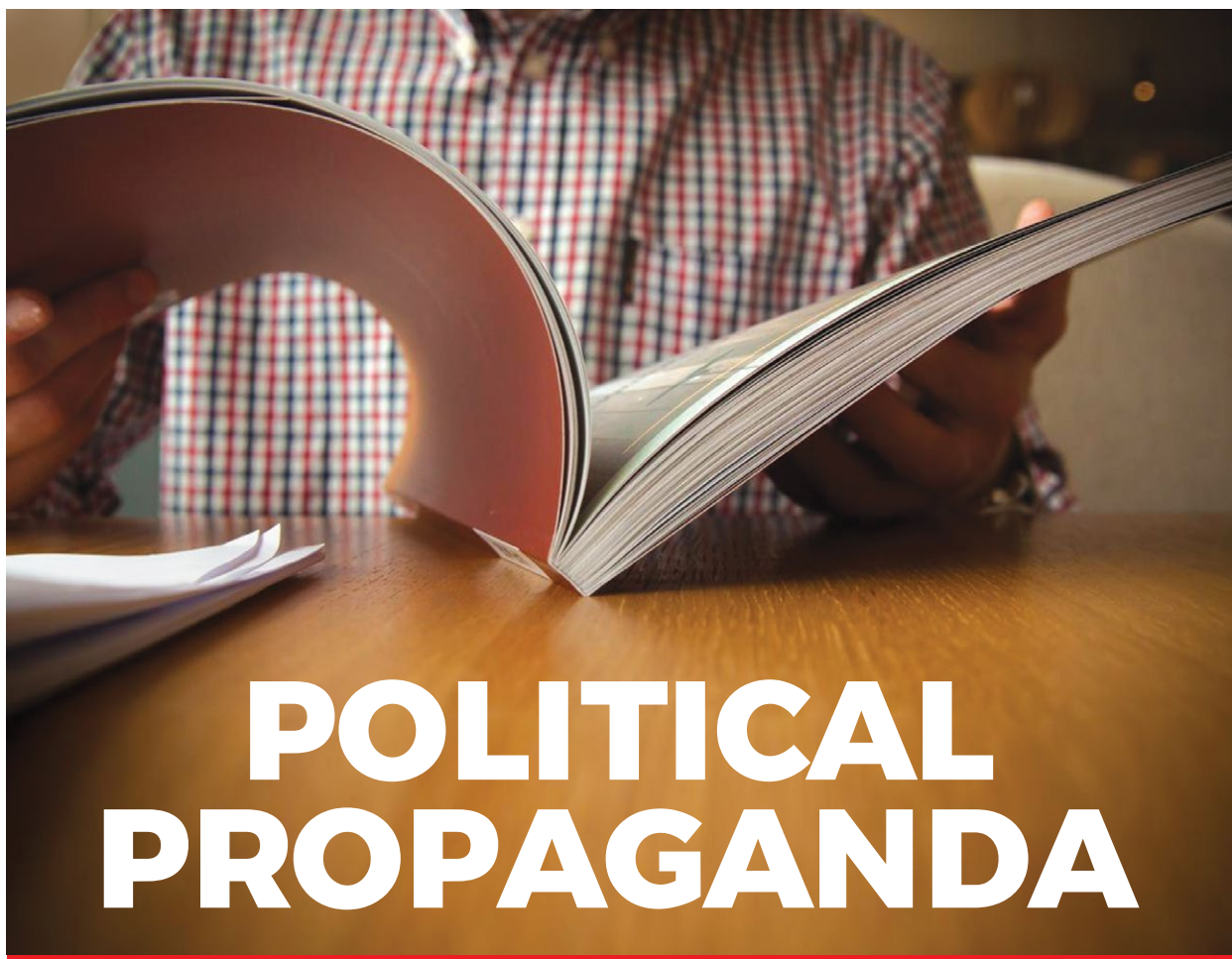


# Indian Currents

Vol. XXXV • Issue 15 & 16 (Combined Issue) • 10 - 23 April 2023 • ₹15  
www.indiancurrents.org Total Pages - 40 Including Cover

## REWRITING HISTORY



# POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

Deleting and rewriting chapters in the NCERT textbooks to suit the partisan agenda of a particular group is an injustice to students, parents, and history itself

# DON BOSCO INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

Monvila, Trivandrum 695583

## OFFERS IN 2023-2024

### Integral Transformative Programs (ITP)

04 June to 29 July (ITP-30), 03 September to 28 October (ITP-31),  
14 January to 9 March 2024 (ITP-32)

### MODULES

<b>Body</b>	Active Meditations, Qigong, Ayurvedic massage and Body work.
<b>Psyche/shadow</b>	Shadow work, Individual Psychotherapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Family Dynamics and Genogram, Positive Psychology, Enneagram, Emotional Hygiene and Focusing Therapy.
<b>Mind</b>	Creating a Bug (virus) Free Mind, Using a Bug Free Mind, Integral Psychology and Spirituality, Creative Thinking and Nonviolent Communication.
<b>Spirit</b>	Meditation Practices, Holotropic Breathwork and Core Transformation.

### Breathwork Therapy & Meditation Training

(Leading to certification)

01. Module 1: The Breathwork Paradigm – 12 to 16 June
02. Module 2: Bodywork – 19 to 24 June
03. Module 3: Spiritual Emergency – 11 to 15 September
04. Module 4: Music and Transcendence – 18 to 22 September
05. Module 5: Advance Bodywork - 4 to 8 March, 2024
06. Module 6: Certification Intensive – 11 to 15 March, 2024

You can attend individual modules for personal growth and transformation as well as participate in training towards certification.

**Breathwork is considered by many as the Golden Key to therapy and meditation. This training is based on the works of Stannislus Grof considered by some as the greatest living Psychologist. He is the founder of Holotropic Breathwork and one of pioneers of Transpersonal Psychology.**

For application and details contact:  
**Email:tomkurian60@gmail.com**  
**WhatsApp: +919961400350**

## A PRIEST UNLIKE ANY OTHER



A diehard optimist with a unique vision and prophetic voice; a staunch proponent of Christo-centric life; an ardent supporter of Gandhian values of peace, non-violence and communal harmony; an inspiring mentor of students; a motivational orator par excellence, a workaholic who would say 'I am busy 24x7 but I have time for you' .... All these could probably sum up the life of Fr. Varghese Alengaden, the founder of Indore-based Universal Solidarity Movement of Value Education for Peace, who passed away recently. Like a colossus, he strode an unlikely path -- a path chosen by few. Today he is no more, creating a vacuum in an area he marvelled himself, in a field he made a niche for himself.

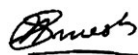
A reference to the sessions and seminars he conducted, and the number of participants in them, could give a glimpse of what he was involved in the last few decades of his eventful, untiring life. He conducted more than 300 seminars for school teachers and addressed 2,15,600 parents in 235 schools and tens of thousands of students from hundreds of schools, both at his USM centre in Indore and outside. This brings out his immense faith and trust in the youth. It was this belief which led him to ask himself, 'why not train the youth to take charge of the nation with an inclusive, broad and lasting vision.' This probably led to the regular leadership training camps for school students, each one lasting for a week, conducted by the USM. The culmination of each camp saw scores of students leaving with new glint in their eyes and new-found resolve in their heart. Their testimonials are galore at the archives of the USM.

Fr. Alengaden's extraordinary vision was not limited to the mission he undertook among the students. He was a champion of peace and communal harmony which was exemplified in the peace conventions he conducted across several cities in the last few years. Though he was a Gandhian without a Gandhian cap, nothing could cap his ceaseless efforts, joining hands with several civil society organizations, to motivate people to work for peace following the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a humanist to the core. He abhorred discriminating people on the basis of religion, region, caste, colour or creed. He had overcome man-made barriers to walk his talk. Readings and prayers from all religions, regularly practiced at the USM centre, stand as a testimony to what he stood for.

He was a priest who shed some of the identities without any inhibition; but Jesus Christ and His teachings were at the centre of his life. The Christo-centric retreats he had conducted for prelates, priests and religious at the USM centre were unique in many ways. His oft repeated and unambiguous stand distinguishing religiosity from spirituality is an evocative expression of what priesthood meant to him. Without mincing words, at every forum available to him, he spoke on the need to shun religiosity and pursue spirituality, following the footprints of Jesus Christ.

Now, that smiling face, with a never say die attitude, with his 'ho jayega' (It will be done) maxim, is gone. The best way to describe his life would be to quote Oscar Wilde, "To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all." Yes, he lived his life, inspiring and motivating those around him, keeping the identity as a human being above all other identities.

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



**Dr. Suresh Mathew**  
Editor

✉ → [frsureshmathew@gmail.com](mailto:frsureshmathew@gmail.com)

# contents

MEMBER,  
INDIAN NEWSPAPER SOCIETY (INS)

VOLUME XXXV  
ISSUE 15 & 16 (COMBINED ISSUE)

EDITOR:

**Dr. Suresh Mathew**

EDITORIAL BOARD:

**John Dayal, AJ Philip, Marydasan John**

ADVISORY BOARD:

**George Plathottam, Skylark George, PJ Joseph,  
T. Dominic, PA Joseph, Anoop Abraham**

DESIGN & LAYOUT:

**Dani Jose**

CIRCULATION:

**Ashish Victor**

FINANCE MANAGER:

**Jainamma**

**Indian Current Publications**

375 - A, Pocket - 2

Mayur Vihar Phase - I

New Delhi - 110091

Tel: 011-45873264, Mob: 7042562963

Email: icdelhi@gmail.com

frsureshmathew@gmail.com

indiancurrentsweekly@gmail.com

Website: www.indiancurrents.org

**DISCLAIMER**

The views expressed by the writers in this Magazine do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Indian Currents weekly or Editor.

Although all efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the content, neither the editor nor the publisher can take responsibility for consequences arising from errors or omissions in the information provided.

Reproduction in any manner without prior permission from the publisher is prohibited. All disputes to be settled in Delhi Courts only.

This issue of Indian Currents contains 40 pages including cover.

## POWER QUOTES



A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it.

**Jean de La Fontaine**

• • •



I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future.

**Ralph Abernathy**

• • •



Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

**William Jennings Bryan**

• • •



The reason people find it so hard to be happy is that they always see the past better than it was, the present worse than it is, and the future less resolved than it will be.

**Marcel Pagnol**

• • •



You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

**Steve Jobs**

• • •



You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.

**Abraham Lincoln**

• • •



Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.

**George Orwell**

• • •



# Hindutva Push through Textbooks

Rewriting history and meddling with school textbooks have been a strategy to brainwash the young and deprive them of knowing facts

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

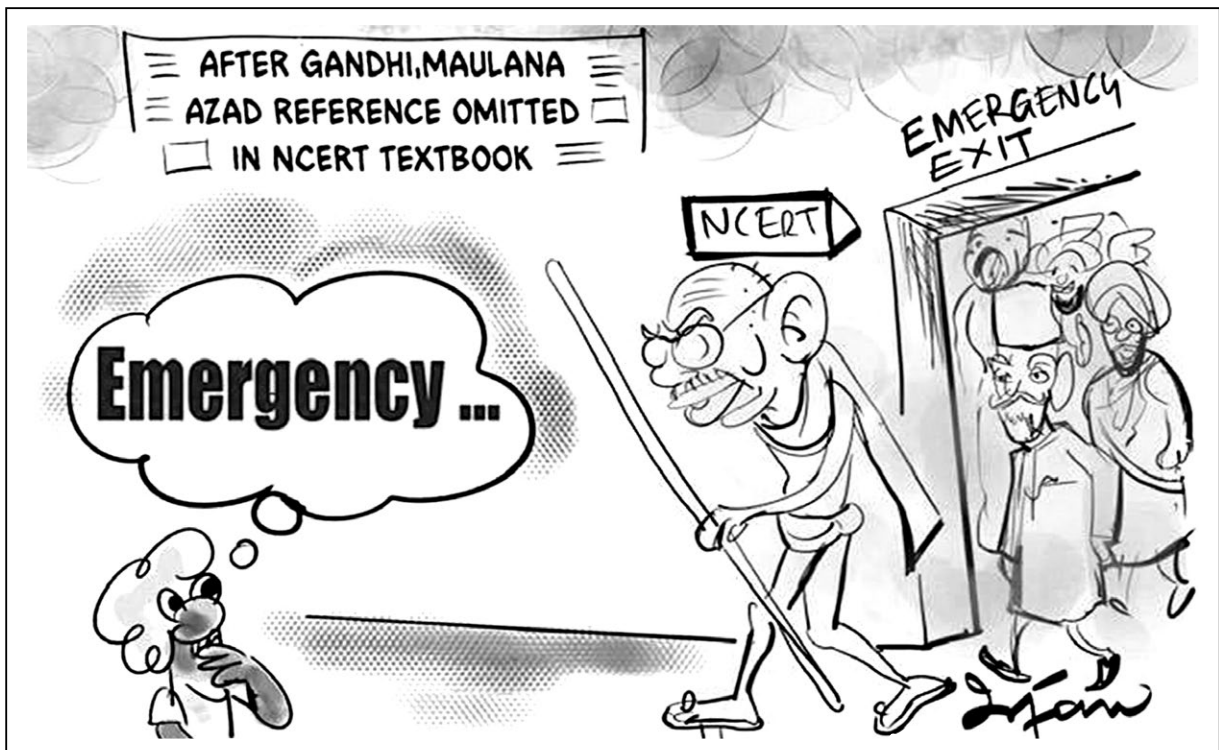
Ever since the BJP came to power in 2014 under the leadership of Narendra Modi, efforts to convert India into a Hindu Rashtra have been intensified. The centenary of the foundation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 2025 is going to be a landmark in the process of transforming India in accordance with the Hindutva ideology of the Sangh Parivar. The large-scale cuts made in school textbooks recently by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have to be viewed from this perspective.

