

Indian Currents

www.indiancurrents.org • Vol. XXXIV • Issue 9 • 21 - 27 February 2022 • ₹15

Total Pages - 40 Including Cover

QUEST FOR JUSTICE

**The World Day of Social Justice 2022 calls for
prophetic courage to listen to the cries of the poor
and all victims of injustice**





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SOCIAL JUSTICE A CRY IN THE WILDERNESS



The United Nations started observing the World Day of Social Justice on February 20, 2009. The very need to declare a day for social justice 64 years after the world body came into existence tells a story not so music to ears. It exposes the underbelly of societies catering to poverty, exclusion, unemployment, human rights violations and more. Though observance of a 'day for justice' may not in itself bring about better days in the lives of the victims, yet it would throw spotlight on injustices hounding people at various levels.

The theme for this year focuses on 'achieving social justice through formal employment.' It assumes an added significance in the present context as millions of people lost jobs in the wake of the pandemic. Though employees of every sector were victims, the worst sufferers were workers of informal sectors who were thrown out of jobs in droves. Hence the best way to rectify this injustice would be shifting workers from informal sector to formal sector.

As many as 60 per cent of world work force is in informal sector, making them vulnerable to unforeseen situations. In India, according to reliable data, this figure goes up to 90 per cent. With such high concentration of work force in informal sector one can imagine their fate during the pandemic. The injustice meted out to this huge number of people could be anyone's imagination. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, this number hovers around 10 million during the second wave of the pandemic alone.

It is equally important to look at the widespread injustices, which show no sign of fading out, despite the country progressing in many fields. One of the ironies of the present day is: The country is progressive on one side, but regressive on the other. There is no dearth of paradoxes in the country. We make efforts to send people to moon, but put roadblocks if a Dalit bridegroom tries to ride a horse on his wedding day; we offer aarti to women and worship them as goddesses, but pounce on hapless girls and assault them when they are caught in insecure situations; we preach values of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, but club to death the hapless youngsters found marrying outside their caste or religion; we are proud of constitutional values like fundamental rights, but will barge into kitchens to look for what people eat; we vouch for freedom of religion, but place curbs on innocuous religious practices; we talk about freedom of speech, but impose sedition charges against those who dissent from the voice of the government. The unprecedented increase in lynching, hate speech and cow-vigilantism are adding to the index of social injustices confronting the people.

Social justice demands a level-playing field for all irrespective of their caste, creed, language, religion and region. All forms of governance become meaningless unless social justice is protected like one's eye balls. Any civilized society has to make sure that it safeguards the five cardinal principles of social justice – rights, equal opportunities, diversity, access to resources and participation. Unfortunately, the country is going through a period in which these pillars of social justice are partially eroded.

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

Happy Reading!

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

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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INDIAN NEWSPAPER SOCIETY (INS)

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375 - A, Pocket - 2
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POWER QUOTES



Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

- **Albert Einstein**

• • •



It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.

- **Aristotle**

• • •



I firmly believe that unless one has tasted the bitter pill of failure, one cannot aspire enough for success.

- **A. P. J. Abdul Kalam**

• • •



If you make your internal life a priority, then everything else you need on the outside will be given to you and it will be extremely clear what the next step is.

- **Gabrielle Bernstein**

• • •



Life has got all those twists and turns. You've got to hold on tight and off you go.

- **Nicole Kidman**

• • •



At the end of the day, whether or not those people are comfortable with how you're living your life doesn't matter. What matters is whether you're comfortable with it.

- **Dr. Phil**

• • •



Just don't give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don't think you can go wrong.

- **Ella Fitzgerald**

• • •



If you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely.

- **Roald Dahl**

• • •

QUEST FOR JUSTICE

The World Day of Social Justice 2022 calls for prophetic courage to listen to the cries of the poor and all victims of injustice



Let Justice Roll

As the world observes yet another 'Day of Social Justice' on February 20, it is time to take a close look at injustices caused by divisions on the lines of caste, creed, religion, region and language

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

On 20 February, the global community will once again be observing the 'World Day of Social Justice.' The day is intended to mark the coming together of people from all walks of life to support the idea of justice, victims' rights and most importantly ensuring no crime that jeopardises peace takes place. The day is also a reminder of the significance of social justice for the underprivileged and oppressed. Above all, the day comes as a grim reminder to the world leaders that justice cannot be relegated to something theoretical and lip-service but needs to be experienced tangibly and substantially for all sections of society particularly those who are victims of injustice and are condemned to a dehumanising existence!

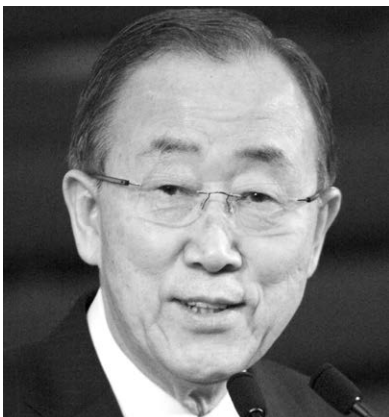
The idea of and struggle for justice is as old as humankind. There is nothing new about it. However, it was only on 26 November 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared that, starting from the sixty-third session of the General Assembly (2009), 20 February will be observed annually as the World Day of Social Justice. The observance reflects on guaranteeing fair outcomes for all through employment, social protection, social dialogue, and fundamental principles and rights at work. The declaration was first announced on June 8, 2008, as a step from the UN towards a commitment for contin-



uous social justice and fair globalization based on the UN Secretary-General's report on 'Our Common Agenda' which included poverty eradication, the promotion of full employment and decent work, universal social protection, gender equality and social justice for all.

The General Assembly recognized that social development and social justice are indispensable for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security within and among nations and that, in turn, social development and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security, or in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says, "the gap between the poorest and the wealthiest around the world is wide and growing. This situation is not only between countries but within them, including many of the most prosperous. The World Day of Social Justice is observed to highlight the power of global solidarity to advance opportunity for all."

In recent years, the idea of social injustice has been classified into five different components: the dignity of the human being, primacy of the common good, reciprocal rights and responsibilities, the dignity of workers and rights for workers, and last but not least, fundamental options for the poor and



"The gap between the poorest and the wealthiest around the world is wide and growing. This situation is not only between countries but within them, including many of the most prosperous. The World Day of Social Justice is observed to highlight the power of global solidarity to advance opportunity for all"

Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General

20
FEBRUARY
WORLD DAY
OF
SOCIAL JUSTICE



the vulnerable. These five concepts and many more are what is at the heart of the United Nations and its push for human dignity and equality for all.

The ideal of social justice is embodied in letter and in spirit in the Constitution of India. The visionary architect of the Constitution and the head of the Constituent Assembly Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was clear that justice for all had to be in the DNA of the new nation from the very inception. That is why the Preamble of the Constitution clearly aims “to secure to all its citizens... Justice: social, economic and political.”

The idea of justice is clearly equated with equity and fairness. Social justice, therefore, would mean that all sections of society, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, place of birth, religion, ethnicity or language, would be treated equally and no one would be discriminated against on any of these or other grounds whatsoever. Then, economic justice would mean that all the natural resources of the country would be equally available to all the citizens and no one would suffer from any undeserved want. Finally, political justice entitles all the citizens equal political rights including the right to vote, right to contest elections and right to hold public office. Whist there is a distinction in each of these dimensions of justice, they are so closely inter-related that they are in practice inseparable from each other.

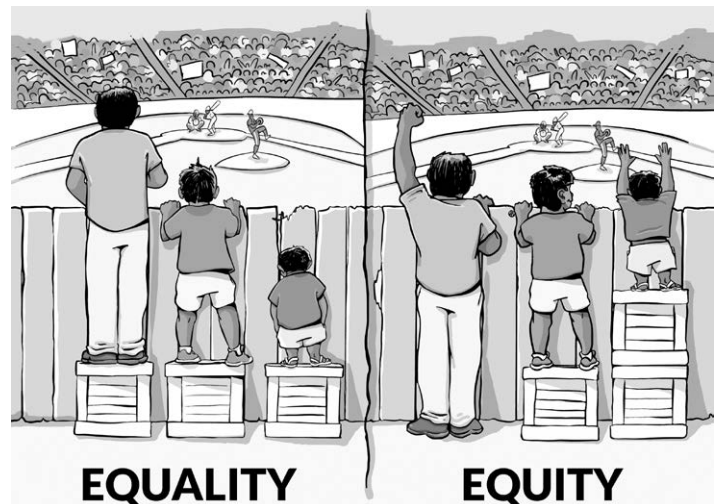
The Constitution of India unequivocally guarantees protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Arts. 23 and 46). The entire Part III of the Constitution on ‘Fundamental Rights’ dwells extensively on a society which is based on social justice. It guarantees equality before law (Art. 14), and enjoins upon the State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Art. 15 (1)).

Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden (Art. 17). The Constitution mandates that no citizen shall, on grounds only of caste or race, be subjected to any disability and

restriction (Art. 15 (2)). It empowers the State to make provisions for reservation in educational institutions (Art. 15 (4) and 15(5)), and in appointments for posts in favour of SCs (Art. 16 (4), 16(4A), 16(4B) and Art. 335). Then we have the protection of rights regarding freedom of speech and expression (Art. 19) and of course, the right to Freedom of Religion including freedom of conscience, practice and propagation of religion (Art. 25)

For Ambedkar, social justice was clearly the only effective means to create an ideal or a just society. To him a just society is a casteless society, which does not discriminate or divide, based on the principles of social justice and a combination of three components: liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar’s ideal society is based upon two fundamental principles. He says, “the first is that the individual is an end in himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary. The second essential is that the terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity.” Ambedkar was emphatic in stating that injustices which abound in India had their roots in caste system.

The United Nations was born in October 1945; less than two years later, in August 1947, India became a free nation. In December 1948, most of the world leaders were signatories to the path-breaking Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in



The idea of justice is clearly equated with equity and fairness. Social justice, therefore, would mean that all sections of society, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, place of birth, religion, ethnicity or language, would be treated equally and no one would be discriminated against on any of these or other grounds whatsoever

January 1950, India became a Republic based on a far-sighted and people-centred Constitution. All these were defining moments not only for the history of the world and of India but the beginning of a new Chapter based on justice, liberty, equality, dignity and fraternity of all people. A new dawn was ushered in pregnant with hope, for a peaceful, harmonious and better tomorrow.

Sadly, as one looks at the reality today, particularly in India, the vision of the founding fathers of a nation which has its moorings on social justice, stand shattered. Hopes and dreams continue to remain elusive. Promises are empty rhetoric before the elections to manipulate the gullible and thus garner votes. It is also true that over the years there has been visible but selective material progress in the country, which some term as 'economic development.' This has naturally upped the GDP, but the grim reality is that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few and social justice has become the prerogative of a privileged section of society.

About a month ago, OXFAM released its much awaited and well-researched report 'Inequality Kills'. It was made public just before the January-scheduled (but now postponed to 22-26 May) annual World Economic Forum to held in Davos, Switzerland. The Report, in its global economic survey, lays bare the dismal economic conditions in India. It says that India had been witnessing declining economic growth even before the pandemic, however, the most vulnerable sections of Indian society have had to bear the brunt of its adverse effects.

Many governments spent vast amounts of money

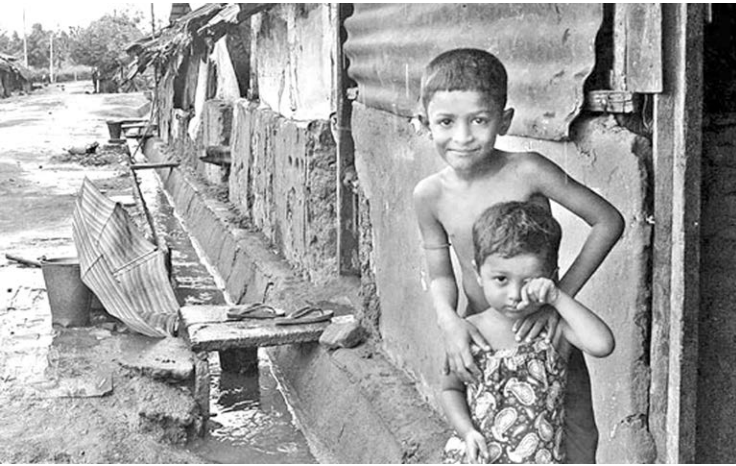


to revive their economies; loan and interest waivers, spending on social security to compensate citizens for jobs and other losses and to improve health outcomes and so on. India, on the other hand, spent far too little and the Budget 2022 saw virtually no change in allocations for health, food security, pensions, employment, insurance and so on and saw decreased spending for some sectors, such as MNREGA.

