

Indian

JOURNALISM WITH A SOUL

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FARMERS FIGHT FOR **JAI KISAN**

The unsung heroes of India on a nationwide stir to protest against the recently amended Farm Laws which disproportionately affect farmers and aid big traders and business corporates



2021 Programme Schedule



SUMEDHA

CENTRE FOR PSYCHOSPIRITUAL WELLBEING
JEOLIKOTE, UTTARAKHAND
A DON BOSCO INSTITUTION

SUMEDHA SADHANA

1. (SS-40) – (10 weeks)
March 14 – May 22
2. (SS-41) – (10 weeks)
July 04 – September 11
3. (SS-42) – (10 weeks)
September 19 – November 27

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an inner journey in quest of greater healing and wholeness. Participants begin from where they are, looking at what is happening on their psychospiritual journey. They then move on to explore the psychological dynamics that affect their wellbeing, get in touch with their emotional and spiritual blocks and brokenness and seek healing so that they can live and minister in more joyful, satisfying and fruitful ways. (Age Limit 32 -62)

FACILITATORS:

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

Sumedha is a centre for renewal of body, mind and spirit through insights and practices from psychology and spiritual traditions. It is located in the rejuvenating lush green Kumaon foothills of the Himalayas, 18 km south of the tourist town of Nainital.

Mini Sumedha Sadhana

(MSS-2) – (4 weeks) May 25 – June 24

In Mini Sumedha Sadhana focus is on the psychological dynamics that affect spirituality. Participants are helped to become more aware of the unconscious dynamics behind their thoughts, feelings and defensive reactions; identify and heal from negative emotions associated with repressed memories; and unleash the powers of the unconscious to move toward greater well-being and wholeness. This integrative process is further enhanced through an exploration of sexuality, celibacy, intimacy and midlife dynamics, and holistic spirituality.

Facilitators:

Johny Dominic, PhD
Jose Parappully, PhD

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CRIES FROM THE FARMLANDS



Delhi's borders are witnessing an unusual protest. Thousands of farmers are camping on the national highways blocking the borders. The hands that harvest crops are up in the air seeking repeal of the contentious farm laws passed by Parliament. Hundreds of tractors meant to plough the fields are lined up on the outskirts of Delhi, providing shelter for the protesters; the roads that usually see huge vehicular traffic have become temporary kitchens. The farmers are out to prove their mettle. While majority of the protesters are from Punjab, one of the granaries of India, their counterparts from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and other places are coming in droves to join them.

The bone of contention is some of the provisions in the amended laws that the farmers fear will break their backbone. The decision to wind up 'mandis' and non-inclusion of a clause assuring Minimum Support Price to agricultural produce have left the farmers skeptical. Theoretically the new law gives farmers choice to sell their produce anywhere in the country. The government argues that this will help them fetch higher price for their produce. But, at the ground level things are not as rosy as it is being portrayed. For example, a farmer with a few acres of land may not be in a position to go around looking for market where he can get the highest price. They will prefer to go to a *mandi* in their area where they are assured of a particular price. They fear that in the absence of *mandis* and MSP, corporate houses will enter the market and fix the prices according to their whims and fancies.

The changes in the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act remove many agricultural produces from the list of essential commodities. This will help private parties to stockpile items, without any fear of punishment, and create artificial scarcity in the market to jack up prices

and make exorbitant profits. The government's unilateral decision to amend farm laws without taking the stake-holders into confidence shows its disdain and disregard for the majority of people.

Agriculture is the only sector which maintained positive growth during the Covid pandemic. The government should come out with a law that would offer assured prices to farmers and an effective procurement system. To improve the farmers' plight, the Swaminathan committee had recommended remunerative price for agricultural produce – a Minimum Support Price which is 50 per cent higher than the cost of production. But the government which swears to double the income of farmers by 2022 has done little to ensure fulfillment of their promise.

If the farmers are digging their heels in, braving water-cannons and tear-gas shells, they want to put an end to their life of impoverishment; they want to come out of debt and penury. Political leaders and bureaucrats who are turning a deaf ear to the cries from the farmlands across the country should know a bitter truth: While the prices of wheat and paddy have gone up by 20 to 70 times from the early days of Green Revolution in 1970s, the salary and allowances of government employees have gone up by 120 to 150 times or even more. The apprehensions of the farmers are not unfounded. Their agitation is a proof that democracy is alive and thriving on the borders of Delhi though it is trampled upon by those who run the country from the national Capital.

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

Happy Reading!

Dr. Suresh Mathew
Editor

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POWER QUOTES



What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.

Albert Pike

• • •



I would rather die a meaningful death than to live a meaningless life.

Corazon Aquino

• • •



Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them.

George Eliot

• • •



No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new.

Steve Jobs

• • •



I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death.

Leonardo da Vinci

• • •



If physical death is the price that I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

• • •

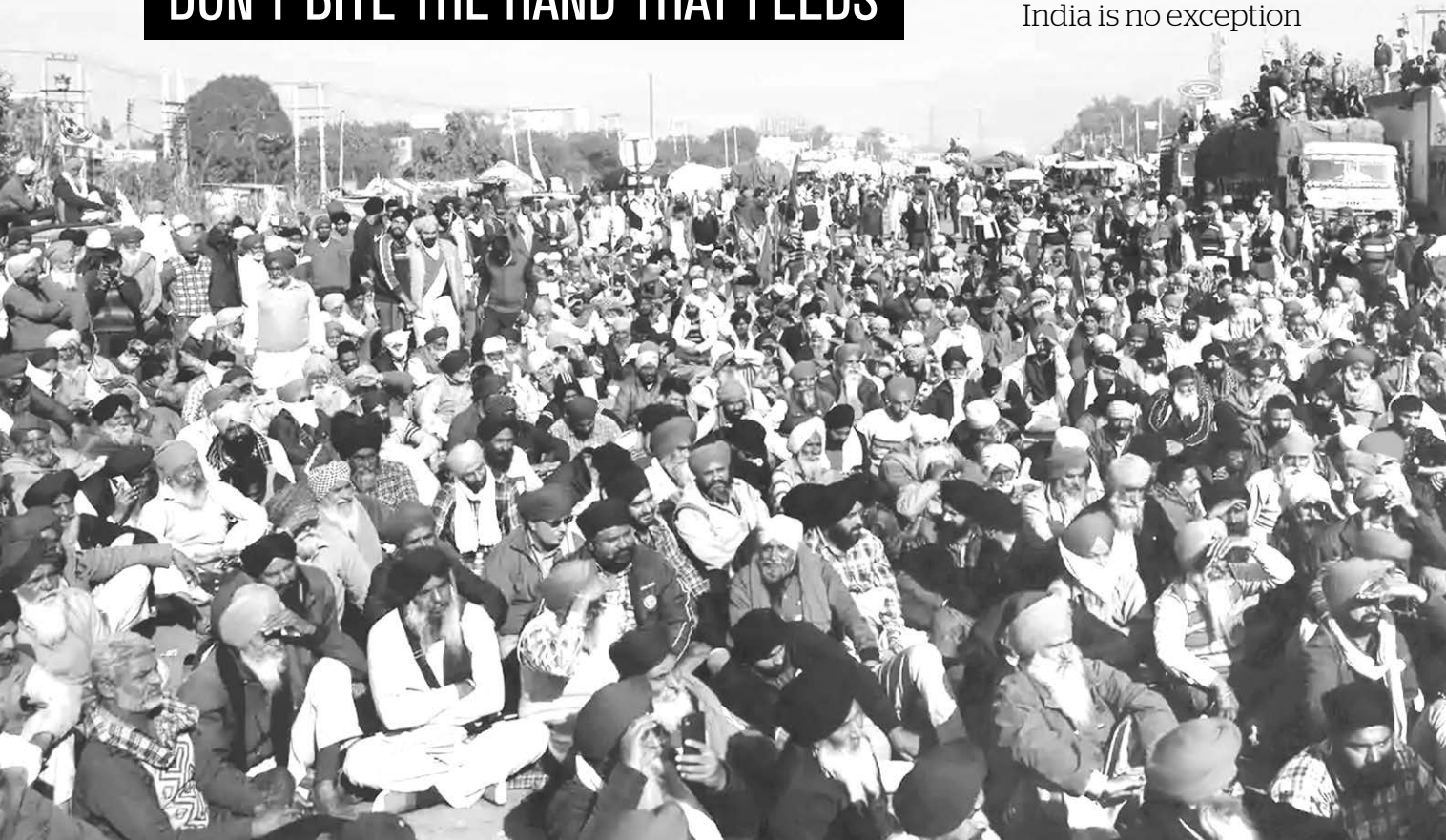
NEEDLESS WAR ON FARMERS

DON'T BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS



BY A.J. PHILIP

Dictatorial regimes everywhere have used the Covid pandemic to push their divisive agenda down the throats of their citizens. India is no exception



In Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*, one of the greatest novels in world literature, there is a conversation in which someone says that the farmers themselves do not know what they want. To that, there is a reply, "The farmer knows very well what he wants. Much better than you

and me. His needs are quite different from that of us".

This conversation sums up the present situation in the country, although *Dr Zhivago* was written 63 years ago in 1957, the year when an elected Communist government came to power in Kerala. The Narendra Modi government

insists that the three controversial laws enacted by it are intended to benefit the farmers. It adds that the farmers are misguided by some vested interests and Opposition parties.

This has been the standard tactic adopted by the Modi government. It said that the people were



misguided about the demonetisation of high-value currency notes, about the citizenship amendment Act and about the harsh steps taken against the starving people who were forced to leave for their villages from cities like Delhi and Mumbai during the lockdown. It says that the three laws enacted during the last brief session of Parliament were for the welfare of the farmers. Now, who benefited from the laws? Let's look at how the share prices of Mukesh Ambani's companies have behaved. One report said that every hour Ambani's wealth has been increasing by Rs 90 crore.

The economy is on a downward spiral. Millions of people have lost their income, totally or partially. How come that Ambani's wealth has been growing exponentially, even during the lockdown and post-lockdown periods? Ambani's share prices went up the moment the three Bills were passed and the President gave his almost-instant assent to them.

Whatever may the government say about the farm laws, the investor knows very clearly who will really benefit from them. Dictatorial regimes everywhere have used the Covid pandemic to push their divisive agenda down the throats of their citizens. India is no exception.

The three Bills were passed by voice vote, without listening to the members' demand for a critical evaluation of the same by a parliamentary committee. Members

who protested were thrown out of the House forcing them to protest outside Parliament House, in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue, all set to be removed from there.

The government knew that if the Bills were put to the vote after a thorough discussion, they might have been referred to a committee for further deliberation. One of the BJP's allies, the Shiromani Akali Dal, withdrew its representative from the government. The government should have known that the farmers would not accept the new laws.



It thought that the brute majority it enjoyed in the Lower House would help it to have its way. Before I proceed further on the subject, let's see why the farmers protest against the new Acts. The government has the power to promulgate ordinances to meet extraordinary situations.

There was no such situation in the farm sector in the first week of June 2020 to issue three ordinances. The farmers in Punjab were the first to protest against them. The State Assembly even passed a resolution against them. It was supported by all the parties barring the BJP.

When Parliament met in September it passed in a hurried manner the three Bills – the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020; the Farmers (Empower-

The economy is on a downward spiral. Millions of people have lost their income, totally or partially. How come that Ambani's wealth has been growing exponentially, even during the lockdown and post-lockdown periods?



Courtesy: Aswin Tooris

The new laws will result in corporatisation of farming. Profit is what drives the corporates. What drives the farmer is the need to make a living, not profit which is non-existent in his vocabulary

ment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

In India, 82 per cent of the farmers have only 2.5 to 5 acres of land. Their condition is pathetic. They are in heavy debt, estimated at about Rs 3.5 lakh crore. The government says that the farmer can enter into a deal with a “sponsor” under which he will produce “quality” grains or pulses or tubers or vegetables or fruits and get any price he wants. Now, who is that sponsor? Let’s take the case of Reliance which has a large number of retail stores in

the country. He promises to buy the farmer’s produce at a predetermined price. He will tell the farmer what to grow and how to grow — what kind of fertiliser and pesticides should be used.

When the farmer is finally ready to supply his produce to Reliance, the latter can reject it on the ground that the “quality” of his produce is not good. Of course, the farmer can go to the court because there is a written agreement between him and Reliance. Do you think a farmer who owns five acres of land will be able to fight Reliance in a court of law?

In short, the new laws will result in corporatisation of

farming. Profit is what drives the corporates. What drives the farmer is the need to make a living, not profit which is non-existent in his vocabulary. He knows that bumper crops can at times be detrimental to his interests. Why? Because the price will fall.

There have been umpteen instances when the farmers threw thousands of kilograms of tomato on the roads because there were no takers for them.

Now, it is the cauliflower season. A farmer will consider himself super lucky if he gets Rs 10 per kilogram of cauliflower, which is actually less than the cost of production. Of course, the farmer does not include the cost of his and his family’s labour while calculating the price. He is at the mercy of the middleman who may get three or four times the price he pays to the farmer when he sells it to the retailer.

The new laws do away with the minimum support price (MSP). Not all crops are covered by the MSP laws. Take the case of Basmati rice. What is the minimum price? It is less than Rs 20 per kilogram. When the same rice is packaged with a brand name like Reliance Fresh, it will sell at Rs 110 or more. The same rice will sell at Rs 250 or more in a foreign market.

Agriculture marketing etc is a state subject. In most states there are Mandis where the farmer can sell his produce through an auction system by paying the relevant fees. The Food Corporation of India also buys rice and wheat directly from the farmers. The farmers are assured of a minimum price. While the MSP has been growing, the growth is not commensurate with inflation. The new laws do not punish those who pay less than the MSP. The government says that the farmers will be

able to sell directly at any price they want. Even now, the farmers can sell their produce at any price to anyone. But, alas, there are no such buyers. Farmers who sell sugarcane to sugar mills have to wait for months, if not years, to get their price. The sugar mill owners know that no one else will buy their produce. The farmers are simply at their mercy!

Under the farm laws, there will be no compulsion for the FCI to procure food grains by paying the MSP. This would have disastrous consequences for the public distribution system without which millions of people would face starvation. There are reports that the FCI, which has not been receiving subsidy from the government, has started giving its warehouses to the private players for rent.

