

MAJORITARIAN AGGRESSION



UNPRECEDENTED HATRED

Intolerance and animosity towards minorities mark Modi's 8 years!

Silence of the Prime Minister emboldens hate-mongers and motormouths like Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal to inject communal venom into the veins of Indian society!!



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2022

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2. (SS-44) – June 12 – August 27
3. (SS-45) – September 11 – November 26

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MOTORMOUTHS SHAME THE NATION



India is passing through an unprecedented situation. The Hindu right-wing leaders and activists are aggressively spewing venom against minority communities, Muslims bearing the maximum brunt. Though the Sangh Parivar groups have pulled out all stops in their vicious attacks, yet the latest round of 'shots' has spiraled out of control and gone too far. The malicious remarks against Prophet Mohammad by two BJP leaders have led to unprecedented reaction from the international community. The response of the Gulf nations has sent shivers down the spine of the BJP government which apologised for the uncouth utterances of the ruling party leaders.

The fast-moving developments, which stained the very reputation of the country at international level, raise several unsavory questions. How could the two known faces of the BJP muster courage to malign the Prophet? The answer lies in the unalloyed support the saffron brigade is getting from the present regime. Several BJP and Sangh Parivar leaders have been going for the throat of the minorities with impunity since the present regime came to power at the Centre. There had been belligerent calls to take up arms to get rid of minority communities and some leaders had even set deadlines for getting such work done. Sadly, neither the saffron party nor the government made any serious efforts to rein in those elements, some of whom are national-level leaders of the party. This supplied further oxygen to the right-wing fire to spread to leaders of lower levels and activists. Ironically, the party and its leaders who kept a deadening silence over attacks on minorities and even garlanded those convicted of lynching Muslims have been forced to kowtow to Muslim nations, a heavy price paid for the majoritarian vote bank politics. The BJP had to go to the extent of shamelessly calling their leaders as 'fringe elements' to placate the Gulf nations.

The country has been witnessing ruthless activities aimed at hurting the minorities, especially the Muslims, in the last few years. Slapping sedition charges, evicting hawkers selling non-vegetarian food, bulldozing houses, creating a feverish pitch over controversies like halal meat and azan, laying claim to innumerable number of mosques – all apparently aimed at a particular community – are heartless measures resorted to by the regime. The government could go ahead with such brutish actions as it could counter the domestic resistance with ease. But, in the face of international outrage, it had to bite the dust; it is the cost of treating saffron hardliners with kid gloves.

It is paradoxical for the government to state that it has the highest respect for all religions, but turn a blind eye to the barrage of attacks unleashed on the minority communities. It is not for nothing that the US Commission on International Religious Freedom has named India under "Countries of Particular Concern", tagging it as one of the worst violators of religious freedoms, along with Nigeria, Iran, North Korea and so on. The US Secretary of State too had recently mentioned the rising attacks on people and places of worship in India. It does not show the government in good light that it had to be prodded by foreign countries to act against its citizens for courting controversy on a religious issue. The ruling party and the government should learn the right lessons from this episode.

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

Happy Reading!

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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POWER QUOTES



Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.

Mahatma Gandhi

• • •



It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.

Charles Spurgeon

• • •



The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts: therefore, guard accordingly, and take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable nature.

Marcus Aurelius

• • •



Happiness is dependent on self-discipline. We are the biggest obstacles to our own happiness. It is much easier to do battle with society and with others than to fight our own nature.

Dennis Prager

• • •



The most worth-while thing is to try to put happiness into the lives of others.

Robert Baden-Powell

• • •



There is only one way to happiness and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.

Epictetus

• • •



Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions.

Dalai Lama

• • •

MAJORITARIAN AGGRESSION



UNPRECEDENTED HATRED

Intolerance and animosity towards minorities mark Modi's 8 years!

Nation Shamed

The unscrupulous leaders and activists of the ruling party have shamed the country. It is high time to wake up to stop the rot, to reclaim our space in a democratic, secular and pluralistic India where the rights of all are respected and protected

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

It has never been so bad ever in India! At the end of a disastrous fortnight – nationally and internationally – India cannot quarrel with the ignominy of being called ‘a shamed nation!’ The writing was on the wall years ago: a good section of ‘we the people’ were convinced that the ‘happenings’ were mere aberrations and just passing; there were many who felt as long as it is not happening to me ‘why bother?’, there were others who deep down felt that ‘they (the other) deserved what they were getting; fear and selfishness gripped several; but the largest segment were those with a ‘don’t care attitude’. Most of the political opposition seem to have abdicated its moral duty on being a responsible and credible alternative to preserve the sanctity of the Constitution. There were, however, some strong voices of sanity, that were clearly foretelling the inevitable. But few were listening, fewer were responding.

Now India is shamed. The effects are felt in India and across the globe. The victims, as always, are the marginalised and the minorities, the excluded and the exploited, the poor and the other vulner-



able sections of society. India is faring badly in every sphere of political, social and economic life. The perpetrators are those belonging to the fascist regime, their crony capitalist friends and their ilk – the vested interests who toe their line and spew venom on others. The latest to hog the headlines are the derogatory statements made on the Prophet by the official spokesperson of the ruling regime. Then came the damning report on religious freedom in India by the US State Department.

Nupur Sharma, the spokesperson of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), is no stranger to controversy. No one, however, is being fooled. What she says and does has apparently the approval of her political masters. So, when on 26 May, she participated on a TV Channel show on a debate on the Gyanvapi Mosque dispute, she was there not in her personal capacity but as the spokesperson of the ruling party. During the debate she made some derogatory remarks on the Prophet. Naturally, these obnoxious remarks were not taken kindly by the Muslims and by large sections of the society. What

Both Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal should have been jailed immediately. That has not yet been done. On the other hand, the Government has been making every effort to call Sharma and Jindal just ‘fringe elements’ and that ‘their views do not reflect the views of the Government of India’





she said, on a programme that was widely viewed, was without doubt, totally unacceptable.

Sharma, in a typical politician-response, denied it at first, claiming that it was “heavily edited”. When there was irrefutable evidence and mounting criticism from all over, the channel deleted the entire video from YouTube. Subsequently, Sharma apparently started receiving rape and death threats prompting the Delhi police to provide security cover. Though a series of FIRs against her were filed in different parts of the country, for full ten days nothing happened to her. Naveen Jindal, media head of the party's Delhi unit, had also posted a provocative and derogatory tweet.

Finally on 5 June, the BJP ‘suspended’ Nupur Sharma, and also expelled Naveen Jindal who had repeated the remark. *The Indian Express* quotes an unnamed ‘senior party leader’ as saying, “Being a spokesperson for the party for the national media, Nupur Sharma should know that the BJP sets its agenda and narrative around ‘sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayas’. The controversy over her remarks and Jindal's tweets has not only hurt our development agenda but also dented the image of the government and Prime Minister at the international level.” Later, Sharma said that she was “unconditionally” withdrawing her statement, but

If the Islamic bloc of nations chokes the trade between India and them or stops the flow of the foreign remittances to India - then it could very well be disastrous for the nation

also made an attempt to justify them claiming that they were in response to the “continuous insult and disregard” towards the Hindu deity Shiva.

Too little said and done! For much ‘lesser’ matters (even non-existent ones) in the country, exemplary citizens and institutions have been hounded and harassed, intimidated and investigated, illegally incarcerated and even killed. Both Sharma and Jindal should have been jailed immediately. That has not yet been done. On the other hand, the Government has been making every effort to call Sharma and Jindal just ‘fringe elements’ and that ‘their views do not reflect the views of the Government of India.’ Declaring that Nupur Sharma's statement “has no impact on the government” since she is not a government functionary, he said “The Foreign office has come out with clarification and BJP has taken necessary actions. We have good relationship with these countries and it will continue.” Obviously, there are few who believe in such empty rhetoric.

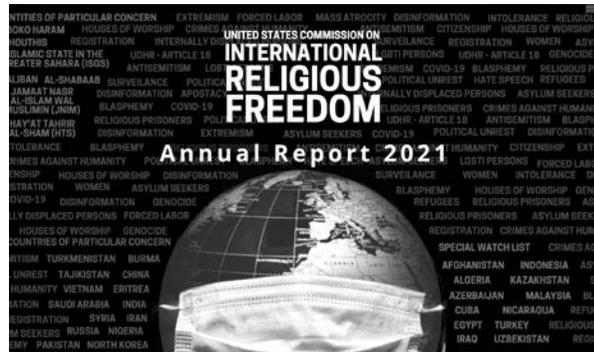
Social media in India has been going hammer and thongs at the remarks of both Sharma and Jindal. Tweets include, “Remember that while Munawar, his friends and an Amazon employee were thrown behind bars for offending Hindu sentiments, Sharma and Jindal have only been suspended from the party;” “Why has not yet UAPA been slapped against Nupur Sharma? There has already been violence in Kanpur because of her derogatory remarks.” There are young Indians who were charged with the stringent UAPA and thrown into jail over the Delhi riots two years ago. They have been charged with incitement -- the same allegation levelled against the erstwhile BJP spokespersons. The youngsters include JNU and Jamia Millia Islamia students, alumni and activists such as Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal, Sharjeel Imam, Umar Khalid, Safoora Zargar, Asif Iqbal Tanha, Meeran Haider and Gulfisha Fatima.

The remarks by the BJP spokespersons have resulted in widespread international outrage and condemnation. By 4 June, "Insult to Prophet Mohamed" was trending among the top 10 hashtags in several countries across the world. The Grand Mufti of Oman called the remarks "insolent and obscene rudeness" and characterised it as war against every Muslim. He called for a boycott of all Indian products and confiscation of all Indian investments in Oman. The Government of Qatar summoned the Indian ambassador and asked for immediate condemnation and an apology for the remarks.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Indonesia, Iraq, the Maldives, Jordan, Libya, Bahrain, the 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and Pakistan have strongly condemned the remark by the BJP spokespersons. Indian diplomats have been trying to placate these countries. India shares cordial relations with most of them; but the storm is far from over, it still continues to rage. India should be concerned. There is just too much at stake. India's trade with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE, stood at \$87 billion in 2020-21. Millions of Indians live and work in these countries and send millions of dollars in remittances back home. The region is also the top source for India's energy imports. The Indian economy is in terrible shape. The ruling regime and their ilk have systematically destroyed the economy leaving millions impoverished. If the Islamic bloc of nations



Courtesy: Manjul



chokes the trade between India and them or stops the flow of the foreign remittances to India – then it could very well be disastrous for the nation.

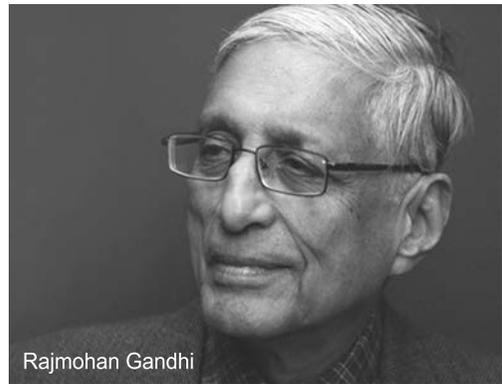
In the midst of all these, the US State Department brought out its annual report on International Religious Freedom 2021. Released by the Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 2 June, the report highlights attacks on members of the minority communities, including, killings, assaults, intimidation that took place in India all through 2021. The report is not only scathing but damning! At the Press Conference, Blinken stated, "...in India, the world's largest democracy and home to a great diversity of faiths, we've seen rising attacks on people and places of worship." The US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Rashad Hussain added "...in India some officials are ignoring or even supporting rising attacks on people and places of worship."