The Sangh Parivar has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to realize its dream of making India a Hindu



Rashtra, totally different from the vision of India as delineated in the preamble of the Indian Constitution. Strategy number one was creating a sense of victimhood in the majority community by manufacturing and propagating the perception of “appeasement” of minorities by the Congress and other secular parties. Along with the appeasement theory, a disdain for secularism (nicknamed as sickularism) was created in the minds of the Hindus.

The second strategy was presenting Muslims and Christians as enemies of India. This was the idea invented by M S Golwalkar, the second Sarsanghcha-



Courtesy: newsctick.in

lak of RSS, in his writings, especially “Bunch of Thoughts” and “We or Our Nationhood Defined”. Muslims are caricatured as terrorists with allegiance to Pakistan and other Muslim countries and Christians are accused of converting poor people to Christianity. Even now the same strategy is being used to polarize Hindu votes in favour of the BJP.

Along with the hatred towards Muslims and Christians fomenting communal riots was used as another strategy. Organizing religious processions on the occasion of Hindu festivals which often resulted in communal violence and further polarization of the Hindus was another strategy. The Ayodhya Ram Mandir movement was very decisive in the process of transforming the mindset of a large section of Hindus in favour of Hindutva ideology. Processions in many parts of India in connection with Ramnavmi celebrations have become an annual feature in recent years. These processions often end up in communal riots. Presenting Maryada Purushottam Ram as an aggressive warrior is central to both Ayodhya movement and propagating the Hindutva ideology.

RSS was opposed to the Indian Constitution when it was adopted, and favoured a Constitution based on Manusmriti. Undermining secular democratic institutions has been another strategy, especially whenever the BJP came to power at the centre. Christophe Jaffrelot in his book, “Modi’s India” and Aakar Patel in his book, “Price of the Modi Years” have elaborately explained how the Parliament, bureaucracy, judiciary, Election Commission and investigation agencies like CBI, ED, NIA etc., have been systematically weakened. Misuse of the investigation



agencies to harass and imprison all those who are critical of the policies of the Prime Minister and the RSS-BJP combine has become a day-to-day affair.

In a democracy, the media is considered the fourth pillar and its role is critical in analysing and assessing the policies and functioning of the government and presenting a realistic and objective picture before the people. All governments try to bring the media under its control; but under the Modi regime, most of the media have become the propaganda machine of the government, so much so, it is called ‘godia media’. Carrot and stick policy is being adopted by the government to keep the media under its thump.

Rewriting history and meddling with school textbooks have been a strategy to brainwash the young generation and deprive them of knowing facts. Saffronisation of history and textbooks intensified since 2014, though the process was started during the regime of Atal Behari Vajpayee. According to a report in *The Indian Express*, the NCERT text books have been revised thrice since 2014. The first round

**RSS was opposed to the Indian Constitution when it was adopted, and favoured a Constitution based on Manusmriti. Undermining secular democratic institutions has been another strategy, especially whenever the BJP came to power at the centre**

**The Indian EXPRESS**  
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE  
SINCE 1932

**AMONG KEY DELETIONS ON GANDHI'S ASSASSINATION IN NCERT CLASS 12 TEXTS ARE THESE LINES:**  
**Gandhi's pursuit of Hindu-Muslim unity provoked Hindu extremists... RSS was banned for some time**

References to Gujarat riots purged from social science books for Classes 6-12

Gandhi's actions were historic and had to be... [The article continues with text about the historical significance of Gandhi's actions and the impact of the deletions on students.]

THESE SENTENCES that have been taught to Class 12 students for over 15 years as part of their Political Science curriculum have now been deleted from NCERT textbooks.

So does the reference to...

Deleted lines from the Class 12 Political Science book, Politics in India Since Independence

HIT DELETE FROM MUGHALS TO EMERGENCY PAGE 7



of revision took place in 2017 in view of updating the textbooks to reflect the recent events, including the legislation on GST. In fact, it was termed a “review” rather than revision. It resulted in 1,334 changes across 182 books and increased content on ancient Indian knowledge and practices and a focus on nationalist icons who had been overlooked, according to the BJP and the right-wing advocates.

The second round of revision was undertaken by NCERT in 2018 at the initiative of then Education Minister Prakash Javadekar and it is known as “text-book rationalization” to reduce “syllabus burden” on students. This exercise led to a 20% reduction, primarily in social science textbooks.

The presumed objective of the third review that took place in 2022 was to reduce the curriculum load further, and to help students recover from learning disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In June 2022, the NCERT had made public a list of changes and deletions in the reprinted textbooks that came to the market recently. As per the report of *The Indian Express*, the printed textbooks have deletions that were not included in the list made public in June 2022. For example, the portions related to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi were not part of the list officially published by the

NCERT in June 2022. Hence, the purported reason for ‘rationalization of textbooks’ appears to be a lame excuse to excise many portions that are not palatable to the Sangh Parivar.

The deletions in general include removing all references to the 2002 Gujarat riots, reducing content related to the Mughal era and the caste system, dropping chapters on protests and social movements and excesses during the emergency. The last round of deletions covers mainly three subjects: History, Political Science and Sociology from Class VI to XII. Removal of a mention of Mahatma Gandhi’s unpopularity among Hindu extremists and of the ban imposed on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the aftermath of his assassination has attracted the wrath of many historians, scholars and political leaders.

Rajmohan Gandhi in his write up in *The Indian Express* under the title, “You can’t delete Gandhi’s truth” has quoted the portion related to Gandhi that is deleted.

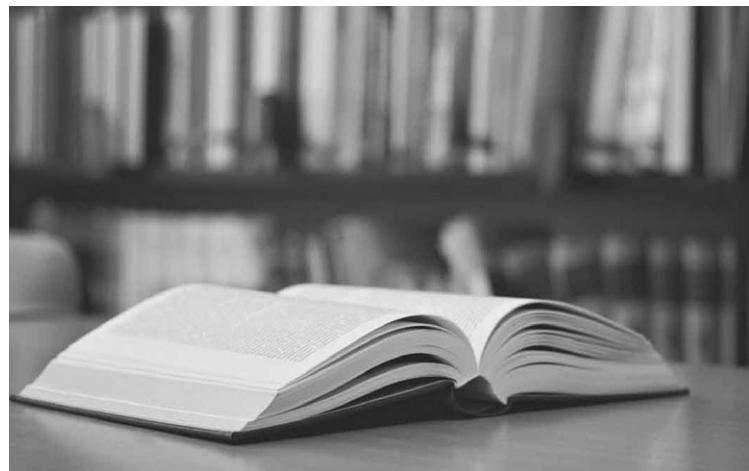
“He (Gandhi) was particularly disliked by those who wanted Hindus to take revenge or who wanted India to become a country for the Hindus, just as Pakistan was for Muslims...”

His steadfast pursuit of Hindu-Muslim unity provoked Hindu extremists so much that they made several attempts to assassinate Gandhiji...

Gandhiji’s death had an almost magical effect on the communal situation in the country...The Government of India cracked down on organizations that were spreading communal hatred.”

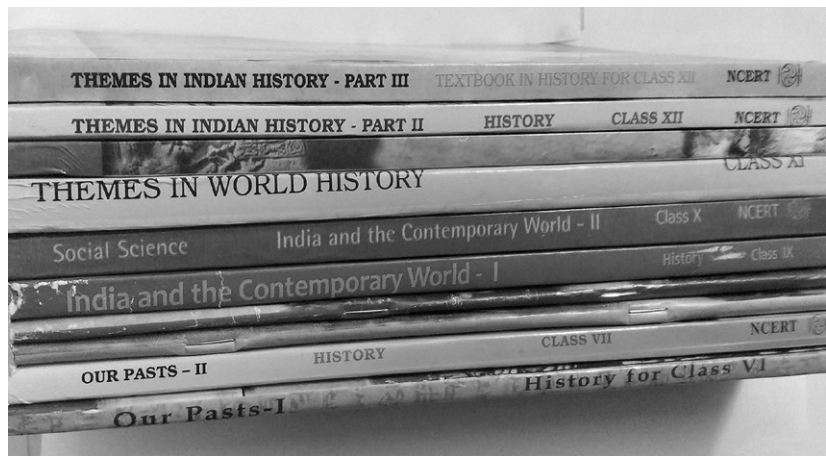
In his article, Rajmohan Gandhi has given the probable reason for the deletion. “I see the deletions as part of an ongoing process of piece-by-piece

**It is an attempt to kill the thought of Gandhi that India belongs to everyone because the Hindutva ideology claims that India belongs to the Hindus only**





**History is a witness to the fact that truth cannot be suppressed forever. Dictators and fascists like Hitler and Mussolini tried to suppress facts and truth, but the cruelties and inhumanities they had committed were revealed to the world later**



obliteration that aims, finally, to remove all evidence that Gandhi was killed because of his insistence that India belongs to all who live in it, including Muslims, Christians, and not just to Hindus,” he wrote. It is an attempt to kill the thought of Gandhi that India belongs to everyone because the Hindutva ideology claims that India belongs to the Hindus only. As one author has mentioned, “At this rate, I imagine that in a few years, we will be told that Nathuram Godse was a great patriot (that’s already happening), that the Muslim League killed Gandhiji and poor old, innocent Godse was framed for the murder”.

Speaking or writing anything good of Muslims of the past or present is intolerable to the protagonists of the Hindutva. Home Minister Amit Shah had made a statement on November 25, 2022, “No one can stop us from rewriting history to free it from distortions”. That could be the reason for a major cut in the section of Mughal history, especially the contributions of Mughal emperors like Akbar and Shahjahan. It is an attempt to portray Muslims as barbarians who invaded India only to rape, pillage, plunder and murder.

In the run up to Assembly elections in Karnataka a lot of mudslinging is going on Tipu Sultan. Students in olden days were taught that Tipu Sultan was a great patriot who fought valiantly against the British East India Company. Unfortunately, of late he has been presented as a tyrant and a “mass murderer” of Hindus by the right-wing groups.

Children have a right to know the facts. Dislike of Mahatma Gandhi by Hindu extremists and the ban of RSS after the assassination of Gandhi, the positive impact of Gandhi’s death on communal situ-

ation in India in the aftermath of the partition are facts recorded in several ways not only in India but also in other countries too. Hence by simply deleting from the textbooks these facts the future generation cannot be kept in complete darkness about them. At the same time, the young generation should not be fed with distorted facts and wrong notions. Portraying India’s diverse heritage to the new generation is essential for the survival of secular democracy in India.

Against this backdrop, the civil society organisations and the school authorities have a responsibility to ensure that what is deleted from the curriculum today, is not forgotten tomorrow. The schools and civil society organizations can share these facts with the students as part of value education and co-curricular activities. For example, street plays depicting the life and contribution of Mahatma Gandhi can be enacted on October 2 and January 30. Videos depicting the facts about the life of Mahatma Gandhi can be uploaded on YouTube and other online platforms.

History is a witness to the fact that truth cannot be suppressed forever. Dictators and fascists like Hitler and Mussolini tried to suppress facts and truth, but the cruelties and inhumanities they had committed were revealed to the world later. All those who try to suppress facts and truth may remember what Abraham Lincoln said, “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” ©

#### 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



# BID TO IMPOSE AN IDEOLOGY: APOORVANAND

A deliberate move is being made to rewrite the history of India through the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks in a shrewd manner. In the past eight years, NCERT has made three rounds of major changes in its textbooks; mainly in history, political science, and sociology, for students of Classes 6-12. This time the historians have raised an eyebrow over the way the facts are being distorted to brainwash the minds of young students. 'History is created and not distorted,' opine many scholars of history. One such name is **Prof Apoorvanand** of Delhi University who is vocal in articulating that "the fact will remain a fact". He shares his viewpoint on

"NCERT Textbook Revision" with **Manoj Varghese** of *Indian Currents*.

