

Primary And Secondary Education in Andhra Pradesh

T. H. Chowdary

I have read the ILG publication on "Reform Trends in Poverty and Inequality in India by Dr. Suresh Tendulkar. It is a wonderful talk. His conclusions confirm what I have been trying to convey in many of my addresses to intellectual audiences.

Globalisation and liberalization add to our competitiveness. The well-educated and qualified and enterprising will create wealth for themselves and for the country. Because of the appalling levels of education & literacy in our country, those who are not skilled and educated and are just unskilled workers who will get only a small slice of the wealth, their incomes won't grow as fast as those of the former group and therefore inequalities increase. This could lead to social strife and instability unless the leadership is patriotic, wise and farseeing to immediately address itself to a) stabilization of population at no more than two persons per family; (b) massive improvement in government educational institutions which are the sole hope of the poorest of our people and introducing competition between government and private schools by giving two vouchers per family per year for the education of their children. The parents will have the choice to admit their children either in government schools or private schools. In the latter case they will have to pay the excess above the voucher entitlement from their own pocket; (c) "de-ruralization" of population. Improved agriculture and mechanization increase food production but require a diminishing number of mere labourers. The children of farmers will have to be skilled to be employable in industries; (d) taking information services to rural areas where graduates are produced. This is what Satyam Computers is doing through its Byraju Foundation. Some of the off-shore work it is entrusted with by foreign companies is now being done in some villages around Bhimavaram to which broadband telecommunications are extended. This means urbanization of the villages. It is in this connection that a talk I gave on primary and education in Andhra Pradesh with special reference to government schools and government regulation and control on private schools, is relevant:

Education in Government Schools

- Government schools, especially in the rural areas have almost ceased to impart education of any value including that required for merely passing examinations.
- These have become the refuge only for SC, ST and the very poor other

backward caste (OBC) students (for example in the Government Boys High School in Angaluru, Krishna District, SCs are 47%; BCs 41% and ST 1%; FCs are a mere 8%)

- In these government schools, teachers for important subjects like Science, Mathematics and English are either not posted or if posted, they are on long leave, usually taking up jobs in private



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convent English medium schools in the nearest town

- Teachers in government schools do not admit their children in those schools; instead they admit them in private convent English medium schools
- Teachers don't stay in the village schools where they are posted. Instead, they commute from the nearest town spending the barest minimum hours in the school. For example the Head Master even of a government High School in Gudipadu, Musunuru Mandal in Krishna District commutes over 40 kms. up and 40 kms. down from Gannavaram, Krishna district where he lives .
- The destruction of education in government schools is not a concern of the teachers who are organized into four of five Marxist-led unions and one by the BJP. They are more concerned with their emoluments, promotion and service conditions than imparting quality education to the children
- Computer education was introduced in one thousand schools more than three years ago. On the expiry of three years, instead of continuing, the contract is not renewed and it has more or less ceased. An inquiry is going on but there is no teaching.
- It is because of the decline and destruction of the quality of education in the primary and secondary schools (and even intermediate colleges) that children belonging to SC, ST and OBCs are not able to compete successfully for admission into prestigious professional institutions and that is the main reason for the clamour for reservations. If excellent education is given there, many of the children would, on their own, be able to compete and get admission without recourse to reservation.
- In the results for the SSC examination in 2006, of the 20 top ranks in Krishna district, *18 went to private schools and only 2 came to government Gurukula schools*. No other category of government schools could produce a ranker.

“Trained” Teachers

- Now teachers in private schools are required by the Government of Andhra Pradesh to have formal training in teaching either from DIETs or a B.Ed. This is an absolutely unnecessary, costly and unwarranted stipulation. Teaching is an attitude, a talent.
- When there is no training or any qualification required for law-makers or Ministers, whose responsibility and duties are far more onerous than teachers in primary and secondary schools, imposition of this requirement is an unwarranted intervention in privately provided education. Are the government officers in the

Education Department qualified to pontificate on education?

- Children can appear privately for all the public examinations including SSC and beyond (Open Universities, Distance Education Programs of universities etc). If self-learning requires no teaching from a B.Ed /DIET qualified teacher why do we impose this condition on teachers?
- Performance in terms of pass percentage or distinction or ranks in government schools where B.Ed or DIET qualification which is mandatory, has always been worse than the performance of students in private schools. Why then this requirement.

Recognition /Registration

- In the latest intervention by government, private schools are required to re-seek recognition although these have been functioning for so long and are even being scrutinized by government educational officers. Why this interference?
- For a primary school, the application fee for the now required recognition is Rs.10,000 and endowment fee is Rs.20,000. For a high school, the application fee is Rs.20,000 and endowment funds Rs.50,000. Is there any rationale for fixing such high sums as application fees & endowment funds - and that too, for schools that have been working for years? What is this endowment fee for? Are these amounts to generate funds for government departments? Are they going to give any resource or value to the schools? This is an exercise by government officers who are not paragons of efficiency and productivity; imposed merely to exercise their authority on private schools.
- Governments are talking of private-public participation PPP). It is because governments are not able to give the constitutionally mandated education for every child between the ages of 6 and 14 years that private schools came into this sector. Instead of helping them, facilitating and congratulating them why are governments becoming meddlers.

Split the SSC Board into Three:

- It is high time that the single SSC Board for the State of Andhra Pradesh is split into three Boards, one for each of the three regions. And most of the powers exercised by the Commissionerate and Secretary be devolved to these Boards. They may have Advisory Councils comprising of non-political educationists known for their integrity and scholarship.

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When Awards are Rewards

Kuldip Nayar

The Constitution lays down: “No title, not being a military or academic distinction, shall be conferred by the state”. Successive governments have violated the Constitution, in spirit if not in letter.

Union home minister Govind Ballabh Pant wore a long coat, his formal dress, to visit Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, an eminent leader who was then the education minister, to inform him about the government’s decision to confer the Bharat Ratna on him. Pant returned home quickly, somewhat dejected. He said that the Maulana had declined to accept the award. He had told Pant: How could they pin the medals on themselves when they were the ones to decide who should get them?

Azad’s objection startled the government. The Cabinet is said to have met informally to discuss his rejection. But Azad did not relent despite Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s pressure. The party leaders, Azad argued, should not hog the glory that their government had the authority to bestow. Still the government went ahead and gave awards to many Congressmen. Several years later, Azad was awarded the Bharat Ratna, but posthumously.

The point Azad made some 53 years ago is still relevant. How can the government, the ruling party, be an arbiter of awards and confer them invariably on those who are close to it? This reminds me of a Punjabi saying: When a blind man distributes sweets, he gives them to his own people again and again.

L. K. Advani, the BJP leader, has done Atal Behari Vajpayee wrong by suggesting his name for Bharat Ratna. Vajpayee’s work is known to the country. A public man like him does not gain stature by getting the award or does not lose it by not getting it. Advani has made him a point of sterile, even motivated debate, when Vajpayee cannot even intervene in it.

Many other names have been proposed for Bharat Ratna by some political parties, almost as if to convey that they too had their heroes. This suggests that the framers of the Constitution were farsighted. They did not want India to follow the British who gave titles of Rai Bahadur and Khan Sahib to their ardent supporters, the toadies. So the Constituion lays down: “No title, not being a military or academic distinction, shall be conferred by the state”. Successive governments have violated the Constitution, in spirit if not in letter.

That is the reason why the Janata, a non-Congress party, did away with the awards after winning the polls after Emergency, defeating the rulers. The Janata considered the awards an anachronism, feudal in concept. Leave apart the Bharat Ratna, the selection of Padma awardees by different governments, when analysed, will show a definite tilt towards the people who suited the party in power. Most people selected were the ones who toed the government line. A few others were thrown in to give a semblance of credibility to the exercise. Critics or opponents never figured anywhere. For example, Ram Manohar Lohia, the socialist leader, or the Marxist E. M. S. Namboodripad, were not even considered. The BJP-led government saffronised the awards and conferred them even on RSS pracharaks.

I saw this subjective exercise from close quarters when I was information officer in the home ministry for six years till 1964. The ministry would receive names from individuals who, or organisations which, were close to the ruling party. Central ministers and chief ministers also sent in their suggestions. A deputy secretary in the ministry and I would prepare the list of names alphabetically and summarise their bio-data. It was a clerical job and the entire exercise was arbitrary. There were no rules to guide the decision, nor any norms to follow. The list was sent to the home secretary who vetted it and forwarded it to the home minister.

Politics would come into play when the list reached the home minister. He would decided who would get which award, Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan or Padma Vibhushan. The Prime Minister would come into the picture later. He too would add or delete some names according to his likes or dislikes. The President who authorised the gazette information seldom changed the list received from the government.

