

Freedom First

The Liberal Magazine



AN ARMY OF GODS



Freedom First believes in an open society based on minimum government and maximum freedom tempered by a sense of individual responsibility, in which the people's genius has a fair opportunity to develop and grow; we reject any ideology, movement or policy that sets one group of citizens against another be it based on class, caste, religion or envy.

Saat^{Ka} Jadoo

Union
DOUBLE
Deposit Scheme



Ek lagayein, Duguna paayein.

**Double your fixed deposit amount in just 7 years and 7 months.
Interest @ 9.25% p.a.**

- For senior citizens amount doubles in just 7 years and 3 months
- Interest rate for senior citizens @ 9.75% p.a. • Maximum Deposit Rs. 15 Lakh

यूनियन बैंक
ऑफ़ इंडिया
अच्छे लोग, अच्छा बैंक



Union Bank
of India
Good people to bank with

Helpline Nos.: 1800 22 2244 (Toll free no.) | 022 2575 1500 (Chargeable)
022 2571 9600 (For NRIs) | www.unionbankofindia.co.in

Conditions apply

Freedom First

The Liberal Magazine
61st Year of Publication

Number 554 – August 2013

Advisory Board:

Mr. Sharad Bailur
Mr. A. V. Gopalakrishnan
Mr. Firoze Hirjikaka
Mr. Ashok Karnik
Mr. Farrokh Mehta
Mr. Jehangir Patel
Mr. Nitin G. Raut
Brig. S. C. Sharma (retd.)
Mr. Kunwar Sinha
Mr. Sameer Wagle

Editor:

S. V. Raju

Associate Editor:

Prof. R. Srinivasan

Web Editor:

Sharad Bailur

Editorial Team:

Dr. Rca Godbole
Ms. Hina Manerikar
Dr. Jyoti Marwah
Mr. Nitin Raut

Cover Design:

Vivek Raju

Administration, Accounts,

Subscription, Circulation:

Ms. Kashmira Rao

Contact:

Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom

3rd floor, Army & Navy Building
148, Mahatma Gandhi Road
Mumbai 400001
Telefax. 022 22843416 /66396366
Editor's Cell: 9820016392

Subscription:

Annual: Rs.200; Two years: Rs.350

Three years: Rs.500

Overseas: Annual only US\$20 / £10.

Cheques/DDs in favour of ICCF

Email: freedomfirst1952@gmail.com

Web: www.freedomfirst.in

Published by J. R. Patel for the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom and printed by him at Union Press, 13 Homji Street, Fort, Mumbai 400001. Tel. 22660357, 22665526. Typeset by Narendra Kotak, A-605/606, Mahavir Platinum, Next to Indian Oil Nagar, Govandi, Mumbai 400043.

Between Ourselves...

"A disaster waiting to happen" is perhaps becoming the most familiar phrase that describes governance in our country – confirming, sadly though, that this phrase and the other one which *Freedom First* keeps repeating – "the Descent Continues.." are both closely related and are likely to be with us for a long time to come, with children, among other sections of the population who trustingly eat what is dished out to them by the state-funded Mid-Day-Meal now more notoriously known by its acronym (MDM) continue to die. Now everyone knows where Saran is thanks to the report that 23 school-going children died of food poisoning; and if you happen to have read page 12 of *The Times of India*, Mumbai you would have also known that another 23 students fall sick in a Goa school (but did not die, because as the health office surmised, it must have been nothing more than indigestion as "the children could have been hungry all morning and the food may not have been cooked properly"; or another which reports that 155 girl students fell sick, "apparently after eating eggs in a school in Neyveli"; or that "39 students fell ill after consuming food contaminated by a dead scorpion served at their school in Odisha's Dhenkanal district." Yet another that belongs ironically to a different genre should be amusing: 60 children in Solapur were admitted to various hospitals "after consuming folic acid and iron supplements served to them under a government scheme"!

On the other hand, I do not recall reading any reference in the newspapers about the wholesome and hygienic food that is served to school children by, for example, the Akshaya Patra Foundation which runs school lunch programs across India. According to Wikipedia, the organization distributes freshly cooked, healthy meals daily to 1.3 million underprivileged children in 9,000 government schools through 20 locations in 9 states across India. There are smaller groups like this one that are doing yeomen service but perhaps not interesting to the corrupt politician-corrupt NGO axis that has a stranglehold on governments and which, to go back to the *The Times of India* report cited earlier, is not bothered if the "kitchen was in the open, there was no storage facility, and worse rice, potato, and edible oil were kept alongside pesticides".

Editor.

In this Issue

Obituary: Dr. Rustom C. Cooper	4
From Our Readers	6
Reflections:	
● Lest We Forget the 'Emergency'	Kuldip Nayar 8
Report:	
● The Uttarakhand Disaster	Suresh Sharma 10
The Economy:	
● Implications of the Falling Rupee	Sunil S. Bhandare 13
Foreign Relations in the 21st Century:	
● India-US Relations Today	B. Ramesh Babu 16
Point Counter Point	Ashok Karnik 19
Cornucopia	Firoze Hirjikaka 21
Perspective:	
● Freedom House Questions Freedom in 'Nations in Transit'	Dr. R. G. Gidadhubli 23
Discussion:	
● On Secularism	Saratchandra C. Panda 26
Book Review	
Yerrangadu Arboretum by M. Murugesan, Lalitha Vijayan, V. S. Vijayan, reviewed by	S. Viswanathan 31
Educating Adults	
● The Right to Education Act (14)	Suresh Sharma 33
● The Age of Darkness – A Short Story	Dr. Ishita Marwah 35
Nostalgia:	
Freedom First This month in August 1956	facing page 38

Dr. Rustom C. Cooper

(18 August 1922 - 18 June 2013)

Dr. R. C. COOPER accountant and tax practitioner, formerly non-executive Chairman of The Times of India Group, Vice-Chairman of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Vice Chairman of the Indian Red Cross and president of the Indian Merchants' Chamber passed away in London on June 18.

In a reply to our message of condolence, his daughter Farida Cooper wrote that her father suffered a cardiac arrest as he was preparing to go to bed at night and died peacefully.

According to Farida her father left India in the mid-seventies and settled in Singapore where he started his own financial and infrastructure consultancy, Coopers Private Limited – which included as clients, individuals, corporates and enterprises in developing countries.

He was a President of the Rotary Club of Singapore and had the honour of having the 3rd Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong who was known to him, as Guest of Honour at his Installation Dinner. Dr. Cooper was also the first representative of the Zoroastrian faith on the Inter-Religious Organization of Singapore (IRO)

His career and interests in India were of course known to us. The photograph published on this page is when he was in his mid or late forties (we prefer to see him as we last remembered him) when he took on Government of India and got the Supreme Court to annul Mrs. Indira Gandhi's ordinance and parliamentary approval to the nationalisation of the country's 14 leading banks. He was the General Secretary of the Swatantra Party.

Between the early sixties and the early seventies he was part of the national leadership of the Swatantra Party. And it is this period I recall my close association with him insofar as his political work was concerned. He was literally conscripted into the Swatantra Party by Sir Homi Mody, himself a distinguished member of the Constituent Assembly, and who was among the party's founders, to help him in his task as the Party's national treasurer. In 1969 when Minoo Masani succeeded Prof. N. G. Ranga as the president of the Swatantra Party Cooper was his choice for General Secretary of the Party.

The election of national office bearers of the Party was held in 1969 in Bangalore. When Cooper was elected General Secretary he was uncomfortable. He told me that with both the President and the General Secretary being Parsis, it would come to be known as a 'Parsis Party'. He would therefore speak to Masani about his fears and persuade



him to choose someone else who was not a Parsi as General Secretary and he himself would be happy to continue as Treasurer. I advised Cooper that before he spoke to Masani who had already made up his mind, he should meet Rajaji and share his misgivings with him. So that evening we met Rajaji at his residence. After hearing him out Rajaji wanted to know whether there was any other problem other than the fact that he and Masani were both Parsis that bothered Cooper? Was he confident that he would be able to discharge his duties as General Secretary? Equally,

importantly would he have the time to give what that position demanded? When Cooper replied in the affirmative Rajaji dismissed his fears as baseless. He said that the Swatantra Party needed office bearers who were competent and men of personal integrity. His religion was of no concern though Rajaji said he had great respect for the teachings of Zarathustra. I still remember the happy smile on Cooper's face to hear what Rajaji had to tell him and even more when as we were leaving Rajaji blessing him for a successful tenure.

Thereafter for the next two years Dr. Cooper established a regular regimen to attend to his work as General Secretary. Three days a week on an average he would walk down from his office (a ten minute walk) to the party office with his sandwich box and we would deal with party matters. When this time was occasionally not enough he would find ways to create time for party work despite his numerous professional and social engagements. He was decisive, clear and revealed a complete understanding of Party policy.

After the Swatantra Party's defeat in the 1971 elections, Masani resigned from the Party's presidentship. Cooper followed suit so that the incoming president would be free to choose his own team. He also decided to retire from active politics.

But this did not end his interest in public affairs, particularly political developments that were very worrisome to all those who believed in liberal values and the need for good governance based on the rule of law. So as a private citizen he engaged in shooting off letters from time to time to the Prime Minister on a number of issues of national concern.

This tribute to the memory of this outstanding person would be incomplete without our sharing with readers a background note as a preface to one of the letters he wrote to Mrs. Indira Gandhi to protest her "Debasement

of Justice” when three judges of the Supreme Court were superseded because their rulings on Bank Nationalisation displeased her and her government.

On behalf of the readers of *Freedom First* we convey

to his wife Zarine Cooper, daughters Feroza and Farida and his brother Khorshed Cooper our heartfelt condolences on their bereavement. We share their sense of loss.

Debasement of Justice

R. C. Cooper

Upon arbitrary nationalisation of (14) biggest banks of India on July 19, 1969, obviously for political purposes, I challenged the nationalisation ordinance and the subsequent act of Parliament in the Supreme Court of India. My petition was heard for seven long months by the Full Bench of the Supreme Court. Legal luminaries appeared for both sides. My petition was argued by a series of most eminent lawyers of the country headed by Mr. N. A. Palkhivala, the most brilliant advocate India has produced in the present century. The Government's side was headed by the Attorney General Mr. Niren De.

After most exhaustive arguments, the Full Bench of the Supreme Court, consisting of eleven eminent judges decided in my favour 10 February, 1970 by an overwhelming majority of 10 to 1 in the famous case “Rustom Cavasjee Cooper *versus* Union of India.” Among the judges were justices Shelat, Hegde and Grover. Two of them were ex-judges of High Courts.

Right from the start, Mrs. Gandhi's government regarded this matter as a political struggle. When the time came, sometime in 1973, to appoint a new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, upon the retirement of Justice Sikri, all the eminent judges who had so far held their offices with great distinction were superseded without any reason.

There was not the slightest doubt in the mind of any right-thinking man in India that the three judges were passed over only because their rulings displeased the Government. This feeling was fully strengthened by the fact that the new appointee to the office of Chief Justice was none other than the judge who had dissented from his other 10 colleagues.

Throughout the length and breadth of the country, there was uproar in the judicial circles and among the intellectuals, against this high handed action of the Government. The irony was that the then Law Minister, Mr. Gokhale, himself a retired judge of the Bombay High Court, took this most unprecedented action to please the Prime Minister. This act could not be justified on any grounds.

On May 3, 1973, in my letter to the Prime Minister, I pointed out the inequity and the inherent danger as a result of this action of her government. The day after the supersession of the three judges (it must be said to the credit of the legal profession and independence of the judiciary at that time), the work came to a standstill for

just a day, not only in every High Court of the country and the Supreme Court of India; but in every single judicial tribunal throughout the country, whether it be the Income Tax Tribunal or the Labour Tribunal or any other such body. This was a mark of protest. I personally led the deputation to the President of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal which also shut its doors for a day, because not a single advocate was prepared to argue before any bench.

Excerpt from Dr. Cooper's letter of May 3, 1973 to Mrs. Indira Gandhi:

“I cannot close this letter without quoting the comments of three of the ablest lawyers of this country:

Mr. M. C. Chagla: “Today is the blackest day in the administration of justice. Something which we all admired in our life and the principles for which we stood is fast disappearing.”

Mr. Ram Jethmalani: This is the most shocking display of executive arrogance.

“It only proves the thesis that a subservient President, in conspiracy with a self-seeking Prime Minister, can supplement democracy without parliamentary concurrence or approval. Such fatal combination exists at the moment.

Mr. C. K. Dapthary, Former Attorney General of India and President of the Supreme Court of Bar Association:

“One apprehends the coming at a later stage of a new quality of justice – debased justice based on political expediency compelled by the executive.”

“...I would fervently make an appeal, which I have repeated in previous letters: “Please do not destroy the freedom of any entire country merely to perpetuate your own power. You should be able to clearly distinguish between your friends and enemies. As has often happened in the past, the very people on whom you are banking so heavily will be cause of your downfall.

“This is not only my personal view. Hundreds of eminently people in this country share this feeling. I sincerely trust you will give a second thought to what you are persistently doing.

Yours sincerely
Dr. R. C. Cooper”

From Our Readers

Deepsang Aggression

I was very happy to read “The Deepsang Aggression” by Mr. Nitin G. Raut in *FF* July 2013. It is very important for us as citizens of this great and tolerant country to know what is happening on our borders, and to be given an unbiased picture of the realities of incursions and threats. A minor intrusion at our border can eventually have extensive ramifications for the entire country, as we observed in 1962. On the other hand, preemptive action by our courageous Defence Forces ensured not only our safety in 1971 but permanently solved the problem of having a troublesome neighbour in our East, with the formation of Bangladesh.

It is unfortunate that despite living in an open democratic country we are not kept informed of the ground realities on our remote borders. I was deeply distressed on the demise of the great hero Major General E. DSouza as his writings in *FF* were very enlightening. I had the privilege of being in correspondence with him and of learning about how, even in his late eighties, he would visit far-flung areas in Arunachal Pradesh and Kashmir, and bring back first-hand information. Hence it is a pleasure that we now have Mr. Raut to keep giving us such meaningful articles.

DR. ALI KHWAJA, Counsellor, columnist and life skills coach, Chairman, Banjara Academy.
Website: www.banjaraacademy.org

*

Honouring Rajaji

I venture to suggest the most appropriate name for the newly opened Eastern Freeway in Mumbai. It should be named after C. Rajagopalachari Independent India's First Governor General and Mahatma Gandhi's conscience keeper. Naming the Freeway after Rajaji will be an apt tribute by an indebted nation to the memory of one of the greatest sons of India i.e. Rajaji.

DHARMENDRA NAGDA, Mumbai.
dharmendranagda@yahoo.in

*

Dharmendra Nagda should be complimented for suggesting that the newly opened Eastern Freeway in Mumbai should be named after Pujya Rajaji. Today's generation may not know that Rajaji's face was blackened by Dattaji Pradhan a leader of the RSS, later a founding member of the Shiv Sena, who joined the Janata Party and became a Municipal Councillor. Mr. Pradhan was protesting Rajaji's view while addressing a meeting in Mumbai that Partitioning of India was inevitable.

When Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to

collectivize Indian agriculture, an old but bold Rajaji who was 80 took up the cudgels and formed the Swatantra Party, to liberalise the economy. It would be in the fitness of things if the Maharashtra Governor Sankar Naarayanan, recommended to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan to name the Eastern Expressway after Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, as Maharashtra's tribute to a great son of India.

S. RAMCHANDRAN,
former municipal councillor, Mumbai.

*

Dalit Capitalism

The *Indian Express* published a transcription of the interview its Editor-in-Chief, Shekhar Gupta had with Milind Kamble, founder of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) and Chandra Bhan Prasad, its mentor, (Walk the Talk, *IE*, June 11, 2013) under the headline, “Capitalism is changing caste much faster than any human being. Dalits should look at capitalism as a crusader against caste.”

Kamble and Prasad made some comments and statements which highlight how the lives of Dalits are changing for the better after 66 years of Independence. The affirmative action included in the Constitution of India by the founding fathers has borne fruit by empowering SC & ST with education. The Constitution had envisaged reservation for 10 years, and now these Dalit businessmen tell us reservation has outlived its utility.

It is a tribute to Indian democracy and its Constitution that today 10 percent enterprises (1,64,000) registered with the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are owned by Dalits. The largest enterprise which is affiliated to the Dalit Chamber is that of Rajesh Saraiya, who hails from Sitapur (UP). His company is registered in London, Ukraine and six other countries, and his company has a turnover of Rs.2000 crore.

Dalits and Tribals are the most oppressed people in this country, and today they are part of a Rising India. This is the real India story.

The comments made by these Dalit businessmen are worth pondering:

SG : So markets have become bigger than caste, bigger than Marx.

CBP : Yes, Bigger than caste, bigger than Marx, bigger than everybody because in this market place, only your ability is respected.

SG: Let me put this metaphorically. If the market is bigger than Marx, is the market a better equaliser than Marx, is the market a better equaliser than Mayavati?

CBP: Most certainly. So far, we held a belief that only an individual can liberate society. Now we see that there is an economic process, that capitalism is changing caste much faster than any human being. Therefore, in capitalism versus caste, there is a battle going on and Dalits should look at capitalism as a crusader against caste.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had exhorted dalits to educate, agitate and organize to find their place in society. Education is a liberating force, so also enterprise. Kamble and Prasad are right that capitalism can destroy caste and discrimination more than Marx and state capitalism.

