doonga”; tell that to the victims of corruption and extortion.

The breaking news is the gunning down of mafia don Atiq and his brother Ashraf, while in police custody in Prayagraj. The jury is still not out, if this was stage-managed for religious polarisation of votes for electoral gain. Remember Pulwama and Balakot just before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and the resultant wave of righteous indignation and nationalism? Very recently the then J&K Governor, Satpal Malik, has raised serious questions on the entire episode, including the role of former master spy Ajit Doval, now National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister.

The ABs are not limited to the BJP. The Congress too has its fair share, because it is enamoured of “fair complexions”. After the Congress debacle in the 2014 elections under the leadership of Raga I had written an article “Why Rahul Should Quit”. He did; the office, not his officiousness. He continued to control the levers of power in the party, the pivot around which everything rotates.

When I tell some of my AB Congress friends that Raga should leave not just the party, but even the country for a two-year break, they are aghast. They insist that the Gandhis are the glue that keeps the party together. The facts are to the contrary.

Mamata Banerjee, Jagan Reddy and Conrad Sangma are powerful Chief Ministers who quit the Congress in the Gandhi era, to form their own regional parties. Ex-Congressmen like Himant Sarma, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Jiten Prasada are now important ministers in the BJP government. Gulam Nabi Azad has jumped ship and Sachin Pilot seems ready for take off. A.K. Antony, the Gandhi's trusted aide, has the consternation of seeing his son join the BJP. So, are the Gandhis the binding gum or the solvent that disintegrates the parts?

There is much talk of opposition unity before 2024. While many parties agree in principle, they are allergic to the principal contender to the throne, Raga himself. Almost all senior opposition leaders have burnt their fingers interacting with him. Yes, his Bharat Jodo Yatra was a phenomenal success, but his Oxford utterances negated it all. It was déjà vu of hugging Modi in Parliament and then winking; again a case of self-destruct. Raga today is the greatest stumbling block to opposition unity and the best guarantee that the BJP will triumph again in 2024. The ABs cannot see this.

Now to the third national party – AAP. Conceived in Anna Hazare's India Against Corruption, it had an array of illustrious leaders from various fields, other than politics. Just as the BJP claimed to be a party with a difference, the AAP was even more so. Then the cookie began to crumble. Gen V.K. Singh and

**The Minister for External Affairs, Dr S Jaishankar, recently made a statement in Rajya Sabha that the number of Indians surrendering their citizenship went up from 163,370 in 2021 to 225,620 in 2022, a 38% jump. Is this not a mockery of the government's claims and propaganda?**



Kiran Bedi joined the BJP. Others like Medha Patkar, Prashant Bushan, Yogendra Yadav, Capt Gopinath and Ashutosh parted company with Kejriwal.

He and his ministerial colleagues are now embroiled in Delhi's liquor scam. Is there any truth in the allegations, is it political vendetta, or a bit of both? Time will tell. Kejriwal has often been described as the BJP's B team, playing spoilsport for the Congress in Goa and Gujarat. At the same time one cannot grudge any political party pursuing its own ambitions, nor can one dismiss the good work that AAP has done in the education and health sectors in Delhi.

However, the problem with these three parties is their affinity to individuals rather than any ideology. Even the BJP sings a different tune when it goes to the Christian dominated North East – Mummy and Yummy as Asaduddin Owaisi describes it. Raga too, for all his emphasis on the Constitution and secularism, misses no opportunity to go temple hopping. So where does all these leave us?

As a citizen I have over the years voted for different parties like the erstwhile Janata Party, Janata Dal, CPM, Samajwadi Party, Congress and AAP. I am now on the horns of a dilemma as we approach the municipal elections in U.P. where I live. I am nobody's AB, so I am studying the ABC of the various parties and their probable candidates. It will be a delicate balancing act to choose between a party and its candidate. Come what may, I shall vote with my eyes wide open. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Surplus Funds in Private Schools

Delhi High Court says private unaided schools have the right to hike fees and have surplus income. However, it must not be for profiteering and commercialisation

BY **ADV JESSY KURIAN**

Private unaided schools maintaining surplus funds for development of schools is not commercialisation of education,” said Delhi High Court in a recent judgement.

“The accumulation of surplus funds is essential for the long-term sustainability and growth of the school which enables them to invest in better infrastructure, equipment, and resources. Private unaided schools may need to invest in building or improving infrastructure, such as construction of new classrooms, libraries, laboratories, sports facilities or technology upgrade such as new computers, tablets and software,” held the Bench of Justice Sanjeev Narula in “Mahavir



Sr. Model School & Anr v. Directorate of Education”(2023/DHC/001866).

The fact of the case is as follows: Mahavir Sr. Model School in Delhi decided to hike fees. The Directorate of Education asserted that notwithstanding the status of “private unaided school” no fee can be fixed without their prior permission. However, the Court

noted that Section 17(3) of Delhi School Education Act (DSEA) contemplates prior approval from Directorate of Education (DoE) only if the school seeks to impose fees in excess of the structure specified in statement of fees during an academic session and not otherwise. The Court also observed that the statement of fees submitted by the school to





increase its fees could have been rejected if the school was found to be indulging in “Commercialisation of education”.

The unaided private schools are permitted to collect surplus fees because they are entirely dependent on the fees collected by them. They would obviously like to earmark funds for specific purposes and planning and maintaining a surplus per se cannot be construed as commercialisation of education.

The right of unaided schools to determine fees to be charged from students cannot be faltered purely on account of presence of reasonable surplus in their books of account.

