

The Impact of Global Warming on Indian Agriculture

Sharad Joshi

According to a front page story in a national Hindi daily the temperature in Delhi on the 11th of April 2007 had risen from 30°C in 2005 to 36°C in 2006 and to 38.3°C in 2007. If this trend continues the peak temperature in Delhi this summer might reach near 50°C. There was earlier a forecast that the highest temperature this summer around Kanpur may touch 52°C. It would appear that the phenomenon of global warming is finally knocking at our doors.

Global warming is the observed increase in the average temperature of the Earth's near surface and oceans in recent decades and it's projected continuation. The models referenced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted that global temperatures are likely to increase by a 1.1 to 6.4°C between 1990 and 2100. The increase of 8.3°C in three years is more ominous than the worst predictions of the IPCC on rising temperatures.

The increases in global temperatures are expected to cause rising sea levels and changes in the amount and pattern of precipitation as also a higher frequency of extreme weather events like floods, droughts, storms, hurricanes and tornadoes.

Side by side with the forecasters of doom, there exist also "cooler headed coalitions" that take a more sober view of the catastrophe. There are also some who think that global warming could not continue indefinitely. The phenomenon that we are experiencing is merely a phase of "climate change" that is unlikely to follow a linear trend indefinitely.

However, the cataclysmic rains in Mumbai, Gujarat and Rajasthan as also the incessantly rising temperatures clearly show that something new is happening. It was projected that the maximum temperatures would be higher and the number of events of hot days and heat waves would increase and the number of cold days and cold waves will diminish. There will be more intense precipitation events over many areas, increased summer drying over mid-continental areas and also increase in tropical cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes etc. Whether the "global warming" school comes out to be right or the "cooler heads" are vindicated by time, the fact remains that all living things will be called upon to brave an epoch of unprecedented suffering and adjustment.

Plant life is even more vulnerable to extremes of climate than most non-

botanical species. It is probable that some of the more vulnerable species of animals, insects and reptiles might simply perish. Human beings may fare better because of the higher degrees of freedom they enjoy and may even manage to save themselves as also domestic animals *a la* Noah of the Ark; but what will be the impact on agriculture at large?

Inside

- ▶ Supreme Court Waivers on Police Reforms
- ▶ Energy Security Begins at Home
- ▶ Tibet's Stolen Child – The Panchen Lama
- ▶ Cornucopia
- ▶ Where is Our Medical Industry Headed?
- ▶ Point Counter Point
- ▶ From Our Readers
- ▶ Book Review
- ▶ Between Ourselves
- ▶ Many Voices

The Impact on Agriculture ...

If the rise in temperature is the central phenomenon, it may be deduced that agriculture, particularly production of foodgrains will shift to more temperate regions. Farmers near the tropics would find it difficult to make their crops grow in the teeth of temperatures above 50°C. Not that the temperate zone regions will not have their own set of climatic problems. The storms, the hurricanes, and tornadoes may visit those countries with increasing frequency. The shift in crop patterns may also result in mass migrations and probably also led to armed conflagrations.

... On India

As it is, agriculture has not been doing famously well. Cultivation in the arid, rain-fed and drought-prone areas barely permits minimal survival even today. With the food grain crops shifting to the more temperate countries, India might become, once again dependent for its food on shipments from abroad. The only ray of hope is provided by rapid technological advance in identifying and isolating drought resistant genes and their introduction into selected varieties of seeds. That, however, is a bleak prospect. The Supreme Court, as it is, has ordered a stay on the approval of new trials and new GMO varieties. As a consequence, only one multinational company and one Indian counterpart that had managed to get all the approvals that they needed for anti-bollworm varieties, are sitting pretty. On the other hand, some of the more recent Indian innovators who have made a breakthrough in drought and salinity-resistant genes have been blocked. The warming of the glaciers might ensure supply of enough irrigation water for some years, but after that lies the prospect of a horrid drought. The entire agricultural cultivation in India will have to start shifting gradually northwards.

Are Our Farmers Ready?

The more important question is: are the government and the farmers ready for this kind of a catastrophe?

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has done some work on the effect of the 'The Heat wave of March 2004'; the 'Impact on Agriculture of the Cold

Wave Of 2002-2003; the 'Impact of excessive rains on yield, market availability and prices of onions, and a generic study on 'Drought Management Strategies In India'.

These studies are comprehensive in nature and should provide useful entry points for the study of the impact of extremes of climate as a global and sustained phenomenon. However, they treat the specific events of extremes of climate as short duration and region specific. The climate change that we are likely to encounter in the near future requires a study with a much broader worldview that will presume that there will be no return to the climatic epoch that we are used to.

Effect on Plants ...

Firstly, there are plants that furnish food, fibre and fuel that might perish as a species altogether due to their inability to withstand the extremes of heat or rainfall. It is incumbent upon the ICAR to start research on varieties that can take the place of the threatened varieties.