In the long run, the disappearance of the FCI like the growing disappearance of the government from the education and health sectors will affect the ordinary citizens, not just farmers. If a person visits a large retail store in America, he will find large-sized banana of a particular variety only. In contrast, in a vegetable market in India, there

will be a dozen or more varieties of bananas, of different shapes, colours and tastes.

Similarly, in a Reliance Store, only one variety of banana is available. The store will decide what to sell and what not to sell. The argument that the corporates will transform the agriculture sector and the farmer's income will double and triple is just a pipe dream. Take the education sector. While the corporates like the Birlas and the Goenkas have built schools in the cities and towns where they charge astronomical fees, they have no presence in the villages.

No corporate invests its own money in any big project. When the Prime Minister went to Paris and struck a deal with the French Government to buy the Rafale fighter aircraft, it identified a company belonging to Anil Ambani as a partner. Today, Anil Ambani claims that he is bankrupt and has to use his mother's credit card to buy provisions!

Take the case of the Tatas, who refused to pay even a penny to the farmers whose land the West Bengal government acquired and handed over to the Tatas to manu-



facture their Nano car. When the Modi government promised more land, the Tatas abandoned their project in West Bengal. Around the same time, they paid a huge price to buy the European steel company Corus which was actually facing closure. Today, Nano is not sold and Corus continues to bleed the Tatas.

Reports suggest that over two lakh farmers in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra and Punjab have committed suicide.



The government is not prepared to write off their dues, while it periodically writes off the dues of the corporates. No corporates, save someone like the Coffee Cafe Day owner, have committed suicide. Today, the non-performing assets of the banks are over Rs 7 lakh crore.

No farmer has so far fled the country like Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya. A person like Ramdev has in less than six years built a business empire worth thousands of crores of rupees. Just before he entered noodle business, the government helped him by banning the popular two-minute noodle on some pretext or the other.

To expect Ramdev and others of his ilk to help modernise agriculture is to ask for the moon. Now that three lakh farmers have

reached the gates of Delhi to demand withdrawal of the three laws, what has the government been doing?

In a democracy, the people have a right to protest. How did the government try to deal with them? The roads were closed and the farmers were lathicharged and water-cannoned on wintry evenings. Finally, they had to be allowed inside Delhi.

Last week, Narendra Modi made a visit to various pharmaceutical companies in places as far apart as Pune and Hyderabad to study the progress of rolling out the anti-Covid vaccine. He was not accompanied by either the Health Minister or science and technology minister. However, the same Modi has left the task of dealing

with the farmers to the Agriculture Minister. The PM has, over the last six years, visited states over 1,000 times to campaign in various elections. Why can't Modi meet the farmers? He is keen to visit foreign countries to meet leaders like Donald Trump for which he has at his disposal two state-of-the-art Boeing aircraft. Why can't he invite the farmers and listen to their problems? That is what any sensible and sensitive leader would have done. Instead, he keeps telling the nation that the farmers are misinformed.

If Modi calls them for a meeting, it would have a salutary effect on the farmers. They would certainly listen to him. He should also show readiness to listen to them. He should convince them that the three Acts are in the farmers' interests. Otherwise, he should either repeal the laws or put them in abeyance till Parliament meets again.

Nothing is more important for a government than the interests of its people. For the countrymen, they can manage with or without Narendra Modi and Co at the helm but they cannot manage even a day without the farmers. The farmers need concern and care, not water cannons.

The farmers have as much stake in the future of the country as this government has. When a BJP leader like Manoj Tiwari calls the farmers "tukde tukde gangs", Modi should have the courage to show him the door. Give the farmers respect, for they feed you day in and day out. Don't call them Khalistanis just because they wear a turban and are ready to fight injustices inherent in the three farm laws. ©

Give the farmers respect, for they feed you day in and day out. Don't call them Khalistanis just because they wear a turban and are ready to fight injustices inherent in the three farm laws



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Farmers' Strike

Why does the State become inhuman?



BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

“We will do whatever we think is good for the nation and all those who question us are anti-nationals” is the attitude of the government

It is a heart wrenching scene that the police are trying to stop thousands of farmers with tear gas, water cannons and barricades when Delhi is experiencing the coldest November in 71 years. At the same time, it is highly inspiring that the farmers are braving the cruelty of the state without resorting to violence except occasional stone throwing.

The agitating farmers even share food with the police. It is a pity that the farmers who feed 139 crore Indians are subjected to humiliation and cruelty by the BJP government that has promised *sab ka saat sabka vikas* and *sab ka vishwas* (Development for all and trust with all).

The question that arises in the minds of many people is how such a confrontational situation has

been created and why the government failed to talk to the farmers before passing the laws that affect them directly. Democracy cannot be limited to winning elections.

Making people partners in the decision making process through proper information sharing and consultation is also part of democracy. People's representatives cannot rule over the people and impose their unilateral decisions on them, as the kings and emperors did in the past.

From 25th November onwards, thousands of farmers, brav-



ing water cannons, tear gas and barricades of the Haryana police, reached the borders of Delhi. While some of them managed to enter the city, the rest are sitting at the border areas, saying they are ready to do anything till the government withdraws the three farm laws passed by parliament earlier this year. The three agriculture related laws are Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. These three laws together seek to open up the farming sector at both ends: production (through contract farming) and sale (through complete deregulation).

There is a disconnect and trust deficit between the government and the striking farmers. The government is of the view that these laws are expected to usher in a revolutionary change in the arena of Indian agriculture and would go in a long way in doubling the incomes of the farmers. On the other hand, the farmers fear that the complete opening up of the agricultural sector would throw the farmers at the mercy of the private players. Thousands of farmers across India fear that the three laws together will deprive them of guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP). They also worry that government markets or mandis will be scrapped, taking away their assured earnings.

The three bills were passed in a hurry without enough discussion in the parliament. When the opposition parties and even an ally of the ruling BJP, Akali Dal, opposed the bills as they were presented, the government could have referred them to a Select Committee of the parliament for detailed



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

Thousands of farmers across India fear that the three laws together will deprive them of guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP)

study. Meanwhile the government could have entered into dialogue with the representatives of the farmers and the states, as agriculture comes under the purview of the states. The bills could have been passed after arriving at a consensus between the farmers and the government. In that case a massive strike by the farmers, causing economic loss and untold suffering for the striking farmers, could have been avoided. Passing

these bills in the monsoon session of the parliament was not urgent; it was an expression of the arrogance of the ruling party. "We will do whatever we think is good for the nation and all those who question us are anti-nationals" is the attitude of the government. That is why the BJP Information Technology Cell head claimed that the farmer protests have 'Kalistani and Maoist' links.

This is not the first time that the BJP government showed its undemocratic, insensitive and aggressive way of adopting policies and implementing them ruthlessly in spite of opposition from the people. Examples are aplenty.

Demonetization that made 85% of the currency invalid and caused untold suffering to millions of Indians, the badly planned implementation of GST (Goods and Services Tax) that made 'surgical strike' on the Indian economy, abrogation of article 370 and 35

and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir State, enactment of the anti-constitutional Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) despite stiff opposition from the opposition political parties and the civil society groups, and the totally unplanned imposition of nationwide lockdown just four hours notice, which resulted in the exodus of millions of migrant labourers to their homes on foot in the absence of any kind of transport are only some of them.

The inhumanity of the BJP government is exhibited in the arrest and incarceration of

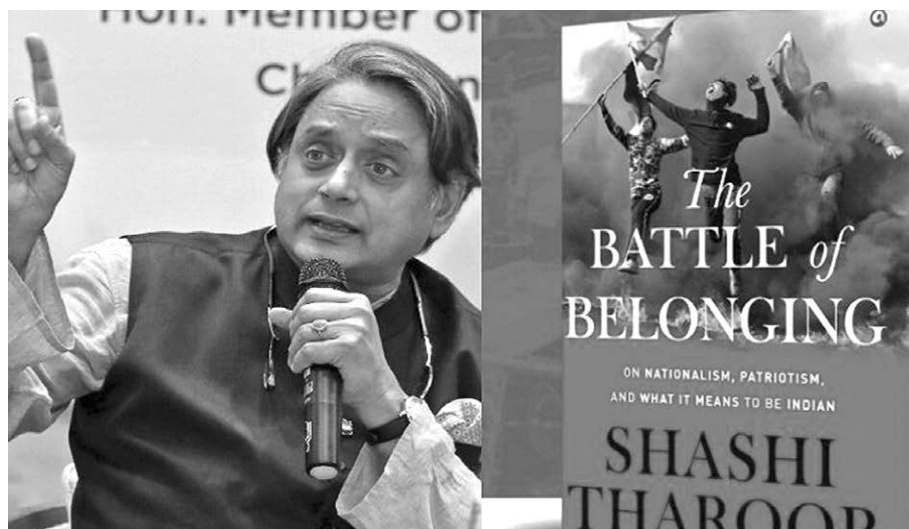
The government is under the impression that the judiciary is not going to intervene even if it enacts laws that violate the fundamental rights of the citizens

many social activists, journalists, academics, using the draconian laws like National Security Act (NSA), Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), and sedition law. Their crime is that they have expressed their dissent to some of the policies and actions of the government. Postponement of the request of 83 year old Stan Swamy for straw and sipper by the NIA (National Investigation Agency) court for about a month is another example of the insensitivity of the state. He is suffering from various diseases, including Parkinson disease. Stan Swamy was arrested on October 8 and has been lodged at the Taloja prison

in Navi Mumbai, being accused in the alleged Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case.

Why is the Indian State becoming cruel and inhuman? Arrogance of power seems to be the immediate reason. More than absolute majority in the Lok Sabha and near majority in the Rajya Sabha, and a weak and divided opposition have made the ruling party arrogant. This arrogance is shown in the way the bills are passed in the parliament, sometimes even without any discussion, making the parliament a mere rubber stamp. The arrogance is reflected in its dealings

is under the impression that the judiciary is not going to intervene even if it enacts laws that violate the fundamental rights of the citizens. According to A P Shah, the former Chief Justice of Delhi and Madras High Court, the Supreme Court has “completely abdicated its duty to defend fundamental rights” and it is going to “affect the credibility of the Court and its prestige”. “In several cases, the Court has refused to act in defence of citizens who have been victimised for their protest and dissent or for simply exercising their fundamental right of speech and



with the state governments, especially the states ruled by the opposition parties. The way in which the nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid 19 was imposed without any consultation with the states is an example for the callousness with which the central government is treating the states. For the BJP, democracy has become winning elections and remaining in power. Hence the party is always in an election mode.

Lack of timely intervention by the judiciary to protect the constitutional values and the fundamental rights of the individual citizens is another reason. The government

expression," said Shah in an interview with Karan Thapar in the Wire.

The most important reason for the State becoming inhuman seems to be the ideology of the ruling BJP, and its commitment to ethno-religious nationalism. Shashi Tharoor, a renowned author and Indian Parliamentarian, in his latest book, *'The Battle of Belonging'* has elaborately explained how the ethnic, religious and cultural nationalism is different from 'civic nationalism'. He has also narrated how India, which adopted after independence 'civic nationalism' by way

of its constitution and institutions, has drifted away from 'civic nationalism' and is in the process of embracing 'ethno-religious' nationalism that is exclusionary and restrictive, under the BJP rule from 2014 onwards.

As mentioned by Shashi Tharoor in his book, the methods used by the ruling party are: "weaken the independent institutions, demolish the autonomous checks and balances, stifle dissent, persecute and prosecute the critics, suspend genuine politics and replace it with mass rallies, parades, celebrations, and entertainments, while treating the populace to 'bread and circus'".

According to Shashi Tharoor, 'civic nationalism' is, essentially, the nationalism that originates in the consent of citizens to participate in a free and democratic society of their own making. "Civic nationalism requires liberal democratic institutions, constitutionalism that guarantees freedom of speech and association, and representative democracy, and is therefore the form of nationalism most closely associated with the modern state". It consists of inclusivity, acceptance of difference, celebration of diversity, respect for all religions, equality, fraternity, and concern for the poor. Crucially, it emerges from a *volun-*

tary participation in civic society. It is this civic nationalism that is guaranteed by the Indian secular constitution, writes Tharoor.

On the other hand, ethno-religious nationalism is based on the superiority of a particular race or religion or culture and naturally excludes those who do not belong to that particular race, religion or culture. In ethno-religious nationalism "the individual is subordinated to the collective and the individual who is outside the collective is despised for not belonging".

Ethno-religious nationalism often promotes hate for people other than one's own by encouraging 'us-them' syndrome. For example, the Nazi type of nationalism requires not just 'enmification' (making the other an enemy) but also the defeat and domination of those who are excluded from its ambit. History is a witness to the fact that this kind of extreme nationalism has led to warfare, genocide, racial extermination, mass expulsion of populations and ethnic cleansing, as happened in places like Bosnia, Rwanda, and Georgia.

What can be done to make the state human, sensitive and compassionate? "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" as Lord Acton has said. Any individual or party that is in power will naturally try to increase its power. A combination of ethno-religious nationalism and enhanced state power can be disastrous for the people of our country. Hence preventing the accumulation of power and promoting nationalism in tune with the Indian constitution and the Indian pluralistic ethos appear to be a viable solution.

The main reason for the expansion of the power of the BJP is the weakening of the opposi-

The opposition parties will be rejected by the people, if they adopt a policy of soft Hindutva. The only alternative that can robustly compete with the hard Hindutva of the BJP is Indian constitutionalism



tion parties. Unless and until the parties that are opposed to the BJP come together and present an alternative before the people the victory procession of the BJP will be continued. A coming together of the opposition parties only to fight election will be a futile exercise as already has been proved from the past experiences. They have to agree on a shared ideology and a minimum common programme. The common ideology should be 'civic nationalism' which Shashi Tharoor qualifies as the 'soul of India'.

Shashi Tharoor has mildly criticised in his book the Congress for adopting 'soft Hindutva' to compete with the BJP for capturing the votes of the majority community. The opposition parties will be rejected by the people, if they adopt a policy of soft Hindutva. The only alternative that can robustly compete with the hard Hindutva of the BJP is Indian constitutionalism. Copying the BJP will be a disaster for the Congress and other parties.