**The unaided private schools are permitted to collect surplus fees because they are entirely dependent on the fees collected by them. They would obviously like to earmark funds for specific purposes and planning and maintaining a surplus per se cannot be construed as commercialisation of education**

It can be construed as a form of commercialisation of education only when such funds are being used purely for commercial gain, rather than for improvement and development of the school.

The Court noted that commercialisation of education encompasses two elements. They are: (1) Charging of capitation fees and (2) Profiteering by the school.

On the aspect of profiteering, the audited balance sheets of private unaided schools can provide a clear and transparent picture of school's economic status and help in assessing whether the school has sufficient resources to meet its expenses and whether a fee hike is justified.

The landmark judgement of the Supreme Court

in this regard is “T.M.A Pai Foundation vs. State of Karnataka” (2002) 8 SCC 481, wherein, an eleven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court observed that the essence of private unaided institutions is the autonomy that they possess in management and administration of their affairs, and upheld the right of such institutions to set up a reasonable fee structure for betterment of amenities so that more students can take admissions.

However, Justice B.N. Kirpal struck a fine balance stating “furthermore, in setting up a reasonable fee structure, the element of profiteering is not as yet accepted in Indian conditions.

The fee structure should take into consideration the need to generate funds to be utilised for the betterment and growth of the educational institution, the betterment of education in that institution and to provide facilities necessary for the benefit of the students.”

In Unnikrishnan, J.P. and Ors.v.State of Andhra Pradesh and Ors, the Supreme Court recognised the necessity of private unaided institutions to charge fee higher than Government and State-aided ones and balanced the conflicting interests by holding that the Government can impose restrictions to check levying of capitation fees, profiteering and commercialisation of education.

However, the Delhi High Court's observation is very significant: “The primary obligation to provide education lies with the State, and it is their responsibility that every child has access to education. Participation of private unaided schools has been permitted out of necessity since the State is unable to perform its function adequately, there needs to be a collaborative effort between private unaided schools and the regulatory authorities to maintain a balance between the right to charge fees and the need for regulatory control to ensure the quality and affordability of education.”

The crux of the matter is that private unaided schools have the right to hike fees and to have surplus income. However, it must not be for profiteering and commercialisation. The surplus funds must be transparent and used for the development of schools, for the best interest of the students studying in those institutions. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ADV. JESSY KURIAN** is the President of Citizen's Rights Trust, an NGO that promotes gender justice and women empowerment.

# A New Dress Code for Lawyers?

Executive interest in lawyers' attire hints that the colonial 'band' & 'robe' will probably change and the 'legal eagle' will fly in 'desi' regalia

BY **F. I. CHOUDHURY**

**T**he Bar Council of India, the apex body of the lawyers, prescribes the dress code for the advocates and mandates that it should be sober and dignified. Importance of wearing proper dress is to bring discipline in profession and to create confidence among lawyers. Black is believed to be the color of authority and it makes a lawyer look professional and dignified. According to an article published in the Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, the monthly scientific journal published by SAGE Publications, the outward appearance and what we wear is a top factor in how we're perceived by others.

Recently the Gauhati High Court called the police personnel to escort a senior advocate out of the court premises when he had come to argue a case wearing denim jeans. The Supreme Court in the case of Satish Kumar Sharma v. Bar Council of H.P., [2001] has held that the Advocates form a class by itself while making the following observations:

"... The profession of law is called a noble profession. It does not remain noble merely by calling it as such, unless there is a continued, corresponding and expected performance of a noble profession. Its nobility has to be preserved, protected and promoted. An institution cannot survive on its name or on its past glory alone. The glory and greatness of an institution depends on its continued and meaningful performance with grace and dignity. The profession of law being noble and an honourable one, it has to continue its meaningful, useful and purposeful performance inspired by and keeping in view the high and rich traditions consistent with its grace, dignity, utility and prestige. Hence the provisions of the Act and the Rules made thereunder inter-



alia aimed to achieve the same ought to be given effect to in their true letter and spirit to maintain clean and efficient Bar in the country to serve the cause of justice which again is a noble one."

The earliest reported controversy on lawyers' dress code happened in the seventies when an advocate came to the court to argue his case wearing 'Dhoti' and 'Kurta'. Enraged by the dress, the Civil Judge, Bulandshahar prevented the lawyer from appearing in his court in dhoti. Challenging the order, the lawyer filed a petition before the Allahabad High Court. While

dismissing the petition in-limino the High Court observed (1974):

".....If the Court possessed the legal power to prevent the petitioner from appearing before it otherwise than in prescribed dress, the exercise of that power would not be vitiated merely for the reason that the same was not exercised against all or other members of the Bar practising at Bulandshahr..."

Many years later in 2015, a PIL came to be filed in Kerala High Court challenging the dress code of advocates prescribed by the Bar Council of India contending that the existing dress known as 'British mourning dress' as it came to be widely used since the mourning for Queen Mary's death in 1694, causes discomfort to the lawyers during the summer. While dismissing the plea, the Kerala High Court observed that providing a dress code for those practising in various Courts can only be termed as a reasonable restriction and cannot be termed as arbitrary or unreasonable. It further emphasized that;

"The dress worn by the Advocate clearly induces the seriousness of purpose and a sense of decorum

which are highly necessary and conducive for the dispensation of justice”.

Justice Khehar while acting as the CJI took strong objection to the lawyer appearing before him wearing a 'bandhgala' jacket with top buttons open. The Court told the lawyer that he would not be heard until he was properly dressed. Justice Indu Malhotra (retd.) soon after her elevation to the Bench in Supreme Court expressed displeasure over the improper 'professional attire' of women lawyers.

