

Freedom First

The Liberal Position

Return to the Command Economy

I N S I D E

A Princess Remembered ...

"Surrender Policy" for Maoists
formulated by Government of India

A Liberal Policy Position on Higher Education

Are We Heading for a 1962 Repeat?

Women As Victories:
A Politico-Scientific Discourse

'Uttankita'

Rites, Rituals and Festivals

Plus:

*Point Counter Point, Cornucopia,
Book Review, Between Ourselves*



Maharani Gayatri Devi, Jaipur, April 1961

A Princess Remembered ... For the courage of her conviction. We honour Rajmata Gayatri Devi

“If an Indian woman placed in the unfortunate position of the ex-princes and ex-princesses of India, displayed the courage to stand up to the rule of the party in power, and shame the industrialists, merchants, professors, soldiers and many others, who are trembling and hesitating to follow their own convictions, and instead

of bidding for their own freedom, contribute to the power of tyranny, it is meet that we should bow in admiration and homage to this great lady (Maharani Gayatri Devi) who has set such a bright and worthy example. God bless her.”

C. Rajagopalachari,
“Alongside the Rani of Jhansi”,
Swarajya, February 4, 1961

“Why I have Joined the Swatantra Party”

April 14 (1961), saw an upsurge such as Jaipur has not witnessed in living memory. Around 60,000 people crowded Rambla Grounds to hear Maharani Gayatri Devi make her political debut. All Jaipur seemed to be there. Several thousand Rajasthani women lent colour to the scene. The Maharani was repeatedly applauded as she spoke.

Shri Laxmansingh of Dungarpur President of the Party in Rajasthan and Mr. M. R. Masani, General Secretary of the Party welcomed the Maharani into the ranks of the Party.

All the speeches were in Hindi. This is what the Maharani said in her very first speech as a member of the Swatantra Party:

“People are always asking me why I have joined the Swatantra Party. I would like to assure you that it was after a lot of thought that I have decided to join this Party. It is impossible for me to see what is happening in this country and especially in Jaipur to remain silent. People feel dissatisfied and they feel the situation is hopeless. But what is the use of talking? One must try hard to remove the cause of dissatisfaction.

“Two years ago when I returned from Europe, I was extremely upset to see the old historic city of Jaipur was being destroyed. I spoke to the Chairman of the Municipality and also to the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, about this, because to my mind, it was ridiculous to break the old walls of Jaipur city and put up a bazaar in its place. There is ample room for markets in the new residential areas of the city. Jaipur city is an example of Indian cul-

ture and architecture and on all accounts it is our duty to preserve it. When my effort to do so was futile, I turned to our Prime Minister Shri Nehruji for help. My appeal to him was not in vain and the destruction of Jaipur was stopped. For this I shall remain grateful to him.

“The whole country is dissatisfied, every class of person whether he be an industrialist or a tradesman, an agriculturist or a labourer, a government employee or a craftsman - the people are unhappy.

“People are being crushed under a burden of taxes. The articles of daily necessities have become extremely expensive. The price of cloth and food is rising steadily. Education, medical attention and justice are not only expensive but out of reach of most people.

“With the introduction of cooperative fanning, the agriculturist stands to lose his land. There are efforts to nationalise big factories and mills when the Government has not the means to run them. Corruption is on the rise. The veteran and revered leader Rajaji tried several times to point out the right road to the Congress. But when they would not listen to his Counsel he formed a new party which is the Swatantra Party. People all over the country welcome it because they saw in it new hope and enthusiasm. I too saw in it all the good qualities which were once those of the Congress Party. That is why I joined the Party. Why is all this controversy over Maharajas and Jagirdars? It is something incomprehensible. The Indian Princes always maintained the arts and cultures of India in their States. They have fought many a battle for this

Cont'd. on page 18

Return to the Command Economy

Stray Thoughts after the Union Budget 2009-10

D. R. Pendse

“Every year”, writes the author “I catch Budget fever. I feel no relief until some viruses are drained out and reduced to writing” and in this article he deals with issues relating to Political Funding, Fiscal Deficit, economic reforms and the economic survey.

Political Funding

In the Finance Minister’s speech, (Paragraph 98) he proposes that donations to electoral trusts shall be allowed a 100% deduction in the income of the donor.

Two cheers. This will bring some transparency to the funding of political parties.

Why not three cheers?

It was Gandhiji’s dream that serving in the Lok Sabha will be used as mode of service to the nation. Gandhiji hoped that Indian elections would give equal opportunity to all citizens to thus serve the country. He therefore favoured a very low amount as the maximum that a candidate should be allowed to spend on his election. Alas, his dream is shattered. Elections have become a capital intensive industry. So, first our apologies to the father of the nation that we have not lived up to his hope; and there is no chance of our doing so in future.

Secondly, the election industry, with present laws and rules allows only the dishonest to run this industry. To permit the honest also to participate, [a]the expenditure limit has to be scrapped altogether and [b] donations have to be incentivised. The F.M.’s proposal goes some way to meet [b] above.

It will be distinctly superior to permit donations as a 100 % tax credit; not just income credit, as proposed. In other words, if an assessee donates, say, Rs.5 Lakhs, the whole amount should be treated as tax paid by him and his total tax liability otherwise should be reduced to the full extent of Rs.5 Lakhs. Such donations will thus amount to state funding of elections [an eminent idea already practiced in some countries, but only discussed to boredom in India]; and, in addition, will give a choice to the donor to select his donee. Cynics will raise questions to every answer. I have answers to most of them; but that is not the main subject today.

The weakest part of the proposal is the definition of electoral trusts and, even worse, the need for approval

of the CBDT! Why should the deduction not apply to donations to any recognized political party directly, and without anybody having to see the face of CBDT?

Returning to Gandhiji’s dream of equal opportunity to all citizens, there is still a way out: Have a random draw. [Ref: S. Sabhlok, ‘Our Politicians have no option but to be Corrupt.’ *Freedom First*, June 2009.]. Nandan Nilkeni’s Unique Identification Cards would be in place by that time. Even a basic *Excel* programme will draw a perfectly random list of 544 eligible Indian nationals who could be our representatives in the Lok Sabha. Looks laughable, absurd? Think again. I for one have such enormous confidence in the talents and honesty of my people at large, and I am so much dismayed at what we have to accept after spending thousands of crores of rupees on elections, that I suspect a random draw will not throw up anything much worse. In all probability, it may produce a distinctly better Lok Sabha. True, some of the honest, talented citizens as well as those proud of their own current pursuits, if thrown up by the random draw may decline the offer to be a Lok Sabha member. (Remember, when a magazine asked JRD Tata, what was the first thing he would do if he were elected the Prime Minister, he quipped, ‘I will commit suicide.’) We then keep on drawing more names at random until we touch the magic 544!

Fiscal Deficit

‘Fiscal deficit’, like ‘poverty removal’ and ‘inclusive growth,’ is on the verge of degenerating into a seminar subject in 5-star hotels. So, I was disappointed, but not really surprised to see the casual manner in which this was treated in the Budget. Letting government expenditure rise sharply at the drop of a hat, without any concern for sustainable sources for requisite revenue is an addiction and so very enticing politically.

On the one hand we insist that we have nothing like a recession [i.e., ‘a decline of GDP in at least two consecutive quarters’]. At the worst, we have a slowdown in our sharply rising GDP growth rate of recent years. Yet,

in size, in urgency, timing and pattern, the series of our fiscal stimuli [i.e., the shopping list for stepping up government expenditure largesse] must match that offered in countries in the midst of the worst crisis they faced in over 50 years.

Naturally, for 2009-10, this will result into an unprecedented fiscal deficit of 6.8 % of GDP [+ States', +subsidies, + + etc]; far larger than the figure that drove us to the feet of IMF in 1991. Yet, we have one single sentence in the speech of 139 paragraphs: 'This level of deficit is a matter of concern and Government will address this issue in right earnest to come back to the path of fiscal consolidation at the earliest.'

Many citizens declined to fall to this lullaby. So the F.M. later came with an reassurance that he had, in fact, already given deep thought to this matter and had quantified Government's resolve, which was open for inspection on one of the many pages in one of the many Budget documents, titled 'Medium Term Fiscal policy Statement.' A due search surely shows up the figures 5.5 and 4.2 as projections of Fiscal deficit for 2010-11 and 2011-12 respectively.

It is however difficult to ignore the perspective [a] that Government has, in one of its many weak moments, enacted the celebrated Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management Act [FRBM Act]; and [b] that, with rare exceptions, Governments have unashamedly broken it year after year.

When we individuals break a law, we are sent to prison. [Exceptions apart!] But the beauty of this law is that whenever Government breaks this law, [i.e., every year], as a punishment those, if anybody, responsible, have only to file notes of explanation. 'The Macro Economic Framework' and the 'Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement' are two of these notes. They are creatures of the breach of the FRBM Act. As a ritual, these notes assure future corrective action in right earnest, and, soon after the Budget is presented, officials promptly start preparing the next year's notes!

Sharp increases in government expenditure year after year and consequently in fiscal deficits are so inviting. Political vote banks and powerful vested interests thrive on them. But, sure enough, it is a one way street to bankruptcy and humiliation. We in India know all that.

On the FRBM Act: [i] Bad behavior can, perhaps, be controlled by a law. But good behavior cannot be ordered by law. I reiterate that this Act should never have been enacted. We knew it will be broken. Such laws only

perpetuate disrespect for laws. [ii] The Act is dead for all practical purposes. There is no point and no need to giving it a reincarnation as FRBM II. It is best rescinded forthwith.

My prognosis for the next five years: [1] Government expenditure has never been reduced. It will continue to rise. [2] Government revenue will never catch up. So, large fiscal deficits have come to stay once again. They will certainly exceed projections in documents, namely, 5.5% and 4.2 % in 10-11 and 11-12 respectively.

I will not change this view even if there is shown to be an improvement in a particular year. For, this will only herald a sharper damage in the following year.

I am amply convinced that perhaps it is in my country's *Kundali* [horoscope] that when economic problems emerge on the horizon and are relatively more manageable, we do not nip them in the bud, but let them grow into monsters. Then we wake up and take far more drastic, more painful and more prolonged measures. For, these alone can retrieve us from that point. As Johnson put it so well in 1777 in one of his letters to Boswell, "*Depend upon it, Sir: When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.*"

It is yet a bit longer than a fortnight.

Reforms and the Budget

One view is that the F.M.'s Budget speech is the most important single document that highlights the forthcoming economic policies and approach of the Government. There is nothing about reforms in the speech. It was thus a great disappointment to observers [particularly to the nosy stock market people].

Another post-budget view is that the budget is not everything. It is simply a statement of accounts for the Government. Major policies, for example regarding reforms, will of course come at the right time later. So, the disappointment is unwarranted.

But, if so, the Finance Minister has gone out of his way in his speech to shower lavish praise on Indira Gandhi's 40-year old decision on bank nationalization. He said:

"Never before Indira Gandhi's bold decision to nationalise our banking system exactly 40 years ago - on 14th July 1969 - appeared as wise and visionary as it has over the past few months. Her approach continues to be our inspiration even as

we introduce competition and new technology in this sector.” [Para 38].

I will not go here into the merits of bank nationalisation. But there are[alas or bravo?] many who believe [a] that bank nationalization was the curtain-raiser of the disastrous 20-year plus era of the license permit raj and the command economy that pushed India back, and therefore [b] that reforms were all about undoing the damage done then. But here we have our finance minister who is happy to declare where his heart really is and where his inspiration really comes from; never mind if dutifully he has to go on introducing reforms [competition, new technology and all that] for public consumption. This finance minister is in no danger of *TIME* magazine placing him on their cover as the ‘World’s Best Reformer’.

Similarly, summarizing Budget estimates, the F.M went out of his way to announce in Parliament that during 2009-10 the total expenditure is estimated to be Rs.10,20,838 crores; and that for the first time the expenditure figure will exceed Rs. ten lakh crores , as compared to some [pitifully?] small amount decades ago. My TV did not show an apologetic finance minister, in mourning that expenditure was going out of hand and needed to be checked. It showed a proud F.M., celebrating an achievement of big government, bigger and bigger year after year.

Worldly wise people however could not be expected to celebrate such signals of a return journey. On policy platforms as well as in the markets they will hope for better in the future. The stock markets will surely improve one day. But it will be another story; not a result of their waking up to something they had missed altogether. The Budget scar in round one will not be erased.

Economic Survey

This year the usual three-day life of the Economic Survey was more eventful. As usual any policy prescriptions [PPs] that the Survey contained were researched with all the media-hype, to discover clues about the likely shape of the Budget that was to follow within three days. Most glancers of the Survey found long long lists of PPs needed, lists so unparalleled that some ‘experts’ declared that the Survey authors were talking through their hat; the PPs were extravagant and not practical at all, and all that.

