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THE COVID CRISIS DEVASTATES INDIA

India is passing through an unprecedented crisis following Covid 19's lethal spread across the country. The densely populated nation of 1.4 billion people is in a state of fear and anxiety triggered by the second wave of Covid 19. *The Economist* of April 24 -30 editorially warned that "This horrifying second wave is a catastrophe not only for India but for the world. Unless India's second wave is brought under control the entire world will suffer." Ironically enough the setback occurred a few weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi exuded optimism in January last week while addressing university students about India's emergence as a global role player. He even drew a parallel between the Indian cricket team's astounding victory over Australia in Australia and his government's 'victory' over the covid virus. "With made-in-India solutions, we controlled the spread of the virus and improved our health infrastructure," claimed India's Prime Minister adding that "We not only solved our problems, but also helped the world fight the pandemic." Health Minister Harshavardhan was no less optimistic about India's ability in taming the virus. Hardly a month later his party the BJP passed a resolution 'hailing the prime minister as 'a visionary who had defeated covid-19.' In the midst of sycophants there was no soothsayer like in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to warn the Prime Minister about the Ides of March. The government failed to prevent massive crowds from gathering at Haridwar for the Maha Kumbha Mela in March.

Thousands of people who took part in Kumbh Mela at Haridwar spread the pandemic across the country. As the situation was going out of control the government prohibited public congregations at religious places. But it was too little and too late as the pandemic's tentacles had spread far and wide. Covid exposed the failure of the health ministry in creating adequate infrastructural facilities in health care. The election fever began to spread as rapidly as the pandemic and holding elections in four states and for local bodies in a few other states was another costly mistake. The fierce battle for power in West Bengal between the ruling TMC led by Mamata Banerjee and the BJP led by Narendra Modi and Amit Shah during the pandemic, lowered the image of both the leaders and contestants.. Many of the government hospitals were ill -equipped and understaffed. The flawed vaccine policy also revealed the complacency of the government and contradictions in decision making. While India exported 64m doses in the first three months of the year it could export only 1.2m doses in April and even defaulted on its commitments to Britain, European Union and some African countries too.

Overconfidence of the leaders of the ruling party was responsible, to a large extent, for the paradigm shift in India's fortunes, from hope to despair. The thousand year old apocryphal anecdote of the tide disobeying King Canute's command has an eternally relevant message for those in power surrounded by flatterers and sycophants. The deceptive fragrance of flattery and the ephemeral power that feeds on it were exposed with subtle humour by the wise King.

Fortitude and humility are virtues of inestimable value, especially in these hard times. Studying disasters and trying to find solutions to some of the problems is the responsibility of the government and the civil society. *The Economist* of May 8th quotes a line from Harvard historian Niall Ferguson's latest book *Doom* that "all disasters are at some level man-made political disasters, even if they originate with new pathogens." Acts of omission and commission at the highest level have contributed to India's failure in managing the pandemic and mitigating the misery of the disadvantaged sections of the country, the farmers in the villages and the unemployed people in urban areas. Sad but true that fear has brought all people together with everyone being worried about the next wave and no one knowing when the pandemic will end.

- The Editor

Leadership across the country did not adequately convey that this was an epidemic which had not gone away.

- Dr K. Srinath Reddy President The Public Health Foundation of India

US AS KEEPER OF THE LAW OF THE SEAS?

Not only has the US risked alienating an ally, it has also highlighted the rich irony of its position in citing the third UN Conference on Law of the Seas without having ratified it.

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)

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Indian visitors to the official website, of the Yokosuka-based Commander, US 7th Fleet, were bemused to read the following announcement: *“On 7 April, 2021 USS John Paul Jones asserted navigational rights and freedoms... inside India’s EEZ, without requesting India’s prior consent.”* With an equal mix of righteousness and chutzpa, the statement adds, *“India requires prior consent for military exercises or manoeuvres in its EEZ... a claim inconsistent with international law... This freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) upheld international law by challenging India’s excessive maritime claims.”*

In an atmosphere of rapidly warming Indo-US relations, this gratuitous public declaration, coming within weeks of the US-led Quad Leaders virtual meeting, and on the heels of a major Indo-US naval exercise, can only be seen as an act of breath-taking inanity. The impropriety becomes even more obvious when viewed against the background that the “international law” being cited by Commander 7th Fleet, is a UN Convention which resulted from the third UN Conference on Law of the Seas (UNCLOS 1982).

India has ratified the Convention, which came into force in 1994, but there is rich irony in the fact, that amongst the 168 nations who have either acceded to, or ratified UNCLOS 1982, the US is conspicuous by its absence. The UN Secretariat has not charged any country with the role of overseeing or enforcing implementation of UNCLOS. It is, therefore, intriguing to see that while refusing to ratify UNCLOS, the US has, at the same time, arrogated to itself, a ‘global-cop’ role in its implementation. Since ‘rules based maritime order’ has become a much-used political catch-phrase, it is worthwhile examining the

provenance of these rules and the role played by the US, so far.

At the risk of sounding doctrinaire, it must be said that the 9-year long negotiations to formulate UNCLOS 1982, were essentially a struggle between the ‘haves,’ (the established European and North American maritime powers) and the ‘have-nots,’ the emerging ‘third-world,’ which began to stake its legitimate claims on the usage and the wealth of oceans. The first major challenge to the old order came from the USA itself, when, in 1945, President Truman unilaterally declared US jurisdiction over all natural-resources on that nation’s continental shelf. This triggered a free-for-all, in which some states extended their sovereign rights to 200 miles, while others declared territorial limits, as they pleased.

To bring order to a confused situation, conferences for codifying laws of the seas were convened by the UN, and after torturous negotiations, agreement was obtained on a set of laws, which formalized the following maritime zones: (a) a 12-mile limit on territorial sea; (b) a 24-mile contiguous zone; and (c) a newly conceived ‘exclusive economic zone’ (EEZ) extending up to 200 miles, within which, the state would have sole rights over natural resources. The EEZ was said to be unique in that, it was neither high seas, nor territorial waters.

It was accepted that the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction was not subject to national sovereignty, but would be ‘the common heritage of mankind’, and this seems to have been at the root of US opposition to UNCLOS. President Reagan was reportedly convinced that this Utopian concept, in the context of seabed exploitation, favoured the under-developed countries, thereby denying America the fruits of its technological superiority. The US Senate, therefore, refused to ratify UNCLOS.

A major residual flaw in UNCLOS 1982, is that the signatories have chosen to remain silent on controversial issues with military or security implications, and mandated no process for resolution of ambiguities. Resort to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea or a Court of Arbitration are amongst the options available, but many states have expressed preference for ‘negotiating in good faith’ as a means of dispute resolution.

In India, the primary task of the government at present is to improve governance.

- Bimal Jalan

Amongst the areas of major contention or sharp divergence in interpretation of rules, are: applicability of the EEZ concept to rocks and islets, the right of innocent passage for foreign warships through territorial seas, conduct of naval activities in the EEZ; and the pursuit of marine scientific research in territorial waters and EEZ. India, had reservations regarding these issues, and made certain 'declarations,' in this context, while ratifying UNCLOS. The time has, perhaps, come for signatories of UNCLOS 1982 to convene another conference to review laws and resolve issues of contention.

In the meantime, it seems pointless for the US Navy to frighten little Maldives, or friendly India, through intimidatory FONOP patrols and provocative messages, while the real culprit, China, presents the world with a succession of 'fait accompli'. Having insulated itself, against US intervention, through the progressive development of its 'anti-access, area-denial' or A2AD capability, which poses a layered deterrent-threat to approaching US forces, China has accelerated its campaign to achieve control of the South China Sea (SCS).

In 2013, China commenced an intense campaign of building artificial-islands in the SCS, using a fleet of dredgers to create 3000-4000 acres of land on top of reefs in the Spratly and Paracel groups. Today, three Chinese outposts, Fiery Cross, Mischief & Subi Reefs, have airstrips and harbours and are fortified with missiles and radars. In 2016, China disdainfully rejected the verdict of the UN Court of Arbitration in its dispute with the Philippines. Closer home, in 2020, PLA troops aggressively surged forward on India's northern borders, to cross the Line of Actual Control, that has marked the interim Sino-Indian boundary.

So far, none of the US initiatives, that include, Obama's abortive US Pivot/Re-balance to Asia, Trump's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, seem to have had the slightest impact on China's aggressive intent and unfolding grand-strategy. Convening of the, first-ever leader-level summit of the Quad, by President Biden seemed to have breathed fresh life into an initiative dismissed by Beijing as so much "sea foam."

In this fraught environment, the ever-expanding, world-wide FONOP campaign needs a careful

reappraisal by US policy-makers for effectiveness - lest it alienates friends instead of deterring adversaries.

(Courtesy: Indian Express, April 12, 2021)

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DHAKA'S PUBLIC ADMONITION BY CHINESE ENVOY: STRATEGIC FALLOUT OF AN EXPANDING PROFILE IN SOUTH ASIA

The Chinese footprint in the South Asian region has been steadily increasing, while that of India is being diluted and all the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations are differently dependent on Beijing for a mix of political, economic, trade and military support, writes

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Beijing's wolf-warrior diplomacy and the pushback it elicited came into unsavory focus on Tuesday (May 11) when Bangladesh Foreign Minister A. K. Abdul Momen conveyed his discomfort with China in public. Responding to the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming's unwarranted remarks on Monday (May 10) at a press conference in Dhaka - where Li warned the Sheikh Hasina government not to engage with the Quad grouping - Momen noted with commendable firmness and sobriety: "We are an independent and sovereign state. We decide our foreign policy. Any country can uphold its position. But we will take decisions considering the interest of people and the country."

The minister clarified that none of the Quad nations had approached Dhaka about joining the grouping and hence the warning was premature. He also observed that this was an unusual statement and added: "We did not expect it from China."

China browbeating South Asian nations

In his defence, Ambassador Li asserted that the Chinese defence minister had conveyed the same message to the Hasina government during his recent visit to Bangladesh and that Beijing viewed the Quad as an anti-China alliance. This was the rationale apparently behind the public warning to pre-empt

Life is a challenge; meet it! Life is a dream realize it!

Life is a game; play it! Life is love; enjoy it.

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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any attempt by Dhaka to engage with the Quad as an entity. The analogy with the Chinese idiom sha-chi-ching-hou (kill the chicken and scare the monkey) is evident and it may be inferred that this could be a case of admonishing Dhaka publicly, to convey a not so veiled warning to other nations in the region.