Judiciary on lawyers' dress code was largely conservative and consistent until now, when in 2021 the Allahabad High Court took cognizance of a PIL that questioned the lawyers' dress code on the ground that the 'band' is a symbol of Christianity and the dress code is unsuitable to the climatic conditions of the country. The petition contended that the Bar Council of India's rules for prescribing lawyers'

dress-code is ultra-vires to the fundamental rights guaranteed by Articles 14, 21 and 25 of the Constitution and against the provision of Advocates Act, 1961 that mandates to have regard to the climatic condition for prescribing the dress code.

Bar Council of India's response that a five-member committee will take a call on the issue is a 'gift cake' on the long standing debate whether lawyers' dress code needs re-tailoring. Union law minister's recent comment that a uniform suited to our weather condition would be better is 'icing' on the 'gift cake'. Executive interest in lawyers' attire hints that the colonial 'band' & 'robe' will probably change and the 'legal eagle' will fly in 'desi' regalia. ©

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## Catholic school seeks protection following threats

**A** Catholic school has sought police protection after a pro-Hindu group threatened to attack it over allegations of organ trade and religious conversions.

A 30-member delegation of teachers from the Nirmal Jyoti Senior Secondary School in Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh met with civil and police officials seeking protection from the student wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Their move follows threats from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad which accused the school of conducting organ trade and religious conversion.

“We sought police protection. We don't convert anyone or indulge in any illegal activity as alleged,” Sister Grace Tharayil, the school principal, told UCA News on April 19.

Allegations of organ trade began after the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights conducted a surprise raid on April 6 and seized a human fetus from the science laboratory, the nun said.

“Local media was flooded with news alleging that the school was involved in illegal activities,” recalled Sister Tharayil.

She said the fetus was more than 20 years old and used for academic purposes in the early days.

The school, started in 1987 by the sisters of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel, has some 2,100 students on its rolls.

The school staff accused the police of inaction that led to violence by ABVP activists who forced their way into the school premises on April 17.

“They threatened to come back if the school is not closed within a week after accusing the management of indulging in organ trafficking and religious conversion,” Gautam Niranjana, a sports teacher in the school, told UCA News on April 19.

The activists also held some students, their parents, and teachers as hostages until the police came and released them, Niranjana added.

The school management met with local legislator Mahesh Rai from the BJP, which rules the state, and sought his help to reign in the violent fringe groups.

Union and provincial child rights protection panels have conducted surprise raids on Christian schools, hostels and orphanages in Madhya Pradesh, accusing them of indulging in religious conversion. © (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

# Silent Slaves

As many as 90% of human trafficking in India happens domestically. Youngsters are lured from villages to cities with the promise of well-paid job, but they end up as domestic maids or in brothels

BY **M.L. SATYAN**

Last week an NGO Director in Tamil Nadu sent me a news clipping. It said that in just one-day three girls were missing in Ramanathapuram district in the State. The report mentions about the network of human traffickers, including bus drivers and conductors. They identify vulnerable girl students, make them fall in love with them and sell them to the redlight area in Mumbai.

After receiving this news report, I watched a Tamil movie named Agilan. Agilan is a crane operator, who is also a smuggler at a harbour in Chennai. He works for Paranthaman, who runs a small-time smuggling business. Being ambitious by nature, Agilan strikes a deal with an entrepreneur named Kapoor and is assigned to deport a man who holds confidential secrets of various countries. The film also shows how human trafficking takes place through ships.

On 18th April, 2023 I met a few NGO friends at Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu. All of them confirmed that human trafficking, especially of young women and



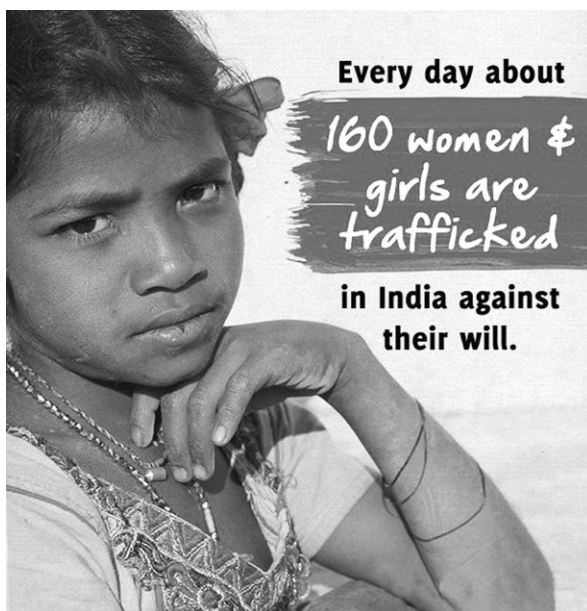
girls from rural areas, is happening silently. In most cases, the traffickers seem to be family members and relatives of the victims.

During my visit to Jharkhand last month, I learnt that many tribal girls migrate to Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru for jobs mostly through brokers or job-placement agencies. Two years ago, I met a group of

tribal girls at Good Shepherd Convent, Mumbai. All of them do domestic work. Many of them were promised better jobs in shopping malls and medical companies, but were offered only domestic work. They have their own painful stories.

What I am surprised is that a vast majority of the common people is unaware of this national and international crime. Today human trafficking has become a multi-billion-dollar business all over the world. Here are some glimpses of recent human trafficking in India:

- Drug peddlers operating in Ahmedabad have been increasingly using orphan children as drug courier, according to senior police officials (Times of India, April 13, 2023).
- A 17-year-old girl was tortured by her employers in Gurugram. Her elder sister too was brought



**Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of trafficking. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims**

## Most anti-trafficking agencies investigate cases and work with police to find the victims and bring them to their homes. To be effective, those involved in anti-trafficking activities must see things from the perspective of the victims

from her village for domestic work. They have been untraceable for the last several months. The police arrested a Delhi-based placement agency owners. (NDTV, February 12, 2023).