Not for the first time again, the budget that followed was found to be at variance with the PPs in the Survey. Not only the Budget speech was without a word about reforms, the finance minister’s approach, as partly seen above, revived for many the chilling memories of the

forgettable decades of the command economy . As usual again, the Survey was soon forgotten and its copies were, I guess, dispatched to adorn the reference libraries of government organizations.

Having been an economist of sorts, I cannot resist a few observations:

- [1] This is an official GoI document; is published, usually two or three days in advance of the Union Budget. As explained, during this interval, the Survey is greatly in demand. Hardly anybody actually *reads* the whole of this bulky, rather dated and [this year was a pleasant exception] drab document. I will be surprised if more than one hundred individuals can truthfully claim to have read the Survey during this interval. As my magnifying glasses were missing then, I myself could read only a few portions from its online edition and from the print media reports.
- [2] The response to the Survey this year has been harsh. This, I take it, is a document by economists. A true economist should have the courage to say whatever he, after full study, considers it to be in the best interest of the country. He is not there to win any popularity contest, and therefore must not be bogged down by doubts about the political acceptability of his considered views. People like Milton Friedman, and my own respected guides like J.R.D and Sumant Moolgaokar invariably supported me, and in fact demanded this from me. An economist’s writing should wake up society to see the valley between what is really good for the country and what the politicians are feeding the country with. I was therefore gravely distressed to see, particularly reputed *economic* newspapers criticising the Survey not because any of its proposals were wrong on merits but because it is extravagant and not practical. Practical, my foot!
- [3] For its economist authors the Survey must have been at once suffocating and pleasing. Suffocating, [a] because, ignoring the lip service, no body examined their views on merits, let alone compliment them for their selfless effort; and [b] because their hard work is so quickly forgotten. Pleasing, because the finance minister and the political bosses in general let them publish views so far removed from their own cherished intentions.
- [4] One reason why the P.P.s in the Survey have come to such a sharp focus this time could be the manner in which they are presented. Most of the chapters discuss the developments in 2008-09 in a particular subject, and then contain ‘boxes’ which in summary

form gives lists of reforms called for in that subject-matter. For example, chapter 2 is about 'Challenges, Policy Responses & Medium term Prospects'. There are at least five boxes [2.3 to 2.7]. Box 2.3, e.g., gives a list of 13 PPs [mostly one line for each] relating to "Fiscal Sustainability & Tax Simplification." The total number of PPs in these five boxes within this chapter is well over 50. A quick glance at these forbidding lists was enough for 'experts' to brand the PPs as extravagant, sweeping and all that. There was hardly any critical assessment on merits of any of these PPs. Economic Reforms is far too important and far too vast a subject to be cluttered up into a number of lists of one-liners in a relatively dull document. This was most unfortunate because almost each of these one-liners is a pearl of wisdom.

- [5] Unfortunately, the PPs are valuable pearls only individually. The seductive necklace is missing. As a group, the PPs fail to lure the political class as a whole, much less the public sentiment at large, in favour of the process of the unfinished reforms agenda. Not only many more pearls of diversified properties are needed, we need skilled and dedicated craftsmen to transform these into an irresistible necklace [and other forms of jewellery] that the people at large will yearn to possess and will coerce their political leaders to acquire for them. As Abraham Lincoln said, *"With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes and pronounces decisions. For, he makes statutes or decisions possible or impossible to be executed."*
- [6] As in some other countries, we too need a couple of highest quality public policy think-tanks to thus mould public sentiment. Even a cursory perusal of the long list of PPs scattered all over the Economic Survey was adequate to re-convince me that such a think-tank will already have its work cut out for it for at least two years. Until then reforms may keep on coming, but in small change, mostly in jerks and probably in response to external shocks, not from within.
- [7] The Economic Survey should be best discontinued. Not because it is too bad; but because it is too good. It is a waste of talent and hard work. It is a public display of utter disrespect year after year to its PPs. The major portion of its contents, in terms of pages, is by way of a review of developments in the previous year. There is nothing great about it; the same work is done at least equally competently by some others, e.g. by the RBI's Currency and Finance Report or by its Annual Report. The Economic Survey merely duplicates it, and not very sensationally either.

Tailpiece: Kautilya

Obviously, the finance minister has enormous respect for Kautilya. [Who does not?] He quotes Kautilya twice and insists that he is acting as per the advice of Kautilya.

After one quotation [Para 32], the F.M. says 'I intend to take Kautilya's advice and return to the FRBM target for fiscal deficit at the earliest..'

The F.M. yields to the temptation of re-visiting Kautilya once again just *"before I turn to my tax proposals"* [Para 78]. 'Collect revenue as it becomes due. Avoid taking wealth that is not due because that will make people angry.' He recalls Kautilya's message, which I am sure, his tax proposals translate into action.

Frankly, in either case, this is all less than clear to me. But that does not really matter, if the finance minister is really convinced that Kautilya would have patted his back.

But I am a Kautilya fan too. I remember another of his messages: 'If you place a drop of honey on the tip of the tongue of a person, it is impossible that he will not suck it in. Similarly, if the king hands over the keys of his treasury to a watchman, it is impossible that he will not help himself at all.' Alas, Kautilya did not explain what would happen if barrels of honey are flowing down the streets all over; nor, if it made any difference to the watchman if the treasury is full of his own or borrowed or printed wealth.

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If the Budget had been a good one, the hon. Minister could have expected my fullest support but, unfortunately, I think the view taken by business and industry is a very superficial and short-sighted one. It reminds me of Sir Robert Walpole saying earlier when the people of London were jubilating: "They are ringing the bells now, but they will be wringing their hands soon." The day is not far when the same gentlemen who have rushed forward to welcome this Budget are going to get second thoughts."

Minoo Masani, while initiating the debate on the General Budget in the Lok Sabha on March 8, 1968

“Surrender Policy” for Maoists

Formulated by Government of India

V. Balachandran

A “dream project” which will solve the Maoist/ Naxalite insurgency problem has been unveiled in Delhi. “A Maoist who surrenders shall get a three year fixed deposit of Rs3 lakhs, and in addition to this, Rs.2,500 will be paid every month to the Maoist”, says a Union Home Ministry spokesman.

A “dream project” which will solve the Maoist/ Naxalite insurgency problem has been unveiled in Delhi. “A Maoist who surrenders shall get a three year fixed deposit of Rs3 lakhs, and in addition to this, Rs.2,500 will be paid every month to the Maoist”, says a Union Home Ministry spokesman. This is based on an internal assessment that Naxalites are mostly indulging in criminal activities and hence there is possibility of weaning them away from the world of crime if adequate financial incentives are given.

Having studied the problem of Maoist movement in India I am amazed at this conclusion. It totally lacks depth and this new policy will fail miserably. Very few of the Maoists are conducting their operations for criminal gains. Most of their activities are concerted, ideologically based operations which no doubt assume the colour of crimes against the State. It is amazing that the Government of India is unaware of this fact.

I had visited Hyderabad in 2007 to have in depth discussions with some very knowledgeable persons *and* I reproduce below their conclusions which I had summarized. One of them was part of the aborted Naxalite dialogue with TDP and Congress governments. He had then told me then that the Maoist movement in West Bengal was growing. I did not believe him since I was under the impression that the CPM government in West Bengal had killed that movement. But now it is all very clear. West Bengal has failed miserably to maintain law & order in the Lalgur area:

1. Social inequalities, widening gulf between the rich and the poor, exploitation by the higher castes (Reddys, Velmas, Brahmins, Baniyas etc) in Andhra Pradesh and more importantly the loss of self respect by the downtrodden helped in establishing this movement as Peoples’ War Group (PWG) in the 1960s by Kondappally Seetharamiah, a school teacher. *Violence was practiced as tactic to motivate and encourage the lower cadres.* The first such brutal murder of an exploitative landlord was in 1978 when one Pitambar Rao was killed publicly. Such killings came to have social acceptance among the lower classes of society. Along with this Seetaramiah sent young students

to the forests to indoctrinate the tribals and agriculturists. They used to look after the needs of these segments like education, conducting medical camps during epidemics etc while governments hardly did anything. Gradually these people started accepting the PWG’s parallel government which was free from corruption.

2. Naxalite philosophy runs into three stages: First is the “Organizational Phase” when overt activities will be pursued to gain influence. They will work with the villagers & spread influence. At this stage violence is less but organization is more. This is the stage when they take up popular causes as now seen in several states like West Bengal (Nandigram and other SEZs), Kerala, Delhi *et al* through front organizations. In this stage the “State” is more powerful than Naxalites. During this stage they will also develop grass root contact to migrate into the second stage. Kondappally Seetharamiah had sent 9 volunteers thirty years ago to Dandakaranya (DK) to spread Naxalite philosophy. The result is now seen in this area which straddles Chhattisgarh, parts of Madhya Pradesh & Maharashtra where a Naxal parallel government is functioning. The second stage is identifying “Guerilla Zones” where they will undertake punitive strikes. At this stage State and Naxalites are equal in power. The third & final stage is “Peoples’ Mobile War” where they try to overrun weak states as we see in several pockets of states now. They also undertake killing of political leadership to create a vacuum so that they could take over the leadership as they tried in 2004 in Andhra Pradesh where they made systematic attempts to eliminate Telugu Desam Party district leadership.

3. All the present top leaders of the Maoist movement were student leaders/volunteers in 1977-80 who used to live with villagers/tribals *making a data base of atrocities.* They used to follow a system of 1+2 (One leader and two followers) while interacting with the affected villagers. What we see today as parallel government in these areas is the result of these efforts twenty years ago. *Government neglected these trends until it became a gigantic problem.* Of course the seeds of the movement date back to the Telengana armed resistance (1946-1951) where

bonded labour and hill tribes revolted against the landlords under the Nizam rule. Village squads numbering 10,000 members were formed while the guerilla forces were nearly 2,000. It was said that nearly 3,000 villages were “freed” from Nizam’s rule. All the present leadership had to do was to reignite the fire since exploitation had not changed even after Independence. *It is difficult to eradicate Naxal movement as long as the reasons exist. It can only be contained by imaginative measures.* Naxalites are also successful in re-inventing themselves and taking up new causes which automatically follow from what they call “LPG”: Liberalized, Privatized & Globalised Society. They are now taking up popular issues like Displacement, Caste equations, Retail business etc. They are also thinking of having a “Pan-Asia Maoist Group” for better coordination among the likeminded.

4. It is often asked why people join this movement despite the hardship of life of living in jungles and constantly facing threats from the police. My Hyderabad interlocutors told me that the life of common people in Indian villages is so miserable that they have no hope of any solution to their problems, whether through exploitation by landlords or atrocities by upper classes. There is always a “disconnect” between the administration and the masses. They have no faith in the bureaucracy which keeps the public away. The Naxalite parallel government is much more effective and honest. *One of the welcome developments in rural India is the respect for the downtrodden by upper classes after the Naxalite phenomenon.*

5. People keep asking why Indian Maoists cannot abjure violence like the Nepali Maoists and come on to the parliamentary path. They seem to be ignorant of the differences between the two movements. The Nepali stream wanted abolition of Monarchy and establishment of multi-party democracy which they have nearly achieved. Nepalese Maoists are more like the Indian Communists. On the other hand the aim of Indian Maoists is overthrowing the present “semi-colonial & semi-feudal” government which increasingly resorts to violence to maintain their hold over the society. *Peoples’ March*, the mouth piece of Indian Maoists in their October 2007 issue had published an interview with Maoist spokesman (*nom-de-plume*: Azad) which clearly reveals the differences between the Indian Maoists and their Nepali counterparts over the constitutional approach being undertaken by the latter. Indian Maoists are like the “Anarchist” ideologues of Europe with the difference that European anarchists could not practice what they preached but Indian Maoists had succeeded in putting in practice a smooth revenue collection agency, administrative framework and offensive military capability like the armed forces. Top Maoist leadership thinks that Indian masses are with them and it is only a

question of time before they capture power. *They have no plans on what to do after they “Take over power” They talk very clearly and seem to be “Possessed” over this conviction. The top leadership is dedicated but they do not seem to know that some lower cadres are doing extortion for personal gains.* In any case for villagers it is the local militant who matters. It is not true that Maoists are getting foreign funds. In fact there is no need for it since big factories located in the tribal belt or gas pipelines pay huge amounts to Maoists.

