



BULLETIN

OF THE
CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Vol.26 No. 3
Feb 2, 2022

INDIAN DEMOCRACY'S DECLINE IN STATUS

India, now preparing feverishly for the Platinum Jubilee celebration in August 2022, has suffered a setback in the democracy global ranking index slipping to 53rd position in 2021 from 27 in 2014 according to The Economist Intelligence Unit. 'Democratic backsliding' by authorities and 'crackdowns on civil liberties' has led to a steep fall in the Freedom House ranking index downgrading India's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free' among the 167 countries. That is 'due to a multiyear pattern in which the Hindu nationalist government and its allies have presided over rising violence and discriminatory policies affecting the Muslim population and pursued a crackdown on expressions of dissent by the media, academics, civil society groups, and protesters'.

The roots of the decline lie, of course, in the past. Nani Palkhivala, hailed as 'the country's finest intellectual' narrated how "the foundations of the Constitution have been shaken by folly of the people, the corruption of the politicians and the negligence of the elite." In an incisive article titled 'Has the Constitution failed?' Palkhivala lamented that 'in just thirty years we have reduced the noble processes of our Constitution to the level of carnival of claptrap, cowardice and chicanery.' 'The unusual predicament facing India,' observed Palkhivala, was that 'an unacceptably large percentage of the 5000 members of Parliament and the state legislatures have sunk to such a level that to call their manoeuvres a rat race for winning elections and personal power would be defamatory of rats.' Indian democracy, wrote Palkhivala, 'has reached its nadir because in our average politician we have the sordid amalgam of lack of intellect with lack of character and lack of knowledge.'

Following a miraculous recovery from the serious economic crisis in the 1990s, the wobbly Indian democracy regained its prestige, to a considerable extent, as an important role player in world affairs with a steady increase in GDP growth rate and maintenance of political stability, even under coalition governments. Indian democracy crossed the Rubicon and sure-footedly moved into the 21st century. Despite the terrorist attack on December 13, 2001 on Parliament of India that shocked the nation the people of India remained firm in their resolve to protect the nation's unity and integrity.

The BJP led National Democratic Alliance formed in 1998 headed a coalition government that ruled from 1998 to 2004 and after ten years of rule by the Congress led United Progressive Alliance from 2004 to 2014, returned to power in the 2014 general elections. Its leader Narendra Modi was sworn in as Prime Minister of India on 26 May 2014. In the 2019 general election Narendra Modi led BJP retained power with a landslide victory.

However the Narendra Modi government has been indicted by credible forums like Freedom House and Economist Intelligence Unit on many counts such as adoption of 'discriminatory policies' causing increased violence affecting the Muslim population. The Constitution guarantees civil liberties including freedom of expression and freedom of religion, but harassment of journalists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other such bodies has increased significantly under Modi. Muslims, scheduled castes (Dalits), and scheduled tribes (Adivasis) remain economically and socially marginalized.' Research studies revealed that 'The level of income inequality increased, and in 2017, and unemployment increased to its highest level in 45 years.' The loss of jobs was attributed to the 2016 demonetisation, and to the effects of the Goods and Services Tax.

The last seven years have witnessed mass migrations of the poor workers, growing unemployment and a feeling of insecurity among the minorities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is more than *first* among equals as he is one *without* an equal in India's parliamentary democracy. Ignoring the fundamental principle of democracy that no one is indispensable or infallible is against the spirit of the Constitution. In the 75th year of the world's largest democracy let us offer our gratitude to its real makers and custodians—the People of India.

- The Editor.

The next decade will test what happens as the politics of digital space and physical space converge.

Ian Bremmer

TIME TO STEP BACK FROM THE BRINK

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)

Former Chief of Naval Staff

Ex-Chairman National Maritime Foundation

Hindus must retain faith in their proud identity and repel attempts to induce paranoid sentiments of victimhood in their own homeland

On October 30, 1947, when I was a three-year-old, my family had to flee the small Kashmiri town of Budgam, before the onslaught of Pakistani tribals advancing from Baramulla. My father, a J&K government civil servant, managed to hustle us into one of the Dakota aircraft that were shuttling between Delhi and Srinagar, ferrying troops to defend this vital airfield against the marauders. We rejoined father, six months later, to find our home burnt to cinders.

We were lucky. The rest of our extended family lived in the small town of Mirpur, now in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Within days of Partition, approximately 25,000 Hindu men, women and children - amongst them, my close relatives - were force-marched, by Pakistani irregulars, from Mirpur to a refugee camp in Ali Beg. Only 5,000 made it to the camp, and a year later, the International Red Cross found a mere 1,600 survivors awaiting repatriation to India; the rest, were killed, kidnapped or had taken their own lives.

My reason for recalling these personal details is to share two thoughts with the reader. Firstly, notwithstanding the bloodbath and trauma of 1947, as well as loss of home and hearth, I do not recall either my parents or others of their generation teaching us to bear hatred towards Muslims, or to carry a sense of victimhood. As they struggled, against huge odds, to rebuild their lives, and grieved for lost family and friends, they acknowledged that in the madness of Partition, such tragedies had occurred on both sides of the Radcliff Line.

Secondly, as a septuagenarian military veteran who has witnessed or participated in all the post-Independence wars and national crises, I wish to convey that rarely have I felt such a deep sense of

dismay and apprehension as I do today. The sequence of events that have unfolded over the past few days has given rise to foreboding about the future of my country.

The so-called 'religious conclave', held in the holy town of Haridwar December 17-19, saw brazen and open incitement to violence, whereby participants took an oath to "fight, die and kill" in order to make the country a 'Hindu Rashtra', and the speakers openly called for every Hindu to bear arms and undertake a "safaiabhiyan" (cleansing campaign) to finish off the minority population. Mahatma Gandhi was abused and his assassin Nathuram Godse received fulsome praise, a former Prime Minister was threatened with violence. The aim of transforming a democratic nation, uniquely rich in its religious, cultural, linguistic and caste diversity, into a majority-dominated 'Hindu Rashtra' could have been dismissed as absurd, had it not been for its ominous connotations and the manner in which it is being sought.

In addition to this deeply disturbing event, there has emerged a worrisome sequence of incidents across the country. Some examples: the repeated obstruction of Friday namaz in Gurugram, the disruption of Christian prayers and the vandalising of churches in Karnataka, Assam and Haryana. A common thread running through all these unsavoury incidents is the total silence of the political establishment and unabashed foot-dragging by police forces everywhere. The obvious message being conveyed is that mobs and fringe groups can take the law into their own hands and threaten or actually inflict violence with impunity, as long as they claim to be acting in the cause of the majority's religion.

Rational politicians must realise that even if such repulsive and unethical ploys win them votes or elections, they would have created a socio-political Frankenstein's monster which will certainly come back to devour them, before it destroys the whole country. Neighbouring Pakistan provides a stark example of how simplistic approaches, dreamt-up by religious fanatics, can have disastrous consequences. Created as the first theocratic State of modern times, Pakistan started unraveling as soon as it adopted religious fundamentalism as State policy and mobilised Sharia

Whatever the case, we have to be civil in the face of incivility. This is the secret of non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi

law to victimise religious minorities and even some non-conformist Muslims. By 1971, culture, language and ethnicity had provided a farstronger magnetic force than Islam, and East Pakistan broke away to become independent Bangladesh.

To view the situation through a national security prism, let us pay heed to our military leadership, which continues to warn the nation about the possibility of a two and a half front war". While the "two fronts" obviously refer to our nuclear-armed adversaries, China and Pakistan, who covet our territory, the "half front" that worries our Generals is the internal security threat represented by the existing Naxal insurgency and ongoing separatist movements in Kashmir and the North-Eastern states. Over this volatile scenario, if you now superimpose religious sectarian fratricidal conflicts, the cumulative threat could overwhelm India's security apparatus and bring us to the brink of disaster.

Thus, as India struggles to cope with the triple-crisis posed by Covid-19, China's border incursions, and the economic downslide, we need to reflect upon the adverse impact that the pursuit of majoritarianism is having on our heterogeneous society as well as on our security, well-being and international image.

Tolerance is the hallmark of a self-confident and dynamic civilisation. India's Hindus must, therefore, retain faith in their proud identity and repel attempts to induce paranoid sentiments of victimhood in their own homeland, where they outnumber minorities 80 to 20.

Elections come and go, but India's ruling elite must recognise that in a multi-faith society like ours, religious polarisation can cause irreparable damage to the fragile fabric of our nationhood. India's supreme national interest will be best served if we retain a sharp focus on unity and internal cohesion through assimilation, inclusivity and maintenance of domestic harmony, everything else is a distraction from the vital task of nation-building. If such wisdom dawns on them, there is still time for India to step back from the brink.

(Deccan Herald December 31, 2021)

* * *

EXPLORATION OF XI JINPING'S CONCEPT OF COMMON PROSPERITY

Shri Shyam Saran

Former Chairman RIS

Former Foreign Secretary

I am honoured to have been invited to speak at this fourth India China Forum hosted by the Institute of Chinese Studies and the Goa University devoted to the theme of "100 Years of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and China's Future." What I hope to explore today with the distinguished scholars and guests present here today is the concept of Common Prosperity. This has a long history but has acquired contemporary significance in its current interpretation by China's party and state leader, Xi Jinping. It has a domestic political dimension signalling a turn towards more egalitarian policies. In its external dimension, it reflects China's advocacy of "win-win cooperation" and its contribution to the "community of common destiny of mankind", another signature phrase associated with Xi Jinping. Common prosperity conveys China's role as a development partner helping narrow the gap between developed and developing countries.

The phrase itself was used in the 1950s to underline the goal of creating an egalitarian society in China following the success of the CPC in liberating China from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial past. It encompassed policies such as the setting up of peoples' communes in the rural areas, the nationalization of the means of production and advocacy of simple and frugal living. The emphasis on egalitarianism persisted throughout the period when Mao was the undisputed party and state leader, from the establishment of the People's Republic right up to his death in September 1976. This was a period characterized more by shared poverty rather than common prosperity, although important advances were made in extending health and education services to the population at large.

The term underwent a complete makeover after Deng Xiaoping too over the reins of leadership in 1977 and launched the "reform and opening up" of the Chinese economy in 1978 at the third plenum of 11th Central Committee. Deng put forward the proposition that in order to bring prosperity to the people of China

Forget and forgive all the harm done to you by others and the help you have done to them.

