

Indian Currents

www.indiancurrents.org • Vol. XXXV • Issue 11 • 13 - 19 March 2023 • ₹15

Total Pages - 36 Including Cover

COMMUNAL CHORUS IN NEWS



Media Mockery

The verdict of the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) castigating three leading channels - *Times Now*, *Zee News* and *News 18* - for airing blatantly communal shows exposes the rot set in the media, especially the electronic and social media.

Recently signed agreement between *Prasar Bharati* and the RSS-controlled *Hindustan Samachar* is an unashamed way of disseminating biased and favourable news to the naïve public.

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STOP PUSHING AGENDA



The recent verdict of the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) castigating three leading channels – *Times Now*, *Zee News* and *News 18* – for airing blatantly communal shows exposes the rot set in the media, especially electronic and social media. The Authority's ire at the news channels was based on a couple of incidents. In one instance, *Times Now* went overboard in reporting that the now banned People's Front of India, during a protest in Pune, raised 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans, which was false. In another instance, *Zee News* while discussing India's population explosion faulted with the Muslim community for the same. To substantiate its claim, the channel used unsubstantiated data and statistics. The case against *News 18* was that its anchor made a nonsensical comment that 20 per cent Muslims were gang-ing up against 80 per cent Hindus who constitute the country's population.

The common thread in the above media coverage is selective targeting of a community based on falsification of events and partial data. It is reporting with an ideological spin to push an agenda that dangerously polarizes the society. It is not an isolated case in the present media scene; it is happening with apparent official and political backing. Many media organizations are wittingly becoming part of this alarming erosion of objectivity, both in news and views. This 'communal chorus' is getting shriller and those not willing to bite the bullet are arm-twisted to fall in line. The recent change of hands in NDTV and the so called 'survey' in BBC offices in the country by investigating agencies are clear cases of bid to subjugate the fourth estate.

As the country is getting into election mode with several Assembly and Lok Sabha polls scheduled in the next one year or so, there is a concerted effort to feed selective news through government-controlled media organizations. The recently signed agreement between Prasar Bharati and the RSS-controlled *Hindustan Samachar* is an unashamed way of disseminating biased and favourable news to the naïve public. Replacing Press Trust of India, the news agency with the widest world-wide reach and a mine of varied news and reports, with the one which has limited means to provide the same is nothing but weakening the fourth pillar of democracy. If the media tells you "who to love, who to hate, who to be afraid of, who to trust, what to think and what not to think" that is enslavement of one's mind leading to authoritarianism.

The importance of unadulterated news is well said in a story about M.V. Kamath, the well-known journalist who worked with several newspapers in various capacities and former chairman of Prasar Bharati. During the initial stages of his career, once he was summoned by his editor S. Natarajan to explain what Kamath meant by describing a man as 'elderly' in his news report. "Young man, how old is elderly?" asked Natarajan. "Sir, the man in the story is 42," Kamath replied. Pat came the editor's retort: "Well, I am 42 and I do not consider I am elderly. I suggest you to stick to giving the man's age and leave it at that. Let's have no more editorializing in the copy." From the days when even innocent adjectives or comments by journalists were taken with a pinch of salt, media coverage of events and incidents has degenerated into outrageous editorializing, verging on polarizing the society. This is the bane of the present-day journalism.

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

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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375 - A, Pocket - 2
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POWER QUOTES



Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently.

Maya Angelou

• • •



Life is never easy. There is work to be done and obligations to be met - obligations to truth, to justice, and to liberty.

John F. Kennedy

• • •



Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.

Steve Jobs

• • •



When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.

Helen Keller

• • •



Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you.

Walt Whitman

• • •



I believe every human has a finite number of heartbeats. I don't intend to waste any of mine.

Neil Armstrong

• • •



What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.

Zig Ziglar

MEDIA MOCKERY

News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority chastises three leading TV channels for airing blatantly communal and biased news and views

BY **JOSEPH MALIAKAN**

In a welcome move, the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) has castigated three leading channels -- Times Now, Zee News and News 18 -- for airing blatantly communal shows.

The Authority in its order of February 27 indicted Times Now and Zee News for their coverage of protests by the now banned Muslim organization, the Popular Front of India, and the increase in India's population. Times Now had falsely claimed that "Pakistan Zindabad" slogans were raised at a demonstration held by the Popular Front in Pune on September 24, 2022.

Times Now had in its defence said it had relied on reports by news agencies ANI and PTI and freelance reporters for the show. However, the Broadcasting Authority was not convinced and pointed out that Times Now while airing the show had boasted that it was the first channel to report on the matter and ran tickers such as "News Break Here First 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans at PFI stir" and "Pak slogans by PFI



workers".

The Authority headed by Justice (Rtd) A. K. Sikri directed Times Now to remove the video of the broadcast and all hyperlinks to it.

The Broadcasting Authority, on another petition, held Zee News guilty for targeting Muslim community on July 12, 2022 in a debate on increase in the population of the country and selectively broadcasting statistics giving the debate a communal colour.

The show lacked objectivity as it focussed on one religious group, the Muslims, being solely responsible for population growth, the Authority said. It directed the channel to publicize that its show violated the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards. The Broadcasting regulator warned Zee News not to air such reports in future.

The Broadcasting Authority fined Hindi news channel News 18 for making objectionable statements on Muslims in four shows hosted by news





anchor Aman Chopra. The topics of the shows ranged from glorifying public flogging of Muslims to giving totally false data to show phenomenal increase in the population of Muslims.

In the case of Times Now, the Authority noted that several fact-checking websites had fact-checked the news report in question and had found the slogan raised at the PFI demonstration was not “Pakistan Zindabad” but “PFI Zindabad”.

In the first case of News 18, the Broadcasting Authority found that a debate hosted by Aman Chopra on January 18, 2022 had religious biases. “By starting the debate on the premise that 20% of the people were ganging up against Hindus constituting 80%, the anchor had given the debate a thrust, which is communal in nature and not appropriate,” the order said.

The programme, NBDSA chairman said, had violated the fundamental principles of impartial-

ity, objectivity and neutrality that are necessary in reporting. In the complaint, Anju Dubey submitted that Chopra deliberately made statements that maligned the Muslim community.

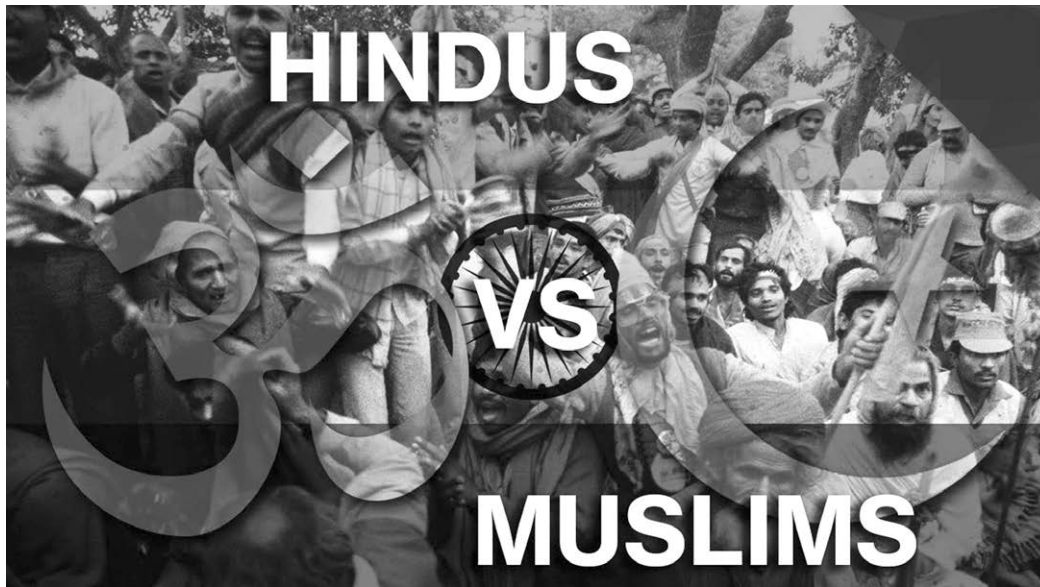
“The entire premise of the show revolved around creating a negative image of the Muslim community to instigate the members of the Hindu community to develop hatred for Muslims,” he said. Throughout the show, the anchor indulged in racial and religious stereotyping towards the Muslims. No caution of whatever nature or restraint was exercised by the anchor or the channel while airing the show in question, it was pointed out.

The Authority also imposed a fine of Rs.50,000 on the broadcaster and directed it to remove the videos of the show from its website and YouTube. It further directed News 18 to state on its ticker once every hour between 8 am on March 6 and 8 am on March 7 that they had violated broadcasting guidelines.

The second case related to another debate, also moderated by Aman Chopra, on October 4, 2022 on the brutal public flogging of Muslim men in Kheda district of Gujarat. On 3rd October night, in Undhela village of Kheda, a group of Muslim men allegedly threw stones at a garba site near a mosque. The following day, five Muslim men accused in the incident were dragged out in public, tied to an electric pole and beaten with sticks by the police as a crowd loudly cheered.

Indrajeet Ghorpade, the complainant in this case, submitted before NBDSA that News 18 India celebrated the flogging of the Muslim men by the Gujarat police by describing it as “police ki dandiya”, a reference to a traditional Gujarati dance in which sticks are used as a prop. The complaint stated that

“The broadcaster had violated the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards relating to neutrality, impartiality and Clause 19 of the specific guidelines covering reportage pertaining to Racial and Religious Harmony”



News 18 had repeatedly showed the visuals glorifying and praising the illegal and inhuman police action of flogging.

The channel also wrongly declared the Muslim men tied and flogged by the police as guilty of stone throwing, the complaint said. By connecting stone pelting with *jihad* and by making negative generalised statements about young Muslim men and accusing them of engaging in various crimes, the channel had tarnished the image of the Muslim community, the complaint added.

Though News 18 denied the charges, Justice Sikri said that the channel had "targetted, vilified and castigated the entire Muslim community for the actions of a few miscreants." Sikri also objected to the use of phrases such as "*garba me love jihad*" and "what is your role in my *garba*", in the ticker.

The Authority in its order said that the news channel did communalise the issue by giving the impression that the Muslims were intruders and were trying to change the demography of the country by supporting illegal infiltrators

The Authority imposed a fine of Rs. 25,000 on the channel in this case and directed it to avoid giving a "communal colour" while reporting such cases. It directed the channel to remove the videos of the show from the channel's website and YouTube.

The third order was against a show hosted on July 28, 2022 by Aman Chopra on the murder of Bharatiya Janata Party youth wing leader

Praveen Nettaru in Bellare village of Dakshina Kannada district in Karnataka. The complaint said that between 19 and 28 July 2022 there were three "communally motivated" murders in Dakshina Kannada but Chopra chose to highlight only Nettaru's case. The two other victims were Muslims.

"The broadcaster had violated the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards relating to neutrality, impartiality and Clause 19 of the specific guidelines covering reportage pertaining to Racial and Religious Harmony," Justice Sikri observed.

