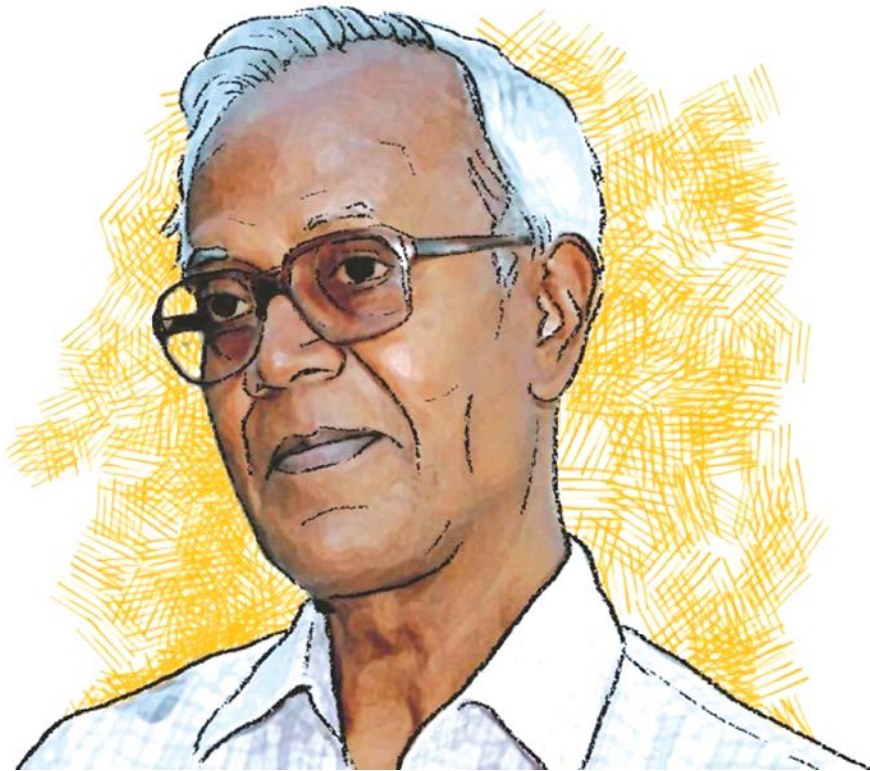


Indian Currents

www.indiancurrents.org • Vol. XXXIV • Issue 27 • 27 June - 03 July 2022 • ₹15

Total Pages - 40 Including Cover

DEFENDER OF THE DEPRIVED



PROPHET OF OUR TIMES

The first death anniversary of Fr Stan Swamy reminds us that recent developments in the Church are an affront to what he stood for all his life

Instead of supping with the devil, leaders must be wise as serpents as they have been 'sent as sheep in the midst of wolves'



www.malankaralibrary.com

SUMEDHA

Jharmari, Punjab

A DON BOSCO INSTITUTION

Sumedha is a centre for renewal of body, mind and spirit through insights and practices from psychology and spiritual traditions. It is located now in a 16-acre plot in the serene countryside on the Don Bosco School campus, Jharmari, Punjab, off NH 152 Ambala-Chandigarh Expressway, 12.8 km from Ambala Cantt. Railways Station.

2022

Programme Schedule

SUMEDHA SADHANA

A Psychospiritual Wholeness Journey

1. (SS-43) – March 17 – May 31
2. (SS-44) – June 12 – August 27
3. (SS-45) – September 11 – November 26

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an inner journey in quest of personal renewal and transformation. Participants begin from where they are, looking at what is happening on their psychospiritual journey. They then move on to explore the psychological dynamics that affect their wellbeing, get in touch with their restricting emotional, relational and spiritual blocks and seek healing and renewal so that they can live and minister in more joyful, satisfying and fruitful ways. (Age Limit 35 -65)

FACILITATORS:

Ajoy Fernandes PhD (*Personality & Spirituality*). Alba Rodrigues MA, BEd (*Yoga & Cosmic Spirituality*). Edison Fernandes PhD (*Therapy*). Joe Mannath PhD (*Sexuality, Celibacy & Spirituality*). Johny Dominic PhD (*Unconscious Dynamics & Spirituality, Therapy*). Jose Parappully PhD (*Midlife Dynamics & Holistic Spirituality, Trauma & Healing, Therapy, Retreat*). Philip Pinto MA, BEd (*Consecrated Life*). Maria Goretti MA., BEd (*Therapy, Emotional Dynamics*). Shalini Mulackal PhD (*Women's Spirituality*). Thomas Kurianthanam MPH (*Breath, Spirit & Wellbeing*).

For further information and registration, please contact:

Sumedha Centre. Don Bosco School Campus, Ambala-Chandigarh Express Way

Jharmari, Teh. Derabassi, Mohali Dist. Punjab-140501. Mob. +91-9410941799 (Director).
+91- 8650051625 (Administrator) email: sumedhacentre@gmail.com Blog: <http://sumedhabani.blogspot.com>

DON'T BLEMISH STAN'S MEMORY



On July 5, it will be one year since Stan Swamy, one of the noblest souls of Indian Church whose heart bled for the Tribals, Dalits and poor, was snatched away from our midst. It was nothing less than custodial death as he was denied bail and kept in jail and hospital until he breathed his last. His was one of the rare cases, in independent India, wherein an innocent man's life was taken away for being with the people, pleading for their rights, voicing their grouses, and steadfastly opposing the injustices meted out to them. This is the past. But the present is no better, rather darker. Instead of trying to keep alive the fire Swamy lit, those who shed tears on his death seem to have forgotten the cause he held close to his heart; they seem to have conveniently erased from their minds the fact that there were forces that worked overtime to cook up cases against him.

Some of the recent developments in the Church are an affront to what Stan Swamy stood for all his life. He was a paragon of secular values; he brooked no division in the society in the name of religion; he was a silent, peaceful campaigner for the rights of the Tribals whose lives had been rocked and wrecked by corporate houses and their godfathers in the ruling regimes and parties. But he was an eyesore for the Hindutva brigade who saw him as someone trying to convert naïve tribals to Christianity. There have been several attempts in the recent past wherein Church authorities have been seen overenthusiastic to the overtures of the right-wing organisations. A recent speech by a prelate, though he later withdrew it, in which he formulated the view that he sees no difference in the ideology of the RSS and the Church seems to be the 'new thinking' at least among a section of the Church leaders. In fact, if he had taken time and pain to read the books of the ideologues of the RSS like M. S. Golwalkar and V. D. Savarkar it would have been painfully known to him that the ideologies of the right-wing and the Church are worlds apart; they are as different as cheese and chalk.

The Sangh Parivar is strenuously working to be seen in the good books of the Church. Recently, a conclave was held, reportedly in a five-star hotel, and the participants were 150 priests, religious sisters and lay leaders who run schools and colleges in Kerala. Though the event looked like an initiative of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC), it was, in fact, called by the Bhartiya Janata Party's State Minority Morcha. It is time to be aware of such traps. Regrettably, there are many in the Church, including clergy, who work overtime to portray the Sangh Parivar as a benefactor, if not protector, in times of need. Messages to this effect fly thick and thin on the social media network.

The RSS envisages majoritarian nationalism. It is an aggressive organization whose founders had visualized second class citizenship for Christians and Muslims in Bharat. How do the values preached by Jesus gel with such ideology and views? The Church leaders should not be so naïve to forget the Sangh Parivar organizations, including the RSS, which had even objected to the very release of *Ecclesia in Asia* by Pope John Paul II in New Delhi on November 6, 1999 during his visit to India. It is important that the members of the Church hierarchy should be wise as serpents as they have been 'sent as sheep in the midst of wolves.'

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'.

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

✉ → frsureshmathew@gmail.com

DEFENDER OF THE DEPRIVED



COVER
STORY

06

PROPHET OF OUR TIMES

Prophet for our Times

BY CEDRIC PRAKASH

12

COVER STORY

'TAKE FORWARD THE STRUGGLES OF ADIVASIS'

BY JOSEPH XAVIER



15

COVER STORY

DIALOGUE, WITH CARE

BY JOHN DAYAL

EDITOR:
Dr. Suresh Mathew

EDITORIAL BOARD:
John Dayal, AJ Philip, Marydasan John

ADVISORY BOARD:
George Plathottam, Skylark George, PJ Joseph,
T. Dominic, PA Joseph, Anoop Abraham

DESIGN & LAYOUT:
Dani Jose

CIRCULATION:
Ashish Victor

FINANCE MANAGER:
Jainamma

Indian Current Publications
375 - A, Pocket - 2
Mayur Vihar Phase - I
New Delhi - 110091
Tel: 011-45873264, Mob: 7042562963
Email: icdelhi@gmail.com
frsureshmathew@gmail.com
indiancurrentsweekly@gmail.com
Website: www.indiancurrents.org

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

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

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

This issue of Indian Currents contains
40 pages including cover.



18 COVER STORY

Be Shrewd as Serpents

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

22 COVER STORY

Catholic Educational Leaders Trapped by BJP in Kerala

BY VINCENT PERAPPADEN

26 COVER STORY

Stan Swamy My Inspiration

BY IRUDHAYA JOTHI

28 A CLOSE LOOK

Maha tragedy Triumph of the will

BY A.J. PHILIP

32 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

President of India Resident of a gilded cage?

BY JASWANT KAUR

34 MEDIA

Advertisements and Accountability

BY AARTI

38 BOB'S BANTER

Welcome Good and Faithful Servant..!

BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

POWER QUOTES



Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.

Bill Gates

• • •



Technology is supposed to make our lives easier, allowing us to do things more quickly and efficiently. But too often it seems to make things harder, leaving us with fifty-button remote controls, digital cameras with hundreds of mysterious features and book-length manuals, and cars with dashboard systems worthy of the space shuttle.

James Surowiecki

• • •



The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do.

B. F. Skinner

• • •



Relying on the government to protect your privacy is like asking a peeping tom to install your window blinds.

John Perry Barlow

• • •



If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant may prove to be our executioner.

Omar N. Bradley

• • •



Men have become the tools of their tools.

Henry David Thoreau

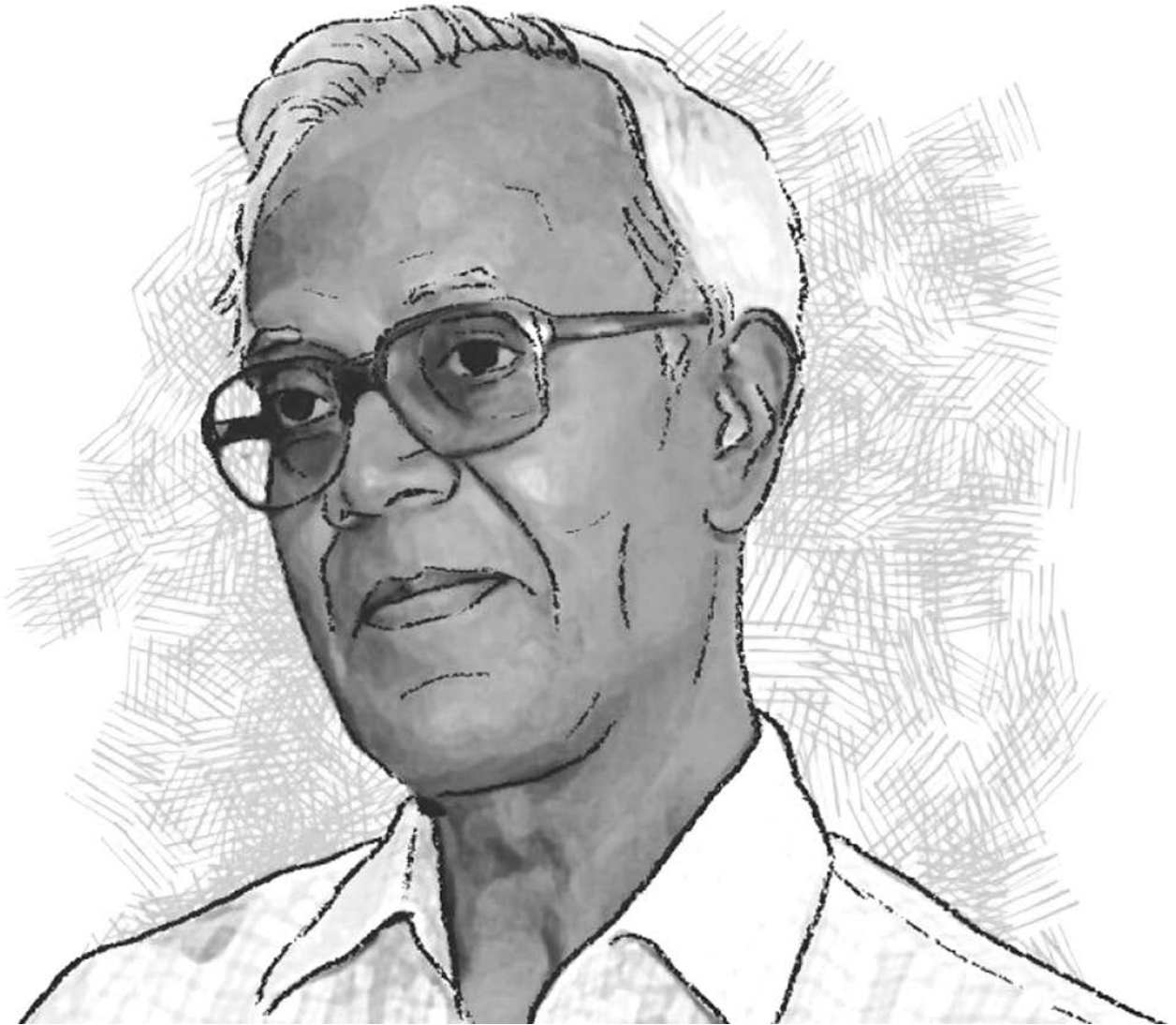
• • •



Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.