Sathya Sai Baba.

it was fine for some individuals and localities to get rich first and to then help and pull others along to also become rich and prosperous. “To get rich is glorious” is a phrase attributed to Deng but there is no record of his having used it, but perhaps it reflects the spirit of his reforms. The hitherto strong commitment to frugality in society and the principle of egalitarianism were jettisoned in practice if not always in rhetoric. Deng’s reforms launched the country on a 4 decade long phase of unprecedented and rapid growth, creating a mass consumption society, celebrating ostentatious living and sprouting its own growing band of millionaires and billionaires. Though State Owned Enterprises (SOE) continue to occupy a significant place in the national economy it is the private sector which has been the engine of growth. Thus Vice Premier Liu He pointed out recently that the private sector contributes 50% of tax revenue, accounts for 60% of China’s GDP and provides 80% of urban employment in the country. The Deng economic strategy continued to be followed and expanded by the succeeding regimes headed by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. However, the runaway export and investment led growth also generated serious imbalances in the economy. Income and wealth inequalities reached levels not seen since the founding of the republic. Chinese reports point out that the Gini coefficient which measures income and wealth inequality, rose from 0.32 in the early years of reform to 0.46 in 2019. (Note: the closer the figure to 1 the greater the inequality). In May 2020, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that China still had over 600 million people, or over 40% of its population of 1.4 billion, whose monthly income was barely a thousand yuans, or \$140. This was followed by a declaration by Xi Jinping in February 2021, to the effect that China had achieved the miracle of eradicating extreme poverty in China. Extreme poverty in China is defined as a per capita income of \$ 1.69 a day or \$ 617 per annum. The World Bank threshold is \$1.90 a day. Since Xi is talking about eradicating extreme poverty this does not contradict Li Keqiang since the latter was drawing attention to the very low incomes earned by a very large proportion of the population, particularly those living in rural areas. They are poor but not extremely poor.

The glaring income and wealth inequalities are considered a source of social instability and incompatible with a socialist society. Since taking

over China’s top leadership in 2012, Xi has signaled his worry over the ostentatious display of wealth, the rising influence of China’s successful multinational companies, especially those in the high tech and digital space and the pervasive corruption which has had a corrosive influence on both the Party and society. The latest Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPC on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party Over the Past Century, adopted on November 16, 2021, reaffirms the Reform and Opening Up policies of the Deng era, but also draws attention to the consequential adverse impacts such as weak Party leadership, “newly emerging problems in reform, development and stability” and the spread of “startling level of corruption” within the Party. Though economic issues do find a place in the long and fairly elaborate document, it should be noted that the term “common prosperity” is mentioned only in the context of China’s external relations and not in relation to the domestic economy. This leads one to think that the decision to make it a defining slogan is of more recent origin. One needs to ask why. Xi Jinping’s economic strategies have evolved from a phase emphasizing “supply side structural reforms”, first announced in 2015, followed by a “dual circulation” strategy, adopted formally in May 2020, and now the pursuit of common prosperity since August this year. There are overlaps among these 3 concepts but each has a somewhat different point of emphasis.

The Supply Side reforms were unveiled at the Central Economic Work Conference in December 2015 and comprised 5 elements:

1. Cutting excess industrial capacity
2. Destocking property inventory
3. Corporate deleveraging
4. Lowering corporate costs (including through tax cuts); and
5. Improving “weak links”

The commentary on Supply Side reforms drew attention to Xi’s directive to guide the “new normal”, which the deceleration in China’s GDP growth. A specific reference was made to the imbalances unleashed by the massive economic stimulus of nearly \$600 billion during the global financial and

economic crisis of 2007-08, which further expanded investment led growth and property development, creating a mounting debt overhang. Even in 2015 it was estimated that China's overall debt to GDP ratio had exceeded 250%. An important objective of the reforms was to shift the economy from its reliance of investment and exports as growth drivers to a consumption, innovation and service-oriented growth pattern. It was argued that there was a mismatch between the category of goods and services which China's consumers were demanding and those supplied by Chinese manufacturing industry. This led to rising imports of such goods to meet domestic demand. Supply side reforms involved changing the production pattern of domestic industry to make it more aligned to the pattern of demand in the country. Similarly, the upgradation of Chinese industry needed increasingly sophisticated components and intermediates which had to be imported. Local production had to be restructured and innovation promoted in order to reduce dependence on foreign imports and technology. This was the driver behind the ambitious Made in China 2025 Plan announced in 2015 and which listed some of the key and advanced sectors in which China should attempt a significant if not dominant position. Among the sectors identified in the plan are semi-conductors, robotics, aerospace, green energy and electric vehicles and advanced materials. A massive amount of resources have been deployed to roll out the plan and after 6 years, success has been achieved in some but not all areas. For example, China has been unable to reduce its dependence on imports of high-end semi-conductors. It has lagged behind in the aerospace field. This ambitious and wide-ranging Industrial Policy is a key component of Supply Side Structural reforms. Over-capacity in steel and coal industry has been largely eliminated but deleveraging of the real estate and property sector has proved to be more difficult and risky. The Dual Circulation strategy which followed in May 2020 was related to both the outbreak of the highly disruptive Covid-19 pandemic and the fallout from the U.S.-China trade war. In an environment of mounting risks and a more hostile and protectionist international economic environment, the Dual Circulation strategy sought to achieve greater economic self-reliance. According to a Chinese analyst, if the previous rebalancing under Supply Side reforms was aimed at reducing China's dependence

upon exports, in contrast, the thrust of Dual Circulation was to reduce dependence on imports and increase self-sufficiency. The effort would be to meet most of increased domestic demand through domestic production rather than imports. This would include the domestic sourcing of consumer goods and services but the domestic sourcing of intermediate goods and components in key industries, semi-conductors being one such category.

The 14th Five Year Plan(FYP), released on March 4, 2021, has a full chapter on Dual Circulation and states upfront that self-reliance is the over-riding objective. It emphasizes technological up gradation and innovation as key to advancing self-reliance. The domestic circulation through domestic demand and innovation would be linked to external circulation through foreign capital and exports, with one being used as a hedge against the other. It is made clear that it is domestic circulation which is the dominant one; external circulation is supplementary. The Open Door allows circulation both inwards and outwards but it is now less open outwards, more open inwards. So where does Common Prosperity fit into the scheme of things?

In the 14th FYP, Common Prosperity does find a mention, but it is defined in a manner different from what it is designed to convey now. The Plan talks about achieving common prosperity through "new rural revitalization and urbanization strategies." It puts the concept in the context of bridging the growing gap between the rural areas of the country and urban areas and narrow the income and wealth divide between them. The Plan envisaged achieving an urban population of 65% by 2025 and 75% by 2035. The 2035 Vision document in the Plan sets forth a number of goals for that year. Among them is that of "raising per capita income to the level of moderately developed countries but with a significant expansion of the middle-class population."

It is at the important Central Finance and Economic Affairs Work Conference on August 17, 2021 that Xi Jinping highlighted the concept of common prosperity declaring that it would be the "focal point" to ensure both the well-being of the people and the Party's "long-term ruling foundation." Some specific features of this version of Common Prosperity include:

Power is to social dynamics what energy is to the physical.

Bertrand Russell

1. Reasonably adjusting excessive incomes;
2. Promoting giving back to society by those who have become wealthy i.e. to encourage philanthropy;
3. Achieving an “Olive shaped distribution structure with a large middle and two small ends”;
4. Reducing regional disparities and the rural-urban divide;
5. Promoting housing for living and not for speculation;
6. Providing public services in the shape of education and health in an inclusive manner so as to promote upward social mobility; and
7. “Maintain the public ownership system (i.e. the state owned enterprises) as the mainstay and simultaneously develop the economics of a variety of ownership systems.”

These elements spelt out in Xi’s speech at the conference have acquired salience in the light of severe penalties imposed on China’s most vibrant and successful private firms like Alibaba, Weibo and Didi Chuxing and forcing the large property development companies like Evergrande to deleverage in a precipitous manner leading to near bankruptcy. There has also been an attack on China’s “celebrity culture”, targeting popular artistes and performers. The video gaming industry has been hit by a state imposed limit on the number of hours that schoolchildren can entertain themselves on the net. Online education and tutorial firms have been prohibited from running their services for commercial profits. While the concept of Common Prosperity has several elements in common with the earlier Supply Side reforms and the Dual Circulation strategy, it has broadened its meaning to indicate a new and strong emphasis on an all-round inclusive development with an unmistakeable egalitarian flavour. It has a clear ideological dimension. And yet it neither figures in its current elaborate incarnation in the Party History document nor in the 14th FYP as we have seen. We know that the decision to come out with the Party History resolution was taken in March 2021 and was accomplished in 6 months that is by September. It was on August 17 that Xi elaborated the more expansive

version of the concept and elevated it into a “focal point” for ensuring the “long-term ruling foundation of the Party.” It appears, therefore, that the decision to make it a key guidepost in relation to China’s economic strategy was taken at a fairly recent date. Could the launch of this initiative which has political, ideological, economic and social dimensions and which attempts to shift China on an altered trajectory, be related to intra-party contention?

In the years of runaway growth delivered by China’s private sector, very strong and intimate connections were established between Chinese entrepreneurs and party functionaries at all levels. A symbiotic relationship developed between the Party-State and business tycoons enabling mutual enrichment. The New York Times expose, in 2012, of the wealth amassed by the family of the then Premier Wen Jiabao is well known. The recent book by Desmond Shum, entitled *Red Roulette* has many details of this “guanxi” or relationships between politics and business. Those who gained most from these networks have been members of the “princelings” faction or the privileged descendants of the first generation of CPC revolutionaries. The members of this faction have fully exploited the opportunities on offer by extending political cover, protection and patronage to enterprising business leaders. We know that Wang Qishan who is Vice-President and has been regarded as one of the closest and trusted aides of Xi Jinping, assisted Jack Ma of Alibaba in the latter’s climb to multi-billionaire status. In targeting large and rich private companies Xi may be holding out a threat to their powerful political patrons. This would be useful in confronting any influential opposition to his personal leadership and his policies. But beyond the factional struggles, one does discern in Xi’s strong advocacy of Common Prosperity a perennial preoccupation of CPC leaders with ensuring social and political stability in China. Through Common Prosperity Xi appears to be preparing China for a new era of slower growth and signalling a decisive shift away from the Deng era. He is casting himself in the role of a leader of the people, capable as no other of turning a pear into an olive!

(Fourth India- China Forum, Goa December 4, 2021)

* * *

If beauty is to be enjoyed to the uttermost, restraint is essential.

Rabindranath Tagore

BREAK FROM COLONIAL HISTORY NEEDS CAUTION

Many practices and ceremonies, once part of the Republic Day traditions, are now being reviewed for their colonial texture. The three issues that have led to varying degrees of disquiet are the decision to merge the eternal flame from its India Gate location to the newly erected National War Memorial, unveiling of Netaji's hologram to mark his 125th birth anniversary, and the decision to drop 'Abide with me' from the Beating Retreat ceremony.

Cmde. (Retd.) C. Uday Bhaskar

Director of the Society for Policy Studies and
Former Director, IDSA & NMF

The Republic Day celebrations of 2022 have been tempered with controversy which has a degree of inevitability about it, given the intensity of the socio-political churning that India is now experiencing. Every major national issue has become contested and this corrosive pattern was on display this week.