However, once the then President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, added one name when I was still in the ministry. He wrote in his own hand the name of a lady from the South (name intentionally withheld). We, in the home ministry, worked hard to find out who she was. There was an educationist by that name in Tamil Nadu. We informed here that she had been selected for the Padma Shri award.

But when the list went back to Dr. Prasad, he wrote that she was a nurse. His ADC informed us that she had treated him when he fell ill while returning to Hyderabad by road. That year, two ladies by the same name received the award!

The screening committee was appointed following a public interest litigation in 1996 to challenge the legality of awards. The Supreme Court did not regard civil rewards as titles. But it suggested the constitution of a screening committee. The court left the job to the government which has been having a committee a few months before the Republic Day, to screen the names. However, the committee are persons cast in the mould of the ruling party. The fact that the Manmohan Singh government constituted a committee different from the one the Vajpayee government did, indicated that the Congress was particular about who did the screening. Of course, the home minister and the Prime Minister remained the final authority.

Whoever the person or whatever the method, the issue of subjectivity cannot be ruled out. Even if by some quirk of miracle the bias were to disappear, the question to ask would be: are the awards necessary?

The government's instruction that the awards should not be used as titles, has been of little avail. The recipients continue to flaunt their awards, some using it on their letterheads and visiting cards. Self-importance is natural for a recipient. However, there have been many who have refused to accept these awards. The late Gandhian Siddharaj Dhadda is one such example. He declined the Padma Vibhushan which the Vajpayee government sought to confer on him. The late Nikhil Chakraborty, a reputed journalist, is another example.

Ultimately, it depends on how individuals look at awards. Do they feel that the award has added to their importance? Governments at the Centre have played havoc with the selection because the ruling parties have included in the list even those who have earned little recognition in the field they work.

Incidentally, after so many decades, I still cannot figure out how Rabindranath Tagore accepted a knighthood. True, he returned it after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, but why did he accept it in the first instance? Freedom fighters did not like it. To that extent, the stature of Tagore came down by several pegs.

MR. KULDIP NAYAR is a freelance journalist.

Dump Devalued Government Awards

Kashinath Divecha

In an open, free and democratic society, the business of honouring individuals should best be left to the people themselves.

Mr. Lal Krishna Advani deserves the thanks of Indian people for being instrumental in raising the basic issue of the granting of awards by the government. These awards have been used by governments of the day to distribute petty patronage eagerly, confer condescending recognition grudgingly and bestow honour rarely.

Immediately after his letter "recommending" Bharat Ratna for our ex-Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee came to light, there was an unseemly scramble from all quarters, projecting the names of persons, long gone or fortunately still with us, who have had their innings in public service for this award. Be that as it may, everyone wanted the best – the Bharat Ratna, nothing less. The only consolation we can permit ourselves is that no one asked for the award for herself or himself! In short, this mad rush in itself clearly indicated two things. One, the sponsors obviously did not attach much sanctity to the awards, and two, precisely for this reason, the recommendations kept pouring in.

praised for whatever he did. May be, he did visualize – shrewd politician that he is – the rat race that would follow his initiative. But, it is a moot question whether he really intended to raise the basic propriety of the government granting the awards.

Yet, it is high time for us, as a nation, 60 years of age, to be mature and seriously ponder over this convention, practice, system, schaeeme, or whatever you might call it, where the government grants awards, inspite of our Constitution prohibiting such conferment or bestowal.

Let us be realistic. Any person, who reaches the pinnacle in his own field of activity is invariably honoured by his peers in the same field of activity in the best possible manner they can as they know the value of the contribution made by that person in that field. She or he is the leading light without the patronage of the government

It is in this context that Mr. Advani should be

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Is Raj Thackeray Guilty as Made Out To Be?

H. R. Bapu Satyanarayana

Not surprisingly what Raj Thackeray said raises the hackles of everybody. The media without exception see it as a call for creating hatred of North Indians, more particularly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who form a sizeable majority. According to statistics the Maharashtrian population in Mumbai has been reduced to 36%.

The North Indian population drives the business and trades of Mumbai in a big way and at basic levels of everyday contact with people as taxi drivers or hawkers, vendors etc they serve the daily needs of the people. Also, as a vote bank, they can wield considerable influence to even upstage the local people. This creates an emotive but complex environment.

Except in Delhi which has some unique cosmopolitan features where lawlessness is taken for granted and which prompted Delhi's Lt. Governor Khanna to be disarmingly honest about it, in other major cities this type of imbalance always acts as a red rag to rouse parochial sentiments. The situation may turn ugly when increasingly the employment situation hurts the prospects of the local people and it becomes a *cause celebre* for petty political demagogues to emerge as a force to reckon with in the political canvas of their state.

Tamil Nadu has very cleverly overcome this by using the Ninth Schedule to give reservation for 69% of its population. Even so the life of the forward communities in Tamil Nadu is always threatened and they live like second class citizens. The situation in Karnataka is also on the boil but despite vocal protests temperamentally they do not carry their protests to extreme limits and are less violent. Of course in the case of sharing of Cauvery waters, since the issue was heavily tilted against them, for the simple reason historically it was at the receiving end of justice repeatedly for various reasons, the protest was uncharacteristically violent as it was a matter of life and death for them.

Given this scenario what Raj did was to follow the classical model of political behaviour, more so since his mentor the redoubtable uncle Bal Thackeray himself adopted it 40 years ago when he hounded the South Indians. In the present case Raj had a further compelling need because having split from his uncle two years ago he was finding himself unable to make any dent. Therefore,

there was a certain inevitability about it. But the more worrying aspect is that this has the potential to spread the contagion to other states and has the potential for anti-social elements and the terrorists to exploit it for their nefarious activities.

Perhaps a deeper analysis reveals that at the macro level a more insidious development is taking place, which has the potential to destabilize the country itself. It has found an echo in Raj's action. In justification he refers to the case of Karunanidhi espousing the cause of Tamilians in Malaysia (refer also to Karunanidhi's statement on the death of Tamil Selvan in Sri Lanka), West Bengal in *L'affair Ganguly*, the recruitment for railways at lower levels when Biharis landed in droves in Mumbai courtesy Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav. In fact, Lalu Prasad Yadav's statement characterizing Kannadigas as 'dirty people' has created a serious situation. It is known that despite serious charges pending against him he has not been hauled up and has instead been given a wide berth because he is one of the main props of the UPA government. This is an example of the cynicism of the UPA coalition with the Congress taking the lead role in protecting him.

For that matter take the policy initiatives of the UPA

The crisis in Maharashtra cannot be handled by making diversity a bedrock value. Rather the bedrock value of our society ought to be freedom: the freedom to call any place in the country home, the freedom to alter culture, the freedom subject to practical constraints, to speak any language, the freedom to break out of the fetter of compulsory identities. Out of this freedom new diversities and cultural forms will emerge. But at the moment the discourse on diversity fails in significant ways. It is too compatible with the imposition of compulsory identities, and too compatible with the idea that each Indian has his appropriate place whether by virtue of geography or kinship. Tocqueville once defined democracy as being a society to the effect that where you are going matters more than where you came from. In this sense identity talk of the kind we are seeing in Maharashtra and the responses to it are deeply anti-democratic.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "His freedoms and ours", *The Indian Express*, February 18

Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

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

The Nano

1) The Tatas have performed a near miracle by producing a car, which nobody in the world believed was possible; Rs.1 lakh car, when prices have been shooting up all around us, could not be dreamt of except by Ratan Tata and his team. The grand success has been marred by the constant carping of the doomsday brigade. It would continue after the car starts running on the roads in India. The cynics hold on to their pet peeve that the cheap car would fill the roads and the traffic and pollution would get out of hand. Their worry is that every two-wheeler owner will now switch to Nano. The US, which is not a market for a small car in any case, argues that the Nano would not meet US safety and emission (?) standards.



1) The innovative spirit and technological expertise behind Nano should make India proud. The US automobile industry should recognise that India can also produce a car that meets European emission standards and third world economic constraints. Nano may not be suitable for US roads as it is essentially an intra city vehicle. However, that is what India needs. The logic that two-wheeler owners should not switch to cars is the height of snobbishness. Who can decide that the middle classes should not own a car? The two-wheeler industry will have to produce cheaper two wheelers or perish. If pollution is to be controlled, why object only to the small car? All cars should be restricted from the city centre or in market places as in Singapore. In fact, smaller cars should be preferred, as these would occupy less road space while carrying the same number of passengers, require lesser parking space and add to fuel economy. In fact, the US should also start worrying about its gas-guzzlers, the way oil prices are climbing. In India, municipalities should think of levying congestion tax, higher parking fees and set up no car zones to reduce traffic but to deny an affordable car to the people is hypocritical.

