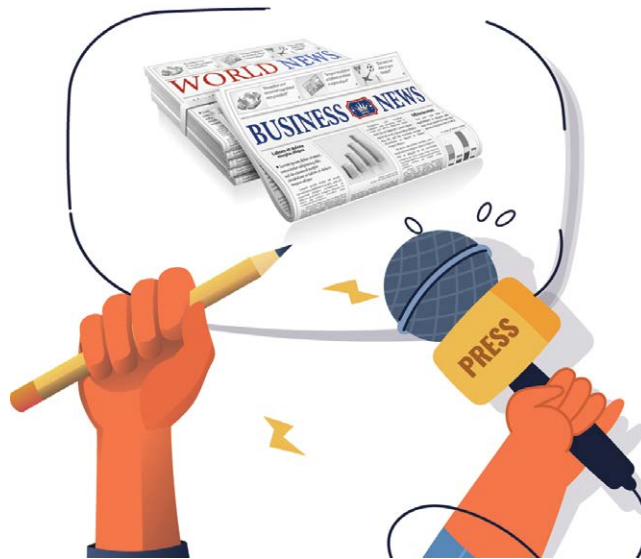


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JOURNALISTS CALLED TO BE PROPHETIC COMMUNICATORS



Prophetic voices of journalists that once kept governments and their officials on tenterhooks have turned feeble. Unfortunately, those who are willing to sing paeans to the powers-that-be are coming to the centrestage.



**STAN SWAMY IS
INNOCENT**



2023 Programme Schedule

1. (PSGA-1) **Post-Midlife Spirituality and Graceful Aging (January 15-29)**

This workshop explores the dynamics that affect the post-midlife years and provides approaches and exercises that enable one to age gracefully. (Age limit: 50 -70 years)

2. (EFS-1) **Enhancing Formation Skills (May 7-21)**

This workshop explores the challenges of religious and priestly formation today and provides formators insights from psychological theories and best practices to understand themselves, their formees, and the requisites for healthy formation and suggests ways and means for this and provides opportunities to learn from one another and be formed to form. (Age Limit- 25-55)

3. (ELS-1) **Enhancing Leadership Skills (May 27-June 11)**

This workshop explores concepts, styles, functions and challenges of effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership in Religious communities. Useful for current and future leaders. (Age limit: 35 – 55 years)

SUMEDHA SADHANA (A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL WHOLENESS JOURNEY): OUR FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

SS-46. February 12 - May 2; SS-47. July 1 - September 18; SS-48. October 1 - December 15

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

Faculty

Ajoy Fernandes PhD (*Personality & Spirituality, Formation*). Alba Rodrigues MA (*Yoga & Cosmic Spirituality*), Edison Fernandes PhD (*Therapy*), Joe Mannath PhD (*Psychosexual Integration, Formation*), Johny Dominic PhD (*Unconscious Dynamics, Therapy*). Jose Parakkad PhD (*Therapy*) Jose Parappully PhD (*Somatics, Midlife Dynamics, Graceful Aging, Spirituality, Trauma & Healing, Formation, Leadership, Therapy, Retreat*). M. Goretti Kanakarathinam MA, BEd, (*Emotions, Therapy*), Philip Pinto MA, BEd (*Consecrated Life*), KC Thomas Kurianthanam MPh (*Breath, Spirit & Wellbeing*).

For further information and registration form, please contact:

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PROPHETIC VOICE OF JOURNALISTS



When Tribals in many places were being denied their legitimate rights, Fr. Stan Swamy's consistent question was: "How long will the Adivasis be victims of systemic oppression?" His was a prophetic voice against an oppressive government and its minions. Like a prophet of olden days, he spoke up for the afflicted and the persecuted; and he paid with his life for what he stood for, and what he spoke. At a time when fascist tendencies are gnawing into the fourth pillar of the largest democracy in the world, journalism is at peril. The prophetic voices of journalists that once kept governments and their officials on tenterhooks have turned feeble. The searing words that exposed the wrong-doings of the government were enough to send a chill down the spine of erring parties and individuals.

Unfortunately, prophetic journalism is slipping to the margins; those who are willing to sing paeans to the powers-that-be are coming to the centrestage. Instead of uncovering the flips and flops of those in governance, the media is after the Opposition trying to ferret out their omissions and commissions. Here prophetic journalism is taking a backseat. Prophets were those who spoke truth without fear or favour. They had the courage to call out the injustices and unfairness of the rulers, unmindful of personal risk and safety. Their objective was nothing but telling the truth. This has been compromised in the present-day journalism. When objectivity gives way to subjectivity, what is reported may not be the whole truth. The real news gets subjected to manipulation to suit vested interests of someone else.

The distortion taking place in media has been picking up momentum in the recent past. The media that withstood the 'arm-twisting' tactics and pressures even during Emergency has been bending backwards of late. Instead of becoming voices of the oppressed, they have become mouthpieces of the government or exploiters of the people. This has become evident in reporting tribal agitations, trumped up cases against human rights activists, police highhandedness in students' stir, people's fight for their hearth and home, and many more such issues. Instead of asking questions to the government on policy failures and inadequacies in implementing schemes, media is more adept at becoming loudspeakers of the regime. A section of media has become an instrument of polarization by focusing on such issues at the cost of people's issues. Divisive communal issues eat up most of their air time.

Of course, it would be wrong to paint the entire media with the same brush. There are still media organizations and journalists whose prophetic voices boom, inviting the wrath of the authorities. This is evident from the number of journalists who are killed in the line of duty or jailed. According to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, globally 363 reporters are deprived of their freedom as on December 1, 2022. In India, seven journalists are in jail charged under various laws. It is a sign of stifling their voices. It is an indication that journalists who are not ready to toe the official line will have to pay a heavy price. In this context, a recent meeting of the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) held in Chennai on the theme "Journalists called to be prophetic communicators" was an important event in highlighting the issue. *Indian Currents* carries many insightful reports on the event in this issue.

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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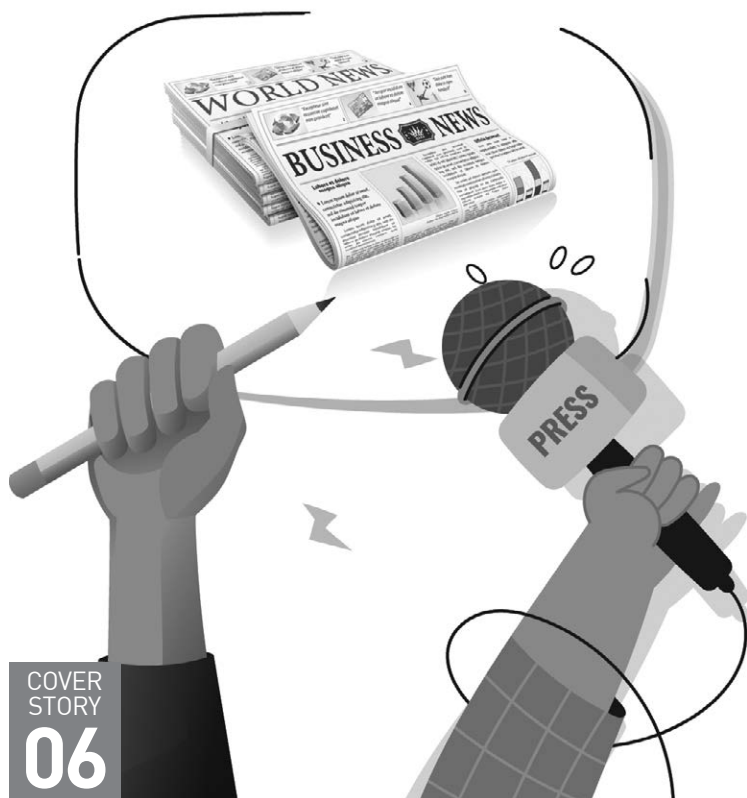
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POWER QUOTES



Our greatest happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed us, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits.

Thomas Jefferson

• • •



When ambition ends, happiness begins.

Thomas Merton

• • •



Be happy with what you have and are, be generous with both, and you won't have to hunt for happiness.

William E. Gladstone

• • •



Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions, it is governed by our mental attitude.

Dale Carnegie

• • •



Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

Helen Keller

• • •



A contented mind is the greatest blessing a man can enjoy in this world.

Joseph Addison

• • •



It is often said that before you die your life passes before your eyes. It is in fact true. It's called living.

Terry Pratchett

• • •



To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one's own in the midst of abundance.

Buddha

Journalism A Profession under Duress

Due to the very nature of the work of a journalist as a watchdog, especially of having an eye on those who enjoy power, his or her work is compared to that of a prophet

BY **GEORGE PLATHOTTAM**

The word 'prophet' is familiar to the people of different faiths. According to the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition, a prophet is someone specially called by God to speak in His name. Often his or her mission entails speaking the truth to those in power, pointing out falsehood and error, besides exposing malpractices and abuse of power.



profit or other personal gain. The nexus between those in power and the media is on the rise. In many instances, political leaders or their parties own and run the media and the journalists are forced to toe the line of these 'owners'. This obviously means compromising on the values of objectivity, freedom and transparency. But

Obviously, such a task entails a lot of risk. Journalism today is a profession under duress. History is tainted with the blood of journalists who have been killed because they spoke the truth. Journalists, no doubt, are prophets. A journalist by his or her profession and personal commitment is called to uphold what is true, what concerns the well-being of the people who do not have much power or influence. Due to the very nature of the work of a journalist as a watchdog, especially of having an eye on those who enjoy power, his or her work is often compared to that of a prophet.

the vast majority of journalists are faithful to their mission. In spite of some aberrations, the profession continues to enjoy much credibility. Many young people look to journalism as an academic choice and career option for the challenge the profession offers.

In today's highly competitive and commercialized world, corruption and malpractices have tainted the hallowed profession of journalism. Not all journalists today are honest and upright. There are those who sacrifice the ethics of the profession for power,

In the 1970s there was a surge in young people entering schools of journalism as they drew inspiration from the work of two young journalists of *The Washington Post*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Their courageous and persistent work at exposing the scandal in the US administration came to be called the Watergate Scandal. Their work eventually contributed to the resignation of the then US President, Mr Richard Nixon. Their brand of journalism came to be called 'investigative journalism'. For their heroic reporting, Bernstein, Woodward, and *The Washington Post* received the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1973. Watergate continues to be a symbol of investigative reporting worldwide, and the suffix "-gate" is used to describe scandals everywhere.





Gauri Lankesh Patrike

whole world acknowledged the work of Resse and her colleagues and praised her for winning the Nobel Prize, the Duterte government uttered not a word of congratulations! It was again a victory for honest, courageous and prophetic journalism, and a slap in the face of the powerful political class that tried to choke and suppress the voice of truth.

Journalists continue to be prophets of our times. Their work entails courage and conviction -- courage because they have to take on the high and mighty; conviction because they need to stand for truth and integrity. However, the journalistic profession comes at a heavy price. Journalists, especially freelancers, women journalists, or those who work with small and medium newspapers, hardly have any means to stand up against the mighty and the powerful except their pen. Like the prophetic voice, journalists' voice can be stifled and silenced, they can be jailed and even put to death. Journalistic organizations like the Indian Catholic Press Association must boldly stand up in support of those who dare to speak the truth.

The year 2022 marks the tenth anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. In a message for the day, the UN Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, noted that many journalists had lost their lives while covering conflict, but the number of media workers killed outside conflict zones has risen in recent years. "In many countries, simply investigating corruption, trafficking, human rights violations or environmental issues puts journalists' lives at risk," the UN Chief said. Journalists face countless other threats, ranging from kidnapping, torture and arbitrary detention to disinformation campaigns and harassment,

particularly in the digital sphere. He emphasized the need to bring the killers to justice and prosecute those who threaten and inflict violence on journalists.

The Director General of UNESCO, Ms Audrey Azoulay observed that for too many journalists, "telling the truth comes at a price." She reminded the Member States of their obligation to protect journalists and to ensure that the perpetrators of crimes against them are punished. The UN also noted that "threats to the safety of journalists, far from abating, have taken new forms in the digital age, especially for women journalists." According to them, the failure to investigate and address attacks online has real-life consequences, affecting their mental and physical health. The UN asked Member States to ensure that all journalists are free to carry out their vital work free of threats, intimidation or any form of reprisal online or offline.