The three issues that have led to varying degrees of discord and disquiet are: The government's decision to move and merge the eternal flame from its India Gate location to the newly erected National War Memorial (NWM); the unveiling of a hologram of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the India Gate on his 125th birth anniversary; and the decision to drop the tune of the hymn 'Abide with me' from the Beating Retreat ceremony. This hymn, composed in 1847, has a universal resonance to it and was very dear to Mahatma Gandhi. The evocative, soothing refrain has been associated with the closure of the Republic Day ceremonies for five decades and Gopalkrishna Gandhi (grandson of Bapu) has noted with sadness: "Without the song, the ceremony will lose something at its heart."

Shifting the eternal flame that was consecrated first in January 1972 to honour the Indian military personnel who had lost their lives in the 1971 war that led to the birth of Bangladesh ought to have been an occasion when the nation would close ranks. But alas, this did not happen. It merits recall that when this modest memorial (a helmet atop an upturned rifle) at the India Gate was first envisioned — weeks after the momentous victory of December 1971 — it was expected that India would soon have its permanent national war memorial and the flame would be

accordingly re-located.

The India Gate memorial that was erected in February 1921 to pay tribute to the soldiers of the British Indian Army who fell in World War I is part of the sub-continent's colonial history and does not have any correlation with independent India. It is estimated that almost 80,000 Indian soldiers lost their lives in that war but not all their names are inscribed at India Gate.

Since the late 1970s, the Indian military had been urging the government of the day to create a national war memorial that would appropriately honour the fallen Indian soldier, but this fell on deaf ears. Ironically, both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have paid tribute to the Indian soldiers who lost their lives in the 1971 war and the IPKF operations, respectively.

It is a matter of shame that it took 47 years, from 1972 to 2019, for the NWM to be realised and thus shifting the eternal flame from a temporary to a permanent site was logical. Regrettably, the manner in which this decision was communicated to the country was sudden and the word 'extinguished' entered the discourse. While a clarification was issued that the flame was only being 'merged' with that at the NWM — the discord about India Gate had acquired its own momentum.

In an unfortunate sequence of polarised exchanges on different social media platforms, those who were in support of the Modi government suggested that the Indian soldiers who had died in World War I were 'mercenaries' and hence shifting the flame was not consequential. This was an invalid formulation, that under the colonial rule — it was only the Indian soldier who had become a 'mercenary' in going to war for the oppressor, while the rest of colonial India that was part of British governance — whether the ICS officer at the top of the pecking order or the lowly peon — were untainted. All of them were acting as per the colonial diktat and among them, it was the soldiers who took an oath of allegiance to bear arms and lay down their lives for the crown and the honour of the 'paltan'.

Milan Kundera, the Czech writer had noted of politics and memory: "When a big power wants to deprive a small (subjugated) country of its national consciousness, it uses the method of organised forgetting" and many monuments and memorials of colonial India are a testimony to this policy of sanitised

The global ecological emergency is the greatest collective-action challenge we have ever faced.

Stewart M. Patrick

and burnished narratives and the India Gate is no exception.

This segues to the second of the controversies, the installation (January 23) of the Bose hologram under the canopy at India Gate, that had till 1968 housed the statue of King George V. At one time, it was proposed that a Mahatma Gandhi statue would replace that of the British monarch — but again, this was not pursued and the void in the canopy for half a century conveyed India's ambivalence about its colonial past.

Paradoxically, while Netaji Bose and Mahatma Gandhi sought freedom from colonial rule — the means they had adopted were very different. If the latter was an apostle of non-violence, the charismatic Bose saw his alliance with Hitler as an acceptable tactical means for a larger objective. The Bose legacy has been shrouded in mystery and conjecture but his role in the Indian freedom struggle and the raising of the INA is a variation of 'organised forgetting' and an issue where consensus is tenaciously elusive. While there is no doubt about his commitment to India's independence and communal amity which must be remembered and emulated, one would still aver that Bose was on the wrong side of the world war.

But India in 2022 has resurrected and rehabilitated the Bose legacy in the larger national consciousness in a very calibrated and selective manner and the political subtext points to a radical shift that seeks to devalue the Gandhian commitment to non-violence and communal amity. While unveiling the Bose hologram, PM Modi dwelt on the manner in which the contribution of many leaders had been 'erased' after Independence and that the country was now 'taking steps to correct those mistakes'.

Thus, many practices and ceremonies that were once part of the Republic Day traditions are now being reviewed for their colonial texture and a new template is being evolved. In that schema, 'Abide with me' is no longer acceptable and the reflective notes of that hymn and the poignant symbolism with the fallen soldier is now interred.

It is a new tune that India will march to — but as Kundera had cautioned: "A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses itself." Nations, alas, can lurch into amnesia.

(The Tribune, January 29, 2022)

* * *

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST – IV

Dr. R.V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar, I.A.S.(Retd)
Former Secretary, HRD, Govt of India &
Prof. IIM, Bengaluru

The cultural fare offered in the University also included music. I heard the violin maestro Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu perform; I also heard Deavdi deva Srivasudvea, a composition of Mysore Vasudevacharya in Raga Sunada Vindoni, for the first time in a violin recital by A V Krishna Rao, a student of Meterology and a violinist of distinction. The melody of a light classical song Swatantra Bharatha Janani performed by a team from Arts College, Rajahmundry, in an inter-collegiate competition in light music still haunts me; it appears to me that the rendering of Tyagaraj's Siva Siva Yanarada by a student of Andhra Medical College in an intercollegiate competition in classical music was only yesterday. There was, however, a yawning gap in the cultural fare that was offered in the University: it was visual art.

Radicalisation is above all a social, not an ideological, process; most people drift into activism through friendship and kinship, and ideology comes in later. Soon after I joined the University, I noticed that most of my friends belonged to the SFI; it is likely that SFI was the most active student organisation on the campus and put in extra efforts to reach out to the fresh entrants to the campus, and to proselytise them. Of course, quite a few of my friends were apolitical like Rama Sastry and V.S. Bhaskar. Rama Sastry who studied Telugu literature generously provided his fellow diners in the Hostel mess delicious pickles which he brought from home in large quantities. Bhaskar, my classmate in the Chemistry honours course, did his very best to teach cricket to me; however, I made no progress whatsoever as I could never get over my handicap of never playing any game so far, and acquire manual dexterity. There were quite a few friends who were opposed to the worldview of SFI like 'Professor Bolt' but those sympathetic to SFI were more numerous. From childhood, I was interested in current affairs, and on the campus I was away from home living amidst friends who were discussing current affairs against the backdrop of ideas new to him. It was the inevitable socialisation of this type that Prof. Meenakshisundaram, an eminent Mathematical

Kissinger's peace process was designed to buy time rather than peace.

Martin Indyk

Physicist who studied with Einstein, and was Warden of the University hostel, had warned me and my father when we met him for admission to the hostel. Looking at me, the Professor observed that I was far too young and advised my father that I better be admitted to Ramakrishna Mission hostel lest I should be 'spoiled'. Father and son went to the Mission to be told that there was no vacancy, leaving no other option for me but to join the hostel. The advice Prof. Meenakshisundaram gave my father was one of the many examples of the keen interest senior professors used to take in the wellbeing of their students. In an article he wrote for a volume commemorating Prof. Meenakshisundaram, Gollapudi Maruthi Rao, the noted actor and 'the best actor and bad student' of his University days, reminisced about the paternal care of the professor. Due to his immersion in theatre Maruthi Rao totally neglected his studies with the result that he secured a Zero in the marks sheet of his second year examinations. Like 'the understanding father of a prodigal son' the professor never chastised him; in the final year the professor ordered him to move into his house so that he is not distracted and could seriously study. It was another matter that during one of his final examinations Maruti Rao slipped away from the professor's home to attend to a preview of a drama competition in Vijayangaram with the result that he just scraped through, may be due to the generosity of the professor.

To get back to socialisation in the Hostel, soon enough, I found myself campaigning for the candidates of SFI in the elections to the Student Union. Their candidate, Ramakrishnamacharyulu- later known as Ramakrishna after he shed the caste suffix- was elected as President. I often went to the office of the Union to join my friends in the planning of the events of the Andhra Varotsavaalu, and in erecting make-shift ornamental gates bearing inscriptions from the poetry of Gurajada and Sri Sri. In spite of their joining a movement that took pride in internationalism, their poetic inspiration was still limited to Telugu verse. I and my friends had not heard of Pablo Neruda or Mayakovsky or even of the Internationale. Getting Professor Mahalanobis to lecture on the Second Five Year Plan was a feather in the cap for Ramakrishna and his team. I joined my friends in attending night classes on history and philosophy conducted by Communist Party intellectuals, Katragadda Rajagopla

Rao and Yetukuri Balaramurthy. Attending the classes had an aura of a conspiratorial activity as I and my friends scaled the low boundary wall of the university and went across to a house lit by kerosene lamps in Chinna Waltair, the habitation nearby. I and my friends were shattered that the 'democratically elected' government of E M S Namboodripad was unjustly dismissed by the central government. Some of my friends pored over Marxist canon in English and Telugu grappling with jaw breaking expressions like gathatharkika bhowthika vadam (dialectical materialism). It was during this phase that I tasted the heady, intoxicating poetry of Sri Sri's Mahaprasthanam. It is said of the musical compositions of Tyagaraja that the Swara and Sahitya, the notes and words, are in perfect harmony. Resonance, not harmony, is the hallmark of Sri Sri. In Sri Sri's poetry the form and content, words, ideas and feelings all resonate together vibrantly, so vibrantly as to leave in their wake sonic booms, sonic booms that shatter the tranquillity of mind, uproot the settled canons of prosody and aesthetics, and overturn the legitimacy of the status quo. Sri Sri negates the proposition of Virginia Woolf that Shakespeare's poetry flows from him free and unimpeded because 'all desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance was fired out of him and consumed'. K.V. Ramana Reddy, a friend of Sri Sri and a litterateur in his own right, calls Sri Sri a splendid alchemist. Alchemist he was in seeking to transmute humdrum objects into subjects of poetry, be they teeny, teeny pups, or postage stamps, or a slice of bread or even a rotten banana that's no good. In all these he saw beauty and grace, desperation to share joy with him.

