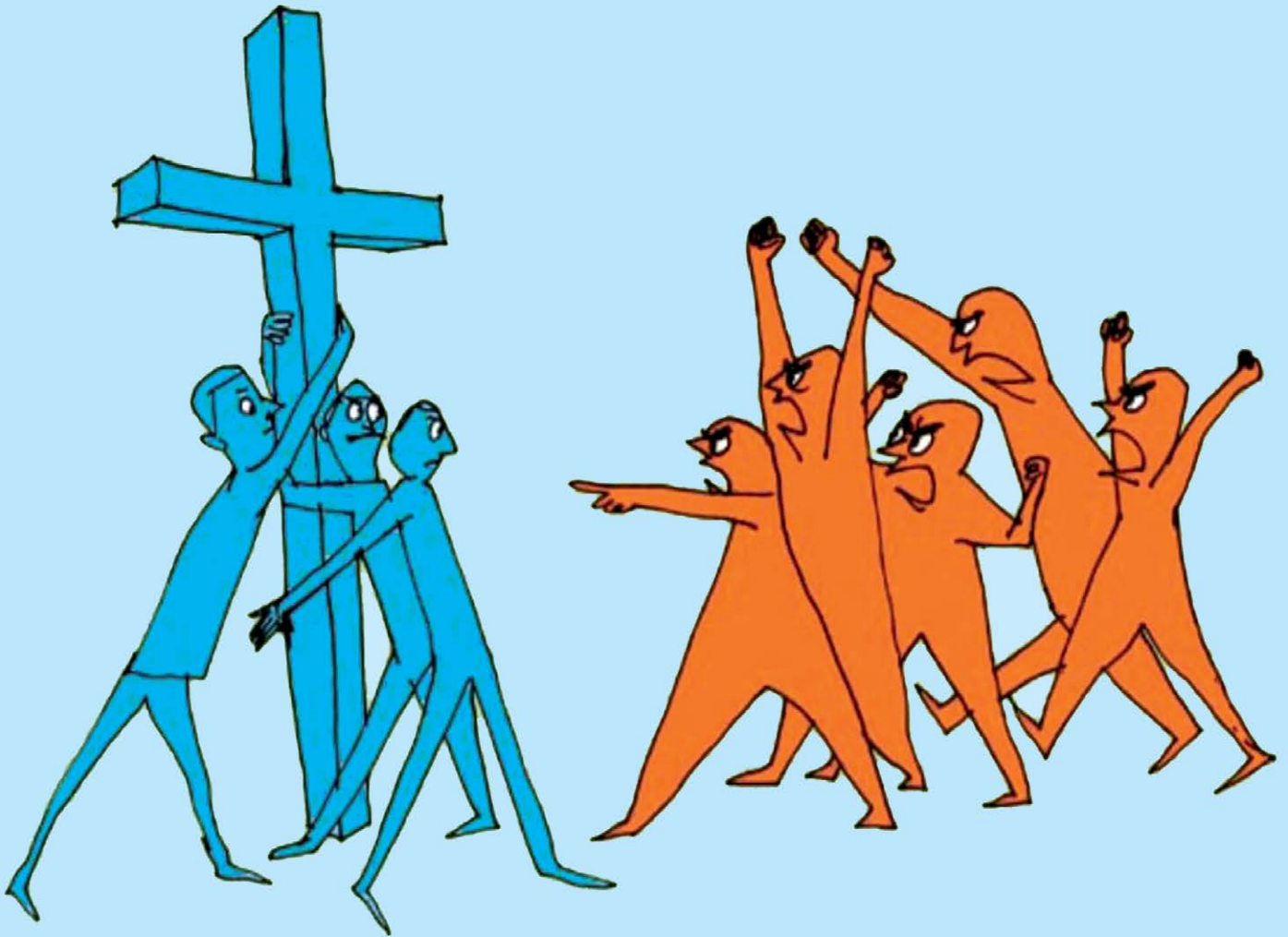


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FAITH AND FREEDOM AT STAKE

ASSAULTS ON CHRISTIANS

With only a few months left for elections in five States, the country is witnessing an alarming increase in the number of assaults on Christians



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CHRISTIANS UNDER HAIL OF ATTACKS



Narendra Modi government's oft repeated slogan is alluring: *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Viswas* (Together with all, for the development of all, and with the trust of all). It sounds good; it gladdens the hearts. But, it seems, the 'all' do not include the minorities in the country.

The proof lies in the increasing number of atrocities on them in many parts of country, especially in the Hindi heartland. The message is louder than the shots fired on the borders: The 'ethnic majority' seems to own the country and the minorities do not matter much.

They are made to feel, as M. S. Golwalkar had stated in his book, as second class citizens "claiming nothing...not even citizen's rights". Though there are half-hearted denials from some official quarters, the highway to *Hindu Rashtra* is being widened at break-neck speed. The increasing number of attacks on Christians seems to be a prelude to this mission.

The latest episode of this saffron drama has come from Mirpur in Uttar Pradesh where two nuns were attacked by right-wing vigilante groups as they were boarding a bus. The same day, in another dastardly attack in the same State, seven pastors were dragged out of a worshipping place and taken to police station.

There were several other attacks on Christians and their places of worship in the last couple of weeks as if to send out some message. It was not long ago that two nuns and two postulates, travelling in a train, were attacked and forced to disembark in Jhansi and taken to police station on the trumped-up charges of conversion. According to one report, from 330 incidents of attacks against Christians in 2016, it reached 527 in 2019.

What is at stake is people's fundamental right to live and freedom to practice a religion of their choice. Christians are becoming sitting ducks to Hindutva goons where ever they are – at worshipping places, in trains, buses and other public places.

In some villages, decades-old churches have been vandalized. Still worse is the indifference of law-enforcing agencies when right wing mobs take law into their hands and haul-up Christians. Police personnel turn into statues at the sight of marauding saffron brigade or they turn the other way when the hapless Christians are shoved around.

Christians' right to be Christians is no less Constitutional than the rights of those following the majority religion. If there are forced conversions, as alleged by the Hindutva forces without any rhyme or reason, there are laws in this country to take care of it. The courts have not relegated that power to individuals or organizations.

The spurt in attacks has phenomenally gone up after new anti-conversion laws have been enacted in many BJP-ruled States. However, certain sections of the Church hierarchy do not seem to have their ear to the ground. Their knee-jerk reaction is tantamount to turning a blind eye to the attackers. There have been voices of concern and condemnation coming from several countries and world organizations censuring these attacks. But, the Church hierarchy adopts an ostrich-type approach as if it is under the spell of the sweet talk of the government and its vague assurances.

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

Happy Reading!

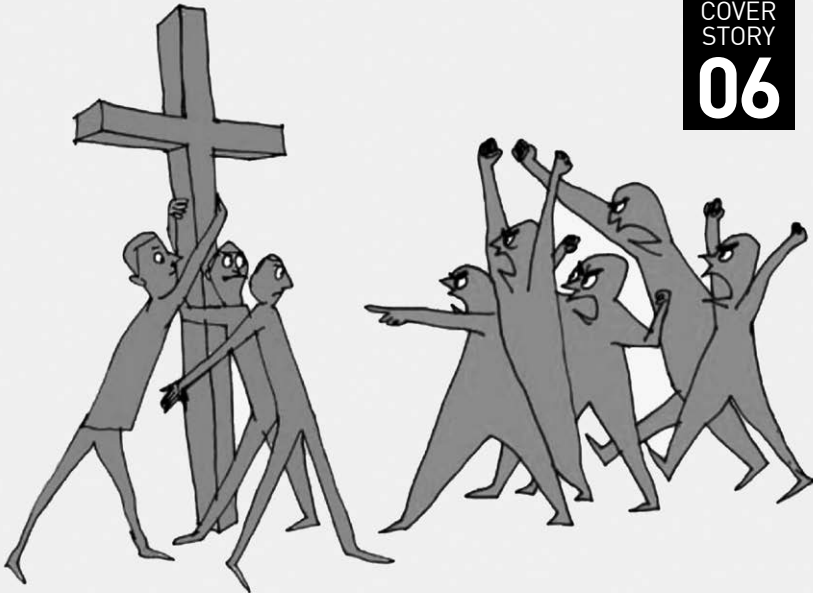
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suresh Mathew'.

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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POWER QUOTES



Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.

- **Bill Keane**

• • •



You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

- **Abraham Lincoln**

• • •



No matter how busy you are, you must take time to make the other person feel important.

- **Mary Kay Ash**

• • •



Time and tide wait for no man.

- **Geoffrey Chaucer**

• • •



Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

- **Carl Sandburg**

• • •



All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.

- **William Shakespeare**

• • •



Tough times never last, but tough people do.

- **Robert H. Schuller**

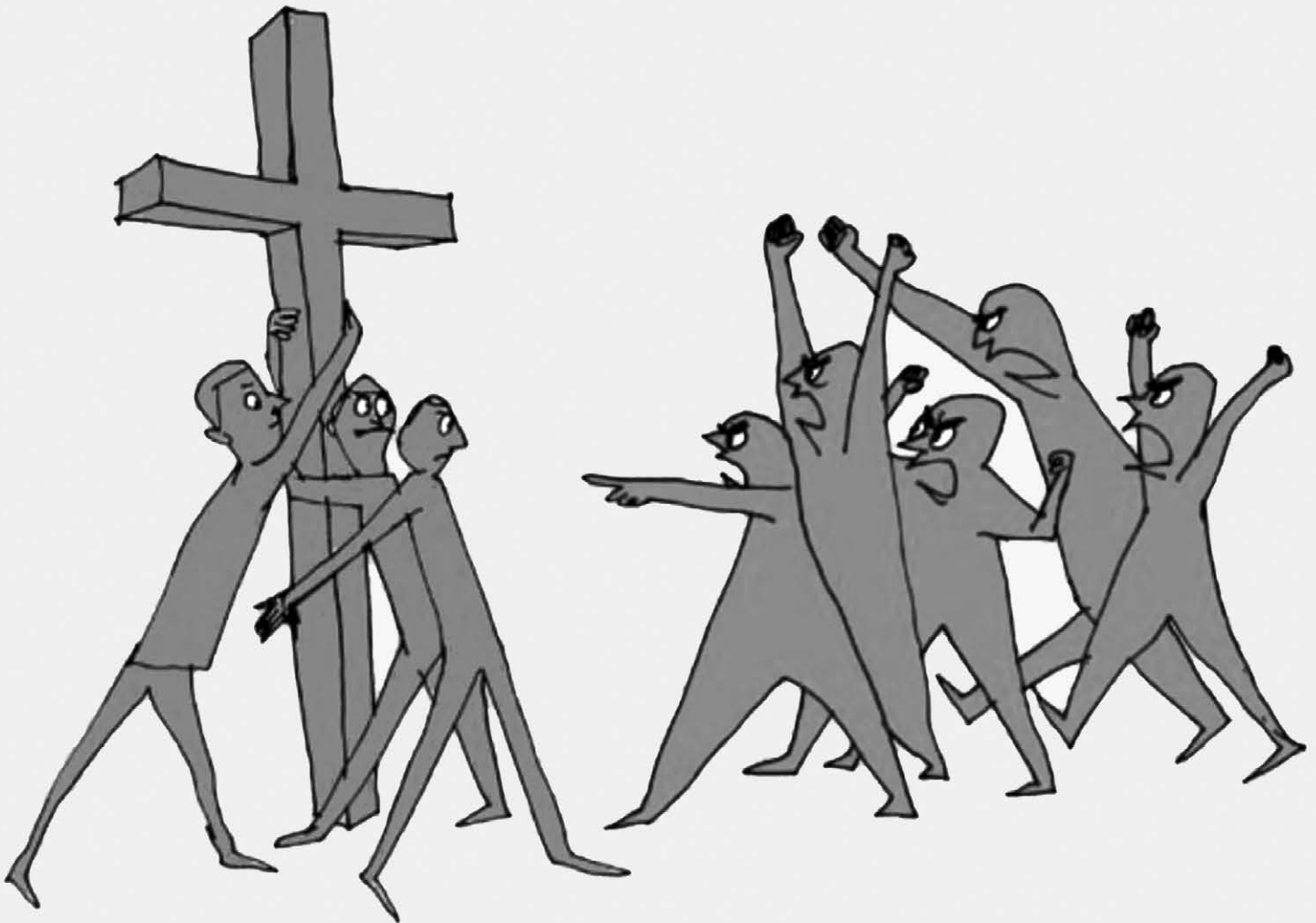
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It is strange that the years teach us patience; that the shorter our time, the greater our capacity for waiting.

