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Freedom First

The Liberal Magazine – 58th Year of Publication
No.522 December 2010

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Between Ourselves...

In a comment in *Freedom First* (June 2009), we deplored the Indian Government’s indifference to the re-incarceration last year of Aung San Suu Kyi on a trumped up charge. She was released on November 13 and it was a pleasure to watch her on BBC speak clearly, firmly yet softly and, above all, with transparent sincerity and clarity. We shall have more about what she had to say in the December *Freedom First*. **For now, we Indians welcome her back to freedom. How one wishes we had some one like her in our country!**

Meanwhile in the pages of this issue we go back to that Frankenstein that is destroying our democracy – corruption. Ashok Karnik wants to know why we are so corrupt and marshals some devastating truths and Firoze Hirjikaka points out to the irony that a building society named “*Adarsh*” a Hindi word meaning “Ideal” is built on the sordid foundation of deceit and corruption by men in high positions.

Professor Christie Davies familiar to our readers takes on the topic of inheritance politics. “Democracy is in serious decline in Britain” he writes ruefully, but comforts himself that while “the country is ruled by interlocking cliques they are not based on kinship.” Ours is, he observes and he traces its origin. A must read, dear reader.

I wonder if you have been giving a few minutes to peruse the page recalling *Freedom First* some forty seven years ago. For me it evokes memories of the many stalwarts who contributed to *Freedom First* being what it is today. With many of them I had the opportunity to interact. Narie Oliaji, from whose lead article in the December 1953 issue we produce a small excerpt, was an eccentric (lower middle class) Parsi bachelor, with a razor sharp mind, an equally sharp tongue tempered by tons of humour. I recall seeing him hold his own at meetings on subjects ranging from art to architecture with personalities better known in the world of letters or whatever. You will also, if you have been following this one-page reminder of the past, realise the truth of that old adage: “The more things change the more they remain the same” – except, perhaps the price of a copy then: “2 Annas” printed on the masthead!

Editor

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From Our Readers

On *Freedom First*

In the September 2010 issue of *Freedom First* in my article “Governance Through Institutions – Karnataka a Case Study” has been printed as “Caste”. I am aware that you are under pressure and your editorial (October 2010) is a measure of your humility and a sense of rectitude and responsibility. We all stand by you and wish that *Freedom First* will carry on the liberal tradition without fear or favour under your leadership.

Sadanand Kumta, Pune. sbkumta@rediffmail.com

*

Articles in *Freedom First* are thought provoking.

Dr. Prahlad Rai, Surat.

*

It was (the late) Dr. Dhiren Narain’s keen desire to make a small donation to your wonderful *Freedom First*. Accordingly I am enclosing a cheque for Rs.25,000/-

Mrs.Vatsala Narain, Mumbai.

*

Such a Long Journey

The deplorable and despicable act of banning the book has put to shame and disgrace, not only the Bombay University and the State of Maharashtra but the country itself.

It has once again proved that Indian democracy is a paper democracy and a gimmick. Further it also forecasts the future of this country, and the quality of leaders to come.

The Chief Minister and the Vice Chancellor have exhibited their yellow streak and rank opportunism, to say the least.

Though the book has been banned by the University, it is selling like hot cakes. The Thackerays may or may not derive any mileage from this stunt, but certainly the author and publisher have gone laughing to the bank.

Mr. Behram Aga, Mumbai.
Behram_r_aga@yahoo.co.in

*

The Kashmir Conundrum

Your cover feature ‘The Kashmir Conundrum’ (October 2010) was superb and has put the whole issue of Kashmir in the correct perspective.

I am an eighty year old man, who holds similar views on the Kashmir issue.

I have also a reason for it. Years ago, I met two Kashmiris – one in Srinagar and the other in Cochin. During a discussion both of them – they don’t know each other – told me that they want Kashmir to be independent. They did not want Kashmir to be part of either India or of Pakistan.

Both of them said that they want Kashmir to be like Switzerland.

In this connection, I have a suggestion. The state of Jammu & Kashmir consists of three different areas:

- (1) Jammu, near to India. Mostly inhabited by Hindus;
- (2) Kashmir Valley with Srinagar as its capital. Predominantly Muslims;
- (3) Leh, with a border with China, mostly inhabited by Buddhists.

Make these three into centrally-ruled areas with separate government like Pondicherry. Kashmiris won’t allow Pakistan to rule them, like they don’t want India to rule them.

There will be some fight, but it will settle. We must help them by giving aid without ropes.

Mammen Varghese, Kottayam, Kerala

*

Of Jaswant Singh, the BJP and the RSS

The Introduction to the book by Shri K. K. Pathak promised a clearer understanding of ‘Why Secularism?’ but it does not create that impression on reading the booklet.

Let me state that the issue of removal of Shri Jaswant Singh from the BJP is now history and he is now with the BJP. All the same, I am venturing to give my opinion about Shri Pathakji’s effort.

- (1) Jaswant Singh is a mature person, much ahead of any other BJP leaders. Hence more was expected of Jaswant Singh’s secular understanding. We have in this book more about Advani’s limitations and manipulations. Advani stands sufficiently exposed.
- (2) Indira Gandhi had her own agenda. She was for herself. Neither for the USSR nor the USA. She used all tools to promote what she wanted.
- (3) I have a different view about Non-Alignment. In the ‘50s, McCarthy was dividing the world into two groups. Nehru’s efforts overcame that thesis.
- (4) Character building is a mask that the RSS wears. It has been for *Akhand Bharat* all along.

- (5) Use of personal experiences and anecdotes could have been avoided. Truth is self-evident.
- (6) V. P. Singh slipped, Morarji slipped, but what is the Mandal stance now?
- (7) Both Gandhiji and Jinnah have been well presented. Congratulations.

As I was close to JP, I refrain commenting on what is said about him in the book. JP has been misunderstood all his life. His role to save Tibet, to create Bangladesh has been forgotten.

Jyotibhai Desai, Vedchhi, Gujarat.

*

Scams Scale New Heights

Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ashok Chavan (now Ex.) was caught in the vortex of the Adarsh Housing Society scam while Kalmadi, the Chairman of the Organisation Committee of the Commonwealth games was also embroiled in the CWG corruption scam. When the media expose became intolerable in both the cases, the Congress was quick to take action in accepting the resignation of Ashok Chavan while Kalmadi was removed from his post as secretary of the Congress Parliamentary Party while his assistants Mahendroo and Darbari have been arrested. They have now spilled the beans and all indications are that the Congress will have to take action against Kalmadi. If he is arrested it will be the first of its kind when a politician with influence is going to be nailed.

Similarly, nemesis has caught up with telecom minister A. Raja the perpetrator of India's biggest scam. This blue eyed boy of DMK chief Karunanidhi was forced to step down when the CAG report indicted him squarely for causing a loss of Rs.1.76 lakh crore to the exchequer on the 2G spectrum distribution. Media was relentless in exposing his culpability and the tipping point reached when the opposition created bedlam in parliament and AIADMK Chief Jayalalitha came up with a well timed master stroke of offering support to the UPA government in case the DMK pulled the plug. This helped force Raja's exit.

It is the first time that the UPA government has been caught in the maelstrom of a series of scams without parallel in the history of India. Corruption has now assumed a different dimension when apart from the known bureaucrat-politician nexus which has played havoc with the system, the contagion has caught up with even the top bosses of our armed forces including two Army Generals and is posing a challenge to the grand old party where it hurts its image badly. For the first time both Congress President Sonia Gandhi and the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are in the direct line of fire with little space to manoeuvre.

The most distressing aspect of this scam is that though our fighting forces were largely immune to the taint of corruption (though there may be some isolated cases), the latest development has the potential to demoralise our fighting forces. Though they are surrendering their apartments they cannot escape the blame. The army has a quick mechanism of court marshal procedure and for the sake of keeping the morale of our fighting forces they must face it and suffer the punishment meted out to them. It's like trial by fire.

But the question on everybody's lips remains: Will anything happen at all to our politicians and bureaucrats? Unlikely, if the track record of the Congress is any guide. The stranglehold of the bureaucrat-politician nexus has the potential to destabilise and disintegrate the nation to a greater degree than any terrorist attack has done till now. The whole country knows that the CBI has not been effective as it has been thoroughly politicised. Probably, the only hope is with our judiciary who will have to move *suo moto* to come up with an out of the box solution to break the present political logjam. This is possible if the CBI is driven to the position of an approver by the judiciary and shame them into action. The situation has reached such a stage that the nation expects nothing short of exemplary punishment in the shortest possible time to bring to justice the criminals who have looted the country. Joining the rhetoric of Arundhati Roy – not that she is blameless for her other intemperate utterances – pity the nation that treats shabbily the families of our brave soldiers who laid their life at Kargil.

Bapu Satyanarayana, Mysore.
email: what_option@yahoo.co.in

PS. According to a report in *The Times of India Online*

1.76 LAKH CRORE IS EQUIVALENT TO

- * The entire defence budget for the year 2010-11
- * Almost one-sixth the size of the Union Budget
- * Over two third of the Centre's interest burden of 2.49 lakh crore
- * More than thrice the 51,309 crore the Centre will get from profits and dividends of PSUs this year
- * Roughly seven times the Union health budget of Rs.25,154 crore
- * More than thrice the Union education budget of Rs.49,904 crore

Corruption and hypocrisy ought not to be inevitable products of democracy as they are today.

Mahatma Gandhi

Political Inheritance in Britain and India

Christie Davies

It is now nearly fifty years since Nehru died and there can be no doubt that he would have been horrified to have known that one day the widow of his grandson would come close to being Prime Minister of India, merely because of her distant connection by marriage with the founding father.

I was in Delhi on Republic Day 1974 and saw Mrs Gandhi in a horse drawn carriage in the parade. She said it was because of the oil crisis but it all looked a bit regal. In this article I have put the British analysis first and the far more important Indian one later. I wanted the reader to know that I am not just picking on Indian political faults but am equally critical of Britain. Mani Shankar Aiyar whose abilities I have justly praised in my article (even though we disagree about politics) was recently honoured in Britain as an Honorary Fellow of Trinity Hall, the Cambridge College where he was educated. He was also a good debater in the Cambridge Union.

The left-wing parties in Britain are against dynasties and that is why the Labour Party has largely eliminated the hereditary peers from the House of Lords. It did so, even though the upper chamber only had the power slightly to delay but not to block legislation and had not provided a Prime Minister since the nineteenth century. Matters of principle have never stopped the leading lights in the Labour Party finding comfortable positions for their relatives but the descendants of the Attlees, and the Wilsons and their Labour party fellows have not been prominent in politics. Earl Attlee, the grandson of the former Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee (who was made an Earl on his retirement), is one of the ninety hereditary peers who still sit in the House of Lords. He holds a very minor office there with the Conservative party. Only the gay Peter Mandelson, grandson of Herbert Morrison, Attlee's deputy, has come anywhere close to high office.

The recent election for the Labour party leadership by transferable votes was a fraternal high farce. Younger brother Edward Miliband came from behind to defeat elder brother David

Voting Round 1: David Miliband 37.78%, Edward Miliband 34.33% Diane Abbott eliminated

Voting Round 2: David Miliband 38.89%, Edward Miliband 37.47%. Andrew Burnham eliminated

Voting Round 3: David Miliband 42.72%, Edward Miliband

41.26%, Edward Balls eliminated

Voting Round 4: David Miliband 49.35%, Edward Miliband 50.65%. Edward Miliband wins the leadership.

The odds against a party election coming down to a struggle between two brothers and decided by such a small margin are very high indeed. The bizarre statistics are an indication of a Labour party that is utterly lacking in talent and has no idea where it is going. It was odd too that two brothers should have shared two-thirds of the vote on the first ballot and odder still that Edward, for whom few were enthusiastic, should have gradually crept ahead to win by a tiny margin on the last round. Not many wanted Edward but 0.3 % disliked his brother David more than they disliked Edward. It was not so much a vote for the election of Edward as a vote for the rejection of David. The rejected and dejected David has quit politics and left for the wilderness rather than serve under his younger brother. In India this clash of brothers would have been made the subject of an epic poem but for the British it was not Cain and Abel or even Esau and Jacob but the comedy of Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee, as in the nursery rhyme made famous by Lewis Carroll.

*Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle;
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.*

This fraternal fight was not a dynastic one, for their father, the late Professor Ralph Miliband had been a narrow and arid socialist theorist who had long since condemned the Labour party for its strong and consistent support for parliamentary democracy. He saw this adherence to a liberal value as hopelessly dogmatic. Such a priority excluded the attainment of socialism and that was all that really mattered to him. It was never quite clear what he wanted to do in the face of this but it did mean he could never have had a political career in the British Parliament. Father Milliband had with clenched fist sworn an oath at Karl Marx's grave in London always to uphold the socialist cause. The old Miliband could not accept, indeed

even grasp, that the British people never wanted socialism anyway because they knew quite clearly that it would be unfree and unpleasant. The sons entered Parliament in spite of their father's views and not through his patronage. The Miliband sons abandoned the father's absurd absolutist views and became pragmatists, possibly because they had been born British, whereas he was never fully reconciled to the country that had taken him in as a Belgian refugee in 1940.

Yet the son Edward is far more of a threat to capitalism than his father, who hated the free market and private property and wanted to destroy them. Father Miliband was never credible and thus harmless and silly. He was a man who wasted his life chatting to coteries of the like-minded and then analyzing the deep chats of these choughs in heavy words to the applause of his clique. He was a mere mini-guru to the English leftist fantasists, including the Pakistani buffoon Tariq Ali, who wrote his obituary. Edward does not hate capitalism but he is an obsessive egalitarian who will gradually squeeze it to death. Ralph the father was a viper. Edward the son is an anaconda. David (Dee) differs little from his brother (Dum) but he might have squeezed more gently.

David Miliband's unwillingness to work with his brother means that there will be no family run politics at the top in Britain. Democracy is in serious decline in Britain and the country is ruled by interlocking cliques but they are not based on kinship. The British people are excluded from exercising any real power but not by ruling families. The Labour party has become that strange anomaly, a farce without a happy ending, indeed without reconciliation.

The Indian situation is different, for India has largely been run by the Nehru dynasty since its very inception. My friend and colleague A. B. Shah and I saw clearly in the early days of Mrs Gandhi that she had inherited power and not achieved it. Whether or not she also had ability is for Indians to decide; here I merely recall that she twice failed her preliminary examination at Somerville College, Oxford and was in effect thrown out. Professor Shah encouraged me in 1973 to travel from Mumbai (then Bombay), where I was attached to the University of Bombay, to Goa to interview Mrs. Shashikala Kakodkar the Chief Minister of Goa who had inherited that office on the death of her father Dayanand B. Bhandodkar in 1972. It was a tiny version of Mrs Gandhi's inheritance, for Bhandodkar had led the Hindus in Portuguese Goa who supported its incorporation into India and subsequently became the first Chief Minister.

It is an Indian pattern but not one confined to India. It is common in many countries and institutions that, when

a founding or charismatic figure dies, people seek to retain his aura and image, to make something of him live on, by choosing his son or daughter or widow to succeed him. An obvious case is the way Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike succeeded her husband Solomon West Bandaranaike as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka after he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk. Indeed the model may be extended to other female leaders in male-dominated countries as with the daughter Benazir Bhutto, the widow Maria Corazon Aquino or even Isabel Martínez de Perón of Argentina who replaced not just her late husband Juan Perón's but his first wife Eva. Lineage trumps gender.

This analysis was not popular with Congress supporters, though the leaders of many opposition parties in India saw that it was accurate. Mrs Gandhi's supporters even had the impudence to claim that she was the world's first real female prime minister because Mrs. Bandaranaike had directly inherited office after the shock of her husband's death, whereas not Mrs Gandhi but Lal Bahadur Shastri had succeeded Nehru. Yet Shastri had told Mrs. Gandhi at the time of Nehru's death that he wished she could have succeeded him and he asked her to be his Foreign Minister. When she declined, he made her Minister of Information and Broadcasting because he wanted at all costs to attach the inherited charisma of the Nehrus to his cabinet. Eighteen months later Shastri died. Suddenly but quite predictably Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister. The crowds shouted in the streets "Jawaharlal ki jai".

Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister, had aspired at the time to hold Mrs. Gandhi's new position but the dynastic position of a sister is much weaker than that of a daughter. Nehru had made his sister an ambassador, first in Moscow and then in Washington D.C. but Mrs. Gandhi wanted no dynastic rivals; her spurned aunt was to campaign for the Janata party in 1977 after the Emergency and helped to bring Mrs. Gandhi down.

It was not certain that a Nehru dynasty had been established until Mrs. Gandhi's own death when her son Rajiv succeeded her. It takes three generations to mean a dynasty. Yet even before Rajiv's succession Mrs. Gandhi clearly saw her family as a dynasty. Her arrogant declaration of the Emergency in 1975 was the act of 'she who would be queen'; her willingness to tolerate the excesses of her heir apparent Sanjay, the great steriliser, in 1976-7 also indicated this. Indeed so does the way she died. After Operation Blue Star that led to the second Amritsar massacre, Mrs. Gandhi was warned not to trust her Sikh bodyguard, but she assumed that she was not like other mortals. She should have learned from the assassination of the wild Irishman Sir Michael O'Dwyer by Udam Singh at a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society in London

in 1940. O'Dwyer had been Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab at the time of the first Amritsar massacre, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, in 1919 and one of the very few supporters of the General Dyer who carried it out using Gurkha troops. O'Dwyer was sacked by the British Government and returned to Europe to write a history of his ancient Irish family. He must have assumed that time and distance rendered him safe from reprisal. Mrs. Gandhi, far more dangerously and against all advice, risked close proximity to members of the enraged Sikh community because she had deluded herself into thinking that she was invulnerable.