- A study report prepared by some IPS Officers has warned the vulnerabilities of the high-speed 5G telecom network that can provide an excellent platform for middlemen and agents for creating linkages for crimes such as drug trafficking, human and organ trafficking, money laundering and terror financing. (NDTV, January 24, 2023).
- Six minor girls from Assam have been rescued from the clutches of human traffickers in various parts of the country. As per the police the girls were rescued after receiving complaints at many police stations in Karbi Anglong district. (NDTV, January, 22, 2022).

Let us understand human trafficking. It is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of trafficking. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims.

This is the third largest organized crime after drugs and the arms trade across the globe. The 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons examines court cases showing that female victims are subject to physical or extreme violence at hands of traffickers at a rate three times higher than males, and children are subjected almost twice as often as adults.

The report also details how war and conflict offer opportunities for traffickers to exploit. It shows that



the war in Ukraine is elevating trafficking risks for the displaced population. Most victims originating from conflict zones are trafficked to countries in Africa and the Middle East. Countries in these regions convict fewer traffickers and detect fewer victims than the rest of the world.

Today, 90% of human trafficking in India happens domestically, not across borders. In many cases, traffickers lure children or young adults from rural villages to the city with the promise of well-paid work. Then, victims are transferred to people who, in a real sense, become their slave masters. Some victims work without pay as household maids. Others enter forced marriages with strangers they have never met. Some are forced into bonded labour in the mining or agricultural sectors. Others are sold into brothels.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that sexual exploitation constitutes about half of human trafficking in the South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific Region. Estimates put the number of women in prostitution in India between 2 and 3 million, many of whom are children. These sex-trafficked minors live in squalid conditions in the redlight districts of major cities, servicing multiple clients a day.

The root causes of trafficking are poverty, social or cultural practice and migration. Other causes are the porous nature of borders, corrupt government officials, the involvement of international organised criminal groups or networks and limited capacity of or commitment by immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders. People from econom-

ically disadvantaged classes, and belonging to the categories of SC, ST, OBC are more susceptible to fall victim to such malpractices.

Here are the Constitutional and Legislative Provisions regarding human trafficking:

- Article 23(1) prohibits the trafficking of persons.
- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) aims to stop immoral trafficking and prostitution in India and is divided into 25 sections and one schedule.
- Sections 366(A) of Indian Penal Code prohibits kidnapping and Section 372 of IPC prohibits selling minors into prostitution.
- Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, Child Labour (Prohibition and Abolition) Act 1986 and Juvenile Justice Act prohibit bonded and forced labour.



- Protection of Children from Sexual offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is a special law to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) was set up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals. It was established on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee to the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Taskforce (1985). NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in the year 2009. This project connects 15000+ police stations and 6000 higher offices of police in the country.

In August 2017, NCRB launched the National Digital Police Portal, which allows search for a criminal/suspect on the CCTNS database. The Bureau has also been entrusted to maintain the National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO) and share it with the States/UTs on a regular basis. NCRB has also been designated as the Central Nodal Agency to manage

technical and operational functions of the Online Cyber-Crime Reporting Portal.

The responsibility to maintain law and order as well as investigation and prosecution of crimes, including the crime of human trafficking, vests with respective State Governments, who are competent to deal with such offences under extant provisions of law. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been supplementing the efforts of State Governments by undertaking various initiatives and measures.

In 2020, MHA provided financial assistance to States and Union Territories (UTs) for strengthening the existing Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) and setting up new AHTUs, covering all districts of country with AHTUs. MHA has also been providing financial assistance to States and UTs for holding 'Judicial Colloquiums' and 'State level conferences' on periodic basis for sensitising police and judicial officers and to make available to them updated information on human trafficking. MHA has been issuing various advisories and guidelines to States/UTs and other stakeholders on preventing and combating human trafficking.

India's efforts to protect victims of trafficking vary from state to state, but remain inadequate in many places. Government authorities do not proactively identify and rescue such unfortunate individuals, hence only few victims receive financial assistance. There is no dearth of the related laws in the country. But there is a problem of inadequate understanding and unfaithful implementation of laws. Social media, used as a new medium for human trafficking, is not regulated by India.

Most anti-trafficking agencies investigate cases and work with police to find the victims and bring them to their homes. To be effective, those involved in anti-trafficking activities must see things from the perspective of the victims. Only then is it possible to understand how traffickers select their targets and craft their messaging to lure victims. High numbers of trafficking cases represent India's failure to create an enabling environment where women and girls are respected and treated with dignity. Emphasizing more focus on empowering women can result in not only reducing their vulnerability to trafficking but also in creating a better and more inclusive society. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ML SATYAN** is an NGO Consultant and a freelance Journalist.

# A Unique USM Experience

BY **SR. MONICA CARDOSO FDCC**

The Enlightened Leadership Training Programme at the Universal Solidarity Movement (USM), Indore from April 12 to 18 was a unique experience. Apart from me, there were 16 students and one teacher from Canossa Convent High School, Dhule, Maharashtra who participated in the week-long programme which was nothing less than a golden opportunity.

It all started when I met Fr. Varghese Alengaden, the founder of USM who passed away recently, in Porbandar for the Peace Convention in January 2023. I was motivated to bring a group of students from our school to USM for leadership training. Sixteen students happily volunteered to take part in the training.

Our surprise started at the very entrance to the USM where we were welcomed with joy and smiles by the members of the USM family.

