

On India's 60th Birthday A Time For Sober Reflection Not Manufactured Media Hype



There's Still A Long Way To Go
Before We Can Call Ourselves
A Mature Democracy
Jai Hind!

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Rural Cyber Enterprises and Gram Swaraj Through ICT Applications

P. Koshy

Apart from creating more jobs, rural cyber enterprises would vastly reduce migration to cities by rural youth, help the rural economy to flourish and bring about a pragmatic 'gram- swaraj' as envisaged by Gandhiji.

A farmer in a remote Indian village striking a business deal with his counterparts in Cairo, Amsterdam or New York is no longer just a dream. Today, even the most inaccessible hamlet in a tiny corner of the world is part of the ICT/IT network (Information Communication Technology/ Information Technology). Thanks to cyber enterprises providing internet browsing & telecommunication services, reaching across to people is no longer difficult.

Advances in information and communication technology have made the world a mini village. So much so that people-to-people interaction and cultural ties have increased dramatically, and enabled cross-border trade in services, resulting in a business processing outsourcing boom.

But that's not where the benefits of ICT applications end. They help make the Small Scale Industry sector more efficient and enable them to survive in a competitive market. Evidence suggests that SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) companies that use information and communication technology perform much better, are more upbeat about their expected performance and are more confident of surviving in the next 10-plus years than their counterparts.

How about micro ICT enterprises themselves? Will they survive in the market in the current scenario? How can they develop their business activities and portfolio? What are the emerging areas for cyber enterprises, other than what they traditionally offer, and how can they exploit present-day opportunities?

Today, it is the services sector that provides the maximum number of jobs. In the early 1990s, the manufacturing sector contributed a 96% share in the total number of enterprises, whereas it came down to 66% in 2002, according to the third All India Census of Small Scale Industries.

Service enterprises that offer a mix of services such as internet access, computer typing/typing, fax, and

photocopying are fast emerging in the cities as well in semi-urban and rural areas thanks to enterprising youth who took the initiative to provide such services and set up ICT enterprises in their neighbourhood. This had the advantage of providing job opportunities as well.

Interestingly, the NGO sector also came forward to provide ICT services across the country. Some of the prominent ones were n-Logue, Tarahat, MS Swaminathan Foundation, Byrraju foundation and Drishtee. With NGOs playing a very proactive role and some of them helping youth entrepreneurs in setting up their own cyber enterprises in villages - rural India also got connected. Thousands of cyber enterprises were set up by entrepreneurs with the help of such NGOs.

This enabled handicrafts and rural-village enterprises to market their products and get wide exposure. In fact, so great is its potential that the possibilities of ICT for further job creation have to be explored. For instance, aspects like how many rural handicraftsmen and enterprises have become empowered with ICT and how many more can get benefited, what are the new areas that could take advantage in the next ICT boom, could well be studied in detail.

Cybercafés have been playing a major role in fuelling Internet development in India. The revenue from IT related services is likely to touch Rs 81,000 crores by the year 2010. And Broadband usage in India is growing at the rate of 20% per month, according to the Internet Service Providers Association of India (ISPAI).

Business Development for cyber enterprises becomes an important and challenging task. With increasing broadband penetration, cyber enterprises cannot survive by themselves on the businesses that they get from surfers living nearby or other services that they offer, like photocopying for example. With broadband penetration rate going up day by day their customer base also would decline, though not yet. But opportunities are vast in today's widely networked world for cross border trade in

services, as the business process outsourcing boom proved.

Business development for new technology enterprises is the real challenge in this era and new avenues and tapping new areas would open up job opportunities for thousands of people. The use of ICTs to move outsourcing jobs to rural areas is a challenging opportunity and would benefit multiple stake holders.

These days, in order to be more competitive, several outsourcing majors are shifting their base to tier II and tier III cities and ultimately may shift to rural areas to cut down on overhead/operational expenses.* Byrrajju foundation of Hyderabad has already started BPOs in rural areas. The setting up of rural BPOs in villages could generate employment and livelihood opportunities, increase the standard of living of the villagers and enhance rural economy. The transfer of BPO units to rural areas make tremendous business sense. So the question is how cyber entrepreneurs could be helped in taking up outsourcing jobs?

Outsourcing of non-strategic government functions is also happening the world over. Generating jobs is the major challenge in a technology driven world. As Joseph Schumpeter said several years back, development of new technologies, while creating new opportunities on the one hand, also kills jobs in a related area, as new technology innovation propels a phase of creative destruction. For instance, introduction of computers in the 1980s led to massive job cuts.

Additional jobs could be created differently.

Management of local governmental level data could be outsourced to rural cyber enterprises. For instance, successful e-governance initiative in Andhra Pradesh has made life easy for the common man. Rural cyber enterprises, if used imaginatively can partner with the State to simplify matters for citizens. They can manage and maintain different documents & data and provide different services that otherwise they would have to get from a village/panchayat office or from district headquarters. Gradually services like rail ticketing can be outsourced to cyber enterprises.

Apart from creating more jobs, rural cyber enterprises would vastly reduce migration to cities by rural youth, help the rural economy to flourish and bring about a pragmatic 'gram- swaraj' as envisaged by Gandhiji.

But for benefits of ICT to penetrate and reach all sections, we must be ready to face a 'creative destruction' phase. The big question is how are we going to treat these opportunities?

* Tier II & III cities are cities like Cochin, Bhubaneshwar, Secunderabad, Trivandrum, Nasik, Jaipur, Madurai (TN), Chandigarh. Outsourcing companies like BPOs are moving from metro cities to small towns/cities and in the long run would shift their bases to rural India. Otherwise outsourcing jobs such as data entry operations, HR processing and even call centers, where highly skilled people are not required would shift to countries like China, Philippines and to Africa, due to cost advantage they offer, especially on account of cheap labour.

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Government Changing Labour Law to Make it More Difficult to Fire Staff

According to press reports, the Union Labour Ministry has proposed an amendment to the Industrial Disputes Act to make it more difficult to fire employees. This is impractical and unrealistic. It is not possible on the shop floor to implement decisions in case of "misconduct" by an individual or a group.