Possibly Rajiv Gandhi made the same mistake, as did John and Robert Kennedy in the United States. They also had a sense of belonging to a dynastic family. In each case they took security risks against the wishes of their advisers. They could not see that the positive emotions on which dynasties ride call into existence equally powerful negative responses. It is curious to note that President John F. Kennedy's son, John F. Kennedy Junior, died like Sanjay Gandhi in an air crash while piloting his own personal plane in a dangerous manner. It is as if they could not believe that they as individuals were mortal because they belong to an 'immortal' dynasty.

It is now nearly fifty years since Nehru died and there can be no doubt that he would have been horrified

to have known that one day the widow of his grandson would come close to being Prime Minister of India, merely because of her distant connection by marriage with the founding father. Even though Sonia Gandhi declined to become Prime Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, the Congress Party's most intelligent, erudite and eloquent spokesman, said of her at the time, "She is the queen. She is appointing a regent to run some of the business of government for her. But it is she who will be in charge and who will continue to direct the fortunes of the Congress Party." Mr. Aiyar's metaphor matches the dynastic reality. Besides her son, Nehru's great grandson Rahul, has already entered politics and is now waiting in the wings for his chance to come to the centre of the stage.

Nehru was strongly opposed to 'dynasticism' and was not happy when his own daughter became Congress President in 1959. Despite their closeness he never gave Indira Gandhi a formal position in any of his governments. It is up to those who in 2010 still uphold the thin and ragged line of the Nehru dynasty to explain why they have betrayed the democratic ideals of Nehru himself. There comes a point where dynasties and democracies are incompatible. Freedom must come first.

PROFESSOR CHRISTIE DAVIES has been a scholar at many Indian Universities. His latest book is *The Strange Death of Moral Britain*. Email: s.c.a.davies@reading.ac.uk

Soldier Firepower at the Commonwealth Games

The Indian soldier is the biggest winner for the country in the Commonwealth Games.

Indian Army soldiers and Indian Navy sailors have won 23 medals between them so far.

They are all havildars, subedars, petty officers and cadets – called PBOR for "Personnel Below Officer Rank". None of the medal winners is a commissioned officer.

Rajyavardhan Rathore, who had brought laurels to the country in shooting, is a colonel in the army. He has not qualified to be part of the Indian shooting contingent in the CWG this time.

Staff of the Indian Railways has also won 17 medals between them in the CWG.

Chief petty officer Omkar Singh of the navy has won three golds and a silver in different categories of air pistol shooting. Subedar Vijay Kumar has won three golds and a silver in different categories of rifle shooting.

The soldiers and sailors have won medals in five disciplines: shooting, weightlifting, wrestling, archery and athletics (20km walk).

41 soldiers were part of the 600-plus strong Indian contingent at the CWG. The army began a "Mission Olympics" programme in 2001 aiming at podium finish at the world-level in select disciplines.

If soldiers must necessarily be good marksmen, India's armed forces have reason to be proud. In shooting alone, the soldiers and sailors have won 15 medals – 11 golds, two silvers and two bronze.

K. Ravi Kumar, Sukhan Dey and V. S. Rao – all havildars in the army – have won three medals in weightlifting. Master chief petty officer-II Sudhir Kumar of the navy took the bronze in 77kg weightlifting.

The sportsmen were trained in the Army Sports Institute, Pune, and the Army Marksmen Unit in Mhow.

Even off the field, the armed forces are being applauded for their contribution to the CWG.

Army engineers put up a foot overbridge in four days after the one built by a Chandigarh-based company collapsed, injuring 23 workmen 12 days before the Games were to begin. The bridge is connected to the main venue in Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

Courtesy: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101012/jsp/nation/story_13048024.jsp

Contributed by reader Col. T. S. Tanwar (retd.)

Why Are We So Corrupt?

Ashok Karnik

According to a Global Corruption Index prepared in 2009, India was down to 84 on the honesty ladder among 178 countries in the world. It came down further to 87 in 2010, presumably due to expert malfeasance in the Commonwealth Games. The Index is prepared by 13 independent expert bodies. We need not accept it and may call it biased but that would be ostrich-like evasion, which would not hide the truth. Those who prepared the Index (Transparency International) had no particular interest in maligning India. At best we can dismiss it as inaccurate and hold that we may not be as low as 87. We could be a little higher perhaps but that is low enough. We want to be among the top, which we are not! (See page 13 for the full list).

Spiritual Height No Longer

India takes pride in its thousands of years old civilization and genuinely believes that it has something to offer to the world by way of ethics and culture. We preach to the world very frequently how our civilization flourished when they were still in the jungles, how our moral standards were impeccable and how our science had progressed even beyond the present scientific achievements. We can cite religious texts and epics to prove our point to ourselves as nobody else is prepared to accept our claims at face value considering our present state. Our claims get exposed when life meets reality. We have no explanation where all that wisdom and knowledge disappeared when we met the outside world. Nothing protected us from invasions; we could not protect ourselves from abject poverty either. Was our progress all in the realm of philosophy and spiritual thinking? We possibly thought that spiritual upliftment was all that mattered and gave up material success. That would be a poor excuse for leaving our people hungry and backward. Now we can no longer claim spiritual triumph either, when we are mired in corruption and all that we can say is that more than half the world is more corrupt than we are! We can still take pride in our lost glory but it is the present that matters to the world.

The Reality

The Global Corruption Index places Afghanistan, Somalia, Myanmar Sudan and Iraq at the bottom while Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal are below us. China is fairly close to us (78) although it spouts communist morality all the time. We may feel relief that none of our neighbours is morally better! For information, New Zealand, Denmark, and Singapore are at the top, none of whom boasts of great civilizational influence. Apart from the Global Index, we ourselves have no doubt that corruption is a major social / moral disease afflicting us.

The Indian Scene

While China executes its corrupt officials, India has built an elaborate charade of legality to avoid taking any action. The dictum that Caesar's wife needs to be above suspicion, is replaced by the legality that nobody is guilty till proven to be so. We have failed to differentiate between public officials and common criminals, forgetting that public officials should, like Caesar's wife, be above reproach. In India, no minister or bureaucrat loses his job (let alone his life) till he is proven doubly guilty; doubly because he has the right to appeal and pending appeal it is hands off. A mere allegation of misconduct used to be enough to drop a Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's time. Now Ministers who are charge-sheeted are safe because they are not yet proven guilty. Criminals can fight elections on the same plea; our legislatures are full of criminals facing serious charges.

When a Minister comes under a cloud, his first response is to deny the charge. If irrefutable proof is presented, a preliminary inquiry by the CBI is ordered. If the CBI gets further proof, it is allowed to register a case. The CBI takes a couple of years to come up with a criminal charge; it may then be allowed or disallowed to file charges in the court. If the case ultimately starts, it can take a few years to complete during which the CBI may even withdraw the chargesheet, depending on new political alignments. If after all this, a leader is convicted, he goes in appeal, which may remain undecided during his and our life time. Do we see anybody punished? If a leader is not actually caught committing a crime, there is an elaborate system whereby he is not held even accountable for wrong-doing; nobody is ever guilty of failure even if there is gross mismanagement or serious failure in duty. Platitudes are spouted to indicate that the matter would receive serious attention, things would change, nobody would be spared; committees are set up to determine what to do and then the government changes and eventually

nothing happens. Witness the release of Warren Anderson of the Bhopal Gas infamy and our difficulty in fixing the blame. Nobody is prepared to pin the blame on the State Government, the Centre, the Courts or local officials. The much talked about Commonwealth Games (CWG) typify the dominance of corruption in our life. There is no area of CWG that has not invited serious charges of corruption, nepotism or plain theft. Forgeries, frauds and 'inside trading' are all in evidence. Nothing can be done. Obfuscation is the name of the game. There is no mechanism whereby defaulters could be found and punished immediately. The 'Kargilgate' in Mumbai (the Adarsh Housing Society scam) is just the tip of the iceberg in the day to day heist of public property by politicians in today's land deals. Everybody is happy to avert any conclusive action and the crises are forgotten in a few days. Peace is restored till it is disturbed again in the next crisis.

Corruption – the Norm

The common man, seeing his exalted leaders defeat justice, is bemused. What example is he to follow? He chooses the line of least resistance and falls in line with the prevalent practice i.e. make money while you can. Corruption in the lower bureaucracy has spread like wild fire. Anybody who has any power uses that power to earn money, right from the traffic constable to a *talathi* (the village accountant) to a municipal employee. The disease is so widespread that even at the higher level, one has to search for an honest official. If one is found, it is a discovery. More than actual corruption, the perception that nothing moves in this country without 'speed money' is soul sapping. It is said that India is a 6% country while Pakistan is a 10% country, meaning that that much extra money needs to be provided in the calculations for any major project. This does not include a little '*baksheesh*' you and I have to shell out to any official we may be unfortunate enough to face for any

work from getting a ration card, a driving license, a death certificate or a hospital bed. You name it and there is a price tag attached. Perjury which is considered a serious offence is so common that witnesses change their statements in court as easily as they spit on the road. Hostile witnesses are the bane of all failed prosecutions. Nobody is ever hauled up for perjury. The common man is not affected too much with the business level payment of 'grease money' but when corruption hits him in his everyday life, he is distressed. Worse still, he has no confidence that he can approach somebody for redress as he has no faith in the system any longer. The poison of distrust spreads rapidly and even a few honest Ministers or officials cannot stem the tide of disillusionment and apathy.

An ex-CVC (Central Vigilance Commissioner) estimated that every third Indian is corrupt. A former law minister claimed (at risk to his own liberty) that out of 16 former Chief Justices of India, 8 were corrupt. Corruption in the judiciary has been talked about in whispers for fear of contempt of court proceedings. Now the gloves are off and there are no carpets left to cover the dirt. In this bleak scenario, a leader who inspires confidence with his honesty and ability to set things right is needed. The people have faith in the integrity of the Prime Minister but not in his ability to set things right. He means well but he is considered too soft to instill fear among his colleagues. He has not established that kind of record; instead he has evaded issues of impropriety and tolerated corruption so often under the cover of being reasonable that he has lost his ability to call his Ministers to account. That is a tragedy for a country priding itself in its spiritual and moral heritage.

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Do Politicians Care for Supreme Court judgements

Five examples where Supreme Court orders were ignored

1. Supreme Court order for construction of Sutlej-Yamuna link canal within Punjab defiantly ignored. Former Congress Chief Minister said making of the canal will mean the return of terrorism to Punjab.
2. In atleast 4 cases the Apex Court asked the Union Government to introduce Uniform Civil Code as stated in the Directives Principles of State Policy but...!
3. In the 1980's the Supreme Court asked the Government of India and Uttar Pradesh government to restore land to the Shias who had complained that the Municipal department had permitted Sunnis to bury their dead on land belonging to the Shias. Government said it cannot implement order due to law and order problem.
4. Congress government overrules Supreme Court October 2004 ruling by issuing ordinance having retrospective effect from 22 years to avoid paying back ITC Ltd. Rs.350 crores plus interest.
5. In July 2005 Supreme Court says that no loudspeakers to be used before 6 a.m. In Mumbai hear Azaan call from the mosques between 5 and 6 am violating the Supreme Court order. Tell the cops and they blame the politicians.

Sanjeev Nayyar on the Net. Contributed by FF reader Kunwar Sinha

Loss of Adarsh

Firoze Hirjikaka

I think our so-called leaders are slowly beginning to comprehend that there can be consequences for their misdeeds; that the days when they could almost literally get away with murder are coming to an end.

The Adarsh Housing Society scandal that is currently hogging media headlines has evoked a gamut of emotions: outrage in the public, opportunism in opposition political parties, somewhat jingoistic jubilation in the media and, above all, surprise in the beneficiaries who had managed to procure prime property in Mumbai for a pittance.

These worthies must be scratching their heads and wondering what the fuss is about. After all, this is the way such things have always been done in the world's biggest democracy for decades. It is common knowledge that senior leaders of major political parties have undeclared assets to the tune of hundreds, if not thousands, of crores – and have you ever met a poor bureaucrat? Far from being brought to book, such charlatans have been rewarded for their ingenuity in acquiring wealth well beyond their known sources of income. A case in point is the proposal by the Delhi Development Authority to award prime flats in the Commonwealth Games village to the very scamsters who used the games as their personal bank. So what's the big deal this time?

The chief casualty of the Adarsh fiasco appears to be the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Ashok Chavan, a pleasant enough fellow who, by the pathetic standards of governance set by India's politicians, is doing a reasonably good job. This leads to another surprise development. The attack on the hapless CM, being prosecuted with unrestrained gusto, is being spearheaded by *The Times of India (TOI)*, normally a pro-establishment newspaper that relies considerably on government advertisements for its revenue. One has to wonder why it is now rocking the gravy train with gay abandon. Considering that Chavan is now tottering on his throne, this bears startling similarities to a palace coup. Conspiracy theorists may be speculating that the *TOI* has struck a secret deal with the next aspirant to the CM's *gaddi*, in return for increased government largesse, but of course this is pure speculation.*

So what is the big deal this time? I regard it as a heartening sign that, at long last, India's democracy is slowly but surely maturing. It took us half a century, but we Indians are gradually escaping from the *mai-baap*

sarkar mindset our British colonial rulers took such pains to foster in us. For decades after Independence, our new overlords – who masqueraded under the sobriquets of ministers, elected representatives and bureaucrats – simply took over where the British left off. They knew what was good for us; they told us what to do and what to believe – and ours was not to question why. In effect, they were a law unto themselves; and they made sure the general public accepted that fact. They controlled the police forces, so there was no question of their being brought to book for their misdeeds – corruption being the major one. Even more shamelessly, they passed laws and amended the Constitution to facilitate their immune status. And like docile puppets, we the people accepted it as the natural order of things.

No longer. The people are fighting back. The first salvo was fired when we forced a reluctant government to pass the Right to Information Act. Hitherto, our *netas* and *babus* considered themselves too superior to be required to explain their actions. Indeed, secrecy was the principal weapon in their armoury. The second armament handed to the people was the emergence of independent private television news channels. For the first 40 years of our existence as an independent nation, the government disseminated information very selectively through the state-owned Doordarshan and All India Radio. However, with the advent of cable and satellite television channels, the media was free to report events and express their opinions and, allowing for a certain measure of sensationalism, they are doing a fairly good job.

It may be too early to be certain, but I think our so-called leaders are slowly beginning to comprehend that there can be consequences for their misdeeds; that the days when they could almost literally get away with murder are coming to an end. Reluctant as our politicians and bureaucrats are to take punitive action against their co-conspirators, public pressure is forcing them to act – or at least to be seen to be taking action. We are still light years away from an *adarsh* (Hindi for ideal) form of government, but at least the first baby steps have been taken.

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* As this issue goes to press comes the news that Ashok Chavan has resigned.

This month in December 1953

Has Art A Purpose?

by Narie Oliaji

Proudhon believed that the purpose of art is to uplift humanity. By thus denying that art is an end in itself, Proudhon, by the implications of this belief, has done a great deal of mischief to the freedom of the artist. The artist who begins upon this road is immediately beset with problems which he has neither the aptitude nor the training to face. Once the artist chooses to have a purpose, he is immediately forced to decide: what is this purpose? The upliftment of humanity, true. But what way lies this upliftment – by perpetuating the system of private property, or by ushering in the dictatorship of the proletariat? By the return to a direct man-to-man relationship of the supposed-to-be discredited feudal system, or by the man-machine-man relationship of capitalist society? By uncompromising individualism or by dragooning collectivism?

On the other hand, Zola defined art as a corner of the universe seen through a powerful temperament. It is one of the life's little ironies that Proudhon, whom Marx despised, should be nearer to the communist concept of art, than Zola, the champion of the proletariat. Zola's profound observation at once explains the nature of art. We immediately perceive that the peculiar thrill of art consists in the fact that it is not an imitation of nature but a transformation of it.

N O T E S

The Assam Incident

The recent incident between the Dafla tribesmen and the Assam Rifles serves to emphasise the resolution on tribal peoples passed by the Madras conference of the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom. This resolution, while stating that the tribal people cannot be maintained as quaint museum pieces for the entertainment of tourists, also suggested the need for the preservation of their distinct culture and way of life and the need for a gradual and sympathetic approach to the question of integrating them into the diverse unity of India.

While no one can condone the ambushing of our troops or the taking of hostages, it must not be forgotten

that punitive expeditions will become a democracy in which the tribal peoples are as much citizens as are others. The causes of this incident must be thoroughly investigated and whatever genuine grievances there are, must be redressed.

*

Liberty of The Press

The report of Mr. Justice P. B. Mukharji's investigation into the Calcutta incident between newspapermen and the police makes interesting reading. Apart from going into the causes of the incident, it also touches upon the fundamental question of the rights and responsibilities of the press in a democratic country.