The training programme was very enriching, informative, inspiring, enlightening and it gave us new insights and awareness on various issues. It was a heart-touching experience for me, even though I had attended a different training in USM earlier, especially because it was held in the absence of Fr. Alengaden.

The movies shown during the training were inspiring and motivating. They had messages and lessons for our life. They taught us how to be visionary leaders and role models; they inspired us to seek truth and die for our convictions. They motivated us to live for others. At a personal level, the movies gave more clarity on the difference between religiosity and spirituality. The movie Gandhi inspired us to be non-violent persons in our words and thoughts.

The classes gave us courage and strength to make

changes in our personal life – the way of thinking and responding to situations. The sharing by students and others helped me to learn many new things. I began to think, “what more



can I do for my students?”

From Ms. Neetu Joshi’s talks on different topics and Father Alengaden’s recorded video talks, I have picked up a few points for my life such as “indifference is the biggest sin”. As an animator, I need to train and help young people to fight against the evil forces in society. Pluralism is another

concept which gave me clarity in my thinking. I understood that it is acceptance, appreciation and promotion of differences or diversities. Another sentence that deeply touched me is “Humanity is religion”. I was very much influenced by a statement of Fr. Alengaden “Be your own role model”.

The prayer and personal reflections gave me an opportunity to formulate vision, goals and policies for myself and for the school. I learned that goals are to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. In the light of the insights and learning during the training, I make the following commitments to myself.

- To read 3 books in a month and write a book review.
- To practice the five paths for personal transformation recommended by the USM and to exhibit them on the school notice board for all to see.
- To read the newspaper daily with critical thinking.
- To do physical exercise for 30 minutes daily in the morning.
- To appreciate five teachers and five students daily.
- To teach our teachers how to write book reviews.
- To give the book Sangam to all guests who come to our school.

I specially remember Fr. Varghese who was and is the force behind USM and its programmes. May God grant him eternal bliss!

I would like to conclude with a quote by John Maxwell. “A leader is one who sees more than others, who sees further than others see, and sees before others do”. Fr. Varghese said, “Success is for those who dare to stand firm at all times”. ☺

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**SR. MONICA CARDOSO FDCC** is the principal of Canossa Convent High School, Dhule, Maharashtra



# Mitigating Heatwave

Many parts of the country are experiencing above normal heatwave conditions. Several deaths have been reported. The focus should be on measures to reduce the impact of heatwave on human bodies

BY AARTI



**W**ith a hotter than normal summer expected this year, mitigation measures are important to manage heatwaves.

On this April 16, around 13 persons in Navi Mumbai lost their lives from a heatstroke. As an immediate measure, Maharashtra Government has banned all open-air public meetings and rallies between 12 noon and 5 PM.

Looking beyond several debates that the above incident has generated, the writing on the wall indicates that a hotter than normal summer is expected in 2023. On an average 5-6 heatwaves occur over north India every year. Notably, a recent study has found that the annual average extreme weather events in the Indian subcontinent has been rising during the last few decades. In particular, the mortality rate for heatwaves has increased by 62.2 percent in the past 20 years.

Let's for a moment have a look at the official weather outlook. On 28 February this year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a Press Release on the seasonal outlook for hot weather season (March to May) 2023 and Monthly Outlook for March 2023 for the rainfall and temperature.

The main takeaways are: (i) during the upcoming hot weather season (March to May (MAM)), above normal maximum temperatures are likely over most

parts of northeast India, east and central India and some parts of northwest India; (ii) normal to below normal maximum temperatures are most likely over remaining parts of the country; (iii) during the season (MAM), above normal minimum temperatures are very likely over most parts of the country except south peninsular India where normal to below normal minimum temperatures are likely; (iv) enhanced probability of occurrence of Heatwave during March to May season is likely over many regions of Central and adjoining Northwest India. A low probability for occurrence of heatwave over Central India is likely during March 2023.

What is a heat wave? Simply put, it is a period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs during the hot weather season. An important factor attributed to heat waves, according to various studies, is that climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels.

This global phenomenon is said to be making extreme and unprecedented heat events. While Climate Scientists at the University of California at Los Angeles maintain that heat waves are probably the most underestimated type of potential disaster because they routinely kill a lot of people, there are other researchers who seem to suggest with climate change the world is seeing shifting wind patterns and weather systems in ways that makes heat waves more intense, persistent and widespread.

The Arctic region, reportedly warming three to four times faster than the globe as a whole, has been witnessing swings in the North Atlantic jet stream, which in turn leads to extreme weather events like heat waves and floods. With a strong change in ocean temperatures, warmer oceans have been causing heat domes which trap heat over large geographical areas. The extreme heat is also raising the risk of wildfires.

So, how to be prepared?

The IMD uses colour codes in weather warnings to highlight the severity of the weather phenomena



expected and at the same time forewarn the relevant authorities on the impact of the weather expected. Green alert means no action is needed. Yellow alert means “watch and stay updated” where moderate temperature will prevail and heat is tolerable for general public but moderate health concern for vulnerable people like infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases.

IMD's advisory is that one has to avoid heat exposure, wear lightweight, light coloured, loose, cotton clothes and keep the head covered by using a cloth, hat or umbrella. Orange alert means “Be prepared”. Orange alert areas will witness high temperature, increased likelihood of heat illness symptoms in people who are either exposed to sun for a prolonged period or doing heavy work. High health concern for vulnerable people like infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases.

There is a need to keep oneself hydrated. Apart from drinking sufficient water -- even if one is not thirsty -- homemade drinks like lassi, rice water, lemon water, buttermilk, etc. have been recommended. Red alerts mean “Take action” – these are warnings for heavy rainfall and its related impacts.

