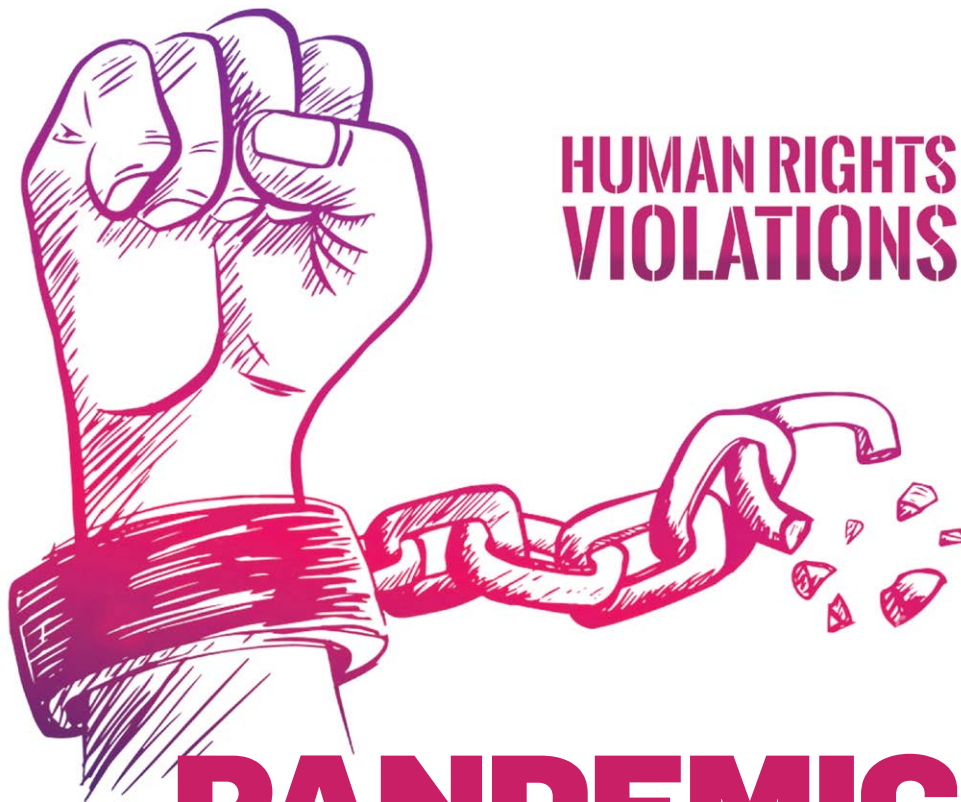


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Unlawful & Arbitrary Killings!
Infringement of Freedom of Press!!
Violence on Religious Minorities!!!



PANDEMIC OF ABUSES

Country Reports-2022 by the US Government on Human Rights Practices, released on 20 March 2023, highlights grave violations of human rights in India.

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STIFLING RIGHTS



The US Government on March 20 released the 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, highlighting grave violations of rights in many countries, including India. Coincidentally, the Indian Parliament was witnessing a wash-out of the second leg of its Budget session for the seventh consecutive day, which is no less than violation of the rights of people and their elected representatives, when the Biden Government's report came out. It could be a mere coincidence, but it adds to the significance of the report.

The US report cited significant human rights violations including alleged unlawful and arbitrary killings, infringement of freedom of press, interference with privacy of individuals, and violence targeting religious and ethnic minorities. The report has been brought out after interaction with the government and meeting with civil society in the US and India. It is true that one does not need the crutches of the US report to get a ringside view of the inhumanities heaped upon the citizens and how the perpetrators go scot-free. The ongoing attacks on minorities, Dalits and rights activists are a case in point. The Muslims and Christians, apart from human rights activists, are facing an existential threat from the right-wing cadres who have got godfathers in the power corridors.

The assaults and lynching for carrying cattle in vehicles or for allegedly keeping beef at home are insane instances of rights violation. The bulldozing of houses of particular sections of the society, on the allegation that they are on encroached land or on the plea of dispensing justice with 'criminals', is a new phenomenon of taking law into hands. The arrest and jailing of rights activists under black laws like UAPA for speaking up for Dalits and Adivasis are instances of throttling constitutional rights bestowed on citizens.

Unjustified arrests of people for social media posts and criticizing the government for its omissions and commissions are nothing but abuse of law. Prosecution of journalists for exercising their freedom of expression is yet another dark episode in the present regime. It is even more disgraceful when a reporter is arrested under a law meant for terrorists or someone else is put behind bars for asking an uneasy question or a university teacher is picked up for sharing a cartoon. It reaches the nadir of rights violation when a standup comedian is taken into custody even before he performs on the stage, or students are beaten black and blue for seeking justice.

The unprecedented attacks of Christians in several states have gained momentum, stifling freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion. The communities' plight and struggle for their right to life were brought to light unmistakably when thousands of members of scores of Christian churches and organizations took to streets and gathered at Jantar Mantar at the heart of Delhi. Their voice echoed the pain of brutality suffered by their brethren across the country. Their slogans resonated the agony of Christians forced to flee their houses, threatened, intimidated and assaulted by Sangh Parivar cadres.

We are now witnessing another type of rights violation in the sanctum sanctorum of Indian democracy – the Parliament. It is not unusual for the Opposition parties to disrupt the functioning of the Houses. But quite unusually, the ruling party members have, this time, joined the chorus in unsettling the function of both the Houses. All these add credence to what has been said in the US report, though the government might term it baseless and untrue.

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

✉ → frsureshmathew@gmail.com

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EDITOR:
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EDITORIAL BOARD:
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DESIGN & LAYOUT:
Dani Jose

CIRCULATION:
Ashish Victor

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Indian Current Publications

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

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POWER QUOTES



Words can inspire, thoughts can provoke, but only action truly brings you closer to your dreams
Brad Sugars
• • •



A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one
George R.R. Martin
• • •



Competing at the highest level is not about winning. It's about preparation, courage, understanding, nurturing your people, and heart. Winning is the result
Joe Torre
• • •



Losers quit when they fail. Winners fail until they succeed
Robert T. Kiyosaki
• • •



Life has many ways of testing a person's will, either by having nothing happen at all or by having everything happen all at once
Paulo Coelho
• • •



Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking
Marcus Aurelius
• • •



The woman who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The woman who walks alone is likely to find herself in places no one has been before
Albert Einstein
• • •



Life's like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending
Jim Hensen
• • •

Human Rights in the Doldrums

Any objective-minded person would predict that we are well on our way to joining the dishonourable club of 54 'not free' countries in the world

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

December 10, 1948 was a significant day for the world. On that day nearly all the democracies and other peace-nations came together to sign the historic and path-breaking Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). India, which attained independence about sixteen months earlier, was also a signatory. The UDHR would in fact inspire the Constitution of the new-born nation which was promulgated a few months later, on 26 November 1949.

After a long, brutal, bloody war everybody desperately wanted peace. The overwhelming chorus of the world was 'Never Again' – but for all sustainable peace would be achieved only if the human rights of every person was respected and guaranteed. Signing the UDHR clearly meant that the nation State concerned would not only promote the human rights of their citizens but would conscientiously protect them.

India, after years of enslavement by colonialists, was one of those nations, which certainly cherished the ideals of the UDHR and did its best to internal-



ise and actualise both in letter and in spirit. The debates in the Constituent Assembly, the assurance of these rights in the Preamble and in the Directive Principles of the Constitution and the unwavering commitment of the political leadership to ensure these rights were clear indicators of this.

Over the years, however, there was a gradual deterioration which began to take ugly shape in 2014. Since then, the political leadership has abdicated its responsibility of promoting and protecting human rights of its citizens. This abdication has permeated to different levels of society where not only officialdom but crony capitalists, vigilantes and other fascist, fundamentalist and fanatic regimes take law and order in their own hands.

At the receiving end of a system, which has become not only immoral but totally inhuman, are the poor and the vulnerable, the excluded and the exploited, the minorities and the marginalised, the differently abled and the LGBTQIA community, the media, writers, poets, cartoonists, comedians who defy the system, human rights defenders and all those who have the courage to take a stand for human rights, justice and truth.

India as a sovereign nation does not need other nations to analyse or report on its human rights situation. On the other hand, India is so desperate to seek approval ratings from almost any country of the world – including tyrannical ones and blatant dictatorships. The country hankers for finance, loans, investments and every form of trade and other material help the world over. It flaunts its current status of G20 Presidency and postures itself as a 'Vishwa Guru' (no one though seems ready to buy it).

So, on the two recent reports – one by V-Dem, the prestigious Swedish institute of Democracy, and



the other by the United States Department of State – both on the gross violations of human rights and democracy in India, the country cannot complain. The reports are not saying anything new but merely highlighting the stark realities which is the lot of a sizeable section of Indians today: the failure of the Government of India to protect the human rights of its citizens. The truth is plainly visible: human rights are in the doldrums.

The annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 were released from the United States Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and by the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. The 57-page India section is replete with facts and figures and reports the ground realities in India which in fact no one with an iota of objectivity or love for truth, can contest. The Report states: “Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful and arbitrary killings, including extra-judicial killings by the government or its agents; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by police and prison officials; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including violence or threats of violence, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; restrictions on internet freedom; interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on freedom of movement and on the right to leave the country; refoulement of refugees; serious government corruption; harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic and inti-

The facts bared both by the US State Department and by V-Dem cannot be contested. There are umpteen examples day-in and day-out to substantiate the human rights violations in the report



mate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early, and forced marriage, femicide, and other forms of such violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic and minority groups based on religious affiliation, social status or sexual orientation; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons; and existence of forced and compulsory labor.”

The Report goes on to add: “A lack of accountability for official misconduct persisted at all levels of government, contributing to widespread impunity. Lax enforcement, a shortage of trained police officers, and an overburdened and under-resourced court system contributed to a low number of convictions. Terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, north-eastern states, and Maoist terrorism-affected areas committed serious abuses, including killings and torture of armed forces personnel, police, government officials, and civilians; kidnapping; and recruitment and use of child soldiers”.

Earlier this week, at a State Department briefing in Washington DC, while releasing the report, when asked about India’s record, Erin M Barclay, acting assistant secretary of the bureau of democracy, human rights and labour, said that the US and India regularly consult at the highest levels on democracy and human rights. He said, “We have and we will continue to strongly urge India to uphold its human rights obligations and commitments. Not surprisingly, we also regularly meet with civil society both in the US and in India to hear their perspectives and learn from their experiences, and we encourage the Government of India to consult with them as well.”

To date, the Government of India has not responded to the report, though it has taken note of it. Actually, if they stand by the accuracy and authenticity of the report – they will have at most a pathetic lame-duck response. In the past, India has rejected



similar reports by the US government. The government has asserted that India has well-established democratic practices and robust institutions to safeguard the rights of all (all who are attuned to the truth know that the Government's response is just a pack of lies).

Then we have another alarming report released recently by the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute at the University of Gothenberg in Sweden titled *Defiance in the Face of Autocratization*. The report puts India as one of the worst autocratizers among democratic nations. A sudden lockdown in 2020 displayed how easily the lives of people at the margins of Indian society could be disrupted. In 2021, the V-Dem institute classified India as an "electoral autocracy", while in the same year, Freedom House listed India as "partly free".