6. *A case study of a tribal village named Gangapur in Adilabad district which was a hotbed of Naxalite activities will indicate how Naxalite activities can be checked by genuine development.* This village used to depend upon the market in Kadam, 40 kms away. The village itself was located 16 kms away from the main road. The tribals used to trek all the way around a hill to sell their paddy or forest produce. Very often the money lenders or traders used to make them trek again to collect the payment for their produce. The village school was unmanned since no teacher was ready to work in that remote place. *This exploitative situation was the breeding ground for Naxalites until an innovative police officer named Mahesh Bhagwat decided to study the situation by meeting the villagers.* All of them told him that only a road connecting their village with the main road which will help in marketing their produce will solve all their problems. Bhagwat used all his influence to get a road constructed in 2004. The local Member of Parliament for two terms (Venugopal Chari) had not thought of this at all. Hence when he came to attend the opening ceremony of the road he was ridiculed by the public. Now the villagers are able to bypass Kadam and sell their produce to other markets. Since this is located on the Maharashtra State border, they are even able to sell cotton at a higher price. In fact wholesale Maharashtra traders are sending their trucks to Gangapur to collect the produce. Teachers have started coming to their school. *The net effect is that Naxalites have “vanished”.* There are thousands of such villages which need attention like Gangapur. *One innovative police officer was able to remove Naxal hold without firing a single shot.* This is in glaring contrast to what is being done by successive governments who are undertaking development only to serve the rich. A glaring case is the effort of Chandra Babu Naidu, former Chief Minister in building a Formula One race track ignoring other concerns. *Other police officers are not interested in doing this type of work since they earn rewards for killing Naxalites: One from the Government and second from traders who pay them informally.*

(Cont’d. on page 22)

Point Counter Point

(A View from Abroad)

Ashok Karnik

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

AFPAK POLICY

1) The newly touted US policy in the South Asia region is full of uncertainties and treacherous implications for India. Nobody is spelling out the policy because nobody is sure where it is headed. US administration seems to be testing the grounds for minefields while India is in a horrible position of not being able to react to it. Obviously, India cannot comment on what is undecided. However, certain outlines are emerging which are not very auspicious for India:

- a) Pakistan has convinced the US that the present democratic set up in Pakistan needs to be strengthened through substantial aid.
- b) The Pak army can be depended on to destroy/neutralise Al Qaeda.
- c) India is a bigger threat to Pakistan than Al Qaeda/Taliban and India should make concessions to Pakistan.
- d) The solution to the Afghan problem lies in getting 'good' Taliban to join the Government and Pakistan can play the role of honest broker.

"..They (Pakistan) run and operate anti-Indian violence in every possible town and city of India. It's in India's long term interest to support the struggle of Balochis who are not anti-Indian nor religious fanatics.

"...what the ISI aimed to achieve in India. He (ISI Chief) replied: "Our aim is to weaken India from within and we can do it."

G. Pathasarathy, in Deccan Chronicle, 29 June 2009

1) There are clear signs that the parameters listed alongside are becoming more and more acceptable to US administration. Richard Hallbrooke, President Obama's Special Envoy for South Asia has categorically stated that the US Administration from President downwards is clear that Taliban have to play a role in Afghanistan's democratic process provided they surrender arms. Hillary Clinton has endorsed this view while at the same time making suitable noises about Indo-US friendship. Shorn of diplomatic subterfuge, this means that the US wants to get out of Afghanistan by leaving it to the Taliban and non-Taliban to sort out the mess. Pakistan has already announced its mid-wifery role by declaring that Taliban leaders will be meeting US diplomats. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman, US Jt. Chief of Staff, has conceded that Pak army considers India as a major threat. Besides, the US Congress has passed a bill sanctioning 1.57 bn dollars this year to Pakistan to fight terrorism, though with some riders. It is clear that Pakistan is ensuring a major role for itself in Afghanistan after the US retreats. This would be contrary to what India is trying to achieve in Afghanistan since the eviction of Taliban. It is not as if the US is prepared to jeopardize Indo-US relations. It has signed several agreements with India during Clinton's visit. On the other hand, the US has to ensure Pakistan's survival and its own extrication from Afghanistan. It hopes that India would accommodate US needs. Conversely, India cannot disregard Pakistan's unreliability just to please the US. The ramifications of US foreign policy in South Asia will become clear after Secretary Clinton visits Pakistan and tries to balance her agreements in India with concessions to Pakistan.

NYT'S CONDESCENSION

2) The New York Times, which is never India-friendly, adopted a patronizing tone in its editorial (July 18) on Secretary Clinton's visit to India. It was full of innuendos and gratuitous advice of a headmaster admonishing a recalcitrant student. Some gems are worth reproducing just to understand how the US press misreads the Indian heartbeat:

2) Secretary Clinton showed more empathy and her visit proved fairly successful as she avoided areas of discord and concentrated on what could be achieved jointly. NYT, on the other hand, fails to appreciate that India has been forced into an undeclared war by a duplicitous Pakistan. A country which declared war on terror - and rightly so - because of 9/11 in which it suffered over

It states *inter alia*, “The Bush administration and Congress rewrote American and international rules to allow India – a longtime nuclear scofflaw – to buy fuel and technology for its civilian nuclear program. – it is time for India to take more responsibility internationally. It needs to do more to revive the world trade talks it helped torpedo last year. And it needs to do a lot more to constrain its arms race with Pakistan and global proliferation. India also needs to help allay Pakistan’s fears. Resolving tensions over Kashmir – their biggest flashpoint – is not possible while Pakistan is battling the Taliban. President Obama and Secretary Clinton now have a responsibility to do what President George W. Bush never did: push India to stop producing more weapons. India wants to be seen as a major world power. For that to happen, it will have to drop its pretensions to nonalignment and stake out strong and constructive positions. President Obama and Mrs. Clinton say they consider India a vital partner in building a stable world. Now they have to encourage India to behave like one.”

3,000 casualties - should easily understand the trauma of a country which has suffered over 90,000 casualties due to terrorism. If nothing, it should stop asking India to normalize relations with Pakistan. NYT need not pontificate. Period. The irony of Clinton’s visit is that the Indian opposition treated it as India’s surrender before the US (because of End User Monitoring - EUM) and the US opposition treated it as Obama administration’s failure to achieve anything in India (because of failure on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Emission Control).

A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation. She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilising the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity.”

Mahatma Gandhi, Harijan, September 23, 1939

NRIS’ PERSPECTIVE

3) NRIs are taking interest in developments back home as never before. They want to glorify their homeland as they deal with their colleagues abroad. Gone are the days when everything back home was considered backward and demeaning; yes, there are things which need overhaul but there are many things to be proud of. They are surprised that the media in India plays down every little achievement that the country makes. They quote ex-President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam’s lament why India is reluctant to acknowledge its achievements: it forgets that it is the highest milk producer in the world, second highest wheat and rice producer, the first in remote sensing satellite technology, etc. Why do we read only of murders and rapes on our front pages? A case in point is the opening of the Bandra-Worli sea link; yes, it took too long, it overshot its budget, it is creating bottlenecks at the Worli end etc. The point is that it has been built; we did it. It should be a historic land mark for Mumbai despite its shortcomings, like the Mumbai-Pune Expressway is. As the ex-President exhorts, we have to learn to be proud of ourselves.

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

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

Why Have We Forgotten Kargil?

The tenth anniversary of Kargil *Diwas* on 26 July passed without much fanfare. Not much effort was made to mark the occasion ... Why has such unparalleled bravery been forgotten by our countrymen within the span of a mere decade? Have our nationalistic feelings atrophied to such an extent that we have no time to remember the sacrifices made by our brave young soldiers and airmen, people who fought valiantly to restore the sanctity and pride of the motherland? Is it the Government, which needs to be reminded to take the lead on such occasions, or the military, or is it the people? The country needs to honour its soldiers and the earlier it is done, the better it is for the security, growth and progress of our nation.

Lt.Gen. Vijay Oberoi (retd.) Excerpted from his article Why Have We Forgotten Kargil?
Visit <http://www.covertmagazine.com/essay.htm>

A Liberal Policy Position on Higher Education

Sanjeev Sabhlok

Liberals generally agree that government has little or no role in matters beyond the three core functions of defence, police and justice. However, most liberals will allow a role for government in ensuring infrastructure and reasonable equal opportunity to the minimal extent necessary to achieve these objectives.

Liberals generally agree that government has little or no role in matters beyond the three core functions of defence, police and justice. However, most liberals will allow a role for government in ensuring infrastructure and reasonable equal opportunity to the minimal extent necessary to achieve these objectives. If we agree that these core areas establish boundaries for the government, then there can be no role for government in higher education, apart from regulating the sector to prevent fraud.

The liberal believes that there are also no natural rights to *higher* education, just as no one can demand that every tennis player should be given an 'equal opportunity' to play in the Wimbledon. The cream of society is found in tertiary education institutions. Students attending these institutions will, on average, become wealthier than the average taxpayer. Subsidising them would amount to consciously *increasing* social inequality, noting that socialists who preach equality are somehow able to justify huge government expenditure in elite institutions.

Privatisation, with Good Regulation

The government must exit higher education completely. Institutes of higher education (including vocational) owned by government should be sold off on the pattern of school privatisation discussed in the July 2009 issue of *Freedom First*, and converted into for-profit corporations with their shares traded on the stock market. Tax revenues thus saved can be deployed in improving law and order and providing good school education: areas which desperately need strengthening.

But selling off IITs, IIMs, medical colleges and other government-owned tertiary institutes does not mean deregulation. Apart from accreditation to prevent fraud, the government must take steps to assure standards (but not set them – a task to be left to the sector to deal with). In such a model, accredited tertiary education institutions would have full operational independence, with the ability to set their own salary and scholarship structures to attract distinguished academics and talented students.

Also, they would set their own fees and determine the type, quality and mix of courses to offer. As a result, only that much higher education will be provided as the market needs and is willing to bear.

What About Meritorious Poor Students?

The issue of funding poor, meritorious students to attend higher education institutions can be easily resolved by a model built on the pattern of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in Australia (noting that HECS has imperfections that will need to be overcome). Under this model, any Indian citizen admitted to an accredited higher education institution could apply for and get a low interest loan from the government for the fees and cost of living, including books and equipment. This low interest rate loan would be repayable over, say, 15 years. Repayment would be through the income tax system after the student concerned gets a job and starts earning an amount greater than, say, three times the poverty line. As a result, all meritorious students would be readily enabled to pursue higher education. The management of this system can be outsourced to the private sector and private competition in the loans market can be encouraged, ultimately allowing the government to exit this area completely.

Preventing Non-repayment of Loans

What if upon completing their studies some students leave India permanently, thus not repaying their loans? (In a way this has already happened in a big way with hundreds of thousands of engineering and medical students having left India). The way out of serious drain of taxpayer resources would be two fold:

One, agreements could be made with countries with similar schemes to ensure that these educational loans are repaid to India. Second, and at the least, a system to monitor departing students can be established whereby students leaving India even temporarily would need to furnish a bank guarantee equivalent to the amount of their outstanding loan plus the present value of costs incurred by taxpayers on their school education. Such a bank

guarantee would be forfeited should they fail to return within the stipulated time. Students not carrying proof of such a guarantee would be turned back at the immigration check. (Of course, this will require linking the loan system with the tax and immigration systems through a well-organised national ID system and database.)

Raising Funds for These Loans

The government can raise funds for these loans from the market. Prudent investors and banks will readily invest in securities backed by tax-system repayments from tertiary educated workers, since most tertiary-educated workers will earn well and be readily able to repay their loans. A rolling debt model can be followed for this purpose, to make the scheme self-sustaining.

For example, government-guaranteed bonds can be issued for the amount of student loans expected to be made in a given year. These bonds can then be retired after ten years using repayments from students most of whom would have by then started working. Not all bond repayments will be met from student loan repayments, given potential mismatches of timing between student earnings and the redemption of the bonds, as well as defaults. Some fine-tuning of the loan cycles could therefore be organised. In addition, the residual costs of administering this programme including the difference in interest costs between the effective rate of bonds and the Bank rate and a write-off for defaults will need to be charged to the taxpayer, thus creating a (small) subsidy for higher education. This subsidy can be potentially be justified as an unavoidable cost for funding the meritorious poor. It can also be argued – by those who take a utilitarian approach and believe that higher education generates positive externalities – that higher education facilitates innovation. But these arguments are highly problematic and the government should endeavour to eliminate this subsidy as soon as practicable.

Objections to Such a System

Would this system lead to astronomical fee levels? No, because of competition in the sector. Students will prefer quality education at the lowest possible cost, thus forcing the fees down. Even the best universities will need to attract high quality students to retain their reputation, and they will have to bid for them through discounts.

Will the liberal arts be ousted from the teaching agenda by the free market? Not really. Good private sector corporations recognize the commercial value of a liberal education. Arts graduates often do better in modern businesses than technical graduates because innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership, people management and strategic thinking have little to do with technical skills. Therefore the fears that markets kill off philosophy are highly exaggerated, noting that most great works in philosophy have come through private institutions and efforts, anyway.

In brief, I believe that should such a system be implemented in India, we could easily get a hundred universities of the quality of Harvard University in a few decades. But the current system will only generate hundreds of third rate institutions.

