

Freedom First

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Freedom First Salutes

B. Premanand

Modern India's *Charvaka* is No More



(17.02.30 - 04.10.09)

B. Premanand, the doyen of the Indian atheist and rationalist movement is no more. He was 79. Rationalists, humanists, atheists and free thinkers, mourn his departure.

Premanand was a keen observer of paranormal

phenomenon even in his childhood. In his teens he approached swamis and gurus to gain spiritual insights but soon fell out with each one of them when he realized they were all fakes.

During a tumultuous campaign spanning three decades and more, Premanand visited almost every village and town in India exposing godmen and their miracles, conducting science workshops for the educated and lay persons giving public lectures and demonstrations. He visited 49 countries to spread scientific awareness. He was awarded a Fellowship by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication of the Government of India for his efforts to spread scientific awareness.

For more than two decades Premanand published the *Indian Skeptic* a monthly dedicated to spreading rationalism. The magazine was an invaluable link between various rationalist groups exposing godmen. The documentary film "Guru Busters" shows Premanand and his crew zealously exposing supposedly supernatural stunts such as levitation, flesh-piercing and live burials. His most popular book was "Science versus Miracles" which gave rational explanation of about 150 miracles including those performed by various godmen in India. In March this year Premanand opened a permanent exhibition on the "Method of Science" at Podanur in Tamil Nadu.

To put a quietus to rumours that advancing cancer had led him to believing in god and supernatural powers Premanand made a Declaration from his deathbed in which he said *inter alia*:

"It is common for the purveyors of superstitions and such anti-rational forces to start spreading rumours about rationalists turning to god and other supernatural forces at the end of their lives and becoming devotees of gods and god men of various types. It is also claimed that at times of crises that we staunch rationalists through the major part of our lives, turn to spiritualism and religion. I wish to clarify that as on today the 20th of September, 2009:

- (a) I remain a staunch rationalist and wish to place on record the following: I continue to be a rationalist of full conviction.
- (b) I do not believe in any supernatural power. All the powers that we encounter are in the realm of nature and nothing exists beyond that. (c) I do not believe in the existence of the soul or rebirth. (d) I have not turned to any religion, god or any sort of spiritual pursuits. (e) When I pass away I shall be leaving only my body which is to be donated to a medical college and no spirit or soul to cause problems for the living..." Unable to sign because of weak hands he put his thumbprint on this Declaration.

Mr. Premanand with his white mane and beard and always dressed in white looked every inch an ascetic. He carried on his person all his worldly possessions in a *Jhola* (cloth bag) with a towel slung round his neck.

Many years ago I had the privilege of engaging him in conversation as he was walking back to the Bandra Rail Terminus after attending a conference convened by another great humanist the late Dr. Indumati Parikh. I was struck by his humility and self confidence. He was already a well known personality in the world of rationalists and atheists. The manner of his living, and simplicity are all part of that glorious Indian tradition when disbelievers had the freedom as much as the believers to propagate their views. They were the Charvakas descended from the time of the Buddha. Premanand was Modern India's *Charvaka*.

This tribute has liberally drawn on articles in the Atheist monthly of October 2009.

From Our Readers

A Veteran Soldier Lists Some Home Truths

Thanks a lot for sending copies of *Freedom First*. I have shared the magazine with other members of the Steering Committee of Indian ex servicemen Movement.

2. There are many important issues which your magazine can take up for building appropriate perceptions and beliefs on nation building or those adversely affecting our country.

- We got our Freedom But Not “Swaraj”
- We have progressed in the material world But have lowered our values, morals and ethics.
- We are producing many Degree- Holders; but few leaders and enlightened human beings.
- A Nation which does not strengthen its security, is doomed to fail.
- No development can take place without ensuring security. Security can only be ensured with Strong Armed Forces.
- All institutions of democracy in our country today have serious ailing factors. The worst is, “Lot of Authority, least Responsibility and No Accountability.
- Pakistan is bleeding India through their policy of a “Thousand Cuts”. All states in India have become border states and no state is a hinterland. Strict Anti-Terrorist Acts like POTA, integration of all Intelligence Agencies to provide Real Time Actionable Intelligence, Surgical Police Reforms, CDS, and NSG under the Army are the need of the hour.
- Strategic encirclement of India by “China” is a strong security challenge for India. Needs high priority.
- We can share our Thoughts.

Jai Hind

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The Hurdle of Corruption

The Prime Minister has said that tribal areas cannot be developed under the shadow of the gun. I would like to add that it cannot be developed under the shadow of political and administrative corruption too. The Prime Minister is silent about his resolve to defeat the forces of corruption in politics and administration at every level while talking about the urgent need to defeat the Maoists.

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Controlling Political Parties

What RSS is doing to the BJP is similar to what the Indira Gandhi family has done to the Congress party. Possibly, BJP under RSS control may do better. It appears that Indian political parties can function coherently only under autocratic rule or family control. Just like nobody can speak against Sonia and her family and remain in the Congress or nobody can speak against Karunanidhi and his family and remain in the DMK, nobody can speak against the RSS and remain in the BJP. This situation speaks volumes about the state of Indian democracy and the present political system in the country.

**Both letters are from N. S. Venkataraman,
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Democracy Demands Open Government

The RTI (Right to Information) Act has proved to be a boon for people suffering from mal-administration in India. The Act has enabled activists to expose many acts of commission and omission by the bureaucrats and the politicians ranging from misappropriation of funds, delays in Speed-post (the State-owned courier service) to decisions of ministers which help their own institutions. Some recent headlines in the newspapers say it all: “IAS officer pays power bills from fund for 1984 Sikh riot victims”; “Speed-post delivers at a snail’s pace”; “Revenue Minister Patangrao Kadam took eight decisions within seven months favouring Bharati Vidhyapeeth, of which he is Chancellor”.

However, it is a sad fact that only 27 percent of the queries have been given information. Now there is a move by the government to bring in an amendment to deny information on the ground that some queries are ‘frivolous or vexatious’. Both expressions are subjective and could be used by the Information Commissioners, who are mostly former bureaucrats, to deny information on the actions of the government and the activities of the bureaucrats and the politicians. There is no need to amend the Act but there is need to fulfil the mandate of the Act. RTI activists should prevail upon the government to appoint eminent persons from public life especially from the Bar and from among retired judges to inspire confidence among the people.

The recent decision of the Supreme Court judges to declare their assets on the website and another deci-

sion by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to have all the reports of the Expert Committees that inspect universities placed on its website have opened the doors a little more to an open society in the country. Now all activists have to fight for transparent governance with *all* decisions of the government departments on its website so that people would be able to access all information that affect them, from the government's own websites. Only an open government will improve the quality of Indian democracy.

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Leakage of Development Funds

A report in *The Times of India* of October 15 was head-lined, "Rajiv was right: only 16p of every rupee reaches the poor". It is a severe indictment of the Indian State's social sector investment strategy. Writing recently in the *New York Times*, Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman said "How did F.D.R. manage to make big government so clean? A large part of the answer is that oversight was built into New Deal programmes from the beginning. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), in particular, had a powerful, independent "division of progress investigation" devoted to investigating complaints of frauds. This division was so diligent that in 1940 when a Congressional sub-committee investigated the WPA it couldn't find a single serious irregularity that the division had missed".

The billions of dollars that have been pumped into the US economy by its government in the last one year to stimulate US economy is being monitored more diligently than before. Earl Devaney, who heads a Stimulus Monitoring Board, is setting up the most complex government website in history which will enable journalists and citizens to monitor every dollar that comes from the government coffers. "The website will unleash a million citizen IGs (Inspectors-General)", says Mr. Devaney. The Indian government should follow this example. India has many people of unimpeachable character who can head such a system and one of the software companies in India could be assigned to set it up. This is more urgent than anything else that the Government of India is doing now, as current social sector spending is almost Rs.200,000 crore. Without a proper monitoring mechanism, tax-payers' money would go to corrupt politicians and bureaucracy rather than to the intended recipients, the poor.

One wonders whether the dole in the form of 100 days of work is the best solution to poverty? Is it not possible to devise another strategy of empowering people with skills which will enable them to earn a living? It has been well-said that it is better to teach them fishing than giving them fish.

Both letters are from M. D. Kini, Mumbai.
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In Nomad's Land

My friend and avid Freedom First reader Air Vice Marshal C. V. Parker, MVC VM sent me some time ago the following note entitled "In Nomad's Land" along with a rhetorical question: "I wonder how many of the most liberal of your readers would like to move 20 times in 34 years and still remain liberal?" – Ed.

Though framed in diverse regional languages the one question every traveller in India invariably faces is: "What is your native place sir?" Till retirement I had found it impossible to respond with an either accurate or a brief answer.

Consider if you will: a mother ethnically a Bengali but born and brought up in Surat (Gujarat) and father from Madhya Pradesh. Born in Anand; pre-school years were a linguistic exposure to Gujarati, Bengali, Hindi and English the last being the only language common to my parents. Boarding school near Ranchi, was evacuated to Allahabad during World War II while college was Kolkata.

On joining the Indian Air Force in Ambala, the flying training academy relocated to Begumpet airfield in Secunderabad where, incidentally, I was destined to meet the young mulkhi lady who was to share the rest of my travels and life. Post Commissioning I moved to nearby Hakimpet airbase and thereafter, for the next 34 years my 'permanent' moves on posting were: Palam, Ambala, Jamnagar, Hindon (UP), Pathankot, Wellington (in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu) Bangalore, Hakimpet, Adampur, London, Wellington, Hyderabad, Udampur (J&K). A second career took me to Mumbai before a final return to Secunderabad where we had laid down roots in the Vayupuri Housing Society.

The houses in our quiet colony of retirees from all over the country bear many appellations but the one most aptly named is 'At Last' – a sentiment we empathised with entirely. We now await the Unique Identity Enumerator who is likely to allot me a UID card bearing a 15-digit number: 22119324346-420 which would faithfully encapsulate my date of birth, service number and allotted plot number in Cemetery No.12. Our travel is now by choice rather than by compulsion Till that final plot is occupied however, life continues to be a wonderful journal in nomad's land!

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The Assembly Elections of October 2009 : Who Won?

Nitin G. Raut

In a democracy, a strong and vibrant Opposition is as much a prime necessity as a ruling party has to be effective.

The Elections to the State Assemblies of Maharashtra, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh were held in October. The Congress won and the BJP lost. Winning and losing is part of the democratic process. But elections in India often throw up a number of imponderables. They can drive a party into the political wilderness leading to the party's eclipse or confers a long tenure for another without bothering about the party's performance when in power. Do the October 2009 elections indicate any such possibilities? Has the victory of the winning party and its allies or the defeat of the BJP and its allies been decisive enough to mark the return of the winners for a long time to come and for the losers to take political *sanyas*? More importantly what does it imply for Indian democracy? .

A Pyrrhic Victory

In reality, it is a pyrrhic victory for the Congress. In Maharashtra, the Congress-NCP alliance won exactly half (144) of the 288 Assembly seats. In Haryana, the Congress did not secure a majority of its own. In Arunachal Pradesh it has a decisive majority. For the BJP it is yet another defeat. This party has been steadily suffering electoral reverses and facing a crisis of identity and leadership ever since it lost in the 2004 elections to the Lok Sabha. Can one say that the electorate has, in the October elections, given the Congress a political mandate and the BJP stands rejected?

The Congress has won Maharashtra and Haryana more by default. No doubt, in politics, victory is what counts and five years in political power is the icing on the cake. The Congress/NCP coalition has returned to power in Maharashtra despite its non-performance. Thousands of farmers have committed suicide, prices of essential commodities are soaring. Instead of creating one crore jobs as promised in the 2004 manifesto, more than thirty lakh jobs were lost. Maharashtra is no longer the number one destination for investment. There was everything for the Congress-NCP alliance to lose, but they registered an arithmetic victory and that ought not to be interpreted as "victory" for the Congress-NCP to shout about. In fact, no Congress spokesman talked of his party's performance during the election campaign. However when voted to office, the party claimed that their return to power was

proof of performance. The other reason for their success is attributed to Congress Party's "heir apparent" Rahul Gandhi particularly his visit to Dalit homes as proof of his Party's concern for the poorest of the poor.