Also in 2021, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance classified India as a backsliding democracy and a "major decliner" in its *Global State of Democracy (GSoD)* report. The data made available by the GSoD report demonstrated that between 1975 and 1995 India's representative government score moved from .59 to .69. In 2015 it was .72. However, in 2020 it stood at .61, i.e., closer to the score India had in 1975 when it was under Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

The GSoD report also listed India alongside Sri Lanka and Indonesia for the lowest score on the religious freedom indicator since 1975. Therefore, it is not surprising that the 2023 V-Dem report refers to India as "one of the worst autocratizers in the last 10

years" in a blurb on page 10 and places India in the bottom 40-50% on its Liberal Democracy Index at rank 97. India also ranks 108 on the Electoral Democracy Index and 123 on the Egalitarian Component Index.

All this is not good news for a regime that thrives on lies, unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and denial of human rights to its citizens. The facts bared both by the US State Department and by V-Dem cannot be contested. There are umpteen examples day-in and day-out to substantiate the human rights violations in the report.

The recent Global Human Index put India at a pathetic low rank of 132 out of 191 countries evaluated. This is a sheer disgrace! There are several other global indices today which put India at rock bottom; unfortunately, the Government of India seems to be totally unconcerned about all these. The poor in India become poorer every day. The Adivasis are robbed of their *jal, jungle and jameen*. The Dalits and OBCs and other subaltern groups are still denied the dignity, equality and justice which are legitimately theirs. The minorities (specially the Muslims and Christians) are targeted with hate speech and by a regime which systematically denigrates and demonizes them with their divisive and violent agenda. How else can one explain the virulent and vicious attacks on the minorities through issues like beef-eating, the hijab controversy and the so called 'love jihad'? We saw how they abrogated the Constitutional provisions of Article 370 and 35A where Kashmir is concerned.

Why do a slew of blatantly unconstitutional laws like the anti-conversion laws take centre-stage in a nation which professes the freedom to preach, practice and propagate one's religion as a fundamental right? They have not been able to prove one instance of 'forced conversion'! The Government has pushed

Every relevant index is screaming the truth from the rooftops - Press Freedom Index, Human Freedom Index, Democracy Index, Human Development Index, Hunger Index, Inequality Index, etc.

through legislation and policies which are against the democratic ethos of the country. A few days ago, a lower functionary of the Sangh Parivar in North Gujarat spewed venom on the Christians, the nuns and the establishment there, including derogatory comments on the Pope. Despite a police complaint, the person is still not booked. On the other hand, if one takes on the Government, with good reason, one is charge-sheeted and arrested very easily.

Not long ago there were the anti-farmer laws; the farmers are naturally still sceptical that these laws may be reintroduced by the back door. Thousands of farmers of Maharashtra last week marched towards Bombay for an MSP for onions. The four labour codes go against the rights of the workers and favour the big corporates. The pitiable conditions of the migrant workers came to the fore when the lockdown was



announced in March 2020. The fishermen of Kerala were fighting against Adani.

India has been placed last in the recent Global Environmental index; the regime has catered to the whims and fancies of those who want to profiteer by destroying the environment: the auctioning of the coal blocks, the destruction of the Aarey forest in Bombay, the introduction of the Ahmedabad-Bombay bullet train project despite opposition. The ecological destruction of the Aravalli and the Western Ghats is there for all to see. The regime has not even spared rivers -- be it the Ganges or the Sabarmati.

Freedom of Speech and Expression is also in the doldrums. Those who take a stand, write and speak against the Government, are hauled up, and false cases are foisted on them; they are attacked and even killed as in the case of Gauri Lankesh. Most of the media (both print and electronic) are godfied.

It is not surprising that India ranked 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index 2022. The Chief Justice of India referred to this reality at a public function in New Delhi this week.

Then we have the issue of the human rights defenders (HRDs) and many others who have taken a visible and vocal stand on critical issues, be it the Citizenship Amendment Act or for the rights of the excluded and the exploited. The Human Rights Defenders in the Bhima Koregaon conspiracy case are still languishing in jail. The list is endless of such people: Teesta Setalvad, RB Sreekumar, Sanjiv Bhatt, Umar Khalid, Disha Ravi, Safoora Zargar to name a few.

The new National Education Policy NEP has been pushed through without necessary deliberations and debate in Parliament. This policy is clearly anti-poor and anti-minority and caters only to a small section of the rich and the elite to the disadvantage of the vast majority of the population. Corruption is mainstreamed. crony capitalism is rampant. The BJP allegedly reaped a mind-boggling amount to its coffers through demonetization and the electoral bonds. Elections everywhere today for the ruling regime is about the money, muscle, media and machines -- which they manipulate so easily.

Obviously, it does not really require the US or an institute in Sweden to tell us all these about India: any objective minded person living here would be able to predict that we are well on our way to joining the dishonourable club of the 54 not free countries in the world. Every relevant index is screaming the truth from the rooftops – Press Freedom Index, Human Freedom Index, Democracy Index, Human Development Index, Hunger Index, Inequality Index, etc. The erosion of the rule of law, the undermining of institutions, the daily attacks on the higher judiciary, the misuse of police, the atrocities on minorities, the hounding of liberals and activists, the deliberate suborning of elected state governments – all these are the visible signs of the dismantling of the substantive democratic structure of India. If things continue in the current mode, it will take just one more general election to topple our democratic edifice which is 75 years old, perhaps for ever.

The people of India need to wake up NOW before it is too late and to ensure human rights for ALL! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Letter to Rahul Gandhi

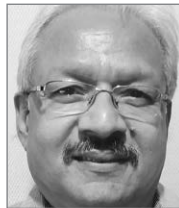
Democracy disqualified

BY A.J. PHILIP

Dear Shri Rahul Gandhi,

I am sorry to say that you are like the Shakespearean character, King Lear, who was more sinned against than sinning. I am sure that you would not have in your wildest dreams harboured any hatred for the surname Modi or for those who have it as part of their name. There may be hundreds, if not thousands, of Modis in this country.

There were a few Modis on the run those days. That is how you rhetorically asked at an election meeting in Karnataka on April 13, 2019, “how come all the thieves have Modi as their common surname?”.



Before this, you mentioned the names of two fugitives – Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi – and prime minister Narendra Modi, whom you accused of corruption, to make the comment intelligible to the listeners.

Ordinarily, only one of the Modis named you. Also, the crime occurred in Karnataka and the case should have been registered in that state, not in distant Gujarat. Now, one of the best ways the establishment has found to break the backbone of a dissenter is to register multiple cases against him.

That is how a Gujarat MLA was arrested by the Assam Police and taken to Guwahati. When he got bail, another case was registered against him that he tried to misbehave with the police woman while he was in police custody. A Congress leader was arrested for a tweet while he was about to board the flight to attend the recent AICC session at Raipur.

Yesterday, when the report about your conviction appeared, I tried to access the judgement. I would have downloaded the judgement had it been in Hindi or English. I wanted to find out whether you had apologised for your comment.

If I were your advisor, I would have strongly advised you to give the following statement at the time of hearing. “I am really sorry that my statement has hurt the feelings of the complainant and BJP MLA Purnesh Modi. I was speaking extempore and I did not want to defame any person, least of all the complainant, against whom I have no personal grudge”.

I am sure such an apology would have taken the steam out of the case and you would not have suffered the ignominy of being called a “criminal” and a “convict” after the verdict. See, how quickly the Speaker of the Lok Sabha has managed to disqualify you, referring to you as an ex-MP!

The tragedy is that there is hardly any politician in the country who has been abused and lampooned as you. It was just a few days ago that BJP spokesman Sambit Patra called you the “Mir Jafar of Indian



politics". Can there be worse abuse than this?

For starters, it was Mir Jafar's treachery that helped the British East India Company to defeat the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies in the decisive Battle of Plassey in 1757. The British never looked back thereafter until 100 years later, when some soldiers revolted against them in Meerut and other places.

Your paternity, maternity and dynasty are all questioned and dragged into public discussion by the same forces who gloat over your discomfiture and disqualification over the Surat verdict. I recently heard the prime minister referring to you as a "dynast", little realising that it is now 38 years since a Gandhi took oath of office, i.e., since your father was sworn in as PM.

I do not know who advised you not to apologise in the court. You should have remembered that you are not like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah who would never say sorry for anything that they ever did.

Have they ever said sorry for the agony they caused to tens of millions of people when they withdrew currency notes of Rs 1000 and Rs 500 from circulation? Or, when they imposed a lockdown that devastated a whole country? Forget the Gujarat riots, which have been whitewashed. They are not your models. In fact, they should never be your models.

We are human beings and we make mistakes. That is why the saying, "to err is human, to forgive is divine". When we find a man killing a man in pursuit of politics, we feel sorry for the man and the ideology that prompts him to do so. No, it is not the sorrow that someone feels when he sees a puppy coming



under the wheels of a moving car. The two are poles apart.

I am happy that soon after you were convicted, you tweeted, "My religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God, non-violence the means to get it". You have rightly quoted Mahatma Gandhi.

I am sure you would have seen in your great-grandfather's library the complete works of Gandhi. Maybe not, because all the 100+ volumes would not have been published in Jawaharlal Nehru's lifetime. I cannot claim to have read the complete works of Gandhi.

I had an occasion to hear KP Shankaran speak at Kerala Club soon after he retired as professor of philosophy at St. Stephen's College, considered the Alexandria of the East, which the BJP has reduced to the status of yet another Delhi University college. He recently published a book titled "Gandhi and the Centrality of Ethics". What he said at the Club was that Gandhi never personally attacked anyone. There was one exception, though.

That was because Gandhi thought that he was corrupt. It is a different matter that the person concerned is today eulogised as a great statesman and revolutionary. He was a vainglorious person, who got a costly uniform made with several insignias on the chest, when he was made head of the Congress Seva Dal.

The point is that it is better to be like Mahatma Gandhi, who was not provoked when a Malayali gen-

Modi does not have the magnanimity to admit that whatever progress India has achieved is the result of the work done by the people of India, whether on farms or in factories



tleman, who happened to head a Congress session, wrote a book titled “Gandhi and Anarchy”. A good politician is one who can take such attacks in his stride.

The whole country has been curiously watching how the BJP has been demanding an apology from you for your statements in London. You have been accused of saying things which you have not said. You are alleged to have said anti-national things. Anyone who criticises the government suddenly becomes an anti-national.

Until Modi came to power in 2014, there was an unwritten rule, followed by every prime minister from Nehru to Manmohan Singh, including AB Vajpayee. They would never criticise the Opposition, while they were abroad. Once, your father included Vajpayee in a UN delegation purposely to let him have a medical check-up there.

Joe Biden of the US would not attack Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin, mention his rival Alexei Navalny’s name while they are on foreign soil. The new practice was started by Modi. For instance, he attacked the Congress while he was in Canada and Germany claiming that it gave away coal blocks like one gave away his pen or handkerchief.

Years later, Modi mentioned while on a visit to South Korea and China that at one time Indians “were ashamed to be born in India” while they are now proud to be known as Indians. He is incorrigible because he believes that India attained Independence only in 2014. He conveniently forgets that there were periods when leaders like Morarji Desai, VP Singh, IK Gujral, Deve Gowda and Vajpayee gave leadership to the country.

Modi does not have the magnanimity to admit that whatever progress India has achieved is the result of the work done by the people of India, whether on farms or in factories.

