

Indian Currents

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BUILDING BRIDGES

Bharat Jodo, Nafarat Chodo



Uniting India, Rejecting Hate

At a time when the country is witnessing an unprecedented rise in hate-mongering and unleashing an aversion for the 'other' with disastrous results, the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi to unite a 'divided' India marks a new beginning!

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2. (EFS-1) Enhancing Formation Skills (May 7-21)

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3. (ELS-1) Enhancing Leadership Skills (May 27-June 11)

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A YATRA TO KNIT INDIA



The country has seen innumerable Yatras by leaders of all walks of life. One of the most memorable ones in the modern history of India was the famous 24-day Dandi March undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi along with several followers. The historic Yatra in colonial India was to protest against the British who levied steep tax on salt. Though the country has witnessed several more Yatras in the post-independence period, the ongoing *Bharat Jodo Yatra* led by Rahul Gandhi, traversing the heart of several states, stands out for several reasons. At a time when the country is witnessing an unprecedented rise in hate-mongering and unleashing an aversion for the 'other' with disastrous results, the Yatra to unite a 'divided' India marks a new beginning. Its avowed objective of maintaining peace and harmony sends out a soothing message to the masses.

One may make derisive comments on Rahul Gandhi for his omissions and commissions as the party's leader; but none can ignore the relevance and significance of the journey he is leading, raising unprecedented enthusiasm in both cities and villages. There are no political speeches hurling accusations against anyone; there is no slogan-shouting denigrating the rivals; there are no false promises to raise hopes among the people; there are no posters and banners demeaning the opponents. The focus is on sending out the message of unity and harmony among people of diverse castes, religions, regions and languages; the objective is to bridge bridges among people who have been fed with communal poison and pitted against one another; the target is to defend the values of equality, fraternity, federalism and pluralism which have come under pressure since the present dispensation at the Centre came to power.

The *yatra* gives a new direction to political parties that shamelessly use every opportunity to politicise issues. They see even the worst human tragedies with an eye to garner votes. It is opportune to recall two incidents to put the issue in the right perspective. When a flyover collapsed in West Bengal, which coincided with the last elections to the Assembly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party saw it as an 'act of fraud' and made Mamata Banerjee government responsible for it. But the party and Modi have not uttered one word against the Gujarat government on the recent Morbi bridge collapse though reports suggest that the bridge was opened without even fitness certificate and it happened due to corrupt practices at several levels. Echoing the spirit of the *Bharat Jodo Yatra*, Rahul Gandhi, instead of reacting politically, saw it as a human tragedy which saddens everyone. It is this spirit of approaching issues humanely that would take the country forward. If the ongoing *yatra* can bring about a change in this direction, that would be its biggest success.

On equal measure, none can dispute the fact that the *yatra* is also meant to resurrect the fading fortunes of the grand old party. As it passes through 12 states covering a distance of 3500 kms, there is hope of reviving a partially moribund party. The continuous enthusiasm witnessed on the *yatra* route, even two months after it started, has enlivened the hopes of the party's rank and file. The Congress seems to have learnt a lesson that negativism alone would not take it anywhere. The positive route taken by the party could be its winning *mantra*.

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

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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POWER QUOTES



The secret to happiness is freedom... And the secret to freedom is courage.

Thucydides

• • •



Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.

Billy Graham

• • •



Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

T. S. Eliot

• • •



I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

Nelson Mandela

• • •



Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye.

Helen Keller

• • •



Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.

C. S. Lewis

• • •



To have courage for whatever comes in life - everything lies in that.

Saint Teresa of Avila

• • •



Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.

Maya Angelou

Bharat Jodo Yatra

A Niche for Rahul Gandhi

BY A.J. PHILIP

When Congress MP Rahul Gandhi announced his decision to go on his Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, many saw it as just bravado. Some claimed that he would chicken out after he trekked a few hundred kilometres. Some others thought that he would find an excuse to terminate his Yatra before it reached anywhere near Mumbai, forget Srinagar, his ultimate destination.

The most distressed were the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) who did not know how to respond to his Yatra. When the Yatra entered Kerala from Tamil Nadu, the CPM unleashed the propaganda that he spent more time in Kerala than in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. They forgot for a while that Kerala was much more length-wise than width-wise.

His detractors were stunned by the response he



evoked in all the places through which he passed. Lakhs of men, women and children waited for hours to cheer him as he and his Yatris passed through their areas on foot. Some of them took pride in joining hands with Rahul as he steadily and silently moved on preaching love and brotherhood.

The BJP hoped against hope that he would not be able to attract any crowd when he left the comfort zone of Kerala, where the Congress still has its roots. Despite the fact that the BJP is ruling Karnataka, tens of thousands of people gathered wherever Rahul stopped. The BJP leaders were shocked that he could inspire so much confidence among the common people.

For once, Rahul did not preach anywhere. Rather, he used the journey to listen to the people, more to empathise with them than to solve their problems. Those who know counselling know that lending an



Rahul Gandhi with children running



Rahul Gandhi with mother of Rohith Vemula

ear to a person in distress is in itself counselling. That is what yesteryear's Naxalite and founder of Anweshi K. Ajitha said while addressing Kerala Club in New Delhi on her NGO's work.

Again, the BJP thought that Rahul would be exposed when he entered Andhra Pradesh, once the Congress Party's citadel. They wanted to see him walking forlorn with his fellow walkers. Surprisingly, he received a huge response from the people of Andhra Pradesh too. The trend continues as he traverses Telangana. He is assured of massive crowds when he enters Maharashtra and continues his onward journey.

Only once or twice he disrupted the walk either to pay tributes to a departed leader or to attend an urgent meeting of the Congress in New Delhi. He follows a strict regimen. At one place in Telangana, he surprised school students when he virtually defeated them in an impromptu race.

If there is any yardstick to measure his growth as a walker, it is the length of his beard. It is at best a conjecture how long the beard would be when he reaches Srinagar. Anyway, nobody harbours any doubt about his ability to complete the Yatra. If he is able to complete it, he will be the first Indian political leader to do so. Of course, one does not forget the Bharat Yatra that former Young Turk Chandra Shekhar undertook.

He was able to complete the Yatra which terminated in New Delhi but it did not enthuse the people because he would often break the journey and return to the road only after long breaks. In short, continuity was not the hallmark of his Yatra. He used the Yatra to collect funds which he used to buy a large plot of land near Sohna in Haryana. People began to call his new house an ashram.

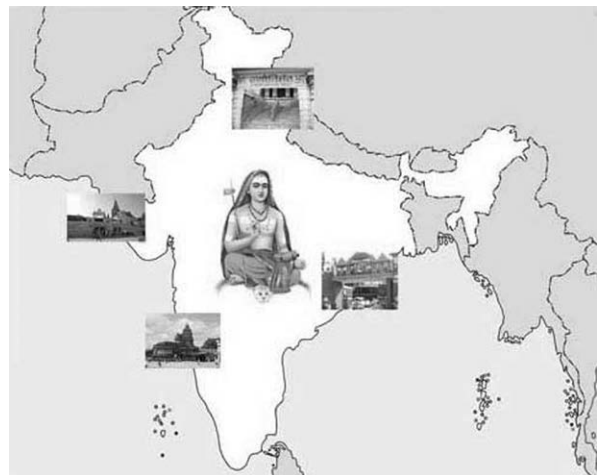
True, Chandra Shekhar became Prime Minister but his prime ministership is remembered not so much for the police allegedly deputed to spy on Rajiv Gandhi as for the national shame he caused when he allowed a Jumbo Jet carrying gold bars, used as reserves and kept in the Reserve Bank vaults, to leave for London to resuscitate the rupee against the dollar and the pound. Nothing was more shameful than the sight of the plane about to leave for London.

There is only one comparable journey that anyone undertook. This happened in the eighth century when Adi Sankara went on what is known as his Dig Vijay Yatra. He visited the four corners of the country to set up his Mutts. They are Badrikashram Jyotirpeeth in the north, Dwarka's Shardha Peeth in the west, Govardhan Peetha in Puri in the east, and Sringeri Sharada Peetham in Chikkamagalur district, Karnataka.

Adi Sankara is also believed to have visited Mahishi in Bihar and Srinagar in Kashmir. Since he had divine powers that enabled him to enter the body of a dog to experience the pleasure of sex to continue his disputation with Mandan Mishra, it is difficult to believe that he walked all the way to all those places where roads were almost non-existent.

In any case, all comparisons are odious. One thing is very clear. The Bharat Jodo Yatra has done a lot to refurbish the image of Rahul. Many have begun to see him in a good light. A few years ago when he jumped into the sea and dived deep, many realised that he was an aquatic champion who had the requisite qualification to do aquatic acrobatics. There is nothing strange about it.

Ask any pilot and he would tell you how difficult the routine medical tests are to renew the pilot's



licence. One of them asked me a bit angrily why he should jump from a certain height to prove that he is physically fit. I am sure Rahul's father and former Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, who was a licensed commercial pilot, would have followed a strict physical regimen to remain a pilot.

Whatever be the case, I have seen a photograph of his great grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, doing Shirshasana (standing on head), called the king of asanas. My paternal uncle used to do it at home almost every day. In short, yoga and asanas run deep in the veins of the Nehru clan.

A politician is measured for his qualities of both head and heart. During the last elections in West Bengal, a flyover under construction in Kolkata collapsed. One evening I was on social media when I saw a video which had just been uploaded. It showed a flyover under construction at Gurgaon collapsing. I took a screenshot and did a post on Facebook within minutes.

Why I took interest in the collapse was because I used to see the construction on the way to Gusbethi in Haryana where Deepalaya, of which I was the Chief Executive, had a school. The incident happened in Haryana, ruled by the BJP. The bridge was being constructed by the National Highway Authority of India, a Central government undertaking. The failure was that of the Modi government.