1. Governments are able to flout court decisions with impunity, but Industry will collapse if saddled with impractical laws that the government cannot implement and the judiciary is unable to decide for decades.
2. Unions are mostly politically motivated or backed by local heavyweights and an individual employer with 20 persons in his employ can hardly match the adversary's might.
3. Employers these days, flout various labour laws, including procedural Acts like the Shops and Establishments Act, with the informal connivance of a government keen to woo foreign investment. Secondly, the nature of employment has undergone drastic changes in the last 50 years.
4. We do not need more laws but effective honest implementors of the law like T. N. Seshan. I know what I am talking about as someone who handled labour relations for over forty years and handled the sacking of erring employees, including managers and directors, for misconduct, under due process of law.

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Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

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

Operation Silence

1) The capture of Lal Masjid, a Taliban citadel in Islamabad on July 10 is possibly a watershed in Pakistan's political life. It marks a definitive change in General Musharraf's policy of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. Musharraf has been doing a tight rope act since 2001, making out to be USA's close ally in the fight against terrorism while shielding Al Qaeda's top leaders and terrorist organisations like L-e-T, Jaish-e-Mohd etc. The Americans tolerated this pretence as they had no alternative but to continue to pressing Musharraf for action against the militants. Under US pressure or as an unacceptable challenge to his authority, Musharraf had to act against the well-entrenched fundamentalists in Lal Masjid. He has had to give up his cozy deal with the terrorists. Now he has cast himself as an enemy of the "jihadis" and invited the wrath of Al Qaeda. This should suit India, as the anti-Indian "jihadis" in Pakistan may, at least now, face action.

1) Musharraf is a past master at wriggling out of tight situations. It may not be beyond him to strike a deal with the anti-Indian groups. His very survival may depend on such accommodation. His own army may not be without its share of "jihad" sympathizers. Musharraf may not like to take on his democratic political opponents and the fundamentalists simultaneously. He may brandish his claim to be a moderate, a true friend of the US, but he cannot keep up the bravado for long. The backlash has already started, with frequent suicide attacks on military personnel in NWFP and other ungovernable areas. President Bush might have patted Musharraf on the back but India needs to be circumspect.

Under US pressure or as an unacceptable challenge to his authority, Musharraf had to act against the well-entrenched fundamentalists in Lal Masjid.

"Bangalore" Bombers

2) The failed bomb attacks in London and Glasgow on June 28-29, 2007 revived fears that UK remained on the terrorist radar and there was no escaping the violence of the jihadis – as India has found over the last decade. It is apparent that good education alone is not enough to stop the spread of terrorism. The disturbing part is the labels being attached to the bombers like, "Bangalore Bombers" or "Doctor Bombers" and even worse, "Indian Bombers". It is convenient for tabloid TV channels to stick such labels but naïve to identify professions and places with such crimes. The criminals happened to be doctors or engineers from Bangalore. It is not as if all Indian doctors in UK are likely to turn terrorists or Bangalore is a breeding ground for terrorists. Hopefully, security agencies are more focused in their search for roots of terrorism and do not get distracted by such irrelevant conjunctions.

The truth is that whether doctors or engineers, whether from Bangalore or Brisbane, anybody can get infected if it is not effectively put across that "jihad" does not sanction killing of innocent people.

2) The London-Glasgow incidents have blown the myth that secular India would not give rise to home grown terrorists; earlier the myth that multi-cultural Britain would not spawn terrorism was negated and now this. It is foolish to claim that a virus that is spreading all over the world would not infect a particular area. It is foolhardy to assert that your own society is so well adjusted that some external influence will not touch its fabric. The poison of the misconceived concept of jihad can strike anywhere. The truth is that whether doctors or engineers, whether from Bangalore or Brisbane, anybody can get infected if it is not effectively put across that "jihad" does not sanction killing of innocent people and those advocating such violence need to be rejected. Islamic scholars must come forward to dispel the untruth and set things right for all peace loving Muslims who are unnecessarily put on the defensive. Mere statements expressing anguish are not enough; a movement to eradicate the virus of fundamentalist propaganda is the crying need. It is heartening to note that some Muslim activists have started an organization called "Jihad against Terrorism."

Dr. Haneef's Plight

3) Dr. Haneef, the Indian doctor deported from Australia, invites a lot of sympathy because of the circumstances that turned him into a victim. Questions arise about the Australian judicial system and its immigration policy. Was the Australian Government right in canceling his visa when there was no evidence of his terrorist links? The case against him was built on the basis of wrong information. Was he trying to run away from Australia or was he simply trying to visit his newborn baby? It is a pity if a person has to lose his means of livelihood, home and friends because of the acts of his relatives. What more could the Government of India have done to ensure justice for its citizen?

3) We must accept that Australia, as a sovereign country, has the right to refuse visa to a foreigner. There are new reports that further details are available linking Dr. Haneef to his cousins' activities. There are more questions than there are answers. It is best that we treat Dr. Haneef as innocent but there is no reason to treat him as a hero. He is a victim of his cousins' acts. Australians were fully justified in looking into his activities. Whether they should have kept him in detention or not can be debated. We are ourselves not virtuous enough to point a finger at another country in this regard.

Sanjay Dutt's Travails

5) The sentencing of Sanjay Dutt to 6 years' imprisonment has shocked many people since Sanjay has led a blameless life for the last 14 years and shown all attributes of a good citizen during this period. Sanjay's fans expected his release on probation almost as a matter of course. His incarceration came as a rude shock. Affidavits from influential personalities came to naught. The reaction to the verdict is more emotional than logical because fans see Sanjay as he is seen on the screen. Some hold that Sanjay's celebrity status hurt him badly as too much attention is being paid these days to see that the high and mighty do not escape the law. The argument can be used both ways; if one escapes punishment, it is because one is rich and famous; if one is punished, it is again because one is rich and famous! Time to make up our minds. All is not lost yet because the Supreme Court can still save the people's hero.

4) An accused person's good behaviour during his trial cannot become an extenuating factor. He has to be judged on the basis of what he did at the time of commission of the offence or else everybody would be on exemplary behaviour after committing a crime. Sanjay did after all acquire a weapon of mass destruction and that too from people he knew to be gangsters. Only if he had acted as a responsible citizen should, a horrendous tragedy could have been averted in March 1993. Justice Kode stood up to all the pressure that was built up and his decision is a victory for justice – although much delayed. Did he have to speak to Sanjay after pronouncing his verdict? Singling out Sanjay was perhaps a concession to the public mood! Still Justice Kode deserves kudos for standing firm in delivering justice.