It went on to state that more than 46 million Indians are estimated to have fallen into extreme poverty in 2020. This is, according to the United Nations estimates, nearly half of the global new poor. In the same year, the share of the bottom 50% of the population in national wealth was a mere 6 per cent. The tragedy is compounded with the fact that the number of Indian billionaires grew from 102 to 142, while 84 per cent of households in the country suffered a decline in their income in 2021, which was also a year marked by tremendous loss of life and livelihoods.

In India, during the pandemic (since March 2020, through to November 30, 2021) the wealth of billionaires increased from Rs 23.14 trillion to Rs 53.16 trillion. The report clearly indicates that the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people hit a record high of Rs 57.3 trillion in 2021. The stark wealth inequality in India is a result of an economic system rigged in favour of the super-rich over the poor and marginalised.

The report also highlights the growing unemployment in India. As of December 2021, it is estimated that there are 53 million unemployed persons (7.9% unemployment rate). A sizeable section of these are women; women collectively lost Rs 59.11 lakh crore in earnings in 2020, with 1.3 crores fewer women in work now than in 2019. Apart from that, amongst the total employed population, 43.7 crore workers are in



There is the wider canvas of how injustices are institutionalised at every level: human rights defenders, social activists, media personnel who take a stand for truth and justice are hounded and harassed, jailed and even killed

the unorganised sector, who are legally not covered by social security benefits.

World Day of Social Justice 2022, has this reality as a backdrop with the theme 'Achieving Social Justice through Formal Employment'. The focus will be on the formalization of employment as a prerequisite for reducing poverty and inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the vulnerability of workers (particularly, migrant workers as we have all witnessed in India) in the informal economy. Informal workers (casual labourers), as they often lack any form of social protection or employment related benefits, are twice as likely to be poor compared to formal workers. Most people enter the informal economy not by choice, but due to lack of opportunities in the formal economy. Promoting the transition to formality is a necessary condition to reduce poverty and inequalities, advance decent work, increase productivity and sustainability of enterprises and expand government's scope of action, notably in times of crisis.

There is the wider canvas of how injustices are institutionalised at every level: human rights defenders, social activists, media personnel who take a stand for truth and justice are hounded and harassed, jailed and even killed. Draconian laws and policies are passed and used to subjugate vulnerable sections of society, be it the anti-farmer laws (though technically withdrawn now) or the anti-worker labour codes. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and sedition laws are selectively used to quell dissent and protest. The Adivasis and the Dalits are denied their legitimate rights. The minorities are consistently targeted through physical attacks or aggressive acts of divisiveness and discrimination: be it the anti-conversion 'love jihad' laws or the current 'hijab row'.

The National Education Policy is clearly meant to exclude the poor and the marginalised. The environment is systematically destroyed to help the crony capitalists' friends of the ruling regime to profiteer and thus amass huge amounts of wealth. For social justice to be mainstreamed in India, all these injustices and much more, need to be addressed and eradicated immediately, with a people-oriented political will.

A little over fifty years ago, the 1971 Synod of Bishops on 'Justice in the World' ushered in a watershed moment for the Church. The Synodal document stated that, "In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognise both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as He shows us new paths toward action in the cause of justice in the world."

Sadly, both for the Church and for the world, this important document was consigned to the dust and dirt of a forgotten history. As we observe another World Day of Social Justice 2022, let us have the prophetic courage to listen to the cries of the poor and to all victims of injustice. Let it not be yet another cosmetic event of empty platitudes and meaningless tokenism. As we respond to the cries of the victims, let us pray in the words of the Prophet Amos, "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." ©

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Justice for Whom?

The minorities, Dalits and Tribals are the worst victims of government's flawed laws and biased policies

BY JOHN DAYAL

The law and justice apparatus in India ought to be praying for a piece of cloth on their collective face to hide their blushes as the world watches in cold horror how constitutional guarantees have been turned on their head to victimise twice over the most vulnerable segment in the country now – the girl child in a Muslim family.

The interim order of the Karnataka High Court, on a petition which challenged a government directive banning the use of the Muslim women's head dress 'Hijab' in educational institutions, has seen a cascading violence. Girls have been "disrobed" of items of clothing identified with their religion. Muslim girls have been chased by louts, and agitations against them have been launched by young men, and some women, sporting suddenly procured saffron scarves.

Police and school and college male and female staff have in effect supported the move against Muslim females by turning away students, and some Muslim teachers, who wanted to attend classes while wearing their hijabs to cover their head, as they had done for many years in educational institutions.

The matter is being heard before a three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice. The Bench includes a Muslim woman judge, but the diversity displayed has paled in front of the calamitous continuance of the interim decision which in effect judicially prolongs the action of the government which had been contested as going against constitu-



tional guarantees of freedom of religion and the right to education.

The majoritarian right wing anti-Muslim agitation has spilled out of Udupi district in coastal Karnataka to cover other towns in the state and is now erupting in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. The Sangh Parivar is actively supporting this new-found movement against hijab. The "Godi media" – a name for newspapers and TV channels which support Prime minister Narendra Modi -- and social media are active as force multipliers. The movement threatens to impact the election in communally sensitive Uttar Pradesh where only two rounds of polling have taken place.

This also marks the incremental escalation of communal polarisation in Karnataka which is still in the process of enacting the Bill it moved last month against religious conversions which targeted Christians and Muslims, precipitating a massive secular protest. It also had an international fallout with many governments and human rights groups calling out the Indian government for eroding religious freedom.

It remains a moot question if the Chief Justice could, in the interests of law and order, modify the interim order to continue the situation which existed before the government issued its ham-handed directive. It is also a moot point if the Supreme Court could have acted on several efforts to draw its attention to the aggravating communal confrontation in Karnataka.



Official data show that of the 2.82 lakh undertrial inmates, over 55% are Muslims, Dalits and Tribals. Collectively, these three communities form a population of only 39%

The core issue of the government's power to ban the hijab in schools and colleges is sub-judice. The eyes of India's Muslims, other minorities, human rights movements and others are on the proceedings in the High Court which are being relayed over YouTube, in one of the smaller miracles of virtual proceedings forced by the Covid pandemic.

The world too is watching. International development agencies and human rights organisations have placed India towards the very bottom of their annual lists, where it just manages to raise itself above the banana republics, some theocracies, and several failed states. It is in that shamefully compromising position because of the treatment meted out particularly in recent years to such groups as religious minorities, the working class, farmers, apart from Dalits and Adivasis who have traditionally been the target of majoritarian excesses which were aided and abetted by various agencies of the government.

The farmers' agitation was lifted recently after a year of a powerful 'dharna' at the very doorsteps of the national capital of New Delhi. The farmers went home but not before making sure that the Prime Minister ate humble pie and withdrew the three agricultural laws he had foisted on the Parliament. The laws, farmers had feared, would make them hostage to big business, and specially to what is called crony capitalism, the less than a dozen top corporations in the country which are also very supportive of the current government.

During their agitation, more than 700 farmers died. This figure includes those who passed away because of cardiac arrest, as also farmers who committed suicide. It also included the several protesters in the terai region of Uttar Pradesh who were

It becomes difficult to say, as minorities and the poor are wont to chant, that "We believe in the judicial system".

Justice delayed is justice denied - for the victim

crushed under the wheels of a car reportedly driven by the politician-son of a junior minister in Mr Modi's government. The young politician was arrested after a national outrage. He was released last week on bail. Mr. Modi refused to take any action against his junior minister.

People, and occasionally some newspapers, point out that the government is not very active against top businessmen who have cheated national banks and public institutions of trillions of rupees. They conducted their loot while allegedly being patronised by the government and the politicians in control.

The data and revelations are startling. A total of 72 Indians charged with frauds or financial irregularities are currently abroad. As many as 33 persons accused in bank fraud cases registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation are abroad, many in the United Kingdom. They include Former Member of the Rajya Sabha and once a top liquor and aviation giant Vijay Mallya, billionaire cricket league boss Lalit Modi, diamond merchant Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Nitin J. Sandesara, and Dipti Sandesara. Only two of the crooks have been brought back in the past nearly six years.

The world saw the plight of India during the first two waves of Covid. The first year, 2020, saw the highest number of suicides among the unemployed in the recent past, with the toll crossing the 3,000-mark for the first time, the National Crime Records Bureau said in its annual data. The actual number of suicide deaths because of unemployment was 3,548 people. The total national figure for suicide in 2020 was 1.53 lakh, up from 1.39 lakh in 2019.

Of the dead, 10,677 people were engaged in the farm sector. Most of these deaths were among those whose primary work was as farm labour.

The discussion on Covid deaths remains contested with estimates ranging from a total of 22 lakh to 40 lakh dead in the first two waves. Government does not accept any non-official or international data on covid deaths in India.



There is, however, little doubt on how minorities, in particular Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis, have suffered at the hands of the police and criminal justice system in the country. Official data show that of the 2.82 lakh undertrial inmates, over 55% are Muslims, Dalits and Tribals. Collectively, these three communities form a population of only 39% with a share of 14.2%, 16.6% and 8.6% of population respectively according to the 2011 census, the last conducted.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Institute in New Delhi, which surveyed the data on prisons, says from 2019 to 2021 the average increase in prison populations in 17 states is recorded at 23 percent, whereas in previous years it was 2 to 4 percent. Prisons are over-crowded and trials in courts very slow. Prison occupancy on an average increased from 115 percent to 133 percent.

The proportion of undertrials increased from 69 percent to 77 percent, with 2020 seeing nine lakh more arrests than 2019, and this despite lockdowns and extensive restrictions on movement of the public.

Anti-Muslim rhetoric surged following the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020, after Delhi government said they found many Covid-19 positive cases among Muslims who had attended a Tabliqi Jamat mass religious congregation in Delhi. BJP leaders called it a Talibani “Corona Terrorism” and the media headlined it as “Corona Jihad.” Numerous physical attacks on Muslims, including volunteers distributing relief material, followed.

Dalits are treated equally bad. According to 2019 government data, crimes against Dalits increased by 7 percent. One example: In August that year, 40 Dalit families in Odisha were socially boycotted when a 15-year-old girl plucked flowers from the backyard of a dominant caste family. In July, a Dalit man was stripped and beaten along with his family members in Karnataka for allegedly touching the motorcycle of a dominant caste man. As for Adivasis and the land on which they have lived forever, United Nations experts raised concerns over the government’s proposed revision of the environmental impact assessment process that exempts several large industries and projects from public consultation and allows post-facto clearance for projects that began without obtaining the required permissions. Diluting the provisions for public consultation and allowing post-facto clearances undermine the rights of tribal communities, activists have cautioned.



Any discussion on the life of the people on the margins cannot be complete without documenting the targets of the most heinous law in India, called the Unlawful Activities Prevent Act, or UAPA.

The National Crime Records Bureau says 6,900 UAPA cases were reported between 2014 and 2020. Jesuit priest Fr Stan Swamy was one of the 16 persons arrested in one of these cases. He died as a prisoner. Lawyers of the Society are trying hard in the Bombay High Court to get his name cleared of the smudge of criminality.

The state has few excuses. But the one it frequently trots out is the slow trial process through the multiple layers of court system. In turn, the judiciary bemoans the many vacancies and the government’s delay in appointing new judges. A study by PRS found over four-and-a-half crore cases pending in courts. PRS calculates that if no new cases are filed in any court, it would take the Supreme Court 1.3 years to clear its backlog, with High Courts taking up to three years or more. Alas, fresh cases are lodged every year, and are increasing.