Freedom Team of India

The Freedom Team of India (<http://freedomteam.in>), which has now been registered as a Trust, would have opened its bank account by the time this article is published, enabling you to contribute to it even if you can't join as a member. A new member category called Freedom Partner will also soon be operationalised. Watch this space!

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

'A' for Aishwarya, 'H' for Hrithik...

"The speed with which the Uttar Pradesh Government issued orders to ban early childhood education textbooks teaching the Hindi alphabet through the use of names of popular Bollywood film stars ('A' for Aishwarya, 'H' for Hrithik) is commendable, especially in a state where maintenance of public education standards tends to be a low government priority...

"That the teachers' community saw nothing objectionable in impacting hollow stars of tinsel town whose contribution to the national development effort has been mindless entertainment rained on impressionable minds, is symptomatic of a new and rising phenomenon in schools countrywide....

"It is disturbing that instead of promoting the rich classical vocal and dance traditions of the sub-continent, institutional managements countrywide routinely parade children as young as six-seven on official occasions to mimic the coarse song and dance drills of Bollywood. Against this backdrop the order of the UP government proscribing the use of early education texts gratuitously associating stars of tinsel with letters of the alphabet hopefully reflects a new and overdue appraisal of Bollywood and its contribution to the public interest.

"...The creeping bollywoodisation of India needs to be seen for what it is: a grave threat to our cultural heritage."

Editorial in *Education World*, August 2009. A visit to www.educationworldonline.net highly recommended

Are We Heading for a 1962 Repeat?

E. D'Souza

Numerous reports have been emerging in the print and electronic media of a possible repeat of 1962 by the PLA (People's Liberation Army), objective Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh (AP/NEFA).

Bharat Verma, Editor of *Defence Today* in an article in his Journal states that it may be as early as October 2009 (before the onset of the winter). Linked with the ambivalent Chinese posture it appears a possibility. Yet another China watcher confirms in his letter "The inflation noose", this possibility is to divert the attention of the Chinese from the rising inflation in that country. So China may well head for Tawang. And to add credence to this deadline, a well known Sinologist of a reputed Think Tank quotes a Chinese writer from Beijing that the Chinese plan is to fragment India and hence the "String of Pearls" strategy. This assessment has not yet been refuted by the Beijing Mandarins! So what better take off point than the occupation of NEFA? These views have been prominently discussed in the Indian media; to which the three Service Chiefs have emphatically stated that the modernisation of the Armed Forces lags far behind that of China in every field including the Defence budget. The Naval Chief has bluntly stated that the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) is well ahead of the Indian Navy as was demonstrated at an imposing naval review showcasing the Chinese Blue Water Fleet, be it aircraft carriers, submarines or other surface warships.

This writer has been advocating that we need a far stronger blue water Navy to handle and counter the "String of Pearls" strategy with the growing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal littorals. The PLAN has already established its presence in Gwadar, Pakistan, Myanmar, the Coco Islands, and is making its presence felt in East Africa and Sri Lanka under the guise of economic aid. It has also shown increasing interest in Bangladesh and Nepal and its hand in assisting insurgents like the ULFA in the sensitive North East and even the Naxals, is known.

The aim of this article is to examine the possible threat to NEFA in the light of these developments. The views expressed are the author's own, based on a recent unofficial visit to NEFA, and his assessment of the possibility of a 1962 type strike on Tawang to establish the Chinese claim on NEFA.

First it is essential to examine briefly, what hap-

pened in 1962. It must be recalled that the Henderson Brooks report has not yet been disclosed. The writer of this article belongs to the same Regiment, the Maratha Light Infantry and in fact took over as Colonel of the Regiment from him in 1969. The General was assisted by the late Lt.Gen. P. S. Bhagat, VC, another distinguished soldier, alas both of them are no more. One fails to understand the rationale behind the government's reluctance to release the report when every other country does so in such cases. Do we not realise that by doing so we shall learn from earlier mistakes? Be that as it may we were lulled into complacency by the *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai* syndrome so assiduously advocated by Chou En Lai the then Chinese Premier. The sad part of it is that both Pandit Nehru and Krishna Menon were lulled into complacency. The late Lt.Gen. S. P. P. Thorat, then our Eastern Army Commander in Lucknow, warned Panditji of the very realistic Chinese threat in NEFA but his advice was ignored. We were totally unprepared under the mistaken illusion that the Chinese would not attack. Thanks to the advice of the late Lt Gen Bijji Kaul who politicised the Army, the troops were hopelessly ill equipped and armed to fight in high altitudes, given outrageous orders to hold indefensible positions dominated by the PLA under the mistaken notion that not a single inch of Indian territory would be allowed to fall, totally impractical tactically as brought out by the late Brig. John Dalvi the forwardmost Brigade Commander, in his book 'Himalayan Blunder', resulting in his capture, opening up the advance of the Chinese into NEFA, and perhaps the biggest omission of all was not to invoke the IAF to attack the advancing Chinese columns along the jungle hill tracts. The rest is history. It is a well known fact that the Chinese won over the locals to act as guides and porters on monetary inducements, as this part of the country was never developed. Have we now learnt our lesson?

The writer last visited NEFA in the early 70s while still in service. He recalls the long tortuous drive from Tezpur to Tenga on an apology of a strategic road, the main Line of Communications with Tawang and beyond via Bomdila and Se La. There is a sea change today with a tarmac road well maintained by the Border Roads with emergency facilities like earthmovers and bridging to clear

landslides and road blocks during inclement weather. What is equally encouraging is the fact that along the four hours drive over two passes to Tenga, Rest Rooms have been set up. Good accommodation has been provided for troops and even their families with all facilities including shopping malls for daily requirements and even Army Schools. This indicates the quiet confidence the Army has of permitting families of all ranks to such locations. It also sends a strong visible message to the civil populace, of quiet confidence. What is equally remarkable that this writer observed was indicative of the strong secular values in the Army – along a stretch of road in the Tenga Valley stands a Masjid, Gurudwara, Mandir and a Chapel, all maintained by the Formation. At no stage during this visit did the writer even get a hint of lack of confidence or preparedness to meet the oft-repeated Chinese claims on NEFA.

What is of importance are the steps taken to improve our preparedness posture. The wisest step taken by the government was to appoint an ex-Army Chief as the Governor. Not many know that he had earlier served in this sector as a Lt.Col. He happens to belong to the same Regiment as this writer. In my conversations with him he mentioned the steps being taken to improve the infrastructure in this neglected State – internal communications, power generation using the high hydel potential, exploitation of the vast forest resources, and most importantly education. Not many readers may know that from far off Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh, he undertook a trip to Pune to recruit teachers for the schools proposed to be opened. This was evident in the number of schools seen in Bomdila, including a public school. By focussing on the improvement of the lot of the State's populace, the chances of doing a repeat should the Chinese attempt to occupy Tawang with local help as in 1962 will be diminished.

On the deployment side one has read in the media that an additional division has been inducted to plug a possible approach which means we have three divisions in front, and one in depth with the dual role of counter insurgency. One has also read that a Sukhoi Squadron has been inducted into Tezpur and forward helipads developed for quick reaction. Interestingly there is a regular helicopter service from Guwahati/Tezpur to Tawang for civilians visiting the famous monastery there. Arrangements for road movement on these mountain roads for commuting and carriage of stores are also now in place and readily manifest in bustling Bomdila. That feeling of neglect as in the past is now being eliminated.

The forces deployed in this sector, north of the Brahmaputra including Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are controlled from a well established HQ in Tezpur where this

writer noticed a spirit of quiet confidence and efficiency when he called on the Corps Commander. Noticeably, there was no sign of tension. The writer, enroute from Tenga to Tezpur happened to meet two of the forward brigade commanders, both from his Regiment, at a road block under clearance and in the few minutes he interacted with them there was absolutely no signs of tension, just quiet confidence, though both were in eyeball to eyeball confrontation with PLA troops. If only our *Babudom* accelerated the acquisition, issue and induction of more modern equipment, the doubts on preparedness expressed by the Naval Chief in his press interview, the situation would be vastly better. Be that as it may let there be no doubts that our men showed no indication of low morale; in fact this was one aspect that struck this old soldier – high morale and top physical fitness. What then do we need to do to ensure stability in this wild, mountainous and sparsely populated country? There are a number of steps.

Firstly the improvement of infrastructural facilities should be on-going, especially road communications, helipads, opening up the interior, education *et al.* Thanks to foresight, the appointment of an ex-COAS as the Governor will ensure better civil/military relations, and this is evident. A reassessment needs to be made of the handling of insurgency especially along the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Army should be relieved of this commitment and a Rashtriya Rifles Counter Insurgency force as in J & K be raised. This threat cannot be wished away as the main lines of communication run through these areas. Forward stocking consonant with the operational requirements should be ensured at all times because of the delays imposed by the nature of the terrain and the weather. This should apply to the civil as well.

The intelligence apparatus should be stepped up to give early warning of any possible Chinese intrusions and for this both the locals and the Tibetan diaspora should be involved. There should no question in invoking our Air Force for interdiction on the axis from Tibet into NEFA. Likewise, our external intelligence agencies should be alerted in Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

A Chief of Defence Staff should be appointed without any further delay. An integrated Defence HQ is already in place, Bureaucratic '*izzat*' notwithstanding and a greater involvement of the Armed Forces in defence planning at the highest level, should begin NOW. Based on all available inputs we need to act now and not be caught offguard as we were in 1962.

We have lead time to get our act right. With win-
(Cont'd. on page 22)



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

A Kick In The Head

Life is a bitch. It leads you on with beguiling innocence, and then clobbers you.

Like the fella once said, aint life a kick in the head? Dean Martin sang that and he knew what he was talking about. To put it bluntly, life is a bitch. It leads you on with beguiling innocence, and then clobbers you. You go for a pleasant walk in the park and end up drowning in the pond.

My purgatory began innocently enough a couple of days ago, when I visited the doctor for my annual medical check up. Before my legion of admirers have a panic attack, let me hasten to assure them that I have not been diagnosed for cancer, or any of that scary stuff. My blood pressure is up a bit; and my triglyceride count is high. Big deal, I can hear you snort. My point, exactly. It should not have been a big deal, except that I committed the cardinal error of letting my wife tag along.

There ought to be a law against doctors; those smug, sadistic cretins. They love to pontificate in somber tones; and the greater the look of terror on the patient's face, the more satisfied they feel. Mine went on to superciliously expound on the problems with my lifestyle; all the while giving the impression that I owed him undying gratitude: the insufferable prig. Triglycerides, he proclaimed, were increased by alcohol, chocolate and rich desserts – in short, my three favorite food groups. As for the high blood pressure, the culprit was my slow rate of metabolism aggravated, in part, by weight gain. So I'd put on 12 pounds since my last check up: but that hardly made me obese. At 154 pounds, I would still elicit looks of envy from hundreds of overweight Americans. This guy

made it sound like the kiss of death.

But he was just winding up for the big punch. He asked me about my diet; and when I told him, he started tut-tuting like a Bangkok *tuktuk*. Junk food was a no no: he recommended wholesome crap like broccoli (don't make me puke). My eyes widened in horror. Deprive me of pepperoni pizza and you might as well stick a flaming skewer in my side. He had to be kidding me. Then I glanced at my wife and knew my fate was sealed. The little woman was lapping all this up. Her eyes gleamed and a silent I-told-you-so hovered around her lips.

As a grand finale, the marauding medic threw in this little tidbit. The magic bullet for metabolism is fiber, says he; and what better source than Kellogg's All Bran. All Bran? That's old peoples' food, for Chrissake. I may be 62 in body, but only 26 in spirit. Doesn't that count for anything? Apparently not to that killjoy.

Normally, of course, I would have treated all this hogwash with the contempt it deserved; but thanks to my foolish lapse, I was in at the deep end. Wives are like elephants. They never forget. Mine is happily making up grocery lists of the most disgusting tripe you can imagine: okra, soy – need I go on?

So here I sit, a shattered hulk of my former magnificence; pondering a bleak and desolate future without pizza and chocolate and Rocky Road and all that stuff that makes life worth living. If you can find it in your hearts, shed a tear for me.

Indo-Pak Tensions : The Farce Continues

Although India is the injured party, it is acting like the defendant in a murder trial

India's diplomacy with relation to Pakistan can best be summed up by Shakespeare's maxim: full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. India may tout itself as an emerging superpower, but it presents all the appearance of a lumbering whale being made to jump through hoops, at will, by the minnow Pakistan.

In recent months, the litmus test of India relations with Pakistan has been the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai; and Pakistan's response to them. On the face of it, India has a watertight case. Even Pakistan has been forced to acknowledge that the perpetrators were Pakistani citizens and that they were controlled by handlers who are still

in Pakistan. Yet, eight months after the attacks, India has been unable to force a resolution to this issue. Although India is the injured party, it is acting like the defendant in a murder trial, forced to prove her innocence before being pronounced guilty.