I am happy to know that you are invited by the universities abroad to speak to their faculty and students. I remember Harvard had invited Laloo Prasad Yadav to talk to the students about how he transformed the Indian railways through innovative solutions that made railway services profitable too.

I can imagine what will happen if you are invited by, say, Kurukshetra University to speak on your unique experiences while walking all the way from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. First of all, no Vice-Chancellor would dare to invite you. And if the invitation is made, there would be crowds instigated to disrupt the meeting. You can imagine what would happen to the VC.

When they abuse you or call you Pappu, what they reveal is their sense of desperation over your growing popularity, as seen during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. You are one leader whom they have not been able to tame so far. We no longer hear anything from BSP chief Mayawati. Nor does Akhilesh Yadav have anything to say.

The Opposition demanded that Adani matters should be left to a parliamentary committee. Who would have enjoyed a majority in such a committee? Obviously, the BJP. Yet, there was no willingness to let such a committee examine the corrupt practices allegedly indulged in by the company

Of course, Yadav would become active once elections are announced. Unlike them, you have been relentlessly criticising Modi. You had rightly asked some questions about the Adani saga. Nobody in India believes that he could have grown so big as to aspire to be the richest person in the world within such a short period.

Nobody wants any proof that he built up his business empire through devious means. Otherwise, the 106-page Hindenburg report would not have destroyed the Adani empire, reminding me of Jesus' words, "Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall".

The honourable course of action would have been for the Prime Minister to distance himself from the Adani saga. Your questions were met by silence and yet more silence. It was the same Prime Minister who called his predecessor "Mauni Baba"!

The Opposition demanded that Adani matters should be left to a parliamentary committee. Who would have enjoyed a majority in such a committee? Obviously, the BJP. Yet, there was no willingness to let such a committee examine the corrupt practices allegedly indulged in by the company.

What's worse, the government did not even mind resorting to adjournment after adjournment of both Houses to keep the lid tight on the Adani issue. The BJP should have remembered what its stand was when a Swedish radio first broadcast something about the Bofors deal.

When the BBC telecast a programme on Gujarat, the government went out of the way to attack the channel. It said that everything was hunky-dory in India. Yet, it did everything possible to ensure that the common people did not see the BBC programme forcing twitter and other social media companies to delete links to it!

On the one hand the government says India is a fully-functioning democracy and on the other it is pushing dissenters into dungeons using agencies like the ED, the CBI and state police. Opposition leaders who were called corrupt suddenly turn lily white when they join the BJP.

You are now facing the greatest challenge in your political career. Lily Thomas was one of my friends.



It was she who went to the Supreme Court and obtained a verdict that ensures disqualification from the membership of the House the moment a Member of Parliament or Legislature is sentenced to a minimum imprisonment of two years.

I remember that all of a sudden, she became the toast of civil society. She was feted and felicitated for her achievement at the fag end of her life when there was nobody to look after her. I am happy to remember that I had criticised the verdict in my column in this journal because of the lack of a safety clause in it.

For instance, you may be able to prove in a higher court of law that the Surat judge was erroneous while giving the verdict. But your seat in the Lok Sabha is gone and you can't contest for six years! In one stroke, they got you removed from the political arena. That is why you were given the maximum punishment and the Speaker showed so much enthusiasm to issue the disqualification notice.

There are millions of people in India who want you to remain in politics. Few people have interacted with the common people as you had during your yatra. You should use the experience to create a niche in politics. Let the people say about you: Here is a man who walks the talk, no matter whether the dogs bark behind him or in front of him, as politics is a mission for him.

Yours etc ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Lessons from Bank Collapse

It might be easier for the bigger banks to manage the affairs of the merged entity. But mergers only hide, not solve problems. One major reason has been the ever-increasing non-performing assets

BY **JASWANT KAUR**

Over the last few weeks, we have been reading a lot about the US banking system. The Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), which was the 16th largest bank in the US, has collapsed. So has the Signature Bank. As if this was not enough, the crisis also impacted Credit Suisse, the famous bank based in Switzerland.



Many would have wondered what happened to these financial institutions. That too in a country, which is popular for its rules and regulations.

Well, crises can strike anywhere, where things are taken for granted. In the case of SVB, the bank management did not focus on what is called asset-liability management. It did not notice that its deposits grew at a phenomenal rate, in fact, three times from 2019 to 2022. This was not followed by fund deployment due to limited opportunities in the wake of Covid-19.

The bank started investing its money in two types of instruments -- short-duration investments categorised as available for sale (AFS) and long-duration investments classified as held to maturity (HTM).

The focus was more on investing in HTM instruments, where money is invested until maturity and is literally free from market fluctuations. However, as the interest rates started increasing, the value of these investments started decreasing. In other words, the bank did not have much money left to service the demands of its customers.

People were taken aback when SVB made an announcement that it needed \$2.25 billion to support its balance-sheet. The announcement certainly created havoc. People started withdrawing their money. In fact, \$42 billion worth of funds were withdrawn in a day! In a couple of days, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) said that only those who

had insured deposits would be able to get access to their money.

The bank was one of the favourite destinations for many start-ups. In fact, it provided many services to the early-stage tech start-ups. Its tailor-made investment plans made it an essential part of the Silicon Valley economy. This also became a major reason for its collapse. Had the bank diversified its operations over various sectors, the story would have been different.

Not only this, the records also indicate poor risk management practices. The bank lagged in creating enough interest rate hedging. Not only this, the bank was functioning without a proper risk management team. While its charter mentioned having a risk management committee, it did not even have a risk officer on board for about eight months in 2022. Only in the month of January, they appointed a new chief risk officer.

If one looks into the details of the risk management committee, one would be shocked to know that no one ever held a senior position like chief risk officer. Not only this, the SVB's board also did not have people with much experience relating to risk management. Clearly, there was a huge disconnect between what was mentioned in the papers and the ground reality.

This gap would have kept the board in the dark about the kind of risks the bank is running into.

Considering their experience, the board did not seem to have the expertise to even ask questions pertaining to risk management. Well, this issue may not be restricted to SVB alone. In fact, it is pervasive all across the banking sector. A majority of the people who constitute bank boards do not have expertise in complex fields like risk management.

While the government has



stepped in to save the interests of the depositors and the general public, India has a lot to learn from this overseas banking crisis. If we look at our banking industry, especially the public sector banks, what we usually come across is a huge pile of bad debts. Yes, the SVB story is different as it does not have a lending fiasco similar to that of Nirav Modi or Vijay Mallya. But the management story could be the same.

The strict RBI regulations do mitigate many risks. Yet, many banks have failed to manage their affairs effectively. While the banking crisis in the western countries may not have a direct impact on the Indian banking sector, it is important to have a relook at our policies.

For instance, the Modi government has been on a merger spree. Smaller banks have been merged into bigger ones. It might be easier for the bigger banks to manage the affairs of the merged entity. However, this may not be the best policy. One major reason for these mergers has been the ever-increasing non-performing assets. However, bank merger is certainly not the solution to this deep-rooted problem, which starts with faulty loan policies, managerial influences, improper credit appraisal, deficient risk management policies, sluggish legal systems and so on.

Another important lesson is the need to diversify their portfolio to mitigate idiosyncratic risks. Our regulators must ensure that regular stress tests are



conducted and capital requirements are strictly adhered to.

Banks often have a lot of focus on their assets. The SVB story certainly shows that it is important to pay attention to the liabilities' portfolio as well. It is equally

important to create sufficient interest risk hedging. With the interest rates going up, the investments may not yield enough returns as anticipated initially. The banks must look at their risk management practices closely.

The banking sector in the Western countries may have their own ailments. The Indian banking sector has its own set of problems. Many have taken banks for a ride. Many a time, those who default on their commitments are in a much better position to negotiate better terms for themselves. On the other hand, those who have been diligent in paying their dues, have to face the heat in difficult times.

At times, auditors, who have been appointed as watch dogs, have failed to live up to their promises. The case of Yes Bank might be still fresh for many people, where NPAs were grossly under-reported. Balance-sheets were window dressed to showcase the rosy picture. It was only when the bank lost its deposits worth Rs. 18,000 crore and restrictions were imposed on cash withdrawals that people came to know the actual story.

Such cases certainly led the government to increase the deposit insurance to Rs. 5 lakh per customer. However, it is still inadequate. Of course, the government and the RBI certainly came forward to bail out the bank. But why should the burden of weak governance structures, ineffective management/board be passed on to the taxpayers? Why can't adequate steps be taken to ensure the safety of public money, which the banks hold in its custody? Why should the likes of Nirav Modi go scot-free while the *aam janta* bear the brunt of their behaviour?

The SVB story brings up all such questions which are often asked the moment a bank lands in a crisis. After a few debates and discussions, these questions are often pushed under the carpet. It is high time, we revisit these questions and find sustainable solutions to these problems, instead of blindly merging the banks. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

The case of Yes Bank might be still fresh for many people, where NPAs were grossly under-reported. Balance-sheets were window dressed to showcase the rosy picture. It was only when the bank lost its deposits worth Rs. 18,000 crore and restrictions were imposed on cash withdrawals that people came to know the actual story

State Governorships

A Costly Vestige from the Past

Apart from the fact that governorships are an anachronism in a democracy, the country is spending an enormous amount for upkeep of Raj Bhavans

BY **JOSEPH MALIAKAN**

The Supreme Court while hearing a matter, on March 15, regarding the action of the Maharashtra Governor in ordering a floor test in the wake of the alleged Shiv Sena split, observed that the Governors would be seriously undermining democracy if they were to misuse their constitutional office to call for a Trust vote, citing dissension within a ruling political party, especially if it will lead to the fall of a legitimately established government.

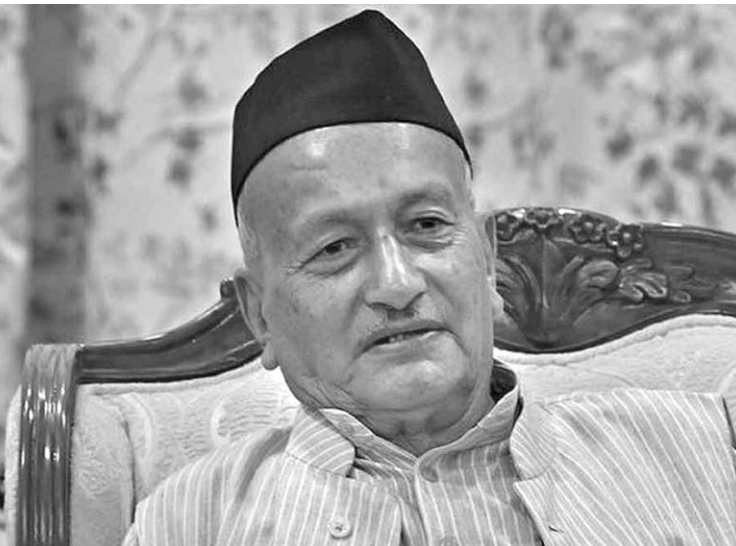
"A Governor must be aware of the fact that his very calling for Trust vote may precipitate the loss of majority for a government. Calling for a Trust vote may itself lead to the toppling of a government.... Governors must not lend their offices for effectuating particular result... The Governor cannot enter into any area by which his action would precipitate the fall of a government," Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a five-judge Constitution Bench observed.



