

Indian Currents

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Christians United Against Violence



Peaceful Protest

“Water has crossed the nose and the tears have dried up”

Christians and members of civil society stage a peaceful protest in Delhi to condemn the unprovoked aggression by the right-wing vigilante groups

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PUSHED TO THE WALL, CHRISTIANS SPEAK UP



The Christians, facing unprecedented attacks apparently from the Sangh Parivar elements, have finally spoken up. The silent sufferers and victims of heavy-handedness of the saffron brigade have made an emphatic statement: 'Enough is enough.' As the attacks on Christians continue with alarming regularity, they have asked the governments to stop the violators in their tracks.

This became evident when the Christian community of the National Capital Region held a protest rally in the heart of Delhi on February 19. It was unique in many respects: irrespective of denominations, thousands of them stood shoulder to shoulder to raise their voice; it was one of the rare occasions that Christians in large numbers descended on the Capital to share their trials and tribulations in the wake of sharp escalation of attacks on them in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka.

It is pertinent to put on record some data on the unparalleled atrocities unleashed on a peace-loving community in the last few years. In 2022 alone, there had been close to 600 incidents of violence against Christians in the country. The marauding mobs have created mayhem in many places; armed with sticks and rods, they have hounded Christians out of their homes; many have been forced to stay in camps with men, women and children struggling to cope with the dreadful situation; several trumped up cases have been filed in courts and many Christians have been put behind bars; hate-mongers are tirelessly working, with threats and violence, to bring Christians back into Hindu-fold. 'Ghar Vapasi' ceremonies are conducted with brute force and rule of law seems non-existent as the Sangh Parivar forces go ahead with impunity. The culpability for failure to control the violence against Christians lies not only with the BJP-ruled states but also with the Congress-ruled ones like Chhattisgarh which saw one of the worst attacks in recent years.

These organised assaults by vigilante groups are planned on fabricated claims that Hindus are being forcibly converted to Christianity through allurements, though such allegations have been denied repeatedly by the community leaders. Moreover, such claims have not been proved, and hardly anyone has been convicted in such cases. In many incidents of attacks on Christians, the police prefer to look the other side, as if mute spectators. Intriguingly, the Modi government has all along been keeping a studied silence over these atrocious acts. It is unbecoming of a government to turn a blind eye to the utter violation of Article 25 of the Constitution which guarantees freedom to openly practice, profess and propagate any religion.

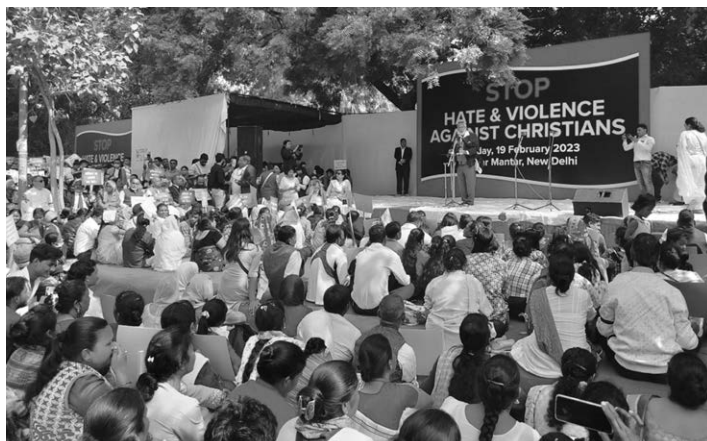
One doesn't need to look far for reasons for the inertia and inactivity of the government in this regard. It is relevant to recall what MGS Narayanan, an eminent historian, said a few years back: "It is the RSS which controls and guides the Modi government. It is not a democratic organization..." It is a case of tail wagging the dog. But it is unbecoming of a government, which is bound by the Constitution, to be guided by extra-constitutional elements and non-state players. The authorities should walk the talk on their commitment to the principles enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution. They should protect Christians and ensure their fundamental right to live according to their faith. Establishment of rule of law is the basic tenet of any civilized society. No country can hope to become a super power unless its citizens have the power to practice their fundamental rights.

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

✉ → frsureshmathew@gmail.com



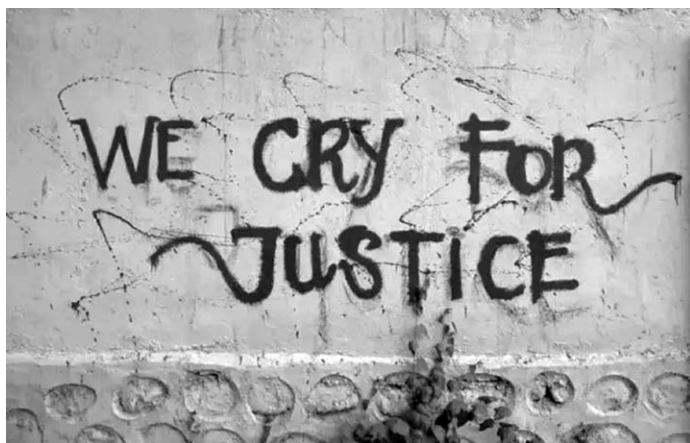
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POWER QUOTES



Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

- **Francis of Assisi**

• • •



A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.

- **Saint Basil**

• • •



One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.

- **Joan of Arc**

• • •



God removes the sin of the one who makes humble confession, and thereby the devil loses the sovereignty he had gained over the human heart.

- **Saint Bernard**

• • •



I only seek in my old age to perfect that which I had not before thoroughly learned in my youth, because my sins were a hindrance to me.

- **Saint Patrick**

• • •



We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can - namely, surrender our will and fulfill God's will in us.

- **Saint Teresa of Avila**

• • •



Since Mary is the prototype of pure womanhood, the imitation of Mary must be the goal of girls' education.

- **Edith Stein**

CHRISTIAN SHOW OF UNITY

The rally held by various Christian denominations in the heart of Delhi on February 19 sends out a strong message to the ruling party and the government: It is time to put a stop to the attacks on Christians

BY JOHN DAYAL

Days after 25-year-old Nasir and 35-year-old Junaid of Ghatmkeeka in Rajasthan were killed and their bodies burnt in their jeep in February 2023 by cow vigilante members of the Bajrang Dal, in distant Meghalaya in North-East, Bharatiya Janata Party state president Ernest Mawrie made a startling statement. He said there are no restrictions on consuming beef in the Hindutva party. Mawrie told India Today that he eats beef and there is no issue with it.

Meghalaya is going to hold Assembly elections on February 27. Rajasthan is also due for elections a little later.

While the BJP and its ideological mother Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh maintain an aggressive posture



on cow, the party is bending backwards to appease Khasi, Naga and other largely Christian tribals so as to keep them in its fold.

Hence the visible presence of Nagas, Mizos, Khasis and Garos – singing hymns with Adivasis, Punjabi and South Indian Christians – at a historic 22,000-strong

protest rally at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on 19th February, caught the government, the intelligence agencies and the ruling national party by surprise. The Church too was caught by surprise, albeit a very pleasant one.

The Church leadership in India has never claimed to be politically the bravest in the world. Faced with erosion of its right to freedom of faith and culture; violence against its priests, pastors and nuns; and





desecration of churches and other places of worship, it has always chosen the part of turning the other cheek.

As its spokespersons said at an event a day before the rally, the Christian Community in India has staged protest demonstrations in the national Capital perhaps not more than five times in the seven decades since Independence. These have been against the O.P. Tyagi Bill banning conversions [1980s], the rape of nuns [1990s], the brutal killing of Graham Stuart Staines and his two minor sons [1999], the Kandhamal pogrom in 1998, and the issue of Dalit Christians.

Faced with the sharpest ever increase in violence in the eight years of the Narendra Modi regime, estimated by the United Christian Forum at over 600 incidents, and the Washington DC-based NRI group Fiacona at over 1200, the Church in Delhi decided to protest, but then allowed itself to shrink it down to a token one-hour candle light demonstration at the gates of the Sacred Heart Cathedral, the seat of the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, and close to the offices of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the titular representative of the three Catholic Rites in India.

Legal counsel, pacifists and political intermediaries have consistently advised the Church leadership that the way forward is dialogue or private negotiations with the government, the BJP and the RSS. And if push comes to shove, move the courts to protect the rights of Catholic educational and medical insti-

tutions. Open, and secret, discussions with the ruling groups and their ideological masters have been the norm.

Not that the episcopal, evangelical, Pentecostal and independent churches are not radically braver. Instinctively the limit of their protests is in prayers, with almost little or no physical presence on the road, alone, or in conjunction with civil society.

Not surprisingly, there is usually little success in getting all denominations together in the type of mass protest that will be noticed by the government or by any political party.

The leadership of various Christian denominations in the national capital region once again came together to see if a physical protest could be staged to tell the government that the community was deeply hurt, angry and was insisting on a positive response from the government to put a halt to the violence

Frustrated by the low tone of the candlelight vigil, and with the images of thousands of people chased out of their villages in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh [see also earlier issues of Indian Currents], the leadership of various Christian denominations in the national capital region once again came together to see if a physical protest could be staged to tell the government that the community was deeply hurt, angry and was insisting on a positive response from the government to put a halt to the violence.

In the current situation of fear in the country of a crackdown by the government, and the lack of support from even state administrations controlled by parties other than the BJP, no protest will be able to bring lakhs of people to the national capital to fill the Ramlila Ground, the birthplace of the Aam Aadmi Party and of the revived Bhartiya Janata Party in the late 1970s.

With the government permitting but a tiny protest at Jantar Mantar, the designated place for protests and agitations, the organizers staged a coup in galvanizing the two communities of indigenous



Since 2017, eight states have enacted or re-enacted anti-conversion laws which are often misused by religious fanatics and Hindutva proponents to target minorities for their faith. There is also a petition re-filed in the Supreme Court for the third time, seeking measures to curb “forced conversions” at a national level

people – Tribals of the North East, and Adivasis of the Chhota Nagpur and Bhilwara regions of central India spanning from Bengal in the east to Rajasthan in the west.

The North East is represented by a strong student body in Delhi’s various educational and coaching institutions, and among shop workers and central government officers. The Adivasis are a major presence in government jobs, education and trained and untrained labour. Most Catholic parishes have a strong and very visible presence of Adivasis; the Nagas worship in scores of communities renting time in major churches, halls and educational institutions. Both are vibrant faith communities, covering the ecumenical spectrum.