Pakistan is the clear ringleader in this farcical dialogue. Although it is obvious who the perpetrators and masterminds of 26/11 are, Pakistan keeps asking India for more "evidence" – which it subsequently ignores – and our country meekly complies. It is as if we are intent on appeasing the aggressors (shades of Neville Chamberlain

(Cont'd. on page 22)

From Our Readers

On Madarsas

This refers to Dr. M. A. Haque's article, "Madarsas: How They Survive and Why These Institutions are Proliferating?" published in the June 2009 issue of *Freedom First*.

Dr. Haque needs to be complimented for elucidating the sources of funds for the Madarsas which hitherto were generally not known. He also brought into focus the fact that a majority of Muslims are not their (Madarsa pass out) type. This aspect is common for almost every religion. The laity is overwhelmingly larger than the clergy.

He states that Madarsas do not make their activities public on account of mistrust.

May I ask, who mistrusts whom and why? When Madarsas teach religious matters relating to Islam, how can a college/university graduate fit into that system? He writes: "Whether we like it or not, historically in India, Muslims have been looked at with distrust by the majority population." May I ask why it is so?

Who demanded creation of Pakistan and who supported this demand? Regarding casualties and loss of properties, on account of the Partition, according to a report read years ago, these were approximately 75% – 25% and 90%-10% for Hindus and Muslims respectively. In 1947, Hindus constituted 22% and 30% of (West) Pakistan and East Pakistan/Bangladesh and now these have been reduced to less than 1% and 8% respectively. In the corresponding period, the Indian Muslim population increased from 10% to 15%. Can he explain why these happened? Secondly, when both Pakistan and Bangladesh were formed, they were secular. Why did they turn Islamic reducing non-Muslim citizens to second and third class status.

Dr. Haque mentions Babri Masjid and the Gujarat riots which widened the gulf between Muslims and the majority community. A few words about these two. Even though the demolition of Babri masjid was not right, considering the number of temples destroyed by Muslims during their 600 years or so rule over large parts of India, it is statistically insignificant. Had the 59 people (men, women and children) not been roasted alive, the Gujarat riots would not have occurred.

On the basis of reviews on the Sachar Committee Report, one gets the impression that it has not touched the family size of Muslims nor has it advocated small size family norms which is a key to poverty eradication. Muslims cannot have it both ways.

Regarding denial of educational opportunities to Muslims, it is common to all poor Indians and poverty is not unique to the Muslim community alone. A mention

has been made of sacrifice of common animals such as goats and lambs. May I ask are not cows included which are held in respect by Hindus.

On Madarsas, it is on record that the former President of Pakistan, Mr. Pervez Musharraf criticised Madarsas in his own his country for producing jihadis. A recent news report mentioned how bombs and explosives stored in a Madarsa exploded and caused damage to property and lives.

Finally may I ask a simple question to Dr. Haque: "Does Islam respect other faiths including Hinduism?" A truthful and categorical answer to this question will make all Hindu-Muslim conflicts as things of the past.

S. C. Panda, Bhubaneswar.
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Of Burquas and Purdahs

This refers to the article Dr. Vasundhara Mohan's article on Burquas in *Freedom First*, August 2009

Purdah is said to have been introduced to protect women from the Muslim invaders. Why did they observe it North India from their elders? They had nothing to be afraid of. The practice did not spread to Assam and South India – particularly Kerala. In these regions women were not treated as inferior. Purdah is probably a sign of servitude.

The burqua too did not enter Bengal, Assam and Kerala. Whether worn willingly or under social and parental pressure, it is a denial of freedom to women and reminds us of the practice of tying the feet of Chinese girls. It too was to make girls look pretty.

Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd).
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Tidings From Sharm-El-Sheikh

News has come from Sharm-el-Sheikh,
Not a fruity shake but one that made India shake
They say it is matter of 'Desh ki Sharm'
A Balochian bloomer of potential harm.

Was there drafting error? Then go back to school;
Learn to draft and to vet; an' look no fool
It isn't a letter to Mom; but India-Pak statement,
De-linking dialogue and terror - an agreement.

Some say it's all a storm in a tea-cup
Shout; terror comes first, then dialogue and give up
It is just a tale of cart and horse, which comes first
After a hot debate, have a drink and quench your thirst.

Sadanand B. Kumta, Pune

Women As Victories: A Politico-Scientific Discourse

Prasenjit Maiti

The disturbing question remains: is woman simply a construct that has to be effectively destroyed during warfare or is woman a human category that has to be addressed critically by the discourse of violence and the violence of politics?

Among the worst victims of any war are women as they have been traditionally picked out by the dominant male power as the most vulnerable civilian enemy targets during military engagements. You actually succeed in subverting the very basis of your enemy's virile power if you succeed in violating the enemy's woman. Then rape becomes disguised military destruction as you also inevitably destroy the enemy's morale and legitimacy and his masculine, fighting qualities in the process. Any war necessarily leaves behind a trail of devastation in its bloody wake as noticed in widows and mothers who have lost their sons and sisters who have lost their brothers and daughters who have lost their fathers in action. We read about such feminine suffering in the epics and war novels and watch movies, admire paintings and listen to music that focus on related themes. But reality is perhaps always more disturbing than art. Prisoner of War camps, the handling and exploitation of comfort women by soldiers in combat, Nazi and Japanese battle atrocities against women during the Second World War, the collective memory and killing fields of Vietnam: they all bear grim testimony to the fact that woman, being a most ordinary civilian and, therefore, a non-military subject, nevertheless becomes a most prominent military target during invasions. War times are insane moments in human history when the exercise and passage of civilized law and order and governance (let alone good governance) are temporarily suspended to encourage widespread plunder, inhuman brutalities and mayhem.

Impact of Mass Violence

We have to look into the possible impact of mass violence against women and the violence this triggers off as a dangerous chain reaction with mind-blowing consequences. Children suffer, dependents suffer, the service sector of the economy suffers and the entire domestic ethos of a given people may even be destroyed with the destruction of women (not necessarily in the physical sense) and their sanctity in war. Woman has always been the weaker, fairer other than in the context of both martial and masculine hegemony. It becomes convenient, therefore, on the part of fighting men to attack and appropriate the

women first and, in this logical process of culmination, to eventually appropriate the otherness of the enemy's territoriality with a kind of xenophobic frenzy because the woman in the final assessment is a man's property and nothing much else (according to the dominating male discourse). The enemy is not only then brought to his humble, submissive knees but the very core of his dignity and sanctimonious moral values is also simultaneously ripped out and violated in public. Just recall the court scene in the Mahabharata when Queen Draupadi, who was even menstruating at that point of time, was manhandled (without any effective protest whatsoever) before her famous and macho husbands and all the royal elders. Lord Rama fought with Ravana and ultimately killed him over the issue of a single woman: however, Rama also asked his wife Sita to prove her (unspoiled) chastity by entering into a circle of fire once the war was over. Therefore, Rama had fought the war not to prove his affection for Sita but to prove his unfaltering machismo.

Double Jeopardy

It is true that wars have been declared because of women (recall Helen of Troy) and wars have been instigated by women like Cleopatra. But it is an even greater truth that women have always been exploited and finally destroyed during combat. A woman faces a double jeopardy during war: she has to suffer as a woman and she has also to suffer as the symbol of pride, prestige and property of her man. Invading armies have been traditionally given the license to gang rape women, often before their helpless men at gunpoint; this not only results in distorted sexual gratification for the invaders but also effectively breaks down the enemy's final vestiges of any meaningful resistance. So the Women and War interface would come across as both a gender and a humanitarian issue to which international Institutions and Non-Government Organizations should accord immediate and topmost priority. They must help formulate agreements like the historic Geneva and Berne Conventions. This would at least constitute the first faltering step toward a better human civilization and a Brave New World in this most insecure new millennium.

Quo Vadis?

But the disturbing question remains: is woman simply a construct that has to be effectively destroyed during warfare or is woman a human category that has to be addressed critically by the discourse of violence and the violence of politics? An opposite trend has emerged in recent times after the invasion of Iraq by the United States of America. Male prisoners of war at the infamous Abu Ghraib Prison have been sexually assaulted and harassed by American security forces that included women personnel. This is a pathetic twist that indicates history making one full turn where human nature tends to avenge human nature by equating sexual domination with power games. Our original position about Women and War thus takes on a different existential stance in the light of recent military engagements worldwide. Admittedly Abu Ghraib happens to be an exception when one recalls military excesses committed against women in North-East India and (reportedly) in Jammu and Kashmir. Such atrocities are the logical fallout of protracted army presence in civilian areas on the pretext of battling terrorism. Manhunts without any warrant, disrespect for human rights and disregard for the rule of law in disturbed times lead to the subversion of the sustaining moral fabric of any civil society. So much so that the aged women in North-East India protested against the brutality of security forces by parading naked in public.

Reconciliation and Reprieve

There cannot be any conceivable reconciliation

between the forces of violence and the subjects of war at such a critical juncture. The only reprieve that one may construe long after the effects of violence have somewhat subsided lies in the core of civil society and social capital that may help conjoin the sanity of the collective with the goodwill of the State. For often it is the State and its array of repressive apparatus that are responsible for sponsoring violence against women during anti-terrorism military exercises. But the State unleashes its own brand of sexual violence and widespread terror in this process.

Conclusion

There cannot be any convenient conclusion with regard to this most critical discourse on Women and War. But civil society organizations, voluntary associations, human rights activists, peace workers and academic institutions may deliberate upon such disturbing issues in order to explore practical solutions to this problem. Sensitization workshops should be held to train the security forces worldwide so that they may read notions of human rights into military manoeuvres and tactics and in the process learn to respect the dignity and sovereignty of the human body. It becomes a sort of body politic treatise in the process that teaches one to respect the human body and its sanctity. Force may not always be deployed in a sanitized manner but at least its aftershocks may be restricted to military and not civilian (and therefore vulnerable) soft (?) targets like women.

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“Why I have joined the Swatantra Party” (Cont’d. from p.2)

country and have sacrificed so much for India. After the Independence of this country, when the New India was being built, the Rajas put forward a glorious example. The way they sacrificed their territories for the sake of the country will go down in the history of our country. In the name of land reforms, the jagirdars were asked to leave their jagirs which they did. But too soon their sacrifices were forgotten. Today they are called reactionaries. All the promises that were given them are being gradually broken. This reflects badly on us in foreign countries because people from outside think that if the government can break this agreement to its own people why should it honour its agreements with foreign countries; and what about the jagirdars who joined the Congress? Are they not reactionaries? Are only those who joined the other parties reactionaries? We have joined the Swatantra Party as ordinary citizens of India. Our Constitution gives us the right to join whichever party we prefer. The Swatantra Party respects the right of every citizen to be able to

choose his own party and that is why it is becoming more popular every day.

I should like to assure you that if I can serve you in any way, I shall be happy. My husband and his forefathers have served you and this country for hundreds of years. I too wish to keep their example before me and do the same. You will, I am sure, help me in this. Your relationship and mine is an old one and one that will never be broken.

“My dear sisters who are sitting here today, I should like to say to them that this work I have undertaken upon myself can never be fulfilled unless they help me. With their help I shall have more strength to work. This step which I have taken is in the tradition of Rajasthani women and now I believe you will follow me.”

Swatantra Newsletter, No.17, April 1961

‘Uttankita’

Gopal Krishna Gandhi

The writer is the Governor of West Bengal. On April 28 this year he launched the fifth volume of a series on Epigraphs (inscriptions on statues, stones or coins) launched by the Uttankita Vidya Aranya.

In response to a query from your editor, Mr. Gopal Krishna Gandhi explains: “‘Uttankita’ (the first two ‘t’s pronounced hard as in ‘table’ and the last soft) means. as far as I could understand, ‘inscribed’, ‘incised’, ‘graven’, or ‘cast in stone’. In other words, the stuff of epigraphy. The name was, I am told, suggested by the Paramacharya himself. As you will notice the word happens, perhaps by accident, to be onomatopoeic. One can almost hear the sound of a metal chisel ringing on a rock surface, in ‘uttankita’. ‘Aranya’ means forest.