The Rural Perspective



There are plants that cannot withstand temperatures higher than a certain level and there are plants that cannot withstand temperatures below a level of cold. Similarly there are plants that can withstand a certain level of drought and/or a certain level of submergence. All these species will be exposed to the risk of

extinction if the new epoch of climate change lasts for a dozen or so years. The ICAR should have started work on the replacement of such fragile varieties by those with greater tolerance to extremes of temperature and precipitation.

... On Fishes and Cattle

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries is even less-prepared for the contingency. The breeding cycles of the fish might undergo a drastic change. Even the milch cattle might be exposed to strains they are not built to withstand. Most importantly, the whole experiment of promoting crossbreed cows might simply flop. Most varieties of Jersey and Holstein Freisen crossbreed cows have to be provided with fans and coolers even in the relatively moderate summers of the present days. Even a short duration exposure to excessive heat affects their productivity. It might come out that it would

have been a better idea to promote the upgradation of the more sturdy milch animals like the buffalo and goats. Even at this late stage, it would be worthwhile developing varieties of the sheep and she-goats that can better withstand the vicissitudes of climate.

Food-Processing and Storage

The food-processing ministry is happily unaware that it has a very redoubtable task to perform. Very high temperatures will make it very difficult, if not impossible, to store both the onion and potatoes. The preservation of vegetables and fruit would also become a difficult proposition. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the entire food processing industry would be in the doldrums if the present cold storage equipment ceases to be effective under the new climatic conditions. The paradox is: the more refrigeration you have, the more the greenhouse gases and the more the green house gases, greater the global warming and the worse the exercises in food preservation. The Ministry is not even aware of

the Catch 22 situation it is embroiled in.

All along the line, agricultural extension has failed and now, as admitted by the Central minister for Finance in his budget speech, it is in a state of collapse. Can the dead donkey of the present extension institutions carry the burden of the technology and management of the global-warming epoch to the farmers of inaccessible and remote parched lands?

When the tsunami came, most of us had not even known the word. Now we have all heard of the expression "global warming" and "climate change". That is about all the difference. Otherwise, India is as unprepared to meet the challenge of the global warming which has started knocking at our doors since last year as we were the day before the tsunami hit us.

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Supreme Court Waivers on Police Reforms

Two retired Directors General of Police filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court way back in 1996 calling for police reform. The case came to be known as *Prakash Singh v Union of India*. After ten years of hearings and deliberations, the Supreme Court, on 22 September 2006, ordered state governments to begin the process of reforming the police in India. It gave the Centre and the states three months to put in place a number of practical mechanisms to do this.

The central and state governments were to report back to the Court on January 11, 2007 on action taken. However on that day they were granted more time till the second week of April to report back to the Court. Alarming, a quick reading of their affidavits shows that a meagre 11% are totally compliant, 40% are non-compliant and 46% only partially compliant. Most states want more time for a review of the original directives. Some are busy cobbling together new police Acts without consulting with the public.

Surprisingly, on 9th April, 2007, the Supreme Court took less than 5 minutes to set yet another date to look at applications for extension and modification! This leeway is a radical departure from the Court's earlier no-nonsense stand of 11 January that "no extension can be granted to any government in this respect." Obviously this was

because this time on even the Union Government started objecting to the directives and wanted a further postponement! This is something that should cause us concern.

Police reforms in India are overdue and the Supreme Court which accepts the need for reforms has to take a strong stand. Police reform has been on the backburner for far too long. As Mrs. Maja Daruwala, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) put it "The Supreme Court's strong stance on compliance is crucial to shake states out of their lethargy on the issue of police reform. Without the Court monitoring this process, this simply will not happen. We need democratic policing and we need it now"

This wavering by the Supreme Court has opened the doors for states to file review applications. The danger of this stance is that the entire original judgment of 22 September 2006 is now up for re-examination, possibly with a view to diluting it; and the insubstantial objections by the states and their resistance to taking *any* steps towards police reform will be given credence.

Based on a press release by the Commonwealth Human Relations Initiative.

For more information on the Supreme Court directives, access the CHRI website www.humanrightsinitiative.org

Energy Security Begins at Home

Nitin Pai

Secure, reliable and efficient energy supplies are necessary in order to sustain India's future growth. The way to get started on this does not require the consent of Iranian ayatollahs, Pakistani generals or American officials. It just requires the Indian government to get the necessary domestic infrastructure in place and let markets do the rest.

Before Mani Shankar Aiyar became petroleum minister in the UPA government, discussions on energy security generally took place within the rarefied circles of high officialdom and think-tanks. Mr Aiyar declared energy security as a major national priority, gave the media a new buzz word and engaged himself in vigorous energy diplomacy. He deserves credit for focussing attention on a vital issue. But he also revived the idea of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline – an idea that quickly crossed over into the realm of the India-Pakistan ‘peace process’ and became a symbol of contrived ‘mutual dependencies’.

Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline

The government, in Mr Aiyar's book, is the grand solver of national problems – and the pipeline project exemplified his belief. Thus the combined petroleum and foreign affairs bureaucracies of three countries found themselves meeting regularly in an attempt to breathe life into the IPI project. Until, that is to say, the little secret about Iran's nuclear weapons programme leaked and the United States found a political reason to register its opposition to the project.

The route of the proposed pipeline traverses the entire breadth of Pakistan, much of it through areas where the State of Pakistan has only nominal control. Even before Balochistan exploded into a full-fledged rebellion against Islamabad, taking potshots at gas pipelines was a sort of coming of age ritual for Baloch tribesmen. The Musharraf regime, of course, assured India and Iran that the Pakistani army was quite capable of protecting the pipeline not least because it could extract rent in the form of US\$500 million in transit charges.

Serves Pakistan's Interests

It is not hard to see why the Pakistanis are excited about the project: not only do they get access to Iranian gas, they also get paid by the Indian government to hold on to India's economic jugular. Mutual dependencies create peace to the extent that they constrain India's ability to retaliate. It would be prudent to remember that Gen.

Musharraf was emboldened to initiate the Kargil war after sensing that Pakistan's declared nuclear capability created greater room for sub-conventional warfare.

In July 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh conceded that the project might be commercially unviable if all risks were priced in. But project risk is nothing compared to the risk to India's national security: It remains a mystery why the Indian government should voluntarily hand over an important bargaining chip to a country and a regime whose commitment to peace is at best uncertain and at worst a public relations exercise. Those in the foreign policy establishment who would have otherwise opposed the project might have remained silent due to their distrust of American intentions: The Bush administration has been a vocal critic of India's engagement of Iran, and the US Congress has gone to the extent of adding riders to the India-US nuclear deal.

Why Only Iranian Gas?

Yet, take away the notion that the gas must be Iranian and that it must flow through a pipeline across Pakistan and there is a better solution to the energy security problem. That solution – entirely within India's grasp – relies not on the diplomatic negotiation skills of government officials, but on the power of markets. Consider a state-of-the-art port with integrated oil & gas processing terminals along India's West Coast, which is then connected to major cities with domestic pipelines and efficient highways. Such a project will allow India to import oil & gas not only from Iran, but also from any other exporting country. The technology to carry oil and compressed gas on ships is mature, and if Indian ports are able to efficiently handle the seaborne traffic, this project will provide all the capabilities of the IPI pipeline, and a whole lot more.

There are Options in India's Interests

The IPI pipeline restricts India to a monopoly supplier and a monopoly transit provider. This is not a very good scenario for any purchaser. The Europeans are finding this out the hard way ever since President Vladimir

Putin began using energy supplies as a coercive tool. Creating the infrastructure that links India to the global energy market, on the other hand, will allow Indian firms to purchase fuel from multiple vendors and through multiple shipping lines. No single supplier or government will be able to squeeze India commercially. Governments will find it much harder to coerce India by threatening to cut off energy supplies. The Indian Navy can be relied upon to take care of those who try rougher methods of coercion.

Almost all the public investment will be domestic: not only creating a source of thousands of jobs but also the conditions for future economic growth. This is a far more sensible use of India's fiscal resources than, effectively, paying protection money to the Pakistani army.

Moreover, a recent path-breaking study by Roger Stern, an American analyst, shows that Iran may not be in a position to deliver all the gas that it has sold. This, rather than India's vote at the International Atomic Energy

Agency (IAEA) to refer Iran's nuclear activities to the United Nations Security Council, may be the underlying reason why the Iranians want to renegotiate the deal with India. In any case, choosing to purchase Iranian gas in the form of LNG and transporting it on ships will not hurt India's relations with Iran.

So Mr Aiyar was right. Secure, reliable and efficient energy supplies are necessary in order to sustain India's future growth. The way to get started on this does not require the consent of Iranian ayatollahs, Pakistani generals or American officials. It just requires the Indian government to get the necessary domestic infrastructure in place and let markets do the rest.

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Tibet's Stolen Child – The Panchen Lama

Shibayan Raha

Born on April 25, 1989 at Lhari County, Nagchi Prefecture in Tibet, Gendhun Choekyi Nyima was recognised by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama on May 14, 1995 at the age of six. He is the second most important religious leader of Tibet.

On May 17, 1995, just three days after his recognition, the six-year old and his family disappeared from their home. Their whereabouts and well-being are still unknown. Thus he became the youngest political prisoner in the world. Defying all religious traditions of Tibet, the communist government of China installed their own choice, a boy named Gyaltzen Norbu who happened to be the son of a Tibetan communist party leader, as the 11th Panchen Lama in December 1995.

The Chinese government initially denied that the 11th Panchen Lama was in their custody. On May 28, 1996, a year after the Panchen Lama's disappearance, the government of People's Republic of China (PRC) admitted that they were holding the Panchen Lama and his parents in protective custody in Beijing. It is difficult to understand why the Chinese authorities considered it necessary to

provide security for a child whom they consider to be just an ordinary boy. Repeated appeals from individuals, human rights organisations are being ignored and United Nations for access to Gendhun Choekyi Nyima have been rejected by the communist government. In 1998 the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson was denied access to the detained Panchen Lama by Chinese officials.