The fourth case is about a debate titled "Ghazwa-e-Hind" aired on August 5, 2022. It was about reports by the police to the Home Ministry on the "sharp rise in the Muslim population in Uttar Pradesh and in districts bordering Bangladesh and Nepal."

The programme used the hashtag "Border Par PanIslam" and showed Muslims in busy neighbourhoods. "In an effort to support the Citizen's Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), rhetorical attempts were made to show Muslims in bad light and breed hatred towards them," the complaint said.

The Authority in its order said that the news channel did communalise the issue by giving the impression that the Muslims were intruders and were trying to change the demography of the country by supporting illegal infiltrators. It imposed a fine of Rs. 20,000 on the broadcaster and directed Chopra not to make communal statements while covering issues of national importance.

A Blow to Fair News

Prasar Bharti's contract with RSS-backed Hindustan Samachar will seemingly make Doordarshan and All India Radio wings of Sangh Parivar

With the signing of a two-year contract between India's public broadcaster Prasar Bharati and Hindustan Samachar, which is a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-backed news agency, for the daily news feed, both Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR) will apparently come under the indirect control of the RSS.

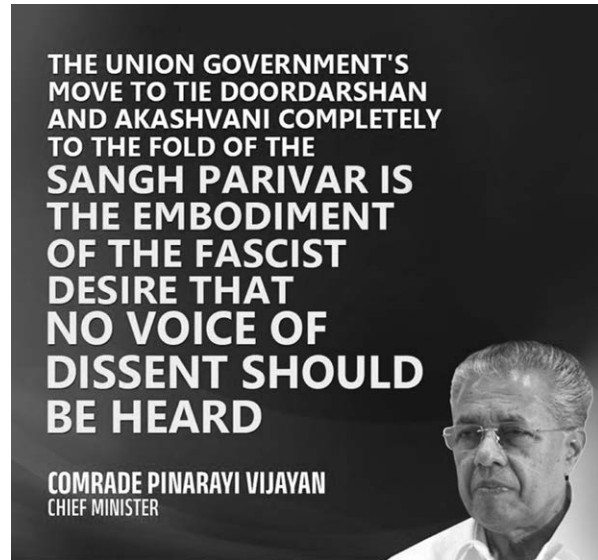
The space for free, fair and independent news and analysis, which has been steadily shrinking during the NDA rule, will further shrink with the operation of the news feed contract with the Hindustan Samachar.

In principle, Prasar Bharati is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which runs both Doordarshan and AIR. However, in comparison with private television channels and newspapers, both Doordarshan and AIR have enjoyed little autonomy and, therefore, very low credibility and people have been over the years turning away from the public broadcaster.

Until 2020, Prasar Bharati had a contract for daily news feed with the Press Trust of India (PTI), India's biggest professional news agency with offices all over India and in Capitals of many countries. The deal with RSS-backed Hindustan Samachar has come two years after the cancellation of subscription with PTI.

The cancellation of the PTI subscription followed its 2020 coverage of the border clash between India and China which Prasar Bharati described as "anti-national". At that time, PTI published an interview with former Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Weidong, who blamed India for provoking the military encounter at the Galwan Valley in Ladakh in June 2020 in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed. China had claimed that only four Chinese soldiers were killed in the clash.

Another interview PTI did with Vikram Misri, former Indian Ambassador to China, also led to the ire of Prasar Bharati against the agency. PTI had quoted Misri saying, "Chinese troops needed to move back to their side of the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh." This statement contradicted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that Chinese



troops did not intrude into Indian territory. How can anyone question the Prime Minister of India let alone contradict him?

PTI maintained that it had only done its professional duty of interviewing the former Ambassadors of India and China and describing the agency as anti-national was "unwarranted, unjustified and unfair."

Commenting on the Prasar Bharati-Hindustan Samachar deal, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan tweeted: "The move by Prasar Bharati to make Hindustan Samachar, a news agency linked to the Sangh Parivar, the sole news source for Doordarshan National and Akashvani is an attempt to saffronise news and silence dissent."

The deal has come at a time when the country has been steadily slipping in world press freedom index over deliberate attacks, arrests and even killing of journalists. It also came after raids on BBC offices in India following the release of the two-part BBC documentary on Prime Minister Modi detailing his role in whipping up anti-Muslim hatred in the wake of Godhra train burning in which more than 50 kar sevaks were burnt to death.

Prasar Bharati CEO Gaurav Dwivedi defended the decision to sign the deal with Hindustan Samachar



saying it was the only news service offering content in various Indian languages. In fact, since 2017 Hindustan Samachar has been providing "free" news feed to Prasar Bharati on "evaluation" basis, Dwivedi added. But Hindustan Samachar which was starving for funds for several years started getting huge Union Government advertisements ever since the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance came to power. Therefore, the claim that Hindustan Samachar gave free feed to Prasar Bharati is nothing but a farce.

Hindustan Samachar was established in 1948 by Shiram Shankar Apte, an RSS leader and co-founder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, along with RSS ideologue M.S. Golwalkar. The agency was established for creating a fertile ground for the growth of Indian nationalistic approach to life in an environment of growing western influence.

As per the contract, Hindustan Samachar is expected to feed 100 news reports to Prasar Bharati every day. The reports should include 10 national and 40 local stories in regional languages. Hindustan Samachar operates in 11 languages including Assamese, Odia and Nepalese.

The Communist Party of India state secretary, at a protest March in Kozhikode, said: "By choosing Hindustan Samachar as the sole agency to offer news service to Prasar Bharati, the Modi government is now officially implementing its policy of saffronisation.... This way the power to decide the kind of news and views that would be relayed through the DD and AIR would go into the hands of the RSS."

The contract was signed on February 14, 2023 under which the agency will give daily news feed for two years on a payment of Rs. 7.7 crores. However, Hindustan Samachar is no match for PTI which employs more than 600 regular staff journalists and nearly 800 stringers providing subscribers 1000 stories in a day. PTI's video service, started in February 2023, streams more than 100 live events and 200 raw video packages.

The NDA government, like the internal emergency regime of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, does not have great belief in the existence of a free, fair and diverse media. Consequently, the way in which PTI and UNI have been bringing out reports critical of the government during the last few years has not been to the liking of the BJP-led Union Government. Therefore, on the flimsy ground that the subscription rates of the news agencies were very high, the government reportedly directed Prasar Bharati to terminate their services and enter into a contract with RSS-backed Hindustan Samachar.

Hindustan Samachar apparently employs people who believe in the RSS ideology of Hindutva and one can naturally expect that all their news feeds whether national or local will be quite biased. One can expect that soon Doordarshan and Akashvani will become two wings of the RSS and the BJP. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH MALIAKAN is a Delhi based Senior Journalist

Ex-civil servants urge Modi to end attacks on Christians

A group of top former civil servants in India has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to end the rising hatred and violence against Christian minorities in the country.

In a March 4 letter, signed by 93 former civil servants under the banner of the Constitutional Conduct Group, they urged Modi to reassure the Christian community of equal and unbiased treatment before the law.

“It is imperative that you, Prime Minister, give them this reassurance,” they insisted in the open letter.

According to the United Christian Forum (UCF), a New Delhi-based inter-denominational Christian organization that keeps a tab on atrocities against Christians in the country, the nation reported 598 incidents of violence against Christians in 21 states in 2022. The number stood at 279 in 2020 and 505 in 2021, UCF said in a report.

The attacks, including social boycotts, vandalism of churches and the arrest of Christian leaders mainly took place in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, and Gujarat, all ruled by the BJP, and in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra, where his right-wing Hindu party has a strong presence. Most of these leading Indian states have enacted controversial anti-conversion laws which Hindu fringe elements use to target Christians and their prayer meetings.

“We are deeply perturbed by the continued harassment, through speech and criminal actions, of minority groups in the country by persons associated with your government, your party, organiza-



Christians hold a candle light vigil against rising hate crimes against them on Jan. 8 in New Delhi (Photo: Bijay Kumar Minj/UCA News)

tions connected to it, and by mischief makers from amongst the public,” the letter said.

The letter said that “we are concerned about hate crimes and speeches against all minorities” and the steadily increasing “ugly words and actions against a small religious minority, the Christians.”

Our constitution clearly spells out that all citizens, irrespective of religion, are equal and have equal rights, but we are compelled to protest to you against the increasing incidents of outright discrimination against Christians occurring in recent times, it said.

Christians are accused of forcible conversion, but their total strength is less than 2.4 percent of India’s 1.3 billion population. The number has remained more or less the same since the 1951 census, the letter observed.

“Yet, in the minds of some, this minuscule number poses a threat to the 80 percent of the population that is Hindu,” the former civil servants, some of whom earlier served as ambassadors to European nations, noted. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

We are concerned about hate crimes and speeches against all minorities

Open Letter to RSS Chief

Why Blame the British?

BY A.J. PHILIP

Dear Shri Mohan Bhagwat Ji,

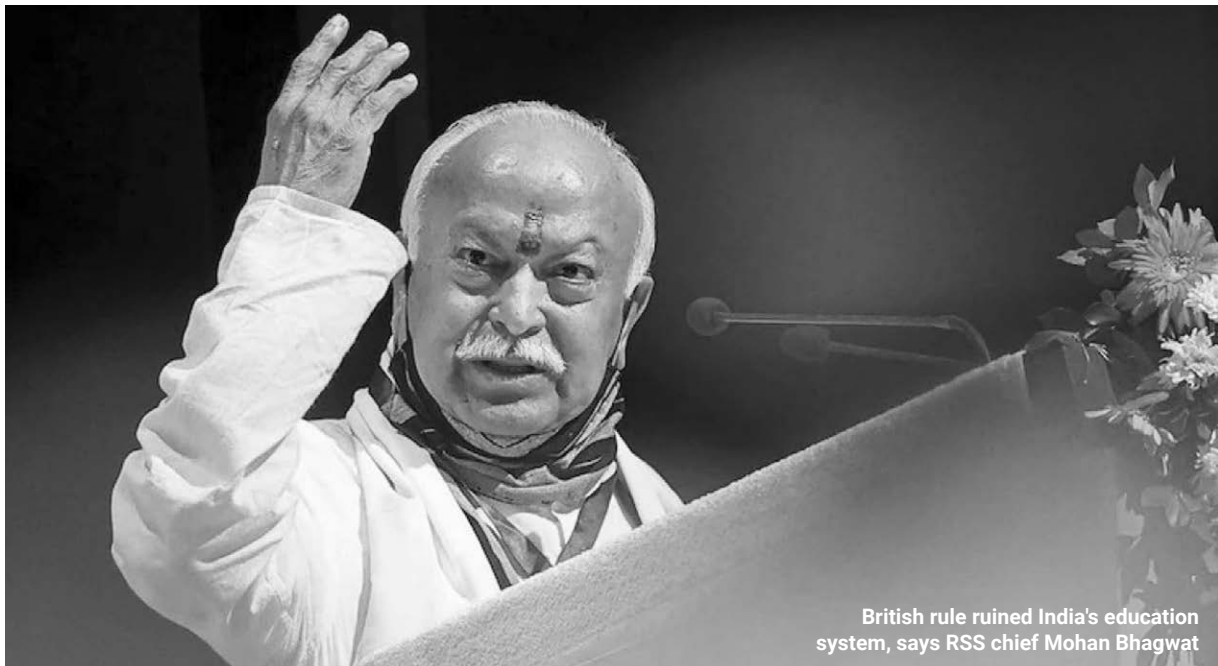
I was happy to hear your views on health and education, as expressed during a talk you gave in Haryana recently. There is a need to increase the government spending on public health and education and I know you have the power to have your wish fulfilled. If you monitor the figures, you will realise that India spends a lesser percentage of its GDP in these sectors than Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The government seems to think that the private sector should step in to fill the gaps little realising that even in the Mecca of capitalism, i.e., the United States, the government spends heavily on education and public health. In the US, an overwhelming majority of the students are enrolled in schools run by the state where education is free. In many Scandinavian countries, the private sector is allowed to run schools but they can't charge fees because the government compensates such schools with a liberal subsidy.