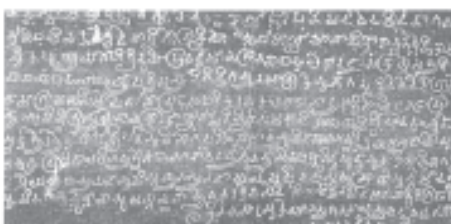
The Emperor Asoka’s high-ranking officials – *Amatyas* and *Mahamatras*¹ – had, one can assume, an intellect that could be cold in its reasoning, a heart that was warm as a bowl of heated milk in its sympathies, and a hand that was unvaryingly just even, and especially when, it had to be firm. For instance, in a bronze plate inscription found in Gorakhpur, UP, said to belong to the late-Mauryan period the *Mahamatra* of Sravasthi declares that in case of the outbreak of drought the contents of the storehouses of Mathura are to be distributed and not withheld. As a sub-divisional officer when Sri Sabanayagam was Chief Secretary in Tamil Nadu, I can picture myself receiving, in my office in Tindivanam, South Arcot, a clear order from him, to that effect. It is in this role of a rich administrative and civilisational plurality that I welcome him to our city and to this venerable venue, the Asiatic Society.

I extend my felicitation to the Trust on its work which reflects the rigour of scholarship and vindicates the faith of its founding spirit, the extraordinary Paramacharya of Kanchipuram. And I congratulate the

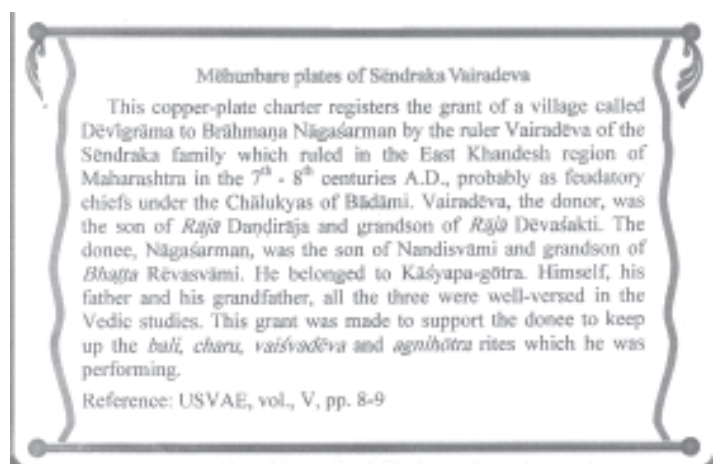
editors of the volume being launched today on the high standard of their work, their translations, notations, diacritical markings – all of which go to make the volume a work of quality.

‘Cast in stone’ is a phrase used to denote something that is authentic, irrefutable and permanently graven. It is because they were etched on surfaces that were difficult to alter, much less destroy, that inscriptions acquired the authority they have enjoyed.

What do our early inscriptions show to laypersons like me? First, that even a thousand years ago there were stable seats of authority in the Indian countryside. In other words, that there was a geographical and political space that knew a measure of stability and of someone being reasonably secure in that space to proclaim an order, an intention or an appeal. Also, that there were literate persons who could combine with stone-carvers (who were both literate as well as artistic) to calligraph on a hard surface something which could be read out to or read by a populace. This bespoke civilization. It reflected the culture of communication between the ruler and the ruled.



Mehunabare Plates of Sendraka Vairadeva, Saka 624 B



Reference: USVAE, Vol.V, pp.8-9

Some inscriptions of course, went on beyond statecraft to give us, like the one in Kudumiyanmalai, a rare insight into the evolution of classical music. All this meant that inscriptions were meant to be the equivalents, in their times, of what in modern times can be called the national broadcasting house or, shall we say, Akashvani or Doordarshan without the interference of commercial breaks.

But, over time, epigraphy, the study and interpretation of ancient inscriptions became an expertise for specialists and those with a passion for the archaeologist's pursuit of the past. The raising of inscriptions to the status of a primary source has also meant relegating epigraphy to a rarefied, recondite expertise. This has been unfortunate, for it has locked up historians-in-the-making, as well as the historically-curious non-historians in the over-populated world of secondary sources – good, bad and indifferent. Worse, it has trapped them in the verbal jungle of legend and myth. In fact, before Princep's work, so intimately associated with the Asiatic Society, legend had surrounded Devanampiya Piyadassi just as shrubs had sealed up Ajanta.

This is where the work of a body such as the Uttankita Vidya Aranya Trust acquires relevance and value.

I have found in the pages of the volume being released today, to my delight, details of the location of each inscription, which helps set one's intellectual coordinates right. I have also found the notes and summaries to be extremely valuable. I found, for instance, under Entry 79, a Seventh Century Rashtrakuta inscription in Jalgaon, Maharashtra, the phrase 'Rashtrapati' being used to denote the senior-most functionary. I had assumed that the word for the Head of State was coined by our Constituent Assembly. And what a felicity that our Rashtrapati herself hails from that region!

The entries in the volume are a repast, no less. The administrator in Sri Sabanayagam will be as amused, as I was, to find in one of the inscriptions, pertaining to a land grant the assurance that the grantee will be protected from undesirable elements and also from unnecessary visitations by officials! The proclivities of the bureaucracy's many layers were not unknown to the kings of a thousand years ago.

In geological terms the 8th and 9th century AD, to which this volume relates, is (to borrow a phrase from Lord Rees' *The Final Century*) "less than a fraction of an eyeblink" old. And yet, a millennium is a millennium and to read inscriptions of a thousand three hundred years ago is to enter a time-machine and ride back into the lap of the past.

How amazingly different those times were, and yet how very like ours! The differences that the inscriptions reflect are, first, ecological.

The web of life a thousand years ago was such as to put modern astro-physicists and climatologists in the shade. Everything was seen in terms of galaxies being connected to life on planet earth. Lunar datings occur invariably in the texts. 'As long as the moon, the sun endure' is invariably followed by 'the oceans, the mountains and the rivers'. The abundance of trees and streams, of animal and plant life, both wild and under human supervision, invoke an altogether different age. No CO2 emissions were known then, no greenhouse gases threatening us with extinction.

Land-grants reflect boundaries in terms of floristics and natural features such as rivers and rivulets with clear names and not human constructs (except for royal roads). We can hardly define an acre today, or the equivalent of a *nivarttana* in terms of the trees bordering it. But a thousand years ago, trees defined space. Elephants, our Departments of Wild Life should note, were not just abundant but super-abundant. How did they manage human-animal conflicts in and around villages with their rice-paddies then? One wonders. And the induction of elephants in royal armies was again something remarkable. Not cavalry, not infantry, but elephants in the parts of the sub-continent covered in this volume, were to the fore. The Chalukyan inscription of Dharwar (707 AD) talks of the monarch having 'crushed and scattered hosts of intoxicated and aggressive elephants of the enemies'. Hopefully, there is some exaggeration here, and more pachyderms were scattered than crushed.

And then there are striking sociological vignettes revealed in the inscriptions. The status of women, both in the cities of those times and villages, is striking. Not perhaps entitled to the rights of inheritance in terms of property-succession, we can see that women in royal households could be phenomenally assertive in the way they decided, in what seems like pure whimsy, on what benefaction is to be given to which village, group of people or to individuals. And God help those who obstructed a royal princess' command – especially her husband's or son's officers!

The similarities are no less striking!

The principal similarity between life in our countryside a thousand and three hundred years ago and today appears to me to lie in the place of land in human affairs. The pervasiveness of the State is clear. Grants were made, to borrow a term from our own current Land

Acquisition Act, for good 'public purposes'. But who can deny that the monarch's individual whimsy must have played a dominant part in those proceedings of a thousand years ago? We know of the donations, inscribed in stone, but we do not know of the dispossessions. On those, the inscriptions are silent. How did people, including hired labour, who lost out as a result of the grant of their lands in the 8th and 9th century, express themselves?

Something not unlike a modern SEZ is the subject of the inscription in Nasik dated 709 AD. The Sanskrit text of Prithvichandra Bhogasakkti says 'The merchants residing in Samagiri are not to pay octroi duty in the whole of the kingdom as long as the moon and the sun endure. Besides, there is not (to be escheat² to the crown of) the property of a person who dies (here) sonless...'

There was no electricity then for the tariff to be waived. But in Samagiri, we can be sure, the *shresthin* would have enjoyed an equivalent waiver.⁴

Interestingly, the bureaucracy too ensures a little 'perk' to itself in the process. The same decree says 'There (is to be) no (tax for the) lodging and boarding (here) of royal officers...'

I was delighted to find a wonderful similarity in the penal provisions operating in this inscription. As in our times, so also in 700 AD, in that region, crime was rife. But the punishments were proportionate. In a paradigm of our IPC, the Nasik inscription says:

For a violent offence against unmarried girls, (the offender will be fined) a hundred and eight rūpakas; for adultery, thirty-two rūpakas; for boxing of the ears, sixteen rūpakas; for injury to the head, four rūpakas. If (the offence is committed) against a labour-woman, a merchant's son caught... would be fined one hundred and eight rūpakas. And whatever eight or sixteen Mahallakas (respectable men) of the town would declare after deliberation, will be the right standard (of punishment).

I find it remarkable that women of the working class were seen to be particularly vulnerable to the attentions of sons of merchants. But there it is.

We should also not imagine that there was no sense of what may be called the culture of the catwalk in those times. Sanskrit inscriptions are not exclusively about the sacred or the serious, they can meander quite easily to the mundane, even nudge the profane. Sanskrit is both the language of the Gods and of more common beings. In a 720 AD inscription located in that Holy of Holies, Kanchipuram itself, there is a description of the female

form (and I quote) "adorned with grace, coquetry and (with) the art of attraction." The phrase *aakarshana-vidyaa*³ could well be borrowed by the world of modern fashion, of fashion-designers and the cosmetic industry.

We should not imagine that the 8th century was a golden age whereas ours is leaden. There was a great deal of lead then, as there is much that glistens now.

There is a veritable mine of insights into the social and administrative morés of ancient times in the epigraphic compilation in this volume which can be read with fascination and, of course, with great benefit. Each entry is in fact a cameo, a painting in words, which can be seen from a variety of perspectives, apart from the purely scholastic. I would urge the Trust in its next phase of publications, to go from annotated compiling to serious interpretations of the inscriptions, by specialized, responsible and yet intellectually accessible scholars. Epigraphic interpretations can enhance not just the understanding of the past but of the factors for continuity and change in society. Above all, in my limited view, such insights into the past, as through a magic lantern, can give us a sense of journeying – not of 'progress' or 'development' on the ingredients of which opinions can vary, but of the aquifers of contentment and, equally, of the pools of discontent in each age, so that we can see our own condition better.

It is time we enfranchised our epigraphic wealth and brought it out of the *acharya-mushti* of closed-door research to the daylight of general knowledge. That will fulfil the Paramacharya's vision.

Endnotes:

1. 'Amatya' is 'minister (the Tamil 'amaichchar' seems related). And 'Mahamatra' refers to a senior official. The references to both in Asoka's inscriptions indicate a well organised and hierarchical bureaucracy.
The Asokan saga is legendary, its dramatic elements having been fully absorbed and utilised in society by opinion-makers and litterateurs and, of course, by evolving media. Some historians seem to think the legend has swollen with the yeast of wishful imagining beyond the size of its true historical content. My point is that retrieving the actual inscribed words from the popular perceptions of the man can sharpen our knowledge, without detracting from the effect of the great emperor's renunciatory example. I should have made myself clearer, but then as only the book-launcher, not a critical commentator, I needed to be brief!
2. 'Escheat to the crown', means lapsing to the State, a principle that Dalhousie perfected in his Doctrine of Lapse whereunder all estates of Indian princes who did not have natural heirs would, on the ruler's death, lapse to and become part of the British Possessions of India.
3. 'Akarshana' literally means 'attraction' and so 'akarshana vidya' would mean knowledge of the science of attraction (adornment, cosmetology).

“Surrender Policy” for Maoists formulated by Government of India *(Cont’d. from p.8)*

7. Almost all States go wrong in tackling the Naxalite situation: First they under-estimate the Naxal impact and when faced with Naxal violence, over-react by treating it a law & order issue entrusting the strategy only to the Police who use brute force. Since the Naxalites usually employ “Hit & Run” tactics, this counter violence by police is on innocent villagers who turn against the State. Further, governments dominated by city bred officers do not realize that a tribal is wedded to his present life in a for-

est & rooted in the land. He lives for the present and does not much care to migrate to improve his standard of life. He is not a “Wage-earner” but a “Food-hunter”. The efforts of all the Indian States especially the Tribal Development Corporations is to convert a tribal into a Wage Earner, which is not going to succeed.

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Are We Heading For A 1962 Repeat? *(Cont’d. from p.14)*

ter approaching will China launch an assault from Tibet to take Tawang given the lie of the terrain, the approaching winter, restricted road communications and India’s defence posture, to do so in two to three months? We need to improve our defence posture and make it difficult for China to venture on such a move in the foreseeable future which means that it will have to wait for the next campaigning season in 2010. We need to utilise this time to improve our defences, communications, intelligence acquisition and updating our equipment with high tech weapons suitable for mountain and high altitude warfare.