Dragon's Handshake

2) The PM's visit to China (January 14) has created euphoria about a possible breakthrough in relations between the two countries, which have been strained since 1962. The two Prime Ministers have signed a Vision Document meaning different things to different people. The trade between the two countries is set to grow, aviation hurdles have been overcome, cooperation in civilian nuclear programme has been offered by China, China has also envisaged a greater role for India in the Security Council and there was a joint anti-insurgency, anti-terrorism military exercise between units of the two armies. In short, the visit could not have gone better.

India has learnt a lot since the "Bhai Bhai" days. Let us not go back to our old failings in our enthusiasm and remember that the boundary dispute is not resolved yet.

2) It would appear churlish to find fault with the success of the PM's visit and doubt the genuineness of the various agreements arrived at. However, it would be prudent not to go overboard and presume that the visit has solved all problems; it is also necessary not to read into the Vision Document that which is not expressly stated. It is wishfully assumed that nuclear cooperation somehow means approval of the Indo-US agreement; and greater role in the Security Council implies approval of India's claim for a seat on the Council. Such assumptions in international dealings cause dismay later. Indians have the habit of expecting a lot because of a seeming good will whereas countries like China believe in spelling out the last comma and go exactly by what is expressly stated. India has learnt a lot since the "Bhai Bhai" days. Let us not go back to our old failings in our enthusiasm and remember that the boundary dispute is not resolved yet.

Molestation And Politics

3) Molestation of two women outside a Mumbai five-star hotel during the New Year celebration stripped the myth that women were safe in Mumbai due to the safety in numbers even at night. The very numbers went against the women as 70-80 hooligans molested them in public view. To add to the shame, the Commissioner of Police treated it as a minor incident now immortalized in his infamous description of the public outcry over it as making a mountain out of a molehill. Other police officers were not far behind when they quibbled over non-registration of FIR and jurisdiction. The police later sprang (?) into action and arrested 14 youth seen in the video of the incident. Let alone the police, hundreds of revelers who were on the scene did not cover themselves with glory either, as they failed to rush to the women's help. A similar incident had occurred outside the Wankhede stadium when the victorious Indian team was felicitated. Two girls were molested in daylight with hundreds of men milling around. Still Mumbai is proud of itself?

3) If this was not shameful enough, the arrested youth pleaded that they were mere by-standers and the two women and their escorts were themselves drunk and disorderly. As if that gave anybody the right to molest them! A political leader then thought it fit to plead with the Dy. Chief Minister not to do injustice to the young men merely because of their presence on the scene. Good sentiment, but did he ask the young men why they did not help the women when they were in a position to do so. Not to be left behind, Union Minister Renuka Choudhary jumped into the fray asking for a report on the incident. She cannot be faulted considering the somnambulism of the police. However, such issues should not become a political football. The upshot is that women can no longer presume that the crowds of Mumbai provide them built-in safety!

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

Dump Devalued Government Awards *(cont'd. from p.4)*

and sometimes, in spite of the government. Look around and you will observe that each and every field of activity and all groups in society have their own way of honouring the best individual among them. Therefore, in an open, free and democratic society, the business of honouring individuals should best be left to the people themselves.

In any case, the basic fact remains that the government as such has not the competence to independently judge on its own, the quality and importance of the contributions made by individuals in their respective fields. What happens is that it gathers the recommendations – like the one made by Mr. Advani and others – and then picks and chooses names. We should,

therefore, consider whether we should continue to subscribe to this national – rather, governmental – game of non-musical chairs. Obviously, this “Lucky Draw” system needs to be abolished.

Since governments go by the precedents, it is recommended that the authorities concerned look back to the late 1970s. Morarji Desai and his government during its short tenure did the right thing by refusing to distribute these devalued awards.

It was a sagacious decision and needs to be adopted as national policy by our republic.

MR. KASHINATH DIVECHA is a trade unionist.

Is Raj Thackeray Guilty as Made Out To Be? *(cont'd. from p.5)*

government itself and its unabashed tilt towards the minority community and the deplorable missive to the army for a Muslim head count. This quota and reservation mentality has made deep inroads dividing and sub-dividing people on caste and sub-caste, which has a great potential to derail the economy of the country apart from spawning an environment of religious disharmony. These moves inevitably send wrong signals and the antenna of Raj has caught it. In fact, in the dithering about the arrest of Raj, rumour has it that there was some understanding with the

Congress with an eye on the elections in 2009 and it could well be true. In fact, despite being charged under Section 153-A of the Indian Penal Code, which mandates imprisonment, it is unlikely that it is going to happen. The way the Congress has conducted itself ever since it came to power after independence, its approach has always been that it has the copyright and divine sanction for dynastic rule. Not in anyway justifying Raj's action, it may be true to say he is more sinned than sinned against.

MR. H. R. BAPU SATYANARAYANA is a freelance writer.

Bhutto and Pakistan : Quo Vadis India?

Arvind A.

Being classified as a terrorist State has forced Pakistan to lean towards the Americans. This has created an explosive situation with extremists distrusting their government.

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto throws into sharp relief the tension and unrest plaguing Pakistan. While the government struggles to grapple with its political problems, tumultuous developments in Pakistan such as spreading civil unrest in large sections of the population combined with growing extremist fervour has pushed Pakistan to the brink of the abyss. The consequences of the upheavals in Pakistan on the world in general and India in particular have to be examined in the context of the socio-religious polarization of the country. This is all the more true because the Pakistani military possesses nuclear, probably biological, and possibly, chemical weapons. Considering the proliferation of extremist operatives in Pakistan, the risk that of at least some these weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) being commandeered against other countries is very real.

Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan's record for stable governance has been patchy at best. Pakistan's history has witnessed long durations of autocracy by a number of military generals [Ayub Khan (1958–69), Yahya Khan (1969–71), Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88)] broken by periods of tenuous democracy. During this time, Pakistan's standard of living and economy have not grown at the pace expected. A large part of the population in Pakistan lives in abject poverty with no access to even basic amenities. Such a population is vulnerable to exposure to extremist indoctrination. The lack of education and desperate living conditions, force many to take solace in religion. Other Islamic countries provide extremist indoctrination under the guise of humanitarian aid while the government turns a blind eye to these activities. Even the world community finds it a very thorny issue to deliberate whether a given country is a peacekeeper or an illicit supplier of extremism.

In its own north-western frontier provinces, powerful mullahs run parallel administrations with the Pakistani government being unable - or unwilling - to stop them. Pakistan's north-western border is also extremely porous allowing many known and wanted terror suspects to enter Pakistan and seek shelter there especially in the light of the American presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's diplomacy has ensured that it is not branded a terrorist. At the same time the efforts to avoid being classified as a terrorist State has forced Pakistan to lean towards the Americans. This has created an explosive situation with extremists distrusting their government. From the Indian point of view, a shrewd administration in charge of Pakistan may vent these frustrated operatives at their most

obvious adversary to prevent fallout on their territory. Due to the inherently covert nature of these operations and the involvement of non-combatants/non state actors, proving Pakistan's involvement could be quite difficult.

Even more disturbing is the probability of a military coup by extremists. If the military sympathizes with the extremists, then all the carefully constructed codes of mutually assured destruction would cease to be meaningful, and Pakistan could even escalate conflict to a nuclear jihad. While this scenario is thankfully quite implausible, it cannot be denied that, considering the increasing sophistication of the Pakistani war machine, even a fraction of that technology in the wrong hands could cost some country, possibly India many innocent lives. Even more surprising is the American attitude towards Pakistan. While this point has been discussed in depth in a number of forums, we will focus here only on the sale of weaponry to Pakistan. Even in 2006-07, the U.S expressed interest in selling the Lockheed Martin Boeing F-16C Block 52+ fighters, AIM-120C AMRAAM, M-4 assault rifles and possibly heavy off road military vehicles to Pakistan. Supplied to Pakistan ostensibly to fight the war on terror, the F-16C is capable of posing a nuclear threat to most of India's west coast.

It has also been felt that Pakistan is one of the biggest sources for illicit arms for non-state actors. A point poignantly proved by the thankfully unsuccessful attack on an El-Al passenger airliner by MANPADS (MAN Portable Air Defense System acronym for shoulder fired missile) in Israel. The missiles involved in that incident were apparently acquired by Hamas probably from Uzbekistan with Pakistan acting as the intermediary.

