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Today, many 'disciples' of Jesus have no qualms of conscience to hobnob (to sup and more) with fascist and fundamentalists, who brazenly destroy the sanctity of the Constitution and the secular, pluralistic fabric of the country

BETRAYING CHRIST & CONSTITUTION

BONHOMIE WITH PARIVAR

PRIESTS AND PRELATES WHO ARE OVERENTHUSIASTIC TO SUPPORT THE SAFFRON PARTY AND UNLEASH AN AVALANCHE OF MESSAGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT BACKED BY THE SANGH PARIVAR SHOULD GO THROUGH THE WRITINGS OF V. D. SAVARKAR AND M. S. GOLWALKAR

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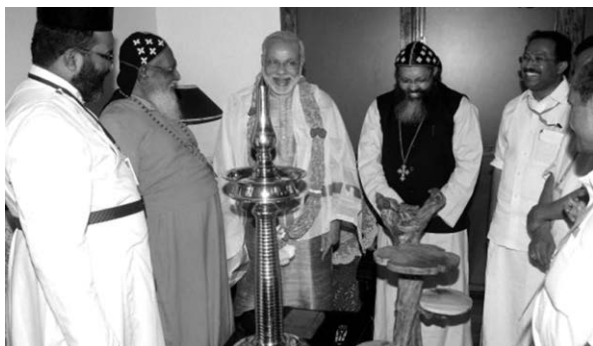
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POWER QUOTES



And one has to understand that braveness is not the absence of fear but rather the strength to keep on going forward despite the fear.

Paulo Coelho

• • •



I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

• • •



If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever.

Thomas Aquinas

• • •



If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

• • •



Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. You have no security unless you can live bravely, excitingly, imaginatively; unless you can choose a challenge instead of competence.

Eleanor Roosevelt

• • •



Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

Helen Keller

• • •



Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.

Nelson Mandela

Sex claims against Indian Catholic school head fall apart

The sexual assault case against a Catholic school principal in Madhya Pradesh has taken a new turn with students and parents dismissing the allegations as false and demanding action against those behind it.

“It is a false case and no such incident took place in the hostel and the school,” said Akhilesh Yadav, whose two daughters are studying in Jabalpur Diocesan Education Society Higher Secondary School in Junwani, a village in Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh.

The school has been in the eye of a storm since March 3 following a surprise inspection by members of the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

During the visit, a Grade 11 girl reportedly told the team that the principal had touched her inappropriately. Shivkumar Pusam, a close relative of the girl who accused the principal of inappropriate action, told UCA News on March 14 that “no such incident had taken place.”

“It is true the principal mildly slapped the girl when she went out to buy sweets during class time and it was misrepresented as a case of sexual assault,” Pusam said.

Radheshyam Kakodia, the spokesperson of the Gondwana Ganatantra Party, an indigenous political outfit, also called the charges “totally baseless.”

The tribal-dominated area comes under the provision of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, where the gram sabha was supposed to be informed before taking any action against such violations, but it was not done, Kakodia added.

“It is a fake case to tarnish the institution serving the poor people in the area,” Kakodia told UCA News on March 14. He has written to the inspector general of police, demanding an impartial probe.

The inspection team did not follow basic provisions and disturbed the students who were appearing for the annual state board examinations, Kakodia said. They entered the hostel after 7 p.m. in gross violation of the rules and took girls away from the hostel at night without the consent of the principal, manager and parents.

After the March 3 inspection, Dhanya Kumari Vasiya, chairperson of the district's child welfare

committee, complained against the principal, accusing him of violating provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Police took the principal into custody. The principal was released the following day after parents and students protested. However, he was re-arrested on March 7 and placed in judicial custody.

A Catholic priest, the manager of the school, a nun and another school staff member are named in the case. However, they are yet to be arrested.

“My two daughters – one in Grade 2 and the other in Grade 4 – are staying in the hostel and studying at the school. No such incident took place in the hostel and in the school,” Yadav told UCA News on March 14.

Yadav said at the instruction of the inspection team, police took away his daughters and other girls from the hostel and accommodated them in a government-run facility for three days.

“Hours before the inspection, I was with them in the hostel and they were happy and had not said anything about it and even now they say the same. My daughters were forced to give false statements against the principal and others,” Yadav said.

“I was offered a check for Rs 10,000 to ensure that my daughters gave a false statement against the principal and others,” he asserted.

“When I turned down the check and refused to join them, I was threatened,” he said and added that other parents also had a similar experience.

Yadav along with five other parents complained on March 6 to the superintendent of police, the top police official in the district, demanding action against the chairperson of the district child welfare committee for taking their daughters into custody without their permission.

Since the police did not act on his complaint, Yadav filed a fresh complaint on March 10, demanding action against six officials.

“I have forwarded the copies of the complaints to the district collector and other top officials,” he said.

When contacted by UCA News on March 14, the head of the district child welfare committee Vaisya evaded questions by saying state commission officials should be contacted. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



WOOING CHRISTIANS, THE BJP WAY

The electoral scene in the country is hotting up. In the next one year or so, several States will go to polls; general elections to the Lok Sabha too will take place. The BJP is not sitting as pretty as it was in 2014 and 2019 due to its loss of allies and waning Modi magic. The party which almost peaked its seat-share in the Hindi belt has come to terms with the reality that unless it scouts for new pastures, it is not going to be easy in the days ahead. Its 'look North-East' policy has borne fruit, though it had to give up its pet slogans there. The party wants to reach out to the people of States like Kerala which till now remained insurmountable. It has realized that without stealing the hearts of minorities, it is well-nigh impossible to achieve the target of even opening an account in the State in the general elections.

Reports suggest that the BJP has chalked out plans to elicit support of the Christian community whose population is around 18 per cent in Kerala. Christians have the numbers to swing the electoral fortunes of parties in several of the 20 Lok Sabha constituencies. One has to look at the recent meetings between the Church hierarchy and the BJP leaders from this perspective. Some of the 'saffron leaders' who used to mince no words in accusing pastors, priests and prelates of proselytization have gone silent. Instead, there is an unusual 'bonhomie' and 'camaraderie' between them. There are reports that BJP workers would visit Christian families to concretize the new-found bonding. The coming Easter could become the D-day for this unnamed operation. The party knows full well that if it wants to open an account in the next general elections in the State, votes of at least a section of minorities should fall into its kitty. As they cannot count much on Muslims, they have to bank on Christian votes.

As BJP makes fast moves in this direction, one cannot ignore two contrasting pictures that emerged in the recent past. One, the swearing in ceremony of Nephthu Rio as Nagaland Chief Minister. A Baptist pastor is offering prayers; the choir is singing Halleluiah hymns. And watching from the dais is none else but Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sitting quietly in the centre. Indeed, it was a rare sight. Now, turn the spotlight on the brutal and ruthless attacks on members of Christian community reported from across the country. Hundreds of Christians were made to flee their homes from village after village in Chhattisgarh. They were thrashed; their worshiping places demolished; fake cases filed against pastors and priests; they were dumped in open spaces with little privacy, that too close to Christmas festival. Organized campaigns by Sangh Parivar members are in full swing to reconvert them to Hinduism by threats and physical assaults. The list of such atrocities goes endlessly.

Along with physical attacks, the Hindutva elements are employing other dubious methods like filing cooked up cases against Christian institutions and authorities accusing them of heinous crimes. One such despicable incident happened early this month in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh where a sexual assault case was filed against authorities of a Catholic school. On the basis of a 'prompted allegation' by a Class 11 girl student, the district child welfare committee conducted an inspection of the hostel in the middle of the night, violating all canons of law. The principal, a lay person, was arrested; the manager of the school, who is a priest, and a nun are facing arrest. However, the saving grace was that the student and parent community stood like a rock behind the school authorities, as they knew that the entire case was based on trumped up charges raked up by right-wing forces.

**Why
has the number
of attacks
on Christian
communities
skyrocketed
after the Modi
government
came to power?**

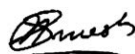
The Dindori incident is not an isolated one. The Sangh Parivar offshoots have been using such tactics umpteen times to harass Christian institutions and many priests and nuns have been put behind bars for no fault of them. This is a signal to other priests and prelates that they too could be trapped using the same ploy as the right-wing forces' target is wiping out the minorities from the country in the next few years as revealed by some of their leaders.

The above incidents are just the tip of the iceberg. One gets a better understanding of the enormity of violence against Christians from a petition filed by Bangalore Archbishop Peter Machado in the Supreme Court last year. It states that at least 700 cases of violence against Christians took place in 2021 and 2022 (till May) alone. Ironically, FIRs have been registered only in 53 cases against the accused whereas FIRs against victims stood at 113. According to the data, in contrast to 23 people arrested for alleged violence, 510 pastors and victims had been booked -- mostly on the charge of forcible conversion. This prompted the apex court to ask the Centre to apprise it of the action taken by the law enforcement agencies in the cases of anti-Christian violence in eight States – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, M.P., Odisha, and U.P.

Yet another disturbing news comes from Arunachal Pradesh, a BJP-ruled State, which has banned conducting prayer services as a means of healing. The government claims that such practices are misleading people from taking recourse to medical treatment and it will lead to discord among people. This should ring alarm bells to the mushrooming charismatic prayer and retreat centres in Kerala where healing is an important part of such services. The priests and prelates who are overenthusiastic to support the saffron party should ponder over the Arunachal ban. It undoubtedly reveals what is in store for the Church, not only in Kerala but in other places too. Unless they 'act as wise as serpents' as warned by Jesus Christ, the result will be the same for the Church in Kerala as the Christians in other parts of the country face. Those who unleash an avalanche of messages on social media in support of the government backed by the Sangh Parivar should go through the writings of V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar. They should also recall the Sangh Parivar stand on St. Teresa of Calcutta and her congregation.

In the background of the escalating violence against Christians, one cannot turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to certain piercing questions that would probably hit the nail on the issue. Why has the number of attacks on Christian communities skyrocketed after the Modi government came to power? What is the strategy of the BJP in wooing Christians in some parts of the country while targeting them brutally in other places? If the 'beef issue' is core to the Hindu belief, why is it not part of the BJP's electoral manifesto in some States? What is the logic in enacting anti-conversion laws when the Christian population remains stagnant in the country and hardly any conviction takes place in such cases? More importantly, what is the justification for denying religious freedom, granted in the Constitution of India, using the bogey of forced conversion?

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



Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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What is the logic in enacting anti-conversion laws when the Christian population remains stagnant in the country and hardly any conviction takes place in such cases?

Betraying Christ and Constitution

When Christians have no courage to take a stand for justice and truth, they are sending a stronger message which is contra-witness: that their faith in Jesus is shallow, mere lip-service; that their treasures are with the rulers of this world

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

The last few years have witnessed a dramatic change in the political ethos and morality of the country. It has reached a new low, with most politicians from across the spectrum demonstrating an unbridled lust for power. Serving the people selflessly is apparently no longer the top priority for many politicians; what matters is to gain power (by hook or by crook) and stay in power. A good percentage of the politicians are really not bothered about the consequences and of the tremendous harm they are doing to the democratic structure, the diversity and the secular fabric of the country.

The minuscule Christian community -- which officially comprises just about 2.3% of the country's population -- has, of late, been hogging the headlines. Unfortunately, for all the wrong reasons. In the past, there were several Christians who took part in the freedom struggle, who were members of the



Constituent Assembly and who contributed significantly to the visionary Constitution that has guided the nation. Christians have been at the forefront of education -- educating the 'creme de la creme' and others of the nation, providing medicare to those who were sick and, above all, reaching out to the poorest of the poor, the excluded and the exploited, in every possible way, through selfless services, empowering them with justice, dignity and equality and ensuring their rightful place in society. Though all these works continue today, they fade into insignificance, with the new narrative which is throttling the nation.

This new narrative is made manifest with the systematic polarization which the country currently is painfully going through. The votaries of the 'Hindutva' ideology are at the helm of this. Besides the ideology does not have any allegiance to the Constitution. They have one clear aim to make India a Hindu nation state by 2025 (when



Routine prayer services and worship are disrupted and attacked; false cases of so-called 'forced' conversion are made; priests and religious sisters are arrested and even denied bail on the flimsiest of reasons

the parent organization, the RSS, completes a hundred years of existence). A full-page advertisement in Hindi in several Varanasi-based Hindi dailies on 15 March 2023 titled 'Call to become Sanyasi' says, "Those who have resolved to establish Hindu Sanatan Dharm as National and World Religion ..." with a nine-day rigorous training programme beginning 22 March and ending on Ram Navami, is a clear sign of things to come.