The Solicitor General Tushar Mehta on behalf of the Governor argued that there was a serious difference of opinion within the Shiv Sena between the Eknath Shinde faction and the Udhav Thakarey one. To this, the Chief Justice said, "the Shinde group had a remedy then. They could have voted their leader out. But can the Governor say that there is dissension about certain aspects of the leadership and a Trust vote is called for? This was a government which had already established its majority in the House. It was a functioning government. Can the Governor, I ask again, use his powers to precipitate the fall of an elected government? This is very, very serious for our democracy."

The severe and unprecedented criticism by the Chief Justice of India of Maharashtra Governor's order for a floor test on the ground that there was dissension in a ruling party has once again revived the debate for the abolition of the Governor's post which is futile burden carried over by the democratic India from her colonial past.

The severe and unprecedented criticism by the Chief Justice of India of Maharashtra Governor's order for a floor test on the ground that there was dissension in a ruling party has once again revived the debate for the abolition of the Governor's post



In a speech in the Constituent Assembly on 2 June 1949, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said, "The Governor under the Constitution has no functions which he can discharge by himself, he has only certain duties to perform."

However, in the recent past, Governors have been as a rule functioning as if they are a law unto themselves, often over-ruling the wishes of the democratically elected state governments, sitting on important legislation duly enacted by state legislatures, refusing to even read address to legislatures approved by the state Cabinet. The behaviour or rather misbehaviour and overbearing attitude of the Governors of Kerala, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu have been particularly unconstitutional.

The Tamil Nadu Governor, N. Ravi, a former police officer, has been behaving as though he is heading a Police State. He had the audacity to even change the name of the state of Tamil Nadu and state that the Dravidian model of politics is regressive. He advised a group of civil service aspirants that whenever there is a dispute between the Union and the States one should side with the Union regardless of the constitutional provisions or the court rulings. He blacked out certain portions of the address to the Tamil Nadu Assembly approved by the State Cabinet and refused to call out the names of even Periyar and B.R. Ambedkar!

The Kerala Governor, Arif Mohamed Khan, has been behaving as if he is the sole depository of constitutional law and he alone can correctly interpret the Constitution of India. Quite often he has been making pronouncements as if the elected State government is a mere appendage to the post of the Governor of the State. One fine morning he sacked six Vice-Chancellors of the state universities, without so much as consulting the State Government or giving any show cause notice to the Vice-chancellors who were respected and valued experts in their fields.

Former West Bengal Governor and present Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had a no-holds barred war with the Chief Minister. He behaved as though he was the patron saint of the State government and nothing can move without his knowledge and patronage. It was perhaps for his undying loyalty to the Union Government he was rewarded with a promotion to the post of Vice-President of India.

Appointment of Governors in India goes back to

1858 when India began to be administered by the British Crown. The Provincial Governors were agents of the British Crown functioning under the Governor General. The Sarkaria Commission set up in 1983 to recommend changes in the Union-States relations had recommended that the Governor should be eminent in some walk of life and from outside the State.

He or she should be a detached figure without intense political links or should not have taken part in politics in the recent past. The person should also not be a member of the ruling party.

The commission also recommended that the Governor should be appointed after consultations with the Chief Minister of the State, the Vice-President of India and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha by the Prime Minister.

Successive Union governments have, however, not bothered to pay heed to the recommendations. In fact, the governments have only breached the recommendations while appointing Governors.

The Governors have mostly been close to the ruling party and they have mostly functioned as agents of the Crown, perhaps with one noteworthy exception.

In 1991, when Surjit Singh Barnala was the Tamil Nadu Governor, he refused to send a report to the Union Government recommending President's rule in the state under Article 356 of the Constitution as demanded by the Union Government. And when the Union Government as a punishment transferred him to Bihar, Barnala resigned.

Following confrontations with the Governors, the governments of both Kerala and Tamil Nadu have passed Bills curtailing the powers of the Governors in the matter of appointing Vice-Chancellors of state-run universities. Apart from the fact that governorships are an anachronism in a democracy, the country is spending an enormous amount for maintenance and upkeep of Raj Bhavans which are continuing to be run in the style of Kings' palaces of the old.

To take one example, the Maharashtra government spent Rs. 60 crores in the last two years (2020-21 and 2021-22) for the running of the Raj Bhavan and the expenditure has increased by Rs 12 crores during the period! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOSEPH MALIAKAN is a Delhi based Senior Journalist

A Different Look at India

The people, be it Adivasis, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists or any community or religious denomination, entered India at different times and settled down here. Hence it belongs to all, and none can claim superiority over others

BY **P. A. CHACKO**

This India belongs to all of us. The controversy about who is real Indian is fallacious. It can only stoke hatred, division, and inhumanity.

Questions such as who came first, who came last, who are the invaders, and who are the real inheritors of India's culture and nationality are being raised from rooftops.

Let us for a moment think that the communities that are here at least for a century are all Indians. In fact, we are all migrants or invaders in one sense. Ages ago, the Indian subcontinent belonged to no one. Our earliest forefathers entered India from distant lands, be it Eurasia, Mid Asia, West Asia, East Asia, or any other continent.

Archaeologists tell us that there were some earliest settlers in the Indus valley. Today we call them the indigenous. The Adivasis claim that they were the earliest settlers in the Indus valley. Then came



the Aryans, and, later, the Muslims.

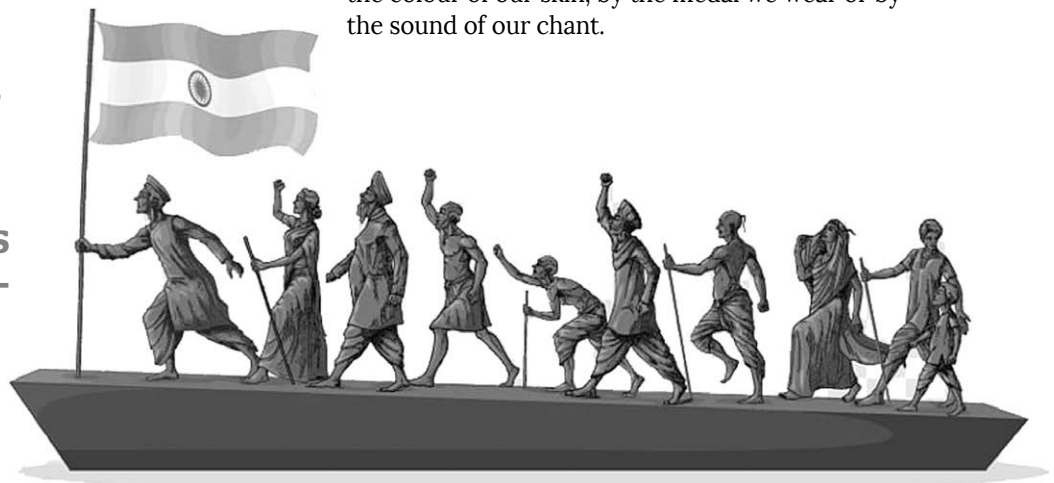
The Indian population, be it the Adivasis, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists or any community or religious denomination, entered India at different times and settled down here.

Some came as traders, some as migrants, and some as vagrants! Those with muscle power captured power over people and declared themselves as rulers. Some rulers were genial, while some others were self-serving predators. Some mixed politics with religion. Some emotionally charged their followers with community or communal sentiments.

Today, India is a spectrum of these different groups and communities, cultures or religious factions. We have no option but to accept them all as nationals of India. Their nationality should not be marked by which religion they belong to or which language they speak.

We are all Indians. Our Indianness is in our blood which is not generated from any religious shrines, churches, temples, gurudwaras or mosques. Nor does our national Constitution define our nationality by the dress we wear, by the tilak on our forehead, by the colour of our skin, by the medal we wear or by the sound of our chant.

No religious group, be it majority or minority, can dictate to us to define our nationality or nationalism under the umbrage of its umbrella politics. Nor does our secular Constitution permit it



Our religious sentiments need to belong to the realm of our private chambers and our devotion to our gods must be confined to our personal allegiance to this god or that goddess. No religious group, be it majority or minority, can dictate to us to define our nationality or nationalism under the umbrage of its umbrella politics. Nor does our secular Constitution permit it.

The way certain factions or groups claim superiority over others as true nationalists or hijack nationalism as their private prerogative only creates divisive tendencies and insecurity among others. Especially when such modus operandi becomes aggressive and is mixed in political cauldron, it has no other name but terrorism. Such terrorist model of street theatricals graduates from pinching to lynching, from communal politics to bulldozer governance.

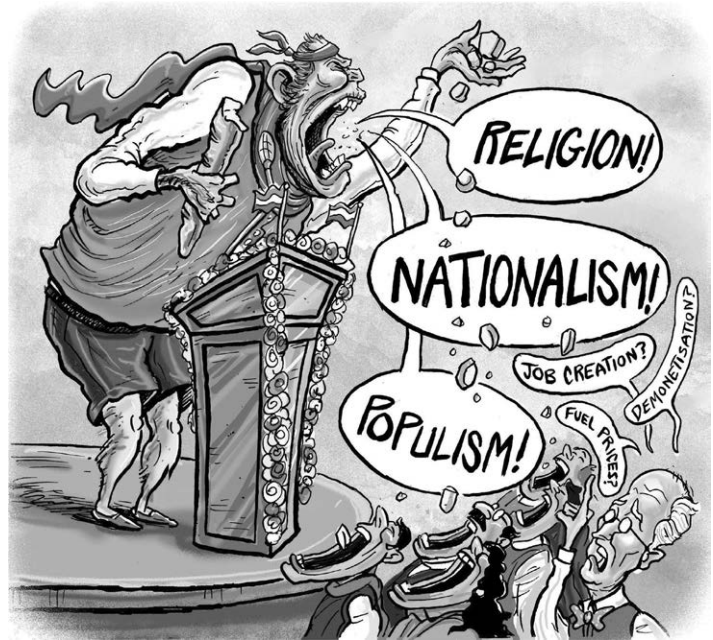
This is not the shape of India our forefathers bequeathed to us especially after winning us an Independent India. In no way did they mean that from political slavery we shift to religious majoritarian slavery. By giving us the Constitution, they had laid the foundation for a cohesive nationalist India where all of us, while belonging to cultures and communities, religions and tribes, bury our differences and live in fellowship for the good of all and for the good of the nation.

If any community or faction defines India or Indiannes or nationality or nationalism according to its religious concepts or political convenience, it is not only an aberration but borders on anti-national tendency. Anti-national, because their exercise cuts the very root of our common nationalism.

We have been witnessing horrific events over a few decades where people of other religions or communities are attacked, their worshipping places burned or destroyed, their residences bulldozed, their near and dear ones lynched and massacred before their very eyes. The faults of the victims have been the way they dressed, the way they prayed, the way they moved about, the way they chose to marry or the way they lived.

The amity and unity with which Indians have been living harmoniously for ages have been shattered by the kind of political mishmash creamed with religious fanaticism and wanton terrorism.

Let those, who preach to us about true nationalism, ask themselves which nationalism they speak of. Indian nationalism or a majoritarian nationalism?



Inclusive nationalism or a fundamentalist religious nationalism? A rational nationalism or an irrational and illogical nationalism which believes in bloodletting, political vendetta and communal disharmony?

