

# Indian Currents

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**MOVED BY LOVE**

## **MARTYR DEVASAHAYAM**

The first Indian, declared as a martyr for shedding his blood for Christ on Indian soil and the first married lay person in India to be included in the list of saints and the first saint from the State of Tamil Nadu





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## 2022

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2. (SS-44) – June 12 – August 27
3. (SS-45) – September 11 – November 26

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## A SAINT FROM THE LAITY



It is not always that a saint is born from among the lay people in the Catholic Church. In India it had never happened in the 2000 years of her existence. Turning a new leaf, Church in India has got her first saint from among the lay persons in the form of Martyr Devasahayam. A lot about Devasahayam's life is exceptional and, probably, one of its kind. He was born into a Hindu Nair family on April 23, 1712 in Kanyakumari district which was part of the erstwhile Travancore kingdom. The fact that his father was working as a priest in a temple tells a lot more about his early days. He was inculcated with Hindu beliefs and traditions from childhood. It is nothing less than a miracle that someone born and brought up in orthodox Hindu beliefs, traditions and rituals turned to Jesus Christ and came so close to Him to be raised to the hallowed family of saints.

Devasahayam's path to sainthood was paved with thorns and spikes. He was a member of the royal service of Marthanda Varma, the then ruler of Travancore, and was in the good books of the king for his commitment to work. Meanwhile, he came in touch with De Lannoy, a Dutchman, who was the commander of the Travancore army. De Lannoy's Christian faith interested Devasahayam and their interaction led to the conversion of the latter who took the name Lazarus. His wife, Bargavi Ammal, too converted to Christianity and took the name Gnanapoo Ammaal (equivalent to Theresa in Tamil & Malayalam). Records show that the caste Hindus and their priests brought false charges against Devasahayam and he lost his job. He was accused of treason and divulging state secrets to rivals and Europeans.

It was the beginning of his long line of troubles and tribulations. He was let off in a forest where he went into deep meditations, and people from the adjacent villages began visiting him. According to the belief of the locals, the people of the area flocked to him and many of them were cured of illnesses. However, the high caste Hindus plotted to do away with Devasahayam, and he was shot dead on January 14, 1752. Later his body was recovered from the forest and his mortal remains were interred near the altar inside St. Francis Xavier's Church, Kottar, Nagercoil, which is now the diocesan Cathedral.

Herein lies the uniqueness of Saint Devasahayam. His new found faith and belief made him not just a believer in Jesus Christ, but a true follower of Him and His values. Nothing deterred him from his faith in Jesus, not even death threats. Nothing frightened him from preaching the equality of all people at a time and place where caste and religious differences were deep-rooted. His sainthood – a crown of his martyrdom – reminds us of the price Devasahayam had to pay for embracing Christianity and remaining firm in his faith. His sainthood tells us that though most of the saints belong to religious communities, the Church has to look in the direction of lay faithful who have led an inspiring life, holding faith and values close to their heart. There were many such 'saints' among the lay faithful – not officially canonized -- across the world who lived a Christo-centric life. There is still no dearth of such 'living saints' in the present-day world too.

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

**Dr. Suresh Mathew**  
Editor

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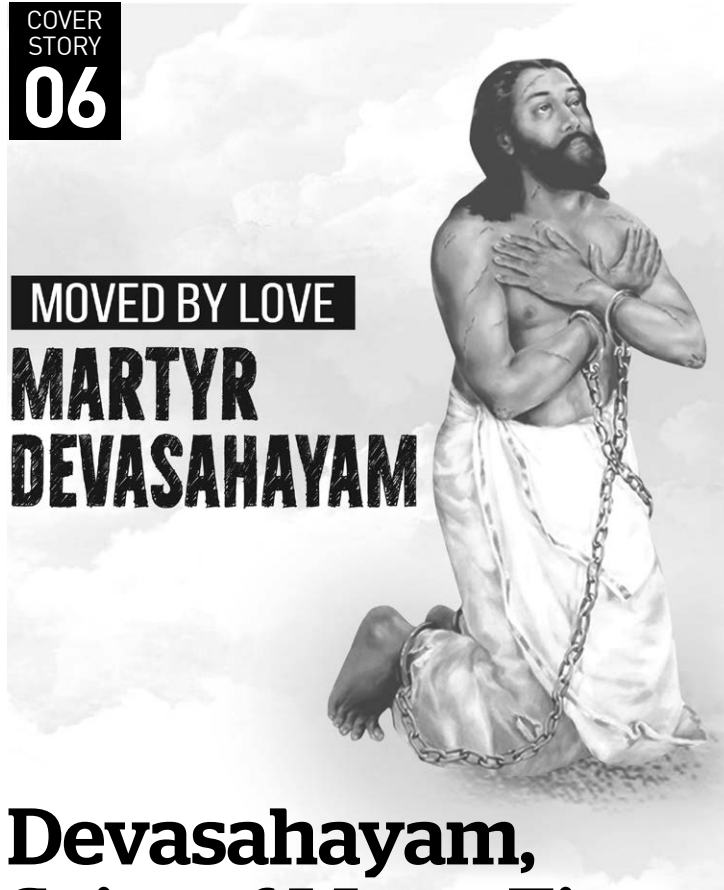


# contents

MEMBER,  
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ISSUE 21

COVER  
STORY

06



MOVED BY LOVE

## MARTYR DEVASAHAYAM

# Devasahayam, Saint of Many Firsts

BY JOHN KULANDAI

12

COVER STORY

## MOVED BY CHRIST'S LOVE

BY DR. ELSA LYCIAS JOEL



14

A CLOSE LOOK

## SINHALA NATIONALISM LESSONS FOR INDIA

BY AJ PHILIP

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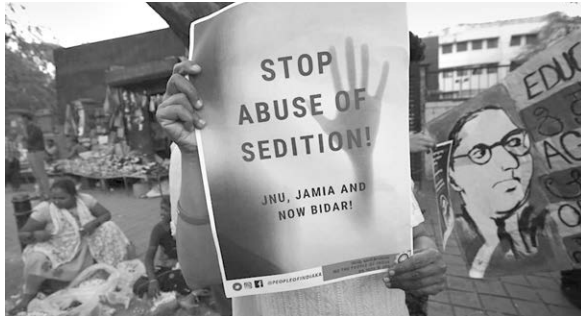
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This issue of Indian Currents contains 40 pages including cover.

**18 SC JUDGEMENT**  
**A Pause for 'Sedition'**  
BY CEDRIC PRAKASH



**22 SC JUDGEMENT**  
**Sedition Law on Hold**  
BY JOSEPH MALIAKAN

**24 REVIEW**  
**'Price of the Modi Years'**  
BY PETER MUNDACKAL

**26 EDUCATION**  
**Saffron Tinge to School Syllabus**  
BY RAM PUNIYANI

**28 FROM THE GROUND**  
**The Story of Nyaya Chaupal**  
BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

**32 OPINION**  
**Satyamev Jayate**  
BY DR M. D. THOMAS

**34 REALITY CHECK**  
**Airing Arrogance at Airport**  
BY AARTI

**38 BOB'S BANTER**  
**Guns and State Warfare..!**  
BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

# POWER QUOTES



In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love  
- **Mother Teresa**

• • •



It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light  
- **Aristotle**

• • •



The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall  
- **Nelson Mandela**

• • •



To succeed in your mission, you must have single-minded devotion to your goal  
- **APJ Abdul Kalam**

• • •



The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart  
- **Helen Keller**

• • •



In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years  
- **Abraham Lincoln**

• • •



If you don't build your dream, someone else will hire you to help them build theirs  
- **Dhirubhai Ambani**

• • •



You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream  
- **Malala Yousafzai**

• • •

**MOVED BY LOVE**  
**MARTYR**  
**DEVASAHAYAM**



# Devasahayam, Saint of Many Firsts

It was one of the most splendid moments for India when Pope Francis canonized Devasahayam on May 15

BY JOHN KULANDAI

The Church in India has now the glory of a new saint, martyr Devasahayam, canonized by Pope Francis on 15 May, 2022 at St. Peter's Square, Vatican. I have been privileged to have been connected with the Cause from the beginning. Now filled with the joy of having realised the dream of two-and-a-half centuries, I would like to elaborate on the saint together with information on different steps taken to reach the canonization.

## Sources

One of the allegations against the Cause of the martyr is that there is not sufficient historical sources. On the contrary, there is an uninterrupted flow of documents/books from 1751, one year before the heroic death of Devasahayam to the present year 2022.

Secondly, the variety of the nature of sources makes one marvel at the impact this one person has made on writers, poets, dramatists, and even artists. There are manuscripts, books, dramas, and poems on our hero. We can certainly say very few personalities in India, with the exception of persons like Mahatma Gandhi, may have had such a long standing influence in the consciousness of people as Devasahayam had.

Thirdly, the extensive spreading of the story of life and passions of the martyr baffles us. Even a quick glance through the bibliography will make anyone wonder how a 40-year-old palace official in the kingdom of Travancore, who lived and died in the southern-most part of Indian subcontinent, had positively affected the consciousness of people not only through the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu but also Sri Lanka, Kerala and even Europe. Any reader can observe that the sources come from almost the entire world and the archives and libraries are spread throughout three continents: Asia, Europe and America.

Fourthly, one can speak of a certain linguistic globality with regard to the original language of the sources. There is a large variety in it. The sources are in Latin, English, Italian, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Tamil and Malayalam. Our archives are equipped with full details on these sources and the following informations are gathered from them, and not just from oral tradition or mythological imagination.

## Life and Martydom

Devasahayam was born on 23 April, 1712 in the hamlet called Nattalam of the former kingdom of Travancore and the Killiyoor Taluk in the present district of Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. His father, Vasudevan Namputhiri, a Brahmin, was an emigrant from Maruthangkulakkara near Kayamkulam of the same kingdom and at present part of Kollam district in Kerala. His mother Devahi Amma was the daughter of Raman Pillai of Nattalam, of the Nair Caste. The original name of the martyr was Nilam, also expanded as Nilakandan. Because of the tradition of marumakkathayam, which followed a matrilineal lineage of inheritance by identifying the caste of the children by the caste of the mother, Nilam too was considered to be of the Nair caste, which was

We can certainly say very few personalities in India, with the exception of persons like Mahatma Gandhi, may have had such a long standing influence in the consciousness of people as Devasahayam had



Devasahayam Pillai was born in 1712 at Nattalam in Kanyakumari District. His mother was Devaki Amma and Father was Vasudevan Namputhiri

considered a high caste, next only to the topmost Brahmin caste.

### **An Official Loved by All**

Nilam was brought up as a devout Hindu. Besides Tamil and Malayalam, the languages of people, he also trained himself in archery, Varmasastra and the use of weapons of war. Nilakandan started his career as a soldier. Later on, he was an official in the Nilakandaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram. He was a palace official, working in the king's treasury. This job later brought him to Udayagiri fort as the paymaster to the construction labourers of the fort. In the age of 27, Nilakandan married Bhargaviammal of the village of Mekkodu and was leading a happy married life.

### **His Evangelization**

In performing his duties as a palace official, Nilam came in contact with a Catholic officer, Eustachius Benedictus De Lannoy, a Dutch military officer, who together with 23 others, had surrendered to the king Marthanda Varma during the war at the Port of Colachel in 1741, which the king won.

During this period, Nilakandan was found to be extremely sad. When De Lannoy enquired about the reasons for his sadness, Nilam narrated a series of tragedies that had overtaken his family. On hearing that, De Lannoy narrated to him the Old Testament story of Job and demonstrated how God allowed

a good man to be tested through sufferings and losses. Finding De Lannoy's explanation reasonable and convincing, Nilakanda Pillai expressed his desire to become a Christian. De Lannoy sent him to Fr. Giovanni Baptista Buttari, a Jesuit Missionary, of the Namon Mission, a resident of Vadakkankulam outside the limits of the kingdom of Travancore.

Fr. Buttari instructed Nilam in the Catholic faith for nine months. Finally, Fr. Buttari baptized him at the church of the Holy Family, Vadakkankulam on 14 May, 1745. At the baptism, he was given the name "Devasahayam" which is a Tamil rendering of the Biblical name Lazarus, which means "God has helped".

### **Lay Man and Missionary**

Having joined the Catholic community, Devasahayam himself started evangelizing others and brought some to Christian faith, one of them being his own wife who took the name "Gnanapu" which is a Tamil rendering of "Theresa". Devasahayam mingled with people of all statuses and castes. Because of his newly-found faith, he disregarded caste distinction, threw away the symbols of his "high" caste, ate and lived with people of "low" birth. Noticing the marked changes in Devasahayam because of his Christian life, the high caste people accused him of insult of gods (deiva throgam), insult of Brahmins and violation of the Caste system (kula throgam) and the royal throne (raja throgam).