**Q To what extent is the move to rewrite the history content of NCERT textbooks justified?**

**A** How can it be justified? The rationalization to reduce the burden of students after the corona pandemic is completely toothless and unacceptable. The argument is not valid for the reason that it is almost two years that the pandemic is over, and the life has come to normalcy, be it the students, parents or teachers. Secondly, the changes were not announced. The claim to be an oversight is totally baseless with having three years gone. It took

Ms Ritika Chopra, the National Education Editor of Indian Express, months to compare and identify those changes from the updated texts and expose it in the newspaper. Thirdly, it is part of a big game plan to impose an ideology by omitting intentionally the contents like that of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire in the Medieval History of India from the history textbook for Class 7. Several portions of the text dealing with Mughal regime have been removed, leading to the 'cultural connection' of that period missing.

**Q What are the few major distortions that have been carried out?**

**A** Some of these changes include removing all references to the 2002 Gujarat riots, reducing content related to the Mughal era and the caste system, and dropping chapters on protests and social movements. Nathuram Godse's affiliation to RSS has been removed, altering the motive behind the killing. Why did he kill him, has gone missing! The impression is to dilute the contributions of Muslims and other minority communities. The mentioning of democratic protests and social movements has been removed. Treating people as sovereign has been diluted at the cost of monarchial rule. Gujarat Massacre of 2002 has been eliminated, whereas the 1984 Sikh riots has been retained and figure prominently. The actual background behind such riots has gone disappearing. The ill motives of Emergency are mentioned. It has removed the description of Caste and refers to a harmonious society with no tensions. They have done away with the term 'caste', which means inequality. An attempt is being made to project India with an ideological origin as Hindus and others came as invaders. Everything is being referred to as the original path of Hinduism. They don't want the students to understand the facts. The effort will lead to a mal-informed or a malnourished citizen of India.

**Q Is it a corrective measure or a deliberate move to distort the facts or an attempt by the sycophants to please their masters?**

**A** One can only speculate as to who had instructed it. The justification is that the learning load will be reduced. But how, is a hundred million question. The Terms of Reference is not explained, names of experts are missing and the minutes have not been circulated. Looking at the scale of changes, it reveals that it is more of an ideological change. NCERT offi-

cial have to be accountable. Even if the Government has dictated, the NCERT should justify and be held responsible for the changes made.

**Q Do you think that the move has tarnished the image of Gandhi or has helped in brand building of BJP?**

**A** No one can tarnish the image of Gandhiji. Assassination of Gandhiji was a shameful act and no one can cover it up. But, why was Gandhi assassinated is the fact that reveals the motive behind getting rid of a secular India. Why did Godse kill Gandhiji speaks about the ideology behind such groups.

**Q What about the other developed countries, do they also distort historical facts in the textbooks in this manner?**

**A** What is happening in India is nothing new. Countries like USA, Russia, China, Japan, Pakistan and others are also known for distorting facts as per the wishes and whims of the ruling party or the government. The people in power make it a point to teach what they want and, in the process, dilute the facts. The narrative on the battle among various states in USA is all manipulated and the story of Texas has been indoctrinated. Countries like Russia, China, and North Korea have full control on the stories that needs to be disseminated.

**Q What is the way out to stop such distortion in textbooks?**

**A** Reach out to the people with facts and figures. All the other stakeholders like media, scholars, and bureaucrats should reach out to the society and spoil this fraudulent attempt to distort the historical records. It is a good move to see that several historians have come out openly and opposed this move of NCERT.

There are reasons why political parties or the government want to control what school children read, and the present regime isn't the only one to have carried out changes in textbooks. NCERT clarified that the portions removed on Mughals were available in the textbooks of previous classes. It is good to revisit the school textbooks periodically, may be after every 10 years, to incorporate the latest technology and advanced knowledge and make them more relevant for the students. It should be done with no malafide intentions and completely in the interest of the students. ©

# Corrupting the Young

The NCERT is trying to whitewash history and corrupt the minds of the young generation herding them from the sunshine of truth to the dark tunnel of ignorance and prejudice

BY **MATTHEW ADUKANIL**

In North Korea the citizens are made to believe that their country is the best in the world, a paradise on earth. The birthday of the leader is a great national festival and anyone showing indifference to the great event will face dire consequences. In China, all thought is regulated and trimmed according to Maoist Communist bible. India is not far behind in the queue in brainwashing the minds of the impressionable young if one is to accept meekly the distortions made in the NCERT history text books of Classes XI and XII. Day after day these distortions were documented in newspapers. At first it was the total erasing of the Moghul empire period in history because the Hindus reportedly faced humiliation by this. It hurts Hindutva pride, not Hindu community as such. Certainly the three essential ingredients of war are greed, vanity and hatred.

The Gujarat riots of 2002 were blotted out since they are a blot on the then Chief Minister and now Prime Minister of India. Unpalatable reference to the RSS and its anti-Gandhi posture and activities were blacked out since from a one-time banned organisation now it is the godfather of the ruling BJP. It was also later discovered that arrangements in the political hot potato of Kashmir suffered an eclipse since it involved a case of the Indian Union reneging on its solemn promise made at the time of its accession to the Indian Union that its autonomous state would be respected. This has been easily done since

Patel who made this promise on behalf of India is long dead and buried though his statue stands tall and proud in Gujarat, dwarfing all other world famous iconic statues. If one does not see a certain pattern of distortion in all these omissions one must be sparrow-brained or brain dead. These are justified by the NCERT in the name of 'rationalisation' of syllabus though if someone termed it 'politicisation' of syllabus, he can hardly be successfully sued in court for defamiation of the respected NCERT body.

What makes it ominous is the fact that all omitted portions were in the NCERT history text books as displayed on its original public net version. Though these are attempted to be passed off as 'oversight' one can hardly trust the bona fide of this shoddy claim.

What is at the bottom of this double speak? Nothing short of whitewashing history and corrupting the minds of the young generation herding them from the sunshine of truth to the dark tunnel of ignorance and prejudice. This saffronised version is supposed to be the official text books in a country that has been amusingly declared to be the 'mother of all democracies' by the ruling regime.

This kind of manipulation of history can cause a critical question to spring in the minds of the young and the old alike: If in a discipline like History which is made of personalities and events, facts and figures, whimsical censorship and tampering with facts is allowed why can't it be done also in other fields of life? Let me give a few specific instances. What moral authority have education officers to pull up students for cheating and malpractices in exam when the lead for it has been given in their official text books?

How can those who make fake declarations in passports and visas be called to book? They are also just distorting facts that are inconvenient to them and their careers. Are we sanctioning social double standards?

Can you speak anymore of false witnessing in courts? Offenders can misrepresent facts in their own personal interests and pass it off as helping their family to survive. ©

(adukanildb@gmail.com)

**What makes it ominous is the fact that all omitted portions were in the NCERT history text books as displayed on its original public net version. Though these are attempted to be passed off as 'oversight' one can hardly trust the bona fide of this shoddy claim**



# Goodbye to Opinion

The fact-checking unit to be set up under a new set of rules will have powers to determine “what is fake or false or misleading”, affecting people’s right to express their views

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

**K**unal Kamra is a household name. A stand-up comedian and political satirist, he has more than a million followers on Instagram. He relies on social media to express his views on social and political issues. His posts have a great reach and they evoke an instant reaction.



Recently, he filed a petition in the Bombay High Court against a recently enacted law, which could directly affect people like him. In fact, the impact might be overarching. It could affect anyone who has been using social media to voice his or her opinion. Now what is this law? Does it also mean that it could impact any one of us? Yes, it can, if a unit specifically formed for monitoring social media posts finds the content to be fake.

Now many would ask: what is wrong in this? We certainly do not want fake content anywhere, be it social media or any other mode of communication. Such content is capable of instigating violence, communal or political. True, the consequences of such content could be humongous. So, what is wrong in having rules that can help us in getting rid of such information? Let’s have a look.

Of late, new rules have been enacted under the Information Technology Act. Ever since this Act came into being, it has been a matter of concern for media professionals. Be it section 66A or Section 69A of the Act, they have been challenged in the court several times. Section 66A had been a bone of contention for many journalists as it was arbitrarily used to punish not only journalists but also ordinary people.

For instance, a Chemistry professor from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, was arrested and put behind bars for circulating a cartoon among his friends, ridiculing Mamata Banerjee. Similarly, two Air India employees were arrested for posting antagonistic content against a Union leader and a few politicians on Facebook and Orkut.

A girl was arrested for criticising the Mumbai Corporation’s decision to impose complete shut-

down on Mumbai following the death of Bal Thackeray. A girl who liked her post was also arrested.

These are just a few incidents. There are many more. These incidents date back to the year 2012, i.e., immediately after the rules under the Information Technology Act

were amended. Consequently, the government came up with an advisory and mandated the prior approval of an officer, not below the rank of Inspector General in metro cities or Deputy Commissioner of Police or Superintendent of Police at the district level as the case may be.

However, this did not bring a substantial change. The girls, who were arrested in 2012 for merely expressing their opinion, filed a public interest litigation before the Supreme Court. The court struck down the section and held that it was unconstitutional and violative of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. Even after the court’s judgement in 2015, Section 66A has been used by the police and the lower courts. The issue was then brought to the notice of the government, which directed the states and the Union Territories to stop registering cases under Section 66A.

The new rules called Information Technology





(Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) are no different. They empower the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to constitute a fact-checking unit. This unit will have the powers to determine “what is fake or false or misleading” with respect to “any business of the central government”.

The rules do not define what could be termed as “fake”, “false” or misleading”. This certainly raises concerns over the intention of passing such rules. In case these rules are implemented, they could also influence public opinion during the upcoming elections, something similar to what Facebook was held responsible for a few years ago.

Any post which may sound derogatory to the government can easily be removed. Similarly, an opinion piece, which might act as an eye-opener for the government itself, could be removed, simply because it does not go down well with the powers that be.

This fact check unit shall also have the powers to issue instructions to intermediaries vis-a-vis social media platforms, Internet service providers and so on for removing certain content based on its own judgement. To cut the story short, the government has got the powers to get any post removed which might affect its popularity in the name of fake news. Not only this, it shall easily bypass the process which has been laid down under Section 69A of the Act. Is this not against Press freedom?

Even Section 69A, which requires the information or content to be removed in case it is a threat to the national security, sovereignty or public order in the country, has also been challenged several times. The government has used this section to block several sites, apps including TikTok, Shareit etc.

In view of the precedents, the new rules will

certainly be exploited for suppressing public opinion on matters that might be of interest to the government. Certainly, these new rules are against the constitutional values of the country, which also gives a right to be heard. Not only this, they also violate one’s fundamental right to speech and express opinion. They have also been enacted in gross violation of the procedures laid down by the Supreme Court of India in *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India*.

The Indian Newspaper Society, Editors Guild of India, the digital rights group, the Internet Freedom Foundation etc., have expressed deep concerns over these amendments. The Bombay High Court has asked the Centre to submit a response to the petition giving details about the background and reasons for framing these rules.

Besides Article 19(1) of the Constitution, Kamra has also submitted that the rules are against the provisions contained under Section 79 (exemption from liability of intermediaries in certain cases) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, Article 14 (equality before law) and Article 19(1) (g) (freedom to practise any profession or business).

The new rules do not have provision for issuing show cause notice and giving an opportunity of being heard. Not surprisingly, these rules were framed without holding consultations with various stakeholders. These rules are certainly against natural justice and the basic thread of our country i.e. democracy. While many social media platforms do have their own set of rules for giving the user an opportunity to explain before completely taking down the content from their platform.

Besides the communication and media industry, these rules will also affect the online gaming industry. Similar restrictions have been imposed on the intermediaries engaged in this business. The intermediaries shall also be held responsible for showcasing any advertisement, surrogate advertisement or for promoting any online game that is not permissible.

The gaming industry is set to become a multi-billion-dollar industry in the years to come. In view of this, these rules might have a far-reaching impact even on the economy! In other words, it may affect the government’s own vision of becoming a five-trillion economy. The law should be used to promote public good not for suppressing opinion. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JASWANT KAUR**, a company secretary, can be reached at [jassi.raoi@gmail.com](mailto:jassi.raoi@gmail.com)

OPEN LETTER TO PM

# Honour your own promise of Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas

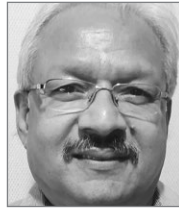
BY A.J. PHILIP

Dear Shri Narendra Modi Ji,

I was very happy to know that you visited the Catholic Cathedral Church, New Delhi, on Easter. You also lit a candle in front of the altar and planted a tree on the campus. I am sure the Catholic Bishop Conference of India (CBCI) authorities would water the plant and ensure its growth.

