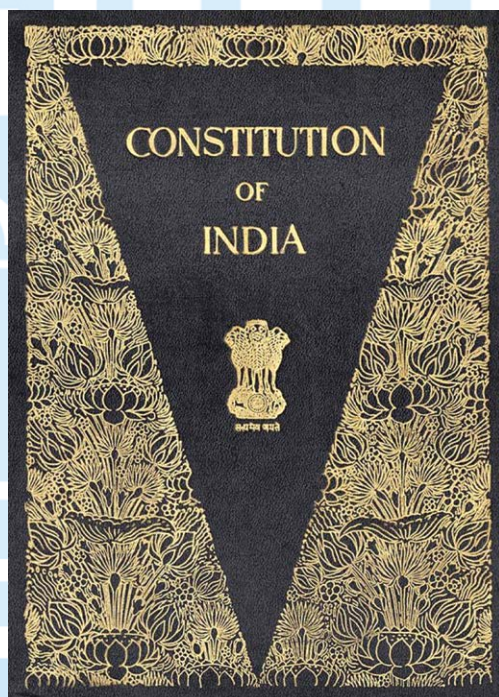


# Indian Currents

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## Constitution Matters

When efforts are on to subvert constitutional values and trample upon democratic institutions, 'We, the people' who constitute the country as a 'Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic' must pledge to protect the sanctity of the only sacred book of all the citizens of our country



## 2023 Programme Schedule

### 1. (PSGA-1) **Post-Midlife Spirituality and Graceful Aging (January 15-29)**

This workshop explores the dynamics that affect the post-midlife years and provides approaches and exercises that enable one to age gracefully. (Age limit: 50 -70 years)

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

This workshop explores the challenges of religious and priestly formation today and provides formators insights from psychological theories and best practices to understand themselves, their formees, and the requisites for healthy formation and suggests ways and means for this and provides opportunities to learn from one another and be formed to form. (Age Limit- 25-55)

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

This workshop explores concepts, styles, functions and challenges of effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership in Religious communities. Useful for current and future leaders. (Age limit: 35 – 55 years)

## **SUMEDHA SADHANA (A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL WHOLENESS JOURNEY): OUR FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME**

**SS-46. February 12 - May 2; SS-47. July 1 - September 18; SS-48. October 1 - December 15**

*Sumedha Sadhana* is an inner journey in quest of greater healing and wholeness, designed to help participants live more fulfilling, satisfying and productive lives. Participants begin from where they are, looking at what is happening in the current phase of their psychospiritual journey. They then move on to explore the psychological dynamics that affect their wellbeing, get in touch with their restricting emotional, relational and spiritual blocks and seek healing and transformation so that they can live and minister in more joyful, satisfying and fruitful ways. (Age Limit 35 -65)

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## 'WE THE PEOPLE' ON BACKBURNER



'Serving people is my priority,' said D. Y. Chandrachud on his very first working day at the Supreme Court after taking over as the Chief Justice of India. These were the words 'We the people' were waiting for long to listen.

Coincidentally, it came a few days before the country marked 72nd Constitution Day on November 26 to commemorate the adoption of the Constitution of India. The Constitution is the heart of the nation whose soul is democracy which stands on the four pillars of legislature, executive, judiciary and media. When efforts are on to subvert constitutional values and trample upon democratic institutions, 'We the people' who constitute the country as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic are left bewildered, unaware of where to turn to for succour and relief.

It is the Constitution that enables and ensures a meaningful life for its citizens. Without the provisions enshrined in it, and their observance, civilized life becomes impossible. However, the country is in the throes of a crisis wherein constitutional provisions are subverted, with the guardians and protectors remaining helpless 'scare-crows'. The rich-poor divide is growing like a gorge, rendering the socialist tenets meaningless; efforts to counter this abysmal performance on the economic front by the announcement of India becoming the fifth largest economy won't wash with the people. The secular credentials are thrown to the winds by taking the country apparently on the path to Hindu Rashtra. Plurality and diversity have become dirty words. What to eat, dress, speak and practice are dictated by one section of people.

Democracy and its institutions are becoming ineffective by making a mockery of the legislature and the executive. The top-most legislative body, the Parliament, has become a 'law-churning' machine as Bills are passed without discussions. Many laws of far-reaching importance like Citizenship Amendment Act, agricultural reform laws, labour reform laws are some of the examples for the government's least concern for consultations with stakeholders.

Right to dissent, the sine qua non of democracy, has become anathema to the present regime. Right activists, intellectuals, academicians and students who fight for fundamental rights are put behind bars. Journalists 'embedded' with the regime have a field day, while scribes who pick holes in government programmes and policies have to face the music.

Several fundamental rights, guaranteed under the Constitution, are put into deep freezer. Right to equality and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion are just two cases to prove the point. When ruling party leaders and Hindutva proponents unleash an avalanche of inciting speeches against minorities and their religions, they are allowed to go scot-free.

Adding insult to injury, when riots and violence take place against minorities, it is the victims against whom trumped up cases are filed as recently revealed in a report by a committee that went into the Delhi riots of 2020. It is a bizarre case of persecution of victims rather than punishing the culprits. Similar is the case with anti-conversion laws: those who want to convert from Hinduism to other religions have to go through a maze of procedures while those who convert to Hinduism have the road paved with red carpet. The rights have been rendered inconsequential by the powers-that-be. As the nation celebrated yet another Constitution Day, it is time that we have to improve the scorecard on many fronts.

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'.

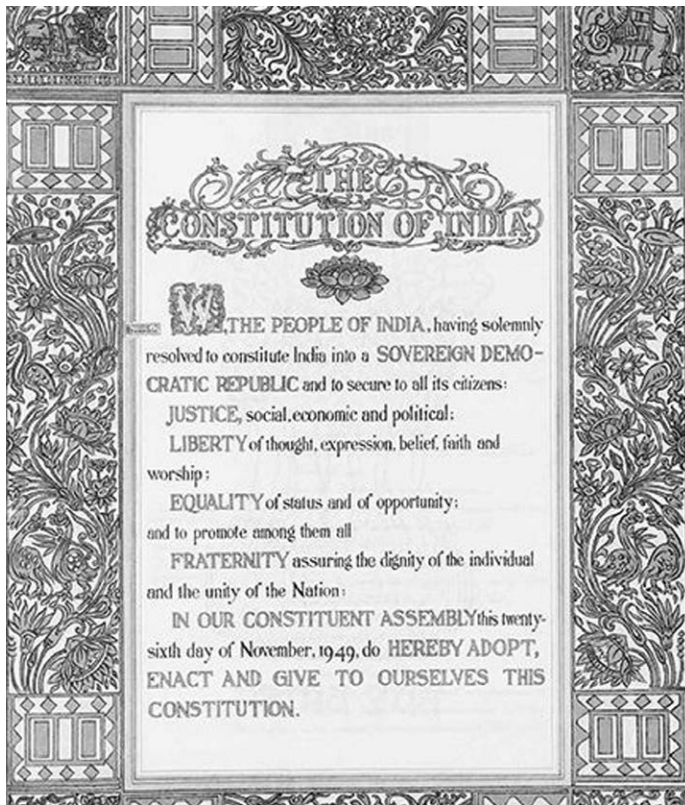
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## POWER QUOTES



Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn't know you left open.

**John Barrymore**



We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.

**Joseph Campbell**



Happiness is not by chance, but by choice.

**Jim Rohn**



Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see a shadow.

**Helen Keller**



Never limit yourself because of others' limited imagination; never limit others because of your own limited imagination.

**Mae Jemison**



Be the change that you wish to see in the world.

**Mahatma Gandhi**



Let us make our future now, and let us make our dreams tomorrow's reality.

**Malala Yousafzai**



You don't always need a plan. Sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go, and see what happens.

**Mandy Hale**



If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.

**Martin Luther King Jr.**



If you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely.

**Roald Dahl**

# CONSTITUTION MATTERS

We can no longer sit in our comfort zones. 'We, the People of India' must rise as one people because Constitution is all that matters. We must 'defend it with the last drop of our blood'

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

In February 2019, Justice D. Y. Chandra-chud (who recently assumed office as the 50th Chief Justice of India) delivered the Justice K. T. Desai Memorial Lecture at the Bombay High Court. His address 'Why Constitution Matters', will perhaps go down in history as one of the most incisive addresses in Indian jurisprudence. He said: "The people who work the Constitution may go terribly wrong and sometimes they do as when we jail a cartoonist for sedition or when jail instead of bail is given to a blogger who is critical of our religious architecture. When a mob lynches a person for the food that she or he eats it is the Constitution



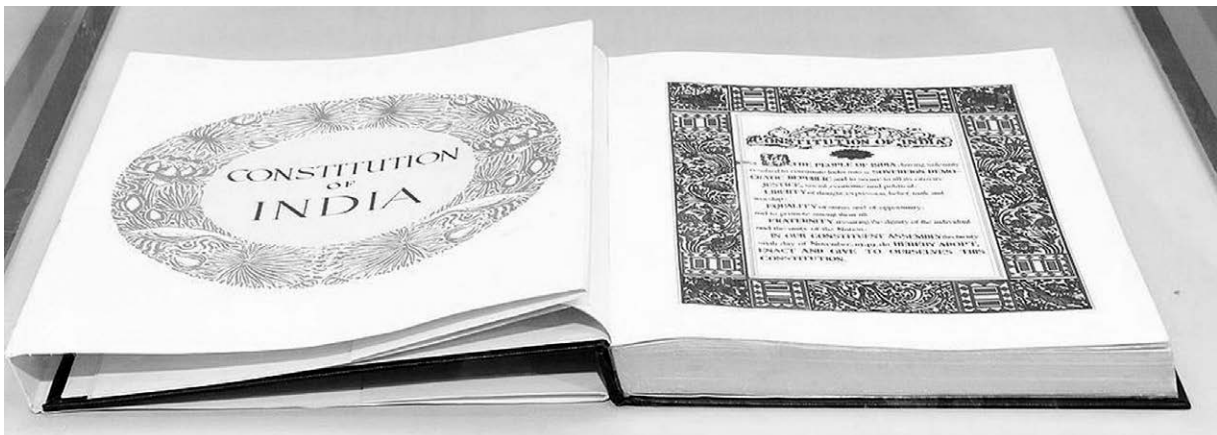
which is lynched. When we deny to human beings the power of love for reasons of religion or caste it is the Constitution which is made to weep. That is exactly what happened yesterday when a groom belonging to the Dalit community was asked to climb down from a horse in a wedding procession. Let's make no two bones about

it. It is the Constitution which weeps when we read of such incidents."

One year later, in February 2020 striking a similar note at the Justice P.D. Desai Memorial Lecture at the Gujarat High Court, he said: "When the Constituent Assembly was called to decide the fate of separate electorates in independent India, they decided that its inclusion was not essential to and even contrary to the requirements of a pluralistic society. They rejected separate electorates and dismissed the relevance of numerical disadvantage in a polity. The framers of the Constitution rejected the notion of a Hindu India and a Muslim India. They recognised only the Republic of India.....Protecting dissent is but a reminder that while democratically elected governments offer us a legitimate tool for development and social coordination, they can never claim a monopoly over the values and identities that define our plural society...Inherent in the liberal promise of the Constitution is a commitment to a plural-



The framers of the Constitution rejected the notion of a Hindu India and a Muslim India. They recognised only the Republic of India...



ity of opinion. A legitimate government committed to deliberate dialogue does not seek to restrict political contestation but welcomes it.... taking democracy seriously requires us to respond respectfully to the intelligence of others and to participate vigorously, but as an equal in determining how we should live together.” All this was in the wake of massive anti-CAA protests all over India!

Interestingly, in August 2022, just three months before he became CJ, Justice Chandrachud at the 11th Convocation Ceremony of the OP Jindal Global University Delhi said: “Our constitutional culture does not maintain itself. It is for each one of us citizens to participate in the slow but vital task every day of transforming our Constitution from a charter of ideals to a reflection of reality... The judiciary has a greater role to play in promoting social democracy. However, the quest for a constitutional culture is not limited to the courtroom or black letter of the law.” Invoking Dr B R Ambedkar, he described social democracy as a way of life that recognizes social liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life.