After the death of Bhutto, Pakistan has become a volatile playground as a number of players are scrambling to fill the void left on the political stage. Musharaf continues to try and shore up his position while many would-be successors to Benazir Bhutto are trying to step into her shoes. Nawaz Sharif meanwhile is doing his best to gain ground in Pakistan. These byzantine power games are occurring against the backdrop of a Pakistan spinning out of control, torn by strife and motivated by extremism. While other incidents have shifted Pakistan out of the world's attention for now, India and the world wait with bated breath for further developments in Pakistan.

MR. ARVIND A. is asyoung research scientist. Email: arvindno1@sify.com

(This article was written before the elections in Pakistan)



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

Mayawati Regina

A recent news report described how Mayawati suspended four IAS officers for praising Rahul Gandhi in a book. Perhaps madam fancies herself as a modern day Jhansi ki Rani, who's every whim is a royal command.

Except for a brief initial mention, this event has been largely ignored by the media: which is a pity, because it has a profound impact on our system of government. We Indians have become used to our “leaders” acting like mini-emperors, but this is a new high, even for one of them. Frowning on signs of disloyalty to one’s party may be somewhat acceptable, but punishing bureaucrats merely for expressing an innocuous opinion crosses all bounds of propriety and fair play. What is equally disgraceful is that Mayawati is likely to get away with it. For sure, opposition parties and constitutional experts are making the right noises, but it is obvious their heart is not in it; and they are more than willing to let the matter drop.

This particular incident may seem rather trivial, but if allowed to go unchecked, it will only encourage someone who is exhibiting all the signs of megalomania. It is painfully obvious that power has gone to Mayawati’s head – absolutely. As it is, the brazen effrontery with which she is enhancing her personal wealth, in the name of ‘donations’, already proves that she considers herself above the conventions of checks and balances that are the cornerstones of a democracy. And I don’t even want to comment on the shameful manner in which this blatant distortion of the truth has been meekly accepted by political parties and the judiciary. The lady is so confident of her ‘dalit’ power that she truly believes herself to be invincible.

In a sense, Mayawati is more of a threat to a democratic society than that other major megalomaniac in Indian politics – Narendra Modi. Modi may truly believe that he is far superior to average mortals, but he is also shrewd enough to calculate when to display that superiority; and when to hold it in check. He has even been known to play the “humble” card, when he perceives political advantage in it.

Mayawati, on the other hand, is a true ‘daughter of the soil’, who has achieved a degree of pre-eminence she would not have dreamed of earlier in her political career. Her storm troopers pledge undying loyalty to her, no matter what she does. And she does precisely what she wants to; fearless of the consequences.

SA frightening analogy can be drawn between

Mayawati’s rise to power and that of Adolf Hitler. Both were persons of humble beginnings and mediocre talents, who rose to great heights based on their oratory and their ability to sway the populace. They demanded blind obedience from their followers; and got it. I am not implying that Mayawati is inherently evil; as Hitler was. Far from it. Her heart is probably in the right place. However, a surfeit of power in the hands of those who are not accustomed to it can be a heady drug. It can cause the recipient to lose a hold on reality; and genuinely believe that she is on some divine mission; that she knows what is best for her ‘people’ – and that it is in their interests not to argue with her.

Like Laloo Prasad, Mayawati’s pre-eminence has its foundations in the awe and reverence she inspires among fellow dalits. Finally, one of their own has shaken loose from the shackles of tradition and intolerance that has bound them for centuries. They see her cracking the whip over the very high caste Hindus who have treated them with utter contempt since time immemorial; and they love her for it. For that one supreme achievement, they are willing to ignore and forgive any transgressions she may commit.

For the consequences of unbridled power, one has only to look across the border at the good General. At the moment, Mayawati’s influence is more or less confined to UP. However, the possibility of her sitting in the Prime Minister’s chair in the near future is not that far fetched. In India’s flawed democracy, the ‘people’ do not cast their votes based on the issues that most affect them; they vote based on caste. There are a great number of dalits and other backward castes in this country. Moreover, come election time, they are much more likely to vote than their more affluent high-caste countrymen.

What right thinking Indians need to ponder is what impact Mayawati, as PM, would have on their country. Running a country is far more involved and complicated than running a state. India cannot survive in isolation. It needs the support and cooperation of the world community. We may become resigned to the fact of being ruled by an internationally-naïve near-dictator. The rest of the world will not tolerate it.

What Next, Parsi Taliban?

Don't we Parsis believe in freedom of expression any more? It makes me ashamed to call myself one.

This has reference to an article in the press about the talk by Dr. Kersi Antia on 2nd February. For the benefit of those who do not read newspapers, Antia spoke in support of admitting outsiders, who showed a genuine interest in the religion, into the Zoroastrian faith. He also supported giving Zoroastrian rights and privileges to Parsi women who married outside their religion.

Consider the sequence of events. A religious scholar announces that he proposes to deliver a lecture concerning his faith. Some zealots 'demand' that permission be denied, merely because they do not agree with his opinions. When their design is thwarted, they heckle the speaker and shout slogans. I believe some went to the extent of waving red flags, like some rabid trade unionists.

Sounds like a bunch of Islamic fundamentalists, or extreme elements of the Shiv Sena, up to their old tricks. Except that these were Parsis, belonging to a supposedly civilized, tolerant and peace loving community.

It is not my intention to debate the correctness or otherwise of Dr. Antia's views. What I do take strong exception to is to individuals from a community that takes pride in calling itself enlightened, behaving like a coven of common rabble rousers. Don't we Parsis believe in freedom of expression any more? It makes me ashamed to call myself one.

What surprises me about this whole affair is that a seemingly innocuous talk, attended by a few hundred at most, has got the self-proclaimed champions of the Parsi community, like the pompously-named World Association of Parsi and Irani Zoroastrians (WAPIZ), so worked up and apprehensive. This is evidenced by the fact that they felt compelled to roll out the heavy artillery – in the persona of head priests Vada Dasturji Kaikhushroo M Jamasp Asa, Vada Dasturji Dr. Peshotan H Mirza, Ervad Ramiyar P Karanjia, Ervad Rooyintan Peer and Ervad Parvez Bajan – in a preemptive strike, an hour before the scheduled start of the lecture. Aren't they confident about their flock?

MR.FIROZE HIRJIKAKA can be contacted at leonardo8_99@yahoo.com

सरकारी प्राथमिक शाळा

बहुजन विद्यार्थ्यांचे स्वादीकस्त्राने

आणि इतर लेख

अशित नाथे

अध्यक्ष शिक्षण समिती

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Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group

The Fourth National Convention of the INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP was held on Sunday 3rd February 2008 at the Alumni Club of Anna University in Chennai. Mr. N. Vittal, formerly Chief Vigilance Commissioner, delivered the Inaugural Address. The subject of his speech: "An Alternative Strategy for Better Governance". Excerpts from his speech will be published in the next issue of *Freedom First*.

Four resolutions spelling out the Liberal Perspective on the Status of Economic Reforms; National Security Imperatives; Governance and Coalition Politics; and Resource Conservation and Environment Protection were adopted.

Status of Economic Reforms

The Indian Liberal Group (ILG) in association with the Project for Economic Education has presented to the Indian people four Liberal Budgets(LBs) from 2004-05 to 2007-08 based on the liberal economic philosophy.

Though the economic reforms started over fifteen years the liberalization process has been trapped in the murky world of coalition politics, and the UPA government is being subjected to persistent pressures from its 'Left Front' allies. In the result privatization and disinvestments have been impeded and labour reforms stalled to mention two key areas. The Left Front and in particular the communists have been blackmailing the Government by threatening its stability. The result is that vestiges of the *ancien regime* of state capitalism continue to haunt the country's political economy.

Consequently, the vital need to accelerate the pace of economic reforms is not being realized. Even though opportunities for realizing the growth ambitions of our people are promising, the challenge of a faster and more inclusive growth is not being tackled with vigour. This, in the long run poses a threat to the success of the liberalization process itself.

The Fourth National Convention endorses the strategy of explaining Liberal economy policy through the medium of the Liberal Budgets. It approves the emphasis on the building of an equitable society; the rigorous pursuit of fiscal governance; and the creation of an investment-friendly economic environment. While the ILG is enthused with the fact that there are substantive areas of convergence between the economic policies of the Central government and the policies advocated by the Liberal Budgets, the ILG is also conscious of many key areas of divergence.