On the occasion of Christmas, the President of India also visited the same church and expressed her solidarity with the Christian community in the country. Such visits are certainly welcome, as they would help to understand the Christian traditions and practices better.

A few years back, a member of our church married a Hindu girl at our church at Dwarka. Her father also attended the wedding. After the wedding, I met him. He told me that it was the first time that he stepped into a church. He had some worries about inter-religious marriage. Of course, he knew the boy who was his daughter's colleague.



Whatever apprehensions he had were removed when he attended the church service which was in his own words "elegant and meaningful". He listened carefully to the prayers and about the duties expected from the groom. "You should clothe her, even if you are naked, you should feed her, even if you are hungry". In fact, he was much relieved after attending the service.

I am sure you would also have understood some of the Christian practices when you visited the Cathedral Church. I remember the then head of the Marthoma Church of which I am a member, Joseph Marthoma, praising you while addressing a gathering at Kayamkulam, my native place.

Once when the Metropolitan visited Gujarat, you treated him as a state guest. You sent the Chief Secretary to receive him at the airport and you accommodated him at the state guest house. When he met you, he had one request. He wanted a plot of land for burial in Ahmedabad.

You were kind enough to accede to his request.

Someone, blessed with dark humour, commented that you donated the Christians a graveyard. I know how difficult it is to buy land for burial. You actually solved a big problem of the Christian community there.

Although it was your first visit to the Cathedral Church, it had figured prominently in your election speeches. I am sure you would recall that you as Chief Minister wanted elections to be held immediately after the Godhra incident and the pogrom or "riots" that followed.

The Chief Election Commissioner at that time was James



Michael Lyngdoh. He was not prepared to hold the elections immediately. You were upset with him. You told public meeting after public meeting that Lyngdoh and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi would meet at the Cathedral Church every Sunday morning and conspire against you, that is "Gujarat".

You made the allegation without any rhyme or reason. The fact of the matter was that Lyngdoh was an atheist who did not attend any church. As regards Sonia Gandhi, she was a practising Hindu, not a Christian. She never attended the Cathedral Church and they never met there.

Now that you have the contact details of all the church authorities, you can ascertain from them whether they ever saw Lyngdoh and Sonia Gandhi attending the church together or separately. No, I am not suggesting that you should apologise to both for spreading the lie about them.

You were politically wise enough to know that if elections were held in the wake of Godhra, you would win hands down. Lyngdoh could only delay the election. And finally when elections were held, you won the state. It was the beginning of your roller-coaster ride as a political leader. In other words, the lie about the Cathedral Church played a role in your success.

I am sure you know that for Christians, the most important days are Christmas, Good Friday and



Easter. The day you visited the church, many Christian teachers of CBSE-affiliated schools were forced to go to their schools to conduct evaluation of the board exam papers.

The CBSE had issued an order forcing them to go to school even on Good Friday. Just imagine how you would have reacted if the CBSE had issued such an order forcing teachers to attend schools on Diwali.

That raises the question: Does the Prime Minister of the country have to visit a church? I do not think Jawaharlal Nehru ever visited a church on Easter or Christmas. Nor did he visit a mosque or temple. Yet, he was the most popular leader for all the minority communities.

I really liked the promise you made when you contested the election in 2014. You promised equal treatment to one and all. Is that the case now? A minister in Karnataka was heard exhorting his men to give Christians a thrashing. An impression has been created among the minds of the people that Christians are out to convert Hindus.

We are less than three per cent of the population. There is not a single case of forced conversion to Christianity although some of the anti-conversion laws have been in existence for more than fifty years. Yet, people are arrested in the name of conversion and jailed.

Of course, they would be released for want of evidence but by then they and their families would have suffered. You know what the Indian state did to Fr Stan Swamy. He was arrested for interrogation but he was not interrogated even for a minute after his arrest.

He was suffering from Parkinson's disease and could not hold a glass of water. When he asked for a straw to drink water, the judge gave a month's time to the prosecution to give its reply. Finally, he died in police custody without the state even submitting a charge-sheet against him.

Stan Swamy is already a saint for people like me. I know you want Christians to vote for you in Kerala where they are about 25 percent of the population. For that you need not go to any church.

We have a beautiful Constitution. It lists the duties and responsibilities of the people and the government. I as a Christian can practice my religion and preach it without fear. Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis and Buddhists, not to mention Hindus, have the same right. We are all citizens with equal rights. We do not want any special privileges, except those guaranteed by the Constitution. History bears proof that countries





progressed when peace prevailed. That is why the Elizabethan period was considered the most productive period in Britain.

A strong word from you that you will not tolerate hooliganism, lynching and hate campaigns against any community, be it Muslim or Christian or Sikh, will go a long way in ending the sense of insecurity

that grips Christians and Muslims in the country.

In other words, what is required is building a sense of confidence and security among the people of India. You should have the moral courage to tell the world that this country belongs as much to Hindus as they belong to Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and others.

There is no need for you to visit religious places, except for your own spiritual satisfaction. Instead, you can concentrate on implementing your own promise of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas.

Let me conclude by telling you that I am planning a visit to the Statue of Unity and the Somnath Temple at my own cost later this month. 📍

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

AJ Philip

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**AJ PHILIP** is a citizen journalist and social worker. He can be reached at: [ajphilip@gmail.com](mailto:ajphilip@gmail.com)

## Christians float political party in Punjab

Christian leaders, cutting across denominations in Punjab, have come together to float a political party hoping to benefit from the sizeable Christian votes in a parliamentary seat.

The United Punjab Party was launched on April 3. It comes ahead of a snap poll necessitated by the death of a sitting member in the Jalandhar parliamentary constituency, bordering Pakistan.

The announcement was made by Pastor Harpreet Deol of Open Door Church, an evangelical Protestant group. He claimed the new party has the backing of around 1,000 Christian leaders of different denominations. Jalandhar, a strong pocket of socially poor Dalit Christians, goes to polls on May 10 and results will be declared on May 13.

Critics say the new Christian political party aims to tap the captive votes of Dalit Christians.

“India is a democratic country and we have the right to float a party. Hence, we appreciate the initiative taken by Christian leaders,” Bishop Agnelo Rufino Gracias, apostolic administrator of Jalandhar, told UCA News on April 5.

He said it is not the first time that Indian Christians have formed a political party but they could not gather enough support to stay afloat.

“Only time and circumstances will decide the fate

of this new political party. We need strong backing from other political outfits who believe in secularism and fraternity,” Gracias said.

Pastor Hanook Bhatti, a Punjab-based Christian leader, told UCA News that the new party was “the need of the hour” as “we felt that our voice was going unheard and mainstream political parties took us for granted.” He cited the example of Punjab’s ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP--common man’s party), which had promised burial land to Christians in Jalandhar, where the community doesn’t have enough space to bury their dead.

“But once AAP came to power in Punjab last year, they did not bother to keep the promise,” Bhatti said.

He said Christians in Punjab are often blamed for converting people from other religions. They needed a platform to voice their grievances, he added.

“The new political party will serve as a pressure group when dealing with government officials and administrations,” he explained.

A.C. Michael, president of the Federation of Catholic Associations of the Archdiocese of Delhi, told UCA News: “Punjab has seen allegations of forceful conversions against the Christian community and the new party may provide an opportunity to come clean on the unsubstantiated accusations.” (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

# Shepherds, Listen to Bleating of Lambs

Shepherds of the Church should be the voices of people. They should listen to the voices of the faithful. It calls for courage to stand for people

BY **GEORGE PLATHOTTAM**

**W**e are witnessing increasing number of eulogies of the ruling BJP by some bishops, particularly in Kerala, and in the national capital. Basking in the oxygen of instant publicity and short-lived fame, these shepherds tend to ignore the larger picture of the situation in the country and the carefully drawn game plan of the BJP. Are these shepherds listening to the bleating of the lambs?

It would be suicidal to ignore the vast data available on the atrocities on Christians across the country. Even as the ruling BJP is making overtures to woo the Christian community in Kerala to gain political mileage, there is no word of regret, no remorse, no warning against the foot-soldiers who are wantonly attacking the minorities with impunity. There are many meetings, protests (as the one in the national capital recently) against the growing incidents of violence unleashed against the Christians and other minorities. For those who are still not convinced should read numerous well researched studies published in India on the ideology of the RSS and the Sangh Parivar and their long term agenda.

The BJP which is in power at the centre and several states are fully in sync with the Parivar agenda of tampering with the educational system, rewriting history, renaming roads and monuments, temple-building spree and even interfering with free functioning of the judiciary. How can our highly educated church leaders like bishops fail to see the writing on the wall?

It would be foolhardy to be carried away by the BJP's game plan to woo the Christian community in Kerala through visits to the Bishops' Houses and Easter greetings on the one hand and the visit of the Prime Minister to the Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi on Easter Sunday, on the other. The church leaders meeting the Prime Minister or other minis-



ters and civil leaders are in order.

In a democracy we should show respect to the elected leaders and there is nothing wrong in allowing ministers and elected representatives to grace public functions of the Church. But allowing them to convert such platforms for divisive politics and vote-garnering should not be acceptable.

I remember watching the installation ceremony of Archbishop Joseph Pamplany. An invited BJP Minister used the platform to bash the Muslim community and speak about love-jihad and pledge the support of his party for the Christian community. That was evidently a misuse of the occasion he was offered to felicitate the newly installed Archbishop.

But many Church leaders seem oblivious of the attacks unfolding across the country against the Christians and other minorities. They have a moral obligation to use every occasion, every meeting as an opportunity to draw the attention of those in power of their duty to maintain peace and protect every citizen irrespective of religion, caste or party affiliation. They should not be afraid to voice the concerns of their flocks under duress in various parts of the



**PM Modi 'good leader', Christians don't feel insecure in India, says Cardinal Mar George Alencherry**

country. They should at least refrain from singing their praises and doling out good certificates. Mutual admiration and adulation and basking in the instant publicity and photo-ops will only be short-lived. Failing to utilize the opportunities to remind those in power of their *raj dharma* and calling their attention to the insecurity and fear in which the minorities live across the country, is tantamount to betraying the people whose shepherds they claim to be.

Are not the bishops who feel cozy and comfortable with Modi and his government, complimenting him and giving out good grades seriously failing in their duty to be prophetic. If they are not aware of what is happening to the minority communities in other parts of India, they should engage knowledgeable persons to get briefed before meeting with political leaders and making statements which are contrary to the facts.

We do not lack examples of courage in the universal Church. Look at the Nicaraguan bishop Rolando José Álvarez of Matagalpa sentenced to more than 26 years because of his refusal to leave Nicaragua. Álvarez was convicted of treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news and deprived of citizenship. But the courageous bishop refused to leave the country to go to the United States along with other others charged with treason by President Manuel Ortega. Álvarez who chose to stay back and face the jail term rather than seek asylum, like another courageous hero of South America, Oscar Romero, has won the admiration of the whole world, and received appreciation from Pope Francis.

Recently someone cited the example of the then Archbishop of Bangalore, Bernard Moras, pointing out how he took on the BJP strongman in Karnataka, B.S. Yeddyurappa, when he, as the Chief Minister, came calling on the Archbishop. Those who watched the video images will still remember the angry Archbishop not mincing words in telling then Chief Minister of his state on the growing atrocities against Christians under his watch and calling for action.

Who can forget the 2019 Easter Sunday bombing in Sri Lanka which claimed hundreds of lives? I was part of a media team that visited Sri Lanka a few months after the event. At the St Sebastian's Church in Colombo we offered prayers and paid tributes to the dead, and then called on Cardinal Malcom Ranjit, Archbishop of Colombo. The Cardinal had stood like a rock in confronting the authorities to demand a



**Cardinal Malcom Ranjit, Archbishop of Colombo**

thorough investigation and appropriate action on the terrorists and the networks that carried out the attack. He did not mince words in demanding security for his people.

The Cardinal told us that when he demanded protection for his people, the government promptly sent him a bullet proof car and a large posse of security forces to guard the archbishops' house. He told us that he angrily turned down these and demanded security not for himself but for his people. This fearless Cardinal has, even four years after the incident, continued to persist in his demand on a thorough investigation and punishment for the culprits. He has not been afraid to question his country's government.