My active association with student politics lasted for the first two years of my student life. In the second year, I contested and won an election on the ticket of SFI to be the representative of my class. I had no hope for victory and was not courageous enough to face defeat; as I lay on my bed in my room fearing the worst, my friends burst in to announce my victory. The experience was nerve-racking enough to dissuade me from ever contesting another election. With our childish audacity, I and my colleagues in the Student Union would have appeared to Prof. Mahadevan, the venerable Principal of the University,

as a nuisance. Come the final year of the honours course, I concentrated on studies much like most of my colleagues; a timely caution from N. V. Rao, lecturer in the Chemistry Department, not to stray too far from my basic purpose of joining the university, helped. The final honours course was extremely demanding, and the slightest distraction, political or romantic, would ruin a student, a tragic fate so compellingly narrated by Veeraji in his novel Tholimalupu. Though I did not let student politics distract me, I did campaign in the elections to the Student Union in 1959 and 1960. The SFI candidate for President in 1959 was an exceptional woman- Sakunatala Raman as she was known then. She was equally proficient in Hindustani and Carnatic music and gifted with a facile pen. She campaigned as well as a male candidate, going from room to room and walking up all the three floors of hostel buildings in the Main and Engineering campuses. However, that did not help her overcome the well-entrenched male chauvinism. She went on to be a noted writer and authored quite a few books on feminist themes including a biography of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. She also continued her interest in music giving concerts, teaching students, and authoring a book comparing and contrasting the Carnatic and Hindustani systems of music. It was a pleasant surprise for me was to meet her four decades later when I was Culture Secretary, Government of India, and she was working on a book on the Rampur Gharana of Hindustani music. In the 1960 elections also, I and my leftist friends could not prevail against the candidate of the opposition, U. B Raghavaendra Rao- or UBR as he came to be known- who later was to be my colleague in the IAS. He was a genius with a sharp mind and sharp articulation, capable of getting to the root of a matter in a trice, and never hesitant to speak truth to power. As Secretary to the mercurial Chief Minister N T Rama Rao, he won the respect of his colleagues and the political class for the stellar role he played as an honest facilitator. He was cut down in his prime in a tragic road accident in 1988, and his death was widely mourned.

I could not escape the fate of men to make many real friends, and lose them in the course of nature. Of the many leftist friends I had in the University, I lost contact with all excepting Yetukuri Prasad, Ramakrishna and R. Venkateswara Rao (RVR). All his professional life, Yetukuri was an

editor at the Visalandhra Press. The other two, after leaving the University, joined the teaching profession. Ramakrishna was Professor of History at the Central University, Hyderabad, specialised in the social history of Andhra, was Secretary of the Indian History Congress, and had been the leading spirit behind the publication of a multi-volume Comprehensive History and Culture of Andhra Pradesh. RVR acquired distinction as a writer and translator publishing over a hundred books. He spent a decade as a translator in Soviet Union, leaving Soviet Union in June 1991, just six months before its fall. Around 2003, he published an honest account of life in Soviet Union TholaginaSwargam (Shattered Dreams) , never allowing his ideological commitment to come in the way of describing the reality. His anguish over the yawning gap between socialism in practice and his socialist faith, and of the disconnect between the people and the regime is writ large on his book. He graphically portrayed the co-existence of universal health care and education, a cradle-to-grave social security, and dirt-cheap public transport along with an economy of acute chronic shortages, the ingrained habit of people joining a queue without knowing what the queue was for, and the utter insensitivity of personnel in the shops to customers. His gripping depiction of travails he had to undergo to secure simple objects like a watch strap is tragicomical. While private property was abolished and the extensive social security system obviated the need for private property, seven decades of Soviet education could not eliminate the innate human trait of acquisitiveness. The craze for foreign products like American jeans and Italian shoes could not be missed in Moscow. While markets were abolished, socialism could not discover a proper mode of organising production. Workers and managers resorted to umpteen subterfuges to fulfil production quotas without any regard for quality or utility of the product. Thus, it was usual to come across stones and lumps of mud in onions and potatoes purchased in stores, as such extraneous matter came in handy for farm workers and managers to inflate their production. What comes out loud and clear is that the Soviet dream of creating a New Man remaining a pipe dream; as I read the book, I was reminded of the popular film song manishimaraledu, athani manasumaraledu (Man has not changed, his heart has not changed) in the box

office mega-hit Gundammakatha. Whatever, apart from describing honestly the Soviet reality, RVR also offered an explanation for the widely prevalent aberrations not expected in a communist society, banking on the classical Marxist theory which held that only advanced industrial countries like Germany and England were ripe for revolution, and not an agrarian country in an early phase of industrialization like Tsarist Russia. That being so, communism in Soviet Union was premature, an aberration much like the marriage of a girl child and bound to spawn other aberrations.

My juvenile infatuation with the leftist worldview lasted till 1980. The Chinese invasion in 1962 baffled me; I could not understand how a country that professed communism could invade her neighbour striving to build a socialistic pattern of society. The Chinese support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue and the Sino-Soviet rift compounded the bafflement; they brought home vividly that lofty principles alone do not guide the policies and actions of countries, even avowedly socialist countries. What cured me of the infatuation was my being an Alice in the License Land, working in the Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals (1980-2) in the late evening of the license-permit-control raj. The twenty-two months I spent in the Chemicals Division were a turning point in my life. Incidentally, it was around that time that the limitations of Keynesian economics, and of Government's ability to micro-manage economy came to be accepted in the developed countries, and the State-centric development paradigm came to be increasingly questioned by development economists. A neo-conservative, it is said, is a liberal mugged by reality. Likewise, mugged by the sordid reality of License-Permit-Control-Raj, I became an economic liberal. After coming to Delhi, I was baffled by what I witnessed in the central government economic ministries day after day. Excepting my faith in the Nation-State, all other articles of the economic faith with which I grew up were affected by this experience. For a while, I thought that what was at fault was not the belief per se but its practice. However, as I gained more and more experience in central government, and as I observed closely the State control of the economy and public sector management, I came across one aberration after another. I had but to accept the reality that aberrations were not exceptions but the rule.

With the passage of time the hubris and certainties of youth were gone. As I navigated life and accumulated more and more experiential and bookish knowledge, I began undergoing a Nietzschean transvaluation of values and beliefs, an unending process that can never end as long as one is alive. I came to acquire a more nuanced relationship between the Past and the Present, between continuity and change. I also came to recognise the limitations on the power of Man to know about himself and the world, of the more serious limitations on his power to order himself and the world around. I also recognised that Man is not perfectible, that schemes which depend exclusively on the altruism and perfectibility of men are intrinsically doomed to failure. Many Enlightenment philosophers believed that any new construction is truly rational only if it demolishes all that was there before and start from a scratch, or as the celebrated revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg wrote quoting Goethe's Faust 'All that exists deserves to perish'. Yet all utopian attempts in history to make a new beginning and to engineer a New Society or a New Man by sweeping tradition into the dustbin of history ended tragically in a dystopia. Man is not putty which could be moulded as per one's whim but a sentient being with a free will which he would exercise at least occasionally. The mind is not a blank slate without any inner traits on which a social or political engineer can inscribe any 'ism' of his choice. Ironically, many of the irreligious Enlightenment philosophes were educated in Jesuit schools, and in more recent times it has been said that those Africans who went to Moscow returned as anti-communists while those who went to Paris returned as communists. My attitude to religion also changed. As I navigated life and experienced swings in fortune and moods, I moved away from my adolescent belief that religion was part of an undesirable tradition that fostered superstition, blocked the road to reason and progress, and that only science and scientific temper could liberate all human beings from a life of physical and mental degradation. I came to believe that at the very least, religion was the 'the stay and comfort of virtue', and an elixir with miraculous therapeutic power indispensable for someone like him in public life who has to bear 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', and 'to take arms against a sea of troubles'.

(To be continued)

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

Shashi Tharoor

11

GUARDIANS OF SANATANA DHARMA

Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar

Sanatana Dharma is a term we use easily in our everyday converse to make a point. It is often covered in the haze of politics for quite a few groups seek to use it as an accusation, a denigration, persons who are blind to the modern age, chaff of pre-Newtonian unscientific age of blind beliefs. This is not a new, post-Narendra Modi scenario including the building of a Rama temple in Ayodhya now. It was built centuries ago, was torn down by Muslim army men after one of those spells of victory in North India. As for Rama himself, or Krishna, or Hari or Narasimha, they remain safe in the only spread of land that has not denied a safe space for even people of other religions who have sought asylum in India. Says Swami Vivekananda in his address at Chicago on September 11, 1893, at the first World's Parliament of Religions:

"I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation."

The very essence of Sanatana Dharma is given in these words of Swami Vivekananda. To gain this broad outlook and to keep to it for millennia has been the glory of the Indian nation. If you read Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics (1916), published by the Board of Trustees, Central Hindu College, Benares, you will know what we have missed in teaching our children when we have chosen English education and scientific knowledge as the only road to future for them. I shall not go into details for here space is limited. But I will spend the rest of the essay in giving a peep into one miniscule item from a huge reservoir of Sanatana Dharma that has kept Satya and Dharma alive in our

beloved nation.

As we all know, Bhakti is the strong base of Indian religions. It is something personal; at the same time it is universal. How have our ancients dealt with it? There are the Vedas who have taught us to love and care for our great rivers that flow all over India. The deities who actually represent various noble qualities that we should learn to follow: Rama for his heroism and adherence to truth and Sita for being a faithful wife, come what may. Devotion to the deities did not mean meaningless ritualism. It shows that the Indian who knows the truth of being can see the Supreme Divine in a piece of silicon dioxide. Ah yes, "The world is charged with the grandeur of god" as the Catholic poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote. The Bhakti ideal celebrates it.

It has done so in innumerable ways with great effect. All these ways have lived patiently with their own methods travelling in India, braving the seasons, and teaching us what Bhakti is. One such is Nama Sankeerthanam that had its birth in Thanjavur with Bodhendra Swamikal Sridhara Ayyaval and Marudanallur Sri Sadguru Swamikal. This movement has been quietly teaching what Bhakti is. Did not Shrinivas Khale ask us: *naamjapankyonchoddiya?* "You have not given up anger, or lying, or hate but have given up the word of truth!"

The current exponents of present Nama Sankeerthanam with verve but also have keerthanas, dance (no special dress, it is only dhoti as worn traditionally and an angavastram that is used effectively), and yet we are lost in their sincerity. We see Rama, Sita, Krishna, Draupadi, Narasimha, Kuchela and others as though they are right in front of us. The background music is only harmonium and mridangam most of the time that assist the singer. Ladies are not part of the sankerthanam groups of this particular tradition. But they attend in huge numbers receiving the best of India's traditional lore. Though every Bhagavathar reveals familiarity with innumerable composers in several Indian languages, some have favourites. For instance, Udayalur Kalyanaraman's favourites are Ramadasa and Purandaradasa; however, when he sings and explains whether in songs or dramatic presentations, the onlooker never escapes the charm of devotion that nestles into him as he moves his head and keeps time. And what a

India as an ancient and at once diverse and somehow unified civilization of more than one billion people deserves recognition for making steady progress under democratic governance without trampling on its neighbours.