The Convention is gratified to note that the Liberal Budget exercise began with a clear affirmation of the importance the ILG attaches to inclusive growth. This is as it should be. The Liberal Budget for the current fiscal

year with its title "Taking Reforms to the Poor" has correctly identified the purpose of the economic reforms viz.: "If the reform process translates itself into a better life for our people particularly those in rural India where 70% of India live; if farmers are no longer compelled to commit suicide as a way out of their indebtedness; if we no longer have starvation deaths; if Indian citizens enjoy medical care comparable with the best that the world has to offer; if our education is not only universal, but of high class quality; and if we can boast of world class infrastructure, only then can we say with some degree of legitimacy that we are indeed on the road to becoming a world power." The effective delivery of these ingredients of decent human life is the real touchstone of a liberal economic society.

It is in the pursuit of these objectives that the Liberal Budgets have provided detailed suggestions. The key to the success of the reforms lies in sound fiscal governance. While revenue and fiscal deficits have been reduced in recent years, there are persistent threats to fiscal stability on account of the rising burden of subsidies, the hidden fiscal cost of Oil Bonds, rising contingent and pension liabilities, and anticipated incidence of the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission. The high level of internal indebtedness of the Government also continues to be a major cause for worry. The ILG strongly contends that it is only through tough rigours of fiscal consolidation that the Indian economy will be able to sustain the progress towards investment acceleration, and consequential high economic growth of 9 to 10% per annum in the coming years.

Tax Reforms play an integral and vital part in the overall growth. The ILG is convinced that tax revenues will not necessarily increase by a cut in the tax rates alone, but by the rationalization and simplification of the tax system. Tax reforms would lead to the creation of a simplified and rational tax policy and globally competitive tax rates.

It is for this reason that the ILG has fully supported

most of the recommendations of the Report of the Task Force set up under the Chairmanship of Dr Vijay Kelkar. Accordingly the Liberal Budgets call for (a) basic stability of tax rates on a long-term basis and the urgency of avoidance of frequent changes in the tax rates, tax policies, provisions and rules; and (b) doing away with experiments of newer and newer forms of taxation like Fringe Benefits Tax and the imposition of multiple cess. At the same time, the LBs have suggested the continuing need for reducing the tax rates further in keeping with international norms and practices.

Based on the experience of the UPA Government's record in steering the reforms process and managing fiscal and economic governance, this Convention recommends a six- point strategy:

- One: Setting up an Economic Reforms Implementation Authority for facilitating cohesive, participative and speedy implementation of critical economic reforms in a time-bound manner;
- Two: Acceleration of investments in infrastructure, core manufacturing and agriculture sectors;
- Three: Widespread promotion of public-private partnership in key sectors through mechanism of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs);
- Four: Further rationalization and reduction of the tax structure, with specific thrust on radical reform of indirect taxation; and significant streamlining and simplification of tax administration;
- Five: Substantive shift in expenditure management with a view to freezing the growth of revenue expenditure and releasing more resources for employment generating social sector spending; and
- Six: Aggressive disinvestment and privatization of public sector undertakings (PSUs) with a provision for "ring-fencing" the proceeds for specific purposes like redemption of high cost earlier borrowings and increasing capital spending on social and physical infrastructure.

At the same time, the Fourth National Convention highlights certain major challenges facing the Indian

economy from both domestic and global factors. With the external sector accounting for 40% of India's GDP and India's ascent on the maps of global investors, India's sensitivity to global economic risks has increased manifold. There are risks being transmitted to India from financial markets as well as global commodity prices. As a consequence, there could be a slowdown in economic performance in the coming fiscal year 2008-09, if no effective and appropriate policy response comes from the Government. The ILG firmly believes that effective and efficient regulatory institutions are integral constituents of the reforms and liberalisation process. In the absence of such institutions there could be market failures causing enormous damage to the confidence of common consumers and investors, as have been witnessed globally in recent weeks.

While India seems to have made a giant leap on the growth trajectory, there are various kinds of challenges that would still require the utmost attention of policymakers. When dealing with some of these challenges, there could be temptations to bring back controls and market distortions, especially when one senses the risk of global economic risks transmitting to India. However, that may not be always the most desirable and sustainable solution. Hence we will have to move towards more reforms and more flexibility in a calibrated manner so as to ensure that the Indian growth story does not succumb to these challenges.

The other is the challenge of inclusivity. Economic reforms should aim at enabling maximum happiness to the maximum percentage of the population which also means that India's reforms process should strive to ensure that the gap in the incomes of the various sectors is carefully monitored to ensure they do not widen too much. The absence of appropriate regulatory mechanisms made worse by the lack of transparency have led to the creation of a few islands of wealth, even as the State has withdrawn from her responsibilities in the areas of primary education and primary health could, if not attended to, endanger the reforms process itself.

National Security Imperatives

The Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group places on record its serious concern over the deteriorating national security situation and the Government's lackadaisical attitude towards the serious threats and failure to take firm action to stop the slide into danger.

National security encompasses a very wide spectrum of public life; it covers security from external aggression, internal disorder, influx of foreigners, diplomatic relations, energy security, economic progress, food

security, landlessness environmental protection, technological advancement, industrial growth, caste and communal strife, secessionist activities, including the problems in J&K and the North East, and more. While many of these problems need long term socio-economic remedies and involve political and ideological formulations, the minimum any government must do is to take appropriate administrative measures to attend to the pressing problems that confront us today. This Convention holds that the Government has failed in its duty in this regard.

The situation in Jammu & Kashmir shows no sign of improvement and the developments in Pakistan threaten to exacerbate the situation. Maoist advances in Nepal, turmoil in Bangladesh, the near civil war in Sri Lanka and repression of the democratic spirit in Myanmar create an area of discord around our country. The fallout from all these developments casts a shadow on the well being of our nation. We have no control over these events but the disturbing aspect is that the Government of India does not have any cohesive policy to deal with the fallout.

Within the country, Maoists are forming a 'Red Corridor' linking Nepal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh/Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and the sea to tie up with the LTTE. The influx of Bangladeshis is changing the demographics of Assam, West Bengal and Tripura. The boundary dispute with Communist China is on the back burner now but should not be lost sight of in the euphoria over the recent India-China agreements. The spread of terrorist sleeper cells through the length and breadth of the country is also a serious concern. It is no longer only the foreign *jihadis* who infiltrate and unleash violence on innocent citizens but they have found support from local misguided youth in their nefarious activities. The need is to guard not only our borders but our backyards too.

Judicial delays have made justice a distant dream for our people. Courts, which are the last bastion against injustice, are losing their sheen. This loss of faith in the judicial system makes a mockery of this country's democratic ideals. All the three stages of criminal justice delivery system are under a cloud. Police investigation, prosecution and judicial processes are fraught with delays and susceptible to manipulation. There is a tendency to seek extra-judicial remedies to settle grievances. This by itself does not jeopardize national security but the failure

to punish criminals encourages lawlessness, and weakens the foundations of civil society.

Though faced with serious problems, the Government appears to be somnolent. The Law & Order machinery required to deal with these problems is the most abused institution in this country. The people view it as the face of the Government but it is the most hated and least trusted arm of the Government. It needs to be freed of political interference to make it more effective and less corrupt, be it in J&K, the North East, Bangladesh border or while rooting out terrorist modules inside the country. Effective police machinery can be depended on to improve its intelligence gathering function, which is vital for anti-terrorist operations. Integrity and efficiency should be the by-word in police administration.

The Government has to show a resolve to tackle problems and not get lost in electoral politics at the cost of national interests. It must show that national interests transcend political considerations. The Government has to create confidence among the people that it is capable of looking after their security; it is the only way of seeking people's cooperation in safeguarding national security. A rudderless government loses people's faith. We are unfortunately in danger of losing faith in our Government and, therefore, we urge the government to pay attention to Governance; this may not by itself resolve all our security concerns but the people and the Government can then jointly address them.

The Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group does not believe in leaving all responsibilities to the Government alone and would urge the people to join hands with the Government in tackling the serious threats to national security.

Governance and Coalition Politics

All politics involves coalition building. The democratic ideal, which requires government by the consent of the governed, naturally envisages government as an arrangement between the varying interests of the people.

In our country the Indian National Congress itself was essentially a coalition of interests held together in a common cause – winning the freedom struggle. With the Congress split in 1969, the informal coalition collapsed. Thereafter, for over two decades and more, India has been governed through patchwork, unprincipled coalitions beginning inauspiciously with what gained notoriety as the SVD (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal) governments which made political defections highly profitable. Thus began the era of opportunistic coalitions formed not for providing

governance but to ensure political survival and power. Coalitions became playthings in the hands of power brokers rather than representing a compromise that involves the interests of the people.

Contemporary coalition politics is an affront to the Constitution as it undermines the authority of the Cabinet and the collective responsibility of the ministers. It is a black mark on our democracy when parties and politicians with a minuscule proportion of the vote have the power of veto over matters of national importance. In this sordid drama played out in the central and state capitals a handy weapon is the politics of entitlement, a form of 'divide and rule' that creates fissures in society along parochial lines. A major casualty is good governance.

The Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group notes with concern that, increasingly, outcomes in national politics are determined less by national issues and more on the basis of regional and parochial issues. The Convention calls on the Indian Liberal

Group to take steps to study and understand the structural issues in the Indian polity that have caused this problem and offer solutions. For, the time has come to think of alternatives to ensure that governance, and not survival, becomes the primary task of governments.

Resource Conservation and Environment Protection:

This Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group wishes to emphasise certain basic postulates that ought to underline the Liberal Position on Resource Conservation and environmental protection issues. These ought to serve as guidelines when Liberals are called upon to respond to the ongoing debate on climate change and fears of the damage to Planet Earth caused by rapid industrialisation in the hitherto 'backward' economies and urbanisation on an unprecedented scale that it has generated.

- Natural resources if destroyed are gone forever. Currently, the area under forests is around 21 % of the geographical area of India. The level of destruction is 1.5 million hectares annually. Species of plant and animal life, once made extinct, vanish for all time. India is one of 18 mega-diverse countries of the world of plants and animals. India is a party to the World Convention of Biological Diversity whose objectives are (a) Conservation (b) Sustainable use and (c) Equitable sharing of benefits.
- The main areas of concern are water pollution, increasing emission of carbon dioxide, destruction of forest and tree cover and encroaching ponds and lakes.
- An open space, a mountain, a forest or a water front if encroached upon for agriculture, or for settlement illegally; a river or a lake, however 'sacred', if misused, polluted and not maintained with sanitation, are destroyed and are gone for ever. For example, our rivers are polluted by 30,000 million litres of effluents every day; our tank systems in South India, for instance, which were sustaining people, cattle and irrigating over three lakh hectares in 1970 with 36 000 tanks in Karnataka, has been curtailed to 2.42 lakh hectares.
- Steps must be taken to decentralise economic activities, including measures for waste land rehabilitation; to manage, and where necessary, contain the massive explosion in urbanisation.
- The very fabric of our towns and cities is being destroyed by indiscriminate high-rise construction, densification and destruction of heritage sites. Green cover is systematically destroyed. Avenue trees are minimal everywhere in cities and even the ones present are being cleared to widen roads or for other uses. Because of the complete cementing all available floor space in apartments, precious rain water flows to the drains instead of getting recharged to the ground.

Acceleration of water runoff from built up areas in urban conglomerates has to be replaced by augmenting water resources of the urbanites by suitable rain water harvesting systems, recovering used water and minimizing extravagant water-use. This is essential as availability of water per person falls steeply from the current 53 litres to less than 20 litres in two decades.

- With deforestation being the source of 26 per cent of all of India's greenhouse gas emissions, there needs to be a moratorium on the destruction of natural forests, including a moratorium on the diversion of any forest lands for non-forest uses. Though forests exist in many States, the dense forests have changed to open forests or scrub forests through illicit felling and smuggling of forest produce (Timber, Bamboo, Sandal wood for example). Two decades ago, 93 million hectares of non-forest area were identified as waste lands. Mangroves need to be re-established or rehabilitated in coastal belts to prevent the catastrophic effects of tsunamis.
- A phased shift from the carbon energy cycle to alternate energy options is needed. Solar heaters need to be made mandatory for all urban houses and biogas units for village households. Kerosene-use should be drastically scaled down and urban wastes have to be converted into compost as an alternate energy source. Enhanced investments are required in research and technologies to mitigate, adapt and slow-down climate change as much as possible to its natural cycle.
- Regulatory measures need to be applied stringently and where necessary enacted anew. The present mindset of industrial growth has to be moderated and made eco-friendly by emphasising the fact that we are all living beings on planet earth and all of us need clean air and unpolluted water as much as economic prosperity that results in a better quality of life. So the two must work in tandem and not at cross purposes.
- Violations of environment stipulations must be dealt with strenuously. We need to ensure that vested interests do not manipulate laws for their own advantage. Environment and Conservation authorities from the national to the municipal levels need to be better informed and made more professional with adequate authority and be seen, not as spoilers but as enablers who, even while saying 'no', are able to offer alternatives.
- Finally environmental protection should be made a compulsory subject in schools and colleges.

Rites, Rituals and Festivals (3)

Suman Oak

Continuing the series, this time on Mahashivaraatri. - Ed.

Mahashivaraatri

This year Mahashivaratra is to be observed on the 6th of March 2008. It is an occasional observance and also an observance for reward. It is one of those few observances that are to be observed not only by women but by all. The deity worshiped in this ritual is Shiva. As the antiquity of this deity goes back beyond the Vedas it will be informative to find out how it evolved to acquire the present elevated status.

The universe is as terror inspiring as it is beautiful. Hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, falling of meteors etc. strike terror in the minds of human beings. In the absence of scientific knowledge that can explain these occurrences the concept of some evil power that causes these calamities evolved in the minds of people and was personified into a deity that had to be appeased. Thus worship of Shiva originated out of fear and not out of love for the deity like the worship of Vishnu. Despite this it was also conceived to be benevolent later. Shiva was considered to be the lord of all vegetation, the greatest physician and an expert of weaponry as well.

As usual there are a number of mythological stories regarding this ritual. One of them says that it was on this day that Shiva manifested himself as a marvelous and interminable 'Linga' to confound the pretensions of both Brahma and Vishnu. To decide who is greater, they agreed to reach the two ends of the extraordinary Linga. Vishnu undertook to reach the base while Brahma proceeded towards the summit. Both returned after a thousand years on this same day of Mahashivaratra, discomfited and humiliated and confessed that Shiva is the greatest. There are two other stories; one of a hunter and the other of a thief. Both of them happened to offer (actually throw) leaves of the sacred tree Bel and blossom of the mango tree respectively to the Linga that was situated on the ground under them. They also were compelled by the circumstances to remain hungry the whole day and night and inadvertently observed the Shivaratra Vrata.

The rites and rituals involved in this observance have three aspects: fasting during the whole lunar day, and holding a vigil and worshipping the Linga during the night. In the evening one has to bathe in the river or a pond, smear sacred ashes on the body and wear Rudraksha (the fruit of *Eleocarpus* of which Indira Gandhi used to

wear a necklace). During Pradoshakal one should go to a Shiva temple, worship Bhavabhavaani with flowers, oblation, pooja, reciting hymns and also the 'Moolamantra'. Then begging for Shiva's pardon, one should take away a flower from Shiva's head and put it on one's own. During the night four Poojas with Abhyangasnaan are to be offered to Shiva. Imagine so many devotees bathing him four times during that night! Then keep vigil the whole night with music, dancing and religious discourses or listening to mythical stories. After completing 12, 14 or 24 such observances one is supposed to do 'Udyapan' a concluding ceremony which is equally elaborate..

To halt the spread of Buddhism and to propagate Hinduism and Advaita philosophy, Shankaracharya founded Jotirlingas at 12 places in India. They were well established and had become quite popular by the time of the Muslim invasions into India began. One Jotirlinga is Vaidyanath in West Bengal where a huge fair is organized every year on this day. In the south, at Chidambaram there are many Shiva worshipers from the Shudra caste who are authorized reciters of Vedas. Not only do they recite Vedas but they can also understand and explain their meanings. Like the Vaishnavites, Shaivaites too wanted that the Shaiva sect be open to all human beings. Shiva is adored and worshiped by Nishads, robbers, dacoits and people staying away from civilization. Among the Dravidian people Shiva alone is believed to be the creator, provider and sustainer of the universe. Their Trimurti—the triad of deities is Shiva-Amma (the Parvati of the Puranas) and their son Murugan almost the same as the emblem engraved on bricks discovered at Mohenjodaro. Thus this deity that evolved out of the fusion of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures is venerated by all castes all over India and his influence is spread over much larger region as compared with the influence of Vishnu. But the real worship of this Lord of the Himalayas and forests and medicinal plants that he has nurtured through ages is to save them from being destroyed and our extraordinary biogenetic heritage being robbed and patented by predators from other lands.

MS. SUMAN OAK is lecturer on Education, SNTU University. Associated with Streehitakarini, Centre for the Study of Social Change and the Andhrshraddha Nirmoolan Samiti. She is a freelance writer in Marathi and English.

Primary and Secondary Education in Andhra Pradesh (cont'd. from p.2)

Personality Building:

- Character and patriotism and thirst for knowledge and continuing improvement can be inculcated only from childhood; first in the home and most importantly, in schools as in these days a mother is increasingly becoming a working woman. Therefore, stories from epics like Mahabharata, Ramayana, Neeti Chandrika, Barthruhari and Sumathi and Vemana and other Sethakas must be included in school books

Telugu & English:

- Telugu /mother tongue must be the medium till SSC but English must be compulsorily taught and obligatorily required to be passed from class III onwards. Also, from class VI onwards Mathematics & Science should be taught through English medium.