Lou Holtz

DEFENDER OF THE DEPRIVED



PROPHET OF OUR TIMES

Prophet for our Times

Prophets are inconvenient and Stan Swamy was a sheer nuisance to the vested interests who were out to exploit the poor Tribals and Dalits; he walked the talk and accompanied them in their struggle for *jal, jungle aur jameen*

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

One year ago, on 5 July 2021, when Father Stan Swamy was called to his eternal reward, the world mourned the death of a prophet! 'Stan', as he was lovingly called by those close to him, died while he was still incarcerated. From the time he was illegally arrested on 8 October 2020, he languished in Taloja jail; his deteriorating health conditions prompted the Special Court to direct the jail authorities to admit him to a private hospital in Mumbai where he finally succumbed, despite the best possible medical treatment. It was indeed too little too late. For one, Stan should never have been arrested; secondly, the frail 84-year-old Jesuit priest was suffering from severe health ailments. His death was universally regarded as 'institutional murder'. It was nothing short of that. Till today, Stan has not yet been exonerated of the trumped-up charges in the Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case; fifteen others still remain in jail (though a couple are on bail) in the same case.

A few days before his arrest, in a video-message which went viral, Stan said, "What is happening to me is not something unique happening to me alone. It is a broader process that is taking place all over the country. We are all aware how prominent intellectuals, lawyers' writers, poets, activists, students, leaders, they are all put into jail because they have



expressed their dissent or raised questions about the ruling powers of India. We are part of the process. In a way I am happy to be part of this process. I am not a silent spectator, but part of the game, and ready to pay the price whatever be it." Words of the quintessential Stan: truly a prophet for our times!

There is no doubt that Stan has left behind a rich legacy worthy of emulation. Stan had a legion of friends -- mainly the Adivasis and the sub-altern groups. He identified with them; walked the talk and accompanied them in their struggle for *jal, jungle aur jameen*. He left no stone unturned, in the defense of their legitimate Constitutional rights. His collaborators were women and men from all walks of life who were convinced that Stan lived his life totally for a more humane and just society. In the realisation of his vision, Stan made many enemies - the rich and powerful, the mafia who were plundering the area for natural resources, the corrupt politicians and their corporate honchos, and other vested interests. Prophets are inconvenient and Stan was a sheer nuisance to them. He thwarted some of their plans of destroying the lives, livelihood of the Adivasis and of their environment. They wanted him out of the way and they succeeded.

Stan was an inspiration to many all through his life and one year after his death he still continues to be so. During his incarceration and on his death, there were hundreds of thousands who came out on the streets, both in India and abroad -- first, condemning his illegal arrest and then his murder. His death was news all over the globe - in the print and electronic media; social media went viral extolling his significant contribution to the sub-altern groups. Like a true Jesuit and a worthy son of St Ignatius, Stan did all he could to "set the world on fire" through the many values he epitomized,

Stan had a legion of friends -- mainly the Adivasis and the sub-altern groups. He identified with them; walked the talk and accompanied them in their struggle for *jal, jungle aur jameen*

among them Compassion, Courage, Collaboration and Commitment are worth noting.

Compassion: Stan's heart bled for the excluded and exploited; his life was focused on the reality and the cries of the poor. He did all he could to alleviate their suffering by identifying with them, being immersed in their joys, griefs and anxieties; walking with them and addressing the systemic unjust issues which caused their impoverishment.

Courage: Stan lived the dictum of Jesus: "fear no one", as he spoke truth to power and took on vested interests who denied the Adivasis of their legitimate rights for their identity and culture, land and other natural resources. He fought tenaciously for the youth who were imprisoned without justification. He was not afraid to risk his own life for justice for others.

Collaboration: Stan believed in collaboration with women and men of goodwill. He realised that people from every segment of society have to come together in order that Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity truly belong to "*we the people of India*". He forged and belonged to networks and alliances which moved towards that goal.

Commitment: Above all, Stan was unflinching in his commitment to God and in the service of his people. At great risk, he gave himself without counting the cost. He lived the Gospel without compro-

The RSS ideology is in no way compatible with the person and message of Jesus. One always needs dialogue, but within the framework of the Constitution where the rights and freedom of both sides are accepted and respected

mise and like his Master Jesus he was one-sided in a total commitment to the service of faith and the promotion of justice, for the poor and the excluded.

Few will contest what Stan epitomised and the unparalleled legacy he has left both the country and the Church. There has been a wave of turmoil all over. The situation in the country is bad in every sphere: political, economic and social. Global surveys on significant indicators put India either rock-bottom or among the worst. Divisiveness, discrimination, demonization and denigration of minorities hold sway; hate and violence is mainstreamed. Human rights defenders and those who take a visible and vocal stand for truth and justice are intimi-



dated and harassed, subject to heavy police interrogations and even incarcerated (as we see in the case of those detained under the UAPA and other draconian laws). Constitutional bodies which are meant to be impartial and objective are pathetically compromised and even destroyed to become pawns of the political masters. The less said about 'godified' media the better.

In a nation which is bereft of moral leadership, the Catholic Church (in fact all Christians), however miniscule in number, could have provided (and can still provide) a witness value given to us by the person and message of Jesus: that of being a prophetic Church in today's India. Interestingly, ten years ago, in 2012, at the 30th CBCI Meet in Bangalore on 'The Church's Role for a Better India', the Bishops said, "We sensed in our hearts our country's yearning for a Better India. Our country has been noted for its deep spirituality, its saints and sages, its rich diversity of cultures and religions. People yearn for the ideals enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India of a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic which will secure for its citizens justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. But this yearning has remained largely unfulfilled. Economic development has brought about increasing inequities, an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor with consequent tensions spilling over into violence. We see around us a betrayal of the poor and marginalized, the tribals, dalits and other backward classes, women and other groups who live in dehumanising and oppressive poverty. We witness rampant exploitation of children. There is disappointment with those in public life for whom ethical concerns matter little. The Church does not wish to rest on her laurels. She recommits herself to being a prophetic Church, taking a decisive stand in favour of the poor and marginalized. We envision an India with more attributes of the Kingdom of God such as justice and equity with its consequent fruits of love, peace and joy."

At the 31st CBCI Meeting on, 'Renewed Church for a Renewed Society – Responding to the Call of Vatican II', the Bishops' statement emphatically stated, "We witness the trend to fundamentalism which seeks to dilute the secular character of our nation.



Against this trend, we stand by the values upheld by the Indian Constitution and appeal to governments to respect these values The experience of God, will lead us to involvement in and solidarity with the marginalized and the exploited, those suffering from disabilities, those living in the peripheries of economic, cultural and social spheres. We will speak out against all forms of injustice meted out to them and we will defend their rights." The statement of the 32nd Plenary Assembly in 2016 on the theme, 'The Response of the Church in India to the Present Day Challenges' appears like a 'dhobi-list' without any direction, leave alone a plan of action.

Whereas the CBCI Statement of the 33rd Assembly in 2018 was surprisingly strong stating, "Any attempt to promote nationalism based on any one particular culture or religion is a dangerous position. It may lead to uniformity but never to genuine unity. Such misconceived efforts can only lead our nation on the path of self-annihilation. Mono-culturalism has never been and can never be the right

The situation in the country is bad in every sphere: political, economic and social. Global surveys on significant indicators puts India either rock-bottom or among the worst. Divisiveness, discrimination, demonization and denigration of minorities hold sway; hate and violence is mainstreamed



Pope Francis asserts in his Apostolic Exhortation, 'Evangelii Gaudium', that when human rights and gospel values are threatened "a prophetic voice must be raised." Stan did exactly that, all his life

answer to the quest for peace, progress and development, especially in a country like ours that has a rich diversity of culture, language, region, race and religion. Violence always recoils upon the violent sooner or later...We deplore the rising incidence of atrocities against women, killings, caste rivalries and communal violence which includes attacks on Christian institutions and communities. Therefore, let us follow the path of true nationalism that can lead our motherland to true peace, harmony, progress and prosperity...We wish to urgently call all people of goodwill to uphold the rule of law guaranteed by our Indian Constitution."

Finally, the last CBCI Statement at their 34th Plenary Assembly held in 2020 spoke about, "False nationalistic ideologies that instigate contempt for cultures other than the majoritarian dominant culture are capable of perpetrating atrocities. It is necessary to clarify the essential difference between patriotism and pseudo nationalism. Patriotism builds up the nation while pseudo nationalism destroys the integrity, unity and harmony of the nation. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical and extreme forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism. We appeal to the State authorities to ensure that pseudo nationalism does not continue to give rise to new

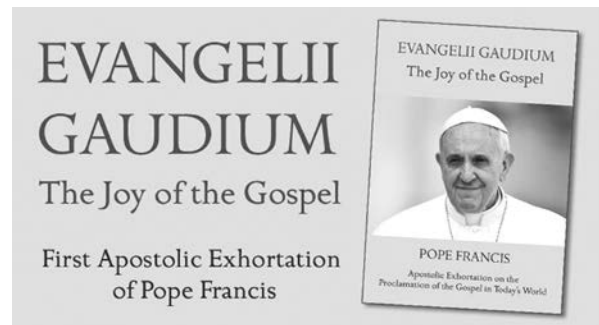
forms of totalitarianism. Together with the framers of the Constitution, we, the Catholic Bishops of India, affirm that religion shall not be a criterion for determining Indian citizenship...Needless to say that dissent should not be misconstrued as un-patriotism. Democracy cannot be built on monologue".

Significant, powerful, incisive statements indeed! But is that enough? What happens after that? Were there any clear directions and actions with definite monitoring mechanisms to internalise them, to propagate them and to ensure their actualisation? If a survey is conducted today most of the priests and religious, leave alone the laity, would never have heard of these statements. Are there effective measures in place to respond to the signs of the times? Is the Church visible and vocal on the current violence regarding the agniveer scheme? Or when derogatory comments were made on the Prophet? What about the anti-farmer laws or the anti-worker Labour Codes? Or in keeping with the mandate of 'Laudato Si' - what's the position of the Church when the environment is being systematically destroyed by the regime and the Adivasis are being deprived of *their jal, jungle aur jameen*? What about the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the sedition and other draconian laws and for those incarcerated under them - are we visible and vocal demanding the immediate repeal of such anti-people laws and for the unconditional release of all those illegally jailed? What about 'love jihad'? Some High Courts have already declared it unconstitutional. That some Church hierarchy can support such a law is downright immoral and against the teachings of Jesus. An adult has a right to marry the person of one's choice and also to embrace the religion of one's choice. There are sufficient provisions in the CrPC to address any force or fraud. What about the Citizen-

ship Amendment Act (CAA)? or for that matter the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A in Kashmir? Are there any statements on the stifling of freedom of speech and expression in the country, the consistent attacks on freedom of religion?

In the recent weeks, the Church in India was embroiled in two controversies: On 19 May, about 150 managers, principals and others of Catholic educational institutions in Kerala were lured to a conclave organized by the BJP Minority Morcha at the five-star Lulu Marriot in Kochi to apparently discuss National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Leading academics and other intellectuals of the country have long trashed the NEP on several counts. It is anti-poor, anti-Constitutional and are a gross violation of the educational rights of minorities. The NEP is non-acceptable and non-negotiable. What is the official stand of the Catholic Church on it? Then there is the Bishop, in a clearly opportunistic but pathetic move, who equates the ideology of the RSS with that of Christianity. Something totally unacceptable. The RSS is against the Constitution of India, the national anthem, the tricolour, against the minorities, it swears by the Manu Smriti – which upholds the caste system and negates equality between women and men. The RSS ideology is in no way compatible with the person and message of Jesus. One always need dialogue, but within the framework of the Constitution where the rights and freedom of both sides are accepted and respected.

There is a deafening silence; perhaps a fear from the official Church on both these 'events! Why? Prophets like Stan are courageous – in announcing the good news they have to denounce all that is evil in society. In doing so, they have to pay a heavy price. One needs to be reminded of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4 :1- 11) during his days of prayers and fast. Satan uses all his wiles to tempt Jesus with the sins of power, privilege, position, possessions and pride. Jesus unequivocally rejects



these temptations in totality and unconditionally. He does not hesitate; he does not run with the hare and hunt with the hound. He does not indulge in diplomacy or engage the devil with niceties. Jesus does not sup with the devil! He bluntly says, "get away from me Satan!" one often tends to forget that clear injunction from Jesus "Fear no one!" In our own times, Pope Francis asserts in his Apostolic Exhortation, 'Evangelii Gaudium', that when human rights and gospel values are *threatened* "a prophetic voice must be raised." Stan did exactly that, all his life.