A strategy to realise this exclusive agenda is to target the minorities – particularly Muslims and Christians – through a continual process of demonization, denigration and discrimination. They often succeed with their manipulative ploy. Venomous hate speeches are on the rise; those who indulge in them do so with impunity knowing full well that the ruling regime will provide them with all the immunity and protection needed. There are anti-conversion laws passed by some States. Though still in the hearing stage in the Supreme Court, vigilantes, in an unhealthy nexus with local police, take law and order in their own hands. Routine prayer services and worship are disrupted and attacked; false cases of so-called 'forced' conversion are made; priests and religious sisters are arrested and even denied bail on the flimsiest of reasons. There are instances when Hindutva elements have demanded exorbitant sums of money from priests, threatening them with false cases, if the money is not received. Christian personnel, institutions and properties are targeted and attacked with frightening regularity.

On the other hand, some Christians including hierarchy, clergy and laity are far from being authentic witnesses to the faith: to the person and message of Jesus. Sadly, there are instances of financial scams, sexual misconduct and other improprieties, which naturally make both individuals and institutions extremely vulnerable and pliable. There are known instances of how the ruling regime has hammered powerful Christians to submission; the underlying posturing is that 'nothing will happen to you if you join us; if you do not do so, then we will destroy you.' When a person has lost all credibility, the so-called 'Christian' has no choice but to succumb to the blackmail and the threats of the powers that apparently control their destinies.

People often wonder why MLAs and MPs who have been elected under the banner of a politi-



cal party easily 'cross the floor' and join the ruling regime. The answer is obvious. Besides, the ruling regime has plenty of money to buy up politicians from opposition parties. The recent political imbroglio in Maharashtra, which is awaiting a Supreme Court verdict, is a case in point. Many Christian politicians are also easy prey: we have the classic example of 'Catholic' politicians in the Goa Assembly elections having absolutely no qualms of conscience to leave their party to join the ruling party.

The recent elections in the three North Eastern states of Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura call for great introspection. The Christian population of Nagaland is estimated to be around 90% and that of Meghalaya around 75%; Tripura has a much smaller Christian population of about 4%. Today, however, in all these States, the BJP is calling the shots, setting the political agenda and in fact, ruling (despite getting just two seats in Meghalaya). The reasons for this seismic political change are several. Many of the politicians (despite being Christian) are corrupt which is no State secret and which the BJP can exploit to their advantage. Then the BJP also used the Christian card singing 'Alleluias' and 'Praise the Lord' in their campaigning. The BJP was happily legitimising the eating of beef in the north-east; whereas in most parts of India they and their ilk lynch and kill minorities even if the latter just happen to ferry a cow in a vehicle. Then, of course, the Sangh Parivar has its whole armoury of money, muscle, mafia, media and manipulations.

Sadly, several Christian politicians (and surely some people too) were trapped into playing the 'religion' card whether it was campaigning with Chris-



tian rhetoric or organising a patently unconstitutional swearing-in ceremony for the newly elected legislators of Nagaland. Having a pastor pray and a choir sing a Christian song has only made it easier for the BJP to give legitimacy for Hindu rituals at Government functions and thus to effectively destroy the secular fabric of the country. Of course, several Christians, (who hardly bother about Constitutional propriety and the severe repercussions such so-called 'Christian' acts would have on the future of the country) went 'ga-ga' when they watched clippings of the Nagaland swearing-in ceremony; there was a similar response when the Chief Minister of Meghalaya went to Vailankanni; those who cheered him did not care a hoot for the fact that the CM has literally sold his state to a fascist regime.

The big news, a few days ago, is that the BJP is going all out to woo the Christians of Kerala during the Easter season. Several efforts have been made in the past; the last elections, however, were a clear zilch for the BJP in God's own country. The ground realities are different now; the BJP has an upper hand in the face of growing scandals among sections of Kerala Christians. Apparently, some Christians (including some hierarchy and clergy) are warming up to the BJP. Everyone knows why!

Few Christians in the country stand up and speak up for the values of the Gospel which are so beautifully enshrined in the Constitution of India. The nation is suffering as never before. Communalism, Casteism, Criminalisation of politics, Corruption and Consumerism are rampant. At the receiving end of a brutal, unjust and inhuman system are the excluded and exploited, the migrants and labourers, the minorities: Muslims, Christians and others; human rights defenders and those who cherish freedom of speech and expression and a free press; those who

defend the right to preach, practise and propagate one's faith; those who are victims of venomous hate speeches and attacks, of demonization and discrimination. Those who have false cases foisted on them – with Government (Constitutional and quasi) bodies breathing fire on them. Then we have the fisher-folk of Kerala and others who have been displaced by megaprojects and the mining mafia (who destroy our precious natural resources); those who are concerned about the ecology (Josimath is a classic case) and environmental justice; the LGBTQIA community; the small farmers and land-holders; the small investors who have fallen prey to a corrupt regime which has been hijacked by crony capitalists like Adani. The Adivasis who are denied their jal, jungle aur jameen, the Dalits and other vulnerable sections of society. There are many more; the list is endless! How many of our Christians (particularly politicians) or the Church as a body, spoken out against all these evils taking place in the country today?

Interestingly, in February 2012 at the 30th CBCI Meeting in Bangalore on the theme 'The Church's Role for a Better India', the Catholic Bishops stated, "We sensed in our hearts our country's yearning for a Better India. Our country has been noted for its deep spirituality, its saints and sages, its rich diversity of cultures and religions. People yearn for the ideal enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India of a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic which will secure for its citizens Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. But this yearning has remained largely unfulfilled. Economic development has brought about increasing inequities, an ever-widening gap between

The BJP has an upper hand in the face of growing scandals among sections of Kerala Christians. Apparently, some Christians (including some hierarchy and clergy) are warming up to the BJP. Everyone knows why!

the rich and the poor with consequent tensions spilling over into violence. We see around us a betrayal of the poor and marginalized, the tribals, dalits and other backward classes, women and other groups who live in dehumanising and oppressive poverty. We witness rampant exploitation of children. There is disappointment with those in public life for whom ethical concerns matter little. The Church does not wish to rest on her laurels. She recommits herself to being a prophetic Church, taking a decisive stand in favour of the poor and marginalized. We envision an India with more attributes of the Kingdom of God such as justice and equity with its consequent fruits of love, peace and joy.” Today times are far worse. Will our Bishops today demonstrate the much-needed prophetic courage and speak up for truth and justice and for the values of the Constitution in the same manner they did in 2012?



In his path-breaking Encyclical ‘Fratelli Tutti’, Pope Francis emphasises the fact that democracy with its core values and underlying principles is what political life should be today. This is made amply clear by the constant call for good politics at every level and of a deep involvement in politics by the people. “What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.” In other words, a “healthy politics... capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia.” (#177) Towards the end (#276) of the Encyclical, Pope Francis emphatically states that the Church must engage in politics. “For these reasons, the Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the

contrary, ‘she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines’ in the building of a better world, or fail to ‘reawaken the spiritual energy’ that can contribute to the betterment of society.”

Those who call themselves ‘disciples’ of Jesus have no qualms of conscience to hobnob (to sup and more) with fascist and fundamentalists, who brazenly destroy the sanctity of the Constitution and the secular, pluralistic fabric of the country. These ‘disciples’ find it easier to indulge in a politics of convenience and compromise; not to take on the Government and police if schools are attacked by the Sangh Parivar or if religious sisters are harassed and hounded out of a train. They are afraid to call for the revocation of the CAA amendments, the UAPA and sedition laws; or the total repeal of the draconian anti-conversion laws; they are frightened to support the protesting farmers or workers or for that matter the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A where Kashmir is concerned. For these Christians standing up to the ruling regime is just not possible. They prefer the more ‘diplomatic’ and ‘cautious’ approach: ‘silence’ they say is important for the ‘greater good.’ Some of them even use scripture to justify their Fear, Ignorance and Exclusiveness. All these are sinful!

Jesus and his teachings are about exactly the opposite. Jesus says to us “fear no one; I am with you!” When Christians have no courage to take a stand for justice and truth, because those who rule us may take away our possessions, privileges, power, position whatever – we are in fact sending a stronger message which is contra-witness: that our faith in Jesus is shallow, mere lip-service; that we really do not believe in Him; that our treasures are with the rulers of this world! Ignorance is never a value: Jesus himself warned us about our inability to “read the signs of the times.” If we don’t stick our necks out, one will perhaps still lose everything, but also one’s own credibility. Christians in India must wake up now and stop betraying the person and message of Jesus and the Constitution of India.

In ‘Evangelii Gaudium’, Pope Francis reminds us that, “The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.” ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Role of Christians As a Punching Bag

BY A.J. PHILIP

I am grateful to my friend A.C. Michael for alerting me about a letter the Department of Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Law and Justice circulated among the judges of the Supreme Court hearing a case about forced conversion.

The letter was signed by Arvind Kumar Sharma and it was meant for the three-member Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India and consisting of Mr Justice P.S. Narasimha and Mr Justice J.B. Pardiwala.

The letter sought four weeks' time to collect details from the state governments. It was the third such letter seeking an adjournment of the case. The government has been consistently saying that there is forced conversion to Christianity. It is the responsibility of the government to substantiate its claim by providing details of the forced conversion.

Why is the government forced to seek adjournment after adjournment, if it has the details of forced conversions? The answer is simple and straightforward. The government has no such statistics. It is not that the government is incapable of cooking



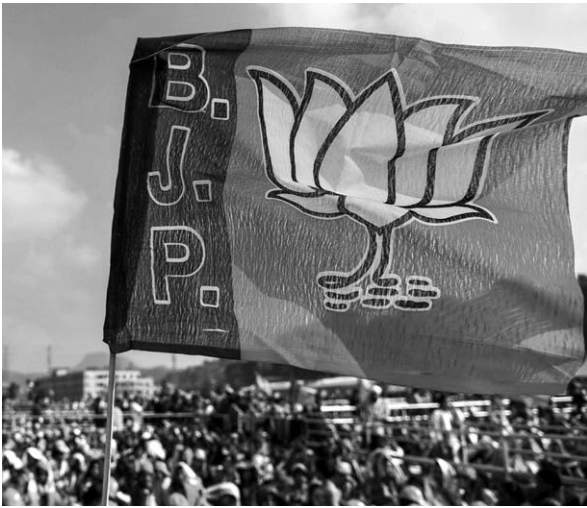
up evidence. It needs time and that is why letters like the one mentioned above (W.P. CRL. No. 137/2022) is circulated among the judges.

There are several states like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh where stringent anti-conversion laws exist. Some of them have been existing on the statute for more than 50 years. Let me repeat once again, for more than 50 years!

The laws were enacted to prevent forced conversion. They are quite stringent. If a person is converted through force, the man responsible for it will rot in jail for many years. Yet, why is it that not a single Christian priest or pastor or missionary has been convicted so far?

Yes, there have been thousands of false cases lodged against Christians as the cases are all built on false evidences. They collapse like a house of cards in a court of law. Anybody who has an idea of how Christians worship would be shocked by accusations that money is used to convert persons.





The fact is that the Christians are one of the poorest sections of society, except in a state like Kerala, where there may be an evidence of affluence thanks mainly to the younger generation migrating to countries like the US, Canada, Australia and Britain.

In fact, an overwhelming majority of the pastors, priests and others who work in His vineyard, to use a Biblical expression, depend on the converted to support themselves. Once a person becomes a Christian, he is expected to give 10 percent of his income to the church. It is called “tithe”.

The neo-converts, who are relatively poorer, are the ones who religiously give tithe. When I grew up in Kerala, my mother would ask me to take a handful of rice, pack it in a paper and take it to the church. The church that I belong to was built with “pidiari” (fistful of rice) that the faithful brought.