Stand-by Power Supplies:

- The computers provided for schools are becoming unusable in rural areas because of the power cuts of long duration. Engine alternators and uninterrupted power supplies as a standby must be provided if the computers are to be made use of.

Workshop for Every High School:

- We must attach a workshop to every high school in the villages. Skills in carpentry, plumbing, electrical wiring, use and repair of appliances, painting (wall and doors and windows), and such skills should be imparted to children. The workshop must also be available to train villagers for a fee.

NRI Help:

- A large number of persons from rural homes are working abroad and quite a number of them are genuinely interested in contributing to education & health facilities in the villages of their parents and forefathers. Every Head- master must be authorized to receive funds from such NRIs (for which he must be held accountable) and utilize them in a mutually agreed manner for improving the quality of education eg: Laboratory, library, workshop etc.

Choice for Students:

- It is a universal fact that even a class-IV employee and agricultural mazdoor wants his child to be educated in a private English medium “convent” school. The reason is the destruction of education in government schools although there are no fees or the fees are nominal in these schools.

- Parents must have the choice whether to admit their children in a government or a private school.
- The choice must be respected by government giving a voucher for upto two children in every family, with a value equivalent to the expenditure that the government is incurring on its schools for the children of the relevant class per year. Suppose this is Rs.2,000 per year for class V and a parent does not wish to admit his child in a government school but a private school he should be given a voucher for Rs.2,000, which he can use to admit him or her in the private school of his choice by paying from his pocket an amount the school charges in excess of Rs.2,000. He will surrender the voucher to the school which can encash it from the government treasury. Government will be responsible for the children’s education but not directly. It respects the choice of the parent who has the freedom to decide what education is best for his children.

Self Employed Teachers (SET):

- There are tens of thousands of unemployed B.Ed graduates in our villages and yet scores of new B.Ed colleges are sanctioned. It appears that although on government records, B.Eds are unemployed they are in fact employed in private schools.
- Most of them are from rural areas. They can become Self Employed Teachers (SET) if the government adopts the following scheme that I have been advocating for some time. Briefly: Co-opt private entrepreneurship of unemployed matriculates and SETs in the villages. They should be permitted to teach village children, when they can be spared by their parents, in shifts upto the 5th Class level; not in the school but in their own homes. Government (Mandals and Zilla Parishads) should conduct 5th Class examination with senior citizens as Examiners. For every pupil who passes, the self employed teacher should gets Rs.1,000/-. This will result in competition among unemployed matriculates/graduates/B.Eds to collect children, teach them and send them for examination. Government be saved from throwing good money on the large number of highly-paid, unionised teachers, who are not only unaccountable but are unwilling to go to rural areas.

DR. T. H. CHOWDARY is Director: Center for Telecom Management & Studies; Chairman: Pragna Bharati, Andhra Pradesh; Fellow: Tata Consultancy Services & Satyam Computer Services; Formerly Information Technology Advisor: Government of Andhra Pradesh and Chairman & Managing Director, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. E-Mail: hanuman.chowdary@tcs.com & thc@satyam.com

Tenzin's Long March To Freedom

Tibetan Poet and freedom fighter Tenzin Tsundue plans a "Long March to Freedom". This "Long March" has been inspired by Gandhiji's Salt March and very different from Mao tse Tung's "Long March" that resulted in totalitarian rule and the colonisation of Tibet. We are sure readers will join us in conveying to Tenzin and his fellow marchers our good wishes. They carry our prayers for their safety and well-being in this truly Himalayan endeavour – Editor.

The time has come for me to go to Tibet again. Last time when I went to Tibet in 1997 - after my graduation - I was arrested by the Chinese authorities, beaten up, interrogated, starved and finally thrown out of Tibet after keeping me in their jails for three months in Lhasa and Ngari. I walked to Tibet, on my own, alone, across the Himalayan Mountains from Ladakh.

Eleven years later, I am walking to Tibet again; this time too, without permission. I am returning home; why should I bother about papers from the Chinese colonial regime who have not only occupied Tibet, but also running a military rule there; making our people in Tibet live in tyranny and brutal suppression day after day, everyday for fifty years.

The year 2008 is a huge opportunity for the Tibet movement to present to the world the injustices the Tibetans have been subjected to, when China is going to attract international media attention. I am taking part in the return march from Dharamsala to Tibet, that is being organized as part of the "Tibetan People's Uprising Movement", a united effort put together by five major Tibetan NGOs: Tibetan Youth Congress, Tibetan Women's Association, Gu-Chu-Sum Movement of Tibet (an association of former political prisoners), National Democratic Party of Tibet and Students for a Free Tibet, India.

The march will start on 10 March 2008, from Dharamsala, the capital of Tibetan exiles and will pass through Delhi and then head towards Tibet. Walking for six months, we might reach the Tibet border around the time China opens the Beijing 2008 Olympics (August 14-25, 2008). It's too early to approximate at which border point we would be crossing; Tibet and India share a border that runs 4,075 kms. along the length of the Himalayas. We might choose any point, or even multiple points.

I know there had been similar attempts in the past, but this is 2008, and I have seen the organizers working extra hard with strategic planning, taking care of every minute detail, and the best thing is that we have all the NGOs working unitedly for the common goal. This unity is our strength! I do not know where we would end up, that's why I am giving away the little collection of books (my only possession in life) to a library that is being set

up in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala. My friends: Lobsang and Nyingje (who served in the Indian army as part of the Tibetan battalion) are also giving away their personal belongings; committing themselves to the march.

Of course the Indian police will do their duty; the Chinese army at the Tibet border would be overtly enthusiastic. Since we are leading a peaceful march, with absolute commitment to non-violence, I do not think anyone - either from Indian authority or Chinese - would impose themselves on us. Inspired by Gandhi's Salt March, even if they did try to stop us, we are not stopping. For how many days can they jail us for just walking peacefully? And why should the Indian government stop Tibetan refugees voluntarily returning home on foot?

In the past I have climbed buildings to shout for freedom, thrown myself at the Chinese embassy gate in New Delhi, spent months in jails, got beaten up by police, fought court cases, but I never lost the dignity of the struggle: my belief in non-violence. The March to Tibet will be non-violent; it is a *sadhana*, a spiritual tribute to the truth and justice that we are fighting for. This is our Long March to Freedom.

Here is an opportunity to join a historic non-violent freedom struggle, a people's effort to win freedom for a country that remains subjugated even in 2008. I invite you to join us, support us in whatever ways possible. We need people to know about it, so spread the word. You can walk with us, as we walk for six months, maybe you can join us for a day along the path, even one hour, or for a week, or months as a supporter. Schools, colleges and even whole towns can walk with us. We need volunteers, media people, writers, photographers, bloggers help us. We need nurses, cooks, technicians and your prayers.

For more information please visit:
www.TibetanUprising.org

For enquiries email the coordinators:
Lobsang yeshi <lobsangyeshi2006@hotmail.com> or
sherab woser <sherabwoeser@yahoo.com>

Join us.

Tenzin Tsundue
Dharamsala

Book Review



CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN NEPAL by Mahendra Lawoti ●
Published by Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, B42 Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi 110017 ●
Year of publication 2007 ● Pages 348 ● Price Rs.695.
Reviewed by Brig (Retd.) S. C. Sharma, adviser to the telecom industry and a freelance writer.
Email: brigsc@bom9.vsnl.net.in

The book, a collection of papers by the various authors, shows that contentious politics did not lead to democratization in Nepal. Some forms of it can hinder the process of democracy. The caste-hill Hindu elite group who constituted 31% of the population dominated the state, politics, economy and society, making Nepal the most unequal society in the 1990s. The dissatisfaction amongst the rural people and a weak parliament created a fertile ground for contentious politics. The Maoists had the largest contingent in the parliament in the 1991 elections. They went underground after being repeatedly ignored and launched a violent insurgency. Nepal which has experienced 40 rebellions since 1770 has about 60 ethnic groups, several religions and 100 languages. They all demanded equality and justice. No group asked for secession. The authors deal with Maoist insurgency, collective protests and identity politics.

Mary Crawford and Kaufman have investigated the effect of insurgency on women and children, who suffer gender violence around the world. Violence forces many men to leave the villages leaving the women and children behind. The women face the risk of being trafficked for sex work. Displacement due to insurgency adds to the woes of Nepalese women already suffering a disadvantaged status in society.