The Rahul Factor

The visit of Rahul to the homes of the Kalavatis and the like was political play-acting. For the media and the Congress to make a big thing of this reflects the bankruptcy of our national public life. There are lakhs of youth fired with patriotism and the urge to do something. But they do not have the paraphernalia of the state at their beck and call. If one swallow does not a summer make, an odd visit to a Dalit home does not make one a messiah of the downtrodden. Going there with an NSG shield, living in sanitized hovels for a few hours or catching a few winks (described as sleep) in a hut or eating there (assuming it to be so) are merely publicity gimmicks. India's poor live in chill penury and severe destitution in remote jungles and hills, not for a day but for generations, come winter, summer or rains, without electricity, tap water, nothing to say of education and means of livelihood. Let Mr. Rahul Gandhi earn his own livelihood like any other youth and then undertake such political roadshows. The Congress having perpetuated poverty through its disastrous policy of socialism is now making political capital out of the misery and poverty of the poor. It reflects crass insensitivity that is packaged as identification with the poor. It is as hollow as Mrs. Indira Gandhi's *Garibi Hatao*.

Unstable Coalitions

In Haryana also, the combined BJP-INLD would have displaced the Congress, had it not been for the BJP's over-confidence in dismantling the NDA and going it alone. With the Independents holding the scales, the Congress coalition is bound to run into rough weather in a state notorious for 'Aya Rams and Gaya Rams'. Remember how, after the Janata Party's defeat in 1980, the then Chief Minister Bhajan Lal defected to the Congress with his government and legislature group. Even if the Congress is able to cobble a majority, it is dependent on political weather cocks. Development is bound to be the casualty. In 1989 when the Congress was defeated but without a clear majority for the Janata Dal, M. R. Masani,

a discerning observer, had pointed out that it is an anti-Congress mandate and the Janata Dal was justified in forming the Government, even if it meant with the outside support of the BJP.

Therefore, despite the Congress forming governments, it is an anti-Congress mandate in Haryana and the win in Maharashtra is more by default resulting from the MNS a breakaway group splitting the Shiv Sena resulting in the BJP-SS combine losing as many as 35 seats.

Will the BJP Learn its Lessons?

The prospects for the BJP as the national Opposition party look bleak. After the loss in the 2009 parliamentary elections, the BJP has been drifting and has really not been able to put its act together. It got embroiled in non-issues like that of Jinnah – an issue not even germane to Indian politics. L. K. Advani's certificate to Jinnah as "secular" triggered his downward slide, threw the party into disarray. Successive electoral reverses have added to its woes. Its central leadership is uninspiring. Factionalism and egos have virtually set the rot for a party which once prided itself for its discipline and values. The State leaders have become regional satraps ignoring, when not defying, their central leadership. If the BJP continues to flounder, it will ensure the return of one party domination in India which lasted for 40 long years.

The Role of an Opposition Party

In a democracy, a strong and vibrant Opposition is as much a prime necessity as a ruling party has to be effective. The BJP in the interest of democracy has to reinvent itself. It is entitled to retain its core ideology of Uniform Civil Code, deletion of Article 370 and the Ram Mandir issue. But these issues have to be coalesced in the light of the globalised economy, upward mobility of the aspirations and lifestyle of the youth who form a large vote bank and are thinking sections of today's society. The youth are as much 'Bharatiya' except that their exposure is at a different level, given the spread of TV and internet. The BJP will have to harmonise tradition with modernity.

The BJP's opposition to the India-US N-Deal was incomprehensible. After the NDA Government did a sterling job in elevating Indo-US economic and strategic relations while neutralising the hypenated US perspective through the India-Pakistan prism, the BJP ought to have supported the Nuclear Deal in the national strategic interest.

India's burgeoning urban middle class, BJP's vote bank, was all for it – for various reasons. BJP's blind

opposition to the N-Deal alienated its vital urban middle class voters and the elections have proved it to be so. The Congress by operationalising the N-Deal was able to hijack the BJP's urban vote bank, leaving the BJP with neither a plausible explanation for opposing the N-Deal nor with a political leverage for its senseless opposition to the N-Deal. If the Communist-Left axis was driven by anti-Americanism and pro-China policies, the BJP's stand neither influenced the N-Deal nor carried weight with its opponents.

The BJP will have to steer clear of the concept of opposition for opposition's sake. Their hostility to the US-Nuclear Deal betrayed this very concept. If the BJP is to be viewed by the people at large as the national alternative, they will have to be seen promoting the national interest even while being in the opposition.

India is still a long way from bipolar politics. Both the BJP and the Congress cannot do without strategic regional alliances. The BJP-SS alliance is one such example that has stood the test, albeit not without hiccups. Both the Congress and the BJP have to make good use of their institutional network. The Congress has done so in Maharashtra in the cooperative field. The BJP can make use of the RSS affiliated education, cultural, women, youth and adivasi wings which if galvanised can help the parties still to emerge as strong pan India parties with some regional support without encouraging parochialism.

When is "Parochial" Parochial

The emergence of parochialism is always talked in terms of the Shiv Sena and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. This to my mind is only partly true but the focus is more because of the Hindutva agenda of the Shiv Sena. Parochialism in India has many facets. Casteist outfits like Mulayam Singh Yadav's Socialist Party(SP), Mayavati's Bhujana Samaj Party(BSP) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Prasad Yadav with their caste agendas are no less parochial as are the DMK and the AIADMK with their linguistic parochialism. The ethnic cleansing of the Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir is also parochialism combined with secession and religious fanaticism. All national parties have aligned themselves with parochial parties. In fact, there will be general acceptance of the fact that it is the Congress which in its long 40-year innings fine-tuned the divide and rule policy they inherited from the British colonial rulers.

Parochialism has to be fought with a strong political will. If pan Indian parties fail, the possibility of disparate coalition of regional outfits will be a disaster.

Cont'd. on p.18

CBI Probe into 2G Spectrum Allocation

Setting a Dangerous Precedent : Prime Minister's Gratuitous Comments

Keshav Rau

Mobile service providers today are provided with what is commonly referred to as "Second Generation" (2G) spectrum. It is a frequency band through which mobile operators are in a position to extend voice as well as limited data transmission services to their clients for effective and varied means of communication. The frequency bandwidth is allocated to the different service providers by the Government. To avail of this facility and provide better services to their clients, the operators are required to pay a fee to the Government. For the Government this is a good source of revenue, if the pricing is done bearing in mind purely commercial considerations. An open auction of the spectrum band is considered to be not only a transparent method, but also one in which substantial revenues could be garnered by the State. The 2G spectrum was allocated in the year 2008 on a first-come-first-served basis as per rates applicable for the year 2001. The adoption of such a procedure has come in for considerable amount of criticism on the ground that the Government lost substantial amount of revenue by fixing rates which had become obsolete.

Some 10-12 years back, there was a lot of concern shown over the fairness in the conduct of vigilance inquiries and bringing to book those guilty of violations under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The Chief Vigilance Commissioner at that time, N.Vittal, made a very sincere attempt at breaking new ground for the introduction of a pragmatic and practical approach in matters having a vigilance angle. In the reform measures that he introduced, he gave a new look to the meaning of the phrase "case having a vigilance angle". He also recognized and appreciated the agony that the victim of a vigilance inquiry was subjected to on account of an inquiry dragging on for a number of years. He, therefore, laid down strict deadlines for the conclusion of inquiries at various stages. He was also pragmatic enough to understand that with the benefit of hindsight every decision taken could be questioned and pilloried. He was, therefore, of the view that such decisions need to be examined and commented upon in the light of the then prevailing circumstances. Decisions having a commercial bearing – as in the case of banks – needed to be judged as such and allowances made accordingly for them. Vittal also advocated the sifting of common procedural errors from those having a vigilance angle, so that clubbing both types of errors/misdemeanors did not result in the cases being dragged on.

Supreme Court Directive

The Supreme Court also, almost at the same time, pitched in and came out with directives to the Central Government to ensure independence to the agencies investigating vigilance cases, and with this objective directed in some cases – Lalu Prasad Yadav's fodder case, for instance – that the CBI SP/any other official conducting

the investigation should not be shunted out. A fixed tenure for the CBI Director was also one of the directives of the Supreme Court. The Central Vigilance Commission [CVC], like the Election Commission, became a three-man body.

These and some other changes brought about were very welcome, and did improve matters at least to some extent, although the nip and thrust that was provided at that time got diluted with the passage of time.

All matters concerning the conduct of vigilance investigation and prosecuting the accused in criminal cases which result from the investigations are entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation [CBI], the country's principal investigating agency. Quite often, the allegation has been levelled that the CBI has been used to suit the political interests of the Party in power at the Centre. However, the recent public pronouncement of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh soon after raids were conducted by the CBI on two floors of "Sanchar Bhawan", headquarters of the Department of Telecommunications [DoT] on Parliament Street in New Delhi has surprised and shocked many.

In the instant case, the CVC had directed the CBI to conduct an investigation into allegations of malafides and conspiracy between DoT Officials and some private companies in the allotment of 2G Spectrum in 2008.

The Prime Minister's Intervention

The CBI registered a case, with the names of the accused being unknown, and raided the Offices of the Departments/Sections concerned of the DoT and also questioned some officials on October 22, 2009. Just three days later (on October 25), of all persons, Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh in a talk with newsmen said that allegations of a scam in 2G allotment were incorrect. He also reportedly gave a clean chit to Telecom Minister Raja.

Now, the CVC had directed the CBI to conduct the investigation into the 2G Spectrum allegations. It can be reasonably concluded that the CVC had with it *some* material warranting the investigation. The CBI functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs. While taking up the investigation and deciding to conduct the raid on Sanchar Bhavan, the CBI, it would be safe to conclude, would have sounded the Ministry, and the latter would have either given its nod or just taken note of the information passed on to it. At any rate, there are no reports of any reservations or objections having been expressed or raised by it. Another point worthy of note is that the CBI has not named any person as an accused, including any of the Officials in the DoT, let alone the Telecom Minister.

Yet, the Prime Minister makes a categorical statement to the media that the allegations of a scam in the Spectrum allotment were incorrect. In making this statement, he has clearly found fault with the CVC in directing the CBI to carry out a probe. For, if the allegations were incorrect, where was the need for an investigation; and that, too, by the CBI? More importantly, what happens to the credibility of the CVC – a body appointed by the President of India? As it is, the CBI's credibility is suspect; the CVC also may find itself similarly placed in the foreseeable future.

Coalition Compulsions Notwithstanding...

Running a coalition government, no doubt, brings in its train several compulsions on the Prime Minister. In the instant case also this was clearly evident, with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi crying foul the moment the raids were conducted. That was obviously to ensure that the head of the Telecom Ministry and his trusted party man was not put on the chopping block. Despite this pressure from the coalition partner, a way to wriggle out of this embarrassing situation could have been thought of instead of virtually questioning the CVC for ordering the investigation. It could have been driven home to the Tamil Nadu CM that it was the CVC which ordered a probe and that it would not be prudent to question the CVC on this count. Moreover, neither the Minister concerned nor any official was named as an accused. Hence, the investigation should have been allowed to continue unhampered.

However, the Prime Minister by his intervention in the matter has placed the CBI in a fix. His statement that the allegations of a scam in the Spectrum allotment were incorrect completely absolves everybody involved

in the case – the Officials as also the Minister. With such a statement by the Prime Minister, what sort of report can the CBI submit? And what would be its credibility?