The Prophet Stan calls us to greater introspection. It is not easy. Like his Lord and Master, he sacrificed his life for a greater cause. We too are called to do likewise. One may not have friends on the way; most of the disciples deserted Jesus. Our Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore motivates us to have the courage to "Ekla Chalo Re".

*If they answer not to thy call walk alone,
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,
O thou unlucky one,
open thy mind and speak out alone.
If they turn away, and desert you when crossing the wilderness,
O thou unlucky one,
trample the thorns under thy tread,
and along the blood-lined track travel alone.
If they do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm,
O thou unlucky one,
with the thunder flame of pain ignite thy own heart
and let it burn alone.*

It would certainly be a fitting tribute to Stan today, if needed, to walk alone... to burn alone...! Do we have the courage to do so? ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

‘Take Forward the Struggles of Adivasis’

One of the biggest missions of Stan Swamy was to establish the rights of the Adivasis over land, water, and forest

BY JOSEPH XAVIER

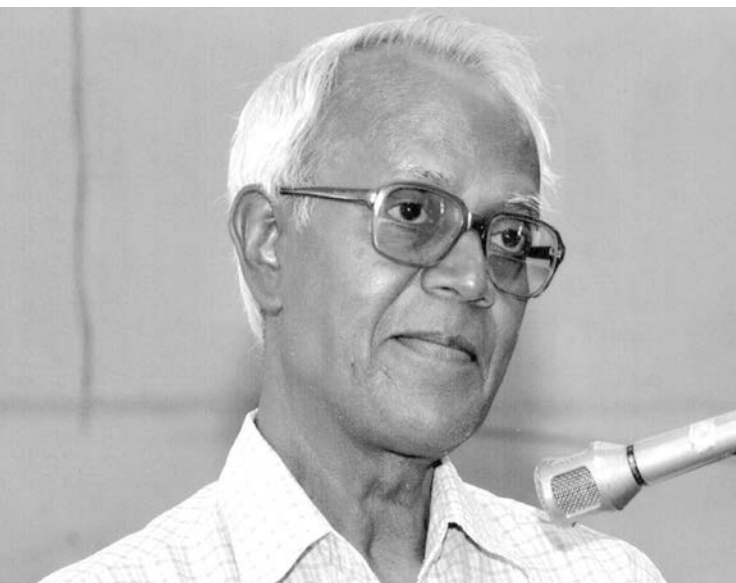
All of us are witnesses to the fact that God glorified Fr. Stan Swamy in his death. A daughter of one of the Bhima Koregaon prisoners met her father in April 2022 in Taloja prison. She told me that during her brief time, as permitted by the jail authorities, her dad was speaking about Stan elaborately. Stan became all for all even in prison by his simplicity of life and high moral thinking. The prison gates curtailed his physical movements but not his spirit and love for humanity. He was well respected as a person and as a Jesuit priest. He bore witness to his faith as a follower of Jesus even inside the prison.

I keep his last conversation with me close to my heart. It provides me with a deep understanding of the reality and meaning to my religious call. Stan was a clear thinker and an articulate person. He would not mince words. On 28 June 2021, from the Holy Spirit hospital Mumbai, he said over the phone, “I am like a child. I need assistance for everything. Take forward the struggles of the Adivasis for digni-

fied life. I surrender myself. Tell the provincials that I belong to the Universal Society. Whatever they decide, is fine with me”. I was speechless. I have observed him having strong intuition. He was able to foresee the future. But he was never perturbed by what would happen to him.

Stan knew that his death was near. Though he wanted to spend the fag end of his life in Ranchi with his friends and Adivasi colleagues, he knew it was not going to happen, given our legal system. Still, he wanted to communicate something from the depth of his heart. He deeply believed that one day Adivasis will have a dignified life. Dignity cannot be snatched away from them. They will struggle for freedom, liberty, and dignity till the end. He also knew that he was only making a small contribution during his life, in their long march towards freedom and dignity. He wanted to give me and all of us a parting message -- “Take forward the struggle for freedom and dignity”.

What puzzled me was also the idea of belonging to a universal society. In the Adivasi culture, it is a belief that when one dies his/her spirit merges with those who have gone before and with the cosmos. I have observed his way of life in Bagaicha, Ranchi.



“I am like a child. I need assistance for everything. Take forward the struggles of the Adivasis for dignified life. I surrender myself. Tell the provincials that I belong to the Universal Society. Whatever they decide, is fine with me”

- Fr Stan

Everyday morning after a meditative walk for about 45 minutes, he would collect some flowers and stand before the 'pathal', a stone erected in Bagaicha, in which Adivasi martyrs' names are inscribed, for 15 minutes in silence. Some flower petals will fall from his folded hands as he could not hold them tight, due to Parkinson's. At the end, he will respectfully offer the flowers to the martyrs, having his right palm on his chest. Once, out of curiosity, I asked him, "What are you doing, standing still for 15 minutes?" He said, "I am infusing my spirit with the spirit of the Adivasi martyrs." Stan was tremendously influenced by cosmic spirituality which prompted him to say, I belong to the universal society. For Stan, universal society means, both the Society of Jesus and the larger society, world as one family.

Stan was a strong critique of the hierarchical Church. He felt that the Church has institutionalised and imprisoned the historical Jesus, and consequently deviated from the core mandate of Jesus, to live in solidarity with the poor and sharing everything in common. He wrote from the prison:

Nothing is mine
Nothing is yours
Everything is ours

Lo, this commonality is wrought by compulsion
If only all humans would embrace it freely and willingly
All would truly become children of Mother Earth.

He did not hate the Church but wanted the Church personnel to follow and practise the values and teachings of the historical Jesus more deeply. He felt on many occasions the Church has betrayed the poor by joining hands with the powerful.

In his analysis he distinguished ideology and persons. He would question and challenge dehumanising ideologies and practices but would not hate a person. Even if he did not agree with some persons due to ideological positions, he would deal with them respectfully. From his personal experiences and analysis, he was convinced that the institutional Church will always go with the powerful, rich and rulers, either out of ignorance, fear, to obtain favours or for survival. He knew the Church as a power centre and like any other power centres, the Church would go hand-in-hand with the rich and powerful. Following Jesus is quite different from following the Church.

In the 70's, when he was the director of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru, he saw many Dalits tilling



**"I am infusing my spirit
with the spirit of the Adivasi
martyrs" - Fr Stan**

the lands of the rich farmers for many years. Land to the tiller policy was promulgated in the country. He demanded the implementation of this policy and joined hands with the landless tillers, who were mostly Dalits. When the struggle was going on, he personally witnessed the Church leadership going with the rich upper caste landowners. The Church leadership demanded his removal from ISI. Fortunately, the Church could not prevail over Stan, as the Society of Jesus recognised the good work of Stan.

He realised that there were contradictions between the life of Jesus and life of the Church. There was a gap between what the Church preached from the pulpit and action. For Stan it was important to follow Jesus rather than the Church. In fact, to faithfully follow Jesus, he kept himself away from the Church hierarchy. When he was planning to establish Bagaicha, in Ranchi, one of the religious congregations wanted to donate him a piece of land. The Church officials blocked the move. However, he had many religious and priests as his friends. Many of them were considered by the mainline church as 'fringe elements.' He believed that the 'fringe elements' followed Jesus more radically than the hierarchy.

His main mission in Bagaicha was to establish the rights of the Adivasis over land, water, and forest. In the name of development, the lands of Adivasis were taken away forcibly without the consent of the Gram Sabhas. His demand was to follow the provi-

sions of V Schedule of the Constitution and judgements of the Supreme Court. Eventually, he realised that the root cause was the unholy alliance between the corporate, fundamentalist/fascist/Hindutva forces and state power. This alliance had only one religion to follow, namely, profit or money at any cost. He found thousands of Adivasi youth were languishing in prison for no fault of theirs, purely on the ground of suspicion that they were sympathisers of Maoists. He decided to confront the unholy alliance head on through judicial processes. He exposed their overt and covert strategies through his writings. This infuriated the state, which was then ruled by the BJP. The state followed the time-tested strategy of filing a false case against Stan. Stan was implicated falsely in the *pathalgadi* case. The *pathalgadi* movement was labelled as an anti-national movement. However, when Mr. Hemant Soren assumed office as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand in 2021, in his first Cabinet meeting the state decided to withdraw the *pathalgadi* case and called the *pathalgadi* movement as pro-Adivasi movement. Political junta will recognise you as national if you follow their dictum and will call you anti-national if you confront them. The Church was a mute spectator while all these were happening. The biggest sin of the Church is the sin of omission. In this background one must understand his words, I am not a silent spectator.

The message that we can draw from the life of



Those imprisoned in the Bhima Koregaon case (known as BK-16), who are still languishing in prison, are not Christians but follow Jesus. They pay the price for refusing to be silent spectators. The Church has much to learn from BK-16.



Fr Stan did not hate the Church but wanted the Church personnel to follow and practise the values and teachings of the historical Jesus more deeply. He felt on many occasions the Church has betrayed the poor by joining hands with the powerful

Stan is very simple. We are called to follow the historical Jesus who emptied himself so that we may experience fullness of life. We must go back to the origin and understand Jesus as a revolutionary, who questioned and challenged all structures of injustice, and stood strong in favour of the poor, the marginalised and excluded. In Taloja prison, he spent his days reading and discussing 'Jesus - An Historical Approximation' by Jose Pagoda. He used to discuss with his companions how revolutionary Jesus was during his lifetime and His teachings are even relevant today. His companions, Arun Ferreira and Anand Teltumbde cherished every movement with Stan, living in the small prison cell, though they had not met each other before. He helped them to find Jesus beyond Christianity. By demonstrating what it means to follow Jesus, Stan continues to live in the hearts of many, including those who are in Taloja prison. A Church that is not with the poor is against Jesus. A Church that does not struggle for freedom and dignity of the poor is a counter witness. Those imprisoned in the Bhima Koregaon case (known as BK-16), who are still languishing in prison, are not Christians but follow Jesus. They pay the price for refusing to be silent spectators. The Church has much to learn from BK-16. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH XAVIER is the Director of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru

Dialogue, With Care

The values enshrined in the Bible and the ideology propagated by the RSS are worlds apart. It is absurd to say that there is a meeting point between them

BY JOHN DAYAL

My heart goes out to Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune.

An apology has been wrested out of him for his remarks at a public function which were carried by the local media. “The Christian Community accepts RSS ideology and principles. We need to establish communication and coordination between Christians and the (Rashtriya Swayamsewak) Sangh,” the Marathi language newspapers quoted the bishop. “The Sangh believes in Nationalism, the church also believes in nationalism,” the punchline said.

Bishop Dabre has been on the Pontifical Council for Dialogue and is well known for his meetings with religious heads in his diocese and often in other parts of the country. He is not politically naïve either. He means well by the nation, and certainly by the Church.

The remarks, understandably, remain viral on social media in Christian, secular, Hindu and Muslim circles. These groups, now sharply divided on the basis of either the faith of their administrators, or the ideology of like-minded people, reacted according to their DNA.



There was a sense of glee in the WhatsApp warriors of the Hindu right wing at this unexpected support apparently from such high quarters.

The Muslim and secular groups were aghast. They had successfully formed a very vocal, if not very successful, opposition to the Karnataka Government’s ban on the Hijab and its enactment of an extremely harsh anti-conversion laws that targeted not just conversions to Christianity, but all but criminalised Muslim young men marrying Hindu women. Leading this struggle is the Catholic Archbishop of Bengaluru, Peter Machado, at the head of a very broad coalition of several dozen groups from the state.

Archbishop Machado is also in the Supreme Court in challenge to the anti-conversion law. Such solidarity has seldom been seen in the country in recent decades. The matter is yet to come up for hearing. The law has been operationalised on the ground.

Away from Karnataka, national civil society was deeply concerned at the political and social climate in the country which even now remains on the boil since the Times Now TV debate anchored by Ms. Navika Kumar in which lawyer Nupur Sharma, a senior spokesperson of the Bhartiya Janata Party, the political arm of the RSS, made disparaging remarks on the Prophet of Islam.



“**The Christian Community accepts RSS ideology and principles. We need to establish communication and coordination between Christians and the (Rashtriya Swayamsewak) Sangh**”

- from an interview with Bishop Thomas Dabre

The BJP suspended her, and sacked her male colleague, as the government of Mr Narendra Modi took what it hoped was remedial action to prevent a threatened economic boycott of India by Islamic nations' consolidated demanding an apology. Ms Sharma, however, has been strongly supported in social media by the rank and file of the Sangh.

The silencing of the spokespersons may or may not have mollified the Islamic nations. Barring Pakistan, which India deems a political and military enemy, the countries of the Gulf as also Iran have a complex mesh of mutual economic interests which neither side can really afford to sunder.