It may be recalled that in end April, the Chinese Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe visited both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and urged the two countries to resist “powers from outside the region setting up military alliances in South Asia”. The unstated reference was to the Quad. It is understood that Colombo was forthcoming in assuaging China’s anxieties over the Quad and Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa assured his guest that his government would “never forge an alliance with any country”.

The Chinese footprint in the South Asian region has been steadily increasing, while that of India is being diluted and all the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations are differently dependent on Beijing for a mix of political, economic, trade and military support. While China’s strategic cooperation with Pakistan goes back to the period when India midwived the birth of Bangladesh in 1971-72, the engagement with other SAARC countries has been more pronounced over the past 15 years.

Currently, China has also stepped in to fill the Covid vaccine gap created by India’s inability to provide this assistance due to its own domestic pandemic surge. Consequently, Beijing’s profile in the region is even more accentuated.

Whether Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal or Maldives, the strategic predicament for these nations is similar, and this pattern can be discerned in different parts of Africa and South East Asia where the Chinese footprint is on the ascendant due to the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and other bilateral agreements. The strategic predicament or dilemma is that even as the leadership in these countries enters into often opaque transactions with Chinese entities or the government in Beijing that provide short-term political and monetary benefits to a small coterie, the political future of the nation and some of its tangible assets that are attractive to China are mortgaged in an

almost irreversible manner.

This predicament is currently most visible in relation to Sri Lanka – which under its current political leadership may be following the Pakistan path of handing over assets for extended periods (99 years?) and slipping into a crippling debt trap. Nepal’s political and commercial elite have made similar bargains with China and the Maldives has gone through its own strategic baptism with Beijing.

Chinese discomfiture over Quad

The tentative inferences apropos the Bangladesh-Quad finger-wagging episode are instructive. The first is that for Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Quad is an issue that causes a visible degree of strategic discord and hence the ‘monkey-cat’ path wherein the traditional mandarin is now morphing into a wolf-warrior. This change of orientation has come about despite earlier attempts by Beijing to dismiss the Quad as ‘foam’ that would soon disappear.

Clearly, the early March virtual summit of the Quad leaders convened by US President Joe Biden has caused considerable discomfiture in Beijing, so much so that even in the run-up to the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in July, the Xi priority is one where fear of China trumps respect. The dragon displaces the panda. Review what happened to Seoul, Canberra and now Dhaka.

The long-term fallout

The related conclusion that follows is how this strategic predicament, that almost all of China’s Asian interlocutors have differently experienced (including India and Japan), will pan out over the next decade. Standing up to China’s intimidation is costly but how much public humiliation (eating crow) will a nation accept to appease an insecure and bellicose Beijing?

Paradoxically, the answers may be embedded in the manner in which the Xi Jinping team can shape the narrative and perception of the Middle Kingdom to its own populace – a very sensitive issue in the weeks preceding the next June 4 Tiananmen anniversary. The Dhaka admonition by an emissary of Beijing may have more strategic context than it appears.

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If there is something wrong with India’s democracy, it lies in the timidity of its practice.

- Amartya Sen

HOW DO THINGS GET DONE IN GOVERNMENT? - II

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III

In the 1960s, school textbooks were 'nationalised', eliminating private production and distribution of textbooks. A Textbook Printing Press was set up to print the textbooks; distribution of textbooks was organised through co-operatives. Over a course of time, the requirement of textbooks exceeded the capacity of the Textbook Printing Press; by 1988 when I was State Education Secretary the Textbook Printing Press could produce only half the textbook requirements and had to contract out the printing of the rest of books. Printing textbooks on contract was good business for private printers as the margins were high, the government itself supplied paper, and they need not take any risk. The centralised mode of production and distribution was utterly inefficient, and every year, when the schools opened, ensuring the timely and adequate availability of textbooks was a nightmare for the Education Department. Late in 1988, during a rambling conversation I was having with him, K.Subramanyam, Finance Secretary came up with a bright idea: why not allow private printers to print the textbooks prescribed by Government, and allow them to market them through private trade channels? For its time, it was an extraordinarily innovative, for privatisation had not yet entered the mainstream administrative discourse. Subramanyam was one of the very best IAS officers in the State, equally good in the field and the headquarters exuded supreme self-confidence and with a cigar in his hand brashly spoke what he thought was right. I followed up Subramanyam's idea by fleshing out all the details. The Government would waive the copyright on school textbooks; anyone could produce them, and market them at whatever price they wished to charge. The Government, however, would fully utilise the capacity of the Textbook Printing Press, and sell the books so printed at the same prices it was hitherto charging. It was not difficult to convince NTR to approve the proposal given that the film industry in which he grew into a matinee idol was a private enterprise. When the

schools opened in the next academic year, in June 1989, there was a sea change in the availability of textbooks. The market was flooded with textbooks widely varying in quality and prices. Some were far superior in their quality of printing to the textbooks produced by government print, and their prices were higher than those of the government textbooks. At the other extreme were textbooks printed on cheap trade paper and sold at prices cheaper than government textbooks. Once the control *raj* was dismantled, shortage of textbooks vanished overnight, and the parents had enormous choice. But with every policy change some lose even when many more gain. The private printers lost a no-risk no-bother highly lucrative business. After Channa Reddy became Chief Minister again, the printers got busy to get the textbook policy rolled back. The new School Education Minister championed their cause, went to Channa Reddy and complained that I was a NTR loyalist, and committed many irregularities including the dismantling of the nationalisation of textbooks. In normal course, I would have been at the receiving end of Channa Reddy's proverbial fury. There was much that was common between Channa Reddy and NTR so much so that when NTR gave way to Channa Reddy in November 1989, I used to quip that *ancien régime* gave way to ancient regime. Both were extremely self-willed, mercurial, highly colourful personalities who could elicit fierce loyalties among some, and deep hatred among some others. While he was utterly inconsiderate, even vindictive, to those whom he disliked, Channa Reddy could be extremely generous to those whom he liked as well as those who were loyal to him. That explains why there was a steady band of politicians loyal to 'Dr. Saheb' in as well as out of office, and droves of loyalists descended on whatever *Raj Bhavan* he occupied. By happenstance, during his first stint as Chief Minister Channa Reddy came to have a liking for me, and during his second term as Chief Minister he continued to have the same feeling. No wonder that Channa Reddy impatiently dismissed the allegations levelled against me by the Minister saying that he knew K well and if me did something there should be sound reasons behind the action. So saying he sternly warned her not come to him with cock and bull stories, and literally chased her away from the room.

Adi Sankaracharya not only synthesized the different philosophies and ideals but purified them.

- Nani Palkhivala

Apart from Channa Reddy's generosity of spirit towards those whom he liked, as my luck would have it S.R.Ramamurthy had returned as Advisor to the Chief Minister. During Channa Reddy's first term as Chief Minister, he was Secretary to Chief Minister and later Chief Secretary and had been my guardian angel. His return from retirement is indicative of the fact that there was much that is common to Churchill's 'recidivist', 'Indian summer' second term premiership (1951-5) and Channa Reddy's second term. Both were tired old men who put up a grand show to prove to themselves and others that they continued to be the great masters they were during the previous stint. Partly due to his craving for the familiar, Churchill called to colours as many of his old associates as possible. So did Channa Reddy. Ramamurthy was recalled from retirement to help him out with administration, and so was B.P.R.Vithal, his former Finance Secretary, to draft a white paper to indict the NTR Government for mismanaging the finances of the State. I used to quip that if possible Channa Reddy would roll back to time, and post all officers including me to the positions they held when he was Chief Minister earlier. It was said of Churchill that on ceremonial occasions such as the annual address to the Conservative Conference or in interventions in the House of Commons such as the debate on the Queen's Speech, he went out of the way to show to the world that he was fit to carry on, and that what mattered was 'not much what he said on those occasions, although he maintained his habit of meticulous preparation, as the fact that he was able to keep on his feet sufficiently long to say it all'. Similarly, Channa Reddy was extremely touchy about any reference to his health, and an inadvertent reference to health by the Speaker during the debate on Governor's Address in January 1990 sparked a big row. Channa Reddy gave a marathon two-hour reply to the debate peppered with humour and reflecting his political insight and rich administrative experience. The reply was followed by a lively and prolonged session in which Channa Reddy offered answers to the questions of the Opposition. When the Speaker wanted to curtail the session by referring to Channa Reddy's state of health, Channa Reddy got wild, and the Speaker's remark as well as Channa Reddy's remarks were expunged from records.

It took about three months for Channa Reddy to make up his mind on HPS; till then, I could not elicit any information about the new Government's stand even though I kept on badgering Ramamurthy. A Calling Attention Motion in the Legislative Assembly on the state of affairs of the School clinched a decision. The discussion of the motion was scheduled on 30th March 1990, and the Education Minister was not sure of the stand she had to take and was hesitant to approach the imperious Channa Reddy for advice. I drafted a statement to be made by the Minister setting out the facts, got the Minister's approval, and showed it to Ramamurthy for good order's sake. While approving the draft statement, Ramamurthy informed me that the Chief Minister was having discussions with the leading lights of the HPS Society and would himself intervene in the discussion, and that I and the Minister need not worry. In the Legislative Assembly, Channa Reddy briskly walked in, settled in his seat, began to read the papers relating to the Calling Attention Motion. After a while, Channa Reddy beckoned to Samarasimha Reddy to come over. As they were chatting, Samarasimha Reddy suddenly got up and rushed up to me in the Official Gallery to collect a copy of the byelaws for handing over to the Chief Minister. After she finished reading the Statement, the School Education Minister rushed to him only to be told brusquely to get back to her seat. In his intervention, Channa Reddy blamed the management for messing up the School. 'Things are bad, and everyone is in the Court', he deplored, and told the House that everyone was happy when the Education Secretary was the Chairman of the Board of Governors, and that he would ensure that the Education Secretary was restored as the Chairman. In contrast to the mood of the House when the Bill for takeover was adopted, now everyone except one or two discordant voices strongly wanted the Government to recover the School.

Having worked with him earlier when he was Chief Minister and having had the opportunity to closely observe him in action once in a way, it did not take much analysis for me to understand why Channa Reddy took the stand he took. He was averse to revive a Bill of the NTR Government. At the same time, as a quintessential Hyderabadite who was in public affairs for about forty years and was a Minister of the Burgula

The Qazi tells untruths and eats filth, The Brahmin kills and takes a holy bath, The blind yogi knows not the true way, All three make for mankind's ruin.