Today my church uses PayTM and GooglePay to collect money from its members. A few years ago, I attended a church in Odisha where I saw the members bringing rice in the same fashion I described. It is they who support their pastor or

Why is the government forced to seek adjournment after adjournment, if it has the details of forced conversions? The answer is simple and straightforward. The government has no such statistics

priest. It is not that the government does not know what I have described above.

If they admit it, they will have no case against the Christians. That is why false propaganda is made that Christians have been forcibly converting Hindus. In Kerala where Christians form less than 20 percent of the population, the figures of conversion show that more people convert to Hinduism than to Christianity or Islam.

The propagandists of Hindutva often make allegations of forced conversion to justify their attacks on Christians worshipping in villages. India is a secular nation but in most cases the police turn the other way when the attack takes place. Often, the police do not take cognisance of the complaints made by the Christians. Instead, they are jailed.

Fortunately, the judicial system is, by and large, dependable and the judges are able to make out when a person is produced before the court with the claim that he was forcibly converted. The fact of the matter is that forced conversion is not at all possible.

Conversion is a decision taken by the person concerned. When a person hears a powerful sermon, he may be influenced for a few minutes but once he comes out of the meeting hall or church, he goes back to his old ways.

I have seen in the villages of Uttarakhand the financial status of Christians improving within no time. It is not because they get money from the pastor. It is because they give up drinking, which will increase their income by as much as 50 to 100 percent.

They are also able to spend quality time with their family. The lady of the house will have a better sari and the children better dresses. The drunkard will feel jealous and will say that their prosperity is



because of foreign money. The Constitution grants the freedom to believe in any religion and also to propagate it. It is this right that the Christians exercise. Forget propagation, they cannot even pray together in many villages as underscored by the 600 or so cases registered against Christians in the last one year.

It is ridiculous to hear claims that laws have to be strengthened against the Christians who constitute less than 3 percent of the population. How can they be a threat to 80 percent of the Hindu population when all the levers of power, including the Army and the Police, the executive and the legislature are under the control of the Hindutvavadis?

Incidentally, Christianity has been in existence in India since the first century when St. Thomas is believed to have come to India and was martyred. I can say without fear of contradiction that as a community, Christians are the most law-abiding.

There have been many incidents of violence against Christians, be it in Kandhamal in Odisha, or in Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Why is it that there is not a single instance of the Christians counter-attacking the aggressors?

Yes, the Christians occupy the moral high ground. When the mutineers of 1857 started their journey from Meerut to Delhi to capture power from the British, they attacked many churches on the way and killed the people who took shelter there.

There was never any retaliation from the church or its members because they believe in the sinless nature of Jesus, whom they want to imitate, successfully or not. But that has not slackened the campaign against the Christians.

The whole world saw how peacefully thousands of them congregated at Jantar Mantar last month to

Even as the torture of the Christians continue in much of North India, the BJP has been doing everything possible to build bridges with the Christians in Kerala. The party believes that it can build a vote bank among the Christians in the State

protest against the atrocities their fellow members have been experiencing.

As I mentioned in my column, the protest gathering resembled a Christian worship with choirs singing hymns and pastors saying Glory to God in languages as varied as Syriac and Khasi and Garo, not to mention Hindi and Haryanvi.

I found the police doing precious little as the crowd was well-disciplined and they did not have to intervene. This is the strength of the Christian community which they do not have to forego under any circumstances. It is said that among the jailbirds in the US, the Jews are the fewest in number. In India, this credit should go to the Christian community.

For those who believe in violence, they want retaliation from the Christian community so that they can paint them in their own hues. That is why they have been trying to provoke the members of the community without any success so far.

Even as the torture of the Christians continue in much of North India, the BJP has been doing everything possible to build bridges with the Christians in Kerala. The party believes that it can build a vote bank among the Christians in the State.

Today the BJP does not have a single MLA in Kerala. The party believes that it can win 10 percent of the seats if they reach an understanding with the Christians. That is why the party has hit upon the idea of letting the BJP members visit the Christian homes and remove their worries about the party.

People live in the third decade of the 21st century. They have all the information available on their fingertips. When a group of Hindutvavadis barge into a church and destroy the statues and other objects of art and worship, the news reaches everyone in the country. If it believes that the media can



be controlled, they are mistaken for the news has its own way of reaching the public.

When Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, the government took some time to make the announcement. In the meantime, the news spread by word of mouth from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Kolkata to Ahmedabad in less than six minutes.

Actually, there is no need for the BJP to do a special campaign to win the confidence of the Christians. As it is, Christians do not want any special rights, except those guaranteed to them by the Constitution. Every Sunday, most churches make special prayers for the President and her Council of ministers.

When I met Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma who was the President of India at that time, he was pleasantly surprised when I read out to him the liturgy of our church in which there was a special prayer for him. I also told him that when the same liturgy is used in the US, the prayer will be for the President of the USA. We pray for the Queen in England and for the Emir in Dubai.

The BJP's campaign to induct Christians in the party is misplaced. There is no bar on any Christian joining any political party. They can even join the Indian Union Muslim League.

What is more important for them is how the party treats the Christians in the areas where they are strong. The Christians of Nagaland or Meghalaya do not find anything amiss in voting for the BJP. Nor do they have any problems in Goa.

Christians also believe that the country is not safe for them if any minority community feels insecure. Let there be no doubt that Christians can never be secure when Muslims, Dalits and women are inse-

Let there be no doubt that Christians can never be secure when Muslims, Dalits and women are insecure. Unfortunately, there is a section of Christians who are so influenced by their Muslim phobia that they are willing to fall in the trap of Hindutva



cure. Unfortunately, there is a section of Christians who are so influenced by their Muslim phobia that they are willing to fall in the trap of Hindutva.

When Narendra Modi returned to power in 2019, the first thing he did was to criminalise triple talaq. There were many socio-economic problems facing the Muslim community but he did nothing to ameliorate their condition.

For instance, the government has watered the scholarship scheme for minority students. They have been deprived of scholarships while the government introduced reservation for the Upper Castes. There is no constitutional sanction for such reservation.

There are Christians, especially among priests, who believe that Muslims are engaged in a Love Jihad. It is as nonsensical as the claim that Triple Talaq was what bothered the Muslim community. They are the ones who would like to have a tie-up with the BJP in the next elections.

This is not surprising at all as history bears proof that a section of the organised church had little compunction in sharing the table with the Nazis during the Third Reich. Let the BJP give up its Hindutva agenda and treat all citizens as equals, irrespective of their caste or community affiliation, then the party will have many takers among the Christians.

It is when the BJP leaders do not condemn atrocities on Christians that doubt forms in the mind of the people about the party's bona fides. The BJP needs to look inwards before it extends the Christians an invitation to join the party. Why should they join the party in Kerala when their brethren in the North are badgered day in and day out? ©

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114-year-old Christian hospital in UP faces harassment

A Christian hospital that has served a northern Indian city for more than a century faces closure after it became a victim of religious bigotry since one year.

The Broadwell Christian Hospital in Fatehpur has faced “physical, mental, and emotional abuse due to the false allegations of forceful religious conversions,” bemoans Sujith Varghese Thomas, the institutions senior administrative officer.

Fatehpur, a city situated between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers in Uttar Pradesh state, is some 550 km southeast of New Delhi.

Some Hindu nationalist groups have accused the hospital of indulging in forcible religious conversions, which the hospital authorities say are false allegations.

In “an open letter” to the media, Thomas claims the hospital that provides dedicated service in social development and healthcare has remained a “vital resource” for the local community for the past 114 years. “For over a century, the hospital, its staff and its management have shared a fraternal bond with the community – something that goes beyond mere

doctor and patient association. This bond is a deep two-way relationship of care, of trust, of service and of dignity – the metaphorical blood flow that has kept us connected, healthy, motivated and in service through the years,” adds the February 23 letter.

However, the institution has faced “undignified abuse, both physical and emotional, due to being a minority institution,” Thomas laments. He holds “politically motivated religious extremists, along with insensitive and prejudiced police officials” responsible for the institution’s current troubles.

The troubles began on April 14, 2022, when some 100 religious extremists with weapons barged into the church where Christians, including many hospital staff and their families, were attending Maundy Thursday services.

The intruders insisted the Christians should chant “Jai Shree Ram” and locked them, including women and children, inside the church and called the police.

Thomas’ letter alleges that the police detained the Christians and registered a First Information of Report (FIR) against 35 for forcefully converting 90 people into Christianity during the service.



They were booked under various sections under the Indian Penal Code, including one under the Uttar Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2021. Uttar Pradesh is among several Indian states that have enacted laws against fraudulent religious conversions. The FIR, filed by a Hindutva outfit leader, says Vijay Masih, the lead pastor, had verbally confessed to the allegations of forceful conversions.

Thomas alleges that the police failed to verify the allegations by crosschecking with the alleged converts.

“However, an examination of the Aadhar cards of all those attending the prayer did not reveal any non-Christian in the meeting. It was declared that the 90 who were supposedly being converted had escaped through the back gate, when the truth was that the extremists had locked both the gates from outside to prevent any person from escaping,” the hospital administrator points out.

The following day, April 15, 2022, Priti Masih, the pastor’s wife, filed a counter complaint against the assailants for trespassing and forcing Christians to convert to Hinduism, but the police refused to register an FIR allegedly under pressure from a Hindu organization. Thomas says after six months the police claimed to have found new evidence to support the case.

On the night of October 13, 2022, a police team forcibly entered the hospital, even those areas where outsiders were prohibited such as the labor and operation rooms.

The police team forcibly took away the staff attending to a woman in labor and questioned them, endangering the patient’s life, Thomas explains.

A complaint to the station in charge produced no action. On November 12, 2022, some “goons claiming to be from the Bajrang Dal,” a radical Hindu group, entered Priti Masih’s home to force her to withdraw her complaint.

“Despite reporting the incident to the police, no action was taken. Additionally, the police issued notices to the church management demanding documents and information that were not related to the case at hand. This suggested that the police were building a case against the church members and were continuing their harassment,” the administrator says.

The hospital faced police action again on January 2 and January 18, when they barged into the community health and hospital offices and seized hard disks from several computers as well as several registers.

It is unacceptable that a hospital dedicated to social development and health-care is being targeted in this manner. The authorities must act swiftly to ensure that the hospital and its staff can continue to serve the community without fear of abuse

Thomas’ letter says, fake pamphlets offering employment and even suitors as inducement for converting to Christianity were planted in the community health office. The medical superintendent was threatened to sign documents that included the planted pamphlets, he alleges.

On January 23, the police registered three new FIRs despite a Supreme Court ruling that no second FIR can be filed for the same cognizable offense alleged in the first FIR.

“Despite reporting these incidents to the police, no action has been taken, and the police have instead continued their harassment of the church members and hospital staff,” Thomas bemoans.

He wants these incidents to be investigated immediately as they are “clear violation of human rights.” “It is unacceptable that a hospital dedicated to social development and healthcare is being targeted in this manner. The authorities must act swiftly to ensure that the hospital and its staff can continue to serve the community without fear of abuse,” he adds.

The hospital on February 8 submitted a four-point memorandum to the National Minorities Commission to look into the matter and bring justice to the harassed Christians. Thomas says the harassment has caused the hospital to experience rejection and that it has become expendable.

“We feel the paradoxical pain and numbness of the cutting off of the blood flow before the amputation begins. We have never intended to bring anything but purpose and healing to anyone who walks in through our doors, much less be a threat to the larger community. We neither deserve nor are willing to be amputated,” he asserts. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Culture Wars Persist

When a society consciously brings to power persons known for corruption, violence or caste rivalries, there is something wrong with that society

BY **ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPAMPIL**

The most painful side of the Ukraine war is that it is a culture-war. A community is struggling fiercely to preserve its language, culture and identity. It is a fight for its "soul". It is all the more painful because the threat comes from their ethnic cousins, the Russians. All hurt memories come alive.

Unfortunately hurt memories are on both sides. Russians remember the NATO promise to Gorbachev in 1989-90 not to go beyond German unification. But the NATO has long forgotten its promises, enticed many of Russia's ethnic kins into its own network in the name of liberal thinking and free market, and it is aiming at regime-change in Russia itself. On the other side, the Ukrainians remember the period when their land was absorbed into the Russian empire, their language totally marginalized, their culture looked down upon, and they were despised as a people.