There certainly is a shortage of judges to decide cases. As on September 1, 2021, PRS notes, in the High Courts, 42% of the sanctioned posts for judges were vacant (465 out of 1,098). Five High Courts (Telangana, Patna, Rajasthan, Odisha, and Delhi) had more than 50% vacancies. In subordinate courts, 21% posts out of the sanctioned strength of judges were vacant (5,146 out of 24,018).

It becomes difficult to say, as minorities and the poor are wont to chant, that “We believe in the judicial system”. Justice delayed is justice denied – for the victim. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN DAYAL is a veteran journalist and human rights activist.

Letter to Lee Hsien Loong

Nehru lives in people's memory

India is now ruled by a party which believes that India should have been declared a Hindu nation soon after the creation of Pakistan. They think that it was Nehru's popularity and pan-India following that frustrated their attempt

BY **A.J. PHILIP**

Dear Mr Prime Minister,
Thanks to YouTube, I was able to listen to a portion of your speech made in your parliament. I do not listen to such speeches, as there are 195 countries in the world, each having some kind of a legislative body where debates take place on most days. Why I made an exception was the comment you made on India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) while taking part in a debate.

I was greatly impressed by the simple dress that you wore, unlike another prime minister I know who sometimes changes his costumes, not just dresses,



several times a day. You delivered your speech in a clear, concise style. Let me quote what you said for the benefit of my readers:

"Things start off with passionate intensity. The leaders who fought for and won independence are often exceptional individuals of great courage, immense culture, and outstanding ability. They came through the crucible of fire and emerged as leaders of men and nations. They are the David Ben-Gurions, the Jawaharlal Nehrus, and we have our own too."

Lee continued, "Imbued with enormous personal prestige, they strive to meet the high expectations of their peoples to build a brave new world, and shape a new future for their peoples, and for their countries. But beyond that initial fervour, succeeding generations often find it hard to sustain this momentum and drive".

"Nehru's India has become one where, according to media reports, almost half the MPs in the Lok Sabha have criminal charges pending against them, including charges of rape and murder. Though it is also said that many of these allegations are politically motivated".

True, there are some MPs who face charges of terrorism. There are some who were prevented by the courts from entering their states. At the same time, there are some who were implicated in criminal cases because of their political activities. They are, therefore, not criminals by the strictest definition of the term. MPs have to mention all the cases against them while contesting elections.

But for the Internet, we in India would never have known what exactly you said in your Parliament. Unfortunately, our government is very sensitive and



Things have changed in India a lot since the death of Nehru. Gandhi and Nehru were very close. Gandhi had four sons but I doubt whether he was closer to any of them than he was to Nehru. They represented two aspects of India

made an exception to your speech. It even called your envoy to the foreign office and told him about India's feelings.

The truth is that nobody, least of all a country like India, would like to be lectured to. You, perhaps, do not know that India is now ruled by a party and a leader who believe that Nehru was the fountainhead of all things evil and bad.

Fifty-eight years after Nehru's death, he is still blamed for the failures of those who rule the country. Recently, a company was accused of cheating a consortium of banks to the tune of over Rs 22,000 crores. As a wit commented, Nehru would be blamed for it, because the main cheat was born during Nehru's lifetime.

The history of Singapore has always fascinated me. It was once part of Malaysia and people from India did not need any visa as it was a British colony. My wife was born there. In fact, there were many people from Kerala in Singapore.

You know one of them as CV (Chengara Veettil) Devan Nair. He was a great trade union leader and became the president of Singapore. Alas, he became a victim of alcoholism and lost his political moorings.

In India, Mahatma Gandhi is called the Father of the Nation while Nehru is called the Builder of the Nation. In the case of Singapore, these honorific titles apply to Lee Kuan Yew, who stepped down as prime minister in 1990. If my reading of Singapore's history is correct, you should have become prime minister much earlier.

The history of Singapore would have been slightly different if the prime minister who succeeded Lee Kuan Yew was able to build a power base to rival that of his predecessor. You were diagnosed with cancer providing the incumbent a chance to consolidate his position.



Fortunately, you were cured of your disease and you were able to reestablish the hegemony of you two Lees with remarkable ease. It is a measure of your close ties with the father of Singapore that when you became prime minister in 2004, Lee Kuan Yew remained in the Cabinet as "minister mentor".

If Goh Chok Tong, as prime minister, succeeded in marginalising the Lees – an unlikely prospect – the situation in Singapore would have been different. Similarly, if the Congress party was in power in the country, it would have gone to town with your praise for Nehru.

Singapore is a tiny country compared to India which is a subcontinent. Even so, Singapore's achievement of becoming a First World country from a Third World country is truly remarkable. It may take many decades for India to reach the stage of progress Singapore has achieved but it is certainly on the way, though divisive elements have been trying their best to create problems on the basis of religion, language, dress, caste, etc.

I read the autobiography of Lee Kuan Yew and I have a fair idea of the condition of the people in Singapore before it got liberated from the British yoke. Unlike Nehru who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and could afford to go to London for his education, Lee had to get a scholarship to go there. His mother had to make sacrifices to let him have the best of education at that time.

When Nehru took over as prime minister, India's condition was pathetic. There are people who ask why the public sector was allowed to flourish and

why the licence raj, under which people had to get a licence to start a factory or business, came into being. They do not realise that there was virtually no private sector worth the name at that time.

I am a journalist. Newspapers need newsprint. Anybody could set up a newsprint plant but nobody wanted to. Finally, the government had to set up a newsprint factory at Nepanagar in Madhya Pradesh. The quality of the newsprint was not as good as the newsprint imported from Canada.

Newspapers could write thunderous editorials about the quality of newsprint but their owners did not venture into the field to manufacture newsprint. When India was partitioned and West Pakistan and East Pakistan were created, India lost Lahore which was the Capital of the undivided Punjab.

India could have declared Amritsar as the Capital but it did not want the capital to be close to the India-Pakistan border. That is how a new capital was built at Chandigarh. Nehru wrote a letter to the French architect who was chosen to plan the city that India could not afford to pay a salary to him. Instead, he would be provided a car, staff and a house.

It is easy to blame Nehru but like Lee Kuan Yew, he had to begin from scratch. Nehru was truly an internationalist. You may be happy to know that Nehru wrote a letter to Madame Chiang Kai-shek

One thing that united Nehru and Gandhi was their commitment to the idea of India that included different states, different cultures, different religions, different languages and different climatic conditions, all united by the thread of a common nation

when he was in jail in 1942. She was a Christian and had an excellent command of the English language.

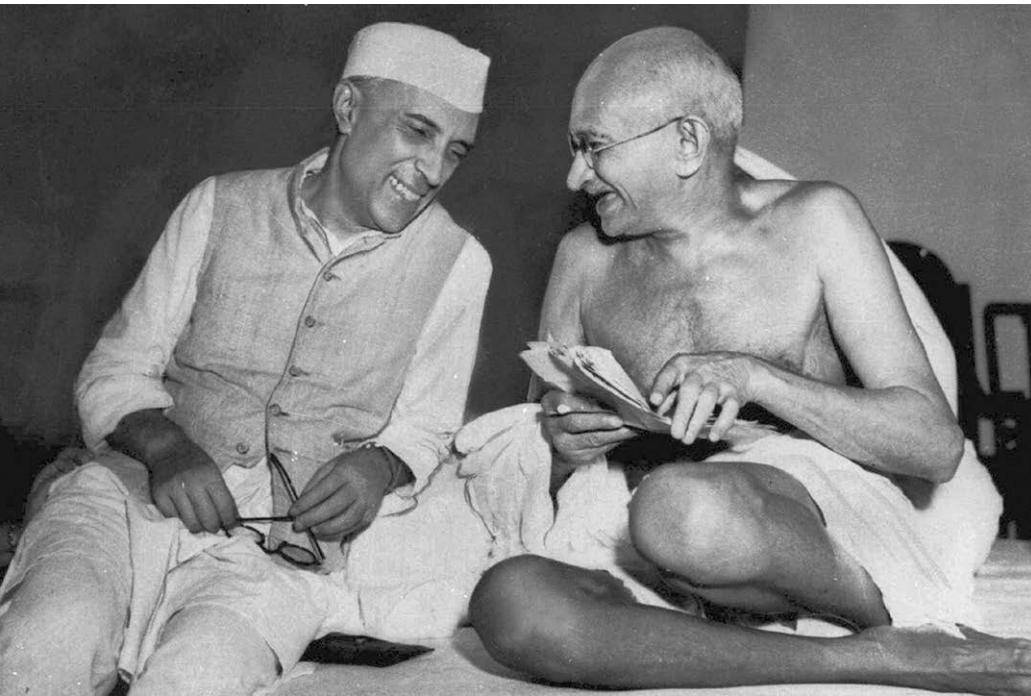
They had met earlier in India and China and became good friends. Of course, there are people in India who make fun of Nehru's friendship with the wives of leaders like Lord Mountbatten. He was kept in a fort at Ahmednagar when he wrote the long handwritten letter.

Nehru concluded his letter, "I hope you are well and keep in good cheer. I may not mention this place where I am kept except to say that I am somewhere in India. But it is a small matter where I am, for my mind is untamed and unbound, and it wanders where it will, crossing seas and mountains and visiting far-away countries.

And this mind carries always with it the precious treasure of my friendship with you and the Generalissimo".

He sent the letter to her at the address of the Chinese Commissioner, New Delhi. The letter was detected by the censor and it was not forwarded. It is a pointer to how international Nehru was unlike any other Indian leader. It was for this reason that his name came to your mind while addressing your Parliament.

Things have changed in India a lot since the death of Nehru. Gandhi and



Nehru were very close. Gandhi had four sons but I doubt whether he was closer to any of them than he was to Nehru. They represented two aspects of India. They had their differences on key issues of development.

One thing that united them was their commitment to the idea of India that included different states, different cultures, different religions, different languages and different climatic conditions, all united by the thread of a common nation. Unlike the present prime minister who reads out prepared manuscripts in what is known as Mann ki Baath, Nehru used to write letters to the chief ministers. They contained his thoughts on contemporary issues.

For instance, in September 1953, he urged chief ministers to "create a sense of partnership in every group and individual in the country, a sense of being a full sharer in the benefits and opportunities that are offered". Six months later, he reminded them that "it is always the duty and obligation of the majority to win the goodwill of the minorities by fair and even generous treatment".

Nehru was not an atheist but he did not wear his religion on his sleeves. He did not distinguish people on the basis of their religion or dress. He was a great democrat who granted even his critics a place in his Cabinet. They were given freedom to pursue their plans subject, of course, to the policies formulated by the Congress and approved by the Cabinet.

In other words, his ministers had the freedom to operate within their domain and they were not just megaphones of the PM.

Of course, Nehru had his failures. He failed to identify illiteracy as the greatest problem facing the nation. He should have spent a greater share of the GDP on school education. The people would have on their own found ways to improve the lot of their families.

He also had challenges like wars with neighbours and skirmishes on the border. It took many years for him to settle the problems created by the world's largest migration of people from India to Pakistan and Pakistan to India. He was once considered representative of the youth of India.

Towards the end of his life, Nehru had become



"an old man, looking frail and fatigued, with a marked stoop in his gait, coming down the gangway (of Parliament) with slow, faltering steps, and clutching the backrests of benches for support as he descended".

India is now ruled by a party which believes that India should have been declared a Hindu nation soon after the creation of Pakistan. They think that it was Nehru's popularity and pan-India following that frustrated their attempt. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic made their task more onerous. They had to wait longer to achieve their aim.

In *Makers of Modern Asia*, edited by Ramachandra Guha sociologist Andre Beteille has been quoted as saying, "the posthumous career of Jawaharlal Nehru has come increasingly to reverse a famous Biblical injunction.

"In the Bible it is said that the sins of the father will visit seven successive generations. In Nehru's case, the sins of daughter, grandsons, granddaughters-in-law and great grandson and great granddaughter have been retrospectively visited on him". However hard some people try to obliterate the name of Nehru, there will be people like you who will remember Jawaharlal Nehru for his vision to develop India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic Republic.