It was an accident, a failure of the engineers. No Opposition party blamed Modi for the mishap. But that was not the case in West Bengal. Narendra Modi was quick in fixing the responsibility on the Trinamool Congress government. He said the bridge collapse was a warning given by God. He did

A manager of the company that renovated the Morbi bridge said that the disaster was an “act of God”. It was the same argument Modi used against Mamata Banerjee

not mention which god. The collapse implied that the whole state would be destroyed if Trinamool Congress continued to rule the state.

When I saw this video, I wondered how Modi could plummet to such low depths. Gujarat will go to polls in December next. Rahul could have taken the government to task for its failure to avert the tragedy. Instead, he said he did not want to take any political mileage from the tragedy. He saw it as a tragedy, unlike Modi.

What happened in Morbi in Gujarat on Sunday last was shocking. It was a suspension bridge built in 1887 by the local ruler. The contract for renovating the bridge was given to Oreva, a clock manufacturer. The company did not have any experience of undertaking the job. So, what it did was to engage another company as a subcontractor. In doing so, both companies wanted to cut corners. So, what they did was to do some painting work. The cables, nuts and bolts which were rusting away remained while the bridge was opened to the public. They did not obtain a fitness certificate from the authorities concerned.

As many as 400 people were on the bridge when the cables broke plunging all of them into the river. At the time of writing this, as many as 135 were dead with many injured, some of them still in hospital. The municipal authorities did not follow any of the standard procedures while giving contract to Oreva. Had someone checked the renovation work, the accident could have been averted. Yet, what did Oreva tell the court hearing the case?

A manager of the company that renovated the Morbi bridge said that the disaster was an “act of God”. It was the same argument Modi used against Mamata Banerjee. He is not the first one to do so. A few years ago, when an earthquake struck Nepal, some BJP leaders blamed Rahul Gandhi for the calamity. His fault? “A beef-eater like him had visited Nepal.” When an earthquake hit Uttarakhand, the





same forces blamed the same leader because he had visited the state.

Yet, none of the leaders was reprimanded. One BJP leader from Kerala tweeted that it was the presence of Christian missionaries in Nepal that caused the earthquake. When the likes of him rule the country, what else can be expected? Few know how Dr Rajendra Prasad became a top Congress leader worthy enough to be chosen as the first President of India.

A devastating earthquake hit Bihar and Nepal with Munger as the epicenter. A committee with Rajendra Prasad as chairman was constituted to provide relief to the earthquake-hit. This was in 1934. He did a wonderful job and he became the tallest Congress leader from Bihar. Mahatma Gandhi saw the earthquake differently.

He saw it as a God's punishment for treating the "Harijans", a term he used for the Scheduled Castes, as "untouchables". It was an irrational and unscientific statement for a leader of his calibre to make. He, perhaps, did not know that there was a group of Scheduled Castes in Kerala who were even treated as "unseeable".

Rabindranath Tagore objected to his statement and wrote a letter to Gandhi asking him to publish it in his journal Harijan. He exposed the ridiculousness of linking ethical issues with cosmic happenings. Gandhi had to publish the Bard of Santiniketan's letter. In a round-about manner he admitted his folly while claiming that it was his personal belief.

Rahul's response to the Morbi disaster showed

that human considerations were above political considerations. Of course, not everyone can appreciate the goodness of another. Those who wear a yellow spectacle would see everything only in a yellow shade.

There is little doubt that the Bharat Jodo Yatra has evoked a good response from the people at large. Rahul has emerged as the tallest Congress leader. Few have the guts or the stamina or the charisma to undertake such a journey. It is a different matter whether the Congress would be able to use the gains of the Yatra for the electoral advantage of the party.

Electoral victories and defeats depend on various factors like the electoral alliances that a party forges. The BJP had invested heavily into perpetuating the myth that Rahul was an idiot. He has never even once shied away from meeting the media and answering whatever questions they had to ask him. It is now eight years since Modi became Prime Minister but he is yet to address the media.

When his teleprompter conked out while he was addressing an international gathering at Davos, he could not even say one sentence by way of concluding his speech. Yet, the irony is that Narendra Modi is considered a great communicator, while Rahul Gandhi who has been walking with the common people from dawn to dusk every day for the last so many weeks is called a Pappu. What an irony! ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AJ PHILIP is a citizen journalist and social worker. He can be reached at: ajphilip@gmail.com

BJP finding it difficult to criticize Rahul Gandhi now: Harish Rawat

Bharat Jodo Yatra has completed two months. Party chief Mallikarjun Kharge said the *yatra* is bringing about a silent revolution that will change the political landscape. **Anju Grover** for *Indian Currents* spoke to veteran Congress leader and former Uttarakhand Chief Minister **Harish Rawat** to understand how the *yatra* will benefit the party politically and help it reconnect with the masses.

Q Bharat Jodo yatra has completed two months. How has been the public response to it?

A We are overwhelmed by the tremendous response to Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi. People have not seen a *yatra* of such a scale in several decades. They consider it as a *tapasya* and Rahul Gandhi as *tapasvi*. The idea of holding such a *yatra* had come up at the Udaipur *chintan shivar* and the objectives were well defined for it. The *yatra* is more for creating *Sadbhavana* and unity and brotherhood among people. Some political parties and organisations have been spreading hatred on religious, caste and linguistic lines which is not conducive for the progress, development and unity of our country.

Q According to you, what are the issues this yatra has highlighted.

A The BJP and the Sangh Parivar have changed the format of public life. In the name of cultural nationalism, they are trying to influence the mind of a section against another section of the society. Issues like Mandir-Masjid, Kabristan-Shamshan play a key role in electoral politics. Congress has always rejected these issues and on the contrary promoted pluralism, secularism, democracy and development of the entire country.

Q How will Bharat Jodo Yatra help in improving Congress prospects in the upcoming Assembly elections and general elections in 2024.

A We are confident that the prospects of Congress in the coming state elections will improve tremen-



dously because of the response from people. There is a public demand in Uttarakhand to hold *yatra* now. The state unit has decided to hold *yatra* and I will be part of it.

Q There has been some heartburn over the yatra from within the Congress rank and file too. Your opinion.

A The Yatra has changed the perception of public life. That will help the party in improving the electoral prospects in all states. In fact, BJP is finding it difficult to criticise Rahul Gandhi now. BJP-led social media trolls have become jobless because they can't find fault in him.

Q The Bharat Jodo Yatra could build bridges to close the communication gap. Your views?

A History has shown that *padayatras* have changed the scenario of the country. Yatras led by Gandhiji and other leaders were politically oriented. But Bharat Jodo Yatra is not politically oriented but it may help Congress gain politically. It is true that we have lost our connect with the poor, the downtrodden, and minorities in the past few years. Earlier, a Congress worker used to work like a social worker but not anymore. Now a Congress worker is a political worker. It is time to reinvent our old recognition now.

Q The idea of Congress-mukt bharat is being pushed by some political parties. How do you see it?

A The idea of Congress-mukt bharat is disgraceful. It is against democratic principles of Indian Constitution which promotes multi-party system in the country. Congress will continue to fight for the continuation of multi-party system. The yatra will reinforce the fact that Congress is a leading party of the country.

Q How would you see party under Mallikarjun Kharge? Will he get free hand to run the party?

A The one-hundred-and-thirty-six-year-old party has been led by non-Gandhi leaders several times

before and after independence. P V Narsimha Rao was a successful party president. Kharge has a long 55 years' experience in public life. Besides, he has a rich experience in legislative matters and administration which he would use to run the grand old party.

Q Groupism, dissent, etc. have marred your party's prospects. Rajasthan is the latest example. Your views.

A There are many senior leaders from Rajasthan who will be able to resolve the issue. Under the leadership of Mr Kharge, the issue will be resolved amicably. Congress is a democratic party where people are allowed to express their views. Once the decision is taken, it is accepted by all of us. **C**

Indian priest stabbed in Ireland

A Catholic priest from India is recovering in a hospital in Ireland after an intruder broke into his residence and stabbed him on October 30. Father Bobit Augusthy was attacked at around 9:30 am at Waterford in the Republic of Ireland.



The property is located in the grounds of Waterford Regional Hospital where Father Augusthy is a chaplain and he was rushed for treatment and remains in a serious condition.

It is understood that the priest, who is originally from India and a member of the Order of St Camillus, was attacked when he came upon the intruder in the home he shares with two other priests. Local parish priest Father Liam Power, who knows the victim, said: "I was really shocked to hear it.

"The chaplains there are always on call for the sick and it's just tragic that this should happen.

"We're praying for his recovery and offering our prayers to his colleagues Fr Russell and Fr John. "All three of them do excellent work in the hospital and the chapel there.

"It's quite shocking that a priest can be exposed to such danger."

Last night Irish police said the victim, who is in his 30s, was in a serious but stable condition in hospital.

Anthony Sweeney, 22, from O'Connell Court, Penrose Lane, Waterford City, is charged with assault causing harm to the priest at the cleric's residence on the grounds of University Hospital Waterford in Ardkeen. Sweeney "scaled a wall"

from the neighbouring psychiatric hospital ward and gained access to the nearby chaplains' house, where three priests live, the special court sitting yesterday heard.

Once inside the house, he allegedly armed himself with a peeling knife from the kitchen and went upstairs. He met the priest coming from the bathroom who he "stabbed six times" in the face, head and four times in the back, the court heard. Police officers said the "violent attack" was interrupted by another priest in the house. He said CCTV showed the man fleeing the house two minutes after the priest was stabbed at 9.16am.

He was being detained under Section 4 of the Criminal Justice Act and can be quizzed for up to 24 hours.

Fr Bobit has been living in Ireland for some time and along with his colleagues Fr Russell and Fr John, works in the hospital and runs the chapel there. **C**

(Source: Irish Mirror)

Rahul's Journey to the Heart of India

“With hatred elections may be won, but problems of people cannot be solved.” Hence it is important to convey the message of harmony to the people

BY **VARGHESE ALENGADEN**

I was fascinated to know the decision of the Congress party to organise the *Bharat Jodo Yatra* to be led by its leader Rahul Gandhi covering 3500 kms in 12 states, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in five months.