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/capitalism-is-changing-caste-much-faster-than-any-human-being-dalits-should-look-at-capitalism-as-a-crusader-against-caste/1127570/0>.

M. D. KINI, Mumbai.
kinis68@gmail.com

*

The Demonization of Narendra Modi

I have read the article "The Demonization of Narendra Modi" in your July edition. It is a remarkable piece. It deserves to be circulated throughout India in order to protect India from being sold to foreigners. Please convey my congratulations and best wishes to Madhu Kishwar, the author of this article.

G. NARAYANASWAMY, Chennai.
svco@vsnl.com

*

I salute *Freedom First* for so boldly publishing Madhu Kishwar's article, "The Demonisation of Narendra Modi" in the July 2013 issues of *Freedom First*. You are keeping *Freedom First* to the spirit and standards of the great Rajaji, Ranga, Masani and K. M. Munshi. The bloated bladder of lies needs to be pricked with the poniard of truth (these are the words of Aneurin Bevan, the great Labour Party leader and colleague of the late Clement Atlee the post-World War II Prime Minister of England).

Bhavan's Journal and *Freedom First* are exceptionally true to the fearless journalism witnessed during India's struggle for freedom.

DR. T. H. CHOWDARY, Secunderabad.
Hanuman.chowdary@tcs.com

*

Vacationing Courts

Here's some humour I picked up from *The New Indian Express* of 23 May 2013.

A PIL petitioned that the summer vacation for courts was an old British legacy and should be done away with.

The British could not bear the heat in summer but with air-conditioning of court premises and improvements in technology, the petitioner felt that the courts should cut the vacation to cater to the large volumes of pending cases in the courts. The newspaper report went as follows:

"Chennai: Hearing on the PIL petition seeking to abandon grant of summer vacation to the Madras High Court and its bench in Madurai has been posted after vacation"

The court sure enjoys its vacation!

CAPTAIN N. R. RAVI, VSM, IN (Retd) Chennai.
lakshmi_ravi1986@yahoo.com.

*

Are'nt We Hurting Our Intelligence Potential?

Director IB is NEITHER BOUND NOR REQUIRED TO REVEAL THE SOURCES OF HIS INFORMATION. NO BODY CAN ASK FOR IT. The IB, R&AW, CBI and other security agencies all function under the Central Govt. In the course of their professional duties they occasionally do happen to tread on each other's toes. In such cases it is incumbent upon their leadership to put their heads together and iron out the difficulties. It was possible for the Director CBI to informally get in touch with his IB counterpart, discuss an IB officer's alleged involvement they suspected and deal with the case with finesse, maturity, confidentiality and professionalism till the submission of the charge sheet. But no, it seems this did not happen. And, unfortunately, the CBI even defended its line of investigation before the press giving detailed justifications. Finally it submitted a preliminary charge sheet on July 3 wherein it pointed accusing fingers at the IB officer and promising to adduce further evidence against him in the final charge sheet. One wonders how the CBI, an agency working with and following the same security philosophy, proceeded to question the IB officer about how and from where he obtained the intelligence inputs against Ishrat Jehan (unknown to him and with whom he nursed no prejudice or enmity). Who gave the dubious go ahead to the CBI to take this path?

As it is, intelligence work is a thankless job. And, if IB officers are hounded out under such wide public gaze its rank and file will soon lose their motivation, dedication, enthusiasm and expertise for delicate and challenging intelligence operations. THEN WHO SUFFERS? THE COUNTRY OBVIOUSLY!! We can not afford this, living in a critical environment. It is necessary for the Prime Minister to step in and firmly curb this trend. Will he, IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST?

V. G. VAIDYA, Former Director,
Intelligence Bureau (IB).
Excerpted from his article in *The Economic Times*,
8 July, 2013

Lest We Forget the ‘Emergency’

Kuldip Nayar

*Nobody, who was found guilty of committing excesses during those days, was punished.
It is comical that some of those found guilty are today at the helm of affairs
in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's rule.*

India should never forget certain days in its history. One of them is June 26 when the Emergency was imposed late at night 38 years ago. Lights of personal freedom were switched off and the nation was left to grope in the darkness of dictatorship. The Constitution was suspended, the press gagged and liberty stamped out. The government became an illegal authority to harass, harm, detain and whatever went with it to silence critics. All this happened because the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was unseated from Parliament for a poll offence and disqualified for five years. She could have appealed against what is popularly known as the Allahabad High Court judgment to the Supreme Court. But she preferred to change the system itself and appropriated power to introduce her personal rule.

A democratic country embracing dictatorship came as a shock to the liberal world. For the people in India, it was unbelievable after having enjoyed a constitutional polity for almost three decades. One remark by a close associate of Smt. Gandhi was poignant: “I can take care of enemies but what do I tell our friends?” Smt. Gandhi had no explanation to offer except to rule more ruthlessly through her son Sanjay Gandhi who had become an extra-constitutional authority. The Emergency lasted for nearly two years. Fortunately, elections threw out the mother and the son lock, stock and barrel for democracy to return.

The atrocities which the two committed were shameful. One glaring thing was to remove thousands of people forcibly from their homes and putting them in the wilderness many miles away. This became a precedent for some extremist organisations like the Shiv Sena which some years later picked up the Bangladeshi, the people they didn't like to push them forcibly to the Bangladesh border.

In fact, Smt. Gandhi set many pernicious precedents, such as making the civil service servile and the police obedient to the rulers' whims. Today many chief ministers, not necessarily those of the Congress party, use civil servants and the police as part of their retinue to punish

critics – just as she did.

The Emergency also saw how pliable the mighty judiciary had become. Four out of five Supreme Court judges, including the so-called liberal, P. N. Bhagwati, justified the imposition of the Emergency. The only one who did not toe the line was Justice H. R. Khanna. He was superseded when Smt. Gandhi appointed the Chief Justice of India. If the judiciary still looks battered, it is because it has not yet recovered from the blows it received during those dark days.

Smt. Gandhi's father, Jawaharlal Nehru, was entirely different. He opted for the democratic republic after Independence and saw to its growth. Take the example of the judiciary. Once he thought of superseding Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan because of his ‘views’. Nehru had to give in when he found the entire Supreme Court bench was proposing to resign if there was supersession. Indeed, Mahajan was appointed the Chief Justice of India.

The most reprehensible thing was the forced family planning. At the instance of Sanjay Gandhi, Smt. Gandhi introduced forced sterilisation. Having less number of children was not something condemnable. But when it came to implementation, the tactics used were no different from those of Stalin or Mao Zedong. Many above the age of 65 were sterilised during the Emergency and even boys who had hardly entered puberty became victims. A policeman could even enter into your sleeping room to check whether family planning instructions had been followed.

Detention without trial was the colonial legacy. Smt. Gandhi imprisoned more than 100,000 people without trial. The tragedy today is that the Home ministry is copying those very methods. The ministry is restricting the democratic space in the name of curbing terrorism. The unlawful activities act can detain people without trial in an open court of law. Such cases have to be okayed by the government-appointed advisory committee and the trial had to be held within the jail itself. Dr. Vinayak Sen, the

famous doctor-activist was first detained under this act. Subsequently, the BJP-ruled Jharkhand government charged him with sedition for having “contacts” with the Maoists.

I often wonder why we haven’t learnt a lesson from the Emergency and why the rulers of different political parties pursue more or less the same path that Smt. Gandhi had taken to derail democracy. I believe the reason is that nobody, who was found guilty of committing excesses during those days, was punished. It is comical that some of those found guilty are today at the helm of affairs in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s rule.

The failings of Smt. Gandhi’s successor government of the Janata Party brought her back to power in less than two years. As the Prime Minister, she not only shelved cases requiring punishment, but also appointed the same tainted officers to ensure that the spirit of Emergency stayed even if it had not been imposed. The loss of democracy has been more or less forgotten. The youth does not know what the country went through. The elders who recall the period sound too wishy-washy. It was a bad dream which

was meant to be forgotten. But when today the steps taken during the Emergency have been adopted in the name of security and peace, there seems little difference between now and then.

There has to be accountability without which none in power will be afraid of using authority that he or she likes. The Lokpal Bill, under discussion, is necessary to find out who are guilty and how they can be punished. The government’s attitude is uncompromising. If the Lokpal cannot look into the charges against the Prime Minister, the judiciary, or the MPs indulging in corruption even on the floor of the house, what is the use of having such an institution? The control by the government of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) makes any action by the agency meaningless. It looks as if we are in for anxious days. Thank God, another Emergency cannot be imposed because the very measure requires a two-third majority in Parliament and a similar strength in state assemblies.

Mr. Kuldip Nayar is a renowned journalist.

COURTESY: *Janata*, June 23, 2013.

‘Emergency in Parliament’

On July 21 1975, Parliament met for transacting “strictly government business.” Normal procedures relating to the question hour, calling attention motions and private members’ business were suspended after an acrimonious discussion. This was the most extraordinary parliament which India had because most of the leading members of the opposition were in jail and some of them, like Madhu Dandavate had been arrested while on official duty. The approval of the emergency was therefore a foregone conclusion; yet the few members who remained to challenge the emergency left a record which constitutes a most glorious chapter in India’s Parliamentary history. The splendid work they did was blacked out in the Press by censorship guidelines issued by the Chief Censor, Harry J.D’Penha. Under these rules, the speeches of the ministers could be published in full but not those of ordinary members. N.G.Goray objected strongly to this procedure, for the Chief Censor had decided on a matter which was strictly within the purview of Parliament. Mathew Kurian, the most irrepressible spirit in these debates asked why there was discrimination between one member and another. Wilting under the impact of this onslaught, all that the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha could do was to say: “You have brought it to my notice, I will look into it.”

In the Lok Sabha, the resolution on the emergency was moved, surprisingly enough by the Minister of Agriculture, Jagjivan Ram. The emergency, he said, was not created, all of a sudden; it was the culmination of

developments over a number of years, especially since the Fourth General Elections of 1967. He recalled the railway strike, and the movement started by Jayaprakash Narayan who “wanted to bring in revolution through the barrel of the gun. Therefore it was necessary to stop such things.” Other Congressmen and their Communist supporters dealt with the excesses of the opposition; but the most elaborate statement, and the one that ran parallel with the Government’s White Paper which was laid on the Table of the House was that of Indira Gandhi herself. She quoted extensively from the writing of RSS leaders to document their non-secular and fascist attitudes. And there was that splenetic attack on Jayaprakash Narayan and the developments in Gujarat and Bihar and the role of the opposition after the Allahabad judgment.

...She vehemently repudiated the suggestion that like Hitler, she too had acted in accordance with the letter of the Constitution. “Of course there is no similarity,” she said, and added: “If you like you can read the history books of that period. I don’t have to read them because I was there and witnessed a great deal of what was happening in Germany at that time.” Needless to say, she did not tell parliament how old she was when Hitler became the Chancellor of the Weimar Republic on January 30, 1933!

From the book “When the Wind Blows, India’s Ballot Box Revolution” authored by S. P. Aiyar and S. V. Raju, Himalaya Publishing House, 1978.

Report

The Uttarakhand Disaster

- Armed Forces to the Rescue, Yet Again

Suresh C. Sharma

*The armed forces were like angels. They carried old people on their backs.
We owe our lives to the brave soldiers of our country.*

The Deluge

A cloudburst at the Vasukital Lake above the Kedarnath Valley on 16 June, 2013, led to unprecedented floods. As the flood waters rushed down the Mandakini, Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers, the dams at Vishnuprayag and Srinagar were opened lest they burst open. This move compounded the floods in four districts in the Uttarakhand region.

Inspector Rawat got information that some mules had been trapped in water in the Kedar valley. He rushed there and noticed an abnormal rise in the level of the Mandakini River. He noticed a few vehicles had been swept away by the fast current at Gaurikhand. News trickled in about rising water levels in other areas. He informed the District Control Room and warned people on the PA system to move to safer areas. His warning was ignored by hotels and lodges. Heavy rains which had been forecast by the Met. Department continued on 17 and 18 June. The Kedar hill top broke away and into the Alaknanda River and the water level in Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers rose. The surging torrents swept away roads and bridges. Water poured into the Kedarnath temple and huge boulders started to tumble into the courtyard. The head priest of Kedarnath temple stepped out and saw people crushed by stones. He observed "Our pristine valley has turned into a graveyard." A thousand roads and more than a hundred bridges were washed away. Thousands of pilgrims were stuck in Char Dham [four holy places] – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

The Ordeal

The hotels and lodges which survived had run out of food. Some of the tourists who took shelter had to pay Rs.100 for a packet of biscuits and Rs.200 for a bottle of water. At some places roads had been reduced to a small track. People who dared walking along these tracks saw their dear ones slipping and sucked away by the torrents. People searched for their family members, often in vain. Tears and cries filled the air. At Kedarnath temple a thousand pilgrims were packed in a narrow patch of land. They were without food, water and shelter. Those at

Badrinath had food, water and shelter but did not know where to go and how. The telecommunication system had broken down and the local telephones and mobile sets were of no use.

The condition of surrounding villages was horrible. In Ghat Gaon village, the men folk moved their women and children to safe places and went back to retrieve their belongings only to be washed away. There are no male members in the village today - only grieving women and children. A large number of animals had no food and they started attacking houses. There was no assurance of relief or any kind of guidance from the Government.

Defence and Paramilitary Forces Take Charge

Request for help from the State Government was received only on 20 June. The Army, India Air Force [IAF], Border Roads Organization[BRO] and Indo-Tibet Border Police [ITBP] located in the area had already started relief operations without waiting for a formal request from the State Government. The armed forces brought thirty satellite phones beside their own integral communications. The media did not give any reports of the disaster till 18 June. It was too busy giving news of Narendra Modi, cricket and branding it as a man made disaster. Early reports may have helped in marshalling aid and deployment of resources.

Roads to all the four holy places had been destroyed. The IAF and Army mounted the biggest air relief operation in India to evacuate thousands of pilgrims and tourists. The IAF brought in 25 helicopters by 20 June. The Army and IAF added 35 more helicopters. A few helicopters from private parties piloted by retired Defence officers too joined in. A helipad had been made at Gaurikhand by Inspector Rawat. Colonel Ram Pal, one of the helicopter pilots recalls that the scene was heart-wrenching. Dead bodies were floating in the river. Visibility was poor and the helicopters had to fly over a treacherous hilly terrain in a narrow valley with vertical sides. There were no ground facilities for guiding the pilots. All the pilots had instructions to stay on the right. This direction

along with radio and visual contact amongst pilots helped to avoid midair collision in the narrow valley. The use of larger aircraft like MI-17 in a limited space makes it even more essential for pilots to communicate with each other. They carried out their mission with zeal. Starting at 7 a.m., they flew 20 sorties a day. Amongst the IAF pilots were two couples. They vied with each other to make more sorties. By 25 June, a few pilots and 50 machines had evacuated all the people in Kedarnath. On 25 June, one helicopter had an accident resulting in the death of twenty personnel-crew and passengers. The rescue work however continued with vigour true to the traditions of the IAF and Army. The Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Browne visited the site, complimented the IAF team and told them to keep on smiling. That is the spirit of the Services. The world's largest helicopter, MI-26 landed at Gauchar in challenging conditions ferrying a refueling tank

There was a mad rush by the stranded persons to get into the helicopter. Most of them would line up in a queue. A system of priority was established - women, children and old people first. Assurance of rescue of every person was given to all the pilgrims and tourists. Lt General Bawa, General Officer Commanding Uttar Pradesh Area, moved his HQ from Bareilly to Dehradun. He directed his officers to send out patrols to locate stranded parties, provide them food and bring them to a helipad or road terminal. Names of all passengers were recorded and they were requested to provide names of any missing persons.

Restoring Road Network

8,000 Army soldiers were pressed into the task. Army, ITBP and BRO started improving the tracks and making bridges. A bridge constructed over Alaknanda River broke down and a new steel bridge had to be constructed. Cloudburst at Dharali, located between Gangotri and Harsil on 16 June blocked the 75 kms long Gangotri-Uttarkashi road, leaving 5,000 personnel stranded at Gangotri. As the tracks improved, a thousand people were evacuated on foot and 1,500 by air. Cars at Gangotri were buried in mud and soldiers had to break the windshields to pull the passengers out. The Army camp at Harsil had a capacity for 200 soldiers. Additional barracks and a canteen were created to accommodate 2,000 pilgrims and another 2,000 put up at the Harsil Inter School. Soldiers cut down on their own food to cater to the pilgrims. They walked to Jhalla, six kms away to bring two tons of rice and food products. Rations could be dropped by air after 23 June. There was chaos at the helipad as every one wanted to board as soon as the helicopter landed. The Army issued tokens to bring some order. Some of the young people who had been motivated to walk rushed back when they saw others being evacuated by air.

Evacuation proceeded from other sites as well. The Army set up bases with medical facilities. Ropeways were strung across where tracks could not be cut due to rubble and boulders. Blowing up of boulders does not solve the problem as removal of one boulder gives rise to more stones pouring in. It is safer not to destabilize the mud and stones for the time being. It was a heartening sight for pilgrims to see soldiers carrying people piggy back or in their arms while negotiating ropeways. No surprise that they were greeted with cheers. The Army personnel not only shared their meals but on occasions gave their boots also to make the pilgrims walk comfortably.