The Mighty can bulldoze, but they have no Convincing Power: For example, the Americans in



Iraq and Afghanistan, Russians in Ukraine, the Chinese in Tibet, Yogi in U.P. A 'Bulldozer culture' is the 'uncivilized' edge of inter-community hatred. It has its limit. Weaker people may be made to bend, bow and prostrate on the ground, but their mind can remain unbending. When they begin to

fight back, they will put their whole heart into the struggle, for they are fighting for their soul.

Reasserting Identities

The marginal zones of India are silently moving in that direction. Perceptive people see it coming. It takes various forms: assertion of ideological difference in Kerala; protest against Hindi-imposition in Tamil Nadu; resentment against outsider arrogance in Goa; claiming back Maratha identity in Maharashtra; call for democracy in Ladakh; insistence on restoration of constitutional guarantees in Kashmir; affirmation of Sikh pride in Punjab; and, the latest, the emergence of Tipra Motha Party of Pradyot

Bikram Manikya Deb Barma in Tripura, asking for a separate tribal state.

The success of the Tipra Motha Party in Tripura elections points to an unmistakable re-awakening of the regional and ethnic identities among the Northeast tribal communities, pleading for continued existence. If you will not allow us to prosper, allow us at least to "exist", they seem to say. Respect our culture, tolerate our existence.

No Modi Magic, No Money Magic

In today's India, objective interpretations of situations have little chance to be heard. For example,



flatterers were the first to comment on the recent election results. Amit Shah called it the “Modi Magic” in spite of the fact that BJP got back just the 2 seats they had in Meghalaya. No Modi Magic, nor ‘money magic’.

The BJP had put up a candidate in each of the 60 seats, poured in money recklessly, clamoured against local corruption, and got Amit Shah and J.P. Nadda to campaign, only to get two seats, as in the previous Assembly, in constituencies where outsiders happen to be numerous. No magic!

As for Nagaland, despite the number game, it is not very clear whether the BJP bent to Chief Minister Rio or vice-versa. Even in Tripura where outsiders seem to tighten their grip, a tribal party has risen in resistance, prodigiously determined to affirm their rights! Essentially it is a cultural struggle like in Ukraine. Unbending ‘No’. Of course, some will want to keep a stronger opponent in good mood to avoid trouble.

Fear in the North-East

It was no less a weighty body than a Bench of Allahabad High Court that called the other day for a nationwide ban on cow slaughter. Justice Shamim Ahmed quoted the Puranas to say, those who kill cows rot in hell. Cow’s legs represent the four Vedas. He went on to lecture on the rite of healing purification, the benefit of milk, curd, butter, urine and dung. Cows and priests were created together, he contended. As the granter of all wishes, the cow is called Kamadhenu.

If Rishi Sunak of Hindu background is making a mark as the Prime Minister of the UK, it is because he works in a secular culture, under reasonable ethical codes and a reliable measure of accountability, and equal treatment to people of all religions. It is not sadhus and pujaris that dictate social norms there



Banaras Hindu University researches Manusmriti ‘applicability’

Is this the Hindutva civilization that Himanta Biswa Sarma wants to impose on Northeast? Or Satya and Dharma? Northeast people know the difference. But Sarma argues, Modi is an ocean into which all of us will have to merge. No one seems eager, except opportunists and sycophants! In fact, the heroes of every North-eastern community have been those who resisted threat from a stronger neighbour or an outsider. If the mighty Mughals were resisted, BJP will meet with the same resistance, when they seek to impose their cow-fads or caste insanities.

Manusmriti-Culture

Then irrationalities reach a climax. Hindutva determination has been to make irrationality more scientific. Benares Hindu University did an intense research on the ‘applicability Manusmriti’ in modern times. Lengthy studies reached the conclusion that Shudras’ destiny is their total subjection to higher castes, that they have no right to education, and that their ‘dharma’ consists in being true to their caste-assigned tasks. Similarly, the dharma of women is to be at their household chores.

The research upheld the validity of these norms on the authority of ancient Rishis. No further argument. This was the result of a very expensive research. Meanwhile, Academic Freedom Index Update 2023 gave India one of the lowest of the 30% positions, declaring that the situation had worsened with autocratisation.

“Men have Lost Their Reason”

Mark Anthony’s exclamation in Shakespeare, “O judgement! Thou art fled to brutish beasts, And men



have lost their reason” makes meaning under Saffron Sovereignty. Helpless farmers do not know what to do with the 500 or more cows that wander round each village damaging crops. In cities, accidents have increased with the increase of stray cattle. More than 100 died in Agra alone recently in cow-related accidents.

When 20 people died on the Ladakh front defending the nation, it was considered a great tragedy. When 100 or more die due to the imposition of “unreasonable cow-policy” there is not a bit of grief. Farmers are compelled to erect electric fencing around their field and install CCTV. Cow-shelters fail to sustain themselves with the poor government subsidy of Rs. 50. This is not a cultural world that north-easterners can recognise as their own.

The more we concede to Hindutva ethos, the lower we fall back in general performance and world rating. If Rishi Sunak of Hindu background is making a mark as the Prime Minister of the UK, it is because he works in a secular culture, under reasonable ethical codes and a reliable measure of accountability, and equal treatment to people of all religions. It is not sadhus and pujaris that dictate social norms there. When a civilized atmosphere is missing, you move into a mantra-sloka civilization, as critics say, where RSS and godmen dictate, and everything ends up in the maya of non-achievement and unjust situations.

A Struggle for Basic Justice

That is what makes Kapil Sibal ask lawyers to take up unitedly the cause of fighting for justice. He has set up a non-political organization towards that end. He asks them to take on the present irrational

order, under which defectors have pulled down eight governments, and 350 million live below poverty line. Unjust treatment of the weak is non-impressive daily news. For example, there is report that another Muslim loses life for alleged handling of beef in Bihar, that a Dalit student Darshan Solanki commits suicide from depression in Mumbai.

Meantime, our national leaders are busy with other concerns like renaming places, re-writing history, or humiliating political rivals by cooking up cases. They are closely following Pakistan that broke all records filing the 80th case against Imran Khan, by filing cases against Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi when their party is in trouble. Manish Siso-dia is put behind bars. It is as though the leaders are saying: Hindu Rashtra is here; we will decide what is dharma and adharm; this Hindutva order will prosper forever.

Our last elections sent more criminals to Parliament than ever before. Though they belong to all parties, the BJP breaks the record

‘Hindu Rate’ of Growth

That is what makes Raghuram Rajan warn against the return of a “Hindu rate of growth”, an expression used by Raj Krishna in 1978, pointing to about 3.5-4% growth. Privatisation to which Modi government has surrendered has shown its weakness when it combines with bania-ethos: the Morbi bridge collapse, the Brahmos failure in the Philippines, the death of 66 children in Gambia after taking Indian cough mixture, of 18 children in Uzbekistan after consuming Marion drugs.

Meanwhile, China is moving ahead with a \$19.2 trillion economy, and plans for 7.2% increase in defence spending. China is a threat, Nikki Haley admits, but they are disciplined.

Our last elections sent more criminals to Parliament than ever before. Though they belong to all parties, the BJP breaks the record. When a society consciously brings to power persons known for corruption or violence, there is something wrong with that society. Our political life becomes criminalized and our culture goes down the moral slope,

leaders misguiding people and mis-shaping society, society throwing up worthless leaders for sectarian interests, groups with political clout manipulating the leaders, and leaders with political interests manipulating the masses. Indian society itself stands in need of reform today.

Beware of Obscurantism

As cases are cooked up, so are the reports on government performance in various fields. Impressive plans and projects are announced, and confident predictions are made of speedy economic growth and proximate acquisition of a Superpower status. But these are as beneficial as the 'scientific astrology' that the BJP is promoting, and just as useful as palm-reading and fortune-telling. Courses in astrology and priestly craft introduced into Universi-



ties will ensure jobs for Brahmins and upper castes, but may not serve the nation's interests. On the contrary, such courses will facilitate the mantra-sloka culture to acquire a strangle-hold over the masses.

Meantime, our intellectual leadership is busy discussing whether Kohinoor should be removed from the British crown and brought back to India to be placed in our dust-laden historic museums, names of our cities should be changed to honour Hindu deities and Hindutva heroes, what ways should be adopted to get Bharat recognised as Vishwa Guru. But alas, we read in the papers about people of Indian origin descending to every form of unethical practices as they settle abroad, indulging in shockingly disorderly behaviour on journeys. As for changing of place names, the Egyptians may point out how jealously they preserved the name Alexandria over millennia, despite change of governments. Petty issues kill us, and we allow weighty

matters to pass us by.

V.S. Naipaul, an India-admirer, wrote in his "Wounded Civilization", "I wondered whether intellectually for a thousand years India hadn't always retreated before its conquerors and whether, in its periods of apparent revival, India hadn't only been making itself archaic again, intellectually smaller, always vulnerable" (New Delhi, 1979, p.15). This tragedy continues.

A New Future

Rahul did not mean to humiliate India when he argued at Cambridge that Indian democracy was in crisis. He felt confident that there was a new awakening in response. Democracy is about collective self-correction. First of all, the leaders must come out of their self-deception. They must develop a larger vision for India, with great open-mindedness; and with respect for diverse identities at the periphery. The majority community must be open to criticism and challenge. Mutual correction should be a sign of fraternal concern than open hostility.

The past can be repaired. A new future can be shaped. Emmanuel Macron has been going round Africa, apologizing for France's colonial past. America has apologized to Japan, Japan has apologized to China, Britain has thanked India for her readiness to look at our shared history positively. Mahatma Gandhi has apologized to humbler communities and marginal groups. As the present leadership is more eager to use representatives of the weaker sections against their own people's interests, we do not see a continuity in them with the Founding Fathers' commitment to the weak. It can be re-built. Emotional loyalties are won, not imposed. Bonds are built up, not dictated.

Bill Gates was impressed by Modiji's humility and his concern for the future. Giorgia Meloni, the Italian PM, described him as the "most loved among world leaders". These are truly tributes to traditional Indian styles of relationship and self-effacing attitudes, that differ considerably from Duterte's or Trump's manner of self-assertion. Our hope is that going beyond mere appearances, a sense of Raj Dharma also becomes evident in due course. Nothing is impossible. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARCHBISHOP MENAMPARAMPIL's analysis of socio-cultural and political issues has led to debates and concrete peace initiatives, for which he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

Immorality of Same-Sex Marriage

Homosexuality is decriminalized; same sex marriage may be legalized; yet it does not mean that they are morally right

BY **BISHOP GERALD JOHN MATHIAS**

The Supreme Court of India has decided that a batch of petitions demanding legal validation of same sex marriages will be taken up by a Constitution Bench, even as the Union Government has opposed the plea.



The Centre in an affidavit in Supreme Court said that legal validation of same-sex unions could cause “complete havoc” as most religions and Indian society at large recognize marriage as a union between a man and a woman, two persons of complementary sexes and not of same sex. Being a delicate issue needing much debate the Centre wants the legislators (Parliament) to handle this issue and said it is “impermissible” for the apex court to decide on a policy that is embedded in religious and social norms and would undermine the stability of the age-old Institutions of marriage and family. The RSS has also endorsed the stand of the Union Government.

In 2018 the Supreme Court decriminalised homosexuality by scrapping the colonial era law. But the members of LGBTQ community are not content with that but want equal rights like heterosexuals namely that their unions/marriages be legally recognized as valid.

What the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court will decide is crucial and will have wide ranging repercussions on the traditions, practices, personal laws, religious beliefs and moral values of most people. Let us keep our fingers crossed.

Pope Francis has also made some comments on homosexuality, same sex unions and LGBTQ. Some have misunderstood him and have thought that Pope has changed or going to change Church teaching on homosexuality. That is not the case.

It is true, when a journalist asked him sometime ago in an interview about gay priests, he replied “Who am I to judge?” On other occasions and in a recent interview with the Associated Press, Pope Francis has condemned criminalization of homosexuality as unjust and wrong. That does not mean that Pope is approving homosexual behaviour or same sex unions.