They turned out in their munificent numbers. Dressed in their traditional dresses, or in plain white shirts and black trousers or dresses, the young and the old prayed, sang and danced on a large scale. In one stroke, it filled two major check boxes. The first was of unity, of course, and vigour. The second was of cultural connectivity with their past. The Sangh often accuses the Church of weaning away people from their roots. Here was a celebration of roots as seldom seen in a metropolis. The South Indian contingent was complemented by a strong Punjabi choir and a very vigorous cultural group, and a small but Rajasthani Hindi singers and dancers who won the hearts of the massive crowd.

As the spokesperson noted at the press conference on the eve of the rally, “The protest is not so

much to oppose, as much is it to bring to the authorities' notice – to the government, the Supreme Court and local authorities – this sharp rise in the violence against Christians on a national scale.”

“While the community continues to have faith in the leadership and the legal system of the nation, it makes a heartfelt and earnest appeal to fellow citizens to stand in empathy and solidarity with it, to raise their voices at the targeted, violent and organised injustice happening across the nation against their brothers and sisters, outraging their religious freedom and inherent dignity,” he added.

Since 2017, eight states have enacted or re-enacted anti-conversion laws which are often misused by religious fanatics and Hindutva proponents to target minorities for their faith. There is also a petition re-filed in the Supreme Court for the third time, seeking measures to curb “forced conversions” at a national level. This petition is plagued with baseless allegations and unverified social media “findings” and several minority groups have filed impleadment applications against it. In the last hearing, the Supreme Court directed the petitioner to withdraw an additional affidavit containing false claims. The Court is also contemplating tagging all challenges to anti-conversion laws in various High Courts with this petition.

The Christian community in the national capital region expressed its commitment to the concept of fraternity enshrined in the Indian Constitution, and a basic tenet of their faith. Their exposition of fraternity was most evident in their demands in the memorandum they wrote to the President of India, Mrs. Draupadi Murmu, whom many identified as one of their own -- a tribal, a woman.

Their major demand was the simplest one. They said if and when they are attacked or suffered a crime, the police must register a complaint. The grassroot reality is that the police do not register what is popularly called a FIR. And if it does, the FIR is more often against the family of the victim than against the criminal and the assailant.

The Supreme Court directive is clear. “In view of various counter-claims regarding registration or non-registration, what is necessary is that the infor-



mation given to the police must disclose the commission of a cognizable offence. In such a situation, registration of an FIR is mandatory.”

Other demands include strengthening of law and order situation in the country. They pertain to lack of CCTVs in police stations and the matter of illegal detentions.

District administrations in various states frequently arrest Christians or persons of other religions who hold their faith in Jesus Christ

on the pretext that their religious activities are likely to breach peace in a region.

An illegality is being perpetuated in police stations across many states by detaining persons in the police station premises for more than 24 hours. The simple demand is for CCTV cameras in local police stations to prevent violation of any fundamental right of the citizens of the state.

There is need for a National/State Redressal Commission/s headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge with representation of the community and civil society to address the issues of targeted violence against minorities. Strict action is called for against vigilante mobs who round up individuals, trespass private property belonging to people of other religions who have faith in Jesus Christ or raise communal slogans outside police station premises.

The memorandum submitted to the President will find resonance with every citizen of the country. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN DAYAL is a veteran journalist and human rights activist.

Prayer as protest

Persecution of Christians

BY A.J. PHILIP

As a Christian and journalist in the North for the last 50 years, I never felt discriminated against. Rather, I felt privileged. I was given prestigious assignments and my ‘impartiality’ was counted upon when I was asked to write editorials, day after day, on the militancy in Punjab or the riots in Gujarat or elsewhere.

When Amartya Sen, who gave me a job, when I did not have one, articulated his theory of multiple identity in a book, I thought about my own identity in the national Capital. Yes, I am an Indian among other countrymen, a South Indian among other Indians, a Christian among other religionists, a Syrian Christian among other Christians, a Marthomite among other Syrian Christians and a member of St. James Mar Thoma Church, Dwarka among the members of 1200 or so Marthoma parishes.



I am also a Malayali from the Travancore region, whose dialect is slightly different from the dialect spoken in the Malabar region of Kerala. These are some of the multiple identities I have, not forgetting my identity as a journalist which overtakes most other identities. I could proudly claim all these identities, unlike some Christians, especially Christian journalists, who are ashamed of admitting that they are Christians.

I have heard them say, “I am a Christian but I am not that Christian”. I have never heard a Muslim telling me that he is “a Muslim but not that Muslim”. I have heard Hindus telling me that they are “atheists”. I never heard them telling me, “I am a Hindu but not that Hindu”.

I never felt ashamed of admitting that I am a Christian or a Malayali. In fact, when a Delhi boy



called me a “Madrasī” soon after I reached Delhi in 1973, I retorted and called him a “Punjabi”. The moment I said this, he began laughing because he was indeed a Punjabi and it was not an insult. Later, I learnt some derogatory words in Hindi, though I never had to use them.

These were some of the thoughts that came to my mind when I left for Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday last to join the Christian rally against the increasing attacks on the community in some North Indian states. It is one of the few designated areas for protest rallies. Police block both sides of the road to let the protesters pass through a rathole kind of entry.

Protests are allowed there because the noise does not reach the South Block where the Prime Minister sits or the North Block where the Home Minister sits. In fact, the voice of the protesters reaches only themselves. That does not minimise the importance of the protest.

As I squeezed myself into the protest area, I left behind an array of Vajra vehicles. You may wonder what a Vajra vehicle is! It is equipped with special features like multi-tube shell launchers in front and rear to lob teargas shells, emergency light bar with PA system for communication, external and internal lighting arrangement with AC/DC and wire mesh protection on the glasses. The vehicles reflected just the preparedness of the Delhi Police!

In contrast, were a few thousand Christians squatting on the road or standing under trees on both sides listening to a choir singing melodious Hindi hymns from a makeshift stage. Were they worshipping or agitating?

I bump into my friend and senior journalist John Dayal who asks me to make a guess of the number of people assembled there. Journalists are supposed to have this ability to count the people in a crowd. Unfortunately I do not have that ability.

I counted the number people in an area I could visualise in my mind and multiplied the number of such areas with the number obtained to reach a figure which I do not want to disclose because it can be as correct as the number of soldiers died on the battlefield at Kurukshetra when the Mahabharata war ended on the 18th day.

Just then a friend and journalist, who claims to visit the area as part of his official duty, told me, “Sir,



I can tell you, even national parties are unable these days to gather such a large number of people”. I was glad that I was there to take part in the history being written.

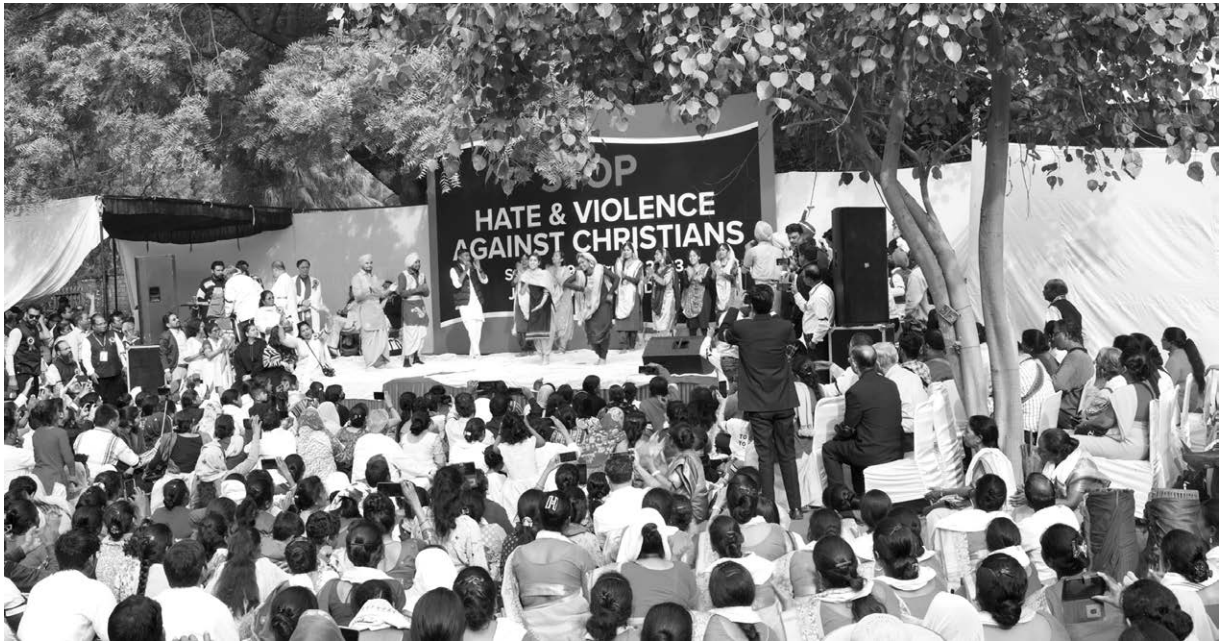
Another reason why I do not want to give the “exact” figure is that by the time I reached there, a large number of people had already left the place for home. Anyway, the turnout will make the organisers of the congregation proud.

As I was meeting some friends and my own church members, a person from Allahabad was introduced to the gathering. I had heard a lot about a church there. It was the Yeshu Ka Darbar church, run by one Dr Rajendra B Lal, who is now a bishop. I also had an occasion to meet him in Delhi.

I was told that it was the largest church in India in the sense that 25,000 to 30,000 people attended the worship service on all Sundays. No other church in India attracts so many worshippers. I was told that the people would begin arriving on the campus of the Allahabad Agriculture University on Saturday afternoon onwards, They came by bullock carts, buses, bicycles and tractors and other modes of transport.

They would spend the night there, attend the service and return to their villages after the worship on Sunday afternoon. I wanted to visit the church and spend a day there. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Now I wonder whether such a visit would ever be possible.

The person from Allahabad described how the state government has been harassing Dr Lal and his family. Criminal cases are being filed against him for alleged conversion of Hindus. I will tell you how ridiculous the charge is.



If there is one name that should be written in golden letters in the history of India it is that of Dr. Sam Higginbottom, an English-born Presbyterian missionary. He came to India, i.e., to Allahabad, to spread the word of God. He lived among the people there.

That is when Higginbottom realised that the Indian farmers had no scientific knowledge of farming. He himself did not know much. He went back to the US to study agriculture and came back and set up the Allahabad Agriculture Institute in 1910.