Search and Rescue

There was no clear information about the number and location of stranded pilgrims. Inputs from the revenue officials and local residents would have been of help to identify villages susceptible to landslides. This information was not available. The political leaders instead started squabbling about the number of people missing or dead. The Secretary Revenue and Disaster Management Department insisted, in an interview with journalists, that the number of missing people was 384. This precise estimate when the debris of collapsed buildings was still to be cleared was amazing. The Chief Minister put the figure of dead at less than one thousand while the Assembly speaker claimed it to be 10,000 or more.

The Services launched 50 sorties by Unarmed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to locate the stranded tourists. The photographs showed trekkers waiving at the UAVs. 110 Paratrooper Commandos were dropped on the night of 16 June to supply food and water. They gathered the stranded people and prepared helipads from where the IAF could evacuate them. One of the most daring rescue attempts was from Jungle Chatri where about 80 people were located by Army helicopters. They were perched on a steep hill side. 18 paratroopers were dropped to help them only to discover more than 800 people there! They had climbed the hills to escape the swirling water. They had not eaten for five days. Every single individual was flown out or helped to walk to safety and to home. The paratroopers motivated the stranded passengers to walk in rough terrain. They had to blast boulders to make tracks. They had to use 300 metres long ropeway. They managed to walk 15 kms a day. Navy commandos too joined in the task of diving and search in hills and jungles. The National Disaster Management Force joined to augment the relief force. Every one wanted to be airlifted. Due to uncertain weather and limited air effort, it was not possible. The Army Commander and his senior officers joined in the walk to motivate the people. More than 100,000 people were evacuated.

Action by Central and State Governments

The Prime Minister and the President of the Congress Party carried out an aerial survey and announced an aid of Rs.1000 crore for relief. The prime Minister, a distinguished economist, uses the same remedy for crisis – a financial grant, be it Kashmir or earthquake. The much needed recipe of leadership and assurance were absent. Compare the situation with the crisis of the underground railway blast in London or when a commercial plane plunged into the sea in USA. The mayor or governor or a senior political leader gave updates regularly. We drew a blank. The Vice-President, National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA] kept on promising evacuation of everybody in two days. Actually, it took longer. Such forecasts and promises are demoralizing. The Air and Army Chiefs gave no time table but assured safe evacuation for one and all. Some State Governments, notably Maharashtra and Gujarat, established camps in Dehradun offering food, medical help and transport facility to their homes.

Some State Governments wanted to bring in their helicopters for their own citizens. The Army told them that “India is one. No discrimination.” There were quite a few messages from political leaders and bureaucrats wanting their relations to be given priority for evacuation. They all got a one sentence reply “They will be evacuated as per laid down priority of women, children, old and sick people.”

The tragedy got aggravated because warnings by

the Met. were ignored. The State government appeared to deliberately play down the extent of damage. The NDMA failed miserably. Unfortunately, the failure to acknowledge culpability does not signal a turnaround anytime soon. It is worth considering assigning this responsibility to the Defence Services who can be provided the necessary resources. In USA, the Army has the responsibility of safety of dams. Political parties squabbled for credit and engaged themselves in a blame game. A convoy of trucks carrying food was flagged off by Congress leaders from Dehradun. It got stuck at Rishikesh as the State Government claimed that they had adequate stocks and had no place to take additional stores. Home Minister, Shinde rightly told the VIPs not to visit but did not enforce it. The Rescue Force must have the authority of controlling air and road space and there should be no interference by anyone.

All the attention had been focused on pilgrims and tourists – that too by the Defence and Paramilitary Forces. They worked efficiently with devotion and compassion. The villagers have been ignored. It is not a surprise that the media and public have praised the valour of the Services. A former cabinet secretary complained that the media turned the army into a hero while the bureaucrats are treated negatively. The Information Minister wanted all credit for the Government who called the Army.

We saw Gods in uniform. – Pilgrims

BRIG. SURESH C. SHARMA (Retd.) is adviser to the telecom industry, freelance writer, and member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*. Email: brigscs@gmail.com

Freedom First

3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400 001.

Phone: (022) 2284 3416 • email: freedom@vsnl.com

SUBSCRIPTION FORM (In Block Letters Please)

NAME : _____

ADDRESS : _____

_____ PIN

PHONE / MOBILE NUMBER :

EMAIL : _____

SUBSCRIPTIONS PAYABLE BY CHEQUE / DD DRAWN IN FAVOUR OF ICCF AND PAYABLE AT PAR IN MUMBAI. IF THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE THEN PLEASE ADD BANK CHARGES RS.50 FOR OUTSTATION CHEQUES WITHIN INDIA. SUBSCRIPTIONS CAN ALSO BE PAID BY MONEY ORDER

Subscription

Within India & SAARC countries

☐ 1 Year : Rs.200

☐ 2 Years : Rs.350

☐ 3 Years : Rs.500

Overseas

(By Second Class Airmail)

Annual: \$20 / £ 10

Implications of the Falling Rupee

Sunil S. Bhandare

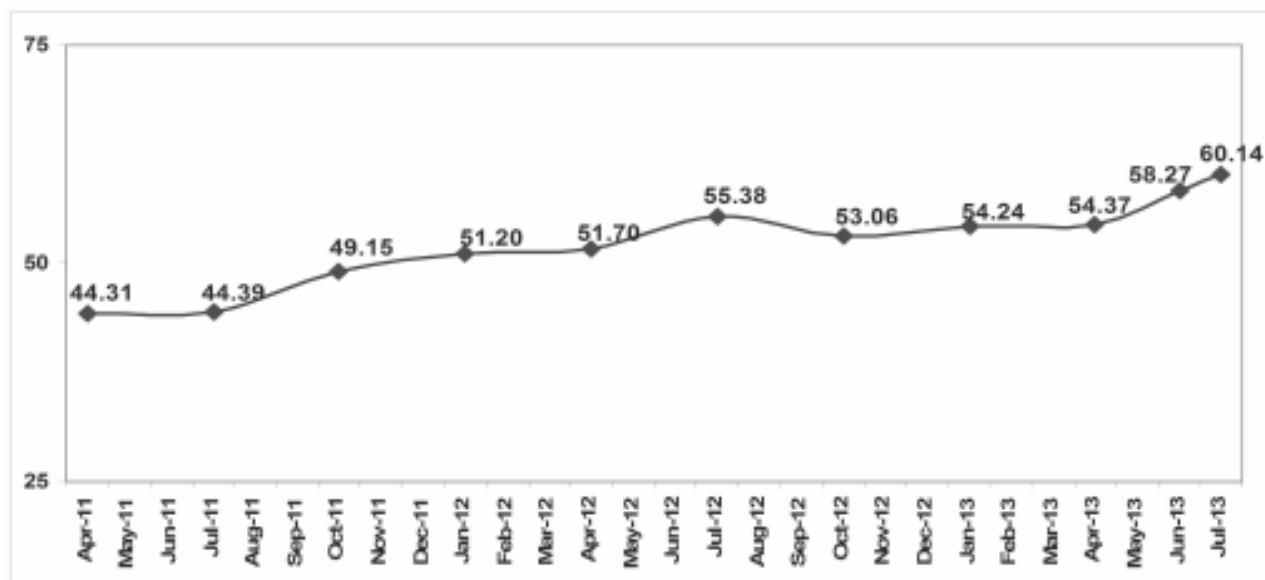
Not long ago, in its Report Card to the nation, the Government of India waxed eloquent about various facets of its achievements both in social sector and economic fields (Freedom First, No.553 July 2013 page 12 “Painting a Mirage:UPA II’s Report Card”). But what has been glossed over completely is its inept management of the external sector of the economy, as is being currently reflected in the volatility of the Indian rupee. The fact is the forces of a market economy cannot conceal such failures. During UPA I (2004-05 to 2008-09), the Indian rupee, on an average, was rock steady. The exchange rate in 2003-04 was US\$ = Rs.45.94 and closed at US\$ = Rs.45.92 in 2008-09. In all probability, it would touch an average of over US\$ = Rs.60 in 2013-14, thereby causing cumulative depreciation of as much as 24% during the current tenure of UPA II. This speaks volumes about its policy failures, and not just of global factors.

Both the RBI and Government of India (GOI) have been struggling desperately to anchor the exchange rate of the rupee for the past about six weeks. Even an anchor of around US\$ = R60/Rs.61 seems very elusive on current reckoning. This is also evident from one of the recent reported statements of the RBI Governor pointing out that “the rupee depreciation over the last six weeks has been because of global factors...It is difficult to say how long that effect will persist because it is due to factors beyond our control”. What, however, transpires is that the Indian currency market has been besieged not only by global factors, but by (a) deterior-

rating fundamentals of the domestic economy; (b) unsteady technical position of the market; and (c) creeping [or crippling!] speculative pressures.

The damage to macro-economic fundamentals over the last about three years has already been well documented. Essentially it finds reflection in two key areas of imbalances in our economic scenario: (a) over-stretched combined Centre and States fiscal deficit to GDP ratio hovering well above 7 to 7.5% for the last three years (domestic imbalance); and (b) its mirror image in rising current account deficit (CAD) to GDP ratio ranging between

(Average Monthly Exchange Rate US\$ = Rs.)



Note: The sudden volatility in the rupee exchange rate that started in mid-June 2013 is still continuing. The exchange rate crossed US\$ = Rs.61 for some time on July 8. The recent RBI measures are expected to bring about some correction. But no major RBI intervention through deployment of forex reserves is likely, except to smoothen out extreme volatility. July 2013 data – average of first 12 days.

4.2% to 4.8% in the last two years (external imbalance). In the process, such disturbing trends have culminated in eroding progressively the earlier healthy savings-investment matrix; 2007-08, turned out to be the best performing year so far in India's economic history (peak level of 36.8% savings/GDP ratio and investment/GDP ratio of 38.1%). In substance, India's external vulnerability is predominantly driven by the weaknesses of domestic economic environment.

Where the rupee would eventually settle down remains largely a matter of speculative judgment! It of course depends upon strength and sustainability of various on-going policy initiatives taken by the RBI, SEBI and GOI. There is no quick fix solution – a magic wand available with any of the policy-making authorities! The existing tool of using the Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) to measure the extent of over-valuation or under-valuation of Indian rupee vis-à-vis major currencies is believed to have several limitations. REER does help in assessing the impact of differential inflation levels between India and her major trading partners on the external value of Indian rupee. But in real life the currencies are not found to correct automatically based on REER trends, despite the prevalence of market determined exchange rate regime. The major fault-line is also said to be that REER in India is computed on the basis of WPI inflation and not in terms of CPI inflation.

Based on the prevailing REER trends, the current exchange rate of Indian rupee vis-à-vis the US\$ is already seen to be fully (or more than fully!) corrected. If it is so, then the currency market should now tend to stabilize around US\$ = Rs.60. But that seems unlikely. The market players would perhaps like to assess how the policy measures taken so far and those in the pipeline would pan out in the immediate future. More importantly, given the rapidity of India's globalization over the last two decades, the exchange rate of Indian rupee is no longer a function of domestic events and policy initiatives alone. The dynamics of external factors – both economic and political – affect sentiments and trends in the Indian currency market. And there is plentiful evidence of this in recent times, including the statement of Fed Governor, Dr. Ben Bernanke on “winding down” process of Q3 in the USA. Indeed, this was the proximate cause of current currency market turmoil across many emerging market economies.

Therefore, the Indian economic scenario in general and likely behavior of the Indian rupee would remain in a state of flux for quite some time. Policy measures taken so far to douse the fire in the Indian currency market can be summarized as follows:

Measures to curb demand for US\$/ foreign currency by RBI/ SEBI:

(a) directives to the state-run oil companies to purchase dollars from a single bank in place of earlier practice of inviting multiple bids; (b) banning banks from carrying out proprietary trading. All transactions by banks in currency futures/ exchange traded currency option markets will have to be necessarily on behalf of clients; and (c) raising margin requirements and curtailing positions for currency derivatives. Demand for US\$ emanating from gold imports is sought to be curbed through recent hikes in the customs tariff as well as RBI's exhortation to banks not to aggressively sell gold products/ gold coins.

As this article was being finalized, the RBI Governor, in consultation with the PM and FM, found it imperative to initiate some unprecedented changes in the monetary policy. This mainly comprised of (a) a sharp hike in the Bank Rate and Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate by 200 basis points to 10.25% with immediate effect; and (b) restricting the banking sector's liquidity. By raising interest rates at the short-term end, these measures are expected to curb speculative activities in the currency market.

Measures to improve US\$/ foreign currency supply:

Relaxation of ECB window to enable companies engaged in (affordable) housing, real estate, civil aviation and telecom sectors to access such sources of funds.

To facilitate export growth, banks have been asked to strengthen export credit and lower interest rates. Various other measures in the pipeline: for example, allowing or raising the existing FDI caps (telecom, civil aviation, defence, etc); but there is considerable inter-ministerial resistance.

Some salutary positive impact of above measures on the exchange rate of the rupee has been observed, with the exchange rate now hovering around US\$ = Rs.59.30 to Rs.59.80. All such actions surely offer short-term palliatives. And hence, more enduring solutions obviously lie in corridors of Govt of India – in a host of structural reforms to deal with current external economic imbalances from both supply and demand sides. In the meantime, it is imperative to evaluate the likely economic implications of the falling rupee. For this purpose, we assume (and also believe) that the rupee would remain anchored around an annual average of US\$ = Rs.60 for the FY 2013-14. This indicates likely average depreciation of about 10% (at this rate, the average exchange rate would actually be US\$ = Rs.60.40) compared to the exchange rate of US\$ = Rs.54.39 in 2012-13. Incidentally, the rupee had depreciated by as

much as 11.9% in 2012-13.

There may be a downside risk of a further 5% depreciation (the worst case scenario) or an upside of recovery of 5%. In substance, while the mean rate would be US\$ = Rs.60, the average annual range would be Rs.57 to Rs.63. Such sharply depreciating Indian rupee would obviously have its major fall-outs, especially in terms of import cost and fiscal burden, as well as on inflation. The precise dimensions of its 'net' adverse impact would be difficult to assess at this stage. However, what is evident is that there would be a great divide between winners and losers among following players in the economy:

Broad Class of Losers

- Importers & Forex Users
- Remittances from India
- Outbound Capital Flows
 - India's FDI
 - Secondary Market investments
- Import-intensive industries
- Outbound Tourists
- Domestic Consumers

Broad Class of Winners

- Exporters & Forex Earners
- NRI Remittances
- Inbound Capital Flows
 - FDI
 - FIIs
 - NRIs
- Export-intensive Industries
- Better protection from cheaper imports to domestic producers
- Inbound Tourists

At the macro level, current volatility certainly unleashes considerable uncertainties; and their adverse impact would be far more overwhelming, especially on consumers. There would be resumption of inflationary pressures due to (a) a sharp increase in the cost of imported crude oil & petroleum products; (b) cost-push pressures on Indian manufacturing, especially in import-intensive sectors; and (c) likely burden on government's fiscal deficit.

The Indian basket of crude oil prices worked out US\$ 108 per barrel in 2012-13. Based on IMF projections, there would be softening of international crude oil prices by 4.7% during 2013. But its positive gains would be more than neutralised by likely average rupee depreciation of 10% in 2013-14. The net (direct) impact would be much higher than 5% increase in domestic prices of petroleum

products. Since the cost escalation cannot be passed on to the consumers (kerosene and LPG), it is obvious that the Central Government would have to carry the burden of additional subsidies and/or of under-recoveries.

With the prospects of WPI inflation returning to 6% plus level, it is doubtful whether the RBI would like to take any chances with respect to its current monetary policy stance on key policy rates. We believe that key policy rates are unlikely to be reduced in the forthcoming (end-July 2013) monetary policy review. In turn this would continue to dampen the investment sentiments.

The burden of servicing the external debt in rupee terms would increase sharply; and the repayment obligations of short-term debt/ ECBs would pose major challenges. India's current high short-term external indebtedness is already becoming a matter of great concern. Moreover, narrowing of the yield gap between 10-year US and Indian papers builds threat of likely flight of capital. Incidentally, the latest IMF World Economic Outlook UPDATE cautions about the prospect of tighter financial conditions, if the anticipated unwinding of monetary policy stimulus in the United States leads to sustained capital flow reversals. The vulnerability of emerging market economies, especially of India, on account expected normalization of monetary policy (winding down of quantitative easing), has already been visible in the current volatility of the Indian rupee. In such an environment, mobilization of resources from ECBs would be increasingly difficult and costly too (including cost of hedging).

Concluding Observations

In summing up, the effective management of external vulnerability and rupee volatility is going to be a tough and tortuous process for India's policy makers. Apart from immediate policy response (essentially of short-term significance) as mentioned earlier, it is imperative for the government to pursue structural reforms aimed at sustainable growth recovery, which, among other things, would involve (a) better energy security – reducing dependency on oil and coal imports; (b) expanding domestic capacity of fertilizer production; (c) raising productivity of pulses and edible oils; (d) building up export competitiveness – ease of doing export business; and (e) focusing on labour-intensive exports – renewing SEZs and strategizing NMIZs, etc. But all these are well said, and too much to expect during the last leg of the UPA II government! The message is one of protracted uncertainty!

SUNIL S. BHANDARE is a Consulting Economist based in Mumbai. Email: sunil.bhandare@gmail.com

Foreign Relations in the 21st Century

India-US Relations Today

Kerry Comes a-Calling

B. Ramesh Babu

Convergence at the conceptual level and conflict at the concrete level have been the central features of India-US relations from the very beginning.