But at this moment in time, it is in India's interests that no country carries out the threat made by some employers to sack employees of a certain religion, or to stop imports from India. It could have cataclysmic impact on Indian states dependent on remittances from the people working in West Asia.

The protests in India continue, however, though in the last two or three days, they have been overshadowed by the burning of trains and railway stations by young men in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar protesting the launch of a military recruitment scheme named Agnipath.

The anti-blasphemy agitation saw the death of two Muslim youth who were killed when the Jharkhand police opened fire. People have been injured at many places in police action, especially in Uttar Pradesh where the police arrested 109 Muslim protestors.

The U. P. Government under Chief Minister Adityanath, now known as Bulldozer Baba, also demolished the home of activist Afreen Fatima who had led a protest against the blasphemy. Afreen called it an

It is of essence to go into any act of dialogue with wide open eyes, with a full understanding of our own needs, as also of the needs of others in our nation. With this must be a set of ground rules of debate and discussion

“act of vendetta” and “trying to crush criticism of the government.”

Bishop Dabre's original statement was aggravated by Catholic media interviewers who recorded him saying “I am not an RSS spokesperson or its defender. In truth, I have demanded a dialogue between the Church and the RSS which Indian Bishops had proposed.” “The Christian Community accepts RSS ideology and principles. We need to establish communication and coordination between Christians and the (Rashtriya Swayamsewak) Sangh,” another interviewer wrote.

Dialogue is a great thing. The Second Vatican Council almost sixty years ago, recommended it as a major instrument of peace and understanding in society and to end the sort of confrontation that had been seen in various continents after World War II.

It is of essence to go into any act of dialogue with wide open eyes, with a full understanding of our own needs, as also of the needs of others in our nation. With this must be a set of ground rules of debate and discussion. Above all, there must be a very clear knowledge of the nature of the other side, be it a religious sect, or a political entity. And, of course, everyone should be using the same lexicon, dictionaries and data, so there is no scope of misunderstanding.

The Church, right from the first general election, has encouraged the laity, and everyone else, to be a sentient elector and to participate in the election process fully. Barring hiccups as happen occasionally in Kerala, the Church leadership also encourages the laity to join the party of their choice. The only stricture, perhaps, is not to be a member of a group that is going into election on a patently bigoted, narrow, or violent agenda.



At its highest level, the Churches - and that includes every denomination and Rite of Catholic and Protestant Churches - have not had formal dialogues with national political parties.

There are informal contacts. The formal sessions, more photo opportunity than anything else, are when Bishops call on the President or the Prime Minister, to invite them to address a meeting, or as in recent years, to persuade them to invite the Pope to India, a visit which has not happened in twenty years and the tenure of two Popes who took office after John Paul II.

Fortunately, this effort has paid off. Prime minister Narendra Modi, at his request, called on the Holy Father in the Vatican during his last European tour, and invited Pope Francis to India. The visit is yet to materialise, but will happen sooner or later, we hope.

[As an aside, the Francis-Modi meeting has also led to a meeting with the Pope by Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. He is seeking western investment, blocked since the Kandhamal carnage against Christians in 2007-08 during his coalition government with the BJP. Perhaps he hopes this will cleanse the state's record and persuade western investments to come to the state once again.]

Coming back to dialogue and lexicons, alas, when the RSS says nationalism, it means a very militant and majoritarian nationalism. The RSS is not a reli-



gious body, and it is not a political party. It is a multi-headed and aggressive organisation whose political face, the Bhartiya Janata Party, has been ruling India since 2014 with Mr Modi as Prime Minister.

The RSS, which has persistently opposed all Papal visits to India, had accused Pope John Paul II, now a Saint of the Catholic church, of using New Delhi to launch *Ecclesia in Asia*. The RSS said this was a master plan for conversions of Hindus in India.

Also, the Church surely knows that the one thing the founding fathers of the RSS held even more vehemently than their supremacist Hindutva was their visceral hatred for followers of Christianity and Islam.

RSS documents are clear that people of these two communities have no place in Bharat, that is India. They would have to accept second class status if they want to live in this Bharat.

This is a sort of combination of apartheid and racism -- a marriage of the worst of the history of Saudi Arabia, Israel, USA, colonial Britain and South Africa. Mercifully Mahatma Gandhi, the legendary Subhash Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, during the freedom struggle, ensured this would never happen. Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar wove these aspirations of the freedom struggle to build a new secular democratic republic.

Would the RSS want to have a dialogue on the damage such a doctrine of Hindu Rashtra, with no equity for Muslims and Christians, can do to India? ☪



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN DAYAL is a veteran journalist and human rights activist.

Be Shrewd as Serpents

The main reason for Christians falling into the trap of the Hindutva forces is lack of knowledge about the dangerous ideology formulated by Sangh Parivar leaders and now being propagated by the outfits

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

What could be the message of Fr. Stan Swamy to the Indian Church on his first death anniversary? When Fr. Stan was accused of aligning with Naxalites and was put behind bars, there were widespread protests by the members of the civil society organizations. Some priests and religious sisters joined the protests, but the response from the official Church was subdued. There was no protest from the part of the official Church against the unwarranted act by the state, but only a feeble request to release him. On the other hand, some fundamentalist Catholic groups spread the fake news concocted by the right wing Hindutva forces that Fr. Stan was a supporter of Naxalites and they had asked the Church authorities not to come to his defence.

Fr. Stan died without getting justice either from the state or from the Church, but he had no complaint because, as an authentic spiritual person, he knew the fate of a prophet, a true follower of Jesus. Indeed, he was a follower of Jesus of Nazareth



and not a devotee of the Christ invented by Christians. But today, he would be totally disappointed with the followers of Jesus, especially the leaders of the Indian Church, because of Church's indifference towards the injustices done to the Muslim community, gross violation of human rights and systematic destruction of democratic institutions; besides, some leaders in the Church subtly endorse the ideology of the Sangh Parivar that is divisive, exclusive, violent and based on hatred.

After a year of his death, the social and political atmosphere has become more vicious with increased pumping of the poison of hatred by the right wing forces and the state unleashing violence on the Muslim community without taking recourse to due process of law, and the judiciary looking the other way. Although Fr. Stan was mainly involved in the issues of tribals, he was basically a human rights activist. His concern and commitment to human rights motivated him to empower tribals whose life is intrinsically related to water, forest and land.



Bulldozing Muslim houses has become order of the day in the BJP-ruled states whenever the Muslims participate in any protest against the injustice meted out to them. This is a gross human rights violation. How can the members of a family be deprived of a house on a mere accusation that a member of the family was involved in violent protest? There was no bulldozing of houses after the large-scale violence and destruction of public property in different cities during the protest against Agnipath, the new policy for recruitment to armed forces. It is conclusively proved that bulldozing houses, shops and business establishment of Muslims is punitive in nature and a blatant discrimination by the state against the Muslims. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to recall what Arundhati Roy said recently in a conversation with Al Jazeera TV. “The bulldozing of Muslim homes, it marks a moment in time where you are seeing a sort of fragile, flawed democracy transitioning pretty openly, pretty brazenly into a criminal Hindu fascist enterprise.” The bulldozer has become “the talisman of the new, avenging, Hindu nation.”

Arundhati in the same conversation spoke about the destruction of the democratic institutions in India. “Every institution that used to be part of the checks and balances of this old democracy is now a weapon that can be used against you.” For the last eight years, the focus of the BJP has been converting India into a Hindu Rashtra through polarization based on religion, passing laws like CAA, cow protection, love Jihad, anti-conversion etc, targeting the minorities and giving a free hand to the right wing organizations to indulge in brutal violence like lynching the Muslims. As a result, the BJP government squandered its resources without solving the key problems like joblessness, malnutrition, poor quality of education etc. India continues to be one of

Fr. Stan died without getting justice either from the state or from the Church, but he had no complaint because, as an authentic spiritual person, he knew the fate of a prophet, a true follower of Jesus



the lowest countries in Human Development Index (131 out of 189) and Global Hunger Index (101 out of 116). Narendra Modi had promised creation of two crore jobs annually during the electioneering prior to 2014 Lok Sabha election. The recent violence by young people against Agnipath is a clear indication of the huge problem of joblessness.

The fundamental reason for the present chaotic and pathetic condition of the country is the implementation of the dangerous ideology of Hindutva. It has made the BJP leaders, who are the present rulers, blind to the social and economic realities. It appears that the Church is unaware of the Hindutva tsunami that has been sweeping through the nation since 2014. From the actions and statements of some Church leaders one gets the impression that they have fallen into the trap laid by the Hindutva forces. Two recent incidents are worth mentioning.

A recent statement of Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune diocese has given the impression that he justifies and endorses the ideology of RSS. His advocacy for a dialogue between the Church and the RSS has created confusion not only among the Christians but also among the civil society organizations. He was reported saying: “The Christian community accepts RSS ideology and principles. We need to establish communication and coordination between Christians and the [Rashtriya Swayamsewak] Sangh. The Sangh believes in nationalism, the Church also believes in nationalism.”

A write up by Nirmala Carvalho published in *Matters India* on 16th June quoted the Bishop: “I think the principles of the RSS should be acceptable to Christianity because Jesus himself was a patriot: he loved the Jewish people; he loved the Jewish

culture. [. . .] On that basis I made the point that Jesus was a patriot and his followers should also be patriots.”

There is nothing wrong in having a dialogue between the Church and the RSS, but the context in which he suggests dialogue with RSS creates suspicion. Secondly, on what basis can he say that the Christian community accepts RSS ideology and principles? RSS ideology as delineated in the writings of its ideologues V D Savarkar (“Hindutva, Who is a Hindu”) and M S Golwalkar (“We or Our Nationhood Defined” and “Bunch of Thoughts”), are diametrically opposed to the core values of Indian Constitution and the values of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus. Exclusion, discrimination and hatred have no place in the teachings of Jesus. How can the Christians accept the principles of an organization that considers Adolf Hitler, who massacred six million Jews, as an ideal leader?

According to M S Golwalkar, Muslims, Christians and communists are internal enemies of the nation. “The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferen-

Nationalism based on division, exclusion and hatred is nothing but pseudo nationalism. Let Christians in India be shrewd enough not to be trapped by the pseudo nationalists

tial treatment – not even citizen’s rights” (We or Our Nationhood Defined by M S Golwalkar). The policies and actions of the BJP governments at the Centre and in the states amply prove that India is being converted into a Hindu Rashtra where Muslims and Christians will have to either become Hindus or live in India without any rights, “not even citizen’s rights”.

The second incident is an educational conclave on NEP (New Education Policy) convened by the Minority Morcha of the BJP in Kerala in which about 150 priests, nuns and lay people of Catholic Schools participated. According to a write up by Fr. Vincent Pereppaden SJ in *Matters India*, invitation to this conclave was sent by the secretary of KCBC (Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council) Education Commission. Although it was informed that the Education Minister would be present at the conclave, the Union Minister for Minority Affairs John Barla was the main



speaker. He spoke mainly about the various schemes available to the students of minority communities. The participants did not get any opportunity to clarify their doubts and apprehensions about the NEP. At the same time the organizers got the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the priests, nuns and lay Catholics, which could be used to trap them later.

Many lay people, priests, religious and some bishops in Kerala are brainwashed through the social media to hate Muslims. It seems that the IT cell of the right wing groups have succeeded to a great extent in creating enmity between the Muslims and Christians in Kerala by sending hate messages. The frequent use of “love jihad” by Christian religious leaders and hate speech against Muslims by some Christian political leaders are clear signs of the increasing divide between Muslims and Christians. The Hindutva groups know well that as long as Muslims and Christians, who constitute about 45% of the population, are together the BJP will find it very difficult to have a foothold in Kerala politics. That is the reason for the right wing groups wooing Christian religious and political leaders and creating enmity between the two communities.

Against this backdrop, the Christians in India have to listen to the warning of Jesus to his disciples, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

How can the Christians become shrewd as serpents? The main reason for Christians’ falling into the trap of the Hindutva forces is lack of knowledge about the dangerous ideology, and lack of awareness about the socio-political developments taking place in India. Hence bishops, priests, religious and lay people are to be encouraged to read newspa-



pers and listen to news channels that are not biased in their reporting. As the majority of the media have become the propaganda tools of the government and the right wing forces, it is very significant to educate priests, religious and the faithful how to use media prudently, including social media. Secondly, the faithful are to be told unambiguously that revenge and enmity have no place in the dictionary of a true follower of Jesus. Thirdly, imparting the core values of the Indian Constitution is to be made as a part of all ministries of the Catholic Church. Fourthly, the faithful are to be taught to reflect over the socio-political issues as part of their spirituality and prayer and discern creative ways to respond to the issues.

