

Freedom First

The Liberal Position

Is Iran Heading for a Revolution?



Photos Courtesy: TehranLive.org

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Is Iran Heading for a Revolution?

Firoze Hirjickaka

**Of course, this new found liberalism is perceived as a grave threat by the ayatollahs.
Therefore, Ahmedinejad's "victory" was inevitable.**

Watching the current turmoil in Iran following the recently concluded presidential election, on television, I can't help getting the nagging feeling that I've seen it all before. It's the common malaise that seems to inflict dictators and autocratic rulers all over the world – inevitably leading to their downfall. They overreach themselves with insufficient provocation. Recent history is replete with examples of this.

Failed Dictators

In the early 1990's, Gorbachev was under tremendous international pressure to give Communism a more human face. He did make a start with glasnost and perestroika, but he remained a traditional communist at heart – and the Soviet Union remained intact. However, that wasn't enough for the old style Communist oligarchs who longed for a return to the glory days of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. They staged an abortive coup which proved to be the final nail in the coffin of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.

Back in the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos was chugging happily along, looting the treasury and allowing his wife Imelda to become the undisputed shoe queen of the world. There was no need for him to do anything drastic, but he couldn't leave well enough alone. He had opposition leader Benigno Aquino murdered and the rest, as they say, is history.

Then there was America's favourite *bete-noire*, Saddam Hussein. For three decades, he had lorded it over his countrymen like a latter day Nebuchadnezzar. He had unlimited power and everything money could possibly buy. In short, he was set for life, but that wasn't enough for him. Like Nebuchadnezzar, he dreamed of conquest. So he invaded Kuwait and started procuring weapons of mass destruction, thereby giving the two Bushes a great excuse to bump him off.

From King of Kings to Supreme Ruler

Let's now get back to Iran and the King of Kings, Shah Reza Pahlavi, who faked his lineage to claim descent from Cyrus the Great 2500 years ago. I happened to be living in Tehran during the final two years of the Shah's reign, so I can add a little personal perspective on this.

Although a Muslim, the Shah considered himself a modern ruler and had no patience with the trappings of traditional Islam – like the veil. His people grumbled about being spied upon by the Shah's secret police – and resented the fact that hordes of Westerners were invited to run Iran's infrastructure projects and were given preferential treatment, but they tolerated it. The upside was that the country was flush with petrodollars; and they were reasonably well off. The economy was booming; a dollar was worth 70 Rials; now it will get you around 6000 Rials. He had things under control. Then Ayatollah Khomeini, then in exile in Iraq, began spewing venom at the Shah and wounded the most vulnerable part of his anatomy – his ego. The reality was that Khomeini in Iraq could do little more than rant: Saddam made sure of that. He was no real threat. But in a fit of pique, the Shah persuaded Saddam to kick the bearded one out of Iraq. A fatal mistake. Khomeini ensconced himself in Paris, where there were no restrictions on his actions – and that lead directly to the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Iranian Band of Islam

Coming to the present, there was never any real hope of the moderate Moussavi becoming President. Iran's ruling clerics and their captive militia would have seen to that. If there is one thing, Iran's theocratic rulers fear most, it's even a hint of liberalism. 30 years ago, they came to power by convincing the majority of Iran's populace that the Shah had strayed disastrously from the tenets of Islam; and that they were needed to bring the country back to the true faith. That myth has become stale now. To put it in perspective, one must understand that Iranians are not Arabs. Their brand of Islam, which seems repressive to the West, is in fact far more liberal than the Wahabbi strain practiced in Saudi Arabia – and by Al Qaida and the Taliban. For example, women may have dress restrictions, but they have a much more powerful voice than their counterparts in many Arab countries. 60 percent of students in Iran's universities are women.

And Iranians have always had an individualistic streak in them. They resent being dictated to and made to conform to the mainstream. The present generation, while remaining committed to the Islamic faith, has come to realize that it is not an acceptable substitute for a degree of prosperity; and for being treated as a pariah by the world's

developed countries. They are no longer hoodwinked by the ruling clergy's demonizing the United States as the Great Satan, for example. Thanks to the opening up of the internet – and despite the establishment's attempt to impart only selective information of the world around them by the largely state-controlled media – Iranians, especially the younger generation, now can see for themselves what sort of life their counterparts in the West lead – and by and large they like what they see. Many of them may be uncomfortable with what they perceive as Western licentiousness and easy interaction between the sexes, but they envy the freedoms Americans and Europeans enjoy. Thanks to internet access to online versions of newspapers like the *New York Times*, Iranians have come to realize that, contrary to the propaganda they have been fed for decades, America is not out to get them and, in fact, Iran hardly registers on the radar of the average American. This is the base for the surge of support for moderates like Moussavi.

Fraud Overdone

Of course, this new found liberalism is perceived as a grave threat by the ayatollahs. Therefore, Ahmedinejad's "victory" was inevitable. Where the regime goofed was in the ham handed way they set about accomplishing this. The smart thing would have been to portray the electoral contest as a close one, with

Ahmedinejad just inching ahead at the finish line. This would, no doubt, have disappointed Moussavi's supporters, but they would have been forced to concede that the result, though improbable, was not outside the bounds of possibility. Instead, by blatantly apportioning two-thirds of the votes to Ahmedinejad, thereby making it obvious that large scale rigging was involved, the establishment has shot itself in the foot. It is this monumental fraud that has angered many Iranians, far more than the actual result.

So what comes next? It is very difficult to predict anything in Iran with a degree of accuracy, but it seems that the establishment will be forced to slacken the reins. People power can be glorious and terrifying to behold. In the past, Iran's Islamic rulers have used it against Israel and the Great Satan. Now, for the first time, that power and rage is directed against themselves – and they are deeply worried. It is difficult to predict how much the ayatollahs will concede, but it seems inevitable that they will have to give up something. It may soon become a matter of survival. Whatever happens, one thing is for sure. The Islamic Republic of Iran will not remain in its present form.

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Iran's crisis and Ali Khamenei

Ali Reza Eshraghi

Would it be possible to legally remove Ayatollah Ali Khamenei from his selected position as supreme leader of Iran? Technically, yes - though in practice this is much harder to achieve.

Such a move is unheard of in the twenty years the supreme leader has been in position (since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini - the founder of Iran's current regime and its first supreme leader - in 1989); for the rahbar (supreme leader) has the final verdict on all issues, and no one can or should challenge his final say - to the point that some extremists even argue that "if the supreme leader says that yogurt is black then it is black."

True, there have been some slogans heard against the supreme leader in the street demonstrations; but the losing candidates themselves have shied away from criticising or even addressing him directly, fearing that this would be equated to deconstructing the entire regime.

The only legal way to remove Ayatollah Khamenei from power is through the Assembly of Experts, a body of clerics that is in charge of electing, supervising, and dismissing the supreme leader.

The reasons of state

The absence of a supreme leader would be a threat to the integrity of the Islamic Republic and pose as a cause for collapse - which is perhaps why Rafsanjani has been silent during the protests. The Islamic Republic newspaper, which is known as Rafsanjani's bulletin, was strongly supporting Moussavi in the elections but changed its tone after Ayatollah Khamenei's speech: "All people, groups and strands have to respect the Supreme Leader for the sake of high expedients of the regime."

"Preservation of an Islamic Republic is more essential than any religious duty." This phrase was coined by Ayatollah Khomeini; it is now repeatedly quoted by his successors to the dissatisfied candidates, as a way of asking them to end their protest for the sake of the entire regime. This phrase prescribes that it is legitimate to stop Islamic duties such as praying daily, being truthful and honest and even accepting fraud - if it is in the best interest of the regime.

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Courtesy: Excerpts from his article in 'Open Democracy', June 29, 2009. For fulltext visit www.opendemocracy.net

How Britain Honours Her Decorated Soldiers

“Sir, how dare I drive off when the Victoria Cross has to cross the road.”

“I had gone to UK in 1995 as Deputy Leader of the Indian Delegation to take part in the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the victory in Europe during the Second World War. I, along with four other Army officers, had just stepped out after attending the inaugural session and were waiting on the roadside for the traffic to ease so as to walk across the road to the vehicle park. Among those with me was Honorary Captain Umrao Singh, a Victoria Cross winner. All of a sudden a car moving on the road came to a halt in front of us and a well dressed gentleman stepped out. He approached Umrao Singh and said, “Sir, may I have the privilege of shaking hands with the Victoria Cross (winner)?” He shook hands with him. Evidently he had spotted Umrao Singh’s medal from his car and had stopped his car to pay his respect to a winner of the highest gallantry medal of his country. Then he looked at me and said, “General, you are from the Indian Army.” When I replied in affirmative, he gave out his name, saying that he was Michael Haseltine. I was absolutely astounded as the recognition dawned on me that he was the Deputy Prime Minister of UK.

“I was totally overawed by such courtesy shown by a dignitary of the second highest status in the British Government and humbly thanked him for having invited our delegation for the VE Day function. Again his reply was typical of his sagacity, “General, it is we the British, who should be grateful to your country and your Armed Forces, who had helped us win both the first and the second World Wars. How can we be ever so ungrateful to forget your country’s great contribution.”

“Suddenly I became conscious that all the traffic behind his car had come to a stand still. I hurried to thank him and politely requested him to move along to relieve the traffic hold-up. He stated, “Sir, how dare I drive off when the Victoria Cross has to cross the road.” Realizing his genuine feeling I and my colleagues quickly crossed the road. Reaching the other side I looked back and saw that Mr. Haseltine was still standing waiting for the Victoria Cross to be safely across.

That is the type of regard they have for their decorated soldiers. I have always aspired that similar respect

could be shown at least to a Param Vir Chakra or Ashok Chakra winner by the leaders and prominent figures in our country.”