The IMD usually issues (alerts) heat wave warning for 5 days in advance. Following IMDs recent heat-wave alerts, all educational institutions in West Bengal have been ordered to remain closed for the next week. In Delhi, schools have been directed not to conduct afternoon assemblies due to high temperature. In Patna, all schools have been ordered to close by 10:45 AM. Schools in Tripura have been shut for a week due to the prevailing heatwave conditions. With the mercury crossing 37°C, schools in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district have been directed to be closed for three days.

Heatwaves impact human health and animals adversely. As temperatures rise, the body may not be able to shed excess heat well enough to remain healthy. Although all age groups may not suffer equally, the cause for concern is that the stress induced due to the heat waves increases respiration and mortality, reduces fertility, modifies animal behaviour, and suppresses the immune and endocrine system, thereby increasing animal susceptibility to some diseases. It can cause heat cramps -- swelling and fainting generally accompanied by fever below 39°C. Heat exhaustion can cause fatigue, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, vomiting, muscle cramps and sweating. Heat stroke can cause body



temperatures to rise above 40°C leading to seizures or coma.

Researchers use wet bulb reading, a measurement which combines air temperature and relative humidity and gauges heat stress on the human body. A wet bulb reading of 35 °C is said to be the threshold beyond which humans cannot survive.

A World Bank report published last November has warned that India could become one of the first countries in the world where this threshold would be reached.

As per a WHO advisory, when the temperature rises above 35 °C, in order to prevent heat-related illness, it would be necessary to follow simple steps like restricting going outside during the hottest time of the day and also avoiding strenuous physical activity. During heat waves, it is required to keep the body cool by wearing light, loose-fitting clothes of natural materials, besides drinking fluids like water or fruit juices to keep the body hydrated and avoiding alcohol, too much caffeine, sugar including foods that are high in protein.

The living place ought to be kept cool by opening all the windows at night/early morning when the outside temperature is lower. Apart from switching off all artificial lighting and unwanted electrical devices, during the day, the windows facing the sun ought to be kept closed. Hanging wet towels can help cool down the room air. Doors and windows of airconditioned rooms need to be kept closed. Special care should be taken for infants or adults over the age of 60 or who have chronic health conditions.

In terms of mitigating measures, in handling heatwaves, we have the success story of Ahmedabad which experienced a devastating heatwave in May 2010 when temperatures surpassed 48°C. It left around 800 people dead. Reportedly bats and birds



dropped dead from the trees. Local authorities assisted by experts developed the country's first heat action plan. Laudably enough, since its launch in 2013 an estimated 1,190 deaths have been avoided

each year. Through the National Disaster Management Authority, specific heat action plans have since been implemented across 23 states and more than 100 cities and districts. A low cost but effective component of the heat plan is the "cool roof" initiative which uses coatings/materials that reflect sunlight and absorb less heat.

Even as heat wave is one of the severe weather phenomena, during summers there are reports of electrical fires which can be directly linked to the rise in temperature. Electric appliances like fans, coolers, air-conditioners, etc., when used continuously can lead to overheating, resulting in short circuits and sparking, thereby causing fires. Vehicle fires also go up during extreme heat. Small preventive measures like regular servicing of cars and electrical devices coupled with fire audits and adhering to various advisories issued by the authorities merit consideration. ©

## Christians protest against attacks in Mumbai

After a massive protest march in the national capital New Delhi in February, thousands of Christians were joined by Hindus and Muslims on April 12 in Mumbai to protest against increasing violence against Christians and their places of worship. The protest rally of 7,000-8,000 people comprising a federation of 80 Christian NGOs under the banner of Samast Christi Samaj (All Christian Community) submitted a memorandum, listing 20 demands, to Eknath Shinde, chief minister of Maharashtra.

"There are continued waves of hate speech and targeted violence against religious leaders, desecration of places of worship, disruption of prayer services and restrictions on religious gatherings, and false accusations of forced and fraudulent religious conversions," the memorandum said.

"We want to end the escalation of violence and attacks against the peace-loving Christian community by those using the unfounded accusation of conversion as an excuse," Dolphy D'Souza, Samast Christi Samaj spokesperson, told UCA News

D'Souza, also president of the Bombay Catholic Sabha (society), said, "Our other demand is that the government should not enact the anti-conversion law in Maharashtra. It will lead to vigilantes taking unnecessary advantage and attacking Christians."

Tushar Gandhi, great grandson of India's father of

the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who attended the rally at Azad Maidan in Mumbai, said, "There was great influence by Christians on my great-grandfather."

He said the attacks on Christians must stop.

"If you are being attacked today, then tomorrow the whole of humanity could also be attacked. We will not let the tree of hate blossom. We will fight it with love," he said.

Gandhi said his great grandfather took inspiration from Jesus who sacrificed himself not only for Christians but for all humanity.

"We need to fight the poison of hate with the nectar of love," he said.