Yours etc ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CRYPTOCURRENCY REGULATE, NOT BAN

BY JASWANT KAUR

Around a decade ago, no one would have thought that the world would have a unique technology albeit a currency to trade in, without having the luxury of touching and feeling it! Yes, cryptocurrency has, of late, been creating a lot of noise, especially in India. The debate over its legality has been there since 2013 when the Reserve Bank of India issued a warning to the public against its use for the first time.



The warning certainly triggered a shock with many websites suspending their operations at that time. In view of this, the currency known by several names, Bitcoin to start with, should have never seen the light of the day. Yet, it continued to thrive. In fact, at a time, when almost everyone was struggling to make ends meet during the Covid-19-induced lockdown, it came as a saviour.

A few intelligent ones started investing with an amount as low as Rs. 1500! In fact, a Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) in Bitcoin can start with as little as Rs. 100 on a daily basis. The money grew manifold. In fact, a friend made it big in a few months.

Now many would ask what exactly is this cryptocurrency? How is it generated? What kind of ecosystem does it operate in? Ever since the recession in 2008, the highly regulated traditional currencies lost their charm on account of loose monetary policies. Bitcoin came as a safe option with literally no interference from the government, without any inherent complications of physical boundaries, region or country.

The virtual currency had universal existence and a unique value, solely determined by the demand and supply forces, connected through a common network. Like any other currency, cryptocurrency can also be used for buying and selling goods. The stark difference lies in the fact that one has to find a merchant who deals in it. The transactions can be done through debit or credit cards too.

The biggest advantage of using cryptocurrency has been ease and safety of transactions. One can transfer funds without involving a lot of cost as compared to traditional means of transferring money, including a wire transfer. The currency



is immune from the risks the traditional currencies face. It cannot be counterfeited. Nor can it be stolen.

In contrast to the normal paper currencies, which are governed by several factors like inflation, interest rates, and the quantum of currency printed by the RBI, it is engineered through a process called “mining”.

No, it does not involve any digging into the earth. It is basically a process of creating new units of currency with the help of a computer, a graphic card, a strong internet connection and, of course, power! There are a number of trading platforms that support software for mining. Once the software is run, it asks the user to solve complex mathematical problems suited to serve a given situation, generating a set of coins. A typical user can also purchase it from a broker which can be stored and spent from encrypted wallets.

Typically, a wallet address would comprise a string of 26 to 35 alphanumeric characters. For instance, 6b88c087247aa2f07ee1c5956b8e1a9f4c-7f892a70e324f1bb3d161e05ca107b is an example of a Bitcoin wallet address. Any Bitcoin address can be used to transfer cryptocurrency to any address on the network. However, the sender’s wallet software should support the address.

Every transaction is recorded in a public ledger of transactions called “block-chain”. It is a decentralised ledger of all transactions across peer-to-peer networks, which helps in confirming transactions. For instance, “A” requests a transaction in cryptocurrency. This transaction is broadcast to a peer-to-peer network, consisting of computers commonly known as “nodes”. Once this transaction is initiated, it is validated through a set of predefined algorithms. After validation, a new block of data is created, which is added to the existing blockchain, which cannot be altered at any point of time. This tech-



nology can be used not only for generating cryptocurrency but also for transferring information, data, contracts and records!

The currency generated through this process can be used for purchasing products or selling at an agreed price or for transferring funds to any place in the world, without going through the cumbersome procedure of getting approvals from the bank. In other words, these transactions can be completed without thinking of restrictions under various legal provisions. Not only this, there is no risk of forgery. It is not easy to trace the transaction too as these transactions are digitally encrypted.

Currently, the banking system requires particulars of the transferor and the transferee viz-a-viz name, address, bank details for transferring funds. In the case of foreign transactions, the details are even more. For transferring cryptocurrency, all that is needed is a public address. It is as simple as sending an email. The software does not even disclose the IP address of the computer used for the transaction.

This has been a concern for various governments across the world, including India. The Indian government has been playing hide and seek with the need of having a cryptocurrency. In fact, it levied a complete ban on cryptocurrency in 2016. Later, it thought of promulgating a law to regulate it. The law was supposed to be enacted during the last session of Parliament.

During the recent budget session, the finance minister announced a 30 per cent tax on income

Like any other currency, cryptocurrency can also be used for buying and selling goods. The stark difference lies in the fact that one has to find a merchant who deals in it



The unregulated currency has certainly helped many in making a fortune. Over the last few years, the investment in cryptocurrency has grown to the extent of Rs. 6,000 crore, which is certainly not a small amount

from digital assets, including cryptocurrency. Not only this, a one percent TDS (tax deducted at source) has also been announced on all transactions in virtual digital assets. An average investor will also have to pay GST at the rate of 18 per cent on brokerage/service fee.

In addition, if an individual suffers loss in cryptocurrencies, he/she will not be allowed to set off this loss against any other income or loss in the current financial year. By all means, it is meant to discourage these transactions. For a middle-class citizen, who has started his journey with a small amount of, say, Rs. 500, 30 per cent taxation is certainly a big blow.

The Indian government is treating income from cryptocurrencies like the income from winning lotteries etc. In many other countries, like South Korea, it is taxed based on profits. In the US, the tax rate is calculated based on the short-term or long-term capital gain. The tax rate varies from 10 to 37 percent in the case of short-term gain and 10 to 20 per cent in the case of long-term gain. In Germany, the tax is paid as per the income slab of the tax-payer.

The unregulated currency has certainly helped many in making a fortune. Over the last few years, the investment in cryptocurrency has grown to the extent of Rs. 6,000 crore, which is certainly

not a small amount. Given the popularity and also its tendency of being misused, it certainly requires regulation and a prudent mechanism of taxation.

A recent report by a cybersecurity firm revealed that ransomware released by cryptocurrency has been the main cause in 79 per cent of cybersecurity incidents over the last 18 months. In view of such incidents, the deputy governor of the RBI, once again called for its ban last week. However, the government and its machinery seem to have taken the easy route of imposing a higher rate of taxes or announcing a blanket ban, instead of thinking out-of-the-box for its effective regulation.

India offers a huge market for cryptocurrency. At present, various portals and crypto-focussed companies have generated employment for around 10,000 people. Had the government thought of a better plan, this digital currency would have generated enormous opportunities of growth in the near future. Harsh measures such as these will ring a death knell for crypto. What is needed is a better system for managing and regulating it, rather than imposing a blatant ban on its use. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JASWANT KAUR is a company secretary. She can be reached at jassi.raoi@gmail.com

HARD CHOICES

UNCERTAIN FUTURE, NOSTALGIA FOR VALUES

BY **ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPARAMPIL**

The latest reports tell us that only 58% of the voters turned up in the first phase of the UP elections. People seem to say: Enough is enough! We have heard too much of venom spitting of one Party against another and allegations of national betrayal, each forgetting their own? The ruling party is coming to us for votes after dumping our bodies into the river during the Covid heights! Wait till the waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna swell up in anger and the stones destined for Ram Temple cry out in protest against the 'politics of anger' to which they have been witnesses so long!

Lalu Prasad has turned most critical. He alleges that Narendra Modi and Amit Shah are doing nothing less than inciting a "civil war"; that the BJP is continuing the British colonial tactics of dividing communities and engineering tensions. Rajeev Yadav, who produced a film on Adityanath Yogi in admiration, now condemns him for spreading the "politics of hate". Yogiji, in fact, proves the allegation true, by



calling for a bulldozer to deal with the SP and the BSP candidates whom he dubs as goondas. After all, the monk-politician had been carrying a revolver and a rifle ever since 2004, on his own admission. Amit Shah remains loyal to the same political culture, contending that the SP candidates are merely a bunch of hooligans. Crime is always on the 'other' side: with the Dalits, minorities, tribals, poor!

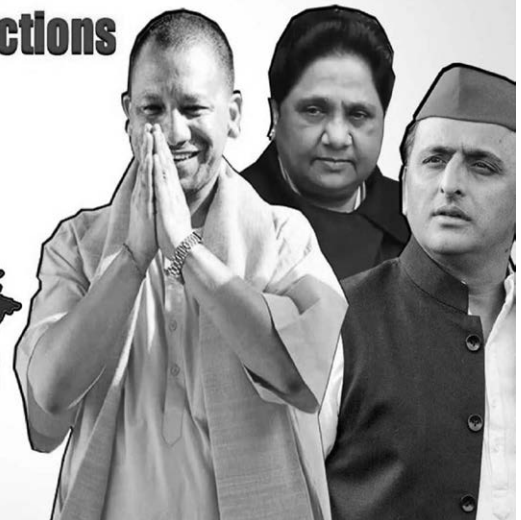
Money Decides

Whom can one vote for in this political climate? Who is going to win? If recent elections are a guide, the victory does not go to the most deserving, peace-loving and purposeful, but those who have the deepest purse. Corporate donors with their self-interested strategies decide the issue. They are the biggest threat to democracy today. They put their bets on the most pliable Parties.

If recent elections are a guide, the victory does not go to the most deserving, peace-loving and purposeful, but those who have the deepest purse. Corporate donors with their self-interested strategies decide the issue

UP Assembly Elections

2022



During recent elections, more than 70% of election money was spent by the BJP. That speaks for their convincing power. MLAs, MPs, and even veteran Party members, no matter which Party they belong to, bend to fat purses and top positions. This is the pitiable scenario today.

The Vernacular Proletariat

There is another force at work. When civil rights groups, secular spokespersons, and the English-speaking elite grow vocal in “snobbish style” against of Modiji, the vernacular majority gathers round him, with the upper castes in full support. He has the skill of eliciting sympathy from the “vernacular proletariat”, leaning against the Ram Temple issue, Kashmir decision, and the pretension of having re-captured the lost “prestige” of the Hindu majority.

What the Government does for the people, like ensuring irrigation, mid-day meal or loan waver, should not be seen as favours, freebies, election bribes or doles, of which we have too much in India, but responding to people’s rights and entitlements

The Modi-Yogi mantra works when you least expect it. But more than anything else, their victory is sure when the democratic parties are themselves in total disarray and ideological loyalty shifts according to the amount of cash or the measure of power offered, or the special political advantage held out. Lamentable, but true!

A Budget for the Elite

What Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman promises is something more than a Golden Age: “Amrit kaal” with a steady 8.5% growth. On the contrary, what Rahul Gandhi notices is the plight of 23 crore Indians in poverty. He says, there are two Indias: one of the poor, the other of the rich. “Entire wealth is going into the hands of select people”, a chosen few. Chidambaram refers to 142 very rich people who nearly doubled their



Courtesy: Sandeep Adhvaryu, Times of India

wealth during the Covid period, e.g. Ambani with monopoly in petrochemicals, telecom, retail, e-commerce. But the interesting news is that the 59-year-old Adani has gone ahead of him, with a net worth of \$88.5 billion, \$600 million higher than Ambani's. Thus, Adani has emerged as the tenth richest man in the world. He controls 7 airports and a quarter of air traffic, largest power generator, city gas retailer.

When competitors grow fewer, ‘privatisation’ effectively means ‘monopolisation’: appropriation of national wealth by one business magnate or a few. What is taking root in India today is an ‘oligopoly’ of 20 companies, belonging to one or two business communities from a specific region with pronouncedly inward-looking traditions. The destinies of the nation are slipping into their hands. So far, what they have done is to ensure more layoffs and less jobs. Unemployment has grown. The Government is catering to these giants in a studied manner.

What the Prime Minister called a “people friendly” budget is considered a “cruel assault on people’s livelihoods” by Sitaram Yechury. Mamata Banerjee affirms, it offers “zero” for the common man. The social sector is greatly enfeebled, with health and education suffering most.

Proposal for Wealth Tax Ignored

Jan Sarokar argues thus: if a 2% wealth tax and 33% inheritance tax were imposed on the 1% richest, the income could look after the entire social sector needs of the country. Sukanta Chaudhuri says that over 100 of the world's richest people have expressed their willingness to be taxed more. If it were done in each country, the whole nation would benefit, and the general economy in consequence.