It has been particularly hard for women journalists to do their work without fear. Among the leading women journalists on the line of duty who have been killed in recent times include Gauri Lankesh, the editor and publisher of a Bangalore-based weekly, the *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*. Lankesh, who was an outspoken journalist, was shot dead on September 5, 2017 in a calculated cold-blooded murder when she was returning home from work. Another prominent woman journalist of Al Jazeera Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead on May 11, 2022 by Israeli forces while covering Israeli army raids in the city of



Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

The 2021 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) shows that journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organization

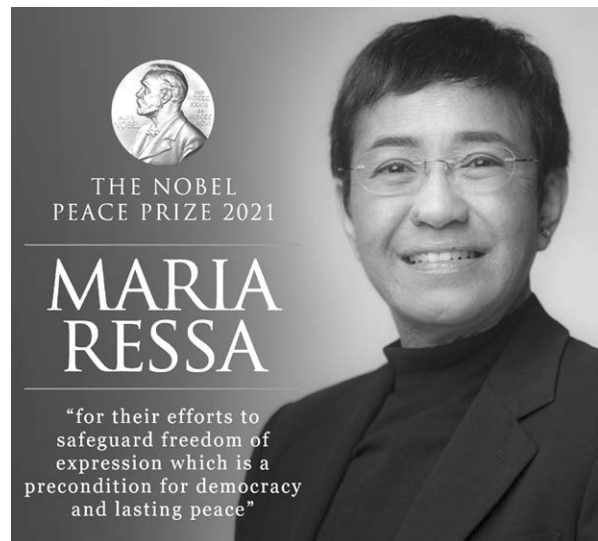
Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank. Abu Akleh was wearing a press vest and was standing with other journalists when she was killed.

According to the 2017 Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, India ranked 136 out of 180, a position quite out of keeping with India's image as the world's most populous democracy. Since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 43 journalists have been killed in India. The number tallied by the International Federation of Journalists is far higher: 73 journalists killed since 2005. In the cases of 30 journalists murdered since 2010, being tracked by the Indian media watchdog The Hoot, there has been just one conviction.

The 2021 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) shows that journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organization. These countries are classified as having "very bad," "bad" or "problematic" environments for press freedom, and are identified accordingly in black, red or orange on the World Press Freedom map.

The Index data reflect a dramatic deterioration in people's access to information and an increase in obstacles to news coverage. The coronavirus pandemic has been used as grounds to block journalists' access to information sources and reporting in the field. The data show that journalists are finding it increasingly hard to investigate and report sensitive stories, especially in Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

There is a disturbing decline in the public trust in journalists. The 2021 Edelman Trust barometer reveals 59% of respondents in 28 countries saying



that journalists deliberately try to mislead the public by reporting information they know to be false. In reality, journalistic pluralism and rigorous reporting serve to combat disinformation and "infodemics", including false and misleading information. "Journalism is the best vaccine against disinformation," RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. Journalism provides the most effective means of ensuring that public debate is based on a diverse range of established facts.

The 2021 Index demonstrates the success of Nordic nations like Norway (ranked first) Finland (second) Sweden (third) and Denmark (fourth) in upholding press freedom. In contrast, only 12 of the Index's 180 countries (7%) can claim to offer a favourable environment for journalism, as opposed to 13 countries (8%) last year.

It is the task of every lawful citizen to ensure that people with genuine motives enter the profession and those who are on the job are ethically guided. It is necessary today to watch the watchdogs and not blindly believe everything that they publish or broadcast is for the public good. It has become increasingly important to encourage good journalism and to educate the public to be more critical and discerning with regard to news and information that the media put out. Independent journalism and media come with a price which the public should be willing to pay. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEORGE PLATHOTTAM is currently the secretary of the Office for Social Communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

A Prophetic Duty

The Changing face of journalism: “Yesterday the country was a slave, a journalist free, but today the country is free and a journalist a slave.”

BY **JOE ERUPPAKATT**

Recently, Pope Francis began his Bahrain trip with these words, “Let us reject the logic of weapons and change course, diverting enormous military expenditures to investments in combating hunger and lack of health care and education.” The words are a powerful warning to the world leaders and those engaged in senseless wars and terrorist activities. This and other speeches of Pope Francis, the modern-day prophet, remind us of the Old Testament prophets who courageously confronted the powerful leaders and authorities.

A prophet teaches the truth. He calls a spade a spade. He courageously points out the flaws in the society and calls people to mend their ways or face the inevitable consequence of perishing. A prophet gives hope to those who are willing to change. He stands against the powers-that-be as sign posts to integrity, honesty and truthfulness. He is the voice of the voiceless, the oppressed, the weak and the marginalized in the society. He is the embodiment of courage and fearlessness in the face of harassment and torture for speaking truth.

Journalists as Prophets

The word prophet comes from the Greek word for spokesman: Someone who speaks on behalf of God. And the Hebrew word for Prophet is Navi/ Nabi meaning someone who proclaims, mentions,

summons. Herein lies a clear connection between a prophet and a journalist. In fact, a journalist is a spokesman, he/she proclaims the truth, summons or calls upon people to change. Prophets of the Old Testament such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Joel and Amos stand out as God’s spokespersons who called upon people to reform their life. Most of them paid the price for their courageous prophecy with their blood. John the Baptist, the one who came to prepare the way for Christ, called the people of his time ‘brood of vipers’ and cautioned them that the axe was laid at the root of the tree! They needed to change or they would all perish.

Like the prophecies of the Old Testament, the purpose of Journalism is communication and education, leading to social, political and cultural changes. Journalists communicate because people have the right to know the events accurately and truthfully, and form their own enlightened opinion. This is a prophetic call. But often the right of the people to know and the duty of the journalists to communicate are both either curtailed or weakened by several factors even in the so-called democracies. This leads to a weakening of our democratic institutions and the very system of democracy itself. Without proper communication of information and formation of enlightened public opinion, there is no survival for

Without proper communication of information and formation of enlightened public opinion, there is no survival for a democratic system. There can only be dictatorial regimes like in North Korea, China and to some extent Russia



Barkha Dutt



Faye D'Souza

a democratic system. There can only be dictatorial regimes like in North Korea, China and to some extent Russia.

Changing Journalism in India

“Yesterday the country was a slave, a journalist free, but today the country is free and a journalist a slave,” says Satyendra Singh Rajpurohit in his blog, “Journalism is Changing these Days”. The reasons for change are many. On the one hand, the big players in business absorb the smaller media houses and create huge media organisations, wielding enormous power, wealth and clout. They dictate terms to their journalists as to what to report and what not. The reporter and the writer have to cater to the interest of the powerful owner and those who finance him through advertisements. Often the journalists are paid to tell what the owner wants to tell – lies and half-truths. Truth becomes a casualty. The public are fed with lies and so fooled to believe what the media reports.

Yet another reason is the fear complex. Journalists are often threatened with raids, arrests and imprisonments by the ruling dispensations. As long as they report according to the dictates of the rulers and the powers-that-be, they are safe and secure. The moment they go against the interest of those in power, they are in their bad book and are likely to be booked any moment for imaginary or invented crimes such as treason, antinationalism, inciting communal tension, insulting the chief executive, etc. In such atmosphere of fear, journalists are afraid to

tell the truth. As a consequence, what the public get is biased and distorted news.

Prophetic Journalism in India

There are of course, exceptions to this state of affairs. The following three scenarios give us the hope that prophetic journalists who strive to tell the truth do exist at least in some quarters.

“News that should be headlines” is an Instagram page owned by the well-known media person Faye D'Souza. What Ms D'Souza does is to pick up and highlight the news that should have been headlines in the mainstream media, but ignored or overlooked by them for reasons best known to them. Surprisingly, Ms D'Souza has commanded a following of 8,43,000 people on Instagram! Add to these a whopping 1,61,000 YouTube subscribers she has amassed! And the good news is that both these are growing day by day. So much for people's thirst for unbiased, true and authentic news and Ms D'Souza's courageous prophetic journalism!

Ms Barkha Dutt, another journalist who needs no introduction, is the founder and of Mojo Story. This is an online portal that has the slogan: “People First – Courage, Compassion, Creative. Ms Dutt writes her stories not sitting in the airconditioned rooms, but travelling around the country, meeting people, talking to them, knowing their struggles, successes, failures and aspirations. During the first wave of Covid 19, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers left main cities to return home, mostly walking on foot, carrying their meagre belongings. It was perhaps the biggest mass exodus of people in human history, but the mainstream media conveniently ignored the poor people and their plight for several days. Ms Barkha Dutt was not one to ignore this catastrophic exodus. She hit the road for 120 days, covering 24,000 kilometres across 13 states to report on the plight of the moving migrant workers. She kept the nation updated on the pandemic hitting the poor and marginalized people. This was a story of courage, conviction and authenticity – all what prophetic journalism is.

The Mojo Homepage says, “Every sunrise gives us a fresh start and something new to relish. Every day, Team Mojo brings you a fresh serving of content covering motivational pieces, listicles, snippets from the women's space, thought provoking viewpoints, flashbacks, things to relax with, or simply savour.” According to Ms Dutt, “There are some stories that

you just know you cannot understand sitting in your office or sitting in your house. You need to go there and find the truth." Truth is what Mojo is all about. Prophetic courage is what Barkha Dutt epitomizes in her journalistic approach.

Hardly any mainstream media covered the story of the striking fishermen in Kerala. Authentic reporting of this story would mean going against interest of Gautam Adani, the powerful crony capitalist. The Vizhinjam Seaport project by Adani group has already displaced thousands of fisherfolk and deprived them of their livelihood and habitat. On the other hand, it is the problem faced by a negligible, poor, marginalised group of people, mainly from the Catholic community. The mainstream media found no interest in feeding the public with the daily stories of these people's struggle, how priests and even bishops in their clergy outfit led from the front and fought for the rights of a neglected and grossly oppressed people. After all, taking on Adani's project

would badly hurt the interest of the media organizations. So, the best option was to ignore and move on with the stories that were convenient to them.

But not surprisingly, Barkha Dutt's Mojo Stories published a brilliant story titled, "Fishing Communities Resist Mega Adani Port Construction, Raising Concerns Over Its Negative Impact on Livelihoods." Mojo had the courage to quote the local, affected people and say, "the environmental impact study for the project does not adequately address the issue of coastal erosion and its impact on the livelihoods of local population." Mojo reported: "The local fishermen held demonstrations, claiming that the port's development had negatively impacted their way of life, made hundreds of families homeless, and damaged the environment."

The above examples show how prophetic journalism is important and how it can influence public opinion. Let such tribe grow and redeem this noble profession from further weakening. ©

Church needs prophetic journalists: Archbishop Antonysamy

The Church needs prophetic Christian journalists today, said Archbishop George Antonysamy of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore while addressing the inaugural session of the 27th National Convention of Christian Journalists hosted by the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) on December 10, at Citadel, Salesian Provincial House Complex, in Kilpauk, Chennai. The prelate, who was the chief guest, reiterated that being a Christian journalist or editor is not a profession, but a vocation.

The venue where the convention took place was named after two prophetic personalities in the Catholic communion of saints -- Saints Titus Brandsma and Lazarus Devasahayam. The theme of this year's convention was 'Journalists: Called to be Prophetic Communicators'.

Mr S Peter Alphonse, chairman of the State Minorities Commission of Tamil Nadu, was the guest of honour. Present on the dais along with the dignitaries were Mr Ignatius Gonsalves, president of ICPA, Fr Suresh Mathew OFM Cap,



Archbp Antonysamy addresses the National Convention of Christian Journalists

Secretary of ICPA, Bishop Henry D'Souza, the Ecclesiastical Advisor of ICPA, and outgoing Ecclesiastical Advisor Bishop Salvadore Lobo. Other dignitaries included Fr K. M. Jose SDB, Provincial of the Chennai province of Salesians, and Fr Don Bosco, the vice-provincial.

The emcees for the power-packed event were Ms Elizabeth F Jane and Ms Priscilla Grace Gregory. The inaugural session began with Mr

Gonsalves lighting three candles in front of the pictures of the three deceased members of the association - Fr Aloysius Kokkatt, Fr Jose Arayathel SVD and MR CV Jose - who passed away this year. Fr Suresh paid tributes to the deceased members after which the attendees observed a minute of silence in honour of them. The dignitaries also offered floral tributes to the trio.

It was followed by a prayer dance put up by the students of St Isabel's College of Nursing, Chennai. Apart from ICPA members, Christian journalists, aspiring members of the association, media and communication students were among those present for the event. The dance was followed by lighting of the lamp by the guests and office bearers.

Fr Antony Pancras, the editor of The New Leader, delivered the welcome address. As he welcomed each distinguished guest on the dais, they were presented with a copy of the "Thirukural" in English and a shawl. He said that all those who have gathered at the venue have come together to listen to each other and strengthen the fraternal bonds to become exemplary journalists.

In his presidential address, veteran journalist, author and Church historian Mr Gonsalves gave a brief overview of ICPA and who comprises the association. He said that next year ICPA celebrates its 60th anniversary while the International Declaration of Human Rights enters its 75th year. He explained that "geopolitical repercussions have pushed human rights to the backyard. Not just India, but elsewhere. No wonder the West does little to challenge Delhi when it deviates from democratic values."