Such pronouncements by the Prime Minister or any other member of the Government during the course of an investigation are unwarranted and would set a dangerous precedent. Manmohan Singh has earned an excellent reputation of having an impeccable record of integrity and uprightness. One just hopes that merely for maintaining the balancing act within a coalition government he will not allow his image to be sullied by interfering with the CBI and eroding the independence of the CVC.

The BJP spokesman, Arun Jaitley, while criticizing the PM's statement has demanded, in his usual rhetorical style, that Minister Raja be sacked because the Party considers him as the principal actor in the scam. As a matter of fact, Jaitley has already pronounced him guilty. If that be the case, then why a CBI probe at all? It's typical of the BJP to miss the larger and fundamental issues involved in any issue. All that is required at this juncture is that the probe by the CBI be allowed to go through its normal course without any intervention. There is also no need to demand the exit of the Minister – unless reasonable grounds could be established of his tampering with evidences in the case. A number of allegations are made against ministers and investigations also carried out on them. That does not mean that each one of them should be made to quit.

Next in line for allocation will be a much more superior spectrum: 3G. This would enable operators to provide higher speeds, video communication and internet connectivity with far greater ease. It scores over 2G in almost all respects. .

The allocation method for 3G would be viewed with considerable interest.

Postscript

After this article was received for publication, newspapers have reported that the CBI will not probe the policy decisions taken in the 2G Spectrum allocation. The reports indicate there will be no investigation on the decision to allocate the Spectrum neither on first-come-first served basis nor on the pricing issue, but confined to the manner in which information was leaked in advance of the policy decisions which formed the basis for the allocation.

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The Rage Within

H. R. Babu Satyanarayana

It appears logical to infer that the protests are only symbolic and not *per se* fighting for their rights nor against perceived discrimination but the manifestation of a much deeper feeling of disaffection. The protests and demands hide a seething rage within.

All-Pervading Malaise

The spate of strikes, workers' demonstrations protesting against lay offs resulting in brutality and killings, doctors driven to strike for greater pay neglecting their sacred duty to care for their patients, highly educated and well-paid IIT professors going on hunger strike, attacks on Churches in Karnataka, protests by government servants, destruction of property by Jagan's followers in Andhra Pradesh, judges forums across the country demanding that the decision to appoint Justice P. D. Dinakaran the present the Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court as a judge of the Supreme Court be revoked, the many hideous social evils going on unchecked and caste and religious divide destroying the harmony indicative of the growing malaise that has gripped the nation.

Maoist Challenge

The Maoist struggle has assumed menacing proportions. This is mainly the result of indifference and lack of sensitivity in tackling the problems of tribals who form a considerable percentage of the population stretching across a wide swathe of land from the foothills of Nepal to Andhra, Karnataka and Kerala. The political class, over the years has been intruding into their land in the name of development while the middlemen are exploiting them in many ways. Not being wise to the ways of the world and lacking in leadership except in a primitive way the tribals were being manipulated till, in recent years, young men and women, ordinary people like you and me moved by their plight assumed leadership. When sensitive souls are a witness to bestiality and brutality perpetrated on the helpless tribals, their anguished cry stirs them, iron enters their heart and their sole resolve is to emancipate these unfortunate people. They say good bye to a life of luxury and ease and willingly embrace the hard life of the jungle. While they are fired by romantic idealism, they derive sustenance from intellectuals in society masquerading as progressives sympathizing with the Maoist ideology churned in institutions like the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). This is not in any way to discredit the just cause for which the tribals are fighting but to trace how their struggle has passed on to others in society. They must share the blame for what is happening now.

Lately the country has seen increased attack by Maoists killing innocent people while the death of security personnel is sending shock waves. These brave soldiers are dying in hundreds year after year are becoming cannon fodder to a ruthless adversary. The name of Kobad Gandhi now in custody accused as a mentor of the Naxals/Maoists is making news. He is only one of several men who must be leading the Naxals. They seem to be well trained and armed with deadly weapons waging a deadly guerilla war. It is always possible that in such a situation other terrorist groups inimical to India may have joined hands with them. The Union Home Minister has virtually declared war against them. The central Government's campaign is now called 'Operation Green Hunt'. This appears to have all the indication of 'Operation Blue Star' when the Indian Army stormed the Sikh's Golden Temple. If this Government continues to view the Naxal movement ignoring the compelling reasons that led to this guerilla movement instead of examining alternative strategy to draw these tribals into the mainstream of society, any victory over the insurgency would be temporary and hollow. A large section of our own people, humbled and humiliated, will always remain sullen and how this will play out in the long run is difficult to foresee. It must be realized that the Government finds itself in a Catch 22 situation of its own making..

Protests Hide an Inner Rage

Therefore, in this atmosphere of political degeneration the organizations concerned appear to have taken to protest and agitation, for they see the politicians enjoying power and the corrupt remaining above the pale of law. It appears logical to infer that the protests are only symbolic and not *per se* fighting for their rights or against perceived discrimination but the manifestation of a much deeper feeling of disaffection. The protests and demands hide a seething rage within. Even the judiciary which is looked upon as the last bastion of justice has become powerless to rescue the society trapped by the very same laws which are designed to deliver justice but largely failed because they are hemmed in by the cliché that a hundred criminals may escape but an honest man should not be punished; in reality hundreds of innocent

people are hounded or made the scapegoats while criminals escape from the clutches of law. The citizens of this country are witnessing day after day how our political class fight each other for spoils of power and pelf. Parliament and the state legislatures are filled with members with criminal records and they are rolling in money amassed by corrupt means and enjoying power at the cost of the general public. The tragic irony is that citizens have been reduced to becoming silent spectators.

Corruption and Swiss Banks

It is well known that a huge amount estimated at Rs.70 lakh crore has been stashed away in Swiss banks and no purposive action is being taken to unearth this. While political parties indulge in rhetoric, it is obvious there is no intention to get the names which the Swiss banks are ready to disclose. The recent example of how the present Government at the Centre is moving to close the case against Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi accused in the Bofors pay-off is one instance. Everybody including the minister and even the investigative agency seemed to be on the overdrive to bail him out at every stage because of the stranglehold of loyalty over national considerations as Quattrocchi happens to be a close family friend of Sonia Gandhi who is the president of the ruling Congress Party. The history of scams show that till now the prime accused have never been brought to book. Scams are breaking every day and lately the babus receiving huge kick backs from US firms are making news.

The cumulative effect is that it is manifesting as a silent rage in the hearts and minds of the common man because the political class has managed to subvert the system in such a way that even honest citizens driven to suspend their moral judgment and are trapped to become corrupt. This is at the root of all that is eating into the vitals of the nation.

Many Positives

If this is the dismal aspect there are many positives too. The green revolution has done wonders. The country ranks second in the production of rice and wheat in the world. The white revolution has ensured that our country occupies first place in the production of milk in the world. In science we have made great strides including space technology. India's remote sensing is the finest. Similarly, on the IT front the country has achieved enviable progress and Bangalore is often referred to as India's Silicon Valley. We have the second largest pool of scientists and engineers in the world. When the West denied us heavy water resulting in a crisis of power generation based on nuclear technology, our scientists rose to the occasion; similarly when the West would not share its knowledge of super computers, our scientists came up

with our version. The achievements of the Indian diaspora spread across the world are enviable. The list is very long. Longevity has increased and in regard to health expertise India is considered a world-class destination for health tourism and that too at a fraction of what it costs in the West. Above all our armed forces have been content to serve the civil administration and our fighting forces are considered among the finest in the world both for bravery and discipline. India is called the largest working democracy in the world. When other countries are reeling under the effect of recession India has withstood its impact remarkably.

Caught in a Time Warp

Notwithstanding these positives, India also lives in another dimension as though caught in a time warp. Even though mandated by the Constitution to provide free education for children up to 14 years the achievement is dismal. Recent findings during the decade of rapid economic growth reveal that India's record of child mortality at 72 per 1000 live births is worse than that of neighbouring Bangladesh. Two million children under five years of age die each year in India. This is the highest anywhere in the world. Of this more than half die in the first month of their birth. Also one third of all malnourished children live in India. The great tragedy is that that 90% of these deaths occur due to easily preventable causes like pneumonia and diarrhea. On the sanitation and water supply front the record is dismal. Manual scavenging carrying night soil is still prevalent. The Mandal report which was hibernating was resurrected not with any noble intention of ameliorating the lot of the poor but as a power ploy. Since its resurrection India has never been the same; politics now revolves round considerations of caste and sub-caste and religious minorities which are ripping the innards of the nation.

The Security Environment

There is yet another side to the story of India. It is about its security which not only concerns the safety of the citizens all across the country but has the potential to destabilize the State. India today is threatened from all sides. It is as if the noose is tightening slowly and forces inimical to India are acting in concert to put India in a spot by their pincer movement. The ubiquitous terrorist attack which saw its high mark in the 26/11 Mumbai carnage seems to have been a dry run for more deadly attacks if the prevailing environment in neighbouring Pakistan is any guide.

China at our Doorstep

China has started flexing its muscles. It may be recalled that during the visit of the Chinese President to

India, the Chinese Ambassador came out with a statement that Arunachal Pradesh belongs to China! India should not have any illusion that China will tone down its rhetoric. All this has come about since India has always been soft in dealing with China. China issuing visas to residents of J&K and Arunachal Pradesh on a separate paper and not endorsed in the passport as normally followed worldwide has been in the knowledge of India and only now have we woken up to record our protest.

Infiltration from Bangladesh

For years there has been infiltration from Bangladesh which has changed the demography of West Bengal and our comrades have been silent because it served their electoral calculation. This has been going on despite the Supreme Court's ruling but the Congress Party who were their comrades in arms till they got disenchanted after the Indo-US nuclear agreement has soft peddled the potential threat it holds for security of India. In fact all indications are that Bangladesh has become a haven for orchestrating attacks on India by extremist elements from Pakistan with the support of religious zealots in Bangladesh.

The Tamil Lobby

It would be naïve to expect that there will be peace on our southern border with the killing of LTTE leader Prabhakaran. The problem of Tamil refugees has become an emotive issue. Karunanidhi will push their cause by demanding citizenship status to the refugees though it is the responsibility of the Sri Lankan government to create conditions so that they can return to Sri Lanka. Even here India is exhibiting weakness. According to a recent news item India has offered \$100m as aid for post war reconstruction to Sri Lanka to rebuild the country's ravaged north from where the refugees had fled. This offer has been made to retain India's influence but it deceives nobody. Karunanidhi has always played the Tamil card and the present Union Government has meekly acquiesced. This has encouraged Sri Lanka to throw the responsibility on India. This aid could have been better utilized in helping India's poor who are languishing in poverty.

Conflicts and Contradictions

These developments often make me wonder whether our progress is really driven by corruption for there is unimpeachable evidence that India has made giant strides on all fronts even though corruption is rising year by year. The logic for this conclusion is that there is a limit up to which the corrupt can keep money idling and in time it must flow into society in one form or the other and create a trickle down effect reaching all sections of people. The rural poor ones migrating to urban areas to enjoy the fruits

of development. That is how the rural population is rapidly dwindling. Even assuming a certain benign tolerance to corruption, allowing the growth of corruption unchecked will lead to compromising India's security and therein lies the extreme danger to the country's integrity and stability.

The Big Question

At one level some may reconcile to the state of things that prevail in India and feel optimistic and criticise those doomsday sayers who, in their view, exaggerate the so called conflicts, contradictions and degeneration in values. It is, they say, a natural development process that has always been part of the Indian ethos. They conveniently explain it away by giving it an honourable tag as an Indian enigma that endures. Even so the burden of this article is intended to serve as a warning. Whether it is human behaviour plunging into intolerable levels marked by all round degeneration in values, viewed in mechanistic terms if this fall in values exceeds the limit of its elasticity it can never recover its original shape. The question is whether India is on the threshold of this elasticity or has already crossed the limit?

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Will BJP Reform Itself ?