Serious allegations of deliberate assault and infringement of the liberty of the press were made against the police and Justice Mukharji has gone into all the available evidence before passing his judgement. The cause of the incident was that the pressmen formed an illegal assembly when Section 144 was in force and that one of them forcibly resisted arrest. Significant also are the facts that no editors or owners of newspapers came forward to give evidence before the Commission and that no representative of four of the more important newspapers complained of closure of any source of news. There was no evidence to support the contention that this was a deliberate assault on representatives of the press.

On the more fundamental question of the freedom of the press, Justice Mukharji says: "I wish the Calcutta press did not put forward under the liberty of the press the claim to breach the order under Section 144 or the claim to interrogate, interfere with or resist a policeman on duty. In claiming to do so, it has misconceived the liberty of the press and made a bid for tyranny or privilege for any one institution including the press." No one can disagree with the learned judge in this conclusion.

Liberty of the press implies free access to news, freedom to publish the news without pre-censorship and freedom to comment on the news. But it does not end there; it also implies responsibility on the part of the press. If some newspapermen resort to printing unchecked information and indulge in sensationalism, then they must be prepared to suffer the inevitable consequences of not discharging their duty to the public in a manner befitting the press of a free country.

Accountability in Public Service

N. Vittal

This is the second of the three-part serial by Mr. N. Vittal whose tenure as Central Vigilance Commissioner saw the Commission play a proactive role in demanding accountability from the elected and permanent executives. The first part dealt with the reason why accountability is so important and the reasons for the erosion of accountability in the last sixty years. In this part Mr. Vittal focuses on weaknesses in the system that have put accountability in the backburner.

Poor System for Reward and Punishment

1. Another major reason for the lack of accountability is the system of rewards and punishment in a system. Most of the governmental systems emphasise the written rules and procedures and, as mentioned earlier, situations when an effectively performing public servant has to go beyond the letter of the law, faces the danger of becoming a victim. This may lead to situations where a person who doesn't take a decision or delays a decision and as a result causes greater harm to public service may make better progress in his individual career than a public servant who takes an initiative that has to break the law once in a while. In order to nurture a sense of accountability, therefore, systems have to be put in place. The rewards and punishments must be directly related to performance and taking initiative instead of blind conformity or ineffective mechanical approach to providing the services. The government is expected to be a model employer and keeping this in mind, the Indian Constitution provides a double guarantee to the permanent civil servants under Article 311 of the Constitution. Article 311 ensures that no one once employed can be removed from service unless the following conditions are satisfied:

Article 311. *Dismissal, removal or reduction in rank of persons employed in civil capacities under the Union or a State.-*

- (1) *No person who is a member of a civil service of the Union or an all-India service or a civil service of a State or holds a civil post under the Union shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.*
- (2) *No such person as aforesaid shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.*

- (3) *Provided that where it is proposed after such inquiry, to impose upon him any such penalty, such penalty may be imposed on the basis of the evidence adduced during such inquiry and it shall not be necessary to give such person any opportunity of making representation on the penalty proposed:*

Provided further that this clause shall not apply

- (a) *where a person is dismissed or removed or reduced in rank on the ground of conduct which has led to his conviction on a criminal charge; or*
 - (b) *where the authority empowered to dismiss or remove a person or to reduce him in rank is satisfied that for some reason, to be recorded by that authority in writing, it is not reasonably practicable to hold such inquiry; or*
 - (c) *where the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that in the interest of the security of the State it is not expedient to hold such inquiry.*
- (4) *If, in respect of any such person as aforesaid, a question arises whether it is reasonably practicable to hold such inquiry as is referred to in clause (2), the decision thereon of the authority empowered to dismiss or remove such person or to reduce him in rank shall be final.]*
2. This sense of security may be justified to ensure that the public servant takes the initiative to meet situations as may arise in the performing of the public service, but what has happened is that once a person becomes a government servant, it becomes practically impossible to fire him. As a result, the greatest measure of punishing poor performance or lack of responsibility or lack accountability gets blunted. In fact, it has been suggested that in order to improve performance, Article 311 has to be modified or withdrawn and replaced by

a rolling contract system so that at any given point of time, the relationship between the public servant and the state is a contractual one and in terms of the contract, depending on the performance.

Weakness of Annual Confidential Reports System

3. One method of rating the performance of public servants is through annual performance reports. We have a system of annual confidential reports. Under this system, while feedback on good performance is not given, adverse remarks are communicated. Thanks to the impact of Article 311, regarding the protection given to the government servant, the reality is that any reporting officer who gives honest adverse remarks in the ACR is more often placed in an awkward situation. Many reporting officers therefore choose the path of least resistance. There is an inflation in the rating of performance. The situation has become ridiculous. For a government servant in India, 'good' means average or even poor!
4. Another complicating factor is that many government servants belonging to the reserved or backward class, many a time, advance the fact of their caste and accuse the reporting officer of prejudice to defend their case against adverse remarks. In Andhra Pradesh, when Mr. Chandrababu Naidu was the Chief Minister, an attempt was made to make this rating of performance as objective as possible, but the impact is not known. It may not be possible to quantify all public service precisely.

Lack of Transparency

5. Another major factor for lack of accountability is lack of transparency. In the corporate sector, the recent debates about the need for corporate governance has brought into sharp focus the fact that if a business enterprise has to be run under the principles of good corporate governance, three factors are important. First, there should be transparency. Transparency is the best guarantee to ensure that no malpractices take place. Because, greater the transparency, greater the accountability so far as decision-making is concerned. One common complaint about governmental systems has been the lack of transparency. Rules and procedures are not transparent and the decision making process is not clear and as a result, the citizen does not get the information that he needs nor can be sure that he has been treated in a just manner. In this context, the enactment of the Right to Information Act 2005 has been a great blessing and an important step forward in the Indian government system for ensuring accountability of public service. Recent

review of the experience under the Right to Information Act 2005 highlights the teething problems of introducing a transparent system of governance and decision making in an administration set up by the British colonial system where secrecy reined supreme. There was an Official Secrets Act but no Right to Information Act. As experience in corporate governance principles shows that transparency helps in fixing accountability and fixing accountability is the first step in ensuring a fair rewards and punishment system so far as delivery of public service is concerned. If this is done in a very meaningful effective manner, it will ultimately lead to the greater satisfaction of the public.

Corruption

6. Perhaps, the most significant factor that comes in the way of accountability in public service is corruption. Corruption has been defined by the World Bank as use of public office for private gain. The concern universally over corruption in public services gathered momentum towards the end of the 1990s and the adoption of a UN Convention on Fighting Corruption in 2003 marks an important step forward. In the context of the public governance system, the focus on fighting corruption ranks very high because corruption has been a universal experience. Transparency International, the Berlin based NGO has been publishing annually, the Corruption Perception Index. The direct correlation between reduction in corruption and greater accountability in public service is obvious. The measures to fight corruption, therefore, can be considered as measures that improve accountability in public service. For tackling corruption, one can adopt the same strategy as has been adopted for tackling any disease. If the cause of any disease is known, then corrective measures can be initiated to ensure that the causes are tackled and to that extent corruption will be reduced and greater accountability introduced. In the Indian context, so far as the bureaucracy is concerned, corruption is due to the following reasons:
 1. Lack of transparency arising out of unclear rules and procedures and nurtured by a culture of secrecy under the ambit of the Official Secrets Act.
 2. Red tape arising out of complicated procedures leading to encouragement of corruption by way of speed money. It is true that the procedures which cause delay and have often been described as red tape, were there to ensure uniformity of decision making in all cases of a similar nature.

The idea was to ensure that justice was not only done but was seen to be done. Unfortunately as happens in many human situations, the path to hell is paved with good intentions.

3. A poor reward and punishment system.
4. the universal human tendency of groupism or brotherhood. Thick as thieves is a very common expression. Nobody talks about 'thick as honest people'. It is the tribalism of the corrupt and the brotherhood amongst them that gives them strength within the organisation.
7. Each of these four reasons can be effectively tackled and in developing alternatives I would suggest that the standard basic principles of industrial engineering consisting of the following options be followed to explore every situation insofar as improving procedures are concerned:
 - i. Elimination
 - ii. Combination
 - iii. e-sequencing
 - iv. Substitution
 - v. Modification

This exercise can be extensively used to bring better transparency and reduce to a great extent the scope

for corruption. Equally important in fighting corruption is the availability of information technology. We have seen in this country the tremendous impact of information technology in improving the Railway Passenger Reservation System. This is benefiting crores of people everyday. E-governance using information technology in various governmental organisations' systems and procedures is also another option that can be considered for reducing corruption and improving accountability in public service. Nevertheless, one must not forget that no machine can be cleverer than the human mind. As Dr. Radhakrishnan pointed out the mind that invented the atom bomb is more powerful than the atom bomb itself. Experience in Andhra Pradesh, for example, in the computerisation of the land record system shows that while the registration system could be simplified and the procedure speeded up, human intervention in inputting data can be a source of corruption!

– (To be concluded)

MR. N. VITTAL IAS (Retd.) has had a long innings in public administration and Industrial Management. Positions occupied by him include Secretary in the Department of Electronics; Chairman of the Telecom Commission. After retirement he was appointed Chairman of the Public Enterprises Selection Board and later as Central Vigilance Commissioner.

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

The global coalition against corruption: www.transparency.org

CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2010

(From 1= Least Corrupt to To 178 = Most Corrupt)

1 Denmark, 1 New Zealand, 1 Singapore, 4 Finland, 4 Sweden, 6 Canada, 7 Netherlands, 8 Australia, 8 Switzerland, 10 Norway, 11 Iceland, 11 Luxembourg, 13 Hong Kong, 14 Ireland, 15 Austria, 15 Germany, 17 Barbados, 17 Japan, 19 Qatar, 20 United Kingdom, 21 Chile, 22 Belgium, 22 United States, 24 Uruguay, 25 France, 26 Estonia, 27 Slovenia, 28 Cyprus, 28 United Arab Emirates, 30 Israel, 30 Spain, 32 Portugal, 33 Botswana, 33 Puerto Rico, 33 Taiwan, 36 Bhutan, 37 Malta, 38 Brunei, 39 Korea (South), 39 Mauritius, 41 Costa Rica, 41 Oman, 41 Poland, 44 Dominica, 45 Cape Verde, 46 Lithuania, 46 Macao, 48 Bahrain, 49 Seychelles, 50 Hungary, 50 Jordan, 50 Saudi Arabia, 53 Czech Republic, 54 Kuwait, 54 South Africa, 56 Malaysia, 56 Namibia, 56 Turkey, 59 Latvia, 59 Slovakia, 59 Tunisia, 62 Croatia, 62 FYR Macedonia, 62 Ghana, 62 Samoa, 66 Rwanda, 67 Italy, 68 Georgia, 69 Brazil, 69 Cuba, 69 Montenegro, 69 Romania, 73 Bulgaria, 73 El Salvador, 73 Panama, 73 Trinidad & Tobago, 73 Vanuatu, 78 China, 78 Colombia, 78 Greece, 78 Lesotho, 78 Peru, 78 Serbia, 78 Thailand, 85 Malawi, 85 Morocco, 87 Albania, **87 INDIA**, 87 Jamaica, 87 Liberia, 91 Bosnia and Herzegovina, 91 Djibouti, 91 Gambia, 91 Guatemala, 91 Kiribati, 91 Sri Lanka, 91 Swaziland, 98 Burkina Faso, 98 Egypt, 98 Mexico, 101 Dominican Republic, 101 Sao Tome & Principe, 101 Tonga, 101 Zambia, 105 Algeria, 105 Argentina, 105 Kazakhstan, 105 Moldova, 105 Senegal, 110 Benin, 110 Bolivia, 110 Gabon, 110 Indonesia, 110 Kosovo, 110 Solomon Islands, 116 Ethiopia, 116 Guyana, 116 Mali, 116 Mongolia, 116 Mozambique, 116 Tanzania, 116 Vietnam, 123 Armenia, 123 Eritrea, 123 Madagascar, 123 Niger, 127 Belarus, 127 Ecuador, 127 Lebanon, 127 Nicaragua, 127 Syria, 127 Timor-Leste, 127 Uganda, 134 Azerbaijan, 134 Bangladesh, 134 Honduras, 134 Nigeria, 134 Philippines, 134 Sierra Leone, 134 Togo, 134 Ukraine, 134 Zimbabwe, 143 Maldives, 143 Mauritania, 143 Pakistan, 146 Cameroun, 146 Cote d'Ivoire, 146 Haiti, 146 Iran, 146 Libya, 146 Nepal, 146 Paraguay, 146 Yemen, 154 Cambodia, 154 Central African Republic, 154 Comoros, 154 Congo-Brazzaville, 154 Guinea-Bissau, 154 Kenya, 154 Laos, 154 Papua New Guinea, 154 Russia, 154 Tajikistan, 164 Democratic Republic of the Congo, 164 Guinea, 164 Kyrgyzstan, 164 Venezuela, 168 Angola, 168 Equatorial Guinea, 170 Burundi, 171 Chad, 172 Sudan, 172 Turkmenistan, 172 Uzbekistan, 175 Iraq, 176 Afghanistan, 176 Myanmar, 178 Somalia. (Please refer to the article on Page 7)

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.

Musharraf's Boast

1. Now that Gen. Musharraf (ret'd) has decided to re-enter politics and has formed his own party (United Muslim League), he is at his old game of proving how clever he is. He is also known for his sophomoric smartness and economy of truth. In his TV interviews, he has answers to all questions and solutions for all problems. He had earlier claimed that Pakistan had trained militants to infiltrate Kashmir; in his follow up interview he clarified that he did not train such militants in his regime but they were trained earlier. He thus got off the hook by disassociating himself from sending mujahideen to J&K. He made some startling claims: L-e-T was born because of the injustice in J&K, Siachen and Sir Creek disputes were resolved and needed just the signatures of the two countries, even the Kashmir issue was resolved through his 4-point proposal and drafts were being prepared to be signed by him and Man Mohan Singh. Hope our PM throws light on these startling achievements! We had heard of some progress on Siachen and Sir Creek but not on Kashmir. He did not regret the Kargil adventure although when Nawaz Sharif, Pak PM, had blamed him for the disgrace of Kargil, he had disowned responsibility. Musharraf is true to his old form of claming and disclaiming responsibility as it suits him.

1. The fact that such a discredited politician was given pride of place by a reputed TV channel is itself a coup for his publicity managers. He is in exile and is trying to come back because he senses that the civilian Government in Pakistan is fast losing its way and the people are waiting for a saviour. He wants to be that saviour, although his previous record as nation builder is disastrous. He is now advocating that the army be given an institutional role in the democratic set up in Pakistan. He glibly justifies this outlandish suggestion claiming that democracy has to evolve in different forms and Pakistan needs the army. Shades of Sukarno who justified 'Guided Democracy' in Indonesia with such verbal gymnastics! The role of the Pak army in the murder of democracy in Pakistan several times over, is well known. It required a Musharraf to give it theoretical underpinning. He may soon come up with reasoning why the army should not be in permanent power in Pakistan. Thank our good fortune that we do not have a General of this erudition and inclination amongst us. Musharraf is like a village 'vaidu' (doctor) who claims to have a cure for all ailments. You can trust him at your peril.

Accession and Merger

2. Omar Abdullah recently raised this issue of Kashmir's accession to India. He tried to distinguish between accession and merger. What does he mean? Legally, all princely states were given freedom to accede to India or Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh of J&K signed the accession instrument like all other heads of princely states (over 500) in India. Kashmir was indeed given a special status because of the UN resolution on plebiscite then pending action. The argument of the 'merger' theorists is that J&K was not incorporated in the Indian Union like other States and, therefore, the Accession remains an unfinished business. What about Parliamentary resolutions declaring that J&K is an integral part of India? Does it not amount to incorporation?

2. Omar Abdullah champions the cause of India most of the time but when pushed to the wall, as at present, his instinct for political survival forces him to make discordant noises to prove that he is not a puppet of Delhi. In doing so, he makes contradictory statements. If Kashmir's accession to India is final and complete, why is it to be treated as unfinished business? The 'Accession vs Merger' argument is not new; it is pushed forward since the 50s. Omar Abdullah cannot simultaneously be a Union Minister in Delhi (which he was in 2001-2002) and also be only a half citizen of India! It is like having your cake and eating it too. The tragedy of Kashmir is that even those who are on India's side get confused by legalistic sounding arguments and New Delhi does not help resolve the dilemma either.

Interlocutors

3. Words assume new meanings and importance according to circumstances. 'Interlocutors' is a word much in usage in the Kashmir context. The Government appointed a three-member team led by Dilip Padgaonkar as interlocutors without stating publicly what the team was expected to do. The idea appeared to be a genuine desire to talk to the agitators through unbiased, non-political personalities. The dictionary meaning of the word 'interlocutors' is simple; 'one who engages in conversation'. However, the interlocutors in Kashmir were tempted to play God. Padgaonkar stretched himself to indicate that Pakistan was a party to the 'dispute'. If he could be excused for stating the obvious, even if unnecessary, his colleague was more adventurous in suggesting that the Indian Constitution could be amended to provide for 'Azaadi' for a State. Since the Government had indicated that any solution must lie within the parameters of the Indian Constitution, the worthy interlocutor decided to change the goal posts by recommending amendment to the Constitution itself. What a clever play! Only an intellectual completely divorced from reality could arrive at such a solution.