CJI Chandrachud seems to be wedded to ‘Constitution Matters’ and rightly so, which should be non-negotiable for anyone professing to be part of the legal fraternity. Seventy-three years ago on 26 November 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted and gave to “we, the people” a landmark Constitution which is the only sacred book of every Indian citizen; it is a bulwark of fundamental rights and directive principles, which are a prerequisite for any healthy democracy. The Preamble, with its emphasis on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and its commitment to India being and remaining a ‘sovereign socialist secular democratic republic’ spells out the vision and the intrinsic character of

the Constitution. The Constitution, with its minute details, is undoubtedly a unique one. Thanks to the vision of women and men of the Constituent Assembly, we can take genuine pride in a Constitution which is forward-looking and all-embracing and which respects the pluralistic fabric of the country.

After many years of having and being guided by a masterpiece of Constitution, unbelievable events have been unfolding in India in the recent past. The sanctity of the Constitution is being systematically destroyed and CJI Chandrachud has been on-target referring to them.

The regime has spared no efforts to destroy the independence and the autonomous functioning of several Constitutional and other statutory bodies. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) the National Investigating Agency (NIA) have all become ‘caged parrots’. The army has been compromised and the police have been taught to kowtow to those who have made them spineless! All these agencies together with the Income Tax Department are systematically used to throttle voices of dissent and anyone who stands up for truth and justice. The Reserve Banking

Seventy-three years ago on 26 November 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted and gave to “we, the people” a landmark Constitution which is the only sacred book of every Indian citizen



of India (RBI) is browbeaten to bend backwards to cater to the whims and fancies of a Government that has sent the country into an economic spiral downwards. Media, the fourth pillar of a vibrant democracy, has been largely made impotent, completely *godified*. Other important bodies like the Information Commission, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and even the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) have been made toothless and filled with pliable henchmen.

The Election Commission of India has become a pawn in the hands of the Government. On 24 November, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Justice KM Joseph, reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking a collegium-like system for the appointment of Election Commissioners and the Chief Election Commissioner and asked the parties to file written submission in five days. During the hearing the bench made some strong remarks questioning if the Election Commission was actually an independent body. It had a pointed "hypothesis" for the central government: "Do you think the Election Commissioner... if he's asked to take on none less than the Prime Minister – it's just an example – and he doesn't come around to doing it: Will it not be a case of complete breakdown of the system?"

The Apex Court said the Election Commission is "supposed to be completely insulated", and referred to how the government had spoken of appointing "a man of character"; it noted that, "character consists of various components... one particular characteristic required is independence." The current Election Commission has demonstrated how partial it is: Instead of announcing the dates of voting to the Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat Assemblies at the same time, it deferred the announcement of the Gujarat election dates till early November, only after the Prime Minister had completed his tasks of ribbon-cutting and inauguration of some populist schemes in Gujarat.

There are several other efforts being made to tamper with the Constitution, to negate its essence (justice, liberty, equality and fraternity) and to destroy some of the key dimensions of its democratic framework (sovereign, secular socialist) which are deeply interwoven into the pluralistic fabric of Indian society. The current BJP/RSS combine, including some of their ministers and leading functionaries have gone on record saying that once they have the pre-requisite numbers in Parliament, they will have no qualms of conscience to change fundamentals of the Constitution like that of 'secularism' and equal rights for all. There are consistent proclamations for the establishment of a 'Hindu State' by 2025 (the centenary of the RSS); the annihilation of the minorities particularly the Muslims and Christians; 'lynching' of minorities is the 'new normal'.

There is talk of a 'Common Civil Code', of a national anti-conversion law (scheduled for hearing on 28 November) and that the rights of the minorities guaranteed in the Constitution should be scrapped immediately. There is the anti-constitutional Citizenship Amendment Act; the abrogation

**Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the father of our Constitution, gave three unambiguous warnings: the need to give up the grammar of anarchy, to avoid hero-worship, and to work towards a social - not just a political - democracy**



of Articles 370 and 35A where Kashmir is concerned; labour codes which favour the corporates. Thanks to the farmers' agitation, the anti-farmer policies are for the time being in cold storage. The proposed Adani port at Vizhinjam in Kerala will affect the livelihood of more than 56,000 fisher folk. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) is used selectively to target dissenters and human rights defenders who stand up for truth and justice on behalf of the exploited and excluded of the country. Governors of States, instead of safe-guarding the Constitution, have become 'yes-men' of the regime. The list of anti-constitutional policies and acts are endless.

On the eve of the enactment of the Constitution, 25 November 1949, in a passionate speech to the Constituent Assembly, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the father of our Constitution, gave three unambiguous warnings: the need to give up the grammar of anarchy, to avoid hero-worship, and to work towards a social – not just a political – democracy. Ambedkar was, at that time, perhaps visioning what India could become in 2022, and how these three aspects could not only destroy all that was sacred in the Constitution, but could result in the dismantling of the democratic framework which a new resurgent India was just born into and committed to.

Ambedkar said: "If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives.... where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for (..) unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us. The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enables him to subvert their institutions in politics. Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship. The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it, social democracy".

Ambedkar added, "Will history repeat itself? It is this thought, which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realisation of the fact that



in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds, we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creed or above their country? I do not know, but this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost forever. This eventuality we all must resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood."

Ambedkar's final words in that path-breaking speech, sums up his views on the measure of responsibility owed to preserve the idea of India, as envisioned in the Constitution. "If we wish to preserve the Constitution in which we have sought to enshrine the principle of Government of the people, for the people and by the people, let us resolve not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path and which induce people to prefer Government for the people to Government by the people, nor to be weak in our initiative to remove them. That is the only way to serve the country. I know of no better."

On 26 November, as we observe 'Constitution Day 2022', we must pledge to fight the fascist and fundamental forces who are destroying the sanctity of our Constitution. We can no longer sit in our comfort zones; "We, the People of India" must rise as one people, for our Constitution is all that matters; in the words of Ambedkar "we are determined to defend it with the last drop of our blood." ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**FR CEDRIC PRAKASH SJ** is a human rights, reconciliation and peace activist/writer. Contact: cedricprakash@gmail.com

# Constitution A Living Document

The soul of India is its Constitution. It is a 'living tree' capable of growth and expansion

BY **DR. PAULY MATHEW MURICKEN**

If it be asked, what is the most sacred duty and the greatest source of our security in a Republic? The answer would be, an inviolable respect for the Constitution and Laws.... A sacred respect for the constitutional law is the vital principle, the sustaining energy of a free government" -- Alexander Hamilton, 1794.

November 26 is designated as the 'Constitution Day' to commemorate the adoption of the Constitution by 'We the People of India', acting through the Constituent Assembly. It is an occasion to understand the incredible and miraculous story of our Constitution and to promote constitutional values among citizens.

In the last 73 years of its organic and progressive growth, the Constitution of India has served as the framework and the sustaining energy of the organs of State. Through times of war and peace and amidst other countless challenges, the Constitution, built on the edifice of the sovereign socialist secular democratic republican structure, continues to strive to secure to its citizens Justice, Liberty, Equality and



Fraternity. This historic document is the vehicle of life for us and is beautiful in its profound simplicity.

Constitution is the reflection of the vignettes from the different periods of history, ranging from Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley, the Vedic Period, the Gupta and Maurya empires, the Mughal era, the colonial period to the national freedom movement. It speaks about 4000 years of rich history, tradition and culture of the Indian Subcontinent.

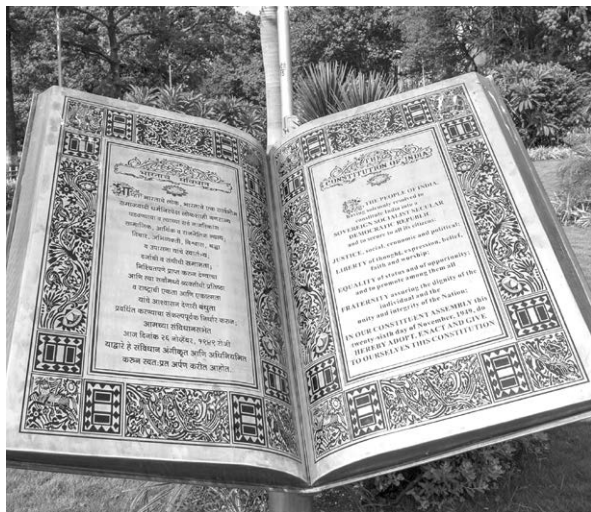
## Custodians of Constitution

People of India are the ultimate custodians of the Constitution. Sovereignty vests in them and it is in their name that the Constitution was adopted. The Constitution empowers the citizen, and the citizen empowers the Constitution by following it, adhering to it, protecting it, and by preserving to make it more meaningful with words and deeds.

The Constitution is everybody's preserve. When the Constitution was adopted, there were no provisions regarding Fundamental Duties to the citizens though there was a Part III for Fundamental Rights. The Fundamental Duties were added to the Constitution by the Constitution 42nd Amendment in 1976, upon the recommendations of the Swaran Singh Committee constituted by the Government. The Committee suggested that steps needed to be taken to ensure that the individual did not ignore his duties while in exercise of his Fundamental Rights. The newly added Article 51-A dealt with a Code of Ten Fundamental Duties for citizens which have now become Eleven by virtue of the Constitution 86th Amendment Act, 2002.

## Fundamental Duties

Fundamental Duties are essentially a part of our tradition, mythology, religions and practices and



they are responsibilities integral to the Indian way of life. They are intended to serve as a constant reminder to every citizen that while the Constitution specifically conferred on them certain Fundamental Rights, it also requires citizens to observe certain basic norms of democratic conduct and behaviour, as rights and duties are co-relative.

Fundamental Duties have brought our Constitution in line with Article 29(1) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights which says we all have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms and it synchronized with the provisions in several modern Constitutions.

Constitution dictated rule by popular consent with laws enacted by people's representatives. It introduced novel governmental doctrine and practices such as rule of law, checks and balances, separation of powers, federal and republican form of government, judicial review, and collective responsibility. It has prescribed the principles for guiding our nation, the mother of democracy and the expectations of people from the State. Its influence on the history of ideas and legal thinking has remained strong. However, there is equally a need to educate our citizens in the knowledge required to defend their rights and fundamental freedoms.

### Importance of 'We the People'

Every Society sets rules to live by. The chief aim of drafting the Constitution was to create a government to serve the citizens and with enough power to act at national and state levels, but without so much power that Fundamental Rights would be at risk. One way to accomplish this was to separate the



powers of the State into three branches and then to include checks and balances on the powers to assure that no one branch of government gained supremacy. The powers of each branch are enunciated in the Constitution itself. Constitution has also determined its relationship with the people. The primary consideration of our Constitution, no doubt, is the welfare of all.

The framers intended to establish a firm league of friendship of the Union with States and between the States. They knew well that making the States strong will make the Union strong. The Constitution in Article 1 affirmatively declares that India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. Constitution recognized the importance of liberty. Jose Rizal, a Filipino nationalist and polymath, rightly asserts that without liberty, there is no light.

The soul of India is its Constitution. It is a 'living tree' capable of growth and expansion. It is organic and progressive and is the light, path, direction and foundation of its people. It is a great edifice raised with love and care. The amending process made the Constitution a living document that could be changed only with enough support to meet the changing needs of the time, without damaging its basic framework. It is said laws and rules that uplift all people sprout from the womb of a good Constitution. Let the Constitution guide India and its people forward, to be the model nation of the universe. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

**It is said laws and rules that uplift all people sprout from the womb of a good Constitution. Let the Constitution guide India and its people forward, to be the model nation of the universe**

# Betrayal of Constitutional Vision

A great damage has been done to the Constitution of India by not heeding to its values of equality, fraternity and justice for all, and violating the principle of unity in diversity

BY **DR ALWYN D'SOUZA** AND **DR LANCY LOBO**

**A**s we celebrate the Constitution Day on November 26 to mark the adoption of the Constitution of India on this day in 1949, it is another opportunity to reflect on the status of the Statute today, not so much our commitment to it but the departures from its vision, ideals and values.

Are we in sync with the original version and vision of 'equality, fraternity and justice for all' or are we drifting away from it? Given the increasing frequency of attacks on the minorities on what they wear and eat, how they pray and dress, isn't it fair to say that we are departing from the vision of the Constitution. This is most visible in the utter neglect and marginalization of some communities (read Muslims and Christians) on one hand and the conspicuous attempts to promote and prioritize the 'care and comfort' of one community on the other hand.