President Obama termed US-India relations as “one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.” John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, co-chair of the fourth India-US Strategic Dialogue (held in Delhi during June 2013), declared that the two countries share “common DNA.” The former Prime Minister Vajpayee characterised India and the USA as “natural allies.” Rhetoric apart, it is noteworthy that the two ‘estranged democracies’ have become ‘engaged democracies’ some time ago. A paradigm shift in the India-US bilateral equation began in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in mid 1980s. This trend was greatly reinforced with the launch of market oriented economic reforms in India in 1991, which constituted a significant rightward political/ideological shift in the country. The US-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement of 2008 was certainly the high water mark in the growing proximity between the two countries. But, since then it seems that the bilateral relations have reached a plateau. A new push is needed now to take the bilateral relations to a higher level, which calls for astute management of differences and nurturing of convergences. Such a task is particularly difficult in case of India and America.

It is often said in diplomacy that most issues between nations can be ironed out across the table. If personal meetings and official dialogues could resolve all differences amicably, relations between India and America should have been smooth and hassle free. Over the last two decades there have been an endless series of interactions between the two Governments, which were variously described as: initiatives, dialogues, agreements, partnerships, joint military exercises, and “next steps in strategic partnership,” and so on. The latest Kerry-Khurshid exchange of ideas is the forty sixth of such dialogues between the two countries. Convergence at the conceptual level and conflict at the concrete level has been the central feature of India-US relations from the very beginning. More general the issue, (democracy, rule of law, international terrorism, etc.) greater is the convergence in principle. More specific the issue on hand (agricultural subsidies, Pakistan sponsored Terrorism in India, Pakistan’s

clandestine nuclear weapons programme, H-1 visas for IT professionals, free trade vs. fair trade, role of the Taliban in the future of Afghanistan, etc.) greater are the divergences.

In such a complex context, consolidation of relations on a high plateau is to be seen as an achievement in itself. Moving up from the high plateau and reaching the next level of strategic partnership takes a lot of doing on both sides. Both Governments have priorities of their own and neither is ready to take the plunge at this time. However, it is important to and appreciate how extensive and deep the bilateral relationship is at the present. The Kerry-Khurshid meeting was to review progress made with respect to as many as the thirty plus dialogue mechanisms underway! These cover everything under the sun: Atomic energy to Ayurveda, TB to Tibet, toilets to teachers in village schools, HIV/AIDS to joint research on the cutting edge of knowledge in a wide variety of disciplines. Furthermore, whatever may be the state of the relations between the two Governments on this or that particular issue, the spectrum of people to people relations on the two sides has been widening and deepening day by day. There is hardly any human endeavour which is not an item of cooperation between individuals, professionals, and civil society groups of all hues and persuasions in the two countries. In fact this penumbra of people to people relations between the two nations is unique to India-US relations and creates an ambience of such high mutual expectations that they cannot be fulfilled.

Issues between India and the USA

Those of us who are intimately familiar with the long history of India-US relations can fathom the significance of the phenomenal advance achieved so far. Indira Gandhi and Lyndon Johnson ordered the end to “mutual carping” so typical of the relations between the two countries so far. Word went down the line to say positive and shared things. That indeed was a much needed breakthrough in the bilateral relations. (Let me add that subsequently I had occasion to personally discuss with the American Ambassador Harry Barnes the challenges

faced by the diplomats on either side in implementing such instructions from the top!) Since then the atmospherics as well as the substance of the relations between the two nations have been improving steadily, despite their differing perspectives on many issues. Coming on top of all that has happened in between, the Bush era US-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (popularly known as the Nuclear Deal) represents a paradigm shift in the bilateral relations, which was inconceivable even a few years ago!

The major issues on the table during the Kerry-Khurshid meeting were export of US shale gas, setting up of American nuclear reactors, visa rules for IT professionals, bilateral investment protection agreement, preferential marketing arrangements, higher limits for FDI in defence industries and insurance sector. Narrowing differences between the two sides is on the agenda and will continue. Each of these issues has complex nuances. For example, India is anxious to import shale gas from US in order to reduce dependence on oil imports from West Asia and reduce carbon emissions. Obama Administration wants to use this as an instrument to push India (and other developing countries) on the critical issues of global warming and climate change. The US has been cleverly trying to wriggle out of its commitment (and that of the other Western countries) on technology transfer and “equitable, but differentiated” responsibilities under the Kyoto protocol. On the question of setting up nuclear reactors in India, the US is still persisting on pushing India to make changes in the Nuclear Liability Law, which is virtually ruled out. But, insiders are predicting some progress on the Westinghouse proposal pending for some time.

On the foreign policy front, the divergences between the two countries are also equally intractable. The North-South divide on vital issues of trade and tariffs, agricultural and other subsidies, patents etc. are the hardy perennials. Absurd as it may seem to us, the American Government gives subsidies to farmers for not cultivating wheat and cotton. America’s policy of being “soft” on Pakistan despite the latter’s known and publicly acknowledged policy of “double speak” and “perfidy” on terrorism and nuclear proliferation has been a source of deep discord between the two countries.

Similarly, the two nations do not see eye to eye on the American policy of re-inducting Taliban as a partner in governing Afghanistan in future. It is in India’s interests to stay on in Afghanistan as a key player in the region. Once the US and the Western forces leave the scene, it is vital that they are not allowed to do back seat driving on the future dispensation in Afghanistan. India, Pakistan,

Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia and China – the key stakeholders in the region – should work together for the development and welfare of the people of Afghanistan and for the country’s stability, integrity and peace. This certainly is not an area of convergence between India and America. The pro-Pakistani leanings of Kerry, the new Secretary of State, do not assuage India’s apprehensions.

Equation between India and the USA

Be that as it may, as far as India is concerned, our equation with the US is the most important bilateral relationship and it is crucial that we act accordingly in the conduct of our foreign policy and relations. Despite its relative decline (in economic and strategic terms), the US is the only ‘game changer’ in global politics today. America’s unrivalled clout was in evidence in the way President Bush could push the nuclear deal with India through the IAEA and NSG notwithstanding the determined opposition and manipulation of China. We need to work closely with the US on every front – economic, political, and strategic – even as we push for better terms of engagement at every turn. Fortunately, we are not the India of the bygone era. The US needs us now much more than ever before. Access to our vast and growing economy is one of the important avenues to pull itself out of the doldrums. Moreover, no major global issue today can be tackled effectively without India’s participation and cooperation. This is particularly so since the centre of gravity in world politics has shifted from the Atlantic to Asia-Pacific.

In the US-China-India trilateral equation – the fulcrum of global affairs today – it is crucial for us to stay very close to the US. The one thing that China is most anxious about is the growing proximity between India and America. We should not do anything to reduce this pressure on China, which is India’s most powerful, treacherous, and proximate enemy on the border. It is pertinent to point out that a few hours before Defence Minister Antony’s flying visit to Beijing (during the first week of July 2013), a prominent General of the PLA “warned India not to provoke new problems and stir up trouble” through increased deployment of forces on the border. Major General Luo Yuan may be a ‘hawk’, but his warning is certainly uncalled for and the timing is not exactly reassuring. Blowing hot and cold at the same time has been the established strategy of China on the border. We better watch out for their actions on the ground.

It is also noteworthy that Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was also in China at the same time and a

Cont’d. on page 20



Trusted Partners.
Innovative Solutions.

CAMARADERIE
FAIRNESS
INTEGRITY
RESPECT
SUPPORT
JUSTICE
CREDIBILITY
COMMUNITY
IT'S A GREAT
PLACE TO
WORK

A conducive environment supports growth.

A philosophy that make us a "Great Place to Work"

At Forbes Marshall, employee engagement is taken very seriously. And that is how, at Forbes Marshall we don't just make great products, we develop great leaders. This is only one of the factors why we have consistently ranked in the top 'Best Workplaces in India'®.

Forbes Marshall believes that every member must have the opportunity to realise his or her fullest potential, and that it is our duty to provide those opportunities to grow.

What makes Forbes Marshall tick; and why do our employees stand out from among scores of others? Our core values of Integrity, Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Delivering Value, and a Family Spirit; make Forbes Marshall a place that puts People first: employees, customers, suppliers, associates and the community. Our members do the rest, making it truly a great place to be.

Want to know more? Just write in to us at response@forbesmarshall.com

Energy Conservation | Environment | Process Efficiency

www.forbesmarshall.com

P B # 29, Mumbai Pune Road, Kasarwadi, Pune 411 034, India. Tel. +91 20 27145595, 39858555, Fax. +91 20 27147413
A-34/35, M.I.D.C., H Block, Pimpri, Pune 411 018, India. Tel. +91 20 27442020, 39851100, Fax. +91 20 27442020

Forbes Marshall | Forbes Marshall Arca | Forbes Marshall Codel | J N Marshall | Krohne Marshall | Spirax Marshall | Forbes Vyncke

Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

Every issue has at least two sides. A wise man examines all sides before coming to a conclusion. This is an attempt to present various sides of an issue so that a considered opinion can be formed.

Ishrat Jahan Again

1. The Ishrat Jahan case hit the headlines again (July 3) with the CBI filing a charge-sheet revealing that the poor girl and three others were murdered (June 2004) in cold blood, pretending it to be an encounter. It named 8 police officers as accused and stated that a supplementary charge-sheet would be filed later as investigations into a larger conspiracy is yet to be completed. It revealed the names of 4 Intelligence Bureau (IB) officers who were under its scrutiny for the genesis of the conspiracy. The question whether the four killed were terrorists remained unanswered as that issue was not before the court at all. The case concerned only the narrow issue of deciding whether the encounter was fake. The reason behind the encounter was not germane to the issue. The problem is that without understanding the motive behind the encounter, the case would remain unexplained. Political motives (the Narendra Modi involvement) of Gujarat police officers look plausible but do not explain the role of Central Government (IB) officials.

Everything can be improved. What is important to know is what is to be improved.

Henry Ford quoted by C. J. Jussawala, Rind Survey, cited in *Parsiana*, May 7, 2013

1. As a legal technicality, the issue before the court is restricted. However, the larger picture cannot be ignored if truth is the goal. Ishrat's supporters proclaim her innocence while the IB which started the entire chain of events still claims that she was connected with L-e-T. Besides its original report, it claims that David Headley of the 26/11 infamy revealed to the NIA that he was told by the L-e-T Chief that Ishrat was recruited by the L-e-T. This statement is irrelevant to the case before the court but is it irrelevant in understanding the genesis of the case? Will the truth about Ishrat's innocence or guilt remain a mystery for ever? Besides the IB and CBI standing on the opposite sides of the fence, NIA's role in not revealing Headley's disclosures about Ishrat has muddied the waters further. The Bodhgaya blasts (July 7) are a warning of what lies ahead and the need for effective intelligence when every social activist is indulging in denigrating IB on the basis of insufficient knowledge about the Ishrat Jahan case.

(IB is lauded for giving advance intelligence about the Bodhgaya attack, where the police failed; it is blamed for giving advance intelligence about the Ishrat Jahan group where the police allegedly mishandled the information.)

The Kashmir Problem

2. The terrorist attack in Srinagar (June 24) was a reminder that in spite of Omar Abdullah's brave declaration that the situation in J&K was under control and that there was no need for the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to continue, the militants in J&K are still active and could strike at will. The attack was launched in broad day light and the target was the army itself; it was launched when security was tightened because of the PM's visit scheduled for the next day. Not that politicians and busybodies would concede that they had read the situation wrongly and the Army was correct in not agreeing to withdrawal of the AFSPA! The AFSPA has become more or less a justification for the militants' violence; the cause and effect have been conveniently reversed. Would any relaxation of strong measures help? Or does the problem go much deeper? India's abiding hope that saner counsels would prevail in any dispute was dashed after Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's failure with the UN mediation. Good intentions are not enough when national interests are at stake.

2. The J&K Chief Minister is placing all the blame for militant activities on the convenient peg of the AFSPA. Such politicians refuse to accept that the problem pre-existed the AFSPA. If the CM is so sure of the normalization process, let him withdraw the army gradually from each district and see the result. If the army is not present, the AFSPA would not apply even if it remains on the statute. The fear is that if the situation goes out of control again, the army would have to be re-inducted. Political pundits want to try out measures like withdrawal of AFSPA and grant of autonomy but there is no reasonable chance of success. They need to calculate the damage that would be caused in the process. The failure of the dialogue process lies in the human anxiety to solve problems here and now. We have waited for more than 60 years and should be prepared to wait for decades more to solve such intractable problems where both sides are wholly wrong and there is no obvious villain to slay.

Dipping Rupee

3. The falling rupee has disturbed the budgetary balance of all Indians and more so of the Government. The cost of imported fuel has upset all calculations and the Government has decided that the biggest guzzler of fuel, the Indian armed forces, should prune their expenditure on fuel by 20-40%. The armed forces have dutifully accepted the order assuring the country that the cut would not affect their preparedness. Very gracious, knowing that just weeks back they had to make hundreds of helicopter sorties to save thousands of lives in Uttarakhand and were immediately asked to move to Assam to save that state from floods. Even then, that is one entity that can be expected to save money on fuel, without demur!

3. On the other hand, the Government has to take care of the poor through subsidies on which it has to spend thousands of crores. After all, these very poor will get the ruling party re-elected so that more goodies can be bestowed next time around. Between the armed forces and the poor, the poor must be given preference as the armed forces may be occasionally useful but are essentially a burden! In fact, the question may be asked why they were spending the extra 20-40% all these years. The diesel guzzling tanks and the fuel hungry jets were going nowhere, carrying nobody, doing exercises for no reason! Good! Adversity teaches us how to economize without anybody raising a ruckus! Who else will obey without asking questions?

Munde's Bluster

4. The bold declaration of Gopinath Munde (BJP) that he had spent Rs.8 crore on his Lok Sabha election in 2009 may have been truthful but the bravado landed him in trouble. He is now open to disqualification by the Election Commission for crossing the legal limit of Rs.40 lakh as election expenditure as also an enquiry by the Income Tax Department about the source of money. He could be disqualified as a candidate for 6 years, ruining his political career. Munde was obviously pointing out the ridiculousness of the election expenditure limit and declaring that every candidate was in effect cocking a snook at the EC.

4. Munde's contention that the State should fund the election expenditure is right but he did not have to put himself in jeopardy to prove his point. The sham that everyone pretends to put up with has to end and the EC has to do away with the wholly unenforceable limits it prescribes for election expenses. Elections generate a lot of black money and create the vicious cycle of corruption leading to more corruption. It is true that even if the Government bears the campaign expenses, there would be the often proffered gifts and cash doles to the voters but at least an honest man would not be prevented from contesting an election for want of funds.

Readers are invited to email their points of view on serious issues of the day to ashokkarnik2001@yahoo.co.in.

Readers who do not have the facility of a computer can also post (mail) their points of view on serious issues of the day to "Point Counter Point", c/o Freedom First, 3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400001.

Foreign Relations in the 21st Century

India-US Relations Today (Cont'd. from page 18)

number of projects based in Pak Occupied Kashmir were signed despite India's long standing protests. In order to contain China and prevent a future conflict on the border, India should maintain closest possible links with the US and also enhance our economic and strategic relations with Japan and Australia. At the same time India should extend diplomatic support to the ASEAN nations in the hitherto dormant territorial disputes between them and the aggressively expansionist China.

It is vital for India to keep the US on our side now and for the foreseeable future without compromising our

national interests. This is not as difficult as it seems because India and the USA do not have serious conflicts of interest. Managing differences among friends is the essence of international diplomacy!

DR. B. RAMESH BABU is a specialist in International Relations, American Politics and Foreign Policy. Currently Visiting Professor, University of Hyderabad teaching a course on Politics in a Globalizing World with focus on India, Dr. Babu was formerly the Sir Pherozeshah Mehta Professor of Civics & Politics at the University of Mumbai. Email: brameshbabu08@gmail.com.



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjika

Modi's Big Gamble

There will be no second chance for Narendra Modi.

Amidst all the hosannas pouring forth from television channels about Narendra Modi's imminent elevation to the Prime Minister's gaddi - not just from the BJP, but disparate star-struck admirers - one important aspect seems to be overlooked. Modi is taking a big gamble, perhaps the biggest one of his political life. He is like the poker player who throws everything in the pot in one last desperate turn of the cards. If he pulls off a victory for his party, he will be virtually invincible and a law unto himself. If he loses however, his detractors will tear him to pieces. Unlike stalwarts like Advani and Vajpayee, he has not built up enough political capital to sustain and survive a defeat. There will be no second chance for Narendra Modi. If he does not succeed in riding the crest of the wave to victory, it will come crashing down on him.

Modi's elevation is being touted by the BJP and a section of the media as a magic bullet that will propel the BJP to power in 2014. This assessment seems a bit divorced from logic and reality however. After all, the party has virtually zero presence in the Southern and North Eastern states; and Modi's much vaunted charisma is unlikely to alter the situation radically. Besides, the South's brief flirtation with the BJP in Karnataka proved to be less than edifying and is unlikely to be repeated. Not that the South is enamoured with the Congress' performance either, but they are likely to choose the devil they know over one they do not. Moreover, the departure of Nitish Kumar's Party from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has dealt a body blow from which the BJP is unlikely to recover despite the outward show of bravado. In India's largest State - Uttar Pradesh - the BJP has hardly any presence at all. Indeed, if one was to draw a map of India where the BJP ruled or influenced States were coloured red, it would present a pretty spotty appearance. So what is the justification for the party's apparent euphoria?

