

# Indian

JOURNALISM WITH A SOUL

# Currents

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## DON'T BLAME IT ON VIRUS ALONE



On August 27, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a farfetched statement: We are facing an 'act of God' and it might result in the contraction of the economy. A couple of days later, on August 31, the bombshell was dropped: Indian economy contracted by 23.9 per cent in the second quarter of this year ending in June. It seems the Finance Minister had taken an 'anti-inflationary bail' before the worst news was officially announced. It is the steepest fall in recent decades. According to reports, India's decline is the worst among the world's top economies with the US economy shrinking 9.5 per cent and Japan's 7.6 per cent in the same quarter. The pertinent question is: Is pandemic the sole reason for India's double-digit negative growth?

The Covid 19 did hit economic activities to the hilt. Industries and business establishments were shut; production was down; jobs were lost; consumption level was drastically down; and investment was not taking place. But what is not clear is why the impact of the Rs 20 lakh crore package announced by the Finance Minister consecutively for about a week is not seen on the ground. It seems the package was not properly planned, as many experts pointed out. It did not put money in the hands of the people to boost consumption. Support from the government through indirect route like promise of increased lending by financial institutions has not borne the desired results. The government failed in transferring cash into the hands of the people, especially the poor who faced an existential crisis, and create public employment programmes especially in urban areas.

Just a few years ago, India was among the fastest-growing economies reaching a growth rate of over 8 per cent. Even before the virus hit Indian

economy, something 'contagious' had hit it ruthlessly: the demonetization. The economy was facing the disastrous effects of this ill-advised decision months before the tiny virus entered the country. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a noted economist, had predicted and warned the government that the blunder would lead to a drop of 2 per cent in GDP. Though the mandarins in the government had pooh-poohed the former Prime Minister, he had his fingers on the pulse of the economy and he was proved right. In fact, the Indian economy fell during the seven quarters prior to the pandemic-hit quarter – from 7.1 per cent to 6.6 to 5.8, 5.0, 5.1, 4.1 and 3.1. Hence it would not be right to say that the pandemic is the only reason for the present state of the economy.

Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India Raghuram Rajan believes that the pre-pandemic slowdown of the economy added to the present unprecedented crisis. His solution to the present predicament is as follows: If one thinks of the economy as a patient, immediate relief is what the patient needs while on the sickbed and fighting disease. This relief can come in the form of more money in the hands of the people which will increase their purchasing power and work as a stimulus to the economy. A government which paid scant regard to his advice against demonetization may not heed to his expert opinion.

As always, we would be happy to hear your reviews, comments, and suggestions.

Happy Reading!

**Dr. Suresh Mathew**  
Editor

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### CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS

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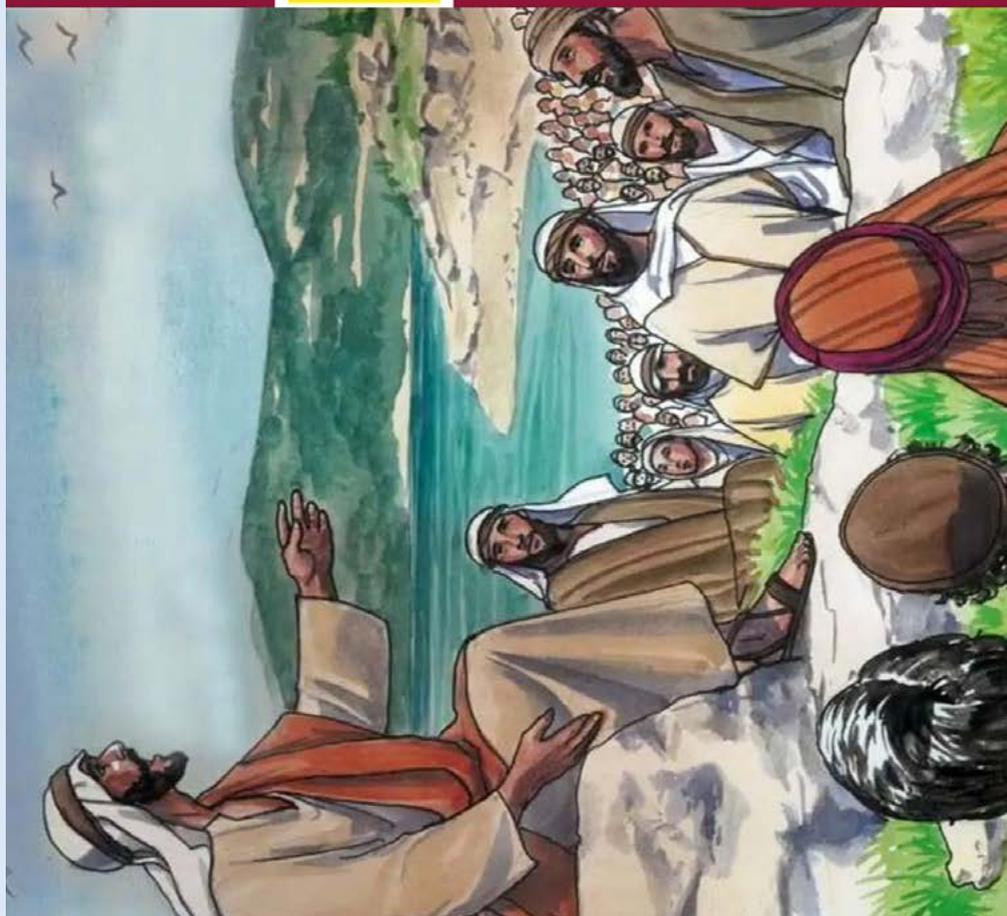
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## POWER QUOTES



If patience is worth anything, it  
must endure to the end of time.  
And a living faith will last in the  
midst of the blackest storm.

- **Mahatma Gandhi**



Be faithful in small things  
because it is in them that your  
strength lies.

- **Mother Teresa**



Faith is the strength by which  
a shattered world shall emerge  
into the light.

- **Helen Keller**



God enters by a private door  
into every individual.

- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**



Faith has to do with things that  
are not seen and hope with  
things that are not at hand.

- **Thomas Aquinas**



Too often we underestimate  
the power of a touch, a smile,  
a kind word, a listening ear,  
an honest compliment, or the  
smallest act of caring, all of  
which have the potential to  
turn a life around.

- **Leo Buscaglia**



What sunshine is to flowers,  
smiles are to humanity. These  
are but trifles, to be sure, but  
scattered along life's pathway,  
the good they do is inconceiv-  
able.

- **Joseph Addison**

# Prophets in Modi Era

## Dr. Kafeel Kahan, Prophetic Voice against Corruption

Despite the large scale brainwashing of the people through print, electronic and social media, there are a good number of Indians who are courageous to speak the truth and stand with the prophets of truth and justice

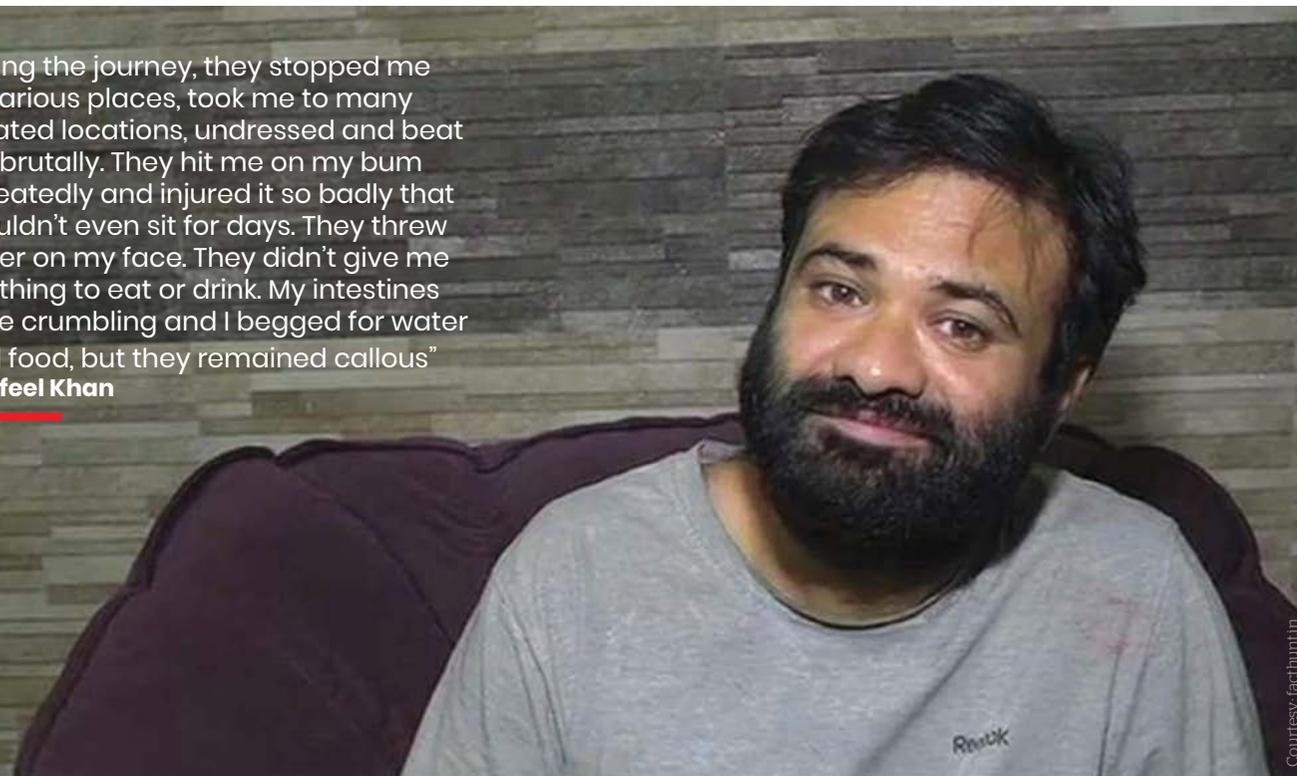


BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

The popularity of PM Modi has not dwindled despite the three huge disasters: Unprecedented spread of Coronavirus infection making India the second most infected country in the world after the US, crash of economy with 23.9% contraction of GDP in the first quarter of 2020-21 and intrusion of Chinese soldiers into Indian territory, threatening the security and sovereignty of India. The *godhi*

media continue to keep away the real issues affecting the country by pandering to the stories related to the suicide of the movie star Sushant Singh Rajput. Despite the large scale brainwashing of the people through print, electronic and social media, there are a good number of Indians who are courageous to speak the truth and stand with the prophets of truth and justice. The massive support to Prashant Bhushan in

“During the journey, they stopped me at various places, took me to many isolated locations, undressed and beat me brutally. They hit me on my bum repeatedly and injured it so badly that I couldn't even sit for days. They threw water on my face. They didn't give me anything to eat or drink. My intestines were crumbling and I begged for water and food, but they remained callous”  
- Kafeel Khan



Courtesy: facthunt.in

the contempt of court case from the intellectuals, activists, academicians and lawyers etc. shows that the prophets of truth and justice are not totally abandoned and disowned in India in spite of the threat from a government that is allergic and revengeful to any criticism.

Prophets are the conscience of the society. Throughout the history of different societies and nations, prophets appeared when *adharma* (unrighteousness) prevailed over *dharma* (righteousness) and they spoke fearlessly against oppression, exploitation, injustice, corruption and immorality. These prophets belonged to different fields like politics, religion, professions, bureaucracy etc. What was common to all of them was their unwavering commitment to truth and love for the people. Three prominent qualities of a prophet are COURAGE, COMPASSION and CREATIVITY.

Ever since the BJP under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi came to power at the Centre in 2014, its main focus has been implementing its Hindutva ideology that is divisive, exclusive and anti-democratic. Hatred and revenge against certain communities were reflected in its policies and actions. Although the BJP had promised to the aspiring Indians *sabka saat sabka vikas and vishwas*, its policies reflected just the opposite. Good governance, the plank on which Narendra Modi was projected as the *vikas purush*, took a backseat during the last six years. Anyone who disagreed with the ideology of the BJP and criticized its policies was branded as anti-national and an enemy of the nation. Many who expressed their dissent were put behind the bars by making use of the draconian laws like Sedition law, National Security Act (NSA), Public Safety



### The godi media continue to keep away the real issues affecting the country by pandering to the stories related to the suicide of the movie star Sushant Singh Rajput

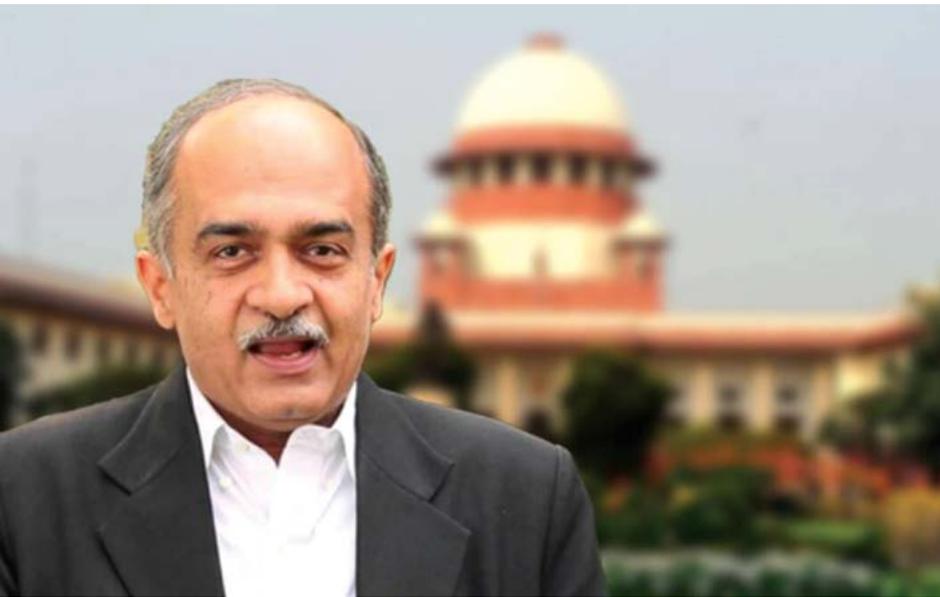
Act and Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA).