Mr Gonsalves said it was no coincidence that December 10 was chosen as the date of the 27th convention as it is International Human Rights Day. Quoting Rumi, he said, "Raise your words, not voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder". He then brought in the example of television news debates which he said were nothing but sound and fury signifying nothing. He gave a clarion call to journalists to put up a stout "existential fight". Before concluding, he bemoaned how the media was celebrating a survey that said journalism was the most regrettable course in universities. "How sad we celebrate our own doom," he

bemoaned. Quoting English poet John Milton, Mr Gonsalves said. "Awake, arise or forever be fallen."

Archbishop Antonysamy, who was the former Apostolic Nuncio to Guinea, Liberia, Gambia and Sierra Leone, invited journalists to bear in mind three words Pope Francis gave to media professionals -- Serenity, Precision and Completeness. The archbishop, who is the head of the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Conference, said Christian journalists should stick to the topic and not deviate and confuse people. They should build up a new society by pulling down evil and replacing it with good. He also shared with them St Teresa of Lisieux's Little Way to keep focused on one's work and thereby become prophetic communicators.

He signed off by saying that every news, blog post, tweet and comment is an opportunity to make God's love manifest if we commit ourselves.

The Guest of Honour, Mr Alphonse explained how after the fall of communism, people came to believe that the world belonged to liberalisation. But after the economic meltdown, they realised it was a big lie to rob the masses and make a creamy layer rich. Mr Alphonse expressed his angst about technological disruption. He said it was the duty of responsible journalists to take their stories on these aspects to the masses. He said this is the duty of Christian journalists too.

Bishop Lobo in his benedictory message said that compromise is the hallmark of the day everywhere. In such a scenario, Christian journalists have to look at Jesus who proclaimed not only the truth but also nothing but the truth. "You have a great part to play to proclaim the truth and complete the work given by Jesus Himself."

Bishop D'Souza said that to be prophetic means to be called 'to pull down and plant new' filled with faith, courage and fidelity. "We are called to give hope and announce the good news. It is a prophetic calling," he said, referring to journalism. Every Catholic journalist should edify and mentor a younger brood for the future, he said while summing up.

During the conclusion of the inaugural session, the guests were honoured with mementos and Fr Amirthraj SDB proposed the vote of thanks. He touched upon Synodality and said Catholic journalists should aim at building a better society. ©

Journalists' ties with power centres dangerous: Shashi Kumar

T rue journalism should not be a crony relationship with those in power, nor should it amplify divisive poisonous messages, said veteran journalist Dr Shashi Kumar, Chairman of the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, participating in a panel discussion on “Journalists called to be prophetic communicators” as part of the 27th National Convention of Christian Journalists on December 10. Mr Kumar said journalism sans context is not journalism, echoing the Pope, adding that journalism without transformative content is sheer gossip.

The moderator of the discussion was Dr Bernard D'sami, Head of the Department of History of Loyola College, Chennai. The other speakers were Dr A. L. Antony Sebastian of JD Academy, Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, and Ms Riann Maria Christus, a student of Don Bosco School of Excellence, Egmore, Chennai.

In his presidential address, ICPA President Mr Ignatius Gonsalves elaborated how the theme for this year's event was chosen. He said the present filthy 'mediascape', the shrinking space for inclusiveness, and the Synod on Synodality led to the formation of this year's theme along with the canonization of two prophetic voices -- St Titus Brandsma and Lazarus Devasahayam.

Dr D'sami reminded the audience that the Holy Father's message on the World Day of Communication was about fake news. He said everyone is going through a difficult time as there is an unholy alliance between the corporate giant-controlled media houses and fundamentalists.

In his keynote address, Mr Kumar quoted Pope Francis saying, “Journalism is not an easy mission. It is complicated to think to meditate, to study more deeply, to stop and collect ideas and to study the contexts and precedents of a piece of news.” He reminded journalists that their profession is not an easy mission. He decried television news debates as nothing short of gladiatorial shows where one is pitted against the other to titillate people and get eyeballs.



Sashi Kumar address the National Convention of Christian Journalists

He urged journalists not to peddle propaganda disguised as news. He also warned about the “post-truth” culture, in which lies are repeated countless times until the public becomes gullible and they are force-fed it. An informed citizen makes a better democracy, he said, adding that the sacred Constitution is slowly being eroded. In such challenging times, journalism itself is facing the biggest challenge of all times now.

In his talk, Dr Antony Sebastian gave a Biblical touch to journalism. He said one needs to stand up and speak the truth sans fear. He said the Bible commands us to tell the truth without bias. Citing the Epistle to the Ephesians, he cautioned against ‘corrupting talk’ coming out of the mouth. He also made a novel observation that the Gospel of Luke is a model for journalism. Luke verified the facts about Jesus and then told the truth.

Ms Riann began her address by quoting noted lawyer Fali S. Nariman: “Freedom after speech is real freedom of speech”. She said Christian journalists have a big responsibility as both believers and citizens of this country.

They have to analyse the truth. She exhorted journalists with a quote from author JRR Tolkien who said, “There is some good in this world and it is worth fighting for.” She said that by imitating the example of Jesus, journalists have to upset money

changers' tables while working for the common good.

It was followed by an interactive session between members of the audience and the speakers. Some of the topics that came up for discussion were the relevance of online media at a time when media houses are being taken over corporate giants, fake news peddled on social media without any checks and measures, the bias of the mainstream media and how to deal with threats and intimidation. The questions were mostly answered by Mr Kumar in his own erudite, pithy style.

Fr Suresh Mathew, Secretary of ICPA, proposed the vote of thanks during which he highlighted the key points of each speaker. Later, Bishop D'Souza presented mementos to the speakers and moderator.

The session came to a close with a short video presentation on the making of the movie on Blessed Rani Maria, a nun who was martyred while working among the downtrodden in Indore. Titled "Face of the Faceless", the movie was explained by its director Shaison P Ouseph. It is slated to be released on February 25 next year, on the day of the martyrdom of the heroic nun. ©

Excellence Award for John Dayal

Jesuit activist Fr Irudhaya Jothi and writer-crusader Sr Ganga Rawat also awarded

Three outstanding Catholic journalists were honoured with awards during the 27th National Convention of Christian Journalists hosted by Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) in Chennai.

Fr Louis Careno Award 2022 for excellence in journalism was conferred on veteran journalist John Dayal for his bold, continuous and consistent writing against communalism and fundamentalism. The ICPA Award for the best reportage on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was bestowed upon Fr Irudhaya Jothi, a Jesuit priest and journalist-activist. He has been regularly contributing to major national and international news portals on Dalit issues. The Swami Devanand Chakkungal Award for contribution to Hindi literature went to Sr Ganga Rawat SSPS, who uses her pen to bring the Word of God to Hindi readers across the country.

The ceremony began with a colourful "Thirukural" dance by the girls of Good Shepherd Hr Secondary School, Nungambakkam, Chennai. Welcoming the award winners, the association members and other guests, Fr Joby Mathew, treasurer of ICPA, said the convention was felicitating those who have translated the theory of journalism into their works and have been prophetic in their writings. The awards were



Dr John Dayal received the Louis Careno Award from Justice Chandru

instituted in 2000 to promote the print media and journalism ethics.

Fr Joby welcomed the chief guest former Judge of Madras High Court Justice (Retd) K Chandru, saying his life proves success is only for those who work for justice. The legal luminary deserves honour for the record of clearing 96,000 cases in just six years. He also scripted history by refusing to have the traditional silver mace-bearing herald while coming to court and did away with the address of "My Lord".

The guest of honour was Fr A Thomas SJ, prin-

cial of Loyola College, Chennai. The other members on the dais included Fr K.M. Jose SDB, Provincial of the Chennai province of Salesian, and Fr Don Bosco, the vice-provincial. They were all welcomed with a shawl and copy of the Thirukural in English by ICPA President Mr Ignatius Gonsalves. Also present on the occasion were Bishop Henry D'Souza, Ecclesiastical Advisor of ICPA, and his predecessor Bishop Salvadore Lobo.

Mr Gonsalves, in his presidential address, said Justice (Retd) Chandru is an icon and an iconoclast and someone who stood by the marginalized. He said if Justice (Retd) Chandru could do all these things, then why can't others? He added that they were fortunate to have him in their midst as three role models of journalists were being felicitated. He quoted from TS Eliot's play *The Rock*: "Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" Mr Gonsalves said these lines have striking parallels to the times we live. He wound up saying the ICPA awards always go to the deserving and that nominations are on the rise each year.

Fr Thomas SJ said they are all living in a post-truth society. He said that being a Christian journalist is quite challenging as he can expect bricks instead of bouquets. He congratulated the award-winners for being prophetic voices.

Justice (Retd) Chandru spoke on media control which is a stark reality and the need to discuss the growing threat to honest journalists. "True reporting will invite adverse reactions from the state as the government feels threatened. They fear the Fourth Estate," he said. He also expressed his worry over attempts being made to rewrite the Constitution. It is a matter of do or die when it comes to nipping totalitarianism and fascism in the bud, he added.

Fr K. M. Jose SDB echoed Justice (Retd.) Chandru in warning journalists of the lurking dangers and thanked them for the wonderful service they are doing. The awards were given away by the former Judge, and as each recipient received the plaque, a citation about the award and a brief description of the award winner was read out.



Justice Chandru Addresses the National Convention of Christian Journalists

Accepting the award, Mr Dayal, who is among India's foremost voices against human rights violations and also an author, said he was accepting it for all journalists who have been killed and incarcerated. He shared his thoughts on the cartelization of the media which the country is facing today.

Fr Jothi SJ told the gathering that the verse he chose during his ordination (Luke 4:18, 19) still guides him as he ministers among the Dalits and the tribals as well as women and the marginalized. After being awarded, Sister Ganga said the pen is a weapon in a positive way and it is still possible to fight with it. A writer and poet, she said there is a great need to encourage and stand for justice. The event also witnessed the release of the book "Journalists: Called to be Prophetic Communicators". During the event, the Tamil Catholic Association also honoured the three recipients of the awards. The greetings of Archbishop Thomas Menamparambil were read out and copies of his book were distributed.

Fr Antony Pancras spoke on a small book penned by Fr Jerry SJ on St Devasahayam, one of the saints after whom the venue was named. He said the content in verse form was of interest to journalists. Fr Gnani Lazar of Tamil Catholic weekly "Nam Vazhvu" presented vote of thanks during which he hailed the award winners as those who left strong footprints on the sands of time. ©

Statement issued by Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA)



The Annual General Body Meeting of the Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) was held at Citadel, Salesian Provincial House Complex, in Kilpauk, Chennai, on December 10, 2022. Preceding this meeting, the ICPA hosted the 27th National Convention of Christian Journalists at the same venue. The convention has always been a meeting place for media professionals to exchange ideas and discuss the trends, challenges and writing on the wall related to contemporary journalism. The theme for this year's convention was "Journalists: Called to be Prophetic Communicators".

Members of the ICPA and the invited guests were privileged to interact with and listen to luminaries from the Indian media. Coming from the print, broadcast and online media, the members of the association actively took part in the sessions and seriously looked at the dark clouds gathering over the mediascape. As members of the Fourth Estate and proud citizens of India, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the unsavoury developments in the social, economic, political, technological and religious spheres. Throttling of dissent and free speech, stifling independent media outfits, the toxic post-truth culture, planted news, proliferation of fake news, hate speech and poisonous rhetoric on social media are baring their ugly fangs. With corporate giants swallowing media houses and cosyng up with fundamentalists and ultra-nationalists, authoritarianism is getting a free run. Central agencies become tools of the state to silence free speech and intimidate journalists and activists.

This creates a fertile climate for slow aggression on federalism, language and civil rights.

In these tumultuous times, Christian journalists are left with little choice but to be prophetic voices and rise up and use the pen to fight for what is right and to protect the sanctity of the Constitution inspired by our Master, Jesus. It is now or never as efforts are underway to even rewrite the sacred Constitution and give it a saffron hue.