The 'India section' of the report dealt with evidence on a wide range of issues in which religious freedom was denied to the minorities – particularly to the Muslims and Christians. These included the slew of anti-conversion laws and the many ways by which the ruling political regime and their officials denied the minorities of their legitimate rights. It also claimed that the Modi government had failed to release data on communal violence for 2021.

"The government did not release data on communal violence during the year. Government data from 2020 reported a large increase in communal violence compared to 2019, largely due to the February 2020 violence and protests following passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)," the report claimed. The 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom also touched upon criticism reportedly levelled by NGOs operating in India, against the amendments made to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA).

True to its word, the Government went on a denial mode. It failed to realise that some of the data used

“Not regarding Muslims and Christians as India's equal citizens, not recognizing that along with Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Jews, agnostics, and any others, they are co-owners of India, is not just unconstitutional, it is the height of foolishness in the 21st century”



Rajmohan Gandhi

in the Report where from the official Government of India records. In a pathetic response to media queries regarding the release of U.S. State Department 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, the Official MEA Spokesperson said, “We have noted the release of the U.S. State Department 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, and ill-informed comments by senior U.S. officials. It is unfortunate that vote bank politics is being practiced in international relations. We would urge that assessments based on motivated inputs and biased views be avoided. As a naturally pluralistic society, India values religious freedom and human rights. In our discussions with the US, we have regularly highlighted issues of concern there, including racially and ethnically motivated attacks, hate crimes and gun violence.” He did not have the honesty and humility to accept that the minorities in India are consistently targeted.

In a statement dated 8 June, the Editors Guild of India said, “The Editors Guild of India is disturbed by the irresponsible conduct of some national news channels for deliberately creating circumstances that target vulnerable communities by spewing hatred towards them and their beliefs.... Expectedly, there was a riot in Kanpur accompanied by an unprecedented trenchant reaction from many countries that were offended by the remarks of the ruling party spokespersons. In their angry statements they wondered about India’s commitment to human rights and freedom of religion....The incident that caused unnecessary embarrassment to the country could have been avoided if some of the TV outlets had been mindful of the nation’s constitutional commitment to secularism, as well as the journalistic ethics and guidelines that the Press Council of India has issued to handle a volatile communal

situation...Some of these channels prompted by the desire to increase viewership and profit were seemingly inspired by the values of Radio Rwanda whose incendiary broadcast caused a genocide in the African nation.” The statement ends with the assertion, “The media is in place to strengthen the Constitution and the law and not break it through sheer irresponsibility and absence of accountability.”

Rajmohan Gandhi concludes an excellent opinion piece on the NDTV portal (9 June) saying, “India is a mighty country. But it does not live alone on the planet. In great parts of the world vital to our life and economy, Muslims or Christians form the majority. And Indians, including Hindus, live right amidst them. The Gulf is conspicuous for obvious reasons. But can we afford to forget that Muslims form 42 percent of the people of vast Africa, and that Christians form 49 percent of that continent’s population, not to mention other parts of the world? Not regarding Muslims and Christians as India’s equal citizens, not recognizing that along with Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Jews, agnostics, and any others, they are co-owners of India, is not just unconstitutional, it is the height of foolishness in the 21st century.”

The outrage by the Editors Guild, Rajmohan Gandhi and by several leaders of civil society from across the board must be taken seriously. The unscrupulous leaders and activists of the ruling party have shamed the country. The Editors Guild reminds us of what took place in Rwanda a few years ago. Wake up to stop the rot – to reclaim our space in a democratic, secular and pluralistic India – where the rights of all are respected and protected! ©

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Cost of Hate Speech

The economic impact of a backlash from the Gulf countries on the issue of Islamophobia in India is unimaginable. It could hugely impact millions of Indians working in those countries, apart from import and export

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

You all must have heard of a famous idiom in Hindi -- “*muh se bola hua aur kamaan se nikla hua teer wapis nahi ata*” (It is impossible to take back the words that you speak and the arrow that gets shot from the bow). What this means is, think before you speak. This is a very old saying and is commonly used in Indian households to guide children. There might be many versions of the same saying in other languages as well.

However, it seems that present-day politics does not abide by such words of wisdom. It is common to see people using obnoxious words on news channels while debating on a subject. Until our school days, we thought that a debate is a tool used for winning over the opponent by buttressing your argument with facts and presenting your opinion effectively to convince people listening to you. Unfortunately, those debates are things of the past.



We often see people using outrageous language at their highest pitch to make sure that others are unable to relate to what is being said by the opponent. To our dismay, most of our news channels have made this format a new normal. The louder an anchor is, the higher its rating would be! This is the formula that has been devised to make a channel successful, without realising that it may prove costly for a country like ours.

In one such debate, one of the renowned politicians from the ruling party lost complete control over her words. A lawyer by profession that too from the London School of Economics, Nupur Sharma, should have thought of the collateral damage her words might bring to the country. Her words about Prophet Mohammad spread like wildfire.

The TV channel was sensible enough to remove the explosive comments. But what about the role





PROPHET ROW: NUPUR SHARMA WITHDRAWS HER COMMENT; BJP EXPELS NAVEEN, SUSPENDS NUPUR

of the anchor, who contributed to the entire fiasco. When a news channel invites guests as panelists for a discussion, knowing well that such interaction may act as a fuel for the fire, why were they not extra cautious?

Of late, the country is witnessing a highly charged-up environment. People who stayed together happily, irrespective of the religion they followed, have suddenly started spewing venom against one another. The Kanpur violence is a case in point. Is this the way forward for achieving the dream of a \$5 trillion economy? Is this how we wish to use our demographic dividend by forcing people to stand against one another?

The BJP might have disowned Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal, the man who supported her statement, by suspending them and calling them as “fringe elements” but is it easy to undo the damage? The neighbouring country Pakistan is trying to take advantage of the international rift that these words have created.

Qatar cancelled an event which was supposed to be attended by Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu. More than 15 countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Indonesia, have joined hands to express their

The country is witnessing a highly charged-up environment. People who stayed together happily, irrespective of the religion they followed, have suddenly started spewing venom against one another

anger against the Indian government. Campaigns have been launched in Kuwait and Qatar to boycott Indian products. Imagine the kind of economic shock India would be subjected to if Modi is not able to pull it out from this catch-22 situation.

All his diplomacy of hugging people and creating a friendly bond will go down the drain. The economic loss of a few minutes that was given to Nupur Sharma is expected to be phenomenal if Muslim countries continue to boycott Indian products or stop trade ties with us.

The recently signed comprehensive economic partnership agreement with the UAE is expected to increase the trade between the two countries by \$100 billion by 2026 from the existing \$76 billion. In fact, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran are our top third, fourth and fifth trading partners. The Gulf Cooperation Council comprising Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE has a trade value of \$87 billion.

Not only this, we as a country, are highly dependent on some of these countries for meeting our energy demands. In a rage of anger, if they stop supplying oil, will we be able to find an alternative source? No. We are already facing the consequences of the Ukraine-Russia war. The fuel prices have touched new heights. In such a scenario, will we be able to absorb another energy shock at a time when most people in India are struggling to make both ends meet?

The remittances from these countries alone account for around 3.17 percent of the GDP. Of late, India's export to these countries has grown by around 60 percent. One can easily imagine how dependent we as a country are on these countries.

Not only this, Indians constitute 35 percent of the population in the UAE and 25 percent each in Qatar and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia has 1.5 million Indians. They own businesses as well as work over there. Imagine a situation where these people are asked to go back! Will we be able to tackle such a situation? What will happen to their families, who are surviving on their income? Many take huge loans and mortgage their assets to fulfil their dream of working overseas, thinking that they will be able to clear the dues from the increased family income.

Internally, such statements often create a volatile environment in the country. A riot-like situation was created in the BJP's most-loved and sought-for state -- Uttar Pradesh. Religious insecurities have extended



More than 15 countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Indonesia, have joined hands to express their anger against the Indian government. Campaigns have been launched in Kuwait and Qatar to boycott Indian products

even to states like Punjab. The economic loss that the country faces due to such violence is estimated to be around 7 percent of the GDP. This is what the recent Global Peace Index 2021 says! We were ranked at 135th position out of 163 countries last year on the index, showing how peace-loving we are.

We as children grew up listening to a song, which promoted peace and harmony among people. The song -- *sun sun sun mere nanhe sun.... desh mein ganga bahe, pyar ki ganga bahe* -- used to be telecast on Doordarshan. Various Bollywood actors acted in the song. This writer still remembers how soothing those words used to be. It did impact the mindset of children. We never bothered which religion our classmates came from. We respected each other's beliefs and opinions. At least, this writer does not remember any fight that might have happened due

to religious differences.

How we wish our political leaders understood that religious debates and extremist views not only affect the social fabric of the country but also its economic growth. People like Nupur Sharma should use their educational background for more productive work rather than triggering the sentiments of people and motivating them to adopt violent behaviour. While pursuing her Bachelors in law, she might have read various theories of criminology. In an attempt to grab brownie points, her comments have only instigated people to take the law into their own hands.

The pandemic has already created a huge income disparity. The richer have become richer and the poor poorer. This economic gap has only increased anger and discontent among the people at the bottom of the pyramid. We have still not recovered from the economic shock. Nor are we prepared to face another economic downfall.

It is high time that our leaders use their words for economic gains rather than short-term political gains. In the end, what matters is India's prosperity and the people, who form this country, irrespective of the religion they follow or caste or creed they belong to, not a particular individual. It is important to sort out this issue in a diplomatic manner. The quicker the better! ©

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Shivling in Every Mosque?

Despite the Ayodhya verdict, Right-wing activists are taking the mandir-masjid controversy forward claiming ownership of several mosques. In this context, the comments of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, “why look for Shivling in every mosque”, give some hope, but it raises doubts too

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

In a highly communally charged atmosphere due to the raking up of temple-mosque disputes at different places in India, the words of Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme head of the Sangh Parivar, “why look for Shivling in every mosque”, gives hope to all Indians who dream of peace. At the same time, it is unbelievable that the head of a pan-Indian organization, which had spearheaded the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, speaks the language of peace and reconciliation. What has been seen and experienced by many Indians, especially the minorities, since the launch of the Ayodhya movement, is the spread of unprecedented hatred and revenge against the Muslims. The waves of different frequen-



cies of hatred and revenge climaxed in the clarion call to the Hindus by the speakers of Dharma Sansad to resort to mass murder of Muslims. It seems that the strategy of communal polarization is resulting in the operation of the law of diminishing returns. It also appears that Mohan Bhagwat could sense that the situation is getting out of control. That could be the reason for his conciliatory approach.