He taught the farmers of Allahabad and nearby areas the scientific way of doing agriculture. He introduced for the first time a subject called agricultural engineering. In due course, the institute became a university. Today it is named after Sam Higginbottom.

He became a good friend of Mahatma Gandhi, who visited the campus at Allahabad several times. They learnt from each other. I would call them two fathers, one the father of the nation and the other the father of modern Indian agriculture.

Dr Lal is today the Vice-Chancellor of the university. Students belonging to all castes and communities study there. Instead of being thankful to the university and the Christian missionaries who had the forethought of setting it up, one year before the British set up the Pusa Institute at Pusa in Bihar in 1911, the VC and his family were being hounded by Yogi Adityanath's administration.

I know the UP chief minister is fond of cows. When

I visited his "ashram" at Gorakhpur a few weeks after he became chief minister, I noticed a hoarding that advertised Yogi introducing an ambulance service for cattle. I wish he knew that the first institute to provide a course in veterinary science was the same Allahabad institute.

I felt bad that some university authorities have been forced to go underground for fear of arrest. It was with helplessness writ large on the faces of the assembled that they heard about their travails.

Was it any wonder that thousands of people from Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan assembled at Jantar Mantar? Many of them carried placards that said, "Stop harassing priests and pastors", "Stop filing false cases", "Stop making false accusations of conversion", "Stop using police against Christians" and "Stop attacking churches".

Christians are not a monolithic community. This was evident at the gathering at Jantar Mantar too. For every Catholic priest, there was a Marthomite priest or a pastor. For every Jacobite, there was an Orthodox. Why I mention these two denominations is because they have been fighting each other for church buildings. They all stood together at Jantar Mantar. There were Pentecostals, Protestants, Syrians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Brethren's, pastors, bishops, deacons and nuns. In fact, they represented the whole heterodox Christian community in the country.

There were not many from Meghalaya, famous

for choir singing. In fact, when the name of a Meghalaya Choir was invited to come on stage, all one could see was a lone singer with an attractive headgear. As he held the microphone and sang a melodious carol, everyone was stunned by his brilliant performance. It was difficult to believe that it was a one-man show.

Rajasthani women are renowned for their choice of multi-coloured, dark-hued dress. They presented a folk song that held the audience spell-bound. Many could not help swaying their bodies and tapping their feet as they listened to the rendering.

Punjab has been in the news with campaigns portraying Christians as trying to proselytise the whole Sikh and Hindu population. Nothing can be farther from the truth as a team of Christians from the border state presented a dance that has elements of worship and bhangra, the folk dance of Punjab. For once those present knew what the word vigour meant. Could anyone say that they were converted forcibly?

The fact of the matter is that conversion is a bogey used by the Sangh Parivar to demonise the Christian community. There has not been a single case of forcible conversion to Christianity. Once the idea that Christians have been converting is spread, it gives licence to anti-social elements and sectarian and communal forces to attack Christians.

No, this does not happen only in BJP-ruled states. Chhattisgarh, which is going to the polls later this year and where the Congress is in power, is one of the worst states in terms of attack on Christians.

The attack happens at different levels. Suddenly a group of people barge into a hall or church where people are praying or singing. They begin attacking the people, destroying the church property till the scared faithful leave the church.

When the Christians approach the police with their complaint, they are not heard. Instead, some of



When the Christians approach the police with their complaint, they are not heard. Instead, some of them are picked up on trumped up charges. Christians in North India are, by and large, poor. Once they are arrested, they are not in a position to fight for their legal rights

them are picked up on trumped up charges. Christians in North India are, by and large, poor. Once they are arrested, they are not in a position to fight for their legal rights.

Even if an organisation like the ADF comes forward to fight their legal cases, it will take weeks for the arrested persons to secure bail. One can imagine what happens to the family if the bread-winner goes to jail. This is sheer harassment.

The United Christian Forum has listed nearly 600 incidents of attacks, big and small, against the Christian community in 2022. The Forum found that the number of attacks has been increasing, not decreasing.

One interesting tidbit is that in not even one case has the Christians retaliated against their attackers. I remember asking the late Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar archdiocese why despite so much violence against the Christians in Kandhamal, there was not a single incident of counter attack. He said he was very happy that even in places where they were in good numbers, they did not attack the aggressors. "My greatest strength is the moral high ground that we Christians occupy", he told me.

Once again, this was clear at Jantar Mantar where the policemen deputed to control the crowd had no work at all as the Christian protestors conveyed their anguish, not anger, their disappointment, not hopelessness, through their dignified protest that resembled a prayer meeting. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

India Cries for Justice

Injustice today abounds in India! Until such time, that the cause of justice is served and made real to every segment of society, the cries for justice will continue to grow shriller!

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

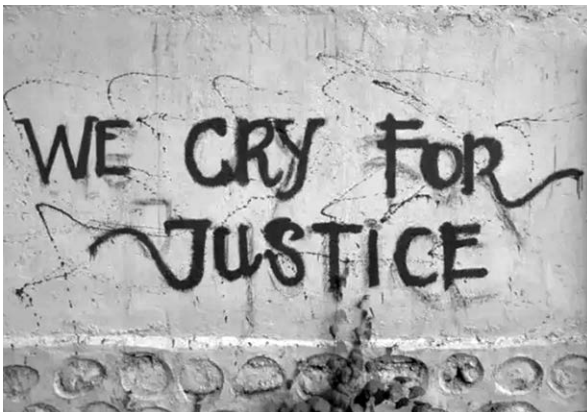
In India, the cries for justice, are becoming louder and longer! They come from different segments of society and particularly from those who continue to be exploited and excluded! These cries are heart-rending: anyone with an iota of conscience will hear them! The sad and tragic reality is that these cries will remain unheard; those who need to hear these cries and to respond to them, have deadened their ears and hardened their hearts!



and Nasir were apparently abducted from the forests of Piruka and taken them to Barwas village in Bhiwani, where they were burned alive. Family members also said that they were killed by members of the Hindutva outfit Bajrang Dal, and that the Bajrang Dal leader Monu Manesar was behind the gruesome killing. Though Manesar and some

others have been arrested, there are others on the street demanding they be released immediately and providing legitimacy to their heinous crime.

Darshan Solanki cries for justice! This eighteen-year Dalit student, was studying at the IIT in Mumbai. Originally from Ahmedabad, his father, Rameshbhai, works as a plumber and his mother, Tarlikaben, as a domestic worker. On 12 February, Darshan apparently committed suicide! He did not leave



Junaid and Nasir cry for justice! These two Muslim men were allegedly kidnapped, lynched, and set ablaze by a Hindutva mob in Haryana's Bhiwani district on 16 February. They were residents of Gopalgarh village in Rajasthan's Bharatpur. The incident happened 100 kilometers away from their village, and the Hindutva group had accused the deceased Muslim men of cow smuggling. Junaid



any note! However, most of his fellow students and others who knew him, have gone on record saying that he faced severe discrimination and harassment because of his caste background. Many regard it as an 'institutional murder'. It was just three months since he had entered the portals of India's premier educational institution. The death of Darshan a Dalit is not a one-off case. There are many more!

Ashaben (name changed) cries for justice! She is still a minor, a 17-year-old Adivasi from Jharkhand. She was hired as a domestic worker by a well-off couple who abused and ill-treated her for the five-months she lived with them. On being rescued she says, "They hit me with sticks, rope... they hit me with



a hot iron tong and used a blade to brand marks on my arm and lips. She would burn paper and light a matchstick and poke me with them... On one occasion, they tried to strangle me and threatened to kill me, I was given only one meal to eat at night, a small bowl of rice, and often ate leftover food from the dustbin since I was hungry for long periods... Often, I slept on the floor in the drawing room... without any clothes. She tore the clothes that I had brought along. He disrobed me and hit me with a stick on my private parts." There are millions of Ashabens in the country today! Their employers get away with this abuse because of their wealth, their status, proximity to the powerful and of course, lack of accountability to anyone!



The victim -survivors of the Gujarat Carnage of 2002 cry for justice! In a few days from now (27/28 February) it will be yet another anniversary of those infamous days in Gujarat! It was undoubtedly, the blackest chapter in post-independent India. Thanks to the painstaking efforts and the relentless pursuit of justice by several individuals and groups, in accompanying the victim-survivors: justice has been delivered in some instances. The truth however is that those responsible, the masterminds, the kingpins have still not been brought to book – despite authentic and incontrovertible evidence to prove their direct involvement and even complicity in those heinous crimes which engulfed Gujarat for week after week those terrible times! They still roam the streets with impunity and have manipulatively covered themselves with the cloak of immunity! Can the world ever forget the suffering and trauma of Bilkis Bano, Zakhia Jafri, Rupa Mody and hundreds of others who have lost their loved ones? Like the holocaust, during the Nazi regime, the Gujarat Carnage of 2002 will forever be etched in the memory of humankind, it will always remain on the radar -until perhaps the cries for justice are heard!



Bilkis Bano cries for justice! Yes, for herself, for her loved ones and for all women who are victims of a heartless, brutal, patriarchal society! Today she is unable to accept the ignominy that the eleven perpetrators of that unacceptable violence have granted remission from their prison sentences and are scot-free. In pain she says, "All the 4 men of my family were killed brutally. The women were stripped naked and raped by many men. They caught me top. My 3-year-old daughter, Saleha, was in my arms. They snatched her and threw her into the air with all their might. My heart broke as her little head shattered on the rocks. Four men caught me by the arms and legs and many others entered me one by one. When satisfying their lust, they kicked me and beat my head with a rod. Assuming that I was dead they threw me into the bushes. Four or five hours later I regained my consciousness. I searched for some rags to cover my body, but couldn't find any. I spent a day and a half on a hilltop without food or water. I longed for death.

Can the world ever forget the suffering and trauma of Bilkis Bano, Zakhia Jafri, Rupa Mody and hundreds of others who have lost their loved ones? Like the holocaust, during the Nazi regime, the Gujarat Carnage of 2002 will forever be etched in the memory of humankind, it will always remain on the radar -until perhaps the cries for justice are heard!

Finally, I managed to find a tribal colony. Declaring myself as a Hindu I sought shelter there. The men who attacked us used foul language; I can't repeat it ever. In front of me they killed my mother, sister and 12 other relatives. While raping and killing us, they were shouting sexual abuses. I could not even tell them that I was five months pregnant because their feet were on my mouth and neck. I have known the men who raped me for many years. We sold them milk. They were our customers. If they had any shame, they would not have done this to me. How can I forgive them?"