3 'Interlocutor' is not an intermediary nor is he a negotiator. He has no powers to make offers or exchange conditions. He is a listener and a reporter of facts. He is expected to provide a balm of talks to soothe hurt sensibilities when normal discourse becomes difficult. He is like a door stopper to ensure that the door for negotiations is not slammed shut. He should not overreach himself and assume the role of a negotiator as he has no powers to make offers or reach a conclusion. He should avoid the temptation of believing that he is the arbiter of national policies. He can at best give his recommendations to the Government without pretending to be the judge. This is the usual problem with track II diplomacy, goodwill ambassadors, interlocutors *et al.* If they succeed, great, if not, there is no great loss! But if they want to play God, there are problems. The Padgaonkar team was already rejected by the militants but the former bravely went ahead. It tried to do more than what was in the script and became more of an embarrassment than help. So much for non-political intervention! (*Please also read V. Balachandran's take on the subject on page 16*)

Thought or Action

4. India faces several serious problems. Whether it is the Indian Mujahideen or Kashmiri separatists or Naxalites, India has to choose between hard choices and soft surrender. We may think of negotiations, all party delegations, round-table conferences or interlocutors, ultimately what matters is action. There are no instant solutions available. Nature intended thought to be a guide to action, not a substitute for it. Thought unbalanced by action is a disease. Lofty thinking has to be shelved when it is time for action. Georges Clemenceau, French statesman, said, "A man who needs to be convinced before he acts is not a man of action; you must act as you breathe"

4. The reverse is also advocated all the time. "Think before you leap", "Thinking never killed anybody, action does" and "Fools jump in where angels fear to tread" are homilies dinned into our ears from childhood. Civilized man then becomes incapable of action. India is in this Hamlet-like limbo, "To do or not to do". It is aptly said, "India has the misfortune of being disarmed by those who have the constitutional mandate to defend it" and "India waffles through self-defeating political correctness" (cited from *India Today*). As was said by a former PM, 'inaction is also a policy decision'. With this kind of prevarication, there is no wonder we are unable to solve our problems.

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

Limits to US Role in the Kashmir Dispute

The Obama Administration also squandered some goodwill with the Indians early in its tenure by raising the spectre of the appointment of a Kashmir envoy to placate Pakistan. President Obama has since demonstrated a keener understanding of Indian sensitivities on the issue and is more realistic about the limits of any U.S. role in the decades-old dispute.

The President's historic visit to India offers an opportunity to set a new course for the direction of the U.S.–India partnership – one that acknowledges India's growing global role and the changing Asian strategic landscape that makes strong U.S.–Indian partnership imperative for stability and prosperity in the region.

Excerpt from an article by **LISA CURTIS** (Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation). For the full text of this article visit www.heritage.org/Research/2010/11/Obama's-India-visit-Should-Affirm-New-Delhi's-Global-Role. Read another excerpt of this article on page 34

Do We Need Such Interlocutors for Kashmir?

V. Balachandran

Are the Interlocutors going to suggest any new measures which have not already been put forward earlier?

I had written 2 pieces for the Delhi Sunday paper *Sunday Guardian*, on the choice of interlocutors. I had felt that appointing a lightweight team like this immediately after a high level Parliamentary delegation's visit to the Valley proved the Marathi adage "*Dongar Pokhroon Udir Kadle*". (Mountain was excavated to extract a mouse). The conduct of interlocutors drew criticism from different quarters. The team members' ego clashes were reported by the media. Their daily commentaries to the media had to be stopped after Home Minister P. Chidambaram openly chided them not to make ball to ball commentaries. Radha Kumar amused all of us by saying that the Indian Constitution should be amended allowing "Azadi". Later she retracted this statement. In any case are they going to suggest any new measures which have not already been put forward earlier? The Kashmir problem has been dissected by several think tanks, both Indian and foreign. Hundreds of recommendations have been made. Several Track-II dialogues have been convened. Government of India must be having mountains of recommendations. Interlocutor Radha Kumar's own recommendations with Ambassador G. Parthasarathy 'Frameworks for a Kashmir Settlement' (Delhi Policy Group) were published in 2006. Similarly Interlocutor Dilip Padgaonkar's views are also well known since he was a member of Ram Jethmalani's group. So what new should the nation expect from such a team?

Secondly how would they hold dialogue with all sections of public opinion when the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and separatists had promptly announced that they would boycott the visit? I was amazed that New Delhi did not think it advisable to discreetly consult the stakeholders before announcing their names. I had felt that the decision by New Delhi in unilaterally announcing the names had a trace of arrogance bordering on stupidity. Perhaps it was only a step to coincide with the visit of President Obama. I had always felt that the whole series of stone throwing incidents were contrived by interested parties to attract international attention on the eve of the annual September UN Session. My assessment proved correct since no stones are now being thrown after the verbal fusillade in September during the New York General Assembly session. Besides the stone throwing incidents

were confined to a small area of 5 police stations. On September 18 a leading PDP activist and Youth wing leader Bilal Ahmed Nizar was caught organizing stone throwing in South Kashmir. He was also responsible for attacking the residence of SP leader Fayaz Ahmed Bhatt in Anantnag. PDP under Mufti Mohammad Sayed was until recently the Congress government's ruling partner in Jammu & Kashmir. PDP is still with the UPA coalition in Delhi. Yet our highly charged visual & print media said that the entire Valley had risen in revolt. New Delhi which had other channels of information should not have lost its nerve.

Stone throwing in the Valley is nothing new. I had quoted Sumit Ganguly, noted US based scholar writing in 1996 that Mirwaiz had told him in New York in October 1995 that Palestinian students who regularly visited Kashmir University had demonstrated the advantage of stones as an "*Intifada*" weapon. While Palestinians were justified in expressing their anger at the illegal occupation of their land by heavily armed Israeli soldiers, the situation in the Valley which was very peaceful after a fair and transparent election in 2008 was subverted by subversive elements and by power hungry politicians like the PDP who wanted to nullify the elections where 64% of the people had participated. Instead of maintaining law and order to save a democratically elected government, the UPA coalition in New Delhi caved in after the stone throwing incidents. The bogey that the local administration, especially the police was extremely unpopular with the Valley youth who were highly resentful was blown by a recent report in *Sunday Guardian* (September 26, 2010) that the State Police received 58,975 applications for recruitment to 2,786 posts. Even in Srinagar and Badgam districts the number of youths who applied was 2,860 and 8,053 against vacancies of 529 and 283 respectively.

MR. V. BALACHANDRAN formerly Special Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat.

I believe we should all pay our tax
with a smile. I tried but they
wanted cash.

anon.



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

Did Obama Imprison South Bombay?

In any other nation, especially in a “free” country, I doubt if the people would put up with such official high handedness.

When the President of America comes to town, his handlers make sure that the host country knows it. Helicopters, armoured vehicles, US marines, even naval gunships accompanying the Great One proclaim that the most powerful man in the world is coming – almost like a Roman emperor making a triumphant entry. An entire hotel becomes a temporary US territory and the President is completely insulated from unwanted intrusion.

With South Bombay virtually under siege on account of the US President’s visit, the residents, taxi drivers and small traders in the affected areas are justifiably upset with Obama for interfering with their Diwali celebrations and affecting their livelihood, albeit temporarily. Their angst, however, may be directed at the wrong party.

While the security team accompanying Obama has undoubtedly imposed some restrictions on the movement of the general public, I believe it is the Mumbai police that have gone overboard. This should not really come as a surprise, since our cops have a long history of over-reacting to a security situation. Hence the fruitless “nakabandis” and “red alerts” the day after any attack

anywhere in the country - after the horse has bolted, so to speak. As a resident of Colaba, I have been personally witnessing, since Friday, hordes of policemen aimlessly standing around the entire stretch of Colaba Causeway with a bored expression on their faces. I wouldn’t be surprised if the majority of them have no idea of precisely what security “threat” they are supposed to be watching out for. To make matters worse, entire roads have been completely closed to all traffic – and even the “open” roads are sanitized by exiling all hawkers and virtually restricting free movement of the public.

Our law enforcement officers don’t seem to realize that it is their job to protect the general public without unnecessarily inconveniencing them; without banishing them completely from public places, where they have a right to be at any time as long as they are not breaking the law. This is not the first or only country visited by a US President. In any other nation, especially in a “free” country, I doubt if the people would put up with such official high handedness. But we Indians merely shrug our shoulders and accept it as the natural order of things. *Sab chalta hai.*

Such a Long Journey into Bigotry

The Shiv Sena seems to be stuck in a time warp from which it cannot, or does not want to emerge.

The Shiv Sena took a very belated exception to Rohinton Mistry’s book “Such a Long Journey” – which was part of Mumbai University’s English Literature syllabus. The objection was on the grounds of a nebulous, perceived insult to the Sena’s perennial mascot, the *Marathi manoos*. Not content with this unabashed display of bigotry, the Sena threatened to burn the author too if he returned from Canada where he now lives. The University’s Vice-Chancellor, Rajan Welukar, promptly and cravenly withdrew the book from the University’s syllabus.

The Shiv Sena’s made-for-television drama was apparently meant as a launching platform for the crown prince, Aditya Thackeray, himself a student of the University – and it was the latest demonstration of a political party singularly bereft of original ideas. It is also a manifestation of the Sena’s growing frustration as it continues to lose ground in election after election. Moreover, if this latest ploy was meant to be a counter to that other

champion of the *Marathi manoos*, Raj Thackeray, it fell flat on its face.

The Shiv Sena seems to be stuck in a time warp from which it cannot, or does not want to emerge. They are living in a fool’s paradise, convinced that the street smart tactics that worked in the 1960s and ’70s are still relevant. They can’t seem to grasp that the Indian electorate of the 21st Century is far smarter and less gullible than the previous generation. *Tamashas* like tearing up posters and bombastic, jingoistic statements serve no purpose than to provide the Sena “warriors” with a brief photo op.

We have become accustomed to the hypocrisy and ineptitude of our politicians, but the Shiv Sena has taken it to a new level. They have completely lost the plot; but are either too blind, or too stubborn to see it.

MR. FIROZE HIRJIKAKA can be contacted at Leonardo_99@yahoo.com

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The Microfinance Conundrum

Do We Risk Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater?

Meera H. Sanyal

I believe that Microfinance in India has benefited millions of poor women

The recent Ordinance by the Andhra Pradesh Government to regulate the functioning of Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) has brewed up a storm of controversy.

In the eye of the storm is the role of the Capital markets, Private Equity Funds and the so called Vulture Investors who seek to participate as equity investors in Indian MFIs.

Critics argue that the high lending rates of our MFIs (24-28% on average) have allowed these investors to profit at the cost of poor marginalized borrowers. The incidence of multiple loans, poaching of clients to gain market share, and stringent collection practices have been held out to be the cause of rising rural indebtedness and suicides.

While there is undoubtedly some truth in the criticism of certain MFIs, based on my experience of the sector, I believe that Microfinance in India has benefited millions of poor women and that MFIs have been instrumental in enhancing Financial inclusion in many remote parts of India.

Our bank works with a multitude of MFIs through whom we have on-lent Micro loans to over 2.2 million of the poorest households across the country. Impact assessments conducted by our own staff and using robust statistical analysis have shown dramatic effects on poverty alleviation.

I should like to illustrate the working of an MFI by sharing the example of Cashpor, an MFI that works in the most backward districts of West UP and East Bihar. Set up by David Gibbons, a Canadian Professor and erstwhile associate of Nobel laureate Mohammed Yunus, David came to India over a decade ago. His aim was to pilot an experiment to try and see if the 'Yunus' model could successfully be implemented in areas considered so backward and lawless that few dared to venture there. His hypothesis was that if Microfinance could work here then it could work anywhere in the world.

To select target borrowers, David and his team have

devised what they call the Cashpor index. On entering a new village they head for the poorest quarter, typically (but not always) the Harijan or Dalit *bastis*. There they assess the credit of the borrower by an assessment of her dwelling. A hut constructed of mud gets 0 points, one with semi solid walls gets 1 point, a brick house 2 points etc. Similarly a thatched roof gets 0 points, a roof constructed with tin 1 point and a solid roof 2 points etc. To be true to their objective of providing access to the very poorest, only borrowers with fewer than 3 points are given a loan.

The repayment track record of Cashpor's borrowers is sterling, and the impact assessment conducted here shows that in repeated loan cycles of 5 years (and a cumulative borrowing of Rs 5000 a year or Rs 25,000 in total) over 60% of these women have lifted themselves and their families out of poverty.

Most of the Cashpor borrowers I have met, have borrowed money to purchase milch cattle (usually a Grade 3 buffalo). Other women have set up small businesses. The most enterprising was a woman in a small village about 100 kms from Varanasi, who purchased a second hand DG set that she rented out in the wedding season to power up "*shaadi* tent houses".

The Cashpor team works hard to create a more efficient governance and distribution model, and pass on the resultant savings through lower costs to their borrowers. Any surpluses that they generate are being channeled back into the community through scholarships to children of borrowers (credit is given both for aptitude and the payment track record of parents!), micro-insurance programs to protect both the assets and borrowers themselves etc.

The problems that the Cashpor team have faced include frequent and periodic mugging and theft (especially as collectors travel to and from remote villages on bicycle) and political intimidation and threats. Collection and distribution costs are high given the necessity of having local staff who can interact face to face on a weekly basis with each self help group. Most importantly what they

have experienced is the lack of access to sufficient equity to be able to expand their portfolio and thus the outstanding work they are doing.

What they have not yet faced is a problem with bad debts or the moral hazard of borrowers repudiating or refusing to repay loans.

David attributes this to a simple fact – these women, who are too poor and lack sufficient collateral even to be considered for a loan by the local money lender, will undertake considerable hardship to keep their credit reputation good. They know that this is the only way to keep credit lines open, which in turn is the only way to secure a better life for their children.

This is a story I have found repeated across the country. While there are not many MFI's as idealistic as Cashpor, David acknowledges that with levels of Financial access as poor as they currently are, access to Credit is more important than a few percentage points in the cost of credit, because once such women get the loan they are enterprising and thrifty enough to turn a decent margin even on costs as high as 30%.

While there are few who would criticize MFI's like Cashpor, or leaders like David, Vikram Akula and SKS have attracted the ire of many. It's not that his organization is less effective or efficient than Cashpor, but that he unashamedly runs his firm on a "for profit" basis and has personally profited, as have his angel investors, from the recent IPO of SKS.

While not wishing to comment on the morality or otherwise of his motives, what I believe is important, is to focus on the outcomes we seek.

Let us assess the facts:

- Levels of Financial inclusion in our country are abysmally low
- Micro-enterprise by women have been shown to have a direct and positive effect on poverty alleviation and socio-economic indices of the entire family
- Despite 4 decades of nationalization, neither our state owned nor private sector banks have a sufficient penetration of our 600,000 villages, and quite frankly neither their costs nor staffing structures will permit them to do so going forward
- MFIs have been able to penetrate deeper and swifter than banks and provided much needed Financial inclusion to women at the bottom of the Pyramid.

Therefore we need more MFIs.

- For MFIs to expand their reach they will need to build scale, and attract both talent and capital

Thus we arrive at the inescapable conclusion that Not for Profit MFIs, notwithstanding their idealism, commitment and good intentions will be constrained in growing to scale and will therefore be increasingly marginalized (note that Indian MFIs are not able to collect Savings unlike MFIs in other parts of the world including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan thus further constraining funding and growth possibilities).

If the objective we desire is greater Financial Access and Inclusion, then 'For profit' MFI's are the only viable means to do so. We must accept that they will need to pay well to attract talent and be able to access the capital markets to attract the requisite Capital and funding.

As in every other rapidly growing sector there is of course the need for the appropriate regulatory environment to ensure that the customer is treated fairly and has a grievance mechanism through local ombudsmen to protect her rights.

To this end regulation to enforce Registration of MFIs is a welcome step, to prevent dubious or fly-by-night operators. Similarly prudential lending norms capping the total exposure of a borrower and curtailing multiple loans through different MFIs / top up facilities are wise precautions to avoid the future problems of a sub prime crisis. The UID program and potential linkages with e-mobile banking can make credit bureaus for Microfinance a reality.

However ideas such as Capping interest rates pose the danger of distorting market pricing mechanisms just as political interference in the collection process will create an unmanageable moral hazard and kill the industry.

What will serve India and our poorest Indians best is a vibrant but well regulated Micro Finance Industry, with professional and well managed MFIs.

In the ultimate analysis this will mean more institutions like SKS and more capital market participation in the sector – not less. If we are unable to live with this reality we risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

MRS. MEERA H. SANYAL is the CEO of The Royal Bank of Scotland and holds 47 shares in SKS acquired in the Public offering under the retail investor category. She also heads Liberalsindia for Good Governance (the INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP). The views expressed here are entirely her own.

Good Corporate Governance – Some Concerns

Nagesh Kini

Two concerns that are blatantly not good practices and need to be brought out in the public domain relate to the present disclosures of Managerial Remuneration and Qualifications in Auditors' Report.