### **A Witness to Catholic Faith**

Some persons of high caste and court officials tried to woo the martyr back from his newly won Christian faith. But he showed great fortitude in expressing firmness of faith and even daringly declared that he was willing to be tortured or even put to death for Christ.

**Devasahayam mingled with people of all statuses and castes. Because of his newly-found faith, he disregarded caste distinction, threw away the symbols of his "high" caste, ate and lived with people of "low" birth**



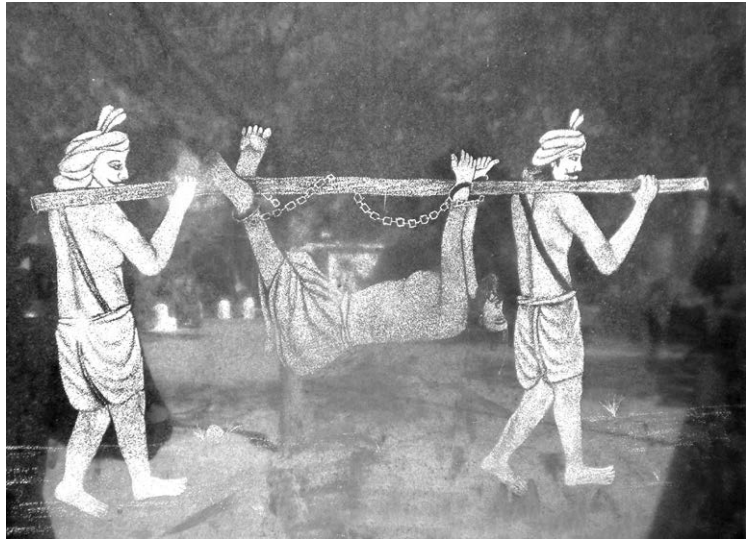
The king, having been incited against Christians, arrested Devasahayam on 23 February, 1749 and put him in a very narrow prison. Soon condemned to death by the king, the martyr was tortured in several ways. He was paraded to many towns and villages, both hands bound by chains, seated on a buffalo, garlanded with Erukku flowers as a symbol of shame. Finally, he was taken to the prison at Aralvai-mozhi, on the border between the kingdoms of Madurai (Pandiya Kingdom) and Travancore.

During the years of his arrest and torture, the martyr led a life worthy of a candidate for martyrdom. Every morning and night he spent certain time in personal prayer. He fasted on all Fridays and Saturdays in honour of the death of Christ and of the sorrows of the blessed Virgin Mary. Whenever a priest visited him, he confessed his sins and received holy Eucharist with utmost devotion. He always exuded deep joy and love and respect to everyone.

### A Witness by Blood

A lot of people continued to visit Devasahayam in the prison. Therefore, it was planned to eliminate him secretly. So, a little before the midnight of January 14, 1752 he was literally carried to the place. There he knelt and prayed for a while intensely. Then he was shot dead by the soldiers with five leaden bullets, at midnight between 14 and 15 January, 1752.

His body was thrown in between rocks and left there to be eaten by wild animals. His mortal remains were discovered by the Christians and buried in front of the main altar in the most impor-



Devasahayam being carried like a hanging animal to Kattadi Malai

tant church of St. Francis Xavier, which is the present Cathedral of the Diocese of Kottar.

From the day of his death to this very day, martyr Devasahayam continues in the consciousness of the people of the region and even the entire South India. The story of his death is being narrated year after year in dramas, poems and folklore throughout the Tamil speaking world, including Jaffna in Sri Lanka.

The places connected to his life and death became important places of pilgrimage by all people. In his memory, churches were constructed at Kattadimalai (Our Lady of Sorrows) and Puliyoorkurichy (St. Michael) and Kuzhimaikadu (St. Antony). Nattalam (the place of his birth), Kattadimalai (the place of his martyrdom) and Puliyoorkurichy (the place where water flowed from the rock when Devasahayam hit with his elbow) have turned out to be important shrines in the district and people from all over Tamil Nadu and from south Kerala frequent them in great numbers.

Devasahayam is one of the popular names for Catholics or non-Catholic Christians in Tamil Nadu.

### Declaration of beatification

Though a lot of enthusiastic attempts were made from the year 1986 (Pope John Paul II's visit and the beatification of Alphonsa), the proper application to Rome was made on 25 October, 2003. The first stage of Canonization was declaration of martyrdom, which is same as beatification; it had Fr. George



Devasahayam's marriage took place under the leadership of his teacher "Karikanda Muthapar"

Nudungatt SJ as Postulator and it lasted only nine years. The altogether quick process had a happy conclusion on December 2, 2012.

### The Process of Canonization

The process of Canonization had a definite direction in 2014, when the Bishop of Kottar got information about an extraordinary event reportedly wrought by the intercession of the Blessed Martyr Devasahayam in 2013. It was the revitalization of a 28-week fetus, certified and declared as an “intra uterine fetal death”. The lifeless fetus was in the “traverse lie” position at the time of the scan. On the receipt of the report, the utterly shocked mother started praying to the Martyr, drinking the water from the well of the house of Devasahayam at Nattalam. After an hour, the mother felt that she was feeling better. Upon immediate check-up by the medical team, it was confirmed that the fetus’ heart-beat was detected again and the mother’s condition was returning to normal. The mother, after three months, delivered a healthy male baby by a normal delivery and the child was baptized as “Devin Joe”.

The diocesan enquiry established by the then Bishop Peter Remigius and the subsequent Roman process, with the involvement of physicians and medical, canonical and theological experts resulted in the Papal approval of miracle and clearing the name for Canonization on February 21, 2020. the declaration was that “the unexpected revival of the heartbeat of the fetus in the 28th week of conception, with successive progress towards a normal completion of childbirth without any negative consequence either to the fetus or to the mother” is a miracle wrought by God through the intercession of Blessed Martyr Lazarus i.e. Devasahayam.”

**In this era of caste-ridden politics in the society, state and even in the Church, Devasahayam shines out as a saint for social equality, calling us all to build a society devoid of caste and class hierarchy**



There was a Consistory of Cardinals on Canonization on May 3, 2021; on November 9 Rome came out with another announcement: Canonization is to take place in the Basilica of St. Peter, Rome on May 15, 2022.

What is special about martyr St. Devasahayam? He is not just another one on the list of Catholic saints. There is something special about him.

### Many firsts

He is the first Indian, born on Indian soil, declared as a martyr for shedding his blood for Christ on Indian soil and the first married lay person in India to be included in the list of saints and the first saint from the State of Tamil Nadu.

### A saint for our times

- In this time of religious fanaticism soring to the level of suppression of religious freedom, the martyrdom of Devasahayam calls for commitment to religious tolerance and religious integration.
- When there are so many threats to the ministry of evangelization, the new saint shows us the path to fortitude and courage, marked by dialogue of love and coordinated action for the good of all.
- In this era of caste-ridden politics in the society, state and even in the Church, Devasahayam shines out as a saint for social equality, calling us all to build a society devoid of caste and class hierarchy. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**FR JOHN KULANDAI** is the Secretary of Historical Commission, Cause of Declaration of Martyrdom of Devasahayam, External Collaborator for Drafting of the Positio on Martyrdom and Vice Postulator for the Cause of Canonization of Martyr Devasahayam.

# Cardinal Zen arrested in Hong Kong, Vatican expresses concern

**N**inety-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen, who was the bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong from 2002 to 2009, was arrested on May 11 by Hong Kong authorities.

The cardinal has reportedly been released on bail, according to reports circulated via social media by local journalists who also posted photos of Cardinal Zen outside the Wan Chai police station.

As he left the police station around 11 pm Hong Kong time, the cardinal reportedly got immediately into a car, without offering any comments.

## Arrest and charges

The cardinal was detained by the police section set up to monitor China's national security.

According to local sources, was held at a police station for questioning. The cardinal is charged with "collusion with foreign forces," in connection with his role as administrator of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, a fund that supported pro-democracy protesters in paying for the legal and medical expenses they faced.

"The Holy See has learned with concern the news of Cardinal Zen's arrest and is following the evolution of the situation with extreme attention," said the Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, in response to journalists' questions on 11 May 2022.

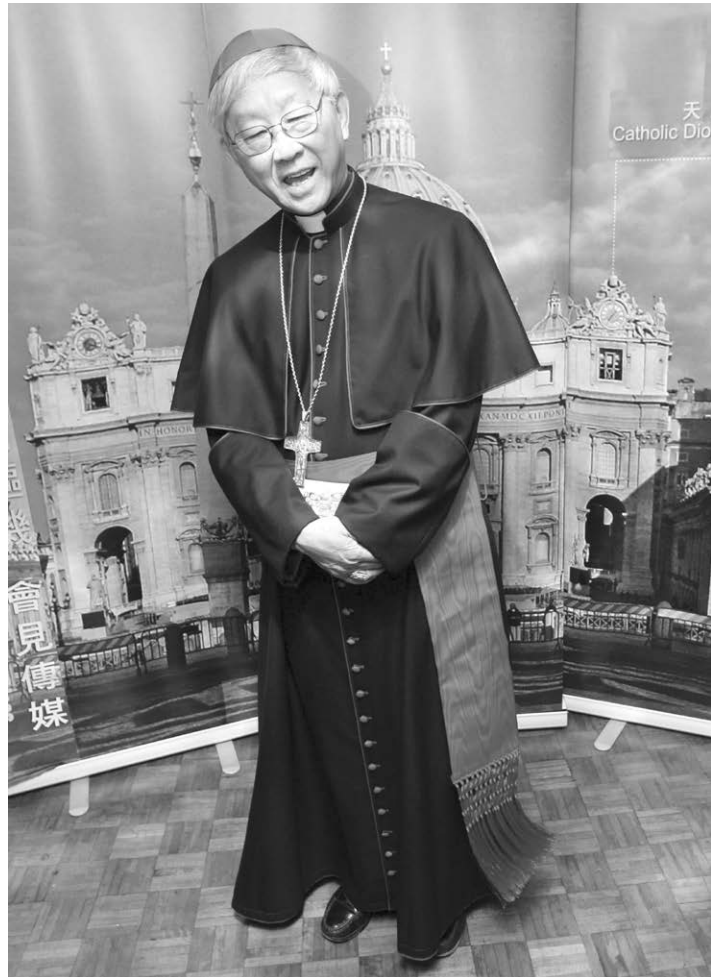
## Three other arrests

Cardinal Zen was one of the trustees of the organisation, established in 2019 and dissolved in October last year.

In addition to the Cardinal, authorities also arrested other promoters of the fund, including well-known lawyer Margaret Ng, a former opposition MP; academic Hui Po-keung; and singer-songwriter Denise Ho. Their arrests were confirmed by Hong Kong legal sources.

## Charges

Local media reported the arrest, saying that the law enforcement investigation focuses on alleged "collusion" by the 612 Fund with "foreign forces," in violation of the national security law imposed by Beijing in June 2020.



The charge leveled against those arrested is one of four offences under the city's National Security Act, designed to quash pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The new law has been internationally condemned. The other offences listed in the act – subversion, secession and terrorism – can carry sentences of up to life imprisonment.

Already in recent months, several Hong Kong media outlets have accused Cardinal Zen of inciting students in 2019 to revolt against a series of government measures. In the past, Cardinal Zen has also criticized the Chinese Communist Party for allegedly persecuting religious communities. ©

(Courtesy: Vaticannews.va)

# Moved by Christ's Love

Devasahayam was moved by the story of Christ's unconditional love and forgiveness. He was against discrimination among fellow human beings

BY DR. ELSA LYCIAS JOEL

There is not one person in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu who hasn't heard of martyr Devasahayam, widely referred to as Devasahayam Pillai. Born as Neelakandan to Vasudevan Namputhiri and Devaki Amma, he was trained in archery, varmasastra and weapons of war only to serve as a soldier in the army of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, king of Travancore. He also served as an official in the Neelakandaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram and as a palace official.

Neelakandan met Eustache de Lannoy, a prisoner of war, and got to know him better when he served as the paymaster to the construction labourers of the Udayagiri Fort. A friendship developed between Neelakandan and the Dutch officer De Lannoy with whom he shared his sorrows and identity crisis. De Lannoy comforted his friend with stories of Jesus and Job. Anguish and despair of Neelakandan's heart were lifted. Feeling strengthened, uplifted and with full of hope, Neelakandan embraced the new found faith. His admirers and followers knew the two reasons behind his allegiance.