We have seen enough and more. The nation is being taken for a ride by politicians who hoodwink people by pandering to cheap religious sentiments and the political game of throwing crumbs to feed the weak and the gullible. Such skewed nationalism, ensconced in political power, arrogates to itself muzzle not only to pulverize any dissenting postures but also to sell off national assets as private property to chums and cronies and lets off the hook business tycoons with hefty bank loans.

Instead of governing the nation under the given Constitutional rules and provisions, the leaders want to re-write the Constitution to fit their agenda modelled on ancient religious texts. That is where secular India is being given a back seat while the majoritarian clan is in the driving seat.

Possibly for instant result, the ruling faction wants to drive the nation to a precipitous cliff. The end result can be disastrous.

Should we throw up our hands in the air and say we are helpless? 'The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind!' ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Greed Breeds Corruption

Greed for wealth ends up in corruption by way of abuse of power for one's illicit personal fiscal gain, which is appropriated by an individual or organization

BY **DR M. D. THOMAS**

The Supreme Court of India has come out with a landmark verdict in the following words: "Un-satiated greed for wealth has facilitated corruption to develop, like cancer, and the constitutional courts owe a duty to the people of the country to show zero tolerance to corruption and come down heavily against the perpetrators of the crime."

The ruling was given on March 3, 2023 by a bench of Justices S. Ravindra Bhat and Dipankar Datta, who set aside an order of the Chhattisgarh High Court, which had quashed the FIR registered against the former principal secretary of the state, Aman Singh, along with his wife, for allegedly amassing disproportionate assets.

In spite of the fact that the Constitution in its preamble promises social justice and equitable distribution of wealth to the people of India, it is yet a far-fetched dream, like a colourful balloon up in the air. The malaise of corruption pervades in all walks of life, including governance, as 'a way of life' and it is a serious hurdle on the way of achieving progress as well as social justice, regrettably so.

The Bench further observed that 'if the corrupt succeed in duping the law enforcers, their success would eat into the fear of getting caught. They would



tend to lie around cocksure that rules and regulations are not for them, but for the humbler mortals! The investigations that follow have become more distressing than the scams themselves. 'Tracking down corrupt public servants and punishing them appropriately is the mandate of the Prevention of Corruption Act,' the court stated emphatically and dutifully.

It is a matter of shame for the country that a steady decline is in row in pursuing the lofty ideals of the Constitution, especially in public persons. The fact that the degradation of ethical values in day-to-day life is heavily and rapidly on the rise is a major anomaly as against the luxurious engagement of religious piety and devotions. The gravity of the contradiction multiplies when Hinduism characteristically considers 'greed' as a cardinal sin, ironically so.

A considerable per cent of persons in responsible positions have been found bending so low in their behaviour, defying the high standards of behaviour demanded by the ethos and values of the Constitution. As a result, the sublime ideal of 'public service' is defiled by 'private interests', at the cost of the people and the country. The razor-sharp question of the supreme bench is highly pertinent 'however, should this state of affairs be allowed to continue?'

It is the duty of the Constitutional Courts to show zero tolerance to corruption and come down heavily against the perpetrators of the crime, while saving innocent public servants, who get entangled by men of dubious conduct,

Corruption has become a way of life botched investigations in these cases are more distressing says Supreme Court



ulterior motives and vested interests. The apex court deserves to be complimented for affirming its duty of playing the role of the whistle-blower, that too, of the supreme order, in view of treating effectively the cancer of corruption.

Greed is 'an intense and selfish desire for something, wealth, power, food', etc. 'More than required' is its essential character. It is inordinately selfish and has hardly any thought left for others. It is a sentiment that can never get satiated. 'More the merrier' is its principle. It is an uncontrollable drive and is pathological to its core. All the lofty ideals of the world are bound to collapse, when greed is at the helm of affairs. Obviously, greed is geared towards crossing all the courtesy limits of life.

Greed for wealth ends up in corruption. 'Corruption' is a dishonest, unethical, immoral and unprincipled behaviour'. It is a 'criminal offense', by way of an abuse of power for one's illicit personal fiscal gain, which is appropriated by an individual or organization. Corruption includes diverse forms, like bribery, lobbying, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, parochialism, patronage, influence peddling, graft, and misappropriation. It is a state of affairs that ultimately lands up the party concerned in an endless doom.

Corruption, preceded by an insatiable greed, is the most compelling concern of our country. It eats up into the entire fabric of human life, both individual and social. The intellectual, emotional, spiritual and cultural assets of the humans are rendered fruitless. It raises a question mark on the evolutionary accomplishments of the 'homo sapiens', like digital precision, artificial intelligence and higher consciousness.

Religion is traditionally considered a great motivator for righteous action, under the auspices of God. It should have been all the more so, given the battalion of major and minor traditions of faith present in India. Being so would have justified the common notion of India, both inside and across the borders, as a 'religious country', too. In that case, the world would have found in India a species of people that are ethically sound and spiritually elevated, as well.

But, as a matter of fact, religions in India are very much a heap of superstitions, empty theological abstractions and fruitless rituals. They are seats of and tools for the foul game of money and power, very much as an ally of the political and the corporate sectors. They fail hugely to produce the moral fruits that can make good, humane and upright human beings. The un-satiable greed and the result-



ant corruption is a proof positive for the prickly pickle in question.

Besides, it is more than true that our country is making a 'hop, step and jump' in the various arenas of 'development'. The technological gadgets, along with varieties of amenities of life, have made human lives on the whole highly convenient as well as advanced, which could not even have been imagined a few decades ago. But, 'the insatiable greed', along with 'corruption', as the top court rightly noted, creates an unfathomable vacuum of principles and ideals, which makes all the merits of development null and void, tragically so.

As far as 'greed' and 'corruption' are concerned, 'sifting the grain from the chaff, no doubt, is an onerous task, no wonder, for that reason, if it sounds even utopian. The state of affairs has reached Himalayan proportions, in the wake of the modern day demands, complexities and problems of life, along with the naive and plan-less increase of population, especially in the lower strata of the society.

At any rate, the effort has to keep going, incessantly so, in view of better times, not only for maintaining ethical standards but also for the wellbeing of the people and of the larger society. Robert Frost, the twentieth century English poet, reminds, "But, I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep". Well, the Indian society in general and the public persons in special have miles and miles to go before they sleep, in line with their promises to the 'vision and mission' of 'We the people' of the Constitution of India! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR M. D. THOMAS is Director of Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi.
He can be contacted at: mdthomas53@gmail.com

Let Truth Come Out

It is futile to ban a documentary or media from telling the truth; only those who are afraid of truth will do so. But truth has its own way of coming out

BY **BISHOP ALEX DIAS**

“Hi Buddy”, I said to my friend, whom I was meeting after a long time. “Where have you been, and what have you been up to, these years?” “Well,” he said, “I have been working for BBC”. That sounded very interesting since BBC has been very much in the news these days, since their documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi was banned by the Indian Government. Someone working for BBC, would certainly be able to give me much from the horse’s mouth, I thought.

Eager to have some more news from a BBC man, I pressed him into sharing what he was doing with the BBC. Laughing loudly, he said his BBC had nothing to do with the British Broadcasting Corporation, but it stood for Bombay Bekaar Company! All my hopes of getting something from the horse’s mouth being dashed, I couldn’t but help thinking I would have slapped this man for his unwanted joke!

The British Broadcasting Corporation has always been my favorite source for news and other knowledge. Apart from being a reputed News Corporation, I consider it a kind of an Alma Mater for me. I pursued my Communications Arts Studies at the Hatch End Communications Centre, London, way back in the late 1970’s. Although the Hatch End Communications Centre was an Independent Entity, it depended much on the BBC for its Staff. Most of



our Staff members were drawn from the BBC.

I still remember our Study Visits to the BBC offices, in particular to the Bush House, which at that time served as the Headquarters of the BBC World Service. The Hatch End Communications Centre was led, at that time, by Rev. Fr. Agnelus Andrew, a Communicator Par Excellence. At that time, I remember how the BBC would fall back on Fr. Agnelus Andrew whenever they found themselves in difficulties. I remember the surprise election of Pope John Paul II, Papa Wojtila, from Poland. Nobody had expected a man from Poland to be brought in to replace John Paul I, the ever-smiling Archbishop from Venice.

With the rest of the world, BBC were also in the dark not knowing the newly elected Pope at all, and not knowing what to tell the listeners about the new Pope. It was a situation in which the reputation of the great BBC was at stake to fill in the slot reserved for the announcement of the election of the new Pope. The BBC could do nothing better than making a frantic call to Fr. Agnelus Andrew to ask him to say something about the new Pope, and save the reputation of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Fr. Agnelus Andrew very efficiently rose to the occasion. He played this clip for us to hear, to teach us, communicators in the making that, as communicators, we have to be prepared to step in and fill the void, whenever and wherever necessary. As a matter of fact, Fr. Agnelus Andrew did not have much to say in that clip. But he stepped in and filled in for the BBC to save its reputation.

My respect and admiration for BBC, therefore, goes back to those years when I almost held BBC as my Alma Mater because of the close cooperation, which existed between the BBC and the Hatch End Communications Centre, where I studied.

While I was still at the Communications Centre, Fr. Agnelus Andrew was picked up and taken by Pope John Paul II, and made the Director of the Communications Department of the Vatican. His gain for the Vatican and the Church was, no doubt, a loss for the Hatch End Communications Centre.



My regard and appreciation for the BBC continue still. The Government's ban on the BBC documentaries has not been able to do away with that. If at all, it has provoked a surprise reaction in me. Why should India, which claims to be the biggest democracy, take such a harsh decision, casting aside all the regards the world has for the BBC, and every democracy worth its name should have for the independence of the Media, rightly considered to be the Forth Pillar of democracy.

Have we reached a stage where we are afraid of our own shadow, because we are afraid to be confronted by Truth? Even if the Documentaries of the BBC were not true and objective, why would the citizens of the world's largest democracy not be allowed to act as mature citizens of a mature democracy? I did not have access to the documentaries, but what we have read about them, is very much corroborated by the media reports we had seen and read already at the time of Godhra incidents.

Truth and God

The third chapter of the book of Genesis of the Bible has a very interesting story about Adam and Eve. Tempted by the devil, who appeared to them in the form of a serpent, they gave in to the temptation of the devil, and sinned against God by breaking His commandment by which he had forbidden them from eating the fruit of the tree from the middle of the Garden of Eden. Immediately after they had broken the commandment of God, their eyes were opened, and they were standing in front of the Truth which confronted them and reduced them to shame. They realized that they were standing in front of God, whom they were afraid to face. God's holiness confronted them in their misery, and made them realize that they were stark naked in His presence. So, they started to hide themselves by trying to cover their nakedness with the foliage of trees.

The people who are afraid of Truth try to hide themselves from it, but that is not possible because hiding from it, is hiding from God himself. God is all-knowing and He knows everything. Hiding from Him is not like sweeping the Truth under the carpet. All those who do this will be facing God in His time, and realize the futility of their efforts to run away from him. Even now we see that God often confronts those who engage themselves in a futile flight from God and from Truth. Sometimes at the hour of death, they are shamefully led to see their nakedness before God's might. Haven't we, and aren't we seeing this

Explained: The 'Emergency' Rules Invoked By The Modi Govt to Ban The BBC Documentary



happen even now?