Christians in India will be able to influence people of other faiths only if they are able to respond creatively to the socio-political issues, as Jesus did in his time. Jesus was highly critical of his own religion and he wanted to transform the Jewish religion by proposing a new way of life based on his core teaching, “Love one another as I have loved you”. It is wrong to assume that Jesus was a blind Jewish nationalist. Jesus was basically a humanist and a prophet who found God in every human person. His message is universal, transcending the boundaries of nationalities. True nationalism is love, justice, concern and compassion for people of all faiths, cultures, languages, castes and classes in India. Nationalism based on division, exclusion and hatred is nothing but pseudo nationalism. Let Christians in India be shrewd enough not to be trapped by the pseudo nationalists. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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



Catholic Educational Leaders Trapped by BJP in Kerala

Education Commission of Kerala Catholic bishops' Council was lured into education conclave organized by the BJP

BY VINCENT PERAPPADEN

It was named as a conclave. The attendees were about 150 priests, religious sisters, and lay leaders who run schools and colleges in Kerala. It looked like a meeting of the Catholic educational leaders convened by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference (KCBC) at its headquarters in Kochi.

However, it was called by the Bharatiya Janata Party's State Minority Morcha and convened at a five-star hotel in Kochi. Educational leaders like school principals, college principals, and administrators responded eagerly to the initiative and invitation of the BJP State Minority Morcha.

However, the official invitation was from the KCBC's Education Commission. The overwhelming response in numbers apparently surprised the organizers. The dynamics of the conclave, its agenda, and the political motives raise some significant and crucial questions in the air. Before coming to those questions, let's examine some details of the program.

What was it?

Literally, a conclave means a private gathering. It is a term derived from the practice of the private gathering of the cardinals of the Catholic Church to elect its Pope. Thus, a conclave is a private meeting of very selected participants for a predefined purpose. In the same way, the conclave organized by the BJP Minority Morcha on May 19 at Lulu Marriot in Kochi was for the Catholic managers and principals of every Catholic educational institution in Kerala to discuss National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

According to the letter dated April 28 from the secretary of KCBC Commission Trust for Education, it was a communication sent "very urgently as per the direction of our Commission chairman Joshua Mar Ignathios." The communication further informed: "[t]his [conclave] is organized by State Minority Morch[a] Commit-



tee and the Central Union Minister for Education is attending the conclave. The main purpose is to suggest ways and means to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. There will be opportunities to express our anxieties and apprehensions related to NEP 2020. You will be receiving special invitation and please do attend.”

From the tone and the force of the communication, every institution should be represented by its head in the conclave. However, this communication was clearly and intentionally misleading. First, it concealed that the “State Minority Morch[a]” is the BJP’s political wing of minorities, especially of Christians (and particularly of the Syro-Malabar Christians of Kerala).

The readers of the invitation had no clue that they were going to participate in a BJP’s politically calculated program. Second, the communication described that the purpose of the conclave was to suggest implementation strategies for the NEP reforms. This statement was intentionally false. BJP’s State Minority Morcha had no power or role in implementing the NEP 2020. Still, the letter unequivocally stated that the conclave’s purpose is directly related to the implementation of the NEP 2020. Therefore, suggesting ways and means for the NEP reforms in a conclave of a political party appears like a trap to allure the educators.

Third, the communication expressively declared that the Union Minister of Education (although Dharmendra Pradhan’s name was not mentioned) will be attending the conclave. However, the truth was that the Minister of Education had no program in Kerala on his agenda of that day. Instead, it was the Union Minister for Minority Affairs John Barla, who has nothing to do with the NEP 2020, who attended.

Finally, the communication purportedly lured the Catholic educators that the attendees will have opportunities to express their “anxieties and apprehensions related to [the] NEP 2020” implying that the Minister of Education will be present to listen to them. The fact was there were no one from the government or from the appropriate authority to heed to the Catholic educators’ “anxieties and apprehensions” regarding the NEP 2020.

The BJP Minority Morcha has collected the addresses with phone numbers of all the participants. Thus, now they know the Catholic institutions and their heads. They assured that the local BJP workers will be visiting each of these institutions under the cover of distributing the booklet offered by the minister

What happened in the conclave?

It was a well-set and well-lit centrally airconditioned conference hall with tables and chairs set for conference-cum-dining. On the backdrop it was clearly presented that the conclave was “an initiative of BJP Minority Morcha, Kerala.” There was a registration counter at the entrance where all the participants registered their names, addresses, and phone numbers. The organizers reverently ushered each of the attendees to their seats placing the priests around the front tables and the sisters in the back rows from the middle. Although the proceeding started much later than it was announced, the conducting of the it was quite formal, compered by a professional.

There were three panel discussions in the conclave. The first was on school reforms. The panelists highlighted the NEP 2020 stipulations as revolutionizing school education in India for the first time in history. The second was on higher education. Here the presenters glorified the imagined India that shines in the world as “Vishwaguru.”

And the third was on teacher education in which the panelists presented a picture of the existing corrupt system that will be radically undone by the implementation of the NEP reforms. Invariably, each of the panelists was eulogizing the NEP 2020 stipulations interpreting them as the roadmap for India’s ascend to a glorified nation on the top of the world.

Among the panelists were some former and present vice-chancellors of universities, and some freelance speakers from other fields. At the same time, they all were hardcore BJP supporters. All presenters insisted

on uncritically accepting and adopting the NEP 2020 since the Central Government is determined to do it. It was clarified that all the confusions and concerns related to the stipulations will be addressed by separate government orders.

The conclusion of all the panel discussions were loud and clear: whatever the BJP government does is to protect the national interest; there is no need for any apprehension or critical questions; trust the government and that it will do good for you; the NEP 2020 is the finest proof for a government that delivers what it promised.

However, the most important part of the conclave was not the panel discussions. They were only the allurements to draw the participants to the program. Organizers' entire attention was on the conclave's inaugural function. To make sure all participants' presence, the inaugural function was held after the first panel discussion. The elevated platform was filled with 16 chairs. Among those who occupied the dais were the BJP's and Minority Morcha leaders, some retired vice-chancellors and Padma awardees, and a Catholic priest.

Minister for Minority Affairs John Barla was on the center seat. The national president of the Minority Morcha welcomed everyone with a detailed introduction about each. The welcome address gave an impetus to the session pontificating the BJP's Minority Morcha's Catholic leaders and their roles in organizing the conclave.

Does the Church take any serious step to enlighten its educational leadership on the impacts and consequences on its institutions if the NEP 2020 is implemented? Conversely, is the Church leadership taking any serious step to study how to take advantage of the NEP 2020 without harming its interests?

The minister addressed the assembly in English impressing the audience on his personal relationship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and explaining the government's schemes, resources, and scholarships for the minorities. He emphasized that those generous Central Government schemes are not utilized by Christians either because of their lack of awareness or because of their prejudices against the government. Both must be cleared with intentional actions, he insisted.

Moreover, the minister offered every participant a booklet detailing the minority schemes. (However, the Morcha leaders want to make it another opportunity to appease Christians. Consequently, they are planning to visit each participant's institution to hand over the handbook).

The Minister reiterated that the Christians have the political responsibility to communicate emphatically

with data that they are a community contributing significantly to the nation-building. In our institutions, all students are treated indiscriminately. As a result, many engineers, doctors, IT professionals, leaders, and more have been produced by Christian institutions.

The Church is the leader of providing healthcare to all sections of society in India. In his opinion, the BJP and the Hindutva forces are creating a narrative against Christians because of their ignorance and misunderstanding. Offering himself as an apostle and mediator for the minorities, he assured his whole-hearted assistance for the community in dealing with any of the problems with the government. Interestingly, the NEP 2020 was not a topic of his address.

In the same way, the speakers who followed the minister impressed the audience with extolling the Minority Morcha's office bearers. They explained the huge acts of hard work for coordinating, communicating, preparing, and executing the conclave. In other words, the session presented a picture that the BJP Minority Morcha is the way to save the Church from all its troubles in India.

Significantly, none of the speakers, including the Catholic priest from the Malankara Church, had any concerns or complaints to make on behalf of the Christian community. There were no references or allusions to the targeted legislations, sanctions, and attacks on Christians and other minority communities in India.

Among the speakers, the 79-year-old Syriac Thomas, a former vice-chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi

University, stood out with his eloquence and calculated words. He placed Modi next to Pope Francis in the world-ranking of top ethical leaders. Using the BJP rhetoric, he claimed that the NEP 2020 stipulations impeccably aligned with the national ambitions for development, inclusion, and perfectly matched with the aspirations of the minority communities.

He found the NEP 2020 stipulations in flawless alignment with the Christian vision of education and exhorted the community to uncritically accept and adopt the reforms. In the end of the speech, he did not forget to express his firm hope that the prime minister would invite Pope Francis to India without delay, and if possible, for the next Republic Day celebrations.

What is coming next?

By way of the registration details, the BJP Minority Morcha has collected the addresses with phone numbers of all the participants. Thus, now they know the Catholic institutions and their heads. They assured that the local BJP workers will be visiting each of these institutions under the cover of distributing the booklet offered by the minister. Their agenda will be to explain the schemes and projects of the Central Government for the minority communities and to attract the institutions and heads to the BJP's political network.

It is based on their well-researched wisdom that the institutionalized Catholic Church will easily submit to any political interest if their institutions are influenced. Apparently, the RSS and the Parivar got the Catholic Church doors widely opened for them by capitalizing the NEP 2020 confusions and chaos. To their favor, the Communist Government in Kerala has not initiated any debate or discussion on the NEP 2020 while the Central Government through its various forums advance the implementation campaign.

Questions in the air

The conclave that successfully gathered many Catholic educational leaders precipitates some crucial and critical questions. What is the collective response of the Church to the hidden Hindutva agenda of the NEP 2020? For example, how does the Church react to the non-recognition of Christian institutions in the NEP 2020 and the categorization of institutions into private and public? In school education reforms, how does the Church respond to the NEP-created open spaces for the local organizations (like the RSS) to enter and interfere with educational institutions?

More importantly, how does the Church deal with the prescription that every higher education institution becomes an autonomous college or a multidisciplinary university? What about the educational needs of rural youth catered by small and single-stream institutions in their areas? How are the educators and institutional heads going to deal with the threats and challenges of the NEP 2020?

There are still more questions.

Does the Church leadership trust that the BJP Minority Morcha is the solution for the conflicts with the Sangh Parivar-led threats to the Church in different parts of India? Does the Church leadership discern the political motives and divisive agenda in gathering exclusively Christians, especially Catholics, under the cover of the NEP 2020 and minority concerns?

Finally, does the Church take any serious step to enlighten its educational leadership on the impacts and consequences on its institutions if the NEP 2020 is implemented? Conversely, is the Church leadership taking any serious step to study how to take advantage of the NEP 2020 without harming its interests?

These are some questions looming in the air and seeking answers and appropriate actions. It looks like the NEP prescriptions are to be challenged in the court by a team of learned lawyers mandated by the minority communities and those sections most impacted by its implementation. If the Church leadership fails to sense these questions and to take steps to defend its interests, its institutions could become RSS-BJP-governed, claiming that that is the NEP 2020 vision of education. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JESUIT FATHER VINCENT PEREPPADAN is the director of Global Young Researchers' Academy, Loyola Extension Services, Sreekaryam, Thiruvananthapuram.

Stan Swamy My Inspiration

How many of us are ready to walk the extra mile and walk the talk?

BY IRUDHAYA JOTHI

When I was a young boy in the late 1970s, there were well-attended meetings in my village. The meeting was addressed by Jesuit priests under a huge Tamarind tree in front of the Parish church. The Village's name is Nangathur some 160 Kilometres from Chennai, the Capital of Tamil Nadu, India.

One of the Jesuits was Fr. Stan Swamy who then was the director of Indian Social Institute (ISI) Bangalore and the other was Fr. Cloud D'Suza from All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF), Loyola College Chennai.

The meeting was to address some of the pressing issues of the Dalit community of both Christians and Hindus in and around the villages in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu.

The educated and employed men and women of the village expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment meted out by the Priests who were from dominant castes in the Parish and for some trivial matters the priests punished the Catholics by closing the Church and not officiating any sacraments for around six months. The villagers went to the Jesuits for help and that is how Fr. Stan landed there from Bangalore.



When one of such meetings was going on, a man named Narasimhan from a neighbouring village, Kalyanampoondi, came running and requested help from the gathering. He was a Dalit bonded labourer.

Narasimhan narrated to the gathering that he was tied to a tree and was beaten by the landlord for some small mistake. The young man of around thirty was working for the landlord as a bonded labourer from a very young age.

The villagers narrated, that due to poverty, the landless Dalits in the village used to work under the dominant caste landowners as bonded labourers and the children also used to join their parents so that they get their daily food, which is gruel poured into their hands. Sadly they were never given plates and tumblers.

As the children grew up, they grazed goats and cows. When they learned the work in the field, they were counted as labourers under the bond and they never managed to come out free.

Narasimhan's punishment and his courage to get support from the neighbouring educated villagers brought in their much-needed liberation.

