

## DISTRESSING DEVELOPMENT

The latest report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reveals that daily labourers are the largest among those who die by suicide in the country



## SOARING SUICIDES

Modi government which renamed *Raj Path* as *Kartavya Path* must realize that the real *Kartavya* lies in restoring a sense of happiness, fulfilment and justice amongst the common man

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## MOUNTING SUICIDES



Contrasting pictures seem to be the ideal DP to showcase the real India. Two such scenarios were widely reported recently. The first one presented two prominent developments – India surpassed the United Kingdom to become the fifth largest economy in the world, and it could become the third largest economy by the end of this decade; Gautam Adani became the world's third richest man and the first Asian to make it to this rank.

Cut to the second scenario which is diametrically opposite – more than 42,000 daily wage-earners died by suicide in 2021, according to the report by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). If one adds the number of others, including farmers, who died by suicide, during the same period, it points to an alarming situation gnawing the very vitals of the society. The first scenario might warm the cockles of many hearts, but the second one exposes a distressing development in the society.

The government might reel out numbers to show that the economy is picking up; it would pat its back flaunting figures of growth in various fields. But, behind such data and statistics lie a disturbing truth.

For example, according to reports, as many as 40 million migrant jobs were impacted/lost in India during the pandemic period. This came as a double whammy as the country was yet to come out of the 'demonetization' shock when the virus attack took place. The demonetization had come as a bolt from the blue especially to the small and medium industries, and people had lost jobs in droves.

A recent report that close to 20 per cent of micro, small and medium industries have failed to payback their loans, making them bad debts, shows the enormity of the crisis in the industrial sector. Hence demonetization together with pandemic broke the back of the economy and workers were the most affected by it. The NCRB report validates it though the government might try to portray a rosy picture.

The growth in various sectors of the economy is not enough to generate adequate employment opportunities. It is not putting enough money in the hands of majority of people so that their purchasing power gets a boost. The demand-supply chain will get a boost when the purchasing power of people increases, and this can happen only when there is growth in employment.

Unfortunately, unemployment has not got the amount of attention as it should have. The unperturbed government, in ostrich-like behaviour, is in denial mode; it prefers to maintain a stony silence on the raging unemployment; instead, it tries to divert attention to non-issues.

Any talk on \$ 5 trillion economy can wait, but the life of the citizens of this country cannot wait. Those who dream of taking the country to the super power status too can hold their horses. It does not make much sense to boast about such visions when thousands of its citizens are taking their lives unable to make ends meet. The government seems to have lost its priorities. It is apparently trying to deflate real issues, unable to tackle them. The real wealth of a nation is its people. If their life is in peril, big talks and bigger dreams make no meaning.

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

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## POWER QUOTES



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

**William James**

• • •



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

**Albert Einstein**

• • •



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

**Audrey Hepburn**

• • •



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

**C.S. Lewis**

• • •



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

**Maya Angelou**

• • •



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

**Dr. Seuss**

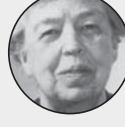
• • •



The most wasted of days is one without laughter.

**E. E. Cummings**

• • •



You must do the things you think you cannot do.

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

• • •



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

**George Eliot**

• • •



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

**Hazrat Inayat Khan**

# The Real *Kartavya* End Soaring Suicides

The NCRB report brings out the magnitude of distress among the common people, leading to an increasing number of suicides among them. A responsive government cannot turn a blind eye to this disturbing scenario

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

**T**he annual dossier on crime is out. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report 2022 speaks volumes about crime and its magnitude. True, the report shows a decline of 7.2 percent in the number of crimes registered, as compared to 2020. Nonetheless, the report has unfolded several horrifying facts. Lower registration does not mean that the crime rate has actually declined. Be it crime against women or children, cybercrime or economic offences, they all have increased many times.



from suicide has increased over the last one year. The report shows that over 1.6 lakh people died by suicide, which is 7.2 percent more than the last year. In fact, it is 10 percent more than the deaths that took place due to Covid-19. Despite this, our focus had remained mainly on containing the invisible virus.

If we look at this data closely, we will find that one in four people who committed suicide was a daily wage worker! The percentage of daily wage workers committing suicide has been increasing steadily since 2014. One evident reason could be the fall in income, unemployment and familial issues emanating from stress caused by such circumstances.

The national capital continues to be the most unsafe place for women. The report shows that there has been a 40 percent increase in the crime against women and children. Out of this, chargesheet has been issued only in 31 percent cases.

Crime under the protection of children against sexual offences Act (POCSO), too, has increased manifold. What is alarming is the rate at which death

After the economic downturn in 2020-21, the Indian economy has started showing signs of recovery. The industrial sector bounced back with rigour but the growth has not been even across all the sectors. The Reserve Bank of India has estimated



that India will grow at a rate of 7.2 percent. But had growth been the perfect indicator, everyone would have had a better source of income.

If one visits any industrial area, one can easily make out that many companies have permanently closed their businesses. If a few large ones had more than one production unit, only one or two would be found to be functional, that too at a much lower capacity than the pre-pandemic period.

Barring a few sectors like power, there is hardly any area, which has remained unaffected due to Covid-19. Only a few privileged like Gautam Adani could grow at a tremendous rate. He has surpassed Jeff Bezos to become the third richest person in the world, that too in a matter of a few months. That's the irony of growth rate! It is uneven, unequal and unfair. The averages are often misleading. Hence, a positive growth rate would generally mean that all is well with everyone. It is only when one looks at ground zero that the fallacy of growth rate becomes evident.

Coming back to the daily wage workers, who depended for work on such factories and would eat food or buy provisions from whatever they earned on a daily basis, had no or minimal source of income during the lockdown period. Many had to take loans, sell their precious possessions, to survive the pandemic. The post-pandemic period has not offered much respite to them. Many business houses are struggling to make a comeback, affecting the daily-wage earners and casual labourers.

The scale of distress is evident from the increased dependence on MNREGA. During 2019-20, 7.8 crore people worked under the scheme. The number increased to 11.19 crore during the first year of the pandemic. While it dipped to 10.62 crore in 2020-21, it is nowhere close to the pre-pandemic levels. In the current financial year too, 6.29 crore people have already availed the benefit under the scheme. How

**Over 1.6 lakh people died by suicide, which is 7.2 percent more than the last year. In fact, it is 10 percent more than the deaths that took place due to Covid-19**



effectively has the scheme been used for development purposes is a different matter altogether. The data does indicate that 100 days of work certainly offered some solace to people at the ground when they had no other source of income.

Another factor, which indicates economic distress is a higher incidence of cybercrime for earning easy money. If one looks at the national capital itself, there has been an increase of 111 percent in cybercrime. Generally, unemployment coupled with economic distress force the youth to direct their energy towards such heinous crimes, forgetting basic humanistic values that form our culture. In a large majority of the cases, cybercrime has been used for sexual harassment. Had these youth been given employment or means of earning a respectable income, they would have contributed to the economic growth of the country, rather than increasing the crime rate.

A report shows that over 2.3 crore insurance policies were surrendered much before their maturity period. This was three times more than the previous year. It indicates that people were exploring ways and means to have cash in hand to meet either day-to-day expenses during a state of joblessness or medical exigencies.

Clearly, the post-pandemic period does paint a gloomy picture from the general public's point of view. Reduced income levels coupled with rising inflation have only added fuel to the fire. The government should look at economic revival in a holistic manner. Unfortunately, it is busy label-

ling roads (the iconic Raj Path is now Kartavya path), forgetting its real Kartavya, avoiding dialogue and discussions at the larger level.

The recent report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has placed India at the 132nd position out of 191 countries and territories on the Human Development Index (HDI). It is an indicator of a nation's health, education and average income. Data shows that HDI has declined over the last two consecutive years, reversing the progress made during the last five years. Not only this, life expectancy in India has also come down from 72.8 years in 2019 to 71.4 years in 2021.

The report also suggests that, "stress, sadness, anger, and worry have been increasing over the last decade. It has now reached record levels." This is one reason why the number of deaths by suicide have shot up suddenly. After daily wage workers, NCRB reveals that self-employed persons formed the second largest population by profession, who committed suicide. Lack of liquidity, stringent laws, piling debt, and bankruptcy have been the main reasons for a small businessman to commit suicide.

Interestingly, there has been a slight dip in the number of suicides committed by farmers/cultivators. As far as women are concerned, around 50 percent who committed suicide were housewives, generally facing domestic issues like dowry, marital problems, infertility, etc. The report shows an increase of 5 percent in suicides committed by students owing to professional/career problems, sense of isolation, abuse, violence, family problems, mental disorders, addiction to drugs, alcohol, financial loss, etc.

The NCRB report should not be merely read as a documentary on crime but should act as an eye-opener for the statutory authorities for taking



appropriate policy-level decisions. To say the least, deaths by suicide were preventable. Had those people received guidance and counselling at the right time, so many lives could have been saved.

The sad part of the story is that more than 25 percent of the global suicides happen in India. Our people are going through severe stress. It is more dangerous than Covid-19. The virus may become powerless in a few years. But the mental health crisis will worsen if it is not addressed suitably and timely. Unfortunately, not much emphasis is laid on mental health. It is still considered an enigma.

People don't like to accept such issues. Even if some level of acceptance is there, it is a treatment, which only the rich can afford to have. A few non-government organisations have certainly come up with free helplines in the wake of Covid-19 but how many are aware of such helplines. Many do not even know that they are suffering from mental health issues.

Apart from re-looking at the economic policies, the government has to develop a comprehensive policy for prevention of suicides. From awareness creation to provision of counselling to launching counselling helpline for the distressed to provision of social security, there is an immediate need to address this issue on a war footing. It requires a multi-disciplinary approach and a working partnership with health professionals, government agencies and non-government organisations at different levels, be it for policy formulation, its implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

The real Kartavya lies in restoring a sense of happiness, fulfilment and justice among the common man, which the government must fulfil. ©



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# Welfare Schemes are Safety Net

Properly planned and implemented welfare schemes are important to give an economic push to the country and to improve people's life

BY **JOSE VATTAKUZH**

**H**eated deliberations and debates continue to take place on the terms 'welfare schemes' and 'freebies' in social, political, and economic circles. Since August 11, discussions on political promises on election time grants, loan cancellation, and government welfare programs have intensified. During the proceedings of PIL against freebies, the Supreme Court remarked on the urgent need of keeping a balance between the economy losing money due to freebies and welfare measures in the country.

The petition has been referred to a three-judge bench of SC for wider view on regulatory tools of welfare schemes and the need to curb economically destructive freebies announced by politicians eyeing votes.

However, political parties are divided on the outlook of spending public money to empower the marginalized and downtrodden people.

As a result, a lot of questions have been raised. Do promises of gifts during the election campaign, including consumer goods like food kits, televisions, cycles, mobiles and laptops, undermine democratic electoral values? What about the different types of government grants, free education, electricity,

drinking water, travel costs, and cooking gas? Furthermore, does the cancellation of farmers' loans or even corporate loans affect the national economy?

An internal report of the RBI in 2019 said that Rs 3.12 lakh crore farm loans were written off by central and state governments from 2008 to 2019, apart from cancellation of corporates' loan. An RTI response by RBI has revealed that Rs 11.68 lakh crore business loans were written off in the last ten years.

In addition, various social assistance programs related to women & child empowerment, food, skill development, health, etc. of various States and the Centre were also questioned. However, one should not forget that these gifts and social assistance programs would directly or indirectly impact the economic growth of the nation.

In this context, a clear understanding of an effective social protection program or system is essential for politicians as they are key players in governments.

## Need for Welfare Systems

The concepts of "welfare state" and "social protection system" are linked to the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of the population of a country. The driving force of welfare thought is based on democratic principles of equality

Many economists argue that development gains have scarcely been treated equally in India. Social protection schemes thus become inevitable initiatives within a country



## FREEBIES OR WELFARE?



example, nearly 50 lakh people in India were internally displaced in 2021, news agency PTI quoted the annual Global Trends Report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in June 2022. They have become, to a large extent, landless workers and slum dwellers. Consequently, their affinities, culture, and lives were disrupted by so-called development activities. For this reason, many economists argue that development gains have scarcely been treated equally in India. Social protection schemes thus

of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to gain themselves the bare minimum prerequisite for decent lives. Thus, the perceptions about the 'right' of citizens that come from the State and the 'responsibility' of the State to create welfare schemes of minimum standard of living for the people would evolve in a country wherein disparity and poverty exist.