- **Elizabeth Taylor**

• • •



FAITH AND FREEDOM AT STAKE
ASSAULTS ON
CHRISTIANS

Spurt in Attacks on Christians

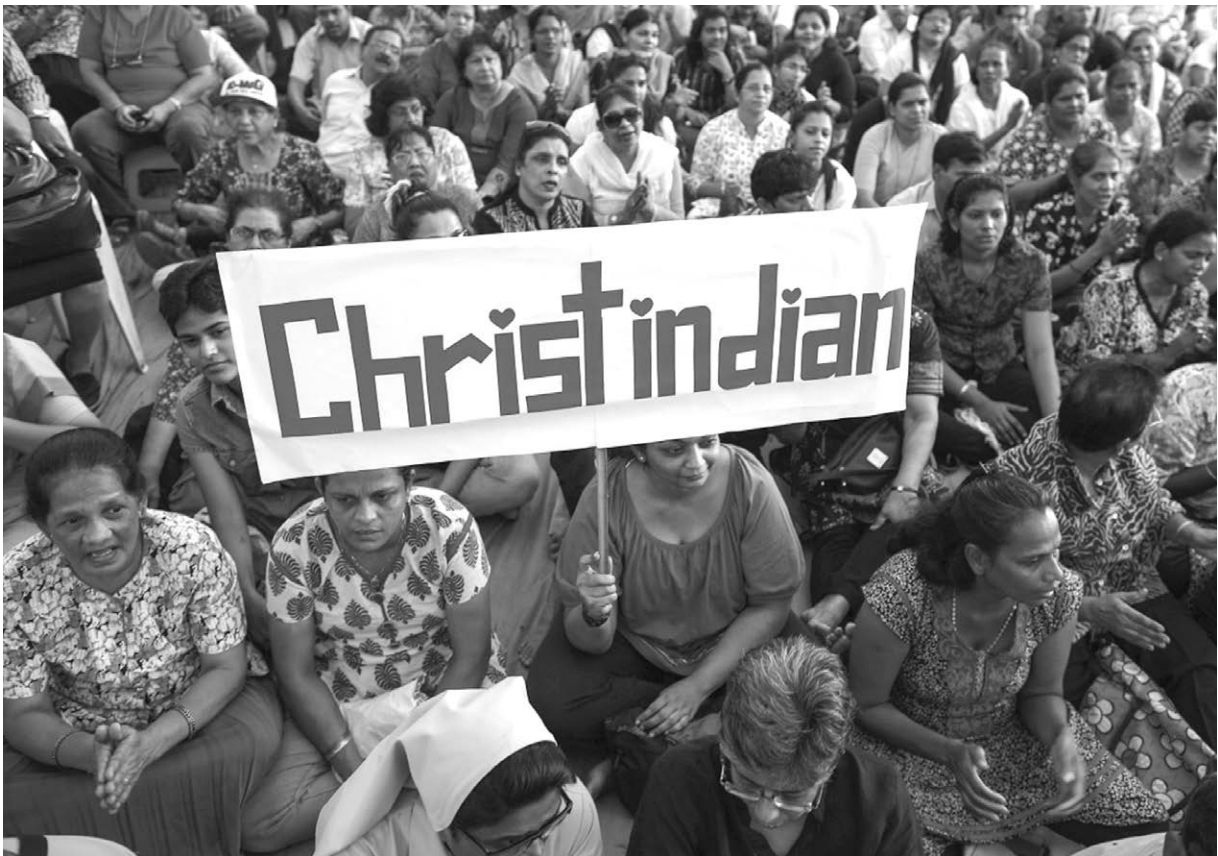
With only a few months left for elections in five States, the country is witnessing an alarming increase in the number of assaults on Christians

BY **KARUNA JOHN**

On Sunday October 10, Sister Gracy Monteiro, a school principal, who belongs to the Mirpur Catholic Mission in Uttar Pradesh, her colleague Sister Roshni Minj, and their driver were attacked by a right-wing vigilante mob while boarding a bus to Varanasi. The mob dragged them to the police station after roughing them up and abusing them. The mob was reportedly a part of Hindutva groups such as the Hindu Yuva Vahini which have been gaining more 'confidence' that they are above the law in Uttar Pradesh and have begun prowling the streets as if looking for minority commu-

nity members to victimise. On Sunday the group was lurking the streets of Mau rounding up a group of Christians, accusing them of conversion, and handing them over to the police. Members of the group remain behind bars.

Then a smaller group, allegedly of the same mob, spotted the nuns' vehicle and attacked them at the town's bus station. These could have been dismissed as bizarre fake news if not for eyewitness accounts. Sister Grace Monteiro, who survived the attack, spoke in detail on the horror she witnessed and experienced on the streets of Mau.



She, an Ursuline Franciscan nun, had come to the city bus stand around noon, with her colleague Sister Minj, and school driver (name withheld to protect identity) when a mob of Hindutva radicals, dragged them out, roughed up the driver and forcibly took the three to the police station where they were kept till 6 p.m.

Sister Monteiro says she kept asking the mob who they were, and kept trying to prevent them from hitting the driver, a non-Christian, even as the mob continued abusing, attacking and accusing the three of religious conversion. The driver, who has worked in the school for a long time, has not converted to Christianity, and now was harassed and victimised for merely being with the sisters. At the police station they were held without reason and later released, recalled Sr Monterio; only once she managed to contact the relevant authorities.

“There were just the three of us. I was accompanying Sister Minj who was going home in Ranchi to visit her dying father. As we did not get the direct bus, we went to the Mau bus stand and Sr Minj went to ask about the bus, while the driver and I stayed in the car. Then a mob came and attacked the driver, dragged him out, and forced the three of us to walk to the police station,” she recalled, adding that they

The mob took out the vehicle's key and made them walk to the police station. It was more shocking that no policeperson intervened when the mob attacked the three

were perhaps identified as Christians because they were in the nun's uniform of cream-coloured salwar kameez and the convent's name was painted on the side of their Bolero.

“They told us to get out of the car; I asked them ‘why’. They started hitting our driver, and I told them not to hit us as I was going to answer whatever questions they had. They told us ‘we will show you who we are,’” she recalled, adding that the mob took out the vehicle's key and made them walk to the police station. It was more shocking that no policeperson intervened when the mob attacked the three.

“We were in shock, this was sudden and unprovoked. Sister Minj was already under stress as her father was critical. I demanded that a policewoman should come and we will not go with them. The police asked us ‘are you converting?’ It was hours later that an inspector showed up and spoke to them, “We showed him all our proof, even the photo of Sr Minj's critically ill father. Then the inspector said it was by mistake that we were picked up.”

However, while there were no apologies, the nuns say it was the most traumatic experience, and they demand an explanation. Sister Minj has managed to reach her hometown to see her dying father, and Sister Gracy says she is still in shock but will file a complaint with the authorities soon. “Who were the two attackers? They have no right to attack us. I am against mobs, we have to complain. They have no right to attack,” she said, adding “We are also human beings, no? I objected to them as they were beating up my driver; they kept holding his collar. What kind of security, protection do we have? I do not have any safety to go out alone. Now we have to be careful.”

Sister Gracy said while she was in stress, there was no fear. “We are citizens of India. We are not doing something wrong. We have a lot of work. The entire day was wasted in the police station. Sister Minj lost money as her ticket was wasted. She had to travel the next day. I had identified the attackers to the lady police, but the cop asked me for the photo. The police had put us in a room; the man who attacked us was not seen again,” she added.

Worshippers attacked

In the other incident, a regular prayer service was attacked by a Hindutva mob, some of whom claimed to be activists of Bajrang Dal as well as Hindu Yuva Vahini. The group then forced the Christian worshi-





pers, including the priest, to go to the police station. According to reports, the mob was accusing the group of ‘converting’ people. However, the devotees, including one Vijendra Rajbhar, who spoke on video said they had been praying there regularly. According to the First Information Report (FIR) filed by one Radheshyam Singh, the worshipers have been accused of forcing people to convert to Christianity through allurements, as well as “violating Covid-19 protocol, using musical instruments, consuming narcotics and other intoxicants.”

Those arrested included Pastor Abraham Shakeel Ahmed, his wife Pratibha, Vijendra Rajbhar and Geeta Devi, the couple in whose house the worship took place. Rajbhar was then questioned on camera by ‘youtube journalists’, and he kept answering their questions and maintained that no forcible conversions were taking place and that the worship in his house had been a regular one. Even the pastor is heard saying in a video clip that anyone can attend the worship and that they pray for those who are unwell or need any kind of support and prayer. The First Information Report alleges that the pastor and others “insulted Hindu deities using abusive language,” reported *MattersIndia*, adding that the devotees also abused the Prime Minister and the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister.

According to local Christians, those from the independent churches are the ones most easily

targeted as vigilante mobs barge into house-churches, and disrupt prayers, beating up those leading the prayers. Some pastors, who often hail from poor families, then go into hiding and some even stop preaching. There is a rise in ‘media houses’ which work as a ‘media wing’ of the vigilante groups. They often accompany the mobs and ask questions which are accusations in themselves.

The office of SP Mau, Ghule Sushil Chandrabhan, declined to comment, but confirmed that the accused were still in jail. Calls to the investigating officer, Inspector D.K. Srivastava, went unanswered.

More attacks in October

Several churches, mostly independent, were reportedly attacked in various States over the Gandhi Jayanti weekend. The most serious attack was reported from Roorkee, Uttarakhand, where worshipers attending Sunday’s congregational prayers were seriously injured when a right-wing mob vandalised the Church. The mob alleged that “religious conversion” was taking place, before it launched its vicious attack.

According to news reports, the Uttarakhand police have booked “200 people for allegedly vandalising a Church in Roorkee”. The accused have been booked for rioting, theft, trespassing and voluntarily causing hurt under varied sections of Indian Penal Code, reported the *Hindustan Times*.

The Church is located in Solanipuram Colony, Roorkee and those attending the prayers told media persons that at around 10 a.m., a right-wing mob, including women, came to the prayer hall and shouted slogans against the church and its people. The mob accused those in the church of “carrying out religious conversion of some Hindus under the garb of charity work in the area” and suddenly began to vandalise the Church premises. The worshipers also alleged that they were “physically manhandled” by the mob.

It is noteworthy that elections are due in the state next year, and communal polarisation and unrest have been reported to peak as the days draw closer. According to news reports, all allegations of “conversions” were denied by N Wilson, who is associated with the Christian prayer house. He told the media that over the “past two decades regular prayers, mass meetings and charity related activities were being carried out from the prayer house.” According to a report, the FIR registered by Prio Sadhana

Bail for women in conversion case

Three Christian women arrested by police for alleged violation of the anti-conversion law in Uttar Pradesh were released on bail by a local court on Oct. 13.

The bail applications of four others, including a pastor, arrested in the Mau incident are likely to come up for hearing on Oct. 16, said Pastor Dinanath Jaiswal.

The seven were part of a group of some 50 Christians attacked by Hindu radicals while attending a Sunday service at the Mau district headquarters.

"The women are so traumatized that they are not in a position to explain their ordeal," Pastor Jaiswal told UCA News on Oct. 14.

He said Christians in the state were living under tremendous pressure and fear after repeated attacks on their prayer meetings across parts of the state.

A local Catholic priest who did not want to be named told UCA News that attacks by fanatic Hindu mobs under the pretext of keeping a check on so-called forced religious conversion activities had become the norm in India's most populous state.

In Mau, Pastor Abraham Shakil and his wife were put behind bars in the latest incident while Pastor Raju Manjhi was arrested a few days ago. In Azamgarh, Pastor Nathaniel along with his wife was in jail. If they don't get bail in the lower courts, they have to approach the high court for relief, the priest said.

"We are scared as they can attack us any time and put the blame on us. The police and political leadership side with the attackers. Many pastors have stopped conducting prayer services," he added.

(Courtesy: ucanews.com)

Lanse, the church pastor's wife, stated that "over 200 men and women belonging to the local Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party's youth wing, barged into the church and started vandalising it, while beating up the churchgoers." She said, "the frenzied mob, shouting slogans like 'Vande mataram' and 'Bharat mata ki jai', barged into the church, which is on the first floor of the building. They started beating our volunteers and the women attackers bashed up our womenfolk." The FIR named Rajni Goel, Rakhi Pradhan, Banita Chauhan, Seema Goel, Dhir Singh and Shiv Prasad Tyagi by Lanse who had recognised them as they were local residents.

However, this is not an isolated incident, according to sources in Evangelical Fellowship of India Religious Liberty Commission (EFIRLC); multiple such

attacks have been reported from other places as well. They were all reported during the weekend of October 2-3, when the nation observed Gandhi Jayanti.

Some of these attacks include:

Bhilai, Chhattisgarh: A local Pastor identified as Santosh Rao was called to the police station along with some others. He was accused of "conversion", and was let go after interrogation.

Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh: Pastor Nandu Nathaniel and his wife arrested under sections of UP's Anti Conversion law as well as some other IPC sections, after a complaint was launched by the person who lives next to the place where Christians worship.

Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh: Evangelist pastor Prerit and his Church were attacked allegedly by a right wing group which came to disrupt their Sunday worship.

Komakhan, Kusumi Police station, Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh: A group of villagers entered a house church and allegedly vandalised it and "slapped a 12-year-old boy" who was praying inside the church. According to EFIRLC sources, the team is gathering more information and is reaching out to the victims with support.

These attacks come close on the heels of another incident that took place on September 28 where, according to sources, Evangelist Charley John (63), Vishal Parashuram (24) and Keval Ram (29) were arrested in Rampur Bushehar in Himachal Pradesh while they were distributing Gospel literature.

In February this year, the Supreme Court of India had allowed Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), to challenge laws against religious conversion passed by Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh by amending its original plea questioning similar laws passed by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In addition, the court also allowed the Muslim organization Jamait Ulama-i-Hind, to intervene in the proceedings. The organisation alleged that the laws led to the harassment of a large number of Muslim men and hence there was a need to oppose the legislation.

On January 6, the Supreme Court had issued notice to the Centre and the states of Uttarakhand and UP on two petitions challenging the validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018. One of the petitions was filed by CJP. ☉

(The article first appeared in SabrangIndia)

FAITH AND FREEDOM AT STAKE

An individual's right to pursue any religious faith of her/his choice is under severe attack across the country, especially in the Hindi heartland

BY **MANOJ VARGHESE**

Dark clouds loom large over Christians and their Churches as they are attacked across the country, especially in the Hindi belt. In recent times, the atrocities against them have increased manifold. Almost a dozen attacks were made on them in just one day, October 10. This is in addition to the 13 church attacks reported on October 3.



One thing common in all these violent attacks is the charges of 'conversion'; whereas all of them had a transformation of their faith, they had not changed their religion. In 1956, Dr B R Ambedkar, along with over 3.7 lakh Dalit followers left Hinduism and embraced Buddhism after they suffered oppression and humiliation for decades. According to the Constitution, following a particular faith is the prerogative of an individual.

In Mau in Uttar Pradesh, Pastor Abraham, who serves with UP Mission, and eight others were arrested on the charges of 'conversion' while they were praying along with a congregation of around 50 people on October 10. They were accused of performing religious conversion. The locals here have been worshipping in Christian faith for the past 5-6 years.

They were booked under Sections 298, 504, 506, 3, 51 of IPC and certain sections of the Anti-Conversion Act. After much persuasion, and in the wake of no evidence, the charges were reframed by the Mau police station under Sections 151, 107 and 116 of CrPC for disturbing the public peace and harmony and entering into a conflict. After three days of custody, only three of them have been granted bail after being produced before the city magistrate.

The landlord of the house, where the worship was going on, has no problem, and has opened up the house for Church

service. He has made a live testimony in the village after getting healed of a disease he was suffering from for the past several years. He had consulted several doctors, but in vain, and finally turned to Jesus and had taken several vows of commitment.

He himself was a part of the congregation which was worshipping there.

In another incident, as stated by Brajraj -- a human rights activist with Persecution Relief -- one Rakesh Gautam was threatened by two men reportedly of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, while he was in a prayer fellowship along with the local people in Masumpur village of Sitapur district. Later, on the complaint of the duo, he was taken to the police station and was kept in the police custody for almost 26 hours.