Pope Francis is only asking the Church and Society to have a merciful and humane approach to and treatment of the LGBTQ people. They are to be respected like anyone else. All are God’s children with same dignity. They cannot be treated as criminals, or excluded from the Church. He has, however, clarified that Church teaching on homosexuality has not changed. “Homosexuality is not a crime but homosexual acts are sinful,” he said.

There is still much confusion in the minds of many people on this issue. Let me try to clarify and present here the official teaching of the Church on homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

A judicious and well considered approach is necessary. Life of human beings is to be ordered not just by legality but also by morality. Human beings are not just a bundle of flesh, but embodied souls. God has endowed us with reason and free will and also the conscience to make right judgments. It goes without saying that in order to make right judgments,



conscience has to be rightly formed. Human behaviour cannot be governed by pure instincts and feelings, but by objective judgments of right and wrong. And that is not always easy for individuals, especially in difficult and conflict situations. Hence, we need the help of Sacred Scriptures and religious and moral teachings.

In order to understand the right and wrong of homosexuality, it is important to make a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. This distinction between *homosexual orientation and homosexual acts* is a very essential distinction to be kept in mind while evaluating the morality of homosexual acts. Homosexuality is not merely a matter of legality but also of morality. Unfortunately, the Delhi High Court while decriminalizing homosexuality by repealing the section 377 of IPC as discriminatory, went beyond its competence to give license to consenting adults to engage in homosexual acts.

It is true no one can be held culpable for having a homosexual orientation, if it is innate and permanent. They should be treated with respect just as any human being and certainly not as criminals. It has to be borne in mind that all homosexuals who have this tendency are not born homosexuals. While some may be born homosexuals, others acquire this orientation due to external environmental factors, especially in early childhood.

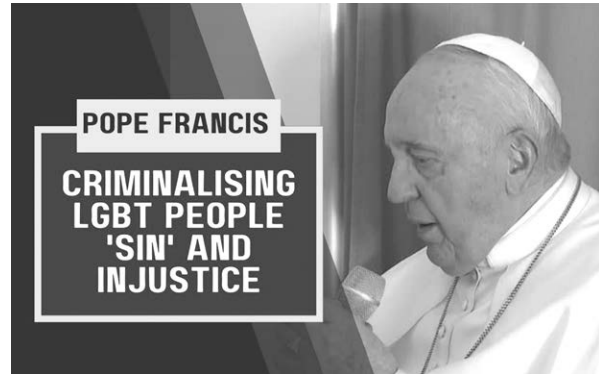
While homosexuals may not be personally responsible for having a homosexual orientation, they are responsible for the sexual acts which they indulge in. All homosexuals have a moral obligation not to indulge in homosexual acts because these are contrary to the inbuilt meaning of human sexuality and marriage. Remember that all unmarried persons, whatever their sexual orientation, are morally obliged to live a chaste life without engaging in sexual activities.

Right reason and natural law would teach that there is an “inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive (love-giving) meaning and the procreative (life-giving) meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman”.

Any sexual act in order to be in keeping with the order willed by God, and therefore morally right, must respect at the same time both these insepara-

ble aspects or finalities. Homosexual acts are incapable of achieving the finality of procreation. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is “a natural institution consisting of a specific communion of persons, essentially rooted in the complementarity of the sexes and oriented to procreation. Sexual differences cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of marriage.” Same sex marriage and homosexual acts, therefore, are contrary to nature as designed by God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly teaches: “Basing itself on Sacred Scriptures, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity (cf. Gen. 19:1-29); Rom 1:24-27; 1Cor. 6:10; 1Tim 1:10), tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’ They are contrary to the natural law.



They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved” (CCC No. 2357).

The institutions of marriage and family are crucial to the stability and welfare of the society. These must be safeguarded with utmost care.

The often-cited argument that heterosexuals have sexual outlet therefore homosexuals also should have sexual outlet in homosexual acts, does not hold water. Heterosexuals too cannot arbitrarily engage in sexual activity with any person.

Heterosexual acts are morally permitted only among lawfully married partners. Adultery, rape, premarital sex, pornography, bestiality, masturbation, anal sex, etc. are wrong for all, even heterosexuals. The full purpose of human sexuality can be achieved only in heterosexual marriage and family. Same sex marriage is contrary to nature and God’s design for humanity.

It is also argued that prohibition of same sex

marriage or sexual activity among homosexuals is discriminatory and goes against human rights. An impotent person cannot claim the right to marriage because he is incapable of placing the conjugal act. Similarly homosexual acts are incapable of respecting the procreative finality of human sexuality and therefore not morally permissible and cannot be claimed as a right.

Permitting homosexual activity, even among consenting adults, does have far reaching consequences on the society. It questions the age-old institution of marriage and family and militates against the right order willed by God by creating human beings as male and female (cf.Gen.1:27-28). It creates a whole permissive and promiscuous mentality which is detrimental to the welfare of family, children and the entire society. Let us also

not forget that homosexual activity is one of the major causes of spread of HIV/AIDS.

Many get confused between legality and morality. What is legal is not by that very fact also moral. Abortion and euthanasia, for example, are legal in many countries. That does not mean that they are morally acceptable and permissible. Similarly, even if homosexuality is decriminalized and same sex marriage may even be legalized, yet it does not mean that they are morally right. Anyone entering into same sex union and engaging in homosexual acts will be culpable of serious moral evil. As good human beings we are expected to obey not only the law of the State, but also the law of God or Natural Law. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BISHOP GERALD JOHN MATHIAS is the Bishop of Lucknow.



VHP leader threatens to tarnish Catholic priest, demands Rs 25 lakh as extortion

Muthuvel, the VHP leader who has been held, played a major role in politicising the death of Lavanya, who died by suicide in January 2022 in Ariyalur.

Muthuvel, the district secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Ariyalur, was arrested by the police on Tuesday, March 13, on charges of extorting money from a parish priest in Ariyalur district. The complaint was lodged by Dominic Savio, the parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes in Ariyalur. The complaint alleged that Muthuvel demanded Rs 25 lakh and if he did not pay, he would tarnish the priest's image by claiming that he harassed schoolchildren.

It is to be noted that Muthuvel played a major role in politicising the death of a schoolgirl named Lavanya from Ariyalur in January 2022. Lavanya was a 17-year-old girl who attempted suicide. Muthuvel shot a video of Lavanya in the hospital bed and encouraged her to speak about her school's attempt to convert her to Christianity. The videos shot by Muthuvel have been challenged because there were two videos of Lavanya doing the rounds, but only one mentioned religious conversion. Meanwhile, three days before her death, Lavanya recorded her statement before a magistrate, where she made no reference to religious conversion.

The FIR filed by Dominic Savio says that six months ago, he was approached by one Vinodh, who claimed that he had a recording of a conversation between himself and Muthuvel. In the recording, Muthuvel is heard

speaking about a suicide case of a student in Thanjavur and planning to launch a campaign against Savio for harassing students.

A recording of a conversation between Vinodh and Muthuvel revealed that someone was willing to pay Rs 5 lakh to the latter to stage a protest and create a commotion. While no names were mentioned, Muthuvel is heard saying that these people were ready to bear all the costs needed to stage a protest. In the later part of the conversation, Muthuvel is heard telling Vinodh, "I will tell you the content, it will help you be prepared. You should say, 'Action must be taken against the priest who is harassing Hindu girls. Hindus, please do not admit your children in this school.'"

Muthuvel also said that such messages would affect all Christian schools including Montfort and Nirma-la, although he does not mention where these schools are located. Muthuvel further adds, "This must be done across Tamil Nadu. I can make people protest across Tamil Nadu. I will make arrangements for that also." Muthuvel is also heard telling Vinodh that if he does these activities, he can also earn money like him.

Speaking to TNM, Ariyalur Superintendent of Police Feroz Khan said the incident took place six months ago. "A complaint alleging extortion of money was lodged and based on that we have secured the accused Muthuvel," he said. ©

(Courtesy: The News Minute)

Corrupting India's Soul

Two recent events - Adani episode and Delhi's liquor scam - are pointers to the rot eating into the soul of the largest democracy

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

In the kaleidoscope of evanescent social concerns, the stench of corruption is in the forefront of public consciousness, sparked by the uncovering of two humungous scams of financial skullduggery -- the Hindenburg expose of the questionable financial dealings of the Adani group and the "Liquor-gate" scam involving the Delhi Government. The citizenry's curiosity has been titillated by the involvement in these monstrous fiscal transgressions of India's most sanctimonious crusaders against corruption - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. For over a decade, these pretenders to moral rectitude have been preaching from on high, tearing into the venality of their opponents. The recent scandals will, no doubt, dent the snow-white image of Modi and Kejriwal, but one is far from sure that their shenanigans will adversely affect their popularity with their base. A bhakt recently socked me in the groin by comparing Modi's connection with Adani to the Mahatma's friendship with G D Birla. I am yet to recover from that blow!

Harold Wilson, British Prime Minister in the 1960s and hard-boiled politician who knew how short public memory is, had percipiently observed that a



week is a long time in politics. By that reckoning, a decade is an eternity and hence the need to jog our collective memory. In 2011, the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement led by Anna Hazare, rode the wave of popular discontent against widespread corruption and brought the allegedly venal UPA Government to its knees.

That was the time when a government deep in the swamp of corruption debased itself for survival. Though not in the same league of ignominy under public pressure as the disgraceful conduct of Baby Doc Duvalier barely managing to pull on his pants while escaping the fury of the Haitian people or Imelda Marcos greedily assembling jewelry and cash before fleeing the Philippines, we were witness to the shameful spectacle of the then senior Cabinet Minister and later President, Pranab Mukherjee, obsequiously receiving the saffron-clad plaster saint, Baba Ramdev - a Team Anna acolyte at that time - at the New Delhi airport.

The stunning demonstration of "people's power" literally coerced Parliament to pass the Lokpal Act in 2013. The Act authorized the creation of an independent ombudsman to investigate any offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988 against



The recent scandals will, no doubt, dent the snow-white image of Modi and Kejriwal, but one is far from sure that their shenanigans will adversely affect their popularity with their base

public officials, and included the power to probe and prosecute Ministers and the Prime Minister.

The enactment of the Lokpal Act was a triumph of the most potent protest movement since Independence which galvanized the common people against the moral degeneration of the political class and the bureaucracy. It proved that ordinary people could shake up the political establishment and bring about seismic changes in policy for the common good. Or so we thought in that hopeful spring of 2013 when “bliss was it that dawn to be alive.”

But, as proved by subsequent events, that victory was pyrrhic. Today, in the wake of the biggest con



tion who rode to power on the sweeping promise of a corruption-free India, is primarily responsible for emasculating the anti-corruption watchdog.

Such is the stranglehold of the Prime Minister on the body politic that the government with impunity put off the setting up of the Lokpal by more than five years until March 2019; in the interim, subverting the statute with critical amendments that diluted the powers of the Lokpal. The procedure adopted for selection of the Lokpal members is a staggering example of the imperious ways of an illiberal State taking decisions unencumbered by democratic norms. A servile Supreme Court passed a judgment in April 2017 that the appointment of Lokpal members would not become infructuous merely because of any vacancy in the Selection Committee, which was precisely what the government wanted and got – the freedom to make appointments to the Lokpal without the Leader of the Opposition.

The nucleus of the Lokpal Act was the clause that envisaged the transfer of the powers of the CBI to the Investigation and Prosecution wings of the Lokpal. The rationale for this radical change was that, freed from the shackles of government control, the investigating agency would be non-partisan and thereby more effective in rooting out corruption. Cocking a snook at the Statute, this regime has converted the “caged parrot” into a lethal beast of prey that has been let loose against opponents of the ruling regime, even as the toothless Lokpal functions as a sinecure for flunkies of the regime.

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. Corruption has always been an indelible part of our being but like never before, fighting the evil of corruption has now become a menacingly savage partisan witch hunt for settling scores with opponents. This regime has cold-bloodedly exploited the fault lines in our society to wrest complete control

Such is the stranglehold of the Prime Minister on the body politic that the government with impunity put off the setting up of the Lokpal by more than five years until March 2019; in the interim, subverting the statute with critical amendments that diluted the powers of the Lokpal

in corporate history and substantive allegations of the nexus between the rogue group and the Prime Minister, there have been demands for an investigation by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) or a Court-monitored panel, but not a single public functionary has adverted to the constitutional mandate of the Lokpal to investigate the allegations of malfeasance against the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Delhi – the two arch-beneficiaries of the IAC movement. The Lokpal is being seen for what it is – a pathetic caricature of the all-powerful ombudsman.