We now learn of a major counter terrorism exercise with troops involving 300 US Special Forces and India’s

Armoured Division to be held in Jhansi. This is a move in the right direction to improve and signal our growing relations with the USA and the possibility of arms purchases of high tech equipment under the new protocol.

Finally, we should not hesitate to invoke air power to impede any such move.

One can end on a slightly optimistic note in stating that so far as our manpower is concerned and the quiet confidence of our Officers and men, given the tools, our response will be good.

MAJOR GENERAL (RETD) E. D’SOUZA, PVSM, Polish Army Gold Medal, is a frequent contributor to *Freedom First*.

Cornucopia *(Contd. from p.15)*

and Munich). In every aspect – military, economy and size – India is clearly superior. Yet it is allowing Pakistan to barter as an equal partner. That is the real tragedy and shame of this imbroglio.

The release of the Lashkar-e-Toiba chief, Hafez Saeed, “on technical grounds” after his farcical arrest and detention clearly indicates that Pakistan has never had the slightest intention of bringing the perpetrators of 26/11 to justice. Pakistan covers up its duplicity by issuing sanctimonious and hypocritical statements about its determination to fight terrorism; and all India can do is seethe in impotent rage. To make matters worse, India’s new foreign minister, S.M.Krishna, is clearly out of his depth. He could almost be a clone of the equally ineffective former home minister, Shivraj Patil. His “outrage” at Saeed’s release took the form of a bland statement asking Pakistan to create a “favourable atmosphere” for further dialogue. Have any of Pakistan’s past actions held out the hope that it was interested in creating a favourable atmosphere? Is the honourable gentleman living in some sort of neverland?

Of course, Pakistan’s boldness is augmented by

the powerful backing of the United States. It has cleverly achieved that by placing the Americans over a barrel. The country’s strategic location ensures that it is indispensable to the American effort in Afghanistan – and it is fully capitalizing on this. America, in turn, is playing into their hands by pressurizing India to maintain the status quo at any cost.

So what can India do? For one thing, it can start asserting the clout it possesses, but has been reluctant to use. It is time India makes it plain to Pakistan and the United States that its patience has been fully exhausted. India should issue an ultimatum to Pakistan to book and punish the guilty of 26/11 forthwith, failing which it will put its armed forces on high alert. The threat of Pakistan being compelled to withdraw the bulk of its military from the Afghan border and transfer them to the Eastern front will rattle the Americans so much that they will finally put pressure on Pakistan to do the right thing.

India is a large and powerful country. It is time it started acting like one.

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Rites, Rituals and Festivals (8)

Suman Oak

The foundation of the intellectual aspect of Indian Culture was laid down by our ancient sages. They strived to progress from ignorance to knowledge. What these sages discussed, debated and passed on to the later generations was beyond the understanding of the common people. The other aspect i.e., social conduct was taken care of by intelligent but shrewd and sharp men with very little consideration for the lofty philosophy of the sages. For a peaceful society they strengthened the social structure laid down by the Varnashrama system. For the moral rectitude of the masses they reinforced ritualistic devotion by writing the Brahmanas that gave concrete shape to rituals of worship and thereby assimilated almost all tribes and their deities into the eclectic Hindu religion. Most of us accept the role assigned to us and faithfully observe all traditionally inherited customs and rituals. We have got to overcome this weakness and inertia and start thinking afresh about our customs and rituals.

The intention, here, is not to condemn all rites, rituals and festivals outright but to look at their utility, propriety and necessity critically, and loosen their grip on the minds of our people. (For the full text of this introductory note to the series please see the January 2008 issue of FF (No.488) or email us at freedom@vsnl.com for the text. – Ed.

Ganesh Chaturthi

Gritsam (and not Gutsamad)

Innumerable tribes with their various totems and deities lived in ancient India. These tribes worshipped and celebrated the festivals of their deities in their own ways. Most of these ethnic groups with their varying religious rituals, deities and their peculiar ways of life were amalgamated in the Varnashram institution of the all encompassing Hindu religion. Lord Ganesh who has now become the most important, popular and benevolent god was originally a deity of one of these ancient tribes. The history of the development and increasing importance of this deity is interesting.

Ganesh is not mentioned independently as a god in the *Vedasanhitas* or *Brahmana Granthas* and no Ganesh idol belonging to the period earlier than the 5th century has been discovered. The *Kautileeya Arthashastra* in its town planning talks about where the temples of various deities be built but does not mention Ganesh. Skand and Ganesh are both originally Dravidiyan deities like the Rudra-Shiva. They were assimilated in the Vedic religion along with Rudra-Shiva and became his sons. Ganesh otherwise known as Vinayak, at first, was considered a vicious Graha (planet) attacking people like a goblin and therefore had to be appeased by various rituals.

Mouse - the Vehicle of Ganesh

The fertile brains of our *Puran* writers have invented a number of stories regarding the birth of Ganesh. Despite being the son of Shiva-Parvati he was considered 'Ayonija', that is, not conceived by any female. Surprisingly the means of conveyance of this God with a huge belly is a mouse round whom too a number of myths have been spun. This seeming paradox has been historically explained thus. During the Kanishka period the northern

Sindh region was called *Mooshak Janapad* (a small country). It had very friendly relations with the nearby *Gaja Janapada*. They had *Mooshak* (a mouse) and the head of an elephant respectively on their flags. When Ganesh became *Gajamukha* (acquired the head of an elephant), the *Mooshak* came down from the flag and became Ganesh's vehicle and was positioned near the right foot of the idol and was worshipped.

Gutsamad and Ganesh

Ganesh was also called 'Gutsamad'. There was a much venerated Vedic Rishi of the same name, Gutsamad, who was a great devotee of Lord Ganesh. He was an exceptionally talented erudite sage, a great devotee, poet, mathematician, scientist, innovator in agriculture and a skilled weaver. He was the first to discern that water vapour from the surface of the sea causes rain; the first to grow cotton in the fields of the Vidarbha region and the first to invent the process of multiplication in mathematics. His life history reveals his noble liberal outlook on life. He experimented in all fields of life. He wanted to live for hundred years only to be able to develop a rational outlook of the world. He prayed that he should never feel tired or bored of serving the people. However the life of this great sage as depicted in the *Puranas* is at variance with the above Vedic depiction. According to the *Puranas* he was a 'Vratya' meaning that he was born out of promiscuous intercourse between different castes. He laboured towards the assimilation by the Aryan races of the *Anarya* tribes into their own cultural milieu. The Aryans vehemently opposed this erudite sage and his progressive, noble outlook. But Lord Ganesh came to his rescue bestowing *Brahmanya* on him and making him a *Mantradrishta* sage (composer of Mantras).

There are clearly identifiable similarities between the characters of Gutsamad and Ganesh. (Some scholars believe that Gutsamad was none other than Ganesh himself.) Like Gutsamad, Ganesh among his many names is also called *Vratapati*, i.e., 'the head of *Vratyas*. As mentioned earlier Ganesh was originally supposed to be a vicious '*Graha*' and '*Vighna*' (one who puts obstacles in every affair).

Socio-historical analysis

A socio-historical analysis of these two characters reveals many surprising things. Both were leaders of the non-Aryan tribes, the poor people who toiled in the fields and at the same time were well educated and erudite discoverers and inventors. Both organized the simple guileless tribals and became 'Gananayak' - captains of their tribes. Understandably the Aryans branded them 'Vinayak'-(one who misleads people into wrong doings) and 'Vighna' and persecuted them. Gradually the Aryans being unable to subjugate the various tribes any longer had to assimilate them into their cultural fold along with their captains. During this period of assimilation Vinayak (Ganesh) became Siddhivinayak-the Lord of prosperity and success. During the Gupta period when the Puranas were refurbished lord Ganesh became Prathamesh-the deity that has to be worshiped first and foremost before starting any work or worship.

Later the Chinese scholars studying Buddhism at Nalanda carried Indian culture and Lord Ganesh with great reverence to China. Ganesh Pooja spread eastward to Burma, Sayam, Cambodia, Java, Bali, Borneo and Japan; as well as westward to Turkey and Mexico. During the 'Peshva' rule Ganesh Festival was celebrated with great pomp and show in Pune.

People's Festival

Later Lokamanya Tilak utilized it for politically awakening the common people to fight against the British rule. A number of lectures and discussions were held during the festival for spreading logical thinking and cultivating national pride; panegyric songs extolling achievements and brave feats of Indian heroes were sung to awaken people from their slumber; other cultural programmes for rousing national pride were arranged. Many organizations under the guise of celebrating Ganesh festival came into existence in this period that laid the foundation of the freedom movement.

Today in the gathering multitudes, din and noise, pomposity, arrogant and insolent exhibition of political and economic clout the original objective of awakening the people is completely lost. Huge pendals are raised in the

middle of busy roads and a lot of money is wasted on installing huge idols, raising backdrops for the idols, lighting etc. Loud speakers blare filmy songs and uncontrollable crowds gather offering good opportunity for eve teasing and pick pocketing. These functions are sponsored by 'dadas' (who have amassed wealth and are now trying to become messiahs), manufacturers of cold drinks and drug dealers. The media give a lot of publicity to them. There is competition amongst them regarding the height of the idol, attractiveness of the backdrop scenes and the programmes of music and dance. Cinema stars and big shots in power attend these pendals and add to the difficulties of the already stretched police force. The immersion ceremony also is equally pompous. The huge idols cause water pollution; the winding processions cause traffic jams. The original objective of awakening and educating people is lost sight of and the festival has become an opportunity for collecting contributions (at times forcibly) from people.

Visage of Ganesh

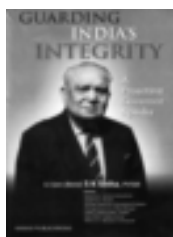
The weird visage of this deity is explained in the 'Bhaarateeya Sanskritikosh' edited by Pandit Mahadevashastri Joshi and his daughter, Tarkateertha Padmaja Hodorakar. Ganesh is a deity that protects agriculture from pests. His monstrously enlarged ears signify the scuttle form baskets for sifting corn. His single tusk means a ploughshare. His trunk tells us the technique of irrigation so that we need not depend solely on rain for agriculture.

The Real Ganesh

Ganesh is also the deity that gives us the gifts of literature, Yogavidya, eloquence of speech, knowledge and above all science. In addition to these artistic and intellectual abilities he was a great archer and captain of a democratically organized autonomous tribe. He fought with many big-headed demons. He used the elephant as his vehicle and riding on it, he fought with bow and arrows with his enemies several sizes larger than himself from a safe distance. His Ashtanayika were the captains of eight female platoons of his army that helped him liberate the women held captive by the demons. After being delivered from the menace of the demons by him, the tribals wanted to anoint Ganesh their King. Instead of succumbing to the temptation Ganesh advised the tribals to nurse their fledgling democracies on their own and proceeded to the foot hills of the Himalayas. Thus having successfully completed his mission, Ganesh embarked on his journey from the South on the Ganesh Chaturthi (fourth day of the fortnight) and reached the North on the Ananta

(Cont'd. on page 27)

BOOK REVIEW



GUARDING INDIA'S INTEGRITY by Lt.Gen. S. K. Sinha, PVS (Retd.) ● Published by Manas Publications, 4402/5A, Main Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002 ● 2009 ● Pages 420 ● Price Rs. 595

Reviewed by Brig. S. C. Sharma (Retd. Adviser to the telecom industry and a freelance journalist. Email: brigscs@gmail.com)

The book is a record of the author's contribution as governor of the states of Assam and Jammu & Kashmir in meeting the challenges of insurgency and poor governance in both these states. An outstanding soldier and scholar, he first made a deep study of the history and cultural ethos of the states concerned and proceeded with needed firmness to solve the issues. Having been denied the top post, he took retirement from the army. He was not offered even a cup of tea when he made a farewell call on the Defence Minister, Shri Venkataraman. A gentleman to the core, he made no public statements of resentment. The sword was sheathed. I had at that time written to him that he had acted in the best traditions of the Army. In his reply, he had emphasized that the Army would continue to do well under the leadership of "my friend, Gen. Vaidya."

He settled down in Patna where he experienced the evil of caste based politics. He had to file a petition in the High Court for the renewal of his arms license as then chief minister Laloo Yadav had issued instructions to the District Magistrates not to renew the arms licenses of people of high castes. The K. P. Jaiswal Research Institute of Patna had invited him to give a lecture on Veer Kuer Singh, the legendary hero of Bihar. He had won a decisive victory against the British in the 1857 War. The Institute later requested him to write a book on Veer Kuer Singh. He readily accepted the assignment but no help was forthcoming to meet the expenses of his visit to National Archives at Delhi and National Library at Calcutta. He was unofficially told that no help could be expected from the government as Veer Kuer Singh was not from the backward class. The book was completed with a fellowship from the Council of Historical Research and was well received. A few years later, he was appointed ambassador to Nepal, when India-Nepal relations were at a low point. His success can be judged from the fact that on the eve of his departure from Nepal, in an unprecedented move, the King and Queen called at his residence.