Excerpted from the book ‘Toward Resurgent India ‘ written by Lt. Gen. (Retd.) M. M. Lakhera, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, formerly Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, currently Governor of Mizoram. Contributed by Col. T. S. Tanwar

Farewell Soldier

You Made Our Country Proud



Subedar Major and Honorary Captain Umrao Singh, passed away at the Army Research and Referral hospital in Delhi on Monday after a prolonged illness.

He was 85. He was from Jhajjar in

Rohtak, Haryana.

He won the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery under British India, for repulsing four Japanese attacks on his advanced battery position in the Kaladhan valley in Burma, on the night of December 15-16, 1944. He killed several Japanese soldiers before being grievously wounded. Six hours later, on a counter attack, Allied forces found him at the site of his gun, injured beyond recognition. Around him lay 10 dead Japanese soldiers. Subedar Major Singh was the last survivor among 40 Victoria Cross winners in the Indian Army known for their feats in the First and Second World Wars.

He was cremated with full military honours in his native village on Tuesday July 14, 2009.

The Union Budget 2009-2010

India Heads in the Wrong Direction with New Budget

Derek Scissors, Ph.D.

Insider onLine is a compilation of publication abstracts, how-to essays, events, news, and analysis from around the conservative movement published by the prestigious conservative foundation The Heritage Foundation. The comments on India's Union Budget 2009-10 reproduced below is from InsiderOnline of July 17, 2009 available at mailingsER@heritage.org. We have also reproduced the many links from Indian publications that Dr. Derek Scissors, the writer of this article cites. Dr. Scissors is Research Fellow in Asia Economic Policy in the Asian Studies Centre at the Heritage Foundation.

As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has noted in advance of her trip to India toward the end of July, the U.S. has an important stake in Indian success. As its clout on the world stage increases, India can play a stabilizing role in the broader Asia region, partnering with the U.S. on a range of issues including maritime cooperation, nuclear nonproliferation, education, science, and defense trade. India also serves as a powerful example of a successful democracy in the developing world.

On the economic side, unlike many of its Asian counterparts, India is consumption-driven, not export-driven. Its growth and greater prosperity therefore offer outstanding opportunities for American agriculture, industry, and services.

The flip side of America's stake in India is that America loses when India takes a step backward. And that seems to have happened with the anxiously awaited Indian government budget for the next fiscal year, which puts political gain over long-term economic progress. This kind of fiscal irresponsibility may help India's ruling Congress Party win more elections, but it will not help the country live up to its economic promise.

Mistakenly Expecting Reform

In May, a new government won a surprisingly strong mandate in national elections. The reaction from some of those seeking market-oriented reform was euphoric: The Sensex Index on the Bombay Stock Exchange rose a staggering 17 percent in one day. It peaked at a total 28 percent gain on the 20th trading day after the election results were announced. The broader response was more subdued but also upbeat about reform.

But the optimism appears to have been misplaced. Prior to both this election and the global financial crisis, the same Congress Party led the coalition United Progres-

sive Alliance (UPA) government that slowed or even halted the liberalization process. This was attributed by some to the need to placate left-wing coalition partners, but Congress also ran on a populist platform in this spring's election.

More specifically, the UPA previously ran large federal deficits for the sake of populist programs. After taking power in the 2004 election, its first budget expanded the gross fiscal deficit 17 percent despite strong economic growth and the pronounced absence of any need for stimulus at the time. The UPA then failed to curb that deficit during ensuing strong years.

In that light, it should not be surprising that the deficit is now exploding. Already hefty in the fiscal year 2007-08 budget, the federal deficit more than doubled for 2008-09. Congress is now arguing that the economy is doing exceptionally well, but the government nonetheless needs to run an even bigger deficit for the sake of stimulus. And so the deficit is to climb another 20-25 percent.

Much more likely, Congress officials assess that they won the elections largely because of rural support programs and thus want to continue large-scale subsidies to maintain or augment political support. The Sensex fell 6 percent the day the budget was unveiled, and reformers despaired at just how irresponsible the budget had turned out to be.

Harmful Long-Term Priorities

The budget in general will have pernicious long-term effects. The huge deficit is a heavy tax on the future that lowers India's growth trajectory. But there are additional devils in the details, in particular with regard to education and liberalization.

A great deal of faith has been placed in India's demographics, i.e., that India is a young nation and will

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remain young over the next several decades while the world's other large economies age. This faith is not entirely misplaced, but a demographics-led economic boom will not occur automatically. The swelling Indian labor force needs productive jobs to be available – and the education and training necessary to fill those jobs properly.

Highlights of the Indian Budget

- Spending increases four times faster than projected GDP growth.
- The deficit increases three times faster than projected GDP growth, after soaring 125 percent the previous year.
- Fertilizer subsidies alone are the equivalent of almost 5 percent of the total budget.
- Subsidies for small exporters are more than three times larger than the amount to be raised from all privatization.
- There is no change in the structure of corporate taxes.

[Source: newKerala.com, “Budget of India 2009-2010: Summary/ Highlights of India General Budget 2009-10,” at <http://www.newkerala.com/nkfullnews-1-67991.html> (July 10, 2009)]

This budget does very little to facilitate that. Liberalization is stark in its absence. A primary task in promoting long-term economic growth is sharpening property rights. Public control of large swaths of industry creates a situation where no one is responsible for weakness in much of the manufacturing sector and arbitrary government rules hamper operation of a slew of companies. Loud talk of divestment notwithstanding, the budget envisions raising less than \$250 million from selling down stakes in public companies despite recommendations of up to \$5 billion.

In contrast, the budget boosts subsidies, worsening government-wreaked distortions and reducing efficiency further. There is no appreciable tax reform, either on the corporate side or as a federal push toward harmonizing what are now divergent and obstructive tax differences across states. Rather, Indian states will remain separate economic entities, inhibiting economies of scale and specialization by sector.

Regarding education, the clock is ticking. The education system is broadly acknowledged as flawed, and India must hurry if it is to better educate the coming influx of workers. Moreover, the stress must be on primary education. Over one-third of Indians are illiterate, which will eventually translate to close to 500 million people as the population mushrooms. A demographic expansion that adds nearly 100 million illiterate workers will not produce the rapid economic rise so widely anticipated.

The budget, however, is overwhelmingly oriented toward current income support. Money set aside for the national rural employment guarantee scheme is to more than double. Other large sops include tax breaks for the elderly and financial support for exporters. This goes hand-in-hand with the deficit in sacrificing the future for the present, even though education will be an even more pressing need as time goes on.

Even within education spending, the priorities are misplaced. The budget emphasizes higher education. There is certainly value to a better university system, but higher education cannot possibly accommodate the flood of young people presently in the education system or bound for it in the next 15 years. If the government declines to emphasize primary education, it could open the door to the private sector. But there was no provision for that in the budget (or elsewhere).

Suppressing the Ascent

This is only one year's budget, of course, and there is already a campaign of reassurance that reform will come later. But the Congress Party's credibility on this is very low. For most of this decade, India thrived, benefiting tremendously from earlier liberalization, which, among other things, drew large inflows of foreign investment. Now India is heading the wrong way on the economy.

The U.S.-India relationship is multifaceted and can certainly thrive based on political affinity and geostrategic considerations. But the direction that Congress has set for the past five years, topped off by this budget, is going to slow and perhaps limit India's ascension to a global economic force. That could limit the value of the partnership.

Courtesy: Heritage Foundation

“Big Spender”

“...there is still plenty of resistance to reform within Congress and among its core supporters, particularly in rural areas. The fact that India has so far weathered the global recession far better than most Asian countries has also strengthened the case against rapid liberalisation, at least temporarily.

“Economic reform may yet move further up the government's agenda. For now, however, the government has set out on an expensively populist course that could create an unsustainable fiscal burden. This is being done in the name of the laudable objectives of economic growth and rural development. But the end result could be a weakening of India's economy – and hence development prospects – in the long run.”

Excerpted from the *Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire*, July 7th 2009

The Union Budget 2009-2010

A Play-Safe Budget

M. D. Kini

Why should a government run airlines and hotels when it has not been able to provide drinking water, primary education and primary health care to our neglected villages?

In the Union Budget (2009-10) which was presented by the Finance Minister Pranab Mukherji the only measure that should be whole-heartedly welcomed by all citizens is the Goods & Services Tax (GST) which will reduce multiple taxes on the manufacturers, traders and citizens. However, the Central Government should adequately compensate all state governments who have to give up some of their taxing powers. This is all for the good of the country as GST will remove barriers for transport of goods, reduce harassment and simplify collection of taxes. This is just like the single market which has been ushered in by the European Community. This has increased the GDP of EU countries.

Another measure which has to be partially welcomed is more investment in the social sector especially what is called Bharat Nirman (rural roads, electrification, housing etc.) as all these years villages have been neglected.. This has been done apparently in the belief that earlier investment in these have helped the party to come back to power. What the government has achieved in this sphere is nothing much to write home about. Till the end of 2008, all that was achieved was: rural road-network (34%), rural electricity to BPL families (13.8%), rural irrigation (50%), rural water supply (about 70%). Then are leakages which have to be taken into account. Nothing much has changed after the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi observed some 25 years ago that only 15 paise out of a rupee reached the beneficiary.

President Roosevelt built oversight into the New Deal programme to ensure accountability, said Paul Krugman, Noble Prize winning economist, in an article in *New York Times*, some months ago. There seems to be no such auditing incorporated in the Bharat Nirman Programme. Until such a measure is taken, this will only receive only one cheer.

All other announcements have nothing much to comment about.

Mahatma Gandhi had given a test to politicians to judge their actions – whether that action makes the poorest of the poor to take charge of his destiny. That is, whether it will improve his life in any significant way. If we apply this test, the budget does not get even pass marks.

We still have at least 25 percent of our population

below the poverty line. Farmers continue to commit suicides. The scheduled tribes children still suffer from malnutrition. There are no primary schools and no health-care facilities in many villages where water too is a scarce commodity.