In the context of the above, we the members of the ICPA, resolve to:

Nip both totalitarianism and fascism in the bud as it is a do-or-die situation

*To desist from cronyism with the powers-that-be
Tell the truth come what may as the Gospel mandates us
Have transformative content in the news*

Diligently stand for the truth at a time when the cartelization of the media is happening

Be prophetic voices of truth and justice in a "post-truth" culture

Put up a stiff existential fight to protect the Constitution

May we be inspired by our Holy Father Pope Francis who said, "Journalism is not an easy mission. It is complicated to think, to meditate, to study more deeply, to stop and collect ideas and to study the contexts and precedents of a piece of news. The risk, as you well know, is to be overwhelmed by the news instead of being able to make sense of it. This is why, I encourage you to preserve and cultivate that sense of mission that is at the origin of your choice. And I will do so with three verbs that I believe characterize good journalism: listen, investigate and report." ©

India and Britain

A Study in Contrast

We in India use our energy to change all the Islamic names of places and institutions, pass laws against non-essential issues like triple talaq, appoint committees as in Maharashtra to monitor how persons involved in interfaith marriages lead their personal lives and find new ways to keep the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes under subjugation

BY **A.J. PHILIP**

Christmas reminds me of the census. The Bible says that Joseph and his heavily pregnant wife Mary left their home in Nazareth in Galilee to take part in the census ordered by the Roman Emperor. That is how they reached Bethlehem where Jesus was born two millennia ago.

On November 30, 2022, newspapers carried reports about the 2021 census in Britain which showed that in England and Wales, Christians were no longer in majority. The Covid-19 pandemic had delayed the census in Scotland. The findings there are unlikely to alter the overall picture.

The census figures have huge implications for Britain. That is what I thought. I expected The Economist to do a cover story and publish a leader on the subject. Nothing of the sort happened. It was reduced to one of the stories in the British section of the weekly magazine, my favourite for many decades.

According to the 2011 Indian census, Christian population showed the lowest growth rate among



the adherents of the first three religions. Yet, the most powerful Indian state has been doing everything possible to harass Christians who consider it their duty to propagate their religion, a right the Constitution of India grants under Article 25.

As many as 11 states have enacted what is euphemistically called the Freedom of Religion laws to ban conversions. As if they are not sufficient, the Supreme Court is now hearing a petition on why a national law is not necessary to fight the evil of conversion. A learned Judge thinks that if a few people change their religion, it will undermine the security of the nation.

Recently, the state of Uttarakhand thought it necessary to strengthen the anti-conversion law. Such strengthening of laws can go to ridiculous extent as in Karnataka.

The fact of the matter is that the proponents of Hindutva do not want the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes to get educated so that they are not deprived of cheap labour. Jesuit Stan Swamy became an enemy who needed to be killed in police custody because he tried to empower the tribals





For instance, the punishment for converting anyone is doubled in the case of mass conversion. I know about only two mass conversions. One was when Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the Fourth Century AD and when Dr BR Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in the 20th century.

The lawmakers in Karnataka have brought the bar of mass conversion so low that mass conversion is defined as “conversion of two or more people”. If a couple converts, it is treated as “mass conversion”. Samuel Johnson, the great lexicographer, would have turned in his grave when he heard about the new definition.

Allurements have also been defined. If a Dalit child is admitted to a good school and taught there, it would be considered an allurement. If the same child is allowed to study in a rotten school, it is not an “allurement”.

The fact of the matter is that the proponents of Hindutva do not want the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes to get educated so that they are not deprived of cheap labour. Jesuit Stan Swamy became an enemy who needed to be killed in police custody because he tried to empower the tribals.

That is what they dislike – empowerment of the poor and the socially and culturally oppressed. I remember listening to a two-term Dalit MP saying that he always carried a glass with him so that when he went to an upper caste person’s house, he could have water in his own glass.

“That is our tradition”, he said without realising that such traditions need to be broken, not perpetuated. Hindus constitute over 80 per cent of the population. Top officials from the President to the Governors belong to this community. Yet, they are so scared of a 2.8 per cent Christian population, a

majority of whom are poor, that they are thinking of a national law to ban conversion.

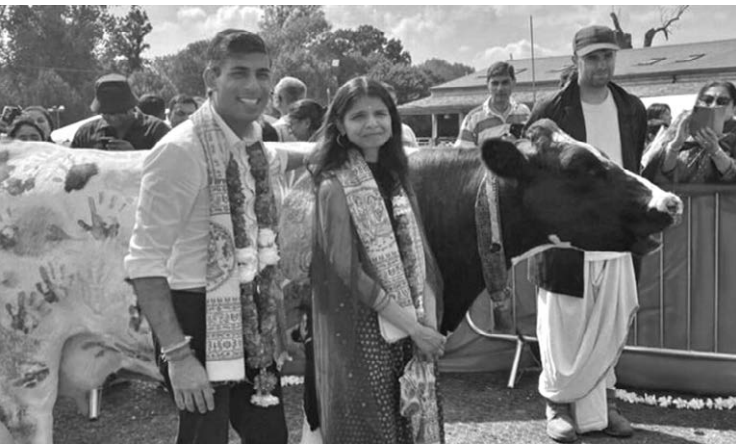
Paranoia is artificially constructed. In 1909, Lt. Col. UN Mukerji wrote a book titled “Hindu: A Dying Race”. He argued that in less than a hundred years Hindus will become a minority. Let me quote his colourful lines, “The Maoris of New Zealand and the natives of the US and Hispaniola disappeared following foreign invasions: We are also a decaying race. Every census reveals the same fact. We are getting proportionally fewer and fewer”.

Mukerji feared the Muslims. The 2011 census showed that the highest decline in the growth rate was among the Muslims. One hundred and thirteen years after his book appeared, the Hindus’ numerical strength remains as strong as ever. Yet, every day, at least two false cases are registered against Christian workers and pastors in the country.

I say false because despite the anti-conversion laws existing in several states like Madhya Pradesh and Odisha for more than half a century, not a single Christian has been convicted for forced conversion. Yet, thousands of Christians were arrested, harassed and incarcerated on false charges. Now, let us know how Britain is coping with the “demographic imbalance”!

True, Britain ruled this country for about 200 years. It was a business enterprise for them. Conversion was not their aim. It is also true that many Christians of Britain thought it necessary to leave the comforts of their native land to work in India. One of them was William Carey, whom the British authorities did not even allow to step on the Indian soil.





He, therefore, went to Dutch-ruled Serampore where he set up, first, a school, then, a printing press and started publishing the *Friend of India*, from which descended *The Statesman*.

It was the setting up of the universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras which enabled Indians to think nationally and eventually demand freedom. The Indian National Congress and even the RSS, founded in 1925, were the result of the sense of nationalism these universities instilled in the minds of the young people.

Now, let's return to Britain and the census there. When Rishi Sunak became the Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister of Britain in October, the media in India, especially the social media, celebrated the event as if India had taken over Britain.

Sunak is a citizen of Britain, his parents having settled down there. The British have no difficulty in recognising talent. VP Menon was not even a matriculate but that did not prevent the British from recognising his talent and making him the Secretary of States, the highest post an Indian could occupy in the British civil service.

As the right-hand man of Sardar Patel, he integrated over 500 Indian native states into what is now India. Recently, an election for the post of president of the Indian National Congress was held. Shashi Tharoor, MP lost the election, though his supporters, like Donald Trump's hardcore supporters, think that he won. There was a leader who was elected thrice to the post of Congress president. He was Dadabhai Naoroji. He became the 2nd, 9th and 22nd president of the Congress.

Thereafter, he went to England, joined the Labour Party there and got elected to the House of Commons from 1892 to 1895. The British Empire was still

where the Sun never set. Nobody questioned his credentials to represent the constituency he represented in Britain on the plea that his heart was in India, not Britain.

On the contrary, we had a leader in late Sushma Swaraj who said that she would tonsure her head and sleep on the floor for as long as Sonia Gandhi remained the Prime Minister. It was an emotional blackmail to prevent her from becoming the Prime Minister. The poor lady did not know that Mrs Gandhi had a better plan up her sleeve.

The British census is quite revelatory. The highest growth rate was recorded by the Indians, who now constitute 7 per cent of the population. Needless to mention, a majority of them are Hindus, including the cow-worshipping wife of Rishi Sunak, who also happens to be the daughter of multi-billionaire NR Narayana Murthy and his wife Sudha Murthy.

How did Britain become a non-Christian nation? The 2011 census showed that it was a marginally Christian nation. In other words, the Christian majority was very thin. True, the appeal of the church has been waning, though the values it fostered continue to remain strong.

For instance, in a public library, the readers are expected to pick up the books of their choice after filling up the book numbers and their membership number on a card to be deposited in a box. There is nobody to frisk them. Similarly, the bus driver himself issues the ticket and collects the fare. There is no conductor or checker or what is called a "flying squad".

In contrast, thousands of ticketless passengers were caught when a surprise check was conduct-

Despite the anti-conversion laws existing in several states like Madhya Pradesh and Odisha for more than half a century, not a single Christian has been convicted for forced conversion. Yet, thousands of Christians were arrested, harassed and incarcerated on false charges

ed on Western and Central Railways in Mumbai as recently as a few weeks ago.

Britain has had a census since 1841. People are encouraged to tell the truth. Is that the case in India? If a Scheduled Caste person who considers Jesus as his personal saviour admits that he is a Christian, the government will immediately stop the benefit of reservation to him.

If the Scheduled Caste Christian is beaten up by upper caste Hindus, he will not be able to get the benefit of the Act that specially protects Scheduled Castes from such atrocities. Falsehood is what the state in India thrives on.

It denies reservation to Christians on the plea that Christianity is an egalitarian religion. Sikhism

Now that Britain is no longer Christian, demands are bound to be made to make some Constitutional changes. For instance, 25 seats are reserved for the bishops of the Church of England in the House of Lords, the Upper House of British Parliament

and Jainism are also egalitarian religions but those who claim to be Scheduled Castes among them are entitled to reservation. It is also a state which fabricates evidence to “kill in custody” a person like Stan Swamy.

In Britain, the citizen does not have to fear any retribution when he honestly says that he has “no religion”. Surveys have shown that only 5 percent of the population attends church service. In a city like London, if the pews of the churches are full, it is because of immigration. Christians from places like India who reach there tend to attend churches. Like whenever I go abroad, I like to attend the nearest church on Sundays. That is how I attended a Black church in Johannesburg one Sunday morning.

The number of people who described themselves as without religion grew by 57 percent from the number in 2011. The ethnic and religious makeup of Britain has been undergoing a metamorphosis. In



London, for instance, white Britons constitute only 37 percent. Together with other whites, the figure of the white goes up slightly over the median by 2 percent.

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Recently, when Queen Elizabeth was given a funeral, it was in accordance with the rites of the Protestant faith. After all, she was also the head of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith. Tens of thousands of people attended the funeral. It is a moot point how many of them would have prayed for her soul. They were there to express their grief.

In May next, the coronation of King Charles will happen. It remains to be seen whether he would be declared the defender of the faith or the defender of all faiths. The latter would be more appropriate as Britain that his mother bequeathed to him is not the Britain her father King George VI bequeathed to her in 1952. Today, King Charles has a Hindu Prime Minister to report to him and a Muslim Mayor to look after the needs of London.

These are not issues of any concern to the average British citizen, who is more bothered about the war in Ukraine making his life miserable with prices of fuel going through the roof. On the contrary, we in India use our energy to change all the Islamic names of places and institutions, pass laws against non-essential issues like triple talaq, appoint committees as in Maharashtra to monitor how persons involved in interfaith marriages lead their personal lives and find new ways to keep the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes under subjugation. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Fr Stan Swamy IS Innocent

The agencies that hounded him - particularly the National Investigation Agency (NIA) - did not have a shred of evidence to prove his so-called 'anti-national activities'

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

That Fr Stan Swamy is innocent, it was never in doubt. From Day One, when his name began doing the rounds as one of the 'wanted' in the Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case, he vehemently denied any involvement. Later, the hounding and the harassment began with investigations, interrogations and the 'seizing' of his meagre possessions including his computer. Then the biased agencies 'confronted' Fr. Stan with some emails and other documents which they had apparently 'found' in his computer. Fr Stan once again said that he knew nothing about them: he neither wrote the stuff with which they were accusing him of nor



did he know or was in contact with any of the persons being referred to. Then came that infamous day: October 8, 2021 when he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and incarcerated in the Taloja jail near Mumbai. He suffered greatly during that time, until his death, which was indeed an institutional murder, on July 5, 2021.

All through, Fr Stan asserted and maintained his innocence. He would constantly say, "*I have done nothing wrong. I am innocent!*" Everyone believed him: the Adivasis, whom he selflessly served; the poor and the marginalized; the excluded and the exploited; and people from every walk of life: the academics and civil society, ex-bureaucrats and politicians from across the spectrum. Hundreds of thousands came out in support of him onto the streets despite the COVID times. His incarceration and the brutalization to which he was subjected to, figured across the globe; United Nations agencies and foreign Governments sent missives to the Indian Government; Statements were issued from every quarter. Nothing, however, could budge a vindictive, unjust system that went all out 'to teach a lesson' to this frail 84-year-old Jesuit priest.