The last part of Shashi Tharoor's book 'The Battle of Belonging' is titled as 'Reclaiming India's Soul'. He has not given concrete



Courtesy: Satish Acharya

proposals in his book for reclaiming the soul of India or restoring and reinstating 'civic nationalism'. The first step could be reinventing the Congress party, the main opposition, which has pan Indian presence, by returning to its original ideology with innovative strategies. The second step is building an alliance of opposition parties which believe in 'civic

nationalism', and the third step should be a nationwide campaign by the alliance to project an alternative narrative of India to the narrative presented by the BJP. This narrative should be focusing on the issues of the people: job creation, quality health care for all, quality education for all, restoring the dignity of all Indians, and replacing hatred with love. The focus of RJD on the issues of the people, especially employment creation, in the recently concluded Bihar election vindicates that people can be liberated from the illusion presented by the BJP.

As long as India is ruled by a party that is committed to ethnic-religious nationalism, the State will remain insensitive and inhuman to all those who do not agree with it and its ideology. ©

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FARMERS WILL ACHIEVE HISTORIC VICTORY:

Yogendra Yadav

The farmers' agitation against the amended controversial farm laws has put the Narendra Modi government in a tight spot. Tens of thousands of farmers from Punjab, who are spearheading the movement, and thousands of their counterparts from

Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and other States have swarmed Delhi's borders. They are staying put on the national highways, braving cold wave, to protest against the new laws that they say could destroy their livelihood.

With support pouring in from across the country and abroad

(Canadian Prime Minister came out in support of the farmers), the agitating farmers are in no mood to go back without achieving their demand of withdrawal of the three new laws.

The agitators have got further boost with many leaders and stars from various arena of life returning their honours and awards to the government. It is pertinent to note that former Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, a former ally of the BJP, returned his Padma Vibhushan award.

The talks between the agitating farmers and the Central government have not yet resulted in a breakthrough as the former are sticking to their guns and are not

willing to end the agitation unless the new laws are withdrawn.

Anju Grover for *Indian Currents* spoke to Swaraj India Chief and political activist **Yogendra Yadav** to understand the reasons behind the farmers' uprising and flaws in the new farm laws. Mr. Yadav is a former leader of the Aam Aadmi Party. He has described the agitation as a landmark in the history of farmers' movements and hoped that it would lead to a historic victory.

The stand-off between the farmers and the Centre continues. The protesters are firm on their demand of repeal of farm laws. Your views. It is a historic moment. The farmers' agitation reminds me of 1988 period when Mahendra Singh Tikait had come to Delhi with lakhs of farmers. It is similar to that agitation but the government is yet to realise it. The government says that farmers do not understand these laws. It is playing a divisive politics by carrying parallel negotiations with one group. The government thinks it can side track and distract but none of this will work.

This historic mobilization should lead to a historic victory.

Q How will you describe farmers' agitation?

A It is people's movement which enjoys large and deep social legitimacy. It also challenges powers. The movement is political but it has nothing to do with party politics or elections.

Q What are the flaws in the new farm laws?

A The provisions of these laws have been in discussion in a select technocratic group for nearly two decades. Certain agriculture economists (largely agro-business economists) have been suggesting for changes in the Indian agriculture. They are trying to implement

US model. The land holding in India is smaller in size whereas the proportion of population dependent on agriculture is huge. The overall spirit of these laws is to corporatize agriculture. It will spell doom for small farmers of the country.

Q Why are the Opposition parties not too visible in the movement?

A At this moment, the Opposition is not in Parliament but on the streets. This is the only serious Opposition that matters in the country because Opposition is weak in Parliament in terms of numbers. But more than numbers, they are weak in terms of 'will' and are incapable of articulating the voice of farmers.

There is nothing wrong if political parties join the protest. I am a political activist. The farmers' movement has reached a stage where political parties cannot lead it





It is absolutely uncompromising as these laws were ‘un-demanded’ and ‘unwanted’ gift from the government to farmers of this country

Q If that is the case, why has Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Opposition parties of instigating the farmers?

A He can weaken the farmers’ movement by linking it to a weak force. It is the easiest thing for him to say that this is an Opposition-backed movement. He is giving credit to Congress party which is incapable of leading such a vast movement. It is beyond any Opposition party’s ability to mobilize huge number of farmers. The government has no argument to counter agitating farmers, so it got into political allegations, used religion and even described them (protesters) as Khalistanis. That shows how weak the government is in terms of arguments to defend these laws.

The fact is that the government has not even reached the starting point of a serious discussion. The

starting point would have been that farmers have a grievance and a legitimate apprehension and it is the government’s task to respond to it. This movement has got social support. Sheer volume, geographic spread and social depth have created trouble for the government. The fight is against the state and not the police personnel. We don’t want to resort to any kind of violence because violence is a sign of weakness. With this kind of mobilization and strength, it would be suicidal to think of any kind of confrontation.

Q So, you don’t want Opposition parties to join the farmers’ protest?

A There is nothing wrong if political parties join the protest. I am a political activist. The farmers’ movement has reached a stage

where political parties cannot lead it. Opposition parties are welcome but with no flag. The opposition parties lack legitimacy.

The issue of minimum support price has not been properly dealt with by governments in the past. The Modi government is no different, your comment. We hope that something positive would come out on MSP as well. If the government wants to use MSP as a way to distract farmers from these laws and use it as substitute to these laws, then it won’t be acceptable to us.

Q Shaheen Bagh protest was led by women from the minority community. However, Shaheen Bagh’s Dadi Bilkis Bano was stopped from joining the farmers’ protest. Any lesson learnt from that (Shaheen Bagh) protest?

A There is a lot to learn from that protest. One was about including women in such protests. But farmers’ movement is generally known to be male chauvinist. A change is visible as more women leaders are taking part in this movement. The kind of resilience and tenacity women had shown at Shaheen Bagh, that is something we need to learn from them. I am confident that the farmers can show resilience and tenacity here.

Q If the government refuses to scrap the laws, then what?

A For us, it is absolutely uncompromising as these laws were ‘un-demanded’ and ‘unwanted’ gift from the government to farmers of this country. This unwanted gift has to go. On MSP and other issues, we can negotiate with the government. The protest will continue. Farmers are in no mood to let go. The onus is on the government to decide if they want the deadlock to continue for weeks. **C**

Indian Farming at Crossroads

Reaping the Whirlwind



BY MANOJ
VARGHESE

Farm Laws are aimed at weakening the local market committees and empower the corporate sector

Big brands of potato chips like Lays, Bingo, Haldiram nowadays enter into a direct agreement with the farmers to procure raw potatoes from small cities or rural areas.

In Mhow, 20 kms from Indore in Madhya Pradesh, big corporates have procured the entire potato field under the contract farming, chip it with their machines in the field itself, get it dried and take it for sale at a grand level. It's a win-win situation for both the farmers and the corporates.

The farmer is at a low risk of losing the crops, and the corporates are ensured of the raw material at a minimal rate. One potato cut into 4-5 pieces, sown in the field, yield 8-10 big potatoes in a short span of three months. One bigha land is leased out for Rs 10-12,000 from which around 500

kg potato is procured. The Malwa belt, known for its high productivity of crops is mostly leased out to such Marwadis, and imports potato from other parts of the country like Saharanpur and hill cities for its own local consumption.

A normal farmer cultivates 2-3 crops in a year in the region; soya bean from March to June, wheat after rains till February, pulses for 2-3 months in between or a seasonal vegetable. The one bigha farmland yields around 300 kg each of wheat and soyabean.

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) of wheat in MP is Rs 1975 and soyabean is Rs 3390 per quintal. Thus, a hard working farmer with one bigha land can earn on an average 16-18,000 per year.

In general, almost 94% of farmers do not get the MSP in India,

owing to the degraded quality of food grains or for one reason or the other. The farm labour, transportation, long queue at the wholesale markets (Mandi) and a dip of almost 30% price compels them to sell the produce to a middleman or a landlord nearby.



The Government's move to bring in three ordinances on Farm Laws in Parliament and later passed them into Acts in September has become a bone of contention. More than 500 farmers' unions are now on a path of agitation.

Around 10,000 farmers have gathered at Singhu border, and lakhs of farmers from other parts of the country are on their way to Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated that farmers stood to benefit from the new measures. Most of the farmers are not convinced by the assurances and fear that their liability will increase as a result of the changes.

Eyebrows have been raised over the way these three legislations came into existence. The government acted in haste and adopted dictatorial form in passing them in the Parliament, without conceding the demand of the opposition parties to send the bills to the Select Committee. It did not even allow

debate in the House. Almost a dozen Parliamentarians opposing in Rajya Sabha were made to disqualify for the bill to sail through. Though agriculture is a state subject, the Centre did not even consult the states before making this law much against the federal spirit of the country. The farmers are currently paid MSP for certain crops, mainly wheat and rice. Produce is currently sold at auctions organised by Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) in each state. There are restrictions on who can purchase goods at those auctions. The reforms will dismantle the APMC structure and allow Indian farmers to sell their goods

to anyone for any price, even to buyers from outside of their state.

The two issues that farmers are mainly concerned are: procurement and MSP. The procurement of the production is quite high in Punjab and Haryana, irrespective of the landholdings. If MSP is there, farming is profitable. If it is withdrawn, it will lead to losses as the cost of production is quite high. Hence, farmers will quit farming, as it is not profitable. The MSP system has made farmers dependent on the central pool procurement system.

The first law gives freedom to the farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country. The

The reforms will dismantle the APMC structure and allow Indian farmers to sell their goods to anyone for any price, even to buyers from outside of their state



second law is to give legal guarantee to the agreements that farmers reach with the traders. The third law is lifting ban on the storage of millets, pulses and oilseeds.

Farmers feel that these laws are aimed at weakening the local market committees and empower the corporate sector.

A few practical questions that bother the laymen and farmers equally are:

- Is it feasible for the small farmers to take their produce to the city or other state?
- Are our farmers educated enough to browse through electronically to know rates, or have money and other resources to sell their produce in other markets?
- Can a farmer holding two acres take his produce to a market away from his village and sell it? Who will pay him the transport charges?
- Can this farmer manage the market forces? Can he bargain with the market forces?
- What if he fails to get even the transport cost? Basically, the farmer is expected to learn the marketing skills!

The traders will have an upper hand over the small farmers with cash in hand while formulating legal guarantee agreements. This would make the farmers sacrificial goats. Even with the statutory bodies and the Mandis in place, the market forces have been cheating the farmers in the local market yards by suppressing the demand and thus bringing down the price below MSP. Instead of giving them the MSP guarantee, leaving the market to the corporate sector and the traders would do no good to the farmers. The laws would also take away the right of the farmers to complain against the non-pay-



With the lifting of ban on storage of essentials like pulses, spices, the traders will buy the produce at the time of yield at lesser price and stock them, and create artificial demand for them to make greater profits

ment of the MSP. Basically, the farmer is expected to learn the legal skills!

With the lifting of ban on storage of essentials like pulses, spices, the traders will buy the produce at the time of yield at lesser price and stock them, and create artificial demand for them to make greater profits.

In the past, several well-performing governments lost power on account of this storage issue, be it the onion or pulses. The government has no mechanism to control this gambling by the traders and the corporate companies, who can store the essential commodities creating artificial scarcity.

The government fails every time the market forces create artificial scarcity, even with the

ban on storage. Now, with the ban lifted, the government would not be in a position to check the market and make the essential commodities available to the people. Basically, the trader will govern the market demand and supply!

Farmers have taken to the streets since these laws are framed to benefit a few corporates, who are otherwise disabled to enter the Mandis and procure the grains at a higher rate of MSP. These laws would jeopardise the food security and security of the farmers in the country. If the Central government is sincere and honest to help the farmers, it should take measures to ensure MSP for every crop. This is what the farmers across the country have been asking for decades. The government, if it is

farmer-friendly, should give MSP to the farmers, buy their crop and pay their money directly into their bank accounts.

Several small and medium landholders who own less than 4 hectares of land are renting out their fields to large farmers as they cannot afford capital intensive agriculture (machines and other inputs). Across India, during the last two decades, the number of marginal and small landholdings (less than two hectares) grew from 83.5 million to 117.6 million. But in Punjab, marginal and smallholdings fell from half a million to 0.36 million during the same period. The number of semi-medium, medium and large (more than two



and over 10 hectares) increased from 0.62 million to 0.69 million which shows poor farmers are either selling land or renting it out to big farmers.

The decline in small landholdings in Punjab shows they are non-viable under modern capital-intensive farming. There are only four per cent farmers in India who own more than 10 hectares of land. The agitation and aggression of the farmers is at its peak. A video is going viral, wherein a reporter of a leading TV News channel was forced to tender apology while covering the farmers protest at Singhu Border for

having projected them as Khalistan activists, terrorists and goons. “The farmers have no trust in the Government as every sector is being privatized, be it the Railways, Airlines, Education, Oil and Natural gas, mobile networks, healthcare, etc benefitting a few like Ambanis and Adanis. Most of the farmers are free after sowing the rabi crops in the field and are tension free at home, and have come prepared for a long agitation”, says a protesting farmer.

Around 32 farmers’ union leaders were called by the Government on December 1 for talks over a cup of tea. The farmers did not sip the tea, instead said our fellow farmers are waiting at the

border with kheer (sweet rice). The government has offered to form a committee, but the farmers are not ready to budge, and have demanded to take back the three agrarian laws. The farmers from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, MP and other states have expressed their solidarity with the farmers’ protest and are likely to join soon. Transporters have warned of a strike from December 8 in support of the farmers demand.

Farmers from Punjab who are protesting against the new farm laws in Delhi are suffering from deep economic stress and shrink-

ing land holdings. The contract farming has killed the agriculture sector in several other states. From 2014, the Delhi Government has allowed the farmers to sell their fruits and vegetables outside Mandis. In Kerala, owing to the high labour costs, the farming has come to a standstill, leaving several paddy fields and the fertile land barren. Almost all food grains, vegetables, fruits are now being imported. Primary agriculture cooperative society procures grains in Bihar for the past 13 years. The middlemen procure the grains at a very low rate, bringing loss to the farmers and sell it at a very high rate.