Now that the ruling coalition at the Centre is no longer dependent on communist support for survival reports have it that in the winter session of Parliament convening on 19 November 2009 for a month-long Winter Session, the Central government is getting to revive the stalled economic reforms process. Several Bills crucial to reform the Financial sector are likely to be pushed through

In this task the government will need the support of the BJP to push economic reforms forward as the ruling coalition does not have the required majority in the Rajya Sabha and hence the government will have to evolve a broad consensus.

Here is an opportunity for the BJP the official opposition in Parliament to rise to the occasion, judge each measure on its merit and support or oppose not on the basis of narrow party interests but judged on the basis of the national interest. As the author says in his article on the recently concluded Assembly elections (pages 5 and 6) the BJP should not oppose for opposition's sake but imagine what it would have done had it been power. It has the opportunity to restore the solemnity and credibility of parliament so badly eroded in the 14th Lok Sabha

Will it have the wisdom to convey to the people of India through its responsible behaviour and actions that it is capable of looking ahead instead of harking on the past and engaged in anti-deluvian rhetoric?

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.

Maharashtra Elections

1) It is good that like the Lok Sabha elections, Maharashtra Assembly elections have provided a clear winner. No longer shall we have to suffer the sight of a tail wagging the dog, of a rump black-mailing a major party into accepting its fanciful demands. That makes for good governance as well as healthy democracy. It is wrong to assume that multifarious group representation provides for greater voice to the people. Cacophony of sounds does not make good music. Harmony and order is as much necessary. The fear of single party dominance is not misplaced but it is better to have effective governance rather than no governance. The victory of the pre-poll alliance of the Congress and the NCP is therefore welcome (notwithstanding their ugly haggling over Ministerial berths). The ruling combine did not do much earlier; it may hopefully do better this time around.

Why Iraqis Like their Mobile Phones

Asked to name the single biggest benefit of America's invasion, many Iraqis fail to mention freedom or democracy but instead praise the advent of mobile phones, which were banned under Saddam Hussein. Many Iraqis seem to feel more liberated by them than by the prospect of elected resident government.

The Economist, November 18

1) It is wrong to conclude that the opposition has been decimated and it is bad for democracy. Yes, the opposition has been badly mauled because of internal divisions, lack of leadership and mis-handling of issues. The major opposition combine's vote share is 30.30% as against 37.40% of the ruling combine. Seven per cent edge can hardly be called dominance. What is worrying is the emergence of spoilers like the MNS which has succeeded in splitting the major opposition vote bank. The uneasy feeling is that the divisive agenda of the MNS which banks on the weapon of hatred is finding resonance in a city like Mumbai. It has emerged as the second largest party in the metropolis, pushing aside old established parties like the Shiv Sena, BJP and NCP. While there is no need to grieve over their fate, the rise of the MNS poses problems for the growth of Mumbai. It can capture the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in the next election if it weans away the Sena votes, which is a possibility now; to be viable, the MNS has to grow out of its slogan dominated politics of hatred or risk dividing the city into a 'we' and 'they' syndrome. Screaming about injustice is enough to attract attention; ascent to power would necessitate finding ways to undo the injustice, perceived or otherwise. We have had a glimpse of the depths to which MNS can sink by their behaviour on the first day of the Assembly session over the use of Hindi. Abu Azmi's record does not justify sympathy for him but it is a sad day when Marathi 'asmita' has to be protected through vandalism and *goondagiri*, which has become a trademark of the MNS.

Is Violence Justified?

2) The Central Government's decision to launch a major, concerted offensive against the Naxalites came rather late but as usual any decision, however well meant, is questioned in this country; that is the price of democracy. Naxalites called it a declaration of war and immediately voices were raised how a constitutional authority could declare war on its own people. Social activists like Arundhati Roy raised the cry of conspiracy by the capitalists and their henchmen against the poor and downtrodden. It was argued that the poor when robbed of everything, their women raped and their lands plundered had no alternative but to grab a gun and attack the perpetrators. When this happened, it was wrong for the State to inflict further

2) The revolutionary lexicon is capable of conjuring up any argument to suit the occasion. Justification of violence in any form is a dangerous enterprise. Any action, however gruesome, can be justified through search for a causative factor. The MNS violence against the 'outsiders' can be justified by the same perverted logic; the anger of one community against another is justified through the same stratagem. Dacoits can also show reasons why they became dacoits. There would be no end to excuses and justifications for any wrong-doing. It is imperative to abide by the dictum of Weber that "the State must claim monopoly of the legitimate use of force in a civilized society". Justification of use of force by non-State actors is a danger to civilized society. Departure from the axiom spelt out by Weber, however expedient, is a plunge into the darkness of anarchy. There is no doubt that poverty is the prime cause of mass violence; however poverty

damage on the wretched souls by declaring war against them. It is further argued that a militarist approach is wrong morally and tactically. The beheading of a cop, abduction of various others, attacks on innocent civilians etc., are but an unfortunate consequence of the situation created by the State in the first place because of its wrong policies and vested interests of the capitalist ruling clique. Class war needs no justification apart from its historical inevitability. With so much intellectual obfuscation, matters became worse and there was confusion among the 'war mongers'; West Bengal negotiated a settlement with the Naxalites for a hostage swap while the Centre talked tough. A Rajdhani train was hijacked but it was mysteriously allowed to go without further ado. The police registered an equally mysterious FIR on the incident, naming no accused and complaining of damage worth Rs. 50/- for the horrors of detention of 500 passengers for 5 hours!

eradication will take decades. Can we condone anarchy in the interim? We have a surfeit of experts who can prove how any Government action is totally wrong; they are regrettably not accountable to anybody. Do they agree with the moth eaten Maoist idea of class war for which the Adivasis are being made cannon fodder? The Indian State is guilty of many things but it is not ruthless or efficient enough to plan the massacre of the entire Adivasi belt; it would require a Stalinist or Maoist State to conjure up a rationale to eliminate an entire population! Let the critics of 'war' come forward and establish viable peace and not obstruct the Government's effort to stop the politically inspired mindless violence.

Scorning the Anti-Communists

Given the vast human suffering caused by communism, in the 20th century, one might think that liberal-minded westerners would have cheered those leading the fight to free those trapped in its grasp. But many liberals chose instead to attack those fighting communism rather than those perpetuating it.

Heritage Foundation's *Insider on Line*, November 12

Taliban's India Connection?

3) It takes a lot of creative effort to put India and Taliban, inveterate enemies, on the same side but there is no dearth of yarn spinners in Pakistan. Asif Ali Zardari talks sense occasionally, which is an improvement on Musharaff but the same compliment cannot be paid to his Prime Minister or the Interior Minister. Both of them manufacture vitriol to blame India for anything going wrong in Pakistan. After accusing India of fomenting trouble in Balochistan, now it is their turn to explain the trouble they are having in the unruly tribal belt. The Pak army had to launch an offensive against the Taliban in South Waziristan. They had earlier divided Taliban into good Taliban and bad, for US consumption'; now they are trying out the foreign hand theory to explain why the army is fighting its own erstwhile heroes.

3) The Taliban are iconic figures for the common religious man in Pakistan. Suddenly, the Taliban have become the mortal enemy to be bombed out of existence. It is hard for the 'aam aadmi' to take this plunge of military logic. The Government of Pakistan had to explain why this was justified. What more convenient explanation than to call the Pak Taliban the agents of the hated Indians? It may sound absurd to the rest of the world, which knows that India is a major target for the Taliban – good or bad –but to the Pakistanis, it is not such an implausible explanation. Our PM has ignored the Pak allegation as nonsense and moved further to offer negotiations as a way to solve old problems. Whether the civil administration in Pakistan can act on the offer is doubtful as usually they prefer to shadow box around such solutions. This time, Secretary Clinton is supposed to make a difference! She put Pakistan on the mat for sheltering the Al Qaeda/Taliban. US diplomats are not known to speak the truth so bluntly. Will her tough talk make any difference?

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

Paying Homage to our Guardians

If you all have access to the European and American papers online, you would have noticed that every country which took part in World War I commemorated Armistice Day on 11 November with due ceremony and the highest in the land took a prominent part in it. But in India 16 December (Victory in East Pakistan) and 10 July (Victory in Kargil) are contentious dates, with every petty politician and mandarin in their Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) giving his own version as to why these days need not be celebrated. Are we really concerned with the security of our country. I doubt it. We seem to be content with outsourcing this task to the armed forces who are getting their due compensation! Is that the only link citizens should have with the people who permit them to carry out their daily professions, permit them to sleep peacefully, be able to talk freely and grow food as they wish? I have never seen any concern being shown at the rising number of deaths amongst our security forces, similar to the one shown by the Europeans, Americans, Japanese, Australians and even the Chinese

Lt. Gen. S. K. Bahri (Retd.), New Delhi. From his letter of November 13 to the Press.

Political Parties in India – A Liberal Perspective

Giridhar Prabhu

Party constitutions cannot be subject to ideology but to democratic principles.

A preliminary study of Party Constitutions in India reveals that they are totally antagonist to the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. The latest developments in all parties in India and the sustained activities of parties and their functionaries are blatantly unconstitutional and consequently debasing democratic principles. A true democrat must be allegated to a written constitution.

As much as coups in South America are watched with relish by commentators or the public, party activities in India have been a subject for political commentators and drama for media a universal derision by the voting and non-voting public exists.

Liberals are in a hopeless minority with the existing parties as well as with political mainstream. So much so we feel we need minority status and protection! A person who is honest can hardly survive in today's milieu. Countless unsaid stories are there of honest political persona who have been disillusioned after being close spectators to this phenomena. In personal lives they and their families have been reduced to penury just by remaining honest in public life.

Today's politicians who create, nurture and destroy parties do it out of personal or borrowed wealth which subvert and demolish due democratic process within parties.

How can we be deemed to be the world's most populous, working and vibrant democracy with an undermined and derogated party system? One learns from Liberalism that the State is an instrument of the public it serves. A democratic Government is to have mastery on the State and its apparatus. Then what is the status of Parties as an organization in India?

It requires the least qualification in this country to be a representative of the people. The people's representatives are to be in charge of the current and future affairs of the nation of a billion people. What expectations can we have from our people's representatives when citizens do not understand the functions of the state, conduct in public life and maintaining, nurturing, sustaining and improving democratic institutions ?

Currently party functionaries have no resources and function on the resources maintained privately or draw on the resources purloined from the State apparatus. Ministers and legislators involve themselves in party activities with the public's resources. Party Organizations are hardly democratic. Any close observations will reveal a combination of feudal, dictatorial, totalitarian based communist and socialist party practices.

One sees liberalism in private and in the party nefarious practices in public. Invisible forces are always at work keeping democracy alive and working. This does imply that there is scope for reform in parties and party functioning. A party is an organization and should be respected and treated as such. It must come within a constitutional and legal framework. Understand the complexities in which parties work. Make it simple. Optimism, hope and a positive attitude by citizens will make the vision clear.

Party constitutions must be reviewed without bias by the public. Political scientists must dissect it relentlessly till a standard is arrived when party constitutions are nationally accepted which need to be followed and needs to be followed by persons who join and nurture parties. Party constitutions cannot be subject to ideology but to democratic principles.

Parties also need to be functional. They need to subscribe to minimum standards and must lead to perform. Organizations are not new to India and India has to evolve its way to raise these organizations. What would be the objective? If the State is an organization for the people it serves, what would be the objective of parties? It cannot be that parties are organizations for the benefit of people who participate in it. Organizations are better than individuals in delivery of functions in a modern society. It cannot also be taken as a given that organizations or people who run them should fail the people it intends to serve.

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African Farmland and India's Food Problem

Neelakant Patri

Maybe, Indians flocking to Africa to grow foodgrains would ship back their produce to India to strengthen the stocks.

Several Indian companies have reportedly bought large tracts of farm lands in countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and Mozambique to grow a range of commodities that would be shipped back to India to meet the growing demand for food by a growing population.