Addressing the concluding session of the RSS officer training camp in Nagpur on June 2, Bhagwat questioned the need to “look for a Shivling in every mosque (har masjid me Shivling kyun dekhna)” and said the RSS was not in favour of launching any other movement (andolan) on these issues. He also said that one should not raise a new issue every



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

India faced condemnation from as many as 15 countries over the comments of the two BJP leaders. Qatar, Iran and Kuwait called Indian Ambassadors in their respective countries and conveyed their strong protest



day. According to him, the Gyanvapi issue is to be sorted out amicably between the two sides and if the two sides decide to go to court, they need to respect the court.

There has not been any formal response from the BJP or the other members of the Sangh Parishad. But some extremist groups are not happy with the statement of Bhagwat. Responding to the statement, Jagatguru Parmhansa Acharya Mahant said they would take back all the temples destroyed by the Mughal invaders. He also added that there is no doubt on the policies of the Sangh leader Mohan Bhagwat, but because of age he could have committed a slip of tongue. Many have expressed doubt whether the RSS will be able to control the members of its militant affiliates. "Those who are used for political purposes may have slipped out of the hands of the persons like Modi and Bhagwat; then it would be difficult to imagine what would happen," wrote Kanhaya Kumar.

Further developments proved that the apprehensions of right-thinking people proved to be correct. The BJP suspended party spokesperson Nupur Sharma and expelled her colleague Naveen Kumar Jindal over their comments on Prophet Muhammad during a TV debate that have provoked back-

lash from the Gulf countries. India faced condemnation from as many as 15 countries over the comments of the two BJP leaders. Qatar, Iran and Kuwait called Indian Ambassadors in their respective countries and conveyed their strong protest. There were also widespread calls on social media for a boycott of Indian goods in Gulf countries.

"Allowing such Islamophobic remarks to continue without punishment, constitutes a grave danger to the protection of human rights and may lead to further prejudice and marginalization, which will create a cycle of violence and hate," told Qatar to Deepak Mittal, the Indian Ambassador. The Ambassador tried to mollify saying that the comments "do not, in any manner, reflect the views of the Government of India.

"The condemnation of hate speech for the sake of international optics is like sticking a band-aid on a festering wound"

These are the views of fringe elements."

As reported in NDTV News, India's trade with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE, stood around \$90 billion in 2020-21. Moreover, millions of Indians live and work in GCC countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken special interest in recent years to strengthen economic ties with the energy-rich nations, the main source for India's fuel.

It is evident that the BJP took action against two of its erring leaders only because of the pressure from the Gulf countries. The top leadership of the party kept mum for more than a week after the controversial comments were made by Nupur Sharma and Naveen Kumar Jindal. If the BJP and the



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

Prime Minister believe in respecting all religions, they would have condemned the highly provocative statements by the speakers at the *dharam sansad* at Haridwar and later in other places and they would have put an end to raking up new mandir-masjid controversies. The silence of the Prime Minister and top party leaders of BJP emboldened the hate mongers.

As per a report published in *Jansatta*, BJP took the drastic action against two of its activists because of five reasons: 1) strong protests from Arab countries; 2) controversy that erupted during the visit of Vice-President to Qatar; 3) the expected negative impact on trade; 4) negative media coverage on the BJP in other countries when BJP has launched a world-wide campaign, “Know the BJP”; and 5) fear of replication of communal violence that took place in Kanpur while the PM and the CM were in the town for a programme.

The justification given by the Indian government's representative that the derogatory statement on Prophet Mohammad was the view of “fringe elements” does not cut much ice. How can a national spokesperson of the BJP be a fringe element? The so-called fringe elements have come to the centre stage after the victory of the BJP in 2014 and 2019 and they are given a free hand. When they indulged in hate speech and violence the police and the administration in the BJP-ruled states looked the other side. India has to face humiliation because of the omissions and commissions made by the BJP and its governments in different states concerning hate

speech and violence against the minorities.

Some of the hate speakers were promoted in the party hierarchy. Two years back Tejasvi Surya had made a regretful statement on Twitter about Muslim women. Then the government had to resort to damage control; but later he was promoted and made the president of the Yuva Morcha, the youth wing of the BJP. Similarly, Anurag Thakur was promoted to the Cabinet rank as a reward for exhorting his supporters to violence in Delhi during the anti-CAA protests. Now he is a high profile Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Nupur Sharma is only suspended now. When the hue and cry related to the current controversy subsides, the suspension could be withdrawn and she could be even given a higher post either in the party or the government, if the BJP does not undergo a transformation with regard to its ideology and practice.

As the *Indian Express* wrote in its editorial on 6th June, “the condemnation of hate speech for the sake of international optics is like sticking a band-aid on a festering wound”. If the BJP wants to fulfil its promise of *sab ka saath sab ka vikas aur vishwas* and refurbish its image at the international level it has to take certain immediate steps.

First of all, the BJP has to accept the fact that India is highly polarized because of its wrong policy of spreading hate speech and hate messages against the minorities by its cadres. Only by denying or refuting adverse reports by international agencies about human rights violations, restricting freedom of speech and expression, and denial of religious freedom by putting in place stringent anti-conversion laws will not be of any use. Reacting sharply to the

The government and the BJP have to build confidence in the minorities, especially Muslims, through proactive measures. As India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, it needs to show by word and deed that it is a government of all communities

The silence of the Prime Minister and top party leaders of BJP emboldened the hate mongers

US State Department 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, the Indian government called it "ill-informed comments" by senior US officials and alleged "vote bank politics" in international relations. The International Religious Freedom Report 2021 has very systematically documented the violence perpetrated on the minorities in India especially by the non-state actors and instances of violation of religious freedom. The BJP and its governments have to make a deep introspection instead of condemning the reports.

The IT cell of the BJP is to be told to stop manufacturing and marketing hate messages and the loudmouths are to be told to control themselves. "Hate speech is unacceptable in itself from the mouths of ruling party members targeting a minority, as it mainstreams bigotry, causes dangerous divisions, and is against the national interest".

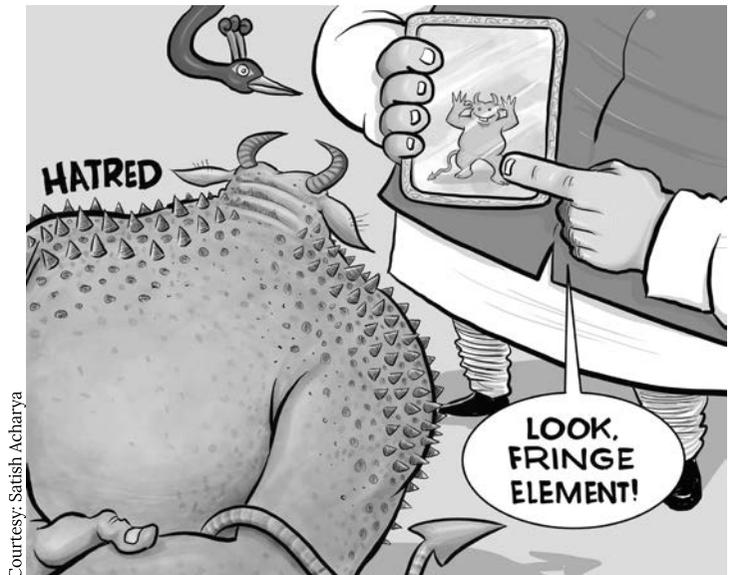
Secondly, the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have to initiate steps to detoxify the venom of hatred that has been injected into the veins of Indian society. A large section of Indian society is already brainwashed with hate ideology and they believe blindly that the Hindu religion is in danger because of the minorities. Treatment for Islamophobia against the minorities is to be initiated on a war footing.

Thirdly, stop immediately raking up Mandir-Masjid controversies. Let the government and the Sangh Parivar shall declare that they will strictly abide by the Places of Worship (Special Provision Act), 1991. Let a strong message go from the Prime Minister to the members of the Sangh Parivar as an endorsement of what Mohan Bhagwat said.

Fourthly, the government and the BJP have to build confidence in the minorities, especially Muslims, through proactive measures. As India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, it needs to show by word and deed that it is a government of all communities. The BJP governments and the Sangh Parivar have to put an end to the divisive and destructive policies like bulldozing houses, slapping sedition charges on academics and university students, evicting hawkers selling non-vegetarian

food, creating controversies out of halal meat and namaz venues, etc.

Finally, the BJP governments at the Centre and in the states have to focus on governance issues like putting the economy on the growth path, job creation and providing quality education and health care to all sections of the society. In order to create an atmosphere of cooperation and good will among all sections of society the government has to facilitate giving bail to social activists and opposition political leaders who are arrested and put behind bar under the draconian laws like UAPA, NSA, Sedition law etc. The government also has to reach out to the opposition parties to evolve a consensus on solving the crucial problems facing the country.



All political leaders and political parties have to learn a lesson from the adage, "pride goes before a fall". The time has come for the Prime Minister to speak out and tell the nation that hatred and revenge has no place in his government's policies. Why do the hundreds of godmen and women of our country who lecture on spirituality keep silent when hate travels faster than the coronavirus? Let the religious leaders come out of their comfort zone and speak out that no religion teaches to hate another human being and hate is an abominable crime and sin. ☺

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Pope Francis surprises world by his appointments: Cardinal-Designate Poola Anthony

The following is the text of an interview with His Eminence Cardinal Designate Poola Anthony, Archbishop of Hyderabad

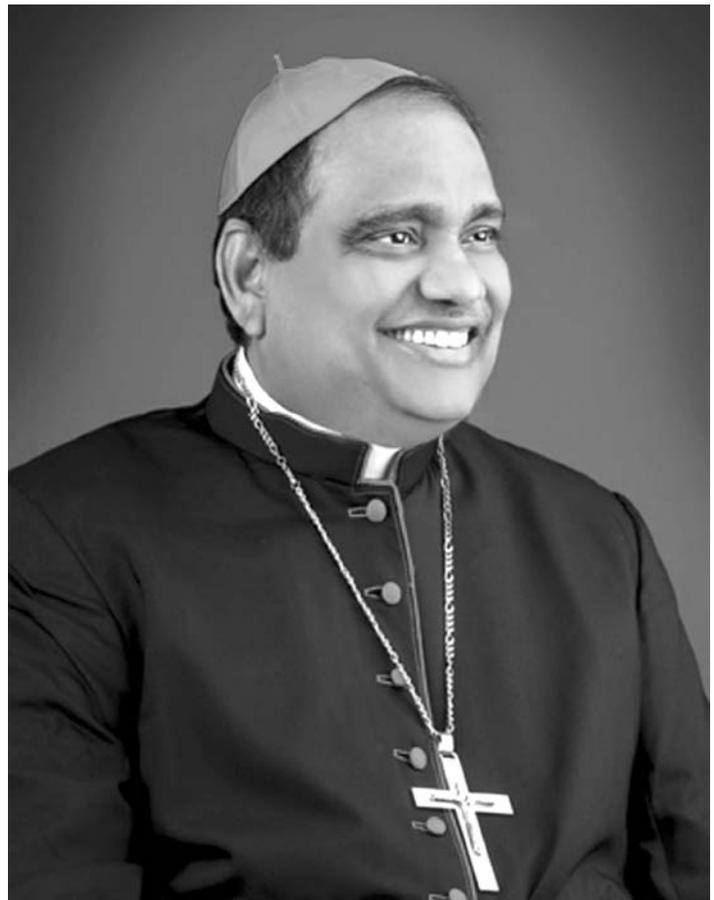
Q Congratulations on your appointment to the College of Cardinals by the Holy Father. Could you share with our readers the uppermost sentiment which gripped you when you received the news?