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"India is a Nation that's awash with mediocrity"

This isn't limited to government, it is spread across all aspects of our society ... We are a nation of average expectations and even poorer delivery. There are exceptions, islands of excellence in the swamp of ordinariness. But these are too few and far between to add up to anything.

There are no easy explanations ... The desire to excel has little to do with poverty– changing attitudes doesn't cost anything.

As we turn 60 and look ahead, the striving for excellence should become a national *mantra*. We need a national campaign that urges every individual to take pride in their work. Other countries have done this.

After World War II, Japan stood for mediocrity and "Made in Japan" meant products of substandard quality. There were many who contributed to a resurgent national identity built around the principle of excellence ...

No doubt, excellence is about processes and institutions and a number of other factors. But it must begin with a change of attitude, with individuals taking pride in their work.

Moving an entire nation into a new orbit takes enormous energy. Changes won't be visible for years. But eventually, the signs will begin to show.

Mr. Ramesh Ramanathan is co-founder, *Janaagraha*. Excerpted from his column in *Mint* of August 13.

Courtesy: *Mint*

Contained by China

Nitin Pai

The border dispute is an intentional thorn in India's side

Two years ago, during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India the two countries agreed on a set of principles that would be used to determine the final settlement of the decades old border dispute. When borders are redrawn, it was agreed, they would not disturb settled populations in either country. But China's position has undergone a sea change since then. Yang Jiechi, China's new foreign minister, recently stated that the mere presence of settled populations does not affect China's territorial claims. Mr Yang's statement confirmed what a series of events — including the Chinese ambassador's remarks last December, its refusal to issue visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh (thereby implying that they are Chinese nationals) and the lack of progress in the latest round of high-level border talks — suggested: China's negotiating position has hardened. Why and why now?

Well, because China sees the border dispute as an instrument in its policy to contain India. Inscrutable though it might sometimes appear, China's strategy towards India involves a combination of co-operation and containment. It co-operates with India — both bilaterally and in multilateral for a — to the extent that such co-operation is not only mutually beneficial, but also relatively more advantageous to China. So while there is some India-China co-operation in the domain of trade and investment, China is more inclined to compete in the global quest for energy resources despite attempts by India to prevent bidding wars.

Cooperation however is limited to the extent that it does not adversely affect China's strategy of confining India to the sub-continent. Globalisation and India's transformation into a major regional power are changing the dynamics of containment — while India's larger regional role is taking it to the Eastern Pacific, Central Asia and Africa, China has made significant military and economic inroads in India's immediate neighbourhood. Containment was historically effected by three instruments — indirectly through the UN Security Council and strategic proxies and directly through the border dispute.

After India's 1998 nuclear tests, the Kargil war and 9/11, China could no longer act through the 'international community' to use nuclear proliferation and the Kashmir issue to press India. But it has enhanced its use of strategic proxies — in addition to its long-time cultivation of Pakistan, it has added Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka

and Nepal to its list. However, India's strategic partnership with the United States and an emerging quadrilateral 'alliance of democracies' involving Australia and Japan in addition to the two is well-placed to counter these moves.

Hence the need to keep the border dispute alive as a thorn in India's side. That Beijing has managed to settle all its border disputes except the one with India suggests its utility to China more than it exposes 'democratic India's inability to compromise'.

The timing of the hardening of China's position on the border dispute, moreover, is consistent with ongoing regional power alignments. But it has been assisted by the presence of a Communist party-supported ruling coalition in New Delhi. The Indian Left, being pro-China will hardly allow the Indian government to take a stronger line against China. Meanwhile public statements from the UPA government disavow balance-of-power geopolitics. It remains to be seen if these statements actually reflect its foreign policy thinking. It would be unfortunate if this were so, not least because it would be a repetition of Nehru's mistakes in the late 1950s. Clearly then, there is an urgent need for India to review the way in which it engages China.

Meanwhile the Indian government is caught in a reactive mode — building infrastructure in remote border regions in response to China. If done with due care to the environment this is a positive outcome of the rivalry between the two countries. Yet roads and railways do not always buy affection and China in any case can build them much faster than India can. A far more effective way for India to bring its most citizens into the national mainstream would be to empower them through tangible political equality. Reconstituting the Rajya Sabha along the lines of the American Senate — and giving states like Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland the same number of seats as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the rest- will not only be far more effective than big but leaky development programmes but is also more democratic. It is also a move that China cannot match.

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'Sanjeevani' for Agriculture

Sharad Joshi

How did agriculture in India, once the most advanced in the world, degenerate to its present state?

All discussions on agriculture, particularly my interactions with the media, finally end with the question, "what do you think should be done to resuscitate Indian agriculture?" The reply I generally give, one that does not satisfy anybody, is, "Just stop harming agriculture and it will germinate and blossom on its own." The seed germinates if the environment is not unfriendly. A tree grows more aggressively after being chopped, unless it is chopped again and again. The more relevant question is: How did agriculture in India, once the most advanced in the world, degenerate to its present state?

Agriculture is the multiplication of the seed using the cosmic energy stored for millennia in the Sun, the Air, the Earth and Water. The farmer who brings together these elements brings about a physiocratic multiplication to produce a food surplus that is unknown to all other species of animals and birds. This surplus can be used for leisure, for producing other consumption goods or capital goods and all varieties of goods and services that mankind knows today. How come the farmer, the source of all wealth, has become impoverished to a point where he finds life insupportable in India?

It is not my intention to repeat for the nth time, why and how the rest of the world manages to rob agriculture to the benefit of the secondary and tertiary sectors. Instead I intend in this essay to share with you some success stories where agriculture has done well in this land of farmers' suicides.

Bishop Arackal, Sunil Joseph and the Peermade Development Society

The present Bishop of Kanjirapalli started as a priest in the region of Kuttikannan in Kerala in 1977. He was so moved by the condition of the tribal people in

the area that he started teaching them how to engage in agriculture by procuring seeds and other inputs for them. In order to find a market for their produce, he established a small unit which has now developed into a full-fledged voluntary organisation – The Peermade Development Society (PDS). Father Arackal, now the Bishop of the region, has put together a team of professionals and inspired them to continue the good work. PDS has since then succeeded in converting the farming of the tribals to organic farming - not for any ideological reasons, but because organic spices command a better market, particularly in Europe and the United States of America.

The professional team led by Sunil Joseph has been so successful that organic spices and tea have obtained the most stringent certificates. The PDS now export spices and tea.