Should we welcome this or take a cautious look at its likely impact on India's own agriculture?

There seems to be tacit approval of the government for the move by the Indian farmers into the uncharted African territories. Leaders in many of these countries are eager that Indian farmers take their knowledge and muscle to help African agriculture. Recently, the Sudanese government urged farmers from Punjab to invest and work to help develop its agriculture.

India, apparently has been late in grabbing this opportunity. China, South Korea and Saudi Arabia have been quite aggressive in moving into African agriculture by leasing hundreds of thousands of hectares of land. With their vast foreign exchange reserves, the two countries have bought land not only in Africa but are venturing into Asian countries, including Pakistan. South Korea recently bought about 700,000 hectares of fertile lands in Sudan, while Saudi Arabia has reportedly signed a deal for half a million hectares in Tanzania.

The Gulf States, Egypt and South Korea together have been leased some 1.5 million hectares of prime land by Sudan. Apparently, the Sheikhs in the Gulf States with their huge oil money, who hitherto flocked to cities like London to buy up real estate are finally finding real farmland a more attractive proposition. Kuwait has leased 130,000 hectares of rice fields in Kampuchea while Egypt, not satisfied with its own fertile wheat fields, has leased 840,000 hectares in Uganda. South Africa, the only producer of surplus food in Africa, has not lagged behind.

Indians have been pioneers in migrating to African countries and starting businesses there. They have been much riled as an exploitative group and had faced

rather harsh treatment in Uganda. Now they are again moving to Africa, seeing the great opportunity that raising food crops provides to a world population that threatens to grow by another billion within half a century.

Though world food prices have declined somewhat from the peak levels of 2008, there is a growing concern about likely food shortages in the future. The Food and Agriculture Organisation forecasts a 3.4% fall in cereals production in 2009 but says that large carryover stocks would keep the prices in check because demand is stagnant. This may be good news for drought-stricken India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as well as Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar have assured that the government would import all commodities in short supply and not let any Indian go hungry.

However, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has said that the government would watch the international commodity prices closely before importing pulses in particular. It is a welcome sign that someone in the government is talking sense. Mukherjee recognises that the moment India announces a decision to import a commodity, international suppliers jack up prices.

One is not sure if India would make a departure from its past practice of inviting tenders for the supply of commodities and then find itself facing a cartel of sorts with bidders jacking up prices and then negotiating a small reduction. In the end India was paying more than the market price that obtained before it floated tenders. Suppliers have been thus shortchanging India in the name of transparency and many Indian policy-makers were buying this argument. That this system also encouraged corruption was quietly buried under this transparency principle!

Though the shortage of pulses is quite visible and people are agitated about the high prices, there seems to be adequate stocks of other foodgrains like wheat and rice. We are not as yet clear about how much loss there would be in food output because of the failure of the monsoon.

The agriculture minister has acknowledged that the situation in nearly 246 districts across 10 states is quite grim. The Kharif crop thus would be severely affected and the government would have to adopt every measure to boost the ensuing Rabi season. The government is urging the states to promote planting of alternate crops like pulses in the traditional fields growing rice. The states should waste no time in taking up this suggestion.

The success of the government schemes to supply at subsidised prices to the BPL and AAY families has been largely due to the huge stocks in the Central pool. Pawar has said that the Centre procured a record 253 lakh tonnes of wheat and 326 lakh tonnes of rice in the current marketing season. That helped release of 11 million tonnes of foodgrains last year and 17 million tonnes in the current year. That kind of comfort may not be available as the states have begun making demands for larger allocation of foodgrains from the Central Pool in the wake of deficit in rainfall.

The government resorts to market intervention measures to bring out hoarded stocks in times of crises. There is already a crisis situation in regard to pulses and another in the shape of sugar shortage is looming. Sugar output is down by more than 11 million tonnes to 15 million while the domestic demand is around 23 million tonnes. That the government is willing to import sugar too (duty free for raw sugar and upto one million tones of refined

till the end of March 2010) goes to show that it is willing to risk the displeasure of the sugar barons of Maharashtra. The state is due to go to polls to elect a new assembly and Mr. Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party depends a great deal on the sugarcane-growing areas in the state for votes.

Since the government is committed to supply food at subsidised prices to the poor under the Food Security Act, there is no escaping from its responsibility. The Central Pool is required to maintain a minimum stock of around 11.8 million tonnes of rice and 8.2 million tonnes of wheat on the 1st January of each year to meet the needs of the public distribution system. Of course, that figures varies for different quarters of the year but with the kharif crop failure looming large, the rice stocks may deplete sharply.

Maybe, Indians flocking Africa to grow foodgrains would ship back their produce to India to strengthen the stocks. It may be another story for the people of those countries if in case they themselves are facing shortfall in food and they need all the food that is grown in their land by both the domestic farmers and the foreign companies.

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Courtesy: *Southern Economist*, September 15, 2009.

What killed Ranjan Das?

A month ago, many of us heard about the sad demise of Ranjan Das from Bandra, Mumbai. Ranjan, just 42 years of age, was the CEO of SAP-Indian Subcontinent, the youngest CEO of an MNC in India. He was very active in sports, was a fitness freak and a marathon runner. It was common to see him run on Bandra's Carter Road. Just after Diwali, on 21st October, he returned home from his gym after a workout, collapsed with a massive heart attack and died. He is survived by his wife and two very young kids.

It was certainly a wake-up call for corporate India. However, it was even more disastrous for runners amongst us. Since Ranjan was an avid marathoner the question came as to why an exceptionally active, athletic person succumbed to heart attack at 42 years of age.

A couple of you called me asking about the reasons. While Ranjan had mentioned that he faced a lot of stress, that is a common element in most of our lives. We used to think that by being fit, one can conquer the bad effects of stress. So I doubted if the cause was stress.

However, everyone missed out a small line in the reports that Ranjan used to make do with 4-5 hours of sleep. This in an earlier interview of Ranjan on NDTV in the program 'Boss' Day Out':

Here he himself admits that he would love to get more sleep (and that he was not proud of his ability to manage without sleep, contrary to what others extolled).

Courtesy: Dr. Surendra Dhelia email: surendradhelia@gmail.com

Come On, Liberals: Let's Change India!

A Liberal Perspective on Taxes - Part II

Sanjeev Sabhlok

Clearly, the liberal is not utopian. He realizes that practical matters related to the ease of collection of taxes will influence the real tax system, even though unavoidable distortions will result.

Last month, in the first part of this article I made the comment that internally consistent theories of public finance simply don't exist. I then went on to (bravely!) propose an internally consistent theory derived from the basic social contract. The following principles resulted from that analysis, that (a) citizens (and not companies) should pay taxes; (b) paying taxes must be mandatory unless someone is simply unable to pay; (c) taxes should be based on the annual average of the lifetime worth of an individual; and (d) taxes must price-discriminate with a modest level of progression: the marginal rates approximating the overall share of taxes to GDP.

According to the fourth principle, the middle class should pay an income tax at a marginal rate approximately equal to the proportion of overall taxes to GDP; the rich should pay at a rate slightly above this; and those below the poverty line should not pay taxes, receiving a negative income tax as part of the social insurance scheme, instead.

The Right Level of Taxation

A fifth principle suggests itself: the total amount of tax collected should be neither too much nor too little, being just enough to ensure *effective* delivery of necessary government services. The liberal believes that when governments are restricted to their proper role they provide us with a crucially needed service. In this regard it may be noted that a society comprising a larger share of honest people (like Japan) will need less policing and hence lower taxation. Corrupt societies will need higher levels of taxation.

In any event, the liberal is not smitten by the mindless fascination of some alleged 'liberals' for low taxation. It is crucial to have the right size of government with right services and functions. That is the only correct determinant of the right level of taxation. Today, India's socialist government imposes an extremely low overall tax burden but then it *squanders* these precious revenues on totally unnecessary activities. The consequent under-supply of basic public goods like defence, police and justice – including the defense of property rights – has led to significant crime and poverty in India.

The Ever-Present Spectre of Regressive Taxation

Theoretical models of public taxation are extremely difficult to translate into practice. We noted last month how regressive taxation is the norm across the world. The rich pay proportionately less as they get richer. At the same time, the poor (who, we have noted, should not have to pay taxes) fork out heavy consumption and indirect taxes. The most progressive taxes of all are reserved for the salaried upper middle class, which carries the world on its shoulders.

The rich benefit most from any number of exemptions, including a regressive capital gains tax regime. Assume that A and B have the same level of assets today and that they invest equally in, say, land; now assume that A receives a windfall gain with his land tripling in value while B's stagnates; most tax systems will treat A's windfall gains very lightly, even though A is now considerably richer than B. It is improper for windfall gains to be taxed proportionately less than income from ordinary hard work.

The reality is that even as the rich continue to influence politicians to give them more and more exemptions, they end up suffering from the effects of the consequent regressive taxation regime. While they can own the best Mercedes, they must then hire heavily armed security guards and drive through sludgy, potholed roads. The quality of life is very low in societies that depend on regressive taxation.

Some Other Principles of Taxation

Other principles of taxation include:

- No taxation without representation (i.e. democratically determined taxes).
- Inflation is the most regressive form of taxation. The liberal therefore opposes deficit financing except in the rarest circumstances (like war).
- Taxes must be levied by that tier of government which administers the relevant service (principle of subsidiarity).

- Since it is citizens who must be taxed, taxation of goods must be avoided, being limited to Pigovian taxes to facilitate the internalizing of negative externalities. Where possible, market-based instruments should be used to control negative externalities.
 - The variable cost of a government service to an individual or industry, such as the cost of processing a license, should be recovered from that individual or industry (cost recovery principle).
 - The government should not own land except for roads, common infrastructure, Parliament, courts, basic defence establishments, and police stations. This will allow land to be put to its most productive use. The government should therefore sell land and use these revenues to keep taxes low.
 - Transfers of assets from one generation to another should be treated seamlessly, thus ruling out inheritance taxes.
2. The only defensible way to increase taxes is to broaden the base by requiring all Indian families to lodge annual income and wealth tax returns. Poverty elimination, a vitally necessary part of the liberal agenda, also depends critically on the information received from such returns (see my article in *Freedom First*, August 2009). The result would be to increase the base of tax returns in India from 3 crores to around 67 crores.
 3. Since abolishing company taxes will be impractical and create many complications, an alternative is to reduce company tax level in India to 25 per cent while requiring dividends paid to Indian investors to be franked through an imputation system: thus defaulting to an income tax system.
 4. Apart from eliminating indirect taxes (already touched upon) most excise duties and taxes on products will, in due course, need to be abolished. Pigovian taxes, however, may well be needed on a few products.
 5. Given that increases in asset prices continuously transfer significant amounts of wealth to the rich relative to the poor, land and capital gains taxes would need to be increased, aiming at the end of all these reforms for a (broadly) overall flat tax system in India from the current regressive one.

Clearly, the liberal is not utopian. He realizes that practical matters related to the ease of collection of taxes will influence the real tax system, even though unavoidable distortions will result. Things like a mix of indirect and direct taxes, or the use of visible and not discounted *future* income and wealth, will therefore be unavoidable.

Implications for India

What does this mean for India? A few thoughts are outlined below.

1. India must raise its overall tax level from the current tax share currently of around 16 to 18 per cent of GDP to 25 per cent of GDP (compared with 33-50 per cent of GDP in the West). Note that merely raising taxes without reforming India's governance model will not improve matters. Therefore governance reforms of the sort advocated in my book *Breaking Free of Nehru* (<http://bfnsabhlokcity.com/>) must form the bedrock of reform in public finance.

Given space constraints I have been able to present only a sketch of a theory of liberal taxation, but I trust that these two articles of mine will be found broadly reasonable by liberals everywhere.

Freedom Team of India

Once again I'd like to remind readers that FTI (<http://freedomteam.in/>) continues to look for leaders and seeks your active involvement and support.