A Thank you, dear Father Suresh, for your kind appreciation and for inviting me to share my thoughts to the readers of *Indian Currents*. At the outset let me thank you for the wonderful service you do to the Indian Catholic Church and to the larger world.

The appointment as a Cardinal has surprised me, and, at first, simply I couldn't believe. I was traveling at the time of the announcement and my friends began calling me. After receiving a call from the Nuncio in which he confirmed the news and congratulated me, the news began to sink in. There is no other way except to see it as God's will, divine *leela*, as people say. In front of God's presence and Holiness we all know how unworthy we are. God chooses whom he wants, and God is free to go out of the way. I have enjoyed serving God's faithful as a priest. Then I was called to serve them as a bishop and then as the archbishop. When God chooses, I trust that God gives sufficient grace to carry on with the given mission.

Pope Francis continues to surprise the world, by his example, by his teachings and by the appointments he makes. I am humbled by his naming me and sincerely desire to rededicate myself to serve the Church to the best of capacities. I am grateful to the Holy Father for his trust in me and for the love he has for the Telugu Church in particular. The Catholics in two Telugu states rejoice at this appointment.

Also, a Cardinal is expected to keep all faithful in mind and work for them, by being the voice of the voiceless and reaching out to those who



live on the peripheries. I need to hold all these and their spiritual nourishment (not merely those of my archdiocese or the Telugu States) in my heart and thoughts, and in my prayers and sacrifices.

Q Is there any particular significance for the Church in India or the country to have two new Cardinals at the same time?

A It is Pope Francis who chose two of us from

India: in this, I am sure, he relied on the advice of others, and more importantly, he discerned it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Maybe, it is best to avoid reading too much into the appointments, from a secular or political point of view. While both of us represent a section of Indians, we are invited to be faithful, by being good and courageous shepherds. Indian Catholic Church is noted for its diversity, plurality, and, the people's faith is profound. The challenges they face are many and we need to allow the Lord to renew and transforms us all. The values of God's reign, that are much like the values enshrined in the Constitution, should be promoted for the peace and prosperity of all.

All of us are aware that there are millions of Indians, including the Catholics, who are deprived of dignity and rights and while we made a lot of progress in this regard, there is much that needs to be accomplished. As an archbishop, my call includes speaking to the conscience of all faithful. The call of the Gospel is a challenge to all of us. My prayer and appeal is that we allow the Lord to convert us so that we become disciples and builders of the kingdom. Our fellow Indians expect us to be authentic Christians, and together with people of goodwill, we can be on a pilgrimage together, receiving and sharing God's blessings.

Q As Cardinal, your role in the Church is enhanced. Do you have any special issues/suggestions in mind which you would like to bring to the attention of the Pope?

A The role of a Cardinal includes collaborating with the Holy Father and being at the service of the universal Church. The Pope is aware of the various challenges people face in different corners of the world. Indian concerns will be uppermost in my mind and, eventually, I will share with him to what extent the teachings and exhortations of the Holy Father are received by our people and how far they are able to make a difference in the life of the faithful.

Q Though the very concept of caste is opposed to Christian values (and also its discriminatory practice is unconstitutional), there is no denying the fact that 'caste divisions' do exist in the Church. How do you envisage tackling this 'unchristian' system?

A There is no point in denying that caste exists and that references to caste are unavoidable in the

While both of us (two new Cardinals from India) represent a section of Indians, we are invited to be faithful, by being good and courageous shepherds

contemporary Indian context. One can wish that it is not there or that we should forget it or live as if it does not matter. Such wishes may be sincere but reality is more complex, and millions of people continue to face discrimination. Down the timeline, in spite of the best of the intentions of the missionaries, caste, which is ingrained in the DNA of the people, could not be overcome. In this regard, it is important to look forward, and not backward. For what we got from the ancestors, we are less responsible but for what we pass on to the others, God will seek accountability from us.

We have a choice in front of us: to tell ourselves and others that we can decide to free ourselves from caste-mindset and build networks of relationships that are beyond ethnicity and language, region and religion. Tackling 'caste' in the Church needs pooling various human, material and spiritual resources and a willingness to change on the part of all. That all of God's children should live a life of dignity and equality is God's design and we all are summoned to collaborate.

Q Pope Francis is particularly concerned about the cases of sexual abuse and financial scandals in the Church. What is your take on these issues in your new role as Cardinal especially in the context of the Indian Church?

A Violation of human dignity in any form is harmful, sinful and punishable. Scandals in the Church wound the Body of Christ.

Sadly, Indian Church had its own share in this regard. That said, there are also examples of several false cases that are put to tarnish the name of the Church or its personnel who continue to live dedicated and committed lives. The need of the hour is to educate ourselves, especially the clergy and the religious, so that people will see our centres and campuses as safe and trustworthy. In my view, the



laws of the land and the CBCI policies and guidelines are powerful tools to direct our action.

Q The Freedom of Religion Laws or the anti-conversion laws violate citizens' freedom to preach, practice and propagate any religion of their choice. How do you look at these laws as the 'Prince of the Church'?

A In my view, Indian Constitution is a sacred document that offers a moral campus to us all. It is disheartening that several States have passed anti-conversion laws. I join all those who have been upholding the rights guaranteed in the Constitution and I sincerely hope that the laws of the land will prevail.

Q It is significant that the Consistory for the Creation of the new Cardinals on 27 August

For what we got from the ancestors, we are less responsible but for what we pass on to the others, God will seek accountability from us

will be followed by an important and historic (summer) Consistory on 29 and 30 August when all the Cardinals will meet with Pope Francis to deliberate on the new Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia, *Praedicate Evangelium*, which is in force from Sunday, 5 June, the Solemnity of Pentecost. Does this not have a very powerful and important message for the restructuring/ reforming of the Church at every level?

A Pope Francis focused on the restructuring of the Vatican Curia, which itself had been proposed by the members of the Second Vatican Council and other later Vatican meetings. The Church is in need of reform is undeniable. The Holy Spirit is the author of any genuine reform. The first Pentecost is the mother of all reforms, at which the Holy Spirit animated the apostles to go beyond the known and to plunge into the unknown. True reforms reflect the changes that are in accord with the changing times. Respecting the diversity of calls and charisms, some of responsibilities can be reassigned. Our Lord who washed the feet of the Apostles and summoned them to love and serve will be with the Church in the path of renewal proposed by *Praedicate Evangelium*. ☪

“Let us Go to the Other Side”

The attitude to accept new initiatives and alternatives provides opportunities to learn the perspectives and opinions of others

BY **VARGHESE ALENGADEN**

The words of Jesus to his disciples in Mark 4:35, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake” was the theme of the general synaxis of a religious congregation. As I reflected on this theme, I found it very relevant to review the way of life and mission of the Church.

The Church which is caught up with the age-old traditional routine style is very slow to experiment any new initiative. In general, people are enthusiastic to new ideas. These new ideas are not put into practice because there is unwillingness to give up the old. Knowing this mind set, Jesus spoke very categorically, “put the new wine in new wineskin”. He warned the danger of doing patch work and compromise. “If you put new wine in old wineskin, the wineskin will break and the wine will be wasted.”

Today, consecrated men and women in the Church are busy with various welfare activities and managing several educational institutions. Yet the Church is facing opposition, harassment, alienation and elimination. All the dedicated works don't help them in getting the good will of people who believe in the negative propaganda of the anti-church forces.

Despite the negative propaganda against the Church and opposition faced by the priests and nuns, there is not only reluctance but resistance from the Church leadership to evaluate its life and work. There is resistance to go for an exposure for learning alternatives. They continue with the old ways of retreats, rituals and way of life. Hardly very little effort is made “to go to the other side”.

The unwillingness to give up the old ideas and way of life, fear of the unknown, prejudice against those who propose new alternatives and experiments often proved successful are the reasons for their resistance to take the initiative of going to the other side. But by this resistance to go for exposure and learn from new experiments by those in leadership positions deprive the community and institution of development. Members miss opportunities for personal growth.



‘Going to the other side’ also provides opportunities to learn the perspectives and opinion of others. We need to have the humility to find out what people think of our life and mission. Following the example of Jesus, we need to find out ‘what do people say about us and our work?’ Leaders need to have the courage to evaluate themselves

by asking the members and people in the society, ‘what do you say about me and my way of life?’

Regular, rather daily, introspection of oneself is the key to one's spiritual growth. Similarly, the communities should evaluate people's impression about them and their works? Evaluation is done with a genuine search for truth, truth about oneself and about a community.

The unwillingness of individuals to accept a transfer from a familiar place and work is due to lack of understanding spirituality behind the words of Christ, “let us go to the other side”. Personally, I had enriched by practicing this spirituality. When I had to bear six transfers in two years, initially I too was very upset because I felt that I was given these transfer orders as punishment. However, I took every transfer as an opportunity to learn from new place and people. These transfers taught me many noble lessons and I discovered many unique blessings in all these new and unfamiliar places. Throughout my life I kept the spirit of “let us go to the other side” and I continued receiving new insights.

I wish if persons were open to explore new possibilities whenever they have to go to new places and work with new people to discover their unknown talents. I wish if those in leadership positions have the courage and openness to set aside the routine traditional practices and enable members to explore new ways of living and working in order to make the community life and mission more relevant and effective. “Let us go across to the other side”. ©

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Saint Devasahayam Celebration of a life

FROM AJ PHILIP AT ARALVAIMOZHI

Let me begin with a mistake I made. I thought the thanksgiving ceremony of the canonisation of Devasahayam would begin at the St. Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar where the mortal remains of the martyr are kept. No, there was no function there. Instead, the function was held at Aralvaimozhi, a tongue-twister for many, about 15 kms from the Kottar church in Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu.

With a few extra hours at our disposal, we went to the church, an U-shaped impressive Gothic-style building. There was a steady stream of the faithful, more interested in taking selfies besides a newly-erected statue of Devasahayam and his freshly-painted and brightly-lit tomb. Many of them were seen touching the tomb and making a sign of the cross in divine obsecration.

After an early, pure vegetarian lunch, we left for Aralvaimozhi, an absolute delight for any visitor.



The Western Ghats that have protected the area from invaders for centuries have lost some of their green cover but they remain as towering as they were ever. In local parlance, the area is called Kattadi Mala because wind is constant there. We could see many windmills in the distance.