Former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao through his Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh brought about a structural change in the Indian economy in 1991 by unleashing the potential of the Indian people. The private sector was given a greater role by abolishing permit-license raj. India's growth rate increased and many people were able to cross the poverty line. Today India requires similar big steps to remove poverty from India.

Privatization of Public Sector Enterprises

Take the example of Air India. It is over-manned, still runs old aircraft and has taken old planes on lease, makes large losses but the government still does want to privatize it. Why should a government run airlines and hotels when it has not been able to give drinking water, primary education and primary health care to our neglected villages? Why government should continue to be the owner of so many manufacturing industries? Most of the public sector enterprises make losses except those which are in the oil industry (Indian Oil, ONGC etc) or have monopoly. With crude oil prices going up recently even the oil companies are in losses.

Non-conventional Energy

Why is there no effort to harness non-conventional energy like solar energy and wind energy? With almost 300 days of sunshine, India should have been a pioneer in solar energy. "A hundred years ago, the world's fuel was primarily coal. Today, it is oil. In the future, it will be renewal energy. By 2050, perhaps 50 percent of our energy will be non-carbon-based", says Fiona Paulus, head of energy at Royal Bank of Scotland (*The Financial Times*, July 8). These energy sources will be ever-lasting and can ensure energy security.

Agriculture

Almost 65 percent of Indians depend on agriculture and its contribution has come down to about 25 percent of GDP. Agriculture is still dependent on monsoon in the large parts of the country. India has large

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cultivable land and it could be an agricultural power if proper facilities are provided to the farmers – credit (many still depend on money lenders), seeds, marketing etc. The extension work done during the Green Revolution has not spread all over the country. Drip irrigation, vegetable and fruits cultivation, contract cultivation has potential to increase agricultural production and create more wealth for the farmers.

Water Resources

We have not harnessed our water resources properly. We have floods in some areas and drought in some other areas. We can collect flood waters and monsoon

waters in dams and ponds. Even kings in ancient times had many step-wells to preserve water for use during the summer months. In this age of technology, impounding water should not be a problem at all. River-linking is a project which can give employment to large number of people and provide water to all dry-land. .

All the above require a bold initiatives. Dr. Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherji do not have the boldness that P.V.Narasimha Rao and Dr. Manmohan Singh had.

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A Budget in a Vacuum

N. S. Venkataraman

The recent budget proposal is conspicuous by the absence of any schemes or proposals to bring back the ill gotten money amounting to several hundred crores of rupees lying in foreign banks and deposited by corrupt Indian politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen.

One more annual budget has been presented in Parliament without being taken note of by the common man. Those taking note of the budget seem to be only the professional journalists who have to fill space, the professional economists and the politicians who make a living by discussing the budget threadbare and businessmen and salaried class who care to look in a limited way as to how the budget would affect them.

The journals and newspapers routinely publish the views of people from a cross section of society who seem to provide their views as a ritual and get a bit of space for them in the media. Otherwise, the budget proposals cause no ripples in the country.

The common man does not view the budget proposals seriously anymore, as the promises, assurances and expectations made by the Finance Minister during his speech in Parliament and in the proposals are only met half way or even less. People also realize that huge outlays of crores of rupees on various schemes are spent with substantial percentage of the money being siphoned off by the politicians, bureaucrats and official machinery and the businessmen, which only contribute to generating more black money in the country.

The recent budget proposal is conspicuous by the absence of any schemes or proposals to bring back the ill gotten money amounting to several hundred crores of rupees lying in the foreign banks and deposited by corrupt Indian politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen.

Nothing has been said in the budget proposals to destroy the parallel economy in the country caused due to corruption and black money. The finance Minister probably thinks that corruption and black money are no issues at all, by ignoring the problem totally!

During the recent parliamentary election campaign, both Congress and BJP talked about the crores of rupees of corrupt money lying in foreign banks and the need to bring them back. The Prime Minister made some promises before the general elections in this regard but now seems to have conveniently forgotten the whole issue.

What is very important is not only the allocation of funds for various development schemes but also the need to ensure that the money is spent properly and fully and without being misused by corrupt elements. When there is no way to do this or lack of willingness on the part of government to ensure this, all such proposals in the budget only become an eye wash, a wasteful and counter productive exercise.

The common man in India has no more faith in the politicians or the bureaucracy and now thinks that corruption has become the order of the day and a part of government dealings. Obviously, he is frustrated and feels helpless and in such circumstances, he chooses to ignore the budget schemes, rightly concluding that all these budget proposals are in a vacuum.

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Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

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

US Perspective*

1) India is far away from here but it should not be invisible. For the ordinary educated Americans, India is not on the radar at all. This contrasts our view of the US; our foreign policy revolves around what the US does. We believe that the US acts all the time with India in the cross-hairs. The US is at present preoccupied with North Korea, Iran, changes in the Health Care system in the US and the wastages in the financial stimulus packages the Government has offered to help economic revival, in that order. India is not in the reckoning most of the time. India is rightly concerned with what the US intends to do to help Pakistan survive. We are unhappy if the US gives aid without preconditions, knowing that Pakistan is likely to use the aid against India. There are speculations that President Obama has written to our PM to help Pakistan by reducing tension on the borders. India has shown extraordinary patience after 26/11 and any further talk of accommodating Pakistan will not go down well with the people. Obama has to show sensitivity to India's views and not only to the predicament of a failing state like Pakistan. Statements by US leaders assuring all out efforts to resolve the Kashmir problem, do not help. It is like a bull entering the China shop - nothing short of a diplomatic disaster.

1) The US is consumed with anxiety that the Pakistan nuclear arsenal may fall in the hands of the militants - call them Al Qaeda, Taliban or local hardliners. The US has to cling to the belief that the democratic Government of Pakistan, however venal, is the answer to the problem. It wants Zardari's Government to survive and the Pak army to act against the Taliban; it may have reservations about the Pakistan's ability to deliver but it has to work with what it has got. US has to ensure Pakistan's survival at all cost, notwithstanding India's sentiments. President Obama's Afpak strategy is based on the premise that democracy has to succeed in both Pakistan and Afghanistan for the Americans to quit the badlands of Afghanistan. The grand strategy may blow in his face but Obama's make or break moves to depart from the Bush administration's policies are based on such imponderables. He will be a hero if he succeeds; he will face the charge of being naive if he fails. Obama is gambling. Good luck to him although he is unlikely to have India's good wishes, the way his administration is moving.

North Korea

2) North Korea's nuclear muscle flexing has put the world on the edge. United Nations has imposed sanctions against the communist regime but it is the US which is the international policeman and has to implement the measure. That is Obama's test. The President talking of dousing the world's fires, lit by his predecessor, has a new fire of his own to extinguish. Obama has refrained from making belligerent noises and declared that the US might stop the ships going in to North Korea but does not intend to board them. Thus he has avoided immediate confrontation but North Korea does not seem to be listening.

2) Reality is hard to face; good intentions count for little. The adversary tends to take the peace moves for granted. The US may have to raise the temperature higher to make North Korea respond. Obama is strong on intent but fudges on details. His good intentions should see resolution of conflicts and not get lost in platitudes. Ex-President Bush, for the first time after his demission of office, commented on the Obama Administration policies in critical terms on June 17 and his comments were received well across the country. The honeymoon with Obama may not be exactly over but gifts have stopped coming in. Obama has charisma, is obviously sincere and retains a lot of goodwill but is that enough?

Iran Election

3) The mystery of the Iranian election may not be resolved at all but it is testing the diplomatic skills of the US President as never before. Forty million votes had to be counted manually, which should have taken at least two days but Ahmedinejad was declared elected within two hours. This

3) Obama's critics were not happy with his hands off policy. The US Congress passed a stinging but non-binding resolution criticizing the attack on democracy in Iran. That suits

Cont'd. on p.23

Burqua, Muslim Society and Secularism

Vasundhara Mohan

Islamic scholars, differ in their opinion whether burqua is a cultural symbol or religious. Indian politicians, except those belonging to the Sangh Parivar, would slam the French President, with Muslim votes in view.

By declaring that the burqua was not welcome in France and calling for a national assembly debate on the question of banning the burqua, French President Nicolas Sarkozy disturbed the hornet's nest in June 2009.¹ So did Pratibha Patil, when she was still a UPA candidate for the Presidency, by saying that the purdah was introduced in India during the Mughal rule "to save women from Mughal invaders." It is besides the point that Indian historians reminded her that the *purdah* made its appearance in India much before Babur heralded the Mughal rule in 1526 AD and has been a status symbol of the higher classes in medieval India.²



France is a secular democracy and a 1905 law strictly separates Church and the State. In February 2004, the French Parliament passed a law (494 out of 577 voting in favour) banning head scarves and other "ostentatious" religious symbols, including large Christian crosses and Jewish skullcaps, in state offices and public schools.

Cultural or Religious Symbol?

France is home to over five million Muslims, a majority of them being migrants from the former French colonies. In keeping with the trend all over the world, ever more French Muslim women are wearing burqas and niqabs, which either cover the entire body, or cover everything but the eyes. Holding that banning the burqua would violate religious freedom, Jean-Marie Fardeau, Director of the Paris office of Human Rights Watch pointed out that "prohibiting the burqua will not give women free-

dom but only stigmatise and marginalise women who wear it."³

The French proposal to ban the burqua has naturally upset and shocked Islamic scholars across the world, including India. Professor Zeenat Shaukat Ali considered the French President's statement undemocratic and irresponsible. "Personally, I feel that *burqua* is more about culture than religion, but that does not mean that Muslim women should be denied the right to wear a burqua or hijab."⁴ On the other hand, noted Muslim Cleric Maulana Abu Hasan Nadvi Azhari said that "Islamic scholars across the world have unanimously held that *burqua* is a religious symbol because it protects women's modesty. The women have been asked to maintain modesty by the Quran and the Hadith." He said that women are required to observe purdah before a man who is not her relative, even if he happens to be blind. Uzma Naheed, Director of Iqra Foundation, attributed Sarkozy's comment to "gross ignorance" about Islam and its values.