- Guru Nanak

Ramakrishna Rao Government which converted the Jagirdars College into HPS, he was very much aware that the claims of the Society members were baseless. While in power, he was one with NTR in conducting himself as if he were the State and he took an affront to his representative as a personal affront to him. Thus, when he visited Prakasam district when I was District Collector and inaugurated the new District Court building he found that I was not seated on the dais. In his speech at the public meeting after inauguration, he went on berating the District Judge for not seating me on the dais of the meeting declaring that, 'By not seating him on the dais, you are insulting me'. From that experience, I knew that for Channa Reddy the displacement of the Education Secretary, his minion, as Chairman of the Board of Governors of HPS was nothing short of *lèse-majesté*.

Eventually, at its meeting held on 30th May 1990 the General Body of the Society restored the old byelaws of the society with slight changes in the composition of the Board of Governors; those bylaws were got drafted by me at the behest of the Chief Minister. The sequence of events that culminated in that *dénouement* was like an action film. On 24th April 1990, a day prior to the meeting of the office bearers of HPS Chief Minister's, a noted industrialist who was President of the Society called on Ramamurthy to make a case for the *status quo* to continue. He argued that Education Secretary would have little time to spare for the HPS, and even if he were to devote fifty percent of his time, he could not be as effective as 'we'. The Ramamurthy that I knew was genteel, soft spoken, and extremely considerate to one and all. I now witnessed a Ramamurthy I did not know, and he gave his visitor a bit of his mind. Ramamurthy bluntly asked the industrialist how as a chairman of a mighty industrial empire he could find time to manage a school. He himself had been Education Secretary; in spite of the onerous demands of the job he as well as many other education secretaries managed HPS well as Chairman. It was unfortunate that during the previous Government there was a rapid turnover of education secretaries, and some of them might not be up to the mark. I, however, was an educationist in my own right and would sort out the mess in which the School was enmeshed, and under my stewardship the school would rise to new heights of excellence.

He made it clear that restoring Education Secretary as Chairman of the Board of Governors was non-negotiable; he was, however, willing to concede the request to have the Vice Chancellor, JNTU as a member, and the President of the Society as Vice-Chairman of the Board. Thereupon the industrialist wanted Government support for starting a Girls' school; Ramamurthy told him that it was for me to decide, and that he should meet me. Later in the day, I and Ramamurthy went to Channa Reddy to brief him on the meeting that was scheduled the next day. Channa Reddy was in a tremendous hurry to go for a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party, and as soon as he saw me he burst out, 'can't we throw out the whole bunch?' He asked me what would happen to the Bill if in case he could impose an agreement on the HPS notables; I replied that the Bill would just lapse. Thereupon, he dismissed me and Ramamurthy, and as we came out, Ramamurthy prophesied that the next day's meeting would be a rough ride for the HPS members. So it was.

In the meeting the next day on 25th April 1990 Channa Reddy who was haughtiness personified and treated them the way a King Cobra would play with its prey, or to draw a historical analogy the way Hitler treated the Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden in their meeting before Anschluss, the forced merger of Austria with Germany in 1937. He asked Ramamurthy and me to be present in the meeting. Any attempt by the three HPS notables to counter him brought forth a volley of abuses and challenges. Right at the outset, he bluntly told the trio that violent changes were made to the byelaws, that the changes were mala fide, and that three families were monopolising the Society. The institution was going to dogs and it was better that it went to dogs under Government management rather than under buccaneers. The Treasurer of HPS Society responded by saying that in deference to his wishes, they were willing to have the Education Secretary as the Chairman of the Board. Far from being mollified, Channa Reddy retorted that 'You're not doing me a favour. The Education Secretary was the legitimate Chairman of the Board whom you pushed out'. He demanded to know what the Society was doing. When the Treasurer replied that it was managing the land, and fighting the court cases, Channa Reddy hissed

Gandhi made it impossible for the British to go on ruling India, but at the same time he made it possible for the British to abdicate without rancour and without dishonour.

- Arnold Toynbee

‘Whose property are you managing? Is it your *jagir*? You allow the land to be encroached, and then fight the cases. You create a problem and say you try to solve it. Except manipulating admissions, what else you do? An Assistant Secretary of mine can manage all the affairs of the society better than you all’. When the Treasurer remonstrated with Channa Reddy and dared him to order an inquiry into the affairs of the society, Channa Reddy thundered ‘Don’t talk to me like a Deshmukh. Don’t talk to me in that language. I’d throw you out’. Then like Hitler intimidating Schuschnigg by calling for General Keitel and asking him to move into Austria with his troops, Channa Reddy turned to me and said, ‘Let’s take up the challenge. We’d take over through legislation. Let me see who can resist?’ The HPS office bearers sought to try another tack by saying that the Society was trying to set up a girls’ school. Channa Reddy was not amused and asked how much money they could raise. Thereupon, one of the trio told him that the Society would be grateful if the Government granted a loan which they would promptly repay as they were doing with the Ramanthapur School. Channa Reddy refused to be mollified and shot back, ‘What else are you but *marwaris* (moneylenders and petty traders)? Are you paying back the Government loan from your pockets? You pay back the loan from the school fees collected from students. I have no time to waste. I want to institutionalise the management of the school. Ayyar might be transferred tomorrow but an Education Secretary would continue to head the Board. You want to personalise the management by vesting the control in two or three persons. I won’t have it’. Then like a good actor changing his persona in an instant, he turned into benevolence personified, and said, ‘I know how difficult it is for voluntary agencies to raise funds. The days when Madan Mohan Malaviya could raise funds and set up the Benares Hindu University are gone. We should all work together to revive HPS to its ancient glory. I have your interests in mind. Accept the byelaws I would get drafted’. So saying, he got up to indicate that the audience was over. As I and Ramamurthy were leaving, he beckoned us to stay back, and directed me to quickly draw up the byelaws in consultation with Ramamurthy and in secrecy. ‘Ask the Law Secretary not to prattle’, he thundered. Channa Reddy was a

shrewd judge of men and knew pretty well that the members of the Society had no option but to abide by his will and restoring the status quo ante would help the Government to recover HPS without any judicial challenge that was sure to be mounted. No one who knew Channa Reddy could have even an iota of doubt that if crossed he was an implacable foe. The Society members could not garner political support from any quarter, least of all from NTR whose Party was the main opposition in the State and a constituent of the National Front Government at the Centre. Further, they were enmeshed in a feud with the Parent-Teachers Association and Principal Bose, enmeshed in court cases, and their claim to own the School and its lands was dubious. All in all, they had only enemies and no friends. Better to go by the wishes of Channa Reddy and secure a better representation in the Board of Governors with the expectation that as chairmen education secretaries would have too little time to keep a tight leash on the institution, and they could continue to have a major say in the affairs of the Board and the schools. Anticipating such a possibility, I secured the approval of the Chief Minister to position an official of the Education Department on the HPS campus as Secretary of the Society cum Administrative Officer so that he could keep a close tab on what was happening.

A few days after the restoration of the original byelaws I drove in glory to the stately building that housed the Begumpet School to preside over the first meeting of the reconstituted Board. I soon found that the price of *La Gloire* was heavy; as it was, I was swamped by a seemingly unending stream of visitors and requests for favours, many of which I was not in a position to accommodate. Requests for admission to HPS transformed the torrential stream into a deluge; the season for admissions to HPS turned out to be a season for making enemies. A Minister wanted three admissions, no less, for boys who did not even apply; one day, a celebrated film personality turned up in my room, followed by my star-struck attendant and staff, to plead a seat for his grandson. A legislator from the Old City briskly walked in with a swagger, and said he was coming straight from the Chief Minister, and peremptorily demanded a dozen seats to be kept at his disposal. I was inundated by calls from my service colleagues; I found it more difficult to say a ‘No’

Without fraternity, Ambedkar reminded his fellow Indians,
‘equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.’

- Sunil Khilnani

to colleagues than to outsiders. Channa Reddy was absolutely right when he once told me and a group of officials 'Look, you fellows. Don't talk as if you are angels and we politicians are unscrupulous. When I ask you to do something, you wilt and call it political interference, but when your colleague asks you to do something you would call it "putting in a word" and favour him'. In his introspective moments, I was exasperated at having to spend much time on a school of the rich and famous, time better spent on more important matters that benefit the parents and students at large. I even felt that the hijackers might actually have done the Education Secretary and education in the State a service by taking over control of the HPS Schools. What if, I mused, if Channa Reddy put the HPS schools to auction for sale to the highest bidder after taking over most of the land and leaving HPS with the bare minimum land necessary?

(Concluded)

* * *

A BRIEF SOJOURN

Prof. R.V.R. Chandrasekhara Rao

Former Vice Chancellor,
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad &
Ex-Head of the Dept. of Politics & Public
Administration, Andhra University.

An angel camped here for a brief sojourn
Came and saw in all innocence things rather incoherent
Native optimism so robust she stayed for a little while
But left behind a grieving partner and some near and dear

Experiences she had for sure both sweet and sour
Absorbed she did into her copious patience
Husband, off springs and in-laws of varying shades
she met
To all she gave her best seeking rewards none
Yet, she received many not always the best

Tired of this place to which she gave so much
Retired to her mother's bosom like Sita of lore
An Idea divine merging back into here space of birth
The blessed dame waves her hands at us from afar

Far far away from the agonies of mortal calls
From the high horizon she beckons her blessings
Left are we here only to yearn for her we cannot recall

Even sans our asking she sends her greetings the
unfading rose with no thorns

An uncommon one who tired to be common only to
fail

The frail one in limbs and joints but a spirit undaunted
It hurts her to hurt others and
others' hurt never pierced beyond a forgiving skin

Gods tested her infinite patience by agents quite close
Her very goodness was called unsmart

By those smarting under her forgiving prose

For she simply was illiterate in the vocabulary of
meanness and malice

* * *

THE SECOND WAVE OF COVID THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS HAS SELF-INTEREST SUPERSEDED PEOPLE'S WELFARE?

Dr. E.A.S. Sarma IAS (Retd.)

Former Secretary to Government of India
Founder-Convener Forum for Better Visakha

While triumphantly launching the roll out of
India-made vaccines on January 16, 2019, with a view
to drive home his point of helping others selflessly,
the Prime Minister quoted the following words of
Gurajada Apparao, the eminent Telugu writer.