The local women, who were part of the prayer meeting, also had to undergo humiliation and investigation by the police for almost 12 hours. Rakesh has a small cloth business and stays in Ladoopur village, almost 10 kms away. He came to the Lord almost 10



Akal Takht accuses missionaries of forced conversions of Sikhs into Christianity

Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh has accused Christian missionaries of running programmes for forced conversion of Sikh families in border villages, a charge vehemently denied by the Bishop of Diocese of Amritsar.

The Jathedar further alleged that several members of the Sikh community were being lured with money for conversion.

“Christian missionaries are carrying out massive programmes for forced conversions of Sikh families and Scheduled Caste Sikhs in the border belt of Punjab. Missionaries are using money and all possible means to force Sikh families of the border belt to adopt Christianity,” alleged the Jathedar of Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhs.

He said, “Conversions of innocent Sikhs into Christianity fold is a direct attack on internal matters of the Sikh community and this is intolerable.”

Singh further said the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has received many complaints in this regard.

He laid emphasis on taking some steps for prevention of alleged forced conversions.

The SGPC has taken a serious view of it and has recently launched a ‘Ghar Ghar Andar Dharamshal’ to stop forced conversions, said Singh.

“Sikh preachers have been given the task to visit all the bordering villages of Punjab to distribute Sikh religious literature, including historical books and other materials

free of cost. Besides, all gurdwaras (Sikh shrines) in the border villages are also being extended help to counter the conversion mission of Christian missionaries,” he said.

When contacted, Bishop of Diocese of Amritsar, Church of North India, Pradeep Kumar Samantaroy rejected the claims as “baseless”.

“This is absolutely wrong and baseless allegations. Christians never believe in forced conversions as it is against the principles of Christianity. We are open to criticism, but I asked them to come forward with facts and even quote any single example of forced conversion,” he said.

“If anything is found, the matter is to be investigated by any independent agency or NGO. Every religion has a right to preach and many people including Sikhs and non-Sikhs with their own sweet will join us, but we never force or pressurise them to adopt Christianity,” he added.

There are 150 educational institutions being run by Christianity and anybody can visit there to enquire from any student about the conversion, according to Samantaroy.

“Yes, we definitely give free education to whosoever approaches for the same. We help people to give them education irrespective of caste and creed,” he said.

He also said, “The SGPC is talking about the bordering belt of Punjab but we are helping people all over the state to extend free education in our schools, whether they are Sikhs or non-Sikhs”.

(Courtesy: PTI)

years ago and lives along with his family of four children. No one lured him with money, job or other resources. He lives a life of hand-to-mouth, then and now. The only difference is the hope and peace he has found in Jesus.

In yet another incident, a group of people were intercepted by some right-wing activists while they were returning from a worship service at Madari-

pur village in Amethi. The villagers, dominated by Thakurs, asked them to refrain from Christian faith and prayers or face the consequences. On a complaint by the activists, one Rajkumar was arrested, but was released on the condition that they will not worship or conduct prayers in their house.

Later, the mob attacked a group of people including Rajkumar, Kuldeep, a senior pastor and an advocate. Yet again, with the help of some influencers, they were released from the police station. Bhim Army of Azad Samaj Party too intervened and mounted pressure on the administration and hence no FIR was filed, stated Kuldeep, a local human rights activist with Persecution Relief.

In Maharajanj, also in U.P., Srinivas and his wife were beaten up by a group of religious extremists while they were leading a prayer service along with around 40 people on October 10. The police intervened, but instead of safeguarding the



The country is witnessing alarming rise in attacks on people who are practicing a religion according to their belief and faith

victims, threatened them of dire consequences if they continued to worship further. They were also booked, but were released later. 'How can the custodians of law violate the fundamental right of people pursuing a particular faith?' asks Surender Pokhal of Evangelical Fellowship of India Religious Liberty Commission (EFIRLC).

In a similar case, Pastor Sukh Sagar from Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh, was beaten up and taken to the police station; Pastor Santosh Kanoj, Rajesh Buriya, Bhawsingh Chouhan and Vinod Rathod have been put in Bagli jail in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh since August 8, 2021.

Pastor Sudama Prasad, associated with the GEMS ministry, was attacked and his prayer meeting was disrupted at Dobhi in Gaya district of Bihar. Around 30 people broke into a prayer meeting and attacked Pastor Sudama, his 22-year-old son, and his wife. Since the pastor resides in rented accommodation, he has been asked to vacate the property.

In Campiorganj, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, three pastors, Vishal, Govinda, and Karan, were taken into police custody. Allegations of religious conversion were made against all three pastors. Christian advocacy groups intervened and the pastors were released without being charged.

In Garhani, Bhojpur, Bihar, as the Sunday Service began in Gospel Echoing Missionary Society (GEMS) Church, a group of people stopped the worship service. They threatened the believers to kill them if they continued to pray there. Evangelist Jyoti Prakash serves as the missionary here.

In Haliyal, Uttar Kannad, Karnataka, a group disrupted a Sunday prayer meeting which was led by an independent pastor, Suresh Durmani. Later, police from Haliyal visited the pastor and told him that only family members should participate in the prayer service and non-family members should not be invited. Pastor Suresh has been doing ministry for the last 10 years in the same area and conducts prayer in his rented accommodation. At present, he

Hindus converting to other religions for marriage are wrong, says Mohan Bhagwat

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has said that conversions of young Hindu girls and boys are wrong and that there is a need to instil in them a pride about their own religion and traditions.

"How do conversions happen? How do Hindu girls and boys adopt other religions for petty selfishness, for marriage? Those who are doing it are wrong but it is another matter. Don't we nurture our children? We need to give them these values at our home. We need to instil pride in them for ourselves, our religion and respect towards our tradition of worship," Bhagwat said in his address to RSS workers and their families at an event in Haldwani in Uttarakhand.

He urged the people to answer questions in this regard without being confused. "Answer the questions if they come. Do not be confused. We should prepare our children and for that we need to learn," said Bhagwat.

The RSS chief spoke about preserving traditional family values and traditions. He also urged people to visit Indian tourist sites, consume home-grown food and wear traditional outfits.

Bhagwat noted that the six 'mantras' to stay connected to the roots of Indian culture include language, food, devotional songs, travel, dress and house.

While he appealed to people to follow traditional customs, he stressed that untouchability should be abandoned.

"Do not differentiate on the basis of caste. There should be no untouchability. Society is habituated to guessing religion from names. Differentiation of people should be completely removed from the heart," he said.

(Courtesy: firstpost.com)

has around 40 members attending Sunday prayer meetings.

As per the Constitution of India, it is the Individual's right to pursue any religious faith. But the country is witnessing alarming rise in attacks on people who are practicing a religion according to their belief and faith. 10

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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BURYING CORBETT, REVIVING SARASWATI

A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

BY A.J. PHILIP

Once my wife and I passed by the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand. For want of time, we could not stop there. We thought of returning to the area, staying at the Park for a couple of days, going on a Safari, taking photographs and writing a column in this magazine after some time. Alas, that wish has not been fulfilled. Now that the Park has been renamed by dropping Corbett's name, I am no longer keen to visit the place.

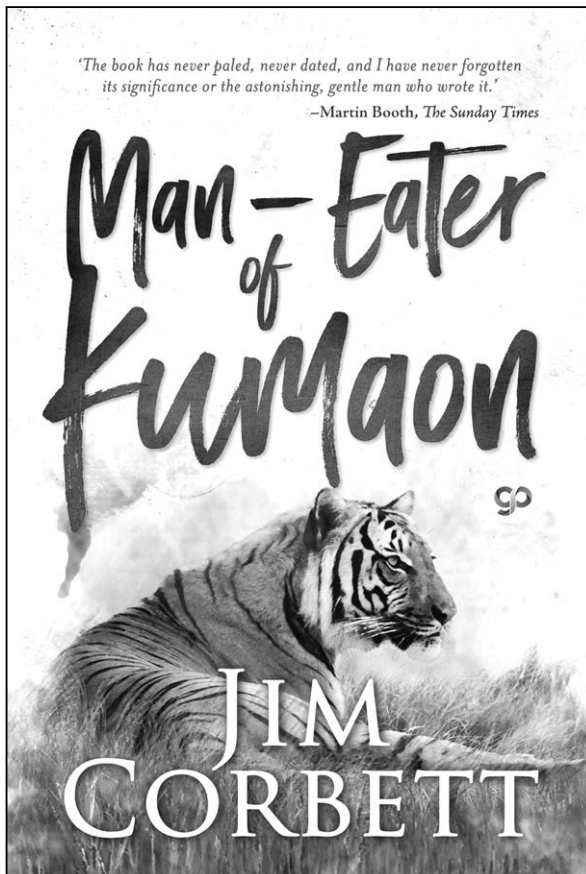


I had a chapter from his masterpiece, 'Man-eaters of Kumaon', to study while I was at college. The lesson was so fascinating that I borrowed the original two-volume book from the local Panchayat Library and read it in one go. It also had the pictures of the various man-eaters he had killed.

He saved hundreds from falling prey to the wild cats. Nobody understood the mind of a tiger or a leopard better than Edward James Corbett (1875-1955), known popularly as Jim Corbett.

To call him just a hunter is to expose one's ignorance about him. He was one of India's first wildlife photographers, a naturalist, tracker and author of several books which continue to be sold and read. Anybody who is born in India is an Indian citizen by birth. Corbett was not a foreigner, as he was born at Nainital in Uttarakhand, though his parents were British in origin. He loved India like no one else loved the country.

There was a time when hunting was a passion for the rich and the powerful. Maharajas of yore went on long hunting expeditions. Once, I stayed at Maharaja Martand Singh of Rewa's palace and visited the exact spot from where he caught Mohan, the first white tiger in the country. All the white tigers in the zoos anywhere in the world are the descendants of Mohan.



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A CLOSE LOOK

Corbett was also a hunter. He would also have killed several tigers and leopards as was the practice those days. However, he loved the people so much that he started hunting only the man-eaters and that, too, on the request of the villagers who lost their kith and kin to the wild beasts. He studied the man-eaters so much that he could reach certain conclusions about them which can only be described as incontrovertible. First, the animals do not see man as their prey.

He described how villagers collecting wood from the forests would just stand still as a tiger or a leopard crossed their path. Neither the people nor the animals saw each other as their adversaries. Then, how did some become man-eaters? In the lesson I studied, the man-eater was a female tiger.

The tiger was no longer healthy. It could not hunt deers, wild boars, antelopes and baby elephants, the meat of which it relished. So she began to look for easy food like goats and cows owned by the villagers. Sooner than later, she picked up some children. Once she got a taste of human flesh, she looked for men and women whom she could easily attack and kill. Hundreds of people were killed before Jim Corbett's services were requisitioned.

It was not an easy job. Identifying the man-eater was the first job. And, then, tracking the animal so that she alone was killed. That was a great service he did to the people of Uttarakhand. To understand the scenario better, recently the Kerala Government allowed those with licensed guns to kill wild pigs that destroy the crops of farmers. And among those licensed to kill was a Catholic nun, if a report I read is anything to go by.

Corbett was not a very well-educated person, let alone a scholar. He learnt everything from nature. He tried to popularise the idea of conservation. He believed in the live-and-let-live concept. He feared that if tigers were allowed to be killed, they would become extinct like the Dodo in Mauritius. The animals had every right to live as homo sapiens have. He was the first to conceive the idea of developing a National Game Sanctuary.

He took steps to set up India's first national park in the Kumaon Hills. Initially, it was known as the Hailey National Park in honour of Lord Malcolm Hailey. Corbett was not interested in any such honours. However in 1957, two years after his death, the Government of India renamed the Park after Jim Corbett. How much he loved India and Indians is



Jim Corbett — the man known for being both a hunter and champion of tigers

obvious from the dedication of his book, *My India*.

He dedicated it to "...my friends, the poor of India". He writes, "It is of these people, who are admittedly poor, and who are often described as 'India's starving millions', among whom I have lived and whom I love, that I shall endeavour to tell in the pages of this book, which I humbly dedicate to my friends, the poor of India." Profits from the publication of "Man-Eaters of Kumaon" were donated to St. Dunstan's, a training school for blinded veterans.

Since rewriting history to project clemency-seekers as the really brave and falsifying truth has become a national pastime, I was not surprised to read someone with a particular political orientation claiming that Jim Corbett ran away from the country when it got Independence. Such persons do not realise that Corbett was a bachelor and he depended on his sister. He was 72 in 1947, no longer in the pink of health.

Two and a half years after India attained Independence, Corbett and his sister left for Nyeri in Kenya where he died in 1955. There, he had an unforgettable experience. He was staying at a hotel, originally built for Baden-Powell, the person who started the Scouts and Guides movement. Corbett was at the Treetops, a hut built on the branches of a giant ficus tree, as the bodyguard of Princess Elizabeth when she stayed there on February 5-6, 1952. That night, her father, King George VI died, and Elizabeth ascended to the throne. Corbett wrote in the hotel's visitors' register:



When the first BJP government under AB Vajpayee came to power at the Centre, the then HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi took upon himself the job of proving to the world that the river Saraswati was not the figment of imagination but a real river like the Mandakini and the Cauvery. He sanctioned crores of rupees to conduct excavations in certain areas of Haryana. Except for finding rock and sand, nothing of any consequence was found

“For the first time in the history of the world, a young girl climbed into a tree one day as a Princess, and after having what she described as her most thrilling experience, she climbed down from the tree the next day as a Queen—God bless her”. She

is still the Queen! How would Jim Corbett have reacted to the decision to drop his name from the Park's name? Ranjit Lal, an author, environmentalist and bird-watcher, had an imaginary conversation with Jim Corbett (Indian Express, October 13).

The writer presented a present-day picture of the Park. After listening to him, Corbett says, “I would never rest in peace knowing that a Park of the kind you have just described is associated with my name”. It won't matter to him whether the Park is called Sri Ramganga National Park or Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Udyan or whatever.

It is a measure of the priority of the Narendra Modi government that renaming roads, parks, towns and villages is accorded so much importance. It took only a few hours for the death of former President Abdul Kalam to rename Aurangzeb Road in New Delhi after him. Taking a cue from the idea, some Hindutva activists took the law into their own hands and renamed Akbar Road in the Capital after some imaginary or real person.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who takes pride in renaming Gurgaon as Gurugram, after Guru Dronacharya, who sought and obtained the thumb of Eklavya, is now busy spending hundreds of crores of rupees on an esoteric religious project at state cost. It is believed that there was a river called Saraswati which, over thousands of years ago, dried up. It joins with the Ganga and the Jamuna at Allahabad to create what is known as the Sangam!