The Constitution tells the obligation of the country to take protective instruments for the well-being of the deprived and marginalized people; Articles 12-35 speak about the fundamental rights of citizens to get a decent life. Inequalities in the society are increasing day by day in different levels. That reflects in income distribution, wealth, education, digitalisation, gender, living conditions, etc. The periodic labour force survey for the years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20 showed that the top 10 per cent earn more or less equal to the base 64 per cent of the people. Hence, lifting the millions of people at the bottom out of poverty is not a small effort.

The main reason for inequality is that the country must accommodate 16 per cent of the global population in space allowing less than 2.4 per cent of the planet. It states that resources are limited. Thus, to maintain equity as part of the maintenance of social justice, it is necessary to put in place social protection schemes.

More than that, studies have observed that since 1991, the sacrifices of the marginalized sections are not properly taken into consideration. They had to give up land for roads, factories, and dams. For

become inevitable initiatives within a country.

In 1980 the World Bank recognized 'social safety net programs to protect families from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises.'

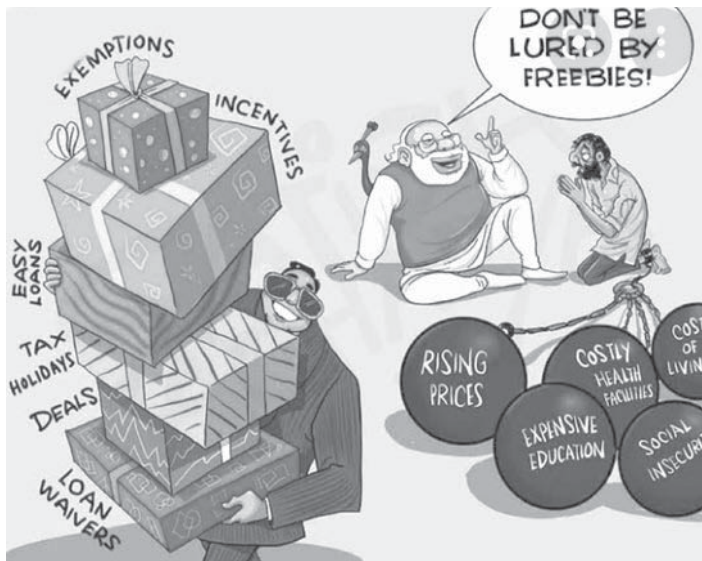
A disaster of various kinds coming out of nowhere is one of the major reasons for having a safety net or social security programs. It was evident from the time of Covid 19, which was the biggest health emergency in the history, that countries, including India, demanded support to take care of different forms of safety nets like vaccination, medical care, livelihood programs, etc. Official data show that during the pandemic the Government had to provide a relief package of free food grains to 80 crore low-income people.

A strong argument of social economists is that welfare systems are an economic push. Free education and health care are human investments that increase a country's labour productivity.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) agency works in more than 170 countries



facilitating the eradication of poverty, reducing inequalities, and building resilience by proposing sustainable policies and initiating welfare schemes for every country. In this regard, UNDP suggests that the welfare schemes, which come from the state, would have a cyclical process starting with the needs of people. It leads to the research base on opinions or views that give options for policies and schemes within the framework of regulations. This cycle ends with an evaluation from which derives the defects of the scheme and recommendations that again lead to generating the needs of people. Accordingly, whatever name is given, an efficient welfare scheme



means any initiative framed under any law to provide financial help.

Several researchers, including the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) on social security and welfare schemes, have established that with the support of beneficiaries' data, every genuine welfare scheme and subsidy is based on rules and regulations. These types of schemes evolve certain kinds of institutionalization through which benefits will efficiently reach the target group and violation of rules and regulations invites the provision of the suit in the judiciary bodies.

The indispensable components of regulatory instruments are sources of funding; the set-up of good administration with excellent communication and grievance redress systems; a participatory mechanism of beneficiaries, an evaluation structure, and the winding up methods after objectives are served.

## Legalized and institutionalized social welfare schemes are unavoidable if the country has to move towards the third largest economy in the world before this decade ends

By 2030, under the sustainable development agenda of the United Nations and the government, legitimate social protection programs should be linked to indicate specific features. They are clarity in aims and policies behind the welfare program, people's participation in welfare works, qualified administration in the implementation of the schemes, a mechanism to maintain good relations with the public wherein people's voice should be considered and administration should recognize themselves as the protector of the system. Schemes would be evaluated to solve the problems and there will be transparency on use of public money.

There is currently no official data on the number of social protection schemes at both central and State levels. However, the 2022 union budget reported some 740 welfare projects under the central government. Generally, a scheme involves its plan, design, or program of action involving many stakeholders who are formulating welfare schemes for the government with the support of rules and regulations either enacted in Parliament or ordinances. In certain cases, social protection systems would be implemented according to the guidelines of the competent ministry.

Anyhow, sustainable welfare schemes should be based on Acts enacted by either Parliament or Assemblies, like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It is also important to note that time has come to give up those schemes, subsidies, and freebies which are being implemented without sufficient consultations, discussions, and legal bindings. Legalized and institutionalized social welfare schemes are unavoidable if the country has to move towards the third largest economy in the world before this decade ends. ©

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# A Skill Deficient Nation

Skill deficiency is the darker side of incredible India even after 75 years of Independence. But people are not aware of it

BY **M.L. SATYAN**

**T**he National Skill Development Mission (NSDM) was launched on July 15, 2015. The mission's task is to create convergence across sectors and States in terms of skill training activities. Further, to achieve the vision of 'Skilled India', the mission would not only consolidate and coordinate skilling efforts, but also expedite decision-making across sectors to achieve skilling at scale with speed and standards.



What is the field reality? Skill training in India among the unorganised sector, school dropout and illiterate youth attain very significant and crucial importance when the country is having school dropout rate ranging from 65 to 80 per cent. A bitter reality is that Vocational Training is not part of the academic curricula in our educational institutions. No wonder why India has just 5 to 10 percent skilled population (those who have completed formal skill training).

In India, recent reports indicate that over four million young people have lost their jobs. Further, more than 20 million people are expected to face job transitions in the post-Covid-19 employment market. Sectors such as customer service, food and hospitality, have taken a massive jolt while e-commerce and related industries such as warehousing and transport have seen some growth over the past year. However, this growth is not adequate to offset the losses in other sectors.

Here are some excerpts from an article written by Vandana Vasudevan, the Senior Fellow, World Resources Institute India, and Neharika Vohra, the Vice-Chancellor, Delhi Skilling University. "India's demographic dividend -- the over-62-percent population in the working age-group of 15-59 years -- is expected to propel the nation to high growth in the coming years. But how and where will they find jobs during an unprecedented crash in the employment market triggered by the pandemic?"

"To state the obvious, only those who have skills that are in demand by the employers will be absorbed in the workforce. The demand-supply

equations are staggering. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has indicated that India is staring at a 29 million skill-deficit by 2030. A 2019 report by Accenture projected that the existing skill gap, if left uncontrolled, will offset the nation's GDP by \$1.97 trillion (Rs.150 trillion) by 2028."

"There is a huge skill gap in India as can be seen from the fact that only 30 percent of graduates from Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), which are the backbone of vocational skill programs in India, get placed. Only a small minority venture into entrepreneurship, and the rest are unable to find jobs. Industry needs to play a vital role here by paying a premium to skilled workforce. While it may be apparently cheaper to hire untrained labour, the costs of training, mistakes, and lower productivity can all be overcome by paying a premium for skilled graduates. In addition, the industry needs to see partnerships with the ITI's, colleges and universities as an investment in their future productivity."

"India's demographic dividend offers a great opportunity, with the proportion of its dependent population decreasing, and that of the working-age population increasing. However, this will not automatically lead to growth, unless there are timely policy interventions. The challenge of bridging the skill gap is urgent and vital to the government's ambitions of making India a \$5 trillion economy."





**SKILL has 5 words. If we remove the first letter S, then, what remains is KILL. If we remove the second letter K, then, what remains is ILL**

Despite the presence of highly qualified people, majority of the workforce in India has very limited education and skills, which severely limit their chances of obtaining gainful employment. The incomes of the majority of workers are low or the quality of work they engage in is such that it is not enough for them to move out of poverty. Access to formal training for those with limited education has been extremely minimal. Institutional support in India to provide vocational training is very weak for both -- youth who have passed 10th class and who dropped out before reaching 10th class.

Even when people can access education and training opportunities, the quality and relevance of the skills obtained are often questionable and many people struggle to find employment as a result. Skills mismatch and limited training opportunities are common problems. The skilled artisans and craft persons are often not formally recognised/certified either. Those skilled crafts are reported to be in decline and calls for an intervention to retain such skilled crafts. A purely technical training aimed only at the professional technical content will not be sufficient to ensure success. It is important to include issues such as entrepreneurship skills, social behaviour, finance mobilization and market analysis along with generic skills.

On the one side, the organised sector professions alone are recognised and most sought after. We put so much pressure on our children to seek white-collar jobs like becoming doctor, engineer, job in armed forces, bank or government employment. Example: Rita (name changed) has completed her B. Ed and works in a private school in Bengaluru. Her monthly salary is Rs.7,000. Like her, there are many qualified teachers who after completing teacher's training, Bachelor of Education and Master of Education etc. earn pittance – somewhere between Rs.5000 and Rs.10000. Yet, they pretend to be happy because of their status.

On the other side, we never encourage our children to take up professions like plumber, electrician, carpenter, welder, hair-dresser, automobile mechanic, driver, tailor, pottery and handicraft maker, traditional musician/dancer etc. because these do not have "social recognition". Ramu (name changed), a carpenter from Uttar Pradesh works in Bengaluru. He has studied till 5th class. His weekly earning is about Rs.5000 and monthly earning is about Rs.20 to 25 thousand. Yet, skilled persons like Ramu are considered inferior and cheap.

SKILL has 5 words. If we remove the first letter S, then, what remains is KILL. If we remove the second letter K, then, what remains is ILL. The first lesson is that a person without skill, kills himself and others. The unskilled person is equal to a dead body. The second lesson is that a person without skill becomes ill or sick and a burden to the society. This person can never make constructive contribution to the society. Another important lesson is that Skill and Will need to strike a balance. A skilled person must have will power. These two qualities of Skill and Will pave way to growth/progress.

Skill deficit situation is the darker side of incredible India even after 75 years of Independence. Sadly, a vast majority of population is not aware of this scenario. As responsible citizens we need to create awakening among the people. We need to develop our own skills as well as undertake skill promotion wherever we are. ©

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# Bharat Jodo Yatra

## Rahul Gandhi's Gamble

BY A.J. PHILIP

A group of friends asked me whether I endorse Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra. I usually do not sign such appeals, for I know that my signature or endorsement does not make the cause any valuable. Yet, I endorsed the Yatra because it seeks to unite the people, rather than divide them on the basis of religion or caste. It is certainly one of the most ambitious a political leader has undertaken so far.

No, I do not forget the Bharat Yatra former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar undertook. He was a leader whom I respected a lot, especially after a Bhopal-Delhi train journey when I saw him busy reading a book. His Yatra lost much of its sheen when he utilised the money he collected on the way to build a farmhouse in the name of "ashram" on the Gurgaon-Sohna road.



I had an occasion to visit the "ashram" and wondered why a leader, who was once known as the Young Turk, took so much interest in real estate when the three estates called for his attention. The Yatra certainly played a role in Shekhar becoming the Prime Minister, whose regime is

remembered for a cargo flight carrying gold bars, kept in the Reserve Bank vaults, for "safekeeping" in London.

Why mention Chandra Shekhar when Mahatma Gandhi had himself undertaken a tour of the country to understand it better after he returned from South Africa and remained a brief-less lawyer for some time. Few realised that he was testing the water before he could plunge into it to emerge as the Father of the Nation.

None of the yatras comes anywhere near the one undertaken by Adi Sankara, who in the eighth century made the first Bharat Darshan when he visited the four corners of what is now Bharat, that is India, and set up four mutts – Badrikashram Jyotirpeeth in the north, Dwarka's Shardha Peeth in the west, Govardhan Peeth in Puri in the east, and Sringeri Sharada Peetham in Chikkamagalur district, Karnataka.

At the highest point in Srinagar is located the Shankaracharya temple to commemorate his visit

Nehru's attempt was to "discover" India. His great-grandson's attempt, as he confessed at Kanyakumari, is to "hear" India. Rahul Gandhi is certainly the "fittest" politician in the country, although he does not claim to have a 56-inch chest



## A CLOSE LOOK

to the Kashmir Valley. How he travelled to all those places when road communication was almost non-existent is not known. He even visited Mahishi in North Bihar to have an exchange of ideas with the great savant of Bihar, Mandan Mishra!