In the past different people had made *yatras*. Mahatma Gandhi had walked 385 kms from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi to challenge the British empire by breaking the salt law. It was a milestone in the freedom struggle of India.

Many others have also made *yatras* at different times in the past. Lal Krishna Advani made Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya, which benefitted BJP immensely. Later Murali Manohar Joshi undertook another *yatra* from Kanyakumari to Kashmir to



promote the cause of the BJP. They were on vehicles. Before those *yatras*, former Prime Minister Chandrashekar made a long walk from Kanyakumari to Delhi.

Bhagwan Ram had made a *yatra* during his exile of 14 years. It is said that Shankaracharya made a *yatra* through the whole country to revive the Hindu religion. Acharya

Vinoba Bhave made a *yatra* throughout India for *Bhoodan Andholan*. He took 13 years to travel 7000 km.

The following factors make *Bharat Jodo Yatra* of Rahul Gandhi different from all these *yatras*. For the first time, anyone is walking a long distance of 3570 km from Kanyakumari to Kashmir for five months at a stretch. There are 170 volunteers from different parts of India, who have opted to walk with Rahul throughout the entire stretch. Lakhs of people are joining the *yatra* in villages and cities.

Congress leaders of each state are walking with Rahul throughout their states. Several members and leaders of other political parties are joining the *yatra*. It was significant that it was flagged off by Mr. M. K. Stalin, the DMK Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, at Kanyakumari. The *Bharat Jodo Yatra* has attracted many social activists, film stars, a large number of youths, journalists and people of all faiths and walks of life.

The determination and purity of intention of Rahul Gandhi are visible in his speeches and body language. The daily schedule of walking starts at 6.00 am and continues till the evening with a break at noon. They walk around 20 to 25 kms daily. Rahul makes use of the breaks to



meet and interact with people from various backgrounds. People share with him their sufferings, pains and aspirations. His compassion and empathy are visible at every time. No other political or religious leaders have received so much affection and love from people as Rahul is receiving. This is reflected in the way people come and embrace him without any inhibition during the walk.

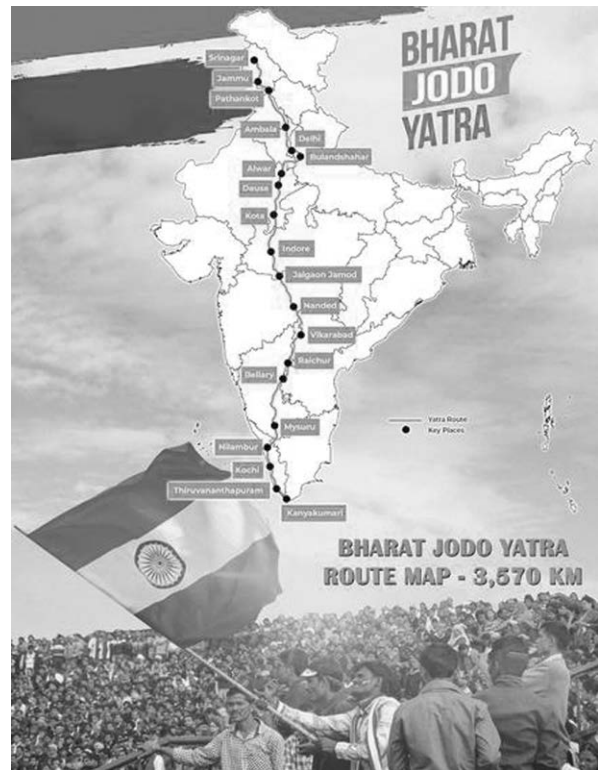
Rahul repeats the purpose of *Bharat Jodo Yatra* to every group. “Yatra is an alternative because opposition parties are not able to express their opinion in the Parliament; Media is controlled; those who dissent are put in prison and harassed by ED and CBI. So, we chose the option to walk and meet people of the country directly and speak to them and listen to them. No one can stop us from this yatra.”

Indomitability of Rahul and the commitment of people were visible when he continued his address in the pouring rain in Karnataka. Thousands of people who were listening to him also braved the heavy rain without moving from the open place where they stood.

Rahul says that *Bharat Jodo Yatra* is the voice of Hindustan. “In this yatra no one asks about any one’s religion, caste or any such petty identities. This is wonderful India; India of peace and India of brotherhood. This yatra is to protect the Constitution. *Tiranga* without the Constitution is of no value.”

While interacting with people, Rahul made many spiritually insightful statements. “When we have suffered much pain and violence we cannot hate any one because we understand what it means to suffer pain and violence. I have experienced much pain when my father and grand mother were murdered violently,” shared Rahul. This is the spirituality which most people fail to understand and practice. Such people shout for revenge and hatred. They forget what Gandhi used to say that ‘only people with courage can forgive’. Rahul repeated in his speeches his intention of building an India of unity with fellowship, equality, love and brotherhood. While watching the *Bharat Jodo Yatra* daily in You Tube, I felt that it is more a spiritual pilgrimage through India than a political action. It is very motivating experience.

At another occasion Rahul said, “In this yatra I am not alone. Lakhs of people are walking with me. Many are not Congress workers. In this yatra you will not see hatred, violence and division. I am strengthened by the presence and love of lakhs of people. I forget my tiredness and pain in their company.”



Many journalists and political analysts are sceptical about the ability of Rahul Gandhi and the impact of *Bharat Jodo Yatra* in winning votes in the election in 2024 and dislodging the BJP. They think that the Congress party cannot be redeemed by this yatra. Rahul has a very realistic view about winning elections: “With hatred elections may be won, but problems of people cannot be solved.”

A vast majority of people consider winning elections is the proof of leadership. Democracy is not elections alone. It is important to understand the ability of common people for critical thinking. When people have not received democratic education, they will be led by propaganda. They can be easily purchased by those who have money and muscle power. Leaders with morals and ethics may not win elections. But they remain moral leaders who act as the conscience of the society.

Rahul repeatedly speaks of the failures of the Modi Government with facts. Narendra Modi and BJP win elections by embracing corporates and controlling the media. Despite getting a brute majority at the Centre and in many states, Modi has not fulfilled any of his promises for the welfare of the common people. People are suffering due to the high price of cooking gas, petrol and diesel. Demonetisa-



tion and wrong implementation of GST put millions of people out of jobs. While small and medium business people suffer big losses, a handful of big corporations accumulate their wealth.

Rahul is fearless in criticising the fascist ideology of Hindutva promoted by BJP governments. He is crystal clear about promoting the socialist, secular and democratic ideology as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Everywhere he repeats his vision of an India with unity, love, forgiveness and justice for all. He is acting as the conscience of the nation.

The spirituality of Rahul Gandhi was expressed when he was addressing the media in Telangana during his yatra. While answering to a journalist he revealed the reason for the hatred, violence and aggression of the BJP-RSS people. Referring to the works and ideologies of Savarkar and Golwalkar, he said that the BJP and RSS people are full of fear. Their fear makes them aggressive and violent. Taking lessons from Mahatma Gandhi he said, “hatred comes from fear. Cowards propagate violence and hatred against the other”.

Why does Narendra Modi keep the media away and not face the media? He appears very courageous externally with many levels of security cover but he may be the one who suffers maximum fear. The ministers who want to have more and more security cover should learn from the courage of Mahatma Gandhi who rejected any security around him. He did not want police frisking people who came for

Rahul Gandhi is truly a Karma Yogi wedded to a mission of uniting India by liberating people from hatred, division, injustice and discrimination

his prayer meeting on 30th January 1948 at Birla House. Hence, Naturam Godse could come closer to Gandhiji and assassinate him by shooting. Mahatma Gandhi was the most courageous person to welcome death with the name of Ram on his lips.

Many express concern about the security of Rahul in the midst of a crowd of people. Rahul is one who is least afraid of his security. Mission of meeting maximum people to learn about their problems and pains is his biggest concern. He reminds me of the words of Martin Luther King Jr, “If you have not identified the cause for which you should die, you have no reason to live”. Only a *Karma* yogi led by the spirituality of values can follow this principle. Rahul Gandhi is truly a *Karma* Yogi wedded to a mission of uniting India by liberating people from hatred, division, injustice and discrimination. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VARGHESE ALENGADEN is the Founder of Universal Solidarity Movement, Indore.

'A pilgrimage to India's Soul'

Hate-mongering against Dalits, Tribals and minorities is not a hallucination but a reality. "This has to be countered with the antidote of Bharat Jodo (Unite India)

BY **VARGHESE THECKANATH**

The Bharat Jodo Yatra (March to unite India) is a "tapasya" (spiritual journey) to seek the soul of India at a time of grave crisis, said Rahul Gandhi, who leads the Kanyakumari to Kashmir march, covering 3,500 kilometers.

Mr Gandhi was interacting with leaders of around 45 civil society groups and intellectuals in Hyderabad where the Indian National Congress party leader reached on the 55th day of the yatra.

The ongoing 150-day mass movement where participants walk by foot (padayatra) began on September 7 from Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of the peninsula, and it covered, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh before entering Telangana.

The Yatra started by the Congress Party with the objective of knitting the country together against hatred and divisions has been supported by a large number of independent civil society groups, academics and human rights defenders across religions and castes all over the country.

The interactive session in Hyderabad addressed a wide range of issues such as the reasons for undertaking the yatra, the state of democratic institutions in the country and the economic model in the Modi era. Calling the yatra "a tapasya," Mr Gandhi lamented that every democratic, vigilance and security institution in the country has been converted into ideological instruments to serve exclusive sections.

On the economic front, large-scale extraction of wealth has been happening from ordinary citizens to the advantage of a few. Unless urgent corrective measures are taken in the spirit of the Constitution, there is bound to be a major unrest.

Large-scale coercive forces both of the state and of private players are already in place to quell the dissatisfaction. If this is not stopped in their track, there is bound to be immense suffering by the ordi-



nary people, he said.