Post-liberalization a lot is being reported of good Corporate Governance practices and Corporate Social Responsibility. The flip side is not all that glorious - it is full of black holes/deeds that companies would rather push under the carpet and but for the mandatory disclosure requirements that perforce bring out ugly skeletons out of the closet.

According to a 2008 Karmayog Report of India's 1,000 large listed companies - around half do not undertake any kind of CSR whatsoever, thereby going to prove that they have no business processes in place to produce an overall positive impact of their contribution to society at large.

Gleaning through the so-called Corporate Governance Reports forming part of the companies' annual reports, it becomes apparent that they are mere cut-and-paste jobs put out by the public relations or corporate communications, blandly reporting the same inanities year after year by changing the numbers here and there just to present data to conform to statutory compliance requirements. Given a chance India Inc. honchos would like to do away with disclosures that they perceive will show them in poor light.

Two concerns that are blatantly not good practices and need to be brought out in the public domain relate to the present disclosures of Managerial Remuneration and Qualifications in Auditors' Report.

Since the early days of the Companies Act going back to 1956, Managerial Remuneration was governed by a mandated overall limit, with the companies required to approach the Central Government for any increases. The regulations were indeed extremely tight fisted. Post 1990s this has undergone a sea change and remunerations hit the roof and gone beyond. Though the practices may be perceived to be within the four corners of the statute, they certainly do not conform to good corporate practices. One western management author has rightly termed it "Corporate mis-governance"!

On the issue of payment of Sitting Fees to Directors earlier the maximum permissible was a measly two hundred fifty rupees per meeting attended. Now sky is the limit and the figures run into hundred of thousands. In the case of Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) there are now additional fees for attendance at meetings of the Committees of Board - Audit, Remuneration, Share Transfer/Investor Grievances Committees. It is said that these Committees meet just before or after the Board Meetings so that the Directors do not have to come more often and yet get paid separately! It is not a coincidence that the attendance at the Board and Committee Meeting are in perfect sync too!

The other related issue is the lack of consistency in Corporate Governance policies concerning commission payments to NEDs. The quotes in their 2009-10 Annual Reports:

1. Tata Steel – "Based on the recommendations of the Remuneration Committee, the Board decided no commission be paid to the non-executive directors for the financial year ended 31 March, 2010".
2. Ultratech Cement discloses that other than sitting fees, there is no other remuneration payable to the NEDs.
3. Hindalco "For FY 2009-10, the Board has approved payment of Rs.14cr (PY Rs. 7.5cr) as commission to NEDs The amount is determined after assigning weightage to attendance and the type of meeting and other responsibilities." The commission varies from nil to a maximum of Rs.1, 307.81L.

Commission disclosures by some other listed companies

1. Hindustan Unilever- 5 NEDs getting commission of Rs.25,00,000 @ Rs.5,00,000 each in addition to sitting fees from Rs.1,80,000 to Rs.3,40,000 each.
2. Siemens – 7 out of 11 NEDs get commission of Rs.11, 600,000 ranging from Rs.450, 000 to Rs.3,150,000.
3. Mundra Port & Special Economic Zone Ltd. - 5 NEDs and Independent Directors paid Rs.60,00,000 @ Rs.12,00,000 each.

4. Siyaram Silk Mills Ltd. – No NED gets paid commission, but only 4 Executive Directors.
5. Indian Hotels – 7 NEDs. “Note – A sum of Rs.1.75 crores has been provided as commission to the Non-Executive Directors for the year 2009-10.”
6. L&T - 9 NEDs paid Rs.87 lakhs ranging from Rs.9 to Rs.11 lakhs.
7. Finolex Cables - 8 NEDs paid Rs.850,000, one Rs.150,000 others Rs.100,000 each.
8. JSW Energy – 5 NEDs paid Rs.14,14,178 range Rs.39,178 to Rs.3,50,000.

From the above it will be noticed that other than Hindalco, no corporate seem to have a rational reasoning or a basis for benchmarking commissions.

Tata Steel, Ultratech and Siyaram do not pay any commission to NEDS very rightly so, in my opinion. It begs the question as to what is the physical and/or intellectual contribution of just a handful of well known names all big timers rushing in their limos from one Board meet to another for not more than the statutory maximum of twenty companies; however they can be on the boards of private and foreign companies and trusts. It is a simple case of “you pat my back, I pat yours” camaraderie nominating each other on the Boards sheerly for mutual benefit and ensuring that they always toe the management line and do not dissent on the pain of not being reappointed at the end of the term.

While one member of the Board chairing any Committee is understandable it would be worth the while, as good corporate practice to consider the induction of a stakeholder/professional shareholder, company executive and employee to make the committee truly representative of a wider cross section of opinion rather than pack it with only board members. This is a suggestion for inclusion in the Listing Agreement

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Laws and Common Sense

Zafer Futehally

It is not the lack of laws but their disregard which is our real problem. ... Common Sense coupled with a strong administrator can solve most cantankerous issues which today continue endlessly.

At the time when the British left in 1947 the Indian Penal Code was a thin volume of 30 pages. Since then it has grown massively and new laws continue to be added to our legal lexicon. The number of laws which are now broken with impunity are beyond counting, and I recall a discussion which we had in a meeting of the National Committee of Environmental Planning and Coordination under the Chairmanship of the late Pitambar Pant. Members were divided about whether or not to propose legislation about some aspect of polluting the natural environment. Some felt that in course of time a law begins to have an effect on the human mind. Others felt that a law which could not be enforced effectively should not be passed because they lead to flippant disrespect for the authority of Government

We have now a plethora of laws relating to the protection of our natural resources, air, water, soil, flora and fauna. The one relating to water is a particularly difficult one to implement for obvious reasons. It is so easy to pollute and so tempting to use extravagantly. It has become one of our most contentious issues both within societies and also at the international level. Laws and Conventions have not helped very much. A strong and intelligent administration is what the situation requires

In the Criminal Procedure Code of British days actually there was one small para which solved many water related problems. The Clause said that all citizens were responsible for ensuring that water flowing downstream from their habitation or place of work should not be polluted. For an effective and caring administration this clause was enough to ensure the purity of water in the sector concerned. Today chemical factories established on river banks use the flowing water as a convenient conveyor belt for disposing of their waste, and this has led to a dangerous level of pollution in most of our rivers. It is not the lack of laws but their disregard which is our real problem.

A judgement given by an ICS officer in pre-independence days might be a lesson in common sense. When a complaint was made by a group of citizens against

the mahant of a temple, who kept a gun within the precincts of the temple, it was found that the gun was old, rusty and non-functional. Giving his judgement the Collector-cum-District Magistrate declared: "I hold that this is not a gun but a God" All was quiet thereafter. Common Sense coupled with a strong administrator can solve most cantankerous issues which today continue endlessly. The Ayodhya case is one striking example – the consequence of a weak and dishonest Civil Servant

For most citizens it is the local policeman who is the most obvious and ubiquitous embodiment of the law. My own experience with several police officers have not been happy. Some 50 years ago I was driving on the road to Thana (a suburb of Bombay) when I saw a young boy on a Jamun tree high up stretching precariously on an outlying branch trying to reach the fruits. I was afraid he would fall, and indeed he did crash down and was badly injured. I tried to assist him and just then a police jeep came from the opposite direction. I managed to stop it and requested the driver and the others to take the boy to the Ghatkopar hospital which would be on their way. Their reply was "*Hamara Kaam Nahin*", - it is not our business – and drove away. I took the boy to the hospital and left him in their care.

The next day I wrote about the incident in *The Times of India*, giving details about the time and the location in the hope that the driver and the rest would at least be adequately censured for their unhelpfulness. I offered to give further details if required. Nothing happened. After about 3 months I woke up to the sound of loud banging on our front door and found a group of policemen very apologetic for waking me up. Apparently my letter was seen by a legislator of the Maharashtra Assembly, who demanded "immediate action against the people concerned". They had come to get the number of the jeep though I had made it clear in my letter that I was not able to do that.

Another more interesting encounter with the police was when we were attacked by "dacoits". These dacoits were a small group of baddies from the local village, Henur

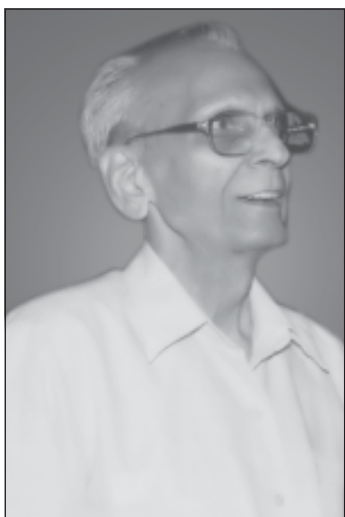
Bande, near Doddagubbi. They broke into our kitchen and helped themselves to the provisions which included a heap of *chikoos* from our garden. No doubt they would have laid their hands on something more valuable if I had not gone to investigate the noise. I was attacked—their weapon being a pocket knife. I bear the scar to this day. The scuffle succeeded in creating a din which brought my wife from the living room. She hit one of the dacoits on the face with the rolled up *Span* Magazine which she had. All this noise brought the servants from their quarters, and our faint-hearted dacoits fled into the night leaving behind their chappals and their chikoo finger prints on the glass panes.

Enter the police. Only after much protest about the difficulty of finding our house in the midst of ragi fields in the then undeveloped area of the 80s.

They took no interest either in the chappals which were lying around, or in the finger prints which could have provided a good clue. We were grateful for the visit of the Police Commissioner the next morning, and for stationing two policemen in our compound for moral support.

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Professor V. C. Phadke R.I.P



28 July 1932 - 8 October 2010

It is with deep sorrow that we record the passing away of one of our regular contributors, Professor V. C. Phadke. He belonged to a generation of Maharashtrian intellectuals who pursued higher education against great odds and sustained an interest in the life of the mind throughout his active service and retirement.

Before he entered the world of education he served for 14 long years in the State Transport Corporation and had he continued he would have reached the very administrative heights in that establishment. However the pull of academics was strong and he joined the college at Bhiwandi and retired with laurels. He was a familiar figure at Thane and was on demand at public platforms and his lectures on the stalwarts of Maharashtra (such as Chiplunkar, Nana Sunkersett) drew attentive audiences over the years. He began lecturing on euthanasia in the small towns of Maharashtra and this was a new theme in the State which had popularised unpopular causes. It needed courage to talk on this at length for it was far from cheering for those who had a weak stomach.

He had planned to do his doctoral dissertation and had written some chapters on the lesser known thinkers of Maharashtra Conservatism but heavy college duties acted as a deterrent.

In addition to his heavy lecturing schedules, he participated in the postgraduate lectures in political science conducted by the Mumbai University in its Thane centre.

Known for his writing in Marathi, he was well known for his regular columns in the popular monthly *Lalit*. He was also a short story writer and his essays have been collected in books. Marathi is exceptionally fortunate in the *genre lalit nibandh* and he added his name to the several who had excelled in this. In addition he wrote for a number of years in the *Maharashtra Times* introducing new English publications. Besides he wrote text books in Marathi for undergraduate students and these have been prescribed both in the Mumbai University and the Y. B. Chavan Open University.

Above all, he was an extremely affable person with a wide circle of friends and they will miss his gentle presence for many years. *Freedom First* pays tribute to this intellectual who added value to the pages of this journal and conveys its deep condolences to his family.

R. Srinivasan

“The Unforgettable Army”

Furdoon S. B. Mehta

The British Army soldier is always first to pay his tribute to that superb old Indian Army, without which it is doubtful if victory could have been achieved.

I am going to read out to you the Foreword written by Colonel the Rt. Hon’ble Viscount Slim OBE, son of Field Marshal Slim of Burma, to the book “The Unforgettable Army” by Colonel Michael Hickey. It reads:

“Look back fifty years. It is a long time ago. At the start of the Asia-Pacific War the Japanese moved fast, seeing off our American Allies in the Pacific and occupying almost all of South-East Asia.

“The British Empire, with all its Indian and Australian comrades, lost Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore. This was the greatest defeat in the history of our Empire. A disgrace and a humiliation. It left the British in Burma facing a growing threat to India and Ceylon. Further disaster lay ahead. The enemy advance could not be halted. From the borders of China, Thailand and Malaya to the Indian frontier must surely rank as the longest overland retreat in our nation’s history. A courageous backward slog – a fighting retreat – but we were beaten. Together with thousands of refugees the remnants of our battle-weary troops eventually arrived, unwanted and to no great welcome, at the Indian frontier.

“Those soldiers, mostly British, Indian and Gurkha, were forced to stare at the stark and harsh realities of defeat. Then came the soul-searching for everyone involved, from generals to the lowest ranks. No excuses. New ideas, new tactics, new techniques, new training and morale-building were evolved by the officers and men who forged the new 14th Army. Reinforced by many thousands of multi-racial comrades-in-arms they faced about and magnificently fought their way back into Burma, giving the Japanese Empire its first major defeat on land, heralding the Allied re-conquest of lost territories in Asia – and turning Defeat into Victory.

“Never has an army had to fight and win a war against such a tough, tenacious, vicious and courageous foe as the Japanese. The fighting was mainly in tortuous, steep and rugged mountainous jungle terrain, bedevilled by some of the world’s

longest and widest rivers flowing across the axis of advance. The campaign demanded more than average hand-to-hand fighting.

“For a moment forget the human enemy. The picture is not complete without recalling the devastating effects of climate, allied to the then-prevalent killer diseases of malaria, dysentery and scrub typhus.

“Challenging enough, but add to these the appalling, lengthy and tenuous lines of communication that had to be rapidly built and serviced in order to ensure the survival of the 14th Army with all its Corps, Divisions, Brigades, Battalions and Companies, fighting on one of the longest land fronts of World War II, and then the overall daunting nature of their task emerges. Burma was, quite justifiably, at the bottom on the national war priorities. The 14th Army had to help itself, and it did so with a vengeance. Improvisation became the norm at every level; initiative, self-help, local invention, plus the ability to do so without, were practiced everywhere, from the front line to the rear echelons. There was much to overcome and achieve in order to bring victory in Burma.

“To survive and win in Burma, a sense of humour was mandatory, and luckily, from generals to privates and jawans, it was there in abundance. A key factor in high morale, their sense of humour not only helped to cement the unique bond and very special relationship amongst officers and men but also to develop a tremendous spirit of comradeship that cut across, and gathered in, all the races and religions which represented that great Army. The 14th Army was a truly united multi-racial force with soldiers, sailors and airmen from Britain, India, Nepal, Africa, Burma, America, China and many other countries.

“It gave an exceptional example; much needed in our world today, of how different nations can work, respect, mix, share, suffer, worship, support,

communicate and live in friendship, and overcome and conquer together. The British Army soldier is always first to pay his tribute to that superb old Indian Army, without which it is doubtful if victory could have been achieved.

“This unique spirit and bond of fellowship lives on today through the Burma Star Association in its dedication, its work and it’s caring. The loyalty of its thousands of members throughout the world is to their continuing comradeship and to all those who fought in Burma. – SLIM, House of Lords, August 1992.”

To this I want to add, that the famous Battle of Kohima in April 1944, on the border of India and Burma, was the fiercest battle of Field Marshal Slim’s Burma campaign. There were hardly any regular troops available to defend Kohima, so a hastily raised scratch force was assembled under the able leadership of Colonel Hugh Richards on 5th April 1944. It consisted of transport companies – both motor transport and mules, a field supply depot, about 500 Indian and British troops convalescing in Kohima, some elements of the only regular troops of the Assam Regiment and Assam Rifles and a newly raised Nepali Sher Battalion. Those not having any personal weapons were handed rifles, bayonets, small arms ammunition and hand grenades with orders to hold Kohima at all cost. They fought the Japanese to a standstill in pouring rain and under continuous bombardment in fierce hand to hand fighting. They were supported by the famous 24th Indian Mountain Regiment from nearly 2 miles away.

On 19th April 1944, a few hundred ragged, exhausted, wounded and dying British, Nepali and Indian soldiers who fought like tigers came down an Indian hill. For two

weeks they had held out against the crack 31st Japanese Division of about 15,000 men with a background of hitherto unbroken victory, until relieved by the 4th Battalion of the Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment which was the advanced guard of the 161 Infantry Brigade which was rushed to Kohima. They arrived with the warrior races of the Indian Army, the most durable and perhaps the most remarkable of Britain’s Imperial creations and drove the Japanese out of their bunkers, across the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy, and out of Burma once and for all. They played the best orchestra of war conducted by Gen. Bill Slim.

The Battle of Kohima is ranked by some as the Stalingrad of India and by Lord Louis Mountbatten as the British/Indian Thermopylae. It was a touch and go affair, and a very close run thing. Field Marshal Slim of the 14th Army in his book “Defeat into Victory” had this to say about the battle:

“Sieges have been longer, but few have been more intense, and in none have the defenders deserved greater honour than the garrison of Kohima which withstood such fierce attacks.”

Those who fought and died there were Not Ordinary Men.

The gate swung slowly open on the hinge of fate. But for the gallant defenders of Kohima, we may have been speaking Japanese today. Night eternal night has folded our martyrs in its soft wings. God Bless their souls.

Address by Brig. Furdoon S. B. Mehta (Retd.) at the Remembrance Day Memorial Service on Sunday 14 November 2010 at the Afghan Church, Colaba, Mumbai.