Madhav Rao More's Wine Revolution

Madhavrao More, a farm leader and the pioneer of the wine revolution in Nashik district, started a bubbly

wine factory under the brand name "Pimpagne". Even French connoisseurs conceded that "Pimpagne" was the best bubbly wine produced anywhere in the world. The French Champagne producers were worried about competition from Maharashtra. "A tiger is rising in Maharashtra. The region enjoys advantages in terrain, climate and hardy labour. Let the French wine producers beware!" was the caption of a story in a prominent wine journal. Madhavrao had enough stocks to launch a full-scale invasion of the European market when the European Union made use of an innovative non-trade barrier to stop imports to Europe. The Government of India, instead of helping the enterprising Madhavrao, compounded his misery by refusing to relax the condition under which the factory was licensed that all the produce would be sold exclusively outside India. The factory had to be closed down.

The Rural Perspective



Bhanwarlal Jain of Jalgaon

A significant example of a successful experiment in agriculture is provided by Bhanwarlal Jain of Jalgaon district in Maharashtra. Jain made a beginning with a very small landholding of his own. Initially, he even took some lands on rent. Jain combined his agricultural operations with the manufacture of drip systems of irrigation, production of organic manures and processing of fruits and vegetables with great vision, foresight and innovation. Some of his earlier attempts for the processing of onion were unsuccessful. Undaunted, he persevered. Today, Bhanwarlal Jain presides over a large area of hilly and drought prone areas which has developed into aesthetically laid out food gardens and fields. His enthusiasm is contagious. He claims he can solve the problem of the shortage of edible oils in India if only the government gives him 5000 hectares of *fallow* land. Jain's establishment can serve as a model for agricultural development. The government has chosen not to adequately recognise his achievement – not even with a *Padmashree*!

Sardar Bhupender Singh Mann

Sardar Bhupender Singh Mann is India's tallest farm leader today. Along with a few of his associates he promoted a company called "Kisan Duddh Udyog Ltd. (KDUL)" in 1992 for producing milk and the processing of milk products with an installed capacity of 1.2 lakh liters per day. They associated themselves with the Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation Ltd. (PSIDC) and obtained help from various financial institutions. The project suffered time and cost overruns and is on the threshold of being wound up. One of the reasons for this according to Mann, is the indiscriminate sanctioning of licenses to competing projects by those with political pull. Another is the depression in milk prices engineered by the free import of butter oil and milk powder. Mr. Mann is now desperately struggling to resurrect his enterprise with a clean One-Time-Settlement plan at a time when the government is boasting about the ease with which credit

is available.

The Sanjeevani Health Research Center

Another outstanding example of making agriculture a highly successful vocation is provided by the Sanjeevani Health Research Center at Gohana in the Sonapat district of Haryana, founded by Mr. Viz who owns about 104 acres, of which around 70 acres are cultivated producing a large variety of fruits and vegetables as also food grains. The agricultural operations employ forty workers in addition to casual labour. Viz is a philanthropist who runs educational institutions for girls as also a Research Institute on problems of health and medicine. The *Sanjeevani Kaya Samsodhan Sansthan* which is a leading nature cure health clinic accommodates less than a hundred patients. The center has established itself for the quality of treatment and medical attention given to patients seeking nature cure. It employs four eminently qualified medical professionals and an operating staff of about twenty. Nature cure requires enormous quantities of vegetables and fruit which are produced in the farm cultivated by Viz.

There are some other success stories, for instance the work done being by Ram Babu under the banner of EID Parry in Tamil Nadu.

One lesson to be drawn from all these stories is that the success has hardly been a result of governmental help or intervention; in fact, the contrary.

In the present crisis situation of Indian agriculture, the government would do well to stop announcing packages of thousands of crores of rupees on the one hand and on the other cease its interventions in agriculture which have been counterproductive in any case. Q.E.D.

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Virtue of A Biased Press

Here are two ways to feel about one's country. Your view depends on where you stand:

A story is told of a Jewish man who was riding on the subway reading an Arab newspaper. A friend of his, who happened to be riding in the same subway car, noticed this strange phenomenon. Very upset, he approached the newspaper reader

"Moshe, have you lost your mind? Why are you reading an Arab newspaper?"

Moshe replied "I used to read the Jewish newspaper, but what did I find? Jews were being persecuted; Israel was being attacked; Jews disappearing through assimilation and intermarriage; Jews living in poverty. So I switched to the Arab newspaper.

Now what do I find? Jews own all the banks; Jews control the media; Jews are all rich and powerful; Jews rule the world. The news is so much better."

From the Internet contributed by Farrokh Mehta



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

Godhra Has A Lot to Answer For

The Godhra riots and the subsequent carnage are now a shameful episode in India's history. However, the forces they unleashed have been mustering over the past few years are now bursting forth with unrelenting vigour.

Heretofore, the Hindu majority in India had held itself aloof from zealotry. With an air of superiority, it regarded religious and moral intolerance as the domain of the less-civilized, less-cultured Islamists – and those, too, mainly from that militant nation across the border. Even extreme right wing factions like the VHP and the Bajrang Dal kept their activities low key, because they realized that most of their co-religionists would not appreciate, nor tolerate, a strident show of force. Nowadays, of course, it's a whole new ball game. The militant face of Hinduism is in full flower and is giving the Islamists a run for their money.

Whether it was the ransacking of the Bhandari Oriental Institute over David Lane's book; or the threat to destroy cinema property in Gujarat if they dared to screen Aamir Khan's film; or the recent incident in Baroda, where a private art examination was transformed into an obscenity debate; or the Shiv Sena vandalizing cyber cafes in Mumbai because they allowed access to the social networking website, Orkut, the spectre of intolerance keeps growing until, now, it has become a self-perpetuating, hydra-headed monster that feeds on its own zealotry.

A small aside on the Orkut matter. It is heartening to note that a major Internet Service Provider, Sify, has taken a firm stand and refused to buckle under the Sena's unjustifiable strong arm tactics. However, it is not too difficult to predict what will happen next. The Shiv Sena 'activists' will pay a 'visit' to Sify's offices, break furniture, smash up computers and rough up a few office workers – all this with a police escort that will just stand by and watch. One can only hope Sify's resolve stands firm – although past experience does not hold out much promise. In all my years in Mumbai, I don't recall a single incident where the police have prevented or broken up a Shiv Sena 'demonstration' – unless ordered to do so by their senior officers. No matter which political party is in power, the Sena's grip on the rank and file of the Mumbai constabulary remains firm and absolute.