Almost concomitant with the banning of the BBC documentaries was another incident, that of the shaming of the Adani Corporate following the exposure of its misdeeds by the U.S. based Hindenburg Research Group. The Adani Group, which had overtaken several other billionaires to be listed as the world's third richest person on the Forbes billionaire list, came sliding down the Forbes ladder. Of concern for me, at this moment, is not the downfall of the billionaire. After all, he is only paying for his misdeeds.

My concern is that, once he has been caught by the study done by Hindenburg Research, he tries to defend himself by telling the world that Hindenburg findings are an attack on India! What a sorry piece of nationalism! And what is even worse is that our leaders keep quiet as if India were at fault in this misdeed. They should have come out shouting and yelling like they did after the BBC documentaries. After all, BBC was only using its freedom of speech, which it has always done in its transmission of the news to the world. And yet there was not a word to distance itself from Adani and his group. Were we afraid, or were we hand-in-glove?

Kudos to the BBC which bore with courage and determination the after-effects of its reporting. I was greatly encouraged to hear the Management of the BBC telling its Staff to go on reporting objectively and courageously. It is because of this courage and reliability of BBC that it has built up a reputation of a great News Corporation. It is no surprise that during the World War, some military decisions were taken only after listening to the broadcast of the BBC. May there be more of these who value truth more than anything else. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BISHOP ALEX DIAS, was Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Port Blair from 1985 to 2019. Currently he is based in Goa

Understanding Controversy Around Tellicherry Archbishop

BY MK GEORGE

The statement of the Archbishop of Tellicherry in Kerala promising a Member of Parliament for the BJP, if the price of rubber is increased to 300 rupees a kilo, is highly regrettable.

There are four reasons why the archbishop does not sound credible. One, a failure to understand deeply the Catholic Social Teachings, second, an oversimplification of the problems of the farmers, third, a failure to look at the Christian Community and the minorities in its totality avoiding exclusivism, and fourthly the clericalism that is so loud in his proclamation.

The Catholic Social Teachings give primary value to Human Dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity. They are 'a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society.'

The primary method that CST offers is 'to see, judge and act.' The problem with the archbishop's stand is that he does not see the whole reality, does not judge properly, but have acted through his declaration. When a Christian is called to see, he or she has to see it with Divine eyes, with the Kingdom of Heaven, Justice, Peace and Love, in mind.

Or to see from the eyes of the Daridranarayan, as Gandhiji's talisman puts it. When social analysis fails, social response and action fail. What kind of social analysis has guided the archbishop? To borrow Paulo Freire's categorisation, magical, naïve, fanatic or critical? I guess it verges on the naïve or fanatical.

In reducing the problems of the agricultural sector in Kerala/India to the concern for pricing of rubber, the archbishop has naively oversimplified the issue. The agricultural problems in the country are primarily the result of the anti-farmer policies of the successive governments, particularly of the current central government. How can one forget the infamous Farm Laws of the current regime and how they were withdrawn after protracted struggle? The promises given to the farmers were not kept and the farmers are on warpath again. How can one fail to see the larger picture of the problems of the farmers?

In a critical analysis of the Farmers' strike, Sheik Saaliq (2021) wrote, "Many agriculture experts agree



that Indian farming needs reforms, but they question the way the Modi government introduced the laws and the corporate involvement in agriculture."

"Leaving farmers to the mercy of the markets would like a death sentence to them," said Devinder Sharma, an agriculture expert who has spent the last two decades campaigning for income equality for Indian farmers."

Thirdly, when one aligns with a person or group, you can look for either one's own personal gains or the good of the whole community. How can an archbishop forget what the Christians in Delhi had gathered for? It was just a month ago in February. A crowd of 22,000 Christians, bishops and people belonging to various denominations, gathered to say aloud, that 'India's Church is exhausted by the surge of anti-conversion laws and accusations of illegal proselytization.

They are tired of mobs driving out Christians from their villages and the possibility that many face property destruction and personal violence. Perhaps most significantly, they're angry at a government that passively enables these actions at best and actively foments them at worst (Surinder Kaur). Does this not matter for the archbishop of Tellicherry that there were 1,198 attacks reported on Christians and hundreds more were unreported in 2022? Does he expect the party to attack Christians in the North and protect them in the South?

If any member of the minorities thinks that their

problems in India can be handled by themselves, they are living in a fool's paradise. It is a real mystery how the Church leaders fail to understand the declared intention of the ideologues of the ruling party at the centre, which declares the three internal threats as Muslims, Christians and the Communists.

In the new India, they dream of, and work assiduously for they want to either eliminate the three or teach them to live as second-class citizens. Naiveté, I am afraid, reaches its nadir in the archbishop's position. May be he should remember the very scripture by which he lives: 'For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush (Lk, 6,43-45)

Finally, the clericalism so evident in the archbishop's statement goes against the very principles of the Catholic Church and the incessant fight of Pope Fran-

cis against clericalism. Clericalism incidentally is "an expectation, leading to abuses of power that ordained ministers are better than and should be over everyone among the People of God." (The Association of U S Catholic Priests). 'In other words, clerics (bishops and priests) are often trained to think they are set apart from and set above everyone else in the Church. Their word is not to be questioned. Their behaviour is not be questioned etc.' (Fr. Peter Daly in NCR 2019)

When Pope Francis is continually asking for dialogue and collaborative action, can the archbishop dictate from the podium how the Church members should vote?

The only hope remains the ordinary Christian who is politically conscious. Or will they also be clericalized? Time will answer. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FR. M K GEORGE in charge of the South Asian region at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome. He is a former provincial the Kerala Jesuit province.

Archbishop's overture to PM Modi's party draws flak

A Catholic archbishop based in Kerala has courted controversy after he publicly promised to support the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the coming parliamentary polls if it hikes the prices of rubber benefiting Catholic farmers.

Syro-Malabar Archbishop Joseph Pamplany of Tellicherry made the promise when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, which is aiming for a third consecutive term, is keen on wooing the Christian community in the southern state.

The prelate's call at a meeting of rubber plantation farmers, a core community of the Kerala-based Church, on March 18 has irked many Christian leaders who now want him to clarify his stand.

"It is pathetic," reacted Father Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit rights activist based in Gujarat, which has been ruled by the BJP for nearly three decades and is among the states that have enacted a sweeping anti-conversion law.

"First of all, bishops and priests should refrain from gathering votes for any political party," Father Prakash told UCA News on March 20. He said pro-Hindu groups associated with the BJP continue to attack Christians and Muslims, undermining the secular fabric of the constitution. Still, if the prelate wants people to vote for the BJP "he should clarify in a written statement," the Jesuit said. Pamplany's support for BJP in the general elections "is fraught with many socio-political ramifications," said Father Babu Joseph, former spokesperson of

the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

Although his comments may send the right signal to the distressed rubber growers of Kerala, "it may not go down well with all sections of the community," the Divine Word priest told UCA News on March 20.

Chacko Kalamparambil, a leader of the Catholic Congress, a Christian-based political party, however, defended the prelate, saying that "farmers in the state are facing an invincible poverty" and Pamplany was highlighting their woes. Addressing the farmers' meeting in the northern district of Kannur in Kerala, Pamplany urged the Modi-led federal government to fix Rs. 300 as the basic support price for natural rubber per kilogram. It will help farmers support BJP, which currently has no lawmakers from Kerala. Currently, rubber farmers are getting 120 to 150 rupees for a kilogram of rubber, after incurring a production cost of 250 rupees, farmers said.

More than 1.5 million people are reported to be rubber plantation farmers in Kerala and the majority of them belong to the Syro-Malabar Church. Kerala sends 20 lawmakers to India's Lok Sabha or the lower house of Parliament. Though BJP has been at the helm in New Delhi since 2014, it failed to win a seat in Kerala.

To win a seat in Kerala, Modi's party needs the support of either Christians or Muslims.

The BJP leaders reportedly have kick-started talks with Christian leaders in Kerala to woo the community ahead of the general elections in 2024. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Sadhu Ittiyavirah

A Testimony to Jesus' Way

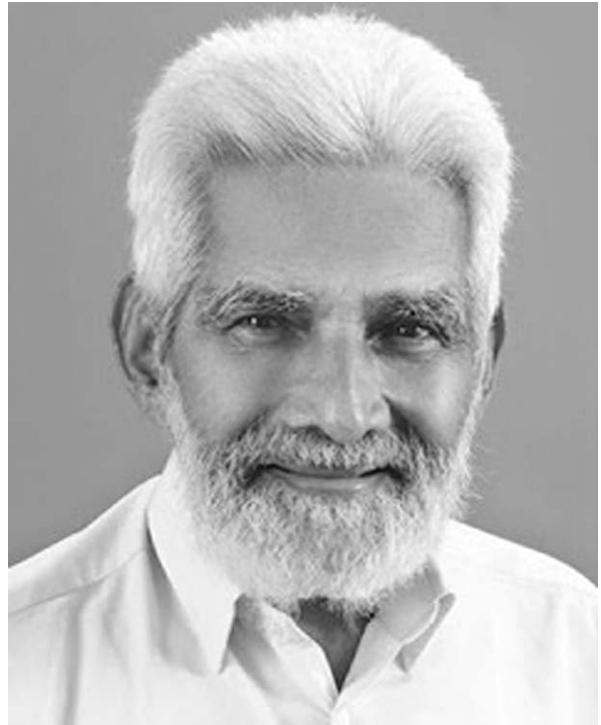
BY J. PRASANT PALAKKAPPILLIL

As I read the news of his gentle departure at the ripe age of 101, I recall Sadhu Ittiyavirah with love and reverence. He is a modern day *Tthagathan*, who 'just went by,' trying his bit to make the world a better place. I would consider him one of the old-time STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) persons, who perhaps didn't ever come across the acronym. By the time, STEM became popular, his faculties had lost their old-time sharpness to grasp anything new.

Otherwise, from the days I had begun to interact with him as a fresher in Social Work education at Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, where he used to bless us with his presence annually, introducing his new books to the college library and receiving gratefully, whatever we deemed fit to give, I had seen him as a sharp-witted, keen to grasp kind person. I tried to make his arrival on the campus, often unannounced, occasions for interaction with the budding social work trainees, and he would engage them for some time with his smile, and his heuristic method, and with its definite link with science (read, nature).

Most of his short lessons in his 100-odd books are based on the basic science he learnt from his PDC or B Sc classes at SH College. (I am not sure, what was that he had studied at SH). But Sadhu Ittiyavirah had this unique trait of taking a phenomenon of nature, and then linking it to life and life beyond the physical. An amazing way towards problem-centred, life-oriented, enquiry-based, experimental learning for life. It had science, mathematics, rudiments of engineering and technology and above all, link to life.

I would call him STEM Sadhu, who was full of STEAM (+A for arts) and had he been recognized and supported properly, could have upscaled it all into STREAM (+R for research). His own house and the land around it were also fields of experiments for him. And he went about, with his disarming smile, doing good in his own way, harming no one and spreading goodness.



The last time I met him, after almost a gap of 6 or 7 years, was in 2020, at his home near Kothamangalam. I went to greet him as the head of his alma mater. Though he knew me rather well, by then, nearing 100, he was not able to place me. When one is not able to do that, in spite of all his goodness, we feel the disconnect. But I did spend quite some time at his place, listening to him, a bit disoriented, but still with a passion and enthusiasm, sparkle in the eyes and smile on his lips. I have pictures taken with him.