*"Sontha labham kontha manuko, porugu
vadiki thodu padavoy. Desamante matti kadoyi,
desamante manushuloy"*

The above verse, which was written more than
a century ago, translates into English as follows.

*"Forego your self- interest to some extent and
help neighbours. Nation does not mean just mud
and soil, but people"*

To what extent have our political leaders set
aside their own self-interest to promote the welfare
of the people, especially at a time when the country is
facing a grave Covid crisis?

Saving lives and livelihoods:

The latest Economic Survey for 2020-21
(ES2021) presented to the Parliament on January,
29, 2021, a few days after the vaccine roll out, has

Yoga is the process that can redeem us from our serfdom to our false self and false values;
the Yoga alone can unravel to us the splendour that is there both within and without us.

- Manoj Das

a separate chapter, “Saving Lives and Livelihoods Amidst a Once-in-a-Century Crisis”. It starts with a profound quote from *Shanti Parva* of *Mahabharat* which said, “*saving a life that is in jeopardy is the origin of dharma*”. Are not the people’s lives in jeopardy today? Has the Centre made a sincere attempt to fulfil the *dharma* described above, especially at a time when the second wave of Covid is shaking the conscience of the nation? Could not the government have anticipated the second wave of Covid and mitigated its impact?

These are the questions that need to be discussed and debated widely in order to understand the shortcomings in planning the Covid campaign and the ways to correct our future responses. One cannot rule out more than two waves of Covid in the coming months and it is imperative that the country remains well prepared to face them.

Could the government have anticipated the second wave?

The way the Spanish Flu progressed across the world during 1918-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/three-waves.htm>) and the more recent experience with the Covid waves that swept across USA and Europe one after the other should have alerted India of the possibility of a second wave affecting the population, possibly with greater fury and ferocity. The Indian virologists, who can compete with the best in the world, were fully aware of this possibility. Had the government listened to their advice, it would have anticipated the second wave well in advance, planned for it prudently and preempted many deaths. The rulers in Delhi thought that they had “conquered” the virus as soon as the second wave started abating and indulged in self-congratulation, which led to undue complacency. As a result, they lowered their guard prematurely, to let the country down and allow many lives to be lost.

The first wave of Covid was sufficiently virulent to put to test every healthcare facility in the country, ranging from ambulances, hospital beds, services of medical personnel, ICU facilities, oxygen supplies, Covid test kits and so on. The government ought to have woken up to this reality and taken advantage of the relief available after the abatement of the first

wave to increase its spending on healthcare during the second half of 2020, enlarged the hospital facilities on a war footing and upgraded them for meeting any eventuality. Sadly, the government failed to respond.

To fail to respond to a crisis is unfortunate. But, deliberately adding fuel to fire in a crisis is unpardonable. That is what exactly those in authority at the Centre and in the States did during the last few months. Their misdeeds exposed the people to unimaginable misery.

Man-made Covid super-spreaders:

Senior political leaders, including the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, as well as several Chief Ministers and others who matter, organised massive election rallies one after the other in W.Bengal and the other poll bound States, deliberately created opportunities for the people to gather in large numbers and violate the Covid norms, knowing well that the spread of Covid would invariably lead to many deaths. The Uttarakhand Chief Minister joined this bandwagon and consciously permitted the Kumbh Mela to take place, where lakhs and lakhs of devotees, crowding the river bank, took daily dips in River Ganga for one long month, violating every conceivable Covid norm. Many who attended the Kumbh Mela have got infected with Covid and they travelled to the other States, spreading the infection far and wide. As if this was not enough, the Centre also allowed BCCI to conduct the IPL cricket matches which not only became hubs of Covid transmission but which forced the local authorities to divert ambulances, security personnel etc. from essential Covid services.

Meanwhile, despite the Covid fury during 2020, the Centre steamrolled three farm bills through the legislature without any worthwhile debate, which evoked widespread protests from the farming community all over the country. Having made it a fait accompli for the farmers, the Centre chose to adopt an adamant stance, forcing large groups of helpless farmers to gather in protest on the outskirts of Delhi, exposing them badly to the virus.

The common thread running through this series of events is not any anxiety on the part of the political leadership to promote people’s welfare but an urge to further their own self-interest. The country is paying heavily for the sins committed by the politicians.

Curzon will be remembered because he restored all that was beautiful in India.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

Vaccine Maitri vis-a-vis people's welfare :

When the first wave of Covid started abating, vaccine manufacturers all over the world, including those in India, had already been making efforts to develop vaccines to combat the virus. We knew in advance that we should vaccinate more than a billion people in our country, in the quickest possible time. The investments made by the previous governments in science and technology have stood us in good stead, enabling us to build a sizeable indigenous capacity for vaccine production. Over the last several decades, India has been exporting vaccines to the rest of the world for several critical diseases. In the wake of the Covid crisis, one would have expected the government to assess quickly the available vaccine production capacity in the country, ramp it up to maximise production of Covid vaccines, so as to restrict dependence on imports to the minimum necessary. Overtaken by an undue sense of complacency, the government, apparently without undertaking any such exercise, embarked on an ambitious "Vaccine Maitri" scheme, exported 63 million doses of precious India-made Covid vaccines to ninety five countries (<https://mea.gov.in/vaccine-supply.htm>), ignoring the emerging domestic demand. As a result, the country has plunged into a serious vaccine crisis today, which has led to deferring vaccination for millions of 18+ youth till June or even beyond and forcing the senior citizens and those with comorbidity to stand in endlessly long queues for the second dose of the vaccine, which they ought to get as a matter of right.

Brazil has no vaccine production of its own but it has prudently planned its imports, including 4 million doses from India and has been able to vaccinate more than 13% of its population already, whereas India which has a significant domestic capacity could so far vaccinate only 9-10% of its population (<https://ourworldindata.org/>). Charity should have begun at home! Timely vaccination in India could have kept its mortality rates low.

Instead of stocking for domestic use, essential items like ventilators, oxygen, oxygen therapy units etc., a complacent government allowed those items to be exported last year. Today, we are facing shortages in each of those items, as a result of which precious lives are being lost.

Vaccine development effort:

As the Covid virus gets transmitted, like any

other virus, it mutates into several variants on a continuing basis. Some mutants are more virulent than the others. The efficacies of different vaccines differ from mutant to mutant. To enhance the effectiveness of the vaccines in combating the virus, the new mutants need to be investigated through "genome sequencing" and its characteristics factored into vaccine making so that the vaccines at any point of time continue to be effective for the new mutants. There are several outstanding scientific laboratories in India which are engaged in this work. They need financial support from the government. Unfortunately, caught in a self-benumbing sense of complacency, the government has failed in funding those laboratories adequately, resulting in a slow-down in genome sequencing studies. Had the government focussed attention on this crucial area of vaccine development, it would have helped the scientists to carry on their work with redoubled vigour to allow updating of the vaccines on a continuing basis. Vaccine efficacy has a significant effect on both the rate of transmission of the virus and the mortality rates.

Healthcare infrastructure:

As pointed out earlier, the virulent impact of the Covid crisis could have been minimised, had the governments at the Centre and in the States gone full steam to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure across the country. A cursory look at the report of the Task Force on Comprehensive Primary Healthcare Rollout (2015) of the Health Ministry and the Urban Health Mission data shows that the average shortfalls in per capita rural and urban health infrastructure facilities in the country are 32% and 44% respectively. The National Health Policy of 2017 (NHP2017) therefore proposed that public expenditure on healthcare should be enhanced from the present level of 1% of GDP to 2.5-3% of GDP so that the gaps in the infrastructure could be fully covered. Healthcare infrastructure includes a network of rural and urban primary health centres, the district hospitals, the super-speciality institutions, testing facilities, vaccine development and so on. Had the Centre implemented the NHP2017 recommendation over a timeframe of three to four years in a purposeful manner, by now, we would have been better prepared for meeting the Covid crisis. Unfortunately, the budgetary allocations for the health sector, as far as the Centre is concerned, stagnated at woefully low levels, resulting in gaps in health infrastructure widening further. Immediately

We need to realize that missions are always bigger organizations, just as organizations are always bigger than the individuals who run them. That will make all the difference.

- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

after the abatement of the first wave of Covid, one would have expected the Centre to increase its own spending on healthcare sharply and enable the States to do likewise. The Centre's budgetary allocations for the Health Ministry during 2020-21 and 2021-22 belie this. It looked as though the Centre remained totally insensitive to the urgency of the Covid crisis and was more engrossed in congratulating itself prematurely for taming the virus, which it never did. No wonder that, when the second wave hit India, hospitals were overflowing with patients, many dying either waiting in ambulances, or gasping for breath in oxygen-starved hospitals, or unable to have access to ventilators and other ICU facilities. The numbers of the dead can be gauged, not by the official figures which are misleading, but by the long queues of the kith and kin waiting to dispose of the bodies of their relatives and the mass cremations that were forced on them by the lack of adequate space for cremation and even shortage of wood to burn the bodies. The country has not witnessed such a traumatic, widespread tragedy anytime within living memory. Clearly, it is a man-made tragedy of an unimaginable proportion.

Is the Centre facing a financial constraint?

The government could argue that it is severely constrained by the economic downturn that has starved it of its resources, to be able to increase public expenditure on healthcare infrastructure. This is not true, as the same government could readily find Rs 8,400 Crores for buying two VVIP luxury, high security aircraft for ferrying VVIPs from place to place in India and abroad. Had the government spent that amount on the health sector, it could have created three super-speciality institutions like the All India Institute of Medical Services (AIMS).

More recently, at the height of the second wave of Covid, when the States were struggling to make both ends meet, the Union Cabinet, which ought to be busy tackling the day-to-day problems posed by Covid, had ample time to meet, discuss and announce the historic decision to start construction of the Central Vista Project (CVP) which will cost the nation Rs 13,500 Crores! CVP is intended to provide, among the others, high security housing for the Vice president and the Prime Minister, though their existing residences are spacious and have high security already. Ironically, this decision was taken at a time when the Covid fires were burning furiously in overcrowded crematoriums in almost every city

and town across the country. The Union Cabinet also declared the project to be an "essential" one, whatever it implies, to be completed in post haste by 2022 or so. For all we know, it is possible that, as a nation, we would have completed the construction of the Central Vista project in all its architectural glory well before we tame the fury of Covid and absorb its after-effects. One is not sure whether the government will be able to safeguard the health of thousands of the workforce to be engaged in construction of this project and whether the project cost itself will not shoot up to twice or even thrice its present estimate. Had the resources appropriated for these two projects been utilised more purposefully for building up the healthcare infrastructure including strengthening the hands of our scientists and the medical personnel, India would have been in a much better position to face Covid-like crises in a more stoic and dignified manner. So many lives would not have been lost.