So where is this nation heading? In past decades, the Indian public has grudgingly put up with corrupt and incompetent politicians; an avaricious and self-serving municipality; or an indifferent police force that will attend

to your complaint only if you can pay for it. We have tolerated all this because, at least, we have a functioning democracy. But what sort of democracy is this, where the rights of the many are increasingly being trampled on, with impunity, by a slogan-shouting, lathi-wielding few? Where an individual's freedom of expression and creativity is being curtailed and eroded by the 'moral police'. Where the politicians, instead of safeguarding the interests and security of the common man – a job they were elected to perform – often side with the hooligans; all with the insidious purpose of protecting their vote bank; and staying in power at any cost.

We Indians have criticized our erstwhile British rulers for formulating and implementing the two-nation theory, but are we not now perpetuating it in our own land? Is not our country being polarized into majority and minority groupings? One may argue that India has always had a majority and a sizeable minority. True, but this new division is not based on religion or caste – or even on wealth. It is the silent, civilized majority against the vociferous, bigoted minority – and the latter appear to be gradually gaining control. And why should they not, when the 'honourable' gentlemen elected to protect our hard-won rights and privileges have proven to be venal and ineffective – or, at best, mute spectators?

The question to be asked now is, how long the silent majority can afford to remain silent. There is a threshold beyond which even the mildest person can be goaded into violent reaction. The day may not be too far off before that threshold is breached.

In one respect, the very economic prosperity brought about by the liberalization process may prove to be our undoing. We are so busy making money and trying to live the good life that we do not seem to be bothered about what happens outside our immediate boundaries. Well, the time may be soon approaching when we will have to bother: when we finally realize that if we want to remain a tolerant society – worthy of that 5000 year-old civilization we always brag about – we will have to stand up and make our voices heard. I just pray that it is not already too late.

So Help Me, Brahma

On July 12, for the first time in its history, the US Senate was opened with the invocation of a Hindu prayer. The prayer was noisily interrupted by Christian activists, belonging to an organisation that calls itself Operation Save America.

Religion usually stirs up strong emotions. Religion is more often experienced with the heart, rather than the head – and why not? Faith is not governed by intellect, but by a perception that there is a higher power guiding us; and it is not given to us mere mortals to question it. This can have dangerous ramifications, of course; particularly for the weak minded. Mindless faith is often the justification for acts no religion could condone – suicide bombings and the murder of innocents, for example. Sometimes the backlash is less violent, more benign; but it is a form of fanaticism nonetheless.

The above diatribe was prompted by the news that, for the first time in its history, the US Senate was opened with the invocation of a Hindu prayer. Let me clarify straight away that, although I am from India, I am not a Hindu. So I can view this episode with a certain detachment. The prayer was brief – just an incantation, really – and was not accompanied by elaborate rituals. In short, it was no big deal and, by itself, would have merited a couple of column-inches in the back pages of newspapers.

The reason it made headlines was that the prayer was noisily interrupted by Christian activists, belonging to an organization that calls itself Operation Save America. The group later issued a statement confirming that three of its members were all arrested in the chambers of the US Senate “as that chamber was violated by a false Hindu god”. The statement continued, “The Senate was opened with a Hindu prayer, placing the false god of Hinduism on a level playing field with the One True God, Jesus Christ. This would never have been allowed by our founding fathers.” Presumably they have an inside line to the founding fathers.

I do not want to get into a discourse here, about the relative merits of different religions, but I am always a little perturbed by intolerance. In terms of scale, this protest does not remotely compare to the atrocities perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists. However, I would respectfully submit that the breeding ground for any kind of fanaticism is intolerance for others’ beliefs: only the magnitude differs.

I realize and appreciate that the fact that the US Senate even considered inviting a Hindu priest to their chambers speaks highly of American values. Something like this would be inconceivable in any Muslim nation,

of course. So when an altruistic action is disrupted in the name of religion, it is doubly disturbing. And it was, in fact, deplored by the organization, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which said the incident showed the intolerance of many religious rights activists. As their executive director, Rev Barry Lynn, put it, “They say they want more religion in the public square, but it’s clear they mean only their religion.”

The US Senate justified their decision to invite the Hindu priest by stating that it has always honored the historic separation of the church and the state, but not the separation of God and state. Their website stated, “All sessions of the Senate have been opened with prayer, strongly affirming the Senate’s faith in God as sovereign Lord of our nation...” Most years, the Senate chaplain delivers the opening invocation, but sometimes guest chaplains are invited from all over the country to read the prayer. Although priests from other faiths such as Islam and Judaism have delivered prayers in the Congress, this is the first time that Hindu invocations were delivered on the Senate floor.

My take on this affair is why open the Senate with a prayer at all? I am all in favour of invoking God’s name on any occasion. What I find a bit puzzling – as an outsider – is how the US has regulated this issue. On the one hand, it is official national policy to separate church and state. Prayers of any faith – or any denomination – are not allowed in schools; and a sculpture depicting the Ten Commandments, put up in front of a courthouse, was frowned upon. On the other hand, witnesses in court trials are required to swear on a religious book; and oaths of office always end with the words “so help me God.” Why this dichotomy?

In my personal opinion, religion is – or should be – an intensely personal communion between an individual and his Maker. Why should the government interfere at all? Some would argue that separation of church and state was mandated by America’s Founding Fathers. Fair enough; but remember that the Founding Fathers lived in a vastly different era. Besides, there have been numerous Amendments to the Constitution over the past decades. It is not cast in stone – nor was it meant to be. It is something to think about.

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The Image of the Indian Babu

Sadanand B. Kumta

Having served the government and the public for nearly 35 years with loyalty and devotion (sheer humility prevents me from even saying “with some distinction”), I was shocked the other day to know that to be called a government servant is an insulting term. Undoubtedly I was not a man with a broken heart while taking voluntary retirement, unlike Cardinal Wolsey whom Henry VIII had dethroned from his high ecclesiastical pedestal over Anne Boleyn. Wolsey lamented, “if I had served God as diligently as I did the king; He would not have given me over in my grey hairs.”

Now to continue with my true story; while my erstwhile young neighbour in Ahmedabad was driving his car with me he said in a sad tone “I am a software engineer, I have put my whole heart into my job by working up to 12 hours a day for over 10 years and now this America-returned new boss who is arrogant and unappreciative tells me that I work like a government servant. This is an insult I cannot live with. So I have resigned.”