Mr Gandhi noted that extensive migration is taking place from impoverished rural areas to cities that have no adequate production capacities to absorb them, turning them into lumpen elements serving a political purpose.

The way to overcome the crisis, he explained, is by people organizing themselves to resist and offer alternatives. He quoted the farmers' strike as an excellent example of how people can organize. In fact, those in power have feet of clay, he said, as their response to the strike manifested.

He talked about his own personal as well as the party's commitment to an inclusive India where all can feel at home and participate in its progress.

The civil society groups put forward several suggestions to save India's democracy and its institutions such as stressing the responsibility of political parties to educate the masses and organize protests against the trend, effective use of the mass media, social media and alternative media, galvanizing the youth, freeing the media from the clutches of corporates and right-wing groups and withdrawal of draconian laws that target human rights defenders, ordinary citizens and opposition parties.

The meeting urged political parties to take a clear stand on communalization and stop playing soft Hindutva. Among those who participated in the interaction were Shantha Sinha, first chairperson of the National Child Rights Protection Commission; G. Vinod, dean of the Law faculty, Osmania University; Susie Tharoor, a writer; and Meera Sanghamitra of the National Alliance of People's Movements.

In reply to Ram Manohar Reddy, former editor of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mr. Gandhi said hate-mongering against Dalits, Tribals and minorities is not a hallucination but a reality. "This has to be countered with the antidote of Bharat Jodo (Unite India)," the Congress leader said. ☐

Rape laws: Walk the Talk

Elected representatives have been garnering votes in the name of promoting women's safety. However, rape cases continue to rise due to indifferent attitude of the authorities

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

A decade is almost over since the 23-year-old physiotherapist was brutally gang-raped inside a moving bus on December 16, 2012 in Delhi. Two weeks later, she died in a hospital in Singapore. Yes, in another month, Nirbhaya case will be 10 years' old. The incident led to a huge public outcry. People took to the streets, protesting and mourning the death of the girl, who was named Nirbhaya (the fearless). Pressure from all corners forced the government to make several amendments in the laws relating to sexual offences.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 came into existence. The definition of rape was widened and it was made a non-bailable offence. The jail term for most sexual assaults was increased. Not only



this, but provision of death penalty was also created in cases where the rape caused the death of the victim or left her in a vegetative state.

Fast-track courts were set up for speedy trial of rape cases under the Indian Penal Code. However, despite these courts, rape victims continue to be harassed. The conviction rate continues to remain low. Even in Nirbhaya's case, the fast-track court convicted the accused in less than nine months and four adult convicts were sentenced to death in less-than one month. However, the cumbersome procedures in the higher courts delayed the execution of the sentence.

A part of the legal reforms made the denial of medical treatment to the rape survivor a punisha-



ble offence under Section 166B of the Indian Penal Code with an imprisonment of one year. Not only this, the Ministry of Health and Family welfare issued new guidelines in 2014 for standardisation of forensic tests for establishing rape. Yet, the controversial two-finger test continues to harass the rape victims, violating their privacy, stigmatising them and subjecting them to judgements by people, who have set their own definition of establishing rape.

Last week, the Supreme Court came down heavily upon this practice of conducting the two-finger test. Now, what is this two-finger test? It is a test involving insertion of two fingers into the woman's vagina to assess the "laxity of vaginal muscle and examine the hymen".

Imagine the rape victim, who is already going through pain and trauma! She is subjected to such a test. The test is done to establish whether the rape victim is sexually active or not. The practice is called per-vaginal examination in medical terminology. It is not only conducted on rape survivors but also otherwise. Unfortunately, whether the victim is sexually active or not has no bearing on her being raped. After all, consent is all that matters to establish rape.

It is a fact that a hymen can be torn and its orifice may vary in size for reasons other than sex. The two-finger test is based on the belief that a torn hymen indicates a sexually-habituated woman and, therefore, cannot be raped! Or the victim is making false claims of rape!

Calling the test as "patriarchal and sexist in assumption", the two-judge bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and Hima Kohli held that the test should be banned and those found to be conducting it shall be held guilty of professional misconduct. The court also restored the conviction of the man who raped and murdered a minor girl in Jharkhand in November 2004. The girl was set on fire, as she tried to save herself from the sexual assault. During the examination, she was subjected to a two-finger test.

"Rape survivors are entitled to legal recourse that does not re-traumatize them or violate their physical or mental integrity and dignity."



The court held that whether a woman is 'habituated to sexual intercourse' or 'habitual to sexual intercourse' is irrelevant for the purposes of determining whether the ingredients of Section 375 (rape) of the IPC are present in a particular case. "It is patriarchal and sexist to suggest that a woman cannot be believed when she states that she was raped, merely for the reason that she is sexually active".

Well, this is not the first time that the court has banned this test. In fact, immediately after the Nirbhaya case, in 2013, in the case of Lillu & Rajesh vs State of Haryana, the test was banned. While referring to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 and the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power 1985, the court held that "rape survivors are entitled to legal recourse that does not re-traumatize them or violate their physical or mental integrity and dignity."

The veracity of the two-finger test was questioned in several cases even before 2013. The Justice Verma Committee constituted after the Nirbhaya case too had given recommendations for scrapping the two-finger test. Consequently, the government amended the medical guidelines and recommended using rape test kits for collecting forensic evidence. These kits include sterile swabs and syringes and are based on WHO guidelines.

However, these guidelines are recommendatory in nature. They are not legally binding. Media reports suggest that only a few states have started using these kits. In the absence of these kits, two-finger tests are being conducted, violating the privacy and dignity of the rape victim. Not only this, many medical doctors and police personnel are even not aware



How can we expect a safe environment for women? No wonder, imposing death penalty, did not bring the kind of results that were expected. Rape cases continue to rise so is the indifferent attitude of the authorities towards rape victims

about the existence of such kits nor have they been given adequate training to administer these kits.

In an incident in the Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh in March, the rape victim was asked to buy rape kit herself, eight months after she was raped! In fact, the victim's family had to run from pillar to post to get the rape kit, which was available at the nearby Community Health Centre. The medical doctor available at the community health centre, initially refused to conduct the test, simply because his duty hours were over.

The family was asked to buy the kit from the CHC for Rs. 1200. Ultimately, the village Pradhan helped them in buying the same kit for half the price. After the examination, the doctor demanded Rs. 500 as his consultancy charges. Not only this, the ward boy wanted Rs. 200 as his seva. The incident shows the sheer apathy of the authorities concerned towards a minor girl, who was raped.

Eight months after the rape, what kind of purpose the rape kit would have served to establish rape? This is just one incident. Every time a woman is raped, the victim is blamed for the heinous crime that a man or a group of men commits in an act to satiate his/their sexual desire.

We as a country have come a long way as far as laws relating to rape are concerned. In fact, a recent ruling has also given a right to get the foetus aborted, in case a married woman becomes pregnant because of marital rape.

Unfortunately, most of these legal provisions remain on paper. They are hardly implemented in

letter and spirit. No wonder, crime against women is on the rise. Our medical curriculum continues to propagate old techniques and methods. But who cares?

The Nirbhaya fund that was created to support rape victims, enforce legal provisions, implement projects for promoting women safety, has met with the same apathy as the rape victims are subjected to. The fund has been used for constructing routine infrastructural requirements under various ministries. Earlier this year, a parliamentary panel noted that out of the allocated funds of Rs. 9,549 crore, only Rs. 4,241 crores were released and Rs. 2989 crores were utilised, that too for purposes other than what it was formed. Interestingly, a significant portion of the earlier allocations went to the Union Home Ministry, of which only 9 percent was actually utilised!

How can we expect a safe environment for women? No wonder, imposing death penalty, did not bring the kind of results that were expected. Rape cases continue to rise so is the indifferent attitude of the authorities towards rape victims.

Our elected representatives have been garnering votes in the name of promoting women's safety and protecting their dignity. It is high time to walk the talk. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ICPA Journalism Award for John Dayal



John Dayal

The Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) will honour noted journalist, writer and human rights activist John Dayal by conferring its prestigious annual Louis Careno Award for Excellence in Journalism for his bold, continuous and consistent writing against communalism and fundamentalism gaining ground globally.

The award will be conferred on Dayal during the 27th National Convention of Christian Journalists, organized by the ICPA, scheduled to be held in Chennai on December 10, according to a press statement issued by Ignatius Gonsalves, ICPA president and Suresh Mathew, secretary.

"Dayal, a prophet of our times, is among India's foremost voices against human rights violations, particularly the persecution of religious minorities, having been a writer and activist for over four decades," the press note reads.

He has been a member of several government bodies including the National Integration Council; he has held senior roles in numerous non-government organizations and networks, including as co-founder and Secretary General of the All India Christian Council (1999-2014), national president of the 1919-founded All India Catholic Union between

2004 and 2008, and a member of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).

He has a distinguished career in the media and academia. He has a long record of investigating and producing substantive and influential documents on communal violence in India, including Hindu-Muslim riots and violence against Sikhs, Muslims and Christians.

He is one of India's leading experts on the situation in Odisha, following the communal violence in 2008.

He has authored and contributed to several books, and regularly writes articles on human rights issues in India. Major books he has authored, co-authored, or edited include *For Reasons of State – Delhi Under the Emergency* [1977], republished by Penguin in June 2018; *Gujarat 2002 – Told and Untold Stories* [2002]; *A Matter of Equity* [2007]; *Reconciliations: A Journey Through Wounded India* [with Harsh Mander and Natasha Badhwar, Amazon, 2018]. He has contributed to several books published in India and Europe.

He served as a war correspondent and foreign correspondent in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Europe. He became editor and CEO of the Delhi Midday and treasurer of the Editors' Guild of India. He continues to provide commentary and analysis in print and on national TV and radio.

His incisive writings on political issues have led to soul-searching debates in civil society and the secular world. He minces no words in raising his voice against irrational, biased, and unfair policies and decisions of governments of all times.