G.Perkovich

wonderful spread we wish to imbibe devotion when we hear the songs! Telugu Kritis, Marathi Abhangs, Narayana Tirtha's Sanskrit Tarangas and the entire verses of Alvars and Nayanmars are with us forever. Yes, Sanatana Dharma is safe, for this unique Dharma is eternal.

(For a snippet of a Bhagavathar emoting Puranic characters like Kuchela, Draupadi, Ajamila and Gajendra, see)

* * *

“LET US LEND OUR EARS TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION TO REVIEW THE WORKING OF THE CONSTITUTION”

Prof. R. Venkata Rao

Chairperson,

VSLLS Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies(VIPS)

Former Vice-Chancellor NLSIU, Bangalore

The epoch making journey of the Constitution of India in the last seventy two years has made the Constitution ‘the New Dharmasashtra’ for every Indian. It has grown from strength to strength and the ethos of constitutional culture and constitutional values have cemented the edifice of the Indian Republic.

One needs to recall the seminal contribution of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution in strengthening the constitutional processes.

Set up on 22nd February,2000, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution with Justice M.N.Venkatachaliah (former Chief Justice of India) as the Chairman, had ten other distinguished persons as members. The members were: Justice Jeevan Reddy Justice R.S.Sarkaria, Justice. K.Punnayya. Sri.Soli Sorabjee, Sri.K.Parasaran, Sri.Subhash C.Kashyap, Sri.C.R.Irani, Dr. Abid Husain, Smt.Sumitra Kulkarni and Sri.P.A.Sangma .

The terms of the reference given to the Commission stated that “the Commission shall examine in the light of the experience of the past fifty years, as to how best the Constitution can respond to the changing needs of efficient, smooth and effective system of governance and socio-economic development of modern India within the framework of Parliamen-

tary democracy, and to recommend changes,if any, that are required to the provisions of the Constitution without interfering with the ‘basic structure’ or ‘basic features’ “.

The Report was submitted on 31st March 2002. 249 Recommendations were made- 58 amendments were suggested and the others related to legislative changes or executive action.

Seminal and far reaching recommendations were made regarding-i) Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles and Fundamental Duties; ii) Electoral Processes and Political Parties; iii) Parliament and State. Legislatures iv) Executive and Public Administration; v) The Judiciary; vi) Union-State Relations; vii) Decentralisation and Devolution; and viii) Pace of Socio-Economic Change and Development.

By way of illustration, reference is made to the following recommendations of the Commission regarding the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles.

Article 21 may be renumbered as clause 1. A new clause (2) be inserted: ‘No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’; New Clause(3)

‘Every person who has been illegally deprived of his right to life or liberty shall have an enforceable right to compensation’.

After, Article 30, the following Article should be added as Article 30 A:

(1) Everyone has a right to have any dispute that can be resolved by the application of law decided in a fair public hearing before an independent court or, where appropriate, another independent and impartial tribunal or forum.

2)The right to access to courts shall be deemed to include the right to reasonably speedy and effective justice in all matters before the courts,ribunals or other for a and the State shall take all reasonable steps to achieve the said object.

Article 39A in Part IV should be shifted to Part III as a new article 30- B to read as under:-

“30-B. Equal justice and free legal aid: The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportuni-

There is no scarcity of work to improve governance and delivery of services, provided the orientation of government activity can be shifted from ‘ruling the people from the top to serving them at the bottom of the pyramid.

Bimal Jalan

13

ty, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.”

The recommendations of the Commission especially the ones relating to the cleansing of electoral processes and the appointment and accountability of the judges are salutary.

One can only wish and pray that the powers that be pay greater attention to the recommendations of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution.

* * *

INDIAN REPUBLIC JUST KEEPS ROLLING ALONG

There have been colossal failures and remarkable achievements, but more importantly there is hope for the future

Dr. Uday Balakrishnan

Indian Postal Service (Retd.)
Former Member, Postal Services Board and
Chairman, Investment Board

For many of my generation born immediately after the formation of the Indian republic 72 years ago this is a moment for reflection and stocktaking. We grew up in the republic, spent all our working lives in it and retired to live our lives out in it. Our reaction is a mixed bag of opportunities missed and foundations laid.

My generation is acutely aware of the frustration and anger among the young who constitute the bulk of the country's population today. India has not moved forward as fast as it ought to have or matched China's growth or the speed at which it eliminated poverty.

Ignoring the young

There are real failures of the Indian state that one cannot wish a way. The gross under funding of primary education something which has continued to this day has left India undereducated and grossly under skilled a tragic outcome for a country with more young people than any other in the world and likely to remain so over the next couple of decades even as

birth rates drop.

The Economist called India out for neglecting its young in a sharp piece titled “India's demographic challenge Wasting time,” in its May 11, 2013 issue. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen devote a whole chapter on the importance of education and India's failure to ensure it in their book

‘An Uncertain Glory - India and Its Contradictions.’

India's healthcare system is abysmal, making Indians one of the most unhealthy in the world. Corruption continues to diminish the state. India's cities are as mired in filth as John Galbraith tells us he found Calcutta in, decades back, in his memoirs ‘A Life In Our Times.’ All this, as the journalist M Rajshekhar trenchantly observes in his book “‘Despite the State’, has “left most Indians trapped in poorly realised lives.” However there is a strong case to be more optimistic and view the Indian republic as a glass half full and filling.

It was never a given that India would emerge as a democratic secular republic in less than three years after gaining independence in 1947. But it did. The Indian republic at creation was heart wrenchingly poor and shockingly illiterate. It produced too little food to feed itself. With memories of 1943 still fresh in everyone's mind, famine was an ever present threat. The wounds of partition were still raw, and the chances of a recurrence of communal violence, which marred the first years of independence, were very high.

That in such unpromising circumstances India could emerge as a republic based on a visionary Constitution was truly an extraordinary achievement that's served India well ever since and how! Almost every decade since 1950 has been better than its preceding one for India.

Food security came with the Green Revolution and India's insatiable thirst for milk was quenched by Operation Flood. A public distribution system set up in the fifties has evolved since then and if anything, has become more transparent. Indians live longer today than at any other time, infrastructure has improved dramatically while poverty continues to decline though the ongoing pandemic has briefly reversed the trend.

Citizenship has been defined as the contribution of one's instructed judgement to the public good.

Harold J.Laski

The country built almost all its steel mills and big dams since it became a republic. Almost all its most modern institutes of science, technology, medicine and management IITs, AIIMS and IIMs came up in that period too. Much to everyone's surprise India's atomic energy and space programmes have taken off the latter acclaimed globally for its innovative and frugal ways.

That all this could happen can be attributed to the fact that the Indian republic has never had to undergo the kind of social and political upheavals

Other countries were forced to endure. The Soviet Union visibly weakened as it aged and failed to reach 70 before imploding in 1991.

China suffered depredations of an extreme kind among them a terrible famine; the Chinese journalist Yang Jisheng catalogues in grim detail how over 30 million Chinese starved to death in his book, *Tombstone The Great Chinese Famine 1958-1962*. The Chinese people are forced to 'deremember' that tragic phase by diktat. Nothing comparable happened in India.

Power of the ballot

Executive power in India, however imperfectly, continues to flow from the ballot box. At no time has a party or coalition which has lost at the polls attempted to seize power or in case it already had it sought to retain it by might. This is more than what can be said of so many countries around the world, most recently and astonishingly the United States.

An India which started off as a Union of States with a powerful Centre is looking more and more federal. While State governments were easily and frequently dismissed right up to the 1980s, today that almost never happens. Protest still is a potent force in India. Public opinion matters.

Despite enjoying a crushing majority in Parliament the NDA government led by the BJP has had to go easy on the CAA and beat a retreat on the farm bills which stand repealed today. How sharply this contrasts with the tragic happenings at Tiananmen square in 1989 and more recently in Hong Kong.

India today is far wealthier than at any time in the last two centuries. It now has the means to cor-

rect its most egregious shortcomings and it will, if the government exudes faith in all its people, not just some of them.

It is their combined faith and hard work that's brought the Indian republic thus far. VS Naipaul makes the point brilliantly in his book, *India A Million Mutinies Now*, "Many thousands of people had worked like that over the years," he tells us, "without any sense of a personal drama, many millions.

It added up in the 40 years since independence to an immense national effort. The results of that effort were now noticeable." This is even more noticeable.'

This is even more noticeable today than when he wrote this more than 30 years ago.

* * *

FROM HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN'S HONIED LOOKS... THE LESS-KNOWN VISION OF SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AND THE ISSUE OF INTOLERANCE – II

Prof. Manoj Das

Yesterday my esteemed friend Prof. B.B. Dutta told me about a scholar who had a significant observation to make: How was it that during the short period when Subhash Chandra led the Congress, there was no feeling of communal intolerance in the party? The answer is, Subhash Chandra had the uncanny knack for inspiring in people an ideal before which communal passions faded away. Deshbandhu C.R. Das too was a stubborn believer in communal harmony and he was sure that man had the capacity to rise higher and higher in his aspirations, going far above personal or communal ambitions. Subhash Chandra's faith in this basic truth was so sincere, so firm that it proved contagious; at least the spirit of politics breathed by him made those following him idealistic enough to suppress, if not totally forget, their pull towards communal prejudices.

But no leader however pure, however great could eradicate intolerance from human consciousness. Nothing short of an evolutionary progress could do that miracle. But the beauty of the minds of both

Many Indians are deeply ambivalent about the private sector and capitalism generally.

Arvind Subramanian and Josh Felman

Deshbandhu C.R. Das and Subhash Chandra was, they believed that progress of that kind was possible – even inevitable.

Let us very briefly survey why intolerance is so deeprooted in human consciousness. The explanation lies at two different planes, anthropological and spiritual. The entire history of human development, in a sense, is marked by two mutually opposing traits: urge for cooperation on one hand and intolerance of one another on the other hand. The primitive man had to seek his fellow-man's cooperation for survival against odds like attacks by ferocious beasts or natural calamities. At the same time he rivalled his neighbour in appropriating the food or other necessities gathered through difficulties. But beneath such superficial diagnosis – which has its relevance at its own plane, there lies a far more profound cause for both the opposing traits. Speaking spiritually, we all are emanations of the one eternal and original Being, call it Brahma or God or the One Supreme creative power. Plunged in ignorance, we have forgotten that sublime source of our origin. However, deeply rooted in our inner-most being, that knowledge is there. Hence we are inevitably drawn towards one another; it is in cooperation that we have built multiple facets of our civilisation, our nations, our several world forums, so on and so forth. At the same time, plunged in ignorance, we have perverted another original truth to its opposite manifestation – the truth that my source, the Divine, is unique, the Supreme, the one without a second; ekamevadvitiyam. This hidden knowledge is perverted and it manifests as my ego, my spontaneous sense of superiority to others, my intolerance of ideas or ideals that are different from mine. God is all-powerful; that truth projected through my ignorance asserts itself as my vanity.