My own “discovery of India” began – it still continues – when I read Jawaharlal Nehru’s book by the same title. I thought it was flawless until a professor at my alma mater, St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, did a Ph.D on the errors in Nehru’s writing.

My efforts to get hold of a copy of the thesis were in vain as the professor was no more and his children were settled in the US. I remember the meeting held at the college where the professor was felicitated. Everybody praised him for the intellectual exercise that yielded him a Ph.D.

Nobody mentioned in what circumstances Nehru wrote his books whether it is the Autobiography or the Discovery of India or the Glimpses of World History. There was no Google Guru at that time. Nor was he at the British Museum in London, the most favourite destination for any scholar. On a visit to Nainital in Uttarakhand, I saw the jail where Nehru spent many years writing his books.

Nehru’s attempt was to “discover” India. His great-grandson’s attempt, as he confessed at Kanyakumari, is to “hear” India. Rahul Gandhi is certainly the “fittest” politician in the country, although he does not claim to have a 56-inch chest. Nor does he claim to have a double-heart. He certainly has a heart that is easily moved by the sight of penury or even hardship.

When a lady passenger had difficulty in taking out her luggage from the overhead storage, Rahul Gandhi helped her. Soon, his detractors trolled him for not letting the air-hostesses do their job. I have myself helped fellow passengers and did not wait for air-hostesses to come. Now that I am a senior citizen, many come forward to help me. His detractors have a mindset that sees manual job as inferior!

Even for Rahul Gandhi who has demonstrable skills in snorkelling and scuba-diving, what he has chosen to do is to undergo a great test of endurance. He will be covering a distance of 3,570 kms between Kanyakumari and Kashmir. He will pass through 12 states and two Union Territories. The journey is wholly on foot. Accompanying him are 118 Bharat Yatris, including women.

The *padayatra* was flagged off at Kanyakumari,



where the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean merge, by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in the presence of the Congress Chief Ministers of Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. I have seen the live coverage of the Yatra on YouTube and it can verily be said that it has evoked a good response from the ordinary people.

It may not be surprising if the Yatra finds mass support in southern Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the Congress still has a good presence. The real test for the Yatris will begin when they cross the Vindhyas and move towards the Aravali Ranges and, finally, the mighty Himalayas. Let there be no mistaking that it is an attempt to rejuvenate the Congress, as mentioned by his mother and Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The last time I voted for the Congress was when former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh contested unsuccessfully for the Lok Sabha. As a journalist, I never tried to cultivate any politician. In fact, I try to keep away from them. I reserve the right to question them if I find them on the wrong side of the law or pursuing an agenda which is at variance with the interests of the common man.

Yet, I cannot accept the slogan “Congress-mukt Bharat”, which is a prelude to “Communist-mukt Bharat”, “Muslim-mukt Bharat” and “Isai-Mukt Bharat”. No, mine is not a misapprehension. Our media have been going to town with probabilities of Rishi Sunak becoming the Prime Minister of Britain. He did well in the initial stages of the election but,

finally, lost to Liz Truss in the popular vote.

Did any British politician attack Sunak for his Indian connection? True, the media highlighted the fact that his wife was richer than the Queen and did not pay taxes under British law. Is that the case in India where Sonia Gandhi is always referred to as an Italian? We celebrate the fact that people of Indian origin hold high positions in multinational companies like Microsoft and ministerial berths in countries like Canada and Britain.

What is the state of Muslim representation in the Union Cabinet? Or, for that matter, Christian representation? Christians have a large presence in the education sector. Yet, there is no representation for Christians in the minorities' education commission. Remember that in the past the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) was headed by a Jesuit. Of course, he was chosen for his competence, not for the cassock he wore.



Once the Gujarat Electricity Board had a chairman. His name was Varghese Kurien, who is also known as the “milkman of India”. When I interviewed him, he asked me one pointed question, “Will the Kerala Government appoint a successful Gujarati businessman in Kerala as chairman of the KSEB?”

Gujarat is a changed place now. Modi and Co have no regard for Kurien or his mentor Tribhuvandas Patel, a dyed-in-the-wool Congressman who spent the evening of his life in a small house on the Amul campus at Anand.

Mahatma Gandhi was first given a job by a Gujarati Muslim, who had a roaring business in South Africa. Today, there is not a single Muslim among the BJP legislators in Gujarat, forget the State Cabinet.

## Attention is diverted from bread-and-butter issues to cooked-up issues like Har Ghar Tiranga. Hundreds of crores of rupees have been wasted in the name of promoting the national flag. What has the country gained by the campaign?

What's worse, there are attempts to marginalise the community, not just in Gujarat but all over the country.

Of late, film and documentary producers have been at work producing films and videos glorifying the past and projecting little known characters as great saviours of the nation. One school textbook says that Savarkar used to visit “India” while he was jailed in Andamans using extraterrestrial powers. Of course, the book did not say why such a person had to send mercy petition after mercy petition to the British.

Those who know the history of Andamans, especially the Cellular Jails there, know how the condition of the prisoners deteriorated when the Japanese took control of the jail for a brief period. During that time, Netaji Bose visited the jail because he was close to the Japanese. The prisoners approached him for help.

The fact is that he could not do a thing for them. A Sikh friend's father, who was a medical doctor posted at the jail, was declared a British spy, jailed in the same jail and was killed. The collaborator of the Japanese and friend of Mussolini has been rewarded with a statue with a canopy that suited the King of England.

At the rate at which Muslim names are changed, those born after 2014 would not even know about the Mughal period from the early 16th to the mid-19th century. When the Viceroy's House was re-christened Rashtrapati Bhavan, it had a logic. Renaming Kingsway as Rajpath and Queensway as Janpath was also logical.

No such thoughts occurred to Narendra Modi when he changed the name of Rajpath to Karthavya



Path. Yes, Karthavya (Duty) is important. What about the fundamental rights that the Constitution guarantees? Will he rename Janpath as “Adhikar Path” or Path of Rights? Is this time for semantic jugglery?

There has been a large body of work which suggests that the condition of the people has been deteriorating. The hiatus between the rich and the poor has been widening by leaps and bounds. Gautam Adani was a little-known industrialist till he made available his aircraft to Narendra Modi for his 2014 Lok Sabha campaign.

Every day the aircraft would take off from Ahmedabad and return to the city the same day after Modi addressed a series of election meetings. Today, the same Adani is the richest person in Asia. He owns ports, airports, mines and what not.

The condition of the people has been deteriorating. Joblessness has been acute. Most people are yet to return to the pre-Covid period. Meanwhile, prices of essential commodities have been going up. There used to be a popular Hindi jingle about Dal-Roti, the staple diet of the poor. Pulses are so expensive that the poor cannot afford them. They make do with onion and green chilly. Yet, there is no discussion in the media about such issues.

Instead, attention is diverted from bread-and-butter issues to cooked-up issues like Har Ghar Tiranga. Hundreds of crores of rupees have been wasted in the name of promoting the national flag. What has the country gained by the campaign? Of course, some businessmen have benefited.

**Divisive slogans like Love Jihad are raised to drive the minorities to a corner and institutions like the Enforcement Directorate are used to send shivers down the spine of anyone who stands up to the regime. It is in this context that attempts like Bharat Jodo Yatra need to be seen**



There are 195 countries in the world today. Has any country wasted its resources to have “Har Ghar Tiranga”? Nothing better can be expected from a Prime Minister who spent Rs 20,000 crore to beautify the Central Vista in New Delhi and build a new Parliament House and a house for himself.

Of course, he showed his priorities when he built the world’s largest statue for a Gujarati, who was born a Congressman, lived a Congressman and died a Congressman little knowing that not a single government dollar was spent on constructing the Statue of Liberty in New York. It was Joseph Pulitzer’s newspaper which raised money to erect the statue gifted by the people of Paris.

Divisive slogans like Love Jihad are raised to drive the minorities to a corner and institutions like the Enforcement Directorate are used to send shivers down the spine of anyone who stands up to the regime. It is in this context that attempts like Bharat Jodo Yatra need to be seen. No nation can prosper without the unity of its people. Otherwise, it will end up like the Third Reich. ©

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# 2024 and Beyond

If the government backed by the Sangh Parivar gets another chance to govern the country, how sure can we be that its secular and democratic foundation would be safe

BY **P. A. CHACKO**

The people look towards the 2024 general elections with mixed feelings. Some are in an expectant mood. They are the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party members and devotees hoping to get a thumping majority to have another term for their Hindu majoritarian rule. Many others are in a revolting mode and say 'enough is enough, move over Modi and Parivar rule.' There are some others, feeling the weight of unemployment, price rise and poverty, are not in a mood to digest the unfulfilled promises of a Ram Rajya.

The 'chai pe charcha' intellectuals scratch their brain to add fire and fuel to heated discussions on what should be and what should not be! The 'godii' media, enjoying the cozy shade of the ruling dispensation, is crawling on all fours and bringing to bursting point its vocal chords to sing glories to their crumbs-throwing masters.

There are more ground realities. The house wife



in the kitchen is cursing her misfortune of having to use gas stove. Those poor who were taken for a ride by having been gifted with 'revdi' gas cylinders as the benevolence of the Modi dispensation feel cheated because they cannot afford to get refills at an exorbitant rate. Those who clapped and cheered when Prime Minister Modi fed their eager ears with the promise of Rs. 15 lakh from the Swiss banks are wondering how to vent their anger at being taken for a jumla ride.

The litany of frustrations is unending. Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party took over the reins of power at the Centre, the nation has been getting dragged into the quagmire of violence, communal tension, hate mongering, and the like. The so-called fringe elements with politically infused fanatical frenzy went ballistic, got emboldened and became a mainstream bulldozer force and a tool to target members of minority communities, to destroy



shrines and churches, to lynch people for the cause of protecting their *Gau Mata*.

Unleashing visceral hatred particularly against Muslims and treating them as alien enemies have been felt by the Muslim community as an 'unkindest cut' in this so-called tolerant India. Christians, Dalits and Adivasis too have been becoming the target of attacks and ill treatment by members of the majority community and its leaders.

One wonders how one can understand the verse from Maha Upanishad: 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the whole world is a family). This concept is said to arise from the understanding that all human beings are emanated from the divine. However, when it comes to the living reality, we are facing an ever-growing intolerant force that dictates to us how to live, how to think, what to eat, whom to converse with or which religion to follow. Where is the tolerance of the Dharma Samhita when they beat to death a dalit boy who happened to drink water from a pot of water in a school? The pot was reserved to the upper caste teacher under Manusmriti rule in a public school. How do you explain to the world the intolerance when eleven of your comrades did gang rape a 21-year-old pregnant Bilkis Bano and killed her three-year-old daughter in front of her and killed seven members of her family in front of her? How does one understand the act of the state government that had the ignominious audacity to recommend release of those eleven convicts and the court signing on the dotted lines? The convicts, on prema-



ture release, were treated as heroes with garlands and sweets. When people's moral sense goes haywire, one wonders what the so-called tolerance is all about!

Is this intolerant India we want to carry to 2024 and beyond? If ever the Sangh Parivar gets another chance to govern this secular, democratic nation, how sure can we feel about its not wiping away all traces of the secular and democratic foundation?

The national assets and resources are being treated like private property and are sold out like fodder to cronies and crawlers. Even street vendors are speculating whether this nation is going to face another Sri Lankan-type crisis? Freedom of expression is getting gagged by being forced to become 'god-media'. Even the few independent channels are getting channelized into private capitalist empires. So, what will be left in 2024 and beyond?

Let the rulers and the ruled of this nation know for sure that India won its sacred freedom by the sweat, blood and tears of our freedom fighters and the masses. This secular, democratic nation cannot and should not be made to dance according to the whims of crass men and women who harp on their skewed nationalist ideology.

The sensible of this sacred nation will not allow the sacred Constitution to be reduced to non-entity and to be replaced by Manuvad and Hindu Dharmasamhitas.

We will demand from any government that comes to power in 2024 the following:

That every home should experience social secu-

**Those poor who were taken for a ride by having been gifted with 'revdi' gas cylinders as the benevolence of the Modi dispensation feel cheated because they cannot afford to get refills at an exorbitant rate**

rity and enjoy food sufficiency.

That every home should get employment insurance and health guarantee.

That every home should experience neighbourhood fellowship.

That every person should feel freedom from injustices and unequal treatment.

That every person should be free from suspicion that the next person is his enemy.