I was told by reliable sources that Pope Francis on his visit to Myanmar in 2017 refused to meet with the Military Junta. But when they pressed for a meeting only to greet him privately at the Archbishop's House in Yangon, where the Pope stayed, they were permitted to greet him briefly. There was one condition that there would be no photographs. However, while greeting the Pope, some of the military leaders tried to take pictures using their mobile, and the Pope's security immediately stepped in and stopped them. The Junta leaders wanted to show the public that the Pope had given them audience and that they enjoy cordial relationship with the Pope. The Vatican diplomats knew well the ploy and would not let the brief meeting be exploited by the dictators to show that the Pope was endorsing them. The mighty military rulers were not allowed to have their way. This shows that the Church has brave leaders and experts in dealing with even the most difficult situations. Of course, one must have courage and a will to stand up against any unjust force or power.

I have doubts about the impact of the injunctions of bishops and other religious leaders on the elector-

ate on issues such as casting their votes and choosing candidates. I am afraid 'the rubber price for vote' challenge of Archbishop Pamplany will meet the same fate. It was at a farmers' rally in Alakode (which incidentally is my hometown) that he threw the gauntlet down the BJP. But my own gumption is that even if the BJP government meets with his demand, the Archbishop may not be able to redeem his pledge of getting a candidate elected for the party in his archdiocese or in other parts of the State.

That the endorsement of the church means little when it comes to elections was proved again and again. One glaring example was the Presidential elections in the Philippines held last year. I live in Manila and have been keenly following the high decibel, American style Presidential election between Ferdinand Marcos Jr, the son of the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and a non-corrupt, credible former vice-president Leni Robredo. In spite of the fact that most of the clergy openly backed Robredo and even converted church premises into campaign arenas for her, Marcos Jr won by a huge margin. This is not the first time that the Filipino voters have rejected clerical appeals to vote against specific candidates. This reveals a disconnect between church leaders and ordinary citizens regarding assessing political candidates. There is a clue that the church leaders in India should learn from the predominantly Catholic country with 84 per cent Catholics, where the candidate widely supported by the clergy lost the election.

Even practicing Christians do not usually consult their bishops and parish priests on whom to vote for, nor follow their diktats for political choices they make. Indian voters have made their choices on their own, whether they are highly educated and politically astute people or simple and uneducated rural folks. One must not overestimate the influence of religious leaders on the outcome of elections. Sometime they have only been counter-productive as the Philippine elections have shown time and again.

So the bottom line is that endorsements by some bishops for the BJP or other political parties may not be transformed into votes in their favour.



Archbop Joseph Pamplany

The well-calculated plans of the BJP have floundered even when they put up highly commendable and deserving candidates who would probably have won if they were to contest as independents. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the icon of Assam and nationally known singer, was defeated on a BJP ticket in the 2004 Parliamentary elections.

Something similar happened in Kerala's Palghat where the BJP was sure to capture a legislative Assembly seat in 2021 when the party fielded the popular metro-man E. Sreedharan. Many people felt that he would have won the seat if he

were to contest as an independent candidate rather than of the BJP.

These instances show that voters may not go by what the bishops say. But shepherds of the Church should be the voices of the people. They should hear the bleating of their sheep. Any form of leadership calls for courage to stand for the people one represents. Bishops in India who are vacillating on their ideologies will do well to read about a fellow bishop in Germany during the Nazi era. His name is Bishop Clemens August von Galen. He was consecrated Bishop of Münster in 1933 during the Nazi regime. His episcopal motto was *Nec laudibus, nec timore* - 'neither by praises nor by fear,' which summed up his ministry throughout Germany's Nazi period. The motto was inspired by the liturgy for episcopal consecration.

Bishop von Galen wrote in his first pastoral letter that "Neither the praises of men nor fear of men shall move us. Rather, our glory will be to promote the praise of God, and our steadfast effort will be to walk always in a holy fear of God." During his entire episcopacy the bishop spoke up against the Nazis' euthanasia program and racial theories, and defended human rights and the cause of justice. Pope Benedict XVI beatified him in 2005. The church leaders would do well to read Daniel Utrecht's book on von Galen titled *The Lion of Münster: the Bishop who Roared Against the Nazis*. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**GEORGE PLATHOTTAM** is currently the secretary of the Office for Social Communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences



# CEDRIC

# CEDRIC

# CEDRIC

# Unveiling the Seal of Secrecy

When a person applies for a job, he or she has to present documents that prove his or her merit. There is no secrecy about it

BY **P. A. CHACKO**

**W**hy this sealed cover secrecy? The Supreme Court wants to do away with it. No more presenting sealed cover replies to Supreme Court's queries or findings and reports of commissions or investigative agencies.

The apex court has a point. We are a democracy. Why this ducking under veiled secrecy? Do not the public have a right to be informed about things that are supposed to be in the public domain?

But, then, the RTI Department says the Prime Minister of India's degree certificate details are in a sealed cover and kept in a sealed vault. Not open to public view. This is what has launched a thousand eyebrows.

There is commotion all over. Opposition parties have made it 'Hulla bol' to break open the vault. "What is so sacred about it so as to be kept under a veil of secrecy? Is not Prime Minister Modi a citizen of this nation? they ask. Do they have a point? Judge for yourself!

In the recent past there has been a tendency on the part of the Executive pillar of our democracy to take umbrage under sealed covers when it comes to presenting certain information or replies to the



Supreme Court. Quite many sensible people felt that, in that case, there is something to hide. All is not well. They are of the opinion that, in a democratic set up, it is the people who are supreme. They elect their representatives and, ultimately, the elected representatives are to function in the name

of the people, for the people and with the people. The public should know the facts.

The Government functionaries are the servants of the people. Hence, by all logic, the public have a right to ask the Executive what it is doing and what it is not doing. Particularly when controversial issues crop up, enquiry agencies are set up to dig up materials, sift facts from fiction and nail the miscreants without bias or favour.

When it comes to the educational qualifications of a citizen, the certificate is a public document for seeking a job. When a person applies for a job of a peon or engineer, a plumber or a philosophy professor, he or she has to present documents that prove his or her merit. There is no secrecy about it. Neither can one present it in sealed cover nor argue that not even the administration-in-charge can require removing the secrecy. And, precisely for that reason, a public servant is a servant of the people in a democratic set up. As an electoral candidate, functioning as a political security guard of the people of the country, he or she has to present his/her papers including educational qualifications.

Unfortunately, this free democratic country, existing in the third millennium, is taken for a ride by some politicians who think that they can exercise authority as high functionaries with or without educational qualifications.

Now, coming to the certificate that is meant to prove Prime Minister Narendra Modi's educational qualification, the RTI Department refused to supply the details. But, surprisingly, the certificate popped

'Sealed Covers violate natural and open justice':  
Why-What-How of 'Public Interest Immunity  
proceedings', the 'fairer' alternative suggested  
by Supreme Court







up like a popcorn from nowhere to prove that Narendra Damodardas Modi completed his degree in 1978 from Delhi university. A computer-printed certificate was demonstrated as proof.

That is where many flexed their muscles to question the veracity of the certificate. Now, the veil of

secrecy has been torn open by CPI national secretary Amarjit Kaur. She claims to have done her degrees in the 1970s at Delhi University. Listen to her: “I studied at Delhi University where Modiji was said to have studied during that period. There were Arun Jaitley and Vijay Goel among others. My MSc, PhD and LLB certificates are handwritten. How come that Modiji’s is type written? And, the computer print font used was not in existence then.”

One wonders under what compulsion the RTI Department refused to provide information about Mr. Modi’s certificate and degree. Now Amarjit Kaur’s revelation should be an eye opener. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**P. A. CHACKO** is an activist and writer. He is the Director of Arrupe Tribal Cultural Centre at Bhojnadih, Jharkhand

## Jabalpur bishop, priests get temporary relief from arrest

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on April 13 granted bail to a Catholic school principal accused of sexual abuse of student.

A day earlier, the court granted temporary relief from arrest to Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur and Father Jagan Raj in an alleged cheating case.

The high court’s principle bench in Jabalpur granted bail to Nam Singh Yadav, a layman principal of a school the Jabalpur diocese managed at Junwani, a village in Dindori district in the central Indian state.

The court also ordered for a probe into the charges against the principal after he denied the allegations against him. Police arrested Yadav on March 7 following a complaint from district child welfare committee that conducted a surprise inspection of the school four days earlier.

A team of Madhya Pradesh’s Commission for Protection of Child Rights that inspected the school and its hostel accused the principal of sexual abuse and took away eight girls without informing their parents or even the hostel authorities at late night.

The girls and their parents denied the allegation against the principal and even demanded a fair probe into the child welfare committee’s allegation and those involved in the inspection.

In its order on Bishop Almeida and Father Raj, the court order said, “Till the next date of hearing no coercive action shall be taken against the petitioners”

and posted the case for hearing on April 24.

The prelate is the chairman and the priest the treasurer of the Jabalpur Diocesan Education Society that run the Junwani school. The duo were framed, according to some Church leaders, after the girls and their parents denied the allegation of sexual assault charge against the principal and sought probe into it.

The court also has asked the prosecution to furnish the case diary and the inquiry report against the bishop and the priest within four weeks.

Church leaders in Jabalpur, on condition of anonymity, told Matters India that the authorities registered “the fake case against the bishop and the priest saying they had taken grant from the government and collected fees from the students, which is illegal.

The Church people expressed the hope that the truth will come out after the police submit its inquiry report in the High Court.

Earlier, the District and Sessions Court in Dindori, a predominantly tribal district, on March 31 rejected the anticipatory bail application of Bishop Almeida and Father Raj.

They were on March 22 charged with cheating, commission of a crime under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the provision of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act that deals with abuses and neglect among other issues. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

# Pitfalls in Justice Delivery

Justice delivery systems, including State Human Rights Commissions, need to be revamped to make them more responsive to people

BY **LANCY LOBO**

On April 4, 2023, “India Justice Report” (IJR) was released based on data of States and Union Territories of India. It was based on four pillars of justice delivery mechanisms, viz., Police, judiciary, Prisons and Legal Aid. The States were classified as large states, middle-sized states and small states. The data was all from government sources. It carried a comparison of years 2019, 2021 and 2022. Each of the four pillars were analyzed through the prism of budgets, human resource, workload, diversity, infrastructure, and trends (or intentions to improve). All in all, 102 indicators across four pillars have been used to measure the deterioration or improvement over the years. Each State is ranked on each of these pillars as also a composite picture. Hence one gets an idea of which state is holding which rank therein.

The IJR is the outcome of continuous and sustained cooperation between the members of the Collective and the founding team of Tata Trusts. The Collective consisted of Centre for Social Justice, Common Cause, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, DAKSH, TISS-Prayas, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, and How India Lives. Acknowledgement from Project Leader, Valay Singh, Introduction by the Editor and Conventor, Maja Daruwala and a Foreword from Uday Umesh Lalit, the former Justice of the Supreme Court, have appropriately contextualized this report. Indeed it is a great effort to highlight the changing character of democracy in India through hard facts. Some significant findings are:



## Police

1. Every State has statutorily mandated quotas for SC, ST, OBCs for Police. However, only Karnataka has been able to fulfil these reservations.
2. Not a single State/UT meets their own reserved quotas for women in police.
3. In 19 States/UTs, urban police stations serve greater populations than their rural counterparts. Kerala's urban police stations serve ten times the population of a rural one and Gujarat's four times.
4. State Human Rights Commissions have a total of 33,312 pending cases across all 25 State Human Rights Commissions in March 2021. National average vacancy across 25 SHRCs is 44 per cent.
5. Compliance with Supreme Court judgment on installation of CCTVs in all 14 spots (as directed by the apex court) is found only in Arunachal Pradesh. Only 8 States/UTs reported having night-vision equipped CCTVs.

## Judiciary

1. No court works with a full complement of judges except the High Court of Sikkim and the district courts in Chandigarh.
2. At the district court level, no State/UT could fully meet all its Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes' quotas. Data on SC/ST/OBC judges is not available for High Courts.
3. Among the 18 large and mid-sized states, only Kerala could achieve case clearance rates of 100



All in all, 102 indicators across four pillars have been used to measure the deterioration or improvement over the years. Each State is ranked on each of these pillars as also a composite picture

per cent and more at both High Court and subordinate court levels.

### Legal Aid

1. The reduction in the number of legal services clinics have dropped to 4,742 in 2022 from 14,159 in 2020 which means a reduction of 9,147.
2. The total value of settlement by National Lok Adalats during 2021-2022 was Rs. 7,322 crore.