Recently, the Railway Minister twitted that a train load of maize has been procured from Karnataka and transported to Utrakhhand, but the fact remains that the maize with MSP Rs 1750 in the state was procured at a rate of only Rs 900. In UP, the BJP workers are in a fix and are supporting the farmers. BJP Yuva Morcha president along with the supporters are protesting in front of the Mandi gate in Jhansi. The local MLA alleged that no MSP is being given to the farmers and have demanded the District Magistrate to intervene.

Several countries like Britain, USA and Canada have come out openly in support of Indian farmers. In Canada, there are no mandis, but the trader pays a reasonable sum of money to the farmer against the procurement of food grains, vegetables and the fruits. The Government encourages the farmers to cultivate well and ensures their hard labour yields a good sum for their livelihood. In India, neither the Government nor the big corporates could be trusted, when it comes to power or money. ☹

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In Covid company

Quandary of quarantine

How could I be positive? I had taken all kinds of precautions. For a few minutes, I could not come to terms with the fact that I was positive



BY JASWANT KAUR

It should not have happened. I had been taking all the precautions. Washing and sanitising my hands as frequently as possible, wearing mask while in office and following the mandatory protocol of removing my footwear outside the house, sanitising my laptop and other belongings, taking bath and washing my clothes as soon as I came back from office. All this gave me an assurance that I would keep the invisible enemy away.

Not only that, I did my Diwali shopping online. Even the festival, on which day the Hindu women wear beautiful dresses, could not force me to visit the market. Amazon came in handy. True, I also received the benefits of discounts and relief.

Like thousands of fellow Indians, I kept the courier packets outside the house for up to a whole day. They were sanitised before opening them. Of course, it delayed the excitement of seeing the newly bought material. But that was a small sacrifice for feeling good that you were keeping the virus away.

However, just a day after Diwali, I developed fever and started coughing. A few hours



earlier, I had stood in my balcony to enjoy the sudden drizzle. I began feeling cold since then. I related it to the change in weather. I didn't want to take any risk and I isolated myself in a separate room.

One of my colleagues had been on leave for a few days and another was having continuous body ache. "It could be Covid", I thought. A day before Diwali, we had a small celebration at the office. And I had removed my mask too. Uff! I shouldn't have done that.

I had heard a lot about quarantining at home. Partly from my colleagues, who had Covid, and from the Facebook posts that my friends wrote. I asked my family members to keep the food outside the door. I would pick it up and wash the utensils inside. "Nothing should go out from the room", I thought. I asked them to wear mask while coming closer to the

door. And I, too, wore it while picking up the food.

The fever continued on the second day. It was not alarming enough to give me goosebumps. Yet, at the back of my mind, I had a doubt. I decided to book an online Covid test.

Late in the night, I called a private lab. The lady was kind enough to tell me that the sample could be collected from my home. I felt relieved as I would be saved from standing in a long queue in front of a Covid testing centre. I felt happy that it was easier to get tested now. A few months ago, it was an uphill task to get a test done, even at a private lab.

Next day, a man came home. All this while, my mind was full of worries. Did I do the correct thing by booking a home collection sample? This man was wearing a PPE kit. Who knows the kit might be having the virus? Even if I am



negative, I may get it from him? Or anyone can get it from him! All this while, I was cursing myself. I should have visited the lab. That would have been much safer.

While the questions remained, the man entered my room with a small bottle and two nozzles. With one hand, he held the bottle and with the other the nozzles (a long plastic pipe). “Remove your mask”, he said. The throaty voice came from behind the mask and the face shield he wore. I was asked to open my mouth with my tongue out.

Without caring about the inconvenience it caused, the man inserted the nozzle into my throat and nose, one by one. He twisted the nozzle in a circular fashion to get the swab. “Oh! am I really giving my sample”, I thought.

My colleagues called me and comforted me. Don’t worry, it would be negative. I also felt confident. It couldn’t be Covid. And went to sleep expecting the report to be negative.

While I waited for the report, I could feel a unique sensation in my head. It appeared as if someone was inserting a needle into my head at different points. What is it? I had never felt like this before.

The sensation worsened as time passed. Finally, I got a WhatsApp message. With trembling hands, I opened the file. “Oh! how is it possible!”, I thought. How could I be positive? I had taken all kinds of precautions. For a few minutes, I could not come to terms with the fact that I was positive.

Reluctantly, I sent the report to my husband. He was equally shocked. “What should we do now”, I asked. “Are you all fine? I think you all should also get yourself tested”.

My mother and my husband had not been keeping well, of late. I was scared. What if they were found positive? Their immunity was already low. What about my nine-year old son? Who would look after them? How could I be sick? The man again visited our house

in an hour or so. I could hear the doorbell ring. “Please sanitise the house once he goes”, I shouted with all the power I had. I got no response. I immediately called my husband and asked him, “why are you not replying?” I pleaded, “please sanitise the house”. “I will do it”, he shouted. “Don’t panic”. That is the kind of stress Covid brings.

While the sensation I had in my head increased, I just prayed that their reports were negative. Tuck tuck tuck... came three WhatsApp messages in the morning. My heart sank as I downloaded the reports. God had listened to my prayers. All three were negative.

I called my husband. “You all are negative. I will manage myself. You please leave this house”. I ordered.

“No, I can’t leave you alone here. What if you need hospitalisation? Who will take you to the hospital”, he said. “Let’s think about the mother and son”. Reluctantly, I called some of my relatives.

More than the fact that I was positive, what kept my energy flowing was the negative status of my family members. I begged and prayed, “Can I send my mother and son to your house for a few days till the time I get well.”

“What are you talking? They can get positive in 14 days. How can we take the risk?” After getting negative responses, finally we found a place where they can stay safely.

I felt at peace with myself when they reached Una in Himachal Pradesh, away from the Covid-charged environment of the national capital. A colleague helped me in shifting them.

Unlike other colleagues, who got calls from the Delhi government after they got a positive report, I didn’t get any call. I was

alone in my room, taking the home remedies that a colleague prescribed, the usual dose of paracetamol, cough syrup, anti-allergic medicine, Vitamin C and multi-vitamins. Of course, not to forget Chawanprash and the steam, that was always on.

My husband was more worried about the loss of smell and taste. “This could become serious,” he said, one of his colleagues had told him. I was calm in my response. “It happens. It is usual. Don’t worry”, I said.

But it is horrible when you just can’t smell and taste. At times, I tried hard to smell the Tulsi drops that I was taking, just to find if my senses were back.

The first 10 days were the worst, I would say. I had no energy to even get up from my bed. I wanted to know if someone could come and help me. But it was not going to happen.

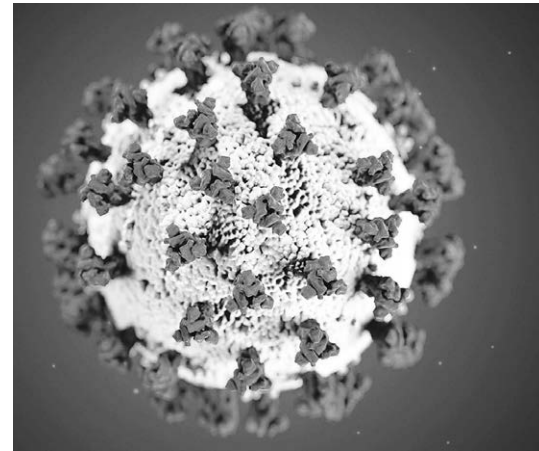
From cleaning my utensils to making kara (a unique concoction of different herbs) to cleaning

my room, I felt like I was moving a mountain. I had put on the induction cooktop that a friend had gifted to heat water and make kara. The backache I had after doing even a small task lasted for a few minutes. And it took some while to be normal.

My cough had aggravated. And fever was not leaving me. While my oxygen levels were fine, I was not able to speak. And then came a panic call, “you should get hospitalised. You don’t seem to be improving”. It was hard to convince a well-wisher, who had even finalised the hospital, where I would be able to get a bed easily.

Finally, I spoke to a doctor on the helpline. The doctor added one medicine and asked me to get hospitalised only if the oxygen levels dropped below 94 and breathing difficulties were there.

I just can’t forget that night. I was finding it difficult to sleep. Even if I slept, I had nightmares of breathlessness. A death in the neighbourhood and of a Facebook



friend had added fuel to the fire. Nevertheless, I woke up slightly better and was able to keep the hospital away. That was the last day I got fever.

After calling the helpline, I thought, maybe the government officials would visit my house like it happened in the case of other colleagues. But I didn’t get any call. I was happy to see that my status in the infamous Arogya Setu app had changed after 14 days. While I was still quarantined, it said “you are safe”. Yes, I thought, I am now safe for at least a month, thanks to the antibodies I have now.

While I was fighting Covid, I was able to complete a short-term course I had opted for even before I knew that I would be Covid-positive. I was also able to read a book on leadership by Robin Sharma. I have emerged stronger.

I have now entered the wiser club of the real “Covid-warriors”. I can now offer free advice on how to fight Covid. As far as keeping it away, I don’t have any formula. You will get it, if you have to get it. Just keep your masks on. Wash your hands often. That is all I can say. ©

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From cleaning my utensils to making kara (a unique concoction of different herbs) to cleaning my room, I felt like I was moving a mountain



Anti-Coal Protest

People's power shows the way

The struggle of the people, by the people and for the people against unpopular development agendas of the government is quite evident



BY PACHU MENON

Goa seems to be showing the way!

Rocked by agitations against coal transportation and rail double tracking, the coastal state has ably demonstrated that even the mightiest of governments can buckle under pressure and give into the wishes of the people.

Though yet to claim an outright victory, it cannot be denied that the vehement protests have been an encouraging start.

This could well have been for the first time that the elected representatives in the government have been approached by the people to endorse an agitation and thus magnify the voices of dissent which have resonated in the corridors of power in the state.

The peaceful march by the people of Nuvem and Loutolim to their MLA's house demanding the scrapping of projects which were not in the interest of Goa and the Goans and the assurances given by the legislator that the

Pramod Sawant-led government would respect the sentiments of the people is one such development that should be lauded for its novelty!

The manner in which the state's Water Resources Minister Filipe Neri Rodrigues took to the public address system to pacify protestors at Nessai railway crossing that he would prevail upon the CM to stop work till the Railway Minister visits Goa is however shrouded in no mystery whatsoever.

For that matter, the eleventh-hour 'intervention' of quite a few from the ruling faction in the on-going protests cannot be seen

as anything but a last-ditch effort by the MLAs to keep their heads above the turbulent waters – politically that is.

The show of solidarity with the agitators is unfortunately not born of an innate wish to save Goa for posterity but comes of a desperation to hang on to power under all circumstances, or so it would seem.

Barring the Cortalim BJP legislator who has been the most vociferous critic of the rail double tracking so far, it was quite riling otherwise to observe the reactions of many of the ruling members who were quite conspicuous by their silence over the matter – especially the congress turncoats who hold positions of prominence in the government.

Yet when most of the ministers in the present government are collective in their opinion that people are having a ‘misconception’ about rail double tracking being undertaken only to facilitate coal transportation and give assurances of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the agitators on the streets if there was even the



Serious journalism has been struggling for years to survive in the internet era

slightest indication of Goa being turned into a coal hub, it becomes all the more confusing.

The MP from North however treaded a moderate path with

sensible suggestions of allowing the representatives of the people in the legislative assembly to debate the issue of coal handling threadbare and pass appropriate resolutions keeping the concerns of Goans in mind.

As Sripad rightly said, governments will come and go, but the will of the people must prevail. The resolution of the House will be a testimony of what people of Goa wanted, as the state takes on the path of development.

Moreover, with a multitude of problems assailing the state, there have been discernible differences between the government and its ministers on a number of issues.

The Goa DGP’s tirade against those willfully hindering development projects in the state and warning them of strict police action were they to continue hampering the works has further irked the protestors.



The response of the Opposition leaders to the unrest is quite understandable. If it has been an issue that they wanted to corner the BJP-dispensation with, they have one right at their doorstep.

It is however the manner in which the agitating groups have managed to keep the 'attention-seekers' away from the forefront of the protests that has been commendable.

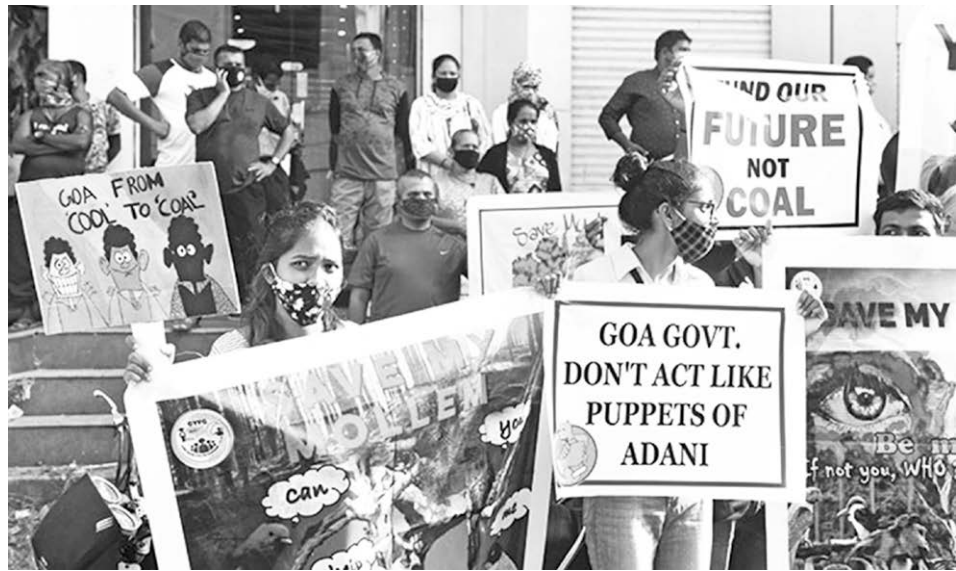
The conviction that not one individual, but every Goemkar, is a leader in his own right and is spearheading the campaign gives the struggle all the more authenticity.

Besides many NGOs and people from various communities, the fact that the controversial projects are being opposed tooth and nail by most of the village panchayats by adopting resolutions against them gives the stir the tag of a people-centered movement.

Whichever way one looks at it, the adavance of the state government in pushing through with the projects despite strong opposition from the people is more than obvious.