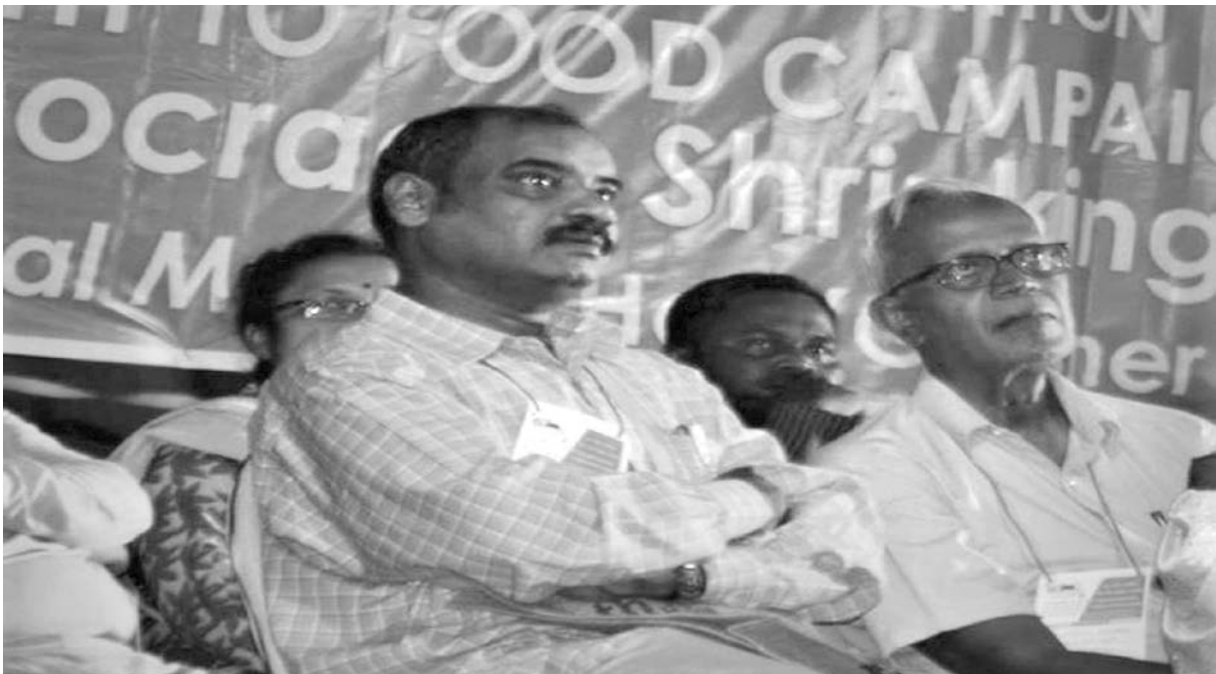
Along with the leaders from Nangathur, Fr. Stan Swamy walked into the neighbouring village of Kalyanampoondi and had a long meeting with the landlords. At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the bonds will be returned and the labourers will be left free once they pay the meagre amount they were bonded for.

The villagers released from their bonds were free to go to the neighbouring towns and cities to work as liberated free men and women.

Recently when I visited the village, many of the villagers narrated the stories of their misery as bonded labourers and also about these meetings and how they got freedom.

One of the villagers shared one such creative and bold exercise to fight the caste oppression in that village.

Today Christians specially the clergy and religious have become mute spectators to all the violations of human rights and assaults on the vulnerable poor who are most of the time the Dalits, Adivasis, Indigenous people, women and children



Fr Stan Swamy attending the national Right To Food Convention in Ranchi in 2016 along with the writer

As per the custom in that village, the Dalits were not allowed to smoke in front of the dominant caste people. In order to challenge this practice the leaders took many Dalit men and gave them cigarettes and they walked around the village smocking while the dominant caste people looked in frustration.

The Dalit who went out of the towns and cities educated their children, built pukka houses and bought four-wheelers and two-wheelers and some of them purchased the land in which they were once labourers and now they own them.

Thanks to Stan Swamy and educated leaders who had started a people's movement under the name of Peoples Multipurpose Development(PMD)Society which still works for the people in that area.

The General Congregation 32 of the Society of Jesus which ended in 1975, came out with a decree which was revolutionary for many Jesuits. It said that solidarity with the poor is our priority.

The poor were defined as Dalit, Adivasis, Indigenous people, Minorities, vulnerable women and children, migrants and refugees. Fr. Stan showed a certain amount of 'Apostolic Aggressivity' which the Jesuit Generals were demanding from their members and committed totally to the mission of liberation.

Fr. Stan worked among the Dalits for 16 years and later 35 years with the Adivasis. Fr. Stan used effec-

tively the Social Analysis tool to liberate the confused minds and it lead them into action on behalf of the exploited and oppressed.

Today Christians specially the clergy and religious have become mute spectators to all the violations of human rights and assaults on the vulnerable poor who are most of the time the Dalits, Adivasis, Indigenous people, women and children.

The all-out 'wholesale' of natural resources and public sectors to the cronies and a few business houses of the powerful rulers is silently witnessed by the church. It is a sin to be silent before this injustice.

Some wish to see Fr. Stan as a Saint; keeping his picture framed and incensed at the altar or bust projected at the entrance of the institutions do not make us prophetic like Stan! How many of us are ready to walk the extra mile and walk the talk?

On a few occasions when I had a chance to speak with Fr. Stan and narrated how he had been my inspiration from my childhood, he used to shy away from the topic but used to listen and support my work among the Dalit and Adivasis. We miss you Fr. Stan. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IRUDHAYA JOTHI SJ, is a Dalit and Adivasi Rights worker and a Right To Food Activist

Maha tragedy **Triumph of the will**

BJP used techniques it tried successfully in states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa and Meghalaya to come to power

BY **A.J. PHILIP**

It is an implosion that has happened in the 56-year-old Shiv Sena (the Army of Shivaji) in Maharashtra. When such an event happens, it is difficult to put together all the pieces and remake the entity in its pristine form. To paraphrase Pilate, “what has happened has happened; it cannot be undone”.

A political implosion does not happen all of a sudden. The build-up to the event must have begun a long time ago. It is not difficult to identify the factors responsible for what finally happened. It all began when the results of the 2019 Assembly elections came.

The Shiv Sena and the BJP had together fought the elections. While the Sena had to remain satisfied with 56 seats in a House of 288, the BJP had won



106 seats, almost double of what the Sena had won. For once the Shiv Sena leadership realised that its alliance with the BJP had been suicidal for the party. The Sena was no longer the predominant party in Maharashtra!

It had been the closest ally of the BJP with political commentators calling them the natural allies like the twins born with the same umbilical cord. They had many things in common like their adherence to Hindutva. The Shiv Sena founder Bal Keshav Thackeray, who started his career as a cartoonist in Swaminathan Sadanand-founded Free Press Journal, did not fight shy of expressing his dislike for what he called the “green rats”.

Thackeray also prided in the claim that the Shiv Sainiks were the first to use pickaxes, shovels and



Shiv Sena MLAs in Eknath Shinde camp in Guwahati

other implements to demolish the centuries-old Babri Masjid in 1992. Five years as a junior partner in the BJP-led government in Maharashtra taught the party a lesson every student of Botany knows – no plant or party grows under a banyan tree called the BJP.

The party MLAs also realised that five years were virtually wasted years. If they had continued in the alliance with a lesser participation in the ministry, it would have been a harakiri for the Shiv Sena. It was against this backdrop that the Sena decided to part ways with the BJP.

It is too well-known to need recanting that the BJP succeeded in forming a government by spitting away a leader from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The government collapsed like the many houses that collapsed in Afghanistan on Wednesday when an earthquake occurred in the land-locked nation, home to warring tribes who all profess their faith in Islam.

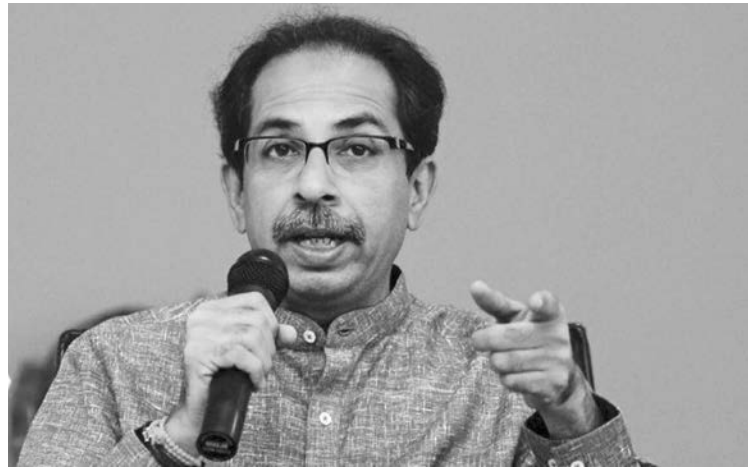
The architect of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), as the alliance in Maharashtra is known, was NCP leader Sharad Pawar, while the beneficiary was Uddhav Thackeray, who was suddenly catapulted to the post of Chief Minister. That he had no political or administrative experience to hold the coveted post was inconsequential.

His greatest qualification was that he was the son of a great leader, who preferred to be photographed while “fondling” stuffed tigers. With the Shiv Sena’s own 56 seats, the NCP’s 53 and the Congress’ 44, his government had the requisite majority to run the government. There were also smaller parties and Independents ever willing to support those in power for either money or pelf.

Since the NCP and the Congress and the Shiv Sena were ideologically poles apart, they had put together a common minimum programme to run the government. To be fair to Thackeray, he has been providing a reasonably clean and efficient government.

Maharashtra was one of the worst Corona-affected states but the government did whatever was possible to control the situation. In any case, much better than the Central government, which pushed millions of poor people to take to the road to reach their villages from cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

Yes, there was some bickering between the Congress and the Shiv Sena on some petty issues but Uddhav Thackeray saw to it that it was kept under



Uddhav Thackeray

control, if not wrapped. The three parties were like the Trimurti in the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. Thackeray was absolutely right that he received full cooperation from his alliance partners.

What the Chief Minister did not know was that the once-bitten-twice-shy BJP was plotting the downfall of his government through standard means. It could not reconcile itself to the fact that a non-BJP government with Congress participation in it was controlling the commercial capital of the country.

Every attempt was made to create political instability in the name of non-issues. For instance, when Raj Thackeray, the estranged cousin of the chief minister and founder of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (Maharashtra Reformation Army), tried to foment communal trouble by demanding a ban on the use of loudspeakers in mosques in the state.

When the Gyanvapi issue erupted in Varanasi, again, an attempt was made to cash in on it in Maharashtra. Fortunately, all this did not have an effect on the government. Simultaneously, efforts were on to control the three parties by letting the Central agencies like the Enforcement Directorate chase their leaders.

Two of the MVA ministers, including Nawab

Maharashtra was one of the worst Corona-affected states but the government did whatever was possible to control the situation



Mallik of the NCP, found themselves in jail on questionable charges. BJP leaders like Kirit Somaiya were so brazen that they named 12 MLAs supporting the state government who would be sent to jail. If anything, it showed how agencies like the ED had become a handmaiden of the ruling party.

The ultimate aim of all this was to destabilise the MVA government. Politics is the art of the possible. No one knows this better than Devendra Fadnavis, who had a meteoric rise in politics. He is only 51 and is already a former chief minister who completed his full term.

The BJP began using techniques it tried successfully in states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa and Meghalaya to come to power. It began wooing a section of the Shiv Sena. Kautilya in his treatise on statecraft had suggested four ways to deal with one's rival.

They are Sama (Diplomacy), Dana (Sacrifice), Bhedha (Division) and Dhanda (Punishment). It looks like Fadnavis and his team have been using all these separately and, sometimes, together to see the back of Thackeray. The pity is that, as lamented by Sharad Pawar, the Chief Minister had no clue as to what was happening in his own backyard.

The setback the MVA suffered in the recent Rajya Sabha and Legislative Council elections should have opened the eyes of Thackeray that everything was not hunky-dory on his home front. He realised that the carpet had been pulled from under his feet only when some MLAs either belonging to the Shiva Sena

or supporting the MVA government reached Surat in Gujarat.

Those who know history know how Surat as the first port of call for any visitor should set alarm bells for those in power. The Mughals ruling India did not know that their countdown began when the British landed in Surat from where the East India Company was allowed to carry on their trading activities. From Surat, the British went eastward to reach Calcutta, where they established Fort William and began ruling the country.

Eknath Shinde knew history. The four-time MLA has his own ambitions. Who does not have it? Otherwise, would Narendra Modi have become chief minister first and prime minister later? He knew that his MLAs would be safe and comfortable in Surat.

Shinde could rely on the BJP government's hospitality and the sense of security it provided. But when word spread that the Shiv Sena revolvers were in Surat and some of them could be persuaded to trek back to Mumbai, he took all of them eastward to Guwahati.

It did not bother Shinde that Assam was in the grip of an unprecedented flood. He found political safety in a state marooned by flood water. In any case, Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma had proved that he was indeed a great fly-by-night operator.

When Dalit leader and MLA Jignesh Mevani became a headache for the Gujarat government, Biswas managed to have a fraudulent case registered

against him for a social media comment he made. He was taken away to Assam to face trial.

And when the court found that the charge against Mevani was flimsy and he could not be held in jail like journalist Siddique Kappan for perpetuity and he was released on bail, he was arrested again on the basis of a police woman's complaint that he tried to offend her modesty while he was in police custody. Who else could have protected the Shiv Sena MLAs better?