That the Dalits need to feel that they enjoy equality guaranteed by the Constitution.

That every Adivasi should feel assured that his surroundings such as jal, jungle and jamin are not looted by anti-social forces.

That no one should be ejected from his homestead land. We would not want to see people feeling the burden of economic insecurity and wander around as vagrants or migrants.

We would not want the nation's financial assets to be looted by anti-national elements with political connivance, or our national resources be sold out to private players. We will demand that the noble time-honoured principles of our sacred Constitution be kept and followed by legislators, judicial officers, executives and bureaucrats. We shall not be submitted to the harassment of bribe at all levels. In the name of development, Adivasis should not be displaced from their land nor the land tenancy laws be flouted. We expect that every politician be honest to the core.

Let not our leaders lie to us thinking they can hoodwink us. Let our bureaucracy and officialdom show clean character and commitment. Let not the police force think that brute force is their characteristic emblem. Let them understand that anyone

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suspected of an alleged crime is innocent till proved guilty, and that it is for the courts to pronounce punishment.

Let every child enjoy freedom from malnutrition. Let every child enjoy the fundamental right to education. Let our youth feel there is direction and future in their life. Let not peace be piecemeal, but wholesome. Let everyone look upon his fellow citizen as his national brother or sister. Let not colour, caste, religion, education or status divide us. Let not anyone feel left out in the enjoyment of the nation's resources under fair distribution.

Let no political or communal windbag divert our attention away from the nation's serious issues. Let no leader imagine that people have to crawl or prostrate before them in obeisance. Let not the citizens feel threatened or insecure by being forced to give up Indian citizenship and take refuge in foreign countries.

Let religion be stored for private use only, and let every citizen enjoy freedom of space, freedom of expression and freedom of religion and worship. Let everyone have the right to his or her choice of food or partner for life. Let no one feel that justice in the courts is a costly affair. Let every judge listen to his conscience before delivering.

And, then, we shall be proud citizens enjoying freedom and fellowship, justice -- social, political and economic; peace and prosperity.

*Har ghar me joy, har dil me national pride, har kone kone me integrity!* In that heaven of freedom let us hold our heads high! ©

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# Who is Pundit and Who the Chela?

Blind worship of leaders with made-up charisma makes people to fall for their charm at the cost of serious issues facing them

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

*“Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic.” Joe Biden, September 2, 2022*



umpteenth time by the uncanny similarities between him and Donald Trump. So close is their affinity that, unlike in the Durrani-Sobers comparison, it is almost impossible to discriminate between these two consummate showmen and tell the master from the doppelganger.

In the halcyon days when cricket journalism was still a fine art that brought the game alive and provided more joy than facts about the cricket, the scholarly journalist, K.N. Prabhu conceived of the perfect metaphor to describe Salim Durrani's prowess when he pronounced him “the poor man's Sobers”; possessed of a similar skill set and style but performing with not quite the same distinction as Sobers. It was a delightful play with words that powerfully conveyed what he meant.

I was reminded of the Durrani-Sobers analogy on reading the Vishwaguru's recent Independence Day address to the nation. I was struck for the

The Vishwaguru commenced his Independence Day oration by evoking the tricolour which, at his urging, was ubiquitous at every conceivable location in the country -- in homes, in offices, in schools and just about everywhere else. In like vein, flaunting and even embracing the American flag has been Trump's studied method of showcasing his patriotism and love for his country. Similarly, by invoking “India First” and “Atma nirbhar Bharat”, the Vishwaguru drummed up the desi version of the trumpery slogans of “America first” and “Make America Great



Again (MAGA)" propagated by Trump.

Ersatz patriotism is not the only characteristic that these two leaders share in common. Trump as President presented a perverse right-wing view of American history, excoriating academia for focusing on slavery and racism in American history and denouncing rallies against racial injustice as the "direct result of left-wing indoctrination in our schools." He even set up a new 1776 Commission in 2020 to "promote patriotic education", with the obvious intent of rewriting history to suit the purposes of his right-wing, racist constituency. The Commission submitted its report -- "filled with errors and partisan politics" according to leading historians -- two days before the end of Trump's term, but, thankfully, neither the Commission nor its historical fiction survived his Presidency.

In our frail democracy, the Vishwaguru has been effective in falsifying history, abetted by his minions in key positions across the educational spectrum. From the ramparts of the Red Fort, he barefacedly presented an alternative reading of the Freedom Movement, expunging Jawaharlal Nehru and including Savarkar in the elite pantheon of four leaders who spearheaded our freedom struggle. Ironically, reinforcing his flight of historical fancy but much to the outraged amusement of those with a modicum of good sense, came news that in Karnataka, the recently revised history school texts have glorified Savarkar, stating, inter alia, that during his incarceration in the Cellular jail, "bulbul birds used to visit the room and Savarkar used to sit on their wings and fly out and visit the motherland every day." The irrepressible Aakar Patel said it for us when he wryly tweeted, "always knew he was a lightweight."

Another point of comparison between the two leaders is their hardened right-wing populism, both adept at fanning passions along religious and other social fault lines. Although Trump has claimed that he "is the least racist person you have ever encountered", he has made explicitly bigoted statements, stretching from calling Mexican immigrants criminals and rapists to proposing a ban on all Muslims entering the US, and pandering to white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan after they held a violent rally in Charlottesville.

Here, behind the beguiling slogan of "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishvas," the Vishwaguru -- except during electioneering when the sneering rhetoric against Muslims is wickedly straightforward



-- expresses his polarizing and communal credo through dog whistles and oblique references. In his Independence Day speech, his assertion that "no part of India or no time period remained untouched by the freedom struggle against centuries of slavery" slyly slots the period of Muslim rule as predatory and alien. He tethers the country to its Hindu roots: "How can we not be proud of this heritage? We are those people who see Shiva in every living being... who see Lord Narayana in every man...who see the divine in the plants...who see Shankar in every stone... This is our power." Not a word on secularism or religious tolerance which are under assault like never before!

The personification of overweening narcissism, Trump is infamous for portraying a grandiose sense of self and his accomplishments. He has touted the development of the vaccines as his personal achievement: "I'm the father of the vaccine!" But the truth is that he was personally culpable for a series of missteps including inordinate delay in imposing travel bans, trivializing covid testing and mask wearing, dismissing the virus as a seasonal flu, even claiming that injecting bleach could treat the virus. For months, Trump was in psychological denial, insisting that the problem was under control, though he did later admit that he "wanted to play it down" as he didn't want people to panic. They didn't panic; they died. The U S with just 4 percent of the world's population accounted for over 20 percent of all confirmed cases and deaths during his tenure as President.

Much more measured in fakery, Trump's alter ego did not miss the opportunity to boast on Independence Day: "When the world was in a dilemma, this is the country which crossed the target of 200 crore vaccinations in a time-bound manner and broke all the previous records." What previous records? One recalls the Vishwaguru preening before the world and taking fulsome credit for "saving humanity" when, in fact, he was personally responsible for decisions that fueled the spread of the virus -- the sudden lockdown and resultant migrant crisis (a World Bank report estimated that 40 million migrant jobs were impacted/lost in India in April 2020), the holding of the Kumbh Mela, the elections in five States and the ill-timed export of vaccines. He went missing when our people were choking for want of oxygen and the spectre of death was everywhere. The tragically sub-optimal pandemic response resulted in a death toll of 4.7 million up to the end of 2021. And yet, in his Independence Day speech, he patted himself on the back for exemplary Covid management.

The two leaders clearly share much in common, but there are marked differences too. Trump has never shied away from the press whereas the Vishwaguru has not faced a single press conference. Trump's private life is an open book that does not make pleasant reading; the Vishwaguru's personal affairs are cloak-and-dagger secrets. At a time when Trump is besieged from all sides by criminal and civil suits, the Vishwaguru presents a squeaky-clean image with potential skeletons in the cupboard waved away by the courts of justice. Even Gujarat 2002 has reached a satisfactory closure, with the dismissal of the Zakia Jafri case by the Supreme Court and the remission in the sentences of the 11 convicts in the horrendous Bilkis Bano case.

Both leaders hold their legions of followers in thrall by projecting grandiose omnipotence and distracting them from bread-and-butter issues with unrelenting theatrics. They stoke the psychic pathologies of their devotees arising out of socio-economic deprivation and create an emotional bond and a blind faith that are steadfast even when the leaders' actions harm them personally.

Despite our country's nightmarish plight – raging unemployment, crushing inflation, communal discord, grave external threats – the Vishwaguru



maintains his stony autocratic imperturbability. His Independence Day speech was a stunning exhibition of delusional grandstanding. Perched atop the Red Fort and the godawful mess that he has created, he gave full vent to his imagination, spouting forth about our "collective consciousness", the unfolding "renaissance", and a world awe-struck by our "political stability, dynamism in policies, speed in decision making, universal trust." Looking ahead, our tinsel visionary even drew up a roadmap to 2047.

Why have we as a nation feted such chimerical nonsense? It is not only an insult to our intelligence but even worse, mocks our travails. Sadly, we have asked for it! Some time ago, a leading psychoanalyst explained the blind worship of our visionary with a story that bears repeating.

A Rabbi in a Polish village had acquired a reputation for being a visionary, but a sceptical journalist decides to travel to the village to check the veracity of the Rabbi's visionary gift. Asked to prove what is being claimed by the villagers, the Rabbi climbs to the roof of his house and peering into the distance, loudly proclaims that a huge fire has broken out in another village 50 miles away. The journalist hurries to the other village where he finds that there has been no fire. He returns to the Rabbi's village and informs the villagers that contrary to what the Rabbi had said, there was no fire in the other village. "So what?" the villagers chorused. "It does not matter if there was a fire or not. Aren't you impressed by how far he can see?" ©

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**MATHEW JOHN** is a former civil servant. Views are personal

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# A 'Shameless' Fund Raiser for the Poor

**R**am Gidoomal lives in the hearts of the people, be it the marginalized, leprosy affected, bonded labour, downtrodden or the oppressed. He has been instrumental in raising funds for them through large corporates and other business tycoons. He has been on the Boards of The Leprosy Mission, International Justice Mission, and several other agencies raising funds to address these issues.

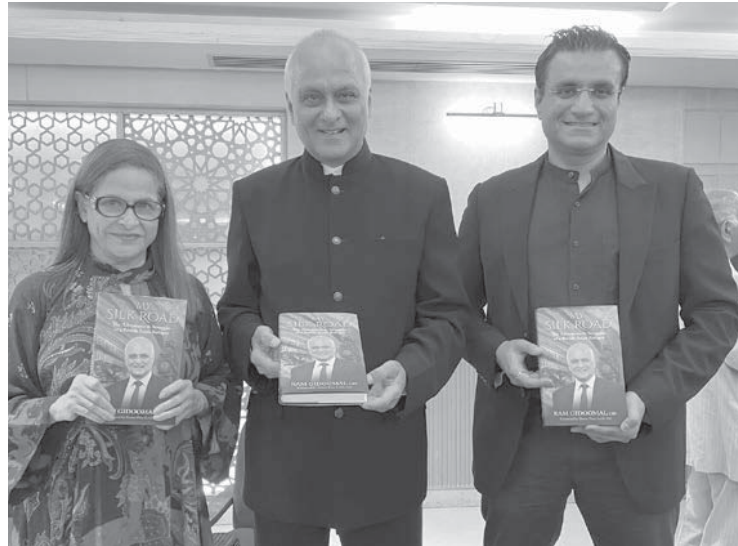
During his run for the position of London Mayor, his punch line was, "If I'm elected, I will work for the homeless, the jobless, and the carless". The manifesto focused on the principles of social Justice, respect for life, reconciliation, active compassion, stewardship of resources and empowerment.

He was in India recently to release his book "My Silk Road". According to John Samuel, IAS, "Ram Gidoomal is known worldwide for his Character, Compassion and Commitment." On behalf of *Indian Currents*, **Manoj Varghese** had an opportunity to interview **Ram Gidoomal** and know the backroom story of the book and the author.

## Q How did you run into a business empire from a corner shop in London?

**A** My grandparents had a well-established silk business in the early 19th century and owned the Moti Mahal in Hyderabad. But first we were refugees during the Partition of India, leaving the Sindh for Kenya, and then we had a second flight due to ethnic violence in Africa, which brought us to the streets of London. In Kenya, we lived in a 15-bedroom flat and led a luxurious life. But, in London, we had to open a corner shop in order to try to eat at least two square meals a day. We made it a point to work hard. I remember opening the shop as early as at 4 in the morning and closing late midnight, while the other shops opened only by 8 a.m.