If you look around, you will find the private sector setting up state-of-the-art hospitals like the one Mata Amritanandmayi set up in Faridabad but they are not affordable even for the middle class, forget the poor. Pauperisation is what happens if a poor man is struck by a problem like the failure of kidney or heart or liver for which there are remedies for persons like the late Arun Jaitley, the late Sushma Swaraj and, now, Lalu Prasad. For the poor, they can only recite "Ram Naam Satya Hai" or "Samayamam rathathil" (In the chariot of time) as they take the body for cremation or burial!

I hope the government will wake up to the need to set up more schools, hospitals and dispensaries where free education and medical care are available to the poor. If your speech serves that purpose, I would really be glad. What prompted me to write this letter is a reference you made to how the British destroyed the education system in India under which 70 to 80 percent of the Indians were



British rule ruined India's education system, says RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat

educated and there was no unemployment. Your claim is hilarious, to say the least. Do you realise that much of India was under Mughals when the British arrived in India to do business? When they landed in Surat, they sent a delegation to Agra to meet the Mughal rulers and seek their permission to do business. Do you mean to say that the education system under the Mughals was perfect and that 70 to 80 percent of the population was not just literate but “educated” and everybody had a job?

The British replaced the Mughals with support from the Hindus. You are from Maharashtra. Goa is close to Maharashtra. Five hundred years ago, a large majority of the Goans were Hindus while the rulers were Muslim. The Muslim population was less than five percent. When the Portuguese arrived, how could they replace the Muslim rulers and rule the state for five centuries? You can use your own imagination to get the answer. Incidentally, Goa was the first port of call for the Europeans.

Here, I would like to mention that India was never a poor country. In fact, it was India’s famed wealth that attracted a horde of invaders to the country. Educationally and technologically, we were superior to the Europeans. When you are in Delhi next, please visit Qutub Minar where you will notice the Iron Pillar, built by the artisans of India, when metallurgy was unknown to the Europeans. The construction of Qutub Minar involved great engineering and architectural skills. Burj Khalifa in Dubai has remained the world’s tallest structure since its inauguration in 2010. Remember when Indians built the Taj and the Qutub, there were only tents in Dubai.

While in Delhi, also, please find time to visit the National Museum. You will find paintings that depict shipbuilding activity in coastal Kerala from where people would travel to distant places to sell spices. How did the seafaring capacity of the Indians end? Because of the injunction by the Brahmins that if one crossed the sea he would lose his religion. Mahatma Gandhi had to fight this superstition when he went to England for higher studies.

I am not talking about the hoary past. I knew teacher and poet Vishnu Narayan Namboothiri. After his retirement, he was engaged by a temple at Thiruvalla to do priestly duty. There was a protest against his appointment because he had visited England and polluted himself. How did the artisans who built the Iron Pillar fade into oblivion? The reason is simple.

They belonged to a certain caste which did not



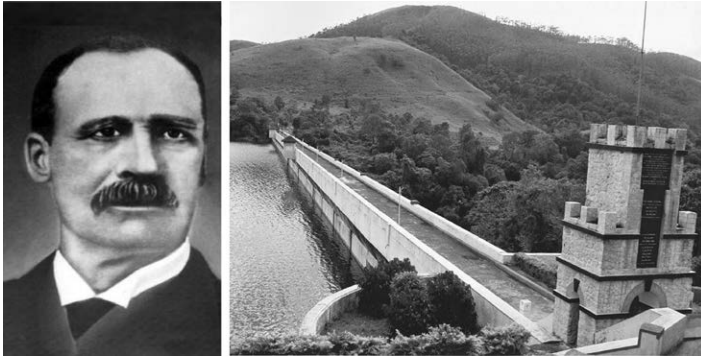
Kerala woman became a toddy tapper to support her family

get respect. Thomas J. Bata was a Czech-Canadian. He became one of the world’s greatest businessmen when the shoes that bore his name were sold by the millions the world over. Had he been in India, he would have been treated as a cobbler and he would never have enjoyed the status he enjoyed in the world. The other day I read a feature about a lady who is a toddy tapper. She does the job to find food for her children.

Her job is tough and it is risky too. A slip can land her in the bed or in the mortuary. A Bharatnatyam dancer, who does not require as much skills as she needs to keep her alive, is feted and celebrated while she is ignored. Had she shown her face in a movie, awards would have followed her like leeches. But because she is a toddy-tapper, she does not become an icon. The British left 75 years ago and can they be blamed for the low status she enjoys? I have travelled all over India and I have always marvelled at some of the wonderful structures we created in the past.

The Tanjore temple, which has the world’s largest Nandi; the temple at Rameswaram, which has

I hope the government will wake up to the need to set up more schools, hospitals and dispensaries where free education and medical care are available to the poor



British Engineer sold his property to build a dam in Kerala to irrigate Tamil Nadu

the world's longest corridor; and the Konark Temple, which has the largest single piece of rock which supports the super-structure of the temple are some of them. I recall with fondness my visit to the Madurai Meenakshi temple where I enjoyed playing with the musical pillars. There are many other structures which are nothing but engineering marvels.

Now, my question is, why was this technology not used to build bridges and dams? That is because temple construction got priority over every other construction. The British built the first irrigation projects in the country. In Tamil Nadu, people virtually worship Colonel John Pennycuik, who lived in the 19th century. Why? Because he used technology to provide irrigation to unirrigated areas of the state. Today, Indians are all over the world. Economically, they are doing well. What do they do abroad? They construct temples. You can see such temples all over the US and the UK.

That is what the Modi government is also doing. After building the temple corridor at Varanasi, it is busy supervising the construction of the Ram temple in time for the next election. In the US, a newspaper owned by Joseph Pulitzer built an island and the pedestal for erecting the Statue of Liberty donated by the people of Paris. His readers contributed the money. Modi used public money to build a statue larger than the New York statute for which he had to approach China to build parts of the Statue of Unity.

As mentioned, the British came to do business, i.e., to make money. They did not want to disturb the system here. That is why initially the British supported the Sanskrit-based education system which was of the elite, by the elite and for the elite. When Sant Tulsi Das translated the Ramayana into the then local language, the religious pandits

objected to it because they did not want dissemination of knowledge. A few years ago, I remember a Shankaracharya admonishing a woman because she recited, needless to say, beautifully, the Vedas before the function, where he was the chief guest, was to begin.

Did you know that Hindu reformers like Rajaram Mohun Roy submitted a memorandum to the British rulers that their children needed to be taught science and other modern subjects, not just Sanskrit shlokas? They had the sense to realise that reciting mumbo-jumbo would serve no purpose. That is how the East India Company earmarked Rs 1 lakh for promotion of education. The amount kept increasing.

In my childhood, buckets and trunk boxes were made of metal. Today, they are made of plastic and other synthetic materials. They are less heavy and are far more durable. Can we say that plastics destroyed the metal industry? New York had at one time thousands of people employed to remove horse dung from the streets. When Henry Ford introduced the car and it became popular, the horse carriages



Hindu reformers like Rajaram Mohun Roy submitted a memorandum to the British rulers that their children needed to be taught science and other modern subjects, not just Sanskrit shloka

disappeared. Does anyone blame Ford for their loss of jobs?

I heard some portion of your speech. You spoke in Hindi, not Marathi or Sanskrit. Did you know that when Gandhi and Tagore met for the first time, they agreed that India had little future as a nation without Hindustani becoming our national language. Neither of them had a vested interest as one was a Gujarati and the other a Bengali. A century before they met, British missionaries like Henry Martyn and Rev Gilchrist laboured to develop Hindustani as our national language. Modern Hindi and Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, grew out of their Hindustani.

I would like to add one more thing. The Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha did yeoman service for the spread of Hindi language and the Devanagari script. Do you know that the key figure behind the work of the Sabha was a missionary, Rev E. Greaves? The other day, I visited the Delhi Book Fair. I suddenly heard a commotion and some people shouting the slogan “Hai, Hai”. It ended as soon as it began. A few seconds later, I went to that area and did not find anything amiss.

Later, I learnt that some people were protesting against the free distribution of the Bible. I saw the Bhagavat Gita, the Quran and Swami Dayananda Saraswati’s Satyarth Prakash being distributed free or at throw-away prices. There was no objection. The objection was only to the free distribution of some books from the New Testament. For once I learnt one thing, the proponents of Hindutva fear the Book, which is what the word Bible means, for it undermines their caste-based social order. There was a cut-out of the Prime Minister distributing the Gita. I wish there was another cut-out of Modi distributing the Quran! I can imagine you laughing at this suggestion.

The father of Indian nationalism, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who gave India its national song, Vande Mataram, declared, “By reading English, Bengalis have learned two new words, Liberty and Independence”



You and your organisation, the RSS, hold Savarkar in high esteem, though he sought and obtained clemency from the British. It was Savarkar who described the 1857 Revolt as the First War of Independence. It was a success. The revolters captured the Red Fort. Thereafter, they did not know what to do. So, they installed Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was idling away as a poet, as the Emperor. Within no time, the British were able to recapture the Red Fort and send the Emperor to Burma where he died of old age.

In the same year, something more important happened. The British set up three universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras which helped in the spread of modern education. The father of Indian nationalism, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who gave India its national song, Vande Mataram, declared, “By reading English, Bengalis have learned two new words, Liberty and Independence”.

I can go on and on but I know you hardly have the time to read it. So, let me conclude by just quoting Nani Palkivala, “Our history goes back to 5,000 years. More than a dozen civilisations waxed and waned in different parts of India over these 50 centuries. Which system could we have possibly adopted as the national system?” Was it Travancore’s or Kashmir’s where Hindu orthodoxy prevailed since time immemorial? Thoughtless words and thoughtless action are two sides of the same coin of ignorance.

Yours etc ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Primacy of Personal Freedom

It is a matter of concern that individual liberty, despite its pre-eminence and constitutional guarantee, does not get the respect it should have

BY **JUSTICE (RETD) ALOYSIUS S. AGUIAR**

Among the many freedoms enjoyed in a free society, personal freedom is the most important. The celebrated Master of the Rolls, Sir Alfred Denning, delivering the first of the Hamlyn Lecture Series explained how the courts in England approached the subject: “Whenever one of the King’s judges takes his seat, there is one application which by long tradition has priority over all others. Counsel has but to say ‘My Lord, I have an application which concerns the liberty of the subject’, and forthwith the judge will put all matters aside and hear it. It may be an application for a writ of habeas corpus, or an application for bail, but whatever form it takes, it is heard first....”