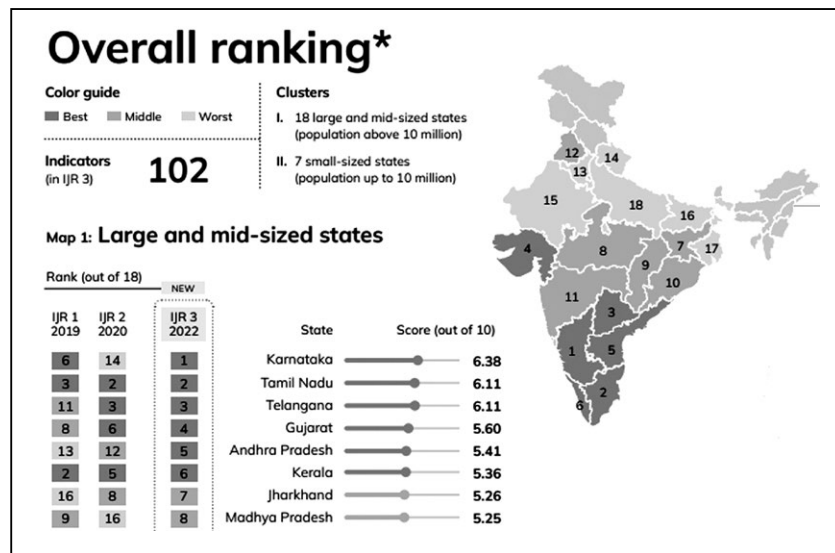
### Prisons

1. 32 States/UTs where the share of under-trials is more than 60 per cent.
2. 24 States/UTs that provided education to less than 59 per cent inmates during 2021.
3. Five States didn't provide any vocational training to inmates in 2021.

**It is alarming that increasingly illiberal ideologies are taking hold of India, giving poor governance despite the rhetoric of politicians, who use money, muscle, media, and machines to come to power**

Maja Daruwala in her introduction draws further attention to some key issues in various States such as budgets allotted and their use, human resources, diversity, infrastructure and so on. Regarding funds she writes, "If funds are tight, what is available is frequently left underutilized". With reference to human resources in justice system, she said, "Vacancies continue to plague all areas of the justice system and can touch 83 per cent as among the prison staff in Ladakh. Between 2020 and 2021 the actual number of prison doctors dropped drastically, taking vacancies to nearly 50 per cent or one doctor for 842 inmates, instead of one for 300 inmates' benchmark".

Regarding diversity in personnel representing caste and gender, "Despite decades of heated debate, while individual states may meet one or other category, no state meets all three quotas



across all subsystems. Nor are women anywhere near parity". Concerning infrastructure, she observes that "Prison infrastructure remains wholly inadequate. Of the 1,314 prisons 391 are overcrowded by more than 50 per cent". Other facilities are rudimentary.

Given the commitment to international Sustainable Developmental Goals, India is committed to "promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. However, this timely report shows a mirror to the status of justice delivery mechanisms which leaves much to be desired.

This report also carries an important data comparing India with the rest of the countries in the world on a number of themes such as the Rule of Law index, Global peace index, Human development Index, Global gender gap index, Democracy index, Sustainable Development global report index, World Press freedom index and SDG Gender index for the year 2022.

Overall there has been a downward slide in most of these indices for India. It is alarming that increasingly illiberal ideologies are taking hold of India, giving poor governance despite the rhetoric of politicians, who use money, muscle, media, and machines to come to power. It also shows how the democratic institutions have become weaker. This is a cause of great concern. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**LANCY LOBO** is a research scholar, Indian Social Institute, Delhi

# Emperor Wears No Clothes

Irrationality has become rational; illogic has become logic; autocracy has become democracy. Yes, new definitions are replacing old ones

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

**F**reedom as undaunted expression of the human spirit has been diminished through fragmentation and self-serving caveats, from Lenin's cynical comment that freedom is precious, so precious that it needs to be rationed; Stalin's insincere and duplicitous half-truth that real liberty can exist only where exploitation has been abolished; to Harold Laski's heresy that without economic security, freedom was not worth having. Today, we have to contend with the mischievous rendition of freedom as a value that needed to be tempered by considerations of "national interest". At a subliminal level, these various restraints, sought to be imposed on freedom, are used as justification to legitimize authoritarianism.

At birth, India pledged her troth to democracy. Emerging out of the vortex of a blood-soaked Partition, the nationalist elite recognized the imperative of building a State that would accommodate and live with differences, that would not be aligned to or identified with any one constituent of society. Only such a State could possibly sustain a democracy "by the people, of the people, for the people". They knew that India could survive and thrive only if it nurtured and sustained the internal diversity of religion, language and culture that had accumulated over the centuries and constituted our most priceless heritage.

This ideal was stated upfront in the noble phrases of the preamble of the Indian Constitution. Going beyond the trumpeted American Declaration of Independence that promised every person the inalienable rights of "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness", we resolved to constitute India into a democratic Republic that would secure for all citizens the four great values of justice, freedom, equality and fraternity. But given our multi-layered ethnic, religious and cultural heritage, the Nehruvian idea of a modern, inclusive democracy of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism had to contend with the exclusive Hindutva vision propagated by Veer Savarkar and the Sangh Parivar of



"one nation, one people, one culture". It was the responsibility of the State to abide by our constitutional commitment to be a "Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic".

But what happens when the State goes rogue, like it has, in the last eight years?

The assault on the democratic framework began around the time of the apocalyptic Demonetization disaster. That was when this regime decided to give up all pretence of deferring to the secular principles of the Constitution and, instead, go ballistic on its majoritarian agenda of Hindutva that would pave the way to the ultimate goal of a Hindu Rashtra.

Effective execution of such a radical, ideological transformation of society is possible only through the Orwellian route of creating an authoritarian State. This has been achieved in large measure through intimidation, coercion and dubious inducements that seem to work wonders in our troubled land. Employing a multi-pronged strategy, this regime has taken imperious control of every aspect of governance. The media, never self-assured or honourable, has become the proverbial stenographer to power. Every state institution has not only been undermined, but even worse for the long term, been infiltrated by lackeys of the regime. The bureaucracy, always a pushover, has outdone itself as lickspittle. The law-enforcement agen-





cies are the menacing hatchet men of the regime, deploying every below-the-belt tactic from arresting and terrorizing opponents and dissidents, burying inquests against comrades of the regime, weaponizing laws such as the UAPA, NIA, NSA and IT Acts, even allegedly pressurizing corporate houses to cede the advantage to cronies of this dispensation. One of the most important protectors of democracy, the Election Commission, functions as enforcer of this government's dictates.

But the pivotal capture has been that of the judiciary which, in the last few years, has largely turned against justice, promoting the cause of the regime over every other consideration, to the extent that it's been dismissed as the "midwife of authoritarianism". The Supreme Court's controversial verdicts on high-profile cases that could have damaged the government – the Hiren Pandya and Judge Loya cases, the Sahara-Birla diary investigation, the Rafale and Pegasus scandals – have raised legitimate doubts about the fair-mindedness of the judges. Long pending controversial cases such as the validity of the CAA, abrogation of Article 370, the dubious Electoral Bonds scheme, the Vote discrepancies and Credibility of the Election Commission inquiry have been deliberately left to stew on the backburner.

Side by side with the coopting of institutions, there is the meticulous creation of the Modi cult, choreographed to perfection by publicists and event managers. Showcasing a saintly religiosity at every turn, complete with tilak, rudraksha and flowing saffron robes, an aura of mystery and distinction has

**The rule of law has been substituted by the rule of one man. There has been a no-holds-barred assault on the Opposition. Apart from arrests and cases being registered against them on the flimsiest grounds, they have been silenced in the pre-eminent arena for political debate - Parliament**

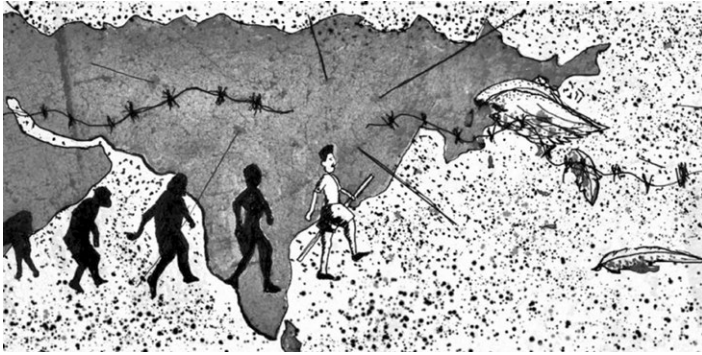
been built around the high priest of Hindutva. He has used his charisma and oratorical skills to attract a huge following of blind worshipers who share his ersatz nationalist fervour, virulent hostility toward Nehru and what he represents, and pathological hatred of Muslims. Like with all narcissistic cult leaders, he has forged a beguiling image out of falsehoods – sold tea as a child at a non-existent railway station, was an itinerant seeker after the truth, earned a bachelor's degree followed by a master's degree in 'Entire Political Science', claimed to have gone to jail over satyagraha for Bangladesh's Independence, et al.

Modi has done what Indira Gandhi attempted but failed to achieve: become synonymous with the nation. Whereas the "India is Indira and Indira is India" slogan remained a grand delusion among the sycophants in the then Congress party, Modi is identified with the nation as its custodian and benefac-



tor. Patriotism is measured by fealty to the king! How else does one explain the unabated idolization of a man who caused misery to millions due to demonetization and handling of the pandemic; in whose watch there has been unremitting persecution of minorities and dissidents, atrocities against Dalits, record unemployment? But apart from the emotional stranglehold that he has wielded over the masses, his grip on power has been cemented by his crony links to the business houses whose support is rooted in their understanding of their economic interests.

At some point, the most powerful PM ever began believing that he is omnipotent, the surest sign that we were heading in the direction of an autocracy. Hubris inevitably results in arrogant and reckless actions, which is what has happened. The rule of law has been substituted by the rule of one man. There has been a no-holds-barred assault on the Opposition. Apart from arrests and cases being registered



against them on the flimsiest grounds, they have been silenced in the pre-eminent arena for political debate -- Parliament. For the ordinary citizens, Modi's imperious advice, which he enunciated in his address on Constitution Day last November, was to fulfil their duties. "Be it an individual or institution, our duties are our first priority. Amrit Kaal is the era of duties for us," the PM said, insinuating that fundamental rights are of secondary importance, a viewpoint espoused by authoritarian leaders in general.

But of late, the ground appears to be slipping from under the Vishwaguru's feet; something has broken his spell over us. One can't help drawing an analogy with Hans Christian Andersen's folktale, "The Emperor's New Clothes" about a vain emperor who spends lavishly on clothing at the expense of improving the lot of his people. Two ingenious crooks convince him that they would design for him the most magnificent clothes that would be invisible only to those who are stupid or incompetent, and the foppish emperor commissions them. They weave not a thread, and those inspecting their work see nothing but pretend otherwise to avoid being thought foolish.

Finally, the swindlers simulate dressing the emperor who also sees nothing, but feigns that he sees the clothes. The emperor sets off in a procession around the city. The people go along with the charade, not wanting to appear inept or stupid, until a child blurts out that the emperor is wearing no clothes. The people realise their folly but the emperor, though taken aback, goes on with the regal procession, walking more proudly than ever.

A similar fate has befallen our emperor who has finally been exposed before his people. One fine day in January, Hindenburg uncovered the web of dodgy business practices of the Adani group, and instantly, without studying the details, every political observer knew that this humungous scandal would

be Modi's Bofors gun, and it has unraveled precisely as predicted. The most sanctimonious and loquacious sermonizer on corruption has been struck dumb by allegedly the biggest financial con in corporate history.

Close on its heels comes the devastating revelation that the country's Prime Minister has, in all probability, fudged his educational qualifications. Nothing can be more damaging to the image of a man who has been unrestrained in purveying advice and *gyaan* to space scientists, military specialists, doctors, engineers, not to mention students who have been regular recipients of his sage counsel on the recipe for academic success.

There's not a hope in hell of such an eventuality! Whoever has watched Modi perform on TV will vouch for his chutzpah, which is defined as "audacity and the willingness to take risks in a highly shameless and confident manner". Perched atop the biggest corporate scam in history, (about which he has not uttered a word), he unabashedly claims to be leading the fight against corruption, repeatedly accusing the Opposition of fostering criminality, and advising his puppets in the central probe agencies not to spare the corrupt.

But irrespective of his seeming self-assurance, he has been discomfited by the recent scandals, which a united Opposition refuses to let go. Insecurity has made him even more authoritarian, as evident in the injudicious ban on the BBC documentary that spurred viewership; the escalation in the persecution of the Opposition; the bullying of liberal NGOs and think-tanks; the brazenness in preventing Parliament from functioning, the first time ever that the ruling party has persistently disrupted parliamentary proceedings.

In this chilling darkness, some political observers believe that the swelling unity among the Opposition born out of desperation, coupled with the recent scandals, have shaken the regime and, for the first time, made it vulnerable. Significantly, instead of seeing these developments as a hopeful sign for the future, many are fearful that a ruthless dispensation will use every possible means to remain in power and, if need be, prevent a smooth transition of power.