The Louis Careno Award for Excellence in Journalism, conferred annually to individuals or institutions, is a joint venture of the Mumbai Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the ICPA, a premier organization of Catholic journalists, dailies, and periodicals in India founded in 1964 by Father John Barrett, an American Jesuit belonging to the Patna Province.

"Thank you, dear friends, for the warmth of your congratulations on the prestigious ICPA award," Dayal told RVA News.

"Awards as heavy as this are also a subtle hint that it is time to retreat into the shadows so that newer

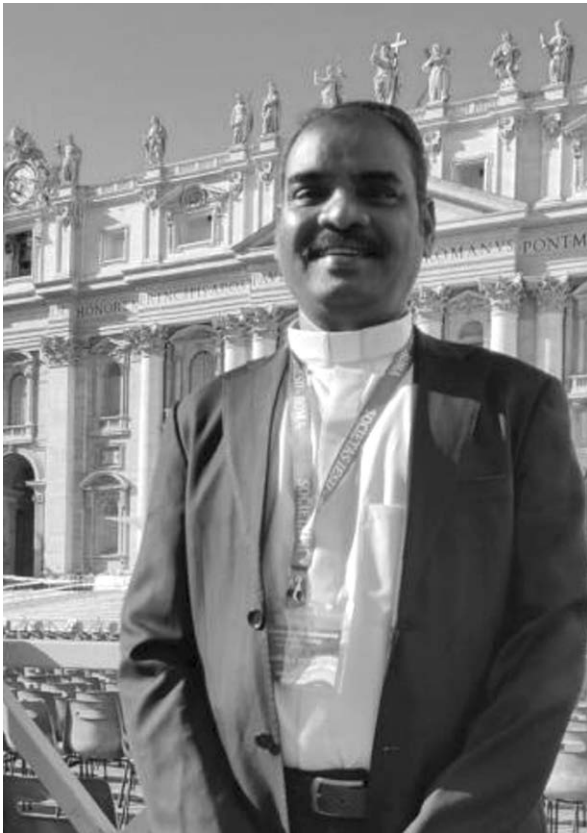
generations can be encouraged to rekindle journalism that helps protect and nurture, when possible, the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized," he added.

"Awards reflect the warmth of colleagues and comrades engaged in the same work. That is what one cherishes, and it is humbling.

"For me, the award had meaning because the profession faces great challenges from the outside and from within. The crisis in The Wire, fake news, arrest of young journalists, and right-wing trolls calling truth-tellers anti-nationals are the new landscape in which reporters have to work. It is not surprising that so few are writing about the human condition, and even fewer are writing about religious minorities and Dalits," Dayal said.

Award for Irudaya Jothi

ICPA also announced two other awards: the ICPA Award for the Best Reportage on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the Swami Deva-



Father Irudaya Jothi is the recipient of the ICPA Award for "Best Reportage on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)

nand Chakkungal Award for Hindi Literature.

Father Irudaya Jothi is the recipient of the ICPA Award for Best Reportage on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The award, sponsored by the CBCI Office for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, goes to Father Jothi "for authentically and consistently being the voice of people's rights, especially the poor Dalits who are susceptible to exploitation and injustice."

He is a Catholic priest-journalist-activist, belonging to the Society of Jesus, and has been regularly contributing to major national and international news portals, especially on Dalit issues.

"Through the power of reporting and storytelling, Jothi amplifies various aspects of Dalits who have been sidelined by the elite, powerful, and societal structures," ICPA said.

"He has been a compassionate social worker, human rights activist, and journalist for over a decade. His deep sense of love and concern for Dalits, tribals, and the poor have been outstanding. He champions the issues and rights of the marginalized communities, particularly tribals, Dalits, and other vulnerable communities on the periphery," ICPA added.

What stands out about him as a journalist is his deep involvement in the issues of Tribals and Dalits. He critically analyzes the deeper aspects of Dalits and Tribals' exploitation, subjugation, and injustice, which they face on many fronts. He is not afraid to speak the truth and is frequently heard calling for transparency and accountability.

His sincerity and perseverance in highlighting the rights of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes show grit, courage, and conviction. His writings showcase the hopes and resilience that deprived people and communities show despite many challenges, deprivations, and exploitations.

"I am delighted to be honoured in the field of journalism. I am a grassroots worker focused on the empowerment of SCs/STs, migrants, and refugees as my 'optioned' group," he told RVA News.

"The 'optioned' people are continuously being exploited, kept vulnerable, and powerless, and are forced to survive as a mute vote bank, and this honour affirms my stand and encourages me to be their voice, come what may," he added.

"I was encouraged to share their joys and struggles, agonies, aspirations, and hopes through stories for a wider readership," he added.



Sr. Ganga Rawat

Sr. Ganga Rawat Honoured

Sister Ganga Rawat, SSpS, is the winner of the ICPA Award for Hindi Literature. She is a Catholic nun belonging to the Holy Spirit Congregation based in Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

She has been chosen for the Swami Devanand Chakkungal award for Hindi literature, instituted by the ICPA and sponsored by the Society of Divine Word Congregation, Indore.

Sister Ganga has been using her pen to make the Word of God known to Hindi readers through her writings. She regularly writes articles and poems on social issues, particularly women, girl children, family, and values, which are published in various magazines and newspapers.

She has also contributed opinion pieces and news stories to secular Hindi dailies like Patrika and People's Samachar, Free Press, Indore Samachar, Kiran Prabhat, Metro Vaartha, and Aagaz-A-Chandan. ☺

(Courtesy: RVASIA)



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Fraudsters Have a Field Day

It is time to think of disenfranchising politicians who in connivance with cheats and charlatans openly indulge in corruption

BY P. A. CHACKO

It is time the people get awakened to disenfranchise political fraudsters from their privileged positions of power and self-sought glory. Day in and day out, we are fed with statements and pronouncements aimed at whitewashing their misdeeds and cathartic performance.

Take the case of the Morbi bridge collapse in Gujarat on October 30. It happened as the count-down to the Gujarat elections started. Political leaders started passing the buck without owning up responsibility and probably saying it was an act of god, meaning 'an instance of uncontrollable natural forces in operation.'

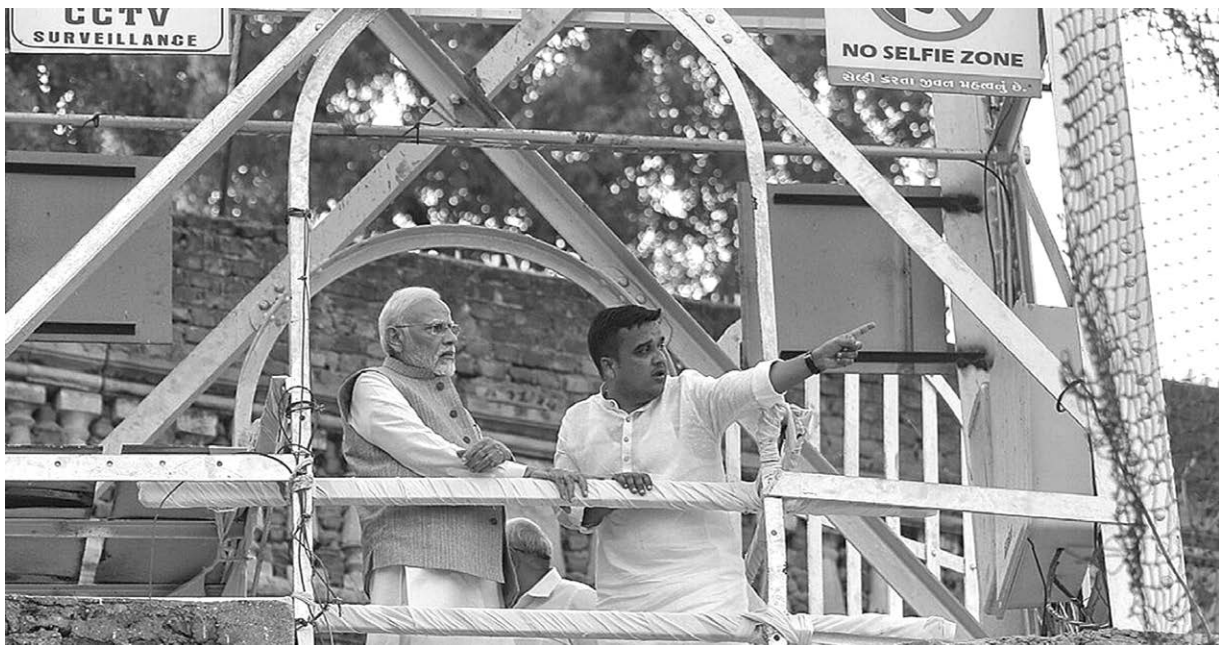
Compare it with the collapse of the Vivekananda Road flyover before the Bengal Assembly elections in 2016. Remember Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pronouncement then: 'It is not an act of God, but an act of fraud.' He was batting for a winning score in



the Bengal election. Not surpassingly, the party under his leadership had to bite the dust in the election. The 'lion of Gir' lost to the 'tigress of Bengal'. It is no wonder the opposition parties are targeting Mr. Modi for not owning up the fraud factor in Morbi

bridge collapse and reminding him of his visceral attack on Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee attributing to her the fraud factor.

The 754-ft-long pedestrian suspension bridge, Jhulta Pul, built over the Machchu river was 137 years old and built during the British era. Such an old bridge should have been sold to a scrap iron dealer and, if needed, make another bridge. Instead, the renovation of the rickety bridge, hailed by the Gujarat government as 'a technological wonder', was entrusted to a company famous for making electrical home appliances. The head of Morbi's civic body alleged that the bridge was opened without fitness



certificate. But the mystery is that the tragedy took place after four days of its opening. Here the question is how could the company keep the bridge open for four days under the very nose of the Municipality without getting clearness certificate?

We have seen iron bridges constructed during the British era collapsing like house of cards in different parts of India because they had outlived their use value. But, with foolhardy sense of devotion to 'old is gold' attitude, our politicians go for quick-fix solutions costing the life of many innocent people. What is revealing is that politicians, who go for such window-dressing operations, show their underperformance, criminal negligence and, possibly, connivance with corrupt elements and business lobbies.