He was moved by the heartrending story of Christ's unconditional love and forgiveness. He realized there is no true love among people who discriminate and exploit fellow beings. After 9 months of catechism classes, Fr. Buttari baptised Neelakandan as Devasahayam which is translated as Lazar in English and Lazarus in Latin meaning 'God has helped'. Soon after, Devasahayam's wife couldn't help but notice a transformation in her husband and decided to follow in his footsteps, with all her heart.

The price Devasahayam had to pay for embracing Christianity and remaining firm in his faith was heavy. He endured untold miseries, inhuman torture, survived several kinds of humiliation, prisoned for years, then shot dead in Kaatradimalai, Aralvaimozhi and his body was thrown to the wild. After some days, his body was spotted and buried at Saint Francis Xavier Cathedral, Kottar, Nagercoil.

The news of canonisation of Devasahayam did not come as a surprise to the people of Kanyakumari



district because they know of him as a layman who did everything he could to disregard the petty and wicked standards set by mere mortals. For centuries, prevalence of caste and caste-based atrocities are so deep-rooted in our societies that people take pride in belonging to a caste or claiming men of



greatness to be their own, not sparing even blessed people. Thus, Devasahayam's name resurfaced with a 'Pillai' in it.

Close to Dr. Lazarus Singarayan's heart (Dr. Lazarus Singarayan is a retired scientist of ICAR and Emeritus professor of MS University, Tirunelveli) was this issue of a caste tag attached to a martyr's name and he was even more troubled by it soon after Devasahayam was declared 'Blessed'. As an Emeritus fellow with a long list of academic credentials, Dr. Lazarus was busy serving educational institutions that fall under the Kottar and Kuzhithurai dioceses. Yet, he channelized a major part of his time and energy towards eliminating the 'Pillai' tag. It was then he discussed this with former IAS officers M.G Devasahayam and S Devaraj, friends B.S Anbu and P Alphonse and they came together around this shared mission.

Soon after Devasahayam was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on December 2, 2012, Dr. Lazarus was prompted to try everything possible to undo the damage done to a soon-to-be saint's name. Research on how the additional name 'Pillai' was added to the martyr's baptized name revealed that people have always sought ways to accommodate caste at any costs and thus couldn't convince themselves that Devasahayam converted to Christianity to disown caste status.

So, in 2015 Dr. Lazarus wrote to His Excellency Peter Remigius, then Bishop of Kottar diocese, that it's not only inappropriate to address the martyr as Devasahayam Pillai but unacceptable by all means. Also, he sent facsimiles of the same to Most Reverend Dr. V. Jerome Dhas, Rev. Fr. Dr. V. Mariadhasan and other notable priests and religious leaders. Since Dr. Lazarus did not receive a reply, he wrote to His Holiness Pope Francis on September 23, 2016. Anticipating a reply in vain, Dr. Lazarus wrote to His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Amato in Rome on March 12, 2017.

On June 19, 2017, Dr. Lazarus received a disappointing reply from Marcello Bartolucci, Archbishop Secretary in Vatican, saying, 'as per the specific indications of His Excellency the Most Reverend Peter Remigius, former Bishop of Kottar, this Congregation is not in a position to make any change or changes to the name of Blessed Devasahayam Pillai'.

However, many Catholic priests of Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari district in particular, were of the strong conviction that the practice of using a caste

title as surname must be abrogated. Hence, with the support from a conscientious civil society, they stood up to fight away false notions surrounding the life of Devasahayam. The evasive reply from Vatican did not deter Dr. Lazarus from going the extra mile to rectify the grave mistake.

In 2018, Dr. Lazarus' letter to His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Amato carried duplicates of Bishop Leon A Dharmaraj's invitation, which did not carry the caste name, to celebrate Devasahayam's 250th year of martyrdom and newspaper clippings of priests who advocated the truth behind the martyr's name. Dr. Lazarus requested the Papacy to cross-check the catechism and baptism records of Devasahayam available in the papal office.

**The price Devasahayam had to pay for embracing Christianity and remaining firm in his faith was heavy. He endured untold miseries, inhuman torture, survived several kinds of humiliation, prisoned for years, then shot dead**

Appreciating Dr. Lazarus' rationale behind his struggles, the present Bishop of Kottar diocese Nazarene Soosai pulled out all the stops to do away with the caste name 'Pillai'. Consistent efforts and persuasion from different quarters moved Pope Francis to drop the fictitious surname and declared the canonisation date of Devasahayam as May 15, 2022. Thankfully, Kanyakumari district is blessed with people to protect and preserve the legacy of the Blessed Devasahayam who advocated dignity and equality of all human beings.

To all those who don't care about hypothesis, this story is about people living up to their names or mere coincidence. Gordon Allport was right: Our most important anchorage to our self-identity throughout life remains our name. As Devasahayam has joined the family of saints, may we ruminate on his remarkable life and courage, and draw inspiration to fight callous casteist biases. ©

# Sinhala nationalism

## Lessons for India

The economic condition of the island nation is such that it does not have money to import ink and paper to conduct school and college examinations

BY **AJ PHILIP**

**T**he rise and growth of Hindutva in India have a lot of similarities to the rise and growth of Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka. Today, Sri Lanka is a basket case. The economic condition of the island nation is such that it does not have money to import ink and paper to conduct school and college examinations. Liberal financial and commodity assistance from India has helped Colombo to avert starvation and fleeing of people to the shores of India.

The new finance minister, Ali Sabry, who is the only Muslim to hold a ministerial post in the country, has the onerous task of negotiating a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to prevent an economic collapse. Mahinda Rajapaksa, who ruled the nation with a firm hand, is so hated that his younger brother and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had to order the military to rescue him from his official residence, Temple Trees. Otherwise, he could have been lynched. His ancestral house was burnt by the protesters.



A cat is believed to have nine lives. Mahinda Rajapaksa seems to have many more. The appointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe, a person who could never complete his term as prime minister and who was roundly defeated in his own constituency in the last election, as his successor is yet another attempt to keep the country under

the Rajapaksa clan's control. Whether he succeeds or not, there is no doubt that Sinhala nationalism has done enough damage to the nation.

It was VD Savarkar's book titled 'Hindutva' which laid the foundation for Hindutva, a militant form of Hinduism. The setting up of the RSS in 1924 by Dr KB Hedgewar was with a view to uniting the Hindu society under the saffron flag. That is why the RSS founder withdrew from the freedom struggle, as he felt that Hindu energy should not be dissipated against the British.

If today the BJP is in power, it is because of the silent and not-so-silent work that the RSS cadres have been doing for nearly a century. MS Golwalkar,

who succeeded Hedgewar as the supreme commander of the RSS, had in his books like 'Bunch of Thoughts' described the scenario when India became a Hindu theocratic nation.

Neither the BJP, nor the RSS has repudiated Golwalkar's theories and as such they can be considered as the foundational principles of the RSS that has umbilical connections with an assortment of organisations. During my younger days, pictures of Lord Ram always had Sita beside Him. Hanuman was also part of the iconography. Ram was the personification of maryada or righteousness.



The picture of Ram that the Sangh Parivar popularises shows Him in a battle-ready state, wielding the bow and the arrow. Have you ever seen a picture or statue of Lord Buddha in an aggressive posture? He was the enlightened and the compassionate, who did not want to disappoint a poor person, who gave him stale pork as food, ate it and died of food poisoning.

Just as the beatific Ram has no use for the protagonists of Hindutva, the Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalists have no use for Buddha, the Learned. What they practise is known as Theravada Buddhism. The text they consider sacred is the Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle, written in Pali in the sixth century.

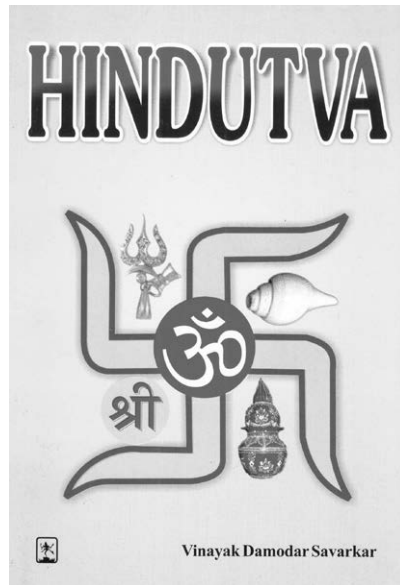
The text describes Sri Lanka as the Promised Land of the Buddhists like Israel is the Promised Land of the Jews. Ram defeated Ravana in Valmiki's Ramayana which became popular in North India when it was translated into the local language by Tulsidas around the time Babri Masjid was built in Ayodhya.

Similarly, the Sinhala nationalists do not see Lord Buddha as the embodiment of peace. He is projected as the valiant who would brook no opposition. He is believed to have visited Sri Lanka thrice and it was to convert the largest island in the Indian Ocean into an abode of the Buddhists.

The Mahavamsa describes in detail the exploits of Dutugamunu the Great, the warrior king of the Sinhalese. He is believed to have reigned from 161 BC to 137 BC. "He is renowned for reuniting the whole island of Sri Lanka by defeating and overthrowing Elara, the usurping Tamil prince from the Indian Chola Kingdom, who had invaded the Anuradhapura kingdom in 205 BC.

"Dutugamunu also expanded and beautified the city of Anuradhapura and projected the power of his native Rajarata region across the island of Sri Lanka". There are many myths and legends about the King. They are a source of inspiration for the Sinhala nationalists. Just as the state of Ayodhya under Lord Ram was considered the ideal state, the state under Dutugamunu was considered blemish-less.

Just like Savarkar who redefined Hinduism making



it muscular, Angarika Dharmapala, who lived in the 19th Century, gave a new dimension to Sri Lankan Buddhism. He campaigned for the sovereignty of the Sinhalese. He was decidedly against Christians and Muslims and believed that Sri Lanka's redemption lay in making Sri Lanka a homogenous state by the Sinhalese, for the Sinhalese and of the Sinhalese. Something like the Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan slogan that writer Sashi Tharoor referred to in his article in a Malayalam daily (May 13)! He can be called the father of Sinhala nationalism.

Just as the protagonists of Hindutva want Muslims and Christians as second-class citizens if they do not merge themselves into the Hindu mass, the Sinhala nationalists find no place for the Tamils or the other minorities in the country. In fact, in the sacred text I referred to, the Tamils are not even considered humans. Rather they are beasts!

It is like Ram encountering the Rakshasas (demons) during his 14-year exile. Extant understanding is that the Rakshasas were actually Dravidians, one of whose greatest rulers was Mahabali. Angarika Dharmapala and his followers could not reconcile themselves to the fact that the Tamils enjoyed certain status during the British period.

Just as the Bengalis and the Menons of British-administered Malabar enjoyed an upper hand during the British regime, throwing up bureaucrats like VP Menon and KPS Menon, Tamils had a presence in the Sri Lankan bureaucracy. The Sinhala nationalists resented it.

They were also against Tamil as another national language. Like the Pakistanis who did not want

**The campaign in Karnataka against Muslims monopolising the mango trade could have been inspired by what the Sinhalese did in Sri Lanka**



Bengali as the official language of what was then East Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh. In India, Urdu, a great language, has been reduced to a Muslim language and it is on its deathbed. Muslims themselves know that there is no future for their children if they study Urdu, instead of Hindi that Home Minister Amit Shah wants every citizen to speak, though it is a language created by the British officials and Christian missionaries.

One of the first things that the Sinhalese did after Sri Lanka attained independence in 1948 was to bring forward the Citizenship Act. Remember the agitation in India on the amended citizenship law! In one stroke of the pen, millions of Tamils in Sri Lanka became stateless. The adherents of Hindutva

**Civil strife and economic mismanagement have brought the country to a standstill. Mahinda Rajapaksa was the most popular leader Sri Lanka has ever seen. Today he is the most hated figure**

took their cue from this Act to demand expulsion of the so-called non-Assamese from Assam. What is forgotten is that many of them were encouraged to migrate to Assam to work in the tea gardens when the undivided Bengal was a part of united India.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a former diplomat and former Governor of West Bengal. He served two terms in Sri Lanka, the second time as Indian Ambassador. He wrote a novel *Saranam*, which I reviewed when it appeared in the eighties. The story is about the problems of the Tamils who suddenly became stateless in the land where they were born. He showed his mettle as a writer. It was at once a very touching novel. The irony is that the Sinhalese are also originally from India like the Tamils.

Today when the BJP leaders say that Bangladeshis infiltrate into Assam, people laugh because the rate of growth of Bangladesh is higher than that of India. More important, on all indices of growth like female literacy, infant mortality and mothers' mortality, Bangladeshi women are ahead of their Assamese counterparts.

The Sinhalese struck again when it introduced a Sinhala Only Act denying Tamil any status. No language can grow without state support. The decision pushed the Tamils to the edges and there was resentment. The protest soon took the shape of Tamil nationalism demanding a separate Tamil Eelam



or state. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) began to represent the Tamils.