Migrant workers cry for justice! There are an estimated 400 million people who work in India's informal sector, on low daily wages and with no contract, pension, paid holidays or health benefits and above all, poor working conditions. The vast majority of them are migrant workers; they are scattered all over the country, who speak different languages. Migrant workers normally cannot defend themselves. When they go to another state, they don't even speak the local language. No one inspects the premises to check working conditions are safe. They don't even feature in the records of the local state government. They are invisible. The powerful images of migrant workers suffering when lockdown was announced in 2020 will remain etched in one's memory forever. Besides, in the height of the COVID pandemic the Government passed the four labour codes, which most people feel are violative of the rights of workers and favour the employers particularly, the corporate sector!

Christians cry for justice! It has never been as bad as this for this minuscule minority! Christians are attacked and persecuted with frightening regularity; Churches and sacred objects are vandalised and desecrated; false cases are foisted on Christian pastors and those assembled for prayer. On 19 February, more than 15,000 Christians assembled at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi for a prayerful and peaceful protest! Speaker after speaker lambasted



the current regime for their open instigation to their ilk to harass, intimidate and attack the Christians. Complete legitimacy is given to fascist outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and the Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Parishad (ABVP)- the student wing of the Sangh Parivar, to storm Christian institutions demanding that Hindu gods and goddesses be enshrined and even venerated in Christian institutions! On 20 February, such an incident took place at St Mary's School, Amreli Gujarat! The goons hounded and harassed the Principal, staff and students for most of the day. Neither the Government Educational authorities nor the local police, think it fit to halt the goons in their steps. In several other instances, Sangh Parivar outfits have been threatening and browbeating Christians, with absolutely false allegations like 'forced conversions'!

Minorities cry for justice! Christians yes, but on a much larger scale, the Muslims are demonised, denigrated and discriminated against. The classic examples in recent years are the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), The National Register of Citizenship (NRC), the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A with regard to Kashmir's special Constitutional status, the so-called 'anti-conversion' laws in several states - are all designed and directed towards the system-



atic targeting of the minorities in the country. There is much more: what minorities and other vulnerable groups eat, wear, see and read has become the bane of several from the majority community. Livelihoods of minorities are destroyed; Government employment is not given to someone from a minority community – even if the person meets the required competence and has the necessary qualifications. Venomous hate speeches against the minorities have become the order of the day. Those who spew them, do so with gay abandon – because they know that no one will touch them!

Voters cry for justice! In the run-up to the Karnataka Assembly elections, thousands of eligible voters, mainly Christians and Muslims, find their names mysteriously missing from the electoral rolls. Their names have been deleted. This is a travesty of justice. Elections are also due in three North-eastern states too. One has witnessed in almost every recent election – how the real issues of the people: their livelihood, employment opportunities, food security, environmental justice, habitat are bypassed and they are cleverly polarised on religious, ethnic and caste issues. Voters are coerced /threatened to vote for a particular party/candidate. The recent elections in Gujarat were a sham on Democracy; mafia of the ruling regime took away the voting ids (EPIC) from several voters prior to the elections and the votes were exercised on their behalf. Some were given money to do so or to vote for a particular candidate/party. Beef and liquor and other 'gifts' were freely distributed. Selected EVMs were manipulated before and also after the elections!



Human Rights defenders cry for justice! Thanks to those who have had the courage to stick their necks out for the poor, exploited and other vulnerable sections of society – that reality is still on the canvasses! Many human rights defenders are still paying the price for their courageous and selfless deeds. The likes of Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira

and others are still languishing in jail, in the Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case. The struggle to prove the innocence of Fr Stan Swamy, who was institutionally murdered on 5 July 2021, still continues. Teesta Setalvad, R.B. Sreekumar and Sanjiv Bhatt are hounded and harassed, with fabricated cases foisted on them. It is not easy for them and for their families, the wheels of justice indeed move extremely and painfully slowly. They however are resolute, determined to fight for the cause of justice – till the very end!

Freedom of the press, of speech and expression cher- ishers, cry for justice!

In a country which is dominated by 'godified' media – it is not easy to speak truth to power! On 2 February journalist Siddique Kappan was released on bail after spending 846 days (28 months) in jail on being released on from a Lucknow prison on Kappan told the media that he had no idea why he was implicated wrongly in a case and jailed. The fact however was that he was on his way to Hathras in UP where a young Dalit girl was gang-raped by the powerful belonging to the ruling regime. Any media house (be it print or electronic) if it takes on the Government – are denied Government advertisements(revenue) and have the ED, the CBI, Income-tax, NIA and other statutory bodies who have become pliable instruments in the hands of a vindictive regime) breathing on them , raiding them and creating untold suffering on them. The raids on the BBC offices in Mumbai and Delhi recently are a classic example of this. A free press is sine qua non in a democracy – and world leaders and Governments have taken on India on this score. Besides the banning of the BBC film on Modi- which is accurate, authentic, objective after faultless research is clearly an example of how the Government wants to throttle freedom of speech and expression. A churlish attitude of a fascist regime that is too frightened to face the truth!

Martin Luther King Jr. once famously said, that, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Injustice today abounds in India! Until such time, that the cause of justice is served and made real to every segment of society, the cries for justice will continue to grow shriller! ☺

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Alarming Erosion of Scientific Temper

It appears that scientific temper is disappearing from national discourse and people are easily falling prey to religious fanaticism and blind faith

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

Rights and duties of a citizen are the two sides of the same coin. In the absence of fulfilling one's duties, he/she cannot morally claim rights. The Constitution of India guarantees six fundamental rights under Articles 12 to 35 in part III of the Constitution. It also enjoins on its citizens 11 fundamental duties under article 51A. The eighth of the eleven fundamental duties is to "develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform". While the fundamental rights are justiciable, the fundamental duties are not. That does not reduce the importance of fundamental duties, especially the need for developing scientific temper.

Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, writes, "Scientific temper is a way of life -- an individual and social process of thinking and acting which uses a scientific method which may include questioning, observing reality, testing, hypothesizing, analyzing and communicating". In the absence of scientific temper, people can easily become victims of superstitions and blind faith. It appears that scientific temper is disappearing from our national discourse and people are easily becoming prey to religious fanaticism and blind faith. Use of religion for political mobilization and religions becom-

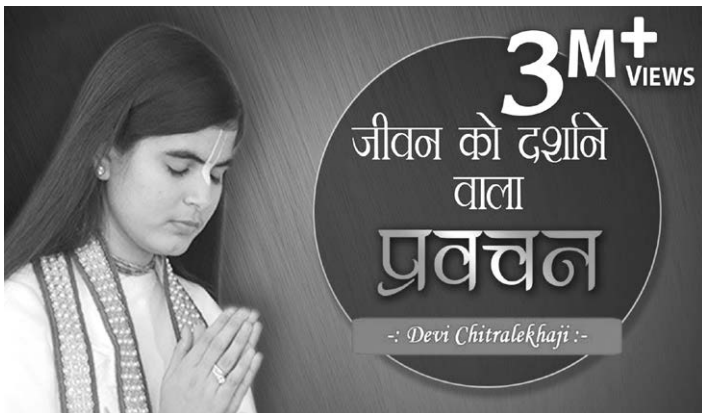


ing more and more fundamentalistic in their application, seem to be the main reasons for the erosion of scientific temper and humanism.

Why do people turn to godmen and godwomen and become prey to their manipulations? Often, there is a mismatch

between the needs and wants of human beings on one hand and the means to satisfy them on the other hand. People also face suffering and tribulations due to poverty, illness, conflicts, natural calamities etc. People in general have a tendency to search for quick fix solutions in such situations. Godmen and women in all religions appear with instant solutions to the existential predicament of people.

TV channels and social media platforms are being used by clever and shrewd godmen and women to hoodwink people. They promise people that if they follow certain rituals or rites, all their ailments will be cured and their desires will be fulfilled. Since the self-styled godmen are getting a lot of coverage on electronic media and on social media, they are making efforts to collect people at their durbars on one pretext or the other. People flock to mega gatherings organized by these godmen and women in the form of pravachan, recital of katha, healing conven-



Use of religion for political mobilization and religions becoming more and more fundamentalistic in their application, seem to be the main reasons for the erosion of scientific temper and humanism

रुद्राक्ष वितरण सीहोर 2023

16 फरवरी से 22

फरवरी मिलेगा

जाने से पहले समझ लो

सबको नहीं मिलेगा लेकिन



tions etc. Politicians of all hues support these gatherings with the motive of garnering votes.

One such mega gathering was planned under the leadership of Pandit Pradeep Mishra of Kubereshwar Dham situated in Hema Chitawaliya village of Sehore district, Madhya Pradesh from February 16 to 22. The programme consisted of reciting Shiv Mahapurān Katha and Rudraksh Mahotsav where more than 40 lakhs of blessed and purified rudraksh were expected to be distributed during the seven-day programme. News was spread among people that if one drinks the water in which the specially blessed rudraksh is kept the whole night, he/she would be cured of all ailments and would become healthy. The news about the rudraksh mahotsav was disseminated widely via TV channels and social media platforms throughout India.

As per the media reports, about 20 lakh people came on the first day itself from Madhya Pradesh and the neighbouring states like Maharashtra, UP, Chhattisgarh, and the situation appeared uncontrollable due to a huge crowd. While people were trying to get Rudraksh, a stampede-like situation was created on many occasions. The situation was such that there was a 20-km long jam on the Sehore-Indore highway leading to Dham. Nearly 25,000 vehicles were reported to be stuck in the jam. Due to the traffic jam several buses plying between Indore-Bhopal were diverted to another route, which is much longer. The buses that usually take nearly 3.5 hours to cover the distance between Indore and Bhopal were taking more than 5 hours to reach the destination, causing great inconvenience to passengers.

Due to the overcrowding at Rudraksh ceremony, the administration stopped the programme of rudraksh distribution at Kubereshwar Dham. According to the Collector of Sehore, Pravin Singh, about 40 percent of people returned on the first day itself, as rudraksh distribution was stopped. As per media reports, two women and a child died

during the first three days of the programme. Many devotees alleged that the temple committee failed to make proper arrangements for the devotees, although they had invited lakhs of people from different parts of the country to the religious event. It was widely reported that the devotees had to face a lot of inconvenience because of lack of proper arrangements, including food and drinking water.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was expected to be present at the temple on the first day of the programme. Because of the traffic jam and overcrowding, the Chief Minister cancelled his visit.