We identified what local people wanted, whether Spanish newspapers or Irish cigarettes, and made it a point to meet their needs. In a short span of time, we expanded our business to another five more corner shops. Later, I worked in Lloyds Bank International, before being recruited to Inlaks, which was founded by my wife's uncle, Indoo Shivdasani. We



Sindhis know how to do our business. In fact, it is in our blood. We were known for 'Idhar ka maal udhar, aur udhar ka maal idhar' (trading goods from one place to another). At the age of 37, I was the CEO of Inlaks UK, and retired at the age of 40 to start up and run a series of entrepreneurial initiatives in the business sector, in the social enterprise sector and in the charitable sector.

## Q What inspired you to write this Memoir/Book 'My Silk Road'?

**A** The covid times created the ambience, and the family provoked me to document my life journey. My friend-cum-publisher Prabhu Gupta accelerated it by setting a deadline to get it published along with the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' in India. During the corona times, my extended family got together online to celebrate my 70th birthday. The small clippings shared online by them made me to work on the content part and set the historical records right. My grandchildren had collated facts from several people and every corner of the earth. The tight deadline made me to think, recollect and scribble as much information as I could in a short span of time. I dedicate this book to the most vulnerable children in India and wish a 'silk road' for each of them.



## INTERVIEW

**Q What created a spark in your life to advocate for the marginalized?**

**A** On a business trip to India to procure large quantity of seafoods for trading purpose, I had an opportunity to visit Dharavi in Mumbai in 1987. I smelt and touched poverty for the first time and saw the slum areas with my own eyes. I could not sleep in peace, the question boomeranged in my mind: what I am doing on this earth. I was moved to help them out. On my way back home in London, I thought of raising funds for such deprived groups of people. We introduced the concept of 'Eat less Pay More' Restaurants on the high streets of the UK where the food was priced high to raise money for India. When it comes to raise funds for a noble cause, I am shameless and ruthless.

**Q Tell me something about the 'Christmas Crackers'.**

**A** The Dharavi experience inspired me and three other friends to set up the Christmas Cracker Charitable Trust with a novel approach of raising money for charity and invest it in the developing countries. Christmas crackers are festive table decorations that make a snapping sound when pulled open, and often contain a small gift, a paper hat, and a joke. We aimed at creating a business run by teenage volunteers, which would donate its profits to relief

projects. The youth groups marketed their food, with slogans like 'eat less, pay more', 'bite for right', and 'justice not just us'. Over seven years, Christmas Cracker project raised US \$10 million for charity, mobilising over 50,000 youth in the process. This campaign was a huge success.

**Q What has been the biggest change in your life?**

**A** As a student relatively new to England, and with no friends at university, out of loneliness, I went to the university pub hoping to enjoy the music and perhaps have a chance conversation. I found a young group playing the song of Glen MacClearn, "Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee...", which touched my heart. But I needed to think through a whole range of things, which required a lot of debate and discussion, and reading and study, so that I began to understand the message of Jesus the Lord, which is to enter into a personal relationship with Him. That made the biggest difference in my life. And, yes, I did go on to complete my Post Graduate Research in Management science and Operations Research. After that, there was a desperate search for a scholarship to pursue higher studies, but I also wanted to marry Sunita and her dad's condition was that I should have a job! It was a tough time.



## INTERVIEW

**Q How did your relationship with Jesus disturb or enrich your relationship with your family?**

**A** I was well versed with Sanskrit vocabulary. I used to tell them, "My Guru is Yesu Masih, the sanathan satguru. He fulfilled his dharma to pay for my karma to enable me to have Jeevan mukti." They had question upon question for me. With time, many members of the family also became followers of Jesus the Lord, while others continue in their own different ways.

**Q What are your views on the recent attacks on minorities in India?**

**A** Many philosophies and faiths have flourished in India over the last 5000 years, and there have been followers of Jesus in India for the past 2000 years. I doubt that any political or other group can change the deep-rooted tolerance of Indian culture. However, the attacks on human rights are a great setback for India, particularly the attacks on Hindus who disagree with Hindutva.

Also, the attacks on the rights of women, of Muslims, of Christians, of Dalits, of intellectual freedom and so on reflect badly on our civilization. In

the popular image of India in the West, these attacks have become more prominent than India's economic success or our journey towards becoming a super-power.

**Q Did the British rule hamper the growth of India?**

**A** Well, since the British left, we have had 14 Prime Ministers of our own now, and we have been independent for 75 years – which is three generations! Isn't it time to ask ourselves, what we have done as against what other ex-colonies such as Hong Kong and Korea have done which have enabled them to do so much better than us? Even Bangladesh has overtaken us in terms of welfare of people.

For all the damage done by British rule, it enabled India to become an independent country for the first time in our history. And they gave us basic infrastructure, like that of railways, roads, scientific and educational institutes, and indeed our administrative and legal structure. But talking about the past should be left to historians. Now we have the resources, and should focus on making our people as educated and healthy and entrepreneurial as possible, so that our nation prospers. ©

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# Vizhinjam Port Protest

## Port of Future and Future of the Fisher

Vizhinjam inhabitants require a just and fair solution. Their traditional right to fish cannot be usurped, but it has to be balanced against economic interest

BY DR. PAULY MATHEW MURICKEN

**V**izhinjam, the capital of Ay Kingdom that ruled between 7th and 11th century AD, having the territories extending from Nagarcoil to Thiruvalla, later became the hub of a fort and a port. The historical port at Vizhinjam initially hailed as the 'port of the future' on account of its proximity to the international ship route has now become the 'port of controversies'.

Fisheries are an important source of food, nutrition, employment, income and above all constituting livelihood to fishers. Fish is one of the affordable options to mitigate hunger and malnourishment. India has rich and diverse fisheries resources rang-



ing from deep seas to lakes, ponds, and rivers. It has more than 10% of the global biodiversity in terms of sea fish and shellfish species. The marine fisheries resources are spread along the country's vast coastline, exclusive economic zone and continental shelf area.

Under the Constitution of India, Fisheries is a State subject under Entry 21 of List II. States play a pivotal role in fisheries governance. Under the guiding principles of co-operative federalism, Centre complements the efforts of the States in this arena. Inland fisheries are fully managed by States. Marine fisheries are a shared responsibility between the



Centre and coastal States. In the sea waters inside the 12 nautical mile (22 km) territorial limit, coastal States have jurisdiction, whereas in respect of fisheries in Exclusively Economic Zone waters beyond 12 nautical miles and up to 200 nautical miles (370 km), the Centre is responsible. Centre and States are committed to ensure sustainable and responsible use of the marine resources.

### A People-Centric Approach

The National Fisheries Policy, 2020 framed by the Centre is intended to offer a strategized way forward to develop, harness, manage and regulate capture and culture fisheries in a responsible and sustainable manner. The national aspirations and the development goals set before the nation through the policy asserts the socio-economic upliftment and economic prosperity of fishers and fish farmers' and holds traditional and small-scale fisheries at the core of the Policy.

To meet the compelling demands that fulfill the requirements of today and leaves an equally better fishery for tomorrow, the Policy asserts that it is necessary to develop a sound framework, based on the principles of equity and equality and adopts a people-centric and participatory approach; mainstreams gender, and maintains inter-generational equity.

One shall not ignore that fisheries have commenced as a purely traditional activity, though now it has almost transformed into a commercial enterprise. The Policy, in fact, recognizes that marine fisheries sector is dominated by the socio-economically backward and small-scale fishers whose lives are closely intertwined with the oceans and seas and that the dependency of traditional marine fishers on marine capture fisheries for livelihoods has been increasing.

**Fishermen naturally require residence in close proximity to the sea, to have unimpeded view of the sea. Relocating landwards is seen as an inherent threat to community's nature and customs**



The vision of the Policy is to develop an ecologically healthy, economically viable and socially inclusive fisheries sector that contributes towards economic prosperity and wellbeing of fishers and fish farmers and thereby provide food and nutritional security to the country. It has the mission of improving the livelihood of artisanal and small-scale fishers through appropriate strategies in a participatory manner.

### Beach Front, the Living Front

The beach front and the sea coast play a crucial socio-economic, cultural role in the lives and living of traditional fisher communities. Historically, they have evolved an intimate relation with particular stretches of coastline that they use, that is in front of their settlement and extends on either side. Its boundaries are separated traditionally, geographically and culturally.

Observing the sea and its conditions using the traditional knowledge is an essential part of the preparation and planning that fishermen undertake for their fishing activities. Fishermen naturally require residence in close proximity to the sea, to have unimpeded view of the sea. Relocating landwards is seen as an inherent threat to community's nature and customs.

The access and visibility of the sea is critical for fishermen as part of their decision-making, basic livelihood activities such as launch of boats, laying of shore seines, drying of fish, mending of nets, berthing of boats. Sea shore has also social functions for the community like sports, leisure, meetings, and cultural festivals. These are the fair use of coastal shore area by the villagers and this extends far beyond their actual areas of settlement.

Transferring the traditional ownership of and access to beach fronts from fisher communities to private entrepreneurs with commercial interest and pushing back the dwelling places of the fisher communities to the landward side of the line would prove to be fatal and a brazen attempt to disempower the traditional fishermen communities



communities to the landward side of the line would prove to be fatal and a brazen attempt to disempower the traditional fishermen communities. When they require extra land and space for the future expansion of their settlements, could it be denied or deprived of under the guise of development is the question being raised?

### Goals of Blue Economy

Bottom-up approaches with fishermen community at the centre is the need of the hour, instead of embarking upon top-down policies. The displaced fishers have to be resurrected by taking them into confidence and by extending just and equitable compensation for the loss suffered. Establishing an independent, impartial, transparent and accessible adjudicatory mechanism to hear them and to provide just solutions on their grievances may win their hearts.

There is no dispute that coastal area development is necessary for meeting the goals of the Blue economy. But it shall not be at the cost of the rights of traditional fishermen. Improved livelihood has to be ensured without affecting the existing livelihood. Fisheries resources are the common heritage of the mankind and its aesthetic value has to be preserved. Vizhinjam inhabitants require a permanent solution and it must be just and fair. Their traditional right to fish in historic waters cannot be usurped; it has to be protected and equally balanced against economic interest. Governments are duty bound to ensure meaningful fulfillment of their rights. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DR. PAULY MATHEW MURICKEN** is a prominent Lawyer, an acclaimed writer and a distinguished academician based in Kochi

The fisher people have been the traditional inhabitants of the coast. Their occupation of the land adjoining the sea was entrenched in their association with the sea. Being close to the sea is critical for their livelihood. They may not always have title for the land and housing that they occupied. They may have to change residence across the coastline in different seasons. Still their right of access, use and control of coastal space is recognized as integral to coastal governance.

### Coastline, the Contested Space

Development projects always have lasting negative impacts on coastal environment and traditional rights of fisher. Coastline is now becoming a contested space. Development activities mainly aimed at the growth of the economy is putting pressures on the coastline. The livelihood concerns of the coastal communities are easily forgotten. The rights of the fishers are being deprived. Their first right over the coast is seldom taken into care.

Transferring the traditional ownership of and access to beach fronts from fisher communities to private entrepreneurs with commercial interest and pushing back the dwelling places of the fisher

# Lessons for the Disciples of Jesus

Christians should be disciples of Jesus rather than His devotees. While a disciple adopts His vision and mission, a devotee limits himself/herself to worshipping Him

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

**T**he latest book of well-known historian Ramachandra Guha is "Rebels Against the Raj: Western Fighters for India's Freedom". The book tells the story of seven foreign-born individuals who chose to struggle for the freedom of a country other than their own. "They exchanged their old homeland for their new one unreservedly, and unequivocally -- once in India, they knew they would almost certainly die in India". When right-wing nationalists are clamouring to convert India into a Hindu Rashtra, these stories are a source of great inspiration to all those who aspire to make India an inclusive pluralistic nation.



the vision and teaching of Jesus, being open to learn from the people.

There is a difference between a disciple of Jesus and a devotee of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is inspired by His vision and mission and is passionate to continue His mission. A devotee of Jesus is concerned about building worship centres, erecting statues, going on pilgrimages etc. A devotee of Jesus need not have commitment to continue the mission of guru. Even if he/she may pay some attention to the mission of the guru, it may not be his/her priority. A devotee need not be concerned about people, but for a disciple, people are the top most priority because the mission is with the people and for the people.