To what extent the Centre has fulfilled its dharma?

Coming back to the Mahabharat quote, "saving a life that is in jeopardy is the origin of dharma", can we say with a clear conscience that those who rule this nation in the name of democracy have truly fulfilled their dharma? Is it not time for the people of this country to discuss, debate and ponder over this question again and again?

Do we ever learn lessons from the present crisis to be able to prepare ourselves to deal with a third wave of Covid or any other pandemic, equally devastating?

Can we ever elect representatives who stand committed to the dharma of saving the lives of the people and ensuring their well-being?

Had Gurajada, whom the Prime Minister had quoted when he launched the vaccine rollout on January, 2021, lived today to witness the ways of the contemporary politicians, he would have re-written the second line of his verse as follows.

"Desamante votlu kadoyi, desamante manushuloy"

which translates into English as

"Nation does not mean just votes (and winning elections), but people (and their welfare)"

* * *

China's two-ocean strategy, should it ever be realized, will not occur in a vacuum, but will be constrained by the navies of other nations.

- Robert D. Kaplan

PROF. MANOJ DAS
‘AN IMMORTAL IN LITERATURE’
AND A SEER AMONG SCHOLARS

It was in 2010 at Sri Aurobindo Ashram that I had the privilege of meeting Manoj Das ji, my favourite writer whose classic *My Little India* I greatly admired. When I sought his kind permission to use an essay from it in the bimonthly Bulletin of Centre for Policy Studies he replied with a soft smile “Why one? You can use all of them if you want” while his noble wife gave us tea in their abode. Thanks to Manoj Das ji all the beautifully written essays were published in the Bulletin between 1910 to 1918. Despite personal work and age related health issues he seldom said no to my request for an article from him. In November 2019 he sent me a copy of his book *Mystics and Miracles and other Essays by Manoj Das*, compiled and edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya with his inscription ‘For dear Prof. A. Prasanna Kumar with warm regards Manoj Das 25-11-2019.’ The renowned bi-lingual author received honours and awards including the Sahitya Academy’s Fellowship reserved for ‘immortals in literature.’ Extraordinary learning allied to rare humility made him a venerable seer among scholars and a saintly visionary. He wrote that “intellect, if tempered by humility can contribute significantly to our aspiration for Truth. In fact, the most noteworthy discoveries of modern science instruct us to be humble.” CPS is deeply indebted to Prof. Manoj Das for his constant support and encouragement and pays its homage to the venerable seer among scholars. Sincere thanks to Ms Ahana Lakshmi, daughter of Dr. Mrs Prema Nandakumar for writing a moving tribute to Manojda as he was affectionately called.

- A. Prasanna Kumar

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BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJE:
THE RISHI AS SRI AUROBINDO
SAW HIM

Courtesy: Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective; Edited by Bhabatosh Chatterjee; Sahitya Akademi

Prof. Manoj Das (Late)

“There are many who, lamenting the bygone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Risis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilization, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Risi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Risis of the later age we have at last realized that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra Vande Mataram.”

This is how Sri Aurobindo paid his tributes to Bankimchandra in an article in the Vande Mataram in 1907. The statement was followed by a distinction he made between the Risi and the saint. The Risi may not be marked by any conventional holiness, but he may activate a people with a certain idealism and may rejuvenate a generation that had fallen into a stupor.

Indeed, one of the characteristic traditions that distinguished India of yore from the rest of the civilized world was this institution of the Risi. The Risis were a lot with surprisingly varied achievements to their credit. As the masters presiding over the educational institutions, they could impart lessons on subjects ranging from the Vedas to military art. They would fight for the cause of the oppressed and advise the kings on matters mundane, but the very next moment, if they so please, turn their back on all such exigencies in a perfect spirit of detachment.

The Risi, in other words, represents a consciousness that is at once plastic and powerful. He may or may not be a spiritual guru, initiating disciples

More people die of the fear of disease than of disease itself.

- Mahatma Gandhi

to mystic disciplines, but events that help humanity in its forward march may be inspired by his vision, his word or his will. It matters little for the Risis if their role in this regard goes unrecognized.

The Risis, unlike the general run of hermits and ascetics, did not reject the world as false or dismiss it as illusion. They saw the Supreme Creative Power in one of its manifold modes at work at the core of the manifested material universe and the earth inhabited by us was nothing if not one of its forms. In one of Sri Aurobindo's longer poems entitled *The Risi*, written in 1899, a Risi says in his answer to a question put by King Manu:

...I saw
How earth was made
Out of His being ; I perceived the Law,
The Truth, the Vast,
From which we came and which we are; I heard
The ages past
Whisper their history, and I know the Word
That forth was cast
Into the unformed potency of things
To build the suns.

There is an evolutionary *nisus* at work on earth. Its *modus operandi* cannot always be seen or understood by man, it being beyond the scope of the human mind. The force can, however, choose its own instruments, different ones in different fields, for executing its aims in several directions, be the instrument conscious of his extraordinary role or not.

Bankimchandra, obviously, was such an instrument and Sri Aurobindo had recognized the extraordinary in him even earlier. When the great writer died in 1894, Sri Aurobindo, then in Baroda (now Vadodara), wrote a series of seven articles in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay (now Mumbai) stressing the unique role played by the departed in the nation's life. Sri Aurobindo was then 21 and he had been in India only for a year, after spending long years in Literature and Education since his childhood. With incredible rapidity he mastered the Bengali language and literature along with Sanskrit and a few other Indian languages. Bengal did not lack critics, scholars and commentators. But it was for Sri Aurobindo—the thrill of exploring Bankimchandra's world fresh in his mind - to make this original evaluation of the writer :

“Bankim and Madhusudan have given the world three noble things. They have given it Bengali literature, a literature whose princelier creations can bear comparison with the proudest classics of modern Europe. They have given the Bengali language. The dialect of Bengal is no longer a dialect, but has become the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible, which cannot die except with the death of the Bengali nation and not even then. And they have given it the Bengali nation; a people spirited, bold, ingenious and imaginative, high among the most intellectual races of the world, and if it can but get perseverance and physical elasticity, one day to be high among the strongest. This is surely a proud record. Of them it may be said in the largest sense that they, being dead* yet live. And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place-hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature and a nation.”

Since the article was occasioned by Bankimchandra's passing away, it was not meant to be critical. It was designed, it seems, to reveal to the reader the profound insight Bankimchandra possessed for envisioning the soul of India.

With such a purpose in view it would be most relevant to examine Bankimchandra's understanding of the Indian womanhood. Sri Aurobindo found that he had been most faithful to the spirit of Indian woman, stressing her deep heart of emotion, her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness'. Sri Aurobindo wished the social reformers to learn something from Bankimchandra. 'Their zeal at present is too little ruled by discretion. They are like bad tailors very clever at spoiling the rich stuff given over to their shaping but quite unable to fit the necessities of the future. They have passed woman through an English crucible and in place of the old type, which, with all its fatal defects, had in it some supreme possibilities, they have turned out a soulless and superficial being fit only for flirtation, match-making and playing on

What I did not understand, at least not clearly enough, is that India's political DNA is fundamentally socialist and statist.

- Ruchir Sharma

the piano. They seem to have a passion for reforming every good thing out of existence. It is about time this miserable bungling should stop. Surely it would be possible, without spoiling that divine nobleness of soul, to give it a wider culture and mightier channels! So we should have a race of women intellectually as well as emotionally noble, fit to be the mothers not of chattering and moneymakers, but of high thinkers and heroic doers.'

Sri Aurobindo found a striking resemblance between Bankimchandra and Henry Fielding. Though he did not state it, we can, from his observation on Bankimchandra's great role in moulding the Bengali prose, surmise that the resemblance concerns Fielding's handling of the language. However, Sri Aurobindo was quick to show the difference between the two, 'philosophical culture and deep feeling for the poetry of life and an unfailing sense of beauty' being the distinguishing marks of Bankimchandra's works. Sri Aurobindo found the tribute to Bankimchandra then in popular currency among the educated, that he was the Walter Scott of Bengal, quite unflattering. Scott's characters may be 'splendid or striking or bold creations, but they live from outside and not from within. Scott could paint outlines, but he could not fill them in. Here Bankim excels; speech and action with him are so closely interpenetrated and suffused with a deeper existence that his characters give us the sense of being real men and women.'

If true poetry has a mantric power, a prose charged with poetic undertones has a subtle charm and Bankimchandra exercised such a charm in its full efficacy. Sri Aurobindo found that 'to the wonderful passion and poetry of his finest creations, there are in English fiction, outside the Brontes and the supreme genius, George Meredith, no parallel instances.'

This estimate of Bankimchandra, made at an early phase of Sri Aurobindo's exposure to Indian literature, does not seem to have changed, even when he reviewed his place in historical perspective. Writing in the *Arya* in 1918, he said in his essay *The Renaissance in India* :

"The work of Bankimchandra is now of the past, because it has entered already into the new mind of Bengal which it did more than any other literary influence to form; the work of Rabindranath still largely holds the present, but it has opened ways for

the future which promise to go beyond it. Both show an increasing return to the Indian spirit in fresh forms; both are voices of the dawn, seek more than they find, suggest and are calling for more than they actually evoke."

The creative consciousness of a Risi-writer may find varied expressions, but sometimes a single piece of work projects the essence of his power. Such a piece, in Bankimchandra's case, was *Vande Mataram*. Said Sri Aurobindo in 1907, 'It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Vande Mataram*. The Mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself.' Bankimchandra had received even a poetic farewell from Sri Aurobindo at his death :

How hast thou lost, O month of honey and flowers,

The voice that was thy soul ! Creative showers,
The cuckoo's daylong cry and moan of bees,
Zephyrs and streams and softly-blossoming trees

And murmuring laughter and heart-easing tears
And tender thoughts and great and the compeers
Of lily and jasmine and melodious birds,
All these thy children into lovely words
He changed at will and made soul-moving books

* * *

MANAGING THE PANDEMIC

Dr. P.V. Sudhakar

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COVID-19 pandemic has thrown multiple challenges to the humanity. The norms of life have changed irrespective of status of individuals. The elite and the underprivileged, the scholars and the illiterates, the young and the old are affected equally. The pandemic has taught many lessons to the public particularly the need to follow a disciplined life, clean habits and adapt the new norms with humility.