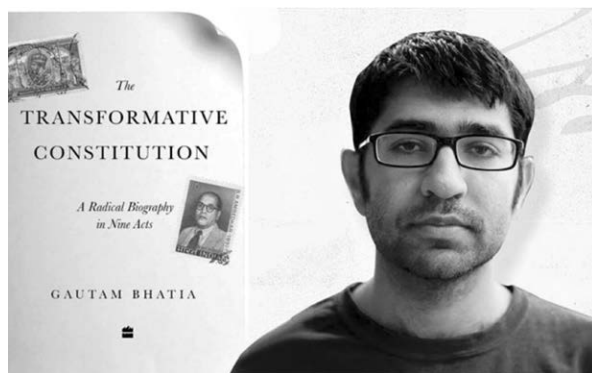
In a recent lecture at the Bangalore International Centre, a well-known lawyer and writer Gautam Bhatia said that the 'Constitutions by their very nature have a story to tell and when we look at the Indian Constitution there are at least three stories that stand out.' According to him, the three stories that stand out in the Indian Constitution are: a) story of continuity (from the colonial rule to the independent era); b) story of transformation (breaking away,

both politically and socially, from the colonial era); and c) story of compromise (to satisfy many competing interests).

While it is difficult to disagree with these stories as features of India's Constitution, one might like to merge them into one and consider the main story of Indian Constitution as one of 'unity in diversity.' This is independent India's original story, and the 'original story' of our Constitution. Unfortunately, this original story has been muddied and is under constant attack with a lot of fake stories. This is orchestrated ostensibly with the embrace of 'unity' and the neglect of the 'diversity.'

The fake stories dominate the discourse today. They are fake stories because they do not represent the original story, and are far removed from its vision and values. In other words, their fake character stems from their constitutional departures. We witness today in more ways than one, the departures from the original story, with attempts to reduce everything to homogeneity -- one religion, one language, one ration, one diet and so on. This is the reality under the New India promised by the BJP dispensation.

Though we can enumerate a lot of departures like the departure from the constitutional values like



Given the increasing frequency of attacks on the minorities on what they wear and eat, how they pray and dress, isn't it fair to say that we are departing from the vision of the Constitution

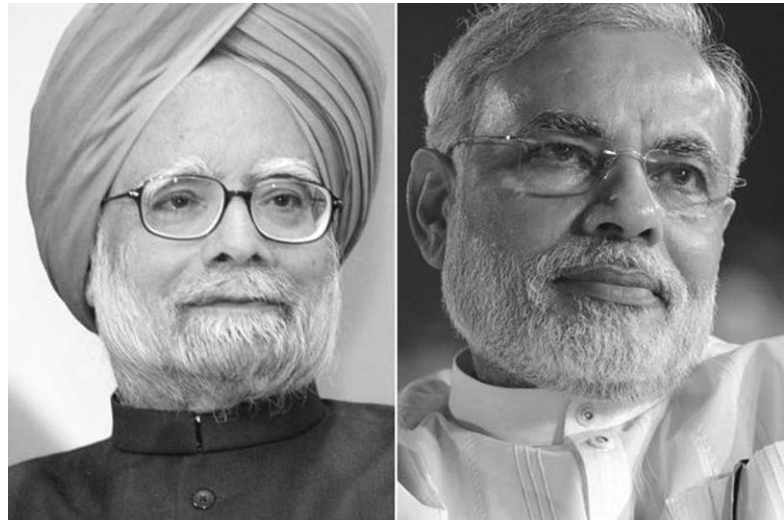
equality, justice, fraternity (Preamble); departure from the democratic and secular spirit (preamble); departure from the scientific temper (Art 51A) to name a few, we find the departure from the federal structure of the Constitution more alarming as it exhibits a noticeable neglect and desertion of the spirit of 'unity in diversity'.

In recent years, particularly under the BJP rule, India has witnessed a repeated assault on the federal structure. There are a lot of instances where the union government has acted hastily or bypassed the states and thus departed from the constitutional obligation of upholding the federal structure. The imposition of demonetization without adequate discussion with the states, increasing the monetary share of the states in centrally-sponsored schemes and delays in GST compensation are some of the examples of doing injustice to the federal structure.

During the COVID-19, it was evident from curtailing the powers of the states for the procurement of testing kits, vaccines, the use of Disaster Management Act and the unplanned lockdown.

The Union-State relations have also been damaged with the introduction of policies like the farm laws (now withdrawn due to protests by the farmers), Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act 2020, Dam Safety Bill 2019, National Education Policy 2020, Government of National Capital Territory Amendment Act, 2021, Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021, The Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2022, imposition of Hindi and the most recent incident of dropping of 'Centre-state Relations' from the agenda of the Parliamentary Committee for Home meetings.

Many opposition leaders have criticized this brazen attack on the cooperative federalism. JD(U) spokesperson, Ranbir Nandan, said that the 'BJP is demolishing country's federal structure by ignor-



ing opposition members in Parliament's standing committees.' Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin said that the 'Dam Safety Bill is an attack on federal structure.' Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, declared the Electricity Amendment Bill as a 'direct attack on federal structure.'

These are only a few examples that show where the centre-state relations stand today and the priority (or the lack of it) that is given to it. It reflects a complete departure from the constitutional mandate, or the spirit of 'unity in diversity' and thus widening and deepening the damages to an important constitutional vision of federal structure. Ironically, it was Narendra Modi during his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat who ridiculed the Centre under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for not practicing cooperative federalism.

As we celebrate the 'Constitution Day' it is everyone's duty to speak and spread this original story of our Constitution and make concrete efforts to reclaim it. The Bharat Jodo Yatra is one such attempt to return to and reclaim the original story. The huge numbers that join this yatra show that there are a lot of people who are tired of fake stories and want to repair the broken system and want to reclaim the original story. While this may be a good beginning, there is a need for more of these efforts to restore and repair the damage done to the Constitution and thus reimagine and build the #NewIndia predicated on the spirit of 'unity in diversity'. ©

**It was Narendra Modi during his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat who ridiculed the Centre under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for not practicing cooperative federalism**

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

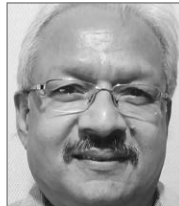
# Gender discrimination Let church be “people of God”

BY A.J. PHILIP

**T**he year: 2000! The Venue: The Vatican! A Capuchin priest and I are waiting for a Cardinal at the parlour. The aim: To meet him and seek an appointment with Pope John Paul II. If not, at least attend the Pope's private mass in the morning. I was in Rome to report the Great Jubilee for the Indian Express, where I was the edit page in-charge.

I felt very uncomfortable sitting there as two Catholic nuns in their white habits were busy dusting the chairs. I could not check their national identity. They could have been from the Philippines. They were either octogenarians or septuagenarians. I felt terribly sad that they were working when they should have been enjoying the evening of their life. Forgive me for my presumptions.

The first time I ever saw Catholic nuns was when my primary class students were taken on an excursion at the Nooranad Leprosy Sanatorium. Today, it houses a battalion of the Central Reserve Police. At that time, the Sanatorium was large and lush-green with hundreds of leprosy patients.



I saw two white European nuns dressing the wounds of patients, some of whom had lost their nose and toes to the most dreaded disease. I was too young to understand why they came all the way from Europe to nurse the leprosy patients.

Years later, a film called *Aswamedham* was shot there. I remember the film because Valsala, who was once my sister's classmate, played a leading role in the film as the main character, Sheela's younger sister.

What the nuns did remained a mystery to me till I read Mother Teresa, now Saint Teresa, explaining that when she and her sisters picked up a dying man from the gutters of Calcutta, they saw in him not a Bengali or an Oriya but the Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, let me take you to another venue: A five-star hotel in downtown Tokyo where a group of journalists from India, accompanying Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, were staying. We all had gone to a special Japanese restaurant where Japanese food was served in all its purity.

By the time we returned to the hotel, a new day had dawned. We saw two Japanese men, who could be in their eighties quietly working at the ground-floor restaurant. They were dusting and cleaning the floor and setting the tables right. I watched them from a distance. They were so engrossed in their work that they were not even talking to each other.

The two did not surprise me. The previous day, I had gone to the bookshop at the hotel where I met the lady in charge there. She was also an octogenarian who worked because she did not want to sit idle at home. Japan was a rich country as its economy was the world's second largest.



**One cannot even imagine the Catholic Church without the presence of the sisters. With the kind of numbers they have, they should have been ruling the church and its establishments. See how Narendra Modi has been managing the nation with less than 35 percent votes in his kitty!**

From the conduct of the three Japanese I mentioned, I learnt how Japan, which was “finished” during the Second World War, rose like a phoenix bird in a few decades to become a wonder for the world.

For the Japanese, work is worship and they all prefer to die in harness. They are like the South Indian lady who told Nobel-laureate Amartya Sen that she washed clothes during her spare time. They were entitled to a good salary and they were doing a job. Was that the case with the elderly nuns I encountered at the Vatican?

Before I proceed further, let me mention the context in which I write this column. I was recently invited as a resource person at a three-day conference organised by the CRI (Conference of Religious India - Women) at Pune in Maharashtra. Attending the conference were administrators, principals and heads of various Catholic institutions in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa. They were mostly middle-aged sisters from all parts of the country.

After I delivered my speech and completed answering the questions from the assembled, one of the organisers of the conference presented to me a potted plant, which I left there as it would have been a hassle carrying it all the way back to Delhi, and a small book.

It was titled ‘It’s High Time: Women Religious speak up on gender justice in the Indian Church’, put together by Dr Hazel D’Lima, Clutus Zuzarte, Pallavi Xalxo and College of Social Work, Nirmal Niketan (Pages 86, Rs 100). I read the book in one go. Let me warn you, it is the report of a study conducted in 2019 and published in June 2021.

One book I noticed because of its title, bought it, read it and reviewed it is “If Nuns Ruled the World: Ten Sisters on a Mission” by Jo Piazza. The author provides a pen portrait of 10 remarkable nuns who changed the way we look at them. They were extraordinary women who stepped into domains, considered taboo for nuns, and made their presence felt. One of them was a marathoner! Let me add, I



The writer addressing the CRI (women) conference at Pune

would indeed be happy if nuns ruled the world!

I did not know until I read this book that there were 1,30,000 women religious belonging to 300 congregations in India. No other country, including Italy, has as many sisters as India. That is quite a large number.

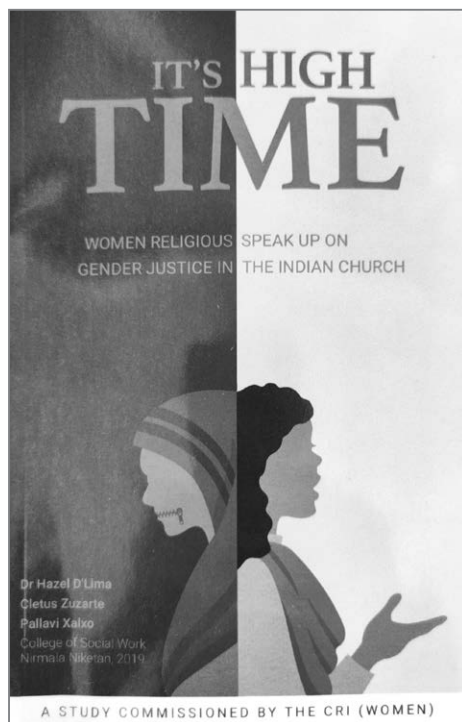
At Pune, I was invited to address a group of women who were undergoing training to become what they call women religious. Let me use the word "Sisters" for women religious. The trainees not only heard me with rapt attention but also asked me some questions despite the fact that while I had my sumptuous food, my talk was delaying their supper.

One cannot even imagine the Catholic Church without the presence of the sisters. With the kind of numbers they have, they should have been ruling the church and its establishments. See how Narendra Modi has been managing the nation with less than 35 percent votes in his kitty!

Gender issues in the church are not merely women's issues. "They are human issues, moral issues and spiritual issues. We, as images of God, deserve to live in dignity. In Gandhiji's words: 'To call women the weaker sex is a libel, it's men's injustice to women'".

A Synod on "Consecrated Life" was held in Rome in 1994. There, a bishop made the startling disclosure: "In the church, 75 percent of the consecrated people are women. If there are no women, there is no Consecrated Life and no church. Hence the future of the church depends upon the response we would be giving to the women religious. If they don't feel our support, eventually the Church will lose women too in this century". In other words, the church will die.

In other words, providing gender justice is a matter of life and death for the church. What is the reality? Let me quote Sister Inigo SSA, former superior general, Society of the Sisters of St. Anne: "Even after 2000 years of their existence, half of the followers of Jesus are not counted. They are



neither visible nor audible in the church. In India, women constitute nearly 82 percent of the religious.