Islamic scholars, thus, differ in their opinion whether burqua is a *cultural symbol* or *religious*. Indian politicians, except those belonging to the Sangh Parivar, would slam the French President, with Muslim votes in view. The Indian External Affairs Minister, S. M. Krishna, refused to comment stating that it is an internal matter of France. But strong support to Sarkozy came from the Shiv Sena chief, Balasaheb Thackeray. He congratulated Sarkozy and called him "an ideal ruler" and a "strong man" and praised France for not indulging in vote-bank politics. He called for a similar ban on burqua in India and implementation of the uniform civil code.⁵ The French President said that the "burqua is not a religious sign; it is a sign of servitude and violated women's dignity and freedom," and as such it will not be welcome on French soil. A group of French lawmakers, including those of the opposition Socialist Party have called for a total burqua ban. Sarkozy asked them to open a debate on the issue.

Threat to Security

Earlier in 2006, the Church of England's only Asian

Bishop, Pakistan-born Michael Nazir-Ali, had called for a ban on burqua arguing that it posed a threat to security and hindered the Muslim community's integration with the rest of the society. He had called for legislation to authorise officials at airports, railway stations and ports to ask women to remove their veil to check their identity. His comments came in the wake of media reports claiming that a Somali man wanted in connection with the killing of a policewoman managed to flee Britain wearing a burqua. Immigration authorities at Heathrow airport have been criticised for not insisting on all burqua-clad passengers to remove their veil for identification. Rev. Nazir-Ali said the case highlighted the danger of too much political correctness where people were "too worried about offending Muslims." In asking for a ban on burqua, has the French President proved that he is a strong man as he is not bothered about offending Muslims? Or has the burqua no place in a secular democracy?

On the earlier occasion, the Muslim groups in London described the controversy as "unnecessary", arguing that only a fraction of Muslim women wear top-to-toe veil. They did not support a school teacher who was sacked when she insisted on wearing burqua in the classroom.⁶

Burqua and the Quran



In India opinion is divided as to whether the burqua is a religious or cultural symbol for the Muslims. If it is religious, is it compulsory that every Muslim woman should wear the burqua? Haseena Hashia, Member of the Muslim Personal Law Board and Professor of Geography at the Jamia Millia is emphatic that there is simply no compulsion to wear a burqua. Some of the Indian Muslim women who wear the burqua say that they do so by choice and not because of compulsion or as a religious sign. They stress that in a world where sexual-crime is rampant, the burqua offers comfort, security and allows a woman her dignity.

Even younger Muslim girls say that they feel safer wearing a burqua in public places, protected from eve-teasers and anti-social elements. Moonisa Bushra Abedi, Professor of Nuclear Physics in Maharashtra College in Mumbai says that "a covered body sends out a positive signal that says no sexual mischief will be tolerated."

While the need for modesty is pointedly made out in the Quran, it is difficult to agree that burqua *is the only option* dictated by the Quran. A Muslim woman, who is religious and close to her Quran, may opt for a *modest dress* but such dress need not be the burqua. Even if we agree that the burqua has any oppressive value to it, the essence of wearing a modest dress is lost when Muslim women wear "modern burqas" which are quite fashionable, with gems and jewels embroidered on them, attracting the kind of attention which is expected to be avoided.

Quran Does Not Mandate Burqua

Contrary to the popular perception that the Quran mandates that the Muslim women shall wear the burqua, scholars hold that there is no support anywhere in the Quran for burqas, chadors or veils. The following are the Surahs in the Quran where dress for women is mentioned.

- (1) *Surah 7:26*: "O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of God's signs, that they may take heed."
- (2) *Surah 24:31*: "And tell the believing women to subdue their eyes and maintain their chastity. They shall not reveal any parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary. They shall cover their chests, and shall not relax this code in the presence of others than their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, other women, the male servants or employees whose sexual drive has been nullified, or the children who have not reached puberty. They shall not strike their feet when they walk in order to shake and reveal certain details of their bodies. All of you shall repent to GOD, O you believers, that you may succeed."
- (3) *Surah 24:60*: "And know that women advanced in years, who no longer feel any sexual desire incur no sin if they discard their *thiyab* (outer garments), provided they do not aim at a showy display of their *zeenah*

(charms or beauty). But it is better for them to abstain (from this); and God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

- (4) *Surah 33:59*: “O prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the believers that they shall lengthen their garments. Thus, they will be recognized and avoid being insulted. God is Forgiver, Most Merciful.”

The above Quranic verses show that in order for women and men to have respectful relationships at work places, they must focus on modesty in their behaviour, which is enhanced by dressing in such a way that reinforces one's image as a modest person. Both behaviour and appearance are important in ensuring respectful interaction between men and women.

Hijab

Literally, the word hijab means “curtain”. In the Quran the term hijab is not used as a reference to women's clothing; rather, it was the screen behind which the Muslims were told to address the Prophet's wives. (The term is also used to describe the “screen” separating God from Moses, as he received divine revelation.) When the Prophet's wives went out, the screen consisted of a veil over their face. It does not appear that covering the face was adopted by other Muslim women at that time since it was a special injunction for the Prophet's wives as is clear in the verses below:

“And (as for the Prophet's wives) when you ask for anything you want (or need), ask them from behind a hijab (screen), that makes for greater purity of your hearts. (33:53)

“O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women: If you do fear (God) be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak with a speech (that is) just. (33:32)

Among Muslims today, hijab refers to the head scarf worn by many women. It is a term used to distinguish between women who cover their hair (*muhajabat*) and those who do not, even if the rest of their clothes are equally modest.

Hadith

The Hadith also addresses women's (and men's) dress. The most oft-quoted Hadith attributed to the Prophet is as follows:

“Aisha said, “Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr (that is, Aisha's sister), entered upon the Apostle of God (pbuh)

wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of God turned his attention from her and said, “O Asma, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her except that she displays parts of her body except this and this,” and he pointed to her face and hands. (Sunan Abi Dawud)

This Hadith is found only in the Hadith collection of Abu Dawud (no. 4095). According to Abu Dawud, it is considered weak because the narrator who transmitted it from Aisha is not known (*mursal*). Other Hadith found elsewhere talk about not wearing see-through clothes or clothing intended for wear by the opposite sex. Also, Aisha reported that when the verse above was revealed about covering the breast (24:31), the women tore their thick outer garments to make veils.

Undoubtedly, both men and women have been advised to dress and behave in a way that elevates their status both in this life and the hereafter. Most Muslims do not view modest dress as an imposition meant to oppress either women or men. In fact, many women who voluntarily wear hijab actually feel liberated; free from society's rules about women's looks, free from being slaves to fashion, free to reserve their beauty for their husbands and so on.

The Quran does not spell out any punishment (*hudud*) for violations of a dress code for the simple reason that it is not *wajib* (mandatory and prescribed by the Koran), but only *sunat* (recommended culturally). Also, in the verses quoted above, the Quran clearly addresses “the believing women” meaning Muslim women, in the form of a *sunat*. Thus, by inference the decision to dress in a certain way is left to the individual who will face the consequences for all actions in this life, to her benefit or detriment, as God sees fit. According to reports in the media, in 2001, the Lashkar-e-Jabbar, a lesser known organisation attacked Muslim women not wearing hijab in Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir). Barring a few radical secessionist outfits, all political, social, militant and secessionist outfits strongly criticised the group for its diktat and the acid attack. Even the radical outfits which supported the burqua campaign described the acid attack as an “un-Islamic action”.⁷ Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a senior Kashmiri leader and former Chairman of the Hurriyat Conference criticized Lashkar-e-Jabbar's move to enforce purdah and said that even though he supported observance of purdah by Muslim women and describes it as a symbol of dignity and self respect, there was a need for a system to be in place and it should be the duty of the State to enforce the law on purdah.

For many Muslim women, dressing conservatively and covering one's hair are felt to be acts of faith. There-

fore, if she is prevented from dressing in a particular way, it violates her freedom to practice her religion, a fundamental right guaranteed in democratic constitutions. A denial of such right will only encourage dissatisfaction among the Muslims against secularism. At the same time, forcing the women to wear the burqua and considering women who do not do so as unchaste and punishing them (as do the Taliban) are equally unjustifiable.