The pandemic has taught the medical fraternity

The man with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds.

- Mark Twain

the reason for their existence in this world. On the positive side, it has given us an opportunity to serve better. It threw a challenge on the medical professionals and administrators to be innovative and resilient. This unprecedented catastrophe has given us immense satisfaction on many fronts. A gentleman from a high risk area of New Delhi to have a last look of his mother in the ICU was kept under quarantine on arrival was facilitated by providing complete personal protective equipment fulfilling the last wish of the elderly lady on humanitarian grounds. The gratitude expressed by the loving son is something that has driven us forwards in the pursuit of service. Taking care of the migrant labor, the stranded fishermen from Gujarat and hundreds of Brahama Kumaris arriving from Mt.Abu gave enormous satisfaction in the beginning of the pandemic. The real responsibility was felt in the thick of the pandemic by deploying more than 1000 doctors and leading them from the front. The sleepless nights spent for arranging beds for the needy has been emotionally taxing. It was quite an elation when the recovered patients met their families. Unfavorable outcomes and rising death toll was a test of our psychological endurance.

Though the teaching medical students and post graduates has taken a back seat during the pandemic, public education through mass media in creating awareness particularly on COVID appropriate behavior, latest developments in the treatment protocols, controversies relating to vaccination has made the medical teacher in us alive.

Formulating strategies along with the district administration as per the need of the hour and keeping the 'City of Destiny' in the forefront in the effective management of pandemic has been quite rewarding. As a whole managing with COVID-19 it has been very satisfying in terms of redressing the concerns of the public and containing the disease.

* * *

COVID PANDEMIC

Dr. A. Aswini Kumar

Retd Professor of Medicine
Ashram Medical College Eluru.

COVID-19 is a VIRUS disease that has originated in WUHAN, CHINA in December 2019 and within an year spread all over the world causing

innumerable deaths and more than that a lot of misery to one and all.

In India, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in February 2020 and since then it spread very fast and virulently causing many deaths and severe hardship to countless number of people. It went up to September-October and afterwards the number of cases slowly came down along with mortality. There was a lull up to February and then the second wave started and its spread has been much more, resulting in rising number of patients with breathing difficulties and deaths.

When the first wave came, we were unprepared and did not know much about the disease symptoms and the complications that followed as we were and not ready for doing diagnostics on a large scale and providing the necessary treatment in tackling the complications. What followed was chaos and confusion. Yet slowly and steadily we learnt from the suggestions of experts published in journals and with our own experience we stabilised the protocols of treatment, successfully controlling the disease and its further spread at that point of time.

What followed was a lull, complacency and a feeling that all was over and people started living normally. Due to our negligence of the basics like wearing a mask, social distancing and hand – washing and indifference to the repeated warnings of scientists of the likelihood of a second wave people assembled in large numbers at festivals and functions.

Differences between the first and second waves:

1st wave: Symptoms of fever, body pains, sore throat and in some cases breathlessness. Incubation was 3 to 5 days. Spread mostly by contact, droplet infection. Critical period 7 to 14 days during which time lung involvement (pneumonia) complication like Hypoxia, cytokine storm - either patient used to die or recover within another 7 or 10 days. Entry of virus is through nose or throat.

2nd wave: Short incubation period about 2-3 days asymptomatic, direct spread to lungs, breathlessness, Hypoxia and death. Many cases are asymptomatic, though extreme weakness, diarrhoea occurred in some cases.

India possesses the civilizational attributes which could contribute to the success of
a new international order.

- Shyam Saran

Tests for diagnosis:

Rapid antigen test, RTPCR and when necessary HRCT to know the disease spread.

In the 1st wave Rapid antigen test used to be done for all and if positive treated as COVID and if negative RTPCR used to be done. If both were negative treated as non-COVID.

In the 2nd wave even if both are negative, if the patient is ill, treat it as COVID. Because of rapid spread determination in oxygen levels (Hypoxemia) and death. Other tests like CRP, LDH, Serum Ferritin, D-Dimer, IL-6 are also needed to assess the various complication and to start treatment.

Mistaken impressions: These tests are costly and people blame doctors for commercialisation of treatment. Please remember these tests are needed for example D-Dimer is needed whether clots are occurring. IL-6 to see the impending cytokine storm, serum ferritin to know haemolysis (breakdown of RBC).

HRCT is needed in some cases to know the whether the lungs are involved or not.

What are the causes of 2nd wave:

First and foremost is the indiscipline and irresponsible behaviour of all.

As Nani Pakhivala India's legal luminary has said "Indiscipline is bad and tolerance of indiscipline is worse".

Secondly once the 1st wave was controlled people became complacent and became totally careless in doing the basics of wearing mask, social distancing and hand washing. Added to these were functions, celebrations, meetings etc.

Thirdly mutation of the virus played a role in the fast spread.

We paid a penalty for our lapses by way of deaths, shortage of hospital beds, medicines and even oxygen.

Improper planning & preparation:

Second wave was predicted by all scientists. But there was poor preparation and planning. Every one took it casually and underestimated the second

wave. People took it easy and the result is total confusion and each blaming the other. Shortage of every thing from hospital beds to medicines and man power. India could not prevent rise in the number of cases and large number of deaths across the country.

Silver lining: A great achievement by our scientists and laboratories in bringing out vaccine in a short period of less than an year. And today and for years to come vaccine will be the saviour of the Humanity.

Unfortunate, unwarranted fears about vaccine:

People eagerly waited for the vaccine but when it is available, they they are hesitating to take it.

Excuses offered:

- 1) In old age is it necessary? – certainly old people need vaccination more than the others.
- 2) Patient with diabetes, blood pressure, heart diseases is vaccine going to complicate? – no.
- 3) Anyway COVID is over, why now vaccination, mistake done by many – we are paying penalty.
- 4) Side effects are more, complications occurring. This is not correct and probably a stray case here and there reported in media caused the fear.
- 5) Preference for one vaccine or other. All vaccines are good and no need for preference.

Unfounded fear - COVID occurs after vaccination - It is not true because Covid infection never occurs because of vaccination.

What should be done to prevent the spread:

- 1) First and foremost everyone should take the vaccination as stipulated.
- 2) Wearing a double mask.
- 3) Washing hands with soap and water or use sanitizers.
- 4) Social distancing to be maintained be it the market places, wine shops and everywhere.

Stay home and stay safe.

Remember victory is ours.

* * *

Gandhi was a thinker as well as a man of action. He was the Marx as well as the Lenin of the Indian Revolution.

- B.R. Nanda

WHY WE FAIL

Dr. Uday Balakrishnan

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Our young neighbour died a few days back of COVID. After a month on oxygen and ventilators his condition deteriorated. His oxygen levels dropped and he passed away as he was being taken for a CT Scan. He was just starting to climb up in life and now the family is back in the pits - the wife with no job, two young kids, one just under 5, and not much resources to fall back on.

This death by Covid is being repeated across the country in ever increasing numbers. Those of us who have managed to stay uninfected and are fortunate to live our lives in relative safety, have no idea how terrible the situation is around us. The media, especially television conveys some of the horror ravaging our country but not the fullness of its scope, but even what it captures is horrible, and tragic. Much of it was preventable and there is little doubt that the BJP led NDA government is primarily to blame. The fact that health is a state subject, some criticism should be directed at state governments too.

The NDA had taken its eye off the ball. Instead of being focussed on seeing the pandemic through all its cycles (the second wave which has proved deadly for India was widely predicted before it happened) and pursued elections and Kumbh Mela with shameless vigour. It has been long enough in power to have understood how to administer a country but some of its members, like a Bangalore MP, are more intent on humiliating Muslims and making the community feel isolated and second class citizens than in governing.

But we need to look beyond Modi to see why our administrative systems failed so dramatically that overnight we went from exporting vaccines to desperately sourcing more of it from around the world. Many of my colleagues in the bureaucracy, now safely retired, speak, almost with one voice, that those still in service cannot be held responsible as all of them could act only when the political leadership

orders them to, hinting that these days nothing in the Government of India moves without the Prime Minister's direct orders.

Perhaps there is a great deal of truth in this argument. But the basic responsibility for informing the political leadership that a big crisis is on its way and outline the steps to be taken to mitigate its impact lies with bureaucracy, something which even the US in the chaotic final year of the Trump presidency did.

It invested US \$ 10 billion to develop vaccines quickly and its pharmaceutical companies delivered as did Astra Zeneca with the UK government contributing 33 million pounds (97 %) for the development of the Covishield vaccine. The Government of India by contrast contributed nothing for the development of any vaccine including COVAXIN. India made matters worse by blithely believing that Covid had run its course and there was no need to place orders on vaccine manufacturers for vaccines in large enough quantities to vaccinate all Indians.

Now we are spending far more than the 10 billion the US spent on developing vaccines under its programme Warp Speed to tackle the pandemic's second coming. Covid is only the most tragic manifestation of our stupid decision making processes that always leaves us flatfooted.

In the past this has resulted in emergency purchases of projectiles for the Bofors gun only when the Kargil war was well underway. Rumour has it that they were almost directly flown to the battlefield. No one till today has asked why this was necessary and "could we not have kept adequate stocks of the same?" Likewise we started procuring cold- weather gear, drones and other items required to enable us to fight in the Himalayas which have always been there and the fact that we have for long been confronting the Chinese in those inhospitable parts.

Having worked in the government of India for over 35 years I can fully agree with Lord Strabolgi's spot-on observation in the House of Lords that nothing contributed more to the occurrence of the Bengal Famine than "the greatest, the most hidebound, indeed ironbound bureaucracy in the world, that of the Government of India, suffering that fatal disease

With 500 motivated men it will take me 50 years to transform India;
with 50 women it may take me only a year

. Swami Vivekananda

of bureaucracy, procrastination. They consider too long, they set up too many Committees, they talk too long about what they are going to do, and in the meanwhile this terrible famine was galloping towards them.”