It is however a matter of deep concern that the Fourth Estate has preferred to take a back-seat in the on-going struggle restricting itself to factual reporting without proffering views of its own.

Serious journalism has been struggling for years to survive in



the internet era. Going overboard with the 'live' coverage of any and every bit of news irrespective of its merits, social media has apparently become the voice of the people. Individual opinions do not seem to matter these days.

Now, every protest or agitation has three broad categories of participants giving the campaign the necessary impetus to keep it moving.

The first group is the core of the movement which actually conceptualizes the whole protest and works whole-heartedly and with complete commitment towards realizing its mission.

As the 'drive' gains momentum, it attracts genuinely concerned citizens and those who take a

fancy to the idea. Many of them may stick on with the 'crusade' and quite a few will drop out the moment the first signs of trouble crop up. This then is the second assemblage of protestors.

Of course the fence-sitting members in any movement cannot be discounted in the statistical count!

We then have the prodigious crowd of bystanders who add their numbers to the strength of any campaign and are pleased at merely being a part of the whole show. This is the third faction!

Therefore one cannot afford to be swayed by the mammoth crowds that greet any agitation. It is not the true indicator of the success of any movement either.

Under these circumstances it is equally important that public views are not permitted to override individual opinions on any issue.

Nonetheless, the struggle of the people, by the people and for the people against unpopular development agendas of the government is quite evident in Goa! ☺



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PACHU MENON is a Goa based journalist

Promoting Amity in times of 'Hate':



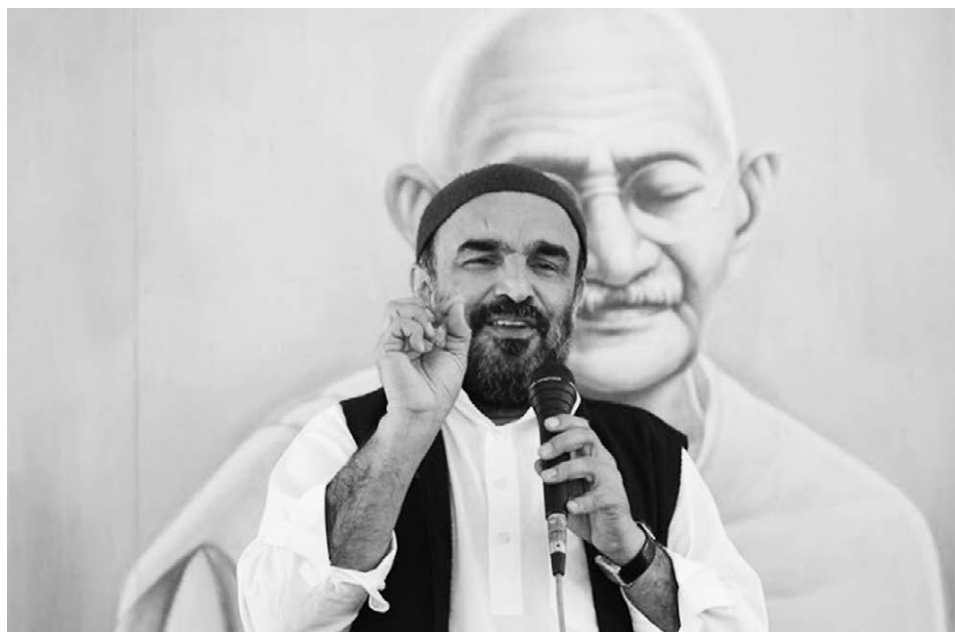
BY RAM PUNIYANI

Arrest of Faisal Khan

The rise of communal politics during last three decades has widened the gulf between the religious communities, particularly Hindus on one side and Muslims and Christians on the other

In the process of formation of the nation, one of the major pillars is the concept of Fraternity. The words, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are flagship of French revolution, the revolution which overturned the feudal system, the kingdom and heralded the coming in of Modern Nation state, the concept of democracy. The path of these values has not been easy in India, where the process of 'India as a nation in the making' begins in the colonial period, running parallel to development of values of a modern state. As an aside since Fraternity, the classical part of triad, is male oriented so we should use 'National community', with all its inherent diversity in place.

This process of formation of national community in India ran along with the anti-colonial movement and came as an overarching Indian identity above the identities of religion, caste, region, ethnicity and language. The national movement integrated all these sections as Indians. History does not run in a smooth line, as National movement led by Gandhi united the people, there were communal elements, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha and RSS which focussed on religion based identity. These tendencies were at the root of sectarian



Amity activist held for offering namaz in UP temple

politics, which acted as a counter to the uniting influence of the national movement.

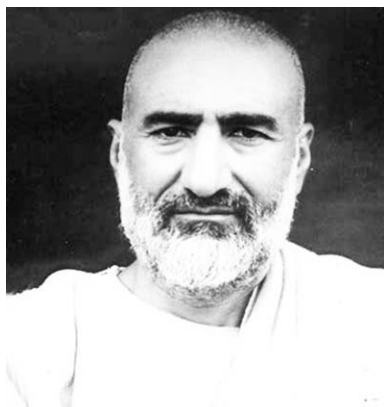
Nearly seven decades after Independence we are facing a situation which is very close to when Gandhi made all efforts to unite the people cutting across the lines of religion. The rise of communal politics during last three decades has widened the gulf between the religious communities, particularly Hindus on one side and Muslims and Christians on the other. Those wanting to uphold the values of Freedom movement and values of Indian

Constitution have been scratching their heads as to how to cultivate and restore the bonding which made India, a nation. One effort has been to make bridges among different communities through respecting the traditions and faith of 'others'. These efforts have also talked in the language of religion; have attempted to follow the moral values of religion. Moral values of religion were the core of teachings of Bhakti-Sufi saints. These also formed the base of Gandhi's practice of Hinduism, which was inclusive and attracted the people of diverse religions.



Faisal Khan and his associate offering Namaz in Mathura Temple

In contemporary times there are activists who are endeavouring to walk this path. It may sound innocuous few decades ago, but not any longer. Now we see the case of arrest of Faisal Khan, who has tried to revive Khudai Khidmatgar, the organization floated by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Seemant Gandhi. Gaffer Khan was ardent supporter of the path of non violence. He stood for respecting all religions and was totally opposed to the partition of the country, for which he had to spend years in the jails of British rulers



Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan

Gaffer Khan was ardent supporter of the path of nonviolence. He stood for respecting all religions and was totally opposed to the partition of the country, for which he had to spend years in the jails of British rulers and later in the 'Muslim Nation' Pakistan

and later in the 'Muslim Nation' Pakistan.

Faisal Khan, yearning for amity love and peace began his journey for communal amity with other peace workers. He decided to revive Khudai Khidmatgar to pursue the path to strengthen the spirit of Indian Community and on these lines has been trying one after the other move to bring the religious communities together.

He set up Apna Ghar for people of all religious communities to share and enhance the intercommunity bandings while celebrating festivals of all religions. He is also a trustee of Sarva Dharma

Sadbhava Kendra Trust located in Ram Janaki Mandir Sarju Kunj, Ayodhya. There is a plan to develop an all-faith communal harmony centre in this Temple. Faisal Khan has offered Namaz several times in this temple. People of all faith and caste including Dalits are welcome in this temple. At another level he is part of organizations for Human rights like NAPM and at global level with Hindus for Human rights in US.

Recently he undertook a five day peace yatra in Brij region in UP along with four of his friends. This peace yatra was '84 Kos Parikrama' of Braj in Mathura during which they paid a visit to Nand Baba Mandir. As Faisal

visited the temple he received prasad from temple priest and recited verses from Ramcharitmanas to the priest. The priest happily allowed him to offer namaz inside the premises on October 29, 2020. The petition that has been launched on Change.org, says, "When it was time for the midday namaz (Muslim prayer), Faisal was going to pray outside, but the priest invited him to pray right there in the temple. Faisal and one of his associates, Chand Mohammed, prayed in the temple compound."

He has been arrested on charges which are related to incit-



Hanuman Chalisa in mosque. Need to grasp Faisal Khan's 'spirit' of religious amity

Faisal Khan decided to revive Khudai Khidmatgar to pursue the path to strengthen the spirit of Indian Community and on these lines has been trying one after the other move to bring the religious communities together

ing intercommunity tensions and is in jail for last few weeks. When we are talking of promoting intercommunity amity such an act is what gives the signal of intercommunity harmony. The state is duty bound to promote fraternity, the sense of Indian community, which Faisal Khan and his friends were trying give a message of. Many people accuse that secular forces have failed to address the

people as they have been talking in a language which is away from the language of people, people who are steeped in the religiosity. Faisal Khan is doing precisely what many sympathetic critics are alleging is the failure of secular forces.

Gandhi and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan saw religion as a moral force, as a spiritual path. They succeed to a large extent. After

their passing away from scene, communal forces have overshadowed the moral ethical component of religion and presented religion as pure identity, and have used it as divisive force.

Today we are in a strange situation. The religious gulfs are rising and those trying to bridge it are accused precisely of things which they are fighting against. Society needs to introspect and take the path of Gandhi and Khan Saheb, to cement to gulfs which have crept in due to the divisive politics of sectarian nationalism. People like Faisal Khan need to be understood and respected for the path they are pursuing to promote the idea of inclusive India. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RAM PUNIYANI is an activist and a prolific writer. He was awarded 'National Communal Harmony Award' in 2007.

Regulating Digital Media:

Over-the-top control or much-needed regulation?



BY ISHA PRAKASH



In what is an important move towards digital content regulation, the central government on Nov. 11, 2020, took the first step in overseeing online news, social media and video streaming platforms in the country.

The government released a gazette notification announcing that the regulation of online news platforms and content providers will henceforth be undertaken by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting headed by Union Minister Prakash Javadekar.

This move includes films and audio-visual content by big over-the-top (OTT) video streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, Hulu and others. News on apps such as Facebook and Twitter will also fall under this cate-

gory and shall be overlooked by the I&B Ministry.

In the notice, the Cabinet Secretariat stated, “In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (3) of Article 77 of the Constitution, the President hereby makes the following rules further to amend the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, namely: (1) These rules may be called the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Three Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Amendment Rules, 2020.” It added that this shall come into effect immediately thereafter.

Additionally, “(2) in the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, in the second schedule, under the heading ‘Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Soochana Aur

Prasaran Mantralaya)’ after entry 22, the following sub-heading and entries shall be inserted, namely:

(22A) Films and Audio-Visual programmes made available by online content providers.

(22B) News and current affairs content on online platforms.”

This comes after the Supreme Court questioned the central government last month, following a petition being filed with them regarding the regulation of content on OTT platforms. This is due to the fact that presently there is no legislation or body strictly overlooking the regulation of content on these platforms. Thus, the central government has time and again expressed interest in doing so.

In 2019, out of fear of governmental regulation and censorship, eight renowned platforms had jointly drafted a self-regulatory code that comprised a set of rules or guidelines that they would all strictly follow in relation to the content available on their respective platforms. However, this code was not accepted by the government. Currently, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) regulates films and the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) overlooks news channels. Other regulatory bodies in the country include the Advertising Standards Council of India, which monitors advertising, and the Press Council of India, under whose purview falls the print media. But as can be clearly under-

stood, OTT platforms and online news portals do not fall under the ambit of any of these bodies and thus, remain almost entirely without regulation. The only signs of regulation visible are when particular petitions are filed against them in Court.

The inclusion of online news portals in this announcement has also created scepticism among a large section of netizens, who fear that this may be another move towards establishing more control over digital news outlets. The previous move being the rule passed in October that said digital news portals could not have more than 26% foreign direct investment (FDI).

Siddharth Varadarajan, founding editor of The Wire told Al Jazeera,



“We have to see what the government is trying to do, what rules they are trying to bring in, but either way I don’t think this is a good sign because the fact is that the digital media is already subject to the laws of the land”

- Siddharth Varadarajan, Founding Editor, The Wire

“We have to see what the government is trying to do, what rules they are trying to bring in, but either way I don’t think this is a good sign because the fact is that the digital media is already subject to the laws of the land.”

He, like several other netizens, strongly believes that the restrictions that exist on regular media, such as the law of defamation, etc., and other such constraints already apply to digital media. In addition to that, digital media also has to abide by the Information Technology Act, which does not apply to newspapers and news channels as it is not enforced by the aforementioned regulatory bodies. They believe the move will lead to excessive intervention in the business of ‘over the top’ censorship of the content present as well as curb or have an adverse effect on the free-flowing creativity seen in the content available on these thriving platforms. ©



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lessons Learned

Indomitable spirit from book of life



BY **VARGHESE
ALENGADEN**



It was marvelous to watch the indomitable spirit and determination of thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana who were marching to Delhi protesting against the farm laws enacted by the Central Government. They braved the water cannons and teargas shells of the police in the biting cold weather. One could see the determination and indomitable spirit of the young and the old alike for a cause. They were ready to face even the bullets because they have the history of fighting wars to protect the borders of India.

While watching the film, 'Delhi Crime' based on Delhi gang rape case I was wonderstruck at the determination and commitment of a woman police officer, Vartika Chaturvedi who was playing the

It is high time that the educational institutions give importance for developing character, will power and critical thinking so that they may be able to stand on their feet despite all kinds of opposition and hardships

role of DCP of Delhi police. Her indomitable spirit and hard work with a small team succeeded to arrest all six criminals within a week in the midst of all kinds of adverse situations.

While both these events motivated me and affirmed my own convictions and way of life I was shocked in the evening to receive the news of suicide of Dr. Sheetal, social worker and granddaugh-

ter of legendary social worker Baba Amte. I recalled my meeting with the youthful and dynamic Dr. Sheetal every time I went to meet Baba Amte in Anandwan, Warora, 100 km from Nagpur. Baba was proud of Dr. Sheetal because she was dreaming of carrying out his great mission after becoming a medical doctor.