Fr. Stan's only crime was that he believed in the Gospel of Jesus and in the Constitution of India - and he did all he could to realize this in the lives of the sub-alterns, those who were voiceless victims of an inhuman system. The agencies that hounded him - particularly the National Investigation Agency (NIA) - did not have a shred of evidence to prove his so-called 'anti-national activities'. They made him languish in jail till a sensitive judge allowed him to be hospitalised in a private facility whilst still in custody. It was then too late. When Fr Stan went to his eternal reward on July 5, 2021, the verdict by 'we the





World War In Ukraine Africa Americas A

ASIA

Hackers planted evidence on computer of jailed Indian priest, report says

Jesuit priest Stan Swamy died after spending more than eight months in jail on terrorism charges



By Niha Masih

December 13, 2022 at 7:30 a.m. EST



people' was loud and clear: 'Fr Stan succumbed to institutional murder! He is innocent!'

Now the bombshell! On 13th December, the prestigious US daily *The Washington Post* under the title, 'Hackers planted evidence on computer of jailed Indian priest, report says,' detailed the findings of the reputed US-based forensic firm Arsenal Consulting. The Arsenal report provides incontrovertible evidence of how Fr Stan's computer was hacked and incriminating documents were planted in it. The *Washington Post* says, "Now, an examination of an electronic copy of his computer by Arsenal Consulting, a Massachusetts-based digital forensics firm, concludes that a hacker infiltrated his device and planted evidence, according to a new report by the company. The analysis is more proof that Swamy and his co-defendants were framed in a case that exemplifies the Indian government's crackdown against civil society and prominent critics, the defense team says."

The article went on to add: "The latest report by

Arsenal says Swamy was the target of an extensive malware campaign for nearly five years, the longest known for any defendant, right up until his device was seized by police in June 2019. During that period, the hacker gained full access and had complete control over his computer, dropping dozens of files into a hidden folder without his knowledge. Arsenal has conducted its work at the request of the group's defense team. These documents – purported letters between defendants and the Maoist group – are cited by the police as evidence against Swamy and others in what is known as the Bhima Koregaon case. International human rights groups, including United Nations experts, have previously called on the Indian government to release the defendants, at least on bail, given their advanced ages and ill health."

The 25-page Report of December 11, 2022, produced by Arsenal Consulting, is furnished with technical data. Arsenal had proved earlier how the computers of two of the other BK accused Rona Wilson and Surendra Gadling were also hacked. In the Introduction, Mark Spencer, the President of Arsenal Consulting states, "Arsenal produced four reports in this case related to Rona Wilson ("Report I" on February 8, 2021, "Report II" on March 27, 2021, and "Report IV" on August 18, 2021) and Surendra Gadling ("Report III" on June 21, 2021) and was then asked by Fr. Swamy's defense team to produce a report regarding our analysis of electronic evidence seized from Fr. Swamy's home".

In a detailed Press Release on the findings by Arsenal Consulting, Dr. Fr. Joseph Xavier SJ, Convenor of 'Fr. Stan Swamy Legacy Committee of the Jesuits' says: "Hackers first attacked Father Stan's computer on October 19, 2014 using a Remote Access Trojan (RAT) called Netwire. RATs allow an attacker

Fr. Stan's only crime was that he believed in the Gospel of Jesus and in the Constitution of India - and he did all he could to realize this in the lives of the sub-alterns, those who were voiceless victims of an inhuman system

to both remotely surveil someone's computer, and to transfer files from and to the computer. In Father Stan's case, every single thing he typed was recorded using a process called "keylogging." The report shows examples of the hackers being able to read his passwords as he was typing them, as well as other documents and emails. The hacker also surveilled as many as 24,000 files on Father Stan's device."

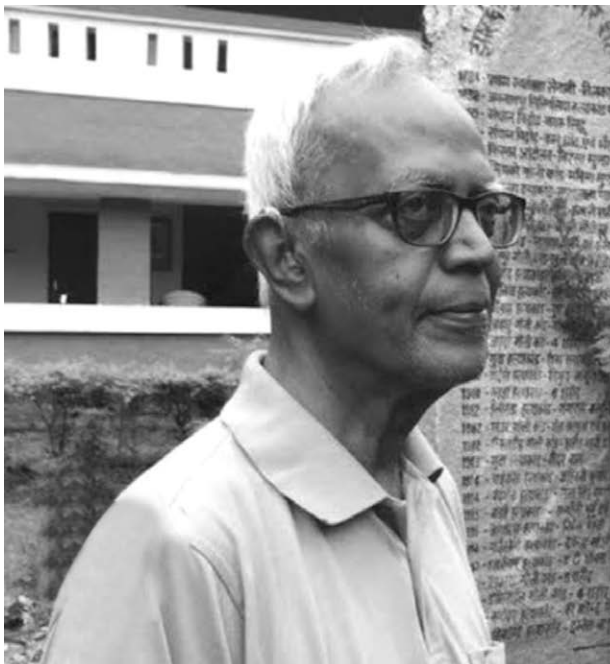
He goes on to add, "In addition to surveillance, digital files were planted on Father Stan's hard drive across two hacking campaigns starting in July 2017 and continuing till June 2019. Over 50 files were created on Father Stan's hard drive, including incriminating documents that fabricated links between Father Stan and the Maoist insurgency. The final incriminating document was planted on Father Stan's computer on June 5, 2019, a week before the raid on Father Stan. It was on the basis of these documents that Father Stan was first arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case, in spite of experts raising serious doubts about the authenticity of the documents."

What clearly emerges from this significant report is that Fr Stan Swamy was framed, his computer was hacked over a period of time, some forty incriminating documents were planted in his computer. Above all, as was believed by most people, Fr Stan Swamy is innocent. Ever since the Arsenal Consulting Report was released, there has been a groundswell of support for the innocence of Fr Stan Swamy and also

The Arsenal report provides incontrovertible evidence of how Fr Stan's computer was hacked and incriminating documents were planted in it

for all the others still languishing in the Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case. The NDTV channel (despite there being a change in ownership) headlined this story for more than a day. Surprisingly, other national channels and also mainstream media have taken note of this report which speaks volumes. Significantly, Opposition members in Parliament walked out of the session protesting a wide range of issues including that Fr Stan Swamy is innocent.

Statements are pouring in from civil society groups, human rights organisations, eminent individuals and others. Social media too has highlighted the innocence of Fr. Stan. The internationally renowned UK-based 'Christian Solidarity Worldwide' has issued a powerful statement. CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: 'This report, with its detailed analysis that Father Stan Swamy's computer was hacked, is further proof that his arrest and the treatment meted out to him while in prison, that ultimately cost him his life, were a violation of his



human rights. We call upon the Supreme Court of India to declare Father Swamy innocent, and to provide justice for those still languishing in jail in the Bhima Koregaon case.'

For the last few years, those who stand up for truth and justice on behalf of the excluded and exploited, the poor and the marginalised, are at the receiving end of a fascist regime. The vicious and vindictive regime spares no efforts in investigating and interrogating, in foisting false cases and using official Government agencies to hound and to harass anyone who dares to take a stand. Some people,

like those in the Bhima-Koregaon case, are not only incarcerated but also killed.

The Arsenal findings have not only vindicated Fr. Stan, but will hopefully ensure newer and greater momentum to those who want to preserve the democratic ethos and pluralistic fabric of the country. Many citizens now feel that the ball is with the Supreme Court where we still have Judges who believe in truth, fair play and justice. The apex Court can easily do a 'suo motu' on these findings. The findings of Arsenal cannot be contested; if there are doubts, since cyber-crime knows no boundaries, an

Indian government asked to apologize for framing Stan Swamy

Catholic Church leaders have sought an "unconditional apology" from the Indian government for the custodial death of Father Stan Swamy after a US based digital forensic firm has found that the late Jesuit was falsely implicated in a sedition case.

"At least at this stage, the government and its probe agency should tender an unconditional apology to people for the unjust arrest, inhuman incarceration and custodial death of Father Swamy for no fault of his," says Jesuit Father A Santhanam, convener of the National Lawyers Forum of Religious and Priests (NLFPR).

Father Santhanam says the government should tell the nation who were behind the hacking and at whose instruction an innocent priest was implicated who had toiled hard for the rights of oppressed indigenous people.

"Yes, the government and its probe agency should take full responsibility for the judicial death of Father Swamy who was even denied proper medical care until his condition deteriorated beyond repair in the jail," Father Santhanam, a practicing lawyer in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, told Matters India on December 15.

Father Joseph Xavier, a Jesuit colleague of the late priest, who is also a convener of the Father Stan Swamy Legacy Committee of the Jesuits, said in a statement, "the Jesuits of India will continue to stand in solidarity with those who are languishing in various jails for defending the rights of the poor, especially those falsely implicated in Bhima-Khoregaon case and reaffirm our commitment to the poor

and the marginalized and walk with them in their quest for dignity, liberty, and freedom."

Meanwhile, the Indian Catholic Press Association has termed the custodial death of Father Swamy as a "state sponsored murder."

The national body of Catholic journalists' statement on December 15 said, "We salute the path-breaking analysis conducted by Arsenal Consulting, which has vindicated Fr Swamy, who was maligned and tortured by the state, and has jumped onto the totalitarian bandwagon."

"The skeletons that are stumbling out of the closet should embolden all those who stand for justice and democracy to oppose state-sponsored fascism tooth and nail," says the statement issued by ICPA president Ignatius Gonsalves.

"We strongly condemn the false allegations foisted on a pious apostle of social justice and his slow martyrdom, confined to a hospital bed and denied even a straw to sip water," the ICPA statement said.

"We demand that the NIA, which hoisted false allegations against a saintly priest, to apologise and those involved in framing him be brought to book."

"We also demand that Fr Stan Swamy be declared innocent by the court that initiated trial against him," the statement urged.

Divine Word Father Babu Joseph, former spokesperson of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, says the latest exposure by the US firm on Father Swamy arrest and custodial death is alarming and a wake-up call to the citizens to be alert against the possible machinations of some agencies within and outside the country.

independent international forensic firm can always be invited to authenticate the findings of Arsenal. One message however must come out loud and clear: Fr Stan IS innocent! Fr. Stan's good name and his selfless service to the people must be redeemed. All political prisoners languishing in jail, particularly those in the BK case, must be released immediately and unconditionally. Those responsible for the murder of Fr Stan and the illegal incarceration of other innocent citizens must be brought to book immediately. The NIA must be disbanded and all draconian, anti-Constitutional laws must be repealed in toto. We need an India



THE EMPTY CAGE BIRD HAS TAUGHT US TO SING

A Tribute to Fr Stan Swamy

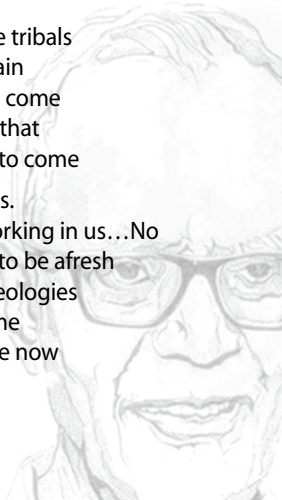
Though you were caged
Though your wings were clipped
Thy song has never faded in the mouths
Thy chorus has not stopped in the shouts

Your spark has lit
The forest of injustice
Can there be a miracle more than this?
Your fingers have shown the destiny
Where to uproot the terror
Can there be navigator more than this?

The beacon you were
To the sailing boats of the tribals
The beacon you will remain
To the sailing ships yet to come
In the storms of injustice that
would follow in the days to come

You have left us..... yes.
You have stopped working in us...No
The battle continues to be afresh
Against the rotten ideologies
And we shall overcome
Some day and let it be now
Long live Fr Stan!
Long live thy vision.!


-Fr Roshan Pinto SJ



For the last few years, those who stand up for truth and justice on behalf of the excluded and exploited, the poor and the marginalised, are at the receiving end of a fascist regime

where truth, justice, liberty, dignity, equality and fraternity flourish.

In a video-message which went viral, a few days before his arrest in October 2020, Fr. Stan said, "What is happening to me is not something unique happening to me alone. It is a broader process that is taking place all over the country. We are all aware how prominent intellectuals, lawyers' writers, poets, activists, students, leaders, they are all put into jail because they have expressed their dissent or raised questions about the ruling powers of India. We are part of the process. In a way I am happy to be part of this process. I am not a silent spectator, but part of the game, and ready to pay the price whatever be it."

None of us can be silent spectators at this moment. We must get out of our comfort zones and courageously say, "Fr Stan Swamy IS Innocent!" 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Modi not Invincible

History is witness to the fact that no political party or leader is invincible. The results of Himachal and Municipal Corporation of Delhi elections prove this

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

The victory of the Congress party with a comfortable majority in Himachal Pradesh in the recently concluded Assembly elections and the defeat of the BJP in the elections to Municipal Corporation Delhi (MCD) indicate that Narendra Modi is not invincible, if the opposition parties, especially the Congress, take elections seriously and fight with passion. The possibility of BJP at any time resorting to 'operation lotus' and capturing power, as it did in Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, cannot be ruled out. Therefore, the Congress cannot be complacent.