There is a shrine at Kattadi Mala, erected in memory of Devasahayam. We gave it a skip to go to the venue, parked the car on the roadside and walked about a kilometre to reach the huge pandals erected for the function. Multi-hued flags on both sides of the road with the Ghats as the backdrop provided a sight to savour. There was a huge stage flanked by two smaller stages in four make-shift pandals joined together. They could withstand moderate to heavy rains and wind.

Yes, we were too early to reach. A kindred soul in cassock inquired whether we had our lunch. No, it was not just to start a polite conversation. We could see everyone there, including a large number of policemen on duty, being provided food packets. He was happy to know that we came all the way from New Delhi via Kayamkulam to witness the function.

I wondered whether the pandals would be filled up as there were at least 10,000 chairs laid to welcome visitors. Girls and boys in dance costumes were seen rehearsing while a large group of women in brown saris each holding a steel pot with a coconut inside it were preparing themselves to receive the guests in the traditional Tamil style.

The central stage was where the mass was to be said and the one on the right was for the cultural show, while the one on the left was for the large choir to perform. It was a musical extravaganza that awaited the audience which began trooping into the pandals. Those who enjoy nadaswaram recitals were not getting bored as a group of professionals were performing on the stage.

By the way, it was not for the scenic beauty of Aralvaimozhi that the place was chosen for the thanksgiving ceremony. Devasahayam's canonisation



Devasahayam as traditionally depicted



Dance that highlights an episode in the life of Devasahayam

is significant for the Indian church, as he is the first layman to be elevated to sainthood in India.

As the story goes, Devasahayam was born to Vasudevan Namboothiri and Devaki Ammal 310 years ago. Brahmin men marrying Nairs was common. It was known as sambantham. In fact, in a Brahmin family, the eldest son married a Brahmin girl while the rest of the boys married Nair women. Children born of such intercaste marriage took the caste name of the mother.

That is how Devasahayam was named Neelakantan, another name for Siva. As was the practice, he learnt martial arts and joined the military service of the Travancore Maharaja, who ruled his kingdom that extended up to Thiruvananthapuram in the west to Kanyakumari in the south from Padmanabhapuram palace, not very far from Aralvaimozhi. Incidentally, it is, perhaps, the oldest palace in the country.

Marthanda Varma, in whose period Kollam and Kayamkulam were annexed and made part of Travancore, was in power at that time. It was with great difficulty that he annexed Kayamkulam, as can be inferred by the huge painting of the annexation ceremony that adorns the wall at the Padmanabhapuram Palace that occupies five-six acres of land.

Another painting there depicts the Colachel war in which Travancore defeated the Dutch forces led by Delenoid, who was arrested and jailed. The King knew that, though defeated, Delenoid was an expert in naval warfare. He was, therefore, released from jail and employed to raise a naval force. In due course,

Neelakantan and Delenoid became close to each other.

Delenoid was evangelically inclined and he led Neelakantan on the Biblical path eventually leading to his baptism. His baptismal name was Devasahayam Pillai. He turned out to be popular and when people began to follow his religious practices, the state turned against him and he was shot dead at Katradimalai (Kattadi Mala). He became a martyr like the protomartyr St. Stephen. He was elevated to sainthood by Pope Francis at the Vatican on May 15, 2022.

I realised how much the people of Tamil Nadu took pride in the canonisation of Devasahayam when all the roads led to the venue and the pandals were all filled up in no time. Occasional breezes kept the pandals cool and tolerable.

The function began when the chief guest, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, who is the Apostolic Nuncio (Ambassador of the Vatican) to India, arrived in the company of Cardinal Oswald Gracias and Cardinal George Alencherry and many archbishops and bishops as the clock struck 2:30 pm. What followed was a breathtaking cultural programme brilliantly choreographed and presented with audio-visual aids.

There was a series of dances based on songs composed, especially for the function. Unfortunately, I could not follow the songs as they were in Tamil but I could make out that each song covered a period in the life of Devasahayam like his birth in ordinary circumstances, his childhood, when he questioned

caste-based discrimination, his teenage years, when he learned martial arts, his service as a soldier of the Maharaja, friendship with Delenoid, accepting Jesus as his saviour, confrontation with the Maharaja and, finally, his execution at the hands of a soldier, who gets the gun blessed by him before he uses it.

As the life story progressed on the stage, the huge electronic screen showed the cinematic presentation of the same episodes from the life of Devasahayam. Those who could not follow Tamil could easily follow the story.

Hundreds of children would have practiced for several days before they could summon up courage to perform on the stage, witnessed by tens of thousands of people at the venue and many more on television and computer/mobile screens all over the world.

The garrulous announcer seemed to have taken a decision not to mention any word other than Tamil while helping the audience understand the goings-on, both on the stage and off the stage. Maybe because they knew that Aralvaimozhi was once part of Travancore where the state language was Malayalam, the choir sang the Lord's Prayer in



Guests were honoured and felicitated

Malayalam. It was at once melodious and beautiful.

After the cultural programme and a brief interval, what followed was a ritual the audience would have loved to give a miss. There were a large number of guests, including the Apostolic Nuncio, state ministers, political and religious leaders and descendants of Devasahayam who needed to be honoured and felicitated. If it took a long time, it could not be helped.

Thanksgiving in the Catholic tradition is never complete without the Holy Mass. The cultural programme and the choir singing were all a prelude to the mass. The central stage was beautifully and aesthetically converted into a huge altar using liberally flowers of various hues. There were hundreds of priests to witness and take part in the Eucharist.

For once I realized why the women in brown were practising what I could not fathom. The Apostolic Nuncio and other Cardinals, Archbishops and others were led to the Altar only after the women greeted them with steel vessels filled with items like coconut, leaves and flowers used for traditional welcome.

The mass began with a statement: "Swimming against the current and shining with unique qualities are the salient characteristics of history makers. Today the annals of history are carving the name of Martyr St.



Apostolic Nuncio lighting the lamp to inaugurate the mass

Devasahayam in golden letters, who left no stone unturned to proclaim Jesus and His words, who strove for the upliftment of the marginalised and the discriminated ignorant people of his soil.

“On seeing the life of this humble person, who fell as a seed on the grounds of Katradi Malai, Kottar, in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, has now been raised by God to bear many fruits, by elevating him to the zenith of sainthood. This could have been achieved by the Saint because of his self-sacrifice, his willingness to die for Christ in all humility and patiently undergoing all kinds of tortures meted out to him.

“On this auspicious day, we are all gathered here in the nearest vicinity where he faced his heroic



Apostolic Nuncio flanked by Cardinals Oswald Gracias and Cardinal George Alencherry arrive at the venue

death as a martyr. It is highly fitting for all of us who are to participate in the Eucharistic celebration, as a thanksgiving to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ grasp and inhale every bit of his staunch faith for which he stood for till his last breath...”

The formal mass began with the Apostolic Nuncio to India lighting the lamp and the choir singing the Tamil hymn “Ontrinaivom pankerppom -irai/ Aatchitin kanavukar meippadave/ Narcheithi arivipppom”. I looked at the watch. It was already 5:45 pm. If I waited for the mass to end, it would take another two-three hours for us to take the road as the large crowd had to disperse. There were thousands of cars, buses and other vehicles parked on the ground and on the roadsides.

We quietly left the venue, walked towards the

“What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God”

car only to find hundreds of people still arriving to attend the mass. I also had another purpose to leave early as I wanted to visit the shrine at Kattadimala, which commemorates the martyrdom of Devasahayam, before the sunset.

It was a short drive from the main road. There were a large number of people assembled there too. They were watching the mass on the huge screen put up in the shrine. A huge statue of Mother Mary, the patron saint of India, welcomed the people with open hands from the hilltop that can be seen from a long distance.

The peaks on the Western Ghats were resplendent with clouds forming different patterns against their backdrop. Our driver was a little impatient as he had 190 kms to drive to return to Kayamkulam.

As we hit the road, I just thought how the situation would have been if Devasahayam was canonised at Aralvaimozhi, and not at the Vatican. I am sure lakhs of people would have converged for the ceremony.

There are some who deny that Devasahayam ever existed. They also say that the Travancore Maharaja could not have ordered his killing. They do not know the history of Travancore. There was one Kerala Varma Valiya Koilthampuran who was known as the Kerala Kalidasa. He had an outstanding command of English, Sanskrit and Malayalam.

There was a time when he hobnobbed with Christianity and he got into the good books of the British. He had to pay a price for it, as he was imprisoned for five long years. That his wife was the Rani of Travancore did not help him. Finally, he was released only after the King died.

Devasahayam was a plebeian, married to Bhargavi, an ordinary lady, in comparison. Whatever be the case, Devasahayam will now be venerated as the seventh saint of the Catholic Church in India. How truly it is said, “What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God”. ☪

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Congress Obsession with 'Family'

The present custodians of the Nehru-Gandhi legacy have shown, time and again, that they will never countenance a *numero uno* from outside the family

BY **ABDUL KHALIQ**

Writing in 1985, Salman Rushdie, in an essay titled "Dynasty", expressed bemusement at the unanimity and speed with which the world's largest democracy anointed 'heir-apparent' Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister within minutes of his mother's assassination, wryly noting the jarring dissonance between democracy and dynastic entitlement. In the same piece, he reveals that at that time, speculation had begun on who – Sanjay and Menaka's son Feroze Varun, or Rajiv and Sonia's Rahul – would be the dynasty's next candidate. With the benefit of retrospect, we know that the people of India resoundingly spurned dynastic rule in 2014. But tragically, the Congress party remains in thrall of the family.

It was a wise man who said that failure is not fatal but failure to change might be. The Congress party, shepherded by the dynastic trio, is now not only familiar with failure but has attained an unprecedented level of proficiency in it. One imagined that



the party had touched rock-bottom in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections but since then, it has been humiliated in every single election, scoring zilch in the West Bengal Assembly polls, disgraced in UP, trounced by the AAP in Punjab, beaten convincingly by the BJP in Uttarakhand and Goa, despite the saffron party having to fight anti-incumbency and incompetence in both these States; not to forget the party ceding power pre-term in Madhya Pradesh due to defections.

The party has lots more to worry about. Despite the charismatic and articulate Priyanka leading an intense, high-voltage campaign in UP, the Congress vote share plummeted to 2.3 percent in 2022 from 6.3 percent in 2017, underlining the family's disconnect from the people. The AAP has sensed that it is a more than credible alternative to the Congress in States where the latter is the main opposition to the BJP. It most definitely stopped the Congress from wresting power in Goa and is certain to at least



do the same in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Prashant Kishore, our election oracle, has already predicted a Congress rout in these two States. Now, there are angry rumblings of discontent in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh at the arbitrary nomination of the family's courtiers as the Congress candidates to Rajya Sabha. Are these guys plain stupid or suicidal?

Never has a political outfit been more in need of a structural and ideological reboot than the rudderless Congress today but most despair about such a transformation ever happening despite the party being diagnosed with all the symptoms of a political outfit in terminal decline. To extend the use of the medical metaphor, the grand old party is suffering from a serious dysfunction that can best be described as anosognosia, which is etymologically a Greek term that roughly approximates to lack of self-awareness or delusional thinking. A person in the throes of anosognosia is hamstrung by an inability to understand or accept that he has a serious ailment even when repeated scanning yields the same negative result. According to expert psychiatric opinion, it is a condition that portends the onset of schizophrenia.