The Modi premise is based on the postulation that the people of India are disgusted with the vacillating and corrupt Congress government and are clamouring for a change. Modi is being promoted as the only politician with the gumption and charisma to effect that change. The BJP is also hoping that Modi's overpowering personality will obscure the skeletons in its own closet, like for example, Nitin Gadkari's creative accounting. The party is also spreading the impression, aided by a cooperative media, that the Congress is a spent force whose demise is inevitable and irretrievable. I am not so sure.

The Congress hasn't survived as a viable political party for over a century by being naive or clueless. It lost power in 1999 because of complacency; and it won't make the same mistake again. There is a widely held perception that the Congress has cooked its own goose because of the big ticket corruption scams it became embroiled in. However, it is precisely because they are big ticket that they provide little more than the vicarious thrill of running down the establishment. They do not really impact the common man. Think about it. The 2G spectrum scam hasn't resulted in increased tariffs for mobile customers. The Commonwealth Games fiasco provided the satisfaction of seeing the once powerful and arrogant Suresh Kalmadi cut down to size, but little more. Coalgate has resulted to some extent in increased electricity bills, but not many make that connection. Hardly anybody uses coal as fuel anymore, so they are not really bothered. Besides, no major political party has a monopoly on corruption, as the BJP effectively demonstrated in Karnataka. As for rural India, its denizens are too preoccupied with merely surviving to bother about the games politicians play. Actually it is the petty corruption at all levels of officialdom that directly affects and annoys the common man; and that remains constant and unyielding no matter which political party is in power.

Then there Modi's forte of good governance. As the Chinese model has proved, it is relatively easy to erect temples of infrastructure like good roads, uninterrupted electricity and so on when your writ runs unquestioned. There has been no viable opposition in Gujarat for the past 12 years. Modi's wish is virtually his command in his home State. He is not going to have such an easy run if and when he is required to govern the whole diverse and raucous nation. The BJP's routine complaint about the Congress government being responsible for India's declining economy is the height of hypocrisy, when you consider that it has been in the forefront of disrupting Parliament and thereby preventing the passage of economic legislation. I sincerely believe that the Indian economy would have maintained its steady growth if Manmohan Singh had been left to his own devices. It is the country's curse that he was so desperate to hold on to his seat that he tried to please everybody; and only ended up as an object of contempt. It is ironical that the PM has started to develop a little backbone in the declining months of his office, but it is too little too late. Again, much is made of Modi's personal integrity, but the same can be said of

Manmohan Singh and look where that landed us. Granted that Modi has a more forceful and dominating personality, but when it comes up against equally powerful and arrogant regional satraps for whom corruption is an entitlement of office, the resultant clash of the titans is unlikely to lift the country out of its economic morass any time soon.

Last but not least is the spectre of Hindutva that always seems to hover around Modi. Indeed, he revels in his reputation as a hardliner. It is this that makes him appear a saviour to some and a dictator to others. After his election by acclamation at the party conclave, Modi is trying to soften his image, which may prove to be a self goal. A leopard cannot change his spots. His success in Gujarat owes a lot to his far right Hindutva credentials and this is the avatar he is comfortable in. Even outside Gujarat, it may win him the support of many who want to

come out of their pseudo-liberal shells and proudly acclaim the Hindu Rashtra he promotes. It also alienates a sizeable percentage of the population who genuinely believe in secularism, but that is a calculated risk he can afford to take.

So there you have it. Will Narendra Modi emerge after the election as the conquering hero, or will he retreat licking his wounds and contemplating what might have been? If it is the latter, he may reflect that perhaps he peaked too soon. Perhaps it would have been prudent to bide his time. As it stands, he is likely to end up battling against not just the Congress, but disgruntled and suspicious members of his own party. He seems to have realized this and has been making a valiant effort to suppress his natural autocratic nature and build a consensus, but he may have left it too late. Only the next few months will tell.

We Are Not British

If India adopted a system that seems to be working very satisfactorily in the United Kingdom, why have we made such a mess of it?

Some time ago, I read an interesting article by David Brooks in the New York Times about how Britain, in the early part of the 20th century, made the transition from an aristocratic political society to a democratic, industrial one without any significant political upheaval or societal turmoil. Now it is widely accepted that India, after gaining independence from the British, adopted the parliamentary system of their former colonizers, as well as many of their laws and statutes. Indeed, many of the provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) are direct reproductions of their British counterparts.

This begs the question: if India adopted a system that seems to be working very satisfactorily in the United Kingdom, why have we made such a mess of it? Pundits would come out with erudite explanations for this dichotomy. Corruption is an obvious candidate. It seems to be ingrained in Indian genes, particularly those of our politicians. However, for me, there is a fundamental reason that overrides all others. *We are not British.* The Indian temperament is diametrically opposed to the British personality. The British stand in orderly queues; we instinctively jostle for precedence by breaking them. Britain has its fair share of crooks, but the general populace is basically honest: Indians adore freebies and are always on the lookout to make a quick buck by fair means or fowl. The British admire discipline: Indians treat it with contempt.

The other explanation is that blindly aping colonial British laws, for example, clauses in the IPC, shows a lack

of application of mind bordering on foolishness. For one thing, these are not the provisions adopted in Britain itself. They were framed by a colonial power and designed to ensure the ‘natives’ never forgot their place. In fact, it is these same clauses that give licence to the Indian police to legally unleash restrictive measures on their fellow citizens; generally with complete immunity. Maybe our lawmakers are not so foolish, after all. In effect, they have merely replaced one form of colonialism with another. Instead of the gora sahibs, it is now our elected leaders who have no compunctions in treating the general populace like chattel. Indeed, if it wasn’t for our hyperactive media laying bare the politicians’ excesses, modern Indians would probably have few more privileges than their ‘native’ forebears did.

There are heartening signs today that the Indian people are very gradually trying to reclaim the power that is due to them as citizens of a functioning democracy. They may even achieve their goal eventually. Be that as it may, we are never going to be as “propah” as the British – and it’s a good thing to have our own identity. So maybe it is time to ponder whether the inherited British system is right for us. We should never give up our democracy, of course, but maybe we can fashion a model that is more suited to our aspirations and temperament. It is certainly food for thought.

FIROZE HIRJIKAKA is a retired civil engineer, a blogger and freelance writer. He is a member of the Advisory Board of Freedom First. Email: leonardo8_@yahoo.com

Freedom House Questions Freedom in ‘Nations in Transition’

Dr. R. G. Gidadhubli

The report of Freedom House published in June 2013 on ‘Nations in Transit’ pertains to 29 former socialist states of East Europe and the former Soviet Union. Freedom House is a U.S. based non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights.

The report highlights deteriorating conditions of democracy, human rights, civil societies in these countries causing concern among human right activists and organizations and Western countries in general. Almost twenty years have passed since these former socialist countries gave up their socialist ideology and opted for political democracy and market economy ending six decades of competition between the capitalist and communist systems. The Capitalist West not only legitimately claimed ideological victory but also declared support to bring about socio-political and economic transition to their former adversaries. In view of this the latest report of the Freedom House has caused disappointment as they expected the ‘Nations in Transit’ would emerge as open democratic societies with liberal social values concerning freedom, human rights and civil liberties.

Even though the thrust in this article is Russia, some of the major observations in the report with regard to other countries are as follows: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia are the worst so far as the condition of civil society is concerned. In Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Belarus there is persecution of ‘perceived enemies’ i.e. political opponents. In Ukraine, parliamentary elections are marked by political prosecutions and legal manipulations. There is appreciation so far as Georgia and Armenia are concerned as they have made strides towards more competitive and fair elections. Among the former East European countries, Romania and Hungary have witnessed dramatic decline away from democracy and governments in both countries have consolidated power over other institutions.

Putin’s Crackdown on NGOs

The Freedom House report is candid in stating that with the return of Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia for the third term in 2012, the country has witnessed the worst repression since the fall of the former Soviet Union. It is observed that Putin has used his authority over the

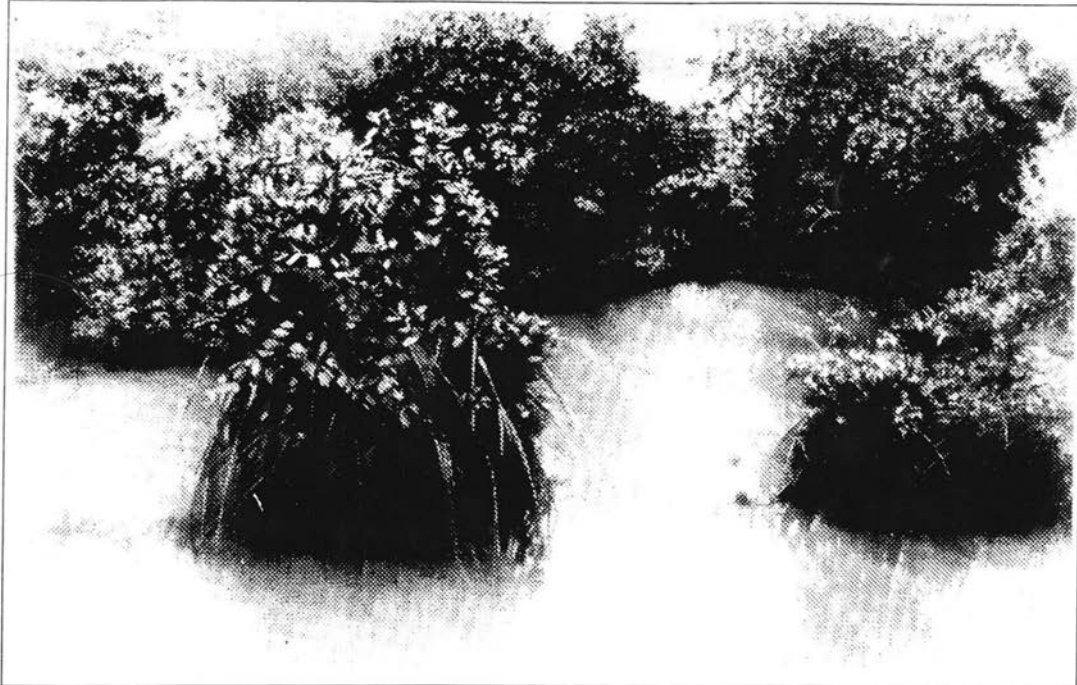
legislature, media and judiciary to impose new policies to muzzle political opposition and civil society including Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The fact sheet so far as NGOs are concerned is worth considering as also the objectives of the government and counterarguments on this issue. Within one month of taking over the presidency in June 2012, Putin signed a law under which NGOs in Russia receiving financial support from abroad are to be registered as ‘Foreign Agents’, which came into force with effect from November 2012 duly passed by the ‘Duma’, the Russian Parliament. To make matters worse for NGOs, in June 2013 Putin virtually legitimized the on-going crackdown on NGOs and inspection by investigating agencies by passing a law on ‘Random Checking’. While both these laws have raised considerable resentment both in Russia and abroad, there are strong disagreements between the government and opposition parties and leaders.

Looking back, the genesis of this issue seems to be the unprecedented protests and campaign in 2012 against Putin for contesting election for the third term as president. To be fair, Putin did not violate the provisions of the Russian Constitution by contesting for presidential election for the third term. In spite of this, in May 2012, there were protests in various parts of the country including violence in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow. Hence the Russian government was critical of some NGOs including Golos (Voice) which is funded by the West and was in the forefront in questioning the fairness of elections in the country.

Secondly, the Russian government has contested that while it was not against NGOs per se, it has been insisting that they have to abide by the laws of the State. There is also legitimate concern in Russia about political stability since there is apprehension about the role of NGOs in the ‘Color Revolutions’ in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyz Republic over the last decade leading to political instability

CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



A unique feature of the Industrial Garden Township, Pirojshanagar, is a large expanse of swamp, one of the very few such areas existing in the city under original mangrove forests.

At a time when mangroves are being destroyed at an alarming rate in the process of excessive and damaging reclamation..., Godrej has taken steps, at considerable care and expense.

to preserve and protect this Nature's gift in the awareness that mangrove destruction leads generally to loss of food, breeding grounds and shelter for numerous forms of life.

It is almost unbelievable that, like the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Borivli, such a mangrove still exists in the excessively congested and polluted megapolis that Mumbai is

HELP BRING OUR INDIA UP - QUICKLY!

Godrej INDUSTRIES

WELFARE : ENVIRONMENT / POPULATION NEXUS...

in these countries.

Thirdly, several southern regions including Chechnya, Tatarstan, which are predominantly Muslim, have witnessed terrorist violence from time to time which is alleged to be carried out by organizations being supported from outside the country. Hence security threats have become a legitimate concern of the Russian government. In view of these factors the government insists that the law is a necessary measure to prevent foreign meddling in Russia's public life.

To counter the Russian government, several political activists and leaders of the opposition parties have been protesting against these laws and the manner in which they are being implemented. At the outset, it may be stated that the term 'Foreign Agent' being applied to an NGO is unfair since the term is derogatory and used for a spying agency and hence there is legitimate resentment in the country. Many Russian opposition leaders, therefore, rightly feel that it is an attack on civil liberty in the country which is now claiming to establish a democratic society.

According to Russian official sources, there are about 650 NGOs in the country some of which receive financial aid from international organizations and institutions to sustain their legitimate activities concerning protection of human rights and social activities. Branding all NGO's receiving funds from abroad, whether they receive 5% or 80% of their total budget, has created a controversy. For instance, the Moscow School of Political Studies has received 12 million Rubles (\$ 411, 000) from the US based Open Society Foundation also known as George Soros Foundation. This institute claims that it is engaged in education and research and hence calling it a foreign agent does not seem to be fair. Similarly, the Helsinki Foundation which is well known in the world has opined that NGOs in Russia are subjected to lengthy inspection and virtual harassment by state agencies. Since March 2013 about 300 NGOs have been subjected to exhaustive checks by the officials and 19 NGOs have been classified as Foreign Agents. On 24th June 2013, a Moscow NGO named 'For Human Rights Group' was forced to vacate, the State owned premises, which it was occupying since the mid 1990. The NGO claimed that the application for extension of lease was made and is pending. Hence Ponamyrov has alleged that the action by officials was deliberate and politically motivated. It seems evident that lease has not been extended deliberately since activities of this NGO are critical of State policies.

Role of State Machinery in Russia

Russia, like other former socialist States of the former USSR, had single party totalitarian regimes and hence there

was hardly any freedom for individual and civil society organizations including NGOs. Judiciary was not independent. Hence one possible reason is that even as these countries are in transition to democracy during the last about two decades, there is still 'continuity' of some elements of the past.

Western analysts and critics would consider Putin's regime in Russia as 'autocratic' and those in some Central Asian States as dictatorial and hence not democratic. This partly applies also to the role of the State machinery in Russia. In fact the Western concept of 'Liberal Democracy' is not acceptable to Putin and possibly many leaders of the former Soviet Union although they insist that they support basic values of political democracy. Hence many Western analysts call these countries 'Controlled Democracies' or 'Managed Democracies' where some political parties do exist but often only on paper.

Putin's popularity has declined during the last several months in some Eastern regions of Russia. Putin might attribute this to the negative role being played by some opposition parties as also activists of civil societies allegedly operating with external support and therefore he decided to adopt strong policies against them. For instance, on 26th June 2013, Russia's Justice Ministry suspended the activities of independent election monitor Golos for six months because of the group's failure to register as a "foreign agent" even though it decided not to accept foreign money since November 2012 when the law was passed. Protests in Russia will continue challenging Putin's power and presidency.

In conclusion it may be stated that the observations of the Freedom House about the status of transition of the former socialist countries of Europe and Soviet Union are not optimistic. From the perspective of the West, the progress of transition to establish political democratic system is far from satisfactory. So far as Russia is concerned, Putin has worked out his roadmap for political transition which is fraught with several challenges.

DR. R. G. GIDADHUBLI professor and former Director for Central Eurasian Studies, University of Mumbai.
Email:rgidadhubli@hotmail.com.

Modi has made performing monkeys out of Congress spokespersons. They swing from channel to channel screaming.

**Subramanian Swamy, Janata Party president
on recent face-offs between
Congress and BJP,
The Times of India, July 17**

Discussion:

On Secularism

Saratchandra C. Panda

This is an attempt to comment on the essay “Secularism and its Discontents”, in Prof. Amartya Sen’s book “The Argumentative Indian” (pp.294-316 – Penguin edition). This article deals with some definitions of and attacks on secularism, mentions briefly what secularism does not mean, secularism in the religious frame, human rights and Indian secularists and bogus secularism.

Definition of Secularism

According to the Chamber’s Dictionary, Secularism pertains to the present world, civil, non-ecclesial, and not concerned with religion.

Dr. Sen provides two definitions of secularism:

- (1) Neutrality between different religions
- (2) Separation of State from Religion

According to Sen, Indian Secularism tends to emphasise the first.

In the sub-heading, understanding secularism Dr. Sen narrates a long history of heterodoxy and India providing a shared home to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Bahai’s and others. He mentions that Christians came to Kerala early and Parsis followed in the late 7th century to escape persecution of Zoroastrians in Persia (now Iran). However, he fails to mention who the persecutors were. Similarly, Bahai’s came in the last century, and here too, he fails to mention the religion of the persecutors. Nevertheless, he does not fail to mention the presence of Muslim Arab traders in India’s west coast much before the Muslims invasions via the north-western route.