What ensued was a fight that had few parallels. Finally, the Tigers, as the LTTE cadres led by Velupillai Prabhakaran were called, were eliminated using means that were as questionable as the terrorist activities of the Tigers. No consideration for Prabhakaran's son Balachandran's age –11 – was given when he was shot. The military campaign was led by the present president.

Sri Lanka could not prevent a vote in an international human rights body which found that the human rights violations at the hands of the Sri Lankan army could not be covered up. As the Sinhalese believe that the Tamil question was settled “once and for all”, the persecution of the Muslims began.

They started a campaign to end the presence of the Muslims in agricultural and fisheries sectors. The campaign in Karnataka against Muslims monopolising the mango trade could have been inspired by what the Sinhalese did in Sri Lanka. The fact of the matter is that the mango cultivators are mostly Hindus and they sell their crop to those who pay them the highest price. They do not look at the religion of the buyer.

It was not for no reason that former Kerala MLA PC George in his hate speech wanted Hindus to boycott Muslim restaurants. The idea is to push the Muslims to the margins so that they do not have any economic wherewithal. This strategy was first tried out in Sri Lanka.

The idea for the Sangh Parivar's campaign against the Hijab that forced thousands of Muslim girls from appearing in school examination in Karnataka was also drawn from the Sinhalese who banned the garment. And when Covid-19 struck the nation like the rest of the world, the government banned all burials forcing Muslims to cremate their bodies. After a year or so, the government had to allow burials following protests from international bodies.

**Today the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) is described as “a white elephant with a very small catchment area” where nobody flies**



The series of bomb blasts in 2019 provided the Sinhala nationalists an opportunity to portray Muslims as terrorists. The anti-terrorism laws were used almost exclusively against Muslims, while the activities of the Bodu Bak Sena (BBS) which resembles those of a three-letter worded organisation in India were condoned. Christians also did not go unscathed.

Evangelical Christians had to face persecution while Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith's support for Buddhist theocracy, instead of secularism, insulated the Catholic Church to some extent from aggression. All this had a deleterious effect on tourism which was the mainstay of Sri Lanka. The negative publicity the nation received reduced the tourist arrivals to a fraction of what it was before Covid struck.

Coupled with this were the vainglorious projects Mahinda Rajapaksa initiated like the construction of an airport, touted as Sri Lanka's first green airport. Alas, the few airlines which started flights found that there were no passengers. Today the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) is described as “a white elephant with a very small catchment area” where nobody flies.

What has Sinhala nationalism achieved? Civil strife and economic mismanagement have brought the country to a standstill. Mahinda Rajapaksa was the most popular leader Sri Lanka has ever seen. Today he is the most hated figure. Hopefully, the Sri Lankans have realised that excessive nationalism does not redound to the credit of any nation. When will those who believe that India's redemption lies in dumping the minorities in the Bay of Bengal realise this bitter truth? ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# A Pause for 'Sedition'

The interim order by the Supreme Court of India on Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code is directional but not conclusive. It is just a 'pause'!

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

The 'sedition' law in India is repressive and regressive, archaic and obsolete, draconian in nature and blatantly violative of the freedoms guaranteed to every citizen of the country in the Constitution. It specifically goes against Articles 19 1 (A), 14 and 21 of the Constitution dealing with the Right to Equality, Freedom of Speech and Expression and Protection of Life and Personal Liberty. Framed under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the sedition law states: "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in India, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which a fine may be added; or, with fine."

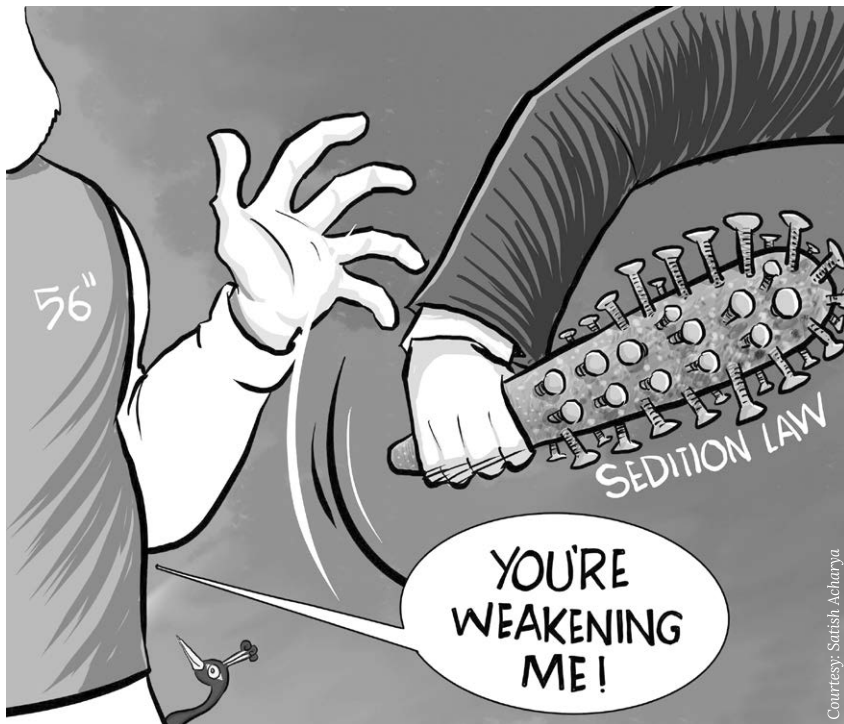


This draconian law was first drafted in 1837 by the British historian and politician Thomas Macaulay. It was mysteriously deleted when the IPC was implemented in 1860. Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when MPs believed that only positive government beliefs should be allowed to exist, as negative opinions were

harmful to the government and monarchy. The British administration in India were wary at that time of movements brewing to challenge their domination. So, in 1870, they felt the necessity for a separate section to deal with the offence, an amendment offered by Sir James Stephen which was inserted as Section 124A of the IPC. The law was obviously challenged by several thinking and eminent citizens of the country.

May 11, 2022 was a historic day indeed for the Constitution of India and for "we the people". In a landmark order, the Supreme Court put on hold Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, known as the sedition law. The 152-year-old colonial era law should be kept in abeyance till the Central Government reconsiders the provision. The order was pronounced by a three-member bench comprising Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, Justice Surya Kant and Justice Hima Kohli while hearing a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the sedition offence.

The three-page order of the Supreme Court states among other things, "This Court is cognizant of security interests and integrity of the State on one hand, and the civil liberties of citizens on the other. There is a requirement to balance both sets of considerations, which is a difficult exercise. The case of the petitioners is that this provision of law dates back to 1898, and pre-dates the Constitution itself, and is being misused".



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

The Apex Court in its concluding directive says, “In view of the clear stand taken by the Union of India, we deem it appropriate to pass the following order in the interest of justice:

**a.** The interim stay granted in W.P.(Crl.) No.217/2021 along with W.P.(Crl.) No.216/2021 vide order dated 31.05.2021 shall continue to operate till further orders.

**b.** We hope and expect that the State and Central Governments will restrain from registering any FIR, continuing any investigation or taking any coercive measures by invoking Section 124A of IPC while the aforesaid provision of law is under consideration.

**c.** If any fresh case is registered under Section 124A of IPC, the affected parties are at liberty to approach the concerned Courts for appropriate relief. The Courts are requested to examine the reliefs sought, taking into account the present order passed as well as the clear stand taken by the Union of India.

**d.** All pending trials, appeals and proceedings with respect to the charge framed under Section 124A of IPC be kept in abeyance. Adjudication with respect to other Sections, if any, could proceed if the Courts are of the opinion that no prejudice would be caused to the accused.

**e.** In addition to the above, the Union of India shall be at liberty to issue the Directive as proposed and placed before us, to the State Governments/Union Territories to prevent any misuse of Section 124A of IPC. **f.** The above directions may continue till further orders are passed.”

‘Article 14’, an online portal which is a joint effort among lawyers, journalists, and academics to address threats to and failures of justice and deficiencies in the legal system, tracks successes that can be built upon and discerns trends and

**May 11, 2022 was a historic day indeed for the Constitution of India and for “we the people”. In a landmark order, the Supreme Court put on hold Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, known as the sedition law**



patterns that require to be brought to the widest public attention. It takes its name from arguably the most important fundamental right conferred by the Constitution of India: “The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.”

On 2 February 2021, ‘Article 14’ launched its sedition database; a count and analysis of all sedition cases since 2010 revealed the following facts:

- 65% of nearly 11,000 individuals in 816 sedition cases since 2010 were implicated after 2014 when Modi took office. Among those charged with sedition: opposition politicians, students, journalists, authors and academics.
- 96% of sedition cases filed against 405 Indians for criticising politicians and governments over the last decade were registered after 2014, with 149 accused of making “critical” and/or “derogatory” remarks against Modi, 144 against Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.
- A 28% increase in the number of sedition cases filed each year between 2014 and 2020, Modi’s time in office, compared to the yearly average between 2010 and 2014, the second term of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) administration.
- Much of this increase is due to a surge in sedition cases after protest movements, such as those against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 and the rape of a Dalit teen at Hathras in UP.
- During the anti-CAA protests, 22 of 25 sedition cases involving 3,700 people were filed in BJP-ruled states. After the Pulwama attack, 26 of 27 sedition cases involving 42 persons were filed in BJP-ruled states.
- Of the five states with the highest number of sedi-



tion cases, a majority were registered during the BJP's time in power in four of them -- Bihar, UP, Karnataka and Jharkhand.

- In UP, 77% of 115 sedition cases since 2010 were registered over the last four years, since Yogi Adityanath became the Chief Minister. More than half of these were around issues of "nationalism": against those who protested the CAA, for shouting "Hindustan Murdabad", allegedly celebrating Pulwama attack and India's loss in 2017 ICC Champions Trophy.
- In Bihar, between 2010-2014, the majority of sedition cases were related to Maoism and counterfeit currency. After 2014, 23% of sedition cases were against those who protested the CAA, against celebrities who spoke up against lynching and intolerance and those who allegedly raised "pro-Pakistan" slogans.

The data was startlingly clear enough: the Government particularly since 2014, had become vindictive and used (abused) the sedition law and other draconian laws very selectively to crush dissent and to throttle the voices of anyone who took a stand against it or criticised its anti-people policies. Thousands are actually still languishing in jails because of this law.

One of the petitioners, Major General Sudhir Vombatkere (retired), in an interview to NDTV said he turned to the court when the Constitution that he swore to protect was being challenged. "Every soldier takes an oath to defend the Constitution, they defend the Constitution even at the risk of their lives. And the country's borders are defended by the Armed Forces in order that the people within the country can sleep safely and enjoy the freedoms and

**Of the five states with the highest number of sedition cases, a majority were registered during the BJP's time in power in four of them -- Bihar, UP, Karnataka and Jharkhand**

rights that the Constitution gives. That is the reason for my taking up this case," said the Major General who is credited with stalling a 162-year-old colonial relic.

He added: "I had noticed that a lot of things go wrong. I believe if there is injustice in one place, there is injustice everywhere. Injustices have to be opposed; they have to be resisted. I took to activism as I believe there have been injustices by all governments, state and central, regardless of their political colour... There are 800 cases and 13,000 are in jail, all citizens of India, my brothers and sisters. Only in the last eight years, nearly 400 of those 800 cases were registered. It has always been used as a political tool, just that it is more in recent years."

In a powerful statement welcoming the Supreme Court order, the pan-India 'Peoples Union for Civil Liberties'(PUCL) said: "The order of the Supreme Court is a significant landmark in the struggle against sedition law which began with the arrest of freedom fighters like Gandhi and Tilak in colonial times to the arrest and conviction for life of PUCL Vice President Binayak Sen, the conviction of PUCL UP office bearer and journalist Seema Azad, as well as the filing of cases against PUCL national secretary Sudha Bharadwaj and PUCL Jharkhand member the late Fr. Stan Swamy and many others under the draconian laws such as sedition and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). The use of this repressive provision led to the PUCL initiating a campaign to repeal the sedition law which garnered over 1,00,000 signatures. While the campaign did lead to the release of Binayak Sen, the petitions committee of the Rajya Sabha was also seized with the issue. But the law continued to be used by all governments to target their opponents... Much as the PUCL welcomes this order of the Supreme Court, it is also constrained to point out that in spite of this order, a





larger number of human rights activists, journalists, Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis and students will continue to languish in jail for exercising their constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression”.