What the Government does for the people, like ensuring irrigation, mid-day meal or loan waver, should not be seen as favours, freebies, election bribes or doles, of which we have too much in India, but responding to people's rights and entitlements. Ensuring common welfare is the duty of the Government, not a favour it does for votes.

In which case, we could not say with the BJP MP Alphonse, who exclaimed: anyone who creates jobs must be "worshipped", be he Ambani or Adani! That is precisely what is being asked of citizens in Hindutva-led India: to worship the leaders. Is not Modi an avatar? Rahul says, Modiji is not acting as a Prime Minister but a king: shah-en-shah, king and master. Imperial overtones are too evident. No one can speak against his decisions. No criticisms.

Jairam Ramesh of the Congress says, ministers are merely reading out prepared reports and chanting *Modi Chalisa*. Mamata Banerjee feels certain that "the whole nation is being run by force". Fake encounters have increased in UP and Assam. Encounter killing of 'suspects' is not the right way of safeguarding social order in a civilized society!

Free Citizens or Bonded Labour?

Mamata accuses Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar of treating her elected Government as "bonded labour". The same is happening in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, with R.N. Ravi and Bhagat Singh Koshyari trivializing elected Government's decisions. No independent thinking is allowed, no regional differences tolerated.

Those who have no faith in themselves nor in others are ruling the country. Ultimately, 'meaninglessness' rules. Irrationality reigns. But a sort of resentment grows at subconscious levels. Emotions build up. The rulers seek to soothe emotions by telling stories about Aurangzeb and Shivaji, or Mir Jaffar and the British. These are idle memories that harass the psyche of the higher classes who are slaves of their complexes, about which the masses are least worried.



Courtesy: Sujith Kumar, Deccan Herald

Words Lose their Meaning

Words themselves lose their meaning, concepts lose their significance: democracy, peace, equality. What does the word 'Equality' mean? I am asking this in the context of Modiji unveiling the statue of Equality and Humanity in Hyderabad on the 1000th birth anniversary of Ramanujacharya. Is there any consistency between the Equality that is being claimed and the equality that is actually prevailing in the country? And what does Atmanirbhar mean? If it means "self-reliance", why was the making of Ramanuja's statue (like Patel's in Gujarat) entrusted to Aerosun in China. No doubt, it was an expensive product. The 216 ft statue cost Rs. 135 crores, and the entire project Rs. 1000 crores. People wanted to ensure quality.

However, is it not embarrassing that Gandhi's India makes headway in advanced arms production (Brahmos, etc), while the construction of stat-

Is the call of the Sadhus at Haridwar a part of the national policy? Is the programme for the next five years to create a Muslim-mukt nation? A minority-mukt India?

utes of inspiring personalities has to be passed on to our controversial friend, China? That is what makes Rahul question Modi's concept of Atmanirbhar. Will the Ambani-Adani combine, masters of unequal wealth, help the Prime Minister to make India the land of Equality, Peace?

“Death” for Conversions

Curiously, on the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, Hindu Mahasabha paid respects to Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte in Gwalior. They mean to keep Godse-Apte smriti every year, calling for Akhand Bharat. There is, then, encouragement for violence still, and at the highest levels. And again recently, a gathering of 400 sadhus in Allahabad called for 'death' for conversions.

Meantime near Bhopal, strong action was taken against a goshala-manager for unexplainable bovine deaths. The deaths were caused by a BJP man who was making money out of leather and bones. See! Cow-protection zeal is merely an excuse for jihad against Muslims and Dalits who handle the cattle trade. In today's India, lives of cows count more than those of fellow citizens!



The Hijab would never become an issue like in France if we had preserved our respect for diverse identities and their respective sensitivities at a given time. When identities are threatened or denied, people cling to symbols of their identities with passion

The sadhus at Allahabad demanded the abolition of words like 'minority' and 'majority'. As far as they are concerned, minorities do not exist! They say, those who follow foreign religions must quit India. Meanwhile, they forget that they themselves are following ideologies that have origin in Italy and Germany, Fascism and Nazism. Noam Chomsky, a US philosopher-historian, accuses Modi of turning India into a 'Hindu ethnocracy'. He feels that a Hindu supremacist ideology has fully taken over.

Hindu Rashtra Strategies

Every step towards a Hindu Rashtra is well planned.

- 1) In the field of education: Shantishree Dhulipudi Pandit, who considered Gandhi and Godse equal, has been appointed Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University; Banaras Hindu University has introduced a course that considers caste system as "Inclusive", contributing greatly to social solidarity. Similar things have been happening under the BJP for years.
- 2) In the field of commerce: a market that excludes weaker communities is gathering momentum, e.g. the economic boycott of Muslim/Dalit products in Gujarat has spread to central India of late, like Surguja district, Chhattisgarh. People view this as 'untouchability' in a new form, marginalisation of minorities, discrimination against weaker communities, exclusion of Dalits, 'othering' of fellow citizens.

The BJP stand in UP has been that any attention to the Dalits is a threat to Hinduism. Thus, caste domination is asserted in veiled language. Unfairness is condoned in the name of social harmony, Hindu interests, cultural solidarity. Caste-based unfairness gets lost under the carpet of 'Hindu renaissance'.

Effectively, the impoverished masses remain in political powerlessness. Hindutva's 'hegemonic cultural politics' leave little hope for the downtrodden. The glory of the nation is not the uplift of the poorer sections as it happened in China, but projects like Bullet Trains and Central Vista. Jawahar Sircar calls the latter a "project of hubris".

A Minority-less Nation?

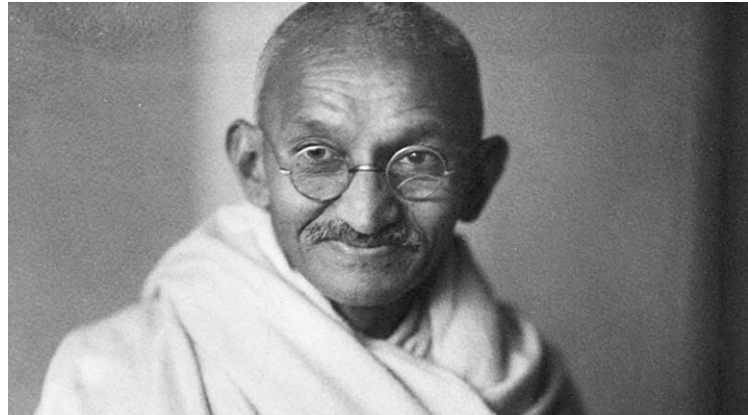
During the current elections in Uttarakhand, all parties are wearing religion on their sleeves to weaken the BJP monopoly. But is it a Dharma-promoting religion or violence-promoting religion? Mukul Kesavan asks, was the attempt on the life of Asaduddin Owaisi because of the provocative things he had said or what the Dharma Sansad said at Haridwar calling for genocide. The Prime Minister's silence in such contexts contributes to national mind-formation. Is the call of the Sadhus at Haridwar a part of the national policy? Is the programme for the next five years to create a Muslim-mukt nation? A minority-mukt India?

Everyone is shocked when a Hindu teacher in Pakistan gets 25 years in prison for blasphemy; but when a Dalit dies in UP at the hands a cow-protection force, no one seems disturbed. The Hijab would never become an issue like in France if we had preserved our respect for diverse identities and their respective sensitivities at a given time. When identities are threatened or denied, people cling to symbols of their identities with passion. Any anthropologist can vouch that this is bound to happen.

Ideological Fidelity, Ethical Convictions

When core human values are rejected, people cling to empty forms of pieties with neither moral content

All Parties that ruled India since Independence may need to ask themselves how far they had diverted from the core Indian values of "sincerity in service" and "respect for diversity" when and where they were in power



nor religious depth. Prophets of every religion held moral uprightness, fairness and justice far above temples, holy places and shallow observances. The sweep of money-and-power during the BJP rule has killed "ideological fidelity" in every Party. This form of ideological erosion has led to the enfeebling of ethical convictions in the Indian political scenario, where principles do not count any more, values collapse, show-and-display mounts, and opportunity decides. All convictions have yielded to opportunism, all principles to profit. Not a tear shed!

All Parties that ruled India since Independence may need to ask themselves how far they had diverted from the core Indian values of "sincerity in service" and "respect for diversity" when and where they were in power. Truth will tell. A return to such values will ensure our future. Rahul Gandhi said on the anniversary of Gandhiji's death, "Wherever there is truth, Mahatma Gandhi is still alive". Rahul too may need to examine how far his party diverted from the great idealism and noble ethos of its earlier days, and whether there is too much of shirking of responsibility and decision-making in the present day. More inspiring figures have to emerge. People gather in strength when they see great ideals lived out, not merely proclaimed.

Gandhiji must come alive to strike the conscience of every Party. Tagore must come alive and demand the removal of all "narrow domestic walls" (Gitanjali). The Vedas should be brought to daily life with its message "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side" (Rigveda I-89-i). Then we will prosper like never before. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARCHBISHOP MENAMPARAMPIL is 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.

RISING COMMUNALISM HATE VIRUS MORE FATAL THAN CORONAVIRUS

Hatred and prejudice towards minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, have penetrated to different layers of Indian society

BY **JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL**

Media reports indicate that coronavirus is subsiding in India. Majority of the states have removed most of the restrictions. Schools and other educational institutions are opened and they are returning to normalcy. Educational institutions are the last to be reopened.

At the same time, infection by hate virus is increasing day by day, and it adopts new carriers, as the coronavirus mutates into new variants. Hijab has become the latest carrier of the hate virus. The protests against the use of hijab in schools and colleges have spread to other states like MP and UP. The other carriers like religious conversion, love jihad and cow slaughter are kept alive. They are used by their inventors as and when required.

Election season provides a fertile atmosphere for the hate virus to spread exponentially. Spewing the venom of hatred against political adversaries and certain religious communities has become a normal



means of electioneering, and no political party in India can excel the BJP in this art. Dharam Sansads organized at Haridwar in December and later at Raipur in Chhattisgarh gave call for the genocide of Muslims. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Union Home Minister condemned the terrible forms of hate speech.

Both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister during their electioneering resort to innuendos targeting certain communities. The level of electioneering in India has degenerated into mutual accusations and acrimonies by the political leaders instead of presenting before people alternative solutions to the serious problems faced by them like unemployment, malnutrition, lack of quality education, basic health care services etc.

The latest major instance of hate speech was a derogatory statement by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Rahul Gandhi. During





a rally in poll-bound Uttarakhand, Sarma on 11th February attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for demanding proof for the September 2016 surgical strike. Sarma asked whether the BJP had ever demanded proof of him being the “son of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.”

A few days back UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath warned voters on Twitter: “I have to tell you something that is there in my heart. A lot of wonderful things have happened in these five years. Beware! If you miss, the labour of these five years will be spoiled. It would not take much time for Uttar Pradesh to become Kashmir, Kerala and Bengal.”

In response, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan tweeted: “If UP turns into Kerala as @myogiadityanath fears, it will enjoy the best education, health services, social welfare, living standards and have a harmonious society in which people won’t be murdered in the name of religion and caste. That is what people of UP would want.”

The tweet exposes not only the prejudice and hatred of Adityanath towards the three states, but also his utter ignorance about them. Yogi Adityanath was denigrating the three states as supporting extremist groups. In his attempt to disparage them he seems to have forgotten that the three states are ahead of UP in economic development, law and order, education and literacy, communal harmony, sex ratio, poverty reduction, status of women, maternal and child health, child nutrition etc.

Hatred and prejudice towards minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, has penetrated to different layers of Indian society. Although its violent expression is found in certain groups, the virus of hatred has infected a large section of Indians. Two apps -- Sulli Deals and Bulli Bai -- created by young engineering students, which sought to silence

Muslim women by putting a price on their dignity, expose the dangerous volcano on which India is sitting. Five young people who were arrested by Mumbai and Delhi police for being involved in creating these apps are between 18 and 26 years of age. It clearly shows that young people with expertise in information and communication technology are being used to spread hatred.