Last year also the distribution of Rudraksh was stopped due to overcrowding and traffic jams. It seems that the temple management and the administration did not learn any lesson from the chaos and inconveniences to the public last year. Instead of expressing regret for the inconveniences caused to the devotees, Pandit Pradeep Mishra alleged that some people were trying to tarnish the image of Hinduism. He also said that a few criminals created a chaotic situation which led to mismanagement on the temple premises. Mishra told media persons that he would organise a religious function that would be bigger than the one that was organised this year.

None of the politicians or the government officials made any criticism for the massive failure in managing the crowd, 48 hours traffic jam, death of 3 persons and a lot of inconveniences to lakhs of people. Except for a few journalists, the media in general ignored such a massive failure on the part of the organizers of the mega programme and of the administration. It clearly shows that religion has really become an opium of people, as Karl Marx said.

Another self-styled godman who has been in the news for about a month is Acharya Dharendra Shastri, who has a huge following. He is associated with Bageshwar Dham in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur. He claims that he can read minds and resolve problems with his special powers. A Maharashtra-based organization fighting superstition challenged Shas-





tri recently to show his miraculous power during his satsang in Nagpur. However, the godman reportedly wrapped up his programme even days before the schedule and fled. In a video widely circulated, Dhirendra Shastri has claimed that a conspiracy against Hindu Sanatana Dharma is hatched and that money was being paid to journalists and people to show him in poor light. In the video, he questioned whether talking about religion could be termed a superstition.

As reported in The Print, Dhirendra Shastri on February 18 said that "India will become 'Hindu Rashtra'. On alleged religious conversions, Shastri said, "We are making Hindus return to the religion they acquired at birth. Some people are creating a nuisance. They have to be taught a lesson. As long as I am alive, I will make all Sanatani Hindus return to their original faith." (ANI).

As reported in The Quint on 15th February, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party are seemingly courting the new godman. Recently, the state president of the Congress and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath met with Shastri in the latter's home town Chhatarpur. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan too is scheduled to meet the godman in the coming days. The approach of Kamal Nath, who is a protagonist of soft Hindutva, appears to be just the opposite to the message loudly sent out by Rahul Gandhi during his Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Not only godmen and godwomen, but also government departments are promoting practices that are diametrically opposed to scientific temper. The latest example is the recent call given by the Animal Welfare Board India (AWBI), but subsequently hurriedly withdrawn. AWBI in a circular gave a call that February 14 should be celebrated as 'Cow Hug Day' instead of being observed as the popular

Valentine's Day. The statutory board circular stated, "Hugging cows will bring emotional richness and increase individual and collective happiness". Union Rural Development minister Giriraj Singh endorsed the idea (February 9, 2023) by saying that everybody should love cows.

It appears that religions in India are playing a key role in moving people away from scientific temper to superstitious beliefs because of their overemphasis on ritualism and obscurantism and failure to focus on the moral, ethical and human values taught by religions. Mega religious programmes are organized by religious leaders, especially the so-called godmen and women who have learned the trick of performing miracles. People are lured towards these programmes that promise not only healing but also prosperity and riches. A large majority of people who throng to these mega programmes are not motivated to become spiritual but they come to gain physical healing and material benefits from God.

There is an implicit or explicit give and take between these godmen and politicians. The godmen get patronage from the political leaders for their business and even if something goes wrong as happened in Sehore, the godmen are protected by politicians. Politicians in turn get the support of the godmen in mobilizing votes for them. This game appears to be very dangerous for the political health and scientific progress of the nation. In this process secularism and scientific temper are being buried.

What is the panacea to the near-death of scientific temper and humanism? Promotion of spirituality based on the practice of the core ethical and human values taught by all religions seems to be the main solution. The core values are more or less the same in all religions. Jesus has summarized in the Sermon on the Mount what spirituality is. That is why Mahatma Gandhi said, "But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart." But the million-dollar question is whether the priestly class in all religions is ready to give up their vested interests, and guide and educate people to become spiritual. Spirituality and scientific temper along with humanism should go hand-in-hand. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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North East Christians urged to defeat communal forces in polls

North East Christian leaders and the apex body of the Baptist Church have asked the faithful in two Christian-majority states to defeat communal forces in state elections on Feb. 27.

“We sent a communication to all our people last Sunday [Feb. 12] during the prayer service and urged them to vote against communal forces working against Christians in our country,” Reverend Zelhou Keyho, general secretary of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), told UCA News on Feb. 21.

In a veiled call to reject pro-Hindu candidates, the NBCC, the apex body of the Baptist Church in Nagaland, asked people to “pray and choose able leaders who would do good for the state as well as who would listen to our people and respond effectively.”

Christians account for 87 percent of Nagaland’s 2.2 million people and they make up 75 percent of Meghalaya’s 3.28 million population. Both the north-eastern states have a 60-seater assembly and poll results will be declared on March 2.

Tribal people-dominated Nagaland, home to the largest community of Baptist Christians in the world, is currently ruled by the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, where the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi serves as its ally and in the hilly state of Meghalaya, the BJP is leaving no stone unturned to capture power for the first time.

Reverend Keyho asked Christians to exercise caution as the BJP, which has been heading the Union government since 2014 and enjoys 12 legislative assembly seats in Nagaland, can influence voters.

Reminding the faithful about the ongoing persecution of Christians and their institutions in the country, Reverend Keyho said in the message that “communal forces working against Christians” in India will have to be brought to justice.”

“We should all exercise our sacred duty keeping in mind the welfare of our community and the development of states,” Reverend Keyho said.



Ongoing attacks against Christians in the country are controlled by “the communal forces,” Allen Brooks, spokesman of the Assam Christian Forum, an ecumenical body, told UCA News.

“Voters should select candidates who are “worthy to lead” without “discrimination, injustice, inequalities and unrest,” he added.

India’s northeastern region comprises seven states. Tripura, one of them, went to the polls on Feb. 16. Christian leaders met in the capital of the largest state of Assam on Feb. 14.

In a statement on Feb. 19, they observed that “as individual voters, one must judiciously exercise our electoral privilege.”

“One should elect able leaders who are just and fair, who shun corrupt practices,” the statement, signed by E.H Kharkongor, said.

Crimes like the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines more than 20 years ago and anti-Christian riots in Kandhamal in 2008 in Odisha in eastern India and innumerable incidents of violence and hate crimes in different parts of the country, are undertaken with the tacit support of the “ruling dispensation,” Kharkongor noted.

The statement urged Christians not to compromise on the principles “taught to by our faith.” © (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

2019 Jamia Case: Dissent, Free Speech & Protests

Dissent is part of free speech says Delhi court in a scathing indictment of State's misuse of power

BY JOSEPH MALIAKAN

The February 4 order of Additional Sessions Judge Arul Verma of the Saket Court discharging JNU student Sharjeel Imam and student activists Safoora Zagar, Asif Iqbal Tanha and eight others in the December 2019 Jamia violence case should be etched in golden letters in the hearts of all freedom-loving people everywhere.

Verma's discharge order is very significant because it will have a major salutary effect on how the innumerable cases filed under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) and various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) without proper evidence or investigation are dealt.

The case pertains to the incidence of violence that erupted at Jamia Millia Islamia University in December 2019 after a clash between police and the people protesting against the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA).



The FIR alleged offences of rioting and unlawful assembly under several sections of the IPC. Ironically, cases were registered only against the protesting students and no effort was made to book policemen who entered the Jamia campus and brutally beat up even those in the university library.

Discharging the accused, Verma said "dissent is nothing but an extension of the invaluable fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression contained in Article 19 of the Constitution of India, subject to the restrictions contained. It is therefore a right which we are sworn to uphold."

ASJ Verma further said that, as laid down by the Supreme Court in *P. Vijayan vs the State of Kerala*, the court is duty bound to lean towards an interpretation which protects the rights of the accused, given the power disparity between them and the state machinery.



Sharjeel Imam



Asif Iqbal Tanha

In fact in his concluding remarks, which are most significant, Verma said to safeguard the citizens' fundamental right to freedom of speech and assembly, in all its actions the State was obliged to draw a clear line between dissent and insurrection, especially in the context of protests like the present one where the prosecution sought to blur them.

"Furthermore, such a police action is detrimental to the liberty of citizens who choose to exercise their fundamental right to peacefully assemble and protest. Liberty of protesting citizens should not have been lightly interfered with," ASJ Verma pointed out.

In its detailed order the court observed that the police was unable to apprehend the "actual perpetrators" and "surely managed to rope them (accused) as scapegoats in the matter." The prosecution was also severely indicted for filing "ill-conceived chargesheets." Additional Sessions Judge Arul Verma said that the police have "arbitrarily chosen" to array some people from the protesting crowd as accused and others as police witnesses. This "cherry picking" is absolutely detrimental to the precept of fairness, the court said.

The court further observed that mere presence at the protest site without overt acts cannot lead to implication as accused, and said that the prosecution has *ex facie* been launched in a "perfunctory and cavalier fashion" against them. To allow such persons undergo rigmarole of long drawn trial does not augur well for the criminal justice system of our country, Judge Verma added.

"The desideratum is for the investigative agencies to discern the difference between dissent and insurrection. The latter has to be quelled indisputably. However, the former has to be given space, a forum, for dissent is perhaps reflective of something which pricks the citizen's conscience," the order said.

In the Jamia violence case, the police had originally filed a chargesheet only against Mohammad Ilyas on April 21, 2020. This was then followed by a supplementary chargesheet against 11 other accused

persons. A third supplementary chargesheet was filed as recently as February 1, 2023. The prosecution tried to establish that the witnesses had identified the accused persons on the basis of some photographs.

In this context the court observed that the Delhi Police failed to adduce fresh evidence and rather sought to present old facts in the garb of "further investigation" by filing supplementary chargesheets.

"In the present case, it has been most unusual of the police to file not one chargesheet but three supplementary chargesheets, with really nothing new to offer. This filing of a slew of chargesheets must cease, else this juggernaut reflects something beyond mere prosecution, and would have the effect of trampling the rights of the accused persons," the order said.

It further said that there were no eyewitnesses who could substantiate the version of the police that the accused were in any way involved in the commission of the offences.