Despite their large presence, the sisters face various kinds of injustice which have no explanation in a democratic society that functions on the basis of adult franchise and on the one-person-one-vote principle. Brother Philip Pinto, cfc, former superior general, Congregation of Christian Brothers, has in his brief Preface says:

"I have sat in silence as individual sisters wept through telling their stories. Enough! It's High Time... This is now the call for action". That is how the book got its title, It's High Time. He continues:

"Respect is obviously absent.

We see highlighted the clericalism that Pope Francis is fighting against: the bullying and spiritual blackmail sisters face, the sense of entitlement that priests are taught regarding their special status and their right to be served, the patriarchal mentality that sees women as possessions and inferiors".

It is not that the sisters are themselves not to blame. "How often the sisters are their own worst enemies! They have been brought up to treat clerics as special people and to defer to them. That needs to change. They have been trained to obey without questioning. That too needs to change".

The book is based on a survey conducted among the major superiors of various congregations. Had ordinary sisters been included, the picture would have been clearer. For one reason or another, only one-third of the superiors took time to fill up the questionnaire that covered a whole lot of issues.

One of the immediate provocations for the study was an article L'Osservatore Romano published in 2018. The article was written by Marie Lucile Kubacki and it was titled "The Almost Free Work of Sisters". She wrote the article based on the comments of several unnamed nuns. The article struck a chord with the sisters and the priests who were exercised over the gender-based exploitation in the Indian church too.



The survey confirmed what the article hinted at and what I observed at the Vatican in 2000 of how senior sisters were “forced” to work for nothing. Generally speaking, the sisters are wary of discussing such issues in public for they know that it can also be counterproductive.

Nonetheless, the survey reveals the fact that gender-based discrimination is a reality in the church. Figures suggest that more than sexual harassment, which does not suggest a large prevalence, it is the low esteem in which the sisters are held that should bother one and all.

When the priests undergo training at the seminaries, they see sisters working in the kitchen or doing sundry menial jobs and they get the impression that they are “mere servants”. Naturally enough, they tend to order them around even when they know that some of them are senior to them not only in age but also in rank.

One major expectation the priests have from the sisters is that they cook delicious meals for them just three times a day. They also expect them to do sundry jobs like ringing the bell early in the morning and keeping the church premises clean and tidy. They also expect them to be at their beck and call at all times.

If the sisters fail to live up to their expectation, they are harassed in hundred and one ways. The Pulpit is to spread or disseminate the word of God. It is available only to the priest. Instead of using the Pulpit for divine purposes, some of them use it to take the sisters to task. It is through the sermons that they express their displeasure.

**Gender issues in the church are not merely women’s issues. “They are human issues, moral issues and spiritual issues. We, as images of God, deserve to live in dignity. In Gandhiji’s words: “To call women the weaker sex is a libel, it’s men’s injustice to women”**



It does not bother them that in doing so they are casting aspersions on the sisters and showing them in a poorer light. They also use sexually abusive and pejorative terms against the sisters, no matter what impact it would have on the lay public.

Institutions which the sisters have built up are taken over by a coterie of bishops and priests who think that they know best how to use church property. More often than not, the bishops are unable to control the priests even when they know that they are at fault. In the process, justice is denied. Deference is seldom shown to the sisters, who are even rebuked in public.

Even when the sisters hold high offices like principal of senior secondary schools, they are paid a pittance on the specious plea that they had taken a vow of poverty. It was unbelievable to know that some priests deny the sisters sacramental privileges like saying mass for them.

The continued use of medieval titles such as “My Lord”, “Your Lordship” “Your Excellency” together with special head dress and robes, only emphasis the institutional attachment to a bygone era, obscuring the Christ-like attitude of service.

The church needs to be sensitive. The sisters today are as educated or, in some cases, more educated than the priests. They cannot be held in suppression for long. The book has a few suggestions on how the leadership can avert a disaster by giving the sisters their due. All they want is a level-playing field in which the church truly becomes the “people of God”. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Moving Back to the Middle Ages

Many things happening in the country are against the tenets of the Constitution, and they are bound to take the nation back to an earlier era

BY **ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPAMPIL**

**T**agore dreamt of an India where the citizens would have the courage to hold their “heads high”. Martin Luther King dreamt of a homeland that would give equal respect to every citizen. An Iranian composer longs for a civilized culture in her country where children will not be forced to learn and live by the “ideologies of the Middle Ages”.

Sadly, these are dreams that have failed.

Recently, most Indians who sought to hold their head high have come under the scrutiny of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and suffered. African-Americans have just gone through a Trumpian wave of racial hatred. They are far from being in ideal conditions. Over 15,000 Iranian protesters have been held under detention, 300 lost their lives. Though millions of agitators have moved on to the streets, universities are up in arms and cities round the country are astir, the army seems to stand by the reigning regime. It seems most likely, medieval fads will be imposed, clear thinking banned, women marginalized, veils remain mandatory.

## Is Law of Contradiction Always Valid?

Are things better this side of the Himalayas? What



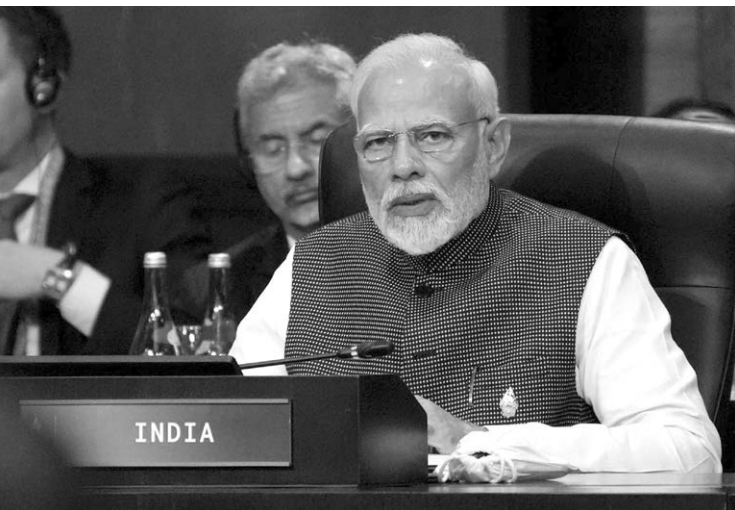
Sitaram Yechury notices in India is not mere Medieval stunts, but the nurturing of ‘irrationality’, ‘obscurantism’ and ‘personality cult’. What worries him most is the promotion of a system of education that follows Hitler’s model of imposing ‘blind faith’ and prevents ‘progressive attitudes’.

The consequence that follows is this: the law of contradiction does not hold good any more. While Narendra Modi spoke at Bali of making G20 “inclusive” as he took over the leadership of the organization, minorities in India had been going through an experience of severe “exclusion” from their own citizens’ rights. More! Every day, papers carry accounts of minorities being harassed and jailed, Dalits being hunted down, their women being raped and killed. That is being ‘inclusive’ in India!

Amit Shah, addressing 450 representatives who gathered in Delhi from 75 nations to discuss the theme “No Money for Terror”, expressed an eagerness to expose the “doublespeak” of certain elements that sponsor violence. He intended to point to Pakistan. But what came to the mind of most Indians hearing of “doublespeak” were the contradictions in

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the mouths of our national leaders about CAA, NRC, Demonetisation, GST, performance of Modi, price rise, banning cow slaughter, and granting generous licenses to beef-exporting companies. A poor Dalit or a Muslim is murdered for killing his own cow to sustain his family, while those who export beef on a massive scale for gigantic profit are considered builders of national economy. Where is humanity? Where is consistency?

Modi, addressing the same audience in Delhi, insisted that anyone supporting radicalism should not have place in any country. But how has radicalism won an honourable place in India as we see cow vigilantes being garlanded by MPs, Masjid-destroyers lionized, spreaders of hatred glorified? Sankarshan Thakur says, “It is thus a sectarian sword becomes the essential arbiter of the law, let us not even speak of justice. It is thus that a call to murder becomes a patriotic act coming from some”. Is that anything but radicalism of the extreme sort?

### **A Fair Deal Should Be Both Ways**

The Assam government was arresting some tourists from Sweden for attending a prayer service near Naharkatia, when Rishi Sunak, a person of Indian origin, emerged as the Prime Minister of Britain. According to Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, Sunak swears by the Bhagavad Gita, wears the sacred thread, remains a teetotalter and vegetarian, pays homage to the cow, and celebrates Diwali. In other words, liberal Britain allows people to be themselves, respects their personal convictions. Datta-Ray says, Sunak’s election glorifies Britain rather than India. “Britain has shown that it is civilizationally far ahead of India

that is retreating behind the blinkers of the ritual mumbo-jumbo of just one religious group. India is not only corrupt, lawless and polluted; it is becoming increasingly bigoted.”

Modi was quick enough to get Sunak to allow 3000 Indian students a year to study in the UK and work for two years. Will they need to keep away from any prayer-gatherings during their stay in Britain if they happen to be believers in some faith? Around 82,000 Indian students received US visa last August. Will they be arrested in America if they happen to join a puja service or light a Diwali lamp? And how many saffron saints are wandering round the globe propagating what they call ‘Sanatana Dharma’, each with his own interpretation of the Vedic heritage? If there is the law of reciprocity in trade, is there nothing like reciprocity in the area of cultural exchange and religious communication?

If propagation of one’s religion is legitimate under the Constitution, what about the decision of the citizen that follows? If every citizen is free to make a choice of his own in the field of religion, why criminalize the propagator, why punish the free chooser?

### **The Hot topic of the Day: ‘Conversion’**

Be sure, something is in the air. Dreadful action follows dreadful words. Something awful is ahead for those who are accused of “conversion”. Popular opinion is being built up. The entire nation is being brainwashed. The Swedish tourists were arrested on the charge of ‘conversion’. A VHP-planned call for a law against conversion was linked with it.

For getting a good certificate from the RSS to return to power, Hagrama Mohilary wrote to J. P. Nadda that many Bodo families were converting to

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Christianity against their will. He complained that there was mushrooming of churches in Bodoland. By raising an alarm about 'conversion', he hopes to get a high rating from the BJP High Command for taking back his lost position as the top Bodo leader.

Again, it is quite some time that the VHP has been pressing for a law against 'illegal conversions', alleging that conversions are a threat to national security and social harmony. Voices increase. Shivraj Singh Chouhan condemns the conversion of tribals, threatening strong measures. Meanwhile, the headlines carry the news of the killing of a Kurmi in Madhya Pradesh. That is not a tragedy for Shivraj, but a tribal choosing Christianity is a horror!

One step ahead, the Supreme Court warns against "forced conversions" made by deception, allurement, or intimidation. The Christian answer is this: a conversion made by force, fraud or allurement is not genuine conversion; the external religious ceremony is not valid, if there is no inner acceptance. He is not a Christian. You can rest in peace. But if there is genuine acceptance of faith profoundly transforming the heart, no power on earth has the right to interfere.

If choosing one's profession or one's life partner is a free personal choice for every individual to make, his religious choice is far more personal, no one has the right to come on the way. The Madhya Pradesh High Court was very clear in specifying that there is no obligation to inform the District Magistrate about one's change of faith. "The religious belief is a matter personal to a citizen".

### "Vanvasis" Forever?

We can well understand why in RSS understanding 'conversion' has always to be done by force. That is what they have been doing all the time, while

**If choosing one's profession or one's life partner is a free personal choice for every individual to make, his religious choice is far more personal, no one has the right to come on the way**

making of non-Hindu tribals Hindus by force and intimidation. Mohan Bhagwat unveiled in Chhattisgarh a 12-foot statue erected to Dilip Singh Judeo, the champion of "Ghar Vapsi", one day before the birthday of Birsa Munda. Tribals' pride is India's pride, Bhagwat explained. He claimed he knew them well, as he lived in a "Vanvasi" area of Nagpur. So, tribal communities are condemned to remain "Vanvasis" even when in urban centres or universities.

But the recent Hindutva "show" has been in the opposite direction. There is an evident effort from the side of the BJP-RSS to remove from them the negative image that they constitute an army of the Upper castes. But truth remains what it is despite display. There was perfect consensus on the choice of Droupadi Murmu for President. There is an all-out drive to honour tribal heroes like Birsa Munda and Dilip Singh Judeo.