On 1 September 1997, he was sworn in as Governor of Assam. Militancy had already set in due to Indira Gandhi's insistence on holding elections using voters lists which included illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Rajiv Gandhi signed an accord with the All Assam Students

Union [AASU] and AGP came to power, only to lose the next elections in 1991 due to rampant corruption. Saikia again became Chief Minister. A section of ULFA continued on the path of militancy. Lt.Gen Sinha, a pro-active governor, decided against Governor's rule and adopted a soft approach. A three pronged strategy was undertaken to tackle militancy - a unified command, economic development and psychological initiative. The unified command was placed under the Chief Secretary to allay fears of military rule and it brought in much needed coordination. Assam which was once a rice surplus state was facing a food deficit. He caught on to the idea of shallow bamboo tube wells costing Rs.22,000 each and convinced the Central Government to finance 75% of the cost, the remaining being met by the farmers. Much can be achieved without involving high technology or large finance. One lac bamboo tube wells transformed the agricultural economy of the state. The simple ingenious device worked wonders. I had seen a similar approach in Pinjore where a low cost earth dam costing about Rs.20,000 had transformed a village from one crop a year to three crops a year.

As part of the strategy of psychological initiative, he honoured Assam's military hero Lachit Borphukan who had won a decisive victory against Aurangzeb's army at the battle of Saraighat in 1671. Two guns used by Lachit and a painting of the famous battle were placed at Raj Bhavan. Later a *son-et-lumiere* show at the site of the battle became a popular tourist attraction. Renaming Guwahati airport after Gopinath Bordoloi and success in the uphill task of award of Bharat Ratna to him were well received by the people of Assam. It may be recalled that Bordoloi had successfully opposed plans for the federation of Bengal and Assam which had found favour with Nehru. He had to appeal to Mahatma Gandhi to convince Nehru against such move. This honour was long overdue to him for having kept Assam in India.

Strategy of unified command and psychological initiative led to the isolation of ULFA. Their support to Pakistan during Kargil operations and to the separatists enraged the people of Assam. ULFA's attacks on the Biharis were firmly put down by the security forces. Insurgency was over; terrorist attacks lingered on. Earlier

the task of winning the hearts and minds of the people was limited to Op. Sadbhavna wherein the security forces assisted in medical and education activities. After Gen Sinha left to take up his assignment in Srinagar, ULFA got a breather due to the government calling off the operations. The Congress government even gave money to ULFA to buy peace for the national games. This confirms the allegations that part of the Central Government's grants to the Eastern states gets diverted to the militants via contractors to buy safety. His efforts to check the illegal immigration from Bangladesh were foiled by the Central Government due to vote bank politics. Even the State government elected on the promise of checking illegal immigration became a victim of this vote bank.

Gen. Sinha arrived in Srinagar on 4 June 2003. Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed did not want a military officer as governor but was overruled, perhaps due to the grim security situation and Gen. Sinha's success in overcoming insurgency in Assam. He had some doubts about Mufti. A former militant, Hilal Ahmed had written in his book that the kidnap of Mufti's daughter was stage managed to get five militants released. He got the sanction of the Central Government to give relief to the families of militants killed in fights with the security forces and talked of a healing touch to the families of terrorists, ignoring relief to the victims. He declined to provide funds to improve the wretched accommodation of pundits living in Jammu camps. They were called migrants and not refugees. Mufti expressed willingness to help them if they moved to Srinagar which was not possible due to the security environment.

As in Assam, Gen. Sinha played a proactive role as Governor of J&K. To the three tried prongs of unified command, economic development and psychological initiative, he added a fourth plank of media management. He succeeded in forming a unified command in spite of opposition from Mufti who had kept the Army Commander out of the unified command. Surprisingly the Union Home Secretary agreed with the views of Mufti. Gen Sinha had to seek the support of the Union Home Minister to rectify this shortcoming. The casualty rate of security forces, terrorists and civilians came down from 10 in 2003 to 1 a day in 2008. He promoted mini-hydel generators. At his initiative, the project was executed by the Army who had a better reach in the remote areas and could execute the work much faster. It ensured that funds would not be siphoned off and there would be no political considerations for selection of sites. If the project was executed by the Army, the credit would go to the Centre as the Army was seen to be an instrument of the Centre. People appreciated the role of the Army. When he drove from Baramulla to the site of the one thousandth mini-hydel project 20 kms away, he was delighted to see the national flags fluttering in every village enroute. Mufti was ever

raising false charges against the Security Forces. On more than one occasion, he deliberately violated protocol by giving precedence to his daughter and cronies over the Governor.

In an insurgency prone region, the crucial battle is for the hearts and minds of the people. He made a good impact by visiting religious places of all faiths, providing a modern hospital, promoting higher education, improving pilgrimage facilities and touring remote areas. Two calamities occurred in 2005, heavy snow in Srinagar in February and earthquake in October. His dash to Srinagar in a fighter aircraft during heavy snow won appreciation and praise. The leader of the Opposition commented "During the snow crisis, we had the 80 year old Governor rushing to Srinagar in a fighter aircraft while the Chief Minister was opening a photo exhibition in Delhi."

Undue importance had been given to the Valley constituting 45% of the population. Gujjars, Bakarwals and Pahans constitute 20% population. They are Muslims but have a separate identity. Non-muslims number 35%. At last the Central Government agreed that they should be J&K centric and not merely Kashmir centric. A school was started for the children of Bakarwals and Gujjars. Special mention need be made about the Bakarwals. In 1965, the first information about the infiltrators was made by a shepherd.

The Kashmir media heavily financed from Pakistan constantly churned out vitriolic anti-India views. The separatists and the fundamentalists were depicted as freedom fighters and nationalists. They alleged that the massacre of Hindus and Sikhs was carried out by the Indian Intelligence Agency. There was no shortage of human rights activists with bleeding hearts ever ready to exaggerate the false charges of torture and molestation of women by security forces. Our bureaucrats in Delhi have taken the easy way of saying that there was no need for us to react. Gen. Sinha built up the correct image by screening the documentary film on the atrocities by Pakistani raiders in 1947. Part of the information management was briefing of visiting ambassadors. Of particular interest was the visit of Baroness Emma Nicolson, a member of the European Parliament. Her report to the European Parliament which was very favourable to India was accepted by 400 votes to 9. Another notable success was the visit of a delegation from the Northern Areas in POK. They were impressed by the authority of the elected government of J & K. This was in sharp contrast to the conditions in POK.

As part of an agreements between the Congress and the People's Democratic Party of Mufti Mohamed Sayeed, Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress took over as Chief Minister on 27 October 2005. He objected to Azad

becoming CM on the ground that CM should be a Muslim from the Valley. After relinquishing the post of CM, he and his daughter Mehbooba started a vicious campaign for demilitarization and acceptance of Musharraf's plans for making the LOC irrelevant. Even while in power, his Government did not take the task of fighting terror seriously. No attempt was made to check the flow of funds from Pakistan to the Press in the Valley or to Hurriyat leaders, in spite of the fact that disruption of terror finance is an important tool to fight terror.

The number of pilgrims to Vaishnavi Devi and Amarnath has continued to grow. In 2007, 75 lac pilgrims visited Vaishnavi Devi, pumping in Rs.470 crore into the local economy. Increased facilities were provided for such a large increase of the pilgrims. In 2003, the Amarnath Shrine Board, of which the Governor was the chairman, decided to increase the yatra period from one month to two months. Mufti opposed it and made a press announcement against it. He was later persuaded to increase it to 45 days. The local Muslims welcomed it but Mufti followed a communal agenda. In order to improve the facilities for Amarnath the cabinet approved the use of 100 acres of forest land for prefabricated huts and orders were issued on 26 September 2008. Mufti made it a point of rallying the communal forces and denounced it as a device to change the demography of Kashmir. He labelled Gen. Sinha as a Hindu fundamentalist. Gen. Sinha stepped down on 25 June 08. The new governor, Vohra was Mufti's choice. He cancelled the transfer of land and dismantled the Amarnath Shrine Board. Hindu ministers in the J&K government resigned. These acts led to widespread demonstrations in Jammu which was already seething with discontent. Jammu had 37 seats in the Assembly for a population of 30 lacs, while the Valley had 46 seats for a population of 28 lacs. The

CM Azad resigned when Mufti withdrew support. Effigies of Mufti and Vohra were being burnt daily in Jammu and Srinagar. The crowds in Jammu blocked the highway and Mufti raised the voice of 'Muzaffarbad chalo'. The demonstrations in Srinagar by the PDP and those in Jammu had one notable difference. In Jammu, they came out with the Indian National Flag and Muslims also joined in it. About one hundred Muslims traveled to Jammu after offering prayers at Jama Masjid in Delhi to support the transfer of land to the Shrine Board. Maulana Madni MP supported land transfer. In Srinagar, they marched with the Pakistan Flag and only Muslims participated in the demonstrations. Pakistan's daily Dawn of Pakistan recently carried a news item that Pakistan's flag is proudly fluttering in some districts of Assam. We come down heavily on any disrespect to national flag and national anthem in other parts of India but tolerate such insults in Assam and J&K.

The people of Assam acknowledged his contributions where insurgency was overcome and due respect given to the traditional heroes of Assam. In J & K, students who had earlier boycotted the singing of national anthem, started singing it with great enthusiasm. Respect for the Army was restored amongst the general public. The secular brigade in Delhi and the secular national press chose to disregard these achievements.

The book is a must read for understanding the turmoil in Assam and Kashmir. Secularism should not be degraded to appeasement of minority. Winning the minds and hearts of the people cannot be done through economic and medical help alone. Victory in this battle requires understanding the cultural ethos.

Rites, Rituals and Festivals *(Cont'd. from p.24)*

Chaturdashi (fourteenth day of the fortnight) and immersed himself in water to bring his incarnation to a close. We celebrate these ten days and conclude the festivities by immersing the Idols in water.

The mythical Ganesh

There are a number of myths regarding the birth of Lord Ganesh, some quite perverse. One myth tells us that he was made by Parvati out of the dirt and grime from her body. His father Lord Shankar cut off his head in a rage and when appeased revived him by putting an elephant's head on the headless body. Today's festival celebrates Lord Ganesh – the mental creation of Parvati – as depicted in the Purans.

We ought to celebrate the festival in a manner befitting the Gutsamad-Ganesh who endeavoured to bring

about racial, caste and cultural integration; abolish the divide between shrewd, learned Aryans and the guileless tribals; discover, invent and use science and technology; teach the downtrodden people to organize and administer themselves in a democratic way; liberate women kept in captivity by demons organizing female platoons led by female captains and that Ganesh who finally, despite peoples' earnest requests, relinquished power when his mission was accomplished. Not just the Ganesh festival but all festivals of all faiths need to be reviewed critically and rationally, sifting the chaff from the grain to find proper ways of celebrating them.

MS. SUMAN OAK, retired Lecturer on Education, SNDT University, is associated with Streehitakarini, Centre for the Study of Social Change and the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti. She is a freelance writer.

Between Ourselves ...

We focus this time on two diverse topics - Global Tax Havens and Madarasaas. Both are of crucial importance to us Indians. The first robs the country of huge financial wealth that could accelerate the development of the physical and social infrastructure contributing greatly to inclusive growth. The second robs us of a huge reservoir of potential talent there for the taking.

While hugely proliferating Madarasaas are evidence that a large percentage of our Muslim population are unable to access modern education, there is also the widespread speculation and suspicions about their sources of income. In his highly informative essay, Dr. M. A. Haque rightly concludes: "... a lot needs to be done to provide opportunities to Muslim children and their guardians to choose between Madarsaas and mainstream education. For children, Madarsaa education should be by choice and not by compulsion. By just sermonizing that the Madarsaas are pushing the Muslim community towards backwardness or that these institutions are growing on account of foreign funds is not going to help in any way."

By the time this issue reaches you we would have had our meeting to discuss the outcome of the General Elections. The proceedings of this discussion will be comprehensively covered in the July issue. We invite you to write in your views on any facet of the election that you would like share with our readers. The deadline is June 12, 2009. You can email your comments to us at jurasv@gmail.com and freedom@vsnl.com. While email is preferred we shall accept typewritten matter. Handwritten material is very difficult to process as we do not have the 'infrastructure' for the purpose.

And, before signing off, a mention about Aung San Suu Kyi. This brave lady is facing yet another prison term. We understand that she is far from well and the cruel military junta show no signs of relenting and is determined to crush her spirit. Even if the Government of India shies away from speaking out for her, we the Indian people do want to protest and *Freedom First* adds its little voice to the demand that Aung San Suu Kyi be freed from bondage.

Editor

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