According to Sidrah Patel who filed the case with the Mumbai Police, “Nobody can work with so much impunity and continue to challenge the Mumbai police. The network has to be really big. This cannot just be the work of 21-year-olds or 18-year-olds working on the internet. There are many other players who are yet to be unmasked and that can only happen, if the investigation is fair”.

Politicians and religious leaders making use of the youth for achieving their selfish and partisan ends is not something new. But what is worrying is the level and extent of brainwashing of the youth by the right wing groups. Students are used by these groups in Karnataka to protest against wearing hijab by Muslim girls in schools and colleges in view of further polarizing people. Muslim and Hindu students who were friends and classmates have become enemies suddenly. It will not be easy to wipe away the mutual hatred created in these young minds by the communal forces.

In an article published in the New York Times on 9th February under the title, “As Officials Look Away, Hate Speech in India Nears Dangerous Levels,” the authors (Mujib Marshal, Suhasini Raj and Hari Kumar) have highlighted the dangerous consequences of uncontrolled hate speech in India. “In recent weeks, global human rights organizations and local activists, as well as India’s retired security chiefs, have warned that the violent rhetoric has reached a dangerous new pitch. With right-wing messages spreading rapidly through social media and the government hesitant to take action, they are concerned that a singular event – a local dispute, or an attack by international terror groups such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State – could lead to widespread violence that would be difficult to contain”.

The right wing organizations and the political leaders are not only spreading the venom of hatred but also some of their policies are motivated by hatred and revenge. For example, the stringent laws banning cow slaughter, irrational anti-conversion laws, love jihad laws and the Citizenship Amend-

ment Act are aimed at harassing, alienating and even persecuting Muslims and Christians. Definitely these laws are not going to do any good to the people of India. On the contrary, they have created a vicious atmosphere of majoritarian arrogance that often leads to violence on the minorities and a deep insecurity and fear among them.

Prejudice and hatred are two greatest enemies of peace and happiness. Hatred destroys oneself and others. "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned", says Buddha. If a person's mind is filled with prejudice and hatred against a particular person or a community, he/she



Courtesy: Alok Niranjan, Twitter@caricatured

will be tempted to take revenge and cannot be happy even though he/she may pretend to be happy.

If anyone speaks about peace and happiness and nurtures within himself/herself hatred towards others that person is a hypocrite. That is why Gandhiji says, "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony". Our present leaders speak about the rich heritage of India when they go abroad and proclaim about Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. But within the country they are busy with manufacturing and marketing hate messages, and indulging in hate speeches.

Those who indulge in hate speech are not the majority, even though they are very vocal and resourceful. Perhaps the majority of the people are indifferent. Hence there is an urgent need for creating awareness among the people about the dangerous consequences of hate speech and circulating hate messages. People are to be encouraged to

Gandhian ideals of non-violence and Satyagraha are the solution to various crises India is facing today. In the absence of peace and communal harmony economic growth and infrastructure development will not be sustainable

use social media platforms to spread the message of peace, love and harmony. There is also a need for exposing the falsehood of hate and fake messages.

A large section of young people is already infected with the virus of hatred. Immediate measures are to be taken to prevent the youth from becoming hate mongers. The value-education programmes in educational institutions have to focus on promoting pluralism i.e. acceptance, appreciation and celebration of diversities and the need for understanding and harmony among the followers of different religions. For this purpose, class-wise peace clubs could be started in schools and they can undertake various activities for promoting peace as an antidote to hatred.

It is very sad to note that the opposition parties, despite being aware of the serious danger facing the country, are not ready to transcend their narrow interests and ego and come together to oppose the forces that are spreading hatred and the government that supports the hate mongers. If they do not unite to oppose the hate-motivated policies of the present government, they are doing a great harm to themselves and the nation.

Gandhian ideals of non-violence and Satyagraha are the solution to various crises India is facing today. In the absence of peace and communal harmony economic growth and infrastructure development will not be sustainable. The citizens of India have to use their critical thinking and work for building harmony among the people of different religions, castes, languages and ethnicities. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Caritas Bangladesh offers free health care to pregnant women

Caritas Bangladesh is offering free medical services to pregnant women from poor families in the rural areas of the South Asian country. "From April 2021 onwards, Caritas Bangladesh is working on health care for about 1,000 pregnant and adolescent women in two districts of the country, Dinajpur and Netrokona," said Dr. Edward Pallab Rozario, health manager of Caritas Bangladesh.

The project aimed at improving health and nutrition status among the underprivileged is funded by Caritas Macau. Rozario said medical care in the rural and remote areas of the country was near to non-existent due to which pregnant women rarely visit a doctor. Most women don't even know where to find a doctor. Besides, there are many prejudices among them against seeking medical care.

Mow Manda, a 23-year-old pregnant woman from Sagordighi of the Durgapur area in Netrokona district, said she was six months pregnant and was consulting a doctor for the first time since she became pregnant. "The only hospital is about five kilometers away from here. I used to think that there was no need to get

tested by a doctor during pregnancy. But now I realize that if I get myself examined regularly, my baby and I will be healthy," the indigenous Garo Catholic mother of two told UCA News.

Caritas Bangladesh is planning on expanding its health awareness programs for the women in Bangladesh's remotest areas, Rozario said.

It is providing health awareness and services to about 30,000 pregnant women, adolescents and HIV-AIDS patients through a dozen health projects.

According to the government's health department, only 12 percent of women were able to receive health advice and care in the year 2000. But at present about 50 percent women are getting help during pregnancy.

Mohammad Sharif, director of the maternal and child health program at the department of family planning, told UCA News: "Reducing maternal mortality is a great achievement, but it is really possible to reduce it further. It is not desirable for a mother to die while giving birth to a child or not having access to proper health care during pregnancy." ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)



Nun's Body Found in Well in Tamil Nadu

The body of a Catholic nun was recovered from a well in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, a day after she accidentally fell into the well close to her convent.

The deceased was a member of the Eastern Province of the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, an international religious congregation of Catholic women working in India and abroad. The congregation has ruled out any foul play in the death of 25-year-old Sister Kausalya Rajendren. Firefighters recovered her body from a 30-meter-deep open well close to St. Charles Arts and Science College in Eraiyur in Kallakurichi district where she was doing her bachelor of science degree in mathematics. The college is run by her congregation.

Sister Rajendren attended college on Feb. 16 and later returned to the convent 800 meters away.

"On her return, she went to wash clothes and met a two-and-half-year-old boy of the neighbors who was sitting in a makeshift tent in the field just inside



the boundary of the convent's land," Sister Anbarasi told UCA News on Feb. 18. The young nun offered a sweet to the boy, with whom she was friendly, before accidentally falling into the well as she returned to her convent.

The child's grandparents sensed something was wrong when the child kept looking at the well.

"They had seen the nun there with the child but when he was showing some unusual signs of going towards the well, they went there and found the slipper of the nun floating on the water," Sister Anbarasi said. The grandparents alerted the convent and their neighbors, who also informed the police and fire service. On Feb. 17, firemen fished out her body from a corner of the well. It was taken for a post-mortem examination at the nearest government hospital.

"We completed all the legal formalities and buried her body in the congregation cemetery in Ammoor village," Sister Anbarasi said. "Her father and other relatives attended the funeral." © (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

AN EDUCATOR AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST

Prof. J. S. Bandukwala, who passed away on January 29, was a democratic dissenter who respected the Constitution and lived by it

BY LANCY LOBO

The inter-religious dialogue we speak about is more effective at the dialogue of life, rather than at the level of doctrinal tenets, beliefs and liturgies. Indeed, we need more of inter-religious dialogues especially of life and work in a multi-religious country like India.

J.S. Bandukwala, a Bohra Muslim, has been an elder brother to me ever since I met him 20 years ago when he was looking for a credible trustee for the Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara, a Social Science research centre. It was Professor Priyavadan Patel of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda who introduced me to him. He was the founding trustee of the Centre and remained an honoured trustee until he could no longer physically move out of his house.

We met often and sometimes weekly and talked on the phone regularly. Over the phone his conversations usually began with the sentence 'what can I do my brother'? We discussed and shared a lot of issues regarding personal, familial, and political. A highly respected academic, he studied at St. Xavier's School and College, Mumbai and obtained his doctorate in physics from the USA. On receiving his doctoral degree, he met a Catholic nun at a meet-



ing who asked him about his future plans. She told him, "go back to India and serve your people". He took that counsel seriously, came back to Vadodara and taught physics at the M.S. University, Baroda until his retirement.

In fact, his retirement was no retirement. He was a Gandhian at heart and fought for the rights of Dalits and tribals. He was a liberal Muslim and inclusive in his values. It was no wonder that he had friends from every religion, every stratum of society. A God-fearing person, he prayed, read the Quran and also the Bible during the month of Ramzan. He may not have been pietistic but certainly he lived by the core values of Islam. He was

He was a Gandhian at heart and fought for the rights of Dalits and tribals. He was a liberal Muslim and inclusive in his values. It was no wonder that he had friends from every religion, every stratum of society



a reformer in his own Bohra Muslim sect and often faced the ire of the authorities therein.

Prof. Bandukwala was as tough as stone when it came to fighting injustice but soft as a flower to the downtrodden. His mannerisms were extremely refined and delicate. He believed in dialogue even with his opponents. It was two days after he went to address an RSS organized gathering that his house was vandalized and burnt down in the year 2002. He and his daughter barely escaped with their lives as a couple of friends protected them. Barkha Datt's interview on NDTV with Bandukwala and his daughter on the above issue brought tears to many.

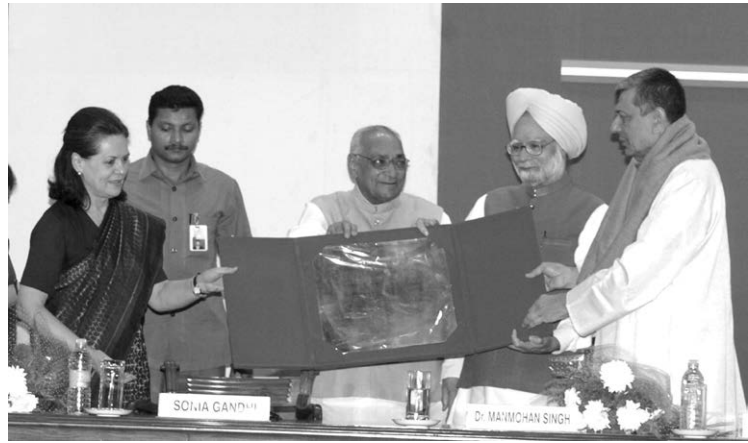
Politically he was constantly asking, "Do we want a Gandhian India or a Godse's India?" As a matter of fact, he was rather disheartened about the political developments in the country. He read much and had great regard for Abraham Lincoln. Prof. Bandukwala wrote letters often to newspaper editors and had a collection of several hundreds of such letters. Till he was physically able, he often wrote articles on critical issues in the *Indian Express*.

He was the PUCL president of Gujarat unit and fought many battles against atrocities and injustices meted out especially to the poor. It was a known fact that he took up the cause of the residents of Kalyanagar in Vadodara, a slum evicted by the Corporation and he saw to it that they got alternative housing to move into for living. A compassionate man, he very often dragged himself to government offices despite his ill health.

His reflections on life and changes in the mainstream society made him focus on his Muslim community which was less literate and poor. He often said that education was the only highway for Muslims as they cannot rely on the Government sources. He began a Trust called *Zidni Ilma* where he collected yearly donations both as *Zakat* and *Lilla* to the tune of Rs. 90 lakhs during Ramzan and invited applications for scholarships from all over Gujarat. He personally ploughed through the applications and selected students for scholarships from his Trust. This kept him busy and engaged for several years.

When his daughter married a Hindu he faced flak from his own community. However, he weathered the storm and upheld the values of the Republic -- freedom of choice of the individual.