It was apparent that the game was up for Thackeray when he issued a statement that he would have resigned and allowed Eknath Shinde to succeed him if only he had met him and told him about his desire in person. The alacrity with which he vacated the official residence to shift to Matoshri, the house from where his father controlled Mumbai and, later, Maharashtra, showed that he was on shaky grounds. In doing so, he sought the high moral ground.

Thackeray would have obliged Shinde to keep the MVA intact. That is not what Fadnavis and his masters in Delhi like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah wanted. They wanted the MVA to go lock, stock and barrel.

Small wonder that Shinde responded to Thackeray's offer of rapprochement by demanding that the Shiv Sena end all its relations with the Congress and the NCP. He also claimed that the Shiv Sena was losing ground to the Congress and the NCP. Electoral records do not suggest that the Sena was yielding ground to the Congress or the NCP.

Statistics prove, on the contrary, that the Shiv Sena can never be the leading partner in any alli-



Eknath Shinde

ance with the BJP. Since the situation in Maharashtra is so fluid that any guess about the likely turn of events would be hazardous. What is clear is that the kingmaker in Maharashtra will no longer be the Shiv Sena but the BJP.

In the history of the Shiv Sena, which Bal Thackeray formed to fight for the sons of the soil, there have been revolts. Chhagan Bhujbal was the first to revolt against Thackeray senior when he found that he was ignored and

the late Manohar Joshi was made chief minister. The next to revolt was Narayan Rane, who is today with the BJP.

The third one to revolt was Raj Thackeray, who felt that he was more qualified to run the party than his cousin Uddhav Thackeray. When these revolts occurred, Thackeray Senior was in command and he could rely on the grassroots support he enjoyed in the metropolis.

The situation is no longer the same. True, Uddhav Thackeray has gained a lot of experience as an administrator but his reliance on some leaders who can only provide soundbites for television channels proved to be his Achilles' heel. Had he kept his ears to the ground, he would have known in advance about the machinations of Eknath Shinde and others.

The MVA government has a lot to commend itself. Together, the three parties are a force to reckon with. With the BJP's own pliable person in the Raj Bhavan, it would not be difficult for it to chart its next course of action. A combative Thackeray can turn the tables against the BJP, if the Congress and the NCP fight the next elections together with the Sena.

Seen in this context, all is not yet lost for Uddhav Thackeray. Like the Pandavas, who were defeated at every stage before they met their foes at Kurukshetra, let the BJP and Shiv Sena renegades like Eknath Shinde gloat over the Pyrrhic victory. Ultimately, the will of the people will triumph when they get an opportunity to distinguish the foe from the friend. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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



Devendra Fadnavis

President of India **Resident of a gilded cage?**

Technically, the President has a lot of power. Whosoever occupies the position can scuttle the ulterior motives of those who enjoy unbridled power

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

In less than a month from the publication of this column, India will have a new President. The election commission has declared the presidential election on July 18, 2022. President Ram Nath Kovind's term will end on July 24. The process of nomination has already started. A few candidates filed their applications on day one itself. However, all eyes were on the candidates nominated by the ruling party and the opposition.

Well, the suspense is over. The BJP and its allies have nominated former governor of Jharkhand, Draupadi Murmu, while the Opposition has fielded Yashwant Sinha, a former finance minister. Within a few minutes, the micro-blogging site Twitter was flooded with tweets praising the ruling party for choosing a candidate from a tribal area and that, too, a woman. A video showing her sweeping the floor of a temple has gone viral.

"Wise decision by NDA govt in selecting a down to earth candidate Mrs. Draupadi Murmu for Presidential polls..." says one tweet. Yet another says, "The video speaks for itself. BJP has considered a woman from a backward class, who leads a simple life, as its next presidential candidate. Real empowerment of women. It is this ideology that sets the BJP apart from other parties."

Another tweet shows pics of the late Abdul Kalam Azad, Ram Nath Kovind and Draupadi Murmu, with a



tag Muslim, Hindu Dalit and Adivasi woman respectively. The tweet says "BJP is against Muslims. BJP is against Dalits. BJP is against Advasis". Such tweets are being circulated to create a positive image about the BJP.

Yet another set of tweets present Yashwant Sinha in a poor light. He is being labelled as a "failed" finance minister. It

appears that the presidential election has become a Murmu Vs Sinha contest. People are forgetting that presidential elections are very different from the Lok Sabha elections. Popularising one candidate against the other will not produce results.

It hardly matters what kind of opinion people hold about a particular candidate. Ultimately, the one who is able to manoeuvre the complex number game in these elections will be the winner. Before we delve further, it is important to understand what is expected out of the President. Should it matter that the proposed candidate is a tribal or an Adivasi or a Muslim or a Dalit?

Lest anyone should label this writer as insensitive, it is important to mention that she wants a person representing any/all of these communities to be the President. However, that should not be the only qualifying/eligibility condition for taking on the role of the President.

Of late, we have been witnessing a highly-charged environment. Some of our youth have gone berserk. The Agnipath scheme has added fuel to fire as if unemployment was not enough. Their aspiration to serve the nation by joining the armed forces is being mocked at. People are adopting violent means to express their anger.

Not only this, religion is being used as a tool to create a rift amongst communities. Be it Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana or Rajasthan, rarely any place is free from communal tension. Internationally, India has witnessed the wrath of several Muslim-dominant countries, which expressed their anger on the



way Prophet Mohamad was projected by a prominent speaker of the ruling party. It is a different matter that the ruling party disowned her.

It is not a surprise that the latest report published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), shows an increase of 95 percent in the cases of communal or religious rioting. This happened despite the pandemic-induced lockdown, reduced income levels and several other issues that we the general public faced.

If we look at a few months down the memory lane, one can recall the huge protests organised by the farmers. In fact, all kinds of tactics were used by the powers that be to scuttle the movement. The farmers were adamant about their demands. Nothing deterred them from demanding their rights. The government had to finally accept their demand. The Prime minister had to personally appeal to the farmers to withdraw the protest.

The case was no different when the citizenship amendment act (CAA) was suddenly passed. People, especially from the minority community, were worried whether they will still be called Indian citizens! The law had triggered massive protests. The national capital witnessed one of the worst riots during that time. Thousands of people had lost their houses overnight. Several were found dead and injured. But for the pandemic, the protests would have continued. The CAA agitation would have taken many more lives.

But has anyone thought about what has triggered such violent events? Do they show an outburst of pent-up feelings of people from one community against the other? What has been the government's role in such incidents? What should have been done to avert such incidents?

They say, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The incidents discussed above show nothing but the sheer apathy of the government towards the masses. Be it the Agniveer scheme or the farm laws, or the CAA, the government has missed one important aspect – the consultative process for understanding the stakeholder needs and taking them into confidence before making any announcement or



BJP and its allies have nominated former governor of Jharkhand, Draupadi Murmu, while the Opposition has fielded Yashwant Sinha, a former finance minister

promulgating statutes.

So was the case with demonetisation and GST. They were presented as masterstrokes which could produce results overnight, without giving thought to their ill effects. Their sudden implementation affected the poorest of the poor very badly. The rich were able to easily absorb the shock.

Now many would say, how are these events related to the Presidential elections? Why should they be even discussed? Well, a strong President would have raised an objection before converting these Bills into Acts. Technically, the President has a lot of power. Whosoever occupies the position can scuttle the ulterior motives of those who enjoy unbridled power.

However, we have rarely seen any of the presidents using his/her power but for a few sporadic incidents. If we look at our history, the first President, Rajendra Prasad, had set a precedent for his successors. A veteran activist, who had gone to jail several times during the freedom struggle, he had expressed his concern to Nehru during the passage of the Hindu Code Bill. Gaiji Zail Singh, a diehard Congress follower, too had kept the Rajiv Gandhi government on tenterhooks. They did not adopt the easy way of using their pen merely for affixing their signatures.

India, that is Bharat, needs a candidate, who looks at the best interest of the nation as the defining criteria for taking decisions rather than the interest of a few. We certainly do not want someone who will simply toe the line of the government. We want stability, safety, peace, love and harmony. Only then, can this country prosper.

It is time to reiterate the age-old saying, "United we stand, Divided we fall". We want a President who can inspire confidence and use his/her pen for the common good. We want a voice who can become the voice of the people and strengthen the democratic fabric of the country. People must know that the President's chair is above all. It is not just ornamental or ceremonial. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JASWANT KAUR, a company secretary, can be reached at jassi.raoi@gmail.com

Advertisements and Accountability

BY AARTI

Over the years, advertising has become a tool to buy new customers at a price which pays a profit and has been compared to a game of chess where one is usually out to capture others' citadels or garner others' trade. In India, the advertising market has been witnessing an impressive growth and was \$11 billion in 2021, out of which 37 per cent comprised the digital ads market

Intended to curb misleading advertisements and protect the consumers who may be exploited or affected by such advertisements, the 'Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022' enforced by the Central Government effective this June 9, is laudable. Implemented in the right earnest, it would protect consumers from being fooled with unsubstantiated/false claims, exaggerated promises and misinformation.

The moment we open up the pages of our newspaper or a magazine, more than the news, what catches our immediate attention are the advertisements for mobile phones, laptops, clothes, shoes, cars, educational courses to name a few. The list of products being advertised or endorsed by celebrities is rather mindboggling. Similarly, turning on the television, we can see smiling faces trying to sell us a plethora of goods. The ubiquitous digital advertisements begin to pop up, no sooner we open our laptops or mobiles.

Advertising, a method of promoting a product or service, has come a long way. An interesting anecdote worthy of mention is the manner in which, Claude Hopkins, an American Sales Executive, who in the early 1900s is said to have coined a new set of rules on how to create new habits among consumers. Besides "seducing" hundreds of women into purchasing Palmolive soap by proclaiming that Cleopatra had washed with it, he also made Puffed Wheat famous by saying it was "shot from guns" until the grains puffed "to eight times normal size". He is credited of turning many unknown products including Quaker Oats, Goodyear Tyres etc., into household names.

According to the Code of the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), established in 1985 for the purposes of self-regulating the advertising industry, an advertisement is defined as a paid-for communication, addressed to the public or a section of it, the

purpose of which is to promote, directly or indirectly, the sale or use of goods and services to whom it is addressed.

While the purpose of advertising is to reach people who are willing to pay to buy a product or service, what counts is the strategy to persuade them to choose the product/service. Advertisements cleverly try to lure people with the "uniqueness" of the product. If one detergent brand might state that it gets stains out better than competitors, another may proclaim it smells great with the promise it will leave clothes feeling fresh. Even before we make up our mind, there would be a number of well-known celebrities endorsing different brands that would make us confused as to which brand ought to be bought.

Now, whether the celebrity endorsing the product has actually tried the same before recommending it? Maybe and may not. It is unclear. Take for instance the famous tobacco advertising for Marlboro cigarettes in the United States. It was known many years later that the Marlboro Man (Robert Norris) who featured in the advertisements for nearly 14 years simply refused to smoke although he promoted the brand. When he died at the age of 90, Norris he left behind a mansion and some 15-acres of land valued at \$8 million.

Consumers have a lot on their minds, beyond checking out for prices, hunting for special offers while planning a purchase. The most powerful effect of advertising is to create a good feeling about a product, which the celebrities do it so appealingly. Remember the manner in which the famous "2-minutes" Maggi noodles was endorsed by celebrities. There was a lot of public anger when the product got withdrawn from the market in 2015 following a ban by food safety regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India after tests conducted on a batch of Maggi were found to contain

more-than-permissible levels of lead which was 17 times more than the stipulated limit apart from high quantities of mono-sodium glutamate, which is considered hazardous. Nestle, the company which owned the Maggi brand had to recall Maggi noodles from the markets across the country and destroyed it. Reportedly, the hit on Nestle's balance sheet that year was a whopping Rs 320 crore of stock of Maggi. While the regulatory authorities filed a Rs 640 Crore claim under the Consumer Protection Act against Nestle for false labelling and misleading advertising, film actors including Amitabh Bachhan, Madhuri Dixit and Preity Zinta were dragged to the court for promoting the Maggi noodles brand.

More recently, as the "Black Lives Matter" movement found traction following the brutal death of George Floyd in the United States, the Hindustan Unilever, which was selling "Fair and Lovely" facial cream for the past four decades occupying nearly 80 per cent of the market share in the category of creams promising the whitening of complexion, was forced to take note of the public angst. It swiftly rechristened its top selling cream to "Glow and Lovely". Despite the name change, thanks to the celebrities endorsing the brand, it is said that its sales numbers have not come down. There are hardcore loyalists!

Now the main takeaways of the recent Guidelines are that conditions for non-misleading and valid advertisements as also for bait advertisements have been specified. While surrogate advertising has been prohibited, free claims advertisements have been clearly defined. Notably, there are a number of restrictions on advertisements targeted at children. Above all, due diligence is required for endorsement of advertisements. A penalty of up to Rs 10 Lakh can be imposed on manufacturers, advertisers and endorsers for any misleading advertisements which can go up to Rs 50 Lakh for subsequent contraventions. The endorser of a misleading advertisement can be prohibited from making any endorsement for up to 1 year and for subsequent contravention, such prohibition can extend up to 3 years.