The AAP has sensed that it is a more than credible alternative to the Congress in States where the latter is the main opposition to the BJP. It most definitely stopped the Congress from wresting power in Goa and is certain to at least do the same in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh



Ideologically schizophrenic in a pathetic attempt to be all things to all people for cynical electoral purposes, the Congress party has run the full repertoire of opportunistic politics -- gyrating from being the secular bulwark against Hindu fundamentalism to adopting soft Hindutva, caricatured by Rahul Gandhi's brand of fatuous religious symbolism; steering clear of the beleaguered Muslim community but contrarily showing an eagerness to ally with communal Muslim outfits at election time; adopting an equivocal stance on the abrogation of Article 370 and being invisible outside Parliament on the CAA. Even Congressmen don't know the party's stand on major issues but that's to be expected when the family as power centre decides everything unilaterally.

A management student is taught that the single biggest way to impact and transform an organisation is to focus on leadership development. Ralph Nader, the great American political activist, went even further in stressing that the function of leadership "is to produce more leaders, not more followers." Sadly, this foundational principle is alien to the Congress party where the leadership remains congealed around the dynasty. The present custodians of the Nehru-Gandhi legacy have shown, time and again, that they will never countenance a numero uno from outside the family. It is now blatant that the Congress party's primary concern is the protection of the Gandhi family's paramountcy and not the country's interests or for that matter the party's interest.

There were optimists who hoped against hope that the recent Chintan Shivir (introspection camp) would be a genuine endeavour at a full-blown transformation of the Congress party. These simpletons fantasized that finally the party would take an unblinkered, hard look at its many shortcomings because that's the only road to reinvention. To invoke the wrathful line in the Bon Jovi song, the Chintan Shivir was a shambolic reiteration of "the same damn song with the same damn melody."

If you need irrefutable proof of a party living in denial, please try to read that turgid apologia titled "Udaipur Nav Sankalp Declaration" that contains the gist of the deliberations at this talk shop. The rambling document kicks off with a tedious recital of the unmitigated achievements of the Congress party from Independence up to 2014. The most significant feature of this segment is the sycophantic focus

If the Congress is going to be positioned as the main opposition, we must all be prepared for a further 25-year rule by the BJP

on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, their sacrifices and achievements. The abject veneration of the family is revealed in this one priceless vignette introducing the achievements of the UPA government: "The collective leadership and vision of Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh and Rahul Gandhi shaped an inclusive and empowered India." Only a party of courtiers would endorse such an obscenity and let me tell you why.

During the UPA years, Rahul Gandhi was a general secretary of the Congress. His only achievement was the dramatic tearing of the Ordinance protecting convicted legislators from disqualification, by which act he publicly humiliated his own government. In sharp contrast to this schoolboy exhibitionist, Manmohan Singh was the PM who, despite being hamstrung by the meddlesome umpiring of the dynasts, had a fairly successful 10-year tenure, and yet he has been diminished by being slotted as a grudging add-on, sandwiched between mother and son.

In essence, the Nav Sankalp Declaration actually proclaims that there will be no substantive change in leadership or policy. It is of vital importance to note that in the Declaration, the word "Muslim" has been totally censored and there is no mention of the Gyanvapi mosque imbroglio, thereby diminishing the unspeakable plight of India's largest minority. Regarding Dalits, although there was much bluster about providing reservation in the private sector, this much-needed reform finds no place in the Declaration. Of course, the strongest signal emanating from the Chintan Shivir is that the family that has turned a ship into a leaky raft will not let go of power, despite the indubitable fact that most people in the country and even within the Congress know that the Gandhis are the BJP's trump card.

Acknowledgement of one's own mistakes is a step towards curative redemption but there was no introspection on the culpability of past Congress governments in designing and misusing the most iniquitous laws that have now been exploited by the BJP to stifle democratic functioning and target opponents and dissenters. The dreaded UAPA which was initially conceived as an instrument to regulate and ban organisations, was upgraded as an instrument of torture by the UPA government. Other questionable laws sponsored by the Congress-led governments include the NSA, the J&K Public Safety Act, the PMLA, the anti-conversion law, the exclusion of scheduled class Christians and Muslims from the benefits of reservation. The UPA government had also grossly misused the Sedition law.

A few days ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told an international forum that his government was planning for the next 100 years. At home, he urged his party members to plan for the next twenty-five years. That's something to worry about in a country that is in free fall economically and socially. Even as we wrestle with the cruel ineptness of the present regime and the likelihood of it continuing to rule indefinitely, we have Rahul Gandhi telling us that only the Congress has the vision, the ideology and the "centralised approach" (whatever that means) to take on the BJP. If the Congress is going to be positioned as the main opposition, we must all be prepared for a further 25-year rule by the BJP. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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On Dying Young, Youngish or Old

Every death is a tragedy, but how you are remembered after your song is done, depends on the melodiousness of your song in life

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

Some days ago, Andrew ‘Roy’ Symonds, the Australian cricketing star died in a single-car crash, his two pet dog companions, miraculously unhurt, grieving by his lifeless body and refusing to budge. He was just a few days shy of 47 years. Less than two months earlier, another Aussie hero, Shane Warne, arguably the greatest slow bowler ever, died of a heart attack, aged 52 years. Both these sporting icons were not young, not old and certainly not, to echo the haunting evocation from the Arundhati Roy novel, of a “viable, die-able age”.

To say that they died before their time is, in a way, to peddle a paradox because implicit in such a pronouncement is the problematic belief that a human being has an ordained shelf life like any pre-packaged food product with a fixed expiry date, but that’s not how our cruel human world works. For us guys, there is only one certainty: the randomness of life and the immutability of death. There is no telling when life will be extinguished, however conscientiously and prudently we walk the earth.

On such a sombre topic it may seem out of place to invoke ghoulish humour, but this rib-tickler reinforces the point I make that “the clock of life is wound but once and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop” (Robert H Smith). There was this funeral cortege of a 50-year-old scion of a maharaja, the mourners inconsolable, many of them wailing and beating their breasts in grief. A curious bystander, told that the death was

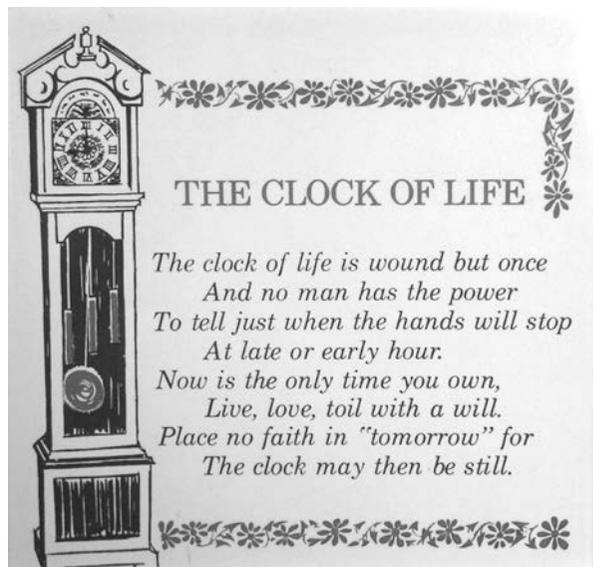


unexpected and sudden, enquired if the deceased was a heavy drinker. When told that he was a teetotaler, the next question was whether he smoked, the answer to which was again a no. To the follow-up query of whether he womanised, the outraged response was that he was a religious, god-fearing man. The bemused

bystander could not help a final riposte: “Then why the hell are you grieving, when, in any case, there was no life in him?”

Symonds and Warne lived life voraciously and unapologetically, pirouetting on the edge, unafraid. They were abrasive but always magnanimous in defeat, readily acknowledging the superior performance of an opponent. They were no paragons of propriety and good behaviour nor did they pretend to be. Even in their playing days, they cocked a snook at the discipline and austerity demanded of professional sportspersons. Not for them the one-dimensional, placid and utterly drab conduct of

“The clock of life is wound but once and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop” (Robert H Smith)



a Tendulkar or a Kane Williamson, because they believed that life was infinitely bigger than cricket.

Sachin, an emotionless, cold-blooded warrior in search of perfection and personal glory was worshipped for his cricketing prowess but even in his playing days, he did not touch people's hearts the way that Warne and Symonds did. They were flawed which made them more human, forever courting trouble and perpetually in the cross-hairs of the 'establishment' but loved by their team mates and fans, who were protective toward these vulnerable heroes. The dissimilarity in their personalities underscores the stark difference between cold dispassionate professionalism as the guiding philosophy for success contrasted with the engagingly expansive stance that sport is 'just a game' and there is more to life than winning and losing.



Shane Warne and Andrew Symonds

In death, for sure, you reap what you sowed in life! It is in human nature to mourn only those who are loved or admired. Conversely, there are the dead who are not mourned but reviled for

Symonds and Warne, without reading Nietzsche, seemed to have embraced his philosophical prescription that "the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously." There are the unforgiving censorious moralists, though, who invoke the aphorism about reaping what you sow to harshly and unkindly conclude that Warne and Symonds died 'before their time' because of their own irresponsibility. To these mean-spirited and pitiless upholders of retributive justice and receiving one's just deserts, I have one question, though it breaks my heart to

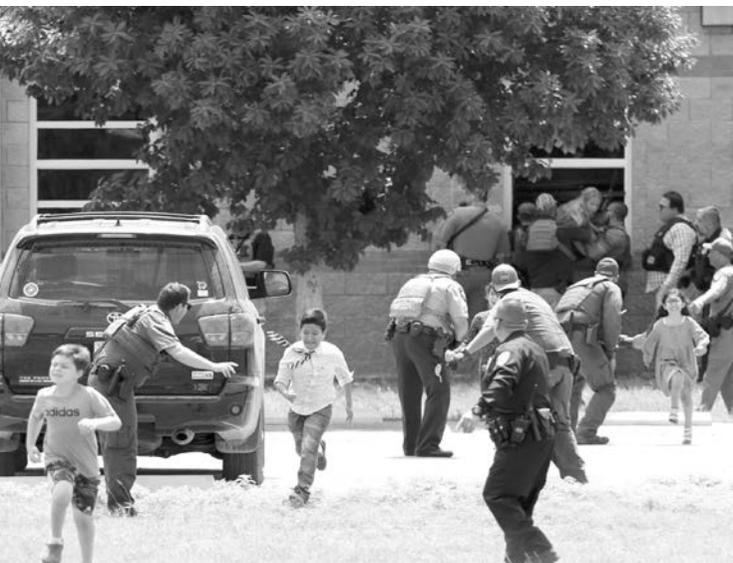
ask it: How do you -- self-righteous judges -- then rationalize with your cold, cruel logic the horrendous killing of 19 children in Uvalde, Texas, an inhuman infliction that should make even the Almighty hang his head in shame?