He was often invited to speak to people from all backgrounds and he willingly went to these functions. The Christian seminary at Vadodara, Sevasi



had invited him to give the inaugural address. The Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara whose founding Trustee he was and continued for nearly twenty years had dedicated its conference hall in his name. Whenever anyone required his assistance and service, he was always available and supported the centre. We, at the centre, always celebrated his birthdays, but lately it was celebrated at his house where he was confined. It was unfortunate that he passed away on the 29th January 2022 at the age of 77 years.

He lived alone as both his children were in the USA but communicated with them regularly. Bandukwala was known for his simplicity and was hospitable to all, especially to the poor for whom he was always available. His loss of hearing did not deter him from being in touch with visitors. For the last year or two he was a victim of Covid-19 which debilitated him and he was confined to his home completely and lately he was hospitalized.

It was not very long ago that I had typed and sent him a few inspiring verses from the Quran which he had given me in his handwriting some years back. He was very happy to receive these verses and he told me, "Now I am asking Allah to call me home".

It is with anguish that I say that we have lost a great India citizen, educator, social activist, and democratic dissenter of this country who respected its Constitution and lived by it. May he rest in peace, and I know that he will most certainly, for a life exceedingly well lived. But he may not be at peace at the direction in which the Republic is forced to move! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LANCY LOBO is a research scholar, Indian Social Institute, Delhi

Uphaar Tragedy

“The Law is Always above You”

While the law will take its course in the Uphaar case, the main macro issues that have been highlighted by the judiciary during the course of trial of this case merit consideration by those in the higher echelons power

BY **AARTI**

The Delhi High Court's recent decision to refrain from suspending the seven-year jail term awarded by the trial court to real estate barons Sushil and Gopal Ansal in the Uphaar fire tragedy evidence tampering case seemingly holds hope for a sense of closure to the almost 25-year-old protracted legal battle.

Yes, with courage and commitment, the Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy (AVUT) has been fighting for justice to bring the Ansal brothers to book holding them responsible for the devastating fire of June 13, 1997 at Delhi's Uphaar cinema that initially broke out in a faulty transformer and swiftly spread, turning the hall into a gas chamber with no safety exits. 59 people died and another 100 were injured.

For a moment, to recall the main Uphaar case for causing death of 59 people, it was first investigated by the Delhi police and later transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation which filed the charge sheet 5 months later in November 1997 against 16 people including the Ansal brothers.

The trial court initiated proceedings in 1999 and after examining around 115 witnesses and placing reliance upon 900 documents, convicted the Ansal brothers on 20 November 2007 for commission of offences punishable under the Indian Penal Code Sections 304A (causing death by negligence), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 338 (causing grievous hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) read with Section 36 (effect caused partly by act and partly by omission) and sentenced each one of them two years of rigorous imprisonment along with a fine of Rs.5,000/- and a default sentence of six months. They were also convicted under Section 14 of the Cinematograph Act, 1952 and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs.1,000/- or undergo two months imprisonment in default. They moved the Delhi High Court which upheld their conviction recorded by the trial court but entitled them to set off the period of detention under section 428 of the CrPC. The default sentence was modified to simple imprisonment for two months in the case of section 304-A

and section 338 and one-month simple imprisonment in the case section 14 of the Cinematograph Act, 1952. The case reached the Supreme Court and finally in 2015, the Ansal brothers were sentenced to a two-year jail term and were released taking into account the prison time they had served on the condition that they pay Rs 30 crore fine each, to be used for building a trauma centre. The apex court after reviewing its decision later sent Gopal back to jail for a year, sparing Sushil because of old age.





Now comes the interesting part of the case. During the examination of witness (Mr T S Sharma - Assistant Divisional Officer, Delhi Fire Service) in the main case, during 2003, the Public Prosecutor found that certain documents which had been marked and which had to be exhibited were found to be torn/mutilated.

Accordingly, the trial court was informed and the AVUT also filed an application for cancellation of bail granted to the accused in the main Uphaar case but it was dismissed on the ground that the trial in the main Uphaar case was at its fag end. AVUT then moved the Delhi High Court for registration of FIR against the Ansals and other co-accused for tampering with the Court records. In 2006, based on the direction of the Delhi High Court, the Special Branch of Delhi Police registered an FIR with regard to the disappearance/mutilation and tampering of documents which formed a part of judicial record in the trial of the main Uphaar case.

Ultimately on 8 November 2021, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mr Pankaj Sharma awarded 7-year jail term and imposed a fine of Rs 2.25 crore each on the Ansal brothers for tampering with evidence. Notably, the Judge had reportedly observed "After thinking over nights and nights, I have come to the conclusion that they deserve punishment," and added that the circumstances during which the instant crime was committed showed the deep disrespect which the convicts had for the law and the judicial process and for the victims.

The Ansals moved the Sessions Court for suspension of the sentence, but it was declined. The Additional Sessions Judge observed on 3 December 2021 that "a criminal justice system drives its legitimacy

At an individual level, it needs to be appreciated that the rule of law has to be respected irrespective of one's societal status, more so because the law is always above you

not only from legislation but more so from the faith that the public at large reposes in it. The nature of the crime is such that it strikes at the very edifice of functioning of the court...the crime involved in the present case is of a very grave nature, suspending sentence at this stage were not only be against the established principles of criminal law but shake the confidence of general public in the judicial system. It is trite to say that if the judiciary as institution began to lose confidence of the public our cherished value of democracy shall come under serious threat".

The Order of the ASJ was challenged in the Delhi High Court which also declined to suspend the sentence of the Ansals and other accused. While asking the Appellate Court to expedite and complete the hearing of the appeals within a month, the Court observed "suspending the sentence of the Petitioners would, therefore, amount to eroding the faith of the public in the judicial system as it would entail allowing convicts, whose finding of guilt has already been established, to take advantage of the passage of time as well as the judiciary as an institution.... The Petitioners herein inhabit the stigma of desecrating the temple of justice and a quietus needs to be put to the same. If they are ultimately found to be innocent in the instant case, this stigma has to be removed at the earliest".

While the law will take its course in the Uphaar case, the main macro issues that have been highlighted by the judiciary during the course of trial of this case merit consideration by those in the higher echelons power - namely, the need for 1) adequate fire safety management infrastructure, especially in public spaces such as cinema halls and 2) comprehensive legal framework to fix claims and liabilities.

At an individual level, it needs to be appreciated that the rule of law has to be respected irrespective of one's societal status, more so because the law is always above you. ©

Karnataka bishops condemn demolition of Jesus statue



The Catholic bishops in Karnataka say the demolition of the Jesus statue in a village is the latest example of growing attacks on Christians in Karnataka.

Father Faustine Lobo, the spokesperson of the Karnataka Regional Catholic Bishops Council (KRCBC) bemoans that the statue in Kolar was demolished in a “very rude and painful way” and without a proper court order.

Kolar that comes under the archdiocese of Bangalore is some 65 km northeast of Bengaluru, the state capital. Mulbagal taluk administration in the Kolar district of Karnataka demolished the 20-foot tall Jesus statue in Gokunte village on February 15, amid opposition from local Christians.

“The video of the demolition was widely circulated and the Christians are really alarmed and pained at such repeated acts by the pro-Hindu government machinery,” Father Lobo told *Matters India* February 16. In Kolar, Tehsildar R Shobhita allowed the demolition claiming that the statue was built on government land which was reserved as an animal pasture field. She also claimed that she acted on a High Court order. However, Christian leaders from the region allege that the statue was illegally demolished while the case was still pending in the court. The statue was erected in the village 18 years ago by the local St Francis Xavier’s Church. Around 90 percent of the village’s 500 odd people are Catholics.

“We demolished the statue based on the High Court order as it was constructed on government land. We had issued a notice to the church regarding

the demolition,” the tehsildar claimed while talking to journalists. However, local Catholics contested the tehsildar’s claim and said the matter was still pending in the High Court. Father Therese Babu, an advocate, said that the demolition letter was never shown to them despite repeated requests.

According to the villagers, a few activists of pro-Hindu organizations wanted to create tension in the region and filed a plea in the High Court. They also claim that the church possesses a letter of claim on the land. The Bangalore archdiocese is yet to come out with a statement to condemn the incident. Kantharaj, its public relation officer, told *Matters India* that the archdiocese opted to wait for its court hearing February 16 before issuing any statements.

Kantharaj said the court had only asked for a status report about the history of the statue, not the compliance report after the demolition. “Local Panchayat and the police were aware of it, but the tehsildar was too hasty to please her masters,” said the first lay PRO of the Archdiocese.

“We don’t understand why the majority Hindus should be afraid of 1.87 percent Christians in the Country,” he said. The village is just two kilometers away from the Andhra Pradesh border.

Father Lobo said a similar event took place in Mangaluru, a port town some 350 km west of Bengaluru, on February 5. A church there was demolished, alleging that it was built on government land. “There too, the matter was in the court and some people demolished it,” Father Lobo said.

Meanwhile, the United Christian Forum, an ecumenical group, revealed that Karnataka recorded the highest incidents of anti-Christian violence in southern India. It comes third in the number of violence against Christians after Uttar Pradesh in the north and Chhattisgarh in the center.

Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore who released the report said Karnataka was earlier known for its progressive politics for being the IT hub of the country, but “seem to have lost our humanity.”

The statue demolition took place as Karnataka is embroiled in a controversy over Muslim women wearing “hijab” in educational institutions. ☉

(Courtesy: *Mattersindia*)

'Violation of Court Order': Bengaluru Archbishop on Demolition of Jesus Statue in Kolar

Peter Machado also alleged that no written notice was served on persons concerned before the statue was pulled down.

Two days after a 20-foot Jesus statue was demolished by the Kolar district administration of Karnataka, Peter Machado, Archbishop of Bangalore, has alleged that it was pulled down in violation of court directives, and no written notice was served on persons concerned before the impending action.

Machado alleged that the administration went ahead with the demolition despite the fact that the said land (of two acres) on which the statue stood belonged to a church, which had necessary documents to that effect. The demolition was carried out

because the “local authorities considered them as not proper or incomplete”, he added.

The archbishop also alleged that the demolition was carried out even though there was a stay order on the demolition from a trial court. “In spite of stay order and best efforts to help the local tehsildhar, Ms. Shobitha, to understand the directives of the court, she refused to cooperate and even to share fresh directives of the court if any,” he said in a press statement released on Thursday, February 17.

He said, “Even if assuming that the structures were not fully authorised, the government could have had magnanimity to regularise them”, considering that they had existed for long.

“Isn't it true that the Karnataka government has recently introduced a bill to protect unauthorised religious structures built on government lands not be demolished in Karnataka? Is this privilege applicable only to certain religious groups and not for minority communities? Are there no other communities of other religions who have illegal structures on public or government properties? Why this discriminatory attitude towards the Christian Community only?” he asked.

According to Machado, in addition to Jesus statue, “14 Stations of Cross” were also demolished in the same Gokunte village.

“Statue to the ground, which has seriously affected not only the sentiments of the Christian community but also the people of other faiths. It was heartbreaking to see hundreds of people shedding their tears,” he said. ©

(Courtesy: The Wire)



Bishop, priests granted bail in sand mining case

A bishop and five priests arrested for their alleged involvement in illegal mining of sand were granted bail by the top court in Tamil Nadu state on Feb. 15.

Bishop Samuel Mar Irenios and five priests, including the vicar general of Pathanamthitta Diocese of the Eastern-rite Syro-Malankara Church, were arrested by police on Feb. 6 for suspected involvement in illegal sand mining, theft, criminal conspiracy, cheating and forgery among other charges.

Father Joel P. John Poweth, the public relations officer of the diocese, confirmed to UCA News that the Madurai bench of Madras High Court had granted bail to the bishop and priests.

“Yes, the high court has granted them bail. We have not got the order yet. We hope in a day or two they will be out after completing the legal formalities,” he said.

The New Indian Express reported that Justice K. Murali Shankar, while passing the order on a joint bail application, also permitted Bishop Irenios and Father Jose Chamakalayil to appear before investigating police officers only as and when required since they had submitted that they were undergoing treatment for cancer.