In the next couple of months, the Supreme Court’s major legal challenge is whether the 1962 judgement in *Kedar Nath Singh v Union of India* was correctly decided. Speech that is likely to provoke disruption of public order is considered sedition, according to the *Kedar Nath Singh* judgement, which affirmed the constitutional validity of Section 124A. A seven-judge panel will have to assess if that verdict was correct, and whether a statute against sedition may be considered an exception to free speech. In the end, unless Parliament rescinds the sedition legislation, the court will have to decide the fundamental issue. Even if the provision is weakened or replaced with a new legislation, it must pass the constitutionality test before the court.

Writing an analytical op-ed in the *Indian Express* (12 May 2022) ‘Supreme Court’s verdict on sedition is a small win’ Chitranshul Sinha says, “This order appears to be a small win but left a lot to be desired. Also, its implementation at the ground level remains to be seen. Lessons should have been taken from the fact that police across the country continued filing FIRs under section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 which was declared to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2015. The purported reason is that even though the provision was declared to be unconstitutional, it continued to remain on the statute book. The lack of awareness of local police is to blame here.....Till the time safeguards are built to prevent misapplication of the UAPA, or even laws like the National Security Act, the law of sedition will keep rearing its head under different names despite the orders passed by the Supreme Court”.

**In 1908, when Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was being tried for sedition in the Bombay High Court, he courageously stated, “Swaraj is my birth right, and I shall have it”**



In 1908, when Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was being tried for sedition in the Bombay High Court, he courageously stated, “Swaraj is my birth right, and I shall have it.” Justice Davar, the presiding judge, then asked him if he had anything to say before the sentence was pronounced, he audaciously replied, “All I wish to say is that in spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain my innocence. There are higher powers that rule the destiny of men and nations. It may be the will of Providence that the cause I represent may prosper by suffering than by remaining free.”

These immortal and inspiring words of Tilak can be read even today; they are etched on a marble plaque outside Court Room 46 in the Bombay High Court. Tilak’s biographer N.G. Jog has described this historic moment profoundly, “These words delivered on the spur of the moment have a spontaneous dignity and almost a Socratic sublimity. They breathe the spirit of dedication to freedom and of defiance against the might of the British Raj. And, they could have been uttered by only one man in India’s contemporary history – Bal Gangadhar Tilak.”

In the final analysis, one has to be painfully aware that this interim order is directional but not conclusive. It is just a ‘pause’! Though a major breakthrough, which has seriously rattled the Government which rules India today, the order is technically a temporary restraint. The people of India must come out in top gear and demand that this draconian law be repealed totally, immediately and unconditionally. Joining Tilak and saying in one voice, “Swaraj is my birth right, and I shall have it!” ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Sedition Law on Hold

The Supreme Court's interim order is a case of 'Too Little Too Late'

BY JOSEPH MALIAKAN

The Supreme Court of India in a historic order on May 11 put on hold trial under the 152-year-old British era sedition law extensively used during British rule and subsequently by independent India's Union and state governments to suppress political dissent.

Prominent among those against whom the British registered cases under the law were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi, Shaukat and Mohammad Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Writer and activist Arundhati Roy, environment activist Disha Ravi, journalist Siddique Kappen, student activists Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal, Asif Iqbal Tanha, Gulfisha Khatoon, Ishrat Jahan, Zafoora Zargal and Meeran Haider are prominent faces who have been charged under sedition law by independent India's Union and state governments.

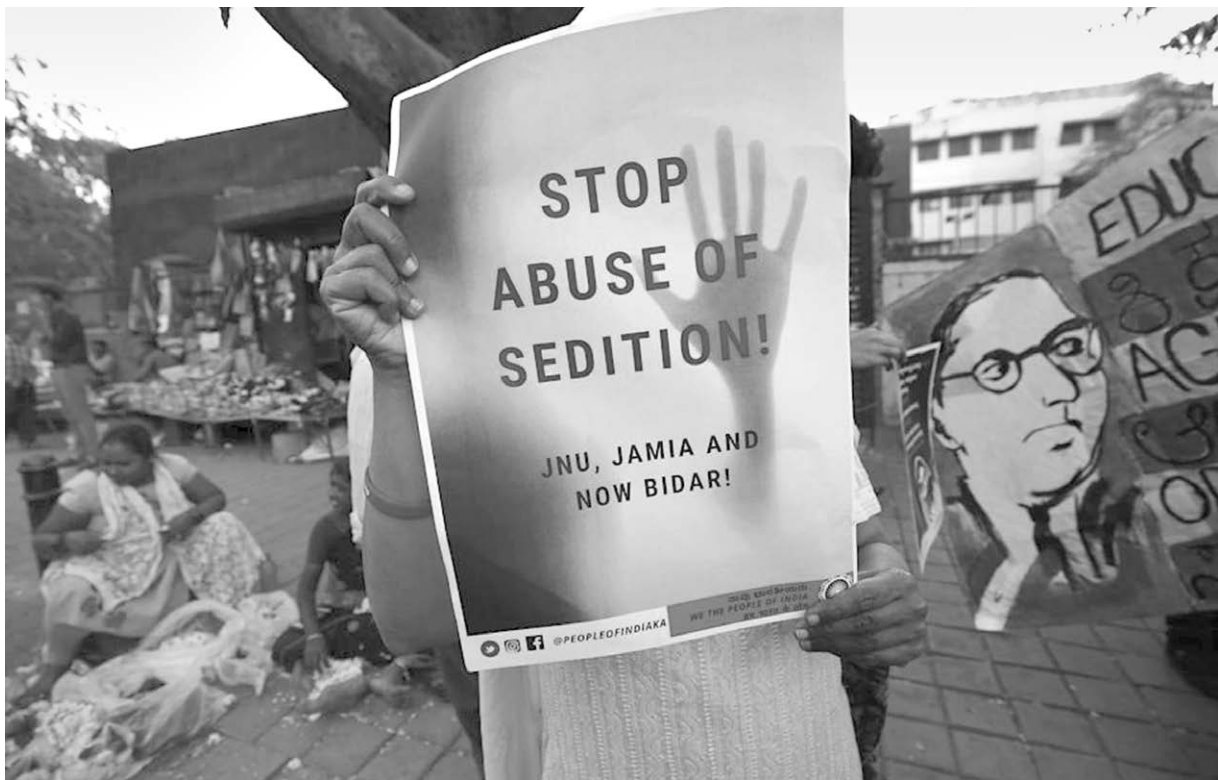


"All pending trials, appeals and proceedings with respect to the charge framed under section 124 A of IPC be kept in abeyance. Adjudication with respect to other sections, if any, could proceed if the courts are of the opinion that no prejudice would be caused to the accused," the bench of

Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli said in their interim order on a bunch of petitions challenging constitutional validity of the law.

The constitutional validity of section 124 A was upheld by the Supreme Court of India in *Kedar Nath v the State of Bihar* in 1962. However, the court had in that order added a caveat that "a person could be prosecuted only if his acts caused incitement to violence or intention or tendency.... to cause disturbance of public peace."

In the present order, the bench said, "we hope



and expect that the State and Central governments will restrain from registering any FIR, continuing any investigation or taking any coercive measures by invoking section 124 A of IPC while the aforesaid provision of law is under consideration.”

However, “if any fresh case is registered under section 124 A of IPC, the affected parties are at liberty to approach the concerned courts for appropriate relief” and “courts are requested to examine the reliefs sought, taking into account the present order passed as well as the clear stand taken by the Union of India.”

The directive placed before court states that “the interpretation of Honourable Supreme Court in the judgement in the Vinod Dua v. Union of India... ought to be scrupulously followed and adhered to” and “an FIR involving section 124 A will be registered only if an officer not below the rank of Superintendent of Police is satisfied and records his satisfaction in writing that the offence involves section 124 A as analysed by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in the captioned judgement.”

Referring to the Union government’s affidavit, the Court in its order said “it is clear that the Union of India agrees with the prima facie opinion expressed by this court that the rigours of section 124 A of IPC is not in tune with the current social milieu and was intended for a time when country was under the colonial regime. In the light of the same, the Union of India may reconsider the aforesaid provision of law.”

The court also said: “It is cognizant of the security interests and integrity of the state on one hand and the civil liberties of the citizen on the other. There is a requirement to balance both sets of considerations, which is a difficult exercise. The case of the petitioners is that this provision of law dates back

**The British who designed and introduced the sedition law to oppress people have abolished the law. In Britain the sedition law was repealed under section 73 of the Coroners and Justice Act, 2009**



Courtesy: PTI

to 1898, and pre-dates the Constitution itself and is being misused.”

In this context the Bench pointed out that Attorney General K. K. Venugopal had “on an earlier date of hearing given some instances of glaring misuse of this provision, like in the case of the recital of the Hanuman Chalisa,” slapping sedition charges against two legislators in Maharashtra over recital of the prayer.

Sedition was not included in the original 1860 Indian Penal Code. Sedition was included as an offence in 1870 under section 124 A IPC through the Special Act XVII. The punishment for the offence of sedition prescribed was transportation “beyond seas for the term of his or her natural life.” Mercifully, independent India’s government in 1955 amended the provision for punishment making it life imprisonment and fine.

The British who designed and introduced the sedition law to oppress people have abolished the law. In Britain the sedition law was repealed under section 73 of the Coroners and Justice Act, 2009. The Act termed the sedition law as arcane, and “from a bygone era when freedom of expression was not seen as the right it is today.” Australia repealed the sedition law in 2010 and Singapore repealed it in 2021.

Even if the Supreme Court finally holds section 124 A of IPC unconstitutional or the Union government repeals the law, on the ground people’s lives are unlikely to change drastically in terms of civil liberties as long as the draconian provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967 and the National Security Act are being widely misused. ©



# 'Price of the Modi Years'

A peep into Aakar Patel's book which is an authentic appraisal of Narendra Modi government's record of governance

BY **PETER MUNDACKAL**

Aakar Patel, a syndicated columnist and author of the famous book on majoritarianism "Our Hindu Rashtra, What It is, How We Got Here", was in the news recently. He was forbidden to go abroad by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) as he was accused of money laundering through Amnesty International India of which he was the Director. Significantly, Aakar remarked that LOC (Look Out Certificate) against him was issued on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021, six weeks after his book "Price of the Modi Years" was published. That gives an idea, how much the Modi Government "likes" Aakar. That there is no love lost between Aakar and Modi, despite Aakar being a Gujarati, is known to everyone. His articles are highly critical of Modi. Unsurprisingly, his articles ceased to appear in the *Sunday Times of India* since the media started kowtowing towards Modi Government. The High Court came to Aakar's rescue and allowed him to go abroad for his lecture tour.

"Price of Modi Years" is a highly readable book, with a flowing style and cogent arguments backed

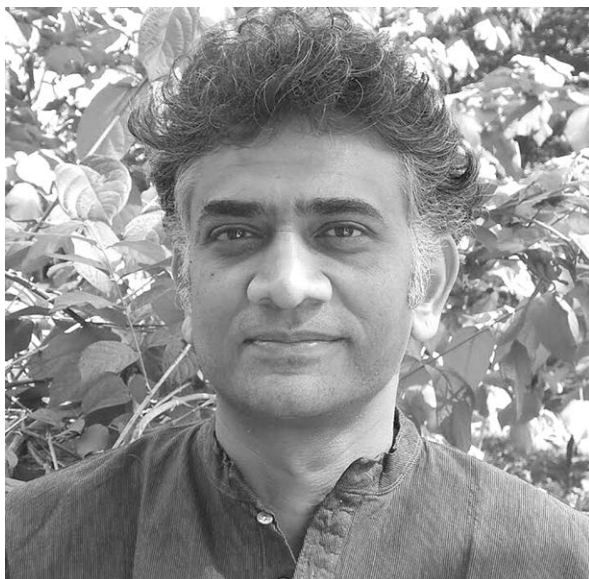


by facts and figures culled from findings of painstaking research into so many reliable publications. In his preface to the book, Aakar refers to a remark which Dr. Manmohan Singh made in 2014, to the effect that Modi would be a disaster as Prime Minister. The preface hints and the book illustrates how this is so true. It is a differ-

ent matter that he brought impressive victories to BJP in two national elections. The book also shows how this was possible and the price the country has paid so far and will continue to pay. "What was once communal is now legitimate and what was secular has been made inauthentic," says Aakar in the introductory chapter. Modi's traits are that he is decisive, full of certitude, transparent (I have doubts about this, unless Aakar means Modi's motives are too obvious), unlearned, energetic and charismatic. Aakar quotes from *The Quint* (21 March 2015) what a British journalist who was paid to write a hagiography of Modi said: "It was strange to interview Modi and hear him speaking of himself in the third person even in personal conversation".