I always held the view that suicide is self defeat and it is the worst defeat. After knowing personally Baba Amte and has witnessed his noble works I had always held him with high esteem. Because of this reason we had

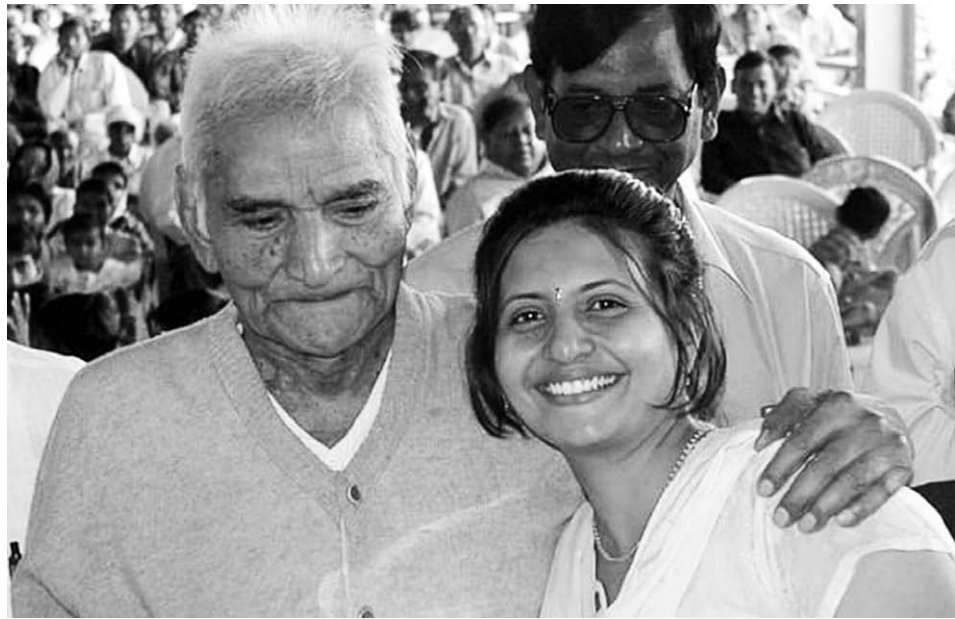
been organizing youth camps, retreats for priests and religious in Anandwan to provide an opportunity to meet and learn from Baba Amte and his trend setting ventures .

After the death of Baba Amte I did not find the same warmth and inspiration in Anandwan. Dr. Sheetal who herself was the CEO of Anandwan projects had alleged corruption in their func-

tioning. Conflicts and rivalries were reported between she and her brother who was also part of Anandwan projects. It is sad that such a dynamic and cheerful young Doctor injected herself with some unknown substance to end her life at 39. She did not have the mental and spiritual stamina to withstand the pressures of personal life and professional work.

Shefali Shah who acted as DCP Varitka in 'Delhi Crime' spoke how the role in the film emotionally drained and consumed her. She was portraying the struggles the dedicated people have to undergo when they are on a mission with absolute sincerity.

While defining education Swami Vivekanand spoke of developing strength of will along with character and critical thinking. It is a pity that many highly qualified people with degrees from famous universities in India and international institutes are not able to withstand the pressures in personal and professional life. The education has not equipped them with the essential qualities



Sheetal Amte, social worker and granddaughter of Baba Amte, commits suicide

such as will power and stamina. Illiterate people in the villages are more educated because they don't commit suicide despite facing struggles in life. They value character and refuse to make compromises.

The agitating farmers have developed more stamina and indomitable spirit than all the

bureaucrats and law makers sitting in their luxury suits.

It is high time that the educational institutions give importance for developing character, will power and critical thinking so that they may be able to stand on their feet despite all kinds of opposition and hardships. Indomitable spirit and focus of the agitating farmers and characters like DCP Vartika should inspire us to face life without accepting defeat until we have realized our vision and mission.

Practicing daily review of personal life by writing journals with observations, insights drawn from them and applying these insights into life would be a great help to withstand the pressures and tensions. Introducing collective evaluation of the communities and organizations at the end of the day based on the vision, goals, policies and priorities would enable to create positive atmosphere to work as a team. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VARGHESE ALENGADEN is the Founder of Universal Solidarity Movement, Indore.



Based on the Nirbhaya case, Delhi Crime follows the Delhi Police investigation into the finding of the men who perpetrated this crime.

'NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY' (NEP) 2020

HIGHLIGHTS & CONCERNS



NEP 2020

Highlights and Challenges

The proposal to end hard separation of secondary school curriculum into Science, Arts and Commerce would enable students to have sufficient flexibility in their choice

BY **PETER MUNDACKAL**

Ever since the enactment of the Right to Education Act, 2009, I have been interested in issues related to education, in particular, education of the poor. My interest was also due to my association with Deepalaya, a premier Delhi-based NGO, engaged in education of children from vulnerable communities. The announcement of the passing

of the National Education Policy 2020, on Wednesday 29 July 2020, was a happy news for me.

Structured in 4 parts ('School Education', 'Higher Education', 'Other Key Areas of Focus' and 'Making It Happen') and 27 chapters, the Policy document runs into 65 pages. My purpose in this article is to deal with the aspects that appealed to me and to dwell

briefly on a few of my concerns, primarily with reference to School Education.

Overall, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) proposes to discourage "rote learning" and encourage "critical thinking". This is a fundamental reform long awaited. Coming to the other notable features, what strikes me most is the proposal to make

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) an integral part of school education. So far, it has not been an essential part of school education. Some private schools have been conducting one or two years of 'nursery' before the child is formally admitted to Primary School. As part of the ICDS (Intensive Child Development Services) programme, Anganwadis have been imparting some lessons in language – often mother tongue or local language – and rudimentary arithmetic, but this not substitute to ECCE. Considering that development of a large part of a child's brain takes place in the first six years, this is an extremely desirable reform.

The Policy stipulates that by the end of Grade 3, every child must acquire foundational literacy and numeracy, so that it would be easier to follow what is taught in subsequent grades. Year after year, the Annual Survey of Education Report brought out by Pratham, a premier NGO specialized in assessing learning outcomes in children, brings the sad news that less than half of the students in

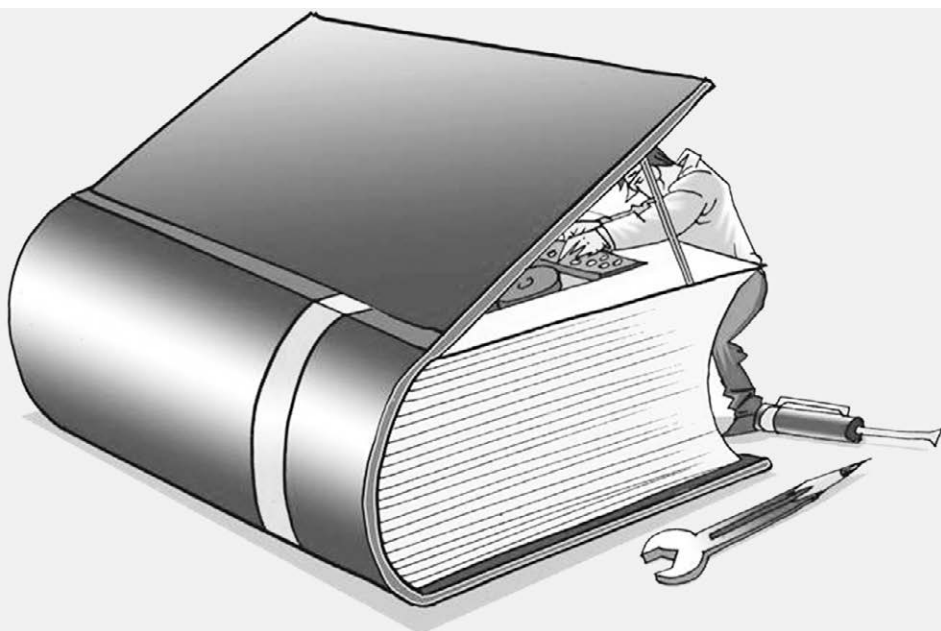


Class V can read a paragraph or do an addition/subtraction of Class III level.

The proposal to end hard separation of secondary school curriculum into Science, Arts and Commerce would enable students to have sufficient flexibility in their choice. The pupil-teacher ratio is fixed at 30:1 and in

backward areas at 25:1. Although several Government Schools now have less number of students in each class, that is mainly due to the fact that many children, even children from economically poor families, shift to private schools, because of the poor quality of teaching in Government Schools. In Private Schools, number of children per class varies from 50 to 55. The proposed ratio will enable the teacher to give sufficient attention to each child.

The section dealing with integration of Vocational Education particularly appealed to me, although I am curious as to how the Government would address the issue of 'low social status' accorded to vocational education, in general, in Indian societies. I am reminded of what I witnessed in a BBC programme, during my stay with my son's family in London. That was a programme titled "Who wants to be a Millionaire", similar to Amitabh Bachan's KBC programme. I was surprised to hear that the man who won half a million pounds, was a plumber



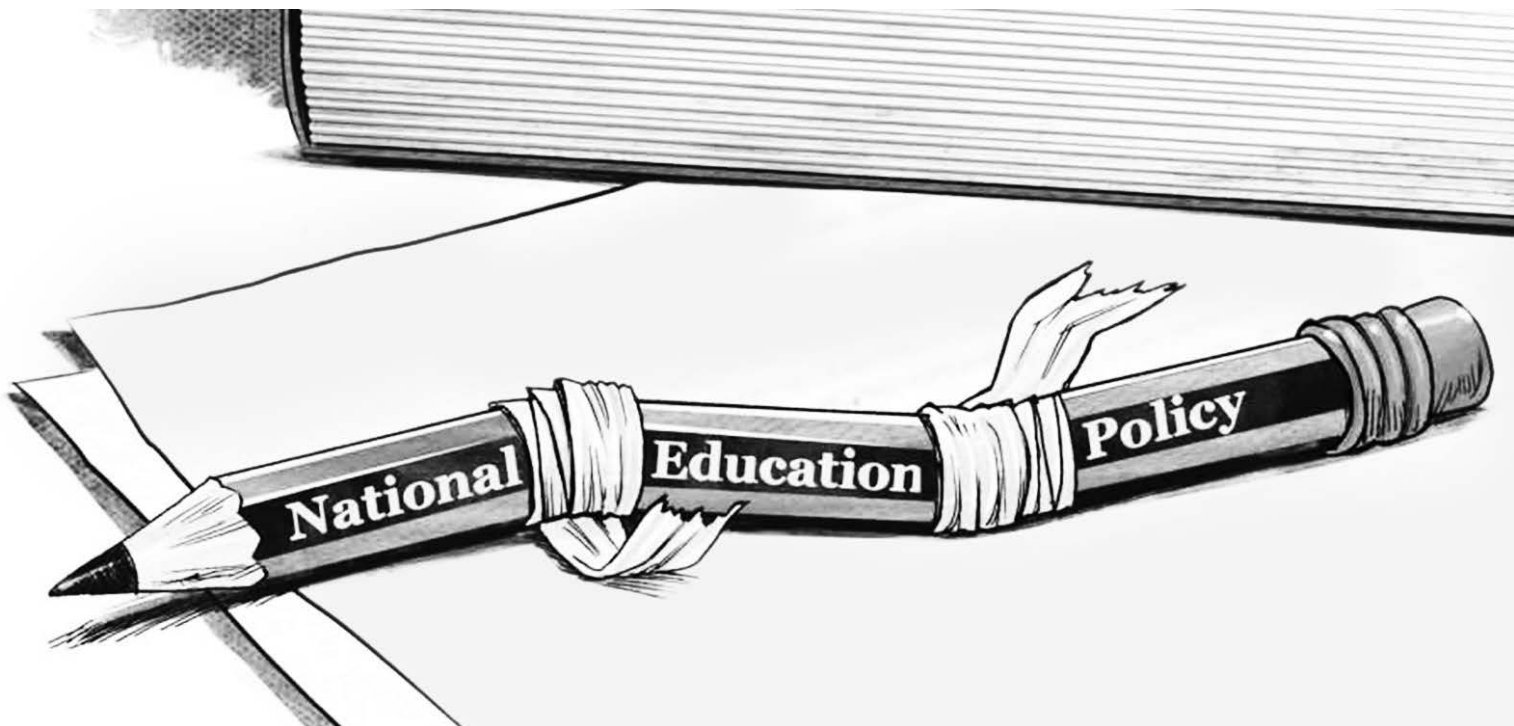
by profession. The facts relevant here are (a) how a man working as a plumber had so much knowledge to answer questions from science, history, geography, arts, sports etc. (b) will the students in India who take a degree in Vocational Education, will get jobs with as much salaries as a lecturer/engineer/doctor/bank official gets, and, if not, will the students take such classes seriously (c) whether somebody with that much knowledge, implying one who is at least a Graduate, if not a Post graduate, will take up a profession like 'plumbing'.

The target of 'foundational literacy and numeracy' by Grade 3, to be achieved by 2025, is another fact that gladdened me, "as the rest of this Policy will become relevant for our students only if this basic learning requirement is first achieved". Besides, 2025 is not that far! Seventh, those who are concerned about school education, complain of teachers being frequently assigned non-teaching tasks like census enumeration, election duty etc. Such people, like me, will be happy to read the emphatic state-

ment that teachers will no longer be assigned non-teaching jobs.

The policy, however, is mysteriously silent about the most worrying of problems – the teachers in Government School, are not teaching at all. As Gurucharan Das says in his article ("One and a half Cheers" in TOI 3/8/20), "one of four teachers is absent in State schools across India, and one in two who are present, is not teaching. This is not because teacher salaries are low – starting salary in UP last year was Rs 48,918/- p.m. or 11 times UP's per capita income". A few years back, I made a casual visit to a Government School in Shaharanpur, along with a Priest of the local Catholic Parish, as he had to meet the Headmaster of the school. I was astonished to find a few teachers playing cards under the shadow of a tree in the school compound, while the children were shouting and playing in the class! While the Policy shifts emphasis from

While the Policy shifts emphasis from 'inputs' to 'outcome', it would have been better if there were a provision to hold each teacher responsible to ensure the expected learning outcome in each students he/she teaches, to be tested by higher authorities from time to time





“How to bring face-to-face learning into online education needs to be looked into. Distance learning needs to be elevated to the same stature as that of education in a regular class”

- Dr. K. Kasturirangan,
Eminent Scientist and
Chairman of the Committee
which drafted the National
Education Policy

‘inputs’ to ‘outcome’, it would have been better if there were a provision to hold each teacher responsible to ensure the expected learning outcome in each students he/she teaches, to be tested by higher authorities from time to time. Nevertheless, it is heartening to note that there is a provision for a periodic ‘health check-up’ of the system, with reference to the learning levels of students sampled from Government and Private Schools, to be done by the National Assessment Centre.