Dr. Kafeel Khan, a child specialist from Gorakhpur's Baba Raghav Das Medical College (BRDMC), is one among the many prophets that the Modi era has created. He was arrested and put behind the bars four times from September 2, 2017 to September 1, 2020. His brush with the Yogi Adityanath government started when he exposed the corruption in the Health Department in connection with the death of 70 kids at BRDMC in 2017 due to short supply of liquid oxygen. He was one among the 9 doctors

accused of being negligent and responsible for the tragic incident.

In an interview with Outlook's Jeevan Prakash Sharma, Khan described how he was tortured after his arrest in Mumbai on January 29, 2020, and why he fears the UP government will encounter him or his family members. The interview was published in the Outlook Newsletter on 7th September. The experience of Kafeel Khan exposes what extent a government can be vindictive to an individual whom it perceives as a threat. Kafeel Khan made it very clear in his interview that he was arrested and persecuted not because he is a Muslim, but because he exposed corruption in the government.

Kafeel Khand was first arrested on September 2, 2017, being accused of medical negligence that led to the death of 72 children. According to Kafeel Khan, the authorities wanted to make him a scapegoat. The 13 committees that the government had set up to probe the case could not find any fault with him. On the contrary, they appreciated his role, as he spent money from his own pocket to arrange oxygen cylinders. Now, the government has set up



## The massive support to Prashant Bhusan in the contempt of court case from the intellectuals, activists, academicians and lawyers etc. shows that the prophets of truth and justice are not totally abandoned and disowned in India in spite of the threat from a government that is allergic and revengeful to any criticism

the 14th committee to investigate his role. All other eight accused doctors have been reinstated in the service, but his suspension still continues. After 8 months imprisonment the Allahabad High Court released him on bail on April 28, 2018. The court categorically said that there was no shred of evidence that could prove his medical negligence.

The second arrest was on September 22, 2018, in Bahraich, where he went to highlight the death of over 78 children in a government-run district hospital due to a viral infection called encephalitis. The hospital author-

ities had tried to cover up their negligence by calling it a mysterious disease. He was released on November 3, 2018, again on bail.

The third arrest was in connection with the protest against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). When the parliament passed the act he started campaigning against it. In his interview, he said that he did not oppose CAA per se. According to him, CAA + NRC (National Register of Citizenship Act) is a dangerous combination. That is why he protested against it. He was invited to address a gathering of 600 students in Aligarh Muslim University on

December 12, 2019. As the college campus witnessed violence on December 15, the local police blamed his speech and lodged an FIR against him for inciting the students.

It is very strange that the police arrested him 46 days after the incident on January 29, 2020, when he was about to address a gathering in Mumbai. When the local court granted him bail on February 10, he was still kept in detention for three days. When the court again ordered the police to release him on February 13, he was re-arrested (fourth time) under the National Security Act (NSA) on February 14.

As part of the interview Kafeel Khan narrated how he was tortured brutally during his travel from Mumbai to Agra. "During the journey, they stopped me at various places, took me to many isolated locations, undressed and beat me brutally. They hit me on my bum repeatedly and injured it so badly that I couldn't even sit for days. They threw water on my face. They didn't give me anything to eat or drink. My intestines were crumbling and I begged for water and food, but they remained callous", he told. When the court sent him to Mathura jail for the initial three days, he was kept in a separate cell with no food and water. Thus during the six days he was given only two chapatis to eat. "I was so hungry and thirsty that I used to shout in pain. I was not able to stand. I felt like I would eat anything, even grass or bricks", he told the interviewer.

Although the Supreme Court on March 18 had asked the Allahabad High Court to hear his case on priority basis, his case was not taken till August 4. On August 11 the SC again asked the High Court to hear his case within 15 days, and his case was taken on August



27 and 28. On September 1, the Allahabad High Court ruled that his detention under NSA illegal and held that his speech was not communally inciting, but was instead a call for national integrity and unity. Kafeel Khan fears that he could be eliminated. Therefore he has shifted his family to Jaipur in Rajasthan.

At the end of the interview he said that he would continue his fight against the CAA and NRC combination. Similarly he is determined to expose the government's failure on the health front and its vindictiveness against the poor people. Before his arrest on January 29 he had initiated a campaign for "Health for All". He has decided to continue his mission of improving the health of the kids.

Even though Kafeel Khan had to suffer a lot, he is not ready for any compromise with corruption and religion based discrimination. He is determined to continue his fight against injustice and corruption along with his work of compassion for the children. He is truly a prophet because a prophet is ready to accept the consequences of his prophetic actions, however harsh they may be.

Dr. Kafeel Khan is only one representative of the hundreds of prophets in India. Journalist Gautam Navlakha and academic Anand Teltumbde were arrested by the National Investigation

Agency (NIA) on April 14, 2020. They have been charged under the strict Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for allegedly having links with the Maoists and conspiring to assassinate Modi and overthrow his government. Both of them were initially booked for allegedly instigating caste based violence at a gathering in the town Bhima Koregoan in Maharashtra in January 2018.

In connection with Bhima Koregoan violence nine prominent activists were arrested in 2018 and they have been in jail since then. They are 1) Sudha Bharadwaj, a law professor and trade unionist who fought for the rights of the tribals 2) Vavara Rao, a poet and a Communist ideologue 3) Arun Ferreira, human rights lawyer 4) Vernon Gonsalves, human rights lawyer 5) Sudhir Dhawale, an activist working with tribals 6) Shoma Sen, an academic and women's rights activist 7) Surendra Gadling, human rights lawyer and Dalit Activist 8) Mahesh Raut, an activist working with the tribals and 9) Rona Wilson, Delhi based social activist. Their crime is that they have been fighting for the rights of the under-privileged groups and in that process they have become stumbling blocks to the vested interests who have been exploiting the socially and economically backward groups. The 79 year old poet,

## Prophets in all societies were branded as extremists and lawbreakers and were persecuted and even murdered

Varavara Rao, is not given bail even after contracting Covid in the Jail. 'Maoist sympathiser' or 'supporter' is an easily used pretext by governments to haunt the activists.

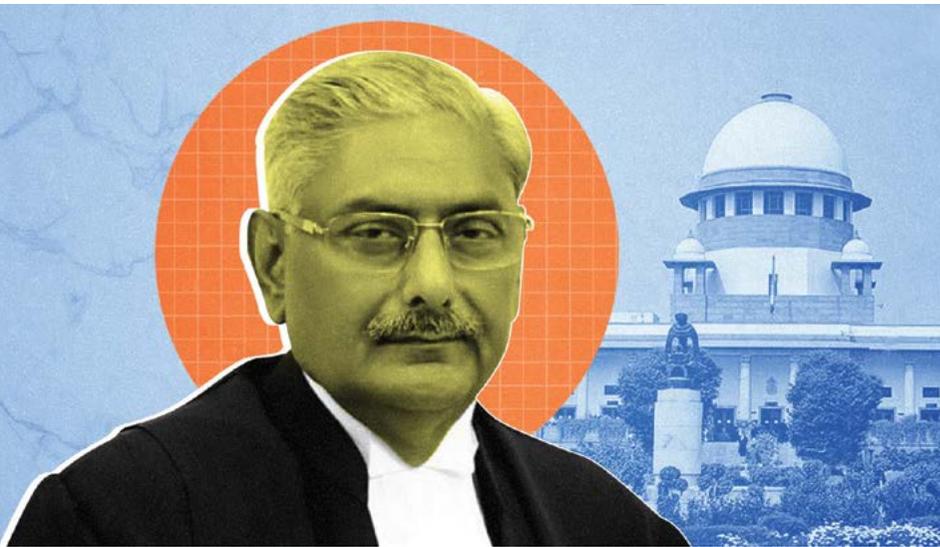
Prophets in all societies were branded as extremists and lawbreakers and were persecuted and even murdered. Jesus was crucified being accused of sabotaging the society because of the nexus between the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities. The followers of Jesus are called to become His Disciples and continue his prophetic mission. Jesus was primarily a prophet who questioned injustice, exploitation and abuse of power in the society in which he lived. While hundreds of Indians are becoming the prophets of truth and justice in the present socio-political context of India are the Christians fulfilling their prophetic role? Are the Churches in India making aware of their members about their prophetic mission or are they satisfied with carrying out the routine rituals and devotions? 🙏

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Letter to Justice Mishra

# Constitution, not Conscience



Dear Mr Justice Arun Mishra,

It is your parting comment that you wrote your judgements on the basis of the dictates of your conscience that prompts me to write this letter.

I thought all judges, especially of the Supreme Court, gave their verdicts within the four walls of the Constitution, based on the materials placed before them in the larger interest of “we the people”.

It is the first time a judge has used the word “conscience” to justify his decisions. You would do well to remember how you took your oath of office.

Did you say that you would uphold your conscience at all times without fear or favour? Did the word ‘conscience’ figure in the oath at all? Like every judge, you

had taken the oath to uphold the Constitution, not your conscience.

I do not suggest that conscience has no role. The word means the part of your mind that tells you if what you are doing is right or wrong. That depends on the kind of conscience you have. I will come to that in an instant.

When Adolf Hitler sent thousands of Jews to the gas chambers at Auschwitz and other places, his conscience was clear that he was doing a great thing to wipe out all alien cultures from his Fatherland.

The Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, which was at one time a great civilisation as can be inferred from Angkor Wat, did worse things in the name of conscience.

Again, it was conscience which guided those who pushed the poor Muslims into the oven of the Best



BY A.J. PHILIP

Bakery in Gujarat in 2002. Those “gentlemen” who threw LPG cylinders into the burning houses of some in Northeast Delhi were also guided by their conscience. Mr Justice, your conscience theory is hollow.

You said your conscience is clear as you retire from the apex court. Whether you have the moral right to retire honourably and draw a fat pension or not is a separate question.

No, I do not grudge your luck of being born in privileges or, to use a cliché, with a silver spoon in your mouth as the son of a high court judge.

What about those whose lives have been devastated by your arrogance and misapplication of justice?

I have a friend who had a house in an apartment complex in Kochi which you got demolished for no rhyme or reason, except to satisfy your ego.

Her husband is a doctor in a government hospital in a small country known as the “Abode of Peace” in Southeast Asia. It is a Kingdom where the doctors are paid well. They are a small family. They know that they cannot live on the island, once his job contract is over.

That is why they bought the flat in the hope of settling down in it once they returned to Kerala for good. She did everything possible to furnish and decorate their house. Today, all her dreams lie buried in the debris, part of which



Courtesy: newindianexpress.com

## Arun Mishra on Maradu Flats, “No question of going back to our earlier order. An order is an order. It has to be complied with”

is still in the backwaters. You retired peacefully but she can never retire peacefully because you shattered her peace and sense of security forever.

No, she is not the only one to suffer. She sent me a letter written by a flat owner who bought two flats taking bank loans in the belief that the rent from one flat would help make a living once he returned to Kerala.

Today, he has to pay EMI for the two flats he had the mortification

to see imploding. Do you know the consequences of your action?

You were ostensibly protecting the environment. Did you know that when the great flood occurred in 2018 and water entered the first floor in the Kochi International Airport, not a drop of flood water entered the five towers which were dynamited?

The buildings did not come up one fine morning. The 343 flat owners were paying land rent and GST on the materials used in the construction on loans advanced by banks which did not sense anything wrong in the land documents mortgaged to them.

Finally, the Kerala High Court cleared the construction and people were staying comfortably there. That is when you intervened and ordered the demolition that nobody asked for.

Now that you have a lot of free time as your post-retirement job is yet to come, I am ready to take

you to some DDA colonies to show you how tens of thousands of flats have undergone modifications and expansion by greasing the palms of the police and the DDA authorities etc right here in the heart of India’s Capital.

There is the famous apartment complex that came up in Mumbai ostensibly to accommodate the widows of Kargil. It was in total violation of all rules. However, judges, more sensible than you, imposed a heavy penalty and regularised the construction for they knew that the option of demolition would have been environmentally more harmful.

Judge, you could have asked the government to take over the buildings to accommodate central government officials posted in Kochi. Alternatively, the flats could have been given to roofless persons. Or, to the owners themselves who were ready to pay a penalty.

Instead, what did you do? You ordered demolition. The Kerala Government had to spend crores and crores of rupees to demolish and clear the debris.

Now, the government will have to meet the demands of the local people whose houses suffered damages when the apartment towers were demolished. A friend suggested that your provident fund etc should be attached to meet a part of the cost, though there is no such provision in the law. I won't blame you alone for your abhorrent act.

Your higher authorities should have intervened and prevented the demolition. Alas, the Chief Justice was more interested in saving himself from the charge that he sexually exploited a staff member than to be bothered by the travails of the apartment owners.

Do you know that under the new environment rules brought into force by the Modi Government, the same structures can be rebuilt on the same spot without question? Did not you feel ashamed when you came across

## Do you know that under the new environment rules brought into force by the Modi Government, the same structures can be rebuilt on the same spot without question?

this fact? How could you, because you were guided solely by your conscience that had nothing to do with realities?

How I wish you had heard my friend or any of the flat owners before you gave your like Tughluq-like order! I am sorry that I compared you to Muhammad bin Tughluq, the 14th century ruler who had a greater common sense for he changed his decision and brought back his Capital to Delhi.

Unlike you, he did not persist with his folly. He changed his decision as soon as he realised the blunder.

Arrogance has been defined as knowledge without wisdom. You caused a social turmoil in Kerala by dispensing justice totally in favour of the Orthodox faction against the interests of the Jacobite group.

I could have understood you giving at least some churches where the members are predominantly Jacobites to the Jacobite church.

We saw at Mulanthuruthi and other places Jacobites forcibly evicted from their churches. Let me add, I do not have any sympathy for either faction because they allowed a character like you to decide the case when the Bible teaches how brothers should settle their disputes in a spirit of reconciliation.