Burqua/Purdah in India

According to renowned historian Satish Chandra, the practice of keeping women in seclusion and asking them to veil their faces in the presence of outsiders, was widely prevalent among the upper class women during the Delhi Sultanate period beginning in 1206. The system became widespread in northern India with the Arabs and the Turks bringing the custom to India. Satish Chandra writes: “the growth of *purdah* has been attributed to the fear of the Hindu women being captured by the invaders. In an age of violence, women were liable to be treated as prizes of war. Perhaps the most important factor for the growth of *purdah* was social - it became a symbol of the higher classes in society. And all those who wanted to be considered respectable tried to copy it. Also, religious justification was found for it.”⁸

“Most historians consider the Muslim invasion as a watershed when *purdah* is said to have become more widespread as a defensive reaction in troubled times among the Rajput royalty trying to protect their women. In fact, the case is unproven in the absence of statistical material that could establish a change in the extent of the practice of *purdah*. It seems plausible, however, that the practice became more widespread amongst the Rajput royalty in trying to imitate the custom of the new ruling classes.”⁹

A survey on the observance of *purdah* in the presence of father in law, mother in law, husband's elder brother and husband's elder sister revealed that “in the presence of father in law 44.04% Sikhs, 40% Muslims, 39.19% Jains and 32.08% Hindus” observed *purdah*. The incidence was found highest in Haryana (72.61%) followed by Rajasthan (62.18%), Delhi (60.78%), Himachal Pradesh (51.19%), followed by Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The *purdah* system was found totally absent in Goa. In the southern states the incidence of the *purdah* system is low: Kerala - 4.29%, Tamil Nadu - 4.93%; Mysore- 5.44%, and Andhra Pradesh- 9.44%.¹⁰

Until a few years ago, only the very orthodox Sunni women wore the *purdah* in Kerala. Its newfound popularity is due partly to the realisation that it is more

convenient than other attire. M. N. Karassery, noted writer and progressive critic on Muslim women's issues opines that “many find slipping into a burqua much simpler than the elaborate ritual of draping a sari. Cost is another factor. But the predominant factor is the editorial support given by women publications and the patronage of community organizations.”¹¹

Although a large section of Muslim women assert that they are wearing the burqua or *purdah* or veil, of their own free will and choice, the progressive among Muslim women believe that the cloak conceals a religious chauvinism that spells danger to Muslim womanhood. “Clerics and orthodox organisations want Muslim women to be confined to their traditional roles in the kitchen and bedroom. The *purdah* provides an effective weapon to restrict their progress,” says V. P. Suhara, president of *Nissah*, the Progressive Muslim Women's Forum.¹²

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Hindu women in certain parts of India, and Muslim women, in a much wider area, wear the ghongut and burqua (or its variant), respectively. There are Hindu and Muslim women who do not wear it, sport modern dresses, have short hair and freely move among men in workplaces. Obviously, what is required of a Muslim woman (equally so with a Hindu woman) is that she dresses up in a modest fashion, without unnecessarily revealing a lot of flesh. If today more Muslim women wear the burqua or *purdah*, it is partly due to insistence from the family (parents or husband), partly the criticism from the community and partly of their own free will. Burqua also literally draws a curtain around a woman and allows her to move about outside the family compound, while conforming to the religious-cultural custom of remaining secluded from men. As the burqua adds respectability to the person, it is mainly women from middle classes and upwards that wear the burqua of their own free will. As a family rises on the social scale, burqua becomes a symbol of its newly acquired social status and class. At the top of the social ladder, the women of rich and modern families may prefer to use shawls and scarves without covering their bodies or faces. But, women who have a compulsion to work alongside men in fields, shops and domestic settings, cannot afford to wear it. Such women, numerically a majority of the population, often opt for a *chador* (a simple unstitched cloth wrapped around their bodies).

A section of the progressive Muslim women in South India is critical of the insistence of the Muslim male *jamaat* on women wearing the burqua. Of these, the Tamil Nadu Muslim Women's Jamaat Committee (TNMWJC),

Pudukottai, a well knit network of 15,000 women spread across Tamil Nadu's 26 districts, who include a veritable mix of Muslim women, rural and urban, burkha-clad and non-burkha clad, is in the forefront. Daud Sharifa Khanam, founder of TNMWJC argues that if Islamic law says a woman is not supposed to wear modern clothes, the same law also forbids dowry, alcoholism and incest. The same male *jamaat*, so keen to lay down the law as far as women's clothing is concerned, has repeatedly turned a blind eye to gross injustices against women. She alleges that the local-level *jamaats* promote dowry and even use force to ensure a share in it. Why don't they stop these practices first if they are concerned about living according to Islamic law? *Jamaats* are worried less about Muslim women seeking alms in front of mosques and *dargahs* than about whether they beg with or without the *purdah*. In any case, it is for the Muslim women to sort out these problems in discussions with the clergy, with support from the reformist males. It is no concern of the non-Muslims, especially in a secular democracy. Burqua is not the opposite of secularism.

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Footnotes

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The (Family) Business of Politics

Pratap Thorat

These are bad times for the regional satraps. Be it Mulayam Singh, or Laloo Yadav; Mayawati or Badal; Deve Gowda or Pawar; Jayalalitha or even a recently successful Karunanidhi. Viewers are fed up of these village acrobats' somersaults on the national stage. Once, their enlargement was deemed as growth. Now it is taken as a malignant tumour or a swelling that has started receding for the good. The media was charitable to them because these regional or sub-regional bosses had picked up cudgels to fight the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty and the autocracy that was suppressing regional aspirations and Delhi's mindset that was encouraging only stupid and lifeless puppets. But there is a growing realisation now that it is far more dangerous to have mushrooming of the regional dynasties all around us and to stretch the pygmies to the national stature and size.

But this does not mean that the game of the regional satraps is all over. In Maharashtra, the assembly poll is only three months away. The Pawars are trying to recover from the punch. The Thackerays are sharpening their broken claws. There will be a desperate bid to grab the throne as if this poll is their last chance for coronation of their young-ones. Politics is after all a family business here. The pensioned off Dukes are keen on reserving remunerative jobs for the next generation of politico-corporates. An 80-year-plus Fuehrer of the Shiv Sena Balasaheb Thackeray is languishing in the aisles over his mistake of baptising nephew Raj ahead of son Uddhav. Raj has hijacked the legacy, agenda and bubbling youth of the saffron army. Uddhav is left with the old guard and the fortress.... Both the seniors are in the same boat. Even the old age and frail physique of Thackeray and ailment of Pawar are not allowing them to rest on the oars. The fatigued men are rowing their boats desperately to carry the kids for the crowning ceremony.

Mr. Pratap Thorat is a political commentator and newsman since 1971. Excerpted from his "Dynasties in Maharashtra Begin Mad Race" For the complete article visit <http://www.politicsindiaweb.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=156>



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

Shahrukh Khan Hanged Without Trial

It is really distressing how motley religious groups purporting to speak for the entire community are so readily given gratuitous publicity by the media.

Following close on the heels of actor Shiney Ahuja's alleged rape case, comes the news that Shahrukh Khan – probably Bollywood's most recognizable face – has got himself in a mess because of some allegedly defamatory statements he made against Prophet Mohammed in a magazine article. Some group calling itself the Mumbai Aman Committee (MAC) is up in arms over this and has even managed to convince the police to file a case against Khan.

Let me state at the outset that I hold no brief for Shahrukh Khan, nor do I hold any opinion on his guilt or innocence. However, it is really distressing how motley religious groups purporting to speak for the entire community are so readily given gratuitous publicity by the media. The headline to a related article in an evening newspaper ("Muslims sore over actor's remarks about Prophet") is itself provocative and misleading. Just who is this Mumbai Aman Committee; and why is it that their website furnishes virtually no information about their organization and activities? Just because some spokesman from the MAC took objection to Shahrukh Khan's alleged statement, why should it be automatically inferred that all "Muslims" are sore? The irony is that the MAC website

opens with the logo of a dove surrounded by the words. "We believe in peace". And yet the President of the same organization issues a belligerent statement to the effect that "they would not allow Shahrukh's body to be buried anywhere in Maharashtra". What gives him the authority to issue such a diktat? Are we living in a police state?

And talking of the police, their action in this matter is even more reprehensible, although on expected lines. It is most unfortunate that the police are so assiduous in filing a case whenever a celebrity is involved. It is open to doubt that they have even done any thorough investigation. And this is the same police force that displays such reluctance to file First Information Reports (FIR) in more serious crimes – especially when the complainant comes from a poor or middle class family. They have even announced his possible sentence of three years in prison, even though there have yet been no court proceedings. This is nothing but publicity-seeking grandstanding.

Coming so soon after the Sheetal Mafatlal drama, it leads one to the despairing conclusion that the Mumbai police really needs to get its priorities in order.

Is This Activism or Hooliganism?

It is this shameless pandering to vote banks – casting aside all propriety – that is the bane of our country.

That the Shiv Sena is carrying out street protests (which is merely an euphemism for *dadagiri*) against the inflated electricity bills of Reliance is nothing new. That the fee hike may be unjustified is a separate issue. They are resorting to their tried and tested formula for keeping themselves in the public eye. Indeed, the Shiv Sena and its offspring, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, always come into their forte when they are *against* something or other. One rarely hears of them coming up with any constructive proposal which would better the lives of Mumbaikars – even the *marathi manoos* for whom their collective hearts apparently bleed.

What is distressing – and quite outrageous – in this instance is that the Sena is encouraging consumers to stop paying their electricity bills altogether. Even worse, they are offering their muscle power (read goons) to intimidate electric company workers when they come to disconnect the supply due to non-payment. These are clearly illegal activities, punishable in a court of law, and

it is disgraceful that a supposedly responsible political party like the Sena is promoting it – all in an obvious attempt to garner votes in the forthcoming state elections. The icing on the cake is that the government – ruled by the opposing party – is standing by as a mute spectator, for the very same reason. They have now instructed Reliance not to collect their dues for the next 15 days. It is this shameless pandering to vote banks – casting aside all propriety – that is the bane of our country.

This is not the only instance of a convenient silence on the part of the government, of course. In another glaring omission, the same government that passed an ordinance stipulating that political parties that destroy public or private property during "spontaneous demonstrations" must compensate monetarily for the damage caused, is strangely reluctant to enforce it. Not surprisingly, their reticence gets amplified when elections loom.

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Eliminating Poverty – A Liberal Solution

Sanjeev Sabhlok

The number of people living below the poverty line declines dramatically when even a few policies of freedom are introduced in a society. This has also been India's experience, post-liberalisation.

The number is reduced considerably but there will still be some who continue to be below the poverty line. Such cases, some people argue, can be taken care of by private charities because of their belief that there can be no role for a government in directly doing anything about poverty.

However, such is not the liberal view.

The liberal understands that poverty will continue to arise through random bad luck, bad decision-making, and a combination of both. The Liberal realises that markets treat those who can't contribute economic value as outcasts, and charities do not have the capacity to reach out to the remotest corners of a vast country like India. Therefore, the liberal calls for an ongoing role for government in this area as part of equal opportunity. We need a social insurance programme to identify the poor and protect them from starvation.