In so far as children are concerned, an advertisement of any goods, product or service which addresses or targets children shall not – (a) be such as to develop negative body image in children; (b) give any impression that such goods, product or service is better than the natural or traditional food which children may be consuming. Importantly, an advertisement for junk foods, including chips, carbonated



beverages and such other snacks and drinks during a programme meant for children or on a channel meant exclusively for children is prohibited. It also discourages any advertisement which offers promotional gifts to persuade children to buy goods, product or service without necessity or promotes illogical consumerism.

Also, due diligence is required for endorsement of advertisements. Any endorsement in an advertisement must reflect the genuine, reasonably current opinion of the individual, group or organisation making such representation and must be based on adequate information about, or experience with, the identified goods, product or service and must not otherwise be deceptive.

With the enforcement of the 'Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022' it is hoped that advertisements in the country would be truthful and all descriptions, claims and comparisons which relate to matters of objectively ascertainable fact are capable of substantiation.

In India, Brand Ambassadors, said to charge between Re 1 Crore to Rs 30 Crore for brand endorsements, have an overwhelming influence on the public, and advertisers bank upon them for their success. So, there is an imperative need for celebrities to obtain all the requisite information before endorsing a brand so that consumers would be able to make informed decisions based on facts rather than false narratives and exaggerations. At an individual level, when anyone has a grievance against misleading advertisements, they can file a complaint on the GAMA (Grievances Against Misleading Advertisements) portal. ©

Odisha Chief Minister calls on Pope Francis

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on June 22 met Pope Francis in the Vatican.

“It has been an absolute pleasure meeting His Holiness Pope Francis in Vatican City. Thanked him for the warm audience and wished him good health and long life,” Patnaik said on his social media post.

On behalf of Odisha, Patnaik presented the Pope a “Pattachitra” painting that depicts the Tree of Life. The unique ancient traditional scroll painting is one of the finest representatives of Odisha’s craftsmanship and artistry.

Patnaik is on his 11-day tour to Rome and Dubai with a high-level delegation, which is scheduled to



visit the World Food Program headquarters in Rome and share Odisha’s “transformational journey” in food security and disaster management.

(Courtesy: rvasia.org)



Tellicherry archbishop leads farmers' protest against eviction threat

Farmers led by a Catholic archbishop in Kerala are opposing a Supreme Court order that imposes a ban on human activity in buffer zones extending one kilometer around protected forests.

They fear the June 3 judgment will lead to mass evictions from agricultural land located in the buffer zones.

“We will not let anyone take away our agriculture land,” warned Metropolitan Archbishop Joseph Pamplany of Tellicherry while addressing agitating



farmers at Cherupuzha in Kannur district on June 21.

As a mark of solidarity with the farmers, the Syro-Malabar Church archbishop even sported a cap made of areca nut leaves traditionally used by farmers as protection from sunlight and rain while toiling in the fields.

“Today the irony is that snakes and wild boars have protection, but not human beings,” he said.

Speaking to UCA News on June 22, Archbishop Pamplany said the court order raises a serious question mark over the survival and future of close to two million farmers who may have to part with agricultural land that provides their only source of income.

India’s top court in its verdict directed that every protected forest, national park and wildlife sanctuary across the country should have a mandatory eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of a minimum of one kilometer starting from their demarcated boundaries.

Archbishop Pamplany has been addressing farmers’ protests in his archdiocese, urging them to join hands and protect their lands and livelihoods.

Some other parts of Kerala are witnessing similar protests to pursue the communist-led state government to seek a review of the order.

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Court grants bail to priest, nun serving jail term for murder

A top court in Kerala has granted bail to a Catholic priest and nun serving a life term for murdering a junior nun three decades ago.

A Kerala High Court division bench of Justice K. Vinod Chandran and Justice C. Jayachandran ordered them to execute a bond of 500,000 Indian rupees (US\$6,380) before being released on bail on June 23.

The court has directed Father Thomas Kottoor, 72, and Sister Sephy, 59, not to leave the state.

The bail order came as a major relief to the Catholic Church in Kerala as it had refused to accept their conviction because it believed they were innocent. Church authorities did not even initiate the process of removing the priest and nun even though a small section within the community demanded they be laicized.

A special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court had sentenced Father Kottoor and Sister Sephy to life imprisonment on Dec. 23, 2020, for the 1992 murder of 19-year-old Sister Abhaya.

The Union probe agency told the court that the

priest and nun had committed the crime to cover up their sex act, which the younger nun accidentally saw while collecting drinking water on the morning of March 27, 1992. Sister Abhaya's body was found in the well of St. Pius Convent in Kottayam district that same morning. The priest and nun were also found guilty of destroying evidence. The priest was sentenced to double imprisonment.

The priest and the nun had filed separate appeals urging the court to grant them bail until the pendency of their appeals in the higher court.

The priest and nun were granted parole of 90 days in May 2021 on account of the Covid pandemic despite opposition from some rights activists.

A Catholic Church official who did not want to be named told UCA News: "We are happy for them. At least they got bail now. They should have got it much earlier."

Sister Abhaya's murder was one of the most protracted court cases in Indian judicial history after church leaders termed it a suicide.

(Courtesy: Ucanews)



Two Jesuit priests murdered in Mexico

The Jesuits in Mexico have said two of their priests were murdered while trying to defend a man who was seeking refuge in a church while being pursued by an armed person.

A statement from Jesuit provincial of Mexico Father Luis Gerardo Moro Madrid on June 21 informed "with deep sorrow and a sense of anguish" about the murder of Fathers Fathers Javier Campos and Joaquín Mora in the afternoon of June 20 in Cerocahui, Tarahumara, a remote mountainous area of northern Mexico.

The murders took place in the context of the violence that Mexico has been experiencing for years, the message further explained.

The provincial said they are working with the federal and state authorities to ensure the safety of



their other members – Esteban Cornejo, Jesús Reyes, and Jesús Zaglul along with the parish's pastoral team.

"We publicly condemn this tragedy and demand a prompt investigation and safety for the community," he further said. We

will keep you informed about the next actions that we, as the Mexican Jesuit Province, will be taking.

Jesuit superior general Father Arturo Sosa said he was "shocked and saddened by this news" and that his thoughts and prayers are with the Jesuits in Mexico and the families of the men.

"We have to stop violence in our world and so much unnecessary suffering," asserted the leader of the largest religious congregation for men in the Catholic Church.

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Welcome Good and Faithful Servant..!



And that morning of July 5th in a hospital in Mumbai, a voice spoke, "You're free Stan!" "Free? How can I be free, I've been languishing in prison for over eight months! Hey!" "What?"

"I'm supposed to be deaf, but I can hear you clearly!"

"Look at your hands Stan, they no longer shake with the dreaded Parkinson's. Look at your body, it's not that of an old man laid out in prison. Stan you are free and I'm taking you to a glorious reception that awaits you!"

"I asked for a straw and sipper, where did I keep it!"

"Throw it away Stan. Where you are going, there won't be a need for such tools. Tools, that these jail authorities took fifty days to give you. Come let's leave this stinking hole, and fly like me, through those walls, through those iron bars. You're free!"

And through the roof of a prison that could no longer imprison him two angels flew heavenward. A young Stan looked down and for a moment he felt

a tear, but gentle hands brushed them away, "They will be looked after Stan. The very One who sent you to serve them, will send others who will care for them like you did!"

And Stan knew that, that was true. He knew a God above had through His saints like Teresa and himself, sent many to look after those who had no one to love them and he smiled and flew with his new pair of wings.

A little angel up in Heaven seeing the heavenly choir being readied asked, "Who is it that is coming? Some emperor, king or president?"

The other angels smiled as one a little older said, "Stan who comes today, and for whom we sing is greater than a king or president. He served the poorest of the poor, and gave up his life for them."

And as the two angels, Father Stan and the angel accompanying him, came near the shores of heaven, the heavenly choir made up not of the finest sopranos or altos, basses or tenors, but of tribals who had gone before Stan, and who had insisted they sing to welcome him in. And as they sang in joyful crescendo, their voices rising high, Stan smiled, then laughed out loud, he knew those voices and knew he'd come home to those he loved.

And then there was a mighty hush, as a Voice beautiful and magnificent rose above the silence, "Well done good and faithful servant!" And nail pierced hands embraced a joyful Stan Swamy as the choir broke forth again in welcome exultation..! ©

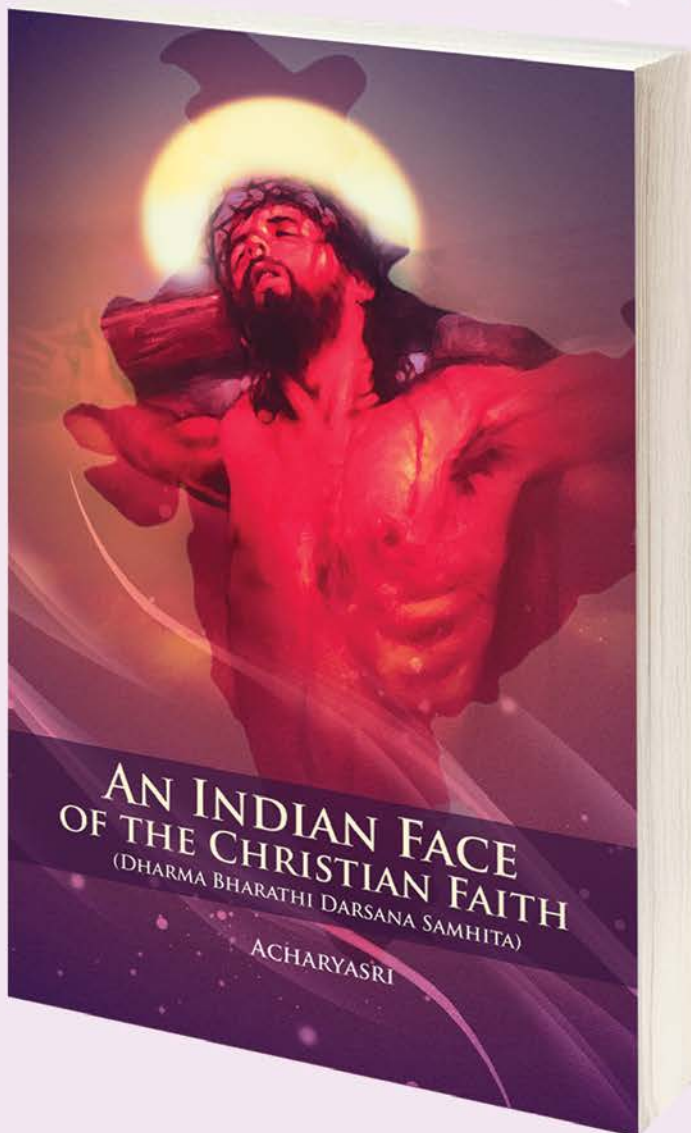
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

AN INDIAN FACE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

(DHARMA BHARATHI DARSANA SAMHITA)

BY ACHARYASRI



In this path-breaking book, the author presents a new hope that will inspire all peace-loving people of goodwill on earth to get involved in the mission of rebuilding the pandemic-devastated world on a peace and sustainable development paradigm with the power and wisdom of God revealed to humankind in, with and through Lord Jesus Christ.

Published by:

The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK)

Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110006

Copies available at:

Dharma Bharathi Ashram

Perumpilly Post, Mulanthuruthy

Kochi - 682314, Kerala

Mob: 6238488650, 8281874941

Email: swamisachidananda@gmail.com

NISCORT MEDIA COLLEGE

NEW INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, RESEARCH AND TRAINING
Affiliated to CCS University, Meerut
OWNED BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA

2022-23 ADMISSIONS OPEN

COURSES OFFERED

BA JMC (3 YEARS)
MA JMC (2 YEARS)
DJMC (6 MONTHS)

Why NISCORT?

- DIRECT ADMISSION FOR THOSE HAVING 75% & ABOVE
- SCHOLARSHIP FOR DESERVING STUDENTS
- STUDY LOAN ASSISTANCE PROVIDED
- ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS LIKE SIGNIS
- OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS
- OUR STUDENTS ARE PLACED IN PROMINENT ORGANISATIONS
- OUR OWN INTERNET RADIO "INNER VOICE"

EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT
UPTO 15%*

APPLY AT
www.niscort.com



Or Scan to register

OUR FACILITIES

- CAMPUS PLACEMENT
- IN-HOUSE PRODUCTIONS
- DIGITALISED LIBRARY
- MAC COMPUTER LAB
- INDUSTRY VISIT
- AUDIO & VIDEO STUDIOS
- WI-FI ENABLED CAMPUS
- HOSTEL WITH A/C ROOMS
- ANNUAL MEDIA FEST
- SPORTS FACILITIES



A-2, Sector 1, Vaishali, Ghaziabad - 201012, Delhi NCR

niscortadmissions@gmail.com 9953538669 7011310683

Follow us on:

*T&C Apply