Those who are skilled in seeing deceptions will notice that Dalits and tribals are elevated to honorary positions, not decision-making teams. They are appointed to challenging situation like Kashmir and Ladakh, hardly ever to policy-shaping bodies. Token presences in abundance, course-changing roles hardly ever. With the narrowing of reservations and the New Education Policy strategy for the blocking of educational access to the weaker sections, those in command today are sure to remain in their positions, leaving the rest to remain Vanvasis and Slum-vasis for ever.

### Rights and Liberties of Citizens

Chief Justice of India D. Y. Chandrachud places a challenge before the nation. He says that the responsibility for ensuring that law does not impede rights and liberties is of every citizen. It does not depend on the Judiciary alone, it is a "collective responsibility"! Not everyone seems to have grasped the full



significance of the challenge. It is our duty to create an intellectual atmosphere where public issues stand in the 'court of the people'. It is you and I who have a duty, not to dictate but to discover what is right, even against the wave of a Majoritarian opinion. This we shall do through honest discussion in public. What is right emerges on its own strength. Undoubtedly there will be moments when partisan views gain the upper hand. We can totally disagree with an unacceptable opinion while showing the greatest respect for the one who proposed it. Aristotle wrote, it is the mark of an educated mind to entertain a thought without accepting it.

Therefore, criticism of the Prime Minister's policy is not disparaging of the leader of the nation. It is part of exercising the "collective responsibility" we owe to the nation. There is no need for Modi to lament that he gets 2-3 kgs of *gaali* a day, seeking sympathy from uninformed crowds.

Congress alleged that the PM was making himself a victim for votes, of entertaining a 'gaali-grudge' that does not pay. Fortunately, he admits that God has given him the capacity of recycling the abuse-bitterness into nutrition and positive energy. We hope that his colleague Amit Shah too develops this ability. For, how can we restrain ourselves from criticizing his irrational call for identifying 100 'infiltrators' in every state and deporting them? Is the matter of deporting as simple as he thinks? Does he pay attention to an inter-civilizational understanding of what is fair in dealing with minority groups?

### We Are at Crossroads

'Conversion'-alarm is only one of the Majoritarian issues today. Another one that has come up for public attention is the Hindutva effort to claim for their community the sites of Kashi and Mathura mosques. Take note of the standard pattern: first a mild suggestion, then a legal claim, followed by

criticism of the Prime Minister's policy is not disparaging of the leader of the nation. It is part of exercising the "collective responsibility" we owe to the nation



mob-pressure, softened by a judicial warning; then there is the return of higher decibels, qualified by sober suggestions, and then comes a final showdown: judicial decree or appropriation by force.

All-India Muslim Personal Board and Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind has described these recent claims as the "opening of floodgates of litigation against countless mosques" and the widening of religious divide. Who is there to stop this, except the good sense of the majority? Or will we wait till the Buddhists claim back half the Hindu temples? Or the tribals demand back most? But no, let us not return to old outdated value systems of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".

Recently Katerine Rundell's biography of John Donne in the UK winning a Special Award drew public attention to its content. The relevance of its Central Message for our times must have been the chief reason for its selection. John Donne (1572-1631) had said, "No man is an island... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind". The death of a Ukrainian or Myanmarese matters to me. The wiping out of the life of a Dalit, tribal or Muslim, be he a Kurmi or a Kashmiri, is the elimination of my brother. People dying in police custody or on 'forced flight' is my concern! Let my cry be heard! Save us from these types of Medieval madness!

Woody Allen's comment is relevant in today's situation, "More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads today. One path leads to despair and utter helplessness, the other to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly". ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

# Persecuting the Victims

According to a report by a Citizens' Committee on North-East Delhi riots, anti-Muslim hate was deliberately fueled in the months preceding the violence, and every effort is made to keep the 'inconvenient' people in jail

BY **JOSEPH MALIAKAN**

**I**nstead of providing timely relief and help them rehabilitate, the state and police have been persecuting the victims, mainly Muslims, of the February 2020 communal violence in North East Delhi, a report by a Citizens' Committee comprising eminent jurists and a former Home Secretary of the Union government has found.

The Committee was chaired by Madan B. Lokur, former Judge of the Supreme Court, and comprised Justices A.P. Shah, R.S. Sodhi, Anjana Parikh and G. K. Pillai, former Union Home Secretary.

According to the report, polarisation between communities, particularly anti-Muslim hate, was deliberately fueled in the months preceding the violence. The Muslim community was grappling with deep fears of loss of citizenship due to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 passed by the Parliament in December 2019, and by mid-December 2019 nationwide protests erupted against the law. Delhi emerged as the epicentre of the anti-CAA protests, with North East Delhi as the site of several sit-in protests.

Against this background, campaigning for the Delhi Assembly elections gathered momentum in



January 2020. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) focused its election campaign on anti-CAA protests framing it as anti-national and protesters were labelled traitors by BJP leaders.

While the violence in North East Delhi first broke out as a clash between pro-CAA and anti-CAA camps, it soon became a full-blown communal violence between Hindus and Muslims because of the anti-Muslim hate build up during the election campaign. While mobs clashed and caused serious disruption of normal life in North East Delhi, Muslim homes, businesses and places of worship were specifically targeted from February 23 to 26, resulting in the death of 40 Muslims and 13 Hindus.

The response of the state and the police to the targeted violence against the Muslims in North East Delhi has undermined all democratic values, the Committee has found. The Delhi police failed to take any punitive action against hate speeches made by political leaders in the run up to the outbreak of violence on February 23, 2020. In fact, the police assisting violent mobs and participating in attacks on Muslims, anti-CAA protest sites, and mosques have been documented in eyewitness and media accounts according to the report of the committee.

It is the Delhi police case that the violence was the product of a grand conspiracy by certain groups and organisations of Muslims protesting against CAA in order to compel the Union Government to repeal

While the violence in North East Delhi first broke out as a clash between pro-CAA and anti-CAA camps, it soon became a full-blown communal violence between Hindus and Muslims



the law. However, manufactured evidence deviously produced in various chargesheets contradict this narrative, the citizens report has pointed out quoting various court orders.

In an incident on 24 February 2020 at about 4 p.m. five Muslim youths were brutally assaulted and publicly humiliated by police officers who taunted the young men saying ye to azadi (here is your freedom) and forced them to sing the national anthem. One of these young men, 23-year-old Faizan, was wrongfully confined in Jyoti Nagar police station till 11 p.m. on 25 February. He died at Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan hospital on 26 February after his release.

According to the post mortem report, Faizan died due to cerebral injury along with multiple injuries all over his body caused by blunt force impact. The medical board of the JP hospital also opined that the injuries on Faizan's head could have been caused by a hard and blunt object such as a lathi. The post mortem report makes it very clear that Faizan died on account of the injuries suffered during the assault or while he was illegally detained at the Jyoti Nagar police station for more than 24 hours.

Though an FIR charging murder was registered the Delhi Police have not yet arrested the assailants, in this case policemen. In response to a writ petition filed by Faizan's mother seeking a time-bound,

## A fact-finding report published by the Delhi Minorities Commission (DMC) has stated that the Delhi police failed to prevent vandalism of Muslim places of worship

court-monitored investigation, the Delhi police filed a status report admitting that the video footage available in the media showed Faizan and others being beaten by policemen. However, the police claimed that the videos were blurred and the assailants were wearing helmets and safety gears and therefore unable to identify their own men accused of murder.

Commenting on the shoddy investigation into the communal violence, a magistrate in the State v. Shah Alam case said: I am not able to restrain myself from observing that when history will look back at the worst communal riots since partition in Delhi, it is the failure of the investigating agency to conduct proper investigation by using latest scientific methods that will surely torment the sentinels of democracy. The sort of investigation conducted

in the instant case and the lack of supervision thereof by the superior officers clearly depict that the investigating agency has merely tried to pull the wool over the court's eyes and nothing else.

A fact-finding report published by the Delhi Minorities Commission (DMC) has stated that the Delhi police failed to prevent vandalism of Muslim places of worship. In the case of burning of Madina Masjid, the complainant Haji Hashmi Ali, the caretaker of the mosque, had to approach the Metropolitan Magistrate as the police refused to register an FIR regarding damage to the mosque.

In fact, going through various cases against Muslims, the Delhi police would have us believe that the Muslims organised riots in



Muslim-dominated areas, killing mostly Muslims and destroyed mosques in protest against CAA which is discriminatory towards Muslims!

A review of the disclosure statements by people accused of committing various offences both under Indian Penal Code (IPC) as well as Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) has revealed some degree of similarity. While some disclosure statements are identical from the beginning to the end, others have quite a few identical paragraphs. Obviously, the statements have been fabricated or the accused have been tutored.

For instance, Meeran Haider's disclosure statement recorded on 8 April and Safoora Zargar's disclosure statement recorded on 14 April are word for word similar except for their names. Disclosure statements of Shadab Ahmed, Salim Malik, Athar Khan, recorded on 27 May, 28 June, and 3 July respectively and Mohammad Salim Khan's undated statement are also identical. Also, Shadab Ahmed's and Athar Khan's statements recorded on 28 August are identical to Natasha Narwal's and Devangana Kalita's statements recorded on 7 June. Further, the

same grammatical errors are made in a number of statements made by different people at different dates. These statements though cannot be relied on to convict a person they are gravely prejudicial and are enough to deny bail to the accused under UAPA and keep him or her incarcerated for long periods.

In fact, investigations in the recent conspiracy cases under UAPA have been plagued by the phenomenon of staggered arrests resulting in inordinate delay of the trial. It is only when the 180 days for filing the charge-sheet for the initially arrested accused is ending that a second set of accused are arrested. A further 180 days' time is then sought for filing the chargesheet. This is then followed by a third set of arrests further delaying trial and keeping the arrested in jail without bail for years. It looks as if the investigating agencies are using the stringent provisions of the UAPA not to convict the arrested but keep inconvenient people in jail. ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH MALIAKAN is a Delhi based Senior Journalist

## Enforcement directorate attaches Christian medical college funds for cheating

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) dealing with economic offenses has attached close to 10 million rupees of movable assets of a Christian medical college in Kerala as part of its probe into a money laundering case.

A November 22 statement from the Directorate of Enforcement says it has provisionally attached movable properties worth 9,525,000 rupees from the bank balance of Dr Somervell Memorial Medical College, Karakonam, in Thiruvananthapuram district, under the Church of South India.

The amount is equivalent to the amount of funds the officials of the medical college, including a doctor and Bishop Dharmaraj Rasalam, had collected from parents promising to give their children seats in MBBS and masters courses in the institution.

The agency also said it initiated the money laun-



dering investigation on the basis of multiple first information reports registered by Vellarada Police Station and Kerala Police's Crime Branch.

The probe revealed that the officials had indeed collected the amount from their parents but failed to give admissions to their children even after taking the money.

The accused, ED release points out, had used part of the cash for developing infrastructure in the medical college and the remaining amount was diverted to the parent

Organisation – the South Kerala Diocese of the Church of South India.

Church officials have not responded to the ED action. Earlier diocesan spokesman Father Jayaraj had claimed that the bishop and other officials of the medical college were clean and the probe could vindicate their innocence.



# Focus on Inter-religious Dialogue

At a time when the country is slipping into religious hatred and violence, dialogue is the best solution to bring it back on the track of peace, harmony

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

World has been witnessing conflicts and violence based on religion from the time people began to form communities or groups based on their religious identity. For millennia, all religious traditions have either fallen victim to or sanctioned violence. Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and others have long invoked violence in the name of religion. When religion and state are intertwined, violence takes place.

Progress in science and technology should have reduced religion-based hatred and violence, but it has not happened. According to Pew Research Centre, in 2018, more than a quarter of the world's countries experienced a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred and mob violence related to religion and harassment of women for violating religious codes.

Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need for revitalizing inter-religious dialogue to reduce and prevent conflicts and violence based on religion and to promote peace and harmony. Identities like religion, ethnicity, language, culture, etc., have been sources of conflicts and violence throughout the history of the world. Inter-religious dialogue, to be effective, requires engaging these identities, especially religious identity. In this context, a statement of well-known Catholic theologian Hans Kung is pertinent. "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions."