Twelve years have passed since the abduction. On April 25, 2007 the Panchen Lama has turned 18. He is a no longer a 'boy' who needs the protection of the People's Liberation Army. It is now time for the Chinese government to release him immediately in order to prove itself to be a responsible member of the international community.

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Shibayan Raha and another Tibetan activist Migmar Tsering were arrested on April 9, 2007 while attempting to storm the Chinese Embassy in Chanakyapuri, New Delhi. The two activists were demanding the release of Gendhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama.

The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.

Friedrich Nietzsche



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

An Inoperable Cancer

Rallies will be organized, editorials will be written – and nothing will change. That is the real tragedy of this nation.

Like an inoperable cancer, politics continues to spread its insidious tentacles in all aspects of public life in India. There is hardly an institution remaining that has escaped its corroding influence.

The police force in almost all states of the Indian Union is already beyond the pale and, perhaps, beyond redemption. Corruption, nepotism, arrogance – all the qualities our venal politicians are renowned for – are evident in large measure. A recent survey conducted by a local evening paper in Mumbai found that over 85% of the citizens distrusted the local cops – and would approach them voluntarily only as a last resort.

Education, too – once a noble vocation – is being perverted by political patronage. Too much has already been written on the quota debate – if one can call it that – to bear repetition. The reality is that the debate is between conflicting politicians' survival instincts, if not egos – with the ones most affected, the students, being reduced to ineffective, powerless pawns.

The latest shameful episode took place in Gujarat, where a publicity-seeking BJP 'activist' vandalized an exhibition organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts and – far from being reprimanded for an act of inexcusable hooliganism – was let off scot free. To add insult to injury, the vandalized became the accused. Now we find that the so-called university guardians – the vice-chancellor and pro vice-chancellor – let alone defending their wards, have demanded that they apologize for being sinned against.

This bizarre behaviour is, perhaps, not so inexplicable, when one realizes that the two University top honchos are political appointees – one appointed by the Modi government and the other a known associate of the Sangh *parivar*. One is not privy to the selection process, of course, but it is doubtful that they occupy their exalted positions due to their academic credentials and expertise. Naturally, their first loyalty is to their political patrons – and the rights and sentiments of the thousands of students under their charge are purely incidental.

What is surprising is the sheer brazenness of their action. One presumes they possess a modicum of intelligence and, hence, they could not have been blind to the probability of their totally indefensible stance being widely ridiculed and pilloried; by the media and the general public. But, it seems, they just do not care. In the time honoured tradition of Indian politics, what transcends all other considerations is that they stick on to their undeserved seats. And that means keeping their political bosses happy. The barely concealed scorn and contempt of students and most of the faculty washes off them like water off a duck's back.

And the two worthies have good reason to be complacent. History is on their side. As expected, students and right thinking citizens are expressing outrage and solidarity with the falsely maligned students. Rallies will be organized, editorials will be written – and nothing will change. *That is the real tragedy of this nation.*

Yet Another Travesty of Justice

That is the way things work in this country. The value of human life is directly proportional to the financial worth of the individual concerned.

I do not understand why so much surprise is being expressed at the relatively light sentence awarded to Alistair Periera in the hit and run case involving the death of seven labourers. The verdict was a foregone conclusion, even before the RTO officer could not identify incriminating photographs because 'he forgot to bring his glasses'. In any other civilized country, he would have been slapped with contempt of court for making such a ridiculous statement. But this is India, where money talks and, make no mistake, money has obviously talked here; in a loud voice.

The presiding judge was only partly correct when he suspected the police of cooking up their case. The case was cooked up, but not to convict Periera. Rather, the shoddy

investigation, the confusion regarding the photographs and everything else was designed to ensure that Periera got off with a slap on the wrist. If an impartial investigation is ever conducted into this disgraceful affair – which I doubt – I would not be too surprised if it was discovered that the investigating officers, the RTO officer and the photographer, among others, had recently come upon considerable sums of unexplained wealth.

That is the way things work in this country. The value of a human life is directly proportional to the financial worth of the individual concerned. And we, the public, will shake our heads today and forget all about it tomorrow. Just another day in India's "shining" metropolis.

Where is Our Medical Industry Headed?

Kusum Choppra

Has anyone taken a count of hospitals which are being constructed, compared to replications of medical insurance for the poor?

The corporate way, with shining five star hospitals winning hands down over the drab public hospitals; they will have the advantage of earning massive amounts from all the medical tourists who will flock to our shores to get cheap treatment.

The treatments are never cheap, as in 'cheap'. Only cheap in comparison to the amounts that the NRIs and others from third world countries would have to pay if they were to opt for treatment in first world countries.