The calculated diminution of the institution of the Lokpal since its inception is the grim story of an overarching institution set up to fight corruption being reduced to a cipher because it had the potential to threaten the hegemony of the Supreme Leader. The self-appointed crusader against corrup-

and power to do as it pleases. And it is up to no good!

The current turmoil in Israel over the Netanyahu government's plans to fundamentally overhaul the judicial system provides an object lesson on how a functioning democracy should respond to any threat to its integrity. In essence, the government's sinister proposal seeks to reduce the Supreme Court's ability to revoke laws passed in Parliament and gives the government a major say in selection of judges. The contemplated changes are designed to give the autocratic Netanyahu untrameled power and weaken the system of checks and balances against government overreach, which are at the heart of a liberal democracy.

The massive protests against the anti-democratic intent of the Israeli government plan have grown more fraught and fractious in the last month. Leading opinion makers including a former defence minister, artistes and writers have joined the protests in solidarity. Civil society has stepped forward to protect their democracy against their leader's autarchic machinations. What a stark contrast from what has been happening in the world's largest democracy, which is in thrall of an imperious leader who has no patience with democratic niceties.

Those who dispute the capacity of political leaders to mould society to conform to their world view would be confounded by the happenings in India in the last few years. The land of Buddha and Gandhi that was tolerant of all religions and justifiably proud of "unity in diversity", is now a deeply polarized, majoritarian State where minorities and dissenters are under siege. Whereas the brutal Netanyahu has sought the legislative route to establish paramountcy of the political executive over the judiciary, Modi has seized absolute control of the polity, not

Ours is a world of lynching and bulldozers, where love is jihad, where religious freedom is denied by using the bogey of "forced conversion". We are today a morally depraved society whose governing class has forgotten ordinary humanity!

through a ticklish law-making exercise or by tweaking the Constitution but by creating an environment of nameless menace and fear, by co-opting the institutions of governance through intimidation and enticement and by stacking critical organizations with loyalists.

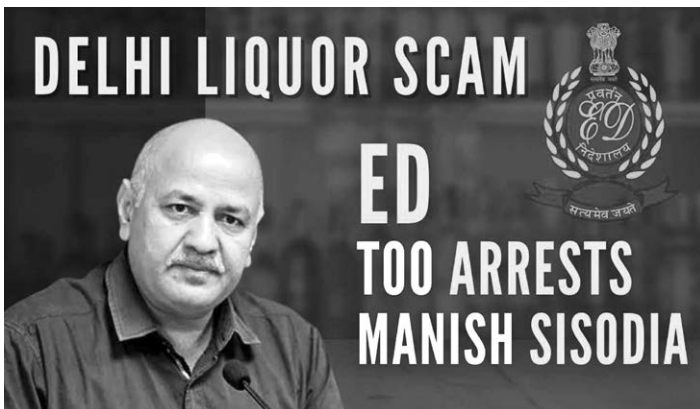
We tend to circumscribe corruption to its narrowest meaning of dishonest conduct, typically involving financial fraud and bribery, whereas the most crippling is moral and intellectual corruption, of which we have a surfeit in Modi's India. We have lost the capacity to love but know how to hate. Ours is a world of lynching and bulldozers, where love is jihad, where religious freedom is denied by using the bogey of "forced conversion". We are today a morally depraved society whose governing class has forgotten ordinary humanity!

For most of us, our personal well-being is all that matters, our social obligations but a peripheral irritant. What we are witnessing is nothing short of the destruction of the atman of our great civilization, the desecration of the Mahatma's idea of India. And there is no outrage! Romain Rolland believed that France fell to Germany in World War II because "there was corruption without indignation". What price will we pay for our indifference?

I leave the last word to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who knew a thing or two about oppression and injustice. He warns with blinding clarity: "In keeping silent about evil, we are implanting it...When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers, we are ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations." ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATHEW JOHN is a former civil servant. The views are personal



Political Clout Matters

Political ethics lose its force when politicians engage in favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism. It heralds the arrival of 'Mitr Kaal'- political clout - and certainly not an Amrit Kaal

BY **PETER FERNANDES**

Humans by nature are political beings, and politics exists for the common good. Truth and justice ought to be weighed objectively to be the guiding forces in politics to promote the common good. For this reason, the elected representatives are entrusted with the common will. Humans desire to live in a society with peace flowing from truth and justice for the good and wellbeing of all people. Any shortfall is amiss and ought to be corrected immediately before it becomes an acceptable tool for the powerful to control the weak in society.

Political ethics lose its force when politicians engage in favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism. It certainly heralds the arrival of 'Mitr Kaal'-- political clout -- and certainly not an Amrit Kaal. While presenting the fifth budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that it was the first budget of Amrit Kaal. Amrit Kaal refers to the most auspicious period. Politics in its purest form is wonderful, but politics as it is applied has been tainted since the beginning of time. The three main factors that contribute to the defilement of politics are favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism.

Favouritism has always been a complaint in government service. Cronyism is a more specific form of favouritism, referring to partiality towards friends and associates. As the old saying goes, "It's not what you know, but who you know." Nepotism is an even narrower form of favouritism -- favouring the members of the family. Both nepotism and cronyism are often at work when political parties recruit candidates for public office.

Political clout that emanates from 'Mitr Kaal' is not good for politics or for the nation, for it sabotages the objective good and the common good. It was supposed to be "Amrit Kaal," as announced by the Prime Minister on the 75th Independence Day. How did it take this ugly turn into 'Mitr Kaal'?

The rise and fall of Adani speak volumes of 'Mitr Kaal'. "Na khaunga na khaane dunga," a favour-



ite election campaign slogan-line that reverberated throughout the nation as a breath of fresh air in response to the anti-corruption movement has become a disenchantment. Who knew that it would just end up as a gloss to sell a brand? The gullible people bought the narrative as if it were coming from a political messiah -- when the whole nation was campaigning against corruption. By betraying the people by not keeping its promises, corruption has taken deeper roots since this government has come into power.

Now, under the so-called 'Mitr Kaal', corruption has reached such an unknown height that the whole nation is confused. By 'misusing' central agencies, the government has left no stone unturned in undermining institutions and targeting political opponents -- even the top judiciary is not spared. Winning elections by hook or crook is the ultimate mantra of the BJP.

The BJP, after losing elections in different states, formed the government through the backdoor. After failing to win the people's mandate in the Assembly elections, it formed governments in Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and some of the north-eastern states by 'managing' majority. Ironically, many MLAs have found a 'washing machine' in the BJP to come clean. Shashi Tharoor said, "I always wondered about the meaning of 'Na khaunga na khaane dunga,' and I guess he was only talking about beef and not corruption."

'Mitr Kaal' is not just a political parody but an economic disaster. The downfall of Adani would not have mattered much if the investments were not from the public sector. India suddenly became the epic centre of an economic earthquake. The rise of Adani was at the behest of the powers-that-be. Many public sector companies were handed over to the Adani Group, like six airports, railways, ports, and roads. Besides, humongous investments were made by LIC and SBI in the Adani Group.

In fact, demonetization was a masterstroke to create an ecosystem for 'Mitr Kaal' to grow organically. In good faith, the people stood in line to empty their wallets, but who knew it was only to help fill somebody else's pockets? After demonetization, the BJP became the wealthiest political party, and Adani successfully invested in Australia's coal mines and became the third richest man in the world.

In his political campaigns in the lead-up to the 2014 national elections, Narendra Modi had berated the UPA government. "Coal scam has darkened the face of the entire nation," he tweeted on September 13, 2012. He had also abbreviated the AICC for 'All India Coal Congress.' Ironically, the Modi government's decisions enabled the Adani Group, whose business fortune has risen in parallel with Modi's political heft, to continue to mine coal, unfettered by the court ruling as well as the government's own policy decisions that put many other private players at a disadvantage. To date, the company has mined more than 80 million metric tons of coal from the block.

Interestingly, India had signed "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change" to reduce carbon emissions. India had also confirmed pledges to generate 50% of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030 and its target for maintaining forest cover, which

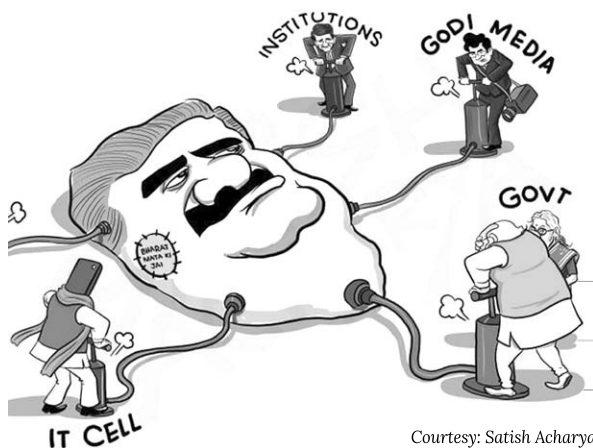
acts as a carbon sink. However, India is sending mixed signals, as it is rapidly expanding its renewable capacity while at the same time increasing coal consumption.

The 'Mitr Kaal' is placing an enormous strain on ecology and the environment as coal is transported through sensitive areas by building additional railways and roads. Concerned citizens are raising their voices, but no one is listening. The ominous signs of ecological and environmental disasters are there for all to see.

"Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas" was supposed to usher in a friendlier era for everyone. But what has happened? When political clout, the 'Mitr Kaal', becomes prevalent with favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism, it undermines objectivity and the common good. Where favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism thrive, the risks of dominating unregulated and opaque action and lobbying become problematic areas in regard to and as opposed to transparent and just public policy-making. It's not sabka vikas but sabka vinash. Government becomes ineffective as a result of a lack of quality and objectivity.

The appearance of favouritism weakens the morale in government service, not to mention public faith in the integrity of the government. When it comes to favouritism shown by government officials to influential corporations, India's ranking had improved sharply in the year 2014, going from 94th to 49th place on a global list. According to an annual World Economic Forum (WEF) study, India has also improved significantly in terms of public trust in politicians, diversion of public funds, and 'irregular payments and bribery' at government institutions.

The Congress president, Mallikarjun Kharge, summed up the Mitra Kaal quagmire by alleging that the "suit boot Sarkar" has written off loans worth Rs. 10 lakh crores by gifting waivers to "friends" on a platter. The Hindenburg Research firm, by showing the courage and audacity to expose the Adani Group, also exposed the cronyism of the present dispensation. By gathering evidence of all the funding operations and offshore activities of the 578 subsidiaries and shell companies linked to the Adani group's seven publicly traded companies, the stock market collapsed like a pack of cards for all to see. 'Amrit Kaal' refers to a pivotal moment when the gates of pleasure are made accessible for human beings, angels, and monsters. 'Mitr Kaal' creates political clout that decimates the common good – Mitros. ©



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

Communal Violence: Mainstay of Hindutva

On the one hand, communal violence is on the increase. On the other hand, the country is slipping in all indicators nationally and internationally

BY **DR. PRAKASH LOUIS**

Three leading newspapers of the country, The Hindu, Indian Express and Times of India, reported over 40 incidents of communal riots in 2022 in India. This is 400% increase from 10 such incidents reported in 2021. While mob lynching incidents are concerned, there was no increase as compared to 2021, which remained constant at 15. Out of the 40 incidents of communal riots, 19 took place owing to processions taken out by Hindu right-wing organizations in various places.

As argued in Millie Gazette, instead of controlling the riots, the response of the state was to further the objective of the rioters, by inflicting maximum damages to the Muslims selectively. This was done by the state by demolishing their properties using state owned equipment like the bulldozers, JCBs and other heavy machineries. Further, the state also falsely branded the Muslims as rioters and stone pelters, which according to fact finding reports of civil society organizations were baseless allegations. The state allowed demonization of Muslims and Christians and hate speeches against them, making them vulnerable to hate crimes, mob lynching and targets during communal riots.