MR. SANJEEV SABHLOK can be contacted at **sabhlok@yahoo.com**.

The Assembly Elections of 2009 : Who Won? *(Cont'd. from p.6)*

Therein lies the danger to Indian democracy because it creates a fertile ground for Maoists and Naxalites. The internal Maoist and Naxalite insurgency is a serious threat to Indian democracy and security. Maoists will never accept constitutional democracy. And if they do, it will be to subvert the very democratic system that ushers them to power, as in Nepal.

The emerging Taliban threat to Pakistan will make India the natural target sooner rather than later. Taliban

and the Maoist-Naxalite axis pose a grave security threat that will undermine India's economic progress, something that China would happily welcome. Can a weak Centre contain the threat? Can there be an effective pan Indian opposition to provide a viable alternative that will transcend parochial and divisive politics? As of today, to expect this kind of maturity is to beg the question.

MR. NITIN G. RAUT is a practising lawyer of the Mumbai High Court and a member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*.



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjika

What's in a Name?

It was a simple business transaction – an apology in exchange for protection.

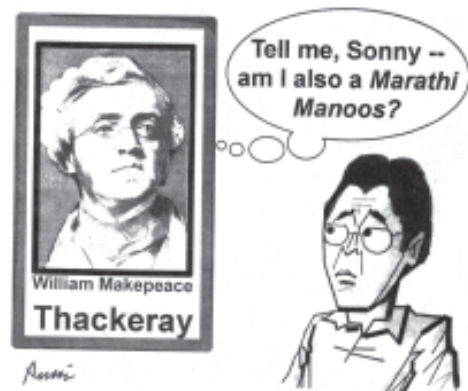
This ridiculous controversy about Mumbai vs. Bombay keeps resurfacing with distressing regularity. The latest brouhaha was caused because a character in a Hindi movie referred to this metropolis as Bombay. Naturally, the non-issue Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) immediately scented blood over this “grave insult” to countless Maharashtrians and milked it for maximum effect. The film’s producer, Karan Johar, promptly trotted out to MNS head honcho Raj Thackeray’s residence to tender an abject apology. Many have criticized Johar for what they regard as an act of craven cowardice, but I don’t blame him. The man has crores invested in his movie and he would naturally do whatever was necessary to ensure that the film is allowed to run without disturbances. It was a simple business transaction – an apology in exchange for protection.

This whole name issue is fruitless and counter productive. The name Bombay resonates through the history of the past few centuries. For two hundred years upto the mid-20th Century, Bombay was universally celebrated as the *Urbs Prima in Indis*: the Gateway to India. Bombay was stately, elegant, benevolent, fun loving and, above all, classy. Bombay was an oasis of elegant promenades, where old-world charm mixed effortlessly with modern conveniences – remember, it was this city that saw the first suburban train, the first tram...the list is endless. In short, Bombay was the premier metropolis in the Eastern Hemisphere. Incidentally, old Bombay had kolis as its original inhabitants and a large population of Marathi *manos*, but no one took objection to the name. On the contrary, they were proud to be known as Bombayites.

In the latter half of the last Century, Bombay became Mumbai, mainly as a result of political jingoism. It had very little to do with Marathi pride and, truth be told, most of the city’s inhabitants didn’t care one way or another. It was merely a gimmicky platform for a party that had little else to offer. It brought about zero improvement

in the life of the common man. And so now, we are living in Mumbai, with its proliferating slums, its overflowing drains and a sense of fear in a metropolis that was once regarded as the safest in India.

The argument that Bombay has reverted to its original name is itself a fallacy. When the British received Bombay as dowry for a Portuguese princess, it wasn’t even a city; just a collection of islands. Historical records offer no mention of Mumbai and tracing the origin to Mumbadevi was dreamed up by the Shiv Sena. Be that as it may, there is nothing wrong with Indianizing a name perceived to be a legacy of colonialism. But it does not follow that the anglicized name should be reviled and banned. Italians call it Venezia, but they do not feel insulted if their city is referred to by its international name Venice. They have the self confidence and maturity to be comfortable with either name. It is only in India that political parties display their immaturity and insecurity by being so touchy.



Courtesy: Rajinder Puri and *The Statesman*, November 12, 2009.

Incidentally, has anyone else observed the irony of the champions of the sons-of-the-soil changing their name from the Marathi Thakre to the anglicized Thackeray? William Makepeace must be chuckling in his grave.

Fighting The Naxals : Warped Priorities

Obviously, according to the government’s skewed priorities, the lives of citizens are of less value than getting charlatans and crooks elected to high office.

A news item in *The Times of India* of October 10, 2009 is an illustration of what is wrong with this coun-

try; and why the Indian public is probably the most tolerant in the world.

The report pertains to the recent encounter between the police and Naxalites in Laheri village in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, where 20 policemen lost their lives and dozens more were seriously injured. The party of policemen was ambushed by a numerically superior Naxalite force and desperately needed air support. They were assured by the authorities that a helicopter was on the way, but it never arrived, although the encounter lasted a full five hours. If it had, a number of lives could have been saved and casualties minimized.

What makes this incident particularly shocking is that, just a day before, the Congress candidate had no problem requisitioning a helicopter in order to attend an election rally in the same region. However, the *coup de grace* was provided by the then Maharashtra's Home Minister, Jayant Patil, who supposedly was appointed to look after the security of his state's citizens. The "honourable" gentleman blithely declared that, following a previous Naxalite attack in May, a plan was drawn up to beef up security in the Naxal infested areas. However, it was not yet implemented, five months later, because the additional forces allotted for this task were diverted for election duty. It never occurred to the minister what a pathetic picture this painted of the government's attitude.

One does not accuse the government of deliberately malafide intentions. It is a question of lethargy and warped priorities. In our democracy which, supposedly,

functions – according to Abraham Lincoln's definition – for the people, by the people; the people are at the bottom of the food chain. Ministers, sundry politicians and bureaucrats belong to a superior species, for whom different rules apply. The police patrol's request for a helicopter went unheeded, not deliberately, but because the required permission to dispatch the aircraft was submerged in a bureaucratic quagmire. The Congress candidate, however, faced no such problem. The red tape which is wound round the necks of ordinary citizens simply falls away from the corpulent throats of our political class.

Far more atrocious was the decision to defer additional security because of the elections. Obviously, according to the government's skewed priorities, the lives of citizens are of less value than getting charlatans and crooks elected to high office.

I am sure the Home Minister does not see the irony in his statement because, for him, it represents business as usual. What he is saying, in effect, is that this is how government functions in India; live with it. The greater tragedy is that we, the people, have lived with it for six decades. I will tell you in one word what will be the outcome of this travesty: nothing. A few outraged citizens will write letters to the editor, opposition parties will sense an opportunity to gain political mileage – and the *status quo* will continue. We have to rely on God to help this country, because our "leaders" certainly do not.

Is Armageddon Nigh?

Mother Nature seems to have gone berserk recently

Unprecedented rains and flooding in South India and the Philippines, two major earthquakes and tsunami warnings – all in the space of a week. We have become so accustomed to major natural calamities described as the worst in a decade, 50 years, in living memory, as also the increasing frequency with which they occur, that we have become almost desensitized to them.

Global warming, greenhouse gasses are the usual suspects; and for sure they are major contributors, but is that the complete explanation? I'm not convinced it is. Yes, global temperatures are rising but only by a fraction of a degree every year. If the cause is so gradual, why are the effects being felt at hurricane speed? Mother Nature seems to have gone berserk recently. It's almost as if she has a personal grudge against us humans and is showing her displeasure in no uncertain terms. Something is seriously wrong with this planet we call home. It is almost as if earth is in its final death throws.

Doomsday scenarios have been around for over a decade now: melting of polar ice caps causing rise in ocean levels and obliterating coastal cities like Mumbai and San Francisco. However, even the doomsayers give mankind at least another 50 years before they need to start heading for the hills, but at the rate our planet seems to be tearing itself apart, I'm beginning to wonder if we have that long. I'm not overly religious, but it almost seems that God has had it with mankind. Are we heading for a 21st Century Sodom and Gomorrah, but on a global scale?

Some spiritualists think it is quite probable. A well known medium in Mumbai who is said to be in constant communication with her two long dead sons, through automatic writing and telecommunication, has published a book where they have warned her to prepare for what they call the "Shift". According to the dead souls, God is so disgusted with us humans that He has made up His mind to wipe us off the planet and populate with a new

race, which hopefully will take better care of His world. In this scenario, in the not too distant future, the earth's magnetic poles will suddenly reverse themselves, resulting in cascading hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that will wipe out the human race. Only a few chosen souls will be saved, though it is not clear how.

So is Armageddon imminent? Is it too late to repent and save the planet? Only the Big Guy Upstairs has the answers – and he's not telling. Now I'm wondering whether to save up for my old age, or just blow up my savings in one spectacular Bacchanalian orgy.

Democracy In Excess

It is why dreams of Shanghai, for example, will always remain just that – pipe dreams.

Sare jahan se accha, Hindostan hamara.

During the recent elections, when I visited my polling booth in Colaba, I was struck by the reality, not for the first time, how the usual government malaise of inefficiency and over staffing have carried over, almost inevitably, to the election process.

My polling station is situated in a school in a quiet by lane; and I doubt if there were ever more than five voters in line at any one time. Yet, I witnessed six, repeat six officials seated comfortably in that tiny room. One gentleman verified my identity and shouted out a number to his colleague across the room, a third gentleman was seated with the sole purpose of inking fingers – and I have no idea what the remaining three were supposed to be doing. This is a scandalous waste of human resources. When I was a student in London, I happened to witness a by-election. The polling booth was manned by a single individual who checked the driver's licence against the voter list, inked the finger and pointed to the voting machine. I believe this procedure is followed all across Europe and America. Some might argue that the assembly line method adopted in this country speeds up the voting process; and this may be valid in polling stations where a large turnout is expected, but why make it a general process?

Some might ask why I am so bothered, since it's no skin off my nose. I will tell you why. For almost a month before the actual election date, I have been reading news reports of schools, colleges, the police force and various other institutions being denuded of important staff for "election duty". This has caused the functioning of these departments – never exemplary to begin with – to be adversely affected. And since many of these institutions deal directly with the general public, it is the common man who has to suffer.

Despite almost two decades of the much touted economic liberalism, some legacies of Nehruvian socialism refuse to go away. Among them is the belief among the establishment that it makes sense to employ two individuals to do one man's job; and that a government employee has the inalienable right not to be fired, no matter how incompetent he proves to be. It is why dreams of Shanghai, for example, will always remain just that – pipe dreams. *Sare jahan se accha, Hindustan hamara.*

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When Obama's Star Power Failed

Four cities were in the running for holding the 2016 International Olympics – Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, Tokyo and Madrid. The International Olympic Committee meeting in Copenhagen decided that the host city for the 2016 summer games will be Rio de Janeiro.

And thereby hands a tale: Chicago, thought by many to be in the box seat, was surprisingly the first city to be eliminated, Tokyo followed soon after. Many developing countries are reckoned to have shown solidarity with Rio – and the event had never before been staged in South America. Madrid was thought to have only a slender chance mainly because the 2012 games will be in London. Tokyo may have suffered because the games would be held only eight years after Beijing triumphed, troubling those who advocate sharing it around more widely. Politics, supposedly, does not count either. Chicago, a town known for political machinations secured the personal backing of its adopted son, Mr. Obama who flew into Copenhagen in Air Force One to personally root for his country. He asked the IOC to "choose America" and to witness the "incredible diversity of the American people." Chicago's resounding loss is something of a blow to his star power.

[Based on an *Economist* (October 2) Report]

How To Be Politically Correct

In this world in which every thing is suspect and every act and word has to be used with the same caution as walking on egg shells, governments and political parties are stretching themselves to be 'politically correct'. Nursery rhymes are being rewritten, childrens stories are being recast...to care for the sensitivities of the 21st century. Not to be left behind, Indian bureaucracy is ideally poised, as always, to keep pace with the world!