It said that no test identification parade was held until filing of the third supplementary chargesheet and that the photographs and videos only demonstrate that the accused were standing behind barricades.

"There is nothing on record to even *prima facie* suggest that the accused herein were part of some riotous mob... Surely prosecution cannot be launched on the basis of conjectures and surmises and chargesheets definitely cannot be filed on the basis of probabilities," the order said.

The court also pointed out in the present case the investigative agencies should have incorporated the use of technology, or have gathered credible intelligence, and then only it should have embarked on "galvanizing the judicial system" against the accused. Else it should have abstained from filing such ill-conceived chargesheets against persons whose role was confined only to being part of a protest. ©

The court is duty bound to lean towards an interpretation which protects the rights of the accused, given the power disparity between them and the state machinery

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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When Facts Speak

It is futile to get furious when a mirror is shown to those who have been on the wrong side of the law

BY P. A. CHACKO

Why this fright and fury? If India is as great as we broadcast from our rooftops, why be frightened by such a 'small fry' as BBC or the Hungarian-American businessman George Soros? Why are we paranoid about a news item that described an event that happened in India? Or, fuming against a man who said that he would like to see India as a democratic and liberal nation? Are such items meant to declare war on our India or defame our nation's name and glory?

Shakespeare the Bard's sonnet number 100 calls on the Muse to cast away its fury: 'Where art thou Muse....Spend'st thy fury on some worthless song, darkening thy power to lend base subject light?' Is the Muse of India so frightened and angry like a child fuming in fury and double-kicking against a granite wall?

Kick, kick, my India, and hurt yourself in your paranoid fury! Our reactions are impish and childish, to say the least. Let us not forget that the world is a global family. And, in this globalized world, anything that happens in any nook or corner comes under everyone's lens and scanner. As Supreme Court advocate Kapil Sibal reminded the apex court that our every movement is observed and recorded under Google Lens which functions like a global CCTV. When the Chief justice of India gets into his car, where he goes, how he gets into the Court premises



etc. are scanned and laid bare under the Google lens. The same applies to the President or the Prime Minister of India or even the pedestrian or the housewife.

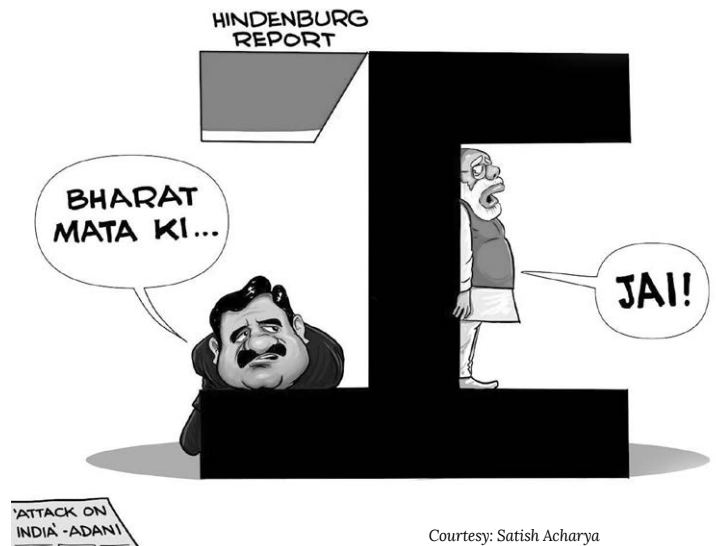
When the *Indian Express* or *The Hindu* reported the Godhra carnage and what evidences the witnesses gave under oath

about who said what, who did what or who put oil in the Godhra flame, there was no fury. But, when the British Broadcasting Corporation, a worldwide news agency, said the same thing, we unleash all our hornets to attack it because the news is 'tarnishing not just Mr. Modi's image but India's image itself'.

What an outlandish reaction? The recent reporting of the incident that happened in 2002 has been questioned for its timing. That is where some people's paranoia gets exposed. The 2024 general election is nearing. Our politicians are on an image boosting exercise. The ruling dispensation gets annoyed about image sullyng events coming in quick succession, reinforced with critical observations from news channels, courts and legal luminaries, pundits and pedestrians alike.

The government feels that things are getting too much. People are using their freedom of speech

The ruling dispensation gets annoyed about image sullyng events coming in quick succession, reinforced with critical observations from news channels, courts and legal luminaries, pundits and pedestrians alike



If Godhra carnage is talked about today, and when people say that there are evidences pointing towards the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's implicit or complicit hand in it, it is considered an 'anti-national act'

too liberally. Some anchors and news channels are getting bolder and need to be harnessed. Even the world media is gate-crashing into our premises. People making statements that they would like to see in India more of democracy and less of authoritarianism are speaking against the interests of India. Such people, if they are Indians, are anti-national and, if they are non-nationals, are promoting war against India.

Where will this paranoia end? When Indira Gandhi was pronounced guilty by the court and the news was flashed around, there was no fear of anti-national propaganda? Even after her having been killed, her critics even today cast aspersions against her dictatorial rule and declaration of emergency. Who considers them as anti-national or acts defaming the nation?

If Godhra carnage is talked about today, and when people say that there are evidences pointing towards the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's implicit or complicit hand in it, it is considered an 'anti-national act'. The pertinent question is, how does reporting the incident or implicating Modi in an incident that happened in 2002, dent our national image?

Modi was CM of Gujarat in 2002. He was also a citizen of India. It was he who was the epicentre of news and views. How can we logically conclude that pointing finger at Modi sullies the image of the Prime Minister of India? Or for that matter, sullies the national image? What he did or what he refrained from doing then is the target point for news and views again and again. Such exercise may go on, and the accusing finger, irrespective of any court's clean chit, may continue to dog him. Why fret over it?

When it comes to the 92-year-old philanthro-

pist George Soros' remark about wanting to see India with a regime with liberal views and principled democracy, the government's ostrich-like reaction is rather funny.

Political observers point out that even if it was to be responded to seriously, it could have been done so through proper channels rather than letting a small-time minister mouthing appellations and uncalled for statements. Her naming him 'an economic war criminal' was a gut reaction bordering on pettiness.

Observers point out that, perhaps for the BJP functionaries and the Parivar organisations Soros' philanthropic grapes are sour. They observe that the BJP government's representatives appearing for channel discussions cast aspersions on Soros' fund-



ing some organisations of his liking. Meaning to say, RSS global fundraisers could not find favour with Soros. In other words, had they been receiving funds from Soros the billionaire, they would not have any hunch about Soros. Does political opportunism rule the roost as far as we are concerned?

Given the disarray of our opposition parties, it is too early to say what the 2024 election is going to be like. The writing on the wall for BJP may not be that clear. But, one thing is evident. The writing is getting clearer as days go by. Because, the furrows of angst on the faces of the Government and its backroom boys are a clear indication! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Be a Humanist

Love mankind, care for nature and promote peace with limitations of one's freedom. Be a rebel in one's heart against the oppressive establishments

BY **N KUNJU**

I am a humanist. So What? All human beings are sisters and brothers. All are expected to love one another. So, what is the big thing of being a humanist?

It is not as simple as that.

The United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights Article I states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood."

The Preamble of the Constitution of India desires to secure to all its citizens: "Justice - social, economic and political; Liberty - of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality - of status and opportunities. And to promote among them all, Fraternity assuring the dignity of all individuals and the unity of the nation."

All these are well said with the best of intentions. But do they actually work?

The UN Declaration of Human Rights is not mandatory to individual nations that work according to the diktat of the respective governments. The laudable assurance the Indian Constitution gives to

its citizen is watered down by laws and practices of the prevailing government.

It is the mode of the government that decides the human rights of its people. The more democratic the state, the more freedom the people enjoy. The more dictatorial the government, the more restrictions on the people. Human Rights also depend to some extent to the wishes of the heads of government. The rights enjoyed under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru may not be the same as that under his daughter, Indira Gandhi, especially during emergency.

Democracy is the best form of government -- rule of the people, by the people, for the people. The less democracy, the more violation of human rights. For example, in the North Korean dictatorship, every person is a soldier; man is born to be a soldier, trained to be blindly obedient to the government. Dress alike, pay obeisance to the leader, march in step with the rest of the population singing paeans to the dictator.

Man is biologically an animal born free to fend for himself/herself after weaning off from parents. But then this can happen in the primitive times



or aborigines for whom time stood still. They have no enemies and don't fight each other and kill one another. The civilized call them savages.

But who are the savages? The aborigines who live in peace or the civilised who kill tens of thousands in wars?

War is the worst violation of human rights. And a soldier is one who has no human rights, he has surrendered his right to his state that is at war. He is to shoot and kill another man, a complete stranger who has never wronged him because he belongs to the enemy country.

Hostility between countries is more a requirement of governments, of the rulers of respective countries. At the international level, World War II broke out when Hitler thought that Germans were a superior race destined to rule over the world and started invading and annexing neighbours. He had his friends in dictators like Mussolini in Italy and monarchists of Japan, who together formed the Axis powers.

Other countries like the UK, the USA, France etc. found the need to resist the dictatorial Axis and allied themselves to fight the axis menace. World War II ensued and thousands of people on both sides, human beings who had no enmity between them, died. Many more thousands of old people, women and children were killed in bombings. The USA that facilitated research on splitting atom, discovered the atom bomb. The US government tested it in the desert and proved its devastating effect.

In fact, the splitting of atom that led to the discovery of atom bomb was attained by the research of Jewish scientists who fled from Germany when Hitler unleashed the racial genocide on Jews. If they were allowed to remain in Germany and work, the atom bomb would have been discovered by Germany, and this would have resulted in the invincibility of Germany. Perhaps the first victim of it could have been England and London could have been obliterated from world map by a single bomb, instead of Japan's Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But then, America tested the bomb on Japan instead of on Germany. This was racial preference that Germany was of whites but Japan yellow Mongloid, so dispensable. It was a sadistic act. The Axis powers were almost defeated and were ready to surrender. There was no need of using the atom bomb but it was used as an experiment to prove its destructive power. And the American action was inexcusable.



Ruling politicians of all countries say they stand for peace. But all are preparing for war. While their standing armed forces are replenished, the defence industries are researching on newer/more effective weapons and manufacturing them to be more effective in killing people.

India is the paragon of peace and Prime Minister Modi says the time for war is over. But his Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, goes ecstatically proud to declare that India has been able to export million-dollar worth of armaments to other countries.