“This simple instance of priority in point of time contains within it the fundamental principle that, where there is any conflict between the freedom of an individual and any other rights or interests, then no matter how great or powerful those others may be, the freedom of the humblest citizen shall prevail over it.”

The Chief Justice of India, Justice Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud, was only following the common law procedure in setting side all urgent matters before him and constituting a special Bench to hear the plea of Counsel Manu Singhvi and granting interim bail to

the Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera.

Mr. Khera’s dramatic arrest by the Assam police at the IGI Airport in Delhi from the Raipur-bound flight, which was on the tarmac getting ready for takeoff, could be applauded for its ingenuity if it were, but, not so unabashedly shameful. Mr. Khera was made to deplane by the Delhi police personnel and to accompany them to the IGI Airport terminal building where the Assam police were waiting to place him under arrest. It is alleged that ‘due process’ was not followed. Mr. Khera was on his way to Raipur to attend the plenary session of his party.

Whether the FIR on the basis of which the arrest was made could stand the scrutiny of the Courts as constituting the offences mentioned therein, is another matter altogether. Whether the ‘offensive’ statement made by Mr. Khera against the Prime Minister of India was due to a deliberate ‘slip of tongue’, or an inadvertent one, would not need a second guess. However, Mr Khera has unconditionally apologized for the derogatory remark after the Supreme Court expressed its displeasure.

But the Additional Solicitor General’s opposition to the bail application is intriguing. It is not on merits but on the procedural aspect requiring the bail application being made before the Trial Court. No doubt it is the Trial Court that will have to decide the case and determine whether the offensive remarks of Mr. Khera amount to offences under the sections of the Indian Penal Code cited in the FIR. Clearly, the thrust of the Additional Solicitor General’s argument was to make sure that Mr. Khera did not get bail and would languish in jail indefinitely -- which ‘lower court’ would dare grant bail to one charged with having committed an offence against the most powerful in the land? Undoubtedly, the procedure canvassed by the police and prosecuting agency was meant to be the punishment for someone who had the temerity to make disparaging remarks about the Prime Minister.



The CJJ cannot be seen as setting the bar higher; but his timely intervention has clearly redeemed the failing image of the Supreme Court as a bulwark against attacks on the fundamental freedoms by arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of persons which seem to have become common place; more so in the recent past.

Personal freedom is protected under Article 21 of the Constitution which reads: "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law". The procedure has to be fair and reasonable and will encompass the principles of natural justice. Article 22 of the Constitution provides for the safeguards to be provided in case of arrest of a person who has to be informed of the grounds of arrest at the earliest and to be produced before the nearest Magistrate within 24 hours of his arrest. These rights are available not only to citizens, but also to all within India.

Lord Denning in his Hamlyn lecture has succinctly summed up the position: "What matters in England is that each man should be free to develop his own personality to the full; and the only duties which should restrict this freedom are those which are necessary to enable everyone else to do the same."

Lord Denning further states: "Every society must have the means to protect itself from marauders. It must have powers to arrest, to search, and to imprison those who break the laws. So long as those powers are properly exercised, they are themselves the safeguards of freedom. But powers may be abused, and, if those powers are abused, there is no tyranny like them. It leads to a state of affairs where the police may arrest any man and throw him into prison without cause assigned. It leads to the search of his home and belongings on the slightest pretext – or on none. It leads to the hated gestapo and the police state. It leads to extorted confessions and to trials which are a mockery of justice. The moral of it all is that a true balance must be kept between personal freedom on the one hand and social security on the other."

In the recent past we have been witnessing a



marked increase in the misuse of the procedural law of arrest which stipulates 'bail' as the rule; and 'jail' the exception. Social and human rights activists, journalists and even humourists are branded anti-social and terrorists and thrown into prison without any credible evidence and kept incarcerated for years; when their only fault has been exposing the misdeeds of those in power or lampooning the high and mighty. These innocuous 'offences' are tagged on to serious charges

under draconian laws like the UAPA, PMLA, etc. where the burden is on the accused persons to prove their innocence, something they cannot do until their cases are brought to trial; and the prosecuting agencies, for obvious reasons, are in no hurry to do so.

The case of Fr. Stan Swamy who died while in judicial custody charged with committing offences against the security of the State on the basis of unsubstantiated evidence is a serious indictment of our justice delivery system. By his untimely death, Fr. Swamy has been deprived the opportunity of proving his innocence and clearing his fair name; while relieving the prosecuting agencies from the burden of proving his guilt on the basis of credible evidence.

Do we see a parallel in the likely happenings described by Lord Denning in the passage quoted above and the happenings in our country where the powers of arrest are being frequently abused; and do we see the 'Rule of law' being replaced by the 'tyranny of law' and our beloved country becoming a police State?

On the other hand, does the deafening silence on the part of the powers-that-be, which includes the police, the prosecuting agencies and even the judiciary, in not taking the required steps to apprehend and punish the cow vigilantes running amok committing egregious acts of lynching persons suspected of dealing in beef; and calls for genocide from the sants and sadhus at dharam sansads, raise the spectre of an emerging fascist state? ©

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Even the Blind See

As the Nazis were exposed at Nuremberg, the misuse of power by the Sangh Parivar will be exposed one day. People will come to realise the reality

BY **ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPAMPIL**

The growing popularity of Hindutva pop songs in the social media that glorify Hindu Rashtra is reported from the Hindi belt. They project a glorious future for Rama Rajya with millions of worshippers in Ram Mandir. But the songs warp as they move on to “hate-themes”, especially damning ‘Babar and his children’, and humiliating Muslims. Bigoted melodies grow vibrant. It is thus that hate is ‘propagated’ in Saffron Bharat. ‘Conversions’ take place too. Gradually echoes reach far beyond the Hindi belt. A leader in Karbi Anglong, Assam, is quoted as having said: topi-walas and cross-walas must go. Prejudices poison the daily drink of the Indian household.



An average Indian is not easily prompted to hate. He is willing to compromise even before a quarrel begins! But today, he is pushed and prodded, coaxed and coddled into doing what he does not wish to do: to hate his fellow countrymen. It does not come spontaneously to him, as it is not a part of his ideas or ideology. But steadily, people have been made blind followers. We are reminded of Oscar Wilde’s words: “Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives mimicry, their passions a quotation”. Thus, many Indians have been pressurized to live by someone else’s ideas and ideology.

An average Indian is not easily prompted to hate. He is willing to compromise even before a quarrel begins! But today, he is pushed and prodded, coaxed and coddled into doing what he does not wish to do: to hate his fellow countrymen

Missionaries of ‘Hatred’ Multiply

One may blame people like Bajrang Munshi Das in UP, who has just emerged from prison for declaring a Jihad on Jihadi Muslims. But did not a bunch of Hindutva religious leaders pronounce something even more deadly at their solemn gatherings at Haridwar or Delhi? Have not some “urban Naxalites” of the fundamentalist ideology been promoting the silencing, marginalizing, and gradually eliminating of those who stood on the way to their ultimate goals? Anonymously! Was not Gauri Lankesh only a recent victim?

Some blame the key men who hold the reins of the Government, under whose benevolent patronage many criminal deeds come to be accepted as





national service? Or, would you blame the BJP? But Prashant Kishor says, BJP is mere froth, RSS is the real coffee. Would you, then, hold the RSS responsible, which has infiltrated into every structure of society? May be, all these are responsible in varying measure.

But let us not blame any of them. Let us merely look for the reasons. Most of them are living in the past. That is not a crime. But in Indian understanding, "Avidya" cripples. A wrong attitude to the past blurs your vision. Living on resentment saps your energy. Feeding your anger kills your future. Piled up grievances of the past are not assets for the morrow. Babar is not alive, why waste your energies on his "alleged" crimes?

Think of the needs of the day like food price and employment. Attend to the realities of the situation: neighbours of various religious beliefs, goods that you need from remote markets of friends and foes, longings for peace in all communities. Panipat and Plassey belong to the past. There is no meaning in fighting a 1000-year-old battle. Tony Evans says, "Insisting on living in your past will kill your future. Let it go".

Aryan Aggression

If you insist on remembering Babars and Mughals, Timurs and Nadir Shahs, the indigenous people of India are going to remember the 3000 years of Aryan aggressiveness on their people: initial destruction and gradual subjugation. Mahabharata and Ramayana will tell the story to the intelligent reader. Aggressively oriented Aryans who captured the subcontinent broke the strength of native rulers by splintering them up into countless castes along ethnic, occupational, colour-based, or pollution-related lines. Rulers were made into Shudras (Dalits).

The elite classes have held on to this enslaving domination to our own days. Ambedkar suffered from its ill effects till the end of his life. He moved on to Buddhism to escape Brahminic exploitation. Of course, Upper Caste scholars deny the "Aryan invasion theory" and violence against indigenous communities. They insist that there is "no archaeological evidence" of large-scale destruction and loss of life during the Aryan dispersion. This would be true of any encounter of a fiercely warlike community (Aryans) with un-warlike peoples (early Indians). In unequal battles ruins are few.

Suppression of Indigenous

However, there is overwhelming amount of "literary evidence" in the Vedas of Aryans storming the walled fortresses of Dasas and Dasyus. Ram Sharan Sharma seeks to be objective. His book "Sudras in Ancient India" says: Rig Vedas have at least 12 references to their general slaughter of prosperous indigenous communities (Sharma 2, 11). We read, for example, "Indra destroyed the seed of Varasikha. At HARIYU-PIA he smote the vanguard of the Vrcivans, the rear fled frightened" (Rig Veda 6.27) (Sattin 55). Could the reference be to historic Harappa?

Tony Joseph in his book "Early Indians" contends that the aggressive dimension of the Aryan migration did contribute to the Harappan decline (Joseph 186). Academic interest can prompt a Dalit or tribal student to study further the 12 instances of devastating slaughter that Ram Sharan Sharma speaks of, or the gradual elimination of Buddhists from India. However, it would do no good composing hate-songs based on those unhappy events of the past. While the indigenous communities were kind enough to let the past be, their masters have refused to follow their example.



After four years of brutal Civil War, the North and the South decided to form the United States of America. After two deadly World Wars, the Europeans decided to forget the past, and made a single economic and political unit, the European Union.

Dividing India

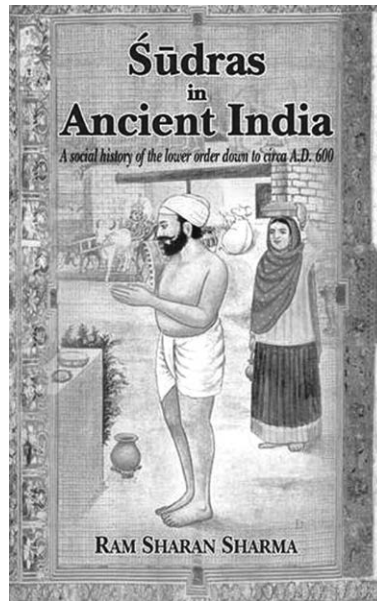
The weakness of Indians is that they bow to Power, of the Mughals, the British, today BJP. Many with hurt sentiments are not in a hurry to express their anger before a sturdier foe. Time will tell. Every drive towards 'forced homogenisation' has planted a seed of discontentment and division at the margins of the country.