When the first BJP government under AB Vajpayee came to power at the Centre, the then HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi took upon himself the job of proving to the world that the river Saraswati was not the figment of imagination but a real river like the Mandakini and the Cauvery. He sanctioned crores of rupees to conduct excavations in certain areas of Haryana. Except for finding rock and sand, nothing of any consequence was found.

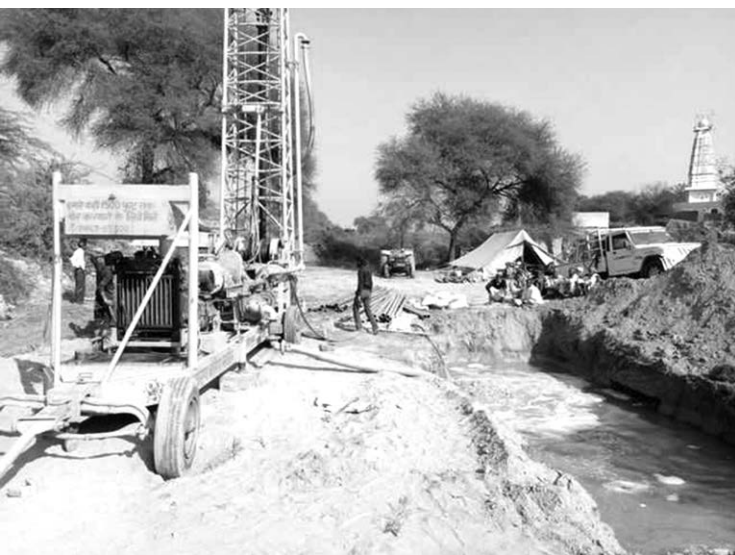
That did not prevent some organisations associated with the Sangh Parivar from claiming that conclusive evidence was found about the existence of the Saraswati. It was as laughable as the Prime

Minister's claim at a meeting of scientists in Mumbai that the recreation of Ganapati with the head of an elephant and the body of a human being proved that plastic surgery originated in India.

These are matters of belief. I was a child when I saw the film Ten Commandments. What impressed me the most was the depiction of what is contained in the Bible, "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." The Israelites were allowed to cross the sea but when the Egyptians followed them, the sea got united again, devouring the pursuers. I found the scene absolutely fascinating.

Today, I am free to believe or disbelieve that the incident happened. Imagine the government of Israel spending a huge sum of money to prove that what Moses did had indeed happened. The fact is that it does not matter to a true believer that whatever is described in the Bible is true or not.

To return to Haryana, Adi Badri is a place in Yamunanagar district. It is situated at the slope of the Aravalli Ranges. Under the project, a Saraswati Dam, a Saraswati Barrage and a Saraswati Reservoir will be constructed at Adi Badri. Besides this, the Markanda and Saraswati rivers will be inter-linked. On completion, around 894 hectare metres of flood water will be diverted to the Saraswati reservoir. The dam is being designed by the Central Water Commission.



BJP government in Haryana plans to revive mythical Saraswati river

At a seminar on Saraswati, this is what the Chief Minister said: "The credit of the progress that is being made in the work related to the discovery of river Saraswati today, goes to the late Mr Darshan Lal Jain. Though he is not with us today, his thoughts are still with us and reviving the Saraswati River while following the path shown by him will be a true tribute to him.

"All the doubts regarding the existence of the Saraswati river have been resolved and scientific evidence has been found for its flow. Haryana is globally known as the cradle of Vedic culture. On the sacred bank of Saraswati, our saints and sages had written Vedas and other religious texts.

"The historic war of Mahabharata, also took place in Dharmakshetra-Kurukshetra, which is situated on the banks of the Saraswati. Lord Krishna also gave the immortal message of Srimad Bhagavad Gita comprising knowledge, devotion and deed on this holy land." My friend, Mr K. Madhavankutty is not a scientist of the late DL Jain's calibre but he worked in the Science and Technology Department of the Government of India.

He wrote on his Facebook Timeline that there were only 33 Gods as mentioned in the Vedic Texts. All the Gods whose names we hear today were created afterwards. Of course, the Khattars can spend public money to prove that all of them really existed.

Meanwhile, the Global Hunger Index report has come. It ranks India at 101 out of 116 countries. India is behind Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, not to mention China. None of the leaders of these countries have two state-of-the-art Boeing aircraft to travel all over the world like Prime Minister Narendra Modi. None of the countries spends precious and scarce resources to prove that mythology is science and science is mythology. They are more interested in filling the bellies of their people.

When a majority of the people do not have two square meals a day, we have a chief minister who is ready to spend hundreds of crores of rupees to revive a river that existed in the minds of some and a prime minister who can part with Rs 20,000 crore to rebuild the Central Vista in New Delhi. Look at the priorities of those in power! ©

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WHEN SHEPHERDS BECOME WOLVES..

Many of our leaders today behave not only like hired servants but also like wolves in certain situations. The violence that took place in Lakhimpur Kheri in UP on Sunday 3rd October, in which Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra and his son are alleged to be involved, demonstrates how the leaders can become killers of people

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

Jesus was an amazing teacher and an ideal leader. The qualities needed in an excellent leader are reflected in his life and teachings. He has compared an ideal leader with a good shepherd and a bad leader with a hired servant who runs away when the wolves come to attack the sheep. During his lifetime he had noticed in his own community, leaders behaving like hired servants and even as wolves. History is a witness to some leaders who became wolves. Adolf Hitler, who was responsible for murdering 9 million people, including 6 million Jews, is one among the most notorious leaders in the history of the world.

What Jesus taught about 2000 years ago is relevant today and we observe sometimes leaders of all hues forget that they are shepherds and behave like hired servants and even as wolves in some cases.

A good leader knows the strengths, weaknesses and needs of his people and he is concerned about each one of them. He goes in front or leads from the front, presenting himself as a role model and protecting his people from all possible attacks and dangers. He is ready to take any risk, even to lay down his life for the sake of his people. On the contrary a fake, egoistic and self-centred leader



leaves his people in the midst of danger or crisis to fend for themselves. Sometimes he may even resort to exploiting and annihilating his own people for his self aggrandizement.

Jesus proved that he is a perfect leader by laying down his life for people. Mahatma

Gandhi is one of the greatest leaders the world has ever seen, and he also laid down his life for his people. That is why people of India honour him as the 'Father of the Nation'.

Unfortunately, many of our leaders today behave not only like hired servants but also like wolves in certain situations. The violence that took place in Lakhimpur Kheri in UP on Sunday 3rd October, in which Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra and his son are alleged to be involved, demonstrates how the leaders can become killers of people.



A shocking video circulated on the social media shows at Lakhimpur Kheri a group of protesting farmers moving forward on a road next to farm fields and then being mowed down by a grey SUV that speeds up from behind. One man is thrown up over the bonnet before the vehicle speeds away, leaving a jumble of bodies on the side of the road. The BJP MP Varun Gandhi tweeted on the incident, "This video will shake anyone's soul," and appealed for "immediate arrests".

According to the media reports, Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra agreed that the SUV shown in the video is his own, but denied that his son was in the vehicle. But the protesting farm leaders have accused that the son of Ajay Mishra was sitting in the vehicle that mowed the farmers. As per the media reports, total 8 people died, including four farmers, in the violence that erupted on Sunday October 3, 2021 in Lakhimpur Kheri.

Farmers had assembled in the district to protest against the visit of Ajay Mishra and deputy chief minister of UP Keshav Prasad Maurya because they were angry with the central minister over his earlier statement of threatening them. The farmers were staging a demonstration on the road when the minister's motorcade allegedly ran over them, killing two protesters and injuring others.

The opposition leaders like Akilesh Yadav of Samajwadi Party, Priyanka Gandhi of Congress and Bhupesh Baghel Congress CM of Chhattisgarh were not allowed to visit the families of the diseased farmers and they were stopped on their way. Priyanka Gandhi was in police custody for more than 48 hours without any FIR and Bhupesh Baghel was not allowed to proceed from Lucknow airport. While the persons who are accused of murder are roaming around, the opposition leaders who went to express solidarity with the families of diseased farmers are either detained or arrested. Retired Supreme Court judge Madan Lokur said that "Priyanka Gandhi is being kept illegally".



The phenomenon of leaders becoming hired servants and even wolves is not limited to politics alone. Religion is another area where the leaders consider themselves as representatives of God and take decisions and impose them on the faithful without consulting them

The same play book was used by the UP government in Hathras gang rape case. The body of a girl, who was gang raped and died later while undergoing treatment in hospital, was cremated in the night even without allowing the family members to take part in the funeral rites. Opposition leaders and journalists were prevented from visiting family members of the girl.

A journalist from Kerala Sidhique Kappan was arrested under stringent UAPA while he was travelling to Hathras for reporting on the case. For more than a year he has been languishing in jail without

bail. All these violations of fundamental rights are done under the guise of protecting law and order. The UP government under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath has shown scant regard for the rule of law while claiming UP to be a role model of good governance.

The BJP has different norms with regard to the opposition ruled states. When there was violence in West Bengal after the declaration of election results in May, the BJP sent a special delegation for investigation. Ministers and MPs not only visited the victims of violence but made public protests against the TMC government. In the case of Lakhimpur Kheri even a chief minister and a deputy chief

of Haryana was inciting his party men in Haryana to arm themselves with lathis to 'reply' to farmers. He also told them, "If you stay in jail for two-four months, you will become a big leader. Don't worry about bail." Earlier a farmer had been killed and several injured after an officer of the Haryana government was filmed saying that his men should "break heads" of protesting farmers. Chief Minister Khattar brazenly instructed his party men to unleash violence against farmers.

No action has been taken against those who are actually indulging in sedition while hundreds of innocent people are booked under the sedition law and are languishing in jails. According to renowned

Supreme Court lawyer Dushyant Dave, the son of Ajay Mishra and Manoharlal Khattar are to be arrested under the sedition law and Ajay Mishra has to resign immediately. No impartial investigation can take place if he remains as Minister of State for Home Affairs.

In a democracy the citizens have the freedom to protest or dissent, and it is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution of India. The BJP governments at the Centre and in many states have been passing laws without taking into account the views of people and imposing them on

minister are not allowed to visit the families. This is a blatant violation of fundamental rights.

The main reason for the eruption of violence at Lakhimpur is highly offensive statements attributed to the BJP leaders, threatening and belittling the protesting farmers. As reported in The Indian Express, the following statement is attributed to Ajay Mishra. "Aise logon ko kehna chahta hun ki sudhar jao, nahin to samna karwake hum aapko sudhaar denge, do minute lagega sirf (I want to say to such people to 'mend your ways', otherwise I will make them face me and set them right in two minutes)."

The day farmers were mowed down and killed at Lakhimpur Kheri, Manohar Lal Khattar, BJP CM

people. The three farm laws, passed in a hurry without proper discussion in the parliament and dialogue with the farmers and the states, are part of the laws imposed on the people of India. The BJP and its ideological mentor think that they have a license to impose on the people of India whatever they want.

In recent years, democracy in India has been reduced to capturing power and retaining power by hook or crook. If a party is not able to win election, it resorts to purchase of MLAs through large scale defections from other parties. The BJP has proved to be adept in this Machiavellian tactic. The leaders, once they are in power, consider themselves to be masters and take people for granted.





We have many examples of political leaders instigating their followers for violence. In fact they behave like wolves instead of serving people as good shepherds. The East Delhi communal violence in which 53 people were killed was triggered by highly provocative communal speeches by a few political leaders. Unfortunately no action has been taken against these leaders whereas many young people who were protesting non-violently against the Citizenship Amendment Act were charged under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and are still in jail.

The phenomenon of leaders becoming hired servants and even wolves is not limited to politics alone. Religion is another area where the leaders consider themselves as representatives of God and take decisions and impose them on the faithful without consulting them. They hold the view that they are accountable only to God and not to people. According to them, the role of people is to blindly obey what they command. They are not even ready to accept the blunders and grave mistakes they commit. Instead of accepting their failures in humility they often become self righteous and go on justifying their wrong actions. They often punish individuals who question their wrong decisions and actions. As a result, they are losing their credibility and influence on the wider society.

Why do the leaders become hired servants and wolves? Lack of democratic education is the main reason. In the absence of educating people on democratic leadership, those who aspire to become leaders see political leadership as a means to amass wealth and acquire power and fame. India has been functioning as a democratic country for about 75 years, but our educational system failed to educate young students on democracy and the constitution

Fundamentalism kills spirituality that is based on scientific temper, reasoning and humanism. In an atmosphere where religious fundamentalists have upper hand people are fed with superstitions and blind faith

of India. The vision of India as a pluralist country where all citizens can enjoy Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Individual Dignity is not imbibed by the people of India, especially the young students. On the contrary, negative forces have succeeded in instilling in the minds of people an exclusive and divisive majoritarian ideology. As a result, we have many leaders who sow the seeds of hatred and violence. What happened in Lakhimpur Kheri is only one of the many hate induced violent incidents taking place in different parts of India.

The second reason seems to be growing religious fundamentalism in all religions. Fundamentalism kills spirituality that is based on scientific temper, reasoning and humanism. In an atmosphere where religious fundamentalists have upper hand people are fed with superstitions and blind faith. They easily become victims of identity politics and are ready to resort to violence to protect their religious faith. In such a situation politicians exploit religion and make use of religious leaders for achieving their political goals. History has taught us that the mixture of religion and politics is a dangerous and poisonous cocktail. Hence religions in India have to undergo a process of de-politicization and de-commercialization. There is an urgent need for reinventing religions with revival of spirituality based on the core values taught by religions.

Education on democratic leadership coupled with revival of the spirituality of practising core ethical and human values taught by different religions can prevent shepherds becoming wolves. ©

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NATION OF HUNGRY PEOPLE

LOWER THE CASTE, LOWER THE INCOME

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report has laid bare the age-old caste system and its effect on poverty in India. It also shows why we still need a reservation policy to uplift those coming from the socially and educationally backward families, especially scheduled tribes, castes and backward classes

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

Nearly two years ago, a report published by the United Nations Development programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) brought cheers to many Indians. The report stated that the country had lifted 271 million people out of poverty from 2006 to 2016. Naturally enough, we all went gaga over it.