He attributes the ethos of Indian secularism to the two emperors - Ashoka (3rd BC) and Akbar (16th century A.D) (p.18). Ashoka’s edicts prescribed restraint in speech....sects of other people all deserve reverence....For he who has reverence towards his own sect wholly from attachment to one’s own, while disparaging other sects, is in reality, inflicting by such conducts, the severest injury on his own sect. If this is accepted, one wonders where Islam stands in the comity of religions.

Dr. Sen mentions Akbar’s brief launch of a new religion, ‘Din-Ilahi’ and despite it, he remained a ‘good Muslim’ whose definition is missing. One wonders why he (Akbar) did not name his religion as “Dharm Ilahi? He

writes, “Akbar’s own political decisions reflected his pluralist commitments, well-exemplified by filling his court with non-Muslim intellectuals and artists (including the great Hindu musician Tansen) and his trusting Raja Man Singh as the commander of his armed forces”. Here, there is a factual error. Tansen, though born Hindu, embraced Islam and hence was no longer a Hindu. Raja Man Singh and Birbal were other Hindus and the rest were Muslims.

Dr. Sen should have focused on the philosophy and ideologies behind Ashoka and Akbar rather than on the two personalities separated by about 1900 years. He wants the secular state to treat members of different faiths symmetrically. When the size of the population of Hindus and Muslims is approximately 80:15, i.e. non-symmetric, how does one address this? Or does he imply proportionally?

In a footnote (p.20), he mentions the divergence in the way secularism is being practiced. For example, exempting the Muslim convention (such as polygamy) from the legal reach of the civil courts but applying the law to members of other communities. He adds in parenthesis that he would not undertake a critical scrutiny of such comparisons. On the other hand, he emphasizes the freedom to choose. May I ask him if Muslims have this choice to embrace other religions?

The Carvaka School of atheism was well represented and was selected for presentation in Akbar’s court. He fails to mention who represented this school (p.25). Why not apply Carvaka’s principles to Islam and Christianity?

Attacks on Secularism

Dr. Sen considers the attack on secularism from Hindutva activists including Bharatiya Janata Party as manifestation of Hindu sectarianism. It also comes from sceptics in society. He regards with disfavour the reluctance of secularists to debate the subjects because it is un-attractive (p.295). He describes himself as an

‘unreformed secularist’.

He says that the State must either not have any relation with any religious group or it can be equidistant from all religious groups. He describes asymmetry as a situation when the State gives the right to one particular community to worship excluding others (p.296). One wonders if any Hindu ruler did it in the past. Why has such an argument come to his mind in the first place? And what are the realities in Islamic countries? If India were really secular, it should have a Common Civil Code for all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The Muslim minorities oppose this tooth and nail. Besides, why are Hindu temples under government control and not mosques and churches?

Dr. Sen categorizes attacks on secularism from six sources (p.297):

1. From Western journalists who do not take Indian secularism seriously. The demolition of an old mosque has not helped to change this perception. For the information of Dr. Sen, India suffered the demolition of 10,000 to 30,000 temples by Muslim invaders and rulers who ruled various parts of India for about 650 years. Compared to these demolitions, that of an old mosque is statistically insignificant. One can only feel sorry for western journalists for considering India as Hindu or mainly Hindu and Pakistan as Muslim or mainly Muslim Pakistan. During the freedom movement, they called Indian National Congress Hindu Congress while the All India Muslim League did not need such a descriptive identity.
2. Under secularism, (p.298) political and legal traditions favour the Muslims. This is proved by the government’s Haj subsidy to Muslims; controlling Hindu temples while mosques are managed by Muslims only; under the incumbent Prime Minister’s 15 point program, the government funds are to be spent exclusively for Muslims as they are a minority. On the other hand neglecting the Kashmir Hindus rendered refugees in their own country, and the government’s treatment of Pakistani Hindu asylum seekers vis-à-vis the Muslims infiltrators of Bangladesh shows the government’s bias.
3. Dr. Sen mentions, “Even the unity of India arises from the ‘cementing force’ of Hinduism”. One wonders why this cementing force should be under inverted commas (p.298). That means, this is disputed. Does this not indicate his mindset?
4. Dr. Sen needs be thanked for including Muslim sectarianism (pp.298-299) in which he mentions Muslim kings destroying temples systematically. However, what he omitted is the fact that these rulers imposed “death or Islam” on some people, e.g. Guru Tegh Bahadur.
5. Dr. Sen invokes Asish Nandi’s argument that as India gets modernized, religious violence is increasing and expressed admiration for the fact that traditional ways of life over the centuries developed internal principles of tolerance (p.299). When the word ‘tolerance’ is used in the Indian context, may one ask who is intolerant against whom?

This answer could be:
 - a) A Hindu can be an atheist, agnostic or a believer of one God or 33 crores gods and goddesses.
 - b) In Islam, concept of God in the Kalma is “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His last prophet”. This definition effectively eliminates all other forms of worship. Muslims believe Hindus worship false gods and goddesses hence deserve to be desecrated or destroyed. Islam should win converts by both persuasion and force or even threat of death. Hindus may not believe in Allah or Mohammed but do not show any disrespect to this concept, because they believe various paths to God. Theoretically, while Hinduism is inclusive, Islam is exclusive. Because of this exclusivist nature, Muslims are intolerant of other faiths.
6. Dr. Sen rightly includes the argument that the United Kingdom is a secular country but there is a Blasphemy Law to protect Christianity. Similarly, Pakistan has a Blasphemy Law to protect Islam (p. 300). Why is there no such law in India to protect Hinduism where Hindus pre-dominate? Is it not asymmetry?

Dr. Sen poses the question, “Is India really the Hindu counterpart of Pakistan?” When British India was partitioned, Pakistan chose to be an Islamic Republic whereas India, under Jawaharlal Nehru, chose a secular Constitution. And that was a mistake e.g. Hindus were expelled from Pakistan and Bangladesh and also from Muslim majority Kashmir. Not only that, Muslims in large numbers are even now coming and settling down in India from these two Islamic Republics. India has to bear this additional burden.

It is very kind of him to admit that because of secularism, the country has had non-Hindus as president and enjoy positions of influence in the judiciary and other spheres. Why has he advanced the argument that India should have symmetric laws of blasphemy applied to one religion only as in Pakistan? This is a humbug argument

especially when a Hindu can be an atheist, agnostic or a believer.

Another argument advanced by staunch secularists that despite elements of legal symmetry Hindus still have a substantial advantage over Muslims. Hence, precisely to disempower Hindus, the UPA government constituted the Sachar Committee and Ranganath Commission and are now implementing their recommendations. Dr. Sen must be happy now. He talks of symmetry in secular India (p.303), for this, a sense of proportion should not be lost. One cannot equate 80% with 20%. This is as simple as that.

He exposes his opportunism when he states (sic) "I am not of course recommending universal anti-Blasphemy Laws and indeed I would argue firmly against anti-Blasphemy Laws" (p.303). Will he demand the same in Pakistan and Bangladesh? That would be a test of his commitment to secularism.

Dr. Sen does not accept that any favouritism is being shown to Muslims (pp 304/305) nor does he concede the failure of secularism when it involves Muslims. Hindus can be prosecuted for polygamy and not Muslims because of the Islamic provision in Sharia. He uses words like 'extremely' and 'rarely' for this provision by Indian Muslims. May one ask, if it is not injustice to be one of the four wives of a Muslim man? This simply goes against the human rights of Muslim women. He admits unfairness to Muslim women rather than Hindu men (p.304). He states that Hindu laws were reformed with little opposition during 1955 and 1956 because of political movements within Hindu communities. Why were such reform movements absent among the Muslim community? Jawaharlal Nehru used to say Muslim laws would not be changed unless Muslims wanted it. Dr. Sen admits that "there would be nothing non-secular in pursuing the possibility of making the provisions of a set of uniform civil laws applied even-handedly to individual to all community (p.304)". Indeed, this is the aim of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

Secularism Does Not Mean Favouritism

1. Keeping Hindu temple administration under government control while exempting mosques and churches
2. Spending temple income on mosques and churches
3. Giving subsidies to Muslims for Haj and taxing Hindu pilgrims in India
4. Constructing Haj houses in different cities and denying similar facilities to Hindus relating to Amarnath Yatra
5. Many financial facilities to poor minorities (mainly

Muslims) while denying the same to general caste Hindus in similar circumstances

Dr. Sen makes facetious comparison of one's religiosity of a leader with his political beliefs by giving examples of M. A. Jinnah and A. K. Azad on one hand, Dr. S. P. Mookerjee with Mahatma Gandhi, on the other (p.307). He describes Nathuram Godse, who killed Gandhiji, as an extremist Hindu politician who blamed Gandhi for his alleged softness towards Muslims in political matters. Some elaboration is required here. During the Muslim League inspired and instigated riots, Gandhi never condemned Muslims but asked Hindus to bravely submit themselves to their Muslim brothers to kill them and thus try to melt their hard hearts. When there was counter violence against Muslims in Bihar etc. he appealed to Hindus not to kill Muslims, in fact, he went on a fast unto death against violence to Muslims. This is as clear as day light, to show where his (Gandhiji's) sympathies lay.

Dr. Sen states (p.307), "the importance of the religious identity is to be separated from its relevance in the political context." Had Muslim League leaders understood this, there would have been no Pakistan and even when it was formed it would have been secular.

He states, "To see India just as a Hindu country is a fairly bizarre idea", because of the presence of 140 million Muslims not many less than Pakistan and rather more than Bangladesh (p.308). Quite commonly, the proselytizing religions viz., Christianity and Islam are referred to as religions of numbers for conversion of pagans / infidels by means ethical or otherwise and a sacred duty.

The government includes Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis along with Muslims and Christians among the Indian minorities. On Parsis, he states "Parsis started moving to India 12 centuries ago to escape a less tolerant Iran (p.308)." One would like to know who ruled Iran then? He does not state the intolerance of Muslim rulers who stipulated the policy: "Convert or get out". This shows him as an apologist of Islam whose intolerance of people of other faiths, within and without, is well known.

He disapproves the fact that even an atheist born in a Hindu family is classified as Hindu (p.309). So does he want in Census reports to have columns for atheists and agnostics? Secondly, can a Muslim be an atheist or an agnostic?

He states, "...those who framed the Indian Constitution wanted to give appropriate recognition to the extreme religious plurality of the Indian people (p.309)".

When Pakistan was formed, it also had similar if not exact religious plurality. Why then did it become Islamic?

He mentions Ram and the Babri Masjid (p.310). He imposes his opinion by condescendingly stating Ram was a heroic king of the epic Ramayana, rather than God incarnate - believed by millions. He terms the epic a wonderful literary achievement. He distorts the statement that Ayodhya was 'claimed' as the birth place of Ram. The correct word would have been 'believed'. In many Hindu homes, puranas and epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata that includes Gita are treated as deities and worshiped. The opinion he has about Ram and Ramayana is perhaps because of the long Muslim domination in Bengal, which weakened Hindu beliefs. Can Dr. Sen who has taken liberties with the Hindu god (Ram) and epic (Ramayana), take similar liberties with the Bible and the Koran? Yes, one may take liberties with the Bible but with the Koran, he will meet the fate of Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen. I wish to add that polytheism among Hindus is a mason's mosaic while the monotheism of Christianity and Islam is metallurgists' melting pot.

He refers to the alleged Muslim disloyalty to India (p.311). The very partitioning of India is itself disloyalty to India. In the election of 1945-46, Muslims overwhelmingly voted for the creation of Pakistan. Having voted, what prevented them from going to the newly formed Pakistan? According to media reports, only 5 to 10 percent of Muslims of truncated India chose to migrate. On the other hand, what happened to the Hindus who constituted 22% in West Pakistan (now, Pakistan) and 30% in East Pakistan (now, Bangladesh)? Today Hindus constitute less than 2% in Pakistan and 7% in Bangladesh. Does Dr. Sen have any comment on this?

On separatism of Kashmir Muslims, he says, it is a special case relating to 4 million Kashmiri Muslims who should not be equated to 140 million Indian Muslims. He neatly forgets the plight of 4 lakhs Hindus made refugees in their own country. This unmistakably exposes him to be a sympathiser of Kashmir Muslim separatism. He further states, "the 'guilt' of Muslim kings, if any, (he still has doubts) need not be 'transferred' to the 140 million Muslims who live in India today (p.312)." So the guilt of Muslims is disputable. By saying so, he rationalises the guilts of Muslim kings. Fine, that cannot be transferred; but what about conversion and expulsion of Hindus from Pakistan and Bangladesh post 1947? Who are responsible for that? Should not the Hindus react to that?

Dr. Sen, referring to the pre-partition riots in British-India, admits that it had taken more lives than any other violence between communities (p.312). He interestingly

does not state who started the riots. He gives credence to the theory that because of British colonial rule, the tolerance between communities had been impaired (p.312). What about the events of post-independence? What kind of tolerance was shown to non-Muslim minorities of Pakistan and Bangladesh? There are no British colonialists now.

Dr. Sen says that secularism does not allow the concept that India's culture is quintessentially Hindu culture because it is not pure Hindu and substantial Islamic contributions were made in the field of literature, music, paintings and so on (p.315). This is like saying the tail is equal to the body. He further argues that this exclusive Hindu culture would also violate the contributions made by the atheists and agnostics who are not Hindus. He says that the discovery of scientific subjects like mathematics, astrology etc. was secular and hence not Hindu (p.316). Besides, he states, "there are good reasons to resist the anti-secular enticement ..." (p.316). ...The winter of our discontent might not be giving way at present to a 'glorious summer', but political abandonment of secularism is to make India far wintrier than it currently is". One must know the winter is severe or harsh in Europe and North America while summer is pleasant. But in India, except the Himalayan region, winter is pleasant. It is quite common among Hindu families to name their daughters as Sheetal meaning pleasantly cool. Indians should have Indian proverbs and usages.

Secularism in the Religious Frame

Now let me make an attempt to put secularism in the religious frame:

1. Hindus can be atheists, agnostics or believers of any number of gods. Hindus believe in several paths to God, hence recognize and respect other Gods whose only begotten son is Jesus and Allah whose last prophet is Mohammed. Peculiarly enough, some followers of these two religions have been abusing Hindus for centuries as worshipers of false gods. Christianity and Islam are exclusivist and imperialistic. Hence while Hindus are naturally secular, followers of these two religions are generally non-secular.
2. The reformation and renaissance movements in Europe made Christians secular. No such movement was allowed to take place in Islam. Of course, Turkey has a peculiar brand of secularism imposed in 1920s from the top and one wonders if it will complete a century.

So lecturing Hindus on secularism is akin to administering drugs to or performing an operation on a healthy person and hence gross foolishness.

Human Rights and Indian Secularists

According to Indian Secularists, Hindus are communal and less than human beings and hence do not have human rights the other communities have. Support of any legitimate Hindu demand / grievance becomes unquestioningly communal. Lack of sympathy for Hindus of Pakistan, Bangladesh or Kashmir may be simply because it perhaps hurts Dr. Sen's secular beliefs.

End of Bogus Secularism

Secularism per se is not bad or undesirable but wrong and faulty interpretation and implementation is. Indian secularism can be put, in perspective, by posing a few questions:

1. Does Hinduism respect Christianity and Islam?
2. Does Christianity respect Hinduism?
3. Does Islam respect Hinduism?

If the above questions appear vast and vague, then a more specific question will be:

4. Is worshipping an idol thinking it as a god (or a goddess) civilised or is mocking, ridiculing, desecrating or destroying it?

It goes without saying that civilized behaviour is characterised by mutual respect or a give and take between individuals, groups and communities. In other words, no entity can enhance its prestige by abusing others.

Conclusion

India will be prosperous, strong, and respected in the comity of nations as soon as such bogus or perverted secularism ends.

SARATCHANDRA PANDA, political activist and Freelance writer based in Bhubaneswar.

Gold Is Best Left Alone

Dattatraya R. Pendse

Herewith some loud thinking on a few aspects of a vast subject:

1. Gold is not a common consumption commodity, like cars or chemicals. It is an asset. If Indians are [rightly] permitted to invest abroad in assets worth billions of dollars, in the form of shares, bonds, etc., they should [rightly] be allowed to import and invest in gold too.
2. Out of India's total official foreign exchange reserves, about \$21.5 billion [after the latest revaluation] are held, by the RBI, in gold. If Indian citizens imported and paid for another \$ 54 billion worth of gold, during 2012- 2013, it is in fact the privatization of the addition to India's foreign exchange reserves. Citizens are helping the government in the task of divestment.
3. Indians pre-empting their purchasing power in buying gold is anti-inflationary. As long as Indians favour buying gold in the form of bars, coins or whatever, they will continue to do so. If one day in future they decide that it was not worth doing it, they will stop doing it. Creating restrictive laws and imposing controls against such universal age-long public sentiment, will turn a whole lot of honest simple citizens into law-breakers. Our decades-long disastrous mis-restrictive adventure with gold control from the nineteen sixties has amply proved the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln: "With public sentiment, nothing can fall. Without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces

decisions. He makes statutes or decisions possible or impossible."