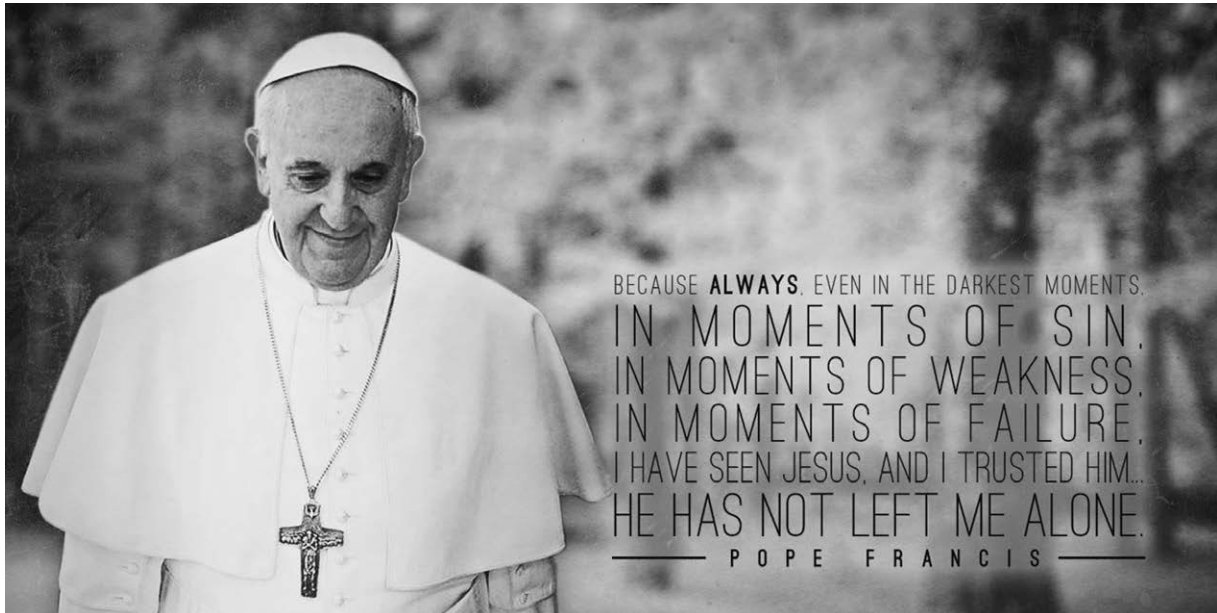
"This is a rally for peace by ending attacks against all minorities like Christians and Muslims under some pretext or other," Irfan Ali Engineer, a Muslim leader, who attended the rally, said.

"Violence and attacks on Christians should stop or else we will protest in bigger numbers next time," Joseph Dias, founder-president of the Catholic Secular Forum, said.

"[New] Delhi witnessed a massive demonstration on Feb.19 to protest against the widespread violence against churches and Christian institutions in many states in this secular country," said John Dayal, spokesperson of the All India Catholic Union. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

## Nun moves court against speech insulting pope



A Catholic nun has petitioned a court in India seeking action against a man making derogatory statements against the pope and nuns in a video clip circulating on social media.

Sister Manjula Tuscano, a criminal lawyer, on April 13 moved the Gujarat High Court through her attorney seeking to register a criminal case against the unidentified man seen making derogatory and defamatory statements in the local Gujarati language.

Tuscano decided to approach the High Court after her attempts to register a police complaint with the signatures of some 100 other nuns proved futile.

The nun alleged that the offensive speech makes sexually explicit references to the pope and nuns and calls on a crowd to not tolerate Christian priests and nuns in their midst.

The speaker, in Gujarati, says the pope is the husband of thousands of nuns the world over because, during their initiation ceremony, the nuns need to accept him so. Therefore, the pope is committing adultery, he adds.

The stage and background from where the defamatory statements are made hint at an event of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which is often accused of attacking Christians in India.

Tuscano, a member of the Missionary Dominican Sisters of the Rosary, told UCA News on April 17, that the petition was filed on April 13. But she refused to

disclose the details.

“Now the matter is pending before the High Court,” she said while adding that it may come up for hearing next week.

Earlier on March 21, Archbishop Thomas Ignatius Macwan of Gandhinagar wrote to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel to take “immediate and stringent” action against the speaker, who is yet to be identified.

Macwan’s letter said the video clip circulating on social media contains “obnoxious, shameful and hurtful statements against the pope.”

The speaker, the prelate said, has “abused His Holiness with demeaning, uncouth and crass words. He has hurt the sentiments of 1.4 billion Catholics all over the world.”

The Christian community in Gujarat is feeling extremely insecure due to the ever-growing cases of attacks, violence, physical intimidation and vitriolic hate speeches, Macwan said in his letter to the chief minister.

The prelate, however, acknowledged the support the Christian community receives from ordinary Hindu members.

The video, according to Church leaders, is believed to be from a gathering at Kadi village, district Mehsana. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

## Court forces Indian archdiocese to part with endogamy

The endogamous Knanaya Catholics in Kerala have marked the end of their centuries-old practice of not marrying outside the close-knit community when one of their parishes allowed a parishioner to marry a woman outside their archdiocese.

On April 15, a priest in the Kottayam Archdiocese allowed parishioner Justin John to have his engagement with Vijimol Shaji of Tellicherry Archdiocese without John having to lose his membership in the community. The 31-year-old John from St. Anne's Parish in the northern Kasargod district had his engagement ceremony at St. Francis Xavier's Church in Kottody village on April 17.

The Kottayam Archdiocese, established for the Knanaya Catholic community within the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, practiced strict endogamy by expelling its members if they married outside the diocesan community. The permission John received is "a major victory for all those who were discriminated," said Biju Uthup, a retired aeronautical scientist, who pioneered the struggle against his community's endogamy practice.

Uthup said he began the campaign in 1989 to end the discriminatory practice, which was aimed at maintaining the community's "purity of blood."

"My purpose was to ensure that our children and grandchildren should not become victims of such barbaric practice," Uthup told UCA News on April 17

A jubilant John told UCA News on April 18, a day

after his engagement: "I am happy that now I will not lose my membership" in the Kottayam archdiocese.