At least it gave an impression that India will soon be able to bring more and more people out of poverty. No one at that time imagined that an unknown, invisible virus would cause high-level disruption and will expose the policy paralysis that haunts the current regime.

A week ago, the 2021 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report was released. It did not create the euphoria that it created in 2019. Rather, the report did not receive much attention for obvious reasons. Except for a few newspapers, not much coverage was given to it. The pandemic has adversely affected the performance of almost all countries.

Before we move further, let's look at what the acronym MPI means. The global MPI measures acute



multidimensional poverty for more than 100 countries. It takes into account three major factors – health, education and standard of living. Each of these three factors is measured against 10 different indicators.

For instance, health is measured in terms of nutrition and child mortality rate and progress in education is calculated on the basis of the number of years of schooling and school attendance. The standard of living takes into account access to cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and ownership of certain assets.

The index was launched in 2010 and is calculated annually with a fresh analysis. For the first time, the report shows the effect of ethnicity or race or caste and gender of the family head while calculating the index. In other words, the report shows the intersectionality of various factors that contribute to MPI.

People are considered as multidimensionally poor,

Neither our social welfare schemes nor our education policies seek to address the issues emerging out of socio-economic differences





“if they are deprived in one-third or more of 10 indicators, where each indicator is equally weighted within its dimension”. The MPI ranges from 0 to 1, and higher values imply higher multidimensional poverty.

The report has laid bare the age-old caste system and its effect on poverty in India. It also shows why we still need a reservation policy to uplift those coming from the socially and educationally backward families, especially scheduled tribes, castes and backward classes.

It says that five out of six multidimensional poor in India belong to scheduled tribes or castes or other backward classes. Of the 227 million people who live under multidimensional poverty in India, 9.4 per cent are from scheduled tribes, 33.3 per cent from scheduled castes and 27.2 per cent from other backward classes. What B R Ambedkar, the founding father of the Indian Constitution, wanted to achieve in 10 years is still “work in progress”!

While a majority of government schemes have been made to help those coming from the scheduled castes, tribes or other backward classes, these schemes have no backing in terms of the number of people belonging to these categories. Simply put, they are just announced randomly to garner votes or mollify the people. Not only this, some people belonging to a particular occupation are also labelled as “other backward classes”. Inclusion of Jat Sikhs in other backward classes in Punjab is a case in point.

In view of this, there has been a constant demand to have a caste-based census. In fact, the Modi government had decided to conduct it, which would have helped in preparing policies more effectively based on exact data. However, the government went back on its words, without giving any clear reason.

The government refused to publish the census data based on socio-economic and caste census. In 2015, a report published in the Economic Times speaks about a conspiracy theory. It said, “when the caste data was compiled, a top official was so startled to see the upper caste numbers (because they were insignificantly low in comparison with the rest of the

castes) that he immediately jumped into his vehicle and sped towards Raisina Hill to share the findings with his bosses. They too were convinced that the upper caste numbers are dangerously low to be revealed to the world.”

One can guess what these bosses were scared of if this report was published. It would have revealed that a small section of the society has been cornering a large share of national prosperity because of their accident of birth in an upper caste. Just as the Sachar Committee revealed how bogus the appeasement of Muslims was!





Our country does not have any concrete data based on which strategic policy-making can be done to lift people belonging to the scheduled castes, tribes and other backward classes out of sheer poverty

Be that as it may, the country does not have any concrete data based on which strategic policy-making can be done to lift people belonging to the scheduled castes, tribes and other backward classes out of sheer poverty. Whatever policies exist seem to be inadequate to meet the demands of the teeming millions. The pandemic has only worsened the situation.

In fact, the new education policy 2020, too, fails to address this issue. Despite the fact that it claims to “bridge the gap in access to education, participation and learning outcomes”, it fails to tackle the increasing differentiation in schooling, especially when government schools have become a primary source of education for the disadvantaged groups while private schools continue to mushroom to suit the requirements of advantaged castes and classes.

It is a known fact that the substandard education being provided in government schools jeopardises the chances of such children in getting enrolments in medical or engineering colleges going forward. The government schools are known to serve the poorest of the poor in view of free education. Except for an exceptional few, the students passing out of these schools lack confidence and are unable to compete with those passing out of private or elite schools. They will continue to have low-income levels.

Such school differentiation certainly defies the idea of education as a leveller. Coming back to the UNDP report, it correlates poverty with the educational level of females in a household. Globally, around 1.3 billion people fall under multidimensional poverty. Of which, 836 million people live in families in which no female member has completed six years of schooling. It shows how important it is to have educated women at home. Of course, the

report does not mention the reasons why women are deprived of education.

The report also correlates that “women and girls living in multidimensionally poor households are at higher risk of violence because they often face uncertain living conditions and have less financial independence and bargaining power within the household. In some countries traveling long distances to fetch water and food or to go to school or work puts women at risk of sexual and physical violence.”

The MPI report also shows that 50 per cent of those falling under MPI had less than six years of schooling. In other words, educated individuals had a lesser tendency of being multidimensionally poor. It shows the importance of education.

Ironically, neither our social welfare schemes nor our education policies seek to address these issues emerging out of socio-economic differences. While complete data about the effect of Covid-19 is not available, the report has exposed the ineffectiveness of our social protection systems and education during the pandemic.

If at all there is any doubt, it has been removed by the latest Global Hunger Index which places India at 101 out of 116 countries. A nation where a majority of the people do not have at least two square meals a day cannot call itself developed. We as a nation has a long way to go before, we can say that no one goes to bed with an empty stomach. It is a pity that the existing policies only make the poor poorer and the rich richer. ©

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NUN MEETS POPE AFTER ISLAMISTS LET HER LEAVE MALI

After almost 5 years as a captive of an Al Qaeda-linked Islamist group in Mali in West Africa, a Colombian nun has been freed.

Sister Gloria Cecilia Narvaez Argoti was flown from Bamako, Mali's capital, to Rome where Vatican Media posted photos of her being greeted by the Pope at Mass in St Peter's Basilica.

Despite earlier fears for her health, her brother told AFP that photos showed her to look well, though extremely brown from the Malian sun. She herself told AFP "I'm very happy; I stayed healthy for five years, thank God."

She was kidnapped on February 7, 2017, in southern Mali, a relatively safe part of the country, which had till then been mainly unaffected by the Islamist attacks which had come in the wake of the Tuareg rebellion and subsequent coup in 2012; a coup which had later been put down by French troops.

During her long captivity, Sister Argoti had also survived the vagaries of another coup in Mali in summer 2020. Now France is reducing its troops by half; and there are tensions between it and the coup's leaders who are now in government.

The nun's personal circumstances included the killing of her fellow hostage and devout Christian,



Beatrice Stockli, probably in late summer 2020; Stockli, from Switzerland had been kidnapped from Timbuktu in northern Mali 13 months before Argoti.

The nun, now in her early sixties, had also endured the freeing of her camp-mate, French aid worker Sophie Petronin, exactly a year before the nun herself was finally freed on October 8.

It was Petronin who confirmed that the Colombian nun was still alive as the captive of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslim (JNIM), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims. ©

Courtesy: Mattersindia



TRIPURA CHURCH MOURNS FRANCISCAN NUN'S DEATH IN ACCIDENT

Sister Josline, a Franciscan Clarist nun, died October 9, a day after she met with road accident.

The 66-year-old nun died in Agartala Government Medical College and Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital in Agartala, capital of Tripura. Sister Josline was the superior of St Alphonsa Convent at Sindukpathar in south Tripura, some 115 km south of Agartala.

The Times News Tripura reported that a goods carrier had collided with a car carrying three women, including two Clarist nuns, and a layman, on the National Highway 8. All of them were injured and rushed to the hospital. The other nun, Sister Maria Therese, 73, fractured both the legs while others had

milder injuries. The other companions in the car, Bina Thomas, and Tom Thomas, are reportedly out of danger. Sister Josline was working with the Missionaries of St. Francis De Sales, or Fransalians, who set up the Sindukpathar parish in 2008.

The Franciscan Clarist Congregation started its Agartala mission in 2011 and they have two communities. The other community is in East Harina, where Sr. Maria Therese is stationed.

The sisters came from the Sacred Heart Province of Ernakulam. After the provincial from Aluva is reached Agartala the mortal remains of Sister Josline will be taken to the congregation's headquarters in Aluva, Kerala, for burial. ©

Courtesy: Mattersindia

WORLD FOOD DAY 2021

'SHARING FOOD' IS A 'HUMANE' CULTURE

'World food day' is a great opportunity, for citizens of India and the world over, to engage seriously in producing food items in all possible ways and recognize gratefully those who make food products available to us

BY **DR M. D. THOMAS**

The 16th day of October is celebrated as 'World Food Day'. This day was designated by the United Nations in 1945, in view of commemorating the date of founding the 'Food and Agriculture Organization' of the United Nations. Raising awareness on concerns regarding 'food and agriculture' was the purpose of the day.

The day was first observed in 1981 and has been celebrated since then by several organizations that are concerned with hunger and food security, in more than 150 countries of the world. 'Feeding the world, eliminating poverty, caring for the earth, growing, nourishing and sustaining life', and the like, have been the core commitment of these organizations.

In line with the priority of the organization that is being commemorated, 'agriculture' is the driv-



ing force in the economies of developing countries in particular. But, unfortunately, there has been very little investment in this vital sector. Besides, recent decades have witnessed a slackening of enthusiasm in this regard, too.

Over the years, the 'World Food Day' has considered several themes. A few of them are -- 'food comes first, food and nutrition, fighting hunger and malnutrition, water for all, trees for life, food for all, food security, right to food, food and human culture and sustainable systems of food. 'Safe food now for a healthy tomorrow' is the theme of this year, as well.

The celebration has a large spectrum of concerns by way of objectives. A few of them are -- 'encouraging agricultural production, stimulating national, bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental efforts, promoting economic and technical cooperation among developing countries and cheering up participation of the rural and the least privileged categories.'

Besides, awareness of the problem of hunger requires being heightened. Technologies have to be transferred to the developing world. National and international solidarity in the struggle against hunger, poverty and malnutrition has to be strengthened. The products of agricultural development have to be shared with one and all, too.

Well, it doesn't need a mention that food is the most basic need of the humans, like other living beings. The corona times, I believe, have been a special occasion for developing an appreciation for having enough food. The pandemic period, I am sure, has also been moments to think of those who had to go without food, off and on, for dire want of it.

16 OCTOBER
WORLD FOOD DAY





As food is the essence of life, so too, food is the bedrock of our cultures and communities. Food industry is the biggest of the kind in the world. Having access to safe and nutritious food is and will continue to be the essential part of the human endeavour. It is all the more so for the poor and vulnerable communities, who are hit hard by the economic shocks as well as shortage.

'World Food day' is a valuable chance to recognize the key role of 'farmers and workers', who are the heroes of the food system, worldwide. The most miserable plight of the farmers in India, who have been on the roads fighting for their rights nearly for a year, is a major case in point for the insensitive treatment they are measured out to, by those who enjoy the fruit of their labour, tragically so. 'When will good sense prevail' is the question.

For human beings, unlike animals, food is not merely a means for survival, but is a social act. Sharing food with others is a great gesture of hospitality and having food together is a proof of fellowship with them. When food and drink becomes a way to socialization, the humans acquire a 'humane' culture. In other words, food has to make social beings out of the humans.

At this juncture, it is good to remember how the modern culture of development has made human beings waste food heartlessly in restaurants and homes. Having a huge number of people in India and

elsewhere either having no food or less food as well as fighting with dogs to collect a loaf of bread from the dustbin is the other side of the story. This is a major blot on human rights, dignity, ethics, responsible behaviour and governance, terribly so.

The food heroes who engage with agriculture require being appreciated and supported. Wasting food has to be stopped with immediate effect. A humane culture of sharing food with others, the hungry in special, has to be strengthened, all the more. It is high time the humans committed themselves to living ethical values for sustainable food habits in life. The 'World Food Day' is a golden opportunity to awaken the 'human conscience' to that effect.

The sacred occasion of 'World Food Day' is a great opportunity, for citizens of India and the world over, to engage seriously in producing food items in all possible ways and recognize gratefully those who make food products available to us. It is also a time to commit ourselves anew to sharing food with one



another as divinely motivated human beings and to ensuring the right to food to one and all. May the good day arrive soon, when all human and other beings will be having enough food to eat and the earth will be a welfare state, at least to the minimum! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR M. D. THOMAS is Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, and has been committed to interfaith relations, national integration and social harmony, for the past over 40 years. He contributes to the above cause through lectures, articles, video messages, conferences, social interactions, views at TV channels, and the like.

PM CARES FUND

AN AMBUSH ON THE RTI ACT

BY **ISAAC GOMES**

The government is adopting a policy of secrecy and non-disclosure on matters relating to PM CARES Fund. As per the copy of the Deed, the Trust was established on 27th March 2020, as a Public Charitable Trust, to provide assistance and relief in emergency or distress situations, similar to those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Deed (Registration Number is 163 in Book 4 Volume No. 1685 07:11:12 PM) was signed in Hindi by the Prime Minister with his photo. There were two witnesses Bhaskar Khulbe and Rajeev Topno ((1996 batch IAS from Gujarat cadre). Incidentally Rajeev Topno is an alumnus of St Thomas Boys' School Khiderpore and St Xavier's College Kolkata. Currently he is Senior Adviser to the Executive Director of the World Bank in Washington DC. (Source: The Hindu, 4 June 2020).