Dear readers, though I am a writer with no formidable credentials, I sometimes mix fact with fiction but the above narration is pure un-adulterated fact. Even if I am dragged to court over this statement, I am ready to produce evidence in the form of a witness in flesh and blood.

A government servant who is associated with administration (euphemistically called governance) is now called a ‘babu’ and the territory over which he has his reach is called ‘babudom’. He is generally feared as an ‘abominable no man’ by the general public. He is now a metamorphosed species with genetic transformation and a strong survival instinct whose work has no relation to his progression in service. If someone wants to know what the *babu*’s ‘work culture’ is, he will discover neither ‘work’ nor ‘culture’. When it comes to work, he is in tune with Jerome K Jerome who vaguely defined a *babu* (in a different context in his ‘Three Men in a Boat’) as one ‘who loves work so much that the very idea of parting with it breaks his heart’. As for culture, a *babu*’s staple food is nothing but files and more files.

Why have things come to such a pass, after 60 years of independence? We have to go up the hierarchy of administration and see what has happened to the top

echelons of bureaucracy. One of my colleagues and a friend with his academic brilliance has analysed the complex and confusing politico-bureaucratic symbiosis. From this milieu, the bureaucrat has certainly emerged powerful enough to annex and colonise even the professional and technical departments both at the operational and overseeing level. While interacting with one of the bureaucrats, my witty friend referred to earlier, told him “you were formerly non-performing assets of the government but in your new role you have become performing liabilities”. If you were to ask me to choose between the word ‘*babu*’ and ‘bureaucrat’ I would certainly go in for *babu*. This is because a bureaucrat or even a technocrat (which I was once branded as) has an ending with ‘rat’ which smacks of undercover operations. It is therefore no surprise that most bureaucrats are unhappy with the Right To Information (RTI) Act, which calls for transparency in dealings in broad daylight.

To some, calling them government servants may be an insult and if so why all this fuss about reservations in such a service? Simple, it is a rat race!

MR. SADANAND B. KUMTA, formerly Director of Technical Education, Gujarat.

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Was the Indian PM Right in Grumbling, about High CEO Salaries

Faiyaz Hardwarewala

No, I don't think the Indian PM was right in his comments about high CEO salaries.

However, the core contention why he was not right in making those comments is not because the hardworking and highly productive CEO's deserve their high salaries, nor is it that the company owners and stockholders are helpless in this matter and that high salaries are governed by market forces. Neither is it that reducing CEO salaries would be pointless as it would have a negligible effect on bridging the rich-poor gap. Not even that giving a free hand to the corporate world is the only way to eradicate poverty and bridging the rich-poor divide, as has been eloquently proved time and again during the last century.

True, as all the above points are, the core issue is simply that the PM and the government have no right in meddling with the internal affairs of private companies. Whatever salaries the owners of a company decide to give, whether wisely or foolishly, is completely their prerogative. And the government has no business advising them. If anything, the PM should have been exhorting the inefficient political *babus* and government administrators to learn from the effective and efficient resource management of private sector companies.

Interestingly, had the judiciary given a similar unsolicited advice to the government in the management of its internal affairs, our present government, in all likelihood, would have accused the judiciary of judicial overreach. And yet, our PM is guilty of the same violation; in this particular context, of governmental overreach.

The real, fundamental issue at the bottom of this controversy is whether we Indians, as citizens and company owners, have an absolute right to our life and property; have the moral right to exist for our own sake, or whether some of our rights need to be curtailed or sacrificed for the larger 'good' of society or in this case, for bridging the rich-poor divide.

Fundamental as this premise is to the unfolding drama, it will unfortunately have little bearing on its outcome, simply because we as a society have long ago, explicitly, implicitly or by default, accepted altruism as a sound moral principle. Year after year, we have seen the

government use its coercive powers on some segments of individuals to achieve the larger good, whether in the form of high taxation of the rich and corporate sectors to be channelised to the poorer sections, or the nationalization of many privately owned companies in the past.

What is then more relevant in our present context, more as an expedient than a moral principle, is to point out that the alleged goal of bridging the rich-poor gap cannot be achieved by governmental interference in business.

During the last century, in whichever country it was attempted, socialism and governmental control of the economy in practice only achieved in widening the rich-poor gap, making it harder for the poor prospective entrepreneurs and workers with no connections to break in and rise, while strengthening the stranglehold of the privileged and rich class. Witness the dismal conditions of the erstwhile USSR's working class while the privileged political class with connections lived in luxury. Or similar conditions in our own country, during the pre-liberalised license permit Raj years.

It is only in post-liberalised India, that workers now have a real chance to rise; for the first time, there is optimism in the air, salaries of the workers have been rising, merit and not pull is now counted. In fact, for the first time in Indian history, we see the chance of bridging the vast rich-poor gap, where the city workers could afford decent housing, cars and other luxuries as in other capitalistic countries.

What then is surprising and at the same time, psychologically revealing, is that given the rosier conditions of our working class, which has been brought about by de-regulation and less governmental interference in business, our champions of the workers (and the poor) are not rejoicing. They should have been taking heed of what's taking place in our cities and should have applied the same principles to our villages, by liberalizing and reforming the agrarian sector, by setting the farmers free of governmental regulation.

cont'd. on p.14

From Our Readers

On India's President Mrs. Pratibha Patil

In the last issue of Freedom First (No. 482 July 2007 page 4) we carried a letter to The Hindu to correct a factually untrue statement involving the Swatantra Party's loyalty to the Constitution of India, by one of their correspondents. We did so because The Hindu did not carry the letter. Subsequently reader K. Vedamurthy of Chennai has sent us a letter which he had written to The Hindu also on the Presidential elections which too was not published, with a request that it be published in Freedom First. Mr. Vedamurthy wants it to be known that we are doing so at his request.

This is what he wrote:

"While wholeheartedly wishing the first woman President-elect of India every success in her new assignment, one begs to differ from the Prime Minister's description of her success in the Presidential election just concluded as 'a vote against the politics of divisiveness'. Far from it because for the first time in our Republic's Presidential elections, so much of political divisiveness came to public exposure now. And one of the most important reasons for it being the politics of untouchability preached and practised so publicly by the vociferous supporters of the UPA-Left alliance, as if those who differed from their choice and point of view were enemies of secularism! The very tone of those who opposed the candidature of Vice-President Shekhawat was highly insulting to those who did not subscribe to the politics of Leftism in India - mind you, their number is not at all insignificant in a country of this size and diversity. What else it is, if it is not political untouchability of the worst kind ever witnessed in India's recent history?"