I am associated with a few NGOs engaged in education of

poor children. Quite a number of children studying in their ‘Learning Centres’ are first generation learners. Their parents are unable to guide or encourage them at home. It doesn’t even occur to them that they should remind the children to do their home work. If the teachers in the school spare some time after school hours and help such students to do their home work, it will help a lot in the children catching up with what is taught in the class. In fact, one NGO I am associated with is taking such a trouble. I wish there were such a provision in the NEP. After all, our goal is ‘Education for All’, which was to be achieved by 2015!

According to Government’s own data, out of 100 children admitted in Class 1, only 17 pass out of Class 12, taking children from all sections of our society into account. If we break down the figure, says Anil Sadagopal, a reputed Educationist, in his article published in “Frontline” of 7/8/15, “only 6% of tribal children, 8% of Dalit children, 9% of Muslim children and 10% of children from Other Backward Communities, cross Class 12”. Most of the children, especially girls, from these sections drop out long before they reach Class 10. The NEP talks of expansion and strengthening of ‘Open & Distance Learning Programmes’, ‘National Institute of Open Schooling’ and ‘State Open Schools’. How far these measures will address this vital issue is to be seen.

The title “Making It Happen” of Part IV of the document indicates that the Government is determined to meet this challenge. This is accentuated by the statement that progress in implementation of the Policy is to be evaluated every year jointly by



“If we don’t build the foundation – the first five years of child’s education in the age group of 3 to 8 well, then the rest of the policy is almost irrelevant”

- Dr. Rukmini Banerji,
Pradham Education
Foundation

the Centre and States. Crucial to “Making It Happen” is the financial means. The document says that Centre and the States together will raise the estimated ‘6% of GDP’. 6% of GDP is the figure estimated by the Kothari Commission in 1964 at the time of formulating the 1st Education Policy, which was much less ambitious than the present one. The fact is also that our yearly allocation has varied from 3 to 4.3% only over the years, during various political dispensations. Let us hope that this time the Government will meet the challenge. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Crushing Human Rights

It has been a particularly bad year for human rights in India



BY CEDRIC PRAKASH

The only way to observe Human Rights Day 2020 - is to wake up from our slumber, shake off the apathy and to rise together: demanding and ensuring- HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL!

It has been a bad year for many: the pandemic COVID-19 has played havoc with lives and livelihoods of millions everywhere.

It has been a particularly bad year for human rights in India: in a systematic but brutal manner, the legitimate rights of people are not only denied but are crushed.

The victims as usual are the poor and the marginalised; the Adivasis and the Dalits; women and children; the excluded and other vulnerable workers. To add to it, human rights defenders, and others who take a visible and vocal stand against a regime which day by day prove to be anti-people, anti-Democracy and anti-Constitutional are at the receiving end of a system which reeks of vendetta.

On 26 November (the Constitution Day in India) it was estimated that more than 250 million people in India went on strike protesting against the anti-farmer and anti-labour policies of the Government. The people of India have little to cheer as the world



observes yet another Human Rights Day on 10 December.

The rights of farmers are being crushed: today thousands of them are literally on the warpath, converging on to Delhi, making sure of a massive blockade. An all-India bandh(strike) has been called for 8 December.

Their message is clear: it is they who provide the nation with sustenance through their toil and sweat; they no longer wish to be

taken for granted; as a group that can just be treated with disdain: as a vote-bank.

Their protest is apolitical yet members of the ruling class have been calling them names like 'Khalistanis', terrorists etc. They demand that their legitimate rights are respected: they want an immediate roll back of three bills recently passed by the Government - they are convinced that these bills will have a nega-

tive impact on their livelihood and are blatantly designed to help the crony capitalists to profit.

In a statement the farmer groups said that in their talks with the government they have asked for the withdrawal of the three laws that they say will leave them at the mercy of large corporations and override safeguards against being cheated. Support for the farmers rights is pouring in from all over the country but also from abroad.

The rights of migrants are being crushed: the nation witnessed their plight from the night of 24/25 March when the lockdown was first announced. Millions of migrants were stranded overnight without food, cash, and shelter.

What the Government did not visualize was that they would have the grit and determination to walk back home. There are the terrible pictures and footage of them walking miles back to their native places. They were subjected to violation of their fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 19,

and 21 and often to severe police harassment on interstate borders.

Many reportedly died as a result of the lockdown, due to exhaustion en route home, starvation, suicides, police excesses, illnesses, and rail and road accidents. There is a Supreme Court order demanding that the plight of these migrants is not only looked into but their suffering is also alleviated; but who cares?

The rights of workers are being crushed: the working

It has been a particularly bad year for human rights in India: in a systematic but brutal manner, the legitimate rights of people are not only denied but are crushed



class has suffered tremendously during this pandemic. Besides, the Government denying them public transportation for almost two months to return home, they were also denied wages when their establishments were closed during the lockdown.

The Government seemed to desperately have wanted to keep them back at their 'workplace' so that they could be available as soon as the lockdown to work once again at the mercy of their employer; many of them are back for long hours of work but with reduced wages. To add salt to their wounds, on 23 September Parliament passed three labour code Bills when the opposition was boycotting the monsoon session on the issue of the farm Bills.

The three Bills, the Industrial Relations (IR) Code, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, and the Social Security Code, along with the Code on Wages, 2019, amalgamate 44 labour laws. All these Codes deal with wages, industrial relations, social security, safety, and welfare conditions. There are several features of the Codes which are problematic and





More than two million of them and other forest-dwellers remain at risk of forced displaced and loss of livelihoods after their claim to stay on in their habitats under the Forest Rights Act was rejected

go against the rights of workers; besides, the process by which they were pushed through was hardly transparent. For one, all central trade unions were opposed to the amalgamation of the hard-won labour laws and had submitted their objections on several occasions. The Government however, does not relent.

The rights of Adivasis are being crushed: one experiences this, the way the jal-jungle-jameen is being taken away from them. The areas which they have inhabited for centuries is being handed over for industrialisation, for

mining, for so called 'development' works and other mega-projects.

More than two million of them and other forest-dwellers remain at risk of forced displaced and loss of livelihoods after their claim to stay on in their habitats under the Forest Rights Act was rejected. Many Adivasis from the Kevadia area (which is around India's latest white elephant – a gross statue in the name of Sardar Patel) were made to leave their homes overnight. PESA is the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 - a law enacted by the Government of

India for ensuring self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas for people living in the Scheduled Areas of India. The sad part is that the Adivasis are also being denied their rights under PESA.

The rights of human rights defenders and NGOs are being crushed: this Government brooks no dissent. What is happening to this essential dimension of democracy has come in from no less a person than the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet who on 20 October appealed to the Government of India to safeguard the rights of human rights defenders and NGOs, and their ability to carry out their crucial work on behalf of the many groups they represent.

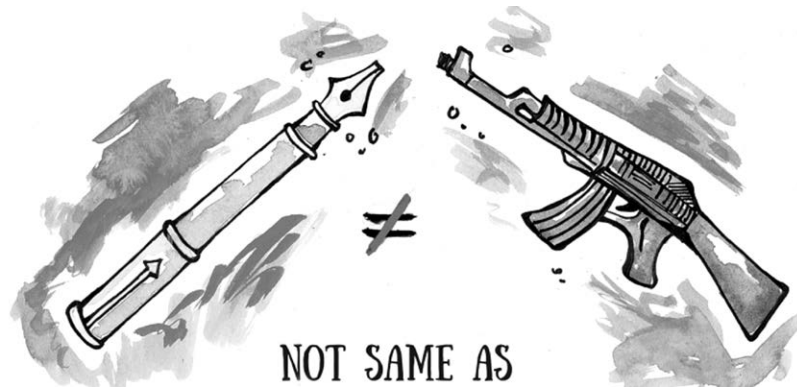
Bachelet expressed regret at the tightening of space for human rights NGOs in particular, including by the application of vaguely worded laws that constrain NGOs'

activities and restrict foreign funding. In a strongly worded statement Bachelet said,

"India has long had a strong civil society, which has been at the forefront of groundbreaking human rights advocacy within the country and globally, but I am concerned that vaguely defined laws are increasingly being used to stifle these voices." Adding, "I am concerned that such actions based on the grounds of vaguely defined 'public interest' leave this law open to abuse, and that it is indeed actually being used to deter or punish NGOs for human rights reporting and advocacy that the authorities perceive as critical in nature. Constructive criticism is the lifeblood of democracy. Even if the authorities find it uncomfortable, it should never be criminalized or outlawed in this way."

What is happening to Fr Stan Swamy and the fifteen others arrested (and now languishing in prison) under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for involvement in the Bhima-Koregaon violence, is a case in point. Many others are detained for no reason.

The rights of minorities are being crushed: it keeps happen-



Courtesy: Aseem Trivedi

ing at a frightening regularity. Muslims and Christians are at the receiving end of venomous hate speeches, constant denigration and even attacks.

The Babri Masjid – Ram Mandir issue had two Supreme Court verdicts with communal overtones favouring the majoritarian community. Come 6 December one is reminded of that infamous day in the annals of the country when the Sangh Parivar destroyed the Babri Masjid in 1992- of course no one was declared guilty of this heinous crime! The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A in Kashmir has enhanced the communal divide. The 'Love Jihad' law of UP is clearly focussed on a Muslim boy marrying a Hindu

girl. Besides it is expected to lead to a spate of anti-conversion laws in the country. A real bogey and which certainly violates the fundamental rights of a citizen.

The recently concluded Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation elections had very strong communal messages delivered which has polarised the communities there very sharply. The Government conveniently forgets that India is a secular country

The environment is being crushed and with that, the rights of all the citizens. Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has given a green signal to more than forty projects without the





The only way to observe Human Rights Day 2020 - is to wake up from our slumber, shake off the apathy and to rise together: demanding and ensuring - Human rights for all

mandatory environmental clearances. Most of these projects favour their rich crony capitalist friends literally giving them a license to loot, plunder and rape the environment and much more!

The felling of thousands of trees and the destruction of a natural sanctuary in Mollem, Goa – has brought thousands of Goans out on the streets. The aim of this project is to build a double track railway line for the shipping of coal for the Corporation of one of the country's henchmen.

Our precious biodiversity and our fragile ecosystems are being destroyed.

The Government today just does not care and has clearly

gone on a downward spiral: doing everything they can to destroy the environment: The Western Ghats and the Aravalli Hills; the building of a dam in Dibang; the selling of coal mines to private companies and much more

The environment is also being crushed with the growth of polluting industries without the necessary environmental safeguards because of callousness and corruption. On 7 May, a gas leak that occurred at the LG Polymers chemical plant near Visakhapatnam killed eleven persons and affecting more than a thousand others.

December 3 marked 36 years since the highly toxic chemical

methyl isocyanate (MIC) leaked from a storage tank in Bhopal's Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) plant killed around 25,000 people and injured nearly 550,000 people in 1984 .

Three and a half decades later, the latter continues to demand justice from India's judiciary and governance with the help of the Bhopal Gas Peedith Mahila Udyog Sanghathan (BGMUS) and the Bhopal Gas Peedith Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti (BGPSSS). "The year 2020 has been an extremely traumatic period for Bhopal gas victims. The struggle for justice, which gas-victims had been relentlessly waging for the previous 35 years, was itself a testimony to the failure of the Indian State to mete out justice in all these years," said a joint press statement released by the two groups. The main culprits have however got away with murder and in connivance with ruling regimes.

The rights of women and children, the rights of Dalits, of the excluded and other vulnerable groups are all being crushed. Above all, the right to freedom of speech and expression, the right to dissent is being crushed. Those responsible are clearly a fascist regime, a spineless judiciary, a pliant executive, a godfied media and corrupt vested interest groups.

The only way to observe Human Rights Day 2020 – is to wake up from our slumber, shake off the apathy and to rise together: demanding and ensuring - HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL! 🗣️

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NEW BOOK BY FR. FELIX RAJ

BY ARITRA DAS



Waves – *Story Bank* is Father Felix Raj's tenth book, published by the SXUK Alumni Association. The book contains 75 inspirational stories. The foreword to the book has been written by Prof. Suranjan Das, the Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Felix Raj has authored and co-authored nine books and has written numerous articles in journals, magazines and newspapers.

In his foreword Prof. Suranjan Das has said, "What is striking about Fr. Felix Raj is his ability to strike a balance between administrative and social responsibilities and academic interests. Surely his collection of stories will enable us to gain new strength in confronting the current challenges plaguing the human society."

The book was formally launched by Prof. (Dr.) Dhrubojyoti Chattopadhyay, Vice-Chancellor of Sister Nivedita University at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata on December 3, feast of St. Francis Xavier. In his speech, Chattopadhyay remarked on the relevance of the book in the context of the paradigm shift in the perception of education today.

He ruled the fact that today's youth is more interested in the prospective value of their educa-

tion rather than the humanistic. They enroll for courses keeping in mind what their takeaways will be after completion of their course of studies. For them, the value of the spiritual and moral education has taken a backseat. But, Father Felix Raj's book tries to instill in the learners some of those lost or rapidly receding values in the form of interesting stories that communicate some spiritual message. He made special mention of some of the stories in which these emotions have been expressed.

Introducing his book, Fr. Felix Raj said, "Every story that I have compiled in this book is a wave from the sea of my heart to embrace every reader so that they are touched and transformed. The stories can be used in lectures, in sermons, articles and even for recollections and retreats. You can read one story a day as food for thought."

No matter whether we are writing a biography or a novel, delivering a lecture or preaching a sermon, our lives revolve around the stories we have heard, read and narrated. Stories are moods; they are powerful vehicles; they matter. When you tell a story you spark a connection. That is how our ancestors have passed on their priceless heritage from generation to generation. From the days of simple pictures inscribed on cave walls to today's multimillion dollar movie blockbusters, our drive for telling stories has been encoded in our DNA. We connect quite powerfully through stories. Our lives are filled with stories that we all are part of. We, as human beings, irresistibly and instantly connect with one another through the magical power of stories.