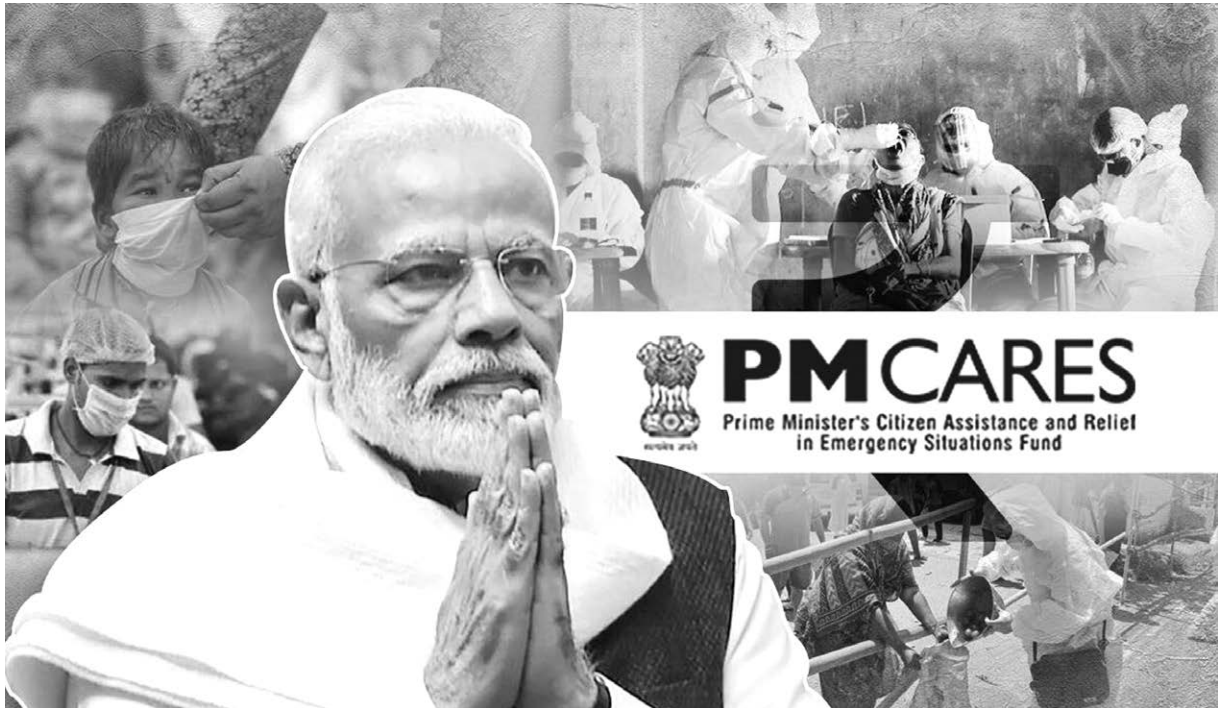
Within the first five days of its launch, Rs 3,076.62 crore was collected through contributions received



from individuals and corporates who got 100% IT exemption under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The result was State governments and local NGOs were deprived of CSR funds. This adversely impacted state-level grassroots development projects, as CSR Funds from April 2020 onwards were also diverted to PM

CARES Fund. The website does not give any disclosure (even a figure) for collections after April 2020.

As the government did not disclose sufficient information on the official website regarding the nature of the fund, its usage, etc, applications were filed by different people under the Right to Information Act (RTI) to obtain necessary information. In reply, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) refused to provide any information, on the grounds that the fund was not a Public Authority under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act. All the subsequent RTI applications were also rejected on the same grounds. Consequently, a



Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed before the Delhi High Court to bring the fund under the ambit of the RTI Act. The case is going on.

In order to understand whether the PM CARES Fund is a public authority or not, it is important to understand “public authority” as provided under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act. It states that:

“(h) “public authority” means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted –

- (a) by or under the Constitution;
- (b) by any other law made by Parliament;
- (c) by any other law made by State Legislature;
- (d) by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any –
 - i. body owned, controlled or substantially financed;
 - ii. non-Government Organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government;

While PM CARES Fund is not a public authority under clauses (a), (b) or (c), the clinching point is whether the Fund comes under sub-clauses (i) of Section 2(h)(d) i.e. “body owned, controlled or substantially financed” by the appropriate government.

The three conditions provided under this clause are (1) ownership, (2) control and (3) substantial finance. Even if one of the conditions is satisfied by any authority, it will be termed as a public authority. This has been laid down by the Delhi High Court in the case of *National Stock Exchange of India Limited versus Central Information Commission and Others* (“NSE Case”).

To arrive at whether or not PM CARES Fund is a public authority, the Trust Deed released by the government in December 2020 will serve as a guide to determine its true nature. The Fund has been established as a public charitable trust but that does not exempt it from the purview of the RTI Act, as claimed by a PMO Under-Secretary in Delhi High Court recently. The Bombay High Court has already clarified that a public charitable trust will be considered a public authority under the RTI Act if it satisfies the condition of sub-clauses (i) of Section 2(h)(d) i.e. if it is owned or controlled or substantially financed by the government. The three conditions being non-cumulative, we will look at only the ‘control’ aspect of the Trust in this analysis with-

out delving into the ‘ownership’ and ‘substantially financed’ aspect of the trust.

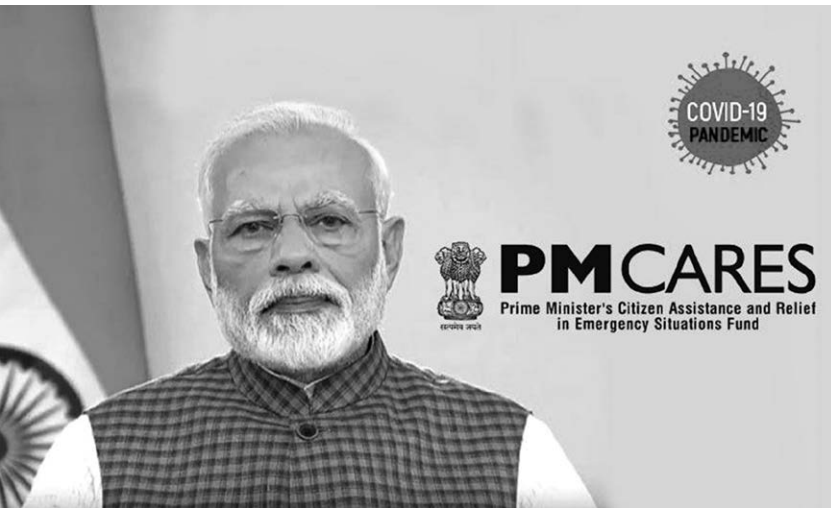
Clause 5.3 of the Trust Deed states: “There is no control of either the central government or any state governments, either direct or indirect, in the functioning of the trust in any manner whatsoever.” It is a settled rule that the intention of the settler (the entity which established the Trust) must be gathered by reading the Trust deed as a whole and no one clause should be construed in isolation. Therefore, this clause cannot be considered conclusive on the issue of control as various other clauses in the Trust Deed convey a different meaning.

According to Clause 8 of the Trust Deed, the Board of Trustees (“Board”) has complete control over management and administration of the trust. Further, the Prime Minister as Chairperson has the

In the case of the PM CARES Fund, the core Cabinet Ministers (Prime Minister, Union Ministers of Home, Defence and Finance - Clause 6) who hold the positions of trustees are not just ceremonial heads, but the entire management and administration of the fund are in their grip

absolute power to nominate three other trustees from among the eminent persons in various fields like law, health, science, etc. (Clause 6.4). The Board has the power to “appoint such office bearers as they may deem fit and such appointees will be directly responsible and answerable to the Trustees who shall have the power to remove or replace them” (Clause 11). So the Deed itself proves that Union Government, headed by the PM as Chairperson, has absolute control over the collection and administration of the Fund.

In the landmark case of *Pradeep Kumar Biswas Versus Indian Institute of Chemical Biology*, the Supreme Court held that if the government has a dominant role to play in terms of power to appoint a



PM CARES Fund is a matter of Transparency and Accountability - both nationally and internationally. Will the PM disband the Trust and liquidate the Fund once he is out of power?

secretary and nominate/terminate members of the governing board, then it is said to have control over the body. In the case of the PM CARES Fund, the core Cabinet Ministers (Prime Minister, Union Ministers of Home, Defence and Finance – Clause 6) who hold the positions of trustees are not just ceremonial heads, but the entire management and administration of the fund are in their grip.

The fund is headed by a constitutional authority, the Prime Minister, who as per Clause 6.7 of the Deed, has complete power to (i) add a person as a Trustee (ii) remove a trustee (iii) replace any existing Trustee with another person as Trustee. The PMO provides to the trustees, administrative and secretarial support which is required for the management and administration of the trust (Clause 6.8 of the deed). Joint Secretary (Administration) in the PMO acts as a secretary to the Fund and looks after its administration.

The decisions taken by the authorities regarding the operation of the PM CARES Fund cannot be said to have been made in a personal capacity. It must be

considered to be official decisions taken by a public authority because the fund is not being used for personal purposes but for the furtherance of public purposes, as is clear from the following objectives of the Trust (Clause 4.2):

1. "To undertake and support relief or assistance of any kind relating to a public health emergency or any other kind of emergency, calamity or distress, either man-made or natural, including the creation or upgradation of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, other necessary infrastructure, funding relevant research or any other type of support.
2. To render financial assistance, provide grants of payments of money or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees to assist the affected population.
3. To undertake any other activity which is not inconsistent with the above Objects."

Further, the fund's physical infrastructure is the same as that of the Central Government. It is housed in the PMO, and no separate expenditure is being incurred on its management as it is managed by the PMO officers on an honorary basis. The Fund uses the state emblem of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka as its logo. Moreover, the fund uses the official domain 'gov.in' which is reserved only for a few government departments and agencies.

In the light of all these, it is crystal-clear that the government has 'substantial' control over the fund, and not merely a supervisory or regulatory control. Therefore, it meets the requirement of section 2(h) (d)(i) as laid down by the Supreme Court in *Thalappalam Service Cooperative Bank Ltd Versus State of Kerala, 2013*. Hence it should be considered a public authority under the RTI Act.

One interesting point in Clause 8.1(w) of the Trust Deed is: "In circumstances where deemed necessary, the Trust may permit any other public charitable trust or institution having similar objectives to amalgamate or transfer, all or part of their assets to this Trust." (Read: gobble up!)

PM CARES Fund is a matter of Transparency and Accountability – both nationally and internationally. Will the PM disband the Trust and liquidate the Fund once he is out of power? 🗳️

(Inputs taken from *The Wire*, February 25, 2021)

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

‘Not being heard is no reason for silence’ at a time when majoritarianism is gaining ground day by day

BY **ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPAMPIL**

When the Supreme Court Judge D. Y. Chandrachud referred to the need of speaking truth to Power, he seemed to manifest a sense of urgency. He emphasized that it is a public duty, a collective responsibility. A democracy cannot survive without it. Every citizen must contribute to the cause of truth; so must every institution; so must the media. When diverse voices are given equal chance to be heard, what approximates truth has a better chance to emerge, and a consensus can more easily be reached. That is how a democracy functions. But if a few voices are consistently favoured and others systematically suppressed, democracy gets warped.

Christophe Jaffrelot in his “Modi’s India” (Princeton University Press, 2021) speaks of many liberal democracies of late turning ‘guided democracies’, ‘illiberal democracies’, ‘authoritarian democracies’ (Jaffrelot 1). He has chosen to describe India as an “ethnic democracy” like Israel, a phrase Sammy Smootha uses for a nation-state whose Ethnic Majority OWNS the country, ignoring minorities. In Israel, the Jewish identity defines everything: calendar, history, heroes, flag, emblem, anthem, names, ceremonies... as though others don’t exist. In fact, it is a hidden form of ethnocide. Modi’s India is fast moving in that direction. The difference in India is merely this: the State withdraws, and vigilante groups dictate how minorities should show themselves Indian: accommodating to the Hindu ethos, social order, moral code, orthopraxy (Ibid 155-56).

Upper Caste Counter-revolution

The present militancy is seen as a reaction of the Upper Castes to the Mandal Commission recommendations that V.P. Singh decided to implement in 1990, ensuring 27% reservations for the OBCs. With the new found prosperity of the Green



Revolution and Reservations, the OBCs from the Hindi belt suddenly emerged a force, winning 45% of the Lok Sabha seats through Janata Dal (Ibid 4). Upper castes were flabbergasted for a while with this “Shudra revolution”; but then they launched a Counter-revolution with redoubled determination (Ibid 24). L. K. Advani’s Ayodhya zeal and Rath Yatra were all about drawing the OBCs and Dalits away from jobs-and-political competi-

We see several contradictions all through: Savarkar’s secularism, Advani’s Ram Temple fervour, Moonje’s violence and non-vegetarianism. These in turn differ greatly from Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Tagore and others



tion to the glamour of Hindu identity, common pride, and united strength: shared Hindu fervour to replace divided caste competition.

They looked to V.D. Savarkar's formula of 'ethnic nationalism' and to M.S. Golwalkar's national identity that excluded the minorities, who could remain "claiming nothing...not even citizen's rights". But the upper caste self-assertion found the best support from K.B. Hedgewar's RSS that insisted on sturdy physical and ideological training and trusted in Brahmin guidance (Ibid 13-14). B.S. Moonje, went further; he believed in "organized violence" in imitation of the Muslims and "virile vigilance". He even urged eating meat to gain strength (Ibid 15).

We see several contradictions all through: Savarkar's secularism, Advani's Ram Temple fervour, Moonje's violence and non-vegetarianism. These in turn differ greatly from Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Tagore and others who sought to define their culture, community and civilization.

The Upper Caste theoreticians liked best Deendayal Upadhyaya's "Integral Humanism" in a 'self-born' society where caste order is a must to preserve harmony. It has to be "hierarchical" to ensure 'organic unity'. Thus, Brahminical concerns are safeguarded (Ibid 23).

Polarized Indian Society

While Advani grew more moderate in his Hindutva fervour as Home Minister, the world changed with

while claiming to be the 'son of the soil' and a humble *chai-wala*, Modi won the election only by making use of the most expensive and sophisticated "foreign" technology and exploiting the services of "foreign"-returned technicians



BJP supporters wear Narendra Modi masks during campaigning in West Bengal

the fall of the Twin Towers and George Bush's war on terror. It had an immediate impact on the Indian situation. The Red Fort bomb blast was only a prelude to those of 2006 in suburban Mumbai and 2008 in two luxury hotels. The Ayodhya campaigns radicalized the Muslim students (SIMI) which claimed four different attacks (Ibid 76-78). Many Muslim plots on Modi's life were alleged, the accused often losing life or being imprisoned, with little evidence (Ibid 61-62). Consequently, in the 2012 Gujarat elections, Modi did not field a single Muslim (Ibid 64). India was gradually falling apart.