It is important to emphasise that this 'social minimum', the product of the social insurance scheme, does not amount to coercive charity or redistribution of wealth, but is a safety net available to everyone should things go wrong. There are many other good reasons for having the social minimum which I have discussed in my draft manuscript of *The Discovery of Freedom*¹ (I invite your thoughts on this manuscript). Suffice it to note that while the liberal society vigorously protects us from coercive socialist redistribution, it also leads us to a humane society with its commitment to reasonable equal opportunity.

Need to Top Up the Incomes of the Poor

Milton Friedman proposed a

solution to poverty through a negative income tax (NIT) model. This is a direct solution where incomes of those living below the poverty line are topped up to reach the poverty line. (It is worth noting here that the poverty line must include an amount for private health insurance: I'll outline in a separate article how free markets can provide health in the free society). The NIT must, of course, be linked to a *requirement to work* condition so that able-bodied persons do not get paid if they avoid work. The best way to ensure that no frauds take place is to keep the poverty line extremely low, barely sufficient to ensure extremely frugal dignity; no more.

But instead of this simple system, for decades our socialist model has churned out one poverty 'alleviation' programme after the other, purportedly to reduce poverty but, taken together with a range of subsidies, intended to steal taxpayer wealth and transfer it to corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and even the middle classes and rich farmers. Very little of that money has ever gone to the poor.

While exploring the NIT idea in the year 2000, I made many rounds of the Finance Ministry and Planning Commission to collect data and talk to senior people there about it. My preliminary calculations suggested that if the money spent on subsidies and poverty alleviation programmes was directly transferred to the poor,

there would be no poverty left in India. (Here I may add that even if, upon further analysis, it is found that NIT is not cost-neutral, relevant funds must still be found since banishing poverty is vital for a free society.)

Thus there has never been a shortage of funds for poverty elimination in India. What has prevented that from happening is the keen desire of Indian socialists to line their pockets and pay off particular constituents such as rich farmers. Socialism has thus sustained (and at least partially created) poverty in India for six decades.

How the NIT would work

The NIT would be implemented in seven simple steps:

1. Identify those who may need assistance during a given year, preferably in advance of the actual requirement, such as on estimated income based on previous year's income tax returns (all families would need to lodge returns).
2. Find how much is needed to meet the gap between expected income of those identified in step 1, and the poverty line. This gap should be small, for even the poor earn above acute starvation.
3. Impose a tax (insurance premium) on the community sufficient to meet this gap. In the early stages,

money can be borrowed against future revenues since poverty will drop significantly after policies of freedom are introduced. This way, the tax burden can be evenly distributed over a number of years.

4. Transfer the precise amount identified in step 2 directly to those identified in step 1 through an automated, fortnightly payment into their bank account (with women in a family getting half the amount).
5. At the end of the year, use the income tax return to automatically adjust what was paid out. For overpayments a refund could be obtained or future payments reduced.
6. Audit those receiving NIT funds to ensure they have been participating in the market to the best of their ability.
7. Once implemented, stop all poverty alleviation programmes and abolish all policies that try to equalise people's incomes or subsidise anyone.

I have provided more details on this system in my book, *Breaking Free of Nehru* and elsewhere. Many of the above steps can be outsourced

to the private sector, with checks and balances ensured through independent government regulators who would be responsible directly to Parliament for the integrity of this process. Basically, we'll need to use independent systems and not our existing bureaucracy. Also, for every one per cent permanent reduction in poverty, MPs and MLAs should get a permanent one per cent increase in their base salary. That would get them involved in this process and also link their pay with performance. Similar programmes have been working in the USA (earned income tax credit) and Australia (family benefits scheme) for decades. We can use the lessons learnt in these countries to avoid their excesses and pitfalls.

When I discussed this idea with Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar and others in 2000, I found myself facing numerous objections in response to which I wrote a 14-page paper (available on the internet²). I'll just touch upon one issue here, related to the difficulty of delivering steps 1 and 2. During 1986-88 I created a fully computerised and validated survey of household income of all registered voters in selected villages in Assam. I believe that by using the technology available today (e.g. pho-

tographs of villagers' houses), it should be possible to identify the poor and estimate their incomes with far greater accuracy today. Therefore I am convinced that it is feasible to determine incomes for each poor household in India with a fair degree of accuracy (particularly since the concerned person would, be personally liable for the veracity of their income declarations).

Freedom Team of India

Finally, a quick update on the Freedom Team (FTI, <http://freedomteam.in/>). On 1 July 2009 FTI became a legal entity, as a Trust created in Indore. An outreach effort was thereafter launched with a number of talks and discussion. These received extensive media coverage.³ FTI is thus now well established as a forum for liberal leaders. I invite you to consider joining or otherwise supporting the team.

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¹ <http://www.sanjeev.sabhlokcity.com/discovery.html>

² <http://www.indiapolicy.org/debate/Notes/NIT-paper.PDF>

³ <http://freedomteam.in/blog/outreach-indore-09>

The desire to excel is exclusive of the fact whether someone else appreciates it or not

A German once visited a temple under construction where he saw a sculptor making an idol of God. Suddenly he noticed a similar idol lying nearby. Surprised, he asked the sculptor, "Do you need two statues of the same idol?" "No," said the sculptor without looking up, "We need only one, but the first one got damaged at the last stage." The gentleman examined the idol and found no apparent damage. "Where is the damage?" he asked. "There is a scratch on the nose of the idol." said the sculptor, still busy with his work. "Where are you going to install the idol?"

The sculptor replied that it would be installed on a pillar twenty feet high. "If the idol is that far, who is going to know that there is a scratch on the nose?" the gentleman asked. The sculptor stopped his work, looked up at the gentleman, smiled, and said, "I will know it." The desire to excel is exclusive of the fact whether someone else appreciates it or not.

"Excellence" is a drive from inside, not outside. Excellence is not for someone else to notice but for your own satisfaction and efficiency...

Contributed by Mayur Kotak. From the Net

NATO - Russia Ties : Positive Changes and Challenges

R. G. Gidadhubli

Notwithstanding some positive changes that have occurred in the recent past, there are several challenges that the leaders of NATO and Russia are facing in dealing with bilateral and security issues in the region.

The first meeting between the US president Barack Obama and the Russian president Dmitry Medvedev at the G-20 Summit held in London in April 2009 assumed international significance with both leaders keen to bring about qualitative improvement in their rather strained bilateral relations. This meeting also coincided with the 60th anniversary celebrations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 2009 held in Strasbourg in France when American and major European leaders also urged the need for improvement in NATO-Russia ties.

NATO was created by the Washington Treaty of April 4, 1949, when the countries of Western Europe sought U.S. security guarantees against the Westward expansion of communism and the Soviet domination in Europe. Hence an important part of the Treaty was Article 5 which ensured that all NATO allies would come to the aid of any NATO member if attacked. These objectives were achieved. Hence the US president and European leaders as also the NATO chief had reason to celebrate the event.

NATO had accomplished its main objective of ensuring the security of its European members crowned by the dissolution of the 'Warsaw Pact' led by the former Soviet Union. Secondly, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the countries of Eastern Europe leaving the Soviet Bloc by the end of the 1980's and subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union itself in 1991 were major changes that occurred in quick succession. These developments marking the end of the era of the Cold War, were to the advantage of NATO. Thirdly, during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990's, Russia largely followed pro-Western policies which brought Russia closer to the West and hence in so far as NATO was concerned, the threat perception ceased to exist.

In the last decade, NATO initiated joint programmes including Partnership for Peace with Russia and with most post-Soviet independent states. In fact in 2002 there was evidence of close cooperation between NATO and Russia when the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was constituted to facilitate dialogue, co-operation and joint decision making

on issues of mutual interest including nuclear non-proliferation, arms control etc. But the initial success of NRC was belied as NATO-Russia relations worsened due to the emergence of strong differences between Russian president Vladimir Putin and American president George Bush.

Fourthly, NATO membership has almost doubled to 28 with the admission of seven East European countries including, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the three Baltic States. These new members are keen that NATO should ensure their security. While NATO has expanded, and the Warsaw Pact extinct, Russia is left alone to fight its battle. In fact, the Russian leaders had hoped that NATO would also be dissolved after the Warsaw Pact was terminated. But that did not happen. Fifthly, during the Cold-war era, NATO's security concerns were essentially 'Eurocentric'. But with its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, NATO now deals with global problems. Sixthly, in contrast to the confrontational approach that often prevailed during the cold war period, there is a qualitative change in NATO's approach to cooperation with Russia. This is evident from the fact that US president Barack Obama has repeatedly stated his desire for a 'New Start' in relations with Moscow and 'Reset the Button'.

Russian president Dimitry Medvedev has responded positively and has also made known his desire for improved relations with the USA. Hence, at the first meeting held between the two leaders in London in April on the sidelines of G-20, the two presidents issued a joint statement saying they wanted to "move beyond Cold War mentality". As a first step Obama and Medvedev have agreed on the need to reduce strategic nuclear forces to levels a little bit below those that Presidents Bush and Putin had agreed to in 2002. This may also go a long way in improving NATO-Russia ties. In fact NATO has decided to restore full diplomatic relations with Russia which were snapped after the Georgia-Russia war in August 2008, when Russia was accused of using its military force disproportionately against Georgia, ultimately leading to Georgia losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia expected NATO to intervene in the conflict, but this did not happen. Hence

Obama's scheduled visit to Moscow in July 2009 may strengthen not only bilateral ties but also NATO-Russia relations.

Challenges

Notwithstanding some positive changes that have occurred in the recent past, there are several challenges that the leaders of NATO and Russia are facing in dealing with bilateral and security issues in the region.