Instead of passing the buck, the political leadership should have owned up the responsibility and made reparations for their criminal negligence. The police administration should have acted honestly to haul up the state minister and his department personnel who gave the contract to a company that could not deliver. Even before clearance certificate was given the bridge was opened. How come that the ever-watchful eye of the police and the state authorities chose to look the other way. Many more such questions are emerging even as over 140 lives are lost and many more missing.

A BBC report questions how such a place, which attracts thousands of tourists, lacked 'safety measures to deal with an emergency; 'How come there were no policemen nearby, no divers and no boats?' The Additional District Magistrate N.K Muchchar's statement was strange: 'We got divers, swim-



mers, ropes, boats and fire services here in ten minutes.'(Quoted by BBC). That is how our officials think. Let the tragedy happen and then we shall look for rescue measures.

During Covid season, many people died like flies and were given sand dune burials. The political responsibility went hiding by believing that the 'act of God' was uncontrollable. It is easy for our politicians to pass the buck. The collusive character of the Morbi bridge contract is becoming evident. Reports say that the Oreva Group (Ajanta Manufacturing Private Ltd.), a domestic appliances manufacturing company, secured repair and maintenance work for a 15-year period. Oreva, in turn, was said to attribute the under-performance to a third party Devprakash Solution. Contractors giving petty contracts and enjoying a backseat drive are very common in India.

Man-made tragedies cannot be swept under the carpet through blame game. The Morbi disaster leaving many dead, many more missing, and many families bereaved is one of the worst tragedies in our independent India. Will our politicians and bureaucrats learn from these disasters rather than keep on making wanton statements to hoodwink people? Such politicians and bureaucrats need to be silenced from their mouthing utter nonsense and stopped from their parading as buffoons in joker's clothing even as tragedies unfold before them. One could say, even with his lavish clothes and glittering displays, the Raja is cat-walking naked! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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



A Call to Become Prophets

The consecrated persons in Religious Life, because of their call to become disciples of Jesus, are obliged to be prophets and champions of justice and truth

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

A prophet is committed to truth and justice in a situation where truth is distorted through spreading falsehood, and justice is denied to people, especially the poor and the marginalized. Rising inequalities, discriminations based on race, caste, religion, gender etc., and misuse and abuse of power are the main reasons for denial of justice. Violation of human rights and genocide are the worst forms of injustice. The consecrated persons, because of their call to become radical disciples of Jesus, are obliged to be prophets and champions of justice and truth.

Jesus was primarily a prophet. There is a huge difference between a devotee of Jesus and a disciple of Jesus. A devotee of Jesus is satisfied with adoring and worshipping Jesus. Devotees promote religiosity based on rituals, devotions, prayers, fasting,



penance, pilgrimage etc. On the contrary, a disciple of Jesus is expected to be a spiritual person who lives the core values taught by Jesus: forgiveness and reconciliation, sensitivity and compassion, justice, non-discrimination and inclusiveness and respect for human dignity and human rights. Prophets,

irrespective of the religion to which they belong, are spiritual persons.

Prophets of the Old and New Testaments were highly spiritual persons and they often denounced religiosity that makes people superstitious and makes religion a business. They spoke passionately about the need for transformation and practising moral and ethical values. Examples are many both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus' fierce criticism against the Jewish religious leaders (Mt. 23: 1-36) was not only a denouncement of religiosity and hypocrisy, but also exploitation of the people in the name of God and religion. Jesus driving away the traders from Jerusalem temple was a strong reaction to commercialization of religion. Jesus declared, "My house will be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers." (Lk.19:46) Another classic text that denounces religiosity and demands doing justice is Amos 5:21-24.

*"I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are stench to me.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and*



Prophets of the Old and New Testaments were highly spiritual persons and they often denounced religiosity that makes people superstitious and makes religion a business

*grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offering,
I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream”.*

Challenges to Prophetic Role

In the context of India today, women and men religious have to face different challenges. The most dangerous challenge to all Indians, especially to the radical disciples of Jesus, today is Hindutva. India is being converted into a Hindu Rashtra: a caste-based

According to A database, 96% of the sedition cases filed against 405 Indians for criticizing political leaders and government over the last decade were registered after the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014

hierarchical and patriarchal society on the pattern of *Manu Smriti*. As Hindutva ideology is exclusive, divisive, discriminatory, toxic and hateful, it is diametrically opposed to the values of the Kingdom of God and the core values of Indian Constitution. Core constitutional values: Secular democracy, Justice, Equality, Liberty, Fraternity and Individual dignity are being destroyed. People are being brainwashed with this divisive ideology. That is why Pew Research in one of its surveys found that 63% of Hindus believe that in order to be an Indian one has to be a Hindu and 59% Hindus believe that to be an Indian one has to speak Hindi.

Democracy is being derailed by reducing the Parliament into a rubber stamp, as crucial Bills like CAA, abrogation of Article 370, the three controversial farm laws were passed without any discussion in the two Houses and any study by Parliament Committees, and without consulting states or



taking feedback from the public. The government has become all powerful without being accountable to the Parliament. Any criticism of the government is not tolerated. Critics are branded as anti-national, Maoists, *Tukde Tukde Gang*. Rampant human rights violations are taking place because of the misuse and abuse of the draconian laws like Unlawful Activities Amendment Act (UAPA), National Security Act (NSA) and Sedition Law.

Hundreds of social activists, political opponents, journalists and student leaders are put behind bars by making use of these draconian laws. Investigating agencies like CBI, National Investigating Agency, and Enforcement Directorate are being used against the opposition party leaders and those who criticize the government and its ideological mentor, the RSS. According to A database, 96% of the sedition cases filed against 405 Indians for criticizing political leaders and government over the last decade were registered after the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014.

The minorities, especially the Muslims, are discriminated, demonized, lynched, publicly flogged and their houses and establishments are bulldozed when they protest against the atrocities committed against them, by the state and non-state actors. For example, the journalists of Article-14.com have documented 85 cases of violence against Muslims by cow vigilantes during 2015-19. Most of these cases of violence resulted in the death of the victims.

Judiciary has become pliable because of the infiltration of majoritarian ideology among the judges, and judges do not have the stamina to resist the



pressure from the Executive. Judiciary often fails to fulfill its tasks. The Supreme Court is sleeping over a few cases that are fundamental to the Constitution of India. For example, petitions challenging CAA, Abrogation of Article 370, Electoral Bonds, bail pleas of those arrested in Bhima Koregaon Case.

Another serious challenge is increasing gender discrimination and rising crimes against Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and women. Crimes against SCs and STs increased by 9.3% & 9.4% respectively, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report 2021. As per the NCRB report released in August 2022, the rate of crime against women, (number of incidents per one lakh population) increased from 56.5% to 64.5% in 2021-2022.

Rising inequalities between the rich and the poor is leading to increase in poverty and it is a great challenge to those who work on the issues of justice. The top 1% and 10% of the population own respectively 33% and 65% of the country's total wealth; the bottom 50% own a meagre 5.9% of the total wealth, according to World Inequality Report 2022 released by World Inequality Lab. The wealth of the top 9 billionaires in India is equal to the wealth of the bottom 50% population. Niti Aayog, using the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), has calculated that 25% of Indians are poor.

As radical disciples of Jesus, are women and men religious aware of the dangerous socio-political changes taking place in India? If they remain indifferent, they are worse than the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In order to fulfil the prophetic role, the religious (consecrated persons) have to cultivate in themselves three qualities: compassion, courage and consistency.

Compassion is the most significant quality of a prophet. Compassion does not mean doing charity out of pity. To have compassion means to empathize with someone who is suffering and to feel compelled to reduce the suffering. What does the Bible say about compassion?

True compassion emanates from the concern and commitment for human dignity. Jesus healed many people because people with dreaded diseases were ostracized from the community and they were treated as untouchables and outcasts. Jesus wanted to restore their human dignity by healing them and reintegrating them with the community.

Courage or fearlessness is another predominant quality of all genuine prophets. They are not afraid of the consequences like suffering, humiliation, isolation, imprisonment and even death. The prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus, are outstanding examples of courage. They were fearless. They chastised the oppressors and the wrongdoers. John the Baptist fearlessly challenged Herod for keeping his brother's wife. For, John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (Mk. 6:18).

A video communication by Fr. Stan Swamy on the eve of his arrest by National Investigation Agency (NIA) demonstrates his courage. "What is happening to me is not something unique happening to me alone. It is a broader process taking place all over the country. We are all aware that prominent intellectuals, activists, writers and student leaders are put in jail because they have raised questions and expressed their dissent with the government. I am happy to be a part of this process, because I am not a silent spectator, I am part of the game. I am happy to pay the price whatever it may be". Truly a prophetic statement. He paid the price by his death.

Consistency is the third quality of a prophet. Prophets never give up. They are not defeated by setbacks; they continue their fight for justice irre-

Are the religious in India today ready to undergo transformation from devotees of Jesus to radical disciples of Jesus and become prophets of justice and truth?

spective of the result of their struggle till the end, as Fr. Stan Swamy did. A dialogue from the Hindi movie Dev based on the 2002 Gujarat riots is very pertinent. Amitabh Bachchan, playing the character of an upright police officer DEV, makes an inspiring statement which every prophet should be able to say.

“Death of a person takes place when he/she fails to oppose injustice wherever he/she sees it taking place. The issue is not whether I succeed or fail. The issue is not whether I live or I am killed. The issue is whether I perform my duty, whether I do it honestly. As a human being, do I fight for truth, for the victory of truth? Whether it is victory or failure, the duty of a warrior is to fight till the last breath, till the last drop of blood. Meaning of life is to always struggle for truth and Justice.”