The following, reproduced from the internet, provides a fine example of how our bureaucrats can show the way to scholars. It is clearly no longer enough to have an answer for every question; it is time to question every answer. A new way to put classics under intelligent scrutiny. Yes!!

- Farrokh K. R. Mehta

To:

**The Writer, Film Director & Film Producer of
MAHABHARAT**

Ref: Film story submitted by you, regarding financing of films by Government of India, Your letter dt.1st April 2009

The undersigned is directed to refer the above letter and state that the Government has examined your proposal for financing a film called "Mahabharat". The Very High Level Committee constituted for this purpose has been in consultation with the Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Women and Labour Commission, in addition to various Ministries and State Governments and have formed definitive opinions about the script. Their observations are as below:

1. In the script submitted by you it is shown that there were two sets of cousins, namely, the Kauravas, numbering one hundred, and the Pandavas, numbering five. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has pointed out that these numbers are high, well above the norm prescribed for families by the Ministry. It is brought to your kind attention that when the Government is spending huge amounts for promoting family planning, this will send wrong signals to the public. Therefore, it is recommended that there may be only three Kauravas and one Pandava.
2. The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs has raised an issue whether it is suitable to depict kings and emperors in this democratic age. Therefore, it is suggested that the Kauravas may be depicted as Honourable Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) and the Pandava may be depicted as Honourable Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha). The ending of the film shows the victory of the said Pandavas over the
3. said Kauravas. The ending may be suitably modified so that neither of the Honourable Members of Parliament is shown as being inferior to the other.
3. The Ministry of Science and Technology has observed that the manner of birth of Kauravas is suggestive of human cloning, a technology banned in India. This may be changed to normal birth.
4. The National Commission for Women has objected that the father of Pandavas, one Sri Pandu, is depicted as bigamous, and also there is only one wife for the Pandavas in common. Therefore suitable changes may be made in the said script so that the said Sri Pandu is not depicted as bigamous. However, with the reduction in number of Pandavas as suggested above, the issue of polyandry can be addressed without further trouble.
5. The Department of Women and Child Development has highlighted that the public disrobing of one female character called 'Draupadi' is objectionable and derogatory to women in general. Further the Home Ministry anticipates that depiction of such scenes may create law and order problem and at the same time invite strong protests from the different women forums. Such scenes may also invite penal action under SITA (Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act); therefore they may be avoided and deleted from the film.
6. It is felt that showing the Pandava and the Kauravas as gamblers will be anti-social and counter productive as it might encourage gambling. Therefore, the said Pandava and Kauravas may be shown to have engaged in horse racing. (Hon. Supreme Court has held horse racing not to be gambling)

Cont'd. on p.24

Carbon Credits Linked to Global Warming

– Whither Kyoto Protocol

Sadanand B. Kumta

Shall we ask a question to our planners and economists? Are they ready to make the effort to saving the Global environment as their central organising principle?

Even a school boy today knows about Green House Gases (GHGs). Ever since Al Gore and Dr. R. K. Pachauri of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2008, the public is now getting increasingly conscious of the hazards involved for humanity in the mindless consumption of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

We should clearly know the meanings of the three terms:

- (a) Green House Effect (GHE)
- (b) Global Warming
- (c) Climate Change

Green House Effect (GHE): is the result of heat absorption radiated from the earth by the GHGs in the lower atmosphere. These are water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides and other trace gases. Without this natural GHE, the earth's average temperature would be -18°C instead of the present average of $+14^{\circ}\text{C}$. It is not the normal GHE that is of concern but the global warming that excessive GHGs lead to, through fossil fuel consumption and deforestation.

Are the GGs increasing? Yes, alarmingly! Before the Industrial Revolution (around 1750 A.D.), CO_2 was 280 parts per million by volume (ppmv) and its current levels are 380 ppmv and increasing at the rate of 1.9 ppmv per year since 2000 A.D. IPCC predicts CO_2 concentrations to rise from 490 ppmv to 1260 ppmv by the end of the 21st century.

Global Warming: Global surface temperatures have increased by $0.74^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 0.18^{\circ}\text{C}$ since the late 19th century. Seven of the eight warmest years on record have occurred since 2001 A.D. There has been a clear trend towards fewer extremely low minimum temperatures in recent decades in several widely separate areas.

Sea Level Rise: Due to melting of ice in the mountain glaciers and Polar Regions, global Mean Sea Level has been rising at an average rate of $1.7 \text{ mm/year} \pm 0.5$

mm over the last hundred years. Depending on GHG scenarios, projected sea level rise may be anywhere from 0.18 to 0.59 metres in a century. Sea level rise will mean more coastal areas under water but also a threat to low level islands like Maldives going under the sea. Climate changes also affect rainfall pattern and hence disturb the traditional sowing pattern. Snow fed rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna are affected adversely due to reduced glacial cover in the Himalayas.

Kyoto Protocol: The above scenarios led to the Kyoto Protocol which is an international agreement that aims to reduce CO_2 emissions and other GHGs. Countries which are signatories to the protocol (unfortunately USA is not one of them) are assigned maximum limits of carbon emission levels. Emitting more than the assigned level will result in penalty of lower emission level in the following period. There are two groups of countries; Annex 1 for developed countries and Non-Annex 1 for developing countries. The latter group can invest in projects which have lower emissions. For such projects they earn carbon credits. These credits can be sold to Annex 1 countries enabling them to higher levels of emissions than the maximum permissible limits. But only to the extent of credits purchased.

Carbon Credits: One carbon credit, also called carbon permit or offset is equivalent to one ton reduction of CO_2 from the atmosphere. There are trading agencies in carbon credits. For example, European Union has its own CC trading scheme. EU carbon permits were 1659 million tons but it has emitted 1768 MT, exceeding its limits by 109 tons. This will invite penalties of lower emissions, unless it buys credits or earns them. The current rate is 11 Euros per ton. This rate can fluctuate based on demand and supply. What are the ways of earning CCs? One way is to plant enough trees to reduce CO_2 by absorption. One can earn credit by using efficient technologies as well.

Individual's Contribution: You can grow green by

Cont'd. on p.24

How To Be Politically Correct *(Cont'd. from p.22)*

7. The Pandavas are shown as working in King Virat's employment without receiving any salary. According to the Human Rights Commission, this amounts to bonded labour and may attract provisions of The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. This may be corrected at once.
8. In the ensuing war, one character by name Sri Abhimanyu has been shown as fighting. The National Labour Commission has observed that, war being a hazardous industry, and the said character being 16 years old, this depiction will be construed as a case of child labour. Also there is no record of his being paid any compensation. This may also be deemed to be violatory of the provisions of The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Such references in the film may be removed.
9. The character 'Sri Krishna' has been depicted as wearing a peacock feather. The peacock is our National Bird and wearing dresses made from peacock feather is an offence under the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972. This may not be depicted.
10. Smt Maneka Gandhi has raised very serious objection to using any elephants or horses in war scenes, since there is every scope for mistreatment and injury to the said animals. The provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1890 and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Act, 1960

would be applicable in the instant case.

11. In pursuance of the Memorandum of Ministry of Finance regarding austerity measures, it is informed that in the battle field sequences, only ten soldiers may be allowed for each side. Also, all the characters may be shown to have obtained a valid licence under the Arms Act, 1959 as well as the Indian Arms Act, 1878.

Suitable changes may be made in the script to address the objections raised.

You are therefore requested to modify the script along the lines indicated above and resubmit it to the undersigned at the earliest for reconsideration.

It clearly takes courage and a modern mind to see and appreciate afresh the ancient texts in today's context. It's a brave, bold step towards 'political correctness'. It's a complex and daunting task, surely, considering the layers of language and religion, caste and class, geographies and histories that must be sanitized. And such a challenge cannot be left to scholars and litterateurs – it must be in the more caring hands of bureaucrats.

Farrokh K. R. Mehta

Mr. Farrokh K. R. Mehta, Corporate Advisor, management trainer - and occasional writer with tongue firmly in cheek.

Carbon Credits Linked to Global Warming *(Cont'd. from p.23)*

not only saving water but by making your house energy efficient by using energy saving lamps and use of other energy efficient devices. Collectively speaking, use of hydro electric power and non fossil energies can lead to significant reductions in GHGs.

Criticism of CC Achievements: Despite all talk of controlling CO₂ emissions these have increased by 20% in the last 15 years. EU leaders glibly talked that they would cut GHG emissions by 30% by 2020 if other countries joined but the ground realities are different. India itself has to move towards funding public transport rather than promoting private cars. Energy saving and use of non conventional energies should be our priorities at the national level. Unfortunately the Kyoto Protocol countries have largely failed to conform to emission limits set for them.

As we celebrate 5th June every year as World Environment Day, shall we ask a question to our planners and economists? Are they ready to make the effort to saving the Global environment as their central organising principle? Otherwise, we are letting down not only a few Al Gores and Pachauris but our future generations, only to be branded as the most selfish generation of the 21st century.

Let us save the only planet that we have. Finally we have to be grateful to organisations like IPCC and its scientists for their relentless pursuit of preventing the creeping doom that awaits us due to reckless use of fossil fuels.

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BOOK REVIEWS



MUMBAI DE-INTELLECTUALISED – RISE AND DECLINE OF A CULTURE OF THINKING by Aroon Tikekar ● Promilla & Co in association with Bibliophile South Asia, C-127 Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi 110 017 ● 2009 ● Pages: 206 ● Price: Rs225.

Reviewed by Mahesh Vijapurkar, a senior journalist and commentator. He retired as Deputy Editor of *The Hindu* in Mumbai, has been a consultant to *Daily News & Analysis* and on projects to prepare Human Development Reports on Maharashtra and Mumbai. He also teaches journalism. Email: mvijapurkar@gmail.com

The higher levels of civilised societies have both intellectuals and the intelligentsia, the former being the thought leaders, who possess good understanding, follow the doctrine that knowledge, wholly or mainly, has its basis in truth. They are also people who study and think about complicated ideas and understand the power of ideas. A tad below is a layer of the intelligentsia, the most educated, who are part of a nation that aspires to independent thinking.

To tell the two segments of society, the intellectual and the intelligentsia, that they are no more vibrant in a vocal city like Mumbai, calls for courage which Aroon Tikekar has shown by writing an entire book about it. It is a laudable enterprise by a thinking man known for his frank exposition based on methodical research. Perhaps because dealing with Indian thought in the pre-British era would have required a whole tome, the author seems to have avoided it. Tikekar has confined himself to Mumbai and its lost intellectualism but this could almost be true of any other place in the country.

Tikekar has written about the de-intellectualisation of the city where, as he says in his preface, intellectuals belonging to the liberal professions – academics, journalists, authors and artists – have “forsaken their social function and are happy to lead the lives of the commoners.” This class of the Mumbai community, once nurtured by the learned among the British, had its distinct identity. The honour of Mumbai then being the *Urbs Prima in Indis* was not just because of its commercial and capitalist stature but the fact that it had a lot to do with its intellectual dimension as well. But now, the “rabble has become the deciding factor.”

I agree with him in his lament about the de-intellectualisation of Mumbai. A few sundry thinkers do not make for a community of intellectuals. They have all crawled under the rug, or so it seems. A properly functioning intelligentsia could have at least served Mumbai better. Mumbai once had been home to several revolutionary leaders of thought who guided the country and its present decline therefore is all the more painful. The role of the intellectuals no less than that of the intelligentsia has substantially declined; the chattering classes backed up by television confidently using single sen-

tence sound bytes appear more self-centric than pro-society in their approach.