As a second world country, India is amply qualified to fill the gap between the first and third worlds, is it not? All our medical specialists, pharmaceutical companies, services and hospitals will soon be raking it in. Has anyone taken a count of hospitals which are being constructed, compared to replications of medical insurance for the poor?

The only losers will be the middle classes and poor, senior citizens and villagers as public hospitals slide back as rapidly as the five star hospitals tried forward. Which doctor is interested in a rural practice when the neon lights of the cities with their malls and their multiplexes augment the five star hospitals?

Only recently I saw two doctors ignore the rural areas, even without a five star hospital to fall back on. A young doctor had just cleared MBBS and was aiming at MS. To qualify for a seat, a six-month stint in a rural hospital was a must. Both husband and wife pulled every string they could lay their hands on to ensure that she was posted to a hospital in a town within commuting distance of a major centre.

Despite being within commuting distance, the young doctor went to the hospital barely eight times, to check in and check out and once a month for the six compulsory months, merely to fill in the attendance register. And so inured are the senior doctors to the antics of the urban ones that they obligingly hand over the register for the young person to sign without having attended to a single patient in all those months.

A few years down the line, with a flourishing practice, what will this young doctor actually know of the realities of the rural areas and the situation of the patients who come in from the villages with such touching faith in the doctor from the big town?

In another instance, a more senior doctor serving

in a civil hospital was posted to a rural centre. To keep the job, the doctor obligingly checked in and took charge, only to go off on leave thereafter. The excuse: it is such a small centre, there are no patients. What was not mentioned was the fact that the predecessor had spent all his time in wrangling for a transfer, hence the patients had given up coming to the medical centre at all. The leave was spent on string-pulling to get back. When that did not look like happening, it was a campaign to get as close as possible to home: a small clinic in a village closer to the big city, within commuting distance. But that was not the end of the story. Once that happened, the doctor still reported to the clinic only once a week, to fill in all the necessary registers to show attendance and some semblance of OPD operations; whether the patients were real or fictitious is an open question.

In vain did I reason that perhaps the best use of an opportunity could be made to actually treat the rural folks and draw on the experience to tabulate rural health problems and possible solutions? Neither doctor would have any of it. They just wanted to get out of the rural clinic at the first opportunity, but with what they wanted in hand, in one case a seat for the MS program and in the other, back to the big city. What was most unfortunate was the fact that both doctors were women, both married to doctors, neither of them 'burdened' with motherhood responsibilities or any such thing to hamper professional functioning.

If this is a symptom of the situation, what does it portend for our medical industry's future?

Kowtowing to medical tourists and corporates who can afford those hefty charges, while the poor fall back on *Dadima ke Nuske* (home remedies) and the so-called quacks whom the medical fraternity loves to deride. How many of them have stopped to think that many of those quack systems have survived centuries? Their medical industry is not two hundred years old and is already losing public faith as its costs spiral astronomically and the side effects of their treatments ring in more ailments than those cured.

Is it not perhaps time that the various systems were married to draw out the most effective treatments for different ailments?

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Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

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

Public Morality

1) PDA – Public Display of Affection – has suddenly become an issue, with the police hauling up young couples indulging in open and excessive show of affection outside the privacy of their homes. The argument against PDA is that the offending couples embarrass decent people, that it is an affront to our culture and unless stopped, things may deteriorate further. Open spaces are not meant for indulging in amorous adventures, which should be confined to the private domain. Who else but the police can do the stopping and punishing? The Mumbai police have been zealously guarding public morality and rounding up the Romeos and Juliets to their great consternation. The Sinhadgad rave party raid also proved that our youth are taking too many liberties and offending social mores. Should society merely look on but do nothing?

1) The rising tempo of moral righteousness is disturbing. There is a demand for action against all activities, which offend against notions of decency, be it gambling, drinking, drug consumption, bar dancing or PDA. The moral guardians want the police to stop the rot. There is a danger in depending on the state to guard our morals. As it is, the police have too many powers without adequate checks. Power without accountability, has led to widespread corruption in the police force. Now we want them to haul up harmless young girls and boys because they are a trifle too amorous for our taste. The bar girls are already on the hit list because of the over zealotry of the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister. This is not to condone any misconduct, but to plead that society can merely point out to the offenders that they are out of line and ask them to mind their conduct. There is no need to humiliate them by treating them as criminals. The Thane Police Commissioner has struck the right note by telling his officers that the offenders should be asked to be conscious of the sensibilities of others. There is no need to haul them up to police stations. The State is not the keeper of our morals; the society is. Social responsibilities should not be shifted to a coercive agency like the police. There is serious danger of the treatment being worse than the disease.

Officers and Gentlemen

2) Once there was the fond belief that officers were gentlemen; the words were synonyms. No longer so. Officers who deal with the law are smart enough to find loopholes in the laws to defeat the laws. They may not be gentlemen in the strict sense of the word but they are clever enough not to be caught. Look at the brouhaha over the allegations against the Maharashtra DGP. He is denigrated as DG Property - not DG Police - because of his fondness for and cleverness in acquiring high yield properties, wherever he was posted. Is there a law against buying property? He had listed all his transactions in his annual returns and hid nothing. So, why start an inquisition now?