Psephologists have analysed the results of the Assembly elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh and have made a comparison between the two. The BJP had a landslide victory in Gujarat winning 156 out of 182 seats with a vote share of more than 50%. The BJP has been in power in Gujarat for 27 years continuously. Anti-incumbency was overcome by a combination of Hindutva, Modi personality cult, development promises, service delivery, a formidable party machine and a hunger to fight zealously for every seat.

At the same time, the above-mentioned factors



did not work in Himachal Pradesh and Delhi to make the BJP a victor. The BJP did everything it could both in Delhi and Himachal Pradesh to continue in power. The MCD elections were delayed from March to December, municipal ward boundaries were changed, several AAP leaders have been

charged with corruption, and some have been put in jail. Several Union Ministers and the PM campaigned for the BJP. But AAP was still able to win the election.

In the case of Himachal Pradesh, the PM campaigned extensively in the hill state, going so far as to tell voters that there was no need to remember the local candidate, and that a vote for the lotus would be a vote for Modi. Still, the Modi magic did not work. Compared to the Congress, the BJP had huge resources at its disposal and a robust election machinery and a strong party organization.

According to election analysts, what worked in favour of the Congress in Himachal is its focus on the local issues like government employees' worries about the new pension scheme, the woes of apple growers and Agneepath. These issues resonated with the voters. *Himachaliyat*, a term coined and made popular by Priyanka Gandhi, trumped Hindutva in the hill state.

Before the starting of Bharat Jodo Yatra by the

The PM campaigned extensively in the hill state, going so far as to tell voters that there was no need to remember the local candidate, and that a vote for the lotus would be a vote for Modi. Still, the Modi magic did not work





Congress under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi the mood of the nation was characterized by the triumphalism of the BJP as a party that is unbeatable on the one hand, and on the other hand a kind of diffidence and fear on the part of the opposition parties whose leaders were targeted by the investigation agencies like ED, CBI and NIA.

One cannot say that there has been dramatic change in the mood of the nation, but some indications of the change are visible. The enthusiastic support to the Bharat Jodo Yatra by ordinary people and people talking about the problems faced by them without fear is a positive indicator. Defeat of the BJP in Himachal Pradesh and the MCD, despite having massive resources at its disposal, is another indicator. Hence, there is hope for the future.

The Congress party has to learn lessons from its electoral rout in Gujarat as well as its victory in Himachal Pradesh, and put up a strong fight to the BJP on the electoral front. Many observers have commented that decoupling the Bharat Jodo Yatra from the electoral contests was counter-productive and the party was not visible in electioneering in Gujarat. The Congress's so-called "silent," localised door-to-door campaign has resulted in a near evaporation of the party. Some commentators have said that the party had already given up in Gujarat even before the election took place. On the other hand, the Congress party had worked actively in Himachal Pradesh. Priyanka Gandhi stayed in the state and conducted many road shows and addressed many rallies.

As India is a hugely diverse country, the political scenario is also diverse. Narendra Modi's magic did not work in West Bengal and it is not going to work in all the states of India. Therefore, the Congress

party has to take all elections seriously and it cannot present a depressive mood in any election. Although the BJP knew that it had an advantage over the Congress in Gujarat, it fought the election aggressively, focusing on each seat and marshalling all types of resources.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra has helped to instil some vigour and enthusiasm in the supporters of the Congress party, as it has raised publicly issues that are vital to the common people like soaring price rice, massive unemployment, and rising economic inequality. The momentum created by the Bharat Jodo Yatra is to be followed up by taking various steps by the Congress if it has to give a tough fight to the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and the general election in 2024. People should get the impression that the Congress is determined to take on the BJP-RSS juggernaut.

First of all, the Congress has to deal with factionalism that is destroying the party in different states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh etc. Its failure to find a solution to infighting resulted in the loss of government in Madhya Pradesh. Factionalism has been weakening the party in Rajasthan ever since Ashok Gehlot was made the Chief Minister. Factionalism in Rajasthan Congress has reached such a stage that Gehlot called Sachin Pilot, his opponent in the party, a traitor in an interview with NDTV. "The MLAs will never accept someone who has revolted and has been dubbed as a *gaddaar*," he said. If the leadership tussle between the two is not sorted out at the earliest, Congress could lose Rajasthan in the next election.

The greatest strength of the BJP is its robust organization with the solid support of the Sangh





Parivar groups. Dedicated workers of the Sangh Parivar are available at various levels. Therefore, the election machinery of the BJP appears to be unbeatable. The Congress will not be able to compete with the BJP, unless and until it revamps and strengthens the party organization, especially at the grass root level -- village, block and district levels. Congress did not pay attention to strengthening party organization when it was in power from 2004 to 2014. As a result, when it lost power, it didn't have the organizational strength to withstand the onslaughts by the BJP-RSS. Along with dealing with leadership tussles in different states, the Congress has to pay urgent attention to rebuilding the party organization.

Through the Bharat Jodo Yatra an image building of Rahul Gandhi is taking place. The negative image created by the BJP's media cell is being replaced by the images of a serious leader who is compassionate and willing to make sacrifices for the people of India. The Congress and Rahul Gandhi have to decide what type of leadership role the latter is going to play. Will he be playing the role of a moral leader like

Jayaprakash Narayan or the role of a political leader like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru? Leadership vacuum in the Congress party since the resignation of Rahul Gandhi as the president of the party did a great damage to it, and it got emaciated. In the absence of a strong leader projected as the PM candidate, the Congress will not be able to take on Narendra Modi who will be projected as an invincible leader by the BJP.

Throughout the Bharat Jodo Yatra Rahul Gandhi has been attacking the ideology of RSS, even though he was avoiding personal attacks on the BJP leaders, including the Prime Minister. He even showed the guts to criticize V. D. Savarkar, one of the protagonists of the RSS, while the foot march was passing through Maharashtra. The Congress has to be committed to its ideology of secularism coupled with centrism with regard to economic issues. Resorting to "soft Hindutva" by the leaders has not done any good to the Congress; on the contrary, it lost its credibility and its support base began shrinking. The AAP is emerging as another Hindutva party attracting Hindu votes. Against this backdrop, the Congress has to make clear to the people its ideological commitments.

The Congress has to enter into dialogue with other opposition parties, as in the present scenario it will not be able to take on the BJP alone. For the sake of secular democracy and the Constitution of India, the Congress has to be humble and must be ready to make adjustments with other opposition parties and build a workable coalition well in advance of the 2024 election. A Congress-led coalition has to present before the people a credible and relevant common agenda as an alternative to BJP's divisive, exclusive and majoritarian Hindutva agenda sugar-coated with welfarism and developmentalism.

History is a witness to the fact that no political party or leader is invincible. The dictatorship of the fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini came to an end. The BJP-RSS rule is detrimental to the pluralistic democracy of India, and it is to be replaced. What is required at this juncture is reimagining and reinventing by the opposition political parties, especially the Congress party. ©

The momentum created by the Bharat Jodo Yatra is to be followed up by taking various steps by the Congress if it has to give a tough fight to the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and the general election in 2024

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Laboratory of Hate

The whole lot of institutions - the bureaucracy, the law-enforcement agencies, even the judiciary -- have become choir boys of the saffron ensemble

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

In Mary Shelley's novel by that name, Frankenstein created a monster in a laboratory over a two-year period, based on an abstruse but deadly effective scientific principle, and this bogeyman (always a 'man') went on to wreak death and destruction wherever he went. I was reminded of this macabre tale as the results of the Gujarat Assembly elections were trumpeted across the country last week.

More than two decades ago during Vajpayee's reign, the country first witnessed planned, targeted violence against minorities, with Gujarat as the epicentre. The now forgotten VHP leader, Praveen Togadia then proudly proclaimed Gujarat as the laboratory of Hindutva -- the gospel of majoritarianism. That was the time when there were coordinated attacks on Muslims and Christians -- assaults on their places of worship, burial grounds, schools, gatherings and businesses -- accompanied by the boastful refrain: "Now that our government is in power, we can do what we want."



But the constraints of coalition politics, the outcry from still independent constitutional bodies and media, and the benign persona of Vajpayee hampered, to an extent, the vigilante squads let loose by the Hindu Dharma Jagran Manch (HJM). The indignation and uproar over the attacks on minorities forced Vajpayee, in January 1999, to visit Dangs, the hotbed of violence against minorities, and order punitive action against erring government officials. Unlike today, there was considerable resistance to majoritarian bigotry at that time, prompting the VHP leader, Giriraj Kishore, to lament that "the Hindu agenda was limping on crutches."

Gujarat has travelled a long way. The double-engine ruling dispensation has dropped even the pretence of being secular or of honoring the country's composite culture. Having captured the collective Hindu consciousness, it now flaunts Hindutva with a swagger. There is an unabashed State-sponsored assertion of Hindu identity and the cancelling out of the minorities, particularly Muslims.





At an election rally a few days before Gujarat went to the polls, Amit Shah justified the horrific happenings in Gujarat in 2002, belligerently stating that “they (?) were taught such a lesson that since then the state has not witnessed a single case of communal violence,” cunningly targeting a community without elaborating who “they” were. My God, the Home Minister of the country was not only extolling evil, but sowing hatred of one’s fellow countrymen to garner votes! It is important to note his choice of locale when making this most inflammatory, cynical evaluation of the darkest period in our recent history. On 22nd November, he was appealing to the electorate to support the BJP candidate, Payal Kukrani, whose father was convicted in the horrific massacre of Bilkis Bano’s family during the genocidal killings in Gujarat in 2002. By nominating her, the ruling party, defying ordinary decency and ethics, conveyed the message that the killers were men of honour!

In a world of unremitting barbarities, we need to be reminded of what happened to Bilkis Bano’s family in those hellish days of national disgrace and infamy in 2002 that claimed over 1900 lives and resulted in widespread destruction of homes and property, mostly Muslim. Bilkis Bano, then 19 years old, was attacked and gang-raped by a mob as were her mother and two sisters. As she lay battered and bleeding on the floor, the brutes took a stone and smashed the head of her infant daughter Saleha, for which act alone they deserved death and eternal damnation! Bilkis lost 14 members of her family that day. Such spine-chilling, gruesome butchery played

out across Gujarat during that period of horrendous savagery.

The heroic Bilkis, despite heartbreak that would have killed even the doughtiest, and undeterred by having to change her home numerous times just to escape being silenced, fought for justice and with rock-like support of activists such as Teesta Setalvad, succeeded in securing the conviction in 2008 of the 11 men guilty of the gang-rape and murder of members of Bano’s family. The convictions restored hope in our secular democracy and the foundational principle that the law would be applied equally to all, irrespective of the religious stripes one wears. We dared to hope that it would bring a closure to the nightmare spawned by Gujarat 2002 and that Hindus and Muslims would once again live together in peace. But it was hoping against hope in a milieu where the most daunting political leviathan ever in this country, whips up hate to win elections!

How we respond to tragedy reveals our national character, our community culture and most importantly, our humanity. Today, the murderous hate and distrust between communities have hardened, fomented by a formidable cultural outfit and its political surrogate. Hindutva’s gospel of belligerent homogeneity and exclusion have assertively settled in the innards of the nation. The whole lot of institutions – the bureaucracy, the law-enforcement agencies, even the judiciary -- have become choir boys of the saffron ensemble.

Look at what has transpired in the momentous Bilkis Bano case. The eleven savages who raped, ravaged and destroyed the Bano family were all released from jail, significantly on 15th August this year even as the PM thundered on about ‘*nari shakti*’ from the ramparts of the Red Fort. While the advertised official version has it that the out-of-turn





release of the convicts was ordered by the Gujarat government, under its remission policy, the Supreme Court actually facilitated the release by directing the State government to consider the remission petition in terms of its policy of 1992 that was in force on the date of conviction, and not on the basis of the state government's revised policy of 2014 which bars out-of-turn release of prisoners convicted for rape and murder. Had the extant policy been invoked, the accused would have been ineligible for remission of sentence. Have no doubt, the entire operation was choreographed by the Centre in a well-coordinated 'jugalbandi'!

Symbols are a microcosmic simulacrum of a country's history, culture and worldview. A devastating example of symbolism heralding the consecration of the Hindu Rashtra was the recent effacement of the Mahatma's image from a flyover located right in front of Ahmedabad's Gujarat Vidyapith university which he had established, and its replacement with Veer Savarkar's portrait. In the new saffron-tainted India, the icon of secular humanism has been supplanted by the patron saint of Hindutva. It was no surprise that at the over-the-top victory celebrations in Delhi, and the swearing-in of the new government in Gujarat, the presence of a clutch of holy men in saffron robes on the dais was emphatic assertion that religion would be commandeered to gain temporal power and that the religious identity of the majority community is what matters in today's India.