4. We saw then that a ban on imports or high import duties will never work. Smuggling became rampant. Then it was primarily from Dubai, which was closest. Now it can be even more easy and profitable from the very porous borders with Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. We will now help these neighbours prosper as we then helped create Dubai. Official figures will show a sharp drop in imports only because all actual imports become illegal and are now funded by the smugglers and the mafia. Make no mistake: smuggling costs more foreign exchange to India than do official open imports.
5. Black money generation is widespread and massive in our country. Among the recipient individuals [or, more correctly, 'entities'] of these funds, some choose not to send them abroad. For these innumerable and powerful 'India lovers', gold is surely the best buy. As long as their number and might is not cut to size, demand for gold will not be cut to size either.
6. Gold is therefore best left alone and free. If the rupee sinks further, alas, so be it. We the nation will be paying that price for the greed of some of us and for treating for decades the whole subject of gold policy rather clumsily.

MR. D. R. PENDSE the well known economist based in Mumbai dadapendse@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEW



YERRANGADU ARBORETUM by M. Murugesan, Lalitha Vijayan, V. S. Vijayan,
● Published by Salim Ali Foundation, Thrissur 680 027 ● 2012 ● Pages 285 ●
Price: Not priced. Only limited copies available.

Reviewed by S. Viswanathan, editor *Industrial Economist*. This review was first published in the *Industrial Economist* and reprinted in *Freedom First* with their permission.

Until two years ago Yerrangadu, 100 km. south of Chennai near the east coast, was one of the thousands of little known villages. This vast stretch of barren land with little vegetation is now the

house of an arboretum. It is a good example for conservation of bio diversity and for rearing hundreds of species of plants and trees little known in this area.

In the United States, an arboretum housing hundreds of trees and plants is a familiar picnic spot in many cities and has also evolved as a focal area for nature education and research. Dr. V. S. Vijayan, Chairman, Salim Ali Foundation, celebrated the birth anniversary of the renowned ornithologist Salim Ali and organised a pleasant function to release the book Yerrangadu Arboretum at the

hands of C. V. Sankar, Principal Secretary to the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Munificence of C. Ramakrishna.

I had the privilege of watching the evolution of this arboretum over the last three years. The Cambridge-educated senior advocate C. Ramakrishna (CR), who has been transforming the villages around Illeedu and Vennangupet into lush orchards, had a small arboretum of a few dozen exotic trees in Illeedu. He was deeply impressed by the much larger number of such exotic trees by another illustrious son of that area, the centenarian Muthumalla Reddy. The exotic trees included decades old mahogany, redwood ...

Ramakrishna, deeply involved in the social amelioration of the area, was keen to develop a unique farm with exotic trees and to leave this for posterity. He had earlier donated land for the national Agro Foundation's training centre, Dr. M. V. Mohan's Rural Centre for Diabetics and has been funding the government higher secondary school at Vennangupet. His recent desire is to set up a sophisticated skin clinic at Illeedu.

Meticulous Planning by Geethakrishnan

K. P. Geethakrishnan (KPG) former Union Finance Secretary and former Executive Director-IMF, who has been closely associated with the Salim Ali Foundation, joined hands with CR to work on this dream project. He involved Vijayan and his wife Lalitha in planning the arboretum. His four-decade old service as a civil servant and his fascination for statistics and yen for details were also a big help in involving senior officials of the Tamil Nadu government, including C. K. Sridharan, then Chief Conservator of Forests. CR set apart 14 acres of land in Yerrangadu for the arboretum and also committed the required resources for developing it. Vijayan and his team, assisted by experts from the Forest Department led by Jain Allauddin, K. S. Devadoss and KPG with a detailed plan, set about the task of mapping the region and planning the species, planting, watering, ... CR spent liberally on

When a botany book makes exciting reading!

We are grateful to Mr. K. P. Geethakrishnan for not only gifting this book for the attention of our readers but also educating us on what this Arboretum is all about. In a note forwarding the book he writes: "Herewith the book on Yerrangadu Arboretum. It is more like a botany textbook and so makes for dull reading. You get excited only when you get to learn the unusual features of many of the plants, e.g. *Adansonia digitata* (page 22) - these are live specimens over 2000 years in East Africa and Australia and is known as the upside down tree; *Corypha umbraculifera* (page 238) - a palm tree that grows up to 100' in 80 years; then flowers - with flowers to 5 lakh small fruits weighing 250 kgs. and dies next year - it is the leaf of this paper that was used for writing in South India till paper was discovered! Even now, a few specimens flower each year in Tamil Nadu, and right now, one is in the final stages - drying up - near Kalapakkam; *Saraca asoca* (page 173) - this is the Asoca tree under which Sita is supposed to have sat while in captivity - not the tall Ashokha tree that you find on most roads and houses in all towns of Tamil Nadu". - **Ed. FF.**

constructing three large wells to ensure copious supply of water. The soil was analysed, corrected for deficiencies, enriched with needed nutrients and linked by a network of drip irrigation pipes. I remember the passion, the involvement and the painstaking efforts put in by this team over the last three years.

Tree saplings were identified and collected from nurseries in Sikkim, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Pondicherry, Thrissur, Tiruvananthapuram ... The trees were planted in rows and columns, to the plans made by KPG. Smaller trees were planted in the front, medium behind them and the largest trees at the extreme back rows to ensure visibility.

I remember the trials and tribulations. Saplings transported over long distances suffered damages. A few also died not able to cope with the pit conditions. These were replaced in quick time. Today, the arboretum consists of 320 species including a ficorium (fig trees), a bambusetum with bamboo species, a palmatum and a large variety of other evergreen and deciduous trees. KPG also looked out for star trees, i.e. trees to each one of the 29 birth stars (e.g. Ashwini, Bharani ...) Today, the arboretum

has 854 plants.

CR has also planted in the adjoining plots hundreds of fruit trees.

The first private arboretum

V. S. Vijayan described Yerrangadu as the first private arboretum. Senior civil servant B. Vijayaraghavan expressed the hope that this should mark the beginning of public-private participation for more such arboretums.

CR mentioned the creation of a separate trust for managing the arboretum under the chairmanship of Vanita Ramani and setting apart around Rs.12 lakhs annually for its maintenance. He also expressed the hope of setting up a centre for education, notably for the classical languages of Sanskrit and Tamil, near the arboretum.

To think these septuagenarians and octogenarians could spend so much effort, resources and energy on creating a project for the education and enjoyment of posterity! God bless them all.



VIRAT INDUSTRIES LTD.

(An ISO 9001:2008 Company)

**A Leading Manufacturer & Exporter of
EXCELLENT QUALITY SOCKS**

Our Export Markets include UK, Switzerland and U.A.E.

Our main customers are John Lewis, Ted Baker and Jaeger in the UK, Migros in Switzerland and Shoemart in UAE.

We produce Mens, Ladies and Childrens Dress and Sports Socks.

We also produce speciality Football and Rugby Socks.

For more information, you may visit our website: www.viratindustries.com

Corporate Head Office:

605, Veena Killedar Industrial Estate
10/14 Pais Street, Byculla (West)
Mumbai 400 011 (India)
Tel: (022) 3294 4131 or 3294 4217 /
Fax: (022) 2306 0486
Email: sales@viratindustries.com

Regd. Office & Factory:

A-1/2, GIDC Industrial Estate
Kabilpore
Navsari 396 424
Tel: (91-2637) 265 011 or 22 / 325805
Email: factory@viratindustries.com

Educating Adults

The Right to Education Act (14)

This is fourteenth in a series, examining the various aspects of the Right to Education Act (RTE).

Education of Children with Disabilities

Suresh C. Sharma

Should these children attend a normal school or be educated in special schools remains an issue, the world over.

Most of the children with disabilities come from the poorest section of the society. One third of them do not attend school. Besides increasing the poverty level, this lack of education imposes great emotional and physical strain. They need special teachers and facilities for toilets and ramps which most schools do not have, thus discouraging disabled children from taking admission. Other children often avoid their company and may even pass taunting comments. The teachers and school administrators must take precautions against such behaviour and impress upon all the students to be sympathetic and helpful to them. In the absence of required facilities, these children themselves are reluctant to join the school or soon drop out.

The RTE Act makes provision for children with disabilities to complete elementary education. Psychological needs also need to be satisfied along with learning. They are assured admission under the socially disadvantaged group. Some States have earmarked an exclusive quota for them. They are to be given special learning and support material. In Maharashtra State, safe transport is to be arranged by State Government or Local Authority. The State Government and Local Authority are to be expected carry out school mapping to establish neighbourhood schools and obtain information on all children and drop outs in the area. No screening test or interview will be carried out or admission denied due to lack of proof of age. The rules do not clarify what action is to be taken when the number of applicants is more than the seats available under 25% quota. First come first serve rule is a good guide but

difficult to enforce or verify. Maharashtra Government has directed that admissions will be decided by lottery.

Integrating Disabled Children

A child will be admitted to a class appropriate to his age even if he has missed school due to some reason. Extra coaching is to be arranged for such students to bring them at par with other students of the class. This is easier said than achieved. It is difficult to make up for missed teaching. It is worth reconsidering and letting them study in classes appropriate to their academic ability. Children with multiple or profound disabilities may opt for home based education. It should be an option for the parents and should not become an excuse for schools to deny admission. Their education needs may be better served in separate sittings. As far as possible, they should be educated in the main stream for integration with other students. Class room assistants and fellow students play a vital role in building confidence. Some students may not be able to attend all the periods due to physical weakness and can be let off early.

Parents like to admit their children to normal schools to satisfy their emotional needs. This is good so that they do not feel themselves to be disadvantaged. An officer whose both feet were amputated due to injury in a mine field and rose high in spite of the injury has recommended that extra care or help should be discouraged and instead children should be encouraged to be self-reliant. Otherwise it gives the individual a feeling of inferiority and they do not put in the effort required to overcome their weakness.



A Feature Sponsored by

Adult Education Institute,

Registered under the Public Trusts Act N.E-4282

Contact: Email:freedomfirst1952@gmail.com

Considerable effort and determination is required by the individual and family in recovering from a disability. An officer whose leg was imputed was advised by the doctors not to use crutches otherwise he would not have the will to discard them later. He did not follow that advice and used crutches all along. Help should be extended without appearing to be so. I recollect a colleague wanting to get a residential telephone for his family when he was posted to a field station. His wife was suffering from a serious disability. I promised to try since I knew his problem. He retorted angrily that he did not want any sympathy. I had not meant to patronize and did realize my mistake in offering help.

It is imperative to make the students feel normal. This will depend on the nature of disability. Students with dyslexia have to get concession in writing or oral examinations. Recently in Mumbai, the Board had exempted children suffering from dyslexia from the Hindi paper in High School examination. They were not allowed to seek admission to college under on-line system since they had not taken the Hindi paper. They had to seek help from the court who directed that on-line admission should be allowed for these children.

Need For Special Schools

There is a need for coherence amongst the various departments of the Government and a uniform policy in the country. The hearing handicapped children or those with visual impairment cannot study in a normal school. There is definitely a need to organize special schools for some category of disabled children. A couple in Mumbai switched seven schools for their eight year old child who suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]. The child was sidelined in all the schools. The parents started a school themselves which has children with disability as well as normal ones. Started in 2012, it has 23 students out of which 12 are children have learning disability. The school follows separate syllabus for special children. The parents feel that special children with disability should mix with other children to get a feeling of being normal. Attempt should be to bring as many students into the mainstream as possible.

Mrs Sunila Kamath, wife of a retired police officer, made several visits to her village in Konkan after her mother's death. She saw first-hand the struggles in the life of people there. She tried to help them. Along with her sister, Mrs Pratibha Sengupta, who had been a teacher for blind children in Pune, she undertook a project to translate books into Braille language and have completed 50 books so far. They started a school at Mandangarh

village on the Konkan coast for visually impaired children with their own resources. Starting with five students, the school has 35 students today. It is a residential institution. In spite of efforts and appeals, they have not been able to get any Government financial aid. Yet they remain committed to bring light into the life of visually impaired kids. There is much that the administration needs to do.

We understand the conflict between the desire of parents and the limitations of school teachers and administrators. Recently, the parents of an eight year old autistic child received a letter from the school requesting them to remove the child from the school as his behaviour was disturbing other children. The parents approached the Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights [MSCPCR] who constituted a panel to report after studying the behaviour of the child for 30 days. The panel submitted a report favourable to the child after observation of only 11 days. This was contested by the school and the Court directed that the panel should submit a report after observation over 30 days. The school has to judge the good of the majority and not that of one child. We must take note of the fact that children study in a highly competitive environment. Any distraction is frowned upon by the parents who keep a close watch on their children's progress. Being dragged to the court is not an ideal solution. Should these children attend a normal school or be educated in special school remains an issue, the world over.

Education of autistic children is an expensive and complicated task. Educating autistic children requires mental health professionals, usually not available in normal schools. The autistic children are not able to form relationships with other children. Some of these children may also be mentally retarded while others may have above average intelligence but have the same communication problems. The parents' expectations are in excess of what the schools are providing. It is not merely the issue of admission and attending classes with a shadow teacher. Effective education requires one to one instruction for 40 hours a week. Schools are not able to meet the expenses and want the Government to meet these expenses. Parents and school officials want what's best for the children. It can, however, be difficult to make the ideal match a reality. The law has a provision to compel the schools to admit these children but cannot force them to impart specialized teaching.

Performance of Disadvantaged Students

Disability in vision or hearing is no bar to academic excellence. These students require special coaching. The

results in High School examination of children with impaired hearing in the Education and Training Centre run by the Navi Mumbai Municipal Committee was 100% this year. Some of the schools run for students with visual impairment are doing excellent work. One such school in Sundarajanpatti has been achieving 100% results in the 10th Board examination for the last eighteen years. It is a result of hard work by the teachers and the interest taken by the students. One of the girl students aspires to join the IAS. Surprisingly, they do not fare well in higher secondary in commerce as the writers assigned to them do not themselves understand commerce.

It is essential to equip them with skills for a job. About 200 children with various disabilities taking education in schools run by NGOs in Mumbai suburbs achieve good results. The Government could do well by supporting such institutions. I have noticed strangers rushing to help the blind at railway stations. However, to accept these children as equals in a job is more taxing

than to help them out of sympathy. I recollect a candidate whose health had no bearing on the job he was being rejected for with the remark “Why not take an individual who can move up or into a better job later.” Government directives for reservation in jobs are ignored.

Some noble minded people are setting up a good example. Miracle Couriers in Mumbai employs only deaf persons for delivery. One member of staff explains to them in sign language. SMSs provide effective communications and means to track deliveries. The owner-director of the company comments “They are great with operational work, good with directions and incredibly honest – apt for the work they currently do.”

Education should help lead a more meaningful and happy life.

BRIG. SURESH C. SHARMA (Retd.) is adviser to the telecom industry, freelance writer, and member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*. Email: brigscs@gmail.com.

The Age of Darkness

– A Short Story in the backdrop of the Uttarakhand Catostrophe

Ishita Marwah

***There were no rich and no poor, everyone was wealthy because everyone was pure,
and that was all that was needed to keep the world going.***

They lived in a tumble-down hut perched at the very edge of the city, where the river became a grey trickle choking helplessly on the rubbish the towns-people regularly hurled into it. The father went into town daily to scrape together a living as a bus conductor, but he didn't manage to make much; most of the buses were out of order, and the ones that worked were so crowded, he could barely fight his way through the mob to extract ticket-money from the rowdy travellers. The mother walked from house to house in the richer part of town, washing dishes and sweeping floors clean, but the wealthier the people, the stingier they seemed to be, so she didn't earn much either. Together they managed to collect enough money to feed the household; themselves, their son, the father's father and the wretched cow they kept in a mud shelter by the hut. Not the heartiest of meals, not even three square meals, just enough fodder to keep their weakened bodies going another day, to keep the skin wrapped securely around their melting bones.

The boy was always hungry, and they gave him as much of their share of food as they could, but no matter

how much they starved themselves and fed him, his tummy was always growling, emitting loud, outraged roars that ricocheted off the walls of their one-roomed hut. The boy did not go to school because they could not afford the expensive public schools in town; the local municipal school building had long since undergone a transformation into a drinking house. So he played around the house all day while his parents worked, chattering brightly to his grandfather, only quieting down when he felt quite faint with hunger. Every morning he milked Dharma the cow, a pitiful creature with only one good leg and curved bones jutting so sharply out of her sides, it made the grandfather wince to look at them. But the boy thought Dharma was beautiful; she was the only cow he had ever seen, and she had always been this way, an ancient wreck balanced precariously on one leg, miraculously still standing upright with the support of the wall. He loved her diamond-shaped tan eyes, full of soul and suffering and a million other things he could not understand, and every morning after he had squeezed half a glass of milk from her dissenting, puckered udder, he stroked the soft patch of hair between her eyes. He swallowed the milk, still warm and frothy from

Dharma's body, and it was the high point of his day, the heady feeling he got as the milk gushed down his throat, swiftly silencing the indignant roars inside him, albeit temporarily.

The grandfather would watch the starving little boy, the severely crippled cow and the dying river and sadly sigh, "This is the Kal-yug! The age of darkness is upon us..."

His son shushed him whenever he made this dire pronouncement, and the wife pursed up her lips in disapproval and covered her boy's ears, but the grandfather would not stop saying it. He had always been a mulish man, and age had only served to effectively sharpen his obstinacy.