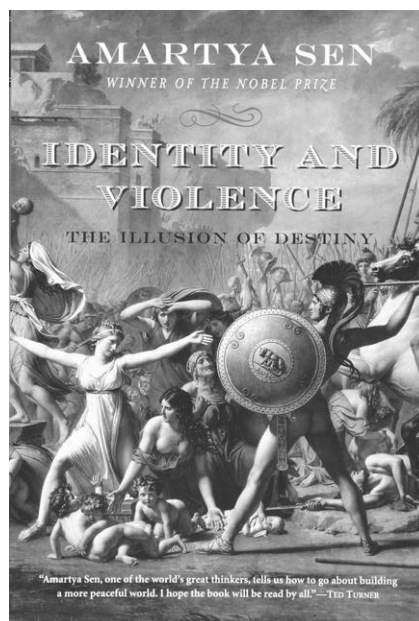


The ultimate goal of inter-religious dialogue is contributing to the promotion of peace and harmony by reducing/preventing conflicts on the one hand and increasing understanding and cooperation among the followers of different religions to build a better world.

A human being has several identities like religion, class, gender, profession, language, politics, etc. Dr. Amartya Sen in his book, "Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny", argues that a major source of potential conflict in the contemporary world is the presumption that people can be uniquely categorized based on religion or culture. "Violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror," he writes. Identity can create in a person a sense of belonging to a community and also a sense of security. At the same time, it can exclude many people; sometimes it can lead to hate and enmity towards another group.

The very process of creating an 'Us' involves creating a 'Them' – the people not like us. Hence, the force of any bellicose identity is to be challenged by the power of competing identities as advocated by Dr. Amartya Sen.

When I look at myself, I can see different identities in me. I am a Christian by religion; at the same time, I am a Malayalee by language and culture; I am a social worker by profession and a writer by my hobby. Therefore, I cannot say that being a Christian is my only identity. I make a choice about what relative importance I have to attach,



in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities. This process requires reasoning and choice. When I am involved in a project of social workers to deal with a social issue, I do not focus on my identity as a Christian. Over-emphasis on a particular identity like religion or ethnicity and limiting one's identity only to one among the several identities to the exclusion of others, often create conflicting situations. Hence, accepting plurality of identities and the freedom to focus on one or the other identity according to the situation, is essential for creating a conducive atmosphere for inter-religious dialogue.

One of the reasons for the conflict among the followers of different religions is growth of fundamentalism or fanaticism within the religions. The fundamentalists believe that their religion is beyond any form of criticism, and anyone who appears to be a threat to their beliefs will be dealt with violence. Religious terrorists belong to this group.

Logical explanations and scientific evidence have no place in the belief systems of fundamentalists. Taliban in Afghanistan is an example of the worst form of religious fundamentalism. Engaging with fundamentalists of any particular religion from the perspective of dialogue is very difficult. Therefore, the followers of all religions have to be alert and should not allow growth of fundamentalism among the believers.

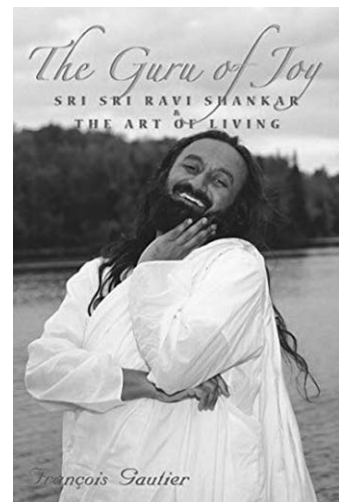
Educating the followers of any religion to transcend lower identities and focus on the highest identities is an effective method to create a conducive environment for inter-religious dialogue. Francois Gautier, in his book "The Guru of Joy: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the Art of Living", writes that human beings

have five major identities. Firstly, all human beings are part of the Divine; secondly, they all belong to the human race; thirdly, they are either male or female; fourthly, they belong to a particular nation; and fifthly, they belong to a particular religion. In order to engage in dialogue with other religions, the followers of a religion have to focus on the highest identities: humanity and the divine presence in all human persons. Thus, the ability to transcend the lower identities and focus on the highest identity will contribute to the effectiveness of dialogue among the followers of different religions.

Another method is focusing on spiritual values espoused by religions. According to Gautier, religion has three aspects: spiritual values, rituals and symbols. The spiritual values are more or less common to all religious traditions, but rituals and symbols vary. The rituals and symbols are like the banana skin, and the spiritual values are the banana. People in all religious traditions often throw away the banana and hold onto the skin. The spiritual values of most of the religions are love, forgiveness, compassion, justice, respecting every being, etc. Promoting spirituality within the religions makes inter-religious dialogue easy. When religion is divorced from spirituality, it becomes easily susceptible to politicization.

A Hindi movie *Dharam* directed by Bhavana Talwar concludes with a very meaningful statement by Pandit Chaturvedi, the main character. "Religion is not mere rituals, but duty and responsibility; rejecting discrimination is religion; unity and harmony is religion; humanity is religion."

One of the main reasons for conflicts between followers of different religions is politicization of religion. Because of mixing religion with politics and the state becoming theocratic, religious freedom is totally curtailed and religious minorities are discriminated against and even persecuted in some theocratic states. Afghanistan is one of the worst exam-



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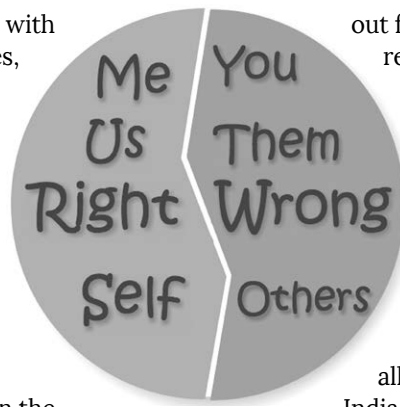
ples of the danger of mixing religion with politics. In many theocratic countries, not only religious freedom but also basic human rights are denied or violated.

Secular or pluralist democracies are found to be the best form of government that can ensure religious freedom and reduce discrimination and persecution based on religion. India accepted secular democracy when it formulated and adopted its Constitution. In the context of India, secularism does not mean anti-religion but equal respect and treatment for all religions. In Hindi, it is called *Sarvadharmā sambhāv*. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution states clearly what secularism means for India.

The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of religion only and that the State shall have no religion of its own and all persons shall be equally entitled to the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion. (Article 25)

Despite the constitutional provisions for equal rights and opportunities for the followers of all religions, the practice of the Constitution may change according to the ideology of the political parties that come to power. Without changing the Constitution, the constitutional provisions could be violated and the judiciary may fail to be a guardian of the Constitution and the fundamental rights of citizens. Hence one of the goals of inter-religious dialogue should be promotion and strengthening of pluralist democracy, especially in the context of many democracies slipping into authoritarianism and even fascism in different parts of the world.

Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, former President of India, is a beautiful example of harmonizing two different religious identities. He was a genuine Muslim, who did his namaz, and observed Ramzan duties with-



out fail. But he was also a vegetarian who read the Bhagavad Gita and listened to Carnatic devotional songs every day.

Universal Solidarity Movement (USM) Indore, of which I have been a partner for the last three decades, is a successful experiment to harmonize different religious identities. USM envisages building a civilization of love by drawing the core spiritual values of all religions in India. USM visualizes an India/world with:

The universal family spirit of Hinduism and Bahai Faith,

The discipline and fellowship of Islam,

The courage of Sikhism,

The compassion of Buddhism,

The non-violence of Jainism,

The creativity of Parsi Religion,

The indomitability of Judaism,

The cosmic solidarity of Tribal Religions,

The self-sacrifice and forgiveness of Christianity.

Based on this vision, individuals belonging to different religions live in a community and work for the realization of its vision. The USM community in Indore has common meals, common daily evaluation and twice a day inter-religious prayer with common songs and readings from different scriptures. The community members are completely free to practice their religion the way they want without causing any problem for others. Prominent festivals of the religions to which the members belong are celebrated.

All those who come to USM community are fascinated by the warm hospitality, respect for all religions and cultures, equal respect for all without any discrimination, transparency and team work. In fact, the USM way of life is an inter-religious living for achieving the goals of Inter-religious dialogue. It is an attempt to demonstrate that the vision of India, as envisaged in the preamble of the Constitution, can be realized – an India with pluralism in terms of religion, culture and language; justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and respect for individual dignity. ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**“Religion is not mere rituals, but duty and responsibility; rejecting discrimination is religion; unity and harmony is religion; humanity is religion”**

# Violence against Women

## The Invisible Epidemic

“Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men...” - Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993

BY **AARTI**



“**U**nite to end violence against women and girls”. The theme for this year’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, (observed by the United Nations every November 25) could not be more apt. Violence against women that includes stalking, physical and sexual violence, forced marriage, forced abortion, forced sterilisation, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, etc., is surging around the globe.

The World Health Organisation in 2013 maintained that violence against women and girls is an epidemic affecting one in three women worldwide in their adult lifetime and particularly, globally, women aged 15–44 are more at risk of rape and domestic violence.

What is shocking is that from an estimated 48,000 women and girls intentionally killed around the world in 2012, the figure for 2021 is 81,000 as per the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s recent

global report on homicide. Sadly enough, around 56 percent or 45,000 of them died at the hands of intimate partners or other family members.

In many countries, reportedly, men propagate violence on women, because of low frustration tolerance, influence of criminal peers or they had been abused or witnessed violence in their families of origin, or their role models settled conflicts through aggression. Further, women with little education are far more likely to tolerate violence from their husbands, especially if they are dependent on them for sustenance.

Specifically, the largely under-reported malaise of domestic violence, a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship, is said to occur when a person consistently aims to control their partner through physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Studies have shown that psychological abuse impacts health as much or worse than physical abuse as it targets thoughts, feelings and perception thereby adversely impacting a person’s psyche and sense of wellbeing. Such behaviours, meant to emotionally scare as well physically harm a partner, can affect anyone irrespective of any age, gender, race etc.

**The World Health Organisation in 2013 maintained that violence against women and girls is an epidemic affecting one in three women worldwide in their adult lifetime and particularly, globally, women aged 15–44 are more at risk of rape and domestic violence**

However, female victims of domestic violence seem to suffer a wide variety of health problems including organ, bone damage, miscarriage, other gynaecological problems. They are also more susceptible to a variety of mental health problems ranging from depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, sleep and eating disorders, etc. The percentage of women worldwide who are battered during their pregnancy is between 25 percent and 45 percent.

Well, the harmful effects of domestic violence against women can also extend to their children as such children who grow up in families where there is domestic violence can experience wide ranging behavioural and emotional disturbances. One of three abused children becomes an adult abuser or victim.

Even as victims of intimate partner violence experience diminished self-worth, anxiety, depression and a general sense of helplessness, why is that many women endure or return to such abusive relationships? Well, it is possible that some are driven by the basic necessities of life. Other victims seem to believe that the rewards outweigh the costs of separation despite mistreatment and return to their abusers.

What goes on within the four walls of a home is surely private. Many years back when I visited my

grandparents during summer vacations, I was literally shocked to hear the loud cries of a woman wailing out of pain from a neighbouring house pleading with her husband not to beat her. When asked, my grandmother muttered, "What goes on behind closed doors is none of our business", and she was correct in a way. The couple who fought so much could be seen coming out of their house together after some time smilingly, as though nothing had happened, depicting a very respectful and loving relationship.

On the flipside, besides right to equality guaranteed by the Constitution, the enactment of specific legislations like the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 have seemingly addressed gender inequality, discrimination and violence faced by women. But there are still challenges and we have a long way to go as the most common type of spousal (domestic) violence, that is physical abuse, emotional and or sexual violence is a cause for concern.

During the period 2019-20, about 1000 cases were registered under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Notably enough, domestic violence against women, according to the recently released National Family Health Survey-5 Report, has declined from 31.2 percent (NFHS-4 – 2015-16) to 29.3 percent (NFHS-5 – 2019-20). While 30 percent women, between the age of 18 and 49, reportedly experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years, 6 percent experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Women in the 40-49 age bracket experienced more violence than those in the 18-19 age category.

While physical violence was more common among women in rural areas as compared to their counterparts in urban areas, such violence declined sharply with increased schooling and wealth of the woman. Even as the husband was the perpetrator of violence in over 80 percent cases, such abuse (physical, emotional or sexual) varied with the level of his education and alcohol consumption.

During 2020 and 2021, the National Commission for Women received 23,722 and 30,865 complaints respectively which included: i) to secure one's right to live with dignity (harassment other than domestic violence like curtailment of one's freedom to take decisions, stopping one from working and situations that infringed their privacy), ii) protection from



Courtesy: freepik.com/pikusuperstar

domestic violence, and iii) matters of harassment of married women including for dowry.