Liu Xiaobo - Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2010 to Liu Xiaobo for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China and, says the Committee in a pressnote there is a close connection between human rights and peace. Such rights are a prerequisite for the “fraternity between nations” of which Alfred Nobel wrote in his will.

Liu Xiaobo took part in the Tiananmen protests in 1989; he was a leading author behind Charter 08, the manifesto of such rights in China which was published on the 60th anniversary of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 10th of December 2008. In 2009 the Chinese Government sentenced Liu to eleven years in prison and two years’ deprivation of political rights for “inciting subversion of state power”. The Nobel Committee drew attention to the fact that “the campaign to establish universal human rights also in China is being waged by many Chinese, both in China itself and abroad. Through the severe punishment meted out to him, Liu has become the foremost symbol of this wide-ranging struggle for human rights in China

The People’s Republic of China is furious. Beijing has threatened there will be “consequences” for countries that support the dissident. The Chinese embassy in Oslo sent a letter to other countries’ missions in the city requesting that they refrain from attending the ceremony in Oslo in November.

More on Mothers-in-Law

R. Srinivasan

The last issue of Freedom First (referred to the general frowning of mother-in-law jokes in modern Britain. It is not likely that in our country there would be anything similar to the prohibition of jokes on mothers-in-law.

One of the regrettable casualties of modernization in urban India is the near disappearance of proverbs in daily conversation and banter. Time was when allusion to proverbs and capping these was the very breath of everyday conversation. Women were of course the repositories of these as were older people, and the spicing of these in conversation was one of the delights of social intercourse. Even before the TV invaded our home, they were gradually waning and it would be interesting to explore why.

However the theme of this piece is on the renewed interest in the mother-in-law as the butt of jokes in conversation. The last issue of *Freedom First* referred to this and the general frowning of mother-in-law jokes in modern Britain. It is not likely that in our country there would be anything similar to the prohibition of jokes on mothers-in-law. (No.521, November 2010 page 2 “A British Ban on Mother-in-Law Jokes”)

A quick look at a collection of proverbs in Indian languages (particularly Tamil) indicate some disturbing trends. A classic collection of these made at the end of the 19th century records proverbs relating to her, all pejorative and biased. Of the forty odd proverbs one could not find a single one sympathetic to this matron. A couple of them clearly wishing for her passing away. This is true of a Marathi collection as well.

One of the puzzling things is why this lack of empathy? Could joint families with numerous sons, daughters, nephews, nieces and the elderly relatives and a sprinkling of servants run at all efficiently without her counsel, guidance, admonition in fair weather and foul? She certainly was a central figure, a readily available physician to minor ailments, entertainer of children and a peripatetic almanac, a chronicler of family tradition and lore. Her centrality in a crowded, bustling joint family was taken for granted.

An examination of more than a thousand Telugu proverbs found twenty two relating to this grand dame. If proverbs in other languages are unsympathetic, the

Telugu proverbs are scathing in their tone perhaps not to be seen in other languages. Her heartlessness is evident in her statement to the daughter-in-law “eat the pestle if you are hungry”. There is no softness in a sword nor goodness in a daughter-in-law. The new born infant is named after the mother-in-law and I would fain throw her into the cooking fire. There is no goodness in a mother-in-law nor sweetness in a margosa tree. The daughter-in-law enters the house as a bride and the mother-in-law enters the Ganges(to die). Yet the Telugu proverb would melt the heart of any mother-in-law. Would she object if the daughter-in-law is to bring forth a son? In a world without a mother-in-law the daughter-in-law is perfect.

One counted thirty odd proverbs in Marathi and these again repeat the wisdom of the other languages. For sheer picturesqueness they stand unique. Being with a mother-in-law is like being in intimate proximity with a branch of cacti. While the mother’s home is a silvan haven of peace, the daughter is waiting for the mother-in-law’s back to be turned when she can gambol in joy. The open quarrel between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is free entertainment for the village. The mother-in-law glowers at the lovelorn eyes of the young couple. With the passing away of this termagant, the daughter-in-law is free to indulge in delicacies.

Almost all Indian languages have jokes at the expense of the mother-in-law; however there are not even a few significant one on the father-in-law. But the standard collection of Tamil proverbs has fifty two and these are well-known to Tamils. Another collection has 35; of these 30 illustrate the relation between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. They testify that the lumbering joint family cannot do without the matriarch. She may be reviled but the joint family cannot slouch and creak without her labour and presence. She happened to be a journeyman with a sharp tongue and sharper eyesight. Generally the younger members of the family gave her a wide berth and took care not to be in her way. She ruled the brood with an iron hand. It was said that she too must have been a

(Cont’d. on page 30)



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Who is the Nation's Social Conscience Keeper?

Neelakant Patri

One would not expect our prime minister making observations that show him in a very poor light. Manmohan Singh did exactly that the other day when he asked the country's highest judicial body to leave the policy formulation realm to the government in the context of the Supreme Court ordering the government to distribute food (food that is stored in the open and rotting) to the poor at no cost or low cost basis.

The Supreme Court's directive to the government was in response to a public interest petition that focussed on the government's failure to save foodgrains from being exposed to the elements and left to rot while millions of poor went hungry. Food and agriculture minister in effect dismissed the Court directive as only a suggestion which the government would look into but the Court clarified that its directive was an order, not just a suggestion.

Perhaps, the prime minister was stung by the Court's language and the snub to his coalition partner in the cabinet and wanted to assuage Mr. Sharad Pawar's feelings in the matter. What was unsaid by him and everyone understands is that the Supreme Court has exceeded its jurisdiction in getting into what was essentially an executive prerogative.

One need not get into the judiciary versus executive debate but purely consider the context. The simple fact is that India has the dubious distinction of having the world's largest number of below poverty line population. Millions of people do not get adequate food and their children are growing up malnourished who would eventually become a burden on the society. At the same time, we have this situation where thousands of tonnes of wheat and rice have been left to rot in the open fields because of lack of warehousing facilities. All that the petitioners wanted was that that rotting food be distributed to the starving poor instead of becoming cattle feed or at worst, fertilizer!

The prime minister's response was that the government would do all that it could to provide "affordable food" to those below the poverty line but it cannot implement the Court order to give food away for

free. Why? That would affect the incentives given to the farmers to produce more. It is the strangest reason that anyone can think of, least of all an economist of renown!

Strictly speaking, the Court is not formulating any policy for the government. Distributive justice is part of our Constitution and the government's policy of selling food at subsidised prices to the poor and economically weak has been in place for so long that the ration card is an accepted ID everywhere! All that the court has done is to order the government to extend the reach of that policy to the starving people. The prime minister went on to admit that "some way should be found to ensure that the food needs of the deprived sections are met."

No one is asking the government to give food free to all of the 37% of India's below poverty line population as the prime minister's remarks seem to indicate. His own party chief chairs an advisory council that has recommended distribution of food at a very low price to the poor in the 200 of the worst affected districts in the country.

We have a democracy and a vibrant Press to show the people what is happening in the country. If Mr. Manmohan Singh's UPA government can afford to spend thousands of rupees on hosting the Commonwealth Games and donate more than Rs.100 crores to suffering flood-hit people of Pakistan, why is the government's chief spokesperson saying that he cannot afford to implement what the Court has ordered?

Obviously the prime minister had taken the cue from his colleague, Mr. Sharad Pawar who at a weekend meeting of his partymen is reported to have said: "The government already spends Rs.66,000 crores on foodgrains subsidy. We buy wheat from farmers at Rs.15 a kg. but sell it to the Antyodaya population at Rs.2 a kg. How can we sell any cheaper than that?"

It is difficult to believe that persons occupying high offices should twist facts. As far as one gathers from the published reports, the Supreme Court's prescription of distributing foodgrains at "below cost or no cost" refers

to rotting food and does not cover all of the poor people. Why then is Mr. Pawar and now Mr. Manmohan Singh talking about free food to all of the poor and then saying the country cannot afford to do this?

We have pointed out time and again that Mr. Pawar seems to be acting as the farmers' representative even though he holds a portfolio that must ensure food supply at fair prices. Consider these remarks attributed to him about inflation coming down and its likely impact. "My concern is the prices should not come down so much that it adversely affects the farmers".

As for selling food under PDS, Mr. Pawar should be aware of what is happening in Tamil Nadu. Even the Supreme Court has held the Tamil Nadu example worth following by others. How is Tamil Nadu able to sell 20 kg. of rice at Rs.1 a kilo to all ration card holders, whether BPL or APL? Why are the economically weak in other states not able to get the same food security? From May 27, 2007, the Tamil Nadu PDS is also distributing at subsidised prices kerosene, sugar, wheat, wheat products, pulses, palm oil to cardholders.

According to official figures, the present monthly offtake of rice under the PDS in Tamil Nadu is 317,000 tonnes. The state pays Rs.5.65 a kg. for the 296,000 tonnes allotted by the Centre, the addition quantity is bought from the open market. It is the same case with other items, buy at a higher price and sell it at the subsidised price under the PDS. Admittedly, this policy has put a heavy burden on the state budget. The food subsidy, which amounted to Rs.734.85 crore during 2003-04 has gone up to nearly Rs.4,000 crores in 2009-10. The allocation for 2011 is Rs.3,750 crores as the government expects market prices to come down this year.

Apparently, the PDS operations in Tamil Nadu are worth emulation. The biggest criticism that PDS draws is that much of the food sold through it is diverted and it does not reach those it is intended for. But reports suggest that Tamil Nadu has been able to minimise such diversion and it is no mean task to cater to 1.97 million cardholders in the state. That figure must be close to 37% of the population about which both the prime minister and the agriculture minister say "impossible".

Well, under the DMK administration, anything seems to be possible. Consider the mechanism of PDS delivery in that state: the quota for a particular month moves from the warehouses to the PDS outlets 10 days before the start of the month, and nearly 60% of the month's quota would be in the fair prices shops and the full quota by the 5th of the month. Apparently, there is strict watch on the movement and checks to minimise losses at every level. And at any given point of time, the state maintains 6 months supply of PDS items. The PDS system in Tamil Nadu has not affected the farm production in that state either. The lesson is clear: you can feed the poor at below cost price without affecting the incentive to increased food production by the farms. All that is required is to cut down on totally unnecessary government expenditure on a host of things and projects. And this requires commitment, which sadly is lacking.

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More on Mothers-in-Law (Cont'd. from page 27)

daughter-in-law! Of course, but then it was "in the dark backward abyss of time." Surely she needs a defendant for almost all the proverbs are from the perspective of the helpless cowering daughter-in-law. If one went by diatribes she perhaps had no role to play except hectoring all and sundry. We need a feminist to correct the general bias and set the record straight.

Subterranean antagonisms must have lurked in all joint families the members looking around and mouthing civilities. With such attitudes being widely prevalent it is surprising that the joint family persisted as long as it did for a millennium. The family continued to participate in numerous religious and social rituals and there were scores of them as they were festivities and celebrations which

penetrated the months all the year round. In all these almost all the members participated, shared responsibilities and had emotional and psychological rewards. In these the mother-in-law had a central place even as the daughter in law.

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MNCs' Advertising Blitz

Threatens Children's Health

Sadanand B. Kumta

Parents who sacrifice so much for their children will do a lot of good to their children if they effectively wean them away from harmful junk food and soft drinks by setting an example themselves.

We live in a make believe world of consumerism. This has been facilitated by the relentless bombarding with ads by the purveyors and sellers of junk food and soft drinks. It is being done day in and day out, by the daily TV shows, by the print media – newspapers and magazines in addition to Internet and sales outlets. The aim is to condition, especially the young mind. The carrot of junk food and soft drinks is dangled before the gullible public all along the highways, especially those who have ample disposable money, unwittingly financing damage to their own health and that of their children. The ruination is slow but sure.

It will be educative to go into some of the recent findings of credible and responsible organizations, which have surveyed the food and drinking habits of people all over the world, especially of children. In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized food marketing to children as a contributory factor to the rising levels of their obesity and overweight. The 63rd World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva adopted a new set of recommendations calling on all nations to take action on marketing of junk food to children. The Consumer International (CI), London has similarly called on governments to ban such marketing, targeted at children, especially in school premises and playgrounds. It must be remembered that diet, exercise or physical activity and health are interrelated. In 2010, 42 million children below 5 are overweight in the world, of which 35 million are in the developing world.

The new regulations pertain to plugging loopholes in policies, and call for monitoring, enforcement machinery and sanctions. The foods include non-alcoholic beverages to children. The new WHA recommendations now aim at reducing impact on children, of foods high on saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, sugar and salt. The organization is asking governments to report on implementation of its directives. It is also important to take note of the fact that soft drinks increase cancer risks. A Singapore-Chinese health study of more than 60,000 people found that individuals who drank two or more soft drinks per week had an 87% increased risk of pancreatic cancer, compared

to those who had not. Sugar in the soft drink was also harmful. A research report published in a journal of hepatology, states that sweetened soda and fruit juices may cause long term liver damage. The fruit sugar is highly absorbable in the liver and can lead to fatty liver including cirrhosis. Water obviously is the best drink.

Under Consumer International's (CI) guidance, the Consumer Education and Research Society (CERC), Ahmedabad, wrote to 14 manufacturers, enquiring about their marketing practices involving children. Of the 9 multinationals, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Britannia Industries, Nestle, Cadburys, Hindustan Lever responded. Of the 5 national producers only Parle replied, all revealing their code of ethics. Those who did not respond were McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Kelloggs, Samrat Namkeen, Balaji Wafers, Rasna and ITC. Thus, what we are talking about is not merely marketing ethics, but the fact that children are consuming junk food and soft drinks harmful to their health.

Conclusion: Parents who sacrifice so much for their children will do a lot of good to their children if they effectively wean them away from harmful junk food and soft drinks by setting an example themselves. Parents must seek the advise of pediatricians or better still nutrition experts or dieticians.

[Note: Statistics given in this article are taken from the Consumer (CERS) magazine, *Insight*, published in their July-August 2010 issue from Ahmedabad.]

MR. SADANAND B. KUMTA, retired as Director of Technical Education, Government of Gujarat. He is resident of Pune and can be contacted at sbkumta@rediffmail.com

What the Corrupt can Never "Understand"

I happened to be on a flight once. A fellow industrialist sitting next to me said: "You know I don't understand, you people are very stupid. Why don't you just pay – You want the airline'. I said you will never understand this. I just want to go to bed at night knowing that I haven't got the airline by paying for it."

Ratan Tata, *DNA*, November 16, 2010

Was the Holocaust a Lie?

Benjamin Netanyahu

Excerpts from a speech by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the UN General Assembly on October 21, 2010 responding to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust.

I stand here today as the Prime Minister of Israel, the Jewish state, and I speak to you on behalf of my country and my people.

The United Nations was founded after the carnage of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. It was charged with preventing the recurrence of such horrendous events.

Nothing has undermined that central mission more than the systematic assault on the truth. Yesterday the President of Iran stood at this very podium, spewing his latest anti-Semitic rants. Just a few days earlier, he again claimed that the Holocaust is a lie.

Last month, I went to a villa in a suburb of Berlin called Wannsee. There, on January 20, 1942, after a hearty meal, senior Nazi officials met and decided how to exterminate the Jewish people. The detailed minutes of that meeting have been preserved by successive German governments. Here is a copy of those minutes, in which the Nazis issued precise instructions on how to carry out the extermination of the Jews. Is this a lie?

A day before I was in Wannsee, I was given in Berlin the original construction plans for the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Those plans are signed by Hitler's deputy, Heinrich Himmler himself. Here is a copy of the plans for Auschwitz-Birkenau, where one million Jews were murdered. Is this too a lie?

This June, President Obama visited the Buchenwald concentration camp. Did President Obama pay tribute to a lie?

And what of the Auschwitz survivors whose arms still bear the tattooed numbers branded on them by the Nazis? Are those tattoos a lie? One-third of all Jews perished in the conflagration. Nearly every Jewish family was affected, including my own. My wife's grandparents, her father's two sisters and three brothers, and all the aunts, uncles and cousins were all murdered by the Nazis. Is that also a lie?

Yesterday, the man who calls the Holocaust a lie spoke from this podium. To those who refused to come here and to those who left this room in protest, I commend you. You stood up for moral clarity and you brought honour to your countries.*

But to those who gave this Holocaust-denier a hearing, I say on behalf of my people, the Jewish people, and decent people everywhere: Have you no shame? Have you no decency?

A mere six decades after the Holocaust, you give legitimacy to a man who denies that the murder of six million Jews took place and pledges to wipe out the Jewish state.

What a disgrace! What a mockery of the Charter of the United Nations! Perhaps some of you think that this man and his odious regime threaten only the Jews. You're wrong.

History has shown us time and again that what starts with attacks on the Jews eventually ends up engulfing many others.

This Iranian regime is fuelled by an extreme fundamentalism that burst onto the world scene three decades ago after lying dormant for centuries. In the past thirty years, this fanaticism has swept the globe with a murderous violence and cold-blooded impartiality in its choice of victims. It has callously slaughtered Moslems and Christians, Jews and Hindus, and many others. Though it is comprised of different offshoots, the adherents of this unforgiving creed seek to return humanity to medieval times.