I remember how arrogantly you threatened to name a High Court judge of Kerala for giving an order which was essentially ameliorative in character. You did not even think that the judge could have been elevated to occupy the same place you occupied in the apex court.

I had the fortune of interviewing Justice VR Krishna Iyer, one of the greatest judges of the Supreme Court. He was courtesy personified. He never lost his cool even when I asked him some tough questions like how he spoke to his dead wife.

You should have remembered that the Supreme Court is supreme not because it has superior wisdom but because there is no higher appellate court in India. Yet, you had the audacity to humiliate the judge in your court knowing full well that the victim judge could not retaliate.

I have noticed that the most

arrogant persons are the most subservient to their masters. You were no exception.

At an international judicial conference in February, you had a forum to expound your legal theories or, as is wont now, to claim that human rights and the rule of law originated in India where there were groups of people who were not only untouchable but also unseeable.

Instead, you used the forum to describe Narendra Modi as a "versatile genius" and an "internationally acclaimed visionary". Even Modi would have been embarrassed by your praise. Many of his party men realise that he is a spent force whom they do not know how to get rid of.

When I read your speech, I remembered former Union Law Minister Arun Jaitley who once mentioned that judges were people who moved about in high circles distributing their biodata. He also described in Parliament how they created jobs for themselves like by ordering that every Chief Information Commissioner in a state should be a retired judge. Sorry, I saw your praise as an appeal to Modi for a post-retirement job.

We have seen how Modi picked up Justice Ranjan Gogoi for a Rajya Sabha seat even before the chair he occupied in the Supreme Court had lost his warmth. There are reports that he may even be the BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate in Assam.

I am sure that you know Rekha Sharma, a former judge of the Delhi High Court. Even if you do not know her, you would certainly have read her article entitled "Goodbye Justice Mishra: His legacy casts a shadow over the country's highest court at a critical moment" (The Indian Express, September 3).



## What contempt did Prashant Bhushan cause that you did not cause by gagging the Press not to report the details of the allegations against your former boss?

You came to the limelight when you were chosen to hear the case seeking investigation into the mysterious death of CBI judge BH Loya, who was hearing the case of the encounter killing of Sohrabuddin Sheikh and his wife in which Home Minister Amit Shah was allegedly involved. True, you recused yourself from the case when three senior judges revolted against the practice of allocating politically significant cases to you, a relatively junior judge.

The whole country was shocked when Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi constituted a Bench presided over by him with you as a fellow judge to hear the case against himself.

If you had any sense of shame, you should not have joined the Bench. How could Gogoi

preside over a bench which was constituted to whitewash the charge of sexual harassment against him? Or, do you believe that a CJI has a superior morality that allows him to attempt the physical?

Never before had the Supreme Court's prestige plummeted to such a low depth. While advising my friends to read Justice Rekha Sharma's article, let me mention your parting gift of Re 1 to the national exchequer.

What contempt did Prashant Bhushan cause that you did not cause by gagging the Press not to report the details of the allegations against your former boss?

Do you know how much money and time of the government and the Supreme Court you have wasted to extract that one rupee from Bhushan? This was at a time when the court did not have time to hear petitions about the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution and breaking up of J&K, the brainwave of Amit Shah.

You have retired. You may become a governor or a minister or a chairman of some authority which will fetch you a lot of power and pelf but remember what the great English essayist Francis Bacon said, "Judges must beware of hard constructions and strained inferences, for there is no worse torture than that of laws".

It is a time of repentance, a time to atone for your decisions that have ruined the lives of many, Mr Justice Arun Mishra.

Yours etc 🇮🇳

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Courtesy: Satish Acharya /FB

# ECONOMY IN FREE FALL

A THROWBACK TO 1991

India's GDP falls by 23.9% in April-June quarter in worst-ever contraction



BY JASWANT KAUR

**F**inally, the result is out. We are in the negative. It is neither 16 per cent nor 18.5 per cent, as estimated by different agencies. It has actually slipped by 23.9 per cent. A double-digit negative growth would have certainly given sleepless nights to the policy-makers.

This is the shape of the Indian economy after the country was put under strict lockdown for nearly 100 days. This estimation has been done by none other than the Minis-

try of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) last week for the June quarter. Hence, the figure cannot be refuted.

In less than a month, the second quarter will also come to an end. Will it be worse or the worst? We could neither control the virus nor the economy from deep diving. When the 21 days' mantra of *ghar mein rahiye, surakshit rahiye* (Stay home, Stay Safe) got extended multiple times, we all knew that the worst was yet to come.

The sad tale of the migrant labourers and daily wage workers walking back to their villages barefoot, without food and other basic necessities, should have been enough to wake up the government from deep slumber.

We saw our finance minister conducting conferences very often during the lockdown, presenting a brave face, as if the government was trying to overhaul the machinery. But now, the ministers are as invisible as the virus is. We rarely get to listen to them. We do not know whether Prime Minister's Atma Nirbhar Bharat scheme will kick off. We also do not know whether the government is capable of rejigging the economy. But we certainly know that the government perhaps has to do something big, something out-of-the-box to actually kickstart the economic activity.

Our readers may be thinking that since we are in unlock 4.0, what else can the government do. Like diligent professionals, they have been telling you to work from home, wear masks, maintain social distancing, avoid venturing out etc. But is it all that the government should have done?

Come September 7, the loss-making Metro shall also be given a new lease of life. Of course, the schools and colleges are still locked in view of what the US faced.

**We saw our finance minister conducting conferences very often during the lockdown, presenting a brave face, as if the government was trying to overhaul the machinery. But now, the ministers are as invisible as the virus is**



Courtesy: Satish Acharya / FB

## Increase in Covid-19 infections, deaths and topsy-turvy behaviour of various state governments – announcing sudden lockdowns, short curfews – have led to a lot of fear and uncertainty

omy. The government may have to think out of the box or may have to look back, deep dive into our history to find a solution. The current crisis can be somewhat related to what we saw in 1991.

At that time, Saddam Hussain's Kuwait invasion had created a debilitating oil crisis in India. Something similar to what Coronavirus has done. The two situations may not be same but they are comparable. We had a huge pile of sovereign debt and the only option that the government had was to pawn its gold reserves.

The news of the government pledging gold and airlifting of 21,000 kg of metal had sent shivers down everyone's spine. We may not have sovereign debt right now but what is disturbing is the negative growth of the economy. Poverty is increasing manifold after decades of consistent decline. In other words, factually circumstances may differ but their effect on the economy can be said to be similar.

With consistent devaluation of the rupee, dwindling foreign reserves, the late PV Narasimha

A question that comes to mind is; if we had closed ourselves, only to open when the infections were at its peak, why did we close at all?

People may have contrary views on this. Yet, this question often pops up during candid discussions. Had we adopted a different strategy, we would not have landed ourselves in this deep trouble. Anyway, let bygones be bygones. The loss the nation has suffered cannot be recouped with a magic wand. It may take years to revive the economy. Yet, the government cannot sit idle, with the leader giving only speeches and waiting for things to settle on their own. It has to come up with the CFO mindset – maximising output, reducing cost, analysing its assets, creating new opportuni-

ties so that people have money in hand to kickstart the cycle.

Currently, the government may have announced unlock guidelines. People have certainly started coming out of their houses. But one quarter of inactivity has led to pay cuts, job losses, business shutdowns etc. People are not keen to spend because of the uncertainty in the market. The current increase in Covid-19 infections, deaths and topsy-turvy behaviour of various state governments — announcing sudden lockdowns, short curfews — have led to a lot of fear and uncertainty. People are not willing to spend as they fear loss of savings or jobs.

This volatility, coupled with high inflation, will not give the much-needed boost to the econ-

Rao placed the new industrial policy in Parliament. The move was said to be drastic. Except for 18 industries, the government had abolished the licensing system. The industrialists were free to enter any sector, expand into new avenues, without going through the cumbersome and time-taking approvals and licences.

The government opened the doors for foreign investments. The limit for foreign ownership was extended from 40 per cent to 51 per cent. The public sector undertakings were allowed to sell their shares. Had the government not taken those drastic steps, India would have never grown at such a fast rate.

The government had struck all the right chords. They could analyse what actually was stopping them from growing. Similarly, the present government needs to sit, analyse and come up with a strategy of reviving the economy, creating more jobs, generating money and demand.

The most pertinent question that the government should answer is how to get funds cycle-kicking once again. Considering the slowdown in the foreign market, right now, we may have to look inwards. Before Covid-19 made its entry, India Inc., was already struggling with its banking sector. Needless to say, this is one sector, which is crucial for driving demand, either by printing notes or by making available finance to the general public.

However, considering the current financial crunch, people may not be ready to borrow. They might be suppressing their demands. At the same time, the corporate sector is struggling for money to revive businesses.

One way of looking at the current situation would be to restructure existing loans for



Courtesy: Mika Azizi / Twitter

**The loss the nation has suffered cannot be recouped with a magic wand. It may take years to revive the economy. Yet, the government cannot sit idle, with the leader giving only speeches and waiting for things to settle on their own**

genuinely distressed corporate borrowers, something which the RBI has already announced. However, this process needs to be done scrupulously without giving any benefit to consistent defaulters. This may give some leeway to the corporate houses to start their business, thereby generating jobs for the jobless.

Similarly, what may drive an individual to purchase products is again looking at loans from a different view or repackaging them differently. People usually don't buy when they have an existing EMI to serve with limited income. In case, the same EMI is lowered and spread across a longer time, they may have more money in hand for buying newer products. Of course, the loan

servicing cost may increase. Yet, this seems to have worked generally.

The government can sell off its share in Air India, BPCL and other PSUs for generating revenue for meeting its deficits, and pumping that money into profitable ventures. However, it has to instil confidence in the general public in this VUCA environment.

In case the Modi government is able to bring the country out of this crisis, the world will look at India differently. It is time to write a golden chapter in India's history just like that of 1991. But then, Modi has to make a difficult choice of choosing economy over politics. 🇮🇳

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# Q & A MODI GOVT IS BANKRUPT SAYS YASHWANT SINHA

**Anju Grover** for *Indian Currents* spoke to former Finance Minister **Yashwant Sinha** to know implications of the 23.9 % contraction in the GDP and ways to recover from this jolt. Sinha has squarely blamed the government for its incompetence, adding that the economy plummeted after demonetisation and implementation of a faulty GST regime. He said that there is no money in market and Modi government is bankrupt. He suggested the government should focus on demand than on supply. In the current climate of demand depression, he further suggested, the government should monetise the economy by borrowing from the RBI and properly spend in infrastructural projects in order to create employment.

**Y**ashwant Sinha is a former Indian administrator, politician and a former Minister of Finance (1990–1991 under Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and March 1998 – July 2002 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Minister of External Affairs July 2002 – May 2004). He was a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party before he quit the party on 21 April 2018. Here are the excerpts from the interview.

• **The Indian economy has shrunk 23.9 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter (Q1) of 2020, i.e. from April to June - much worse than market forecasts of an 18.3 per cent drop. This is the biggest**

**contraction on record in India's statistical history as the coronavirus-induced nationwide lockdown aggravated an already terrible economic situation. Why is the contraction in India so severe?**

• **A** The figure of 23.9 per cent does not include the contraction in the MSME sector for which figures have not yet been received. If the MSME figures come, then the contraction would perhaps be between 35 or 40 per cent. In actual terms, the contraction of 23.9 per cent means a loss of almost Rs. 50 lakh crore in the GDP and that is nearly 25 per cent of the total GDP of Rs. 200 lakh crore. It will ultimately reflect on per capita income. This means that many people, including those who are

above the poverty line, would have been pushed below the poverty line. Crores of people have lost their livelihood in the course of the lockdown. Those who have been able to retain their livelihood are getting much less than what they were getting earlier. The construction sector, which is the biggest employer in India, has contracted very badly. The MSME sector, which has the potential to employ people, is facing a crisis because many units have closed down. There is an overall suffering in the society as a result of the contraction. By and large, people do not understand the GDP, but the moment you relate it with their lives, they immediately understand what it means.



**Q For the first time in India's recorded statistical history, all the eight GDP segments, except agriculture, have seen major contraction in the April-June quarter of 2020. Is lockdown the sole reason behind contraction?**

**A** It is now official that India's economy had been contracted badly from the year 2018-19. And continuously for eight quarters, it came down from nearly 8 per

cent to 3 per cent. The lockdown was an irrational step. Without understanding the implications of either coronavirus or the lockdown, Modi government announced the national lockdown on March 24. The announcement was done without taking into account the impact that the lockdown would have on livelihoods, on every walk of life. Lockdown has proved to be a disaster.

**Among the G20 countries, India is the one that has suffered the most in terms of contraction of the GDP. Neither the U.S. nor Brazil has recorded that kind of contraction in their GDP**



Courtesy: Twitter

Among the G20 countries, India is the one that has suffered the most in terms of contraction of the GDP. Neither the U.S. nor Brazil has recorded that kind of contraction in their GDP. Like demonetisation and GST, this lockdown has badly affected the economy, which already had a delicate health before the lockdown.

**Q Since quarterly estimates rely on time series projection and in the absence of actual data, past values tend to influence upward bias, the contraction is much more than the 23.9 per cent announced...**

**A** Yes, you are right. The MSME data comes with a lag of three years in our system. Quarterly estimates are prepared on the basis of select number of organised industrial units and agriculture. The agriculture sector has recorded a decent growth in this quarter, which is a saving grace. But the government cannot take credit for growth in the agriculture sector. The agriculture growth is dependent on monsoon and winter rains in India.

**Q The data on agriculture is collected bi-annually and that on industries annually in India. Service sector data often is collected once in three to five years. The quarterly estimates are not based on surveys. It raises doubts on the process of data collection itself.**

**A** You are right. The process of data collection, compilation and analysis needs to be improvised. This is the first government that has interfered with data collection and presentation. Acting chairperson of the National Statistical Commission and another member were forced to resign because the government was not ready to publish jobs report. Dressing up with data has become a habit of the Modi government.