Spiritually speaking, the whole process of evolution is a progress from stark ignorance and ego-sense into the light of knowledge and a sense of universality. The process can be hastened up only by a collective aspiration, by a faith in the future, not by legal, moral or administrative patch-works, though they have their role to play. Today, as some of our friends were discussing the issue of intolerance in the society, I remembered an anecdote which may not be unfamiliar to you:

One day a hermit who sat inside his cave in a

forest saw through his seer-vision a dark spirit passing by. It was the spirit of an epidemic. The hermit called out to him and asked, "Where are you heading? How many lives are you going to claim?" The spirit bowed down to the hermit and said, "Holy Sir, I'm visiting the locality beyond the river; but I am not going to bag more than just a hundred souls."

However, the hermit soon learnt that ten thousand people died of the epidemic in a week. At the end of the week the hermit saw the same spirit returning to his abode. The hermit called out to him and took him to task: "You said that you will take only a hundred lives. But you took ten thousand!"

Answered the spirit, "Holy Sir, believe me, I did not claim a single life more than a hundred. But the other nine thousand and nine hundred people died out of stark fear!"

Well, dear friends, I hope we will not create a climate by shouting "Intolerance" so that, even though there may be a few cases of intolerance, we all will not become victims of the fear of intolerance. And let us not forget that a nervous fear may lead one to do something which he would not do otherwise. There are instances galore of this kind of tragedy.

The twentieth century witnessed the worst manifestation of intolerance. Imagine a nation that was outwardly quite cultured being possessed by an evil force that would lead its entire administrative set up to drive tens of thousands of Jews in broad daylight into the horrors of gas-chambers. Remember the India of the time of Partition – the intolerance witnessed in horrendous communal massacres. The size of headlines such massacres made in newspapers at that time is the same today when a solitary crime of intolerance is reported. That is good so far as that symbolises our greater sensitiveness, our greater feeling of disgust at such occurrences. But more publicity should not be confused with more intolerance. Intolerance - one of the signs of ignorance - is a term with very wide scope. Every case of violence, barring those perpetrated in course of a theft or for strictly personal gain, is a sign of intolerance either at the ideological level or at communal and caste level or at level of personal rivalry, ambition and animosity. But we should be careful enough not to use the term "Intolerance" in the limited politically

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.

Thomas Jefferson

oriented sense in which it is being used today, to any incident of violence.

Once a centipede – as you know that worm has a hundred tiny legs – went to a wise owl and complained of arthritis and the terrible pain he experienced. With great sympathy the wise owl observed that his pain was so terrible because he had a hundred legs. If the number could be reduced to fifty, the pain would be half. To the hopeful centipede the owl said again, “If you reduce them to ten, your pain will be one-tenth of what it is now.”

“Great! Well, Sir...”

“Let me finish,” said the owl gravely, “But the best course open to you is to reduce the number further and have only a pair of legs so that the pain would be the minimum.”

“Wonderful, Sir, now please tell me how to achieve the feat!” appealed the anxious centipede.

Assuming even greater gravity announced the owl, “Look here, I only state the principle; the execution is not my business.”

Our motherland is a vast sub-continent with a hundred painful problems. Over the millennia great spiritual, religious and social ideals have been reduced to lifeless superstitions and prejudices. They cannot be set right by a stroke of legislation or police action or newspaper statements or rejection of awards. Some of such actions may even lead to more intolerance unless we are extremely cautious. Indeed, legislations and police actions are indispensable, but they will not eradicate the disease as it is. Those who are truly concerned about the situation should camp among the people and try to remove the prejudices they nurture. But a true service in that direction can be obtained through education - an education that is just not training for career, but an education that teaches us true human values, spiritual, not the conventional religious education.

What is most important is to inspire in the young a faith in the future of humanity and the role India could play in realising such a future. As Sri Aurobindo said, at present mankind is passing through an evolutionary crisis. All that our mind, our intelligence could give us had been exhausted. We have built up a colossal globe of science and technology, around

us which serves us but which can also destroy us. In any case its service had not brought us any sense of security or freedom from tension and anxiety; it has not blessed us with a sense of fulfilment. For these goals to be achieved, we must activate the dormant power of love in our consciousness. Subhash Chandra believed in this innate power. This is what he wrote:

“For me the essential nature of reality is Love. Love is the essence of the Universe and the essential principle in human life...I may be asked how I came to the conclusion that the essential nature of reality is Love. I am afraid, my epistemology is not quite orthodox. I have come to this conclusion partly from a rational study of life in all aspects – partly from intuition and partly for pragmatic considerations. I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfil myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life. A plurality of considerations drive me to one and the same conclusion.”

Subhash Chandra goes on:

“I have remarked above that the essential principle of human life is Love. This statement may be challenged when one can see so much in life that is opposed to Love; but the paradox can be easily explained. The essential principle is not fully manifest yet; it is unfolding itself in space and time. Love, like the reality of which it is the essence, is dynamic.

“What, now, is the nature of the process of unfolding? Firstly, it is a movement forward or not? Secondly, is there any law underlying this movement?

“The unfolding process is progressive in character. This assertion is not quite dogmatic. Observation and study of nature point to the conclusion that everywhere there is progress. .. there may be periodic set-backs but on the whole, considered from a long period point of view, there is progress. Apart from this rational consideration there is the intuitive experience that we are moving ahead with the lapse of time. And last but not the least, there is the necessity, both biological and moral, to have faith in progress.”

The essay from which I read out these passages is included in Subhash Chandra’s autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim* and bears the title “My Faith”. We can

pay the best tribute to Subhash Chandra if we share this robust faith of his. In fact we are rarely conscious of the fact that we live every moment of our life by faith; even every physical step we take is based on the faith that the earth would not give away; the very first cry a child gives out is the assertion of its faith that there are loving souls awaiting to welcome it. Love and progress are the two cardinal values of life. It is a truth, ladies and gentlemen, that the average Indian has these qualities built into his consciousness.

Once a professor from the West, a renowned expert on the theories of Evolution, was speaking to a group of professors and research scholars in an Indian university. Towards the end of his talk he revealed that his knowledge of the theories of Evolution received a sense of fulfilment not through any new theory put forth by any scientist, but in the light of the celebrated Indian mystic, Sri Aurobindo, who asserts that whatever had evolved was already involved: life evolved in matter because it was already involved there; mind evolved because it was involved in life – just as a flower evolved because it was involved in the bud, bud was involved in the stem, so on and so forth. But the process of evolution has not ended. Out of mind will evolve what remains involved in it – the Supermind. Man as he is today could not be the final product of evolution. Out of him will grow a new species that will live a life divine, totally bereft of the present vices dominating the human consciousness.

It was evening and it had begun raining. As the professor was entering his host the Vice-Chancellor's car, an elderly man unfurled an umbrella on his head and thanked him for the talk. The professor was intrigued, for the man looked like a rustic. To his polite query, the man introduced himself as a retired primary school teacher who lived with his son, a clerk at the university. What the man remarked next amazed the guest. "Sir, when you said that the evolutionary spirit could still bring out a new glorious race out of the present half-baked mankind, some scholars in the audience murmured expressing their doubt if man as he is now – nasty and gross - can ever become pure and divine. But I don't appreciate such doubts. You see, in front of my son's residence there is a lake. Sometimes in the morning I find a few lotuses abloom. Well, if out of a stuff like the mud a wonder like the lotus could be possible by the Grace

of the sun, why can't out of the filthy human life, with the Grace of the Divine, grow a glorious divine life?

Well, that is the native Indian faith. Subhas Chandra's faith represented that indefatigable optimism.

I am grateful to the Trust for giving me this opportunity to speak to you. My sincere thanks are due to Brigadier Chhikara who took the trouble of personally flying down to Pondicherry and meeting me and finalising this significant programme. Thank you all.

(From: Manoj Das Of Mystics and Miracles and other Essays Edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya 2018)

* * *

THE GENIUS OF ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR

Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty

Former Vice Chancellor,
Central University of Orissa, and
Former Professor Head, Department of English
University of Hyderabad

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar [26 September 1820 – 29 July 1891), was undoubtedly a star in the firmament called the Indian Renaissance. An intellectual, scholar, activist, educator, philosopher, philanthropist and reformer all rolled into one he strode the literary and socio-cultural scene of his times like a colossus. Many of his mentors, associates and fellow scholars were giants like him, and yet Vidyasagar left his own footprints on the sand of time. Sri Aurobindo often speaks of 'idea forces' responsible for the birth of epoch making movements and personalities. There is no doubt that the Bengal and Indian Renaissance must owe its genesis to a Divine dispensation.

Vidyasagar's life and times intersected with some of the major literary, educational and political developments of his times. Taught by such luminaries as Raj Narayan Basu, the grandfather of Sri Aurobindo from his wife Swarnalata's side, Vidyasagar witnessed the great Indian uprising of 1857, rubbed shoulder with British and Indian personalities such as Drink Water Bethune (after whom the famous Bethune School and College for Women have been named),

Lord William Bentinck, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, Sir Fredrick Halliday and others.

A life of struggle marked Vidyasagar's childhood. He was given Sanskrit education by Thakurdas. Subsequently, he was admitted into the Sanskrit College on 1 June 1829. His marriage was settled with a daughter of Satrugna Bhattacharya's daughter Dinamayi Devi who was eight at that time.

Vidyasagar steadfastly pursued scholarship and won many prizes for essay writing. In 1838, John Mayor offered a prize of one hundred rupees in cash for the best poetic essay in 100 Slokas on a description of the earth and other celestial bodies. Iswar Chandra's poem was judged the best entry and he won the coveted prize.

Among the notable events of Vidyasagar's life, we are told, was a deep friendship he shared with Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar. Always modest to a fault, Vidyasagar recommended Tarkalankar for a position to teach Hindu law to civilians in Fort William College. Soon he gathered a reputation for his sense of generosity towards all especially his colleagues and rivals.

Vidyasagar's first Bengali work *The Vasudeva Charita* was an important landmark. In 1847, he published his *Vetala Panchavingsati*, a translation of the Hindi version. In March 1849 he was appointed to the post of the head writer and treasurer of Fort William College. He joined as Professor of Belles Letters on a monthly pay of ninety rupees, and became the Principal of Sanskrit College on 20 January 1851.

Vidyasagar's role in the promotion of widow remarriage and female education is not widely known. His friend and close associate, Bethune had established a girls' school in 1849 in Calcutta. In 1855, he was appointed as a Special Inspector of Schools on a monthly pay of 200 rupees in addition to being the Principal of Sanskrit College.

Vidyasagar's spirited defense of widows to have a decent civic life in accordance with the best social and community practice was opposed by many orthodox and hostile observers. For instance, the influential *Bangadarshan* edited by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in its issue of June 1880 wrote against widow remarriage. Undeterred, Vidyasagar published

Marriage of Hindu Widows. After a brilliant and dedicated career, he retired from public service in November 1958.