Three Contemporary Prophets

Fr. Stan Swamy, who had dedicated his life to struggle for justice to the Adivasis of Chotanagpur, saw and experienced the injustice done to the tribals through exploitation, expropriation of their resource and their extermination through displacement. He had compassion for them. He decided to put an end to it by using non-violent means of taking recourse to legal routes and peaceful protests. His various efforts to get justice for Adivasis landed him in jail. The 85-year-old tribal activist who was suffering from various ailments, including Parkinson, was falsely accused in the Bhima-Koregaon case and was incarcerated in prison for 8 months during Covid 19. He died as a victim of Covid 19 while being a detente.

Dr. Sudha Bharadwaj, who was arrested and incarcerated in jail along with Fr. Stan Swamy and 14 other human rights activists, observed the blatant



Sudha Bharadwaj



Stan Swamy

exploitation of workers and denial of human rights of the Adivasis. She had intense compassion for them. She decided to dedicate her life to fight for the cause of workers and the Tribals through their legal empowerment and challenging the mighty corporates and the governments that support them. After being in prison for more than two years, she got bail. But she continues her struggle for the cause of the people to whom justice is denied.

Teesta Setalvad, a journalist-cum-human rights activist, could not tolerate the grave injustice done to the victims of 2002 Gujarat riots by the communal forces with the connivance of the state. She decided to stand with the victims by fighting their cases in various courts. Her relentless efforts resulted in 120 or so convictions in different cases. Despite her arrest in June 2022 and incarceration in jail for about two months, she continues her fight for the rights of victims of 2002 Gujarat riots.

The women and men religious in India have to learn from these activists how to become voices for whom justice is denied and become prophets. All three of them are radical disciples of Jesus, even though two of them are not the members of the Church.

Are the religious in India today ready to undergo transformation from devotees of Jesus to radical disciples of Jesus and become prophets of justice and truth? ©

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Stop Deadly Corruption

One is reminded of an old RK Laxman cartoon. An individual enquires at the information desk in an office as to where he has to give bribe. The ubiquitous Mr Citizen laments, “The reputation of this office is getting from bad to worse. That chap wants to know where to give the bribe”

BY **AARTI**

“Corruption-free India for a developed Nation.” The theme for this year’s Vigilance Awareness Week, observed across the country (October 31 to November 6) needs no further simplification.

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), India’s anti-corruption watchdog, introduced the above practice to coincide with the birthday of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (October 31) since the year 2000.

Gifted with a unique personality, Patel’s integrity as a politician and a leader possessing a very strong will that made him handle all matters with an iron grip made him to be known as the Iron Man of Bharat. He is said to have held the broom against nepotism, corruption, graft and greed whenever he came across and spared no efforts to weed them out ruthlessly. Mahatma Gandhi once wrote in his journal, “Sardar is incorruptible”. In the words of Rajaji (C Rajagopalachari), “Vallabhbhai was born not a day too soon for India. But, alas, he died too soon. India wishes he had not found his rest in the mother’s lap so hurriedly, when he was so much wanted for some time longer.”

The Vigilance Awareness Week aims to make the employees of Government of India, as also those employed in companies, societies and other local authorities owned or controlled by it, aware of the dangers and harm caused by corruption. Workshops and walkathons are organised towards awareness generation. An annual pledge is taken to follow

probity and rule of law in all walks of life; to neither take nor offer bribe; to perform all tasks in an honest and transparent manner; to act in public interest; to lead by example exhibiting integrity in personal behaviour and to report any incident of corruption to the appropriate agency. However, it is laudable that the message of integrity is being extended to all spheres of life including schools and higher educational institutions.

The Prime Minister, too, in his address on the occasion of Vigilance Awareness Week, among others, reportedly advocated that “for a developed India, we have to develop such an administrative ecosystem with zero tolerance on corruption”. He urged the need to devise a way of ranking departments on the basis of pending corruption cases and publish the related reports on a monthly or quarterly basis and added that, “no corrupt person should get political-social support. When you take action with conviction, the whole nation stands with you.”

But what is worrying is that the menace of corruption is rather deadly and India is no exception. More so because, the adverse impact of lack of probity in public life leading to a high degree of corruption is manifold.

Some 64 years back, the Law Commission observed in its fourteenth report that “there is a vast field of administrative action in which the administrative authority may act outside the strict scope of law and propriety without the injured citizen being in a position to obtain effective redress. Administrative power and discretion are vested at different levels of the executive, all the members of which are not endowed with the same level of understanding and strength of character. Where there is power and discretion, there is always the possibility of abuse, more so when the power and discretion have to be exercised in the context of scarcity and controls and pressure to spend public money. The absence of a machinery for appeals other than inside the hierarchy and of a machinery for redress of grievances



contributed to the growth of an impression of arbitrariness on the part of the executive. Consequently, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of peddlers of influence..."

The Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption set up by then Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1962 to suggest ways and means to take remedial action against corruption had noted that, "the anxiety to avoid delay has encouraged the growth of dishonest practices like the system of speed money...a fairly common type of corrupt practice particularly in matters relating to grant of licences, permits, etc. Generally, the bribe giver does not wish, in these cases, to get anything done unlawfully, but wants to speed up the process of the movement of files and communications relating to decisions. Certain sections of the staff concerned are reported to have got into the habit of not doing anything in the matter till they are suitably persuaded."

The CVC, born in 1964 on the recommendations of Santhanam Committee attained statutory status on September 11, 2003 with the enactment of the CVC Act, 2003. The CVC, consisting of a Central Vigilance Commissioner as Chairperson and not more than two Vigilance Commissioners as Members, is empowered to enquire or cause inquiries to be conducted into offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 by certain categories of public servants like Group "A" officers of the Central Government, such level of officers of the corporations established by or under any Central Act, Government companies, societies and other local authorities, owned or controlled by the Central Government, as specified by the Government.

CVC faces a lot of challenges and although its opinion is only advisory, valuable inputs provided therein have helped government departments in decision-making. And over the years, thanks to the efforts of CVC, a sizeable number of public servants are being brought to book and their numbers seem to be growing. That, on an average, every year around 1200-plus of them have been awarded major penalties as well as minor penalties may be tip of the iceberg. But for those slapped with major penalties that include reduction to a lower stage, reduction to a lower time scale, grade, post or service, compulsory retirement, removal and dismissal from service, the writing on wall is clear. Minor penalties like censure, withholding of promotion for a specific



period, recovery from pay whole or part of any pecuniary loss caused to the organisation by his/her negligence etc., reduction to lower stage in time scale and withholding of pension/ increments does adversely impact the wrongdoers.

To cut the story short, can CVC hasten up alleged cases of corruption? According to information laid in Parliament in 2015, a committee set up by CVC to study the existing pattern of prolonged disciplinary proceedings and suggestion for remedial action found that on an average, it takes about 8 years for finalizing a major vigilance case from the date of occurrence of irregularity. So, the need for organisations to prevent corruption in the first place is important.

CVC alone cannot curb corruption. Organisations have to do their bit. Beyond having impressive mission statements, the actual delivery in organisations may be somewhat hampered due to a plethora of reasons including lack of effective governance. Nonetheless, at a macro level there is an imperative need for organisations and those who hold public office uphold trustworthiness in letter and spirit besides display high standards of ethical behaviour, openness and accountability.

At an individual level what kind of person can resist corruption? Studies have shown that individuals are less likely to act in a corrupt way if they are more committed to their moral values. Such values, perceived as "not-for-sale", includes values one holds dear, like integrity, honesty and humility which is seldom compromised even in the face of financial incentives.

For a corruption-free nation, the grievance redressal machinery in organisations needs to be effective as it can provide vital inputs to prevent corruption in the first place. ©

Vizhinjam protests: Catholic priest denies foreign aid allegation

A Catholic priest has vowed to quit priesthood and face any punishment if an allegation is proved that a Church-led protest against seaport project has received foreign fund to destabilize the country.

“Our hands are clean and ready to face any probe,” says Father Theodacious D’Cruz, one of the conveners of the fishermen’s protest against Adani international seaport at Vizhinjam coast in Thiruvananthapuram district in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Hundreds of thousand fishermen and their family members have been protesting against the construction of the private seaport since July 20 after Kerala’s Communist-led government refused to accept their demands for resettlement and rehabilitation. “Our protest has now entered the 105th-day and we are getting good public support, but we are being accused of accepting foreign funds to destabilize the country and its developments,” Father D’Cruz told Matters India on November 1.

The priest was responding to the allegation that Aleyamma Vijayan, the secretary of Sakhi Women’s Resource Centre, received funds for the ongoing coastal protest. She is the wife of A J Vijayan, a trade union leader and a petitioner in the National Green Tribunal against the port project.

Aleyamma has filed a defamation suit against the news channel “News 18” that carried the controversial news. In the petition, she said the organization has been working in human rights since 1996 in Thiruvananthapuram. It is registered as a Public Charitable Trust with a Foreign Contribution Regulation Act registration to receive funds.

“Sakhi’s activities are very transparent. Since it is a registered body under the Indian Trust Act, its income has been audited every year and its income tax returns have been filed promptly,” said Aleyamma in the petition.

She also said Sakhi had received foreign funds for the implementation of the projects done by them and not for the cause of fish workers at Vizhinjam as alleged. The organization has not accepted funds after Covid as they could not conduct field studies. She demanded the channel to tender an apology or pay 10 million rupees in damages.

News 18 had also accused Father D’Cruz of taking 250 million rupees as foreign donation.

“If the channel can prove I have taken 25 paise from any foreign country I will quite my priesthood and undergo any punishment,” he said adding if the channel is not able to prove it “it should provide 3 cent land to each fisherman who lost his house due to the port project and build houses for him.”

He pointed out the funds from overseas received by the Latin archdiocese of Trivandrum are monitored by the Union government and “it takes no time for it to take action against me in case I have taken any foreign funds illegally.” The channel released a video clip of the priest taking contribution from the Latin Catholics working in Dubai claiming that the priest had taken money from Dubai Sheikh.

“It is true that our brothers and sisters working in Dubai had donated 25,000 rupees. Does that mean that we got it from any Sheikh from Dubai?” he asked and challenged the television channel and other media houses to prove the allegations with evidence.