In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal launched a violent struggle when the world view was that such movements were no more relevant. Li attributes their success to widespread poverty and a weak central system which did not reach the rural countryside. In 1996, the Maoists had only a few guns and by 2005, they had expanded to two divisions. He has not given the source of funds for buying arms and ammunition. This information has been given by Somlai. The sources are smuggling timber and rare wild life, extortion, looting of banks and donations. It is of interest that while illegal timber felling is being resorted to by the Maoists, they blame India for it. Similarly the claim of the insurgents to work for the uplift of women is hollow since, as shown by Mary Crawford, women and children are the worst sufferers. Not many will agree that Nepal is dominated by foreign powers or that the Indian Army is likely to intervene. Somlai

contends that it is not possible to pinpoint the precise cause and effect relationship of insurgency. He brought the two sides to the negotiating table but of no avail.

Bal Gopal Shrestha traces the movement by ethnic minorities for political representation and equal rights for their languages in courts and schools. The Government has been unable to solve the ethnic conflicts. The Maoists have advocated a federal structure of state. Vihar Buddhism was mainly revived by the Niwaris as an expression of protest against the Rana Regime. It received a setback after the introduction of the Panchayat system. A large number of people found peace of mind in this religion. The spread of Vihar Buddhism can be understood both as the cause and effect of the political and socio-economic transformation of Nepal.

Amenda Snellinger has analysed the impact of the students' movement. In May 2003, after the King dismissed Parliament, the students launched a movement against increase in the petrol price. During the protest a student was shot dead and the movement took a new turn, demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister appointed by the King. A social movement led to a political opportunity.

Mass mobilization on the streets brought down the King's Government in April 2006. Such protests do not reflect popular will and are coercive even though these movements achieved results which could not have been possible through the legal or political process. To that extent they have helped in the democratization process.

Anne Rademacher has brought out the increasing dissatisfaction with democracy due to escalating violence in the countryside and steady decline in the vitality of the urban rivers. The rapid turnover of more than a dozen successive governments during this period limited any action. Democratization came to be identified with environmental degradation.

Lawoti concludes that contentious politics affects democratization both positively and negatively. He contends that the nature of activities, whether they are

coercive or voluntary, lead to different effects on democratization. The challenge is to promote positive consequences by recognizing the social forces and their

causes. The book presents a balanced view of the role of various political parties and movements in contemporary Nepal.



THE ROYAL NEPAL ARMY. MEETING THE MAOIST CHALLENGE by Ashok K. Mehta ● Published by Rupa & Co., 7/16 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002 ● Year of Publication 2005 ● No. of Pages 110 ● Price Rs.295

Reviewed by Brigadier (Retd.) A. Thyagarajan, freelance writer and management consultant.

In recent years, much has been written in the media about the instability of our neighbours, especially Pakistan and Nepal.

Being a Hindu kingdom, Nepal enjoyed a great degree of independence even during the British period. After having suffered defeats at the hands of the British army in India, Nepal lost her hold on certain parts of the mountaneous terrain to the British. However, the Nepalese Army helped the British Crown in suppressing the 1957 revolt. Subsequently, the famous Gorkhas of Nepal were not only recruited in the British Indian army in large numbers but also offered its men to form a few regiments directly under the British Crown. The performance of the Gorkha regiments both in India and abroad is now part of military folklore.

In recent times, Nepal witnessed the horrible massacre of the Royal Nepal family in 2001 and the grave inroads made by the Mao insurgents in Nepal. The situation today is so serious that almost 70% of the Nepalese kingdom is in the grip of highly motivated insurgent groups who have threatened to occupy Kathmandu. Peace negotiations have been going on with the King and the political groups are trying to find a way out of the insurgency war.

Only recently has the Royal Nepalese Army been actively involved in counter insurgency warfare with the help of Indian hardware and assistance from the USA and the UK. It is interesting to note that the Nepalese Army which was considered a purely ceremonial force owing allegiance to the King, embarked on a major programme

of reorganisation, re-equipment and the adoption of a new grand strategy.

The author, Ashok K. Mehta, who has himself served in the Gorkha Regiment of the Indian Army for many years has portrayed with candour the quality of Gorkha manpower, its deployment and the calibre of its senior officers. Unfortunately, the Royal Nepal Army is plagued by poor incentives, lack of professional leaders and the absence of a well thought out national security directive. Even now, the Royal Nepal Army tends to pay more attention to the Kathmandu Valley and some national assets like the forests. Due to their suspicion of the 'big brother's intention (India)', the Nepalese king and political leaders have treated the Indian government with disdain. What is surprising is that the king never brought the Royal Nepal Army to the forefront of counter insurgency till the Maoist groups started direct attacks on the Royal Nepal Army's outposts. The book has analysed lucidly the rise and growth of Maoist insurgents and the events of major importance in the struggle for supremacy. The average reader would be surprised by the strength and resources of the insurgents who have forced the Royal Nepal Army to use even a helicopter gunship for aerial bombardment.

A very interesting book written with adequate data to examine the structure of the Royal Nepal Army and its performance during the past six decades. However, the author who has intimate knowledge of Nepal and the Gorkha soldiers could have brought out the contours of a military strategy to counter the Maoist threats.



MINOO MASANI

A Biography by S. V. Raju

Published by the National Book Trust, India In their National Biography series

This book is a brief biography of Minoo Masani based on the author's 40-year association with him. It traces his roller coaster ride as writer freedom fighter, parliamentarian from the Constituent Assembly to the Fourth Lok Sabha. His journey from Marxism to Liberalism and his role in the formation of, and the decline of the Swatantra Party.

This is the story of a principled politician – an oxymoron in current political dialogue. Today the word politician draws sneer and derision. That it was not always so the author seeks to establish in this biography of Minoo Masani whose life and work spanned the greater part of the twentieth century.

Price: Hard cover: Rs.200; Soft cover: Rs.40

Available at leading booksellers or from the National Book Trust offices in your city. If unavailable, please email jurasv@gmail.com

Between Ourselves ...

Call it a new year resolution if you like, *Freedom First* will have as the main 'story' in its monthly features, issues that really matter. Hence this issue has as its main feature, primary and secondary education in Andhra Pradesh. It is not as exciting as headlines such as exulting in the fact that the number of billionaires in India is growing or that cricketers are for sale – at a price – how disgusting! But that's another matter. At the root of India's problem of poor governance is the continuing neglect of primary education particularly in rural and semi-urban India. Liberalism can thrive only in a milieu where a majority has received at least basic primary education.

We therefore have a vested interest in education and that too quality education – not mere literacy! Another is primary health which in most parts of rural and semi-

urban India is in shambles. There are other issues. Choose your topic. Write for us.

We draw your attention to the resolutions passed by the Fourth National Convention of the Indian Liberal Group and look forward to your comments particularly if you have perspectives that may have been missed or are different.

The cover feature of our April issue is on threats to our national security particularly from the Naxal-Maoist insurgency which the Prime Minister recently described as the gravest threat to our stability and integrity. Indeed the danger is clear and present. If you have views on this subject why not share it with readers of our journal.

Editor

Many Voices

A jihadist is no more representative of Islam than a Bolshevik was of atheism. Unfortunately, like Marxism, jihadism feeds on ignorance, apathy, corruption, despair, and human suffering.

John DiMarco of Brampton, Ontario in a letter in *National Geographic Magazine*, January 2008

It is fallacious to blame Islam for the present condition of Pakistan. The fact of the matter is that Pakistan never had Islamic law. The deplorable condition of that country is primarily from following non-Islamic laws.

Akhtar Mahmood, Chandigarh, in a letter in *National Geographic Magazine*, January 2008

We want five-day week. But we don't want more work hours.

L. Byrappa, president, Karnataka State Government Employees' Association, *The Times of India, Bangalore*, February 7, 2008

When Raj Thackeray's 'boys' flaunting his portrait, were smashing taxis, slapping *paanwalas* and burning rick-

shaws in Mumbai, DCP Dyaneshwar Phadtare went to their leader's home, not to arrest him, but to request him not to resort to violence.

Jyoti Punwani, *The Times of India*, February 17

The reason to worry about Raj Thackeray is not that he is being cynical; the reason may be the opposite: he is being sincere.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Indian Express*, February 18

Election is the means not an end in itself. Even if you may win elections without adhering to values, you are creating a society where there would be no elections one day. The value system is what distinguishes a democracy from other systems.

Veteran journalist Kuldeep Nayar, *Janata*, January 6

"...The truth is that as India flourishes, the Idea of India, as a space marked by freedom and reciprocity, is slowly dissolving into particularities.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Indian Express*, February 18

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