1. Russia's relations with the West in general and with the USA in particular deteriorated during 2004-2008 which coincided with second term of both American president George Bush and Russian president Vladimir Putin. 'Colored Revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine, which Russia alleged were supported and encouraged by the West, worsened the relations. Moreover, the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 further aggravated the situation with the potential threat of NATO involvement in the military conflict. Hence while there are policy statements as also indications of closer co-operation between NATO and Russia, political analysts argue that there is persisting lack of trust between Russia and the West due to decades of rivalry. This is evident from the fact that on 4th April 2009 NATO carried out air defense exercises in the Baltic region close to Russia's northwestern borders. In turn Russian air defense chief declared that in 2009 Russia will launch 14 ICBM's and will extend the service life of Voyevoda-M missile the most powerful in the world by more than 10 years.
2. With the expansion of NATO, interests among members have become diverse and less cohesive particularly with regard to NATO's relations with Russia. Ironically, while 'old-NATO' members such as USA, Germany and France, overcoming their old rivalry, want to establish close ties with Russia, new members such as the Czech Republic and Poland which were once part of the Soviet bloc are critical of Russia. These differences are reflected on the proposal made by George Bush a couple of years back to station 10 Anti-Ballistic Missiles in Poland and a radar unit in the Czech Republic to provide security for Europe on the ground that Iran could misuse nuclear technology provided by Russia. To put pressure on Bush, the former Russian president Vladimir Putin threatened to instal Iskandar Missiles in Kaliningrad close to Poland's border. Even as these differences persist, in order to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and to seek cooperation with Russia on this issue, Obama has offered to reconsider the stationing of missiles in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. Not surprisingly, Poland and the Czech Republic are not happy with this new development.
3. During the last two decades Russia has been strongly opposing NATO's policy of Eastward Expansion and this has been one of the causes for strained relations between the two even though NATO leaders reassured Russia that it would not be a security threat to Russia. Not accepting this argument, Russia's relations with Ukraine and Georgia are under severe strain since these two neighbours of Russia want to join NATO. Desiring Russia's cooperation, NATO leaders have not offered membership to Georgia and have also decided to stop further expansion of NATO.
4. There is a debate among commentators as to whether NATO has outlived its existence. There are some American analysts who argue that with the end of ideological conflict and the absence of a threat from Russia, NATO has become irrelevant for the USA. Some others opine that NATO should not become a 'World Policeman'. In this context the German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated firmly on 27th March 2009 that there will be "No Global NATO."
5. Afghanistan has become a major challenge for NATO, which has deployed peace keeping forces from many member countries in the last two decades with no solution in sight. Hence Obama's proposal of 'Burden Sharing' within the Alliance both personnel and financial has become a critical issue. For instance, the French president Nicolas Sarkozy is not keen to increase its force in Afghanistan. Lack of success during the Bush administration in the Afghan crisis and increasing threats to security has necessitated the USA and Western leaders of NATO in seeking the cooperation of Russia to deal with the problem in this region. Moreover, with growing instability in Pakistan due to terrorist attacks by the Taliban, the importance of Russia has increased as a transit corridor for NATO supplies bound for Afghanistan. On its part, Russia has offered due cooperation to NATO leaders to deal with this global challenge of terrorism and on its part had arranged an international meeting in Moscow on Afghanistan in March 2009. In turn Western countries also discussed the Afghan issue in the The Hague after G-20 meet which shows the growing security concerns at the global level and the need for NATO to find a solution to the problem. In fact Russia also has its own interest in containing the problems of insecurity and terrorism spilling over from Afghani-

Cont'd. on p.23

Book Review



HUMAN REASON AND ITS ENEMIES – A RIGOROUS CRITIQUE OF POST-MODERNISM by Sheryar Ookerjee ● Publisher: Promilla and Company and Bibliophile South Asia, C-127, Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi 110 017 ● Pages: 370 ● Price Rs.750

Reviewed by Prof. N. G. Kulkarni, Professor of Logic and Philosophy, K. J. Somaiya College and Oxford 62-63; has published a number of articles on epistemology and early Buddhism

The sub-title declares the book to be a rigorous critique and rigorous it is. It is packed with close reasoning and helpful explanations. Seldom, if ever, the argument is purely polemical. The central feature of post modernism is its rejection of reason with its necessary logical principles and its universality and the implicit claim that it is the sole arbiter of disputes in the field of science and philosophy. M. Foucault claims that enlightened reason has placed us in the grip of forms of oppression more insidiously powerful than post modern forms of control; it is the dehumanising logic of industrial capital's drive towards efficiency which is its own ultimately irrational end. The identification of reason with the dehumanising logic of industrial capital is very strange.

As is pointed out in the book, we can argue against it. According to Kant 'enlightenment is man's release from self-incurred tutelage which is man's inability to make use of reason with direction from another and the cause lies not in understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it.' Foucault however, quoted on p.14, thinks that it is a manifestation of the will to power which secures itself through the insidious exclusion of all that it identifies as non-rational: desire, feeling, sexuality, femininity, art madness, non-caucasian races. Reason is

seen as part of the impulse to control and subjugate which is the logic of capitalism, colonialism, racism and sexism. 'Against such rage reason is helpless' comments the author.

But stranger still is the identification of reason with the masculine, consigning women to the realms of feeling and domesticity. This is in connection with an odd distinction by Kant. 'By the public use of reason, I mean the use a person makes of it as a scholar before the reading public. Private use I call that which men may make of it in a particular civil post or office where one must obey orders. After commenting that Kant makes a strange use of 'public' and private, Prof. Ookerjee continues '... but stranger still it is to see it made to coincide with masculine and feminine. Surely feminists do not think that in Kant's time civil posts and offices were filled by women and that even if they were, they were realms of feeling and domesticity'. (p.15)

Such egregious error requires a diagnosis, particularly if it provides a clue to the working of the minds of feminists and postmoderns. They are sensitive to the suffering inflicted on weaker sections of society, particularly women by the application of science to industry. Foucault leaves no social evil out of the list he gives ascribing the whole lot to a mani-

festation of the will to power which is inherent in the scientific method. We may question this view without minimising the evils he points out. Surely, we are inclined to protest. The misapplications of science and technology could have been avoided. In any case, they are logically separable from the scientific method and the enlightenment. This is the objection that springs to our mind when we read this tirade against reason and the scientific method. Why do such obviously intelligent persons not see this simple point? Apparently their sensitive nature blinds them, or they persuade themselves that the abuses, if not inherent in the impersonal use of reason are naturally associated with it. The best way to answer this is to eliminate these abuses and apply scientific technology for human welfare – fighting hunger and malnutrition, controlling floods, building irrigation systems that are serviceable rather than grandiose. We are beginning to do it though success is far from complete.

Prof. Ookerjee repeatedly points out how objections of relativists can be met and the scientific method made to work satisfactorily though it may not always lead to unanimity. There should be no interference from religious dogma or philosophical correctness as in the case of Galileo's persecution or the banishment of all scientists from the Soviet Academy who dif-

ferred from Lysenko (when he was trying to show that acquired traits are heritable). Feyerabend in an apology for Cardinal Bellarmino which seems to amount to justification writes: "Church doctrine is a boundary condition for the interpretation of scientific results. But is not an absolute condition. Research can move it." Prof. Ookerjee comments, 'So science has the last word. Feyerabend goes on to say 'scientific knowledge is connected with too narrow a vision of the world'. It must be judged from a wider point of view which includes friendship, happiness "need for salvation".' But this narrowness of vision is no defect in mathematical physics. It is a consequence of confining physics to the measurable aspects of every thing in the space-time world. To maintain that what physics reveals about the world alone is real is no part of physics. It has to be argued out as scientific naturalists have always done. But there are alternative synoptic visions and the construction of such all-inclusive systems is one of the tasks of philosophy. But by rubbishising metaphysics and denying the existence of universal standards cutting across different traditions and culture postmodernists cut at the root of any rational inquiry of this type.

The denial of rational and therefore universal, standards, even in the field of science is a central theme of postmodernism. If this denial were limited to social sciences and moral debates, it would sound much more plausible. By their indiscriminate application of relativism to all inquiries the postmodernists make themselves easy targets and Prof. Ookerjee has no great difficulty in showing that their claims are unproven and untenable. In this context, Prof. Ookerjee discusses at some length

the Hopi view that spirits live on trees and the ancient Egyptian ascription of sacredness to gold. In both the cases, contemporary science has replaced ancient superstition in all serious debates. Prof. Ookerjee further points out that Indians have mastered the scientific method and techniques. They have done it to an extent where they seldom speak of 'western science' but 'science' simply. The same is true of China and Japan. All these countries differ from one another in moral and cultural traditions and also from the contemporary West and the West of Galileo's time. How would this be possible if one's own tradition and culture conditioned one completely? The truth is that our traditions predispose us without predetermining us.

The central concept in the debate is that of 'truth'. If it meant 'acceptable within a tradition by reference to its standards' rational argumentation would be impossible. But there is a movement towards 'ideal acceptability' which goes beyond mere acceptance. Even postmodernists and allied philosophers are not immune to this. See in this connection Bernard Williams' attempt to show (p.185) that the presence of subjective elements does not make it impossible for it to give (some) knowledge. And he goes on to explain how this can be done. Rorty endorses Putnam's view that "truth" is idealised rational acceptability ... This idealised community is us, not as we are but as we aspire to be, Putnam and I hope at our best to be'. (p.263). This cannot fail to warm a liberal heart. Two cases are discussed at length in dealing with the attempt to show that truth is contextual. In neither of them is there any conflict of cultures. The first concerns a Belgian police of-

ficer Lesage who maintains that he sent a certain file to Judge Doutrewe who however denies having received it. The conflict can be resolved easily by supporting either that one of them is not telling the truth or that the file was lost or misplaced on the way, and therefore, both are telling the truth. That an anthropologist of communication had to be called upon to unravel such a simple matter shows the I.Q. of whosoever decided to seek his expert opinion. The second case concerns Smith who maintains that a certain plane stops at Chicago and Mary and John who deny Smith's claim to know on the ground that he relies on an itinerary which is unreliable. Clearly the case involves standards of justification in accepting an empirical proposition. Prof. Ookerjee suggests that the contradiction would vanish if we were to write out the propositions fully. 'Smith relying on the itinerary etc.?' This makes the ground for believing a proposition part of its statement and is rather inelegant. Instead we could suggest that the standard for justification of an empirical proposition varies in strictness, as pointed out by Cohen who cites this example if a proposition turns out to be false, we withdraw our claim to know. There is no standard which logically ensures truth, and some degree of doubt always remains. Prof. Ookerjee is quite right in concluding that there is no case here for the view that truth is contextual and that it varies from person to person and from time to time.