At stake is our democracy and we all need to worry! ©

---

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MATHEW JOHN** is a former civil servant. The views are personal

---



# Zero Tolerance is the Key

Sexual harassment of women at workplaces is an affront to their fundamental right to equality and a life with dignity; It should be dealt with an iron hand

BY **AARTI**

A student arrested for sexual harassment of woman professor; a railway ticket checker booked for sexually harassing female passenger; a woman teacher at correctional home booked for sexual harassment of inmate; a finance head of private firm arrested for sexually harassing woman employee; a coach booked for sexual harassment of teenage girls at academy. While it is rather disconcerting that such news as above seems to be emerging, the two horrifying incidents that reportedly took place at the Indraprastha College for Women (IPCW) in Delhi, and the Kalakshetra Foundation (KF) in Chennai depict that sexual harassment is obviously alive despite the enactment of a separate legislation aimed at providing protection to working women.

What exactly is sexual harassment? Briefly put, it includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely: (i) physical contact and advances; (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; (iii) making sexually coloured remarks; (iv) showing pornography; (v) any other unwelcome physical,

verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Having its roots in the Supreme Court's landmark judgment (*Vishaka & others vs State of Rajasthan & others on*) of 13 August 1997, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 ("SH Act") came into existence across India from December 9, 2013. Notably, while delivering the *Vishaka* judgment, the Apex Court directed the following preventive steps should be taken by all employers or persons in charge of work place both in the public as well as the private sector to prevent sexual harassment.

(a) Express prohibition of sexual harassment as defined above at the work place should be notified, published and circulated in appropriate ways.

(b) The Rules/Regulations of Government and Public Sector bodies relating to conduct and discipline should include rules and regulations prohibiting sexual harassment and provide for appropriate penalties in such rules against the offender.

(c) Private employers should take steps to include the aforesaid prohibitions in the standing orders



under the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.

(d) Appropriate work conditions should be provided in respect of work, leisure, health and hygiene to further ensure that there is no hostile environment towards women at work places and no woman employee should have reasonable grounds to believe that she is disadvantaged in connection with her employment.

As the very purpose of the SH Act, 2013 is to provide protection to working women, sexual harassment cases are dealt under Section 354A and 509 of the Indian Penal Code in respect of acts like (i) physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures; (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; (iii) showing pornography against the will of a woman; (iv) making sexually coloured remarks. This also includes any word uttered, or sounds or gesture or act intended to

## Indraprastha College and Kalakshetra cases, still being debated, are just a tip of the iceberg but the cause for concern is that insult to the modesty of women at office premises is a growing worry

insult the modesty of a woman. Section 354A is punishable with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both. Those convicted under Section 509 are liable to be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years plus fine.

Even as investigations are underway in IPCW, what we know so far is that on March 28, when the students were participating in the annual festival, a group of men entered the premises of the Institution by scaling its boundary walls and began harassing them for over two hours. The Delhi University constituted Committee which is probing the incident is expected to unravel what exactly happened during the course of the annual festival. IPCW is said to have filed a police complaint on the alleged trespass and harassment of women students after it received around 230 complaints and representations

from its students.

Regarding KF, it was founded by legendary “cultural ambassador” Rukmini Devi Arundale. She pioneered in creating dances and plays. When she gave her first performance at the open air Adyar Theatre (of the Madras Theosophical Society) in 1935 at the age of 31, many were mesmerized by the spiritual quality of her dance. It is said that a Bishop who attended the performance wrote that he felt as if he had been “present at a benediction ceremony”.

In 1977, when the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai offered the chair of the President of India to Rukmini Devi, she politely declined. As a member of the Rajya Sabha she was instrumental in passing the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. After Rukmini Devi passed away, the Government of India took over Kalakshetra and through an Act of the Parliament it has been functioning as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India since 1993.

KF saw massive protests from students of Rukmini Devi College of Fine Arts in March this year. With the protesting students raising multiple allegations of sexual harassment against four faculty members, they have been removed by the authorities. Based on a sexual harassment complaint filed by a survivor (an alumni of the college), Hari Padmam, an assistant professor who went missing, has since been arrested and is in judicial custody. More recently, his bail application has been rejected by a local Court. Hari Padmam's wife, in her complaint against the victim and two teachers at the Institute, has alleged that her husband's arrest was based on a false complaint.

Being an Institute under the control of the Union Government, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women was the first to visit KF. According to news reports, NCW had wound up its probe and asked the Tamil Nadu DGP to investigate the matter. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin who visited the KF campus and held talks with the students as well as the management had assured on the floor of the State Assembly that appropriate legal action would be taken if charges were confirmed in the investigation. The Tamil Nadu State Women's Commission which probed into the matter is said to have asked the State Government to take legal action on KF. Reportedly, KF initially denied having received any sexual harassment complaints as per guidelines, but later constituted a Committee of Inquiry led by a retired Judge, Justice K Kannan and includes former

Tamil Nadu DGP Letika Saran and Dr Shobha Varthaman, a medical doctor who has worked with international NGOs. The report is awaited.

Indraprastha College and Kalakshetra cases, still being debated, are just a tip of the iceberg but the cause for concern is that insult to the modesty of women at office premises is a growing worry. As per figures published by the National Crime Record Bureau, out of 52,759 sexual harassment cases registered during the period 2019-2021, the total number of cases registered under the category insult to the modesty of women at office premises was 1407.

To deal with sexual harassment at the workplace, especially in the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), campuses in these matters are governed by the University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition and Redress of sexual harassment of women employees and students in higher educational institutions) Regulations, 2015. All other cases are dealt under the SH Act, 2013. Thirty-eight cases of sexual harassment were reported in HEIs across the country, during 2021-22 of which 36 were disposed of and two were pending for more than 90 days. Nearly 216 awareness generation programmes against sexual harassment were held during the said period.

Last December UGC issued fresh guidelines for basic facilities and amenities for a safe, secure environment for Women and Women cells for sensitization, policy implementation, monitoring and grievance redressal in HEIs. Among others, campuses/its adjoining areas should be well-lit and under CCTV coverage. Sports, other playgrounds and public parks should have flood lights. All buildings, open public spaces, other infrastructural amenities including transport, restrooms, footpaths, entry and exits should be friendly for specially abled students. Sufficient number of female security guards hired from

**As sexual harassment is a result of unchecked power, armed with the Vishaka Judgement and the SH Act, 2013 there ought to be a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual harassment of women**



credible security firms should be deployed. Students are to be provided with a handbook at the time of admission containing detailed information about rules and regulations regarding proper conduct and behaviour expected of them. The handbook must also mention important helpline numbers like that of student counsellors, anti-ragging cell, proctor office, medical emergencies, health centre, canteen and other university authorities to be approached in case of need.

The She-Box or the online complaint management system developed by Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2019 is aimed at facilitating the registration of complaints related to sexual harassment of women at workplace. Once a complaint is submitted to the She-Box portal, it directly reaches to the concerned authority having jurisdiction to take action in the matter. Last year a special drive was carried out to review all pending cases of sexual harassment in central government ministries and departments.

As sexual harassment is a result of unchecked power, armed with the Vishaka Judgement and the SH Act, 2013 there ought to be a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual harassment of women. It needs to be realised that punishment can prevent a crime and as research shows clearly that the chance of being caught is a vastly more effective deterrent than even draconian punishment. ©

# Indian president concerned over attacks on Christians



President Droupadi Murmu has expressed concern over reports of increasing persecution of Christians and assured community leaders of taking action as the highest Constitutional authority in the country.

Murmu received a delegation of Christian leaders at Rashtrapati Bhawan, her official residence, in New Delhi on April 13. Led by Archbishop Anil Joseph Couto of Delhi, it comprised Methodist Bishop Subodh Mondal, Protestant Bishop Paul Swarup of the Church of North India, and Christian activists Michael Williams and Tehmina Arora.

During the half-an-hour meeting, the president was briefed about the steep increase in the incidents of violence against Christians, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Murmu said she had read reports about the targeting of Christians, however, she believed that these violent attacks were perpetrated by only a handful of people and stressed that the secular fabric of the nation was still vibrant.

The memorandum highlighted the recent series of attacks in the tribal-dominated southern region

of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, against tribal Christians over allegations of religious conversions.

The memorandum urged the federal and state governments to protect the Constitutional rights of the Christian community, its freedom to practice and propagate the faith, and to live with dignity and without threat to lives and property.

It further called to strengthen human rights monitoring mechanisms and set up national and state redressal mechanisms to address targeted violence against minorities.

The delegations also sought speedy closure of false cases against Christians, reconstruction of illegally demolished churches across the country, strict action against vigilante mobs, and compensation for individuals and institutions who are falsely targeted for their religious identity.

Murmu gave a patient hearing to the delegation and applauded the Christian community's service in the area of healthcare and education.

She fondly recalled her time volunteering with nuns in her home state of Odisha and also remembered the tragic loss of Graham Staines, an Australian missionary who was brutally murdered along with his two young sons in 1999.

The president said the Staines were her neighbours and expressed regret in her inability at the time to avert the tragic loss.

Christian leaders said they decided to meet the president during a peaceful protest of some 22,000 Christians in New Delhi on Feb. 19.

The protest sought government intervention to ensure justice and peace for Christian the community across the country. © (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

# Manipur Christian body condemns discriminatory demolition of churches

The All Manipur Christian Organisation (AMCO) has expressed serious concern over the demolition of three churches belonging to three different denominations in the northeastern state that has 41 percent Christians.

The Manipur authorities on March 11 demolished the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church Manipur and Catholic Holy Spirit Church at Tribal Colony in Imphal, the state capital.

In a press release on April 12, the AMCO condemned the demolition of only Christian places of worship under the pretext that they were built on government land without permission.

“The harsh action of the night raid” in the presence of a large posse of security personnel and without any regards to religious sanctity “has created a nightmare and fear psychosis to the people in and around them and also hurts the sentiments of the Christians in general,” said the statement that conveyed its solidarity to the “ill-fated members of the three Churches.

The Christian body termed it unfortunate that the government demolished only Christian worship places despite a Supreme Court instruction for regularization, relocation or removal of unauthorized religious structures.

The Christian body also noted that under the Supreme Court directive, the Manipur Policy for review of unauthorized construction of religious structures was framed and a proposal for regularization of 188 religious structures in five districts was approved by the state cabinet on October 11, 2011. Subsequently they were regularized on October 27 the same year.

“It is unfortunate that not even a single church/Christian worship place was included (regularized). This was a discriminatory decision of the government,” the AMCO statement asserted.

It urged the state government, now ruled by a coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, to follow in its true sense and spirit the noble ideals of secularism enshrined in the Constitution which guarantees Freedom of Religion, Belief, Faith and Worship to every citizen. The Christian body called upon all Churches and denominations in Manipur to cooper-



ate and share the grief and sorrow of their brethren at Tribal colony.

It further reiterated its undaunted commitment to uphold the spirit of love, care and fraternity among the people of Manipur, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. One of the demolished churches had existed since 1974. The churches were demolished days after the Manipur High Court vacated its 2020 order for status quo on an order for an eviction drive by the BJP-led state government.

The matter was brought to the high court by a local organization. An order passed by the bench of Acting Chief Justice M.V. Muralidaran April 4 said the decision of the state authorities in evicting the respondent churches are based on the documents, policy decisions and pursuant to the directions of the Supreme Court. Chief minister N Biren Singh said that the demolition was in accordance with the court order.

Pastor Nengzahau V. Haupi said the government eviction notice came on December 24, 2020, and the high court protected the status quo for 3 years. However, the high court revoked their status quo.

As the administration demolished the churches, many Christians gathered and performed prayers on the debris on April 11.

One of the priests said that the state government should not have demolished the churches as those were not for personal benefit of any individual or organization, reports Deccan Herald.

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

# Fr Alfred Roche OFM Cap He was 'Our Father' to All

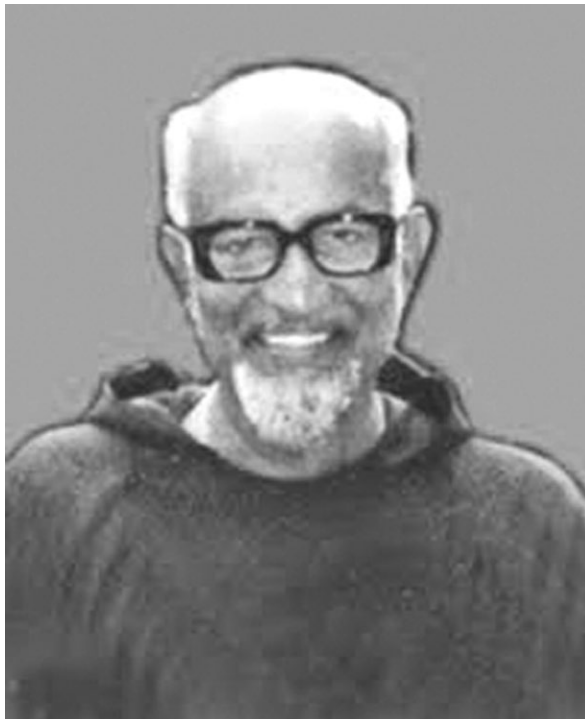
BY ALEXANDER CRASTA

**T**he SERVANT OF GOD, Fr. Alfred Roche, was born in a small island called Pandeshwar belonging to St. Peter's Parish at Barkur in the Diocese of Mangalore (presently Diocese of Udupi) in 1924. His parents, late Mr. Isaac Roche and late Mrs. Carmine Monteiro, were farmers. But, Mr. Isaac Roche could find time to go to his parish church every morning and render his service as the sacristan for nearly 50 years, having daily crossed the Sita River on a small boat.