Mr. Vedamurthy followed this up with a second letter to *The Hindu* which was published in a rather mutilated form. We reproduce the full text:

"The new President's speech is good so far as it goes, but forgive me for pointing out some glaring omissions. She made no reference whatever to her illustrious predecessor Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's record in office - it cannot be an inadvertent omission because whoever wrote that speech for her chose to harp on the 'scientific temper' etc., - something which the outgoing President was justly famous for, in every nook and corner of the country all through the last five year term of his exalted office! Read Dr. Rajendra Prasad's hearty reference to C. Rajagopalachari as the first National head of the Indian State as his immediate predecessor and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's eloquent tribute in his 'swearing-in' speech to Dr. Rajendra Prasad's adorning that high office for twelve years from the birth of our Republic.

Not a single South Indian name was mentioned in her catalogue of our freedom fighters - why? May be she mistook Sarojini Naidu as one from Southern India. but she was a Bengali Brahmin who married a Telugu gentleman. It is highly doubtful if President Patil has heard of our national poet Subramania Bharati! It is again communalism that takes the rank and not terrorism in her first speech on priorities before the nation - is it an innuendo against the BJP? She spoke first in English - that is certainly a plus point in her favour for the non-Hindi majority population of India!"

K. VEDAMURTHY who worked closely with C. Rajagopalachari, is a well-known writer based in Chennai. He can be contacted on kved2001@yahoo.com

The Post Office Amendment Act.

The article on the Indian Post Office Amendment Bill is timely. Unfortunately, there has been little public debate on this issue. The public, particularly the business houses prefer the services of courier companies due to their efficiency reliability, and pricing. Moreover the courier companies have offices all over the town and offer pick- up facility, something which the Postal Department also introduced and discontinued later.

The suggestion to give subsidies is typical of the government to perpetuate inefficiency in the name of service

to the villages. Rajiv Gandhi had himself discovered that ninety percent of Government doles are eaten up by the State machinery. There should be no subsidies. Instead the tax on the profits of the Courier companies can be shared with the Postal Department. It will be a good idea

to conduct a study of the cost of the various products of the Postal Department and eliminate some of them. The threatened Courier companies could finance such a study.

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When India Dances to the Communist Chinese Tune

Shibayan Raha

I am an activist in the movement for Tibetan freedom for the last four years now. In these four years I have got used to be calls from the Home Ministry, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Intelligence Branch (IB) at all hours of the day or night. But I will remember August 4, 2007 for a long time to come, for on this day my freedom of speech and basic human rights guaranteed to the citizens of this country by the Indian constitution were severely mauled by the Government of India.

A few days earlier the MEA refused a No objection Certificate (NOC) to the Tibet National Football team to play a Delhi Team at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Delhi. Though permission was given for a 6 kilometre International Run for Tibet on August 4.



That morning on our way to the Stadium I received a call from the office District Commissioner of Police informing me that the permission for the 'Run' had been cancelled without giving a reason. Within minutes I started receiving phone calls from my friends in Majnu ka Tilla, the Tibetan settlement in North Delhi, that the entire settlement has been sealed off by the Delhi police and free movement of people have been severely restricted. Calls kept coming from Tibetan Youth Hostel, Rohini citing the same situation there. But the worst was waiting for us. I reached Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium at 10.30am with my three Tibetan friends and we were amazed to see a huge battalion of Police accompanied by RAF and CRPF

jawans, who are only sent to control riots, blocking the entrance of the stadium. They were carrying all the modern weapons with them like AK56, Insas Rifles, Carbines and batons ready to charge us anytime. On asking the reason why they have been deployed I got the answer that it's the order of higher authorities and we cannot stay there. Scores of participants were loaded in a bus and were sent back to Majnu ka Tilla. I stood there witnessing the state power against unarmed and peaceful people who came there to play sports for their country which they have never seen. I have never been to Lhasa but I had heard and seen films of a police violating Human rights there. I felt I was in Lhasa. On 4th August I ceased to exist as a free citizen of a Free Country. The Indian Government went out on all lengths to appease the Chinese regime and it stole the freedom and dignity of its own people.

We will be celebrating the 60th Anniversary of our Independence. Scores of freedom fighters had laid down their lives so that we can breathe freedom today. But we need to ask ourselves are we free? Did Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ever dreamt of India in this state? How long will this continue?

SHIBAYAN RAHA, Campaigner, Friends of Tibet. Shibayan.raha@friendsoftibet.org

Friends of Tibet is a people's movement to keep alive the issue of Tibet through direct action. Our activities are aimed at ending China's occupation of Tibet.

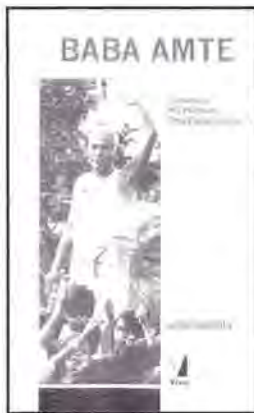
Was the Indian PM Right in Grumbling, About High CEO Salaries (cont'd. from p.11)

However, in the face of all these developments, when our Prime Minister still clings to his socialistic prescriptions, one wonders whether the socialists from whom he mistakenly takes inspiration, have really been pro-poor and not been merely anti-rich. One wonders whether their hope of achieving egalitarianism is not a sinister wish to see everyone reduced to the least

denominator (capitalists, CEO's and workers alike) rather than raising the poor to the level of the rich and our present CEO's.

MR. FAIYAZ HARDWAREWALA is a journalist from Mumbai, who writes on social and cultural issues. He can be contacted at faiyaz_h@yahoo.com.

Book Review



BABA AMTE (with a foreword by the Dalai Lama), by Anita Kainthla • published by Viva Books Private Limited, 426/3 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002 • Year of publication 2005 • Price Rs.195

Reviewed by Prof. V. C. Phadke, retired professor of political science and freelance writer.