Amit Shah may be a good election strategist. Is he a perceptive interpreter of community-emotions? His threat to impose Hindi stirred reactions in the South. Migrant workers from the Hindi-belt have suffered the consequence. Poor people paid the price. It was big news when Shah opted to go to Mon in Nagaland. He was on an election campaign. Elections will come and go. But India has to remain united. Dividing the Eastern Nagas from the Western may be a shortcut to election goals for the Home Minister, or alienating the Gorkhas, Rajabonshis and Adivasis from Mamata's Bengalis, but India has to hold together.

It was Vallabhbhai Patel who exclaimed, "It is not the British who divide and rule. It is we who divide and they rule". The present regime has changed this policy: they divide, and they rule. But, then, they have created a divided India: a fractured economy, a shrinking domestic market, a sense of insecurity in individual communities, an emotionally divided nation.

One needs skill to interpret Northeast election results intelligently. The high turnout stands for the sense of insecurity in threatened communities: Tripura 88.9%, Nagaland 85%, Meghalaya 77%. The stubborn loyalty to the regional parties is a stubborn assertion of distinct individualities. Respect our identities, they say. We are different, we want to be different.

The Ruling Class may rejoice when they succeed



to suppress public dissent and protests for a while, but they cannot command inner loyalties. Viktor Frankl discovered while slaving in Nazi camps, that he could remain the absolute 'Master of his Mind'. Inner Loyalty alone can guarantee India's security. Hindutva Think Tank must understand that the nation's future can be built only on its cohesion.

Jokes come up against "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" imposition and about the BIMARU condition of states in the "cow-belt", and against Haryana where Gau-Rakshaks are kings. Brinda Karat of the CPI (M) urges the Haryana Government to stop patronizing Gau-Rakshas who rob and kill. Meanwhile,

the most backward African countries overtake the 'Bimaru' states, leaving India far behind.

Harmless sounding anti-Communist humour made ordinary citizens think under the extremist Soviet regime. But it was perceptive humour that brought down the Soviet Empire, that too peacefully! Will Hindu Rashtra face the same fate?

Resistance has begun. Unfortunately, some understand only the language of violence. Even so, they have not drawn a lesson from the fact that 29 civilians have lost their lives in Kashmir recently. The blind see, but the full-sighted are too proud to see. If they see, they fail to understand. Is it Hindu Rashtra fanaticism that has thrown up reactions like that of Amritpal Singh, 29, who has renewed a call for Khalistan? Its echoes have reached Australia and Canada? Will responsible people reflect how Khalistan movement itself originated? Insensitivity invited a response. Amritpal Singh has not spared either Modi or Shah.

Pawan Khera is arrested for mispronouncing a Modi name, but Amritpal is allowed leverage. Even the blind see. Sisodia is arrested under charges of corruption. Himanta Biswa Sarma has been spared after he joined the BJP; Shashi Tharoor asks why. Kejriwal wonders whether Sisodia would be found not-guilty if he joins the Prime Minister's party.

During the elections, Amit Shah thundered against the corruption levels of the NPP in Meghalaya. After the elections, he embraced the NPP



winner as though they were his best political partners in the country. Every time Lalu Prasad spoke up and challenged the BJP, a new case came up against him and sent him to hospital again! Advani, Sasikala, Arun Shourie, and others have learned to be wise and silent before this evident duplicity.

Cronies Spared

But cronies like Adani are spared. Beware! They may be people who finance the elections, but exploit the people. More than 2400 years ago, the Chinese saw the damage that crony capitalism can inflict on society. Tao Te Ching reads thus: “When rulers live in splendour and speculators prosper, while farmers lose their land and the granaries are emptied; when governments spend money on ostentation and on weapons; when the upper class is extravagant and irresponsible, indulging themselves and possessing more than they can use, while the poor have nowhere to turn. All this is robbery and chaos. It is not in keeping with the cosmic order (Tao)” (Tao Te Ching 53). It looks as though this piece was written precisely for BJP India.

Private initiative can be stimulating. Deng Xiaoping knew that, and encouraged private entrepreneurs after the Mao era; but they were kept in check. All are to be accountable, whether they be Jack Ma, Bao Fan, Guo Guangchang, or Sun Dawu. Rahul questions the blind support that LIC and SBI have given to Adani. Only time will tell.

Rulers Who Instil ‘Fear’

Meantime, Hindutva leaders like Yogi are at another wavelength. Their enemies are cow-dealers,

not Adanis or other speculators. He vows to destroy “criminals”. Now, who are his criminals? Are they BJP-critics, political dissenters, Muslim minorities, dissident Dalit or tribal groups, or plain cow dealers? Modi who belongs to the same school of thought was addressing a gathering of 9000 police personnel in UP, when he said that their sovereign duty was to create a system which drives “fear” into criminals.

Wise men of our civilization taught us something saner. They asked us to create a climate that fosters happy relationships and social wellbeing. Our Founding Fathers proposed strengthening national institutions that function efficiently to promote the same goal. Today a monk-turned-politician, Yogi, is threatening to “destroy” fellow citizens, if they dissent...if a tribal shifts a cow from a licensed slaughterhouse that exports beef, owned by a Hindu or Jain business baron, and takes it to a poor Muslim. No wonder UP drags behind in education, health, and all human development indices, with Assam closely following with encounter killings. We dread the day of reactions!

Will This Dark Night End?

Our self-imposed blindness had led us to a democracy of sycophancy, mutual flattery, dependence. Pranab Bardhan alleges that the legitimate rights of citizens are handed out to them as gifts from the Prime Minister. Thus, it turns out that ‘India first’ formula stands for the ‘me first’ claim of the leader. In the same way, making India ‘great’ turns out to be ‘making India hate.’ Press is silenced, states have become dependent on the Centre. What is offered to people is a form of nationalism that chokes. When will this nightmare end?

Najeeb Jung, former Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, calls for a dose of optimism. “The night does not last forever,” he says. When day comes, darkness lifts. As the Nazis were exposed at Nuremberg, the misuse of power by the RSS will be exposed one day. Yes, even the blind see: voters bought, MPs and MLAs sold, critics raided, robber barons aided; cows alone thriving in air-conditioned shelters! Marcus Aurelius says, be serene: “The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury.” For, we choose to be different! ©

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.

Democracy to Autocracy

A recent report by V-Dem Institute shows that democracy is being replaced by autocratic set-ups across the world. It says that by the end of 2022, 72 % of the population was ruled over by autocracies

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

Ever since we grew up, we have been constantly told that we are the largest and the most vibrant democracy. We as citizens have been given certain fundamental rights. In case someone violates them, our Constitution has given us certain remedies. We can approach the court to get these rights enforced.

During our school days, we were asked to memorise these concepts so that we are able to use them during our day-to-day life. We used to take immense pride in describing that we all are one despite the kind of diversity we have in our country.

That's why we were highly disturbed when we saw people fighting over religion or matters that actually defined our diversity. We did not like the charged-up environment when the government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report. We hated the violence that followed. Vehicles were burnt and schools were closed as people adopted violent behaviour.

So much so that Doordarshan had to stream a special song in the 90s to spread the message of love, harmony and integrity. Many of us may still remem-

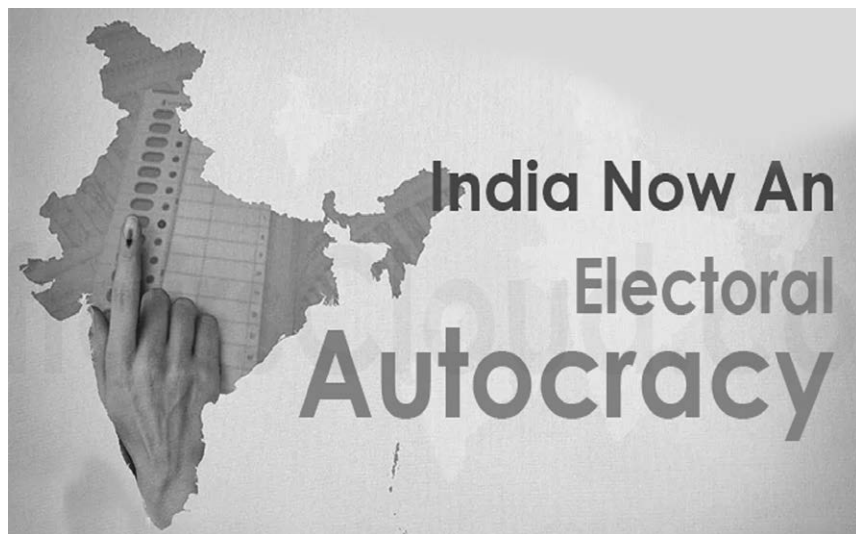


ber the song *Sun Sun Sun mere nanhe sun/sun sun sun mere mune sun/Prem ki Ganga bahe/desh mein eka rahe/* The depiction of the song had featured many film actors and child actors. The idea was to spread the message of love and unity among children assuming a trickle-down effect.

Recently, the 11-year-old son of this writer, started asking about the functioning of institutions like Panchayat, Zila Parishad, state Assembly and Parliament, as he listened to the conversation of a few people in his village. That is how children generally contextualise the knowledge gained through books or digital platforms with real-life. If things appear to be different, they do question.

Of late, a lot of debate and discussion have been held, questioning our democratic values. There have been several incidents that raised our eyebrows, be it vandalism of religious places, atrocities on minorities or restrictions on civil society, misuse of constitutional institutions and so on.

A recent report published by V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden has ignited the debate afresh. The



“Advances in global levels of democracy made over the last 35 years have been wiped out” during the last half decade. Not only this, as on date, only 13 percent of the world population live in liberal democracies

report speaks volumes about a new emerging trend. It shows that democracy is swiftly being replaced by autocratic set-ups across the world. The data captured by the report reveals that by the end of the year 2022, 72 percent of the world population was ruled over by autocracies. Out of this, nearly 28 percent stayed in “closed autocracies”.

It also says that “advances in global levels of democracy made over the last 35 years have been wiped out” during the last half decade. Not only this, as on date, only 13 percent of the world population live in liberal democracies.

It says that many governments promulgated various laws during the onset of Covid-19 in the garb of taking stock of the situation. These laws/regulations gave extraordinary powers to the executive, impinging on various constitutional rights of the citizens and curtailing their freedom. For instance, the stringent rules were imposed for stopping certain protests in Delhi while political and religious rallies were allowed.

In April 2020, the legal provisions imposed included announcing an entirely new set of law for the state of Jammu & Kashmir. The law gave rights to acquire permanent residence in the state to people who stayed for 15 years or those who have studied there for seven years and have appeared in Class 10 and 12 exams.

A sudden lockdown was imposed without taking into account its impact on millions of people who struggle for two square meals a day. It showed how easily the lives of the marginalised could be disrupted. The images of migrant workers walking barefoot without any resources from the national capital and other metro cities to their hometown cannot be forgotten.