**Q The government has made efforts to address the problems by making two rounds of announcements in the form of enhanced payments for farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme and a set of guarantees for loans to be made by banks to the MSMEs and the agricultural sector, besides a host of structural reforms. But there is a financial crisis in the country, so what can the government do in it?**

**A** It is sheer incompetence on the part of the government. For two years, economists across the board have been saying that problems of the economy are on the demand side. The government, instead, is tackling problems of the supply side. The concession in income tax to the big industry or the Rs. 21 lakh crore package are the decisions for the supply side. The government has done precious little to raise demands in the economy. If proper investments are made based on borrowing to address the demand side, then there will be some hope for economy post COVID-19. If those steps are not taken even today, then there will be no demand, no employment and no industrial expansion. There will be more economic problems.

**Q In the current climate of demand depression, as former finance minister, what are your suggestions to the current finance minister?**

**A** The government should start making investments in the infrastructure sector. This is what we did when Mr. Vajpayee was the prime minister and I was the finance minister. We were facing the crisis post economic sanctions. We had started investments in national highways, rural roads, telecom, besides hous-



**Make investments in infrastructure in order to create demand, put money into people's pockets by creating employment opportunities through infrastructure. Investment in demands will encourage consumption**

ing and railways to encourage demand. So, investments must be properly done to get the desired results. During the global financial crisis of 2008, the UPA government had tried to raise demand by directly putting money into people's pockets. And that led to inflation. Make investments in infrastructure in order to create demand, put money into people's pockets by creating employment opportunities through infrastructure. Investment in demands will encourage consumption. The government should ask RBI to print notes which it should lend to the government. The government

then should spend the money on infrastructure, which will generate employment and that will reduce the transaction cost in the economy. Good railway and good airlines will always help in reducing the transaction cost in the economy. **C**



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# Guardians of Civil Liberty

## High Courts Rise to Protect Civil Liberties

Several high courts in the country have come to the rescue of the affected groups and individuals at a time when protection of civil liberties in different parts of the country has become a grave concern



**A**t a time when protection of civil liberties in different parts of the country has become a grave concern because of the high-handed behaviour of the police and other law-enforcing agencies, several high courts in the country have come to the rescue of the affected groups and individuals.

In a very significant order, the Delhi High Court on September 1 allowed the bail plea filed by Pinjara Tod activist Devangana Kalita in a case related to Delhi riots in

which more than 50 people, mostly Muslims, were killed. The order was pronounced by Justice Suresh Kumar Kait.

Kalita is an accused in four FIRs related to the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests and the Delhi riots and has been in judicial custody in Tihar jail after her arrest in May. Kalita's bail plea was rejected by the trial court in June. In the High Court, Kalita argued that there was no evidence to show her participation in the rioting or



BY JOSEPH MALIAKAN

violence. She neither featured in any of the CCTV footage collected by Delhi Police nor was her name taken by the co-accused Shahrukh.

The Delhi Police submitted that the demonstrations in which Kalita had participated were part of a "conspiracy to lower the country's image" when U.S. President Donald Trump was visiting India. In the bail order, the Court said, "No prejudice would be caused to the respondent's investigation by grant of relief to the petitioner, and she would be prevented from suffering further unnecessary harassment, humiliation and unjustified detention."

The court also observed that "though her presence is seen in peaceful agitation, which is fundamental right guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution of India," the Delhi Police failed

**There was a time when the High Courts were guided by the Supreme Court. Perhaps the time has come when the Supreme Court has to be guided by the High Courts**



Devangana Kalita

to produce any material that she instigated women of a particular community or gave a hate speech.

In another very significant judgment, the Allahabad High Court on September 1 ordered the release of Dr. Kafeel Khan, ruling his detention under the National Security Act (NSA) was illegal. Dr. Khan was held under the NSA for a speech he had delivered during the anti-CAA protests at Aligarh Muslim University last year.

Ordering Khan's immediate release, the division bench of Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Saumitra Dayal Singh observed: "A complete reading of the speech prima facie does not disclose any effort to promote hatred or violence, also nowhere threatens peace and tranquility of the city of Aligarh. The speech also deprecates any kind of violence. It appears that the District Magistrate had selective reading and selective mention for few phrases from the speech ignoring its true intent."

The speeches were delivered in December 2019 but Khan was charged under the NSA only after a Chief Judicial Magistrate released him on bail in another case relating to the death of scores of children in a government hospital in Gorakhpur where Khan worked. Gorakhpur is also an area where Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath holds great influence. The Bench further said: "The



Dr. Kafeel Khan

**Dr. Khan was held under the NSA for a speech he had delivered during the anti-CAA protests at Aligarh Muslim University last year**

closure of examining record as suggested (by the counsel for the state) would be nothing but a licence to allow the executives to act at their whims or caprice. This would be against the fundamentals of our constitutional values and provisions." These are strong words, especially considering the fact that the Supreme Court has been sleeping over similar habeas corpus petitions for months. "Mere apprehension expressed in the grounds of detention, not founded on any material shown to exist on record, if allowed to stand, would fall foul with the test laid down by the Supreme Court in Khudi Ram Das," the Bench stated.

A Division Bench of the Bombay High Court at Aurangabad on August 22 quashed the FIRs filed against 29 foreign nationals and six Indians accused of participat-

ing in the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi without permission and for staying in masjids in Maharashtra amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Condemning the government for illegally charging the petitioners, Justice T.V.Nalawade stated: "A political government tries to find a scapegoat when there is pandemic or calamity and the circumstances show that there is probability these foreigners were chosen to make them scapegoats."

The Court also noted that the complaints were registered in the backdrop of the CAA-NRC protests in Delhi which had a substantial number of Muslim participants. In this context, Justice T.V. Nalawade in his order said: "This action indirectly gave warning to Indian Muslims that action in any form and for anything can be taken against Muslims. It was indicated that even for keeping contact with Muslims of other countries, action will be taken against them.

"Thus there is smell of malice to the action taken against these foreigners and Muslims for their alleged activities. The circumstances like malice is important consideration when relief is claimed of quashing of FIR and the case itself."

There was a time when the High Courts were guided by the Supreme Court. Perhaps the time has come when the Supreme Court has to be guided by the High Courts. The three High Court judgments briefly dealt with in this article should, one feels, with due respect, be made compulsory reading for the Supreme Court judges. Law students, I am sure will greatly benefit from closely studying the pronouncements. ©

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## Certainty of Punishment

Hardly a day goes without a rape case making headlines in India even during the challenging times when the country is trying to deal with the global pandemic

BY AARTI

Two instances of COVID-19 related rape in Kerala last week has triggered public angst. On the night of September 5, a 19 year old Covid-19 patient was reportedly raped by an ambulance driver in Pathanamthitta district. Two days earlier on September 3, a 44-year old woman in Pangode in Thiruvananthapuram district was allegedly raped by a health inspector.

Even as both the accused have been arrested, the incidents have taken a political turn with the opposition lashing out at the ruling LDF.

In the first case, according to media reports, the patient who was tested positive was asked to be ready by 9.30 AM on September 5 for being transported to the First Line Treatment Centre which was a 10 minute drive from her home. However, the driver of the 108 Ambulance Service that reached her place close to midnight instead of taking her to the treatment centre, drove past it to a deserted place only to sexually assault the hapless victim. The origi-

nally assigned Ambulance driver is believed to have made an informal arrangement with the accused (Noufal) to take the patient to the treatment centre as he did not have enough fuel in his ambulance. After Noufal was arrested it was found that he is already an accused in a murder attempt case. Noufal's story ends here as he has been dismissed from service. The investigation team has been unable to obtain from the victim as she is mentally disturbed after the incident even as a psychiatrist has been assigned for her counselling.

In the second incident of sexual abuse, the victim was asked by the health inspector to go over to his house to collect 'coronavirus negative' certificate to enable her rejoin duty post quarantine, when the sad and shameful saga unfolded. Reportedly after tying the victim's hands, the accused not only sexually assaulted her but also threatened her that he would get a case registered against her for jumping quarantine and get her arrested by police. There was public outcry and both the accused have been swiftly arrested. But the cause for concern is that hardly a day goes without a rape case making headlines in India even during the challenging times when the country is trying to deal with the global pandemic.

The Kerala Ambulance Network for indisposed victims (Kanivu) launched by the State Government almost a year back, was intended to provide free emergency trauma care ambulance service across Kerala through public private participation.

Monitored by the district-level committees headed by the district collector, anyone who wished to avail the services had to dial the toll-free number 108. The operational part, which was handled by

a private company, would collect the name and address of the patient and pass it on to the nearest ambulance. A 24x7 control room was supposed to track each ambulance.

The Kanivu service has been touted as one of the best examples of the 108 Ambulance utilization. During the initial days of lockdown, specifically in April 2020, as many as 12,531 suspected COVID-19 patients from across the states have been transported through the Kanivu ambulance network that has around 316 ambulances across

Kerala. It is said that more than 1400 employees are part of Kanivu, which includes nurses (625), drivers (625), call centre staff (100) and support staff (50).

What went wrong with the 108 Ambulance Service on that fateful night?

Was it negligence that led to lapses?

If the antecedents of Noufal had been verified, he would not have been employed with Kanivu.

Was there laxity in monitoring and effective management of the call centre?

**While a thorough probe and fixing of responsibility merits serious consideration, the management of the Ambulance service cannot absolve itself of the shameful incident that is shocking beyond words**





Courtesy: thedailystar

## While the law will take its course in respect of the two Kerala rapists for their crime on unsuspecting women, as the certainty of punishment produces a stronger deterrent effect, there is an imperative need to have these cases fast tracked

Did the drivers exchange duties on their own or it was with the knowledge of the call centre?

While a thorough probe and fixing of responsibility merits serious consideration, the management of the Ambulance service cannot absolve itself of the shameful incident that is shocking beyond words.

Against the backdrop of the 108 Ambulance sexual assault case, let's for a moment go back

to the ghastly rape and murder of 28-year-old Prathibha, a call centre employee on 13 December 2005 in Bengaluru?

Prathibha had left her home to attend the night shift at the office and instead of the assigned cab driver, another driver, Shivakumar, who picked her up in his vehicle, raped and killed her.

The incident had brought the issue of safety of women working in the night shift to the fore as also

whether the top management of such companies would be liable for the safety of women. The Managing Director of the said call centre was booked for violating the Karnataka Shops and Establishment Act. He moved the Karnataka High Court to quash prosecution proceedings arguing that he was exempt from liability under the Act.

The High Court rejected his petition. He moved the Supreme Court, which too, dismissed his appeal, allowing the prosecution to continue.

While the law will take its course in respect of the two Kerala rapists for their crime on unsuspecting women, as the certainty of punishment produces a stronger deterrent effect, there is an imperative need to have these cases fast tracked. 

# “We Must Arise!”

Emergence of the 'hindutva' ideology wedded to fascism and fundamentalism is destroying the country!



BY CEDRIC PRAKASH

On all counts the past couple of weeks, particularly the first eleven days of September, have been a defining period in the history of India. It is no longer about the 'writing is on the wall'; it is much beyond, not any more a reality show, but reality itself! It is about THE WALL which divides, denigrates, demonises and decimates. About a regime which has become completely insensitive to the cries of millions of people, which just does not care!! In the garb of 'democracy', it is hard-core fascism! There is however, a silver lining with more and more coming out (at least virtually in this time of the pandemic), becoming much more visible and vocal, saying in one loud voice, “We must arise!”

The eleventh of September was a day of great significance: several special anniversaries on just one day! In 1893, Swami Vivekananda

gave that celebrated speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago; in 1895, Vinoba Bhave was born; in 1906, Mahatma Gandhi launched the 'Satyagraha' movement in South Africa; in 2001, the world witnessed the violent attacks on the US; and now in 2020, we have just learnt the news of the sad demise of Swami Agnivesh. All seemingly unrelated events, spanning 127 years; yet in every single one of them, is that defiant assertion, “We must arise!”

Swami Vivekananda was palpably direct when he said in Chicago, “Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more

advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal”. Today, the bhakts of the Sangh Parivar are doing just what the Swami has condemned. Christians and Muslims are at the receiving end of an agenda of hate, fanaticism and bigotry. We have seen it happening in these past days. A Muslim barber from Panipat had his hand chopped off because he had '786' tattooed on it! Four Christian organisations had their FCRA suspended because of 'conversion' activities! But the

“Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now”

- Swami Vivekananda



minorities of India are no pushovers; the sanctity and rights guaranteed in the Constitution belong to every single citizen. The minorities have literally no choice today but to say in unison, **“We must arise!”**

Mahatma Gandhi launched his non-violent resistance campaign at a historic mass meeting in Johannesburg South Africa. It was the birth of a new movement ‘*Satyagraha*’ - the relentless pursuit of truth and justice. Gandhi believed that they were non-negotiables; two-sides of a coin. More than three thousand Indians (both Hindus and Muslims) and others, gathered to support the beginning of civil obedience. Later with ‘Ahimsa’

(non-violence), ‘*Satyagraha*’ would ultimately become Gandhi’s twin-doctrine in belief and in practise. He used it effectively in his struggle against British colonial rule in India. Many Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela have over the years embraced this twin doctrine. Sadly, the India of today does not have the courage to learn from the past; casteism, xenophobia, exclusiveness, pseudo-nationalism and discrimination have a stranglehold on the nation. The emergence of the ‘*hindutva*’ ideology wedded to fascism and fundamentalism is destroying the country! Some are ‘building walls and fences’ to keep ‘others’ out but **“We must arise!”**

## Vinobha Bhave initiated in 1951 the ‘Bhoodan Movement’ (Land Gift Movement) which was a voluntary land reform movement in India. The Bhoodan Movement attempted to persuade wealthy landowners to voluntarily give a percentage of their land to landless people



A case in point is the one of ‘Prashant Bhushan’. The ‘final judgement’ was delivered on 31 August after holding him guilty for contempt of court earlier. The punishment was a one-rupee fine, which today has become symbolic of the resistance also growing in India. Earlier when Bhushan was asked to tender an apology by the Supreme Court he categorically said, *“Therefore, I can only humbly paraphrase what the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi had said in his trial: I do not ask for mercy. I do not appeal to magnanimity. I am here, therefore, to cheerfully submit to any penalty that can lawfully be inflicted upon me for what the Court has determined to be an offence, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.”* A defining statement for the cause of justice and truth; for freedom of speech and expression and above all for freedom of conscience. This struggle is still on for **“We must arise!”**