The priest also questioned their logic of a Sheikh from Dubai donating 25,000 rupees.

All these media campaigns “are part of the strategy at the behest of the private firm to undermine the fishermen’s struggle for survival,” Father D’Cruz alleged. Meanwhile, the fisherfolk asserted that they would not give up their protests until their demands are met. The protesting fishermen have been demanding to rehabilitate their fellowmen who lost their house to the seawater after the Adani seaport construction began in 2015, subsidy to kerosene like what is given in neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, house rent to those living in warehouses among their seven demands.

The main dispute, however, between the government and the protesters is their demand to halt the port construction work for three months and order an impartial social impact assessment as they believe since the construction work started they lost their houses and kilometres of their seashore.

The government, on the contrary, agreed to accept all their demands, barring stopping the construction work as it will affect the image of the state. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Franciscans conduct training on good governance, financial management

BY SUJATA JENA

As many as 140 priests and nuns from across India attended a two-day capacity-building training program on finance management in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru.

The participants of the October 29-30 program at National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre represented 20 religious congregations and dioceses. The training aimed to capacitate them on good governance and financial management.

They came from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh. The program was organized by the Association of Franciscan Family in India (AFFI) in collaboration with the Salesian Father Xavier Packiam and his team.

“Every year we organize several national programs for formators, major superiors, social work directors, secretaries, and procurators. Since the pandemic we have extended these programs to international communities, covering more than 43 countries, reaching out to more than forty thousand participants”, said Capuchin Father Nithiya Sagayam, national coordinator of AFFI at the opening of the program.

He welcomed everyone and assured them that the team will provide quality inputs that would lead to the effectiveness and efficiency of good governance and financial management. Father Xavier Packiam, rector and correspondent of Don Bosco Higher Secondary School and Don Bosco School of Excellence, Chennai, along with his team Anthony Selvam, were the key resource persons of the training program.

At the training, the participants learned, about governance and financial management capacity building, income tax department intimations, the latest development of income tax department, e-governance, the latest development of Tax Deduction at Source (TDS), Foreign Contribution Registration Act (FCRA), Employee Provident Fund Employees State Insurance (ESI), Trade Reporting and Compliance Engine (TRACE), Inception-to-date, and Goods and Service Tax. One of the participants, Sister T R Rosy,

the treasurer of St. Anne, Phirangipuram of Hyderabad province, said, “I was happy to attend the training program. It helped me to have a clear idea about good governance and financial management.”

“It was also very clear about taxation and came to know the importance of the cashless, paperless, and faceless transaction. The three pillars are Activity-based laws, Operational laws, and Fiscal laws. The information about Digital Document Management and FCRA is very useful to have transparency and smooth Governance of the Congregation,” added the nun who was attending training with forty-six other treasurer-sisters of her congregation.

Another participant, Sister Rosy Antony Puthusery, the procurator of the Guntur province of the Jesus Mary and Joseph congregation, said the seminar was “very informative regarding the recent changes and developments in the Income Tax Department.”

The nun added, “the topic of Governance Financial Management has given us guidance to carry on our Mission in Finance with Accountability and Responsibility. Although it is very challenging and demanding, we need to update and justify our activities in answering the Government and Income Tax queries. It also brought awareness to be always alert and accurate.”

The resource person, Father Packiam, is the financial consultant for many religious congregations. He promotes good governance among religious houses and in the church that is accountable, functional, transparent, responsive, oriented, participatory, inclusive, and efficient through following the rules and laws of the church and the country.

According to Capuchin Father Vijesh Loyed Menezes, treasurer of Holy trinity Bangalore province, the workshop was a timely event and undoubtedly was of the utmost importance.

He said, “the valuable interactive sessions, practical inputs, expert advice, down-to-earth sharing, and clear presentations, loaded with information, by the resource persons, guided all of us through the intricacies of our entities’ financial management, which will certainly be beneficial in the very long run.” ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Pope in Bahrain: Bring waters of fraternity to desert of human coexistence

BY CHRISTOPHER WELLS



Pope Francis described Bahrain as a place of encounter between different peoples,” a land where “ancient and modern converge; tradition and progress mix; and above all, people from different backgrounds create a distinctive mosaic of life.”

Image of the "Tree of Life"

In the first public encounter of his Apostolic Journey to Bahrain, the Pope dwelt on the image of “the Tree of Life,” an “emblem of vitality” in the country. The “majestic acacia” has survived in a “desert area with very little rainfall thanks to its deep roots.”

Bahrain’s roots, with over 4500 years of history, “shine forth in its ethnic and cultural diversity, and in the peaceful co-existence and the traditional hospitality of its people.”

This diversity bear witness to the ability and necessity of living together in the world, which has grown into a “global village” but in many ways still

lacks the “spirit of a village,” which is expressed in “hospitality, concern for others, and a sense of fraternity.”

Looking at the image of the Tree of Life, the Pope invited his listeners to bring “the waters of fraternity” to “the parched deserts of human co-existence,” and to work together towards that end.

Forum for dialogue

“I am here, in this land of the Tree of Life,” he said, “as a sower of peace, in order to experience these days of encounter and to take part in a Forum of dialogue between East and West for the sake of peaceful co-existence.”

He thanked the organizers of the Conferences promoted by the Kingdom of Bahrain, which stress in particular “the themes of respect, tolerance, and religious freedom.”

These themes, he continued, enshrined in

Bahrain's constitution, are "commitments that need constantly to be put into practice, so that religious freedom will be complete and not limited to freedom of worship; that equal dignity and equal opportunities will be concretely recognized for each group and for every individual; that no forms of discrimination exist and that fundamental human rights are not violated but promoted." He particularly highlighted the right to life, even for criminals, "whose lives should not be taken."



Pope meets with authorities, members of civil society, and the diplomatic corp

Global labour crisis

Returning to the image of the Tree of Life, he highlighted the progress of Bahrain, due in large part to immigration. At the same time, he highlighted the plight of unemployment in the world, which remains too high; and deplored that too often, labour can be "dehumanizing."

Calling attention to the "global labour crisis," Pope Francis emphasized the value of labour," which must be directed to the good of men and women, and not reduced simply to a means of producing wealth. He called for safe and dignified working conditions that serve to foster cultural and spiritual growth and advance social cohesion, for the common good.

Bahrain, the Pope said, "can be proud of its significant contributions in this regard," pointing to the first school for women in the Gulf region and the abolition of slavery.

"May [Bahrain] be a beacon through the region for the promotion of equal rights and improved conditions for workers, women and young people, while at the same time ensuring respect and concern for all those who feel most at the margins of society, such as immigrants and prisoners."

Caring for the environment, promoting life

Pope Francis then called attention to two "critical areas for everyone," but especially world leaders and those responsible for the common good: the question of the environment, and the responsibility of all human beings to promote the flourishing of life. The Holy Father emphasized the importance of working "tirelessly" to confront the climate emergency, and

expressed his hope that the COP27 meeting, taking place in just a few days, would be a "step forward in this regard."

Peace, not war

The Pope then lamented the increase in "lethal actions and threats," as well as the "monstrous and senseless reality of war, which everywhere sows destruction and crushes hope." Every war, he said, "brings in its wake the death of truth."

In particular, the Pope said his thoughts turned to the "forgotten war" in Yemen, that, "like every war, issues not in victory, but only in bitter defeat for everyone."

"I beg: Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let us be committed, everywhere and concretely, to building peace."

Pope Francis concluded his address by quoting the Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration, which highlights the role of religious faith in building a foundation of peace. "I am here today as a believer, as a Christian, as a man, and as a pilgrim of peace," the Pope said, "because today, more than ever, we are called, everywhere, to commit ourselves seriously to peacemaking."

From the same Declaration, the Pope made his own the commitment "to working for a world where people of sincere belief join together to reject that which divides us and concentrate instead on celebrating and expanding on that which unites us." © (Courtesy: Vatican News)



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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Godmen and the Honeytrap..!

How could he?" we shout hysterically when we find that a godman or a man of God, has fallen into a honeytrap!

"He's nearly a god!" some say.

"He is one!" say others, and therein lies the problem.

Many years ago, an old, wise, ninety-year old lady stopped me as I criticized a priest, "Remember Bob, beneath the cassock lies a man!"

Wise words indeed!

Most priests start off on the right track. They, at some point in their lives decide that instead of serv-



themselves pure and holy so God could live in them.

But as these gurus progressed from teacher to preacher to godman, they lost God!

In the losing of their holiness they became the base man they were before they started, with all the desires of an ordinary human being. It was dwelling with God, that kept them from the carnal, but now with a smile on their lips and lewd words from their mouths they step into the honeytrap!

We, as a people have a duty here. Since we are



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ing mammon, serving God makes more sense. Somewhere on the way, their flock change them.

"You blame us for what happens to these godmen and men of God?" you ask incredulously.

To a certain extent yes!

We love men and women with chutzpah and charisma, right? And when that same man or oftimes a woman wears white, red, purple or saffron, we revere them all the more. In our emptiness we admire they have reached fulfillment quite similar to our love for billionaires who we envy for what we don't have and then put them on a pedestal.

And like the golden calf of yore, we adulate them.

And that adulation gets to the godman, or man of God, who starts enjoying a near 'godlike' worship up there where you've placed him, laps up the feeling, and slowly over a period of time starts imagining he is God himself.

He isn't. His job was to point the way to God, to teach men and women in his care how to keep

part of the problem. We need to see this does not happen to those who've decided to serve God. Stop treating them like the divine, and consistently bring them back to earth, when they start climbing the pedestal.

Instead of saying "You are a wonderful speaker!" say simple words like, "We thank God for the wonderful discourse you were able to deliver!"

Remind them constantly about Whom they serve.

Do this at every stage in their rise, remind them, their gift to speak, to heal, and to enlighten comes not from themselves but from the One above.

Then, you will find fewer falling headlong into the honeytrap, and the Divine smiling at you for guarding His chosen..! ©

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