Vidyasagar was no nativist in the exclusive and parochial sense. Although a votary of Sanskrit, he realized the importance of English as a window to the world, and introduced English in the curriculum of Sanskrit College, for he had a strong belief in the efficacy of English education.

The correspondence between the acclaimed poet Michael Madhusudan Datta and Vidyasagar gives us valuable glimpses into the character and personality of Vidyasagar. It testifies to his sense of generosity coupled with utter simplicity, rare to find in a man of his attainments. Madhusudan Datta continued to prey upon Vidyasagar's kindness to extract money on one pretext or the other; the money was never paid back. Whether in service or not, Vidyasagar carried out philanthropic work among the hungry and the needy. During the Great Famine of Bengal and Orissa in 186, he opened feeding houses at his own cost for Birsingha and the surrounding villages. He spoke out against the prevalent custom of polygamy and opposed demeaning colonial practices in institutions of learning. 'The shoe question', tells us that on 28 January 1874, a controversy was created when Vidyasagar was not permitted to visit the Indian Museum in the Asiatic Society Complex in the Park Street. Indignant, he made a representation to H.F. Banford Esq., Hon. Secretary to the Trustees of the Indian Museum protesting against the colonial practice where natives were not permitted to enter the building with the Indian shoes. There was no outcome to his protest. However, there was a wide coverage of this issue in the native press. For instance, *The Hindoo Patriot* wrote vehemently in support of Vidyasagar on 26 July 1874.

When the Age of Consent bill was being framed, Vidyasagar wrote a detailed note safeguarding the health and wellbeing of young brides. Unfortunately, his advice was not heeded by the government, and an opportunity was clearly lost. After a life dedicated to intellectual pursuits and steadfast social service, Vidyasagar passed away on 29 July 1901.

A born genius, Vidyasagar has left a legacy

Bold has been my message to the people of the West. Bolder to those at home.

Swami Vivekananda

hard to surpass by any standard. The conversation he had with no less a person that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, confirms the fact that the truly great are the ones who are possessed of real humility.

* * *

SOME GREAT BHARATANAARIS-I

Dr. R. Sampath

Former Chief of Bureau
The Hindu Visakhapatnam

That the fair sex has been given a special status in Sanaatana Dharma is endorsed by the fact that women need not perform any austere ritual to achieve the goal of liberation. It is enough if they assist their husbands in Dharmic activities. It is further emphasised in our Shastras that a woman gets half the merit of her husband's 'punya', whereas the man has to bear fifty per cent of the sins, if any, committed by her. And a man without his 'sahadharmini' (consort) is unfit to perform any sacrificial ritual.

Though woman by nature is docile, she can rise to the occasion with her inherent spiritual strength whenever situation demands. Instances are aplenty in our Puraanas wherein women have shown their mettle. The sterling example of such womanhood is Saavitri, who could bend even Yama, the Lord of Death, tactfully and retrieve her husband Satyavaan from the jaws of death. Here goes a brief version of her story: King Aswapati, ruler of Madra, who was childless for a long time, performs a ritual to propitiate Surya who grants him a daughter. She is named Saavitri because she was the product of the Savitru yagna. Saavitri grows up to be the most beautiful princess of her time. As several princes seeking her hand could not match her beauty and brain, Aswapati asks her to find a match herself. While on a search for her suitor, Saavitri sees in a forest ashram a handsome youth guiding his blind father into the hermitage. On enquiry she learns that the young man is Satyavan who is the son of Dyumatsena who had lost his kingdom and sight in a battle. Moved by Satyavan's nobility, she decides to marry him. Saavitri returns to Madra where she finds Narada Muni talking to her father. When she tells both her choice of husband, Narada dissuades her from marrying Satyavan who has been destined to die exactly one year later. But seeing Saavitri's determination to marry Satyavan, the divine sage who is a 'trikaalagnaani' blesses her. After the wedding, Saavitri moves to the hermitage to live with her

husband and in-laws. As the day of destiny becomes imminent, Saavitri performs a special and austere ritual to ensure her husband's longevity. On the fateful day, she accompanies Satyavan to the forest, taking the permission of Dyumatsena. Satyavan, while cutting wood, suddenly becomes weak and lays his head in Saavitri's lap. Lord Yama himself comes to pick up the soul of Satyavan. Seeing Saavitri, Yama asks her to go back since her husband's life span is over. But Saavitri pleads with Yama to take her also with him, since a devoted wife's place is where her husband is. Yama tries to persuade Saavitri against that, and offers her some boons, barring the one seeking her husband's resuscitation. She then asks Yama to restore the sight and kingdom of Dyumatsena. That done, she continues to follow Yama, who appreciates her perseverance and says, "Oh lady, I have done only my duty. I cannot take you with me since your life span is not over. Please leave me. For that I will give you more boons." Noting that Yama has not this time included the "except your husband's resuscitation" clause, Saavitri asks for a hundred sons to her parents whose only daughter she is, and a hundred sons for her and Satyavan. Cleverly entrapped thus, the Lord of Death praises her ingenuity and grants her wishes, restoring the life of Satyavan. After taking leave of Yama, Saavitri and Satyavan return to the hermitage where they find

Dyumatsena in all regal glory with the restoration of his kingdom and sight. Saavitri has thus proved how a virtuous woman could achieve the impossible. The story of Saavitri inspired Yogi Aurobindo so much that he authored a great poetic work by name 'Saavitri'.

Damayanti, the most beautiful and intelligent princess of Vidarbha, hears the greatness of Nala, the handsome prince of Nishada, from a swan messenger sent by Nala himself after falling in love with her without even seeing her by listening to a Brahmin mendicant and migrant. She is also keen on marrying him. During her 'swayamvara', arranged by her father King Bhima, she correctly identifies Nala, despite four celestial suitors, Indra, Varuna, Agni and Yama, who replicate Nala, and chooses him as her groom. The celestials appreciate the uncanny skill of Damayanti to pick the right person. Kali Purusha, who also wants to marry her, comes late to the 'swayamvara' and is disappointed. Despite the other celestials' advice to leave the matter at that, Kali Purusha vows to punish

Keeping too many secrets has blinded the United States to an emerging and dangerous threat.

Oona A.Hathaway

both Nala and Damayanti. Learning that Nala has a weakness for gambling, Kali encourages Nala's distant relative Pushkara to defeat Nala in a game of dice, by which Nala loses his kingdom and gets banished. Both Nala and Damayanti retire to forest. Owing to his inability to look after her welfare, Nala deserts Damayanti in the forest, leaving a message that she get back to Vidarbha. As Nala wanders in the forest, he saves Karkotaka, a mighty snake that has fallen into fire. Instead of thanking him, Karkotaka bites him, thereby turning him ugly in appearance. When Nala protests, the snake says that destiny has willed that for the next twelve years Nala will face a lot of difficulties; hence his ugly appearance will protect him from his enemies. Karkotaka also gives him an ornament wearing which, after twelve years, would restore his original form. Nala, who is an expert cook and also charioteer, goes to Ayodhya where he becomes the cook of King Rituparna. In order to find out the whereabouts of Nala, Damayanti sends a Brahmin pundit to visit the durbars of all kingdoms directing him to question whether it is fair on the part of a husband to abandon a hapless wife. The pundit does accordingly and only in the Ayodhya durbar he gets a response from an ugly looking person who says: "It is not at all unfair, because the husband's duty is to send his spouse to her parental home when he is unable to feed her." When the pundit narrates what has happened in Ayodhya, intelligent Damayanti concludes that Nala must be in the service of Rituparna. She immediately asks her father to send the message of a second 'swayamavaram' for her, scheduled for the very next day, only to Rituparna, who is tempted to attend the event. "But how to go to Vidarbha the very next day," he is worried. Nala assures the king "Oh Lord! If you permit me to drive the chariot, I can reach you there quickly, since I am an expert charioteer." Rituparna agrees, and he is there in the capital of Vidarbha at day-break. By the time they enter Bhima's palace, the twelve-year adverse period is over for Nala. He wears the ornament given by Karkotaka and his original handsome frame is restored. Rituparna apologises to Nala for unknowingly employing him as a menial servant. After the happy reunion, Nala challenges Pushkara for a game of dice. In the absence of Kali Purusha's support, the latter is easily defeated and Nala regains his kingdom. The trials and tribulations of Nala and Damayanti would not have ended, but for the strategic

moves of the Vidarbha princess. Damayanti is an example of how a woman can convert impossibility into possibility.

Another great woman of yore is Sakuntala, the daughter of sage Viswamitra and celestial nymph Menaka who was deputed by Indra to disturb the penance of the sage. In a weak moment, Viswamitra falls prey to the temptress. Their progeny is Sakuntala, who is abandoned by both parents. Despite being deserted at birth and having been brought up in the ambience of a hermitage, the youthful Sakuntala is married by the Puru king Dushyanta in Gandhrva style, only to be repudiated by him later because of his inability to recall, due to sage Durvasa's curse. When we look at the plight of a woman, who is carrying her lover's child, we cannot but hail Sakuntala's will power to redeem the situation. The story goes thus: The helpless innocent child Sakuntala is found by Kanwa Maharshi who raises her in his ashram. She grows up to be the most beautiful maiden. One day when Dushyantra comes to the ashram chasing a deer, he sees Sakuntala and, charmed by her beauty, wants to marry her. Sakuntala, too, is attracted to Dushyanta. As the sage is away at that time, they marry according to the Gandharva tradition. Dushyanta, who has to return to Hastinapuram because of royal duties, takes leave of Sakuntala with a promise to make her the queen, and as a token of their marriage he presents her his signet ring. Sakuntala, who is pregnant, is constantly yearning for Dushyanta's company. On one such occasion sage Durvasa comes to the ashram. Instead of receiving the sage with honours in the absence of her foster father, she is contemplating on when Dushyanta will come and take her to the palace. This indifference towards the guest enrages Durvasa who curses that whomever she has been thinking of, instead of performing the duty of receiving the guest, will forget her. Hearing this, Sakuntala's aide Priyamvada prostrates at the feet of the sage and begs him to take back the curse, as she is pregnant. Durvasa relents and says if Sakuntala could produce a token of Dushyanta, he will immediately recall his association with Sakuntala. On return, Kanwa Maharshi learns the developments and asks ashram matron Gautami and two hermits to take Sakuntala to Dushyanta's palace and install her as the queen. On reaching the palace, Dushyanta receives them as guests, but when told about Sakuntala's rightful claim, he repudiates it because of the loss of memory from Durvasa's curse.