Another revealing statement by Aakar in the 'Introduction' runs like this: "The Modi years are littered with the corpses of projects thus taken and discarded once a new toy had been identified - 'Make in India', 'Demonitisation' - about which hardly any BJP leader speaks nowadays - 'Surgical strike', 'Smart Cities', 'Namami Ganga', 'Lockdown', 'Vocal for Local'. It is governance by catchphrases. A clever name, often a dazzling event with little follow-up and not much thinking". Years before Modi became Chief Minister of Gujarat, Ashish Nandy, Political Analyst, along with writer Achyut Naik, met and interviewed him. Nandy wrote about the interview thus: 'It was a long, rambling interview, but it left me in no doubt that here was a classic, clinical case of a fascist'.

In the chapter "Brand Versus Product", Aakar Patel exposes the much talked about 'Gujarat Model', just by demolishing the usual claims concerning Modi's ability to deliver transformative economic growth.

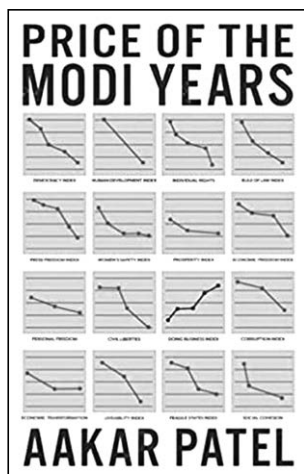


Aakar Patel

The scholars who examined the claim have come out with the following findings:

- In annual growth rate, Gujarat was slower than Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Bihar in Modi years. Gujarat had in fact grown faster between 1992 and 1997 than under Modi;
- The state had been in third position nationally before Modi, and continued to remain in that position under Modi years;
- During the Modi years, unemployment rates were lower in Chhattisgarh and Karnataka than in Gujarat and foreign direct investment (FDI) was higher in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Delhi;
- Human Development Indicators fell under Modi, Gujarat dropped five places from 6th to 11th. Gujarat stood 21st in child malnutrition. Asked by Wall Street Journal why half of Gujarat's children under five suffered from stunting (low height for their age), Modi replied that Gujarati girls were 'more beauty conscious than health conscious' and 'refuse to drink milk';
- The number of girls attending secondary school in Gujarat was only 29%, in comparison to 93% in Kerala; for boys the corresponding ratio was 45% versus 90%!

Aakar Patel then goes on to list the ratings India received before and after 2014, i.e., before and after Modi became PM, on various aspects like the health of its democracy, human development, religious restrictions, rule of law, GDP per capita, quality of life, freedom of the Press etc. and proves that "under Modi, across 53 indices, India's ranking rose on 4, but fell on 49". "India under Modi did poorly on 6 indices that tracked civil liberties and pluralism, 7 that tracked health and literacy, 2 tracking religious freedom and minorities, 2 tracking internet denial, 6 tracking national capacity of various types, 6 tracking rule of law, corruption and transparency, 6 tracking sustainability and environment, 4 tracking gender issues and women's safety, 5 tracking the economic freedoms of Indians and 5 tracking urban spaces". When India plummeted in the Hunger Index, according to the report in *New Indian Express* of March 20, 2021, the government said in Parliament, it was not possible that Indians were hungry, because



whenever a street dog gives birth in our village, even though it bites, our women provide them with *gheer* (a sweet dish)!

"Joblessness rose consistently under Modi," says Aakar in the same chapter. The total number of Indians working shrank under Modi from 44 crore in 2013 to 41 crore in 2016, to 40 crore in 2017, then to 38 crore in 2021, though the workforce grew from 79 crore to 106 crore. Sedition cases rose from 30 in 2015 to 70 in 2018, to 93 in 2019. Only one person was convicted between 2016 and 2019. UAPA (Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act) cases rose from 72% between 2015 and 2019 though the conviction rate was only 2%.

The second chapter, "Godi Media" deals with the pro-government colour which most of the newspapers and TV channels began to exhibit, of which the 'Republic TV' of Arnab Goswami and 'Times Now' of Rahul Shivshankar, are leading the race. 'Republic TV' takes a lot of pain to 'run down the Opposition and attack Muslims. Similarly, 'Times Now' spends a good part of its time to criticise the Opposition and least time on economic issuers, prices of petrol, diesel etc. After dealing with certain studies and analyses of the Indian media under Modi by well-known experts like Christopher Jeffrelet and Vihang Jumb, Aakar Patel states: "Most of it (the media) has joined the state and can be seen as a part of the government propaganda machinery. The purpose of Godi media is to distract, attack Modi's opponents, laud him, and to divide society and discredit and vilify those who resist the division. Let me, however, add that certain editorials and leading articles in 'The Times of India' and 'The Indian Express', two newspapers I regularly read, do not always support this inference.

I decided to write about this book out of a missionary zeal to promote any effort aimed at throwing light on the dangers posed by the Modi Government. I now find it difficult to do justice to that task within one article, as I have been able to deal with three chapters only, out of the 14 chapters, including the introductory chapter. I hope to write more on this book in another article. ©

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# Saffron Tinge to School Syllabus

Efforts are on to remove many relevant topics from CBSE syllabus; however, many topics, which go against rationalism and scientific temper, are included

BY **RAM PUNIYANI**

In the name of rationalization of curriculum, many topics have been removed from the CBSE syllabus (April 2022). From the tenth standard syllabus, the topics excluded are: Democracy and diversity; rise of Afro-Asiatic Islamic states; history of Mughal Courts; non-alignment movement; impact of globalization on agriculture; popular struggle movements; poems of Faiz in the section of Communalism; and challenges to democracy.

Criticizing this, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi labeled CBSE as Central Board for Suppressing Education, and called RSS, the force behind these policies, as Rashtriya Shiksha Shredder. All India Democratic Students Organization has launched a signature campaign against it. As such when the BJP comes to power, one of its major goals is to modify or change the education policy and curriculum to tune it to its version of sectarian nationalism. Its focus is on faith-based knowledge away from scientific temper and rational approach to social, historical issues.

One recalls when BJP-led NDA came to power in 1998, Dr. M.M. Joshi was the HRD Minister. He changed the history books to introduce communal angle to historical events. Accompanying this

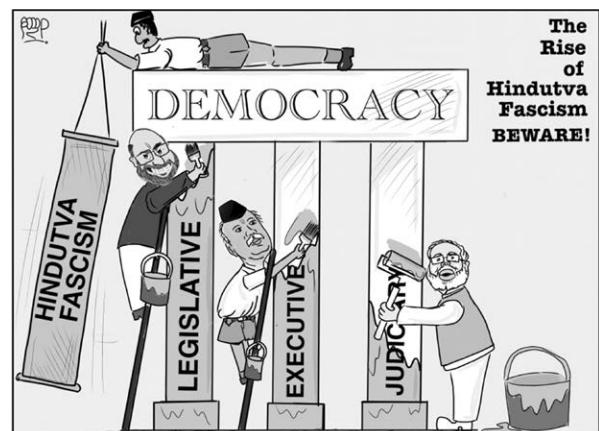


was the introduction of Paurohitya (Priest craft) and Karmakand (Rituals). In contrast to scientific astronomy, astrology started being taught. There was an interesting paradox. In astrology Saturn was the trouble-maker, while in astronomy Saturn was taught as a planet of Sun. In opposition to

biological understanding that sex of child is determined by X or Y chromosome coming from father, the Putrakameshti Yagna (ritual to get male child) was being taught as the method for getting the much sought-after son.

The pattern continues. RSS has already formed Shiksha Sanskriti Uthan Nayas, an RSS affiliate, to campaign for influencing the MHRD Ministry. It has been pressurizing NCERT for removal of the following among many other things: English, Urdu and Arabic words; the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore; extracts from painter M F Husain's autobiography; references to the Mughal emperors as benevolent; the BJP as a "Hindu" party; an apology tendered by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over the 1984 riots; and a sentence that "nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat in 2002". As such, the recent

When the BJP comes to power, one of its major goals is to modify or change the education policy and curriculum to tune it to its version of sectarian nationalism



Courtesy: Nehel Politik @Neuscitok.in



recommendations to NCERT are continuation of the same agenda which is working for its goal of Hindu Rashtra.

It had also been putting pressure to undertake Bharatiyakaran of education. Under its pressure, many publishers have buckled. A major example is that of Penguin pulping the book 'The Hindus: An Alternative History' by Wendy Doniger. This was an academic work which looked at various aspects of Hindus, particularly the plight of women and Dalits. One RSS leader Dinanath Batra has been very active in this area and has produced a number of books for school children. In Gujarat, 42,000 schools introduced his books after their translation to Gujarati.

The pattern of the curriculum presented in these books spells things like Qutub Minar was a Hindu Monument called Vishnu Stambh built by Samudra Gupta. These books totally bypass the syncretic traditions and present the Kingdoms through the eyes of king's religion. The focus is to present the view that foreign Muslim rulers were doing atrocities on the native Hindus. It is through this lens that Kings of Mughal dynasty are presented. Now in the new scheme of things the Mughal Courts and their pattern will be totally eliminated. Even during the much-maligned Mughal period, the Mughal Kings had Hindu associates (Akbar and Mansingh, Aurangzeb and Raja Jaising, and so on).

In these books, Muhammad Gazni and Ghori are the key villains. Gazni had many Hindu generals (Tilak, Sondhi, Harzan, Rai and Hind) in his army. Shivaji and Rana Pratap are presented as the main heroes. Incidentally, Shivaji's confidential secretary was Maulana Haiser Ali and Rana Pratap had Hakim Khan Sur as one of his generals.

The disturbing changes brought by BJP are an attempt to construct a history to suit its narrative of Hindu nationalism. Gandhi (Hind Swaraj) and Nehru (Discovery of India) gave the history of India, which was inclusive and reflected the emerging National movement and underlying concept of Indian Nationalism. The changes brought in by BJP in education were called as Saffronization by its critics. Initially, BJP and company responded to this criticism by ignoring the phrase. Later they aggressively said that the syllabus needs to be saffronised.

The current changes are in tune with the political requirements of RSS Combine. Mughal Court was an example of Hindu-Muslim unity, so it can't have a place in BJP scheme of things. Faiz Ahmad Faiz,



who was a democrat and secular and nominated for Nobel Prize for Literature, is an icon of literature for progressive democratic values. Having a poet with Pakistani identity will surely be big 'no' for the present ruling dispensation.

Currently, one of the aims of the Government is to undermine the first Prime Minister of India, the architect of Modern India, one who stood tall for his commitment to democratic and secular values, Jawaharlal Nehru. His major contribution on global scene was to evolve and work for Non-Alignment Movement. This movement gave a new direction to global alignments. It also helped India to develop taking advantage of collaboration of different camps in the World despite the Cold war. So, the chapter on Cold War era and non-alignment has been kept out of the syllabus.

The ruling party at the Centre and its ideology want to push the country in authoritarian sectarian state, where democracy has no role, so that chapter on pluralism and diversity is out. India's pluralism and diversity have a major role to play in the culture and strength of India. India's freedom movement and Indian Constitution respect our diversity. But uniformity in language, religious traditions and other cultural aspects is what is being aimed at.

Overall, the changes proposed, and to be implemented, are in tune with the concept of nationalism, and the culture which sectarian nationalists want to impose on the country. These need to be opposed and ensure that our syllabi are in tune with rationalism, scientific temper and pluralism of India. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**RAM PUNIYANI** is an activist and a prolific writer. He was awarded National Communal Harmony Award in 2007.

# The Story of Nyaya Chaupal

Successful experiment by a women's legal cell for empowerment of women and prevention of domestic violence

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

Most NGOs, including faith-based ones, are mainly involved in welfare and development activities in the process of empowering women. Organizing women into Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas and urban slums and supporting them to start income generation activities is a commonly adopted strategy by majority of NGOs. Most of them are hesitant to enter into the area of ensuring or enhancing security of women by educating and supporting them to fight against violence inflicted on them, especially domestic violence.

Uday Social Development Society, the Social Work wing of Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS) of the Central Province, has been making an experiment in empowering women by forming Nyaya Chaupal-Women's Legal Cell since 2017 for enhancing their security and preventing violence.

The Nyaya Chaupal consists of women volunteers who are trained to help themselves and others to settle issues related to different forms of violence that women and girls face. The selected women leaders are given training on various issues related to gender discrimination, patriarchy, exploitation of women and men at workplace, child marriage, child



labour, process of registering FIR, woman's right to property, leadership, Indian Constitution, government schemes, etc. so that they can help and guide other women in the slums. "Nyaya Chaupal is a forum and a community-based legal aid program for the victims of violence by the survivors of violence," says Sr. Lizy Thomas, the Chief Functionary of Uday Social Development Society.