We seem to have lost the power of compassion and common humanity. The aspirational India envi-

A devastating example of symbolism heralding the consecration of the Hindu Rashtra was the recent effacement of the Mahatma's image from a flyover located right in front of Ahmedabad's Gujarat Vidyapith university which he had established, and its replacement with Veer Savarkar's portrait

sioned in that magnificent poem, "Let My Country Awake" by Rabindranath Tagore lies in tatters. Written before Independence, it is an inspiring manifesto of hope for every Indian, brimming with optimism at the the sheer promise and possibilities for the future. The poem is also a universal declaration of camaraderie "*where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls....*"

Our present state is a grim contradiction of what our greatest bard envisaged, hence this dire parody (with apologies to Gurudev):

"Where the mind cringes in fear and the head is bent low;

Where knowledge is powerless.

Where the world lies in broken fragments wrecked by the canker of hate.

Where words spring from the depths of chicanery.

Where unrelenting strife reaches out to perdition.

Where the murky stream of vicious unreason has become an ugly habit.

Where the mind is constricted by bigoted thought and action.

From this hell of iniquity, my father, let my country awake!"

At this benighted, hopeless time, if there ever was a bootless cry, the concluding line is it! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATHEW JOHN is a former civil servant. Views are personal

'External Hand' in Goa Crime Scene

For the increasing crimes in Goa, the role being played by those coming from outside the state cannot be discounted

BY PACHU MENON

In response to the deteriorating law and order situation in Goa, the Chief Minister has repeatedly said that external elements are solely responsible for the rising crime graph in the region.

Despite reports of criminals from outside the state indulging in nefarious activities emanating from every corner of Goa, the state police force has been an epitome of efficiency, thoroughly meticulous with its policing ways, comments and opinions from various quarters to the contrary notwithstanding.

Monitoring criminal activities in the state, for that matter, has come with its own share of pitfalls for the men in uniform.

Besides the expertise shown by the criminals in evading arrest by the police, their ingenuity at carrying out some of the more sophisticated crimes has cast the force in the mould of perpetual losers who are outsmarted at every turn by the goons.

Despite a track record which maintains the crime detection rate in the state at an exceptional high, the Goa Police seem to flounder every time they are



confronted by criminals who are seemingly adept at employing the latest of techniques while commissioning crimes.

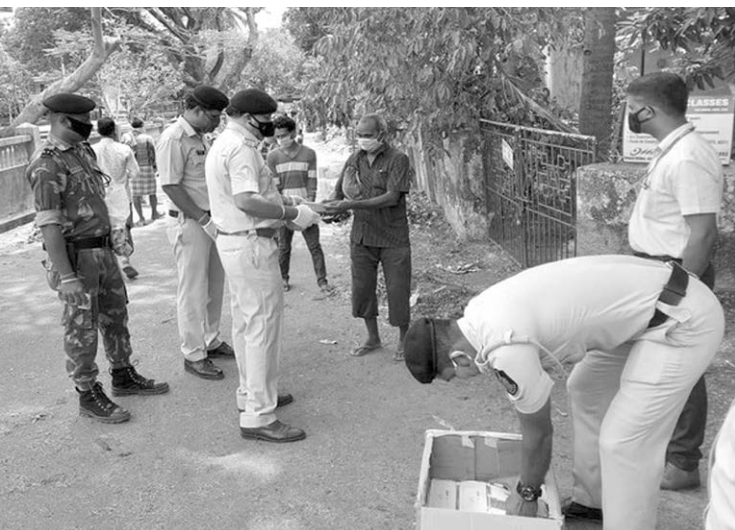
But the Chief Minister's claims on the crime scenario in Goa is just a generalization on the state of affairs prevalent and without actually 'familiarizing' oneself with the nuances of crime that has the state in

its throes, it would be difficult to understand the state's predicament vis-à-vis the ever-escalating crime rate.

The unchallenged presence of foreign cartels operating from Goan shores is a truth the local police have to come to terms with. Besides the 'professional' approach to their clandestine activities, the syndicates are known to have infiltrated police ranks thus compromising preventive actions being planned against them.

As a criminal business 'enterprise' which is said to thrive on the corruption existing within the system, it becomes difficult to tackle organized crime with the meagre resources available with the state police. Criminality within the system is indeed a serious problem. The underworld-politician-police nexus which is clearly visible, and 'visibly ignored', could well be attributed to the helplessness of the law enforcement agencies when confronted by typical situations.

Maintaining very low profiles, foreign cartels operating in Goa have made headlines only when some drug-related crime or death has been reported. But investigations into such matters usually hit a roadblock and are shelved for want of concrete evidence



With a setting that reminds one of the dismal situation in Punjab where disillusionment with life has driven many youngsters to drug addiction and indulging in petty crimes to sustain the dependence, will Goa too witness a similar scenario in the near future?

With the criminals always managing to stay a step ahead of the police, this argument gains more credence. Moreover, the detection of crime largely depends on an efficient network of informants developed by individual police officers.

Nevertheless, personal egos and professional rivalry have hampered the smooth functioning of police departments across the country and at times senior officers have been at loggerheads with their political bosses over a number of issues.

Classic examples of criminals evading the long arm of justice and cocking a snook at the incompetent ways of the cops are legion.

Moreover, with splinter gangs operating along the fringes of the syndicates, local criminals and gangs find an inevitable place in their larger designs by default. It is rumoured that Goa is a principal hub of international drug trade, apart from being a known centre of consumption. So, it is obvious that the 'established' hubs will have local players being drawn into the 'business' as 'carriers' and 'pushers'.

Maintaining very low profiles, foreign cartels operating in Goa have made headlines only when some drug-related crime or death has been reported. But investigations into such matters usually hit a roadblock and are shelved for want of concrete evidence.

Petty crimes and thefts are just not up their alley! Yet, gang wars and murders have become the order of the day in Goa.

While the CM's "External Elements" implication is rather too vague a definition, it is understood that he is referring to those who come from outside the state and indulge in criminal activities here.

Goa is a highly favoured global tourist destination and while welcoming visitors who are equally in awe of the splendour and serenity of the place, it has also

inadvertently thrown the doors open to those with a criminal bent of mind. The ease of moving across the country has also had a detrimental effect on the peaceful ambience of the region.

Felicitating criminals to give shape to their reprehensible plans and moving out of the state in 'the next train available', a spate of criminal activities has been sending shockwaves across the state for quite some time now. Ignorant about the antecedents of those suspected to be involved in the crime, it is usually the modus operandi that has helped police crack seemingly impossible crimes.

Amidst the tumult over these rampant cases, the law enforcement agencies have also had to contend with a case now-and-then attracting a lot of attention and involving influential personalities.

Barring a few stray incidents where they have been conspicuous by their complicity in some sensational crime, the locals by and large have preferred to stay on the right side of the law.

This then brings us to the most relevant question in this context! Is Goa falling prey to the fast-paced development it has been experiencing the last few years! If the mega-projects which have invited unprecedented presence of a large contingent of men and machines at various sites in the state are not scenes of alarm in themselves, the ever-increasing population of migrant labourers employed in the industrial estates in the state have not been anything less shocking.

However, with a few gruesome murders reported in the state in the recent past bearing the distinct stamp of 'local' involvement, many are of the opinion that these disturbing instances have explicitly bridged the 'outsider-insider classification'.

While citing reasons to justify the rising trend in crimes in the state today, very few will sit back and think of the reasons which lead to lawlessness in the society. A price-hike of essential commodities which has never shown a logical pattern to it and unemployment among the youth are some of the sure recipes for disaster.

With a setting that reminds one of the dismal situation in Punjab where disillusionment with life has driven many youngsters to drug addiction and indulging in petty crimes to sustain the dependence, will Goa too witness a similar scenario in the near future? ©

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Acid Attacks

No Room for Leniency

Acid attacks, one of the grave offences against human body, cause perpetual suffering to the victims, often leaving them permanently disfigured, socially isolated and emotionally scarred

BY **AARTI**

The recent acid attack on a 17-year-old 12th Class student in Delhi, once again draws attention to the easy availability of acid despite a slew of directions passed by the Supreme Court on July 18, 2013 including prohibiting over-the-counter sale and purchase it.

The victim, while on the way to school along with her younger sister, was attacked with some acid-like substance at 7.30 a.m. by two persons riding a bike on December 14. Thanks to the swift action by the police, three accused persons have been apprehended.

While the ongoing investigation is expected to decipher the actual motive, what we know is that the acid attack was allegedly planned by 20-year-old Sachin Arora who knew the victim and they were on friendly terms till September. They had fallen out after September which is believed to have led the accused to indulge in this crime. Sachin who used to do wallpaper work is said to have procured the acid from an e-commerce company.

The crime, reportedly executed by 19-year-old Harshit Aggarwal, is a packer in a private company. He drove the bike and his accomplice, 22-year-old Virender Singh, a generator mechanic, in the pillion, threw the acid. Sachin is said to have placed his mobile at another location so as to create an alibi.

Various studies have concluded that the motive behind acid attacks usually include family/land disputes; domestic abuse/violence; relationship conflicts; turning down indecent proposals, suspicion of infidelity; theft; sex abuse, etc. 78 percent of acid attack cases take place due to refusal to marriage or a rejection of romance by the other party.

Earlier this month, a 24-year-old man, according to news reports, was held in Delhi for allegedly threatening women online with acid attacks. Having created a fictitious Instagram account about a year and a half ago, he had around 1100 followers. He sent messages to beautiful women and whenever anyone responded, he would threaten them with making their objectionable videos viral and throw acid on them if they did not meet him. It is said that out of fear, many women met him.

It is not only when relationships turn sour that acid is thrown on girls and women but also due to domestic disputes. Last month, in Jharkhand's Ranchi, a husband allegedly threw acid on his wife's face after the latter failed to provide him with money to buy a motor bike. The wife had asked her father to provide Rs 70,000 for the purpose and she was assured that the money would be arranged soon. In the meanwhile, her husband became uncontrollable and threw a jug full of acid on her face. Hearing her screams and cry, neighbours ran to the spot and rushed her to the hospital where she is undergoing treatment.

An alcoholic husband, in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, who would often beat up both his wife and four-year-old daughter, had a rather bitter shock of his life. This August, after he abused his wife and daughter, the enraged woman allegedly threw acid, mixed with chilli powder on him when he was asleep. With over 40 percent burns on several parts of his body, he had to be hospitalised.



Well, even animals are vulnerable to acid attacks. A few years back, many flabbergasted animal lovers in Ireland literally wept, appalled at the worst case of animal cruelty they had ever seen. For reasons unknown, a dog had been subjected to untold abuse by some unidentified unscrupulous elements. Yes, the sight of a struggling female bull terrier, generally a friendly dog, was so grave that a large part of her skin had peeled off, actually burning away. Her tongue was found ulcerated from licking the acid poured on her body. Though the hapless dog was rushed to a Veterinary hospital for treatment, the surgeon, due to the severity of its injuries, decided to euthanize her.

Some years back, a couple in Pakistan killed their 15-year-old daughter by pouring acid on her for committing the “crime” of merely looking at two boys riding a motorbike outside her home. Suffering 70 percent burns for two days, the teenager died in agony and pain. Both parents were slapped with murder charges.

The unthinkable happened in 1999 when 3-month-old Samuel Lim Hong Xiang was left by his parents (before going to work) at the grandmother’s place, in Singapore. No sooner the grand mom stepped out briefly for some work, after putting the toddler to sleep, one of the two maids working there allegedly poured sulphuric acid down the baby’s throat. This was done with the motive of damaging the reputation of the other maid. The child was rushed to a Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, where he spent over six months. The horrific attack, besides leaving the infant with terrible scars, also severely damaged his tongue, throat and vocal chords, while his upper airway was completely blocked. The doctors thought he wouldn’t survive, but the “miracle boy”, as he is known, survived amid multifarious challenges. Nonetheless, unlike others, Samuel is unable to speak. He interacts actively through non-verbal means like writing and gesturing. He has never tasted food. He breathes and feeds through tubes inserted into his body. Well, the accused maid was jailed for 8 years after a fast-track trial.