Disciples of Jesus can learn a good number of lessons from the 'Rebels Against the Raj', especially from four of these illustrious women and men:

- 1) Mira Behn whose original name is Madeleine Slade, a British national
- 2) Samuel Evans Stokes, an American,
- 3) Ralph Richard Keithahn, another American and
- 4) Sarala Devi -- formerly Catherine Mary Heilmann, another English woman.

All of them had the openness to learn about the people of India, their religion and culture, and they were able to identify themselves with Indians to a great extent. They participated in the freedom struggle and went to jail. On the contrary, many Christian missionaries who came to India from the West were prejudiced against Indian religions and cultures and they tried to impose their religion and culture on the people of India instead of sharing



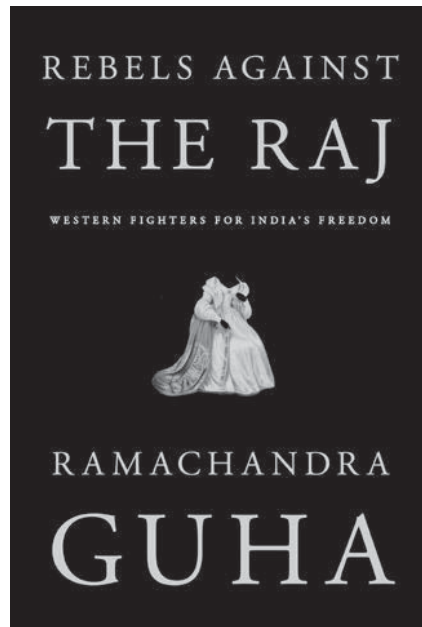
Jesus. Mission of Jesus is bringing about individual and social transformation in view of the reign of God.

A disciple of Jesus is passionate to bring about individual and social transformation, following the teachings of Jesus in view of creating the Reign of God situation in the context in which he/she lives. As Jesus was always available to people, a disciple of Jesus is always available to people and is in the midst of people, sharing their joys and sorrows. A devotee of Jesus need not be with people; in fact, many devotees of Jesus live in their enclosures and comfort zones, often cut off from people. Often, they are unaware of what is happening to people.

Devotees of Jesus may not be able to learn much from the lives of the men and women about whom Ramachandra Guha has written in his book. The most important lesson the disciples of Jesus can learn from the four foreigners is openness and readiness to learn from the people. They did not come with the prejudice that the people of India are ignorant and their religion is superstitious. They also did not claim that their religion and culture were far superior to those of the people of India.

For example, Samuel Stokes studied Upanishads and Puranas. In the words of Guha, “these studies, however, in no sense diminished his faith in Christ; rather the light from the Hindu scriptures had come to fill the gaps in Christianity as he had known it and to make it a connected whole”. Stoke said of himself that ‘he came to teach and stayed to learn’. As a result of studying about Hinduism he came to the conclusion that “Christianity and Hinduism need each other”. “When a divine synthesis has been affected a true Christian will be able to call himself a Hindu, and a true and perfect Hindu will be able to say, “I am a Christian”. Ralph Richard Keithahn visited the Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi, Santiniketan of Rabindranath Tagore and the ashram of Ramana Maharshi in Tamil Nadu to learn about Indian culture and religions.

While Mira Ben was in jail she read Upanishads, Quran and had planned to read Mahabharata. She



also finished the year-long course in spiritual reading that Gandhi had laid out for her.

Second lesson one can learn from them is identification with the people of the area as far as possible. Samuel Stokes married a Christian woman of Rajput origin. He built his house in tune with the local culture and named it “Harmony Hall”. He and his children adopted the dress of the local people. Contrary to the behaviour of the British officers, he treated Indians as equals, as he strongly believed in equality of all people. He wrote, “No nationalism is worth straining for that does not stretch beyond the interests of one’s race so as to

include the interests of all humanity”.

Madeleine Slade (Mira Ben) was fascinated by the personality of Gandhi and his work after reading a booklet titled Mahatma Gandhi written by Jean Jean-Christophe, Rolland. She wanted to be a partner in the mission of Gandhi. Even before coming to India, she prepared herself for the mission. She had given up drinking, and no longer ate meat of any kind. She learnt to spin and weave, as it was a practice in the ashram of Gandhiji. She also wore an Indian dress.

Regarding the efforts of Keithahn to identify himself with the people of India, the Indian Express wrote the following on 30th August 1944. “The American had gone further than Andrews, in identifying himself with the common people of India. Latterly he had even begun to dress like an Indian peasant and eat only such simple food as obtainable in the village itself”.

The examples of Samuel Stokes and Mira Ben are challenges to the contemporary missionaries in India. What extent are they ready to identify themselves with the people with whom they live and work? Genuine mission requires incarnation into the culture of the people, as Jesus became one among the Jewish people.

The third lesson is acquiring mastery in the language of the people. Stokes acquired mastery in Hindi and in the local *pahari* language, and as a result he could effectively communicate with

people. He taught his children only Hindi and *pahari*. Mahatma Gandhi's remark about Stokes is very pertinent. "He has not, this day taught his children a single word of English. They only know two languages -- *Pahadi* and Hindi. He too threw his clothes into the sacrificial fire on July 31 and now dresses himself in a dhoti, shirt and cap, all made of khadi."

As a preparation to join the mission of Gandhi, Mira Ben learnt Hindi and read books on India and its culture. After coming to India, she continued her efforts to gain mastery in Hindi. Sarala spoke and wrote Hindi like a native. She also picked up the local dialect, Kumaoni while she worked among women in Uttarakhand.

Without being proficient in the local/regional language missionaries will not be able to influence people among whom they work, and their mission also will not be effective.

The fourth lesson is responding to the needs of the people, especially fighting against injustice and exploitation, if the mission is to be successful. Samuel Stokes found the people of the villages surrounding Simla were subjected to an exploitative practice called *begar*. During the summer the high officials of the Raj took their families on the treks and tours, forcing the villagers to carry their loads and supply stuff for their meals too. Meagre wages were paid for these services; and sometimes nothing at all. Stokes decided to stop this practice. He submitted applications alone and with the signature of hundreds of villagers to the high officials like commissioner, besides going to the public by writing articles in renowned publications like *Young India*.

Mira Ben accompanied Gandhi in his travels to different parts of the country to mobilize people in the struggle for independence of India and in this process she often became sick. For supporting Gandhi, Mira was arrested and sentenced to three months in prison, Bombay's Arthur Road Jail. Again, she was arrested and had to remain in jail for about a year. She undertook an intensive tour to the UK and the USA to promote the cause of India's freedom. Within two weeks in the United States, Mira addressed twenty-two gatherings and gave five radio broadcasts. She addressed sixty-seven meetings in the United Kingdom. She took up the cause of the people of India and left no stone unturned in achieving the goal.

Besides establishing Kasturba Mahila Utthan



Mandal and Lakshmi Ashram at Kausani in Uttarakhand for the empowerment of women and girls, Sarala Behn travelled on foot for ten years in many parts of India for creating awareness among women. She also spent one year in the dacoit-infested areas of Chambal Valley and Morena, working for a transformation in the dacoits and motivating them to surrender themselves.

The contemporary missionaries have to ask themselves whether they have the courage and determination to take up the cause of people among whom they live and work. Stan Swami fought against the exploitation and oppression of the Adivasis of Jharkhand and supported them to access their rights, especially rights related to *jal, jungle, jameen?* How many missionaries have the guts to follow the footsteps of Stan Swami?

In short, what the disciples of Jesus (missionaries) can learn from the four foreigners, who had identified themselves with the people of India, is that mission is with the people and for the people. Institutions started for facilitating the mission can in course of time become obstacles to the mission, if the persons who manage the institutions are not people-oriented and people are not at their heart. In such situations institutions can become ends in themselves and people could be used to perpetuate institutions. In such a situation the mission is bound to fail. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL** is a trainer and consultant to Non-Profit Organizations and presently a team member of Universal Solidarity Movement (USM) Indore. He can be reached at: [jacobpt48@gmail.com](mailto:jacobpt48@gmail.com)



# A Look at Laws of the Church

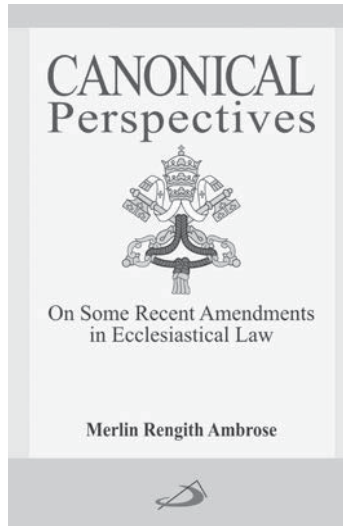
BY **PROF. FELIX WILFRED**

**C**anonical Perspectives on Some Recent Amendments in Ecclesiastical Law” by Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose echoes the canonists of the Middle Ages who were the most innovative and creative in the Church of the period; they were ahead of their times both in the Church and in the world. Reflecting contextually and beyond the boundaries of the Church, they sowed the seeds for the modern human rights regime and democracy.

The eight canonical thematics the author has chosen to delve into are significant and pastorally relevant. They are so actual that the readers are bound to vibrate with them. It is about forty years now since the present code was promulgated (1983), and the fast-changing times and the conditions of the Church and the world have triggered a much-needed reform of it. Pope Francis has dared to bring changes with the pastoral situation of the present times in mind, and the innovations introduced are a prelude to a complete overhaul of the current code, and hopefully promulgation of a new one.

The book starts with the much-debated issue of the participation of women in the life and ministry of the Church. The author deals with the reform, instituting women officially as ministers of lector and acolyte, which was reserved only for male members, thus introducing change in the existing Canon 230. It may not be an earth-shaking reform. Nevertheless, it is very symbolic and hopefully a prelude for more radical changes in the ministerial role of women in the future. On the other hand, women were actually involved in these ministries. In this case, it is a confirmation of the approval of practice in the spirit of the sense of the faithful – *sensus fidelium*. The second chapter reflects on the synodal path introduced by Pope Francis based on a solid ecclesiology of the People of God, and the author throws light on this connection in Canons 342-348.

On May 23, 2021, Pope Francis introduced significant changes in the penal norms in the Church and thus reforming Book VI of the code. This was done with the pastoral goals of healing and correction in the Church and removing any traces of the spirit of revenge and retribution. This is the focus of the reflection of the author in chapter three. Recently we all witnessed the canonization of the martyr St. Devasahayam. It is the auspicious occasion to learn in the fourth chapter of the



book about how through the two millennia of Christian history, the process of recognizing and declaring saints developed and understand the various stages involved.


Of late, clerics forming Trusts and engaging in profit-making business activities are widely discussed in the country. In the fifth chapter, the author provides an exegesis of the pertinent Can. 286 and reflects on its nuances and implications.

A painful everyday issue that several Christian faithful encounters is the nullity for which they apply to the ecclesial authorities. The last three chapters go into the various aspects of this question. As the author tells us in the sixth chapter, the declaration of the

nullity of marriage is not annulling the marriage bond but rather the declaration of a marriage that was invalid and non-existent right from the beginning, based on invalidating reasons.

The author explains the five different phases in the process of marriage nullity, which would be very helpful to those perplexed by the laws of the Church on marriage and divorce. It also enlightens on the rights the faithful enjoy before the competent ecclesiastical forum. The author throws much light on these rights in chapters seven and eight. It delves into the significance of proof in the instructional phase (chapter seven) and the publication of the acts (chapter eight).

This book is the fruit of much study and research, as the numerous references testify. It is not a heavy and frightening work on Canon Law. Written in a lucid style and accessible to a broader readership, Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose, Professor of Canon Law at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute & Executive Secretary of CCBI Commission for Canon Law, brings to our doorsteps the laws and norms of the Church, evoking our interest and making dialogue with them possible. The book is pastorally relevant and practical that it is likely to see many editions. I am sure many Christian faithful will benefit by reading this excellent and timely book.

The book is published by St Paul's Publication, Mumbai, and is priced at Rs. 300. 

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**PROF. FELIX WILFRED** is a former Member of the International Theological Commission of the Vatican

# No Substitute for Safe Driving

There is an imperative need to enforce rules related to speed limits, seat-belt wearing, lane discipline etc., in the right earnest, to bring about the expected reduction in road traffic fatalities

BY AARTI

**T**he manner in which former Tata Group Chairman Cyrus Mistry was recently killed when his Mercedes GLC 220d 4MATIC car (costing a whopping Rs 80 lakh on road approximately) hit road divider on a bridge over the Surya river in Maharashtra's Palghar is rather traumatic.