** Those who walked out were the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica and the 27 nations of the European Union.*

Contributed by reader Ram Narayanan. For the full text visit <http://blogs.jta.org/politics/article/2009/09/24/1008134/netanyahus-un-general-assembly-speech>

The Brihadeeshwara Temple in Tanjore

– Celebrating its 1000th Birth Anniversary

B. M. N. Murthy

The temple in ancient India was the place of all cultural activities. Temple building by itself was an act of devotion.

In the history of the development of Hindu temples, the Chola period (900-1200 A.D.) marks the Golden Age. The Brihadeeshwara Temple at Tanjore in Tamil Nadu is a classic example of the glory of Hindu temples. It is a remarkable structure, perhaps the biggest and the best, which belongs to the Chola period. In fact it is the world's first granite temple built in such awe-inspiring magnitude. This was built by the Chola King Rajaraja Chola I who ruled the kingdom from 985-1014 A.D.

Legend has it that Rajaraja was a victim of black leprosy due to the sins he committed in an earlier life as a hunter. To expiate the sins and to get rid of the disease, he was commanded by his Guru Haradatta to build a temple to Lord Shiva, after obtaining a *Lingam* [emblem of Lord Shiva] from the river Narmada. When the King went to the river and got the *Lingam* out of water, it started growing bigger and bigger. To give significance to this event the *Lingam* was called 'Brihadeeshwara' [*Brihad* means big in size] and the official name given to the *Lingam* was Rajarajeshwara.

The 10th century was a momentous time for the Chola kings. Their ambitious plan to build a great temple had met tough challenges and the tide turned in their favour only after Rajaraja-I ascended the throne in 985 A.D. In the following years till he died in 1014, Rajaraja waged many successful military campaigns, expanded the territory, set up an efficient administration and brought immense wealth to his kingdom. He thereafter wanted to build a grand temple in his capital Tanjore, something that had never been attempted before and something that would symbolize his achievements and show to the world the greatness of the Cholas. He knew well that that only a grand structure which could withstand the ravages of time should be built. He therefore chose granite as the material for the construction of the temple.

The problem then arose as to how to obtain granite since Tanjore had no granite quarries in or around. But this did not deter the king. His loyal men toiled day in and day out and brought nearly as much as 30,000 tons of granite stones from places as far away as 30 miles. After

ten long years of construction, the temple was completed and consecrated in 1010 A.D, exactly 1,000 years ago. Some historians and architects have described the mammoth and magnificent temple as a 'mountain and cavern combined'. Nowhere in the world can a visitor literally see a hand-crafted mountain towering over the sanctum. The most interesting feature of this temple is its *Vimana* or towered sanctuary which rises perpendicularly from a 15 feet high square base at a height of 50 feet to a total height of 216 feet. There are 14 storeys, with small pillars, pretty balcony windows and beautifully carved images.

The crowning stone at the top called '*Shikhara*' is octagonal in shape and crowns the tower. The gilded *Kalasham* or the filial over it is 12 feet and weighs about 80 tonnes. It is said that this *Kalasham* was conveyed to the top of the tower by means of an inclined plane commencing from a village about 4 miles north east of the city. The *Pradakshina* Path (circumambulation path) or the *Prakaram* has fresco paintings depicting stories and incidents from Hindu mythology.

The temple complex is situated in the southern half of a small fort and is surrounded by a moat on the east and the west. Apart from the main temple, the complex contains temples of Devi Brihannayaki, Subrahmanya, Ganesha, The Navagrahas and a number of Lingas are



The imposing and awe-inspiring structure

estimated around 252. To financially support and sustain the temple, Rajaraja endowed it with agricultural land and wealth and described in detail the duties of different groups of people who would keep accounts, sing, dance and take care of the security arrangements. He also made sure that they were all well paid and even specified their place for living. In fact, it was in this temple that the Devadasi cult was fostered.

The temple in ancient India was the place of all cultural activities. Temple building by itself was an act of devotion. As Bharata's *Natya Shastra* which includes drama, dance, music etc., was created by Lord Brahma himself, it was but natural that this art form was presented in any of these forms and it was therefore the practice in ancient India to present these fine arts in the precincts of the temple. It was not mere amusement but education. It is with this



A Marvel in Stone

view in mind that the Tanjore Temple houses many sculptures of dancers on its walls and pillars. Moreover, both *Sangeetha* and *Nritya* [Music and Dance] have been classified under the 16 offerings (*Shodashopacharam*) to be given to the deity of the temple every day.

The kings and other members of the royal family were in general great patrons of fine arts and encouraged the performances of musicians and dancers. Rajaraja Chola was no exception. This is reflected in the numerous sculptures of dance poses, called *Karanas*, sculpted in the temple. These *Karana* carvings are found in the corridor on the second storey of the *Vimanam*. Even though Bharata in his *Natyashastra* enumerates 108 *Karanas*, only 81 have been sculpted leaving the balance unsculpted but making provision for sculpting the balance 27.

This year, September 25, 2010, marked the completion and consecration of the Sri Brihadeeshwara Temple at Tanjore, with a grand dance spectacle at the temple. For the first time in the history of dancing, one thousand dancers drawn from all parts of the globe came together on a single platform. The well known Bharat Natyam dancer Dr. Padma Subramanian choreographed the performance and composed the music.

MR. B. M. N. MURTHY is a retired Engineer. Over the last ten years he has been writing weekly articles recalling India's great heritage. This month he wrote his 600th article. Email: bmmurthy@vsnl.com

Obama's India Visit Should Affirm New Delhi's Global Role

By Lisa Curtis

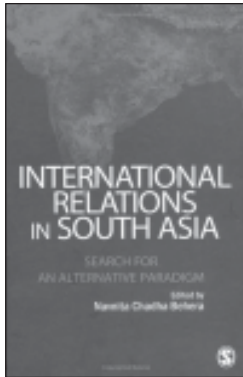
The Obama Administration's South Asia policy has focused a tremendous amount of attention on Afghanistan and Pakistan. India, being the stable and prosperous country in the region, has posed much less of a headache for the White House and thus tended to receive less attention...

President Obama has often adopted an overly simplistic approach toward U.S.-India trade and economic ties, focusing on India as an economic competitor to the U.S. During a speech on the campaign trail in July 2008, Obama noted that "children in Raleigh and Boston" are forced to compete with "children in Bangalore and Beijing." In August, Obama signed a law raising U.S. visa fees for foreign workers in the information technology (IT) sector – a protectionist move directed against Indian IT companies that bring high-skilled labour into the U.S.

While clamping down on outsourcing, President Obama has missed the larger story on the benefits to the U.S. economy from increased investment and trade ties between the two countries. For example, as Indian companies expand their operations in the U.S., they will create jobs for U.S. citizens and purchase U.S. equipment that will in turn generate additional economic activity. Indian software major Wipro recently hired 500 skilled U.S. workers in Atlanta, while IT service provider Tata Consultancy Services is expanding its campus outside Cincinnati to eventually employ 1,000 professionals. Likewise, when American companies invest in India, they not only create jobs there; they also build efficiencies and create export opportunities that lead to more jobs in America.

Excerpt from an article by **LISA CURTIS** (Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.). For the full text of this article visit www.heritage.org/Research/2010/11/Obama's-India-visit-Should-Affirm-New-Delhi's-Global-Role. Read another excerpt of this article on page 15

BOOK REVIEWS



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA – SEARCH FOR AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM edited by Navnita Chadha Behera ● Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. B1/I-1, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110044 ● www.sagepublications.com ● 2008 ● pp.342 ● Rs.725

Reviewed by Dr. Ramesh Babu, Visiting Professor at the Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad. He was formerly the Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta Professor of Civics & Politics, University of Mumbai.

The global meltdown of 2008 and the economic and intellectual disarray of the western countries ever since, eroded the post cold war triumphalism of capitalism irretrievably. Rise of protectionism, retreat from multiculturalism, and growing populist intolerance of religious and ethnic minorities of late are clear signs of the decline of the West. Unfortunately however, ‘conceptual colonialism’ of the West and blind imitation of the western ‘life styles’ persist in many walks of life in Asia (and the rest of the world). The academic discipline of International Relations theory (IR) is one such field that is yet to emerge from the shackles of the legacy of the West, which over the last four/five centuries emphasised conflict and clash of national interests. IR theory starts with the premise of anarchy in the international arena and “justifies” the ‘sovereign’ nation state’s right (not merely its might) to pursue its narrow national interests at the expense of peace, justice, and the common good of mankind. In fact, such a mindset and behaviour have become ‘normal’ and even ‘legitimate’ inevitably leading to “a clash of civilizations” – a kind of self fulfilling prophecy (Huntington).

Obviously such a precept and practice cannot be the basis for international understanding and world peace. Many perceptive thinkers around the world, especially IR specialists in Asia have been uneasy and deeply disturbed over such an intellectually sterile and negative foundation of their discipline. Some of them have even come together in search of theories that are more in tune with their own traditions and legacies, which assert that cooperation and harmony seeking dimensions of man are equally significant. Even as they pursued their chosen avocation of research and teaching IR, they could not be blind to the massive fact that the Western theories did not comprehend the reality around them. In fact persistence in the exercise that was out of sync with ground realities in Asia only led to alienation. Most of them felt that it was time they craft their own concepts that make sense and come to grips

with the national and international reality relevant to their situation and challenges confronting them. The book under review is one such intellectual endeavour by a devoted group of IR scholars in search of a new paradigm and, as such it is most welcome especially when capitalist globalisation is sweeping the world. Though the search has a long way to go, the learned contributors to the volume discuss in depth the dilemmas and frustrations involved in liberating the discipline from the entrenched Western legacy of enviable disciplinary rigour.

The book on *International Relations in South Asia* is based on the papers presented at the first Regional Workshop of the Asian Political Science and International Studies Association held in Goa in 2003. Twenty six scholars participated in it. Fourteen papers including an overview by the editor, who was also the organizer of the Workshop, are included in the volume.

In her insightful survey of the IR scene in South Asia and a very able summary of the main arguments of the contributors, Behera elaborates on the travails of the young discipline in the region. She discusses the relationship of IR with Area Studies and the parent discipline of Political Science. IR is called International Studies in the region and Behera rightly points out how that itself was the key hassle in the muddled evolution of the discipline in the subcontinent. While Nehru consulted economists all the time, he never even perceived the need to do so in the realm foreign policy. He knew everything and had all the answers, he thought. All the other leaders (with the notable exceptions of Rajaji and Masani) deferred to him. People by and large endorsed the great leader’s approaches and policies in dealing with the outside world. That was the fundamental tragedy. The only person Nehru would consult was Krishna Menon, his ideological alter ego. That only compounded the damage to the growth of expertise in foreign policy and international relations in the country. As long as the two were around, the institutional role of the Ministry of External Affairs was minimal. Consequently, no intellectual

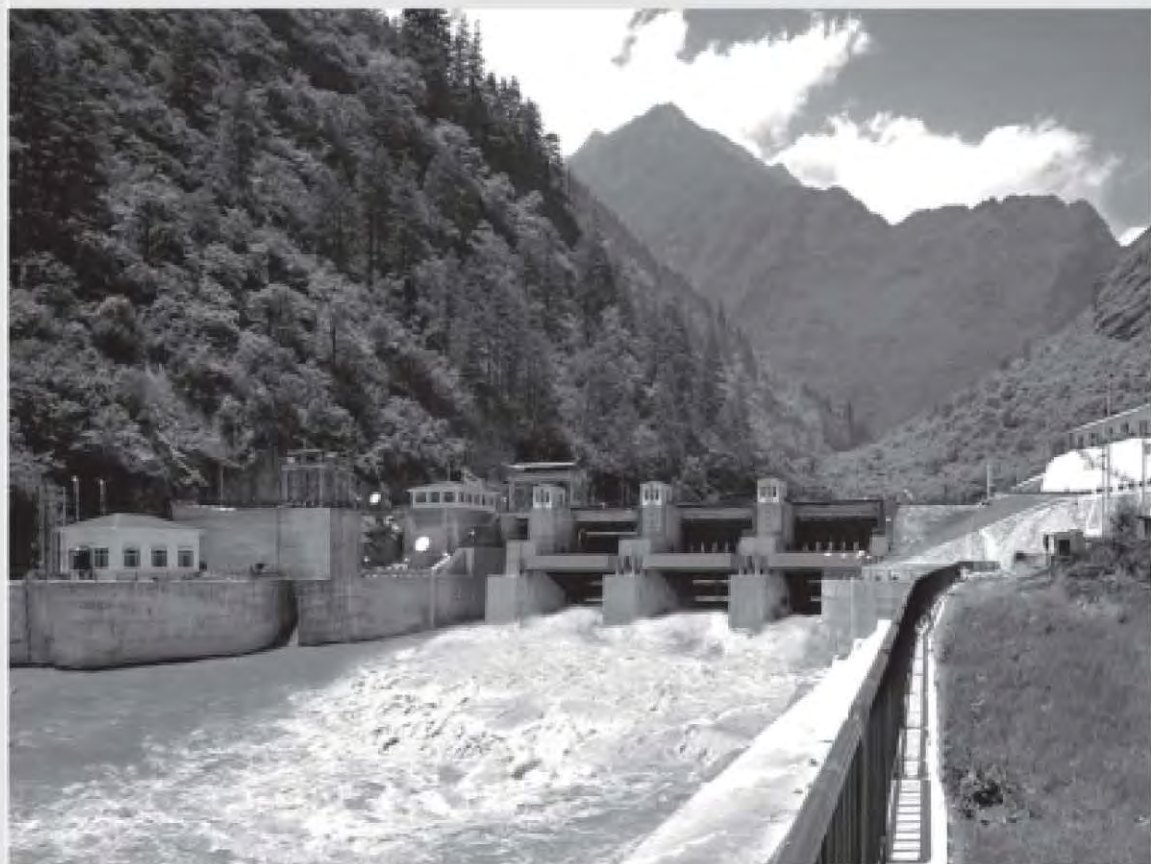
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pool of IR experts emerged either from the Parliament or the universities. Neither Panchsheel nor the mandala theory of regionalism, India's conceptual contributions in the realm of foreign relations, won the recognition they deserved in the core theory of IR, a historical monopoly of the West, particularly the US.

Political allegiance to the territorial State, the very foundation of the western conception of international reality, is new to South Asia. 700 years ago there were no nation states, everybody forgot it seems. No wonder, dependence on Western theories led to alienation in South Asia. In a review of an edited volume, it is neither possible nor necessary to discuss the main points of every chapter. An effort is made here to capture the essence of the collection of articles related to the issues in the growth (or its lack) of IR theory in South Asia. Owing to their colonial experience, Mirajul Quayes points out that the 'nation state' is mostly irrelevant to the majority of the people in the region. Empowerment of the citizens takes place within the 'inclusive communities' and not through the sovereign super structure of the State (Chapter six). Extending the logic further, Shibashis Chatterjee argues that hostility between India and Pakistan is not due to the anarchical nature of the international system. It is rooted in the exclusivist nation building strategies of the two countries. The paradox of the territorial state is not reconciled with the idea of common cultural past (Chapter eight).

The vital issue of 'security' is shifted from the inter-state arena to the relations between the State and its citizens, according to Neera Chandoke. The State is obliged to provide security because the citizens have rights vis-à-vis the State (Chapter eleven). Instead of being a liberating force, the State in South Asia often functions as the "bulwark of the established order," asserts A. K. Ramakrishnan (Chapter thirteen). Consequently, the hegemonic State becomes a contested site, rather than the foundation for building national consensus, according to Mangalika de Silva (Chapter fourteen). Haider K. Nizamani seeks an alternative to the State centric conception of security. He views the State as an integral part of the society in which the external and internal are intertwined inextricably (Chapter four).

The book is full of findings and interpretations revealing the inadequacy of the key Western concepts of IR, i.e. national security, sovereignty, territorial state, etc., in comprehending the ground realities in South Asia. However, the contributions in the book fall very much short of coming up with any viable or meaningful IR theories of their own. Even their concerted search for an

"alternative" paradigm became controversial because Western IR theory by implication became the point of departure. What is needed is an altogether truly universal or 'global' perspective, as I have argued for long in my own writings. Be that as it may, Amitav Acharya's word of caution is eminently valid. He warns us of the dangers of claiming exceptionalism on the one hand and indulging in parochialisms of our own on the other. He advocates international 'regional' perspectives of viewing the wider world without reducing regions to "subordinate systems" of the world (Chapter Three).

All in all, the book is full of a variety of new approaches with potential for theory building. Let us hope, there will be several other similar intellectual exertions in Asia and elsewhere, which could over time lead to more comprehensive and universally valid IR theories. The globalizing world of ours needs them urgently. I am more hopeful now than in the past because as the relative clout of Asia increases in the global arena, the 'merit' of Asian ideas becomes more powerful and credible. In the meanwhile, 'the Rest' has to resort to innovative dissent and concerted action to deal with 'the West' in order to make the extant global governance more humane and just.

I commend the book to all the aspiring and established researchers and teachers of IR all over the world, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The book is a must for all research libraries and think tanks in India and in the West.

Alcohol or Army?

Do you remember Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, the Malayali army commando officer who sacrificed his life to save Mumbai from the terrorist attacks? His bravery will remain unsurpassed.