2) Difficult to believe now, but there was an era when civil servants used to keep their distance from businessmen or others who were likely to be brought before them for official action; civil servants did not want to make it even appear that they were doing a favour to anybody because of their personal relationship. Caesar's wife had to remain above suspicion. C. D. Deshmukh, the then Finance Minister, had asked his lawyer brother not to take up cases connected with the Finance Ministry as it may be construed as breach of propriety. Now officials can be chummy with builders and underworld figures under the plea that they had no way of knowing that these worthies would ever fall foul of the law. The sense of propriety has given way to clever rationalization. The law is impotent to act and their political masters too steeped in amoral dealings to take tough action. Propriety is for the fuddy duddies; cleverness is the operative word now.

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

Nations grown corrupt
Love bondage more than liberty;
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty.

John Milton

From Our Readers

Of Tasleema Nasreen, Muslim Women in Burkha and Khushwant Singh

Even at the age of 92, Khushwant Singh continues to write every week his thought-provoking and iconoclastic column supporting good causes. On February 20 he came out in strong support of the beleaguered Tasleema Nasreen's request to the Government of India to grant her a permit to reside permanently in India and protect her life. The government granted an extension of her visa for a measly six months. After the expiry of the six months where is she to go? She cannot return to Bangladesh where a *fatwa* hangs on her head. She cannot indefinitely reside in Western countries though liberal countries like Sweden and Norway are willing to give her permanent residence. She is a writer in Bengali and she feels at home among Bengali intellectuals and Kolkata is like a heaven to her. Several Bangladeshis who illegally enter India for employment manage to get ration cards and even voting rights. Why not Tasleema?

Recently Tasleema incurred the wrath of Indian Islamic fundamentalists by writing an article in *The Outlook* magazine urging Muslim women to discard the Burkha and burn them. Supporting her, Khushwant Singh wrote in his column: "Segregation of women is a relic of the medieval past and should be discarded in the interests of the Muslim communities... It is assumed that the matter concerns Muslims only. This is not so. It concerns all of us, because Muslims are an integral part of our society".

I have written on this subject in the past calling upon all humanists and human rights activists and this time there is strong support from Khushwant Singh.

M. A. Rane, Advocate, Mumbai

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"Religion, Power and Violence"

I have read the review of the book "Religion, Power and Violence" by Professor S. H. Deshpande. Though I have not read the book I would like to comment on his review. The human being has evolved over billions of years through the principle of evolution. Human culture, politics, ideas have all evolved only in the last 8,000 years. All religions and ideas are evolving. There are many inputs to this evolution. There is nothing rigid; everything is changing. Islam, Christianity and others have many limitations. However, these religions have helped to organise large societies. Modern science and technology inputs – travel, communications, trade are all leading to a unified humanity. It may take a few hundred perhaps even thousands of years. Also all those cultures which cannot survive will die. Hence our effort should be to introduce in our society ingredients which can increase its survival.

B. P. Rastogi, Mumbai.

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Plastic or Paper for *Freedom First*?

I am in total agreement with my co-reader from Bangalore (Mrs. Carolyn Parpia – *ed.*) about the use of plastic envelopes. I receive three magazines in recycled brown paper; seven journals wrapped in available recycled paper including *The Hindu Weekly* and *The Times of India*.

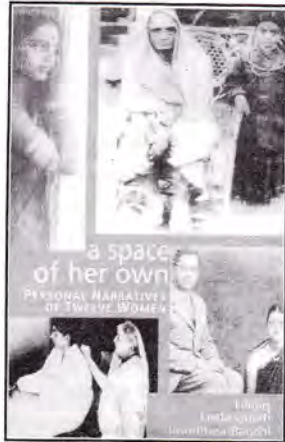
How could a reader of *Freedom First* devalue the contents of such a peerless journal; by saying it would be treated as junk mail simply because it comes in a brown wrapper. I fail to comprehend the argument. Let's be more careful about our environment too.

Jyotibhai Desai, Vedchi, TalukaValod, Dist Surat

It would be best if envelopes from recycled paper are used. If virgin paper is used, we still add to degrading the environment because trees are to be cut to make paper. Plastic will add to polluting the environment, but there are many who reuse the plastic for other purposes like using it to cover books, or packing stuff. Answers to such problems are not easy

Hina Manerikar, Vadodara

Book Review



A SPACE OF HER OWN : PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF TWELVE WOMEN edited by Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi; published by Sage Publications, B/11, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area Mathura Road, Post Bag 7, New Delhi 110 044; Year of Publication : 2005 No. of Pages : 275 Price: Rs.340

Reviewed by Dhiren Narain, Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology (retired), University of Mumbai.