Any and every form of violence is non-acceptable and needs to be strongly condemned. No violent act can be justified, whatever the provocation! That unprecedented violence in the US is remembered and defined by a date “9/11.” The very utterance of it evokes all kinds of emotions: from undiluted hatred to a feeling of utter helplessness, in the face of rabid terror; from inconsolable grief at the loss of a loved one to heated debates on imponderables. A visit to ‘ground zero’ brings back painful memories of the almost three thousand lives, which were lost in just one place. One is also reminded of the millions of people who suffer every day in Palestine and Yemen, Syria and Iraq, DR Congo and Sudan, Myanmar and Afghanistan, Venezuela and El Salvador and so many other parts of the world. Though 9/11

will continue to remain etched in memory of many, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Vietnam and Cambodia, Germany and Poland and other places will never be forgotten. We need to stop all war and violence just now; we must close down the military-industrial complex and all nations need to de-nuclearize immediately! These days we have witnessed any number of despicable acts of violence: yet another rape and murder in UP: this time of a three-year-old child; a navy veteran is bashed up in Bombay because he forwarded some message on WhatsApp. The perpetrators of these acts of violence get away with impunity! To ensure a non-violent society, **“We must arise!”**

Vinoba Bhave would have completed 125 years on 11 September. This great but unassuming Gandhian initiated in 1951 the ‘Bhoodan Movement’ (Land Gift Movement) which was a voluntary land reform movement in India. The Bhoodan Movement attempted to persuade wealthy landowners to voluntarily give a percentage of their land to landless people. Philosophically, Bhave was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s Sarvodaya movement. Women volunteers carried the message of Bhoodan to all parts of India. Women played a significant role in the Telangana Peasants Armed Struggle which challenged the feudal system. As their region became free from bonded labour, women also found freedom from this torment. Very ironically and sadly, one of the last orders of Justice Arun Mishra in the Supreme Court before his retirement was the eviction of thousands of slum dwellers who lived along the Railway tracks in Delhi. The judgement among other things stated, *“We also direct all the stakeholders that a comprehensive*

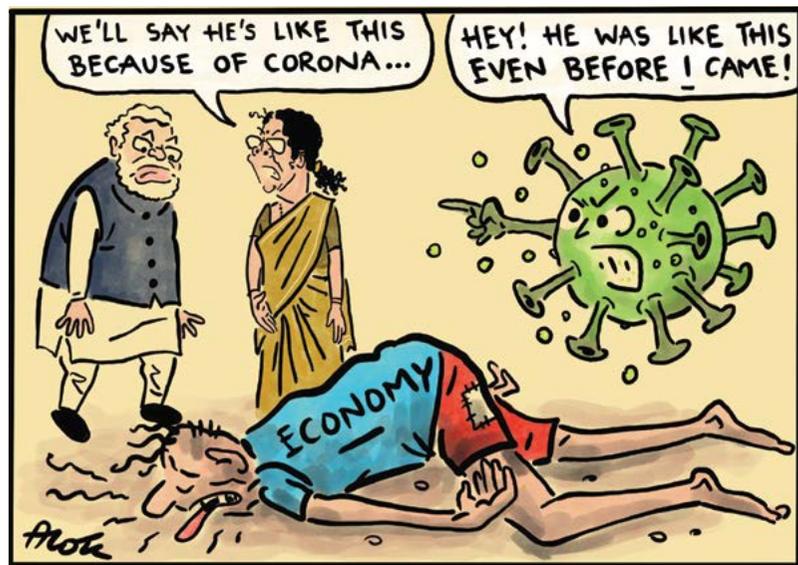
## Swami Agnivesh was a well-known social activist who founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) and worked relentlessly on behalf of the oppressed and exploited of society



*plan for removal of jhuggies be made and executed in a phased manner. The encroachments which are there in the safety zones should be removed within a period of three months and no interference, political or otherwise, should be there and no court shall grant any stay with respect to removal of the encroachments in the area in question. In case any interim order is granted with respect to encroachments, which have been made along with railway tracks, that shall not be effective.”* Writing in ‘The Wire’ (6 September 2020) V. Venkatesan says, *“The order smacks of complete absence of concern for the right to housing and dignity as part of the right to life. With such a poor record in rehabilitation, imposing a stringent deadline seems not only unjust but an invitation to a humanitarian disaster”* and further, *“With COVID-19 still raging, the court appears to have learnt no lessons from that initial abdication of its responsibility, which invited universal condemnation. The eviction order smacks of a deep disconnect of the court with*

*the realities of urban poverty and the contribution of the urban poor to the city’s growth and prosperity.”* So, at the receiving end are clearly the poor who need to say **“We must arise!”**

Swami Agnivesh left this earth on 11 September! His death is a great loss to all those who struggle for a more secular, tolerant, equitable and democratic India! Swami was a well-known social activist who founded the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) and worked relentlessly on behalf of the oppressed and exploited of society! He fought against every form of injustice and very specially against the hatred and divisiveness which is gnawing at the heart of the nation! In 2018, he was attacked by BJP henchmen and their ilk in Jharkhand when he was there to attend the 195th Damin Mahotsav at Littipara and once again at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, Delhi while on his way to pay tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He never seemed to have recovered from these violent attacks. The perpetrators once again have gone scot-free! In a tribute to him Shab-



Courtesy: Cartoonist Alok/Twitter

nam Hashmi of ANHAD says, “We have lost a fighter, but his teachings will always be with us. He believed in the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, a vision that encapsulates the world as one family. His struggle for achieving social justice and casteless society will be carried forward by thousands of those who were inspired by his life.” He has left us all a rich legacy! If Agnivesh was with us today his voice would be emphatic, “We must arise!”

Silencing those who take a stand for truth and justice, the human rights defenders, those who dissent, those who side with the poor and the excluded, the marginalized and the minorities- is a fundamental of fascists. The past few days have witnessed this in no uncertain ways. Freedom of speech and expression is being throttled. Even a virtual ‘question hour’ in Parliament was a no-go! Those who took a stand against the CAA and the NRC, have cases foisted on them and have been incarcerated. Many of them are Muslims; then we have the case of a huge 50-lakh surety being imposed on the 24 year old Dalit student Suvarna Salve by

## The economy is in a terrible mess; millions are unemployed! India’s GDP has fallen to a record minus 23.9% and the Finance Minister terms it ‘an act of God!’

the Mumbai police. Salve, a lead singer and activist of the cultural troop Samata Kala Manch, was one of the thirty-one persons to be booked by the police for participating in a peaceful rally from Hutatma Chowk to Gateway of India in South Mumbai on January 6. Over 300 people from across Mumbai had joined that anti-CAA rally. Then we have the BK-12 (11 in jail and one still to be imprisoned) who took a stand on behalf of the Dalits and the down-trodden. They were once again in the news because of their plight. The

message however is unequivocal truth can never be silenced and, “We must arise!”

On 5 September thousands observed the third anniversary of the brutal murder of Gauri Lankesh; also remembering the others who have been killed because of their efforts to preserve the secular and pluralistic fabric. A huge national effort #IFWEDONOTRISE, brought together thousands of citizens from every walk of life from 3-5 September. The statement signed by thousands said, “On the one hand, India is recording the largest daily increase in corona cases in the world, and deaths are on the rise. On the other hand, the country’s economy is in deep crisis. Lakhs of people have lost their jobs, unemployment is soaring. However, the central government has provided a niggardly relief package to tackle the crisis: neither has it substantially increased the investment on our public health services; nor has it provided any significant economic relief to the people in the form of sufficient rations and cash transfers. It has also not provided sufficient cash transfers to the states to fight the corona crisis - in a complete violation of federal norms. At the same time, taking advantage of the lockdown in which people cannot protest, the Modi government has accelerated its pro-corporate policies. It has announced a massive privatisation drive of all public sector undertakings and banks, it is accelerating the corporatisation of agriculture, it has announced a new education policy which only promotes more privatisation of education and makes it more elitist, it is dismantling labour laws to make it easier for corporations to exploit labour. Simultaneously, it has launched a vicious fascist attack to suppress all dissent, harassing and imprisoning

activists opposing its anti-people policies and reporters exposing the lies of the government under false charges; attempts are being made to silence even progressive lawyers.

We - the working people, farmers, students, youth, intellectuals, all the common people, need to unite, overcoming our religious, caste-based, gender-based, regional differences, and fight this onslaught on our livelihoods. We need to demand that the country be run according to our Constitution, which calls for building a country that guarantees good quality and free education and health care, decent jobs, and adequate shelter to all people, and also guarantees our democratic rights of speech and dissent. The people, united, can never be defeated. History has witnessed that whenever injustices were done on people, they have united and fought back and ultimately changed and advanced society. Not very long ago, we defeated the world’s biggest empire and won independence for our country. Now we need to unite to further advance the dreams of our freedom

fighters and fight for getting the Constitution implemented. More than 600 human rights groups, Farmer-Worker-Feminist-Student organizations, LGBTQIA community & intellectuals from all over the country are taking part in this movement, #IFWEDONOTRISE”. Therefore “We must arise!”

There is much more: The economy is in a terrible mess; millions are unemployed! India’s GDP has fallen to a record minus 23.9%

## Godified, paid, corporatized media tries to make us believe that the only thing that matters in the country today is the suicide or murder of a Bollywood actor



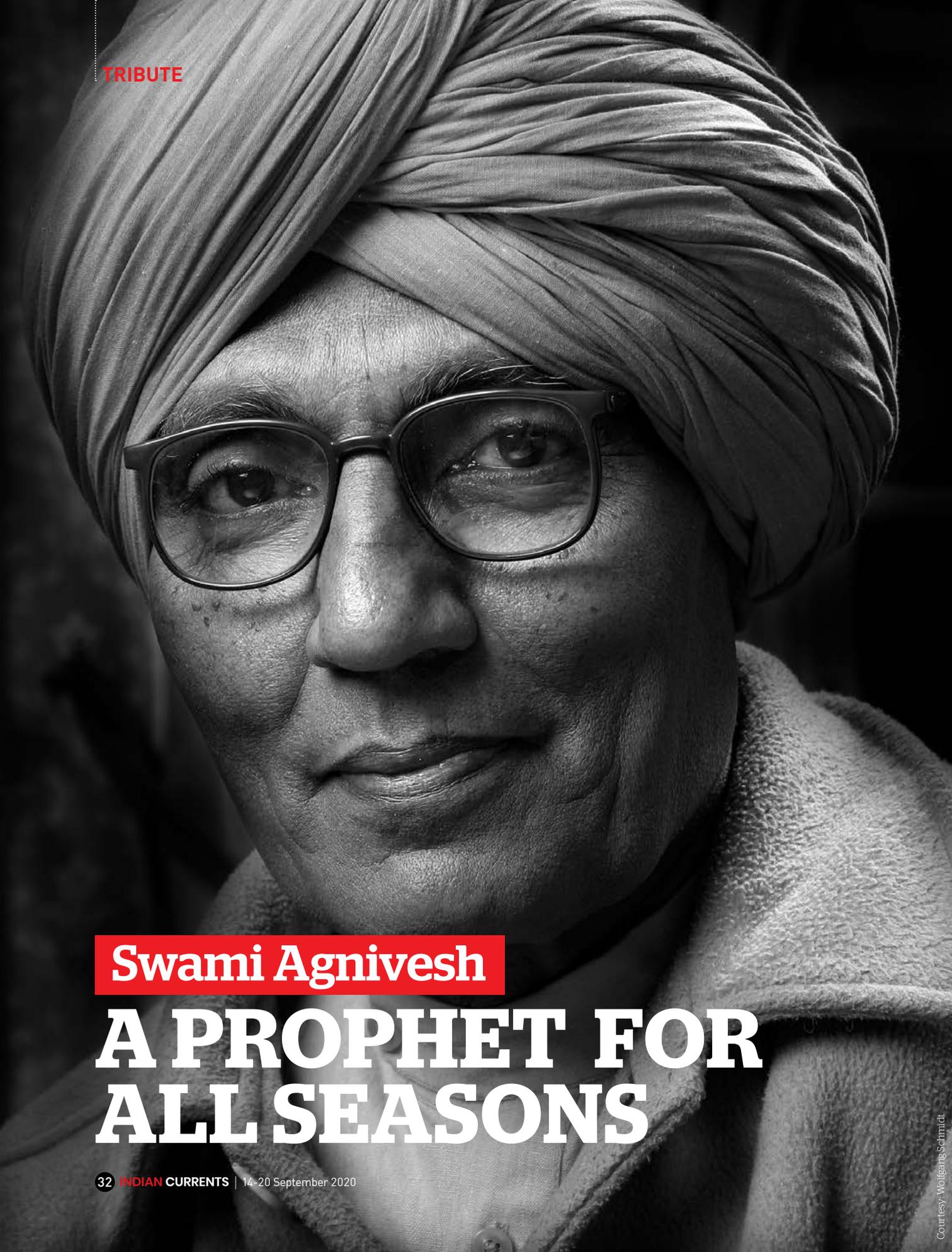
Courtesy: Satish Acharya/FB

and the Finance Minister terms it ‘an act of God!’ The COVID-19 pandemic is holding India with an iron grip; with over four million cases India is the country with the largest numbers affected and killed by the pandemic in the world after the US; in the daily spike India is on top. India has no answer to the almost daily incursions by the Chinese! Yet at the launch of the Raffaele jet in India- which is clearly one of the most corrupt cases in the history of the country – many unthinking Indians are clapping hands because some prayers were said from other religions! No God blesses corrupt deals or machines that kill other human beings! The regime is destroying the environment, ensuring that some corporates loot our precious natural resources and fragile biodiversity for their own profiteering! Adivasis are systematically being evacuated from the forest lands! The Education system is being tampered with as never before and students are left in the doldrums. All this and much more in just a few days. So, “We must arise!”