According to Sr. Lizy, 181 women leaders are working as volunteers on prevention of domestic violence and women's issues. Among the 181

The women who have volunteered to be members of Nyaya Chaupal are proud of what they are doing for liberating women from domestic violence and preventing different kinds of violence against women and girls



women, 132 have become members of *Nagar Suraksha samiti* and *Shakti Samiti* attached to the police stations. *Shakti Samities* and *Nagar Suraksha Samities* are registered with police stations for community policing. More than 750 cases related to domestic violence have been resolved through counselling and assistance by the members of Nyaya Chaupal from 2017 to 2021. The women leaders visit government departments to discuss various issues related to women's security, submit applications and do the follow up.

The women who have volunteered to be members of Nyaya Chaupal are proud of what they are doing for liberating women from domestic violence and preventing different kinds of violence against women and girls. Phoolvati Sahu, Alomali Rai and Rajkumari Rajput of Jatkhedi slum of Bhopal have been part of Nyaya Chaupal from its beginning.

Three of them said, during an interaction, that they were victims of domestic violence not only from their husbands but also from in-laws and sister-in-laws. "My husband used to beat me and left me after my first delivery and even filed a false case against me," said Alomali Rai. Participating in the training sessions imparted by Uday Society gave her courage to fight against false case and join the team to support other women who are victims of domestic violence, she acknowledged.

The three women said that they together resolved about 150 cases of domestic violence and narrated a few of such cases. They did not want to reveal the names of the women and men involved in these cases with a view to maintain confidentiality. In one case, the husband used to beat wife on a regular basis after consuming alcohol. On receiving a complaint from the neighbours, the three women met the husband and counselled him not

**Now the Nyaya Chaupal experiment has assumed a wider dimension, as it has become a joint venture of Uday Social Development Society and the Police Department with the generous support of the latter**



to repeat violence on his wife. They explained to him the provision of the Domestic Violence Act. But there was no change in him. As a next step they complained to the police. The police called him to the police station and threatened him with arrest. They also advised the wife to go to her parents' house for some days. For two months he struggled to cook and do the household chores. Meanwhile, the three women continued their efforts to make him understand the need for stopping alcohol consumption. After two months he went to the police station and gave in writing that he would not inflict violence on his wife. As a result, the police and the three women called his wife back to husband's home and he kept his promise.

Another incident is related to stopping a child marriage. They came to know from a family that had come to Bhopal as migrant workers that the parents of a 14-year-old girl in their village Shakti Garh in Betul district was planning to marry off their minor daughter. They tried to persuade the parents to postpone the marriage till the girl attained the age of 18. But the husband-wife duo was not willing to postpone the marriage plan.

The three women under the leadership Alomali Rai contacted the *Sarpanch* (Village Panchayat President) through the police of Misrod Police Station and warned the *Sarpanch* that if the marriage takes place he would be in trouble. They asked him to bring five men (*panch*) from the village to Bhopal and give a written assurance that the said marriage would not take place. As the *Sarpanch* got frightened, he brought ten men to Bhopal and they gave in writing (*panchnama*) that they would take the responsibility of preventing the marriage.



According to the women, a lot of change took place in them also as a result of becoming members of Nyaya Chaupal. "I was very shy and did not know how to speak before others and also frightened of the police. During the last five years, I learned how to speak before other people, including the police and other officers. The training given by Uday Society helped me to enhance my knowledge on various legal issues, including POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Now there is no fear at all in me of the police or of government officers," said Phoolvati Sahoo. "We are freely interacting not only with the police department but with the officers of other departments and get the work done for the women of our area," added Rajkumari Rajput.



As a sign of the membership of Nyaya Chaupal, all women volunteers wear uniform sarees and it is very helpful for their identification, when they approach the community members, especially men who indulge in domestic violence as well as different officers.

"It was not easy for us in the beginning. The members of our own community, including women, ridiculed us and some men laughed at us saying that they are not able to set their house in order and they are going to settle disputes in others' houses," said Bindu Prajapati another member of Nyaya Chaupal. The discouragement and taunting by other women and men did not prevent them from intervening when domestic violence took place in the families of their respective areas. The various training sessions

they got from Uday and the cooperation from the police stations emboldened them.

Now the Nyaya Chaupal experiment has assumed a wider dimension, as it has become a joint venture of Uday Social Development Society and the Police Department with the generous support of the latter. In view of expanding the experiment to more slums, Uday Social Development Society conducted a sample survey of 1000 households in 20 slums of Bhopal in 2020. The survey revealed that 94.6% of women suffered domestic violence during the lockdown.

On the International Women's Day in March, the Society organized a programme in which more than 1000 women from the 20 slums participated. Mr. Vineet Kapoor, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Head Quarters, was the Chief Guest. He heard the testimony of many women survivors of domestic violence. They shared the violence they had suffered in their homes and the changes that have taken place in them as a result of joining Nyaya Chaupal.

In his address, the DCP asked why not the experiment is replicated in the areas of other police stations of Bhopal. He expressed interest to make it a joint venture of Uday Society and the Police Stations. He proposed to implement the experiment in 8 police stations (Misrod, Bagsevnia, Kolar, Aishbagh, Piplani, Avadhuri, Kamla Nagar & Katara Hills) by training 30 women volunteers from each of the police station area. The Uday Society agreed to the proposal and the proposed project of training 240 women as leaders and volunteers is planned jointly and it is to be completed by the end of December 2022.

According to Mr. Kapoor, the 240 trained women leaders will be linked with the police stations as members of 'Shakti Samiti'. The Shakti Samiti is

**When the activities of many NGOs, especially faith-based ones, are viewed with suspicion by governments, including the police, Nyaya Chaupal shines as a model of excellent cooperation between an NGO and the police department**



planned as a wing of URJA (Urgent Relief and Just Action) Desk in every police station, which will address the issues of domestic violence through voluntary efforts.

URJA Desk is a special one set up for immediate hearing, assistance and action on violence against women and at these help desks the cases are handled by women police personnel with separate infrastructural set up. Currently the Desk is established in 700 police stations of Madhya Pradesh. "If the Nyaya Chaupal experiment under the 8 police stations is proved successful, it will be replicated in all 45 police stations of Bhopal Municipal Corporation with the support of other NGOs," says Mr. Kapoor. The Uday Social Development Society will provide the resource team to train the NGO personnel.

On the basis of the experience, Sr. Lizy has presented the following as the objectives of the Chaupal.

- To make women and adolescent girls aware of the legal provisions related to women security and protection so that they are empowered to get justice for themselves and others.
- To reduce the cases of domestic violence in communities through counseling and referral services.

- To provide legal assistance to the victims and to plug loopholes in the legal process.
- To take initiatives to prevent domestic violence against women with the participation of women volunteers of the community.

Sr. Lizy said the UNICEF and the Azim Premji Foundation have shown interest in expanding this experiment to new areas.

When the activities of many NGOs, especially faith-based ones, are viewed with suspicion by governments, including the police, Nyaya Chaupal shines as a model of excellent cooperation between an NGO and the police department. Any successful experiment in empowering the underprivileged sections in society requires building good relationship with different stakeholders, especially with government departments. Uday Social Development Society has presented a replicable model of collaboration with the community and the police department through the Nyaya Chaupal experiment. ©

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# Satyamev Jayate

Indian politicians seem to compete with the entire world for filling the public space with half-truths and full lies

BY DR M. D. THOMAS

The Sanskrit phrase 'satyamev jayate' means 'truth alone prevails or triumphs'. It is inscribed in Devnagari script at the base of the national emblem of India, referring to the lion capital of Ashoka. Independent India adopted it as the national motto.

The slogan 'satyamev jayate' was popularized and brought into the national lexicon by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1918. He was serving as President of the Indian National Congress for the second of the four terms then.

'Satyamev jayate' is a mantha from Mundaka Upanishad. As the national emblem, it is considered the symbol of the moral authority of the government, in the day-to-day functioning of the government. It is found in all official communications, naturally so.

As a matter of fact, political leaders in all countries, leaders in other domains also, tell lies at will and people soak them in. Why should people believe in the lies spoken by their leaders, especially of the political ones? This is a crucial question that requires being answered.

"We must reject the culture, in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured", said Joseph Biden, the new president of the United States. This was an ardent invitation to truth, in the wake of a heap of falsehood around as he took over his office.

For German and Soviet dictators, Hitler and Stalin respectively, lying was an 'essential tool of government', not merely by habit but as a convenient way of sanding down unwanted facts. Most governments



in the world today resort to lying on a grand scale to gain power and remain in power.

In the words of Alexandre Koyre, "lying was never more widespread than today or more shameless, systematic and constant... The grosser, the bigger, the cruder the lie, the more readily are the lies believed and followed".

The social media and the enormous power of technology have made the spreading of lies almost instant and the impact has become deadly. When the mainstream media is subservient to the rulers, the ordinary citizen has no chance of even hearing the truth. Examples abound in every country.

The corona pandemic times were highly vulnerable due to the sense of insecurity, economic, social, psychological and spiritual. Any hope-generating information has been gulped in and believed. Politicians, along with the religious and the corporate sector, literally made the best advantage out of the situation through lies and half truths.

Delving deeper into the tendency of the humans to believe in falsehood, conspiracy theories and falsi-

Social media and the enormous power of technology have made the spreading of lies almost instant and the impact has become deadly

## THE TRUTH PREVAILS



When history is re-written or re-interpreted, lies are being written. When certain statues are pulled down and others are erected, there is beheading of truth and coronation of lies. When names of the places, institutions and roads are changed, it is truth that is meddled with

fied history, it is not difficult to arrive at the roots of human deprivation, of food, clothing, shelter, freedoms and ultimately the dignity of the human being.

Human beings have the terrible need to make sense out of the reality in front. When usual explanations do not work, they search for more. The more out of the ordinary the explanation is, the more attractive it becomes. No wonder, people swallow the lies down, spontaneously so.

The opinion of the leaders makes a huge impact because of the power positions they hold. For school-going kids, 'my teacher told me' is the final word. What the leader says is like the Gospel word for the people, especially the illiterate masses.

One has to read the innocence of the ordinary human being also in the context of the crisis of an economic system, which has failed the majority. Every crisis is an opportunity for the liars, in order to 'fish out of troubled water'. Or else, the politicians will trouble the water and fish.

"Neo-liberalism simply re-produces itself by resorting to magic theories of spillover or trickle as the only solutions to societal problems", observes Pope Francis. He criticizes the neo-liberalist governance of the world, arguing that the alleged 'spillover' does not resolve the inequality and the ensuing forms of violence.

'When you are totally deprived, you tend to believe anyone who promises to save you.' This is the logic of the tragedy that emerges from falsehood. When religious beliefs and practices are manipulated to convey a particular line of thinking, it mesmerizes people.

When history is re-written or re-interpreted, lies



are being written. When certain statues are pulled down and others are erected, there is beheading of truth and coronation of lies. When names of the places, institutions and roads are changed, it is truth that is meddled with.

When entertainment media, particularly television, internet and social media, fill themselves with half-truths and untruths, the viewers are unconsciously brainwashed. For a drowning human being, even the thinnest handle will bring hope.

The promises and lies that the politicians spread out every day and every moment become those thin handles that they hold on to. Unfortunately, they never realize that these lies could only take them deeper into the water and ultimately make them get drowned.

The Indian politicians seem to compete with the entire world for filling the public space with half truths and full lies. Where our dear country, the world as well, is heading for? Well, only time can tell us what doom is awaiting us.

The leaders in the religious sector are not behind in propagating lies and half truths. There is a lot of untruth in the superstitions, theological doctrines, pious stories and stipulations that are in the religious air of the country, much more than any other country. Well, they are lies in the disguise of God.

Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free". Truth alone can win over the lies that are in the air. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Truth is God". In the long run, untruth can never prevail. Only truth can prevail. Untruth is doomed to perish, miserably so, sooner or later. 'Satyamev jayate!' ©

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# Airing Arrogance at Airport

The Ranchi airport incident of denying permission for a specially-abled child to board a flight shows the need for changing the mindset of people

BY **AARTI**

**O**n May 7, the Indigo Airlines did not allow a specially-abled child and his parents to board its flight to Hyderabad at the Ranchi airport. The incident came to light after other passengers posted about it on social media.

Although the child and his parents were frequent fliers, on the day of the incident, he was said to be in a state of panic when the family arrived at the airport. However, his parents had quickly brought the situation under control.

Nonetheless, the ground staff of Indigo refused to let him board till he became more normal. Reportedly, though he had calmed down before the take-off time, the airline staff stuck to his stand saying that his behaviour posed a risk to other passengers. Indigo Airlines did provide the family hotel accommodation for the night and flew them to Hyderabad the next day.