The baptismal name of Fr. Alfred Roche was Peter John. He was commonly known as Piti. He was the leader of the altar boys while he was in the elementary school. He joined the Capuchin Order in 1944, and in the novitiate he received the new name Alfred. Then, having finished his initial formation (seminary studies), he received the Sacerdotal Ordination in 1951.

Fr. Alfred Roche OFM Cap rendered his precious service in 4 places: 10 years at Monte Mariano Novitiate, Farangipet (Diocese of Mangalore) as a formator to the novices; 18 years at Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, Diocese of Mangalore (presently Diocese of Udupi); 3 years at St. Anne's Church, Binaga, and 12 years at St. Joseph's Church, at Lower Kasarkod, Diocese of Karwar.

At this juncture, one may ask: How and where did Fr. Alfred Roche acquire this new name, "Our Father"? Normally, if not the family members who are priests (by the grace of God I have two brothers who are priests, whom we call "Our Father/s"), we do not



call the parish priest "Our Father". But, the case of Fr. Alfred Roche is quite different. His pastoral ministry was unique. On account of his simplicity of life and dedicated pastoral ministry, solidly founded on the spirit of faith in God as well as his deep concern towards his flock entrusted to his care, he could mingle with every category of people, irrespective of caste and creed, age and stage.

His prime concern towards the faith-formation of his flock in and through catechism, down-to-earth sermons based on the Word of God and liturgical music; his

special attention towards the education of the children and the youth even by helping them economically through friends and benefactors; his constant efforts to find adequate jobs to the youth and the jobless; his regular visits to the sick and the aged; his accompanying some of them even to the hospitals since he had personal contact with some of the doctors and nurses; his gentle and patient approach in repairing the wounded relationships within the family-circles and with others; his yeomen service in bringing back the sheep scattered owing to schisms and ruptures. All these evangelical virtues that he imbibed, spending time in the company of the Divine Master, the Supreme Pastor, enabled him to be not only a loving and compassionate pastor of the faithful and good shepherd of the flock entrusted to his care but also to be a loved and respected member of every family. That is how he gained this beautiful and meaningful name "Our Father". For, he became the Father of all. ☪



# Nature is a Blissful Home

BY P.A. JOSEPH

It is interesting to note that since we go away from ordinary environment of living and functioning, we encounter negative issues and problems. Our bodily and emotional functions set to work with the plan of nature. We take pride in moving to flats, but gradually struggle there; it is a shift from homely bliss to concrete forest. It may look a bit embarrassing as we reflect further.

I am referring to the context of nearly one century back. Temples and such common places of worship were always built in areas surrounded by trees, hillocks, streams and environmentally cool and silent places. We see children playing around trees and climbing on them; they enjoy playing on the grass lawns; playing in the streams; fountains, etc; it is a sort of green bathing or forest bathing. Trees have inspired people in all religious traditions. Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful tree. To plant a tree is to follow a dream. To uproot a tree is to be boorish.

Sadhus are found sitting under shady trees; people come to them and sit around them. Silence of the tree is inspiring. Siddhartha Gautama after years of struggle and pilgrimage in search of truth found enlightenment having sat under a shady tree for seven weeks. Here he became the Buddha, the enlightened one; here he learnt the inspirations of his new thinking and religion. Even today after about 2500 years, the devotees visit the tree in Bodh Gaya in Bihar, which had inspired their lord and master Gautama Buddha.

In the middle of Bahrain desert, there is the acacia tree which is about 400 years old. No drop of water is found for many kilometers in all direction around the tree. In California, general Sherman, the 2000-year-old tree has a base bulk of 11 meters diameter. The Montezuma cypress tree has the stoutest trunk in the world, with 43-meter diameter. It takes 30 people holding the hands to hug it. It gives shade for thousands of people.

Dehradun district in Uttarakhand, with its numerous health resorts like Nainital and Mussorie, is surrounded by spacious forests on all sides, and that makes the district most comfortable especially in summer. It is one of the most lovely places in the world.

The enlightened group of Taoists enjoy simple life and contemplation in the midst of trees. Chinese cul-



**Magic indeed is all around us, in stones, flowers, stars, the dawn, wind and the sunset cloud; all we need is the ability to see and understand**

ture advises its followers to have retreats in the midst of nature surrounded by trees. Ancient Celts believed forest to be the center of the universe; trees were at the center of their mythology. The spiritual men and women preferred to make their dwelling around trees. Forest as a “right of passage” from childhood to adulthood is a belief of many civilizations. In some tradition of the Amazon, teenagers had to go to the jungle and be there for many days living by hunting and defending themselves; after this test they are accepted as strong adults to face the life challenges.

According to Hindu belief, Lord Ram lived in the forest till the appointed time; Jesus Christ at the last sacrifice of his life allowed to be nailed to a tree and died on it. Believers accept that tree (cross) as a sign of salvation. In some traditions tree-hugging is a therapy for health; it is medicinal. The sick gets vibrations from the tree which cure them. Some traditions hold that we have deep relation with nature, with all its living beings as brothers and sisters. In the words of Doreen Valente: “Magic indeed is all around us, in stones, flowers, stars, the dawn, wind and the sunset cloud; all we need is the ability to see and understand.” ©



# Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

## Mini-Skirts and the Constitution..!

Just heard that Mary Quant, the British designer who revolutionized fashion with her mini-skirt, is dead. Rest in peace Mary, because it's not about what you did in uncovering those feminine legs I'm going to write about, but why you did it.

Quant brought in her concept of the mini-skirt when women in England were feeling suffocated, dressed in the corseted clothes of their mothers, with their nipped waists, and ship-prow chests, corsets, bonnets, top hats, bustles and petticoats. And with women corseted, bonneted, and top-hatted, nobody ever really knew what the actual woman was inside.

Then came Mary Quant, who turned the world of

hate, usage of government agencies against those elected, using money power as enticement and slowly that very freedom we won, is being covered by tight corsets, hoop skirts, bustles, ruffles, and lace!

There's pageantry in showing the starving poor and illiterate that we are a super economy, although their empty stomachs growl in hunger. There's a flashiness of hugging dictators and despots although such rulers are a threat to our belief in 'people rule' or democracy!

Do we need a Mary Quant?

No, not a fashion designer to showcase once hidden legs, but yes indeed a Gandhi, to show the



**Become a Powerful  
Writer and Speaker!**

Online course of 1 month,  
4 hours a week  
and write like a Professional

- Write a book
- Speak at functions
- Create change around you

Taught by Robert Clements himself.

Just send a thumbs up to +91 9892572883

women upside down by literally saying, "Reveal your true self, don't hide behind all that pompousness!"

A few years earlier, a man from India, had more or less done the same when he got off the ship at London, representing the freedom struggle, dressed in just a piece of khadi! To the fashionably dressed, jacketed, leather booted, stylishly wigged Englishman, it must have come as a royal shock to see this, as Winston Churchill himself said, "a half-naked fakir!"

But just as Mary Quant released women of her generation from the shackles of unwanted lingerie, Gandhiji went much farther as he released a subjugated nation from the iron fetters of colonialism into a freedom that the one point three billion people today believe is their birthright.

And so it is! Unfortunately, just as English women centuries ago found themselves getting wrapped up in finery, our one point three billion are being wrapped up in lies, empty promises, rhetoric's of

people of India, that the one thing that is being cleverly hidden and that needs to be shown off, and guarded with our lives is the very essence of India; The Constitution!

That even as those heavy loops and corsets made an old lady out of a young British one with the weight of her paraphernalia, so also this unnecessary, pomp and pageantry about one religion dominating another and about ancient greatness, be gently kept aside and instead, the rights of every Indian, enshrined so intricately by Dr Ambedkar, who I remember today as I write this piece on his birthday, be what we reveal; our freedoms; the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear..! ©

### 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

# DHYANAVANA

## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY, MYSORE

Affiliated to the Pontifical Institute of Spirituality 'Teresianum', Rome; and St. Philomena's College (Autonomous), Mysore

### SUMMER COURSES - 2023

COURSES AND RETREATS FOR MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS  
FOR - **PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS ANIMATORS/JUBILARIANS**

#### COURSES

April 17 - 22, 2023	-	Leadership and Community Building Skills
April 24 - 29, 2023	-	Re-Visiting the Consecrated Life
May 01 - 06, 2023	-	God Experience through Mystical Prayer
May 08 - 13, 2023	-	Counseling Skills and Human Wholeness
May 15 - 19, 2023	-	Seminar for Teachers (booked)
May 22 - 27, 2023	-	Psycho Spiritual Development

#### RETREATS

March 27 - April 1, 2023	-	Walking with Christ to Calvary
May 01 - 06, 2023	-	The Art of Living the Contemplative Prayer
May 22 - 27, 2023	-	Encounter Jesus in Prayer

### RENEWAL AND FORMATION COURSES FOR WOMEN RELIGIOUS

THE NINE - MONTH DIPLOMA COURSE IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY  
JUNE 25 - MARCH 20

A THREE-MONTH CERTIFICATE COURSE IN SPIRITUALITY OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
JULY - SEPTEMBER

A SIX-MONTH CERTIFICATE COURSE IN SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THROUGH INNER HEALING  
JULY - DECEMBER

A THREE-MONTH CERTIFICATE COURSE IN COMPREHENSIVE BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY  
OCTOBER - DECEMBER

A SIX-MONTH CERTIFICATE COURSE IN HOLISTIC FORMATION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE  
OCTOBER - MARCH

A THREE-MONTH INTENSE CERTIFICATE COURSE IN SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WITH MISSION ORIENTATION  
JANUARY - MARCH

For information and registration, contact the Director / Receptionist / Website

Address: **Rev. Dr. Dominic Vas OCD, Director, DHYANAVANA**

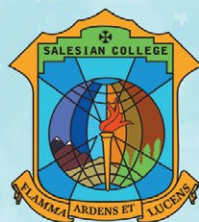
R.S. Naidu Nagar, Mysore - 570 007, Karnataka State, India

Telephone: 0821 - 2492623; Mobile Number: 90086 03388

E-mail: dhyanavana@gmail.com / dhyanavana@yahoo.co.in / dhyanavana@rediffmail.com

Website: www.dhyanavana.com





# Salesian College

(Approved to be Autonomous by North Bengal University)

Siliguri (2009) & Sonada (1938)

A NAAC accredited (twice) 'A' Grade College & UGC certified College with Potential for Excellence (CPE)



## Programmes Offered

For Admission: <https://salesiancollege.ac.in/admission/>

### ARTS & HUMANITIES

MA Education  
MA English  
MA Psychology  
MSW Social Work\*

BA Economics Hons  
BA Education Hons  
BA English Hons  
BA Geography Hons  
BA History Hons  
BA Mass Comm. & Journalism Hons  
BA Philosophy Hons (Sonada Only)  
BA Political Science Hons  
BA Psychology Hons  
BA Sociology Hons  
B. A. Programme  
BA Physical Education (GE)

### PROFESSIONAL COURSES

BCA Honours  
BBA Honours  
Bachelor of Social Work  
(BSW) Honours  
B.Voc Retail Management  
B.Voc Tourism Management

### CAREER ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

Communicative English  
Travel & Tourism Management  
Computer Application  
Sports Management  
Music

### SCIENCE

Computer Science Hons.  
Mathematics Honours  
Economics Honours  
Physics Honours  
Statistics (GE)

### COMMERCE

B. Com Honours  
B. Com Programme

### NCC (GE)

Girls hostel available

\*Applied for

Call / Visit our website for more details:

Siliguri: +91 99334 02478 / +91 90023 02122 | Sonada: +91 75839 20883

Siliguri Campus: Don Bosco Road, Siliguri-734 001, West Bengal, INDIA

Sonada Campus: PO Sonada, Darjeeling-734 209, West Bengal, INDIA

[www.salesiancollege.ac.in](http://www.salesiancollege.ac.in)