At this stage, the unique skill of Modi consisted in bringing together the ANGER and FEAR of 1) declining Upper Castes unable to compete with newly emerging OBCs, 2) frustrated OBCs with degrees but no jobs after the brief period of boom, 3) ambitious Dalit youth to whom all things were promised by all parties with little real opening...and pitting this ANGER against a common "enemy" (Muslims) and those who protected them (Congress and the English-speaking elite) (Ibid 80, 107-08). Congress was considered an ENEMY, not a competitor. The phrase English-speaking elite here included liberal journalists, modern thinkers, social activists, and international public opinion. Modi knew how to keep motivating his support base: "neo-middle class" and the semi-urban classes (vernacular upstarts in

general) that felt marginalized by the English-speaking snobs (Ibid 67).

Dalit youth longing for recognition, organized from 1984 as Bajrang Dal, showed their readiness to take on this common enemy: the English-speaking critics of vernacular-speaking leaders, including Modi. The Bajrang Dal, in addition, was entrusted with the mission of keeping alive “low-intensity riots”... steady, low-key communal tension (Ibid 80). They had to keep the pot boiling, upholding majoritarianism, delegitimizing secularism. Such “educated unemployed” were the key actors in riots like in Mau 2005 and Gorakhpur 2007, until such a situation of trouble-making became the “new normal” (Ibid 82).

Thus, the Bajrang Dal emerged as the “Proletariat” (Subramanian Swamy) within the Sangh Parivar, to do the “dirty work”, and act as their shock troops (Ibid 84). Vinay Katiyar, their first leader boasted, “Might is the only law I understand”. The Babri Masjid fell to Bajrang Dal in 1992 which was followed by many killings (Ibid 85). In this way, these “angry young men” that Modi encouraged found recognition in the Hindutva household. They gained self-esteem proving themselves a “militant defence” force for Hindutva cause (Ibid 87).

As a populist, Modi speaks for the people, but his subsequent action shows that he cares for them least

Modi's Image, Creation of “Foreign” Technology

Modi as Prime Minister would be giving lectures on self-reliance, *atma nirbhar*, even though the 182-metre Statue of Unity in Gujarat, representing Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was made in China. Similarly, while claiming to be the ‘son of the soil’ and a humble *chaiwala*, Modi won the election only by making use of the most expensive and sophisticated “foreign” technology and exploiting the services of “foreign”-returned technicians. Rajdeep Sardesai says, 2,500 people handled hundred and twenty-five 3D projector units (Ibid 95). K. N. Govindacharya described elections as a “battle of images”, not debate on policies (Ibid 96).

Modi's helpers used “TV, print, radio, hoardings, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, DTH,” cable



TV services. People like Arvind Gupta were Silicon Valley-trained professionals who used the services of 1.3 million volunteers. Gupta called it “carpet-bombing” through tweets! Modi was described as “Initiator, Innovator, Implementor” (or a mere propagandist?) who guaranteed “*acchhe din*”. The 2014 campaign cost the BJP \$1 billion (Ibid 98-100). *Chowkidar* image for boasts, cash for elections!! Competing even with Obama!!

In addition, the RSS went house-to-house, and Amit Shah organized “booth committees” hiring the services of “specialized polling firms”. His strategy of giving tickets to non-Jatavs and non-Yadav SCs, who felt forgotten, paid dividends (Ibid 102-03). Majoritarianism won over Bahujanism (Ibid 105). All these groups had come to consider themselves as victims, like Modi after the 2002 pogroms in Gujarat, of English-speaking critics. The more they attacked him, the more their loyalty grew, built on blind admiration. It was a battle of Grand Illusion. In fact, Modi said in UP in 2017, election is a war, and I am the commander (Ibid 111).

“Saintly Politics”

If the elections were an exercise in deception, Modi's early projects as Prime Minister too stand out, not for their social benefit but self-respect creation... which meant much to the poor. His Swachh Bharat was one such. While 66.42 lakh households in urban India and 934 lakh rural units were given toilets, many of them were not used nor functioning (Ibid 118). Similarly, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana gave the poor dignity, but too little actual benefit (Ibid 120); gas cylinder gave a sense of pride to women, but most of them could not afford to refill them (Ibid 124). As a populist, Modi speaks for the people, but his subsequent action shows that he cares for them least. In his Mann Ki Baat he asks for suggestions. Adopting a fatherlike tone, he invites collective introspection, and seeks to build a relationship with the listener offering hope (Ibid 112-15). But nothing follows.

In a “sanctimonious” vein, Modi explains how demonetization was a measure to chastise the rich, apologizing for the marginal inconvenience it caused to others (Ibid 126-28). This is what W.H. Morris-Jones calls “saintly politics” of evasion (Ibid 129). In reality, farmers had no money to buy seeds for the season, many small enterprises went bankrupt. According to Deendayal Upadhyaya, this is

Gautam Adani has kept on taking loans despite having a debt of 840 billion rupees. Meantime, loans are refused to farmers and medium-sized enterprises

matter of no concern; in the self-regulating system of Hindu civilization, the poor must help themselves. In fact, many pro-poor programmes were cancelled (Ibid 131). The MGNREGA was one of the first victims, rural dwellers suffered (Ibid 132-4). The only beneficiary seems to have been Anil Ambani who took over crop insurance against natural disasters (Ibid 134). Funds for Dalit education were reduced, five million Dalit students affected. Shockingly, 10% of economically weak Upper Castes have been offered assistance. According to income calculation, 99% of upper castes can be beneficiaries (Ibid 137-38).

Modi has abolished wealth tax, and increased indirect taxes which weigh heavy on the poor. India has one of the highest tax rates for fuel (Ibid 144). Centre's education spending has come down (Ibid 146). The corporate tax has been lowered, with no favours to peasants (Ibid 145). Modi government protects industrialists who borrowed millions, destabilizing the banking system. So, Gautam Adani has kept on taking loans despite having a debt of 840 billion rupees. Meantime, loans are refused to farmers and medium-sized enterprises. Many SMEs have gone bust (Ibid 146-47). Crony capitalism has developed into “wholesale collusion”. A 2018 Oxfam report shows how 10% of the Indian population has gathered 77.4% national wealth, 58% in the hands of 1%. In 2017 alone Mukesh Ambani increased his wealth by 67% according to Forbes India (Ibid 143).

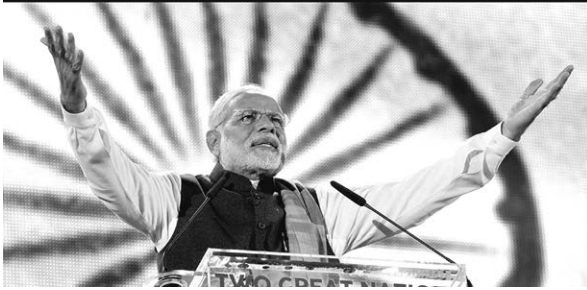
Construction of Hindu Rashtra

While what is done for the poor is merely symbolic, what has been launched for *Hindu Rashtra* is solid, well planned, farsighted, widely owned. In this short article we will not be able to go into the details of what Christophe Jaffrelot presents in his 639-page volume on Modi's India. He shows in his most detailed study how every aspect of public life and private thinking is being brought under Hindutva regimenta-

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

MODI'S INDIA

HINDU NATIONALISM AND THE RISE OF ETHNIC DEMOCRACY



tion. We will merely rush through a few headlines to gauge the breadth of the strategies envisioned.

The various ministries have begun to hold regular consultations with the RSS (Ibid 167). Governorship is mostly passing into the hands of RSS men. The RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat, is ready to act as 'Raj guru' to the nation (Ibid 169). A re-writing of Indian history has begun glorifying the Hindu period. It would seem India has ceased exist since those days; Akbar, for example, is reduced to three lines (Ibid 170). Over 1,334 changes have been introduced to NCERT textbooks (Ibid 172). The technological height that India had reached in ancient times is exaggerated, Modi presenting the image of Ganesh as an example of ancient plastic surgery (Ibid 174). Those who spoke out strongly against obscurantism have been eliminated like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, M.M. Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh (Ibid 175, 241-247). Sangh Parivar men control universities through appointed authorities and student unions (Ibid 176). NGOs have been immobilized through new FCRA rules (Ibid 183-86).

Missionaries are criticized for conversion, but feared for what they do to conscientize and empower the poor (Ibid 190-91). There are many instances of physical attack (Ibid 191-93). Campaigns have been launched against love jihad, land jihad, cow protection; drive for Ghar Wapsi (Ibid 195-210). Violence-prone Senas and Vahinis receive official protection (Ibid 222-230, 233). Everything is handed over to the "people's angry reaction" (Ibid 232) and digital vigilantism (Ibid 236). De facto, ETHNIC DEMOCRACY has taken over India (Ibid 249). According to Steven Lavitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, democracies die when they "endorse violence" (Ibid 253). Lakhimpur Kheri is the last instance.

"Not Being Heard is No Reason for Silence"

Christophe Jaffrelot has spoken. His words carry weight. Others must add their views while looking ahead. "Not being heard is no reason for silence" (Victor Hugo). What we are asking for is not a chaotic expression of irresponsible statements that clash purposelessly. What we encourage is intelligent interactions among responsible citizens, institutions, and media, that take history forward. Will Modiji prove to the world that India is the "Mother of all Democracies" as he claimed before UNGA? Amit Shah hails him as a world 'icon' of democracy.

When such deceptions are perceived at depth, the truth grows brighter and turns into a double-edged sword. Will there be a reaction within the Hindutva fold itself for being led blindfolded? For being "used" and discarded like Uma Bharti, Pragya Thakur. Will the Hindutva "Proletariat" shed their 'illusions' and make their voice heard? Let it be clear, a slippery grip on money and power can be used to tempt and enslave before being dumped. Will leadership jealousies, opportunism, and petty self-interests, yield their negative fruits in due course? Will Regionalism revive? Will Ethnic assertion survive for long?

Who controls devotion? RSS. Who controls promotion? BJP. Who controls cash-accumulation? Crony capitalists. Will people be happy if cash accumulates in Gujarat and cost is evenly distributed over the rest of the country? We tremble to think! Let Truth appear. Let it reveal its power! 🗣️

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARCHBISHOP MENAMPARAMPIL is analysis of socio-cultural and political issues has led to debates and concrete peace initiatives, for which he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

KHELA HOBE IN GOA

With the assembly polls in Goa barely months away, it is time for the locals to rejoice, presumably so, considering the sops and goodies coming their way - and especially so with so many political dispensations trying to woo them

BY **PACHU MENON**

Considering the recent developments which throw a big question mark over the Opposition's intention to unitedly take on the might of the Saffron brigade in the state, a probable alliance of like-minded-parties in Goa is drawing enough scepticism to discourage even the staunchest of believers in last-minute miracles which have lodged the most unlikely of political dispensations at the helm.

The political dramas unfolding in the state with each passing day has caught the most seasoned of campaigners unawares.

While it remains amply evident that it is not individual parties but a strong coalition that can hope to dislodge the BJP from the position of power that it occupies in Goa, the wastefulness of having so many political parties sprouting up regularly in the tiny coastal state is not lost on the electorate.

Besides, with all of them confident about making a mark in Goa during the upcoming state assembly elections, the large array of choices available by way of candidates nominated for the polls by various parties, not to speak of the independents, could spring quite a few surprise results.

In such a case, just as much as the Opposition, the ruling-BJP too is naturally bound to feel the need for alliances to cement its place at the top.



'Going solo' hence becomes politically too much of a risk in the present order of things in the state's effervescent electoral scenario.

Moreover, if disenchantment within the party ranks is the prime reason for members seeking 'greener pastures' outside,

let us not forget that the Saffron party in Goa too is riddled with its own share of similar problems.

It is amidst such a situation that the All India Trinamool Congress party has firmly resolved not to have any truck with other political dispensations in the state while singling out BJP as the principal target in the coming assembly elections.

While it is difficult to comment on the TMC's spirited retorts at this stage, it is the manner in which the Congress in the state has been abandoned by its 'leaders of long-standing' that has further decimated it.

No doubt it is on an overdrive infusing fresh blood into the organization as a part of its revitalizing process. But how combat-ready does it make the Congress for the ensuing elections!

No other party but the Congress in Goa seems to have the 'disgruntlement' factor playing such a deci-

Having lost quite a few stalwarts over the years who have gone on to play distinctive roles in national politics, the Congress today faces the prospects of engaging with its own, albeit 'ex-cadres', in electoral battles across the country



ELECTION

sive role in the, by now, regular exodus of its prominent members desiring to chart a different course in the state's politics.

Hence the TMC's foray into local politics does not come as a big surprise!

However, with disenchantment within its ranks having splintered the party many times over in the past few decades, Congress has apparently not found it worthwhile to assess the situation and go into a damage control mode.

Having lost quite a few stalwarts over the years who have gone on to play distinctive roles in national politics, the Congress today faces the prospects of engaging with its own, albeit 'ex-cadres', in electoral battles across the country.

But then that has been the way politics has been played out in the country over the ages.

However, with politics in the country having moved along predictable paths all these years, it will always be lamented that the electorate has not been given much to choose from.

Will the arrival of Trinamool Congress in the state's political horizon afford Goans a chance to redeem their electoral options!

With almost all the major national parties having a palpable presence in the state now, Goans could well look forward to a slew of fresh faces contesting the coming elections.

Nonetheless, the keenness shown by most of the political dispensations in the state to field 'tried-and-tested' figures, but who are known to have made famous entries and equally spectacular exits at will to and from various parties, is unbelievable.

There has never been a dearth of good candidates who can vie to be people's representatives in the state, but the 'winnability' factor is what puts the 'big guns' in an unassailable position.

But with almost all parties believing in such machinations during election time, this has become a general trend. Hence the Congress begrudging TMC's Goa entry is just a formal reaction and does not warrant any extra attention.

For a party that intends making an electoral debut in the state, the TMC will quite naturally encroach into opposition turf to take advantage of a situation that has dissent written all over it.

But what 'novelty' exactly will the TMC bring along with it!



However, with the Chief Minister, in his own characteristic style, asserting that every sitting MLA cannot be assured a ticket, fresh 'permutations and combinations' could evolve with the 'side-liners' in the present coalition looking out for options.

Hence the observation that while the Chief Minister has been busy garnering public goodwill for his government during his whirlwind tours of various constituencies, it is the manner in which some of his colleagues in the cabinet have chosen to criticise their own government over inconsistencies and irregularities that were however more than obvious during their last term itself in the ruling dispensation.