And in all this rot – Godified, paid, corporatized media tries to make us believe that the only thing that matters in the country today is the suicide or murder of a Bollywood actor and the shenanigans of an actress acting on behalf of the regime! We forget that the Bihar elections are round the corner and the Maharashtra Government has to be taught a lesson! In short, they really think that the citizens of India are a bunch of morons who cannot think for themselves any longer! Before it is too late “We must arise!”

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Swami Agnivesh**

**A PROPHET FOR ALL SEASONS**

Courtesy: Wolfgang Schmidt

Swami Agnivesh, who was hospitalized due to liver cirrhosis at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) in Delhi and suffered multiple organ failure, passed away on Friday 11 September 2020. I had spoken to him on Tuesday



BY DR J. FELIX RAJ

**S**wami Agnivesh, who was hospitalized due to liver cirrhosis at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) in Delhi and suffered multiple organ failure, passed away on Friday 11 September 2020. I had spoken to him on Tuesday

The 80-year old former professor of St. Xavier's College (1963-69) and a friend of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata and a social activist was an advocate for dialogue between religions. He was involved in various areas of social activism including campaigns against female feticide and the emancipation of women. He was a prominent associate of Anna Hazare during the India against Corruption's campaign in 2011 to implement the Jan Lokpal Bill.

Swamiji delivered the keynote address on the 15th August 2018 at SXUK to a rapt audience comprising faculty members, staff and students. His speech was both inspirational and compassionate underlining the need to serve the underprivileged section of our community, particularly the children from poverty stricken homes and of course not to forget the bonded labourers. In fact Swami Agnivesh had undertaken THIS to be his mission. He worked incessantly in trying to make a difference to the marginalised sections of our society.

Swami Agnivesh was truly "a man for others"...A sanyasi in the Arya Samaj Order, he stood tall, both on the national and international stage, as an educationist, a philanthropist, a philosopher,

a spiritualist, most of all as a humanist. The sublime words of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order applies to him perfectly... "He was contemplative in action, finding God in all things". And also important to me, Swamiji and I were close associates and friends.

I met Swami Agnivesh 34 years ago in Delhi, although I had heard of him three years prior to that, while I was a lecturer at St Xavier's College. He was known for his revolutionary ideas, oratory skills and the bold stand he often took for the liberation of the disadvantaged people.

A 14 year old Sri Lankan girl had been arrested for unlawfully entering India. She was housed in Tihar Jail in 1987. My Sri Lankan friends had requested for my help for the child. I met Swami Agnivesh seeking his guidance and advice.

Both Swamiji and I were at the court when the case came up, we

modestly sat in the last row. When the judge entered, he happened to notice Swamiji and questioned his presence. Swamiji explained the context and that he hoped for the smooth release of the minor.

Since then our friendship blossomed we worked on several issues, social and religious. Thereafter I often invited him to visit Xavier institutions be it the Jesuit College of theology in Delhi, Vidyajothi, St Xavier's College or St Xavier's University, Kolkata. He also figures amongst one of the most notable and prominent former faculty members of the St Xavier's College.

Vepa Syam Rao was born into a Brahmin upper caste Telugu family. He completed his Masters from Calcutta University and taught at St Xavier's College, Kolkata from 1963 to 1969. At 24 young Rao was inquisitive and curious to know the inner workings of the Belgian Jesuits. One day he sneaked into



Swami Agnivesh with Fr. Felix Raj



the Jesuit residence known as cloister and peeped in. The austerity and simplicity of the Jesuit living quarters astounded him ....Only a table, two chairs, a bed and a wooden almirah.

It was unbelievable... 'The Jesuits lived a life of high thinking and simple living,' this made a deep impact on him. While coming out of the Jesuit cloister Rao met a senior Belgian Jesuit in the corridor. He asked the priest as to what had motivated him to come to the distant shores of India leaving behind his home and the comforts he had had there.

The Jesuit answered him.... 'I am here like my fellow Jesuit Fathers. Our mission is to serve the people of India, particularly of Bengal, mainly to impart quality education to Indian students; this is the humble contribution we hope to make.'

Swamiji was deeply impressed and he has often reiterated that this response by the Jesuit priest had an influence his future life and missionary zeal. He said, 'it

made me ponder. What is MY mission for India?

Swamiji has always stressed his strong faith in spirituality. He insisted that spirituality ought to be social spirituality. This spirituality should not be an individualistic or escapist type. He insisted that it should be one that would keep the interest of the society intact; which would depend on the respect for individual interest. These are inextricably linked. They are complimentary...religion must be a thrust for social awakening and revolution. Swamiji has written a number of books on this subject to promote and share his views and ideas.

Swamiji was a bridge between religions, respecting the differences.... 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,' was his golden rule. He further advocated, if we want life, let us give life to others; if we want opportunities, let us provide these opportunities to others. God's love is the same for all, no matter what one's religion or nationality is.' He was

against the throw away culture, where people not only throw junk but also the poor, the refugees and the downtrodden. He promoted through his work an education in fraternity for real solidarity. This in fact was the essence of Swamiji's conviction and work.

Swamiji was termed as anti-national, Christian sympathizer. It is forgotten that he believes the world is one family....'Vasudhaiva kutumbakum'. God enjoins us stay united as one family. Swamiji was a messenger of God. He was a giant among men. India is blessed to have him.

He was a relentless fighter for the downtrodden not caring for personal attacks or even results... just fight till something positive emerges was his firm belief. As Shakespeare said, reiterated by Justice V.R Krishna Iyer.... 'What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god, never at rest but ever in meditative communication with God.'

Swamiji was diamond hard in his convictions, honeybee in his sweet collectivism for all suffering humans, a defender of the constitution and a humanist, aware of the religious pluralism of Bharat. Anything that might destroy the fabric of this country or threaten its development was the recipient of his ire.

Swami Agnivesh was indeed a man among men....A prophet for all seasons on the side of truth and justice with a deep seated spiritual perspective. A true inspiration. A Karma Yogi, Champion of the socially challenged .....A true Arya Samaji. May his soul rest in peace. 🙏

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DR. J. FELIX RAJ** is the Vice Chancellor of St Xavier's University, Kolkota



# Peace Alone Will Ensure a Future Look before You Leap

These are difficult times, with coronavirus advancing, economy collapsing, leaders still unwilling to admit their mistakes and listen to diverse points of view. But a change is possible. It will be a pity if they will be forced to learn a hard lesson in the hard way



BY ARCHBP THOMAS MENAMPAMPIL

## Wars Have Unintended Consequences

**H**istories are usually written by winners who describe the performance of their heroes in glorious terms. Their society

immortalizes the epic tales in song and story, drama and recitations, adding flavour to the narratives with the integration of facts with fiction, overlaying of humiliating truths with colourful boasts. However, perceptive students of

history notice other dimensions to the embellished account.

Every victory over a neighbour makes a nation live in "continuous dread" when the retaliation will come. The defeated nation, in turn, keeps alive the wound that

they are determined to avenge at the earliest possible opportunity. Everyone fights to win. But every thunderous victory opens out a shortcut to a crushing defeat...if not today, tomorrow; if not with these allies, with others; if not because of fresh economic sturdiness, because of burgeoning population growth at a later date. The story is extremely similar between England and France, France and Germany, Athens and Sparta. Only, in the last case, Athens never recovered. Her Delian allies abandoned her, and Ionia was annexed by Persia. And Macedon took over Athens itself a little later.

It was the Peloponnesian war that destroyed Athens. It was between neighbours. Three times she had been offered terms of peace by Sparta. Lost in her self-importance and proud of her democratic traditions, she was determined to teach autocratic Sparta a lesson. But she destroyed herself. Thucydides, the great historian, describes the war at

length. He had served in the Athenian army; so had Plato. What you fight for is not what you get.

### Grabbing a Bit of Land Can Pave the Way to Self-destruction

Achaemenid Persia controlled the entire world from the Indus Valley to the Aegean Sea. But the emperors were not satisfied until the Greek cities too were brought under their control. The Greeks refused to yield. They threw the Persians back in the battles at Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. And a little later, Alexander pressed further forward, determined to teach them a lesson, carrying all before him even up to India. The Persians lost their very homeland. Herodotus, the great historian, takes pains to tell us WHY "the two peoples fought with each other". Human pride and human follies. He wanted later generations to learn a lesson.

Look at what happened in the Seven Years' War (1756-63). Austria

merely wanted to take back Silesia which she had lost to Prussia in a recent war. France was ready to help Austria, and so Britain hastily joined Prussia to keep balance. The war that followed killed more than 850,000 troops; over 30,000 civilians died from local violence and disease; all fighting nations went bankrupt. Further blunders followed. The British government raised taxes to stabilize her economy, provoking the American War of Independence and thus losing her major American possessions. The French over-taxed their people which ultimately led to the great Revolution of 1789. You sow winds and reap whirlwinds, you grab an inch of land and lose a continent.

### The Mood for War Is Collectively Constructed

The two World Wars turned out to be the "Collective Suicide" of Europe. A Continent that controlled over 90% of the political space of the world at the begin-



Courtesy: Pegasus/FT



## Two schools of thought have always flourished side by side: the one proposing peace, collaborative effort and progress; the other suggesting a self-assertive way to the same progress, which will not however exclude conflict and war

ning of last century, drove themselves to total helplessness by the end of the two Wars. They were able to stand on their feet again only with generous American help, the Marshall Plan.

But this was a tragedy that they had invoked upon themselves. Roger Osborne in his book "Civilization" (Random House, London, 2006) is merciless in placing the full responsibility for the disaster on the "War Mentality" the nations concerned had built up during the 19th and 20th centuries. Each of them were convinced of their own superiority, looking down on others. The French considered the Germans uncultured, the Germans despised the Russians as an inferior race. The British were sure that they, as

Anglo-Saxons, were destined to rule the world. Patriotism meant near "worship of the state", nationalism the peak of spirituality, and national symbolisms almost objects of idolatrous adoration. Hatred of the 'enemy' was a national duty. Anyone who failed to do so was a 'traitor'.

Have you heard echoes of the same fervour among our Hindutva nationalists during the brief period that the BJP has been in power, demanding from fellow-citizens that they shout their slogans, dictating postures at their whims, imposing their food habits on others, declaring dissenters 'anti-national', asking colleagues who differed to 'go to Pakistan'? Such an aggressive mood is "collectively constructed",

shaped under formal instructions. These things do not happen by mere chance.

### Bitter Fruits of Aggressive Nationalism

John Keegan argues that long before the First World War, Europe had increasingly come to resemble a "vast military camp". See in comparison in India, the mounting enrolment rate of the RSS in recent years and their glamorous display of strength during their drills and in defence of Hindutva values and aging cattle manifest precisely the same traits of irrational display of chauvinism. At the beginning of July 1914 there were some 4 million Europeans actually in uniforms; in two months there were 20 million... and tens of thousands were already dead (Osborne 11).

This disaster did not overtake them unexpectedly overnight. It was invited. Osborne says, not only ambitious leaders, but entire populations, were convinced that a "major conflict was not only inevitable but positively desirable". Militarism, he says, and "aggressive nationalism infected every area of life". An eagerness for aggressive action was consciously

built up over decades (Ibid 408). The way some of our countrymen express their pride about 'surgical strikes' against a neighbouring country, Balakot intrusion into another sovereign State, and force occupation of PoK raise questions, anxieties. They little realize that the same "aggressive nationalism", that destroyed Europe during the last century, is being driven into Indian blood; in fact, that they are active agents of it. In India, there is the additional dimension to it: that of venting anger against minorities, Dalits, tribals, marginal communities. The Sangh Parivar tutors who are eager to add an "aggressive edge" to our collective psyche are accountable to our centuries old Civilization!

### Death, Defeat and Destruction

Once war was declared, there was exuberance on every side for a while. Letters, diaries and memoirs record the "sense of joy" at the hope of proximate action: daring, venture, achievement, triumphant return home! Such were the songs. Every nation was confident of victory. "German military leaders felt their nation was invincible, while the Russians believed they might reach Berlin before the Germans reached Paris". Leftist parties who were in principle against war consoled themselves with the belief that this would be a brief decisive war: 'the War to end all Wars'. A minority of sober-minded people could hardly believe that "Europe had sleep-walked into a war" that really meant its own destruction (Ibid 423).

This widespread sense of joy could not continue as the War began to make its demands. Thousands were dying in a single day. Trench warfare was exasperating. Day in and day out before fire-



**The fact that countries like Italy and Germany destroyed themselves in opting for the violent path has not discouraged Savarkar's followers from seeking to impose it on others**

power, in the cold, rain, hunger... amidst feelings of betrayal, cowardice, flight. But the struggle dragged on. All optimism and thrill vanished as the conflict days lengthened. No victory, only uncertainty. Here, before mighty machine guns, there was too little chance for self-display or teasing challenge. War became a living nightmare of technically advanced weapons inflicting anonymous carnage on "millions" of human lives. The artillerymen never saw those they killed, the infantrymen never knew who killed them (Ibid 423). Most of the generals were used to fight-

ing colonial wars against poorly armed enemies; none had ever fought a war where the defence was sustained by a vast machinery of artillery and machine guns. Millions of men of service age were mercilessly poured into the murderous conflict. War really meant mere death and destruction.

We will not go into further details of the disastrous War, its humiliating conclusions, and its many unintended consequences: the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Communist movement worldwide, the definitive decline of the colonial powers, the rise of America with already her initial readiness to replace them, peace terms that paved the way for another War. Despite all this, the painful fact remains: humanity is slow to learn from a perceptive reading of history.

### Two Schools of Thought

Two schools of thought have always flourished side by side: the one proposing peace, collaborative effort and progress; the other suggesting a self-assertive way to the same progress, which will not however exclude conflict and war. The Indian genius opted for the first approach from the times of Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira, whose genes probably ran in the veins of Mahatma Gandhi. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, on the other hand, believed in strong national self-assertion. He belonged to the age of Mussolini and Hitler and closely vibrated with them. He wanted his countrymen to be like the young European rebels of his times who wanted to change the world order. He thought that the Buddhist approach would be a betrayal of the national cause. The fact that countries like Italy and Germany destroyed themselves in opting for the violent path has not discour-

aged Savarkar's followers from seeking to impose it on others.