The boy picked up the phrase soon enough and he would gleefully exclaim as he ran around the hut and milked the cow, "The age of darkness is upon us!" It made the grandfather smile his rare, crooked smile.

Although the boy did not go to school, he learned wonderful and exciting things from the grandfather. He picked up nuggets of math and science, history and geography, and all sorts of amazing facts that schools tended to overlook in their short-sightedness, like why flies were coloured a shiny green (they bathed daily in grass-juice and sprinkled on diamond-dust for make-up after; if you saw a fly that wasn't shimmery green you knew at once that it hadn't been conscientious about its beauty regimen), and why the sky was ochre (it used to be an enamelled blue, but the angels of the Age of Darkness painted it dull yellow because they were jealous of how pretty it looked in blue). The boy had a lot of questions about the Age of Darkness, but the grandfather wouldn't let on much because the boy's parents disapproved of the topic, even though he secretly knew the boy was clever enough to understand, and would have to learn about it someday.

But the boy had picked up more from his grandfather than just a feverish imagination; he was every bit as pig-headed too, and he meant to wheedle out every bit about this Age of Darkness business from the old man. So when his parents left for work and his tummy was momentarily appeased by Dharma's milk, he made a habit of pestering the grandfather for details.

What was the world like before the Age of Darkness?

And what would it be like After?

Was there an After at all?

The old man did not need much needling; he was eager to tell the tale, and which story-teller can resist the entreaties of an attentive, keen audience? So he began to wait as eagerly as the boy for the mother and father to depart, and then sat straighter in his rickety chair than he had in years, his leathery vein-marked hands clutching the arms of the chair as he prepared to talk.

"I'm afraid my boy, that before I tell you anything, we will have to grapple with some maths."

"Awww shucks Grandpa!" The boy wasn't a genius with numbers, and to tell the truth, neither was the grandfather.

"Sorry son, it's integral to the story! We'll try and keep it simple."

"All right, go on Grandpa!"

"Let's start with Brahma; you know who Brahma is right?"

"The creator of the universe!" the boy yelled, burping a milky belch.

"Very good, the creator of the universe, part of the holy trinity formed by..."

"Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer!" the boy piped up, right on cue.

"Very good indeed, you are quite the little genius my boy! So Brahma lives a hundred years, and the hundred years of Brahma are the life-span of our universe, our entire universe, including the sun and the stars and the moon and the milky-way, okay? And one year of Brahma has twelve Brahma months, and one month of Brahma has thirty Brahma days, and one day of Brahma..."

The boy went slightly cross-eyed with this deluge of pointless information and interrupted with some urgency, "I can't see what this has to do with the Age of Darkness Grandpa."

"Shhh you little twit. So one day of Brahma, it is made up of 4.5 billion years for you and me and everybody else on the earth. How many zeroes in a billion boy, quick, tell me quick?"

The boy, rushed to come up with an answer, said, "six, no seven, no six, no eight! Tell me Grandpa!"

The grandfather nodded sagely, and said, "No, you figure it out yourself", while desperately probing the recesses of aged his brain for the answer.

"Eight." The boy said decidedly, locking in on the

number for no earthly reason.

“Nine!” the grandfather said excitedly, having landed on the right value at last.

The boy grunted moodily.

“So 4.5 human years is one day for Brahma, his twelve hours, and it is called a Kalpa okay?” The grandfather carefully ticked each announcement off his fingers.

“Kalpa, which is twelve hours for Brahma, 4.5 billion years for us, billion with nine zeroes...” the boy said, catching on.

“Excellent! So each kalpa (which is just twelve hours for Brahma) is divided into a thousand yuga-cycles, or age-cycles.” The grandfather closed his eyes and rested his head in his gnarled hands, rocking backward and forward in concentration, “And each age-cycle or Yuga cycle is divided into Satya-Yuga (the Age of Truth), Treta-Yuga, Dvapara-Yuga and Kal-Yuga, the Age of Darkness you want to know about. At the end of each age of darkness, the world is purged of all evil, and a new Satya-Yuga begins. This process continues for the hundred years of Brahma, for the life cycle for the universe, till after a hundred Brahma years, the universe is destroyed.”

“And we are now in the Kal-Yuga, which is just one part of four parts of one cycle of a thousand cycles that form one kalpa, which is just twelve hours for Brahma?” The boy said slowly, closing his eyes and speaking things he could not quite understand, “Grandpa, do you mean to say our lives are not even a second in Brahma’s life?”

“Not even a pico-second...” The grandfather said, nodding gravely at the bewildered child, “We are just tiny specks in the universe, visible only under the highest power magnification.”

This sudden leap from time to space confounded the boy, who steered the topic back to what interested him before the grandfather began to ask him nasty things about how many pico-seconds to a second.

“Tell me more about the ages Grandpa, the Age of Truth, and the Age of Darkness!”

“The Age of Truth was the most beautiful time of all; the sky glittered like amethysts and the sun smiled down at the world, golden and warm and kind. At night, the moon grinned in a velvet sky, painting the world silver in glittering moon-shine. There were no rich and no poor, everyone was wealthy because everyone was pure, and that was all that was needed to keep the world going.

People were tall as trees and white as snow, the women as stunning as goddesses, with glossy hair that cascaded way past their knees. They wore huge, sparkling jewels in their hair and on their fingers and wrists and slender necks, and never had to labour the way your poor mother does. Doors were never locked, because people didn’t steal, and the food was always fresh and full of goodness...” Here the grandfather stopped and smacked his lips, dreaming of delicacies he would never see again.

“What sort of food Grandpa? Tell me more!” The boy was hungry again, Dharma’s milk long digested and gone.

“Rich curried vegetables, tender meats, soft, fresh, yielding bread, fruits so ripe and full their brightness hurt the eyes! Pastries and pies, oozing chocolate and milk-caramel and strawberry syrup, topped with cream...”

The boy was salivating now, tightly clutching his empty stomach.

“What’s milk-caramel Grandpa?”

The grandfather looked at the child’s eyes shining brilliantly with hunger, and silently cursed a world where a boy could not know first-hand what caramel was.

“It’s a sweet, my boy, a wonderful sticky sweet made from sugar and milk thickened for hours over a stove. It’s my favourite sweet in the world.”

“I’d very much like to taste some Grandpa.” The boy’s voice was quiet, and full of yearning. It depressed the grandfather more than the rancid smell that hung heavy over the town and the pale dirty-brown sky.

“I’m sure you would, my boy,” he said, surprised to feel the sudden moisture wetting his age-sunken cheeks.

“So the age of truth went on, and the lovely people lived long, for thousands of years, having many children on the way. The animals were happy and fat and loved, and frolicked in bright green fields all day.”

“Animals like Dharma, Grandpa?”

“Yes animals like Dharma, son. If we were in the age of truth, Dharma would have four strong legs, and would gallop around the world like the wind. She would be so fat, she wouldn’t fit in that mud hut of hers, and her udder would be baby-pink and full of milk; we would get from her not just the titchy glass she gives you now, but gallons and gallons of creamy milk that we could all drink, left-overs that we could sell and churn into golden slabs of butter and sour into thick, delicious yogurt!”

The boy ran his tongue wondering over his

parched lips, and imagined thick slabs of glowing yellow butter lined up on the kitchen bench.

“What happened then Grandpa?” He said in a small voice, his mind still far away in an enchanted land where cows had four legs and people were tall and willowy as trees.

“What happened son? What else? People became everything they were not meant to be; greedy, selfish, jealous. Treta-Yuga came, and then Dvapara-Yuga, as the Gods valiantly tried to steer people onto the right path. Vishnu turned up, disguised as Ram and Krishna and Buddha and others, and attempted to set the world right. But people would not listen, they sank to new, filthy depths with every passing year and we entered Kal-Yug, indulging in debauchery and crime and other heinous acts. People killed each other ruthlessly, as they continue to do today, and the evil rose to power. Society was split straight down the middle into the rich and the poor, and now the rich are full of sin and the poor so wretched, we cannot do anything but work our skins off to survive.”

“What’s debauchery Grandpa?”

“Oh just bad things men and women do...”

“You mean have sex all the time Grandpa?”

“Yes, yes, something like that...” the grandfather nodded gruffly, flushing as red as the strawberry syrup he had just described.

“What happened to the animals Grandpa? Who broke Dharma’s legs?”

“People of course; in Treta-Yuga, they broke just one, and the poor cow still managed to hobble along and do her thing. In Dvapara-yuga they broke another, and then she found it harder to move. And then finally in Kal-yug, they broke the third, and finally her spirit. Here she stands now, balanced on one leg, her faith lost, her world shattered.”

“Poor, poor Dharma...” The boy said softly, staring out the window at the cow’s dingy shelter.

They were silent for a while, the old man and the boy, gazing out of the grimy window at the gutter-like river and the yellow-grey world beyond.

“What happens next Grandpa?” The boy whispered finally.

The grandfather sighed and shut his loose, crumpled eyelids again, so that his face became a mass of soft, criss-

crossing wrinkles.

“Next my boy, the world as we know it comes to an end.”

“How, Grandpa?”

“We are descended too deep into Kal-yug my child; there is only one way out, we wait for our saviour, Vishnu to arrive, this time in a fresh, new avatar, and finish off all that is wrong with the world. He will ride in on a shining white horse, this avatar, and he will do away with all that is wrong in our world. Dharma will stand on four legs again, and a new Satya-yuga will begin, with only the chosen few surviving, only the purest of the pure in the world today.”

“When will this happen Grandpa?”

“Very soon, my child very soon, judging by how heavy and still the air has become, and how Dharma can barely stand up at all...”

The boy was silent for a while, trying to make sense of all that he had heard. He finally whispered, his voice cracking with fear.

“Will we all die Grandpa?”

The grandfather looked at him for a whole minute, opening his eyes the tiniest bit.

“You tell me that my boy...” he said at last, grasping a knobby ear-lobe and waving it violently in an attempt to dislodge months of accumulated ear-wax.

“Huh?” the boy watched in fascination as a round glob of gunk rolled out of his grandfather’s ear and onto the grimy floor.

The grandfather massaged his ear with the flat of his palm, groaning in pleasure, and said, “Do you know the name of the tenth avatar of Vishnu, son?”

The boy nodded dumbly.

The grandfather sat up straighter in his chair than the boy had ever seen him sit before.

“His name is Kalki, my boy.”

Kalki looked at the grandfather, and beyond him, at the yellow-grey world he was meant to save.

DR. ISHITA MARWAH,
working with the Dept. of Medicine,
John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford.

N O T E S

“Thoughtless Statement”

We agree with Mr. Purshottamdas Tandon, a former Congress President, when, at Allahabad some time ago, he expressed amazement at a reported statement of the Congress President, Mr. U. N. Dhebar, in which he had said that if people really loved their Prime Minister they should not do anything that he did not like. Mr. Tandon rightly said that such a statement could be made only in a moment of thoughtlessness, “I want the people to be independent in thinking and not mere yes-men,” he stressed.

It is unfortunate that in our country today there is too much of unthinking obedience to the will of the Prime Minister. We do not deny that our Prime Minister is a great man or that his sincerity to the cause of the country is above question. Yet, as human history has shown, great men and sincere men have often committed mistakes and blunders, which have cost humanity dearly. Even Gandhiji admitted Himalayan blunders and was ever ready to be corrected. And, as Mr. Tandon rightly points out, nobody could say for Gandhiji what Mr. Dhebar has said about Pandit Nehru.

An attitude such as that advocated by Mr. Dhebar is bound to sow the seeds of totalitarianism in India. “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” Only an effective application of that principle in our daily lives can provide perennial safeguard for democracy.

However great may be a national leader, his policies and programmes need to be scrupulously watched and even disapproved whenever they are likely to affect people’s interests adversely. And the leader, if he is a democrat, must always take the people into confidence.

That the trend which Mr. Dhebar expressed is widespread was prominently brought out last week in the reactions of Congress parliamentarians to the speech that Mr. C. D. Deshmukh made explaining the reasons of his resignation. They expressed surprise that Mr. Deshmukh should have launched a frontal attack on Mr. Nehru “who symbolises the basic unity of the nation.” At this rate it may not be long before it will be said that any criticism of Mr. Nehru is an attack on the unity of the nation. This is, indeed, a dangerous trend which needs to be vigorously combated.

Two Centenaries

In July were celebrated the birth centenaries of two distinguished Indians. One was that of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the other of late Mr. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. The Tilak centenary was celebrated as a national event owing to his long association with the national movement and the prominent part that he played in it. Leaders of all parties paid him well-deserved tributes on the occasion.

The other centenary was equally important. Agarkar died at an early age, long before the national movement had assumed a mass character. His role was different from that of Tilak. He did not believe in mere political independence. He stood for an all-round regeneration of the country – social, political and

economic. In emphasising a rational outlook and complete social equality he was far ahead of his time. Now that independence has been attained and a new society is being developed, his teachings will prove of great significance.

Conformity in Excelsis

That elder statesman, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, has rendered a distinct service by calling attention to the waning influence of the Press today in India. He points out that “after independence, patriotism and public cooperation in India have swung to the other end of the arc, and the Indian Press has gone all out for praise and admiration leaving the Prime Minister in a dangerous state of loneliness, for unqualified adulation day in and day out is loneliness.” Mr. Rajagopalachari stressed the benefit that “great Governments derive from public criticism without which they are bound to deteriorate in self-complacency and unchecked self-will.” A free play of thought and expression in public discussion is vital to the health and vigour of democracy. The value of an independent Press giving a lead to the country, in addition to functioning as a forum – for the ventilation of all shades of opinion, is all the greater today in view of “the weakness of opposition parties who are divided into separate small self-interested groups.”

He notes sadly that “the daily Press which at present flourishes in a business sense is daily chiming concord and approval and in all cases waits to form an opinion until the Prime Minister indicates his own and contributes little or nothing by way of criticism. Papers now have lost the habit of criticism either of the Government or of their small adversaries”. For a democracy to be good, says C.R., “the Government requires statesmen who educate and guide the people and are not merely politicians occupied in conserving their popularity for future power. Without guidance, adult suffrage and democracy based thereon, will confirm the worst fears of those Indians who opposed the movement for independence.... The Press too should not only aid at reflecting and forecasting public opinion but should try to educate and give guidance to the reading public.”

We endorse the foregoing analysis of the present state of the public Press in the country as well as the exposition of the essential role of the Press as a leader of instructed opinion in a democracy.

Modern democracy functioning in large nation states with populations running into tens of millions, throws up new classes of politicians, newspaper and periodical journalists and organisers of pressure groups of various kinds who engage themselves in meeting some need or other, legitimate and illegitimate, of innumerable interests. A stable and progressive democracy needs the evolution of clear and wellunderstood codes of public conduct governing the classes dealing with power in public life.

What you have just read are excerpts from the comments in *Freedom First* in its issue No.51 of August 1956. You will find the full text of these comments and more in our archives – www.freedomfirst.in

Do A Favour

to your friends
send them
a sample copy of
Freedom First
with your compliments.

Freedom First

3rd Floor, Army & Navy Building,
148, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Mumbai 400 001.

Please send a sample copy of **Freedom First**
to the following with my compliments:

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

*

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

*

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

*

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

*

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

Sender's Name & Address

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Pin _____

THE LIBERAL POSITION

*Some Publications with a Liberal Perspective
that might interest you.*

PROFESSOR AMLAN DATTA

(Author, academician, political philosopher, Vice Chancellor
Shantiniketan University)

THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF LIBERALISM

K. P. GEETHAKRISHNAN

(Indian Administrative Service (retd.), Secretary, Finance GOI,
Chairman Expenditure Commission)

TRENDS IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE – ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF OUR PEOPLE

P. V. INDIRESAN

(Padma Bhushan. Faculty IIT Delhi, Director IIT Madras,
Distinguished Fellow of the Institution of Electronics and
Telecommunication.)

EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MINOO MASANI

(Author, Parliamentarian, Doyen of the Post-Independence Liberal
movement Management Consultant and President of the
Swatantra Party)

1. OF FOUR REAL LEADERS

2. LIBERALISM – AN ESSAY

3. WE INDIANS

4. OUR GROWING HUMAN FAMIL

5. MINOO MASANI 90 (Excerpts from his writings) 1940-1989

B. K. NEHRU

(Padma Vibhushan, ICS, Ambassador to the USA, Governor of
several states, economist and author)

THE RETREAT FROM SOCIALISM

DR. H. R. PASRICHA

(Colonel in the Indian Army Medical Services. In active politics
- held senior positions in the Swatantra Party)

THE SWATANTRA PARTY – VICTORY IN DEFEAT

SOLI SORABJEE

(Padma Vibhushan, Senior Advocate Supreme Court, Attorney
General GOI, author and Lectures on Constitutional and
Administrative Law.

INCREASING INTOLERANCE AND SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT

SURESH TENDULKAR

(Professor of Economics and member Centre for Development
Economics in the Delhi School of Economics, served on the Prime
Minister's Economic Advisory Council)

POST-REFORM TRENDS IN POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN INDIA

N.VITTAL

(Indian Administrative Service, formerly Chief Vigilance
Commissioner, Chairman Commission for People's Empowerment
Andhra Pradesh.)

CORRUPTION MOCKING AT LIBERALISATION

For copies, get in touch with us at *Freedom First*, 3rd floor,
Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai
400001. You can also email us at freedomfirst1952@gmail.com
or phone/fax us at 022-22843416.