He said he'd been searching for a suitable match from within the Knanaya community for five years, but could not find one.

"Finally, I decided to seek alliance from other Catholic dioceses," he said adding it is an arranged marriage, as per Indian tradition, with consent from both families. "We are planning to solemnize the marriage mid-May and are permitted to choose any Church," John added.

Their marriage will be a turning point in the history of Knanaya Catholics.

The endogamy practice among Catholics in Kottayam Archdiocese, a diocese until 2005, is at least 17 centuries old, according to Church officials.

It was struck down by a civil court in Kerala on April 30, 2021, after a protracted legal battle by Biju Uthup and others.

The lower court ordered the archdiocese not to discriminate against its members who married from outside the archdiocese.

The court also directed the archdiocese to issue mandatory church certificates to solemnize marriages of those willing to get married from other Catholic dioceses.

The archdiocese appealed against the order before the Kerala High Court in March 2022. But the top court in the state ordered the archdiocese to comply with the lower court order during the pendency of the appeal.

Father George Karukaparambil, public relations officer, Kottayam Archdiocese, told UCA News on April 18 that "permission was given as per the direction of the court."

He, however, refused to elaborate.

People like John say ending the age-old practice will help the Church to grow.

"Throwing the endogamy practice into the dustbin will only help the archdiocese to grow and become more vibrant."

"Now, most of our parishes are on the verge of elimination as we don't have enough members," he said. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



# Strategy Training on Project Management

BY SR. EKTA FSLG



**S**ocial directors and social activists from various states gathered at Velankanni Shrine Retreat Centre for a three-day Residential National Training from April 12 to 14. There were 112 delegates (from 61 Organisations of Religious Congregations and 16 NGOs) who are working in the field. This is a continuation of the First Phase of Residential Training held in Kolkata 6 months ago.

This was organised by the Capuchin Online Ministries (COM) of Amala Annai Capuchin Province, Tamil Nadu. Besides various international training by COM in the past 2 years, this network has begun professional support to various sectors.

A team of four resource persons led the input sessions: Mr. Prabhakar, Fr. Stephen SJ, Mr. John Aruldoss and Fr. Nithiya ofm.cap. They conducted the input sessions and led the group interactions, group works, presentation and review.

The training focused on various elements connected to Project Management: Human rights-based approach in socio-economic development, Theory of Change, quality management, the scope, schedule, resources, risk, procurement, stakeholder management, etc. There were sessions on CSR fund raising strategies, opportunities, networking and coordination. The sessions on the second day focused on

Grant Development and Management; Techniques and Strategies, Logical Framework Approach (LFA), Budget and Timeline. The participants were classified into 10 groups and each worked on a proposal.

This was critically reviewed with objective analysis. They participated in the Eucharist at the Shrine Basilica and special Rosary Procession in the evening. At the end of the day, each of the ten groups presented a street theatre on their specific issue.

On the third day, the input sessions were on Monitoring and Evaluation, latest updates on 12A, 80G, FCRA and Donors' Timeline etc. One of the groups was selected to present their project for objective review.

This enabled the participants to critically understand the process, objectives, timeline, activities, use of SMART, etc. The final sessions were on fundraising and Development Foundations, both National & International.

Besides the input sessions and group works, the national training enabled the participants to interact with the undertakings of other organisations, and the strategies used to solve practical problems.

The training enabled them to have better understanding of how to proceed in project management to get the best and effective results. ©



# Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

## Creating History, Through Fiction..!

The wife came bouncing into my study, where I pretended to write an article while actually looking longingly at some online shopping clothes, "There's some government officials to see you!" she said.

"Oh no!" I said, "Have they come to arrest me?"

"They're not cops," she said, "I think they're going to give you some award!"

"Award! Me!" I said, "Awards are only given to people with political contacts!"

I wandered into my sitting room, and watched as two obviously government officials, rose and extended their hands in my direction, "We are honoured to have you on board sir!"

tryman already being on the moon, and welcoming Neil Armstrong there!"

"But that was just a work from my imagination!" I cried.

"We would like our history books to carry that story!" said the taller man, "All you have to do is to give it a date, just before the Americans landed!"

"A car with a red beacon!" sighed the wife.

"Our children also need some, fighting, some bloodshed and heroes," said the shorter man, "So let us have the freedom struggle a little bloodied, with some of our present ministers being soldiers, even officers in the liberation army! You can even have a scene of these officers driving the British out of the



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"On board!" I said, "I'm quite happy where I am!"  
"You have been chosen unanimously as the country's new historian!"

"Whoa! Whoa!" I said, "I am not a historian, I'm a story teller! I write fiction!"

"Yes sir, all of us in the government have read your stories sir, and felt you were best suited for the job of rewriting our history!" said the shorter of the two officials, as he pulled out a sheet of papers and gave it to me.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Just an agreement saying you accept the post!"

"You are very kind gentlemen, but I have to refuse!"

"You will be offered a post equivalent to a ministerial one. You can have a red beacon for your car!"

"Lovely!" exclaimed the wife. "Would I be able to take it to the mall and kitty parties?"

"Of course madam!"

"We liked your article yesterday about our coun-

tryman, singlehanded with their swords!"

"I can't do that!" I said desperately, "It is absolutely fictitious!"

"That is why we have hired you!" said both the men as one pulled out his pen and offered it to me.

"A car with a red beacon!" sighed the wife as I reluctantly took the pen and signed the agreement.

"This sir, is your first assignment!" said the tall man giving me some notes

"What is it?" I asked wearily.

"That our country won the first Olympics!" smiled the shorter man. I reluctantly took the notes, put off the online shopping site and started creating history..!"

### 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

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