We were delighted when Professor Narain consented to review the book. Normally, due to space constraints, book reviews in Freedom First are restricted to 1200 words but this review is three times as long! If we were to abridge it to fit into the normative size of our reviews such a condensed review would do injustice to the reviewer who considered it important enough to review the book in some detail. We therefore decided to publish this in three parts. This is the third and concluding part.

III

In the gallery of strong women, Vinz Mazumdar's *Pishima* (father's sister) will easily take the prize. Married at 14, she left her husband's home one night (no one knew why), got into the boat of an old Muslim and reached her father's home early morning. She fell asleep on the verandah. The Muslim boatman sat guarding her. When Vina's grandfather opened the door in the morning and found his daughter sleeping on the floor, the Muslim boatman begged him not to send his daughter back nor scold her or beat her. He returned the jewellery that *Pishima* had given him, on the other side of the river, as payment and refused to take any money from *Pishima's* father. To bring her safely to her father was enough of a reward for him and quietly went away. What guts on the part of a young girl and what nobility on the part of a poor Muslim boatman! Incredible.

The father was indulgent but the rest of the family was not. She had lost her mother at 6. She stood firm and defiant – no going back to the husband. Nobody knew what had gone wrong¹. The husband seemed fond of her and came several times to take her back. But she refused to see him. She fought many a battle in the family and always emerged victorious by simply being firm. She championed the cause of female education and helped many girls to receive education, including Vina's mother. Though *Pishima* died in 1932 when Vina was only five, she heard stories about her fantastic personality, from everyone, to establish her as an iconic figure. A wonderfully warm and supportive relationship developed between *Pishima* and Vina's mother. *Pishima's* whole-hearted commitment to female education is absolutely refreshing. Vina's mother was the liberal in the family, no doubt under the liberating influence of *Pishima*. Mother settled Vina's

marriage, objectionable on many traditional grounds.

As against the above, we get many examples of weak, subservient and submissive women, including women being slapped, physically hurt and generally humiliated, in private and in public. Women's minimal or no role in decision-making should then come as no surprise. Generally women considered it an ill-luck to be born as women. "She would always regret the fact that she was born a girl and would say it was a curse to be a woman – first as a daughter, then as a child-bearer and finally as a widow." (p.109). So, even a mother's role was not fulfilling. Contrast this with Nabaneeta's views: "Motherhood was the most magical thing to have happened to me in my entire life ... How marvellous, I thought, that it took only nine months within my womb to make life pass through all those stages of evolution, from fish to man, for which this planet took millions of years." (p.35).

Leela Gulati writes that her mother was sent to her parental home for each of her many confinements, which caused a lot of resentment because it meant expense. "Each pregnancy was thus a long-drawn period of boredom, trauma, humiliation and dependence on her embittered mother". (p.113). "The message was that with a daughter one's responsibility never ended; they only multiplied and gave one pain throughout one's life". (p.114). Her mother went to USA where she lived for 20 years, with one married daughter after another. "She thought Western society was more just towards women". (p.121). She went to West Indies to visit the Gulatis. She "had come a long way from an arranged marriage at the age of 12". (p.121). Though she had many problems of adjustment in USA, she became accustomed to life in the US and found it

difficult to adjust to India on her visits. But she became unwanted in USA in her daughter's home and had to return, unhappily, to Trivandrum where the Gulatis were based. But she had become so used to the sanitized life in USA that she kept falling ill. Within eight months of her return, she died in April 1993. "Saras (mother) was an extraordinary woman, of great personal courage and confidence ... Her good looks masked an indomitable spirit ... Adversity only strengthened her character ... In essence, she shaped the lives of three daughters and a son, and all her grandchildren, making a success of not only her own but all whose lives she touched". (p.123). Jasodhara Bagchi's account of her grandmother, mother, herself and daughters, with father and husband making their suitable entry and exit, is too rich and too insightful for me to say anything worthwhile. There are wonderful sentences, beautiful and expressive, that can be reproduced here, with profit. But I will resist the temptation.

We have encountered wife-bashing earlier in this book. But in Mary Roy's account of her father, we have a monster – a man who would use curtain rods to hit his wife. "Why did he beat her? For no reason at all. He was a wife-beater by nature". (p.237). In Ooty, in the middle of a cold, rainy night, "Father's uncontrollable anger was directed against Mother. He beat her and thrashed her and finally opened the front door and pushed her out into the night". (p.239). After her brother graduated and started earning, he saw his father beating his mother and his 16 year old sister Mary. He held both his hands and calmly said, "No, Never again. Never again are you going to beat your wife or any of your children". (p.238). Taken aback, he obeyed and walked out of the house and out of their lives. "He never came home again". (p.238). Somehow a graduate, both mother ("almost a widow, but not quite") and daughter sat at home in Kottayam, doing nothing. Mary went to Calcutta and lived with her brother. "This was the most miserable period in my life. It was more miserable than being at home". (p.243). "I still fail to understand my inertia". (p.243). "Fortunately, along came Rajib Roy (or was it unfortunately?) who asked me to marry him. He had a very good job in a jute mill and much money to throw around. This impressed me ... So I said yes to his proposal though I loved him not". (p.244). Roy was an alcoholic. 30 years old, with two children, Mary walked out of the marriage. "I hold nothing against my husband. I do not keep in touch with him now, nor he with me. I knew he would not. I knew he was not bothered about the children. I am happy that we do not have any contact. I do not know where he is now or what he is doing". (pp.244-245).