No sooner than the incident had generated sharp reactions from several quarters, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia was quick to respond to a social media post. He stated, "There is zero tolerance towards such behaviour. No human being should have to go through this. Investigating the matter by myself, post which appropriate action will be taken." In line with the Minister's assurance, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has deputed a three-member fact-finding team to probe into the Ranchi airport incident.

Notably, unruly passengers can pose a serious problem for airlines. They can delay flights and in the worst-case scenario hurt other passengers or crew members. So, in all such situations they are a nuisance to the people around them.

But in this case, it was a child with special needs who was a frequent flier and not unruly.

After the matter received public attention, the Indigo Airlines while expressing "sincere regrets" and offering an electric wheelchair for the child, defended the action of its staff for having taken the best possible decision under difficult circumstances.

Under the Aircraft Rules, 1937 (Part III General Safety Conditions - 24A. Carriage of persons suffering from mental disorders or epilepsy in aircraft) the relevant extracts as under:

No person shall knowingly carry or permit to be carried, or connive at the carriage of, a person suffering from any mental disorder or epilepsy in any aircraft:

Provided that this prohibition shall not apply if the person to be carried is certified by a registered medical practitioner to be fit to travel by air without being a risk to other passengers or to the aircraft, and in addition:-





(a) has not taken or used any alcoholic drink or preparation within twelve hours of the commencement of the flight;

(b) is kept under proper sedative, if in a state of excitement, during the flight and stops enroute; and

(c) is accompanied by an attendant, provided that in case he has been in a state of excitement requiring sedation within the two weeks preceding the date of commencement of the flight, he shall be accompanied by a registered medical practitioner and adequate escort who shall individually and collectively be responsible for ensuring that no alcoholic drink or preparation is taken by the person in their charge and that such person is kept suitably sedated during the flight and stops enroute.

Well, the ongoing DGCA instituted inquiry is expected to unravel what exactly happened but the cause for concern is that when there are guidelines as well as court orders to ensure rights and equal treatment for people with special needs why are they not being followed in letter and spirit?

Even though air travel is most preferred for a plethora of reasons, in recent times, the operating environment in airports across the globe has been seeing lots of changes. The ground experience before boarding an aircraft can be frustrating for several people. Many passengers tend to arrive quite early to get inside the airport but the greatest uncertainty they can face is the time spent at the security checkpoint. Thereafter, finding the gate and getting past the queue for boarding the flight all makes it tiring at times especially for the old and persons with special needs.

This March, a professor complained that he was not allowed to board an Air India flight from Bengaluru to Kolkata for his refusal to remove the batteries of his wheelchair. According to him the wheelchair was designed to be taken by air without removing the batteries which were fitted with dry-lead acid sealed cells. The airlines, however, justified its action stating that leaving the batteries in the wheelchair flouted safety guidelines.

Way back in 2012, Jeeja Ghosh, an eminent activist involved in disability rights, born with cerebral palsy, was to fly from Kolkata to Goa on 19 February 2012 by a Spice Jet flight. She was invited to participate in an international conference related to her field of work. After being seated on the flight, she was approached by the flight crew who requested to see her boarding pass, which she gave them. Then they proceeded to order her off the plane. Despite her tearful protestations and informing them that

**The Indigo Airlines while expressing “sincere regrets” and offering an electric wheelchair for the child, defended the action of its staff for having taken the best possible decision under difficult circumstances**

she needed to reach Goa for the conference, they insisted that she de-board. After returning to the airport and arguing with airlines officials, she later discovered that the Captain had insisted that she be removed due to her disability.

She moved the Supreme Court in respect of the treatment meted out to her by the crew of Spice Jet. In the judgment of 12 May 2016, the Apex Court noted: "It is the common experience of several persons with disabilities that they are unable to lead a full life due to societal barriers and discrimination faced by them in employment, access to public spaces, transportation etc. Persons with disability are the most neglected lot not only in the society but also in the family. More often they are an object of pity. There are hardly any meaningful attempts to assimilate them in the mainstream of the nation's

**There is an imperative need for airline companies to train their employees for cultivating a measured response in the face of stress at the workplace. But most importantly, they must treat passengers with empathy, especially the old and those with special needs**

life. The apathy towards their problems is so pervasive that even the number of disabled persons existing in the country is not well documented... Jeeja Ghosh herself is a living example who has, notwithstanding her disability, achieved so much in life by her sheer determination to overcome her disability and become a responsible and valuable citizen of this country. A little care, a little sensitivity and a little positive attitude on the part of the officials of the airlines would not have resulted in the trauma, pain and suffering that Jeeja Ghosh had to undergo. This has resulted in violation of her human dignity and, thus, her fundamental right, though by a private enterprise (Spice Jet)". For acting in a callous manner and violating Aircraft Rules, 1937 and Civil Aviation

Requirements (CAR, 2008 Guidelines) resulting in mental and physical suffering experienced by Jeeja Ghosh, Spice Jet was directed to pay Rs 10 lakh as damages to her.

The Court had also observed that suitable amendments are required to be made in those CAR, 2008 guidelines in order to effectively take care on persons with disability. By its judgment of 1 December 2021, the Supreme Court has ruled that differently abled persons with prosthetic limbs/calipers are required to be checked for the purpose of security in a manner where no such person is asked to remove prosthetic limbs/calipers to maintain human dignity while ensuring the requirement of security checks.

But then human behaviour is rather complex. So, was the Indigo Airlines staffer who did not permit the child from boarding the flight at Ranchi ignorant of the rules? Or does it reflect a lack of empathy? Was he speaking up and standing up for himself? What one can infer from the social media video grab of the incident is that he was simply not listening to the public who were in favour of the child boarding the flight. Why can't some people be tolerant for another's opinion? Studies have shown that stress associated with certain occupations can have a host of consequences and airline crew can face penalties for not enforcing safety regulations. So, is it better to err on the side of caution?

Instances galore where some passengers have been very rude and nasty to the airline crew. A recent online survey of 5,000 flight attendants across 30 airlines in the US found more than half had experienced at least 5 incidents with unruly passengers. The survey data found 71 per cent of the flight attendants who filed 'incident reports' with their management didn't receive a follow up and a majority didn't observe efforts by the airlines to address issues with unruly passengers.

There is an imperative need for airline companies to train their employees for cultivating a measured response in the face of stress at the workplace. But most importantly, they must treat passengers with empathy, especially the old and those with special needs. To forestall situations like the Ranchi airport incident, it is necessary that besides the availability of a senior officer of the airlines for escalation of unsolved issues, deploying a government-approved medical practitioner at airports merits immediate consideration. ©



## Bishop Thomas Anthonios transferred as Gurgaon bishop

Pope Francis on May 7 transferred Bishop Thomas Anthonios Valiyavilayil to the Eparchy of St. John Chrysostom of Gurgaon of the Syro-Malankara.

He is currently the bishop of the eparchy of St. Ephrem of Khadki of the Oriental Catholic rite. This was announce at noon in Rome.

In another development, Father Antony Kakkanatt is appointed the Curia Bishop of Syro Malankara Catholic Church and Father Mathew Manakkara the auxiliary of Trivandrum Major Archdiocese.

Bishop Thomas Anthonios Valiyavilayil, a member of Order of the Imitation of Christ, was born on November 21, 1955, in Adoor, in the Archieparchy of Trivandrum.

He made his perpetual profession on December 9, 1980, and was ordained a priest on December 27 the

same year. He received his doctorate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Oriental Institute .

After ordination, he held the following positions: Superior of various convents; Director of a school in Kottayam; Master of postulants; Treasurer; Chaplain and parish priest; Professor in Trivandrum 's St. Mary's Malankara Major Seminary and other Major Seminaries; General Councilor of his Institute and Postulator of the Cause of beatification of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios; Chancellor of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syrian Malankara Church.

Elected Bishop on January 25, 2010, he received episcopal consecration on March 13 the same year.

On March 26, 2015, he was appointed first Apostolic Exarch of St. Ephrem of Khadki of the Syro-Malankara. ©



## Itanagar diocese ordains first indigenous priest

BY FELIX ANTONY

Itanagar diocese in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh on May 7 ordained its first priest of indigenous origin

Bishop John Thomas of Itanagar ordained Father Roshan Bamin Peter, a member of the Apatani tribe, at Mary Immaculate Church, Hapoli, Ziro, his home parish in Lower Subansiri district. Among those present was Emeritus Bishop Gabriel Kujur of Daltonganj.

"It is a proud moment for all of us in the diocese especially to the people of Apatani tribe," Nani Yase Teresa, the president of Apatani Catholic Women Association of Itanagar diocese. "It will inspire many young people of all tribes to become priests and nuns," she added.

Father Peter, the fourth of the six children of (Late) James Bamin Tabin and Monica Bamin Yabii, joined Itanagar diocese's St. Patrick Minor Seminary, Naharlagun, after completing his schooling. He completed his philosophy in Salesian College, Dimapur, the commercial capital of Nagaland, and Theology in St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore, southern India.

Many expressed their joy over the ordination of the

first Apatani tribal priest. "It is good to have a priestly ordination on the eve of the Vocation Sunday," said Taw Tebin, the president of Arunachal Pradesh Catholic Association. "It augurs well for the young Church in Arunachal Pradesh and particularly for Itanagar diocese," he added.

The Apatani are a special tribal group living in the Ziro Valley in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. Unlike other tribes, they are a non-nomadic and practice permanent wetland cultivation in hilly terrain by slicing the hills. According to the 2011 Census Arunachal had 43,777 Apatanis.

"It is a historic moment for the Catholic Church in Arunachal Pradesh. We pray for Father Roshan to help him spread the message of love, peace and kindness of the Lord to every corner of the world," said Yamlam Kaha, a Church leader from Itanagar.

Father Peter now becomes the second tribal priest from Arunachal Pradesh. Father Francis Belo from Galo tribe was ordained in 2008 for the congregation of Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)



## Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

# Guns and State Warfare..!

Somewhere in the US, arms manufacturers seemed to be throwing a party. There was the firing of cannon, rifle and pistol shots coming from their estates. The local police were baffled and rode over to see what the commotion was all about, "Good evening," said the sheriff respectfully as he got off his car and went over to the billionaire's huge gates where an armed guard stood, "There's a lot of shooting and firing, hope all's well!"

"Couldn't be better!" said the guard, "We are so happy, and I've even got a bonus!"

"I guess that's because of the Russian-Ukraine gun sales right? You guys are raking in the moolah!"

"Nah, that's chicken feed. We've got some big orders come in!"

"From where?" asked the sheriff.

"From India!"

"They going to war with China?" asked the sheriff uneasily.

"Nah, the order's not from the Indian government but from all the states!"

"You joking?" asked the sheriff, "Who they fighting with?"

"With each other," said the guard chuckling, "Police from one state have started going to another. One lot arrests a person, the other de-arrests the same person. One captures him, the other sets him free!"

"Ye gads!" cried the sheriff, "this is terrible, this could lead to civil war!"

"Which is why we are going into high speed manufacturing!" said the guard gleefully.

"But..." said the sheriff, who knew a thing or two about guns, "How will all this still make them purchase guns in such huge quantities? I mean the kind of celebration that's going on, it looks like the whole population in the sub-continent will want to arm themselves?"

"That is what we envisage!" said the guard glee-



fully, "Today, it's state police against state police, soon it will be one police station against another!"

"You mean if someone is arrested in one police station, the police across the road will come to set him or her free?"

"Yes," said the guard at the gate of the mansion belonging to the arms manufacturer, "We know it will lead to that and then bigger buying as the ultimate happens!"

"And what is that?" asked the sheriff.

"The people of the country seeing their cops occupied in fighting each other will soon realise they have no one to keep them secure but their own true selves and will start buying arms..."

"In hordes!" completed the sheriff.

"And do you know something sheriff?"

"What?" asked the sheriff.

"Most of the sounds you think are coming from inside our estate, are not coming from here. They are coming from India; between the Assam police and Tripura, Delhi police and Punjab and UP, and sporadic shots between Maharashtra local police and the Centre's CBI! Our billionaires have gone to sleep, they just provide the means for others to have fun..!" ©

### 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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| DVS – 3: April 25 – 30, 2022 | - God Experience through Mystical Prayer                       |
| DVS – 4: May 02 – 07, 2022   | - Leadership and Community Building Skills                     |
| DVS – 5: May 09 – 14, 2022   | - Psycho-Spiritual-Sexual Development                          |
| DVS – 6: May 16 – 21, 2022   | - Counseling Skills and Human Wholeness                        |
| DVS – 7: May 23 – 28, 2022   | - Re-Visiting the Consecrated Life                             |

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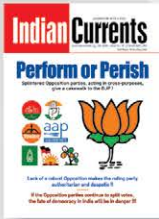
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