If reports are to be believed, domestic violence kills more than 14,000 women every year in Russia while in China, one-third of its 270 million households cope with it. In Zimbabwe domestic violence accounts for more than six in ten murder cases while in Kenya and Uganda, 42 percent and 41 percent respectively of women have been beaten by their husbands. In some Middle East countries both fathers and eldest brothers, in most cases, assert their right to punish their wives and children in any way they see appropriate.

Amidst protests from women activists, South Korea recently abolished its Ministry of Gender Equality and Family while Australia implemented its first Gender Equality Act that will require public sector employers to promote and advance gender equality in the workplace. The intent is to ensure all genders enjoy equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and outcomes. Also, public sector organisations will need to undergo gender impact assessments besides prepare and publish a “Gender Equality Action Plan.”

Domestic violence is undoubtedly a human rights issue and serious deterrent to development. It needs to be realised that violence against women has a high economic cost to the society. While the cost of domestic violence is pegged at 11.1 percent of the world gross domestic product, the costs related to violence against women and girls and child abuse are also high at 5.3 percent and 4.3 percent of the global GDP respectively. In the US, the cost of domestic and family violence is USD 12 billion annually. Likewise, it costs the Australian and British economies an estimated \$13.6 billion and £66 billion respectively.

**While the cost of domestic violence is pegged at 11.1 percent of the world gross domestic product, the costs related to violence against women and girls and child abuse are also high at 5.3 percent and 4.3 percent of the global GDP respectively**

## UNITED TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



As gender inequality usually fuels intimate partner violence, at a macro level there is an imperative need to address sexist and misogynist beliefs through multi-pronged strategies in order to achieve gender equality.

So, what's new?

This October, Australia unveiled its National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children within the next ten years (2022–2032). One in 3 women there has experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and one in 5 has experienced sexual violence. On average, a woman is killed by an intimate partner every 10 days.

The National Plan intends to take actions across four domains: 1) Prevention – by addressing the attitudes and systems that drive violence against women and children to stop it before it starts. 2) Early intervention – identifying and supporting individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence and prevent it from reoccurring. 3) Response – by addressing existing violence and support victim-survivors experiencing violence, like, crisis support and police intervention and a trauma-informed justice system. 4) Recovery and healing – supporting victim-survivors to be safe and healthy to be able to recover from the trauma and the physical, mental, emotional and economic impacts of violence.

At the societal level, basically, changing the mindset and attitudinal behaviour towards women can help immensely. There are others who argue that unless we change the culture, victimisation of women will continue.

Well, at an individual level, the victims of gender abuse ought not suffer in silence. They must consider taking the assistance of someone they trust, or join a support group.

The invisible epidemic of violence against women has to be tackled ruthlessly. Surely, together, we can. ©

# Tribal family attacked for embracing Christian ways

**T**ribal families were attacked by their fellow villagers for embracing a Christian way of life and refusing to follow indigenous traditions in Chhattisgarh.

Some 15 people were injured and three people, including two women, who sustained serious injuries in the Nov. 22 attack in the Bhaissabod in Kondagaon district are being treated at a government hospital.

A man injured in the attack said on condition of anonymity that eight tribal families in the village have been following “Christian practices” like praying daily in the evening and on Sundays along with other observances for quite some time.

“None of us have converted to Christianity, but we follow its practices,” he said.



The families even stopped participating in traditional rituals, which caused a rift with their fellow villagers.

It culminated in the violent attack on the night of Nov. 22, he said. “The attackers forced their way into the houses and attacked us,” said one of the injured.

Speaking to UCA News on Nov. 23, the family said that all those who follow Christian practices might have to leave the village.

“Now we are all scared as our own brothers and sisters have turned against us,” the family said and added that “we might have to leave the village unless

we’re given police protection.”

The family members said the police who responded to the incident did not take any action against their attackers, which has emboldened them to threaten to burn the houses of those who refuse to follow indigenous faith practices.

Pastor Moses Logan, president of the Chhattisgarh State Christian Welfare Society, condemned the incident and said Christians and even those showing an affinity to the faith were under attack in the state.

Omkar Diwan, the station house officer of Bade Dongar police station said a formal complaint was registered and action will be taken against those involved.

He told UCA News that the incident was the result of a “family dispute.”

“The aggressors and the victims are part of an extended family. After the victims started following another religion, the others attempted to pressure them to follow the indigenous faith. They attacked them in a fit of rage,” the officer explained.

Diwan said he had visited the village twice since the incident and tried to convince both sides to maintain peace and harmony.

However, Pastor Logan, in a statement, accused the police of inaction and urged the district police superintendent to initiate action against local officers for dereliction of duty.

Meanwhile, in yet another incident reported from the state, a Pentecostal group’s Sunday service was disrupted and the faithful beaten up by an armed mob in Narayanpur district on Nov 20

“The attackers were indigenous men wielding sticks. They also tore up copies of the Holy Bible among other things. Two people suffered serious injuries and were undergoing treatment at a government hospital,” Pastor Logan said.

He blamed the ruling Congress state government for failing to check the growing violence against Christians in Chhattisgarh. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

# Church-run prison ministry calls for penal reforms

**A** Catholic Church-run prison ministry in India has appealed to provincial governments to speed up reforms and adopt a rehabilitative view of prisoners and jails in the country.

The Prison Ministry India (PMI) wants authorities to address issues such as overcrowded prisons, delays in court trials, and inadequate health and hygiene facilities among other things to help transform the lives of prisoners.

The administration and management of Indian prisons and prisoners is the responsibility of the provincial or state governments.

“The governments with a view to providing better amenities to the prisoners have formulated policies and programs, but often the benefits are not reaching those languishing behind bars,” says Father Francis Kodyian MCBS.

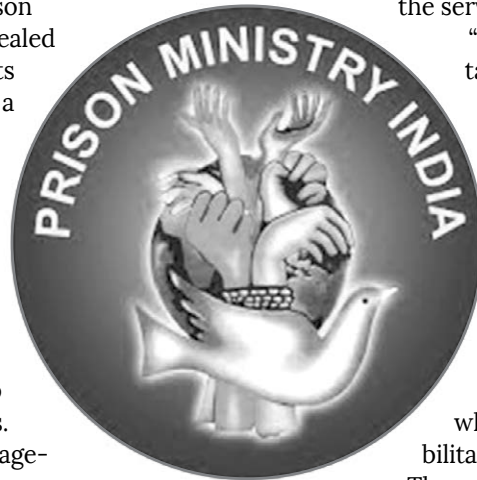
Father Kodyian, who founded the PMI along with Father Varghese Karippery in 1981, said some 450 delegates attended the organization’s 13th convention in Goa on Nov. 15-19.

The convention, according to an official statement, urged governments to “adopt more concrete measures to ease the hardship of those behind bars, their families and rehabilitation of the released”.

“Incarceration must give every opportunity for prisoners to accept their own guilt, acknowledge their need for repentance and reformation. It is the duty of the governments to make sure that prisoners enjoy fundamental and basic human rights,” the statement said.

Alluding to the deplorable conditions of prisoners, Father Kodyian told UCA News on Nov. 23 that “more than 70 percent of prisoners are awaiting or are on trial, and delays in court procedures make them vulnerable to abuse and violations of their human rights.”

He said a vast majority of the prisoners came from poor backgrounds and hence were unable to afford



the services of competent lawyers.

“It is high time that governments take special initiatives to provide legal aid and ensure speedy trials,” the priest said.

Father Kodyian also suggested the classification and separation of prisoners based on the seriousness of the crime

“A first offender or a small offender is put inside the same prison cell as a hardcore criminal, which is detrimental to their rehabilitation,” he said.

The priest also appealed to the governments to start more open jails.

“It will not only help reduce overcrowding inside jails but also help first-time or small offenders transform their lives,” he added.

The PMI emphasized other steps like facilitating “visits by spouses and family members, special consideration for women prisoners, especially those pregnant and with young children.”

It also called upon the Catholic Church to train and engage more volunteers in addition to the 8,000 currently serving in the ministry. This could help accelerate schemes for providing employment, housing, healthcare, and education to those released from jails and their families.

“Serving prisoners is serving the suffering Christ,” Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao of Goa and Daman said in his presidential address to the convention on Nov 16.

The cardinal called for reintegrating released prisoners into society with compassion.

Bishop Alwyn D’Silva, chairperson of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) Office for PMI said: “Let us not forget that repentance and reconciliation are acts of grace and spiritual warfare for overcoming our worldly challenges and struggles.”

The convention decided to open 10 new homes for released prisoners and 10 special homes for trafficked girls, besides setting up 5,000 educational scholarships for children of prisoners. ©



## Northeast Christian leaders decry “alarmist” conversion news



Christian leaders in northeastern India on November 24 voiced great anxiety about “alarmist news” being spread in connection with the issue of conversion.

Such “painful developments” are “nothing but an effort to malign our community which has rendered yeoman service in the field of education, health and social development to all sections in society irrespective of caste, creed, or ethnicity,” said the leaders who met at Guwahati, the commercial capital of Assam state and nerve center of northeastern India.

“We have been the first to denounce any sort of “forced” conversion. At the same time, we also affirm the right of every citizen to choose any religion of his/her own choice that the Constitution guarantees, see Article 25-28,” asserts a press statement the leaders issued after the meeting.

They termed as “very wrong to make false allegations of ‘conversion’ by force, fraud or inducement with the intention of humiliating our community. We feel that such accusations are made with the deliberate intention of dividing our society.”

The leaders represented the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, Church of North India, Presbyterian Church of India, North East Christian Council ( All Protestant Churches), Evangelical Fellowship Of India (All Pentecostal Churches) and the Regional Catholic Bishops Conference of North East India (All Catholic Churches of the region).

“What we feel embarrassed about most is that it is the very identity and cultural ethos of the North-Eastern region and of Assam that are being eroded by people who seek to take their models from those areas of our country, where, unfortunately, communal violence has found ideological acceptance. North-eastern society has always been open-minded and liberal, with an eagerness to promote enlightened thinking and refined relationships,” the Christian leaders explained.

People in the Northeast, they added, have always vigorously opposed the imposition of value-systems, divisive thinking and narrow-mindedness that are totally alien to our collective ethos. “We have always believed in harmony and cooperation and warm-hearted relationships. Our mind has always been ‘inclusive,’” they added. The leaders expressed their pain at the “unpleasant incidents that have happened at the inter-state borders and express our solidarity with all those who are trying to settle the problems amicably. We appeal to all parties of good will to approach the entire matter with a sense of history and fair-mindedness.”

“What we want more than anything else is that an atmosphere of peace, collaboration and mutual assistance prevails among us in these days of growing political and economic anxieties. United we shall never fail,” the leaders warned. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

## Probe demanded after woman alleges conversion

**N**ational Commission for Women, meant to protect women's rights in India has sought action against two Christian men for allegedly converting a Hindu woman in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

A video of the woman from Damoh district claiming she was offered 120,000 rupees to convert to Christianity was posted on a social media platform on Nov. 18.

The woman, whose identity could not be ascertained, said she was in dire need of money and agreed. The duo dipped her in a water tank and told her she had become a Christian.

But when she stopped going to Church the men demanded she repay them four times the amount. She paid 90,000 rupees, but they kept insisting on the rest of the amount. The woman further claimed that five others were also converted along with her.

Taking cognizance of the video, Rekha Sharma, chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) demanded action against the culprits.

"NCW has taken cognizance [of the video footage]," Sharma stated in a tweet adding that she had directed the Madhya Pradesh director general of police and Damoh district collector to arrest the suspects if the allegations are found to be true.

When contacted, Damoh Superintendent of Police



A screengrab of the video showing the unidentified woman from Damoh district in Madhya Pradesh alleging she was converted to Christianity by offering money.

(Photo courtesy: Tweeter)

(SP) D R Tenivaar told UCA News that no case has been registered yet. "The police are carrying out a preliminary investigation into the allegation and only then the future course of action will be decided," he explained.

The Damoh police had on Nov. 13 charged 10 Protestant Christians of alleged religious conversion at an orphanage they ran and launched a probe after a complaint by Priyank Kanoongo, chairman of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

Christian leaders in Madhya Pradesh say false charges were being cooked up against the minority community as part of a deliberate strategy to harass them.

"We don't convert anyone by force or allurements or any other means, but we accept those willing to become Christian out of their free will," a Christian leader who did not want to be named told UCA News.