It is as if the censure of their government over its oversight on a number of matters would absolve them of their 'inactivity' and 'dis-connect' with the people during the past five years!

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the contention that the much-sought achche din for the populace inevitably comes at the fag-end of any government's term, especially the one that comes with the announcement or the anticipation of elections any time soon.

With the assembly polls in Goa barely months away, it is time for the locals to rejoice, presumably so, considering the sops and goodies coming their way - and especially so with so many political dispensations trying to woo them! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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WATCH OUT: COVID IS FAR FROM OVER

In dealing with a highly infectious disease like COVID-19, precautions are a must. As crowded spaces are fertile ground for disease transmission, it is important to ban crowding, especially in closed spaces, since it has been found that the disease is airborne

BY AARTI

According to a report in the Hindustan Times, the Central Government has started a campaign dubbed Mission 100 Days, effective this October 11, to control the spread of Covid-19 infections during the festive season.

The initiative is laudable. More so because, ever since its outbreak in mid-December 2019, the Novel Coronavirus, as it was initially called, has been literally devastating the world and India is no exception.

First noticed in a seafood market in Wuhan city of Hubei Province, China, the virus spread to nearly 114 countries across the globe with 118,000 cases by the time it was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020. Most common symptoms of the disease included fever, cough, tiredness and loss of taste or smell. Patients with

serious symptoms were found to experience difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or mobility, or confusion and chest pain.

Well, it is simply nightmarish even to revisit the days gone by. Be it the nation-wide lockdowns, recurring sounds of ambulance sirens, death of near and dear ones etc. Amidst multifarious challenges, India managed to contain the virus in the first wave in early 2020 through various interventions even as COVID-19 cases reached mind boggling heights in the country.

From day one, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has been reaching out the States and Union Territories with its regular advisories starting from 24 March 2020 to deal with a faceless disease that was hard to fight against in the absence of any vaccine. It

started with a very small number of infected people but it spread due to a plethora of factors and reached the peak six months later, leaving tens of thousands of people dead.

Finally, there was light at the end of the tunnel when Prime Minister Mr Modi launched the first phase of the vaccination programme on 16 January 2021 primarily meant for health workers, frontline warriors including police, paramilitary forces, sanitation workers etc. Close to 1.6 lakh people were vaccinated on the first day. The two-dose vaccination has been provided to 96 crore citizens so far. While 73 per cent of people have received the first dose, 29 per cent have received both doses.



Let's for a moment visit the specific advisory of the Ministry of Home Affairs issued on 26 March 2021 to States and Union Territories well in advance for effecting necessary measures to regulate crowds during festivals like Holi, Shab-e-Barat, harvesting festivals, Easter, Eid-ul-Fitr, etc., by ensuring strict observance of COVID appropriate behaviour, such as wearing of mask and maintaining social distancing.

Then came the second wave of COVID-19 infections in April 2021 which hit like a Tsunami. Getting hospital beds, key medicines and oxygen was a challenge in many places.

The second wave, according to the Indian Council of Medical Research chief Dr Balram Bhargava was less severe than the previous one in as far as fatalities are concerned. But the only difference being the shortness of breath was higher among the patients who required higher levels of oxygen. Reportedly, during the peak of the second wave there was a sudden decrease in the oxygen saturation of some patients, even when they were recovering well, giving less time for the proper ventilation support. Many cases of mucormycosis, also known as the black fungus, were reported in patients with diabetes.

The Mission 100 Days, supplements an advisory issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs dated 28 September 2021 which, among others, had cautioned that as the absolute case numbers are still significantly high, there should be no room for complacency and the process of relaxing restrictions should be carefully calibrated. Importantly, the emphasis is that COVID Appropriate Behaviour is adhered to in all crowded places, in view of upcoming festivals.

The cause for concern is that a large number of people seem to be callous by failing to wear face masks, which greatly protects against the spread of COVID-19. In Delhi alone according to reports, more than 2.4 lakh people have been caught between 19 April to 31 August this year for not wearing face masks. At least 1,100 people continue to be caught every day for not wearing masks. Over 28,000 challans have been issued against people for violating social distancing norms in public places and 1400 challans against groups for holding large gatherings or protests.

It is so shocking that a survey released last week by LocalCircles, an online polling platform for governance issues of public interest, found



that while 6 per cent of respondents said people in their localities were following “good social distancing compliance”, 94 per cent found it “limited” or non-existent. With regard to wearing masks, only 13 per cent said the norms were being followed by “over 90 per cent” of people around them.

Why don't people follow rules? According to Prof Fay Short, a psychologist at the Bangor University, UK, there are three kinds of rule-breakers. The first are those who do not know what the rules are - partly because guidance has changed over time and in different areas. The second type of people are those that don't think rules are important. The third set of people seem to reason that since none of their family members have had it, you're not in touch with it, and therefore it seems distant and something that happens to somebody else.

So, the writing on the wall is pretty clear. In dealing with a highly infectious disease like COVID-19, precautions are a must. As crowded spaces are fertile ground for disease transmission, it is important to ban crowding, especially in closed spaces, since it has been found that the disease is airborne. Festivities are important. Nonetheless, utmost caution can help to keep the virus at bay.

At the grass root level, there is an imperative need for awareness generation among the citizens at the society and household levels so that it becomes a collective effort to keep the dreaded virus under check.

Better to be safe than feel sorry afterwards. ©

RSS MAGAZINE WANTS PROBE INTO INDIAN CATHOLIC CLERGY

Pro-Hindu 'Panchjanya' weekly targets the Church over worldwide reports of sexual abuse. Panchjanya, a weekly magazine linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has sought an inquiry into the Indian Catholic Church and its clergy while citing the recent expose of child sexual abuse within the French Church.

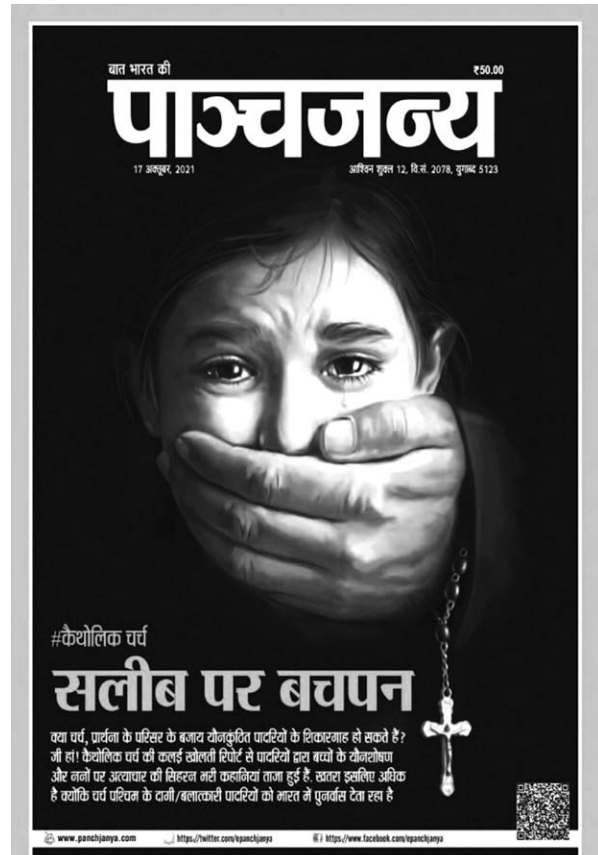
In its latest issue, which will hit the stands on Oct. 17, the magazine has reportedly published a cover story on the sexual exploitation of children and nuns by priests across the world. Panchjanya, published in Hindi to uphold Hindu patriotism in keeping with the objectives of the nationalist RSS, has claimed that incidents of sexual exploitation of children and nuns are on the rise in India too.

Referring to the reported incidents of rape of a woman in a missionary college in Chennai and a nun from Kerala, the magazine has said the people of the country wanted a probe against the Church and its priests. Detailing the inquiry that unearthed the scale of abuse within the French Church, the magazine termed the earlier apology by Pope Francis in 2019 for such incidents a "formality under pressure."

It went on to question and blame the style of functioning of the Church for the declining number of religious nuns across the globe. A similar trend was witnessed in the southern Indian state of Kerala and so the Church was targeting girls from poor families in underdeveloped states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Odisha, the magazine alleged.

A.C. Michael, a human rights activist and former member of Delhi Minorities Commission, said that "the Catholic Church has its own mechanism to handle such cases and has never shied away from taking action."

If one has committed a crime even if one is a priest or minister, he should be investigated and if found guilty be punished as per the law of the land



His only concern, he said, was that when such statements are made they should be based on facts. "Let me remind my friends in the RSS that the incidents they have quoted are investigated and tried in various courts in India," Michael added.

He said all were equal before the law and the Supreme Court of India has made it amply clear by intervening in such matters in the past, as it has in a recent case involving the son of a junior federal minister arrested for allegedly murdering farmers.

"If one has committed a crime even if one is a priest or minister, he should be investigated and if found guilty be punished as per the law of the land," Michael said. He also sought to remind the accusers that the Church had never disowned or defended errant priests as the RSS did "in the case of Nathuram Godse [Mahatma Gandhi's killer]." ©

Courtesy: UCANEWS.COM

DISPLAYING CROSS NO SIGN OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION, SAYS MADRAS HIGH COURT

A top court in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu has ruled that a Dalit Hindu woman marrying a Christian or displaying religious symbols such as the cross cannot be cited as reasons to revoke her scheduled caste (SC) community certification.

The Madurai bench of Madras High Court held that hanging the cross on a wall or going to church does not necessarily mean one has altogether abandoned the original faith to which one was born and cannot be the basis for canceling an SC certificate.

The bench was hearing the case of Dr. P. Muneeswari, who belongs to the Hindu Pallan community. Her SC certificate was canceled by district officials in Ramanathapuram in 2013 on grounds that she was married to a Christian man and their children were also being brought up in the Christian faith.

The officials had reached the decision after finding a cross hanging on the wall of her clinic and concluded that she had converted to Christianity and hence was not liable to continue as a member of her Hindu SC community.

Members of the Hindu Dalit or former untouchable communities in India are often discriminated against under the centuries-old caste system. In legal and constitutional terms, they are now listed as scheduled castes enabling them to access the government's affirmative action policies and programs.

Dalits who converted to Christianity and Islam are excluded from India's affirmative action plan that includes reservations in educational institutions and government jobs among other social welfare schemes.

In its landmark judgment on Sept. 27, the high court ordered the restoration of the caste certificate with immediate effect, saying that "the acts and conducts of the respondents [government officials] portray a degree of narrow-mindedness that the constitution does not encourage."

The court further noted that there was no dispute that the woman was born to Hindu Pallan parents but merely because she married a Christian



and their children have been recognized as members of the community cannot be the reason for denying her rights.

"The court has upheld the position of the constitution," said Father A. Santhanam, a Jesuit lawyer practicing in the Madurai court.

He said the assumptions made by the district officials could create chaos in society as people of different religions keep attending religious celebrations of one another in the country.

"I know people belonging to Hindu and other faiths who attend churches during Christmas and other important events. Can such visits be termed religious conversion?" he asked.

Scheduled castes make up 16 percent of India's more than 1.3 billion people. A majority of them profess Hinduism while some have converted to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

A 2008 report for the National Commission on Minorities had concluded that there was a strong case for including Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims in the SC category.

In January 2020, the Supreme Court of India agreed to examine a plea by the National Council of Dalit Christians to make the government's affirmative action programs "religious neutral" so that the Dalits among Christians and Muslims can benefit from it. The plea is pending before the top court. ©

Courtesy: UCANEWS



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Drugs, Actors and Sons..!

“That’s my cousin!” whispered my friend, as we looked at a bedraggled, shabby, girl, hair matted and unkempt, looking at us with haggard eyes, in one of the bye-lanes in the city. He went up to her, but when he offered her a meal instead of money, which was certainly for her next dose of drugs, she ran away.

“Hers is a sad story!” my friend whispered and told me a tale of unrequited love which made her seek recourse in drugs.

I do understand such tales, but when I hear about actors and now a son of one falling prey to the tentacles of this evil habit, I stop and ponder: Most of these good men and women, have enough money and more, enough fame and more, then obviously it is not frustration or a broken heart that leads then to this addiction. I am certainly not going to generalize, but most often it is boredom!

The boredom of not having to work anymore for fame or success, the boredom, when they find the fame and money they so wished for, doesn’t give them the satisfaction they thought it would give. That the thought of fancy cars, bungalows and beautiful women drove him or her relentlessly to work hard to achieve recognition, and those cars, women and houses arrived, they came with a huge vacuum that screamed, “I am still not satisfied!”

The craving mind was dissatisfied, and the only way the mind could attain satisfaction was in lulling it into a false sense of a temporary utopia; drugs! And in those injected or inhaled moments, he was able to drift into artificially, stimulated excitement.

And this doesn’t limit itself to only actors or their sons or only to the intake of drugs. I watch and see politicians who incensed with unlimited power, assault and rape, as if it is their birthright. As when they who are sometimes caught are led off to jail, the world wonders was there a need for such dastardly crime? Wasn’t being a minister enough?

A satisfied life is better than a successful life because our success is measured by others. But our satisfaction is measured by our own soul, mind and heart

No it wasn’t! After reaching there his dissatisfied self, wanted more.

What then, the solution?

To be able to work for success with a peaceful self, also to realize that satisfaction does not come from outside pleasures but inside joy!

The one who got our freedom from the British; Gandhiji, realized this, and worked to master himself, before trying to reach his near impossible goal.

Poor twenty-three year old boy, he didn’t know what hit him, but if he comes out of this mess, understanding that all his father’s name and wealth are useless, and that a simple learning of finding peace, joy and satisfaction within will work, then his days inside won’t be in vain, and he will come out with a new message, not written on needle pricked arm, but in a heart that has found peace within himself..! ©

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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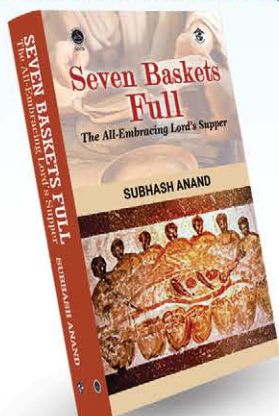
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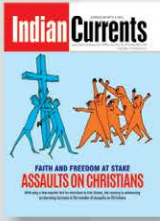
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