On the one hand, communal violence is on the increase. On the other hand, the country is slipping in all indicators nationally and internationally. In a recently released report, 39 of world's 50 most polluted cities are in India. The data from 131 countries was taken from over 30,000 ground-based monitors, either government or non-government operated. The ranking was decided by Swiss firm IQAir in its 'World Air Quality Report' released this month. Neither the government nor the media has anything to say about this. But call for 'genocide of the minorities' is heard from the Hindutva forces.

In a report published by Pew Research Center as

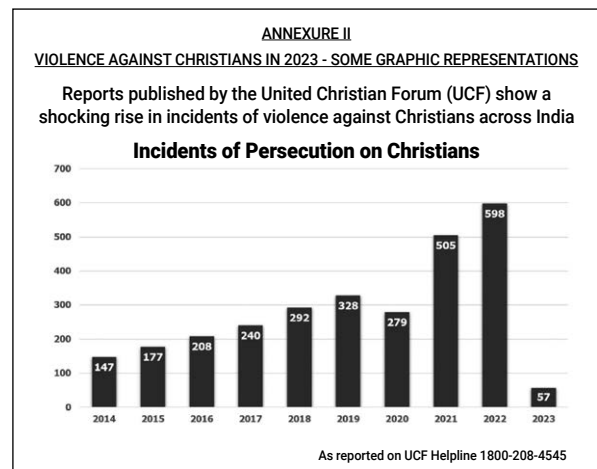


part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, in 2022, titled, 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation', the clear wedge that the Hindutva forces have managed to drive deep into the Indian mind and society comes out clearly. It is something positive to hear that the Indians feel

they have religious freedom and respecting all religions as a core value. But at the same time, Indians want to maintain the religious separation.

Many Indians, across a range of religious groups, say it is very important to stop people in their community from marrying into other religious groups. Roughly two-thirds of Hindus in India want to prevent inter-religious marriages of Hindu women (67%) or Hindu men (65%). Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages were considered to be one of the values to bring unity and harmony among various groups of people. But now that is seen as a threat to one's own community forgetting what good it can do to the country.

The BJP is promoting a Hindu nationalist ideology. With systematically planned anti-minority senti-



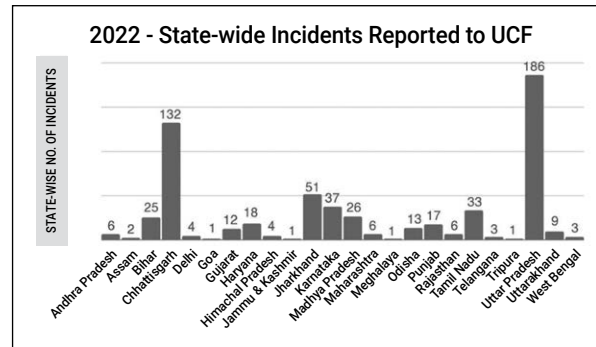
ments, the divide between various religious groups has become deeper and unrepairable. The survey finds that Hindus tend to see their religious identity and Indian national identity as closely intertwined: Nearly two-thirds of Hindus (64%) say it is very important to be Hindu to be “truly” Indian. Most Hindus (59%) also link Indian identity with being able to speak Hindi. Thus, a regimented mindset is created in an already fragmented society and country.

As per the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India, there are 22 languages which are officially approved and are in use in the country. Overlooking these historical and existential facts, the majority Hindu community (80%) has been straight-jacketed to believe and speak that it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian, and also it is very important to speak Hindi to be truly Indian. Thus, the slogan, ‘One Nation, One Religion, One Culture, One Language and One Leader’ has succeeded in homogenising the Hindu majority against the hapless minority.

In the 80s there was the slogan, ‘pahaleka-saai aur uske baad iisai’, that is, ‘first Muslims and then Christians’ will be dealt with. But now there is a demand for genocide. This demand is even more clearly and categorically articulated after the Gujarat pogrom. Irrespective of this, India’s Muslims almost unanimously say they are very proud to be Indian (95%), and they express great enthusiasm for Indian culture. Further, most Muslims across the country (65%), along with an identical share of Hindus (65%), see communal violence as a serious national problem.

In this extremely devastating and depressing national scenario, two intertwined facts of the Indian society and country need to be highlighted. Indians are fundamentally and foundationally multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and have been living for centuries side by side. But in the last few decades, there are consistent attempts by the Hindutva forces for electoral gains to divide religious communities by demonising the minority Muslims and Christians as the ‘enemy other’.

Secondly, as stated above statistically, over two-thirds of Indians pointedly state that communal hatred, crime and violence are serious national problems. Ordinary citizens are reeling under price rise systematically created by the Hindutva ruling class. For instance, cooking gas cylinder was Rs. 410.50 in 2014 when the BJP came to power in the centre.



But in 2023 it has tripled to Rs. 1,103.00. This is the double game that has become the mainstay of this regime. First, they make promises to make things cheaper, easier, closer, comfortable, etc. Then they go back on these promises and leave the citizens in the lurch.

In the past, social scientists talked about the nexus between landlords, upper castes, officials and police. But now the Hindutva forces have succeeded in using communal hatred and violence as a ‘weapon for mass destruction of the minorities.’ Forgetting about how one’s public projection of religious practices may be affecting the citizens of other religions, the majority Hindus are regimented to oppose anything and everything of the minority communities. In this the Hindutva leaders have gone to the ridiculous level of stating that the call for prayer, the hijab that the Muslim women wear, the sale of meat, food habits, educational institutions, prayer and worship are antithetical to the country.

An aggressive individualism of the political leaders has collectively transferred to individualism of the majority community and sectarian issues are highlighted and sympathy ensured and aggression on the ‘other’ is unleashed. The country becomes the point of international ridicule when the leadership projects that it is pained when the temples are attacked outside India. But they keep a studied silence when customs, practices, beliefs and rights as enshrined in the Constitution are denied to certain sections of the people in the country. May be, we have to pray with Rabindranath Tagore, “Into that heaven of freedom and right let my country awake”. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. PRAKASH LOUIS is an Action Researcher, Writer, Activist, and Animator, Trainer. He was the Director of Indian Social Institute, New Delhi and Bengaluru

Q & A CATHOLIC NUN WHO HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE GAIN SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

BY SAJI THOMAS

Sister **Remya Thomas** has become a harbinger of hope for poor jobless youth in Odisha state in eastern India. St. Joseph's Community College in the state capital of Bhubaneswar, which is managed by her congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Ancecy, finds them jobs after imparting skill training.

"I am grateful to Sister Remya for giving me this wonderful opportunity," said Gloria Baliar Singh, who works in a private hotel chain in Bengaluru, capital of the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka, after a three-month course on accounting at the community college.

The 24-year-old told **Global Sisters Report (GSR)** that the college had conducted some crash courses on basic computer application, sales, marketing, and English language and etiquette to enhance her job eligibility. After the pandemic lockdown in 2020 and 2021, the hotel chain transferred her to their location in Mangaluru, a port town in Karnataka.

Similarly, Mases Nanda thanks Thomas for his job in the international airport at Hyderabad, capital of Telangana, Odisha's western neighboring state. He was desperately looking for a job when he joined Thomas' community college, which provided him a course on business management, spoken English and computer skills.

Sister Remya, as she is called, has a master's degree in social work and a bachelor's degree in law. She took over as the director of the college in 2018. The 37-year-old native of Kerala shared with GSR her challenges as a missionary in Odisha.

Q GSR: You were engaged in empowering women in Odisha's remote villages before you took up this responsibility. Why did you join the community college?

A Sister Remya Thomas: Yes, I was doing quite well in my work among poor and illiterate women in the remote villages of Kandhamal district, but my superiors asked me to take up this job as they found me suitable for the post.



Q Why did your congregation start this college?

A My congregation started this in 2008 to provide skill training to young people from shanties in cities and remote villages in Odisha, as unemployment was rampant among them. Our sisters managed the college until 2012 with courses in tailoring and other skills. In 2013, they handed it over to the Salesian priests to provide short-term skill training and job placement. In 2018, they returned the college to our congregation, and I was asked to head it.

Q Do you mean things were not as rosy as they look today?

A You see, there is always a scope for improvement, but that does not mean those who served the institution earlier had done nothing. They did what they could, and I got an opportunity to build upon the foundation they laid.

When I took over, the biggest challenge was to find funds to sustain the college and to keep the momentum going. But I trusted in the providence of God and moved on.

Now, our college offers training on industrial machine operation, fashion design, computer skills, hotel management, nursing aid, and communicative English for school and college dropouts from economically poor backgrounds. On successful completion of the courses, the students are helped get instant placement through our network of employers.

We also offer three-month certificate courses for schoolchildren during summer vacation, such as communicative English, computer application, creative writing, crafts and arts. Now, 10 full-time teachers work in the college. We have 45 resident students and 65 day scholars.

Q How many students have you placed so far?

A We have trained more than 4,100 students and, among them, more than 85% are employed. In some cases, female students find difficulty to continue with their jobs after marriage or other family-related issues.

Q What are procedures for their admission and placements?

A We choose our students based on their needs. Most students come through known contacts such as former students, priests, nuns and others associated with us. This ensures genuine people get the benefit of our free training.

When it comes to placement, once a student successfully completes the training, we recommend him or her to a network of employers associated with us. Sometimes, they come to our campus and directly recruit them.

I also visit every candidate's workplace at least in the first year of placement. When it comes to girls, I take them to their employers and keep in touch with them. I also try to meet our former students at least once a year. It is also quite satisfying to see them lead dignified lives with jobs that fetch them a monthly income between 12,000 and 20,000 rupees [\$150 to \$250].

Q Could you elaborate on your earlier work among women of Kandhamal?

A I was working to empower illiterate rural women who were treated like objects with no rights or respect. Gender discrimination was so deep-rooted in society that people always preferred boys and considered girls a burden.



I worked in 25 villages, setting up self-help groups for women. Although women were not respected, they were the backbone of the family because generally, men were into alcoholism, drugs and other negative activities. Some men have multiple relations, but nobody bothers about it. It is true that some women too have multiple partners. We tried to promote education among the children and inculcate self-respect among women through livelihood programs.

Q Did you ever face any threat for being a missionary?

A Yes. Once, I got a rape threat from a local gang leader who knew my movements in the villages. When he threatened to rape me, my sisters were afraid and took me to Bhubaneswar, where I stayed for a week. My sisters were worried because to reach one of my mission stations, I had to travel by bus for 150 kilometers [94 miles]. I used to board the only bus at 3 a.m. and returned in it at midnight.

But I soon realized that there was no pointing in hiding and returned to my workplace a week later. I was sure hiding would not stop the threat. It would happen if it was God's plan. I strongly believe that nothing happens in my life without the knowledge of God. I continued with my work until my transfer, and nobody disturbed me.

Q What is your message to aspiring missionaries and those serving in difficult missions?

A When we do God's work, he will be our guard. He will not let you down, whatever the difficulties. When I joined the community college, it was literally a hand-to-mouth existence. But providence helped me so much so that different people offered help, and therefore, I am able to help so many unemployed youths. ☺

(This interview first appeared in globalsistersreport.org on March 14, 2023).

Sadhu Ittiyavirah, “God’s pilgrim,” dies

Sadhu Ittiyavirah, an itinerant preacher, a spiritual guide, a renowned writer, and a social reformer who had inspired several generations, died March 14 at Kothamangalam in Kerala.

He would have turned 101 on March 18. The death due to age related illness occurred at Jeevajyothi, his residence in Iramalappadi, Kothamangalam.

A former Jesuit theology student, Ittiyavirah left the seminary just nine months before ordination and walked on foot throughout Kerala and other parts of India for 20 years. He preferred to be called “God’s tramp.”

Before entering the Gujarat province of the Society of Jesus, he had joined the Army during the Second World War, but soon came out of the regimental framework. The tall charismatic leader had addressed more than 60,000 venues about God’s love. His talks were on love based on the classics of major religions. He had also authored 60 books in English and 38 in Malayalam. He had written more than 7,000 articles for various periodicals and magazines.