Pope Francis said in one of his exhortations that industrialist countries should stop manufacturing arms and exporting them to developing countries to avoid war. Will the manufacturers of arms in the US who export weaponry to other countries listen to the Pope? They may contribute millions of dollars to the Catholic Church in their country rather than stop manufacturing arms.

Any action that promotes war is violation of human rights. Manufacturing of nuclear weapons, their maintenance and threat to use them are the utmost violation of human rights. All countries formally support disarmament especially elimination of nuclear weaponry. But they find excuses that their potential enemies have them and they too have to have them for deterrence.

Coming back to the individual being a humanist, one's ideal has to compromise with the prevailing political and societal compulsions. One has to be patriotic and cannot injure the faiths of people even when you don't agree to all of them.

Then how to be a humanist? Love mankind, care for nature and promote peace with limitations of one's freedom. Be a fighter against wrongs and injustice. Be a rebel in one's heart against the oppressive establishments. ©

Need For Tough Measures **House of Horrors**

To ensure that flagrant violations of law as well as human rights do not happen in shelter homes, there is an imperative need to keep Anbu Jothi-type Ashrams under check through regular and continuous social audits

BY **AARTI**

In the second week of February this year, Tamil Nadu woke up to newspaper reports of blood chilling episodes of not only torture and physical attacks but even sexual exploitation of residents at a privately run shelter home – Anbu Jothi Ashram (AJA) located in Villupuram, Tamil Nadu.

What we know so far is Halideen, a resident of Tiruppur, admitted 70-year-old Zafirullah (uncle of his close friend Salim Khan presently in the US) at AJA on 4 December 2021. Zafirullah did not have any close relatives to look after him. Later, when Halideen tried to meet Zafirullah, he was informed by the owners of AJA that the latter and some others had been transferred to another home in Bengaluru on 6 December 2021. Halideen, then proceeded to

Bengaluru but to his shock, he could not find Zafirullah there. When a Tamil Nadu police team visited the Bengaluru shelter, they were informed that the elderly man and a few others escaped from the facility by smashing open a bathroom window. Halideen accordingly, filed a habeas corpus petition at the Madras High Court on 19 December 2022, which came up for hearing on 2 January this year.

Under the directions of the court, when the police visited AJA, to investigate the missing Zafirullah, the owners – Jubin Baby (45) and his wife Maria (43) – released two wild monkeys on the officials. However, the monkeys turned against them and attacked the duo, following which they were admitted to the local Government Medical College



hospital. Around 142 persons, including 109 men, 33 women and a boy have since been rescued. With the possibility of human trafficking not ruled out at AJA, the case is being handled by the Crime Branch-Criminal Investigation Department. The State Human Rights Commission, taking suo motu cognisance of media reports over the incident, has sought for a report from authorities. In the meanwhile, the Court has directed the police to file an Action Taken Report by February 27.

It was reportedly found that AJA which functioned without permission accommodated destitute women, abandoned senior citizens, beggars, alcohol addicts and persons with mental retardation or illness. During his early days in 2004-05, Jubin is said to have gone door-to-door seeking donations, old clothes and food. He used to target people roaming in and around bus/railway stations. After bringing them to AJA they would be tonsured and shackled. Long back the Supreme Court had directed that inmates cannot be kept chained. According to residents who were rescued, many had undergone untold torture. After admission, they would be thrashed and some were given drugs. A 42-year-old woman had testified to local media that employees of the home including Jubin and Maria used to beat her and other inmates with long sticks after chaining them to the window grills if they failed to obey their commands or found making phone calls to their relatives. Another resident who in came as a teenager from north India through a rescue group

Although entirely by accident – thanks to a writ of habeas corpus filed in order to locate a missing person – now that the dark secrets and happenings inside a shelter home in Tamil Nadu has come to light, the incident should serve as a wakeup call to put in place requisite systems to prevent any such recurrence



Jubin Baby and his wife Maria

that took her to AJA said she was repeatedly raped, beaten up and threatened. Whenever she tried to resist, the employees set on her the two ferocious monkeys which were kept in a cage. The employees also used to kick the residents on the back with their knees folded.

So far nine, persons including Jubin Baby and his wife Maria, have been arrested.

The CB-CID has since sealed the AJA and also blocked its website which was being used to seek donations. It is rather baffling as to how the nefarious activities of AJA went unnoticed for nearly two decades and how the shelter was able to sustain itself financially. Whether Jubin was just a small fish or was he part of a bigger group, particularly, human trafficking network? Well, the ongoing investigation is expected to unravel what was actually happening inside AJA.

Remember the Muzaffarpur shelter home case that hit headlines in 2018? Well, in 2017, the Bihar Government had engaged Mumbai-based Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), to perform a social audit of around 110 short-stay and shelter homes for homeless girls, women, boys and juveniles in conflict with law indirectly run by it. These shelter homes were funded by the State, but managed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The TISS social audit found that almost all the 110 government-funded institutions were run in violation of the mandate of the respective schemes and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 which was enacted to provide care, protection, treatment, development and rehabilitation of neglected or delinquent juveniles. While bathrooms at some shelter homes did not have latches inside leaving the girls vulnerable, in one

short-stay home for girls, a security guard, said to be sexually abusive, had been vested with management powers. A boys' home was found to be a place of serious physical violence and sexual abuse was reported by those living there.

Although sexual exploitation and physical abuse was reported at six short-stay homes and 14 shelters in varying in forms and degrees of intensity, shockingly enough the Muzaffarpur short-stay (shelter) home run by the NGO Seva Sankalp Evam Vikas Samiti was the worst performer. Here, the audit team reportedly found "grave instances of violence". The girls had no access to open space, were locked up in their wards and allowed to go outside just to take their meals - that too up to the dining hall only. No vocational training and recreation means were provided to the inmates. The said NGO had received about Rs 4.5 crore over a ten-year period from the State Government for its activities.

Notably, following submission of the TISS Report on 26 May 2018, which blew the lid over an organised sex scandal in the State, the government immediately formed a special investigation team, sealed the Muzaffarpur shelter home and rescued 46 minor girls from there. Taking cognisance of the matter, the Supreme Court handed over the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation and in February 2019, the Apex Court ordered the transfer of the trial of the Muzaffarpur shelter home to a Special Court in Delhi. In February 2020, the trial Court sentenced Brajesh Thakur, owner of the Muzaffarpur shelter home to imprisonment till his last breath including 11 others for several offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act as well as the Indian Penal Code.

During the hearing of the Muzaffarpur shelter home case, the Supreme Court had also ordered the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to undertake a social audit of all child-care institutions (CCIs) across the country. NCPCR's social audit of 7163 CCIs, which house 2.56 lakh

children across the country, found that 2764 CCIs accounting for nearly 40 percent of these homes did not have adequate measures to prevent any form of physical, emotional abuse of children. 2039 CCIs (28.5 percent) were not registered; 1504 of CCIs lacked exclusive toilet facilities and 434 lacked privacy in toilets and bathing areas. 23 percent CCIs did not have a cook to prepare food for children and about 48 percent of CCIs did not have counselors. 29 percent of the CCIs had untrained staff with regard to the rehabilitation process of children.

Also, the first social audit of education undertaken in India across ten states as a pilot project under the aegis of NCPCR, not long ago, revealed interesting information. Briefly put, it provided an opportunity to a Block Education Officer to highlight the challenges he faced in discharge of his duties

- like having to monitor some 400 schools under his jurisdiction in the absence of financial or in-kind support for undertaking visits to schools. Similarly, it gave a student the chance to expose his teacher, who routinely asked the boy to procure alcohol for him from a neighbouring store

and remained inebriated during school hours even as selling of liquor in the proximity of educational institutions as well to minors is banned. After the social audit, it was found that discipline improved in many schools which not only started opening on time but teachers, too, became more punctual.

To ensure that flagrant violations of law as well as human rights do not happen in shelter homes, there is an imperative need to keep Anbu Jothi-type Ashrams under check through regular and continuous social audits. Most importantly, the outcome of such audits needs to be analysed and corrective actions merit to be implemented in the right earnest. Also, regulatory authorities must make it mandatory for shelters run by the Government as well as NGOs to maintain an online registry of their inmates and also upload quarterly returns with respect to their sources of funds to bring about the much-needed transparency. ©

Regulatory authorities must make it mandatory for shelters run by the Government as well as NGOs to maintain an online registry of their inmates and also upload quarterly returns with respect to their sources of funds to bring about the much-needed transparency

Protestant bishop arrested under conversion law

A Protestant bishop in Madhya Pradesh has been remanded to judicial custody over allegations he violated the provisions of the state's stringent anti-conversion law.

Auxiliary Bishop Paul Muniya of the Protestant Shalom Church in the Jhabua district, inhabited predominantly by tribal communities, surrendered to the local police on Feb. 23 to comply with an order issued by the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

"The high court order said he would be granted bail once he surrendered to the police, but instead he was sent to jail," the bishop's son Kaleb Muniya told UCA News on Feb. 24. Police charged Bishop Muniya under the state's anti-conversion law following a complaint by local resident Kailash Bhuria on Jan. 11. Bhuria alleged that he was being intimidated to attend prayer services by the bishop and Tita Bhuria, a church elder. The duo in September last year took him to a nearby church and sprinkled water on him, gave him a Bible and a cross, he said.

The bishop accompanied by the church elder also visited his house in January and threatened to ostracize him from the village for not attending prayer services. The police arrested the church elder while the prelate approached the local court for anticipa-

tory bail and further moved the high court, which granted him relief on the condition that he surrenders himself to the police. "It is true. The high court said bail will be granted once he surrendered to the police. But the lower court cited a technical issue and sent him to judicial custody," Kaleb said.

The bishop's son said the complaint was "totally false" as his father never visited the village of the complainant nor did he meet him.

"It is part of a well-orchestrated campaign against us [Christians] to defame us," he said. Father Rockey Shah, the public relations officer of Jhabua Catholic diocese, said it is true that certain Hindu nationalist groups are targeting Christians and their institutions. "They are using various social media platforms to spread fake stories of religious conversions against us," the priest told UCA News.

Some 70 priests have been booked in the tribal-dominated district for violating the provisions of the state's anti-conversion law, but the administration has so far found no evidence against them.

Hindu mobs openly threaten to destroy the places of worship and other institutions run by Christians in Jhabua by alleging they were illegally built. ☪

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



'Not going to issue any injunction to media ever': SC on Adani-Hindenburg case

The Supreme Court has said that it will not pass any injunction orders against the media when it comes to the January 24 Hindenburg Research report that accuses the Adani Group of stock manipulation and fraud and the impact it has had on the market.