* * *

A LIFE OF LIGHT

Dr. Ms. Ahana Lakshmi

“For three long days and nights our lonely little valley was tossed by a violent gale that seemed to threaten its very existence. The frequent claps of thunder that echoed in the surrounding hills, seemed to be playing hide and seek; sometimes they made such a terrible noise that I plugged my ears and shut my eyes and imagined myself trapped in a desolate and dreary wasteland, its last blade of grass licked away by thunderbolts. At relatively sober times, the rumbling of the thunder was like the anxious cries of a brood of lion cubs lost in the hills, yearning for its mother.” (A Tiger at Twilight)

“What is this?” Jay who had practically stopped talking since witnessing the talkie, asked in a whisper. But Ramu and Shekar appeared too stupefied to respond. The very next moment, they were lashed by a terrific wind, cold and sharp. Hardly had they come closer, holding on to one another with Jay in the middle, when they were engulfed by gushing water. Its level rose higher and higher, quite rapidly, as they plodded through it in the direction of their village, Vikrampur, as fast as they could.’ (The Fourth Friend)

This is life in Odisha, even today. The first is how “A Tiger at Twilight” opens, setting the stage for a complex trail of events that follow. The second is from “The Fourth Friend” which tells us how three small boys have an unexpected delightful adventure when caught in a cyclone and flash floods. Both are by noted writer Manoj Das who effortlessly straddled the world of adults and the world of children. Nothing perhaps has changed as far as rain, cyclones and floods that form part and parcel of life in Odisha. As do forests, tigers and crocodiles. It is thus not surprising that they form the backdrop of so many stories written by Manoj Das.

My grandfather, Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, oft referred to him as “The finest short-story writer I

have known”. I had the opportunity of meeting Manoj Das only a few times – most recently in 2018 during Auroville’s Golden Jubilee and in 2008 when he came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi to participate in the centenary celebrations of my grandfather and was kind enough to autograph two of his books for my daughter Mythili. A gentle face breaking into an easy smile is how I will always remember Manoj-da. A teacher, thinker, editor, writer who wrote with equal comfort in the two disparate languages of Odia and English, he was an adept story-teller and a staunch devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. His demise on April 27, 2021, has left a void that cannot be easily filled. The biggest consolation we have is the huge body of work that he has left behind for us to read and enjoy, and reflect on the multitudes contained within his writings.

Manoj Das was born on 27 February, 1934 in Sankhari, a village in coastal Odisha. His parents were Madhusudan Das and Kadambini Devi and he was the last of their five children. After his early education at Jamalpur and Balasore, he studied English literature and law at Cuttack. Attracted to politics, especially communism, he was a youth leader who led a number of agitations. Even then (it was the mid-1950s), he had started writing actively not only in Odia but in English too. He had started a periodical called *Diganta* while in his teens. Though he studied law, he did not take his final exams and instead pursued a Master’s in English literature. He married Pratijna Devi, a post-graduate in psychology, and they settled down in Cuttack where he joined Christ College as a lecturer and revived *Diganta*.

In 1963, with Pratijna Devi as well as other members of his family, Manoj Das visited Pondicherry and had darshan of the Mother on the 21st of February when he had a deeply spiritual experience. Barely a week later, on 27th February, he and Pratijna Devi had been formally accepted as inmates of the Ashram. While he taught English literature and his wife taught psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, together they looked after the ‘Hall of Progress’ where many children stayed. His writings continued to pour out and soon he received a continuous stream of awards including the Sahitya Akademi award and the Saraswati Samman for his contributions to Odia as well as English literature; and most recently, in 2020, with the Padma Bhushan.

A single shelf of good European Library was worth the whole native libraries of India and Arabia.

- Lord Macaulay

Pratijna Devi, who predeceased him, was a favourite of my grandmother. She gifted my grandmother a beautiful yellow and maroon Orissa handloom sari which she wore till her last days.

When I came to know about the passing of Manoj-da, my first act was to bring out all his books that we have – not the full collection of his writings, but a fair number nevertheless – and read them all over again, beginning with a well-thumbed five-decade old book, published by the National Book Trust (and still in print) - “Stories of Light and Delight”. One of my favourite books when I was growing up: the simple stories, just the right length for a child of eight or ten to maintain interest, supported by the quirky drawings of Mario, were read time and again; not only by me but also my siblings and three decades later, my daughter. The stories gently spread nuggets of wisdom, without being overt about it. The very first story is about a king being advised by his Minister that ‘To take notice of the vanity of others is to lose one’s own peace of mind’. Soon after, a small squirrel is seen holding up a coin and teasing the king that he has so much wealth and the king has none. The king got angry and almost sent an army after the squirrel to try to catch it. Finally, sense prevailed and the king listened to his wise minister. When the squirrel next tried to provoke him, he smiled and said gently:

‘Who does not know that the mighty squirrel

In wealth and wisdom can easily excel

A king or a monarch, as the yawn of a hen

Excels in expanse the mighty ocean?’

The squirrel stared at the king, quietly dropped the coin and was never seen again!

Manoj Das knew how to attract a child’s attention. He realized that many of the children at the Hall of Progress knew little about the rich story telling culture. Fortunately for us, the stories that he told those children, and many more that flowed out of his pen were also made available to millions more through his books. I mean, which child will not want to read a story titled “Hussain, the Terrible, the Horrible, the Sorrible” or “The Wholly Holy Man”. And read them over and again just to let the words roll off the tongue!

Reading Manoj Das perhaps after a decade or more has made me look at his books a little differently. “Legends of India’s Rivers”, gifted to me from the author way back in 1975 is a collection of stories about some of our greatest rivers. Multiple stories about each river, straddling mythology and the recent past, of rishis and rajas and the people of the land. In the last essay, he mentions visiting a village by the river near the sea after ten years, he had found that the river had disappeared, buried under earth so that a huge project on the sea could be constructed. He writes “the geography of our land is changing under the impact of industrial progress. Forests are cut down and hills are dynamited”. This anguished alert was written at a time when such huge projects were referred to as the temples of modern India. But it is not just about the environment – his anguish is also about the loss of our cultural heritage. As the rivers disappear, stories about them and real events and descriptions associated with them are reduced to mere myths and legend.

Manoj Das grieved about the loss of lands or heritage, but also understood that these changes are sometimes necessary. In his own words, “if we are losing our lands, it is for a change for the better, for the welfare of a larger population” (The Submerged Valley). This is another very characteristic trait of his writings – his ability to see multiple points of view in any situation. But he remained firm in expressing his unhappiness about widespread ecological destruction, writing in his last editorial of the Heritage (December 1989) that nothing could compensate “for what we lose in terms of rivers, hills and simple crop-yielding grounds”.

A keen observer of people, he docketed their foibles, and the result was unexpected humorous imagery (He was sweating like an ice cream stick), cynicism (the brightly burning example of humility that he is) or harsh realism (Wisdom is a ladder that touches the sky; its higher rungs almost hidden from our eyes. What pushes us up are often kicks or whips from below) through his deft use of words and phrases. Some of his stories have been published in multiple collections: The Mystery of the Missing Cap, The Crocodile Lady, Sita’s Marriage.... Being bilingual (he also translated his own stories from Odia

Our mind has faculties which are universal but its habits are insular.

- Rabindranath Tagore

into English), he was able to convey his thoughts effortlessly, without any artificialness creeping into his language.

Serious stories, funny stories, thoughtful stories, thought-provoking stories, stories of deep sadness, stories of love, dark tales, delightful tales, stories of ghosts – real and imaginary, stories of Rajas, stories of tigers... each carefully crafted. All we have to do is open one of his books at any page and read on. And on. Till we finish the story, all the other stories in the volume, and all the books that we are able to get hold of. Thank you Manoj Das, acclaimed story teller, for teaching us to observe and reflect, and for enriching our lives.

(Daughter of Dr Mrs. Prema Nandakumar and grand daughter of late Prof K.R. Srinvasa Iyengar Ahana Lakshmi completed a PhD in Environmental Science after post- graduation in Environmental Toxicology. She has taught (as guest faculty) at the Institute of Ocean Management as well as Centre for Environmental Studies, Anna University, Chennai. The late Prof . Manoj Das autographed his books for four generations of her family—Prof KR Srinivasa Iyengar, Dr Prema Nandakumar, Dr Ahana Lakshmi and her daughter Mythili. Ahana's paternal grandmother was the famous Tamil scholar Kumudini)

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- On April 14, 2021 Dr. Uday Balakrishnan's book *India On My Mind* was released by former Energy Secretary, Govt. of India Dr E.A.S. Sarma and his wife Mrs. Rani Sarma at their residence.
- On February 2, 2020 Centre for Policy Studies brought out a book by Cmde. Uday Bhaskar, one of India's top experts on strategic affairs, titled *India's Strategic and Security Concerns*, released by Admiral Arun Prakash.
- The 25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume of Centre for Policy Studies was released on November 6, 2020 by Swami Atmavidanandaji Maharaj Secretary Sri Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama Visakhapatnam.

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Book Review :

'India on My Mind – Reflections on Politics, Democracy & History' by Uday Balakrishnan. Published by the Centre for Policy Studies, Visakhapatnam.

What is it that makes India great despite all its inadequacies in terms of economic prosperity, social cohesiveness and human development? This vast land mass, with teeming millions and myriad problems, has always been a paradox to all outsiders. Prof. J.K. Galbraith once jocularly remarked that India is a "functioning anarchy". A Japanese diplomat once told this writer, "My faith in God has redoubled after visiting your country." Asked to elaborate the statement, he said: "Things are moving here amidst the chaotic conditions. Any other country would have collapsed in such circumstances. Hats off to you!" How could India etch for itself such a niche in the comity of nations? This we owe to our age-old traditional values that we somehow are able to retain despite the innumerable military and cultural invasions suffered by this country. Naturally we Indians take pride in proclaiming those values that have put this country on a high pedestal. Thus India is always on the minds of everybody, native or otherwise.

Dr. Uday Balakrishnan's book, "India on My Mind", confirms this uniqueness of the land that has upheld the Rig Vedic aphorism 'Aa noo bhadrah kratavo yantu viswatah' (Let noble thoughts come to us from every side). He particularly pinpoints in this connection the way our Constitution has been drafted deriving all good things from other countries' statute books. In other words, we Indians do not hesitate to adopt and adapt all good things available everywhere.

'India on My Mind' is a nosegay mainly of his published review articles in 'The Hindu' and its sister publication, 'Businessline', and a few from other publications. Going through each of this scholarly output, one is astonished at the way Dr. Balakrishnan handles every issue from the point of view of a dispassionate critic. His varied experience as a bureaucrat in the Union Government, coupled with the rare privilege of being on the ring side seat of observing the powers that be, has enriched his capability to call a spade a spade. Further, his stint as an academic in the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Bengaluru, has widened the horizon of viewing things in proper perspective. In his foreword to the

The British destruction of textile competition from India led to the first great deindustrialization of the modern world.