History has lessons for us. People usually follow those whom they admire. Many of the leaders of the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian Communist Revolutions had studied in Paris, and the models for radical social change that were placed before them were those of the French Revolution. No wonder they tried to imitate them with similar consequences. On the contrary, Indian freedom fighters like Gandhi, Nehru and others studied in London and had seen that even revolutionary social changes could be brought about through parliamentary reforms. They had seen that peaceful self-assertion could combine with dialogue and tangible results. They opted for the latter path and left the ideals of peace for fellow Indians.

### The Chinese Have Admired Indian Wisdom, Indians have Esteemed the Chinese

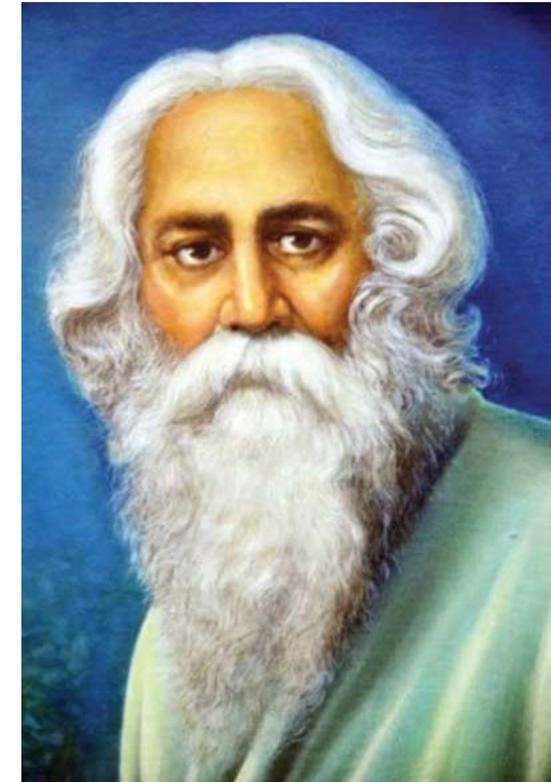
The Chinese have always admired Indian wisdom and still cherish the memories of Indian teachers of earlier centuries, both Hindu and Buddhist. However, a section of the community thought that the Indian submission to colonial rule was a humiliating acceptance of servility by a great Asian nation. Indians fighting for the East India Company and in the British Indian army strengthened that attitude. Today, they are worried lest Indians shift the same loyalty to the Americans. It is good to look at reality with someone else's eyes, even as we make the wisest decisions.

Tagore, while having many admirers in China, was humiliated in Hong Kong by some young men of this school of thought

**Rabindranath Tagore, while having many admirers in China, was humiliated in Hong Kong by some young men of this school of thought who considered the Indian path of peace a public admission of weakness**

who considered the Indian path of peace a public admission of weakness. They did not want China to be infected by that enfeebling ideology. Mao Zedong certainly belonged to that school of thought. In fact, he was convinced that Confucianism itself had a weakening impact on the Chinese character. That is why he adopted a fierce western ideology (Marxist) to avenge the western humiliation of the Chinese people. Xi Jinping holds on to the same ideology. If we go by the experience of history, we know there is a limit to excessive self-assertion with arms. The great Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (604-531 BC) with his deep intuition proposed centuries ago, "Can you know what is emerging, yet keep your peace while others discover for themselves?" Watch for a while until your opponent is forced to learn a lesson for himself.

These are difficult times, with coronavirus advancing, economy collapsing, leaders still unwilling



to admit their mistakes and listen to diverse points of view. But a change is possible. It will be a pity if they will be forced to learn a hard lesson in the hard way.

In any case, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, seems to believe in dialogue and a sober approach to issues, whether they be conversation with people of similar concerns or respectful dealing with neighbours. For he knows, as Lao Tzu says, "For every force there is a counterforce. Violence, even when well intentioned, always rebounds upon oneself" (Tao Te Ching 30). And to match it, Indian wisdom urges, "Oh Men! Direct your energies to promote the good of all mankind" (Rig Veda 8,49,4). ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ARCHBISHOP MENAMPARAMPIL's** analysis of socio-cultural and political issues has led to debates and concrete peace initiatives, for which he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.



# Literacy: A key for development

While the country has made significant progress in improving literacy over the years, it continues to be home to 313 million illiterate people



BY ML SATYAN

In January 2020, a Bengaluru based NGO conducted a baseline survey among the migrant workers who were mainly from Bihar, UP and Odisha. Out of the 100 men interviewed, 20 men did not know to write their names. They also could not read any

language. Out of 100 women interviewed, 95 women did not know to read and write. They were habituated with the practice of 'thumb impression'. Only 5 women could write their names and read their mother tongue. The natural consequence was the 'exploitation' by the agents.

Between 2016-2018 I had visited several women SHGs in AP, Telangana and MP. They were enrolled for an economic development project. In the initial stage of the project we found that more than 70 percent could not read and write. As a result, they were far behind

the mainstream society. Towards the end of the project, most of them learnt at least to write their names. Moreover, regular capacity building programs helped them to become aware of the socio-economic-political situations and development-related issues.

## Important facts on literacy and education in India

- India is home to the largest population of 287 million illiterate adults in the world. This amounts to 37% of the global total.
- Kerala stands first with its literacy rate of 96.2% Delhi is in the second place with 88.7% and Uttarakhand is in the third place with 87.6%
- Surprisingly the recent national survey shows that the last five places are occupied by UP (73%); Telangana (72.8%); Bihar (70.9%); Rajasthan (69.7%) and Andhra Pradesh (66.4%).
- 47.78% out of school children in India are girls. They will be

calculated as illiterate women in the next census and this will have an impact on the education of their children.

- The number of out-of-school children is estimated to 3.45 crore.
- Out of every 100 children, only 32 children finish their school education.
- Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh are amongst the bottom five states in terms of literacy of Dalits in India.
- Though India's literacy rate has increased since Independence, yet it has the world's largest population of illiterate adults.
- The literacy rate of female Dalits in Bihar is far behind India's progress trend.
- 92% of government schools are yet to fully implement the RTE Act.
- India is ranked at 123 out of 135 countries in female literacy rate.

Literacy is one of the most essential indicators of the quality of a country's human capi-

tal. While the country has made significant progress in improving literacy over the years, it continues to be home to 313 million illiterate people; 59 percent of them are women. The high rates of illiteracy among Indian women and the corollary gender gap in literacy attainment are attributable to many social, economic and cultural factors. Official reports focus on studying the adult literacy rate among individuals aged 15 years and above. The adult literacy rate for both males and females increases at a slow pace since most of the progress occurs through improvement in child and youth literacy.

**Literacy is one of the most essential indicators of the quality of a country's human capital**



**Certain factors and implications**

▶ Child and youth literacy numbers for both males and females show that sustained efforts to improve literacy have borne fruit over the years. The introduction of the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme (1995), the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001), and the enactment of RTE (Right to Education Act-2009) have contributed significantly to improving literacy. According to the latest available data, child and youth literacy in India stands at 93 percent and 94 percent, respectively. If India is able to sustain this momentum, then the country might be able to achieve universal literacy for children and youth by 2030.

▶ The gap between male and female literacy rates for children and youth has been shrinking steadily, signalling greater gender parity in literacy attainment. The problems in female education are not confined to issues of increasing access, expanding coverage and improving quality. Rather, the biggest hurdle is to transform mindsets and convince parents to send their daughters to school. National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level, 2003 has played an instrumental role in improving female literacy.

▶ The illiteracy of older adults and the elderly is also a pressing concern, as they are more susceptible to ill health,



exploitation and human rights abuse. They are more likely to remain unemployed and earn lower wages. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) launched in 1988 included adult education as one of its key components. It focused on imparting functional literacy to non-literates in the age group of 15-35 years. More recently, a new variant of the NLM called *Saakshar Bharat* (2009) was introduced to bolster adult education and skill development.

- ▶ The progress that India has made in the realms of child and youth literacy often gets offset by its poor performance in the literacy of older adults. This is one of the reasons why India still ranks low in most of the global human capital indices. To achieve universal literacy by 2030, creatively designed literacy campaigns and initiatives need to be integrated with non-formal education programmes for older adults.
- ▶ The wide literacy gender gap for older adults and the elderly is masking the progress made with regards to the gender gap for children and youth. Latest NSS data reveals that female literacy for the working-age population is 59 percent, 20 percentage points lower than the male literacy rate for the

same group. While educating young girls will continue to be India's top priority, policy-makers must keep in mind that educating and empowering mothers is just as important as "beti padhao".

- ▶ To achieve universal literacy for youth by 2030 there is a need to focus on education quality, digital literacy, and skilling. Even as India has its fundamentals in place, the country must ensure that the younger generation is able to benefit from digitisation and not suffer its costs.

In India, thousands of women and men enter adulthood without the ability to read and write and consequently miss opportunities that would have enabled them to improve their lives and contribute to the country's growth. If this unfortunate trend is to be arrested, policymakers need to re-examine their development agendas and make adult education a priority. Literacy must no longer be confined to the basic, foundational skills of reading and writing but linked to the broader notions of financial, digital, civic and multicultural literacy. Some concrete steps are given below:

**Inclusive Education:** The RTE Act (2009) has resulted in increased enrolment of children in schools, but the Act is applicable for children between 6-14 years of age. Children, especially girl children, who drop out of school after 14 years of age, find it almost impossible to continue their education. The purview of the Act must be increased to make education accessible to every individual.

**Increased investment in government schools:** Lack of basic facilities like toilets, hand-washing area, and drinking water compel children, especially girl children, to drop out of school.



**As India climbs the development ladder, literacy must occupy a high spot on the policy agenda since it not only has a high intrinsic value but is also a powerful force multiplier**

Increasing government expenditure in public schools will make them more accessible.

**Vocational Training:** The current system of rote learning without practical training affects the quality of education and fails to develop employable skill sets. Thus, vocational training is important to fill this gap. Carpentry, plumbing, electrical wiring, cell phone repair, stitching and nursing are some of the skills which can help individuals seek fulfilling employment.

**Teacher training:** Lack of qualified teachers in both public and private schools impact learning outcomes of children. There is a need for making drastic changes to ensure that schools hire qualified teachers, retain experienced teachers and provide opportunities for teachers to undergo regular training.

**Changing social norms:** Social norms play a huge role in determining the growth of a country. Regressive social norms result in girls dropping out from schools or children not being sent to school at all, and this creates a vicious cycle of illiteracy and patriarchal norms for even future generations.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society". More than two decades since Annan said these words, they still ring true. As India climbs the development ladder, literacy must occupy a high spot on the policy agenda since it not only has a high intrinsic value but is also a powerful force multiplier. 📖

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**ML SATYAN** is an NGO Consultant and a freelance Journalist.

**Literacy must no longer be confined to the basic, foundational skills of reading and writing but linked to the broader notions of financial, digital, civic and multicultural literacy**



# CALLED TO CARE

## Option for the Poor is not a Mere Option!

The Church, Civil Society Groups and welfare governments must show greater levels of sensitivity to and solidarity with those in dire need of basic necessities of life during the Covid pandemic



BY DR. JOLLY  
PUTHENPURA



At this time in human history, we are all learning to live with COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic is affecting our lives in numerous ways. It has created implications in the economic, interpersonal, family, community and other spheres of life. Indeed, these implications are here to stay for now and for several coming years too. The new normal situation that COVID-19 places before us forces us to *reimagine* new possibilities and opportunities, *reshape* our thoughts, *redefine* our approaches and *redirect* our actions, focuses and commitments.

In these past months of COVID experiences, Pope Francis quite frequently reflected on the coronavirus pandemic as it took hold of the human family. His reflections had twofold objectives: “The first is to suggest direction, keys and guidelines for rebuilding a better world that might be born from this crisis of humanity. The second objective is, in the midst of so much suffering and bewilderment, to sow hope and faith in the lives of people.”

On the Easter Sunday of 2020, Pope Francis wrote, “Our civilization needs to downshift, take stock, and renew itself. You are indispensable builders of this change that can no longer be put off.” Emphasizing the need for authentic human solidarity during this time of humanity’s manifold sufferings, he further stated that we should be “profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us and recognize ourselves as part of a single family and support one another.” Further on, urging all people of goodwill to realign the current social and economic systems, the Holy Father exhorted that “the time has come to eliminate inequalities to heal the injustice that is undermining the

**“The time has come to eliminate inequalities to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family; the time has arrived to prepare for fundamental changes in a post-COVID world”**

-Pope Francis

health of the entire human family; the time has arrived to prepare for fundamental changes in a post-COVID world.” He also warned the world that “as members of one human family and residents of our only common home, a dangerous selfishness infests many more of us than COVID-19.” Reiterating the need for mutually supportive changes in all spheres of life, Pope Francis further stated that “our life after the pandemic must not be a replica of what went before, no matter who used to benefit disproportionately. Let us show mercy to those who are most vulnerable; for only in this way will we build a new world.”

The above reflections of the Holy Father Pope Francis in the immediate context of COVID-19 is a real leap into the inexhaustible treasures of wisdom contained in the different Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and to reshape the future of humanity in line with these principles, fundamental to the Gospel Values. The social concerns of the Church seek to look at human life in its totality.

It also emphatically underlines that the integral development of human persons and society is also the concerns of the Church in so far as these are aimed at unfolding of the kingdom of God. For, “the Church had always considered that it is her basic vocation and integral mission to be concerned about the human situations of poverty, injustice, deprivation and marginalization. The Church seeks to be the prophetic voice of the voiceless and the victims of injustice, the comforter of the sick and the suffering. The Church seeks to be the hope of the poor and the needy.”