The radiant innocence and childlikeness of children are the only redemptive feature of our mad, vile world. Those 19 mutilated little bodies sprawled out in the Texas classroom was yet another awful reminder that the human race is brutish and evil, rotten to the core. What's truly reprehensible is that this colossal tragedy has not stunned us into wakefulness and rage at diabolical wickedness. The cold-blooded Governor of Texas, who has presided over the enactment of the most dangerous gun laws in America, responded to the tragedy by playing shameless frontman for trigger-happy killers and the infamous National Rifle Association (NRA) that has made a commercial killing out of exploiting the US Constitution's Second Amendment, drafted, it would appear, by a bunch of teenage delinquent killers. The Second Amendment reads: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." Did the 18-year-old killer believe that he was part of that militia protecting a free state, and, by implication, was the State an enthusiastic advocate by allowing him to buy, over the counter, a deadly assault rifle, whose only purpose is human extermination?

Canada, rattled by the heinous crime in America, rushed to enact the strongest gun control measures that include a national freeze on handguns

and confiscation of the firearms licenses of those involved in any form of criminal activity. But in the heart of the vile West, the USA which should most appositely be renamed Trumpland for the millions who have embraced that wretched orange man's warped world view, nothing tangible has been done to counter this evil. On the contrary, within days of the gruesome killings, the NRA convention was held in Texas, a depraved act of defiance that thumbed a nose at the dead and their grieving kin. Predictably, the arch Republican pervert and embodiment of human depravity, Donald Trump, was there, outright rejecting gun control and grimly warning his crazy supporters that the Democrats were plotting to take away their weapons, as though that amounted to a crime against humanity. Expectedly, another mad American has killed three and injured several others in another mass shooting in Philadelphia. With no lessons learnt, the world now waits with bated breath for the next mass killing in a school!

Every death is a tragedy, but how you are remembered after your song is done, depends on the melodiousness of your song in life. It is then no longer the power you wielded or the wealth you amassed that will determine your place in the hearts of people but how you conducted yourself and treated others when the world was at your feet. In death, for sure, you reap what you sowed in life! It is in human nature to mourn only those who are loved or admired. Conversely, there are the dead who are not mourned but reviled for, as Mark Anthony declaimed: *"The evil that men do lives after them"*.



Speaking of the unsung dead, I remember the untimely death of a national figure in a glider crash at the ridiculously young age of 32 years, a human tragedy that did not plunge the country into a welter of grief but, on the contrary, was greeted with a huge sense of relief, if not unbridled joy. At a personal level, I cannot forget the day Sanjay Gandhi died, 23rd June 1980, not only because it was my dear elder brother's birthday but also because it prompted the most devastating repartee on the deceased Gandhi. When my brother delightedly gloated that the air accident was the best birthday gift he had ever received, my father clucked in disapproval at such offensive rejoicing. He then told us that when he got the news of Sanjay Gandhi's death, he was reminded of G K Chesterton's observation following the death of a notorious criminal in a car crash in London: *"While all England rejoiced, I alone mourned because I would rather have seen him hanged."*

Having expounded on the varying responses of the living to the dead and their legacy, it is perhaps appropriate to consider whether we, the living, have done it right by our dear departed when they were alive and well. I dare say that most of us have the experience of the death of a loved one that breaks one so badly that it takes a long time to heal. The more fortunate grievers can and do fall back on memories of the good and bad times shared but with a clear conscience. What of those guilt-ridden beings who hear the plaintive whisper from the grave: *"Why send me flowers after I'm gone, when you didn't do so when I was living?"*

My parents suffered much heartache because of my wayward ways but there is a particular dereliction of four decades ago that still haunts me. In their seventies, they boarded the Kerala Express from Ernakulam to Delhi. I did not receive them at the New Delhi station because I was engrossed in a cruddy sybaritic Diwali card session with my friends, leaving my gentle parents to handle the trauma of dealing with the not-so-gentle porters and taxi drivers at the station. When I returned home late at night, they greeted me with warmth and happiness, and not a word was said about missing me at the station. Confronted with such sheer goodness and magnanimity, what forgiveness? 🍷

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Words of Discrimination

The words 'sex worker' and 'prostitute' are meaningless as they try to discriminate women further and add stigma to their life

BY **M. L. SATYAN**

The words "Sex Worker" and "Prostitute" are commonly and widely used to refer to women who are into sex trade. But both these words are meaningless and try to discriminate women further. Commonly the workers come into two categories namely Organized Sector and Unorganized Sector. All employees who are formally employed like teachers/professors, doctors, IT sector employees who enjoy employment benefits like fixed working hours, salary package, holidays, leaves, provident fund/pension scheme come under Organized sector. Daily wage labourers, people who do small scale business like running petty shops, vendors who sell vegetables/fruits/flower in push carts or on streets come under Unorganized sector.

The women in sex trade do not come under these two categories. They come under "Forced Labour Sector". No woman in this trade gets into it voluntarily. They are duped and cheated by their own family



members, relatives, friends and agents by false promises and then forced into this trade. Once they are into this hell-like life, they are unable to get out of it. Since women are forced into this, they cannot be called a "sex worker". Rather they could be called "forced sex worker". Likewise, it is the men who come to them as clients, and they are

the ones who are prostitutes. So, the women need to be called "*women who are prostituted*".

The people in organized and unorganized sectors can easily change their jobs and they are respected and accepted everywhere. This is not the case with the women under the forced labour sector. *The Times of India*, Bengaluru edition dated June 06, 2022 published an article. I quote the following examples from it:

"Alia (name changed), a sex worker, said: "I have tried many other jobs to escape this work. But wherever I go, people eventually find out that I was a sex worker and



make it the talk of the town. I was hired as a domestic worker in Dubai through an agency and knowing my past, they felt entitled to mistreat and oppress me. I was not paid for months. When I complained, the agency locked me up in a dark room for six days. After being rescued and brought back to India, I resigned to my fate and went back to the old job.”

“Shobha (name changed) in her early 40s switched her job to that of a field officer with a women’s rights group about 20 years ago, but is still identified as a sex worker and jeered at on the roads. As a rights worker, she has plenty of stories of other women like her to narrate. She is helping all of them fight and survive. The sex workers expect what they have always wanted: DIGNITY in society. According to Shobha, the reason society still remembers her as a sex worker is “police”. She says police let everyone know, chase sex workers every night, train their guns on them and assault them with canes. They even gossip about us and our bodies and never let our past go.

“Guna (name changed), a sex worker, wants to work for the government, use her experience to help them nab traffickers or bust sex rings. She said, “If the state really cares about our welfare, it should create safe spaces for us to retire when we can no longer do sex work. We can be offered government jobs or create a policy that will place us in well-paying occupations. The benefits of the state government’s Chetana scheme have not reached me or any of my colleagues. Also, we do not want policies that are exclusively for sex workers. We want anonymity. We want to disappear in the crowd and do not stand out. Help us do that.”

I wish to narrate my personal experience of visiting a redlight area and meeting some women there. I had written a detailed article titled “From darkness to light” published in the *Indian Currents* in the issue 22-28 May, 2017. I was working with The Sisters of the Good Shepherd as a Manager of the Mission Development Office. These sisters are working in a redlight area at Bhiwandi’s Hanuman Tekadi, Maharashtra to help prevent the second-generation girl children of these women, who are prostituted, from entering into the same profession. More than 5000 women live in the brothels.

The sisters have a Day care Centre close to this area where the children are kept during the day. They are provided lunch and taught value-based lessons through play-way methods. The women also attend weekly/monthly meetings in this Centre.

The sisters keep the children above 8 years in their boardings at Virar and Karjat. They are sent to formal schools to pursue education. Many of the children have completed 12th standard and pursue diploma courses on education, nursing etc. The children’s mothers are permitted to meet them once in a month.

I had visited this place along with the Regional Manager of the MDO. Due to the rapport of the sisters, we could easily interact with some of the brothel madams as well as some women whose children are under the care of the sisters. Almost all of them were enquiring the sisters and the staff about their children who are studying. Some women wanted to quit this profession and take up some other profession like driving, beautician etc. Those



who ventured had to live with the same stigma and discrimination.

“Given the ingrained prejudice and stigma towards sex workers in our society, the Supreme Court’s recent verdict might not change the ground reality overnight. The order, affirming their right to dignity, will however help them fight for legal protection and safety. Tackling the larger issue of stigmatisation, which often results in their exclusion from the mainstream, needs societal involvement. There may be diverse views on their work, but every individual deserves Dignity and Human Rights.” (Times of India).

As responsible citizens, are we ready to extend our whole-hearted support to help these women to live with dignity, march from unreal world to real world and from darkness to light? ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ML SATYAN is an NGO Consultant and a freelance Journalist.

Managing Plurality

Plurality becomes a threat because where there is plurality there is difference. It can create criticism and appeal for defence

BY **PAUL THELAKAT**

Politics as I understand is how we manage plurality. Because politics is nothing but plurality, it is not man but men with whom we live. To be social means to be political. There is one value in politics which is very often misunderstood and that is equality. We are said to be equal which is very true. But equal where? We are all equal before the law. We are equal does not mean that everyone is a copy of the other. We are not editions of the one and the same. Everyone is unique, different from the rest of us. Why there is difference and what does it mean? Everyone is born differently. Birth is birth of a beginning, St Augustine will say an "initium" is born. With the birth of a person something new is born and newness can be created by him or her. With birth of man novelty is born into the world. A person reveals himself through his or her life span of lingering in the play of existence. We are in a world of a show of existence, where existence as existence withdraws and hides and world appears where everything appears lingers a while and disappears. We are in the wonder of world "worlding" itself. In this world play, it is man who is born with a capability to start newness into the world. So, man is an initiator capable of initiating.

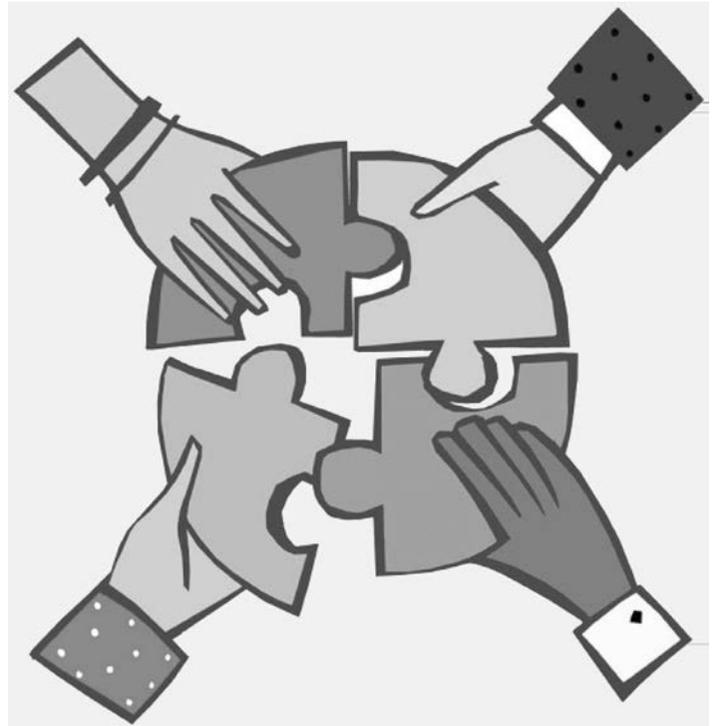
But this capability exists and activates in two ways of activity and language. It is in these two domains



man exists, externalises and expands; man shows, manifests, reveals and plays in the theatre of plurality. I am what I am by my activities and language -- in work and word. Word can be seen as work and work can be read as word. A writer's novel is a work, a person's life is a book. It is always the plurality who are witnesses. But the possibility of

newness depends on freedom of expression with is by work and word. What we call public is the place of plurality where the plural can express and manifest. The public place, then, provides a place for human freedom: freedom is exclusively located in the political realm. The distinction between the public and private spheres becomes a distinction between freedom and necessity: between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life. To be sure, not all that is public is thereby political. In schools, temples, churches, and all services that

Objectivity in plurality is a matter of dispute. This is normally the ways of democracy in the world. But democracy can easily degenerate and become mobocracy and the mob of majority dictates its terms as to truth and common sense



people require to earn their livelihood. What makes a public space political is that in it people meet as equals, as peers, neither being ruled nor ruling over others: a principle derived not from their nature as "human beings" but from their status as citizens. Society is where the plurality lives.