A far more weighty problem is discussed in Chapters 9 and 10 – the place of reason in morals and the comparison between Aristotle, Aquinas and Hume in this context. The discussion is worth a close study like everything else in the

book excepting perhaps the chapter on the wonderland of feminism which is pure entertainment. The conclusion reached after the discussion of practical reason is that the thinkers themselves and we who judge about their differences, must share a common standard of rationality.

I would hesitate to say that W. V. Quine is a thinker very sympathetic to postmodern ideas. This suggests that there was a set of characteristic ideas which could be so labelled when Quine did his most influential work in the fifties and early sixties. Thinkers like Rorty admire Quine and they freely borrow from his radical relativism and pragmatism. To a lesser extent they admire Wittgenstein, Davidson and Ryle for their holism, and banishment of Cartesian dualism. Quine rejects foundationalism and insists that the system we adopt must be adjusted to the boundary conditions of experience. A recalcitrant experience necessitates the redistribution of truth values. But we may carry out our revision as we like guided by the very general requirements of economy elegance and minimising arbitrary assumptions. There is no hint that we can put up with a contradiction or make truth relative to a particular person or culture. Pragmatism is introduced to make a choice between two equally comprehensive systems which are incompatible provided utility is not interpreted narrowly to mean the satisfaction of my desires or those of a chosen group, there is nothing pernicious, it seems to me about this kind of pragmatism.

That brings me to comprehensive coherence as the sole criterion of truth which is the only point of agreement between the author and postmoderns. Prof.

Ookerjee writes: 'Bradley and Bosunquet make an important distinction on the one hand between the nature and definition of truth and on the other criterion of truth. The latter is not as for the correspondence theory a comparison between copy and original but comprehensive coherence. Davidson seems to corroborate this view when he writes: "Truth as correspondence is an idea we are better off without ... The formulation is not so much wrong as empty; but it does have the merit of suggesting that something is not true simply because it is believed and it does capture the thought that truth depends on how the world is' though it is admitted that comprehensive coherence cannot give us the analysis is of 'truth'. It is worthwhile to remind ourselves of the reason. Truth cannot be defined in terms of coherence because coherence can only be defined in terms of truth. In the minimal sense coherence means compatibility. Two propositions are compatible if they can be true together. In a stronger sense, p coheres with q, if the truth of one implies the truth of another. In the strongest sense, P coheres with Q when the truth of either implies the truth of the other. But comprehensive coherence cannot be the sole criterion of truth either. Suppose there are two systems S(1) and S(2) both equally consistent, equally comprehensive but more comprehensive than any alternative system and mutually incompatible. Comprehensive coherence cannot help us to make a choice. Nor is this a purely imaginary situation. Euclidean Geometry and the two alternatives to it are equally rigorous deductive systems. If we want to find out which of them is true of actual space, the answer given is that it is the elliptical system of Reiman which is part of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity and his new way of

envisaging gravitation. In the case of the movement of the perihelion of Mercury and the bending of a ray from a distant star when it passes the gravitational field of the sun the prediction of the new theory have been verified by sophisticated measurements. The values predicted by Einstein differ so minutely from those which follow from the Newtonian formula that astronomers still use the old formula for routine calculations and predictions. But theoretically the new formula replaces the old.

Here we seem to escape from indecision by ascertaining certain facts experimentally instead of waiting for the next stage in our knowledge – as recommended by the classical coherence theory – to lead to the emergence of a more comprehensive system. In this case the elaboration of a more comprehensive system is not possible. It is true that the recorded observation statements together with others involved in conducting an experiment form a consistent system. But no new propositions are added to the verified system. The verified statements were already there as predictions. The background propositions are not included in our system either. They would be the same even if the experimental results were different. I am sure, Prof. Ookerjee would make some pertinent and forceful comments. But I don't think they would be knock-down arguments.

The admission that comprehensive coherence does not give the definition of 'truth' has an important consequence. Bradley asserts repeatedly that truth is agreement between our experience and reality. The more the former approaches the latter, more truth it will have. What is this agreement between our experience and reality? Similarly what is the relation

between a true proposition and 'how the world is'? Which relation is presumably the basis of truth. To dismiss correspondence with condescension and a kind word does not absolve us from the duty of trying to specify, if we can, this

relation. If we do so we may get entangled in the difficulties of the correspondence theory. To say that the notion of correspondence is empty may be like saying that it is unique and further indefinable. A philosopher who says this is in a

very unhappy position. But that is not to say that his position is false or self-contradictory. It is a sign of bewilderment which is good for philosophy.

Point Counter Point (*cont'd. from p.8*)

created doubts to put it mildly. Given the hostility between the two countries, the US is no doubt pleased with the discomfiture of the President elect Ahmedinejad but has had to tread cautiously. President Obama is walking a tight rope by not taking sides but declaring that the US is concerned over the punitive action taken against peaceful demonstrators. He made it clear that he would not like to give an opportunity to the Iranian government to dub the protests as an American conspiracy. This showed diplomatic sagacity although the Iranians were sure that the US was up to no good.

Obama as he did want to convey to Iran, US displeasure without a formal statement from him. A repetition of the 1950s scenario when the US went whole hog to help the Shah of Iran was not desirable but the Republicans wanted the President to do more - without stating what exactly they had in mind. That is politics everywhere - not only in India. Hit the opponent whenever an opportunity presents itself. Is Iran heading for a new revolution as most US TV channels believe or is it the usual overkill of the media? The storm may not have stirred any tea cup beyond Tehran. Everything may not be well in the Ayatollah land but the idea that the US must rectify the ills of the world has to be discarded.

* Writing from the United States where he is currently visiting.

Readers are invited to send in their points of view on serious issues of the day to avkay@mtnl.net.in

NATO - Russia Ties : Positive Changes and Challenges (*Cont'd. from p.29*)

stan into the Central Asian nations and the southern regions of Russia including Tatarstan, Bashkiristan and Chechnya which have predominantly Muslim populations.

Thus there are many complex issues and challenges that lie ahead both for NATO and for Russia. On its part the Russian leadership under Medvedev's presidency needs to be pragmatic in its policy to improve ties with the West to tackle challenges that lie ahead. At the same

time the 'comprehensive' and positive approach of president Obama and other NATO leaders to policy changes and their desire to seek Russia's co-operation by positively responding to Russian concerns may go a long way in finding long term solutions to challenges and security issues including nuclear threat and global terrorism.

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The 4th Annual World eBook Fair

The 4th Annual World eBook Fair has opened on 4th July, 2009 and will end on 4th August 2009 when book-lovers can download 2 million books free of charge. This exhibition has been sponsored by WorldeBookFair.org which is supported by Project Gutenberg, World Public Library and others. The collection is created by the contribution from 100 + e-libraries from all over the world. After 4th August the books can be accessed for a small fee of \$ 8.95 per year to maintain and expand the collection.

Let all people enjoy and learn from this great collection which includes many great works of masters in many languages.

M.D.Kini

Between Ourselves ...

In the lead story on the discontent in Iran following the result of their presidential election, Firoze Hirjikaka draws attention to the fact that to escape persecution by the Shah of Iran, Khomeini fled to Iraq where, with Saddam Hussein around, there was not much that Khomeini could do to foment trouble in Iran. The Shah persuaded Saddam to throw him out and Khomeini fled to France. Had Khomeini remained in Iraq the religious revolution might not have happened. But ensconced in democratic France, Khomeini was able to direct his clerics to take advantage of a developing revolutionary situation and hijacked it to establish a religious dictatorship. By a coincidence we carry another story arising out of a declaration by French president Nicolas Sarkozy that the burqua was not welcome in France. France, as author Dr. Vasundara Mohan points out, is a secular democracy and a 1905 law strictly separates Church and the State. So here we have an interesting situation – France offering refuge to a religious bigot on the one hand and asserting its secular policy of disapproving public exposition of religious affiliation, on the other. As a democracy there is room for what appears to be on the surface contradictory policies to be sorted out. Would this be possible in a religious dictatorship as in Iran. That is the essential difference between a real democracy as in France, which the Khomeinis of this world

exploit! Just like the communists exploit democratic rights to subvert democracy.

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Freedom First's administrative structure is very thin. Three of us double up doing many things ranging from the editorial to circulation. Hence we are not very alert in managing subscriptions. We have just begun sending out reminders to our subscribers. This is what it says:

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Editor

Many Voices

The poor are ignored or patronised, crushed or pitied. Few seem to believe that these people are capable of helping themselves if they are given the right opportunity...The poor in such places as Lalgargh and elsewhere need a patient hearing rather than hasty responses.

Niranjan Rajadhyaksha, Managing Editor, *mint*, June 14

Too many people, especially in Europe, equate mistakes made by economists with a failure of economic liberalism. Their logic seems to be that if economists got things wrong, then politicians will do better. That is a false - and dangerous - conclusion.

John Mickelthwait, editor, *The Economist.com*, July 19,

The reality is that for many Muslims, sharia courts are in practice part of any institutionalised atmosphere

of intimidation, backed by the ultimate sanction of a death threat.

Dr. David Green, Director of the think tank Civitas (London), *The Statesman*, June 30



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