The report refers to India as “one of the worst ‘autocratisers’ in the last 10 years”. It bases its findings on 60 indices and 500 indicators. In other words, it is not just based on a few reports. Extensive data has been collected to form its opinion.

During the last 10 years, many countries have witnessed reduced/curtailed freedom of expression, worsening the quality of elections and implementation of the rule of law, increased government-led media censorship and repression of civil society organisations.



Considering India’s performance on various indicators, it has been placed in the bottom 40 to 50 percent on Liberal democracy Index. It ranks 108 on the electoral democracy index and 123 on the Egalitarian Component Index. All these mean that elections are no longer conducted in a free and fair manner, while judicial constraints on the executive have weakened with lesser protection on civil liberties.

Not only this, academic freedom in the country has also taken a hit. The report has put India in the list of 22 countries where academic institutions and scholars have “significantly lesser freedom today than 10 years ago.” The country has received a score of 0.38 on the scale of zero to one (where one is highest level of academic freedom) which is way

Considering India’s performance on various indicators, it has been placed in the bottom 40 to 50 percent on Liberal democracy Index. It ranks 108 on the electoral democracy index and 123 on the Egalitarian Component Index

behind neighbouring Nepal (0.86), Pakistan (0.45) and Bhutan (0.46).

The academic freedom started declining in the year 2009 characterised by a drop in university autonomy followed by a sharp decline from 2013 onwards. To quote the report, “Around 2013, all aspects of academic freedom began to decline strongly, reinforced with Narendra Modi’s election as Prime Minister in 2014.

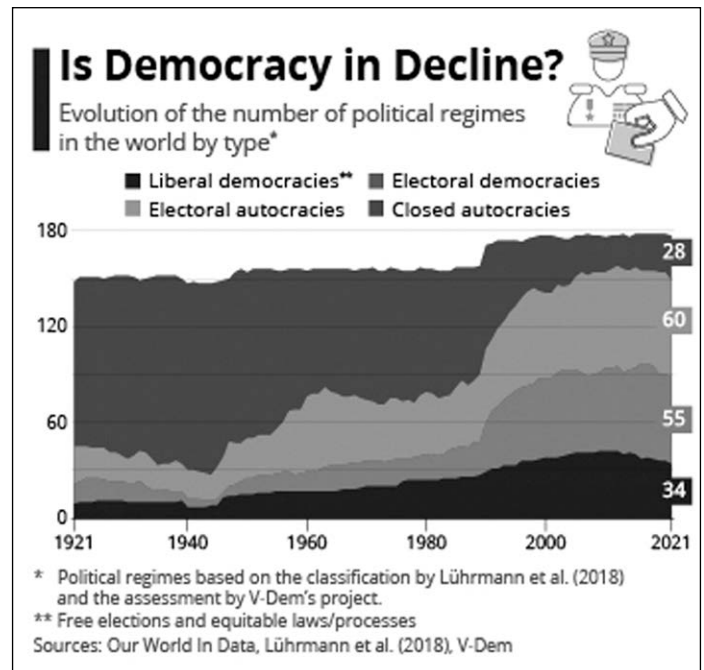
Campus integrity, institutional autonomy, and the freedom of academic and cultural expression declined more strongly over the following years than the freedom to reach and teach and the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination”. Around the same time, India saw a huge decline in indicators for electoral democracy. So much so that the report labelled India as “an electoral autocracy.”

If one recalls a few reports published during the last two years, the V-Dem report should not come as a surprise. In 2021, when V-Dem had categorised India as “electoral autocracy” for the first time, Freedom House, another entity, had also classified India as “partly free”.

During the same time, another organisation, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, classified India as a “backsliding democracy” and a “major decliner” in its report titled Global State of Democracy (GSoD).

In other words, this is not the first time that India’s democratic status has been questioned. Yet, the government has outrightly rejected and questioned the methodology used by V-Dem. It is time to do some introspection. The government should have started a dialogue with the institute and highlighted the flaws in their methodology. It should have raised its objection with reason and logic just like a research paper published by Sydney-based Indian Century Roundtable. If one goes through the

The report refers to India as “one of the worst ‘autocratisers’ in the last 10 years”. It bases its findings on 60 indices and 500 indicators. In other words, it is not just based on a few reports



research report, one can seriously find some flaws in the methodology.

However, the entire report cannot be ignored just by labelling it as a “motivated” effort to degrade India when the country is relating itself to the position of “Vishwa Guru”. It is important to self-introspect and relook at some of the key policy decisions that the government has taken in the past.

For instance, the FCRA amendments in 2021 and the recent income tax amendments and finance Bill 2023, have certainly affected the civil society, which is an important indicator for the V-Dem report. Year on year, the civil society organisations have faced the government’s wrath for criticising the government in its functions.

This is just one example. There are several other instances which have certainly raised questions on the government’s stand on constitutional principles. It is important that we walk the path we talk about. Our children certainly are looking at our leaders. It is important that they get the right message at the right time. Lest they start questioning the content being taught in their textbooks and start disbelieving in what we call ourselves – the mother of all democracies. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Plot suspected in sex claims against school principal

Police in Madhya Pradesh have re-arrested a lay Catholic school principal accused of sexually assaulting young girls, which local people say is part of a conspiracy to deny education to tribal people

Nam Singh Yadav was arrested and detained in judicial custody on March 7, three days after he and three others – a Catholic nun, priest and another lay male teacher – were accused of violating the rights of children.

The complaint was registered with police in Dindori district, a predominantly tribal district in Madhya Pradesh state. Yadav was first taken into police custody on March 4 after officials from the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights inspected the Jabalpur Diocesan Education Society Higher Secondary School and its hostel in the district's Junwani village.

The police complaint, filed by the district's Child Welfare Committee, accused the principal and others of violating the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. The complaint accused the nun of beating up the girls, and the male teacher of physically assaulting boys. The principal is accused of inappropriately touching eight girls. But no specific charge was leveled against the priest, the school manager.

Yadav was released a day after his arrest following protests from students and their parents demanding his release. They shouted slogans saying the charges against Yadav and others were "fake and part of a conspiracy." Yadav was arrested again on March 7, following the intervention of Priyank Kanoongo, the chairman of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, according to local reports. The police inspector, who previously released Yadav, was also suspended. Police told local media that they were continuing a manhunt for the arrest of other accused. Local tribal leaders, including Christians, say the child rights officials target Christian schools and orphanages as part of a plot to tarnish Christian institutions and deny educational facilities to indigenous people.

"This is a clear case of conspiracy against the Church-run school that has been providing quality education to our children", says Aman Singh Porthe,

state president of the indigenous political outfit, Gondwana Ganatantra Party. Porthe, who follows animist Gondi religion, said he and another leader of the party, were accused of obstructing government officials from discharging their duty in a separate case.

"It was for voicing the concerns of the parents and their children studying in the Catholic school," he said. "Our children who studied in such Church-run schools and hostels received a good quality education. Many even succeeded in cracking India's toughest civil service examination and other competitive examinations and progressed in their lives", Porthe told UCA News on March 8.

He said right-wing Hindu groups, backed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), do not like the popularity of Christian schools, particularly in indigenous areas. Hindu groups fear education will lead to indigenous people rejecting the caste-based Hindu religion, which treats indigenous people as outcasts with contempt. "This they believe will lead to the collapse of the upper caste Hindu hegemony they try to establish. So they file false cases often aiming to tarnish Christian missionaries and their schools," Porthe said. Porthe said pro-Hindu leaders "want to educate their children in missionary schools in cities but deny the same facility for poor indigenous people."

"The world does not understand this deep-rooted conspiracy to push us backward. We will fight it," the tribal leader asserted. The diocesan-run higher secondary school in Junwani has been serving indigenous people since 1940. Currently, it has more than 600 students-boys and girls. The school also runs separate hostels for boys and girls.

Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur also denied the allegations against the principal and others as "baseless" and accused state officials of violating laws.

The child rights officials violated the laws when they "forced their way into the children's hostel, especially the girls' hostel, at night after seven," Bishop Almeida told UCA News (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

War unto what end?

BY P. A. CHACKO

A year into Ukraine war, people with human feelings ask: war unto what end?

The UN's passing a non-binding resolution calling for Russia to end hostilities and withdraw from Ukraine appears to be water on a duck's back. Given Putin's intent, the Russian invasion of Ukraine will escalate as he has reportedly declared that the delayed Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile will be deployed this year.

The RS -28 Sarmat, known as Satan II, is reportedly a Russian liquid fuelled super heavy missile. It is capable of carrying about 10 tonnes of payload for 10 to 15 warheads, 24 hypersonic glide vehicles and counter measures against anti-ballistic missile systems. In other words, Putin is saying, don't joke with me, nor take me as a joker.

Mass graves and torture chambers, pulverized homes and mansions, smoldering heaps of hospitals and worshipping places, streets littered with dead bodies, homeless refugees and heartless deeds of the power hungry are there for everyone to see as the end product of the infamous Ukraine war. But, these things don't seem to be enough for Putin.

According to BBC reports, the yearlong war has resulted in the death of 8000 Ukraine civilians, 13,000 wounded, more than eighty lakh homeless persons, death of one lakh Ukraine soldiers and 2 lakh Russian soldiers, and 1 crore fifty lakh men, women and children thrown out homeless and stateless. The world says enough is enough!



The Ukraine War started on February 24, 2022 with Russian President Vladimir Putin calling it a "special military operation".

The UN resolution calling for a "comprehensive, just and lasting peace" was backed by 141 countries, while thirty-two countries, including India, abstained from voting, and seven countries, including Russia, voted against.

The Russian invasion was described by the UN Secretary General António Guterres as an 'affront to our collective conscience.' Ukraine's staunch defense has been for its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

This war has been termed 'the largest, most protracted military offensive in the continent since World War II.' Between these two warring nations, it is the innocent civilians and the civilian institutions that have paid the highest price.

Understanding such horror and agony, Pope Francis expressed his anguish and sorrow and has been sending out tireless appeals for peace. "I would like to appeal to those who have political responsibility, so that they may make a serious examination of conscience before God, who is the God of peace and not of war."

The Pope says 'War is madness!' Hence, his urgent appeal is: 'Stop, please! Look at this cruelty. It is inhuman and sacrilegious cruelty!'

Denouncing Russia's year long offensive against Ukraine, the Pope highlights the deaths caused "not only from gunfire and acts of violence but also from hunger and freezing cold."

Any war is tragic and sows destruction and death. But, when it is perpetrated by power packed despotism and hydra-headed arrogance, the consequences can be more spine-chilling and horrendous. The world witnessed it with horror when Hitler's nationalistic pride took him to heights of madness by exterminating the Jews in gas chambers and through other weird means.

When such evil forces reincarnate in today's world where despots ride high and authoritarian governments use their power arsenal to do ethnic or communal cleansing, men and women of conscience need to stand up to denounce them. If the world stands in need of peace today, a firm denuncia-



tion has to come to the centre stage. It was to this purpose the world bodies stood shoulder to shoulder and presented to the nations a monumental document called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. They had in mind the horrors of two world wars and the devilish rise of Nazi rule under Hitler.