According to the CCTV footage and preliminary investigation, reportedly the car was being driven by Cyrus' family friend Dr Anahita Pandole apparently at a speed of 180-190 km per hour. The faulty design of the bridge parapet wall (an infrastructure issue) is also stated to be a cause for the car crash.

So it is because of multiple factors like over-speeding and the error of judgement by the driver, the accident is believed to have taken place. It is also stated that Cyrus and his friend Jahangir Pandole both seated in the rear who were not wearing their seatbelts died on the spot.

There have been a lot of reactions in wake of the death of Cyrus. Mahindra Group Chairman Mr Anand Mahindra was quick to urge all passengers to take the pledge to wear seatbelts asserting that he always

wore his seat belt even when in the rear seat of the car.

While the ongoing investigations are expected to unravel what actually happened, let's for a moment rewind some 60 plus years back when cars manufactured even in developed countries had no basic safety features.

In 1956, Ralph Nader who was researching automotive safety as a second-year student at Harvard Law School published a book "Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile" in 1965 in which he portrayed how car manufacturers rejected safety features, like seat belts in favour of looks and comfort. The book not only was a best seller but made Ralph Nader famous as an influential consumer advocate.

In about 10 months after the book was published reportedly US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, requiring the adoption of new or upgraded vehicle safety standards, and creating a dedicated agency - the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - to enforce them and supervise safety recalls. Under the Motor Safety Standard, which took effect on 1 January 1968, all vehicles (except buses) have to be fitted with seat belts in all designated seating positions.

With the amendment to the Motor Vehicles Act in 1993, seatbelt was made mandatory for the driver's seat in respect of four wheelers manufactured in India after March 1994.

With Delhi alone accounting for nearly 150 deaths due to road accidents every month, in December 2001, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court issued directions for mandatory wearing of seat belts for front seat occupants in cars. In 2003, the Motor Vehicles Act was amended making it compulsory for all occupants in a four-wheeler to wear a seatbelt.



## TRAFFIC FATALITIES

According to Rule 138 (3) of the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, passengers in the rear seats are required to wear seat belts. It's violation, attracts a penalty of Rs 1,000.

Following the Cyrus mishap, as an immediate measure, the local police have asked the Central Institute of Road Transport, Pune for undertaking a road safety audit of black spots done at national and state highways within the jurisdiction of Palghar to rectify structural faults if any.

The police have also requested the National Highways Authority of India to install signages, cat-eyes, rumble strips and radium reflectors appropriately so as to alert motorists.

According to the World Health Organisation, wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of death among drivers and front seat occupants by 45 to 50 percent and the risk of death and serious injuries among the rear seat occupants by 25 percent. A recent road safety report prepared by the Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Centre, IIT Delhi, has estimated that air-bag deployment reduced mortality by 63 percent while the lap-shoulder-belt use reduced mortality by 72 percent. Notably, the combined air-bag and seatbelt use reduced mortality by more than 80 percent.

Use of seat belts and airbags, as studies have shown, increases the safety of passengers in case of a crash. The seatbelt holds the passenger in place while the airbag helps to cushion the head and chest from any avoidable injuries during an impact.

That not using a seatbelt can prove fatal is substantiated by official statistics: 26,896 people had died due to non-use of seat belts in accidents in 2017 and 16,876 of them were passengers.

Not long ago, a road safety study commissioned by Maruti Suzuki across 17 Indian cities found that only 25 percent of car occupants use seat belts.

While 32 percent of those surveyed blamed a weak legal enforcement for not buckling up, 27 percent felt seat belts impacted their image, 25 percent didn't use didn't seat belts as they considered it to damage their clothes, 23 percent didn't consider seat belts safety devices at all and 20 percent of those surveyed also didn't feel the need as their family and friends seldom used them.

With the stark reality before us, isn't it time we realise that road safety doesn't happen by accident.

Now that Union Transport Minister Mr Nitin Gadkari has stated that wearing seat belts is to be made



mandatory for all passengers including rear seat passengers, things are bound to change in terms of safety.

The new rule, to be put in place shortly, will empower the traffic police to impose a fine of Rs 1000 on the drivers of those cars in which rear seat occupants are not wearing seat belts. The issue of many vehicle owners using clips as an alternative to not wearing seat belts, to avoid the sound alerts of seat belts, is also being addressed and cameras that will be installed everywhere would detect such defaulters.

Those in the higher echelons of power need to address road safety in a holistic manner. Apart from raising public awareness, and imposition of fines, the certainty of punishment will serve as a deterrent.

There is an imperative need to enforce rules related to speed limits, seat-belt wearing, lane discipline etc., in the right earnest, to bring about the expected reduction in road traffic fatalities.

There have been suggestions from some quarters that using technology it ought to be made impossible to operate a motor vehicle if seat belts are not fastened.

Well, at an individual level, it needs to be understood that overspeeding, over taking from the wrong side, driving on the wrong side, driving under the influence of alcohol etc., are some of the factors that pose a public safety risk.

Self-discipline in adhering to all safety precautions while driving will prevent accidents.

Please appreciate that there is no substitute for safe driving.

Better to be safe than feel sorry later.

Our safety is in our hands. ©

# Holiness requires working for social justice

BY SUJATA JENA

A state-level peace and harmony convention was held in Odisha August 25 on the 14th anniversary of the Kandhamal communal massacre in this eastern Indian state.

For new readers, the 2008 Kandhamal communal violence stands out as an organized attack. It was the worst violence India's Christian community had faced in 300 years. During the violence, more than 100 Christians were killed, more than 75,000 families were displaced; 5,600 homes were destroyed, and 360 churches and church-run institutions were looted and destroyed.

More than 40 women were raped, molested and humiliated, including a young nun working in a pastoral center, who was gang-raped and paraded naked on the street in broad daylight. The struggle for relief, rehabilitation and justice continues in courts and government forums.

To observe this day, more than 300 civil society groups, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, writers, students, and academics, including some priests and nuns, across the state joined the daylong peace and goodwill convention in Bhubaneswar, the eastern Indian state of Odisha's capital.

The chief speakers at the event were Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of the framer of the Indian Constitution; Baba Saheb Ambedkar; and Arfa Khanum Sherwani, a renowned journalist.

Several political party representatives participated and expressed their views. Everyone invariably and

empathetically spoke about justice for the victims of anti-Christian violence and the urgency of promoting unity, brotherhood, humanism, secularism, solidarity, and social and economic justice at this trying time in India.

True followers of Christ know the pain of others. They do good to others without letting self-interest enter their minds.

What disturbed me was the response of the priests, religious and church at this event. Surprisingly, most of them were reluctant to be part of the solidarity meeting. A significant number of those who eventually attended the gathering left in the middle of the convention. Some even dismissed this as a political gathering.

The current political scenario in India is frightening. Attacks on Christian and Muslim religious minorities; saffronization (right-wing policies that attempt to glorify Hindu contributions to Indian history while undermining other contributions) of education and culture; rising inequalities that flow from flawed economic policies of the government; increasing atrocities on Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables," or people who belong to the lowest stratum of castes in India), tribals, and women; and muzzling freedom of expression and speech are all worrisome signs of fascism.

As the country celebrated its 75th anniversary of Independence Day on August 15, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called to end misogyny, the Gujarat



government released 11 convicts who were serving time for raping a pregnant Muslim woman in 2002.

Soon afterwards a 9-year-old Dalit boy in the western Indian state of Rajasthan died after being beaten by a teacher for drinking water from a pot that was meant for the upper caste.

Three tribal villages' farmland and huts were set on fire in the eastern Indian state of Odisha by the members of a forest protection group engaged by the state government. The list will go on.

Crimes against humanity are increasing. When the government does not safeguard the rights and privileges enshrined in the constitution, it is the right and duty of every citizen to hold the government responsible.

Jesus critiqued the unholy elements in his religion. He did not keep quiet when there was injustice, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. The seven woes stated in the Gospel of Matthew (23:1-36) are a list of criticisms by Jesus against scribes and Pharisees for neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness as they "followed the law."

The martyred priest Oscar Romero (1917-1980), a modern prophet, was convinced that he had to announce the Good News and that he could never do so without first denouncing all that was evil in his society. He was an outspoken critic of his government, the military and the other right-wing elements of his country, for their continued oppression and exploitation of the poor in San Salvador, El Salvador in Central America.

He condemned their heinous crimes. The day before his assassination, Romero delivered his now-famous Sunday homily, ordering soldiers to stop killing their countrymen. "It is time to regain your conscience. In the name of God and the name of the suffering people, I implore you, I beg you, I order you, stop the repression!" There has never been any doubt about who was responsible for his murder.

Human rights defenders are imprisoned worldwide. Prominent minority rights crusader Teesta Setalvad is the latest to be incarcerated in India. For most of them, humanity is their religion. They live their lives fighting for a crime against humanity. They know well that to understand the pain and suffering of people, one has to be a human with a good heart.

True followers of Christ know the pain of others. They do good to others without letting self-interest enter their minds.

It is the responsibility of every citizen, every

baptized Christian, to save democracy. The more the church isolates itself and goes away from people, the further it moves from the teaching of Christ.

The role of the Church, along with civil society, is pivotal today in establishing a just, peaceful, and harmonious society. For this, we need to:

- Raise our voice in opposition to all forms of discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and human rights violations within the church and throughout society.
- Ensure that our efforts, initiatives, and resources reach the people who need them the most: poor, Dalits, tribals, minorities, migrant women and children.
- Keep ourselves abreast of what is happening in our society and respond to events with love, compassion, dignity.
- Accept, appreciate and celebrate differences to promote religious, cultural and linguistic pluralism.
- Network in a proactive way with other women and men and groups of goodwill that are working toward the establishment of a more humane and just society
- Transform religious communities and church-managed institutions into all-inclusive communities in which all workers and staff join for meals, inter-religious prayer, planning and evaluation.
- Let transparency, accountability and participation characterize our church institutions.
- Collaborate in more meaningful ways.

Finally, Pope Francis offers a thought-provoking insight for everyone who wants to be saint and live a true and happy life. In his 2018 apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et exsultate* ("Rejoice and be glad") he said "Holiness requires working for social justice. Holiness includes working to change social structures that oppress people."

Francis, the beloved leader of more than one-sixth of the world's population, is reminding us that our goal must include the restoration of just social and economic systems, so there can no longer be exclusion. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**SISTER SUJATA JENA** is a member of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Congregation. She is an advocate and social activist. This column first appeared in [globalsistersreport.org](http://globalsistersreport.org) on September 2, 2022

# St. Mother Teresa lives on 25 years after her death

BY JOHN DAYAL

If I may gloat, I am a member of the Mother Teresa Parish in India's Delhi Archdiocese. I knew the Saint of Calcutta as a journalist in her lifetime, even argued with her on her position on abortion, and defended her in print when the editor of the country's biggest English language newspaper sought to castigate her for supporting the cause of the Dalit Christians in the 1990s when they launched a national campaign for the restoration of their constitutional rights.

"Mother don't divide your love," the late Chandan Mitra, executive editor of the Hindustan Times, had said in a page one, eight-column article. The Mother had launched the Dalit movement at a rally held at the gates of the Sacred Heart Cathedral – the complex housing both the headquarters of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and Delhi Archdiocese.

The government of the day, and her "secular" or apolitical followers did not want her to identify herself so closely with a community that has emerged from casteism within the Church, and before that, from a status that deemed them not fit to even cast their shadow on people of the upper castes. Enlightened Hindu savants had called some of the Indian provinces Hell because of the manner in which they practiced untouchability.

The Mother remained unfazed and did not dilute her position. She continued also to do what she did best – serve the poorest of the poor, comforting the dying to bring some hours or days of human dignity to their last days, saving those she could, looking after infants, children of unwed mothers abandoned by poor families, or thrown away for being girls, or deformed, or sick. Many of these children have done exceedingly well for themselves as educated, professional citizens of India.

Governments and politicians have never been able to tame her, or after her death, her Missionaries of Charity, because their work touches something very living and human in the heart of the people, especially Hindus who are spiritual. I have seen this repeatedly in the children's homes she ran.

During festivals, on birthdays of their own chil-

dren, and on days holy to their family gods, women from very rich families come and engage in cleaning the premises, or bringing clothes to the children, and not just giving them away as gifts, but taking time out to be with the children.

For those moments in those homes, full of laughter and often with a small garden with flowers and a larger playground, there are sounds of joy one would dream of in a cathedral.

The mothers see in the Mother something much more than a Christian social worker, Nun, or now Saint. She becomes the mother goddess of their own pantheon. Nothing blasphemous for them in this feeling, even if it may embarrass the more orthodox or fundamentalist amongst the Catholics.