Madhya Pradesh is among a dozen states in India where Christians are facing increasing persecution, especially after the state enacted a more stringent anti-conversion law last year.

The campaign against Christians in the guise of alleged conversions may also be part of a strategy for the state elections scheduled for November 2023, a Christian leader said. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

**Christian leaders in Madhya Pradesh say false charges were being cooked up against the minority community as part of a deliberate strategy to harass them. "We don't convert anyone by force or allurements or any other means, but we accept those willing to become Christian out of their free will," a Christian leader who did not want to be named told UCA News**

# Rome studies miracle attributed to Venerable Agnelo



The canonization process of Venerable D'Souza has entered a new phase after the Congregation for the Causes of Saints began to study a miracle attributed to the saintly priest from Goa.

"The process of this case has begun," Father Nazareth Fernandes, superior general of the Society of Pilar, told the 95th death anniversary of Venerable Agnelo D'Souza, a member of the congregation.

The priest said Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, has informed the congregation that they have accepted the miracle and opened it for study on November 3, 2021.

Father Nazareth Fernandes said that the devotees of Venerable Agnelo are eagerly praying for his beatification and often ask when the Church would declare him a saint.

Maintaining that such queries are difficult to answer since the process of canonization is lengthy and rigorous, he explained.

Father Fernandes also quoted Redemptorist Father Antonio Marrazzo, who has been appointed as postulator by the Pilar Society to handle the process of canonisation, has urged the devotees to pray un-

ceasingly during this period.

The death anniversary was celebrated November 19 with great fervour and devotion at the headquarters of the congregation in Pilar. Thousands had flocked to Pilar during the past nine days to seek the saintly priest's blessings.

The venerable was born in Anjuna, Goa, on the January 21, 1869. He was ordained a priest in 1898 and served in Pilar, Shiroda, Sanvordem and Kumta. He was appointed as a resident spiritual director of the Seminary of Rachol, where he served for nine years, until his death on November 20, 1927.

This year, the death anniversary was celebrated on November 19, a day earlier, as the day coincided with the solemnity of Christ the King, celebrated on November 20.

The solemn feast day Mass was presided over by Bishop Emeritus Alex Dias of Port Blair. In his homily, the prelate described Venerable Agnelo as a saint in a hurry. Like Jesus who went out preaching the Good News of God hurriedly, Venerable Agnelo followed his Lord with a sense of urgency.

"Agnelo was a man of prayer; a lover of the Word of God, a caring and compassionate person," the bishop added. ©

## Fr. Alfred Roche OFM Cap

# A Family-Builder

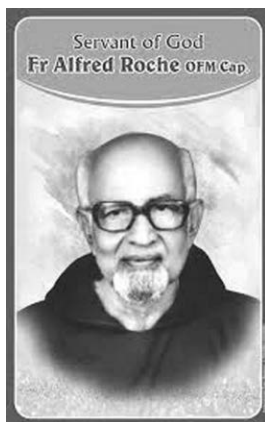
Being brought up in an atmosphere of love and deep faith, Fr. Alfred Roche had known the importance of healthy and God-centred families

BY **PATRICK CRASTA**

**W**e know the importance of family in our day-to-day life. We call it the Church in miniature. For we believe that the quality of the Church, the spiritual vitality of the Church, depends upon the quality/the Evangelical Spirit prevailing in the families where the children are born and brought up. The love, care, and attention that they receive in the family context, and the faith-formation and value-system that they imbibe from the teaching and life-pattern of the parents and the elders set the foundation for their life so that they become solid pillars of their families, and firm and faithful members of the Church.

As we have reflected upon, the All-Loving Father had blessed Fr. Alfred Roche (Peter John) with loving and devout parents, two caring elder brothers, and two sharing elder sisters. Although his dad, late Mr. Isaac Roche, was a farmer by profession, he could find time and energy daily to cross the Sita River with a canoe and to render his devout service as a sacristan in his parish dedicated to St. Peter for more than forty years. It was nothing but an expression of his deep spirit of faith in the Lord. The daily family-prayers never failed.

Being born and brought up in such an atmosphere of love, care, and deep faith from his childhood, Fr. Alfred Roche had known the importance of healthy



and God-centred families. This early home-formation was further consolidated through the seminary-formation that he got during the different stages of his religious and priestly formation in the Capuchin Order.

As an ordained minister of Jesus, the Prophet and High Priest, while strengthening the faith of his flock with his sermons based on the Word of God and while fostering deep devotion in the Holy Eucharist in and through his devout celebration of the Holy Mass and through regular Holy Hours with the

Blessed Sacrament exposed, he tried to build up the families.

Let us listen to what Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, Snehalaya, Solur, would like to say: "Every family he visited, he spent time in praying for the family. In a family, if any member has to go in search of job, leaving the house, he would visit the family, pray and bless the person and give the needed direction.... He made time to visit the families to know their situation very personally in order to pray, console and encourage for better living" (Witness no 58).

When there were natural calamities, the concern of Fr. Alfred Roche was unique. During the rainy season, when people, irrespective of caste and creed, had lost their houses, cattle, and other belongings due to heavy floods, Lilly Teacher from Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, would like to bear witness to what he was doing: "Fr. Roche was a person of prayer. He had a special love for the poor. When there were floods, he used to get into a boat and visit every house. When he was walking along the edges of the fields, there were occasions when he had fallen into small pits.... He was visiting the sick and consoling them and comforting them with the words of Jesus. Thus, walking in the footsteps of Jesus he did spread the Good News of God" (witness no 55). ©

**Every family he visited, he spent time in praying for the family. In a family, if any member has to go in search of job, leaving the house, he would visit the family, pray and bless the person and give the needed direction**

# A Happy Way to Live

BY P.A. JOSEPH

**T**here is a Japanese word UKETAMO, meaning “I accept with an open heart.”

In our life we come across a number of issues. Some of these are positive, some negative, some moments are highly tensed; at times we are unable to proceed further, and we are left with no one to help us, no one to understand us. Sometimes we are not understood, or even totally misunderstood. All these have sometimes grave consequences and we are not able to take a step further. In all such moments the Japanese advice is UKETAMO, ‘I accept with an open heart.’ This capsule of spirituality is discovered by years of experience by numerous people who lived the life just like us.

Japanese history is a history of struggles, both environmental and man-made. During the terminal end of World War II, Japan was literally crushed and destroyed with US atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in July 1945, killing 80,000 and 40,000 people respectively. The people encountered hard life, and they bore it in agony and heroism. The whole world accepts the history of endeavor and struggle of the Japanese. Let me try this in my own life, saying to myself even in moments of minor struggles, UKETAMO ‘I accept with an open heart’, a truly positive approach to life.

There is yet another word ARIGATO, meaning ‘Thank You’. ‘Thank you’ is a personally addressed word ‘to you’, to someone. We don’t say ‘thank you’ in



the air. We look at someone and tell to the person. The best way would be to say ‘thank you’ with eye contact. Say it looking at the person in front of you. That means a lot. In all the moments of happy and other moments let us have the courage to say: thank you. What better word we can say to God than ‘Thank You’. It will leave us in peace of heart and soul. When we have a tensed relation with neighbors, parents, children, companions, spouse, brother or sister, help-

ers, if you can say ‘thank you’, it is wonderful.

We are not alone. We live with others. We interact with others. We confront them, or we are challenged by others. Sometime we try to change the situation in which we are placed. As in a game I have to play with such and such persons; sometimes we may be able to change such situations. If we can change it, well and good. Or, if that is not possible, we must be able to change our mindset. That is an intelligent and mature approach; when we cannot change others we change our mind-set, our disposition, our attitude, our approach, etc. With some I cannot be too personal; ignore it; let them mind their business; I do in a different way; the issue is well handled and managed.

Life often may be confrontation with others. All problems we face are inter-personal. It would appear that if one is alone no problems would crop up. May be, then we are not humans. It demands giving and taking; criticizing and accepting criticisms. We can only dream of a situation when everything is so nice and beautiful. Such situations are rare. As we are all individuals and brought up with varying options and priorities, we cannot expect everything as we want; hence problems crop in. This is a reality to be accepted. Happiness is not absence of problems, but it is the ability to deal with all of them. Wisdom demands that we be aware of such situations, and be open to accept these in a very comfortable and healthy way. ©

**It would appear that if one is alone no problems would crop up. May be, then we are not humans. It demands giving and taking; criticizing and accepting criticisms**



# Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

## Rahul's Long Walk..!

**A**s Rahul carries on his long trek through our vast country, there's something happening. This isn't a walk galvanizing people to hate their neighbours as most other recent walks have been.

This is a walk, in which we are seeing compassion at work!

Compassion is simply a kind, friendly presence in the face of what's difficult. Its power is connecting us with what's difficult—it offers us an approach that differs from the turning away that we usually do, and that's what is becoming increasingly noticeable in Rahul's strides through India.

be free from suffering, and it's imbued with a desire to help.

It's going to be a long walk for Rahul, no not this padayatra that he's doing, but the walk into the hearts of voters, but the impression he makes though it will take long to form, will be deep!

Hate has always lost to love!

Hate wins small battles, but love ultimately wins the war. Another Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, won freedom for our country through a simple method of non-violence. He and India did not react when the British used sticks and guns on them.

And they won, and won so well, that in America,



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There's no turning away from the poor: No, there isn't as we see in many leaders of today, who have a great disdain for the poor, and are visibly more in love with the rich and influential. But Rahul, he hugs the most insignificant individual, and in the hug we see love, love for the people of India!

Love for the poor!

Love for the human condition!

When we can acknowledge the commonality of the human condition, something beautiful happens: we diminish the subtle cruelty of indifference.

Compassion helps him connect with others, mends relationships, and it seems to be moving him forward while fostering emotional intelligence and well-being. Though he made a statement about a historical freedom fighter that made the Shiv-Sena bristle, still one phone call to Sanjay Raut, smoothed the ruffled feathers as Raut spoke of the compassion Rahul is showing in his 'great walk'!

His compassion harbors a desire for all people to

Martin Luther King used the same formula, and what ultimately happened was the unheard; a black man becoming the president of the most powerful country in the world, and for eight years was the most powerful man in the world.

All through using the formula of love and compassion!

It's going to be a long walk for Rahul, but it's a walk India needs, after being fed on hate for some time now. It's going to be interesting to watch, because though love will win in the end, hate does take it's pound of flesh. Will the boy turned man, who India is beginning to love, survive that pound being removed, is what we hope will happen..! ©

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ROBERT CLEMENTS** is a Newspaper Columnist, with an estimated readership of 6 million. He also conducts a short-term Writer's Course. Contact him on bobsbanter@gmail.com for more details

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**Last Date of Registration: 30th November 2022**

## SOME SPEAKERS



**Ms. Anuradha Shankar IPS**  
ADGP, Bhopal



**Rtn. T.N. Subramanian**  
Rotary International Director



**Dr. Sudarshan Iyenger**  
Former Vice Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad



**Shri Tushar Gandhi**  
Social Activist, Author & Great Grandson of Mahatma Gandhi



**Swami Nikhleshwaranandaji**  
Adhyaksha Ramakrishna Ashram, Rajkot



**Dr. Bharat Chhapparwal**  
Former Vice Chancellor, DAVV, Indore



**Prof. Anamik Shah**  
Former VC Gujarat Vidyapeeth



**Rtn. Shrikant Indrani**  
District Governor, R.I. Dist 3060



**Rtn. Jinendra Jain**  
District Governor, R.I. Dist 3040



**Dr. Markandey Rai**  
Chancellor, IGTAMS University, Arunachal Pradesh & The Global Open University, Nagaland.



**Shri Shravan Garg**  
Senior Journalist



**Prof. Mathai M P**  
Editor, "Gandhi Way", Gandhi Peace Foundation



**Dr. Jose Nandhikkara**  
Dharmaram College, Bangalore



**Rtn. Dr. Bindu Shirsath**  
RI Dist. 3132



**Rtn. Dhiran Datta**  
PDG, R.I. Dist 3040



**Dr. Sujan Baranath**  
Trustee, Nai Talim Samiti, Sewagram



**Rtn. Ritu Grover**  
DGE, R.I. Dist 3040



**Rtn. Harshit Rughani**  
President, Local Organising Committee of Peace Convention, Porbandar



**Rtn. Dharmendra Joshi**  
Rotary Club of Kankaria, Ahmedabad, RID 3054



**Rtn. Dr. K.A. Kuriachan**  
PDG RID 3201, Coimbatore



**Advocate Rtn. S. N. Lathi**  
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