The response came in reply to a plea by advocate M.L. Sharma, who is one of the petitioners in the case and had sought directions to market regulator SEBI and the Union home ministry to conduct an inquiry into and file an FIR against Hindenburg, its researcher Nathan Anderson, and others.



"We are not going to issue any injunction to the media ever. We will pronounce orders shortly," CJI D.Y. Chandrachud said, according to Bar and Bench.

The bench also comprises Justices P.S. Narasimha and J.B.

Pardiwala.

Turning down the names proposed by the Union government, the Supreme Court had, on February 17, said it will form an expert committee to review regulatory mechanism in the light of Hindenburg's report. ☪ (Courtesy: Bar and Bench)

Bangalore archdiocese alleges minorities cut from voter list

Several thousand voters belonging to religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims have been allegedly removed from electoral rolls in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, say Catholic leaders.

The state, where the Bharatiya Janata Party runs the government, is headed for polls in May and Christian leaders suspect deleting minority voters could be a strategy to retain power.

A delegation from Bangalore archdiocese on Feb. 15 submitted a memorandum to the state's chief electoral officer (CEO) saying a total of 9,195 voters' names were removed from electoral rolls of the Shivajinagar constituency in the state capital, Bengaluru.

At least Some 8,000 names were of Christians and Muslims, the memorandum said.

"We fear that [voters lists for] many constituencies across Bengaluru city could have tampered with impunity. If such mischief is allowed to carry on unchecked, the confidence of the people in the electoral process will be destroyed beyond measure," J. A. Kanthraj, public relations officer of the Archdiocese of Bangalore, told UCA News.

He said it appeared to be clear manipulation to prevent Christians and Muslims from casting their votes in the upcoming elections.

Repeated attempts by UCA News to reach the CEO did not elicit any response but Kanthraj said the top election officer suggested they hold camps across constituencies in Bengaluru so that people can find out if their names were deleted from the electoral rolls.

The archdiocese has undertaken such a campaign across parishes, Kanthraj said.

Father Vivian Monis, the parish priest at the city's St Joseph Church, said they have "been actively campaigning to check if names of Catholics from our parish are missing from the voters' list."

Opposition Congress party legislator Rizwan Arshad who represents Shivajinagar said he was shocked to see that several thousand names of Christian and Muslim voters were missing from the revised electoral rolls of his constituency.

"This is a blatant attempt by the ruling BJP party to rob minorities of their fundamental right to vote,"



he said. Arshad filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court on Feb.9 alleging a political conspiracy to identify Christian and Muslim voters and deprive them of their voting rights.

Justice Michael F. Saldanha, a retired high court judge, told UCA News that the court must set up an inquiry committee "to probe this clandestine attempt to alienate minority voters and submit its report at the earliest possible date."

If any manipulations are found, then strict measures must be passed to set an example for the whole country, Justice Saldana said.

"Over the years, I have witnessed this trend of missing names of religious minorities from the electoral rolls. This is a conspiracy to disenfranchise the minorities so that the BJP can win elections easily," he said.

John Dayal, the spokesman of the All India Catholic Union, said the illegal and unethical methods adopted by the government machinery in Karnataka, where the incumbent BJP government and the opposition Congress party are engaged in a tough fight, can be replicated in other Indian states.

"Deleting the names from the voters' list is one of the many malpractices indulged by the BJP's federal government. In the past six-seven years, I have seen how pliable bureaucrats are in the national and state election commissions and the election process gets manipulated and communalized," the rights activist-journalist alleged. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

The Road Map Ahead

BY P.A. JOSEPH

As I discover the road map for the year ahead, this should challenge and guide my path in the future. The past must fuel the present. As I look at my life there are areas and points that are fine and inspiring. These are well registered in my memory. We should collect these strayed fragments and take guidance from all these. In that way my past, present and future are well knit to make my life a continuous and contiguous whole. According to Soren Kierkegaard, the great modern philosopher, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards". For Steve Jobs, the Apple CEO, "you cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. Hence you have to trust in something -- your gut, destiny, life, karma, and whatever". This enables me to have a sense of continuity to go ahead.

It is said that if you want an urgent work to be done, ask a person who is busy; he/she will do it better than a person who is not busy at all. This is the dynamism of enthusiasm

We need to be passionate about each moment of our life. If I aim at success, my life has to be strenuous, fatiguing, and tensed but meaningful and joyful, though often visited by moments of dizziness, panic, loneliness, and insecurity. I must try the hardest way to achieve the objective, my mission. At times I feel I have not found my mission in life, and in that case it is definite that my task is first to discover my mission. Benjamin Franklin, the US statesman, diplomat, inventor and scientist, said: "There are three extremely hard things in this world: steel, diamond, and knowing oneself".

I must develop a sense of covenant, never giving up a task I have undertaken. Continuous effort to keep on is a powerful grace. If I don't do anything, death will come soon; or rather I have already died, or have become a zombie. The greatest secret and



lesson for longevity is keep busy and embrace covenant spirit. This will have to be accompanied by sincerity, simplicity, purity, patience and perseverance. I must ask myself: Am I living or dead! Probably others will judge me well.

My mode of life and functioning must be in fever-pitch, really tough and strong, and able to endure for long. A powerful energy comes from sharing space with other people who are operating in fever pitch. Similarly, "when something has a name, it starts to exist in our reality, while, if it lacks a name, it fades away in the universe of the abstract and immaterial ...in the same way the written word has more power than a thousand vague ideas in our head" (Hector Garcia).

Another aspect or dimension of my life is that I must be enthusiastic in my life and activities. It is really inspiring to see enthusiastic operators in different kinds of life. Whatever area they enter they manifest the dynamism of enthusiasm. It is said that if you want an urgent work to be done, ask a person who is busy; he/she will do it better than a person who is not busy at all. This is the dynamism of enthusiasm.

Besides, in my undertakings I must insist upon quality than quantity. In quantity one goes to the huge mass but in quality one goes to details, relevance and precision.

After making so many rules for my life-movements, I will do well to question myself regarding my performance in the past, the lessons I learnt in my life, and the reasons thereof, where I failed to be connected in life-dots, and how do I reconnect the dots now, and how to resolve in changing situations etc. In any case I need to be relaxed, positive, and decisive. ©



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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Afraid of My Lunchbox..!

The wife ran to my car as I started the engine this morning, "You forgot your lunchbox!" she cried. "No!" I said in terror, "I don't want it!"

"You don't want lunch today? You know what the doctor said; skipping meals isn't going to help you get any healthier!"

"Yes," I said, looking fearfully at other flats in my building, where neighbours were peeping out at the commotion downstairs, "But, I'd prefer being alive than healthily dead!"

"You don't like my cooking?" she asked, arms



"Oh husband!" laughed my wife, "It's only a tomato sandwich, don't be scared!"

"But they don't know!" I said, looking fearfully up at the flats where I suspected men and women stood huddled, staring fixedly at my lunchbox, "They might think it's a non-veg meal!"

The wife slowly looked at the now invisible neighbours, behind their window curtains, "Maybe I need to give them cooking lessons!" she suggested.

"No!" I shouted, "Maybe you just need to take that lunchbox off my car, and back into the house."

"Maybe I need to train you in karate or judo!" she



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akimbo, a sign of trouble. "I love it!" I said hastily, "And I love it so much, I want to be around to eat another meal, and another and another!"

The wife looked at me, as if I needed to visit a shrink, "You know something, I'm just going to leave the lunchbox on your car bonnet. Take it or leave it!"

"Don't!" I shouted, jumping out of the car, and running to her, "Don't let our neighbours see that box!"

"Neighbours!" she spat out and looked up to see a dozen of them staring down at her, "What have neighbours got to do with your lunch!"

"They may be in touch with mobs!" I whispered urgently, "As soon as I leave, they will call some mob leader and get me lynched outside!"

"But why would you want to do this to my husband?" shouted the wife looking at all the neighbours, peeping from their windows.

"Because, they think there's non-veg in the lunchbox!"

said, again standing with arms akimbo, looking at a fearful me, staring at my lunchbox.

"No," I said, "Maybe we need to tell our leaders to leave the nation alone, a country, once never afraid of their lunchboxes!"

"Where are our leaders?" asked the wife, looking like holy thunder.

"Having meetings across the globe with non-veg eating leaders, asking them to bring business to the country!" I said lamely.

The wife took my tomato sandwich and walked back home, "maybe you need to stop being afraid of what people think, and eat what you like!" she said wisely..! ©

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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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Archbishop Francis Kalist | Bishop Lourdes Daniel | Mother Nirmalini AC

MARCH 14-16 | DAILY 5.30 PM TO 6.30 PM

REFLECTIONS BY DR. MARIA ARUL RAJA SJ

MARCH 14 MON:	ABIDE IN ME	From Arrogance to Participation (On Maundy Thursday)
MARCH 15 TUE:	IT IS ACCOMPLISHED	From Humiliation to Sacrifice (On Good Friday)
MARCH 16 WED:	FEAT NOT	From Death to Re-creation (On Easter Sunday)

FREELY REGISTER AND GET THE LINK.

To register yourself, **CLICK THIS LINK:** <https://bit.ly/lent-march>

RESIDENTIAL TRAINING FOR SOCIAL WORK DIRECTORS

(PROJECT WRITING & MANAGEMENT, INTERNATIONAL GRANTS, FCRA REGULATIONS)

12-14 APRIL, RETREAT HOUSE, VELANKANNI

For more details, click this link and Register: <https://bit.ly/phase2-skills-development>

ITALIAN LANGUAGE COURSE (INTERNATIONAL - ONLINE)

WITH PERSONAL ATTENTION ON READING, WRITING, SPEAKING...

1-31 MARCH, 2023 | ONLINE | 7PM-8PM (IST)

- Week 1** - Understanding the essentials of Italian language
- Week 2** - Italian Nouns, Pronouns and Adjectives
- Week 3** - Italian Verb and their Conjugation
- Week 4** - Italian Prepositions and Tenses
- Week 5** - Italian Prepositions and Tenses along with sentence formation

Click this Link for more details and to Register: <https://bit.ly/empr8-italian-march-2023>

For more details, contact the Director: Br.Nithiya OFM.Cap | +919445548000 | nithiyas@gmail.com