The current government, which has demonized Christian and Muslim clergy and institutions in the guise of attacking fraudulent and forcible conversions, has tried often to belittle the Mother's image. Professional makers and destructors of images – the corporate world is full of this competitive specialty – try to sully her image. Western aid is sought. Social media is the latest addition to this armament. But they have all failed.

Support has come from unexpected quarters, even from the allies of the ruling formation. After the sharp attack on her last year when they stopped the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) permits of her congregation to receive foreign donations – and there was talk of starving the mission into submission – it was the government that had to relent. The outrage was global. And the Indian people led the protests. The FCRA permits were restored.

The Mother was remembered as a teacher on Sept. 5, celebrated in India as Teachers Day to commemorate Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second president of the Republic who was a teacher of philosophy at British universities, and an expositor of the Vedic culture and Brahminical texts.

People may not know in which country her native village Uskub or Skopje now falls – it was in Albania when she came to India but is now listed in North Macedonia. Anjeze Mary Gonxhe Bojaxhiu went to

Ireland in 1928 to join the Sisters of Loretto at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and sailed six weeks later to India, where she taught for 17 years at the Order's school in Calcutta. She was from 1937 to 1948 at Loreto St Mary's School where she became the headmistress in 1944. For a person from a country that changed its political geography frequently, she ironically taught geography, and in the local Bengali. Above all, the Mother, eventually sent on the path to sainthood by Pope John Paul II with whom she had shared a wonderful bond, will be remembered in India as a person who taught the value of love to a country where spirituality does not always lead to fraternity, much less to equality of the rich and the poor.

Love till it hurts, and Give till it hurts are not always understood as a pair where the charity can well be a million dollar crown in a place of worship

when orphans crave protein in slums and schools.

Mother Teresa of Kolkata has succeeded beyond the dreams of her admirers and followers in the Catholic Church in the way she has crossed the limits of denominations, religions, and theologies. She has held her own, and more in a country where religion is almost entirely patriarchal. There may be just two or three women in this country of more than a billion and a quarter whose name is taken with the same love and reverence as hers.

Who cares if many mix up her biography a little, and presume she was born in India? Who, but an Indian can carry a blue striped, white sari in the manner she can, not caring if she stains the "pallu," the free end of that six-meter piece of cloth, with the dirt and sweat of a waiting child, or a gasping man in his death rattle. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



## Bishops join fishermen's anti-port protests

**I**n a rare show of solidarity, three prelates from the Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum went without food and water for the day

Catholic bishops joined protesting fishermen in a day's hunger strike to oppose a multi-billion dollar port project in the southern state of Kerala.

The hunger strike at the Vizhinjam Adani port construction site on Sept. 5 was launched by a Muslim cleric, Palayam Imam V.P. Suhaib Moulavi, who pledged support to the just cause of fishermen in Kerala. Archbishop Emeritus Soosa Pakiam of the Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum joined the hunger strike along with Archbishop Thomas J. Netto and Auxiliary Bishop Christudas Rajappan.

The three prelates spent the entire day at the venue of protest without food and water in solidarity with the fishermen and vowed to intensify the protest as the government refused to accept their demand for halting the construction work until an impartial environment impact assessment of the port construction is done.

The Latin Archdiocese has been spearheading the protest since July 20 after the government failed to respond to the fishermen's demand for rehabilitation and resettlement, especially those who lost their houses and means of employment due to coastal erosion after the port construction started in 2015.

The retired archbishop has been a strong back-

bone for the causes of fishermen in this archdiocese.

"I lead a retired life. I joined this hunger strike even though I am unwell as I strongly feel for the causes of the fishermen... I have difficulty speaking. I do forget," he said and began to read out from a prepared text amidst thunderous applause from the protestors. Archbishop Pakiam refuted the allegation that the Church was sitting idle until now and is creating hurdles when the private company had invested huge sums of money into the project.

"We never agreed to this project. We always opposed it right from the beginning," he said in a feeble voice. He said the government had ignored their demands despite the Church having conducted studies on the project's social and environmental impact. Experts had warned of serious coastal erosion and damages to houses and other properties of the fishermen. The government, however, got favorable reports from hand-picked experts, he added. A cabinet sub-committee constituted by the Kerala government held a dialogue with the leaders of the fishermen on Sept. 5 but failed to reach any consensus on stopping the port construction work.

Vicar General Father Eugene H Pereira said the protest will spread to the entire state as Catholics from other dioceses including bishops and priests, had started to visit Vizhinjam to pledge their solitary.

(Courtesy: UCANEWS) ©

# Christians welcome top court's move on persecution

Christian leaders have lauded Supreme Court for directing the states to verify allegations of persecution against the community people after the Union government refuted their complaints as baseless.

"We are satisfied with the Supreme Court order," Archbishop Peter Machado of the Archdiocese of Bangalore told UCA News on Sept. 5.

Archbishop Machado, based in Bengaluru, Karnataka state, is one of the petitioners in the public interest litigation (PIL) that sought direction to end the persecution against Christians in the country.

A division bench comprising Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice Hima Kohli in an interim order directed chief secretaries of eight states to verify allegations of persecution of Christians listed in the PIL.

The verification, the court said, would help it know the reality after the federal government described the incidents listed in the PIL as fake cases and urged the court to dismiss the petition.

The top court in its Sept. 1 order also directed the states to provide information such as preliminary police reports, status of investigation, arrests made and charges filed. The top court also directed the petitioners to provide a detailed breakdown of the incidents of violence indicated in the PIL to the office of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta within four weeks. The court also ordered to complete the verification process within two months in view of the gravity of the allegations and file an affidavit before it. The federal ministry of Home Affairs has been authorized to collect the verification reports from eight states.

"We have filed detailed reports of persecution against Christians from 22 states in our PIL. The Supreme Court, however, has sought details from eight states such as Bihar, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh regarding more than 20 cases of violence against Christians that were reported," said A. C. Michael, another petitioner.

"It is a very satisfactory order and it will help bring out the truth. We have submitted complete documents related to each case to the top court,"



Michael told UCA News on Sept. 5.

While passing this order the court had made it clear that it had not expressed any opinion on the veracity of the allegations raised in the plea.

Archbishop Machado, the National Solidarity Forum and the Evangelical Fellowship of India in their petition said on average 45 to 50 violent attacks take place against Christian institutions and priests every month throughout India. The petitioners sought direction from the top court to end such violence and seek protection for community members.

The federal government in its affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court on Aug. 16 denied the allegations of Christian persecution and denied any kind of targeted attacks.

"In some cases, incidents of a purely criminal nature and arising out of personal issues have been categorized as violence targeting Christians," it added. The government said the PIL seemed to be based on misleading and self-serving data compiled by certain organizations.

The petitioners in their rejoinder refuted the government's claim and reiterated that their reports were authentic as they collected them after proper verification from the victims and the local police involved as well. Now, with the top court ordering verification of the details of the cases listed in the PIL Christians believe the reality will come out.

They claim that more than 500 incidents of attacks were recorded in 2021 which they described as the worst year for Christians. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



# Liturgy must look to God without being worldly: Pope

Pope Francis on September 1 warned against “worldly” approaches to the liturgy, saying liturgy must be directed to the Mystery of Christ while remaining close to daily life.

He was addressing the Italian Association of Professors and Practitioners of Liturgy on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the organization’s foundation. The Pope noted that fifty years corresponds to “the ecclesial season of this liturgical reform:” following the initial phase marked by the publication of new liturgical books, “we are now in a period of deepening acceptance of the reform.” This process, he added, requires not only time but also “passionate and patient care,” “spiritual and pastoral understanding,” and ongoing formation.

The Pope encouraged members of the association to continue to pursue their work in a spirit of dialogue.

“Theology can and must have a synodal style.”

## Listening key in liturgical study

In order to ensure that their efforts “are never separated from the expectations and needs of the People of God,” Pope Francis said, listening to the Christian communities is “indispensable.”

The Pope also noted that the academic work of liturgists cannot be separated from the pastoral and spiritual dimension of liturgy. Liturgical formation must reach the people of God, he asserted. In this regard, he held up the model of Romano Guardini, a German priest and scholar who, among other notable accomplishments, was able to spread the “achievements of the liturgical movement” in a way

The Pope also noted that the academic work of liturgists cannot be separated from the pastoral and spiritual dimension of liturgy. Liturgical formation must reach the people of God, he asserted



that was accessible to the ordinary faithful.

“May his figure and his approach to liturgical education, as modern as it is classical, be a point of reference to you.”

## Progress rooted in tradition

Finally, the Pope insisted that progress in the understanding of the liturgy and the art of celebrating it “must always be rooted in tradition.” At the same time, he warned of a worldly spirit of going backward. Going back to the roots, he said, does not mean going backward, but instead means allowing true tradition to lead one forward. He cautioned liturgists to carefully distinguish between tradition and “traditionalism,” warning that “today the temptation is ‘backwardness’ disguised as tradition.”

Concluding his address, Pope Francis reminded his audience that the study and promotion of liturgy “must be imbued with prayer and the living experience of the Church that celebrates, so that liturgical ‘thought’ might always flow, like a vital sap, from the lived liturgy.”

All theology, he said, but especially liturgical study – precisely because it is directed to “the act of celebrating the beauty and greatness of the mystery of God who gives Himself to us” – must be done “with an open mind, and at the same time, ‘on one’s knees,’ in prayer. ©

(Courtesy: Vatican News)



## Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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# Cyrus, A Martyr..!

There's enough that's been written about the car crash that took the life of billionaire Cyrus Mistry, and I'm not going to wade into those already muddied waters. However, something that struck me as I read our transport minister's statement after the accident, was the sudden focus on using seatbelts in the rear seat!

The ones who wear rear seat belts in our country can be counted on one's fingers.

When you buy a second hand car, the one unused item, that's still as good as new, are those rear belts. But suddenly, when a man whose net worth is over twenty nine billion, who should have been one of the most protected people in the country dies, because he did not buckle up, leaves the whole nation realizing how a life was lost through sheer negligence, but more importantly now, we're going to see how that same death is going to save hundreds of thousands, as focus shifts to the need to buckle up in the rear seat!

A few weeks ago, at a get together at the Taj in Mumbai, I met a polished young man, who introduced himself as the grandson of the Late Bal Thackeray. I was certain he was not Aditya the young politician, and asked him if he was the son of the Thackeray who died in a car accident on the Bombay Pune highway, which used to be literally a treacherous death trap.

He replied he was.

"Nihar," I told him gently as we chatted, "because of your dad's death, thousands now travel in safety on the newly built Mumbai-Pune Expressway!" He nodded, as I continued, "Your dad died a martyr for the many who have been saved because of a safe expressway built due to his death!"

There are hundreds of such martyrs, who through their tragic death drew attention to safety needs we'd brushed aside.

A tiny girl I know, developed a huge campaign in Maharashtra for helmets being mandatory after



she lost a close friend in a motorbike accident many years ago. That death has saved thousands of lives.

And as I think of Cyrus Mistry and the late Balasahb Thackeray's elder son, I wonder whether every catastrophic death that happens can be used to champion some lifegiving succor?

I remember a man who lost his teenage daughter to cancer, who started a fund for those who could not afford cancer treatment. He told me, that through those saved lives, his daughter lives on, and I believe if we all could do this with every tragedy that befalls us, that the dead will never die!

Think about it, even as you grieve for a loved one, about turning that grief to a cause mighty, forceful and powerful through which your loved one will always be cherished and remembered as a saint, as a martyr who lives on, in the minds of a grateful many..! ©

#### 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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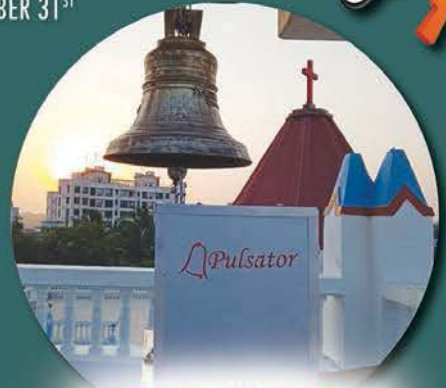
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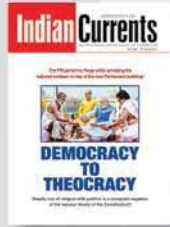
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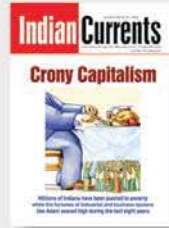
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