Now we see a miracle, a blossoming, a release of unsuspected strength. With two children, no job, no

income, no support from anywhere, she was desperate – "very often, we had no food for the next day". (p.245). She started a kindergarten and it has kept going up and up. It has existed for 35 years. "It is easily the best school in Kerala and renowned as an excellent school all over India". (p.246). Final word: "What is most important is that I am happy. I am economically independent and I have an important place in this society. I still cannot explain how all this came about. A miracle, no less!". (p.246). Mary has taken up legal battles against the Syrian Christian community right up to the Supreme Court to establish her a daughter's right to inherit her deceased father's property. The battered and beaten daughter of 'God's Own Country' has come a long way. Mary is Arundhati Roy's mother².

I have now read the Introduction which initially intimidated me. I have also read the equally perceptive Afterword: The Colonised Coloniser. I am immensely impressed and deservedly overawed by the high quality of both the writings. I do not need to add or delete. If one were to fully absorb the insights, one will have to write an altogether different kind of review, clearly a task beyond me. These are masterly pieces, written with grace and clarity and are full of penetrating insights. I heartily recommend the twelve narratives and the Introduction and Afterword.

I like to end this review by reading a very moving story by Phaneendranath Renu, author of the famous and popular *Teesri Kasam*, starring Raj Kapoor and Waheeda Rehman in lead roles. The story is called *Samvadiya*, meaning messenger. A poverty-stricken woman, on the brink of starvation, sends a messenger to her affluent brothers that she be allowed to come and live in their household, like a dog who gets enough to eat morning and evening. This is the ultimate degradation and humiliation of a human being when he/she envies the fate of a dog. Coming as the messenger does from sister's *sasural* (husband's home), the messenger is treated lavishly, so lavishly indeed that he does not have the heart to convey the message. On his return journey, he is very uncomfortable at his failed mission – how is he going to tell her that he could not deliver her message? When, finally, he gathers enough courage to tell her, she is relieved that she had not disgraced her husband and brought dishonour to his name. (Concluded)

¹ Is it a case of impotence or perversion? It is very surprising that Vina does not *speculate* on the cause. Can such a drastic step be taken by a very young girl without sufficient cause?

² See the write-up on her, with her photograph in 'People' of *The Asian Age*, 9th April 2006, page 35, entitled: "She is still the mistress of spice". It deals mainly with her legal battles for the inheritance rights of the daughter and not with her earlier life as a young girl and a young wife.

Between Ourselves ...

Mayawati's victory is a very significant development, and could well prove to be a milestone in the country's journey towards genuine democracy which began sixty years ago. Most political parties have been caught in a web of their making – divide and rule. In the last forty years all political parties in the country including the BSP, have been using the caste and religious divide in their pursuit of political power. Mayawati broke away from this strategy, with her new formula for political success: 'Unite and Rule' Unite not parties in the manner of the United Fronts; not the Haryana model of the infamous Samyukta Vidhyak Dal or SVD which pioneered the era of opportunistic politics and which in turn resulted

in the debauching of the party system, but a united front of the peoples irrespective of caste, religion and class. This was her recipe for securing an overall majority in the UP Assembly. This could well mark a turning away from divisive politics which has eroded the quality of our democratic system to the politics of consensus.

How do you, dear reader interpret what has happened in UP. Send us your views (on or before June 10) for this will be our lead story in June. Also to remind you, that the cover story for July issue is India-China relations: China: Friend or Foe?

Editor

Many Voices

As the nation goes from one election to the other, whether it is for parliament, the state legislature or the local body, it appears that criminals, casteists and money bags are gaining ground.

Kuldip Nayar, *Janata*, April 22

Fear shouldn't make you censor your thoughts. If you are to self-censor, then you may as well shut up and never speak in public. No you cannot be afraid.

Salman Rushdie during an interview by Antara Dev Sen,
The Week, February 4

This country is now debating euthanasia. A Supreme Court judge has advocated "hanging from a lamp-post" for certain type of humans, it is now time to apply our minds to painlessly putting down stray dogs.

Dr. A. R. Mookhi, *The Agni Times*, March 19

If India didn't have a finance minister, the growth rate would still have been 8 per cent.

The column 'Rajpath', *The Week*, February 4

We are told that we live in godless times, yet more and more people all over the world are going on pilgrimages

Peter Popham *The Sunday Statesman* 29 April

If the Election Commission allows entertainment (by bar girls) during the campaign, the bar girls should be allowed to perform legitimately too as they attract and retain crowds.

Varsha Kale, president of the Bharatiya Bar Girls Union, *Sunday Hindustan Times*, March 18



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