Baba Amte, is indeed as the author observes, an unusual man who lived an unusual life doing unusual work. In his twenties his pen-friends were great film stars like Greta Garbo and Norma; he smuggled arms for the Indian

Revolutionary Party and participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and was imprisoned. Can we think of a practicing lawyer and a Corporator becoming president of a Scavengers' Union and cleaning forty latrines a day for nine months just to experience their terrible working conditions? Or the rebellious son who clashed with his stubborn father, gave up his right to the ancestral property and sacrificed his lucrative practice to establish the Mahayogi Seva Samiti for the rehabilitation of leprosy patients? Baba Amte did all this and more.

Murlidhar Devidas *aka* Baba Amte was born on 26th December 1914 into an orthodox brahmin family in Vidarbha in Maharashtra. He wrote poems, ate flesh, drank spirits and enjoyed hunting in his youthful days; and then disillusioned, he trekked the Himalayas, visited Ashrams and met with ascetics. After returning to Warora, his native place, he worked for the cause of the sweepers, scavengers and the other scheduled caste people. When he met a shy, orthodox and reticent Indu Ghule at a family function, Amte broke his vow of celibacy and married her. Life partnership with Baba transformed Indu into a liberal, self sacrificing and determined Sadhana Amte.

The mere sight of a patient of leprosy, a dreadful disease, creates a feeling of revulsion. Baba's moment of truth came when he encountered a dying leper Tulsiram whom he not only nursed but decided to dedicate his life to the service of lepers. He founded the Maharogi Sewa Samiti in 1951 which runs a hospital and a settlement for lepers at Anandwan near Warora. The inmates, produce all the necessities of life except salt, sugar and oil. There are also hostels for the blind, dumb and deaf; homes for senior citizens and orphans, schools and colleges for the children of the patients. Generous donations from philanthropic organisations both in India and overseas have sustained the Samiti. The work is being carried on ably by his first son Dr. Vikas Amte.

Baba, who suffered from a degenerative spinal disease in 1980s, underwent a major operation in London. Unfortunately since then he is totally unable to sit and has to either lie flat on his back or stand. Only a man of indomitable spirit and steel nerves can endure such disability cheerfully.

The assassination of Indira Gandhi followed by the massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi and the terrorist activities in Punjab made Baba Amte restless. He went on a 107 days pilgrimage from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in 1985. He called it the Bharat Jodo Campaign (Knit India Movement) in which 116 youth accompanied him on bicycles. Baba's second march was from Itanagar to Okhla, covering a distance of nearly 7,500 Kms in four months. Baba joined Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan which was fighting for the rehabilitation of the lakhs of people who were threatened with displacement by the surging waters of the gigantic dam. He lived near the bank of the river amongst the victims of the big dam for a decade and returned to Anandwan only due to his wife's prolonged illness.

Baba Amte received national and international recognition for his selfless service to humanity. Apart from a Padmashri (which he returned as a protest against the Narmada Dam Project) and Padma Vibhushan, he was the recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay, the Damien Dutton and U.N. Human Rights awards. His second son, a Padmashri holder Dr. Prakash and his wife Dr. Mandakini who are serving the Gond-Madiya tribals in Hemalkasa of Gadchiroli District, have pioneered a unique animal orphanage to care for orphaned, diseased and injured animals. The couple were honoured in 1995 by the Prince of Monaco with a Postal Stamp bearing their names.

Anita Kainthla, the author of the book, is to be complimented for the enormous data she collected through interviews and field surveys. Her style of writing is lucid and simple. A forward by the Dalai Lama adds to the value to the book. The story of Baba Amte, is both educative and inspiring. A must read for the younger generation.

Between Ourselves ...

We salute Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on our country's sixtieth birthday. He was the architect of our parliamentary democracy. It is not entirely his fault if our democratic system is flawed. There are many blackheads that disfigure the face of our polity. Nevertheless we have survived as a democracy. We have on a number of occasions demonstrated our ability as citizens to vote in and vote out governments at the centre, states, municipalities, *zilla parishads* and *panchayats*. What is more when not moved by emotions we have even chosen wisely. The economy is booming. It has come, though forty years late but it did come, that too because we went broke. Thereafter we took a 'U' turn, thanks to another Prime Minister who had

the courage and who too deserves our salute - Mr. P. V. Narsimha Rao.

The polity is in shambles. It too needs a 'U' turn before our democracy goes under. For this 'U' turn we cannot turn to the World Bank or the IMF. We need to travel back to 1950 and start all over again. This is our next cover feature for October, titled 'India's Polity Needs a 'U' Turn'. We invite your views. Please send us soft copies. We just do not have the infrastructure to word process manuscripts typed or handwritten. Deadline 2 October 2007.

Editor

Many Voices

...though (former President) Kalam is no Nehru, in a small way, his popularity is testament to the possibility of leaders transcending class barriers.

Political Scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta,
The Indian Express, July 25

Even by the lowly standards of Indian Academic life, Jamia Millia Islamia's decision to name a building and street after HRD Minister Arjun Singh is truly shocking.

Editorial in *The Indian Express*, May 3

If ever a military ruler was needed by Pakistan, it is now. Circumstances have forced moderation on the army.

Editor of *Dawn* (Karachi) Murtaza Razvi,
The Indian Express, August 11

The price of freedom, it is often said, is eternal vigilance. We let our guard down 60 years ago. Perhaps its time to fight back.

Columnist Amit Varma, *Mint*, August 11

The cynical exploitation of the Muslim community by its politicians surpasses anything the BJP every attempted...Somebody like Owaisi is God's gift to the RSS.

Journalist Vir Sanghvi, *Hindustan Times*, August 12

I don't hold any brief for Taslima...but it's not the way to oppose someone you don't like. I call them Muslim Bajrang Dalis because there is no difference between them and Dal activists

Poet-lyricist Javed Akhtar, *The Times of India*, August 12

She (Tasleema Nasreen) says The Koran should be rewritten and revised. Would it be palatable should any one say that The Bible or The Mahabharata should be rewritten and revised?"

Akbaruddin Owaisi, MIM president whose legislator colleagues led the attack on Taslima Nasreen, *The Statesman*, August 12

The attack on Taslima Nasreen by three elected members of the Legislative Assembly of Andhra Pradesh, is a mockery of democracy. Members of assemblies cannot take the law in their hands. But do the police have the courage to tackle politicians?

Reader Ramesh Kateja in a letter to
Hindustan Times, August 11

.. let's make sure we tell those who treat human beings like *fatwa* fodder that they have no place in a truly secular society

Barkha Dutt of NDTV, *Hindustan Times*, August 11

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