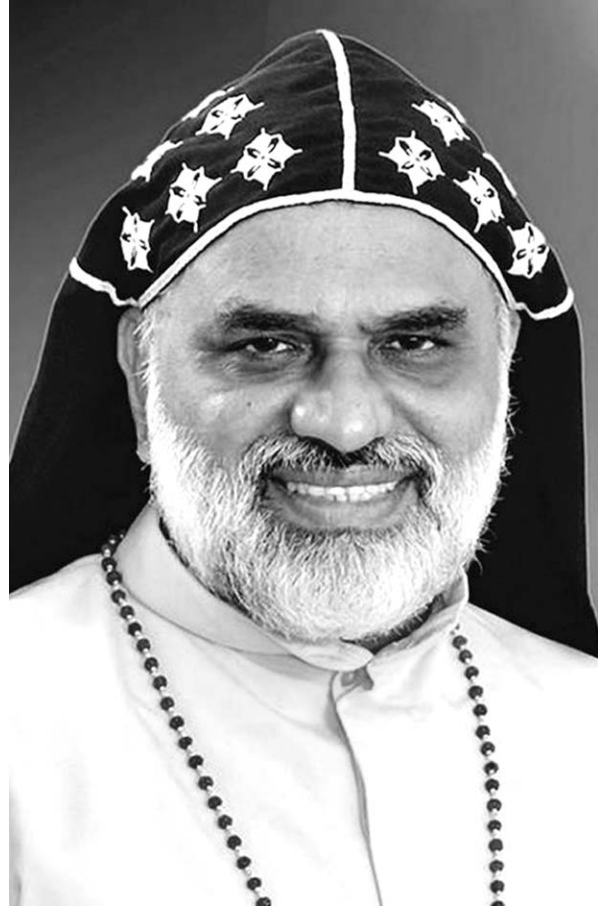
They were admitted to Tirunelveli Medical College after they complained of chest pain and giddiness after arrest, while the other priests were lodged in Nanguneri jail.

The arrested bishop and priests were earlier refused bail by subordinate courts on grounds that their custody was needed to enable investigators to unravel the conspiracy.

Their release on bail could also have an adverse impact on the probe that was still at an initial stage, the courts said.

Police suspect the bishop and priests were involved with Manuel George, who was arrested earlier for allegedly carrying out the large-scale mining of river sand near a check dam on Thamirabarani River near Pottal in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district.

George, a native of Kottayam district in neighbouring Kerala state, had obtained a lease for farm-



ing on an adjacent plot of 300 acres belonging to Pathanamthitta Diocese in Tirunelveli district.

While the land was given on a five-year lease, George began illegally mining sand in the nearby area and sold it in connivance with local revenue and police officials, it is claimed.

The sand mining came to light after environmentalists registered complaints with higher authorities, who conducted an inspection.

Church officials denied any involvement of the bishop and the priests in carrying out illegal sand mining as no one from the diocese could visit the site during the frequent lockdowns and other restrictions on movement imposed during the coronavirus pandemic. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Thousands join campaign against anti-conversion laws in India

Thousands of people cutting across religions have demanded the repeal of all anti-conversion laws in India.

The demand comes ahead of February 14 when the Karnataka government plans to table the Anti-Conversion Bill in the state's Upper House.

Prominent signatories of the petition to the Indian president of India included among others Admiral L Ramdas, former Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy, Mallika Sarabhai, accomplished dancer and choreographer, Medha Patkar, social activist, Anand Patwardhan, film Maker and Mani Shankar Aiyar, former federal minister. They assert the new anti-conversion law is unnecessary, since the Indian Constitution has enough provisions to curtail fraudulent religious conversions. 'Wherever the anti-conversion law, ironically officially called Freedom of Religion Act, was passed, it became a justification for the persecution of the minorities and other marginalized identities' the petitioners explain. They also say the attacks on the minorities has grown sharply in recent years since this law was used as a weapon targeting the dignity of Christians and Muslims particularly belonging to Adivasis, Dalits and women.

The petition urged people to join the campaign to defend the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution and protect human rights of the minorities and other marginalized sections in India.

The petition was initiated by the National Solidarity Forum, a network of groups and individuals who started acting in response to the Kandhamal Genocide on the Adivasi and Dalit Christians during 2007 and 2008. Kandhamal is a district in the eastern Indian state of Odisha. The petition also noted scattered and sporadic sub-radar attacks on Christian communities in India in the past few years. "Pretext made is that Christian missionaries are converting by force, fraud, coercion or allurement."

Citing the Indian census, the petition points out that Christian population declined from 2.6 percent in 1971 to 2.3 percent in 2011. "These Anti-Conversion Laws, generally called freedom of religion laws, are attempts to intimidate the Christian Community and the planned law in Karnataka is on the same lines," says Ram Puniyani, the forum convener.



Supporting the petition, Margaret Alva, a former governor of Goa, Gujarat and Uttarakhand, commended the National Solidarity Forum's attempts to collect signatures from all religions and backgrounds to dissuade the government from passing the Karnataka anti-conversion bill. "I request you to sign this appeal to withdraw the anti-Christian bill and such laws in other states of the country," she urged people. John Dayal, senior journalist, human rights activist and a forum founder, says the anti-conversion laws do not affect the Christians alone, but "meant for further persecution on the Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis and women." These laws violate the basic tenets of the Indian Constitution and India's secular heritage, he asserts.

Vidya Dinkar, human rights activist and a core team member of the forum, says the anti-conversion law disrespects women and places restrictions for a woman to choose her partner. "It is conceived with a notion that women in India are not in a position to think on their own and act on their own. This law is highly patriarchal. It is not acceptable," she added.

Another woman activist, Brinelle D'Souza, Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, says the anti-conversion law "discriminates against certain religions. It is a violation of the principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution that all religions are equal. It is meant to strengthen religious conflicts and majoritarian nationalism in India. Moreover, it infantilizes the poor and gives the State power over matters that are deeply personal."

The forum leaders say thousands of people have already responded to the petition and more endorsements are pouring in. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Instead of Wooing Prashant Kishor..!

Today, political rallies are all about candidates insulting each other. The days of dignified talk seem to be over, and just when I was beginning to feel sad about the bygone days, I suddenly started realizing that even insults could be turned around and made to work for us:

This incident happened during the latter part of 1800s, in Bengal when Sri Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and his few friends were busy collecting donations to start Calcutta University.

One day Vidyasagar stopped at the door of the palace of Nawab of Ayodhya. The Nawab was not exactly known to be a generous person and many people tried to dissuade Vidyasagar from taking his mission to the nawab.

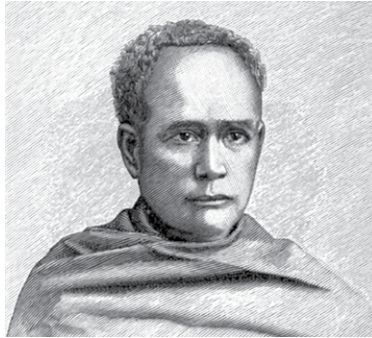
Vidyasagar met the Nawab and presented his cause. On hearing Vidyasagar's plea, Nawab got up, pulled one of his shoes off and dropped it in Vidyasagar's bag as a donation.

Vidyasagar did not say a word. He simply got up, thanked Nawab and left.

Next day Vidyasagar organised an auction of the Nawab's shoe in front of his palace. Lots of Nawab's knights, Jahagirdars, court members, who wanted to impress the Nawab started bidding. By the mid afternoon the shoe was sold for Rs 1000.

The Nawab, happy to hear that his shoe fetched Rs 1000, and matched the auction money. He added his own Rs. 1000 as donation.

When destiny dropped a shoe in his basket, Vidyasagar could have walked out furious. He could have thrown the shoe at the Nawab as an insult. He could have got depressed and gone home and cried that nobody is willing to give him a donation and given up his efforts to raise donation for the university.



But he did nothing of that sort. He remained focused on the main goal.

He took that shoe and converted it into the biggest donation to the University of Calcutta. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar converted his on-face insult and resulting disappointment into a Rs. 2000 donation plus a pleased Nawab who could be of some

assistance at some point later.

Yes, when someone has insulted you, you need to look at the bigger picture.

When you look at how that same insult can be turned around, creative ideas come abounding. But first you have to control the urge to hit back. Stop feeling insulted, rise above your personal feelings, ego and insecurity and you will find enough ways to change the situation into a positive one.

I wonder which political leader will realise he can do what Vidyasagar did? The results could be quite positive and rewarding and like Gandhi the same strategy to win our freedom, maybe some politician could win an election!

Imagine a scene like this:

"Pappu!"

"Thank you for calling me Pappu. Maybe one day that pappu will be remembered as the Babu who saved India!

Seems a better and cheaper idea than every political party wooing Prashant Kishor the poll strategist..! ©

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



SUMEDHA

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Sumedha is a centre for renewal of body, mind and spirit through insights and practices from psychology and spiritual traditions. It is located now in a 16-acre plot in the serene countryside on the Don Bosco School campus, Jharmari, Punjab, off NH 152 Ambala-Chandigarh Expressway, 12.8 km from Ambala Cantt. Railways Station.

2022

Programme Schedule

SUMEDHA SADHANA

A Psychospiritual Wholeness Journey

1. (SS-43) – March 17 – May 31
2. (SS-44) – June 12 – August 27
3. (SS-45) – September 11 – November 26

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

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

FACILITATORS:

Ajoy Fernandes PhD (*Personality & Spirituality*). Alba Rodrigues MA, BEd (*Yoga & Cosmic Spirituality*). Edison Fernandes PhD (*Therapy*). Joe Mannath PhD (*Sexuality, Celibacy & Spirituality*). Johny Dominic PhD (*Unconscious Dynamics & Spirituality, Therapy*). Jose Parappully PhD (*Midlife Dynamics & Holistic Spirituality, Trauma & Healing, Therapy, Retreat*). Philip Pinto MA, BEd (*Consecrated Life*). Maria Goretti MA., BEd (*Therapy, Emotional Dynamics*). Shalini Mulackal PhD (*Women's Spirituality*). Thomas Kurianthanam MPh (*Breath, Spirit & Wellbeing*).

For further information and registration, please contact:

Sumedha Centre. Don Bosco School Campus, Ambala-Chandigarh Express Way

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KRISTU JYOTI COLLEGE

BENGALURU - 560036

(AGGREGATED TO THE PONTIFICAL SALESIAN UNIVERSITY - ROME)

COURSES OFFERED

1. A Two Year Master's Degree Course in Theology

- M.Th. with Specialization in Youth Ministry (June 2022 to March 2024)
- M.Th. with Specialization in Catechetics (June 2022 to March 2024)
- M.Th. with Specialization in Liturgy (June 2022 to March 2024)

2. A Three Year Bachelor's Degree Course in Theology (B.Th. in Theology)

- For students preparing for Priesthood (June 2022 to September 2025)
- For other students (June 2022 to March 2025)

(Two years of Philosophy is a must for obtaining a B.Th. degree)

3. A THREE YEAR DEGREE COURSE IN PHILOSOPHY CUM B.A. IN SOCIOLOGY (With a B.A. from IGNOU: June 2022 to June 2025)

4. A TWO YEAR BASIC COURSE IN PHILOSOPHY (April 2022 to March 2024)

5. A ONE YEAR DIPLOMA COURSE IN FORMATION OF FAITH EDUCATORS AND YOUTH MINISTERS* (June 2022 to March 2023)

It consists of: Phase I - Basic Theology for Faith Formators
Phase II - Faith Formation and Youth Ministry
Phase III - Audiovisuals in Pastoral Ministry

6. A THREE MONTH CERTIFICATE COURSE IN LITURGY (June 2022 to August 2022)

7. A 10-WEEK CERTIFICATE COURSE IN PASTORAL COMMUNICATION (January 2023 to March 2023)

8. A 6-MONTH DIPLOMA COURSE IN FORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY FOR THE FORMATION OF THE FORMATION GUIDES (Spread over 3 Years)

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