- Shashi Tharoor

book, published by the Centre for Policy Studies, Visakhapatnam, Prof. Raghvendra Gadagkar, in-charge of the Centre for Contemporary Studies, aptly describes Balakrishnan as “an academic and an intellectual in the garb of a bureaucrat”.

The book has been divided into six sections: Tolerance, Accommodation, Contrition; The Struggle To Be A Nation; Faces In History; Our Worrisome Neighbours; Totalitarianism; Power & Control; and Economics: The Human Dimension. It is sheer delight to read these 64 essays in this collection which dwell upon the warp and weft of governance, though one may not agree with his stand. He has covered the whole gamut of Indian style of governance.

In this volume, Dr. Balakrishnan emerges as an uncompromising votary of our secular ideal that has stood the test of time, notwithstanding occasional aberrations. In the article, ‘Linking Culture, Religion and Civilisation’, he says: “Let’s take religion first. Is mine better than yours? This is a question that has no answers, no sensible ones in any case. However, much we may argue, there is much to commend in each faith and a lot to condemn in every one of them. The great philosopher, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, observed, ‘To admit the various descriptions of God is not to lapse into polytheism. When Yajnavalkya was called upon to state the number of gods, he started with the popular number 3306, and ended by reducing them all to one Brahman. This indestructible enduring reality is to be looked upon as one only.’ So where is the big difference between the many faiths in India? I, for one, am proud of the juxtaposition of a temple, a mosque and a church at Palayam in my home town, Thiruvananthapuram, and hail the Holkar queen of the Maratha Malwa kingdom, Ahilyabai Holkar, for preserving the Gyanvapi Mosque even as she rebuilt the Kashi Viswanath Temple. There is a lot to learn from our past.

In the article, ‘Stop Balkanisation of India’, the author avers that secularism has served India well. “It has done the Hindus no harm while leaving the minorities feeling safe. Learning from what happened to the Pandits in Kashmir, the Hindu majority in the country needs to take on and not be cowed down by the few fanatics in their midst who are striving to fit a religion that neither has a centre nor a periphery, into a fundamentalist bag. It is their kind that led to Partition in the first place and we need to stop them now or pay the price — the balkanisation of a country.” One may

slightly disagree with him to emphasise that secularism is always part and parcel of the Hindu ethos. But the official stamp in the amended Constitution (during Emergency) has opened the entire constituency of India for reckless proselytisation, engendering the fear of a demographic dwindling of the Hindu majority.

India, with the third largest number of Muslims, has so far been an exception in allowing the community to regulate itself. The passing of The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, making triple talaq a criminal offence, has changed all that. Such legislation, however laudable, made by a Parliament in which Muslims are grossly underrepresented

— numbering a mere 27 out of 542 MPs in the Lok Sabha— has left the community weaker and more voiceless than ever in the past. Salman Khurshid’s book *Visible Muslim, Invisible Citizen*, effectively conveys the angst of a community that has endured many indignities over time in a seemingly secular state, says the author.

He is critical of the Congress which, “after its spectacular electoral success in the 1937 elections, hardly did anything to raise the confidence level of Indian Muslims in the provinces it governed. The gross under-representation of the community in public services continued as did its backwardness. This is something that Jinnah set out to correct. Much to his surprise, he found himself heading an unwieldy state separated by the Indian sub-continent at its widest. A ‘mutilated, moth-eaten Pakistan,’ as he once referred to it, didn’t even last 25 years before breaking up.

Communal representation, according to Dr. Balakrishnan, was the factor that split India at creation in 1947. It had a long history going back to 1906 when a demand for it was first made on behalf of Muslims by a delegation led by the Agha Khan to the Viceroy. Jinnah bought into it much later and even arrived at a pact with the Congress to have it, in fact with the consent and blessings of India’s formidable nationalist, Lokmanya Tilak. “Few today know that the Lucknow Pact, as it was popularly known, was arrived at in a joint session of the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916. Jinnah, who played a major role in getting the pact through, was hailed as an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity by Sarojini Naidu. It was the Congress that later repudiated the pact. Jinnah’s is a cautionary tale for India. His is a story of continuous efforts by the Congress to marginalise him

The universe is not only queerer than we imagine, it is queerer than we can imagine.

- J.B.S. Haldane

from the early 1920s onward. A brilliant legal mind, Jinnah fought his corner doggedly and could convince most of India's Muslims that it was impossible to trust their future to an overwhelmingly Hindu India without 53 built-in safeguards to ensure their voice would be heard."

Jinnah emerges as one more sinned against than sinning from the author's view, when he says in his article, 'Who is responsible for Partition?', "Fulminating against Jinnah does not help anyone. It is more important to understand him and know what it takes to avoid, not just another partition, but a total fragmentation of an India that has been brought together with such great difficulty."

Dr. Balakrishnan laments that the strident story of India's integration has not been well publicised, as the younger generation is practically ignorant of the great event. "India's integration", historian Ian Copland observed, "represented a major watershed. It swelled the area of the new Indian state by over half a million square miles and its population by nearly 90 million people, redrew the political map of the subcontinent and overthrew an entire governing order." The process was largely peaceful with a few exceptions, the most prominent being Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad. V.P. Menon, one of the moving spirits behind this massive task the other being Sardar Patel, in his book, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, urges us not to think of the project "only in terms of the consolidation of the country," but also "pause to consider the toils and anxieties that had to be undergone till, step by step, the edifice of a consolidated India was enshrined in the Constitution." Quoting Ian Copland, Dr. Balakrishnan says, "The coming together of a fifth of all mankind, relatively peacefully, into a single state is one of the great events in history and one which we have sadly all but forgotten. Unlike many European universities with centres that study European integration, we have none to look at our own. India's successful integration holds significant lessons for the rest of the world, especially for the countries of Europe and their fitful efforts at coming together. It took the nations of Western Europe thirteen years following the Second World War to start on their process of integration. This led to the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1958, and later, the European Union (EU) in 1993. However, the EU remains a tentative and inconclusive experiment, with one of its largest

members — the United Kingdom — about to exit it. A European political union, which looked very possible a decade back, is not being discussed even as a possibility today".

B. R. Ambedkar is another personality that gets full marks for his contribution to the drafting of the Constitution and also towards the upliftment of the depressed classes. Says the author on the famous Poona Pact between him and Mahatma Gandhi that resolved a big crisis and saved the life of the fasting Mahatma: "As a practical man Ambedkar was not looking for a perfect solution. As he remarked in a 1943 address to mark the 101st birthday celebrations of Mahadev Govind Ranade, all he wanted was 'a settlement of some sort'; that he was not prepared to wait for 'an ideal settlement'. It is very much in this spirit that he affixed his signature to the Poona Pact saving Gandhi's life as well as that of the Congress Party's while giving a big voice to the depressed classes."

Caste based reservation is another thorny political issue. Like many a right thinking Indian, Dr. Balakrishnan is aghast at the policy of reservation remaining as a permanent measure, which was originally restricted to fifteen years as suggested by Ambedkar, with an ever increasing competition for backwardness of different castes. "With half, and in some instances more, of all educational and job opportunities in the public sector going to candidates coming under the reserved category, there is some resonance to Hardik Patel's demand made in 2015 to 'either free the country from reservations or make everybody the slave of reservations'. This is a widely shared feeling across the country by communities feeling marginalised. What the young are looking for today is not more of the same — admissions to courses that lead to nowhere and low-entry jobs in the government. By empowering them with skills the world needs today and tomorrow, the government will be building the country's human capital far more quickly than any more reservations ever can."

Dr. Balakrishnan prefers a settlement of the issues between India and Pakistan to ensure lasting peace in the sub-continent. He is confident that Narendra Modi can achieve this in a tactful manner. Incidentally, the author gives two cheers to Modi administration, reserving the third for settlement with Pakistan. China should not be treated as an enemy, he feels and wants India to emulate the developmental

The truly religious person is not concerned with reform. He is seeking what is true and that very search has a transforming effect on society.

- J. Krishnamurthi

activities in that country which is capitalist in character with a facade of communism.

Among various personalities discussed in his review articles, Mahatma Gandhi emerges as a man of practical genius with a penchant for uplifting the downtrodden. Nehru also gets the praise he deserves for handling the most difficult crises that were haunting the nascent nation. The author hails the uncanny knack of Nehru in picking talent to implement many of his pet schemes. The talented individuals with no political backing are H.J. Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai to mention a few. Subhas Chandra Bose was a flawed hero according to Dr. Balakrishnan, since the revolutionary leader befriended Hitler and Mussolini, the avowed enemies of England. Had he not done and that and remained in the national politics, things would have been different. But he also highlights the hostility that Bose had to face in the Congress to the extent of being hounded out.

Indira Gandhi gets bouquets for her achievements like winning the 1971 war against Pakistan and liberating Bangladesh, Pokhran nuclear blast, etc. The author is critical of the lost opportunity to discipline Pakistan by signing the Shimla Pact with Bhutto to release the POWs without any commitment on the part of the latter. That Bhutto reneged on the Shimla Pact is now history. Proclamation of internal Emergency was another faux pas on her part.

P.V. Narasimha Rao, the reluctant Prime Minister after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, emerges as the most efficient PM thanks to his bold initiative in liberalising the economy, Navodaya schools which offered tremendous opportunities for

rural children and so on. Sadly, says the author, PVN has not only been forgotten, apart from being insulted after his death.

The author's assessment of Krishna Menon: "Indiscretion, condescension and arrogance were always part of Krishna Menon's repertoire".

Being a bureaucrat of standing, Dr. Balakrishnan does not spare the bureaucracy also. "If there is one big takeaway from the messy manner in which governments at the State and national levels have handled Covid, it is the need for the government to develop coordinating mechanisms between its different wings that will automatically kick in during a crisis such as the one brought about by Covid. Such coordination needs no political will, as it is well within the capability of bureaucracy to achieve. With the virus spreading more virulently than before, India's bureaucracy has another chance to redeem itself and prove that it can manage the future course of the Covid pandemic much better than it has done so far. Will it seize the day?"

On the whole, the book is a well documented effort by Dr. Balakrishnan and is a welcome contribution to various think tanks that are indulging in finding solutions to the ills of our society. The Centre for Policy Studies deserves kudos for bringing out this volume for the benefit of all those interested in orderly development of the experimental society called India.

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