In a society which fails to grapple with real issues, these chattering classes clothed in respectability by the mass media, perform a cameo role. They flocked to locations with television cameras in tow giving their opinion as to how poorly the country was being governed, citing the attack on Mumbai by Pakistani terrorists as a case in point and then vanished from the scene when it came to casting their votes. Such has been the precipitous decline of Mumbai’s intelligentsia, a poor proxy indeed for the intellectual.

The dialogue of the deaf, utterances of only what is politically right, generally determined by a small section of the vocal left, amplified by the electronic mass media, with the print segment almost muted by the electronic, the intolerance of any line of thought that questions such utterances has become the marked feature of the Indian, and of course, the Mumbai scene. They are happy to be jostling for space – or time – with trivia and inanities dished out incessantly by the 24x7 telecasts.

If the detached intellectual is an extinct specie, the intelligentsia is insular, unconcerned and is forever complaining. You see them on television all the time but as pointed out earlier, shying away from the normal duties of a citizen. These essentially belong to the middle classes, who once in the recent past did wonders by active involvement. The movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, and the one against Chimanbhai Patel in Gujarat were taken

Aroon Tikekar’s interests go beyond purely literary scholarship. He developed early an interest in wider fields of enquiry like the history of modern Maharashtra. This is evident in his Ph.D. thesis, published in 1992 under title: ‘The Kincaids: Two Generations of A British Family in the Indian Civil Service’, and in ‘The Cloister’s Pale: A Biography of the University of Mumbai’ (2006). The latter is an attempt to show how the city of Mumbai and its university, one of the oldest in India, grew almost together, culturally and intellectually. He was Editor of *Loksatta* between 1991 and 2002. He has delivered numerous memorial lectures. He is currently President of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai, a premier institution of higher learning in Western India, established in 1804.

forward by them. So too the ascent of N. T. Rama Rao which had middle class support.

It transpires that most of the thinking that affects the people at large is by political leaders; what we have are not leaders of thought who also inspire but politicians in an era when good governance is all about less government than good governance. Society has settled down to accept rabble-rousers, demagogues and partisan leadership and is having a free run. You can question an intellectual, but you dare not, these days, question a politician despite knowing that he masks his self-seeking greed in the trappings of public service.

Let us look at the community of writers. How many write? How many read? How many libraries are there with good membership lists? A society which does not clamour for books and libraries and where publishers do not aim beyond a thousand copies, is not a good index of the intellectual contours of a society. The intellectuals have not even asked the politicians who run government for us, why so few libraries and why so few books on their shelves. Then we have the community of newspaper writers, perhaps a tad better than the talking heads on television.

That takes us to education, the setting up of the University of Bombay during the British rule being the critical element that triggered the intellectualisation of Mumbai. Tikekar has dealt with it ably. But sadly the University, like virtually every institute of higher learning in the country, has become more like a factory. No wonder there are industrial leaders speaking about educated but unemployable youth. If the British are accused of churning out clerks, we are sanguine in churning out code writers for the IT industry and call centre agents for the IT enabled industry.

PhD theses are like schoolboy essays and a system which has failed to stimulate the minds can scarcely be expected to do better. The tragedy is that even policy makers are ignorant of the slide in standards. Tikekar's anguish becomes clear from a quotation he cites from Sir Bartle Frere's address at the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society: "I will not believe that a hundred men can graduate at the University without ten of them at least becoming not only members, but working members of the Society". Frere, were he to witness what passes for education today would have an ashen face. Or, for that matter, can any one of us say that of the universities today?

The failure of the education system, more specifically, given the context of the book, the Mumbai University, is central to Tikekar's anguish at the decline of intellectualism in Mumbai. Of course, what the universities get as raw stock for shaping are those who have excelled – this is an expression used advisedly – by taking examinations by rote after memorization at great financial cost to parents. Regurgitation from dictated notes

is more common than one would like to believe. That ensures that the students coming out with degrees are not the 'most educated' to be a part of the intelligentsia, leave alone being intellectual.

Let me deal with the slice of the society, said to be the mirror of that society – the media. At the same time enter a *mea culpa* for I have as a journalist, seen values declining.. There was little I could do except keep my head and work by my own code of decency and deal with facts as best as could be acquired.

Tikekar has spent time and space outlining how the media too has lost its moorings, its purpose. It is now a business, less a mission, and not even a profession. One cannot disagree with him on a single point. I wish I had said all he said before he did!

Media is certainly the big letdown, in its transition from the fierce pre-Independence mission of freeing the country of foreign rule. Media seem to have lost their way, forgotten their purpose of informing and fostering educated judgment, a prerequisite for a better citizenry. It is now infotainment, a strange and pointless hybrid of entertainment and information, with more of the former. So much so, television network honchos now ask their staff, however inexperienced they are, devoid of even ordinary background and even minimal perspectives to editorialise news to rivet the attention of the viewer. This is a trend now being followed by print journalism.

Media are supposed to be the best stimulant of the mind, delivered in the morning by way of a newspaper, once run by good minds. They have now followed the idiom of hype that has been the staple of television. To satiate the demands of television's 24x7 genre news, trivia is elevated into 'facts'. Objectivity has been lost, sides are blatantly taken, rules are broken and despite the mushrooming of schools of journalism media houses are stacked with the ignorant and the mediocre. There has been complete dishonesty, save among a few media outlets, and news items with a particular slant are purveyed. They are actually sponsored by someone who has a stake. Most columns of sportsmen on the sports pages of newspapers are ghostwritten. Reports lack factual accuracy, have no interpretation or explanation of the background and exhibit blatant bias. They lack even expression.

The media now reaches a vast segment of the population even those who are illiterate, thanks to television news. The way media can take hold of minds is self-evident for me to get into a discussion on that here. However, both the print and the electronic genres resort to either a lot of monochromatic presentation of hanging on to a single dimension on any issue or take some trivia and paint it in all colours. Things are seen either as black or white and the whole band of the grey is missed.

There is breathlessness, instead of a calm presentation of facts and background, little useful background added to provide a perspective and the calmness that one sees on the BBC. Compared to the Indian TV news-casts, BBC appears so pale to our media professionals who have invented its antithesis and are indeed proud

of it. One would fail to find *The Economist* from among the rash of titles in India.

This decline of Mumbai is hard to arrest as are other aspects which too are in rapid decline.



DREAM DESTINATIONS by Urmi Popat ● Manas Publications, 4402/5A, Main Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002 ● Year of Publication : 2008 ● No. of Pages : 239 ● Price Rs. 3,000.

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Ms. Urmi Popat is an architect by profession but 'travel big' is her hobby and writing about it to reach a larger audience is a compulsive by-product of her hobby. Fortunately, her parents too share her hobby. This work has hit the market after her first work on her travel to Arctic and Antarctic entitled: *Journeys to the Extremities of the Earth* (Manas Publication, 2005) was well-received.

Urmi has chosen only those places recognised by the UNESCO and has presented them in ten chapters. She begins her first chapter on Russia quoting Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes: "The camera is modernity's paint brush." Photos included in the chapter on Russia and others confirm Fuentes opinion.

Moscow getting its name from Moskva River is a heaven for sightseers. Whether intended or accidental, Urmi makes a political observation when she records being received by "unsmiling female immigration officers" on her landing in Moscow. It seems to me a hangover of communist days of the Soviet Union. I still vividly remember, while going to East Berlin – then under the Soviet influence – from West Berlin during the Cold War being strictly warned not to make any jokes or laugh loudly! Be serious was the message!

Tibet is the theme of her second chapter. The one thousand km drive from Kathmandu to Lhasa the soul of Tibet, by the author and her family is through potholed and dusty unpaved roads but the rewards were "breath-takingly beautiful landscapes, past serene lakes and quaint villages and yes, yaks grazing in the fields." To enjoy this 'Forbidden Land' of Lamas now under the control of occupying Chinese, one needs a lot of perseverance, putting up with time consuming procedures and chaotic queues if you wish to see the Potala Palace, the winter palace of the Dalai Lama since the 7th century,

China is her next destination, at least in the arrangement of lands visited by her. She is struck by Chinese paradoxes – modern skyscrapers of Shanghai with ancient places of Beijing, like the Great Wall or Tiananmen Square.

As a matter of fact, the entire city is "one great historic museum," as Ms. Popat puts it. That she has not taken a political line to include Tibet in her treatment of China has a political message: Whatever might be China's political claim over Tibet as a part of China, she considers that Tibet has enough to exhibit on its own in the field of art and architecture.

Writing about Japan, she, like many in India, admires the rise of Japan "through the atomic ashes of World War II...." What strikes the visitor most are Japan's technological achievements in engineering, high-rise buildings, mindboggling highways and flyovers besides its ancient Buddhist cultural monuments.

She provides illustrations of the "glitter and gloss" of Tokyo, and describes the experience of travelling in Shinkansen, the Bullet Train, which is like flying; but the advantage, is: you take off and land right in the middle of the city. While she has covered a few cities of Japan, it is Hiroshima that completely captures her attention. While everything within 500 meters from ground zero was destroyed in 1945 after the city atom bombed, Hiroshima's Industry Promotion Hall survived. It "has been intentionally preserved as a visual reminder of the effects of nuclear warfare..." There is also the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and many other structures to demonstrate the demonic effects of modern warfare and the inevitable need for peace.

The charm of this book is not only its pictures which tell you a lot more than words but also the descriptive texts which are very readable. It contains primary geographic information like area, climate language, religion, capital and currency of the country described in the various chapters.

This book is a must for all those who intend to visit any of the countries captured by Urmi's camera. It will be an asset in reference libraries and the drawing rooms of elite families.

Between Ourselves ...

Yet another election has come and gone. This one to the State Assemblies of Maharashtra (in Western India), Haryana (North India) and Arunachal Pradesh (North East India). Nitin Raut takes a look. There is much to ponder about in what he has to say. Once again the "Arithmetic of Stability" which played a key role in the Lok Sabha elections of May 2009 played an equally important role in Maharashtra and Haryana. Fortunately a single party, the Congress, secured an overall majority in Arunachal Pradesh. This speaks for the wisdom of the electorate in this border state – for, with Communist China across the border casting lascivious eyes on this part of our country, political stability is crucial. Also an object lesson to the commies on the virtues of democracy!

Keshav Rau explains what this "2G Spectrum" is all about. A potential source of legitimate revenue for the State, has corruption, as often happens, intervened to deprive the people, only to enrich some politicians? And, is the present Government of India, again not unusually, sweeping the dirt under the carpet, to ensure its survival?

There is little new in most of what Babu Satyanarayana has to say – "The Rage Within". Yet it bears repeating - the many-pronged protests from the insurgency of the Naxalites to the suicides of farmers and the Sri Lankan refugees - does one perceive a common thread?

A good and scholarly economics journal, the *Southern Economist*, edited and published with great dedication by Mrs. Susheela Subrahmanian from Bangalore, carried an article on the

race to take on lease agricultural lands in Africa – globalisation of agriculture? As in many areas of natural resources, the grabbing communist Chinese are leagues ahead in this race too, way ahead of India for we are in the race as well. The associate editor of the *Southern Economist* Mr. Neelakant Patri discusses this, not so well known development.

How many of us really understand what "Carbon Credits" are all about? Sadanand Kumta explains.

A word about the two columns Point Counter Point and Cornucopia: The columnists Ashok Karnik and Firoze Hirjikaka have drawn much appreciation from readers. The first for presenting both sides of an issue so that "a wise man examines all sides before coming to a conclusion" ; and the other for his, often irreverent, sometimes acidic comments on men and matters which says it all! Between the two they have made *Freedom First* so much more interesting.

We have given pride of place to letters "From our Readers." We hope this will encourage more readers to write in their views. It was nice receiving an email from reader Ram Narayanan to say "*Freedom First* is one magazine I enjoy reading from cover to cover. Even the letters to the editor are of high standard."

We (*Freedom First* and the Freedom First Foundation) had a half discussion on November 7 on (what else!) "India China Relations – Some Strategic Perspectives". Read what went on at this discussion in our January edition.

Editor

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