We are drawn to stories, because they are the index of our mind. They are universal in meaning and purpose. They help us to share our varied emotions – joys and sorrows that design the bouquet of life. They each come with a message and influence our thought processes and decisions. They make us human and teach us wisdom. They shape our perspectives. Everyone is a story and every story belongs to someone. Stories take us on a journey of self-discovery and transformation. As Justine Musk says, "Whoever shares the greatest stories rules the world."

"Have you ever stood or sat on a sea shore? If you have, you will certainly understand what I intend to share with you through the pages of this book. If you haven't, then read this book, it will take you to the shore to watch the mighty ocean and its army of waves embrace the land incessantly," Fr. Felix Raj said.

Waves are caused by the winds blowing on the surface of the ocean or even lakes. This happens all the time. The wind has no effect on a perfectly calm sea. But, as it begins to slide over the surface of the water, it causes eddies. Small ripples are formed and they find their way to the shore and then break on the shore.

Waves, tall and short, keep on marching like an army of stories towards the shore. As the waves embrace the shore, the sea incessantly kisses the land. Caught in the tight intoxicating embrace of the waves, the sands of the shore submissively erode and drift away with the waves. ©

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Images of Mother Teresa, Mary vandalized in West Bengal

Unidentified persons have vandalized the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mother Teresa kept at two grottoes of a parish under the Baruipur diocese in West Bengal.

“Two of the images had been removed from the grottoes and made into small pieces. Efforts were made to other statues around but the culprits could not succeed to do so,” says a message of Bishop Shyamal Bose of Baruipur to his priests and religious. The November 28 letter says the grottoes are situated on the side of a road to Morapai presbytery from Sadashivpur village. The grottoes belong to Morapai parish.



Bishop Bose says no damage was done to the statues in the parish church or those in the front of the church. The priests of the parish learned about the vandalism at 6 am on November 28, who in turn informed the village council chief and the local police stations and they came within half an hour, the bishop’s letter says. The grottoes are under the juris-

diction of two village councils. As news spread, people started gathering at the church. Officers in charge of Usti and Madirabazar police stations came to the parish around 8 am along with local legislator.

Bishop Bose too reached the place along with his vicar general Father Kanuj Roy and spoke to the police officers and others. The bishop said he found some 300 people at the church and told them to main peace and tranquility.

The prelate appreciated the steps taken by the administration and added that he has confidence that the authorities would do the needful. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)



Maharashtra teacher wins global prize for educating girls

This year’s Global Teacher Prize has been awarded to Ranjitsinh Disale for his work helping girls, most of them from poor tribal communities, at a village school in Maharashtra.

He was selected from 12,000 nominations from more than 140 countries around the world. The Indian teacher was announced by renowned actor Stephen Fry as the winner of the Global Teacher Prize 2020 at a virtual ceremony broadcast from the Natural History Museum in London.

Disale immediately announced he would share half the \$1m prize money with the nine other finalists. His decision means \$55,000 will go to each of the other nine finalists from nations including Italy, Nigeria and South Korea. Disale is the sixth winner of the award, estab-

lished by the Varkey Foundation and is given in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

He said the global coronavirus pandemic had shown the importance of education to communities. “In this hard time, teachers are giving their best to make sure every student has access to their birthright of a good education,” he said. Disale added that all teachers were “the real changemakers who are changing the lives of their students” and it was in this spirit that he said he was sharing his winnings.

Humble beginnings

The teacher arrived at the Zilla Parishad Primary School in a small village near Solapur, in

Maharashtra in 2009. At the time, the school was in a rundown building next to a cattle shed, according to organisers. School attendance was low and teenage marriage common. The curriculum was not even in the girls’ main language, Kannada. Disale moved to the village, learned the language and translated the class textbooks.

He also introduced digital learning tools and came up with personalised programmes for each student. His system of QR-coded textbooks is now used across India.

Stefania Giannini, assistant director-general for education at UNESCO, said teachers like Disale would build “more peaceful and just societies”. ©

(Courtesy: Aljazeera.com)

Indian Jesuit ranks among world's top 1 percent scientists



Jesuit Father Savarimuthu Ignacimuthu has been identified as one of the top 1 percent scientists in biology.

The director of St Xavier's College in Tamil Nadu's Palayamkottai town earned the honor after scientists in the United States evaluated the Jesuit's research publications.

A recent article by three professors of the Stanford University in the United States has analyzed the contributions of more than 100,000 scientists from all over the world in biology.

The article, titled 'Updated Science-wide Author Databases of Standardized Citation Indicators,' was authored by professors John P.A. Ioannidis, Kevin W. Boyack, and Jeroen Baas. It was published October 16 in the "Plos Biology," a reputed journal.

The US professors used assessment parameters such as total number of papers published in journals indexed by Scopus, an abstract and citation database

launched in 2004, total number of citations, h-index and hm-index.

The h-index is used to measure the impact of a scientist's publications in terms of the citations received. It is defined as the highest number of papers of a researcher that have been cited h or more times.

The US professors have used sophisticated algorithms to simplify their findings and presented the data with clarity and depth. The authors have analyzed 113,961 scientists from all over the world and ranked Father Ignacimuthu 872.

The professors analyzed the Jesuit's contributions during 1985-2019. He has been ranked below 1,000 for the past 20 years. His name is found under high achievers' category in all the parameters used for the assessment. He is ranked 10th among Indian scientists.

The 71 year-old Jesuit scientist has published more than 800 research papers and 80 books; he

has 12 Indian patents and two US patents. He has helped more than 100 students to get their doctoral degree.

One insect species is named after him: *jacthrips ignacimuthui*. One natural molecule is named after him: Ignaciomycin. He was instrumental in developing Xavier herbal hand sanitizer to protect against pathogens including Covid-19.

Father Ignacimuthu had earlier served as the vice chancellor of two universities in Tamil Nadu — Coimbatore-based Bharatiyar University and Chennai-based University of Madras.

He had earlier developed a natural herbal biopesticide *Ponneem* to control insect pests. He worked at Entomology Research Institute, Loyola College, Chennai, during 1993-2018. Since June 2018 he has been working at Xavier Research Foundation, St Xavier's College, Palayamkottai.

The Jesuit scientist attributes all achievements to scientists and students who have worked with him in what he says is the "labor of love with God's grace."

Father Ignacimuthu says God has blessed him "abundantly" and he owes everything to the Society of Jesus, his congregation. "She has nurtured and helped me in all ways," he told *Matters India* November 28.

He also recalled with gratitude his teachers, "who formed me from my very young age with intellectual curiosity. They have played a very big role, especially the professors during my university days."

He further thanked his research staff and students "who have toiled with me for the last 35 years with dedication and hard work". ©

(Courtesy: *Mattersindia.com*)

Bangladesh ships Rohingya to remote island despite outcry

More than 1,600 Rohingya refugees sailed from Bangladesh's southern port of Chittagong for the remote island of Bhasan Char in the Bay of Bengal, a naval official said, despite opposition from humanitarian groups against the move.

The South Asian nation says it is only moving refugees who are willing to go and that this will ease chronic overcrowding in camps that are home to more than one million Rohingya, members of a Muslim minority who have fled neighbouring Myanmar.

But refugees and humanitarian workers say some of the Rohingya had been coerced into going to Bhasan Char, a flood-prone island that emerged from the sea 20 years ago.

The naval official said the Rohingya were on board seven boats, with two more carrying supplies.

Pictures taken from one of the vessels showed refugees lined up on blue plastic chairs under the watch of uniformed sailors.

"The government is not taking anyone to Bhasan Char forcibly. We maintain this position," Foreign Minister Abdul Momen told reporters.

"My family didn't want to go, they are taking them by force if my family go to the island they will die because of floods," a woman told Al Jazeera.

Humanitarian and human rights groups have said the island is flood-prone and vulnerable to frequent cyclones, while the government has not allowed the United Nations to carry out a safety assessment.

"From what they told us the living conditions are good," Al



Jazeera's Tanvir Chowdhury reporting from Cox's Bazar said.

"They have rooms that can accommodate up to four people, there are two hospitals, with 20-bed hospitals, there is a police station."

"But... they [told us] they don't want to be there, they [want] to be near their homeland.. and they have extended family all across the country, they can visit," he added.

An 18-year-old woman said her husband had put their names on the list thinking it was for food rations. He fled when they were told to go to Bhasan Char, she said, adding that she is also hiding in the camp.

They were among more than 730,000 Rohingya who fled Myanmar in 2017 following a military-led crackdown that the UN said was executed with genocidal intent.

Myanmar denies genocide and says its forces were targeting Ro-

hingya rebels who attacked police posts.

Human Rights Watch said it had interviewed 12 families whose names were on the lists but had not volunteered to go, while Refugees International said the move was "nothing short of a dangerous mass detention of the Rohingya people in violation of international human rights obligations".

Two aid workers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said refugees had come under pressure from government officials who used threats and offers of cash and other enticements to persuade them to go to the island.

More than 300 refugees were brought to the island earlier this year after several months at sea in an attempt to flee Bangladesh. Rights groups say they are being held against their will and have complained of human rights violations. ©

(Courtesy: Aljazeera)

POINTS TO PONDER

» By FM Britto



Like a bird

she wants all girls to fly

The drunkard husband beat Firdaus every day. The young lady's family members advised her to adjust with him for her sake and her two little children. Finally one day he set her ablaze. Being a man of influence, he got the case squashed. No one raised their voice.

But that incident worried Shahina Javed. How many Firdaus will go on getting killed by their husbands, she wondered.

Teenager Shahina had been watching in her Rajabazar locality of Kolkata how males torment their female family members. When Shahina questioned her parents the fate of the females in their Muslim community, she was told to shut her mouth and abide by the community's norms. The paper-bags-making father and the house-wife mother trained their only daughter, born in 1989, to endure the inhuman tortures that will follow her after the marriage.

By joining an NGO, she became more aware of the violence women suffer. Shahina realized that in the name of her religion so many social restrictions had been imposed on women.

Since Shahina means bird, like a bird she wanted to fly. She refused to don their traditional hijab. While it angered her family and community, she stood undaunted. Though her father did not want her to study beyond



Shahina Javed started Roshni Youth group in 2009 to empower girls in Rajabazar, Kolkata

metric, she persisted to pursue her Masters in Social Work from Calcutta University.

Braving to act against the injustices inflicted on the females, in 2009 she started in her locality 'Roshni Centre', an association of young girls and boys. Through awareness workshops she animated the girls about their basic rights, self-defense, higher studies and career. They began to raise their voices against injustices done to women.

She then founded an all-women soccer team. That infuriated more the Muslim priests, scholars and men. "Girls too have a right to play," she asserted. The team now has about 40 girls, including daughters of clerics, coached by a male foot-ball player. It has won many matches and awards.

Shahina and her centre were attacked when they informed the police about a child-marriage. "Getting scared and discontinu-

ing our activities meant defeat," she declared. "I have started my journey and have to go a long way. I am very optimistic. It might be difficult, yet not impossible," she added.

Presuming that with political clout she can transform this patriarchal society, she contested the local election. But scared of this firebrand crusader, her four male opponents conspired together to defeat her. "But I will not give up. I will always raise my voice against any type of injustice against women," she declared boldly.

"This brutality and injustice can only be stopped when society changes its views towards women," she says. Shahina tells the girls not to wait for someone from above to come and deliver them from the clutches of persecutors. They need to redeem themselves. With Shahina's guidance, lives of many women are getting changed.

Shahina confidently asserts, "We are a community of people making an effort towards this goal and we will reach our destinations soon."

"Be the heroine of your life, not the victim," says writer Nora Ephron. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANCIS BRITTO is serving the marginalized in a remote Chhattisgarh village. He is also a freelance writer and author. He can be contacted at: francismbritto@gmail.com



Chief Guest Boris...!



Many world leaders and people across the globe are wondering why dear Boris from Merry England's been chosen India's Republic Day chief guest. A tabloid in London interviewed him, and found he was blown over by the invitation, "It's not every day one gets an invitation to visit our colonies!" said Boris, sweeping back his unruly hair, "I guess Lizzy's too old to check on her subjects so they're inviting me!"

"Sir, India is not one of our colonies anymore, and not been for the past seventy years or more!" said the reporter.

"Oh Blimey! I must strike that out of my speech!" said Boris as he searched his pocket for the paper he'd written his speech on, to deliver on the ramparts of the Red Fort, "Could it be because of my hair?"

"Your hair sir?" asked the reporter a bit surprised.

"Yeah, it's rather windy in Delhi in January, and maybe they chose someone who wasn't bothered about which way the wind tossed it!" chuckled Boris.

"That could be a valid reason Mr Prime Minister!" said the reporter respectfully, as he wrote down the PM's comments dutifully, "But I'm sure there must be more a reason than just your hair!"

"You think so?" asked the English PM hesitantly?

"I don't know sir, I'm only asking? Though we were all wondering whether it has to do with the vaccine?"

"Vaccine?" asked Boris.

"Yes sir, didn't you announce to the world today, you are the first country to start vaccinating everybody?" asked the reporter.

"Yes!" said Boris squaring his shoulders, "We are going to show the world, that Britain leads the way again!"

"That Mr Prime Minister, could

be the reason them Indians are calling you sir!"

"Ah they want to give me an award? They give a lot of awards I heard, and my trophy shelf desperately needs one!"

"No sir!"

"No? You don't think they want to give me some award or other?"

"No sir!"

"So dammit, what could be the reason?" asked Boris as he saw visions of the award on his mantelpiece fading away, "Why else would they call me as their chief guest, there in front of all the cameras with all the world to see me!"

"Exactly sir!"

"Exactly what?"

"There in front of the cameras with all the world to see! They want to examine you sir, to see how the vaccine has worked on you! Whether you've grown a tail, lost your hair, hands trembling, voice quivering! You're their vaccine guinea pig for the whole country to watch sir! After that they'll decide which vaccine to order!"

That night as Boris felt his hair for the tenth time, his live-in partner Carrie asked, "What you doing Boris, you're acting as if you're hair is fallin' off?"

Boris looked at her with haunted eyes..! ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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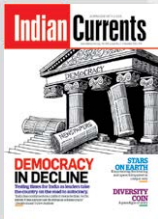
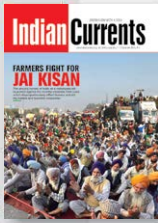
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