Counter sale of acids is completely prohibited unless the seller maintains a record of the address and other details of the buyer and the quantum. The chemical can be sold only after the buyer produces a government issued photo identity card and after the purpose of purchase is specified

But for the unrelenting efforts of acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal, whose real-life story is quite inspiring, the law in India wouldn’t have become strict. In 2005, Laxmi, then 15-year-old, was doused with acid on her face in broad daylight at a Delhi bus stand by a 32-year-old man and his girlfriend. He had proposed to marry Laxmi and she said “No”. Three days later, on April 22, 2005 Laxmi was stopped outside the bus stand from where she usually took a bus. The woman pushed her down and threw acid on Laxmi’s face. Her father supported her to file a case in court in 2006 to ban acid. Her attackers were charged with attempt to murder and for criminal conspiracy but later on got bail. The Delhi High Court on appeal upheld the decision of the sessions court and ordered the accused to pay Rs 3 lakh as compensation to the victim. Laxmi next moved the Supreme Court which expressed grave concern on the availability of acid in market and issued a slew of directions.

Counter sale of acids is completely prohibited unless the seller maintains a record of the address and other details of the buyer and the quantum. The chemical can be sold only after the buyer produces a government issued photo identity card and after the purpose of purchase is specified. The seller must submit details of sale to the local police within three days of the transaction. The chemical should not be sold to any person under 18 and all stocks must be declared with the local sub-divisional magistrate within 15 days. Undeclared stocks could be confiscated and the defaulter fined up to Rs.50,000.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 has introduced important provisions to the Indian Penal Code for offences of causing grievous hurt by throwing acid. Section 326-A and 326-B have been added with the object of making specific provisions for punishment in case of causing grievous hurt by use of acid etc. or voluntarily throwing or attempting to throw acid causing permanent or partial damage, or deformity to, or burns or maims or disfigures or disable any part of the body of that person.

Under 326-A, the minimum punishment for acid throwing is a 10-year imprisonment which can extend up to life imprisonment with fine. Under Section 326-B, the minimum punishment for attempted acid throwing is a 5-year imprisonment which can extend up to 7 years imprisonment with fine.

Further, Section 357-B provides for compensation payable by the State Government under Section 357-A shall be in addition to the payment of fine to the victim under IPC Section 326-A. Under Section 357-C, all hospitals, public or private, whether run by the Central Government, the State Government, local bodies or any other person, shall immediately, provide first-aid or medical treatment, free of cost, to the victims of acid attacks.

At an individual level, once an acid attack has taken place, for the victim, the consequences are

quite challenging. When thrown on an individual's face, physical trauma is simply awful and depending on the concentration of the acid, the layers of the skin and the bones may get affected. Inhalation of acid vapours can create breathing problems since it causes reaction in the lungs. Victims may also suffer from psychological problems and mental health issues which take considerable time to heal. Above all, many victims may feel that they are being ignored in the society as well in the community at the household level. This is where family support and counselling measures can instill confidence amongst the victims of acid attack.

In August, the Lok Sabha was informed that 386 acid attack cases on women were reported during 2018-22 and 62 persons convicted. It is time to nip the menace in the bud itself and there ought to be no leniency. ©

D.Litt. to be Conferred on Mamata Banerjee

BY DR. SOMAK SEN

St. Xavier's University, Kolkata (SXUK) is holding its fifth Convocation ceremony on February 6, 2023. The University will confer a D.Litt. (Honoris Causa) on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on the occasion. Vice-Chancellor of the University, Father Felix Raj told the PTI that the Chief Minister has given her acceptance to the varsity's proposal of conferring D.Litt. on her. She herself made the announcement in the State Assembly on November 25.

Rev. Fr. John Felix Raj, S.J. said, "We decided to confer D.Litt. on the Chief Minister. We are happy that she has kindly accepted to receive this Honoris Causa. She has personally written to me accepting the honour to be conferred on her especially as an Honorary Alumnus of St. Xavier's family. She has also expressed her desire to share some moments and thoughts with the teachers and students of the university on that occasion."

Fr. Raj said they were bestowing D.Litt. on her for three reasons. "Firstly, she is a literary person and she has written so much in terms of poems and short stories; secondly, her generous contribution to the establishment of SXUK; and thirdly, her contribution to the higher education in Bengal," he added.

The honour will be conferred on her by the



Mamata and Father Felix Raj

Vice-Chancellor of SXUK in the presence of the Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal, Mr. C. V. Ananda Bose.

Fr. Raj said, "800 students will receive their graduate and postgraduate completion degrees in the Convocation ceremony". SXUK is one of the six Catholic Universities and one of the three Jesuit Universities in India. Many Jesuit colleges are taking consultations from SXUK to upgrade their colleges to university. SXUK was set up in New Town Kolkata on a land given by the TMC government in 2017. ©

Children Seek More Funds for Education

In a novel initiative, children of NINEISMINE, an advocacy group, interacted with the Union Minister of State, Pankaj Chaudhary, and submitted their recommendations for the coming Union Budget. They presented the 'Budget for Children' charter to the Minister.

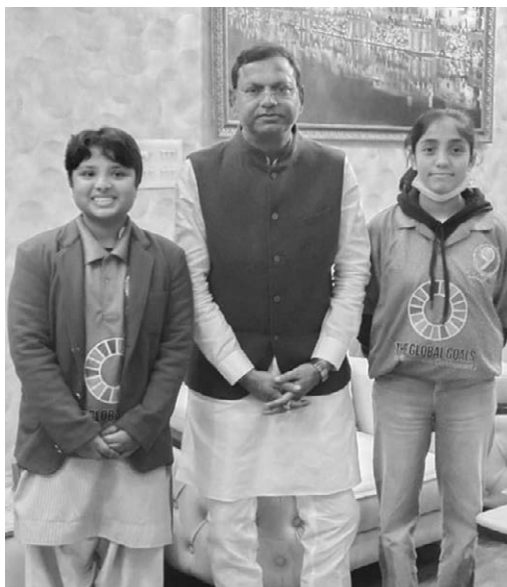
Their Charter of Demands is the result of numerous local to state and national consultations with over 3,500 of their peers across the country. The interaction was led by 15-year-old Ruksar Rehman, the President of the National Inclusive Children's Parliament.

They demanded that 6% of the GDP should be allocated for education and 2.5 % for health in the Union and State Budgets for 2023-24. They sought an increase in the investment on all schemes for children particularly on PM-POSHAN scheme.

NINEISMINE is a children-led advocacy initiative that seeks better investment in children. Currently, the expenditure on education stands at 3.56% of GDP, which is just below the global average of 3.66%. Health expenditure, on the other hand, stands at 2.1%. The Minister listened attentively to the young advocates and acclaimed their confidence and their awareness about their rights. Mr. Chaudhary said, "This is indeed a great initiative. I will place your suggestions before the budget teams."

The children praised the Modi Government for its commitment to its schemes particularly the ICDS, the PM Poshan Scheme, the National Education Mission, the National Health Mission and the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Steve Rocha, the National Convener of the NINEISMINE, said, "This interaction with young citizens without a vote is a welcome precedence of consulting children in relation to Budget." Mr. Rocha hinted at the recommendation of the Kothari commission (1966) and underlined that the 6% promise is 55 years behind schedule. He added that "each year of failure to invest in children and Mother



Earth translates into decades and trillions in terms of inter-generational losses and irreversible deprivation."

Charter of Demands

- To increase budget for sports, physical, mental health and well-being.
- To ensure child participation creating budgets at all levels.
- To generate more transparency on how the resources are spent.
- To ensure that all state governments announce their child-budget in keeping with the statement of the Union budgets.
- To invest on child's safety by creating more schemes and policies which can stop violence against children.
- To support the vulnerable children's development and upliftment with adequate investment for the backward and economically weaker sections.
- To invest and increase the financial resources for children who need scholarships.
- To invest in water and sanitation which will support children to avoid health issues.
- To increase the budget on education: providing enough laboratories, and digitalized education in rural setups.
- To increase budget on all the PM's schemes that affect children.
- To increase the budget on nutritional policies and schemes including quality mid-day meals.
- To invest more in programs like Anganwadis for underprivileged households.
- To fulfil its promise by providing 6% of the GDP (public spending) by the time of the announcement of the National Budget 2023 as stated in the National Education Policy, 2020.
- To devote at least 2.5% (if not 5%) of the GDP public spending on Health.
- Increases the union budgetary allocation to the environment sector from the current to 0.08% (union budget 2021-22) at least 5% . ©



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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Journalists as Prophets..!

Many years ago, my column was read by a well-known person in Canada, who decided he would write to me in the email address generally carried beneath my column. After a few complimentary lines on my article, he concluded by saying "Bob, the journalists of today are like the prophet of old!"

I had some knowledge those days of the prophets he was referring to, but decided I would study them further, and at the end of my research was not too sure that the writing profession was the best to be in.

being a writer is not just the ability to wield a pen but to be brave in the face of adverse circumstances, and if they couldn't convince their family and dare to develop their God given talent, they were certainly not journalist material!

Something else I found out about prophets was that they were quite the lonely people! They didn't have many friends, because people were most probably scared to be associated with them.

"There's no point being his friend, because we might spend jail time with him!" Something like pressing a 'like' on Facebook for some article the



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The prophets of old I realized were almost all lonely men or women, whose job was to tell the people and rulers where they were going wrong, almost always incurring the wrath of the rulers. They were guided by God, and had a firm sense of justice. Which meant they had to be very brave people.

Many of them were not, and ran away, when they were supposed to go in front of a ruler and tell him or her that they were ruling wrong. They were always afraid to lose their head, and many times did, after getting whipped publicly or thrown in prison.

But they were men of God, and ultimately had to do their job.

Are we doing ours here in India?

Very often at a party, someone who's had his third drink and going on to his fourth crawls up to me, and tells me in slurred tones, "I also wanted to be a writer!"

"Ah!" I tell him or her, "Then what happened?"

"My family wanted me to become a doctor!"

And very painstakingly I explain to them that

government felt was anti-national, and you landing in prison!

There was a lot more I learnt about prophets in my study, but found one thing that was very satisfying, prophets lived by the truth. Their only law was the truth, and with that as their barometer all readings that fell short had to be rectified.

Are we the journalists of this beautiful land, basing our writing on the truth? Are we revealing to our readers the truth of what is happening or have we become storytellers, writing fiction known as fake news?

Are we, the journalists of today, living up to being the prophets of old? ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

New Book of USM

Enlightened Leadership

By **Jacob Peenikaparambil**

The world today looks desperately for enlightened leaders in the midst of mushrooming popular leaders who speak the language of hatred, revenge and exclusion. The urgent need of humanity today is building enlightened leaders with vision, character and competence, and schools play a pivotal role in building leaders. The book, 'Enlightened Leadership' will be a great help to the teachers and principals in the task of training leaders.

Leaders are needed not only in politics, but in all fields, and all individuals are expected to play leadership role in their family and profession. Realizing the urgent need for building leaders, Fr. Jacob Peenikaparambil has written the book, Enlightened Leadership. Besides highlighting the qualities needed for a leader, the book presents many examples of ordinary individuals who have displayed extraordinary leadership qualities. As Dr.

George Arickal has pointed out in the foreword of the book, "The different chapters in the book are not theoretical treatises on leadership, but they are referring to actual happenings in life. The background is real, the message is authentic and clearly articulated. Qualities, attitudes and capabilities needed for an enlightened leader are described in this book".

Since 2014 Fr. Jacob has been part of the USM team that facilitates one-week Enlightened Leadership Training for students. On the basis of his experience of interacting with young people he has written short articles on leadership since 2020.

This book will be an appropriate gift to students and teachers. It also can be a significant part of resource items for value education.

Varghese Alegaden

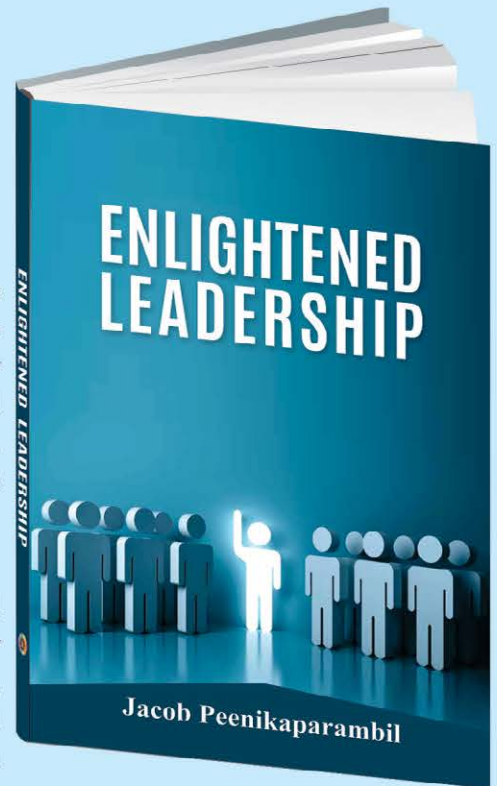
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