Sakuntala gently recounts the happy days she and the king had spent in the ashram, but Dushyanta rejects the claim as false. When all her pleas fall on a deaf ear, Sakuntala, as a last resort, wants to persuade the king, by showing the signet ring he had presented her. But to her horror, she finds the ring missing. [Actually, the ring was lost in a river when Sakuntala was playfully keeping her right hand in the waters, while the four were crossing the river in a boat to reach Hastinapuram, and it is swallowed by a fish]. Dushyanta laughs at this, calling it a “deceit only a woman is capable of”. Piqued by the snide remark on womanhood, the helpless Sakuntala wants to return to the Ashram, but Gautami and the hermits tell her to stay on until Dushyanta regains the memories about her. Left in the lurch, Sakuntala invokes the intervention of her mother Menaka who descends from heaven and takes away her daughter. All, including the king, are perplexed. Dushyanta feels sad for the helpless Sakuntala, but thinks “How can I accept a woman with whom I had no contacts; that too in the absence of any proof?” As time passes by, one day the royal sentries bring a fisherman to the palace, accusing him of theft, since he is in possession of the king’s ring. The fisherman pleads not guilty stating that the ring was found within a fish he had caught in his net and that he was bringing the same to the palace. When Dushyanta sees the ring, he regains memories about Sakuntala, and he curses himself for having ill-treated her. He then rushes to Kanwa’s ashram only to be told that she is not there. Like a mad man he wanders for weeks together all over in search of his heart-throb. When he almost loses hopes of finding her, Dushyanta sees a little boy putting his hand in the mouth of a lion. Wonder-struck, the king goes near the boy and asks him what he is doing. The boy replies, “I am counting the teeth in the lion’s mouth.” Pleased by the reply, he enquires about the parentage of the child who proudly declares, “I am Bharata, son of king Dushyanta and Sakuntala.” Overwhelmed with joy, Dushyanta says “I would like to see your mother.” Bharata takes the king to Sakuntala, and after the happy reunion of the lovers and their son, they move over to Hastinapuram. Sakuntala thus proves how a woman, despite in a distress condition, could face any challenge boldly and successfully, too.

(To be continued)

* * *

WATER IS LIFE – OUR WETLANDS

Dr. (Ms) Ahana Lakshmi

Environmental Consultant

There is something decidedly peaceful in sitting by a large expanse of water. A lake or a river-stretch exudes calm and apart from a boat or two gliding by and perhaps sounds of clothes being washed, there is relatively little sound from the waterbody itself, unlike the pounding surf on a beach. All seems still till a kingfisher suddenly appears, darts into the water and flies away, all in a flash. Then you begin to become more aware of what is around, that what you thought was a stick is a heron stalking a frog, a kite is flying high in the sky and the red-wattled lapwing is calling from not far away.

Wetlands are all around us. They have been the core of our life from times immemorial. Alas, these days not all of us have the good fortune of close association with wetlands, especially the town and city born younger generation that see rivers appear more like sewers and lakes and tanks used as dumping grounds for waste; and do not think beyond the fact that when you open the tap, you get water. This needs to change and we need to have a greater connect with the wetlands around us on a regular basis and not just while on a holiday.

Every year, 2nd February is observed as World Wetlands Day to mark the date of adoption of the multilateral treaty on Wetlands of importance especially as waterfowl habitat in the Iranian city of Ramsar (which is why it is also known as the Ramsar convention). It is also the first year that World Wetlands Day will be observed as a United Nations international day, marking the importance being given to wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention includes a wide variety of wetlands – natural and artificial, permanent and temporary, flowing and standing, fresh, brackish and marine. Ramsar sites are identified based on a list of criteria and special efforts are made to ensure that they are protected, cared for and improved. There are only 47 such sites in India but more than seven and a half lakh wetlands in India listed in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change’s website on Indian wetlands; and thousands more that are probably known only locally. In fact, it was only in

We should take care not to make the intellect our God; it has of course powerful muscles, but no personality.

Albert Einstein

2015 when Chennai literally went underwater that detailed maps of all the waterbodies in and around Chennai surfaced. The maps were stark reminders that there used to be so many more wetlands in and around Chennai. In their place we have dense housing with road names such as Spur Tank Road and Nungambakkam Tank Bund Road, to name just two.

The looming threat of climate change as well as potential water wars has spurred a lot of action, individually and collectively, for a while now. Technology in the form of satellite imagery is helping us identify these wetlands and their watersheds, so that at least they can be factored in regional and local planning. Slowly and steadily the huge variety of services that wetlands provide are being understood and valued. Wetlands are biodiversity hotspots (especially birds and fish), freshwater stores (wetlands swell during the monsoon and prevent flooding, they release water relatively slowly and allow it to percolate underground; surface and groundwater is used in agriculture), carbon sinks (there is so much talk of carbon sequestration – the reeds, sedges and grasses as well as the plants underwater store huge amounts of carbon) and a source of livelihoods (from reeds to make mats to fish for consumption) – these are just a few examples. Many of the wetlands are ‘Important Bird Areas’, serving as feeding and nesting grounds for a huge number of migratory birds bringing a host of excited birdwatchers with their binoculars and telephoto lenses.

But they need to be cared for, protected, enhanced and respected. Not used as dumpsites for our sewage and wastes. This year’s campaign on world wetland day calls on everyone to take action – to invest financial, human and political capital to save wetlands. That action can be something as simple becoming aware of wetlands around us, and teaching wetland lore to the younger generation. It could be encouraging children to learn to identify wetland birds, by sight and by call. It could be supporting a local organisation that is working on cleaning and maintaining a wetland. It has to be done; as the Shathapatha Brahmana says ‘waters are the foundation of the universe’ and the core of our existence.

* * *

Book Review

SOUTH INDIAN INSCRIPTIONS, Vol. XLII (Telugu inscriptions collected during the years 1954-57), edited by Dr. C. Somasundara Rao (New Delhi 2020), published by the Archaeological Survey of India. Price: 923/-.

This volume is the latest in the series entitled South Indian Inscriptions, published by the Archaeological Survey of India. The Epigraphical branch of the Survey collects inscriptions from different places in the country and makes note of them briefly in its annual reports; and the texts of these inscriptions are published in due course under this series.

The texts of the inscriptions are very useful for reconstructing the history of ancient and medieval India; and Andhra and Telangana are no exception to it. In general, the material contained in the inscriptions is considered more valuable than any other form for the simple reason that it is documented. The inscriptions which find a place in this specialised volume are written in both national and regional scripts- Brahmi, Telugu-Kannada and Telugu scripts. Inscriptions found in the border of the Telugu speaking areas have been inscribed in the Tamil, Kannada and Oriya scripts. While Sanskrit and Telugu are the predominant languages in which the inscriptions were written, Prakrit was used for the Buddhist inscriptions (e.g., Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, etc.).

Though the period of collection is just three years, inscriptions starting with the Asokan period (3rd century B.C.) and ending with the Vijayanagara period (16th-17th century A.D.) find a place in this volume. The earliest inscriptions are Buddhist in nature- the Asokan edicts at Rajula-mandagiri and the Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda inscriptions of the period of the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus. Along with these are the label inscriptions on pot-sherds from Salihundam ranging from 2nd-1st century B.C. to the 5th-6th century A.D. They record the names of the donors to the Buddhist monasteries.

Except for a few label inscriptions, most of the other inscriptions of the mediaeval period record gifts to Hindu temples. They record the donation of sheep, buffaloes and cows for supply of ghee to the temple for the lighting of a perpetual lamp (akhanda-

Many of the sweetest things in our lives are not rational, though natural.

Manoj Das

dipa) in the presence of the deity. Many also record gifts of villages/lands/ money for daily (nitya) and special (naimittika) worship of the god/goddess (involving activities like dipa, dhupa, naivedya) and for angarangabhogas. Sometimes the items that are to be offered to the deity are listed along with the names of the special occasions (utsavas), on the lines of the Tirumala-Tirupati inscriptions.

The temple acted as an epicentre of socio-economic and cultural activity in the mediaeval period. It employed persons from different social classes for attending to various works performed inside the temple. For example, it used to maintain the architect, goldsmith, brazier, carpenter and many other persons for sundry duties in the temple. Mercantile and maritime communities (Nanadesis) used to meet in the temples and make resolutions in the presence of the deities to have sanctity of the resolutions and implementation by fellow workers.

The inscriptions of the Vijayanagara period make a very interesting reading because it was during this time that the Nayakships rose to prominence. It was also the time when sub-infeudation was at its peak.

There is an inscription of Krishnadevaraya which describes him as mahamandalesvara (title of a feudal lord), in contradiction to his assumption of high-ranking titles like maharajadhiraja and rajaparnesvara. In an inverse way, Kakati Ganapatideva, who usually styled himself as mahamandalesvara in his inscriptions, had taken the royal title of rajadhiraja.

The Vijayanagara records mention land endowments for specific rituals and festivities in the temple. Auspicious days like dasami and purnima and festivals like Krishnashtami, teppa-tirunallu and teru-tirunallu were celebrated pompously.

The book further lists out the terms used for coins, territorial divisions, weights and measures, etc. It also contains the terms indicative of the tax exemptions and privileges granted to persons/ institutions by the State, particularly in respect of agraharas and temple lands. Photographs of select inscriptions appear at the end of the book.

A book of this type, addressed mainly to the specialists in the field of epigraphy, can also interest laymen, provided they are eager to know more about the society and culture of ancient and mediaeval Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It is understood that the work on the texts of inscriptions collected subsequent to 1957 is in progress. Hope these publications would encourage people to learn the old scripts and add to the existing treasure trove of knowledge of history. Dr. Somasundara Rao who headed the Department of History and Archaeology was President of the Epigraphical Society of India and Andhra History Congress. The self-effacing scholar was fortunate to have become a disciple of late Shri Mallampalli Somasekhara Sarma, a pioneer in the field of epigraphy and numismatics and a widely respected teacher and a doyen among Andhra historians.

- A Prasanna Kumar

* * *

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Dwarakamay, 50-52-19, T.P.T. Colony, Seethammadhara, Visakhapatnam - 530013.

Tel : 0891-2534868.

Governing Body

Prof. A. Prasanna Kumar - President
Dr. S. Vijaya Kumar - Vice President
Shri D.S. Varma - Secretary
Shri T.S.R. Prasad - Treasurer

Shri V. Seetaramaiah
Shri A.S.N. Prasad
Prof. K.C. Reddy
Dr. K. Venkateswarlu
Prof. R. Venkata Rao
Dr. G. Madhukumar
Prof. I. Dosagiri Rao

Members

Dr. (Mrs.) R. Sasiprabha
Dr. (Mrs.) B. Meena Rao
Prof. P. Vijaya Prakash
Dr. Lucas Peter I.R.S. (Retd.)
Shri P. Suryanarayana
Dr. K. Kumar Raja
Mr. Hamza Kasim Mehdi

Edited and published by A. Prasanna Kumar

Website : www.centreforpolycystudiesvizag.com Email: ayyagariprasannakumar@gmail.com

and printed at Sathyam Offset Imprints Ph : 984 999 6538