I first heard about him from some casual reference made by my mother who spoke about Sadhu Ittiyavirah. The name itself was a strange one! But I got to see him, and converse with him several times, almost two decades later, after my having been ordained a minister in the catholic church. He was a radical who took to Jesus-way radically, feeling that the Jesuit (the conventional Catholic religious life)

was not radical enough. That was a daring step, and perhaps, he gave himself the monicker 'sadhu'.

Sadhu would mean 'right' or 'valid', but derivatively, in Malayalam, it meant as a noun 'someone who was poor or good or harmless', or as an adjective 'poor' or 'harmless'. He lived as a 'sadhu' with God alone as his asset, and the rest 'asadhu' (invalid). But he is said to have finally given himself to the counsel of the very many of his 'beneficiaries' in the Church, to adopt the conventional family life, though at a very late stage (as per conventional age-norms) in his life.

After I shared my notes on him among the friends' circle, many who were senior to me by 10 or more years, responded how he was a household name in the school circles across the Christian belt of Kerala. He would appear in his coarse khadi *dhoti and jubba (kurta)*, with a cloth bag slung on his shoulder, and would narrate stories, sing songs and teach the youngsters lessons for life. When I began seeing him, he had shifted to pants for his lowers, and I

didn't observe them to be coarse cotton, but *khadi kurta* still held the sway.

I deem myself blessed for having had the 'satsang' of this great soul. He literally took to Jesus' way of growing great by being small, who conquered hearts with his smile, and who persevered till the last to have lasted over a century! He was someone who dared to walk it alone, and didn't bother about the consequences. May your frail frame hold no fear of death and decay dear elder brother, dear fellow traveller and pilgrim; continue to walk with us in the communion of saints that we too may find the joy of learning and discovering the connect with the phenomena – life-text-context and beyond!

P.S. Though my own holiness is not growing, my company of saintly people is swelling - Mother Teresa, Rani Maria, Sadhu Ittiyavirah, my great grand-uncle, Ven. Varghese Payyappilly, my young student Ajna... Hope that will merge with the countless witnesses above, whose company, I hope to enjoy irrespective of its coordinates! ☺

Emeritus Archbishop Powathil dies

Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Powathil, a former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and a leader of the traditionalists in the Syro-Malabar Church, died March 18 in Changanacherry, Kerala. He was a priest for 60 years and a bishop for 51 years.

Archbishop Powathil, a soft-spoken prelate and economist, headed Changanacherry archdiocese for 22 year from 1985. He was the archdiocese's auxiliary bishop during 1972-1977.

Archbishop Powathil led the Indian bishops' conference for four years from 1994. He was also the president of the Kerala Catholic Bishops Council (1993-1996), and chairman of the Education Commission of the Indian bishops' conference.

He was a member of the Post Asian Synodal Council in Rome, for nine years from 1998. He chaired the Kerala bishops' Commission for Education (1986-2007). He was the founder chairman of the Inter Church Council for Education, chairman of Inter Religious Fellowship, member of the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna, Austria and member of the Scientific Commission of International Publication 'Oasis' in Venice, Italy.

He had written several books and published

scores of articles on liturgy and eastern theology as well as on matters related to the Church and secular society, especially the field of education. He spent his retired life writing on the Church and social issues.

As the Kanjirapally bishop, he founded the Peerumedu Development Society and the Malanadu Development Society in 1977. He also founded the Kuttanadu Vikasana Samithy (Kuttanad development society). As the patron of the Changanacherry Social Service Society, he oversaw numerous developmental schemes. Many scholarship schemes were set up for the Dalit Christians in the archdiocese and the poor and eligible students of the professional courses. He had worked hard to preserve and develop the traditions of his Syro-Malabar Church.

Archbishop Powathil has pushed for the restoration of East Syriac traditions in the Syro-Malabar Church and fought for the complete revival of the Divine Liturgy, which he believed was Latinized after the Synod of Diamper in 1599.

These efforts created several critics for him, who accused him of forcing adoption of Church of the East practices. ☺

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Doctors' Pain

Violence against doctors at workplace across the land is a major issue that needs to be tackled with a heavy hand

BY AARTI

The manner in which a 59-year-old senior cardiologist was assaulted by a patient's family members in a Kozhikode hospital this March 5, following the unfortunate death of a baby, is rather disturbing. A patient who was under the treatment of the cardiologist's wife, a gynaecologist working in the same hospital, is said to have developed some complication and lost her child during labour.

Accusing the hospital staff of delaying treatment and medical negligence, several relatives of the patient vandalised the hospital and brutally punched the cardiologist who was present there. He was immediately taken to the ICU after he fell unconscious. Following the attack, doctors in Kozhikode went on a day's strike. Six persons who were subsequently arrested have since been granted bail by a local court.

The Kerala High Court which is seized with the issue of attacks on healthcare personnel (138 cases between June 2021 and May 2022) has already issued several interim orders to enable Doctors/nurses to function in the most efficient manner, without any extraneous pressure being brought upon them. On 1 December 2022, a Division Bench of the Court directed that every Station House Officer shall regis-

ter complaints (FIR) of atrocity or attack or harm on any Healthcare Professional – be that Doctors, Nurses, staffs, security or such other, or against the property of a Hospital -- within an hour from the time on which such information is obtained or gathered.

The court further observed that swift action thereafter needs to be initiated to apprehend the offenders, as and when it requires so, leading to prosecution and such other, as the law warrants. Seeking an action taken report over the recent attack on the Kozhikode cardiologist, the High Court has observed that the accused were not arrested, but they surrendered much later and the FIR was registered nearly 24 hours after the incident.

The following are some of the news items recurring in the media: 'Orthopaedic doctor thrashed by patient's kin'; 'Relatives of an alcoholic deceased patient brutally thrash two medical residents'; 'Brick hurled at a junior resident doctor by the relatives of a 75-year-old patient results in skull fracture'; 'Grandmother of a 2-month-old baby (who succumbed during treatment) assaults a junior doctor in the paediatric department'.

More recently a junior doctor at a Raipur Government hospital who asked a patient in the ICU to stop smoking was attacked by his relatives. Not long ago, two doctors at a Government Medical College in Maha-



There is an imperative need to prevent attacks on medical professionals. The society at large in the right earnest can help in nipping them in the budding stages itself

According to a 2018 Lancet report, quoting the Indian Medical Association (IMA), nearly 75 percent doctors in India have faced either verbal or physical violence during their lifetime

rashtra's Yavatmal district were assaulted with a fruit cutter knife by a patient. In Shimla, a patient asked the lady doctor to bandage an incision and when she entered the next room to get the bandage, the accused followed her, finding her alone, he assaulted her. In Faridabad, a 40-year-old doctor on duty in the Emergency Ward of the Civil Hospital was assaulted by attendants of a patient. The incident happened because the doctor who was already attending to another patient could not immediately attend the said patient, which infuriated the relatives who started beating him.

Although several states have passed the Protection of Medicare Service Persons and Medicare Service Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, which prohibits violence against doctors and other healthcare workers, that many hospitals have deployed security guards and bouncers to protect doctors on duty shows that attacks on doctors is happening across the country. For instance, between 2016 and 2019, there were 58 incidents of doctors, especially residents, being assaulted by patients' kin in Maharashtra. Similar incidents have been reported from several states.

During the first and second waves of COVID, instance of many doctors being attacked by relatives of family members of patients have been reported.

In case of doctors managing casualty wards, handling road traffic accident patients is at times difficult and reports indicate that with both the patients as well as their relatives drunk, arguments seem to be never ending.

According to a 2018 Lancet report, quoting the Indian Medical Association (IMA), nearly 75 percent doctors in India have faced either verbal or physical violence during their lifetime. Most of the cases of violence are due to patients' death, inflated bills and sometimes behaviour of the doctors. Junior



doctors are more exposed to violence for they are the first responders. Notably over 40 percent of resident doctors in tertiary care hospitals in New Delhi faced violence at work. Over 80 percent of doctors are stressed out in their profession and nearly 56 percent don't sleep comfortably for 7 hours a day.

Violence against doctors and hospitals is a major worldwide issue transcending regions and religions. If reports are to be believed, one-third of healthcare workers in the United Kingdom had faced violence at the workplace. In the US, between 1980 and 1990, more 100 healthcare workers died due to violence. According to the Chinese Medical Doctor Association, more than 105 violent incidents occurred between 2009 and 2015, leaving doctors with serious injuries. Notably a patient who was treated by a Dentist in China 25 years ago stabbed the 60-year-old doctor to death as he was left with yellow teeth after the surgery.

The general public needs to appreciate that many doctors and medical support staff work under challenging circumstances. Last year a 44-year-old surgeon who was stuck in Bengaluru traffic literally ran 3 km in 17 minutes to reach the hospital where his patient was scheduled for a surgery. He later observed that had he not reached on time, the patient would have felt uncomfortable as she had not consumed food before surgery. Moreover, his team was waiting for him and it would have resulted in a chain reaction affecting other patients scheduled to meet him and other doctors as well.

Breaking the bad news to a patient's family is delicate issue. There is an imperative need to prevent attacks on medical professionals. The society at large in the right earnest can help in nipping them in the budding stages itself. ©

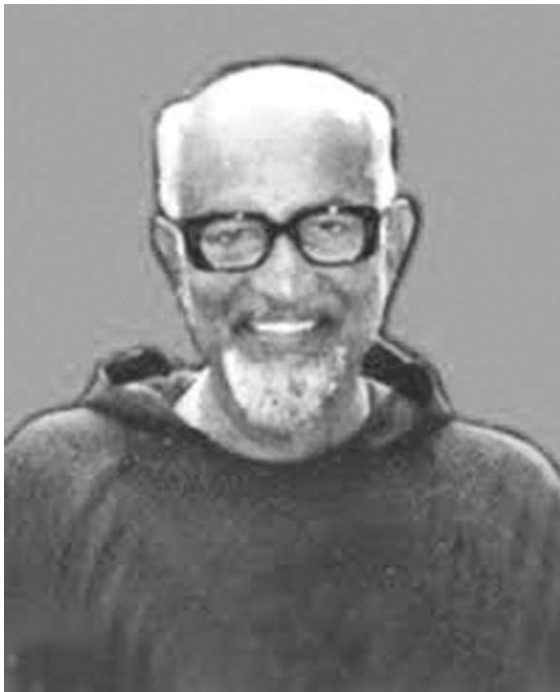
Servant of God: Fr Alfred Roche OFM Cap

A Vocation Promoter

BY **PATRICK CRASTA**

God the Father, in creating each and every one of us and conferring upon us different graces and blessings, has implanted in us seeds of gifts and talents of different kinds. These are meant to be fostered and rightly made use of, in thanking and praising God and in loving and serving one another. St. Paul beautifully bears witness to this: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1Cor 12:4-7).

Although every child of God is endowed with different graces and blessings, time and again, we see people who are not aware of these God-given gifts and talents. The Servant of God, Fr. Alfred Roche, had a special grace in discerning these God-given gifts and in orientating the young and the old during his pastoral service from place to place. He was encouraging and motivating even the elementary school children by giving them nice nick-names. Let us listen to Mr. Alex Crasta, Paradigm Excellus, Kadri, Mangalore: “In order to make these children more happy he gave new names to them: doctor, engineer, guitarist, lawyer, judge, secretary etc. Though they did not know the real meaning of those names, they were very happy and proud when he called each by the respective new name.... Fr. Santa Lopes, who was called secretary, and who is presently the vice-postulator for the Cause of Beatification of Fr. Alfred, bears witness to



this.” (Alex Crasta, *Alfred Roche: A Compassionate Pastor*, p. 39).