It is through society the life process itself which in one form or another has been channelled into the public realm. Society constitutes the public organization of the life process itself. The form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public. The distinction between the social and the political are notoriously hard to grasp. The rise of the social realm represents a terrible kind of deformation and that, as a result, extinguishing the human condition of plurality became a goal of politics.

Plurality becomes a threat because where there is plurality there is difference. Difference is not always positive it can be negative and negation. The possibility of plurality can bring in conflicts and oppositions. It can create criticism and appeal for defence. Anyone who is in position of managing the plurality can be questioned and opposed. This opens the society to conflicts and problems. There opens talks, discussions and debates and dialectics. How do we silence the uproar or the upheaval? Truth is said to be the silencer of the uproar and upheaval. Who decides truth, what is ground of objectivity? Generally speaking, the common sense decides the matter as the truth of it accepted by inter-subjective agreement.

Objectivity in plurality is a matter of dispute. This is normally the ways of democracy in the world. But democracy can easily degenerate and become mobocracy and the mob of majority dictates its terms as to truth and common sense. The mob rule can become intolerant to the unpredictability of the human novelty banning such unpredictability. The management of plurality comes to situation

where nothing unpredictable is tolerated. Then the very existence of plurality is in peril. The crowd is not plural, it is singular, and it has no face. It is neuter. It is the edition of one and same, it has no responsibility for there is no person.

We see that the rebellion against inner plurality parallels a rebellion against human existence itself. It is speech that makes man a political being. Significantly, that modernity encourages us to adopt a way of life in which speech is no longer meaningful. Pressing men against each other the State can create the space between them terror-stricken which destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom.

"The next decisive step in the preparation of living

corpses is the murder of the moral person in man. This is done in the main by making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible: How many people here still believe that a protest has even historic importance? This scepticism is the real masterpiece of the SS. Their great accomplishment. They have corrupted

all human solidarity. Here the night has fallen on the future. When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony," wrote Hannah Arendt in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Is there a tyrannical thought? Only in thinking but when he wills and judges it will be overcome. How to get over where plurality is destroyed, the unique perspective of human beings and each person's ability to come to good judgments is likewise destroyed? The answer is simply in the thinking of the plurality.

George Orwell reminds us: "Do we have to conclude that it is the duty of every writer to 'keep out of politics'? Certainly not! In any case, as I have said already, no thinking person can or does genuinely keep out of politics, in an age like the present one. I only suggest that we *should* draw a sharper distinction than we do at present between our political and our literary loyalties, and should recognise that a willingness to DO certain distasteful but necessary things does not carry with it any obligation to swallow the beliefs that usually go with them." ©

Plurality becomes a threat because where there is plurality there is difference. Difference is not always positive it can be negative and negation. The possibility of plurality can bring in conflicts and oppositions

Promoting Gun Culture in Punjab

The spread of hate speech, intolerance of Hindutva groups towards minorities and the killing of Sidhu Moose Wala have led to unsavoury developments in Punjab

BY **BALVINDER**

Apparently prompted by the BJP/RSS stalwarts, the spread of religious intolerance and hate-fire started with the demolition of the disputed Babri Masjid at Ayodhya by a large group of right-wing activists in 1992.

Largely encashing upon this hate-wave, the BJP managed to get hold of the reins of the country's political power. Considering this methodology to be an easy election winning formula, they started flaring up the hate campaign further.

Starting from indulging in lynching orgies, a spree of changing Islamic sounding names of places and enacting much more similar dirty dramas, they started looking up for more Islamic religious places to target.

Emboldened by chancing upon some finds of Hindu religious icons at a few places of Islamic religious places, they even started asking for digging many old Islamic historical structures for ascertaining their origins!

Though recently the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, reportedly has taken a sudden U-turn, for unknown reasons, and asked his followers to 'now' stop looking



for more Hindu religious icons in Islamic places of worship, yet these incidents have spread unspecified fears, may be unjustified ones, among various other religious minority groups also.

Digging of the dead past of other non-Islamic religious structures, if and when desired for similar scary reasons, can begin

anytime without any warning.

Sadly, today such unsavoury happenings in the domain of personal religious identities are not only being discussed and debated on various social, political and journalistic media, but are also being pondered in law courts.

In Punjab, some Punjabi folk singers and writers have been facing court cases for promoting violent gun culture. The recently killed young singer Sidhu Moose Wala too was reported to be facing these very charges against him



Punjabi Singer Sidhu Moose Wala

And we, the ignorant people of India -- forgetting the current steeply rising prices and the sharp fall of opportunities to earn an honourable livelihood -- apparently have become just curious and hapless spectators.

Will there be an end to this haughty hysteria, which has seemingly been engineered by its political beneficiaries to hold on to the reins of power? The deafening silence of the leaders of the day apparently is playing the same 'mischief' that is capable of harming the nation's secular fabric beyond repair.

Akal Takhat Sahib, Amritsar, located within the Golden Temple complex, is considered as the highest seat of authority in Sikhism. It was established by the Sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind ji in 1606, to address the spiritual and temporal concerns of the Sikh community.

The enclosed replica of an old, now non-existent, wall mural, depicting a scene from Ramayana, a Hindu religious text, once adored the walls of Siri Akal the Sahib, along with a few more similar ones.

This perhaps is an example, which can also be used to lay claim on this Sikh holy place, if and when required by the hate promoters, to achieve their hidden dirty designs.

The mere thought of such hypothetical notion sends a sharp chill through the spines of every individual Punjabi as none can ever think of repeat of the bloody June 1984.

In Punjab, some Punjabi folk singers and writers have been facing court cases for promoting violent gun culture. The recently killed young singer Sidhu Moose Wala too was reported to be facing these very charges against him.

Sidhu was one of the many persons whose state provided security cover was pruned only recently by the new Punjab Government, perhaps as a money saving measure. But it is cited, by many, as one of the causes of his brutal killing.

Agreeing to this very view, the Punjab and Haryana Court has asked the state government to restore the security of all of them. It is another story that most of these security covers are well known to be used only as a status symbols.

Some political analysts attribute these security cuts to a shocking video call in which Giani Harpreet Singh, the Jathedar of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib, Amritsar, the highest temporal seat, appealed to all Sikhs to keep licensed weapons in view of the "uncertain times"!

It is high time that this hate-fire gets doused sooner than later so that a sane social equilibrium, as designed and desired by the visionary Constitution-makers of our multi-cultured country, could be maintained in reality

However, after the pruning of his security cover, the Jathedar reportedly has relieved the other half members of his security also, perhaps as a protest. Not only this, he himself has started wearing a licensed gun around his neck.

However, strangely enough, the Central Government has offered the Jathedar, who openly prompted the Sikhs to keep fire arms, Z security.

Following the chief Jathedar's edict, the head priest of Patna Sahib 'Takhat' has also issued a similar suggestion to all the Punjabis to get licensed arms "for self defence"!

However, it is worth pondering that what made the high priests to issue such edicts. What did the Chief Jathedar mean when he hinted upon "uncertain times"? May be they have started nurturing a fear, may be hypothetical one, that once after subjugating one particular faith of one minority religious group, other groups can also be targeted by the trouble mongers? Or are they both playing in the hands of BJP to tarnish the image of the state under the new government?

A shrewd BJP perhaps is following the foot-steps of Mark Antony, whose oft-told speech at Caesar's funeral ended with the smirky remark: "Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot, take thou what curse". But one should not forget that such an act ultimately led to the burning of whole of Rome.

It is high time that this hate-fire gets doused sooner than later so that a sane social equilibrium, as designed and desired by the visionary Constitution-makers of our multi-cultured country, could be maintained in reality. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BALVINDER is a former principal of Chandigarh's first government college



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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Block Party..!

This was many years ago, while visiting my parents in America: 'What are our neighbours doing?' I asked my father, as I peered out of my parents' apartment in New York.

'They're having a block party,' he said, peering out from his apartment.

I walked downstairs onto the road and was amazed as I saw everybody enjoying themselves. Generally nobody bothered to even smile at each other in Brooklyn where my parents lived. But today, children were skating, mothers were chatting with each other knowing that today their babies were safe and pretty girls were walking up and down the road parading in front of young men and boys with cokes or beer cans in their hands who laughed at each other's jokes while quietly eying the pretty girls.

In all, an air of festivity and gaiety.

'Have a coke,' a stout Mexican shouted at me from across the road.

'Thank you,' I said, 'I'm enjoying the fellowship and friendship!'

'Enjoy!' shouted the man grinning at me, 'We get this chance only once a year.'

'Only once a year,' I thought to myself and my thoughts went back to my beloved country. I thought of our people over there. People in the housing societies. People in chawls. People in hutments.

'Do you have block parties,' asked the man, handing me a coke.

'Yes,' I said, 'yes, we have them many times a year.'

'What,' asked the man, 'how can you have it so many times. It is only once a year that the whole block can get together.'

'In my country,' I said, 'as I watched other people, coming closer to hear me speak, 'we people share each others' joys and sorrows, burdens and laughter.'

'How d'you do that,' asked a man in the crowd.

'Every event is an event we share with everybody.' I replied. During Diwali, the Hindus, and Muslims



and Christians and all communities, join in the celebration, so it is with Christmas or Bakri-Id or any festival of any community. Not only do we celebrate each others' joys, but also the sorrows that come upon us. More than the relatives, it's the neighbours and friends who stand by you, whichever community you belong to.'

'It seems to be a beautiful country,' said a lady, 'here we are so busy we have no time for each other.'

'Yes,' I said slowly, 'my country is a beautiful county, where love and compassion and sharing still come first and where we still do have time for each other.'

'Have another coke,' said my stout Mexican friend, 'and here's cheers to your lovely land where there are so many block parties.'

'Yes cheers,' shouted all my newly found friends, 'Cheers!'

That was many years ago. Today, in my beloved country things have changed dramatically, so much so that other countries are questioning us for the polarization happening!

Oh for the block parties of old..! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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