The world leaders denounced the past and announced measures to ensure peace and security in the world in future by respecting the human person and his/her rights which are fundamental to a decent human existence. The nations were to put them into practice by inserting them into their legal system. However, in spite of such efforts, human rights abuses have been the rule rather than an exception. That is where we see arrogant and mega-

lomanic political leaders not only fiddle while their nations burn with the escalation of human rights abuses, but also invade other nations to pander to their selfish motives. Even in such cases, the United Nation Organization can pass only resolutions without any binding force. With the super powers wielding control over the Security Council using their veto power, the UN appears to be a prisoner in its own premises. And, succumbing to madness, if a despot were to press the nuclear button, not only the UN but the whole world could be reduced to ashes. Should such eventuality happen? No, never! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Two pastors arrested over alleged conversion

Two pastors belonging to a new religious movement influenced by the Church of God in South Korea have been arrested by police in Uttar Pradesh for allegedly luring people into changing their religion.

Pastor Rajat Kumar Shah, a resident of Delhi, and Pastor Abhijeet Mesih, hailing from Chakeri, a town near Kanpur city, were arrested on March 4, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police Ravindra Kumar told the media they were alerted about an event being held inside a building in Shyam Nagar in Chakeri town to allegedly force poor people to convert.

The alert came from members of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or world and its youth wing, Bajrang Dal, according to some media reports.

The pastors, Shah and Mesih, are associated with the World Mission Society Church of God, which is said to be influenced by the Church of God, which originated in South Korea in 1964.

Media reports quoted police claiming to have found books written in the Taiwanese language from them. A case under the Indian Penal Code and the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act has been registered against the duo.

The Kanpur police also detained four others, but they were later released.

“This is not the first time Christians, including pastors, are being arrested in the state. Police have initiated action against more than 100 people in the last six months under false conversion charges,”



Pastor Jitendra Singh, general secretary of the Pastors' Association of Uttar Pradesh told UCA News on March 8. He said more than ten churches were shuttered in Kanpur, Fatehpur, and Bareilly.

Singh, who is a member of the New India Church of God, said Christians “are living in constant fear due to repeated threats from Hindu nationalist groups who are backed by the police.”

He recalled the previous arrest of Pastor Santosh John along with his wife on Feb. 26 from their residence at Indrapuram town in Ghaziabad district after a false complaint by Bajrang Dal. Both were still languishing in jail and the next hearing of their case in court was scheduled for March 10.

“We are praying and are hopeful that all those arrested may be released soon,” he said. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Free Thinking Stifled

Those in power fear the presence of Socrates, for he promotes the right of the individual for liberal thinking; hence, they don't want Socrates to live

BY **PETER FERNANDES**

Socrates is the father of western philosophy and liberal thinking. A thoughtful and free discourse is paramount for a progressive society, but those in power abhor it to the core. Each civilization advances through free thinking, and the layers of development are attributed to the same, and yet, every generation wants to kill Socrates. Those in power fear the presence of Socrates, for he promotes the rights of the individual, liberty, the consent of the governed, political equality, and equality before law.

The opposite of critical thinking is illogical, irrational, and incoherent. Tyrants are the epitome of irrationality. They use this methodology to keep the masses subjugated, illiterate, and malnourished to achieve their selfish and dehumanising goal. A free and progressive society should have the freedom to evaluate information and decide how to process it in order to reach a sound judgement that allows everyone to enjoy freedom and achieve the highest goal of human existence. Hence, the government must exercise its power to protect individual liberty, and at the same time, those in authority should restrain from abusing their power. Therefore, Socrates has to live. The question every generation should ask is: Should Socrates live or does he have to die?

The fourth pillar of democracy is the free press or media. The media is one of the primary artilleries

The opposite of critical thinking is illogical, irrational, and incoherent. Tyrants are the epitome of irrationality. They use this methodology to keep the masses subjugated, illiterate, and malnourished to achieve their selfish and dehumanising goal



for ensuring that the heart of democracy receives adequate oxygen and the system remains well balanced to avoid sudden heart attacks. In a democracy, news outlets and other publications, even individual citizens, have the right to communicate information without fear of influence or retribution from the state or other powerful entities or individuals.

India, the biggest democracy in the world, under the present dispensation has undoubtedly compromised with free press. Currently, the opposing voices find themselves incriminatingly targeted and investigated for reasons unknown. Intimidating tactics are employed by the government to silence the voice of truth, objectivity, and justice. It is shameful but true: India takes pride not in the free press anymore but in Godi-media. History denounces and bespeaks such a stance, especially under tyrants like Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Mao, and others.

Not too long ago, the Prime Minister exalted the BBC for being fearless voice of truth and objectivity. Suddenly, the same news agency finds itself in the dock and appears to have lost its credibility for airing the documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots. By barring the documentary from airing, India has once

again made sure that Socrates has to die.

It's clear that when business tycoons take over media houses to create a discourse in the country that fits their narrative, an ominous sign of dark days is over the horizon. Among the few news channels that stood for their principles, NDTV was one of them. Sadly, not too long ago, this channel was also taken over by the now-infamous Adani Group. It was mainly to stifle independent voice that was pumping enough oxygen to keep the heart of democracy going. Those with honour and courage left the organisation to keep their voices open and free to continue to be a voice of conscience for the nation. But who will tell the Andhbhakt that Socrates should live and not be killed?

In recent years, false allegations have silenced a number of journalists and independent voices;

At least six journalists were killed, 108 attacked, and 13 media houses or newspapers targeted across the country in 2021. For the moment, it appears that they are successful in keeping Socrates silent. But can Socrates be kept silent?

inquiries and arrests have been made, and a few have died under suspicious circumstances. One such voice was Gauri Lankesh who was killed for taking a stand against the government, and in favour of the poor and the lower caste. Those who target journalists do so with impunity in order to instil fear in society. Journalism is not a crime. Sixty-seven journalists were arrested, and nearly 200 were physically attacked in 2020. At least six journalists were killed, 108 attacked, and 13 media houses or newspapers targeted across the country in 2021. For the moment, it appears that they are successful in keeping Socrates silent. But can Socrates be kept silent? Keeping Socrates silent would mean taking away the true nature of humanity, and that is not possible. Sooner or later, human nature has to rise and triumph.

Socrates was killed because, they said, he was poisoning the minds of the young. But that is not the case. He leaves nothing unexamined; he questions the hegemonic values of Athenian society, demonstrating their shamefulness, and in so doing proposes a qualitatively new way of theoretically and practically approaching human life. Socrates questioned the root values that allow the Athenian aristocracy to sustain its position of power. Socrates was killed because, as Cornel West says of Jesus, he was "running out the money changers."

The term "Godi-media" appropriately sums up the present state of the so-called free press. Paid media is doing a great disservice to the world's largest democracy and to the citizens in favour of money changers. Equally shameful are the government agencies that target independent voices to squash them. Last July, the I-T department raided the offices of one of the country's leading newspaper groups, *Dainik Bhaskar*. I-T raids were conducted around the same time at the office of Lucknow-based *Bharat Samachar*. A similar raid was carried out by the Enforcement Directorate at the residence of journalists and officials working for the Delhi-based independent media house *Newslick.in*.

In October 2018, the I-T department carried out a nearly 22-hour-long search at the Noida-based independent media house, *The Quint*. I-T officials were also present at the residences of the founders, Raghav Bahl and Ritu Kumar. Back in 2017, during the initial years of the BJP, the CBI conducted a raid at the offices of NDTV, its founder Prannoy Roy, and his residence. In October 2020, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted raids across 10 locations in Jammu and Kashmir, including the offices of the Union Territory's leading English daily, *Greater Kashmir*. The money-changers know that they cannot afford for Socrates to live -- he has to die.

If humanity has to survive and thrive, Socrates has to live on with every generation. Will the nation open its eyes, hear the anguish of the masses, and answer the call? Or will the free voice be targeted as "anti-national"? Socrates exists in each and every human being, that is, rational mind with free will to live in freedom in order to achieve the highest goal of human existence. The temporal society cannot and should not crush the human soul's destiny for freedom and the highest happiness. Allow Socrates to live... ©

Avoidable Tragedies

The firecracker industry - estimated to be worth Rs 75,000 crore and providing livelihood to over 10 lakh people - is witnessing recurring loss of lives every year

BY AARTI

No festive occasion or major celebration is complete without the sound and colours of fireworks in India. However, the cause for concern is the recurrence of firecracker-related mishaps on a regular basis.

Sample these. On February 27, one of the two daily wage labourers hired to transport firecrackers in connection with a religious function at Dadri, Greater Noida in U.P., reportedly lost his life while the other was grievously injured. It all happened so unexpectedly and quickly that no sooner than a lighted firecracker was carelessly burst, it inadvertently landed on firecrackers being carried in the e-rickshaw and the vehicle went into flames. The organisers of the event had obtained permission to carry out the procession but approval for bursting firecrackers was not granted.

On February 28, in a major explosion at Kochi, one person was killed and seven injured, including three children. It is said that the unauthorized firecracker storage unit, operating out of a house in a residential locality, had the licence for conducting fireworks display but not for storage. Not only the building got reduced to rubbles, the impact of explosion, felt around a 5-km radius, caused considerable damage to nearly 10 houses in the immediate neighbourhood. The windowpanes of vehicles parked in their porticos got smashed. Notably, in 2016, the fireworks

accident at a temple in Puttingal, Kollam, killed 112 people. A powerful explosion that occurred on February 21 at an illegally run firecracker factory had the licence to manufacture weighbridges and steel RCC at Una in Himachal Pradesh. 11 workers, including 6 women, who were literally burnt alive, died, leaving many others injured. Had the 1,905 kg of gunpowder since seized from the spot exploded, the devastation would have been simply unimaginable.

Last year, during the occasion of celebrating the New Year's Day, in a firecracker unit at Sivakasi, four persons were killed, and many others seriously injured when a shed exploded, destroying four other sheds. The abovementioned accidents, which are only a tip of the iceberg, seem to have occurred because safety measures had not been followed.

Firecrackers, having its origins in traditional Chinese culture, were originally dry bamboo (when burnt produced an explosive sound) which was meant to scare away evil spirits. Over the years, across the globe, fireworks is a major custom to celebrate - be it the coming of the New Year, or during Deepawali, marriages etc. -- besides enhancing the festive atmosphere.

In India, the Explosives Act 1884, regulates the manufacture, possession, use, sale, transport, import and export of firecrackers (fireworks) which are classified as Class 7 explosives. Illegal manufacturing of firecrackers is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees or with both. Fireworks, defined as a low hazard explosive comprising any composition or device manufactured with a view to produce coloured fire or flame, light effect, sound effect, smoke effect (coloured or natural), or combination of such effect are subject to the Explosives Rules, 2008 which is quite comprehensive. Accordingly, some 34 types of sound emitting and colour and sound emitting fireworks are approved. This includes the popular "atom bomb", "palm leaf crackers", "garland crackers", "coloured matches",



“flowerpots”, “rockets”, “sparklers” etc. Sound levels have been prescribed for all firecrackers.