He had preached in several countries. His journeys in northern India had earned him the title, “Sadhu” (sage). Ittiyavirah was born March 18, 1922, at



Kollappilly near Pala in Kottayam district as the son of Anna and Mathai Perumattikunnel. On his hundredth birthday in 2022, the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council, hailed him as a prophet of love who spread Christ’s message through an innocent smile. He preached the Gospel with his words and deeds, the council said.

A sadhu’s travels, it added, are a guide for those who want to walk in love.

Ittiyavirah’s interest in science, especially its applications for the benefit of the common man, saw him form ‘Anusandhan,’ an organization at Bhanpuri in Raipur, then in Madhya Pradesh, to utilize solar energy practically. The Anusandhan Ashram was in 1973 handed over to the Raipur diocese.

He was the winner of the 1981 Albert Schweitzer award for social work and he spent a major portion of the prize money on the organization.

At the end of his long wanderings, he heeded to the constant pleas of his friends and relatives to settle down at Kothamangalam. His well-wishers helped him buy 10 acres of land at Eramalloor.

Again, bowing to his friends’ persuasions, he married Lalykutty Manalel, Thiruvalla, at the age of 56. His son Jomon is a teacher at St George Secondary School in Kothamangalam. © (Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Knanaya endogamy: Kerala High Court refuses to stay order

The Kerala High Court has turned down the Kottayam archbishop’s plea seeking a stay of a lower court order that ended the centuries-old practice of endogamy in his Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church.

The Kottayam archdiocese based in Kerala prohibits marriage of its members from outside the community. Those violating the practice are denied membership in the Church to maintain the purity of blood theory. The Kottayam district court on April 30, 2021, declared the practice as against India’s laws and directed the diocesan authorities not to discriminate its members who have married outside the

community.

The lower court, in its order, ordered the archdiocese to ensure that the Knanaya Catholics marrying from other diocese do not lose their diocesan membership.

It further restrained the archdiocese from terminating the membership of such people.

The court made it mandatory for the archdiocese to “provide equal rights and facilities through parish priests for the sacrament of marriage to those members of the Archeparchy of Kottayam who wish to marry Catholics from any other diocese.” ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Ban demanded on play “insulting” Catholic monastic life

Catholic bishops of Kerala have demanded a ban on a stage show that they say insults Catholic monastic life and Christianity.

“The communist organizations are giving huge publicity for the drama,” says a statement issued by the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council (KCBC), referring to the Malayalam play, “Kakkukali” that describes the alleged trials and tribulations of a woman who becomes a nun despite her Communist father’s opposition.

However, those behind the drama term it as an expression of freedom. The drama is an adaptation of a short story written by Francis Norona. It was scripted by K B Ajayakumar and directed by Job Madathil.

It was staged by Alappuzha-based Neythal Nataka Sangham.

KCBC president Cardinal Baselios Cleemis condemned the drama saying it was against the cultural fabric of Kerala and staging it was a blot on the culture of the state.

The statement issued by KCBC deputy secretary Jacob Palakkapilly says the play insults the self-respect and confidence of nuns, and has been included in the state government’s international drama fest.

But, the play director Madathil said that by now they have already staged it at 15 places and that the drama will go ahead as planned.

The trouble began when opposition came from the Pro Life group under the bishops’ council revolted when the play was to be staged at Guruwayoor Municipality’s cultural event in Thrissur. However, the All India Youth Federation (AIYF), the youth wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI), has supported the play. They have promised to support the play if its people want to stage it at Thrissur, the cultural capital of Kerala.

Meanwhile a circular against the controversial play was read at the 275-odd parishes of the archdiocese of Trichur during the Sunday Mass on March 12.



The circular was signed by vicar general Monsignor Jose Vallooran.

“The play wrongly portrays the convents as centers where nuns are made to work as slaves and abused. This is part of a growing trend to denigrate the Christian faith and the institutions run by the Church,” the circular says.

Various parishes on March 12 organized different forms of protests. The vicar general had urged parish priests to ensure maximum number of faithful at a protest march held at the Thrissur collectorate on March 13.

The circular regrets that the play was showcased at the recent International Theatre Festival of Kerala organized by the state’s Marxist-led government. The state minister for cultural affairs, who attended the function, hailed the play and those behind it.

The play was subsequently staged at the ‘sargolsavam’ cultural program of Guruwayur municipality.

“The attempts to portray the belief systems and ritualistic practices of a religious community by spending funds from government coffers should be objected vehemently,” asserts the circular. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Say 'Yes' to Safety Norms

The Brahmapuram fire accident in Kerala ought to serve as a wake-up call because any complacency in handling environmental matters can adversely impact all of us

BY **AARTI**

The Brahmapuram dump yard fire that engulfed the Kochi city in Kerala for over a week since March 2 has been successfully put off. A major tragedy has been averted. Well, the company which was awarded the contract for treating the municipal waste reportedly did not fulfil its obligations. With regard to what went wrong, relevant details are expected after various agencies concerned complete their probes and submit their reports. Also, an expert team is to provide detailed recommendations on preventing such incidents besides making waste management scientific and effective.

Kochi is not the first instance of garbage dump fires affecting the health of citizens. Delhi's Ghazipur landfill site (covers 70 acres) which has seen several fires was famously expected to surpass the height of the Qutub Minar. Such fires are usually caused due to aerobic decomposition of waste stored in dump sites which releases methane gas and the presence of combustible substances increases the risk of fires. Underground fires are difficult to extinguish because it would go undetected. In Alabama, a landfill caught fire last year which spread over 24 km area. It took three months and around USD 2.8 million was spent to put out the fire.

The cause for concern is heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), as studies indicate, generated in municipal landfill fires poses a potential threat to human health. Notably, PAHs can penetrate the body through the respiratory and digestive systems besides by direct skin contact with particular substances such as soot and tar.

A vital municipal responsibility, solid waste management is meant to protect the environment. The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, provide the statutory framework for management of solid wastes in the country. The local authorities are required to arrange for door-to-door collection of segregated solid waste from all households, including slums, informal settlements, commercial, institutional and other non-residential premises.



Throughout the waste chain, be it collection, treatment or disposal there are several challenges. But they are worth overcoming because, ultimately, an effective solid waste management system promotes good health.

The CAG conducted a performance audit on 'Solid Waste Management in Urban Local Bodies' for the period 2012-13 to 2016-17 in Karnataka to assess whether management of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) and special waste (including construction and demolition waste) was effective, efficient and carried out economically/scientifically. It was found that 92 per cent of the waste was collected and only 26 per cent was processed each year and a major portion of the remaining MSW was dumped at landfills. However, CAG had appreciation for Kumta, a town in Karnataka known for its ancient temples and beaches. With a population of around 30,000, the town municipal council of Kumta introduced decentralised composting systems such as pipe composting (household waste) and pit composting (horticulture and market waste) for converting wet waste into compost in 2016. It also initiated collection of food waste from 40 restaurants and marriage halls which resulted in processing of considerable wet waste thus, reducing the burden on the landfill site to that extent.

The good news is that 70 percent of the MSW is scientifically processed (from 18 percent in 2014). That is of the 1,40,557 metric tonnes (MT) of MSW generated daily, 98,324 MT is treated and 42,233 is untreated. There are 1924 sites identified across the country for development of landfills. 305 landfills have already been constructed, 126 are under construction, 341 are in operation. 17 landfills are exhausted and 11 landfills have been capped.

In 2021, Niti Aayog and Centre for Science and Environment published some best practices in municipal waste management. Alappuzha city focussed on source segregation which decreased the operational cost of dealing with municipal waste as well as created a source of revenue. Indore's robust communications strategy helped to bring about behavioural change at the mass level and motivate citizens to embrace segregation. In Panaji there was 99 per cent waste segregation in households. In Mysuru the collected biodegradable waste is converted to compost by means of scientific methods which is packaged and sold to nearby farmers and the horticulture department.

Jamshedpur has deployed nearly 1400 ragpickers and established dry waste collection centres to manage its non-biodegradable waste, where the waste is further segregated into paper, metal, wood, cloth, non-recyclables and packaging materials. Notably, more than 20 km of roads have been constructed in Jamshedpur using non-recyclable plastic waste collected. Ambikapur in Chhattisgarh had a garbage mountain laced with municipal waste. But since 2019-20, women self-help groups began sorting out the waste at source (household and commercial areas) ahead of loading it in their rickshaws to be taken to the "Garbage Clinic" where secondary segregation is carried out by another

Environmental problems can become big and urgent if not tackled routinely in a timely manner. It needs to be appreciated that health, hygiene and sanitation are the crucial components of urban existence

SHG team. The organic waste is then converted into compost and sold. Papers, plastics, leathers, rubbers, wooden pieces, glass, metals and others are separated from the bulk garbage. The town boasts of "garbage cafes", where one can get a full meal in exchange for one kg of plastic waste. It has the country's first digitised garbage management system and freed itself of dustbins.

The Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U), launched on October 2, 2014 by the Government of India with central share fund allocation of Rs 14,623 crore (of which Rs 7365.82 crore is allocated for SWM) aims at making urban India free from open defecation and achieving 100 percent scientific management of municipal solid waste in 4,041 statutory towns in the country.

Subsequently SBM-U 2.0 launched on October 1, 2021 with an allocation of Rs 36,465 crore (of which Rs 10,884.80 crore is for SWM) and operational in all urban local bodies across the country hopes to achieve "Garbage Free" status through 100 percent source segregation, door-to-door collection and scientific processing of all fraction of waste, safe disposal in scientific landfill by 2026. The scheme also envisages remediation of all legacy dumpsites and convert them into green zones.

Remember what happened in Western India during 1994? Well, uncollected solid waste blocked drains, caused a major flooding followed by subsequent spread of water borne diseases including an outbreak of plague-like disease killing over 50 people and affecting tens of thousands.

Environmental problems can become big and urgent if not tackled routinely in a timely manner. It needs to be appreciated that health, hygiene and sanitation are the crucial components of urban existence. ©





Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Peegates Leave a Stain..!

With three distasteful incidents of fellow countrymen peeing on their fellow passengers while flying, I should have been a little more prepared before I ventured on my air travel. The wife was the first to wave me goodbye with just one hand, the other carried a parting gift for me. "It's not eats!" she whispered, "But diapers!"



The security at the airport gate looked at me, then spoke into his phone while looking at me and my diaper packet. I knew intuitively I was a marked man.

"Sir," said the lady at the counter, scowling, "If you are carrying your certificate with you then you can

pin me down, "Did he?" asked the co-pilot.

"I'm not sure," said the lady, touching her seat.

"Look," I said, trying to get out of the pilot's firm grasp, "All I said was hello!"

"May I call your wife on your phone?" asked the pilot.

"Sure," I said, dialing her number and giving the phone to him. "Hello!" said the pilot, "This is the pilot speaking."

"Is everything alright?" asked my wife, "I hope he is using the diaper I gave him. Please don't arrest him sir, he's a good man, and doesn't normally do things



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skip the test! "It's a mandatory eye test sir, to see whether you can differentiate between a toilet and a passenger!"

"Ofcourse I can," I said, "You think I'm blind? I can easily make out you are a human being not a toilet!"

The girl at the check-in counter seemed convinced my eyesight was good enough and directed me to proceed. I decided to call my ophthalmologist and congratulate him on keeping my eyes in perfect condition. I pulled out my phone, when I heard a voice next to me saying, "Don't!"

"Why?" I asked the man next to me in the waiting area.

"That little bit of radiation from your phone could excite your bladder!"

The cabins were dimly lit as the other passengers and I were herded into the aircraft, "Hello!" I said to the American lady next to my seat, who let out a scream on seeing my face, one, which made the pilot and copilot rush out of the cockpit down the aisle and

like this!"

"Why was I targeted?" I yelled in utter dismay as I was offloaded, and I hear actor Satish Shah retort to the racists in Heathrow airport, who had whispered, "how can they afford 1st class?"

"Because we are Indians," replied Shah, "because we are Indians!"

"True!" I say bitterly, "Very true!" And then silently scream at leaders who boast of us becoming a financially powerful country, but fail to see that culturally we remain the same or worse; jeering in Parliament while women speak, and doing worse up in the air, and now on trains, making us the laughing stock of the world!

Our Peegates are leaving a stain..! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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