Fr. Alfred was very kind and generous. Sr. Elveera D’Costa, Sacred Heart Convent, Brahmavar, shares her personal experience: “I was privileged to have Fr. Alfred as my Guru, learning things not so much by preaching as by example of life. The fragrance of his saintliness spread around fast and many sought him in their need.... He encouraged students to work hard and study, bringing out their hidden talents. He gave always a positive stroke, showing how useful

they were and they proved it to be.” (witness no. 62). Besides, he helped out youngsters to find proper jobs and a number of them went to foreign countries. As a result, there was economic progress in many families.

The approach of Fr. Alfred was holistic. Along with faith-formation, education, and employment of the youth, he fostered vocations for priesthood and religious life from place to place. His humble and simple life-pattern attracted many to be priests and religious. Let us listen to Mr. Maxim Furtado, Baikadi, Brahmavar: “If there are many priestly and religious vocations in our parish, he is the cause for it. In reference to my own family, it was he who gave proper names to my children. It was he who encouraged them in their priestly and religious vocation; then he was an exemplary guide of my entire family.” (witness no. 15).

We say there are very few vocations for priestly and religious life. Is it not owing to lack of witness value in the life of priests and religious? ☪

Challenging Life

Do something you have never tried. Read a book or learn a new thing you have never tried. Give randomness to your career, it may surprise others but it will speak of originality

BY **P.A. JOSEPH**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), German music composer and one of the top world musicians, who had directed numerous orchestra programmes, was gradually losing his hearing capacity and by the time he was 40 he was totally deaf. But this did not make him stop his work, he continued with the same acumen and perfection to the admiration of all. It was really a wonder and miracle for his companions the great singers.

Another quality to be imbibed is courage to be cool and relaxed in spite of hard and tensed moments. We see people who can do hard work, but no one can approach them while they are busy with work. It is a great quality to be involved in strenuous work even for days and at the same time to be able to relax with friends and family.

The more I am involved in many tasks I must learn to have a harmonious life. The best quality table fans, even while in full speed, do not make any noise, not even vibrations. Same is the story of modern machines. These show harmony and symphony.

Smile has tremendous power. It is the beginning of friendship. Smile can bring in peace and it is a healing balm to any one in stress.

Expect the unexpected. A farmer was working hard in a strange field, cutting the hard soil with his spade and axe. The ground was very hard, and he realized that he was cutting heavy gold pieces. He was so much excited and quietly purchased the plot of land which fetched him millions of rupees. Luck and benefits come to the one who works hard.

Most of the discoveries are made in quite unex-



pected ways. Fleming, the British bacteriologist, discovered penicillin by pure chance. He found in his laboratory that in the dish something was killing the bacteria. He began to study on it and invented penicillin. Sir Isaac Newton saw an apple falling and began to think why apple is falling down and not going up. He began to study on it and discovered the theory of universal gravitation.

All these facts enable us to look for fresh places, new people, interesting verities, challenging situations, useful contacts and thus fresh encounters and business. Always expect the unexpected.

In this context it is advisable to travel often. Seeing is learning. Take a different route. Do something you have never tried. Read a book or learn a new thing you have never tried. Give randomness to your career, it may surprise others but it will speak of originality. When you show originality, others will follow and life becomes more interesting.

Unknowingly you build up a friendly team around you. There is an unknown fear to meet a stranger, but if I take courage and meet him/her for the first time, may be, I would find a friend in that person. Creating social contact is not magic. It is simply to get out of the routine feeling, and in that way a social network is created. These are all very simple wherever we are. ©

There is an unknown fear to meet a stranger, but if I take courage and meet him/her for the first time, may be, I would find a friend in that person

Church leaders seek action against speech insulting Pope

Church leaders in Narendra Modi's home state have demanded strict legal action in a case of hate speech circulating on social media insulting the pope and Catholic nuns.

Archbishop Thomas Ignatius Macwan of Gandhinagar in Gujarat on March 21 wrote to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel to take "immediate and stringent" action against a speaker, who is yet to be identified, and organizers of the event where defamatory statements were made against the supreme leader of the Catholic Church.

A video of the event has been circulating on social media for the past few days and contains provocative statements against local Christians and a Catholic pilgrimage center called Unteshwari Mata Mandir in Kadi village.

"We do not know the name of the speaker. But from the podium and background of the stage, it is clear that he was speaking at a Vishwa Hindu Parishad function in Kadi, Mehsana district, north-western Gujarat," said Father Telesphoro Fernandes, secretary of Gujarat Education Board of Catholic Institutions.

The speech in the local Gujarati language makes sexually explicit references to the pope and nuns and calls on the crowd to not tolerate Christian priests and nuns in their midst.

He said the pope is the husband of thousands of nuns the world over because nuns during their initiation ceremony need to accept him so. Therefore, the pope is committing adultery, he said.

The speaker further called to drive away the "dagalawala" (priests in cassocks) from the area.

Macwan's letter, released to the local media, said the video clip contains "obnoxious, shameful and hurtful statements against the pope."

The speaker, the prelate said, "has abused His Holiness with demeaning, uncouth and crass words. He has hurt the sentiments of 1.4 billion Catholics all over the world."

He further stated that the speaker also "cast aspersion on the integrity of the Catholic nuns and priests who have been doing a yeoman's service to humanity irrespective of caste, creed or religion."

Macwan said there is a possibility of support from local political leaders for the event.

"This is done systematically, consciously and deliberately with the tacit support of local political bosses and their ideologues," he said in the letter.

So far, no action has been initiated by the police against the accused person.

The VHP is considered an organization of Hindu radicals who openly target and threaten to uproot Christians from the country, accusing them of converting people through force, fraud and allurements.

"The Christian community in Gujarat is feeling extremely insecure due to the ever-growing cases of attacks, violence, physical intimidation and vitriolic hate speeches," Macwan said in his letter to the chief minister.

The prelate, however, acknowledged the support the Christian community receives from ordinary Hindu members.

Unteshwari Mata Mandir was built in honor of Mother Mary in 1969 and became a separate Parish with a resident priest in 1986.

It has 19 villages with a few Catholic families in each, while also serving as a secular space for retreats, spiritual and other social activities for various faith groups. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



'State can regulate fees' in minority colleges in India

In a verdict that will have far-reaching implications for minority Christian-run higher educational institutions in India, the country's top court has ordered that while a minority educational institution is free to devise its own fee structure, the state has the power to regulate it.

The Supreme Court ruling came while hearing a petition that challenged the authority of a committee set up by Madhya Pradesh state to regulate fees and admissions in minority-run higher education institutions in the state.

In its March 17 order, the Supreme Court said the minority institutions of higher education "should not claim complete immunity" in admissions and fee structures and "seek exemption from any interference" from the government.

The state established the committee in 2007 to fix the fees and supervise the admission process in the state's private higher education institutions following complaints that these institutions were charging exorbitant fees. The Church "accepts the verdict with mixed feelings," said Father Maria Stephen, the Church spokesman in Madhya Pradesh.

He said Church institutions "do not fix admission fees and other fees with the intention of making a profit. Our aim is to provide excellent structures and modern facilities. The fee regulatory committee should not compare private institutions with government-run colleges," he said.

"My point is that both sides [government and private owners] should walk hand in hand with understanding and transparency to improve the quality of education. Efforts should be made to remove the misunderstanding that private institutions are profit-oriented businesses," he said.

With its order, the Supreme Court was upholding a state high court verdict delivered on a petition filed by the Icon Education Society, a minority institution in Madhya Pradesh. The society refused to accept the authority of the state committee to scrutinize its fee structure.

The society complained to the court that the state committee violated the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and manage educational institutions for the betterment of their communi-



Members of a parents welfare association hold placards during a protest against a hike in fees charged by private schools in Amritsar on Feb. 3, 2018. (Photo: AFP)

ties, without the interference of the government. It is a right guaranteed in the Indian constitution, they argued. But the Supreme Court observed that the government has supervisory powers over institutions functioning in a state. It asked the society to submit the fees proposed by it for the state committee's "review and regulation."

"Setting up a reasonable fee structure is also a component of the right to establish and administer an institution....and every institution is free to devise its own fee structure subject to the limitation that there can be no profiteering," the court said.

In order to achieve that purpose, the state has to "regulate admission and fee structure," the top court said. The court also said there could be no capitation fee imposed on parents directly or indirectly or in any form. Govind Yadav, a lawyer in the Supreme Court, said the judgment is "applicable to all minority-run higher education institutions."

The court has not "interfered with the rights of minorities to establish and administer their institutions, but curtailed their unbridled power to charge whatever fees they wish," he told UCA News on March 21. Such regulatory systems exist in some states. But with the judgment "sooner or later, all minority institutions will have to subject their decisions" to such regulatory bodies, Yadav said.

The judgment will help students get higher education at a reasonable rate at private institutions, including those run by religious minorities, he said. © (Courtesy: UCANEWS)



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Jails, not Parliament..!

The auditors of the country, who are very powerful people and oversee how public money is spent by the ones who govern, in my imagination, pursed their lips while the government official sat in front of them. "Sir," said the first auditor, "there has been some very unwise spending on your part in building the new parliament building!"

"What are you saying?" screamed the government official jumping to his feet, then being told to sit down by his colleague, who gestured that auditors were very powerful people and could not be reasoned with threats or bullying, as he was used to doing. He sat down mollified, and asked in a whisper this time, "What are you saying?"

prudently..."

"Because we are not a very rich country," continued the first official.

"And if that same money could have been spent on something which is more necessary at the moment, then our job is to question you as to why the money wasn't spent there."

"Sirs, where else can we show the world we are the biggest democracy? Where else can our men make glorious speeches, and use argument and debate over pressing issues, than in parliament?"

"True," agreed the first auditor.

"Very, very true," said the second auditor.

The government official smiled with self-satis-



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"Speak louder!" said the first auditor.

"I did, and you didn't like it. What I said was, "What are you saying?"

The second auditor explained to him even more clearly what he had just said about too much money being spent on the new parliament building.

"What are you saying?" asked the government official again, and then realizing he had already asked that question rephrased it saying, "You are saying we have spent too much money on the parliament building?"

"No sir, we are saying there was no need to spend any money on a new parliament at all!" said both the auditors together.

"Do you know who built the old building?" asked the government official, "The British! Do you want to sit in the same building where our previous rulers sat?"

"Sir," said the second auditor, "Every bit of money in our country has to be spent wisely and

faction, and continued smugly, "Where else can the opposition speak against a motion, watched by the rest of the world?"

"Where is the opposition?" asked the first auditor quietly, "With many of them being put in jail, facing charges to be put in jail, or will soon find themselves in jail, don't you think the old parliament building would have sufficed to hold the rest of the members?"

"And so," said the second auditor even more firmly, "shouldn't you have spent that same money on building more jails to house all the opposition?"

The official from the government looked at his hands. He had nothing to say..! ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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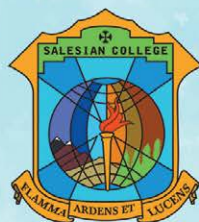
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