It may be quite pleasant to see the various colours during bursting of crackers, like the white colour emitted by burning aluminium, magnesium and titanium; the orange colour due to carbon or iron; yellow colour because of sodium compounds; blue and red on account of copper compounds and strontium carbonates; green colour emitted due to barium mono chloride salts or barium nitrate or barium chloride.

But such traditional firecrackers have been found to release several toxic metals that can be harmful for health. Reports seem to suggest that lead in crackers can impact the human nervous system; copper can trigger respiratory tract irritation. While sodium can cause skin problems, cadmium can damage the kidney. Besides the presence of nitrite can cause irritation in mucous membrane, eyes and skin, the most harmful ingredient in traditional firecrackers, namely, the nitrate can cause mental impairment.

Over the past few years, with air pollution reaching menacing levels, many states have banned traditional fireworks and only green firecrackers can be burst, that too for a limited period of time. It is said that green crackers reduce emissions substantially and absorb dust. Most importantly toxic metals in traditional crackers are replaced in green crackers with less hazardous compounds. But there are a few black sheep who seem to be selling banned firecrackers with impunity.

The Sivakasi firecracker industry, situated in Virudhunagar District of Tamil Nadu, accounting for the manufacture of 70 % of fireworks of the country, said to have nearly 1010 licenced units, has witnessed about 75 accidents during the last three years in which more than 55 people lost their lives. Many others have been maimed for life, losing limbs, eyes and many more suffering from hearing impairment.

The State Government, besides providing a compensation of Rs 3 lakh to the families of each of those killed in such accidents and Rs 1 lakh to those injured, has set up a Fire and Match Workers' Welfare Board headed by the Labour Minister as the Chair-



man. Each unit has to annually contribute Rs 200 per worker employed to the Welfare Board to provide compensation to accident victims as also to those who are injured in the mishaps.

But why should accidents in respect of firecrackers take place in the first place and why should precious lives be lost if safety measures are scrupulously followed?

Among others, all units manufacturing firecrackers need to employ a duly licenced Foreman to ensure compliance of safety

norms. Besides a comprehensive “safety management plan”, for ensuring and managing safety, every manufacturing unit must have emergency response planning/preparedness such as first aid and the emergency plan should be tested once in a year.

Further, every unit must have provision of escape route; evacuation plan, appropriate firefighting controls, consequence minimizing steps like control of spills, appropriate off-site response plan, maintenance of records, etc. The building housing firecrackers shall be so constructed or so lined or covered as to prevent the exposure of any iron or steel and the formation and detachment of any grit so as to come into contact with the explosive or ingredient thereof in such building and such interior benches, shelves and fittings shall, as far as reasonably practicable, be kept free from grit and otherwise clean.

Apart from efficient lightning conductors designed and erected as per specifications laid down by Bureau of Indian Standards, the connections to various parts of earth resistance of the lightning conductor terminal on the building to the earth shall be tested at least once in every year by a qualified electrical engineer.

Yes, compliance to the Explosives Act and the Rules by all stakeholders can greatly reduce avoidable tragedies in the firecracker industry. Accident prevention requires purposeful, continuous action on everyone's part. Both inside manufacturing units and outside the workers handling firecrackers must understand the safety aspects and the supervisors should lead the effort in identifying possible hazards and correct them.

Safety first means zero accidents. ©

Christians slam ban on healing prayers in northeast India

Christians in a northeast state are opposing a ban on organizing and publicizing healing prayer events, saying it violates the constitutional right to practice their religion.

Authorities in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Siang district issued an order on Feb. 28 banning all kinds of "prayer healing, healing crusades, healing through the local priest, pujas [ritual worship in Hinduism], as a remedy to cure various diseases and illness."

The order issued by a district magistrate said "such practices are misleading the innocent people from taking recourse to scientific medical treatment and cause severe health issues."

The healing prayer programs also give rise "to social-cultural problems like conversion to other faith and thereby spread discord among people and groups," the order said.

It further banned publicizing such events invoking the Drug and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act 1954, which prohibits the advertisement of remedies alleged to possess magic qualities.

The government order stated that the ban is applicable to "all individuals, groups, faiths, and religions."

"This order is against our fundamental right to practice our religion," said Tarh Miri Stephen, presi-

dent of the Arunachal Christian Forum.

Stephan told UCA News on March 7 that his organization will call on the district magistrate who issued the order to know the reasons and appeal to him to withdraw it.

"In case the district magistrate does not comply, we will apprise top officials in the government including the state's chief minister," he said.

Stephan did not rule out approaching the courts if the political leadership failed to protect their constitutional right to religious worship.

"Such prayer events do not lead to religious conversion as they are meant to help people give up bad habits like drug addiction, alcoholism, etc," he said.

Church leaders suspect the order was another tool to harass Christians in the state and sought more clarity on the political intent behind it.

When contacted, Bishop John Thomas Kattrukudiyil of Itanagar told UCA News he was "waiting and watching the developments that would unfold."

Arunachal Pradesh is India's remotest state on the northeastern tip bordering China, Bhutan, and Myanmar, and is currently governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



Pope renews Council of Cardinals

Pope Francis has renewed the Council of Cardinals, as known as the 'C9', since the mandate of the previous Council has expired.

The cardinal members of the new Council are: Cardinals Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the Governorate of Vatican City State; Fridolin Ambongo, Archbishop of Kinshasa; and Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay; Seán Patrick O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston; Juan José Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona; Gérald Lacroix, Archbishop of Quebec; Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg; Sérgio da Rocha, Archbishop of San Salvador de Bahia.

The Secretary of the commission is Bishop Marco

Mellino. The next meeting of the Council will be held on April 24 at 'Casa Santa Marta,' the Pope's residence.

Its last meeting, held in December 2022, had been devoted to the continental phase of the ongoing synod, among other topics.

Established by Pope Francis on September 28, 2013, the Council of Cardinals was created to assist the Pope in the governance of the universal Church.

The Council was also founded with the project to revise the Roman Curia, the latter accomplished with the new Apostolic Constitution 'Praedicate Evangelium' published on March 19, 2022. ©

(Courtesy: Vaticannews.va)

Light for My Journey

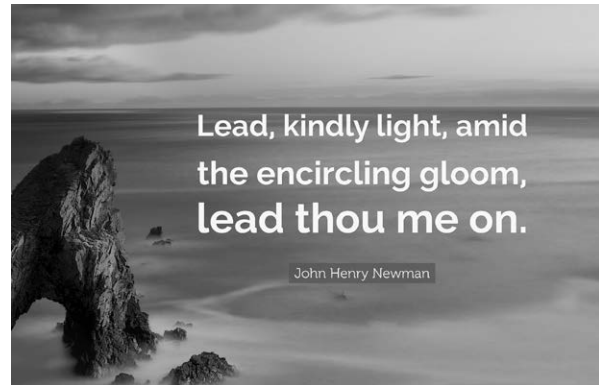
BY P.A. JOSEPH

Cardinal Newman, in his inspiring prayer Lead kindly light, asked the Lord's guidance only for one step for his life. When we reflect upon this thought of Newman, we need light only for the next step in our life. We all move forward taking one by one step. It is enough to get light for one step.

In line with Newman, I ask for the blessing for one second, the one now given to me. I am foolish to worry about the past, nor to dream about the future, actually what I need is light and strength for living 'the now'. Each moment is unique and I must make it meaningful and beautiful. My whole interest and insistence must be to stress on the present. When I stress on the present, I see that "life is too short to be stuck in the desert". If I allow my life to be stuck in anything, all I have to do is to come out of it at the earliest. There is no other way than coming away right now. I must concentrate only on the present. This also instructs me to be mindful of everything at hand.

In Japanese Zen spirituality, it is said, "sitting is Zen, walking is Zen, the iPhone is Zen, the daily news-paper is Zen, household work is Zen, driving is Zen..." In our language we can translate Zen as everything of the present is divine. This means in whatever I am attending to or involved, give full

Today we see and feel that the busiest person is the most successful one. We are enslaved by speed. It is a malady. It is a virus that makes everyone tensed and restless. We go for quantity and ignore quality. Quantity we can purchase but quality, we have to select and decide. Quality is always personal and it charms everyone



attention to it. Only one task is to be done at a time, and give full attention to it. A mother with a baby in her lap is fully involved with the little one; even if the baby is only of three months, she communicates with the baby, and the baby responds in its own way, by looks, shaking hands, little noises, or even crying.

Another step is that, as I am confronted with a number of issues, I must learn to prioritize, that is, what is important and meaningful must get priority. The other things are secondary and can be postponed or even ignored. Wisdom means the ability to choose from many things. This also means selective listening to news, selective watching of TV, selective reading, selective confrontation with others, etc.

If we can write down our priorities, that is much more selective and precise. In confronting situations, if we are asked to write down, we will be all the more careful in choosing words, the time of events, and the context. All these processes enable us to follow the right path in our life and activities with others.

Today we see and feel that the busiest person is the most successful one. We are enslaved by speed. It is a malady. It is a virus that makes everyone tensed and restless. We go for quantity and ignore quality. Quantity we can purchase but quality, we have to select and decide. Quality is always personal and it charms everyone.

Another reality I encounter is the tension between ego and love. Ego tries to dominate, enslave, control, overpower, subdue, and show oneself; on the contrary, love has just opposite functions – joy, peace, patience, gentleness, self-control, etc. ©



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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The Law and Us..!

Living in a housing society has its upsides and downsides, and somehow with the use of the law and a strict committee, people more or less learn to live with each other. A few months ago, I was told a neighbour was going to join two flats, one upstairs and the other below, with either a staircase or a lift and there would be a lot of noise from breaking, "But don't worry," he told me when I confronted him about the disturbance it would cause, "we will abide by all the rules,



much noise you make.

I heard of a recent incident at Santacruz, in Mumbai, a chapel was destroyed by a builder. The people went to the local police station but the police did not register an FIR, why?

Let's not speculate if the police were given or not given a treat and gifts during Christmas, but as to why ever should such special treatment be given to guardians of the law, for simply doing the duty, for which they are paid with our taxes.



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and have boarding of the windows done, so noise will be minimal for you."

To be truthful, he has kept his word.

But this morning I walked to the other side of the flats being reconstructed, and found that no boarding of any windows had been done to stop any inconvenient noise for the others.

Let's leave my friendly neighbour alone, and move to other instances where the law is applied differently to different people: A friend of mine in Pune, told me that during Christmas, his church decided to go to the local police station and distribute sweets and gifts to the police. "That's very kind of you," I said, "I hope you do the same to the firemen and municipal workers!"

"We don't need firemen or municipal workers," said my friend, "Once the police are happy with us, they will protect us, if there's a problem!"

And that's how we function.

The law is applied depending on how close you are to the law keeper, what gifts exchange hands, or how

Does the policeman have the right to decide who he should use the law on; the builder or the worshippers, or shouldn't he register the complaint which is the right of every citizen of this country?

I felt sad, seeing the worshippers of the broken chapel, singing hymns, outside the police station as a form of protest!

I believe, as soon as a policeman fails in his duty, the judiciary should see he is suspended, till an enquiry is conducted. Justice is blind, and not applied only to those who make a bigger noise, have a larger wallet or more clout. Till this starts taking place, building bigger Parliament buildings doesn't make any sense..! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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