The Kerala Government headed by Shri V. S. Achuthanandan awarded Rs.3 lakhs to the family of Maj. Sandeep Unnikrishnan.

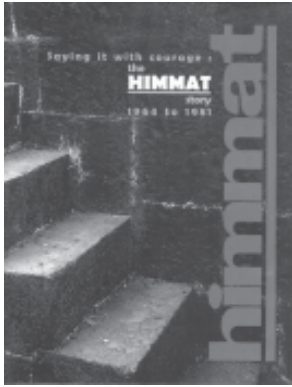
The same government headed by the same Chief Minister, donated Rs.5 lakhs to the victims of the recent Malappuram Liquor tragedy.

Now you decide - what should a youngster do?

Join the Army & die for the Nation? Or die by consuming illicit liquor?

From the Net by Cdr Ravindra Waman Pathak I. N. (Retd.) raviwarsha@hotmail.com

Contributed by: Brig Suresh C. Sharma (Retd.) brigscs@gmail.com



SAYING IT WITH COURAGE: THE HIMMAT STORY – 1964 TO 1981 ● Edited by Bhanu Kale ● Published by Himmat Publications Trust, Mumbai ● 2009 ● pp.180 ● Rs.300. (For copies contact Asia Plateau, Panchgani 412805, Maharashtra)

Reviewed by Dr. L. N. Godbole, a practitioner of Management and a thinking thinker about business and society. Email: tatami@mtnl.net.in

Frank Buchman, an American Lutheran minister of Swiss descent who was the initiator of “Initiatives of Change”, had a spiritual experience of release from bitterness in crucial relationships that altered the course of his life. He initiated a Movement in USA called “Moral Re-Armament” (MRA) now known as Initiatives of Change (IOC). It came to the limelight in the early years of the Cold War. It has its Headquarters at Caux in Switzerland. One of their Conference Centres is located at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, Maharashtra.

Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of both Mahatma Gandhi and C Rajgopalachari, started publication of *Himmat*, an English language weekly from Bombay in 1964 as a cause-driven mouthpiece of the MRA. MRA could not have chosen a better person as Founder since he had all the goodwill of positive thinkers and held in high esteem by Indians. November 1964 was a time after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India who had a marked tilt towards Soviet Russia in the Cold war game. Rajmohan Gandhi is currently World President of Initiatives of Change. The aim of this evangelical movement is to build bridges for Peace between Peoples and Nations by individual initiatives.

Elsewhere in the world (including Pakistan, which was a part of India till 1947) Military juntas took over absolute power by establishing military rule professedly in the public interest and failed virtually everywhere. In this period of Indian history a civil coup was successfully executed by Indira Gandhi in 1975 to keep herself in power by throttling Democracy with the help of the English-educated elite and Marxists entrenched in the Civil Service.

Coverage of censorship by *Himmat* in 1975 with blank pages without comment but referring to Pre-Censorship was exemplary. It was a pinnacle of glory in its short life span. Selection of some pages with official stamp of rejected articles by Censor is now published in this compilation. It is a historical document.

Himmat, stopped its publication in 1981 on account of financial difficulties. *Himmat* folded as it remained a voice of English-educated elite of Mumbai (who will still

like to call it Bombay) with no worthwhile *desi roots*. It was an imported plant, which flourished initially but died prematurely. It had no sustenance from the soil of India. It remained a foreign plant.

Russi Lala formerly of the Tata House was its first Editor. *Himmat* initially attracted many budding journalists like Kalpana Sharma, David Davidar, Neeraja Choudhary and a host of young newspapermen from UK, USA, and Australia with youthful enthusiasm at virtually no cost for this do-gooder mission. These do-gooders have done well in their later life in main-line newspapers run without any voluntary support for a CAUSE.

In the final section of this compilation these early associates have written nostalgically about their fond association with *Himmat*, without sharing their insights into reasons for the abrupt stoppage of the publication in 1981. They have politically correct disdain for existential necessity of flow of Finance through profit. The weeklies like, *The Week*, and fortnightlies like *India Today* came on the scene in the seventies and are doing well today.

Right from the beginning *Himmat*'s readership reach was spread from USA to Australia in some 73 countries, and had a circulation of 7,000 in the second year of its publication. It bravely continued its missionary efforts of publication during the infamous Internal Emergency of 1975-77. It had to hunt for printers due to Censor directives on the Presses and eventually had to have its own old style printing press. For that purchase of a Treadle printing machine it received worthy response from its readers.

The Foreword for this compilation is by Rajmohan Gandhi, Founder of *Himmat*. The compilation has a collection of old articles published in its life time of 17 years touching important current topics of that period with a world perspective. It has a section with photographs of the title pages of the weekly spanning those 17 years.

Bhanu Kale of Pune was associated with *Himmat* for two years during the time of its publication. He has continued his mission at individual level with the publication of *Antarnad*, a quality Marathi Monthly magazine with a small circulation amongst the Marathi literary circle. He has done a wonderful job of compiling the history of *Himmat*.

Even in the small number of Letters to the Editor published in this compilation, there are two worthy of mention. One is by M. J. Akbar of Calcutta who saw in 1966 the great change Indira Gandhi brought about which others saw only in 1975 in the declaration of Internal Emergency. Another is a column on Bombay which

ridiculed the change of name of Dhobi Talao to Krantiveer Vasudeo Balvant Phadke Chowk, named after the first freedom fighter in 1876 who was hanged that year after the 1857 War of Independence. This is in keeping with the elite tradition of some who feel orphaned even today by the demise of English rule.



SANANCHE KOOL ANI UTSAVAANCHE MOO (a book in Marathi on Rites and Rituals)
by Suman Oak ● Published by Sadhana Prakashan, 926, Sadashiv Peth, Pune ● 2010 ● Pp 120 ● Rs. 100

Reviewed by Mr. P. K. Nanawaty, an activist of Andhashraddhaa Nirmoolan Samiti and editor of e-zine *Thought & Action*, an English Quarterly of the Samiti. He is also one of the Trustees of Rationalist Foundation, founded by Justice R. A. Jahagirdar (Retd). pkn.ans@gmail.com

The fact that rites and rituals in our country have a religious background cannot be denied. The equation that 'culture means religious observances and that, in turn, means observing religiously all the old traditional rites and rituals passed on to us through several generations is firmly rooted in our minds. So one who dares express a different view regarding them, runs the risk of incurring the wrath of his/her family, relatives and friends. Such efforts are opposed vehemently by people of all strata of society. So wise people prefer to distance themselves from the chaotic religiosity leaving the over-religious alone.

Why do these meaningless and wasteful religious rituals that drown the common sense of people into intoxicating religiosity continue through generations? Where are their roots? This book is in search of answers to these questions; and the author Suman Oak wants to know how much importance we should give them. The intense sensitivity of the society's psyche regarding religion hampers our progress as individuals and as a community. It is surprising that no one seems to complain about it. Barring a few superficial changes, the traditions have not changed at all. On the contrary new rites and rituals are being added. The book is a small effort to help people get out of this defeatist tendency of surrender to traditions. From the plethora of rites and rituals, she has chosen some important ones for critical analysis.

The Indian mind is not satisfied with the 33 crores of deities the Hindu religion has spawned; so along with these deities we worship rivers, mountains, animals, trees, souls of dead human beings, ghosts, fairies, peers, saints, Babas, Sati, Santoshi Mata for reserving a place for us in the heaven. There are so many different rites and rituals observed throughout our country, that critically analyzing

them will require several volumes. She has therefore chosen twelve rituals or festivals from the twelve months of the year and discussed their origins, the mythological stories, their present forms, merits and demerits, and sensible alternative ways of celebrating them if you must. These rituals, ceremonies and festivals are observed mostly in Maharashtra.

Makar Sankranti and *Rathasaptami* celebrated in January are in fact, astronomical phenomena. But due to our craving for festivity god worship we convert it into a deity '*Sankrantidevi*' and attach some worthless predictive phenomena to it. The writer describes that as innocent optimism; that the exchange of '*Tilgul*' during Sankranti will reduce rivalry and enmity, but in real life we notice that the bickering and quarrels do not reduce after exchange of *Tilgul*. Going to the roots of *Dattajayanti* the writer detects some important characteristics of accord and harmony between the *Shaiva* and *Vaishnav* sects, as also between Hindus and Muslims. Another important thing about *Datta* worship is that there are no rigid rites in it. She finds the seven days continuous worship (*parayan*) and worshipping the deity's '*paduka*' (prints of feet) worthless and expects devotees of *Dutta* to be rational which seems very doubtful.

A strict whole day fast on *Mahashivaratri* day improves one's health and praising Lord Shiva can give the strength to digest even deadly poison, proffered as benefits of this ritual. In her opinion '*Shivaleelamrit*' is produced by a pleasure loving pervert mind. She has suggested some very good alternatives to celebrate '*Holi*'. Originally a community festival *Holi* has been chained in religiosity and ugly rituals, giving it the present hideous form. All this must be changed. The writer has traced many stories about the life of Ram. She thinks that people should not believe in these mean stories that are contradictory

to the heroic personality of Ram. She denounces exploitation of peoples' sentiments about 'Ram' by political and social vested interests. It is a pity that the gullible people do not understand their hidden purpose and allow themselves to be used.

'Akshaya Tritiya' is a ceremony which originally was celebrated as 'Parashuram Jayanti'. The writer describes who Parashuram was and what were his exploits. About 'Watasavitri Pooja' she says, in the present times, a woman like Savitri may be pitied and sympathized with; but she cannot be a role model for the modern day woman; Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams who have made a niche for themselves should be today's role models instead. Regarding the *Nagapanchami* festival the writer has brought out the scientific facts about snakes and tries to dispel many false notions regarding snakes that are spread through our mythology.

In tracing the roots of the 'Ganesh Festival' the writer has expressed her progressive views about celebrating community festivals. While tracing the myths regarding the Dussera and Diwali festivals she asks 'how long are we going to keep these age old incredible legends alive in our memories and value them as our faith and culture and how long are we going to depend on these crutches?' 'While celebrating Diwali', she says, 'the anger and resentment in the minds of the depraved and neglected section of the society cannot be ignored any longer. The intoxicating exhibition of riches must be stopped and a new awareness be created.' While tracing the mythology of 'Tulasi Vivah', she explicitly maintains that all these mythological stories are idle talk and they are meant to impress upon the minds of women that they should not

blame their husbands for their sinful and immoral behaviour.

Our saints have written profusely about many silly and inhuman customs like the 'Bagad' custom at Jejuri. And yet people still indulge in these cruel and worthless practices. Many of us know that once in twelve years the *Simhastha* fair is held in Nashik. There, in the name of religiosity a lot of time and money is wasted and the water and the atmosphere are polluted. On reading about *Sinhastha* in the book one feels the urgency of putting restrictions on these wasteful practices. But the vast crowds obsessed with hoarding religious merit will not hear this weak voice. To atone for ill gotten wealth, it is customary, these days, to offer 'Satyanarayan Pooja' or visit 'Balaji' temple. Satyanarayan has become a social function or a family function to celebrate success. The writer has traced the origin of this pooja and when it started. *Yagnya* has become a panacea for all ills. Nothing is gained from *Yagnya* except that the priests can fill their pockets.

The wealthy and those in power exploit the religious sentiments of a gullible populace. It is quite possible that the references given in this book may also be utilized by such people for nefarious purposes. Why god helps only such shrewd people is a riddle that no one has been able to solve as yet. There are particular timings and seasons when visits to the different deities are deemed as being more fruitful. Insistence on sticking to these timings has encouraged religious tourism to such an extent that at times the overcrowding at some places lead to fatalities. So, instead of faith and devotion, espousing discretion and rationalism is certainly beneficial and sensible.

Scams by Politicians and Bureaucrats

Every day newspapers & television channels are full of reports of scams and other corrupt and criminal practices going on at the Central and State levels. Most of these cases go unreported because, often the investigators themselves are corrupt or they are under political pressure!

You talk of the CBI. Any matter referred to CBI is destined for "National Natural Burial"!

Meanwhile the image of India in the world has gone down considerably. Every foreign businessman wanting to enter the Indian Market says so!

There is corruption in other countries but it is in a different form, and it is not affecting the national growth of that country. It is not making the people poor as in India!

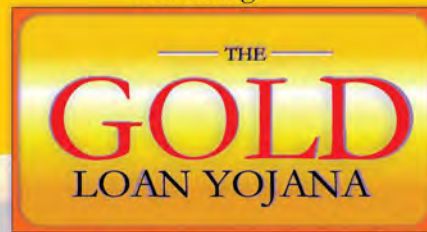
Some one eats "Cow's Chara" (Fodder scam); another snatches public government funds reserved for poor!; a third misappropriates funds allotted for a particular project; a fourth puts his own son, other kith & kin in government and semi-government jobs whether they are qualified or not, whether they deserve it or not.

What is to be done? Have any of your Advisers thought about it, or are they also in the same boat! It needs strong political will/strong bureaucratic will by the few honest people left in the country; but the people in power do not use their services, do not consult them; do not heed their advice!

Excerpted from an Open Letter from Mr. N. B. H. Kulkarni (nbhk@vsnl.net) to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi

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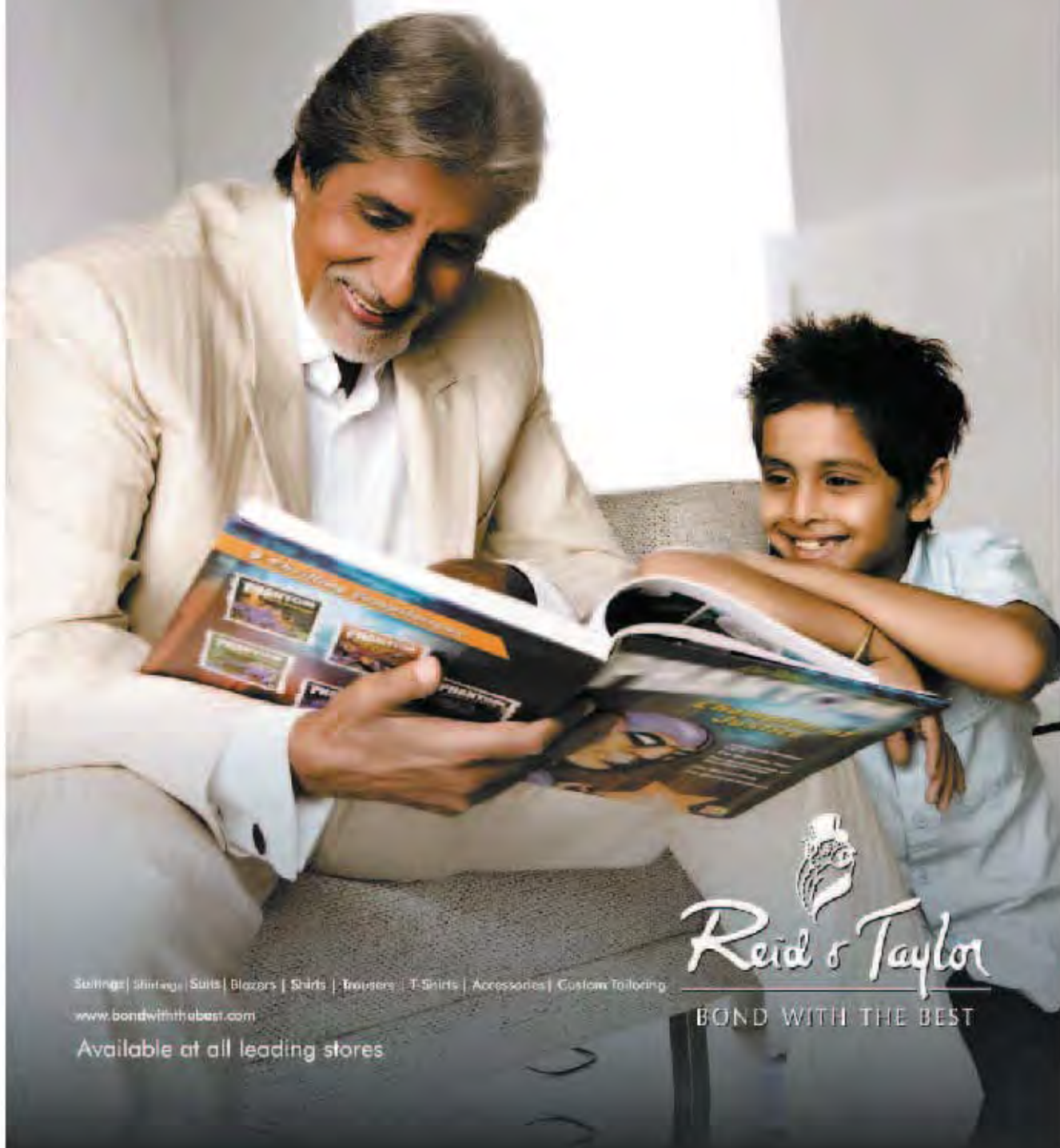
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- PLAYING HERO.
- PLAYING CHILD.

A photograph of a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a light-colored blazer over a white shirt, sitting on a couch and reading a magazine. A young boy with dark hair, wearing a light blue shirt, is sitting next to him, leaning on his arm and smiling at the magazine. The magazine features a large illustration of a person's face. The background is a simple, light-colored wall with a window letting in natural light.

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