Within the last few months of COVID-19 pandemic, the plight of the poor in the world has become more acute and their sufferings have increased manifold. The plight of domestic and international migrants, the sufferings of widows and orphans and the homeless, the persons with disabilities and those who are terminally ill, the people who lost employment and livelihoods, the families in debt traps, the children who are deprived of online classes due to family poverty situation, the women and children whose vulnerabilities to potential human trafficking increased – this litany goes on! In this context, the ‘preferential option for the poor’ as a Catholic Social Teaching principle has once again become relevant for our personal and collective reflections, leading us to more innovative ways and greater levels of solidarity actions for and on behalf of the poor of the world.

Jesus’ teachings and actions always exemplified the aspect of seeking for and reaching out to the least, the last and lost ones of society – the Gospel in action to those on the fringes and peripheries – as part of his larger inclusive vision for humanity. Taking



## The social concerns of the Church seek to look at human life in its totality. It also emphatically underlines that the integral development of human persons and society is also the concerns of the Church in so far as these are aimed at unfolding of the kingdom of God

inspiration from the words and deeds of Jesus, the Catholic Social thought gives paramount importance to special care of the needs of the poor and advocates for a preferential option for the poor. More authentic promotion of human dignity requires of everyone to show a preferential love of the poor and voiceless, because Jesus had identified himself with them in a special way. “This love excludes no one, but simply embodies a priority of services to which the whole Christian tradition bears witness. This love of preference for the poor... cannot

but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and above all, those without hope of a better future,” stated the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in its publication “The Social Agenda” (2000).

Taking guidance from the Gospels and other Biblical texts, several Papal and other Catholic teachings from the beginning of the Church have underlined the need to sensitize the Christian community about the care of the poor, the orphans, the widows, the marginalized and those on the

fringes of the society and those whom the society tries to exclude from its mainstream. Jesus spoke extensively about the spirit of poverty and simplicity and invited his followers to offer them love, compassion and material support. The poor have been closer to the heart of God and hence, loving God would mean that we take care of the poor and the deprived ones of the society. Christian charity urges the Church members to walk the extra mile in offering their love and support to the socially and economically excluded ones of the society. The Church’s humanitarian and social action initiatives and programmes meant for the empowerment of the poor and the powerless ones are to be seen as her preferential option for the poor of the society.

At his General Audience on August 19, 2020, Pope Francis said that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has not only “exposed the plight of the poor and the serious inequality that reigns in the world, but even exacerbated them.” Continuing his catechesis on “Healing the World,” the Holy Father said our response to the pandemic must be twofold: “Finding a cure for this small but terrible virus,” but also curing “a larger virus, that of social injustice, inequality of opportunity, marginalization and lack of protection for the weakest.” In meeting that challenge, he said, we must always keep in mind the “preferential option for the poor. This is not a political option; nor is it an ideological option, a party option... no. The preferential option for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel. And the first to do this was Jesus.” The Holy Father went on to cite a handful of Gospel passages in which we see Jesus ministering to the poor in a variety of ways. “He took risks to be

near to the poor,” the Pope said. And thus, Jesus’ followers “recognize themselves by their closeness to the poor, the little ones, the sick and the imprisoned, the excluded and the forgotten, those without food and clothing.”

Taking forward Jesus’ teaching on the care for the weaker sections of the society, St James in his letter exhorts his readers in these words: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but had not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says, ‘go in peace, be warmed and filled’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:14-18). Thus, based on this Scriptural foundation, for a believing Christian, preferential love/option for the poor is not merely an option but a faith-driven and action-oriented requirement of solidarity with those in need of his/her care and support in his/her communities and society.

Giving an added mission dimension and communitarian aspect to the Christian call of preferential option for the poor and reiterating the universality of the call to love the poor, St John Paul II in “Sollicitudo rei socialis,” no. 42, writes that “this preferential love for the poor is not a task for the few, but in reality it is the mission of the Church as a whole. Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor.”

The preferential option for the poor is not just the acts of charity of Christians alone. It does have larger scope, implications and aspirations. For instance, most of the modern democracies of the world are built upon the foun-

dational framework of ‘welfare state’ concept and practices. By its definition, “the Welfare State is a form of government in which the State protects and promotes the economic and social well-being of the citizens, based upon the principles of equal opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth and public responsibility for citizens unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life.”



India is a welfare state which has the Directive Principles of State Policy, enshrined in part IV of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution itself envisages India to be a ‘socialist’ State. Socialism, as envisioned in the Constitution, aims at elimination of inequality in income, status and standard of life and actively promotes social democracy. Hence, in the strictest sense, a welfare state is a government that provides for the welfare and well-being of its citizens completely. Such a government is involved in the lives of its citizens at every level. Such a government provides for the physical, material and social needs of its people, especially those who belong to the weaker sections and vulnerable categories.

Hence, in progressive democracies, the welfare measures and

programmes are not the ‘benevolence gifts’ to the poor and needy by the governments or the political parties they represent. On the contrary, the governments in welfare states are constitutionally duty-bound to provide for the social and economic needs of their citizens, especially those who are in the margins of the society and suffer social and economic exclusion due to various structural and other factors. Thus, the principle and praxis of the option for the poor is not just an option of the Catholic Social Thought, but it is also a social and economic obligation of the welfare state governments such as India.

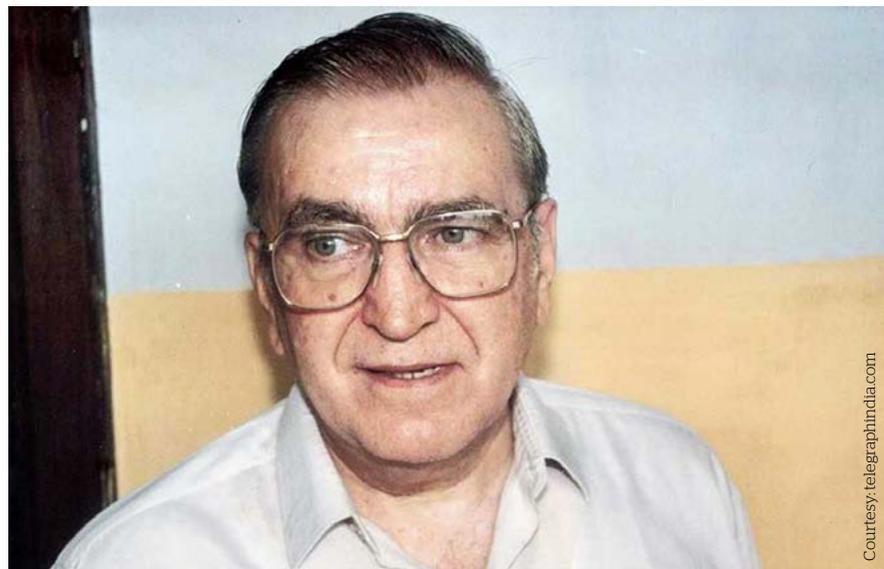
COVID-19 pandemic has created several challenges for all segments of the society, especially for those who are poor and struggling to meet the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, housing, children’s education and livelihood options. In this grim situation, the Church communities, the Civil Society Groups, the welfare governments and all people of goodwill are called upon to show greater levels of sensitivity to and solidarity with those in dire need of basic necessities of life. Such faith-driven and humanitarian efforts, to a large extent, will ensure to realize the aspirational objective that no one is excluded or left behind from receiving the required care and support during this period of COVID-19 pandemic-induced misery and suffering. And a more contextualized understanding of the option for the poor and its manifold practice with a sense of urgency will help to create a better world and a more caring humanity post COVID-19. 

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Tribute to an Endless Legend

## Gaston Roberge, SJ



Courtesy: telegraphindia.com

**Gaston Roberge**, a Canadian Jesuit priest was a pioneer in the study of Cinema and had made significant contribution to the film industry in India



BY DR J. FELIX RAJ

Fr. Gaston Roberge, a French-Canadian Jesuit priest, had been asking himself since the 1980s why India did not have a new theory of popular films. It was only in 2010 he got an answer after studying the 2000-year old Indian treatise of dance and drama – *Natya Sastra*. The result was a 100 page book, *The Indian Film Theory: Flames of Sholay, Notes and Beyond* that offered a new perspective on the theories underlying Indian commercial cinema.

The book was released at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata on June 15, 2010 by Goutam Ghose, a renowned Indian film director. It has been described as

'easily readable' and 'radical in its content.' Ghose said, 'Fr. Roberge introduced the study of film in the context of our social matrix, which is very important. He analysed the phenomena in the sociopolitical context of this complex and heterogeneous country, writing about our society while studying two films - Sholay and Beder Mehe Jyotsna. He had a kind of social observation on cinema. He would ask, "Why were people enjoying films? Which class of people? What about education?"'

Fr. Gaston, a legend, a pioneer in the study of cinema and a close friend of Satyajit Ray, passed away in Kolkata on August 26 and was laid to rest at Dhyana Ashram, the Jesuit Novitiate at Konchowki, 20 KM from the city of Kolkata. He was a Master teacher of film theories and was known as the high priest of cinema.

Fr. Roberge, was born in May 1935 in Montreal, Quebec. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1956

and was sent to India on his request in 1961. He graduated, and did his Masters at UCLA. He graduated from the University of Montreal and did his Masters at the University of California in film studies.

He then went to New York where he saw Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali and became a fan of Ray. He became a close friend of Ray, with whom he had many interactions and wrote about. They were mutual advisors to each other in the world of films. Ray was also one of the advisors of Chitrabani. Father Roberge also developed great associations with Mrinal Sen and other filmmakers of India.

I had known Fr. Gaston for over thirty years. He was an exemplary Jesuit and in the 70s and 80s, an idol to many young Jesuits like me. I had interviewed him a couple of times for an Italian magazine, Popoli and other publications. He was a large-hearted man with the spirit of magis in all that he did especially in spiritual and intellec-

tual life. During his short break in Montreal, I paid a visit to him. He took me to the St. Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, a basilica and national shrine in Montreal. It is a National Historic Site of Canada and is Canada's largest church, with one of the largest church domes in the world.

In one of my interviews he told me, 'I was reborn in India on October 15, 1961. For the last 50 years I have been mostly living in Kolkata. I teach communication media and write. My main interest is the cultural roots of the Indian movies. And I love it.' Fr. Roberge has authored more than 25 books on cinema, communications and spirituality. He won an Indian National Film Award for his best writing on Cinema for the year 1998 from the then President of India, K. R. Narayanan.

His first book, *Chitrabani*, published in 1975, like the institute he started, is a book on film appreciation. Satyajit Ray, through his kind relationship with him and through his films, helped him in his journey to the 'cave of the heart.' That is how he completed the "Pedagogy of the Media Oppressed – In Tune with the Indian Folk Movies: Seven Steps of a Self-Education for Liberation."



A young Father Roberge interviewing Satyajit Ray



Fr. Roberge with Mother Teresa

He was the founder-director of Chitrabani (1970), the first and the oldest media center in eastern India located at Prabhu Jisur Guriya campus, Kolkata. For some years, Chitrabani was an extension centre of SXCK and Fr. Roberge taught film appreciation at the college. Thousands of film-makers, scholars and film critics have been students of Fr. Roberge. National Award Winning director, K G Das has made a documentary on 'Fr. Roberge – Master Preacher of Film Theory.' He was also the founder-director of the

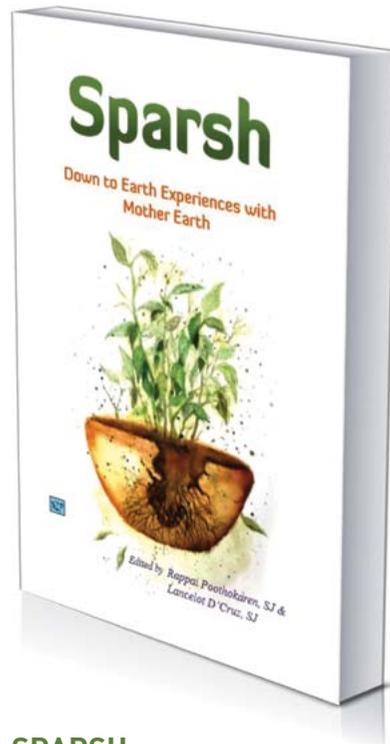
EMMRC of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. He was solely responsible for the UGC granting the necessary affiliation and permission of EMMRC to SXCK. St. Xavier's is the only College which has an EMMRC under its management among the 19 EMMR Centres in India. He was the Executive Secretary for Social Communication (1997 to 1999) at the Jesuit Curia in Rome.

Ray's Pather Panchali shook him and Indian cinema became his passion, his love and his commitment. Through Chitrabani Fr. Roberge pioneered film academia in India as well as cultivated and nurtured several generations of cineastes and filmmakers." That is why the Bimal Roy Memorial & Film Society, Mumbai gave him the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

After his retirement he remained at the St. Xavier's infirmary till his eternal rest. He was 85. He had almost totally lost his hearing and had to be on hearing aid. This Jesuit priest and film guru has made a "significant contribution" to the film industry. He will continue to be a major player on the field of Indian cinema. ©

# CARING FOR MOTHER EARTH

BY VARGHESE PAUL



**SPARSH**  
Down to Earth Experiences with Mother Earth  
Edited by: Rappai Poothokaran and Lancelot D'Cruz  
Published by: New Leader Publications, Chennai, 2020  
Price: Rs. 300/

Climate change and its ill effects like environmental pollution and global warming are everyone's experiences during the past few decades. Hence environmental problems and caring for Mother Earth are much discussed topics in our times. In this context I consider SPARSH – a new book on “Down to Earth Experiences with Mother Earth” is an outstanding contribution to caring and protecting Mother Earth.

Two Jesuit priests Fr Rappai Poothokaran and Dr Lancelot D'Cruz have edited the book collecting 42 articles from 30 authors who have written about their personal experiences in caring for the Mother Earth.

SPARSH is a unique and outstanding book in its category in a number of ways. First, the writers of the articles treat a variety of topics describing their love and care for the Mother Earth. They come from different professional background. Deeptiben Rajubhai, Rajubhai Deeptiben and Shri Shashi Darshan have given up their highly paid professional jobs.

Second, the authors narrate personal experiences in their chosen field in caring and nurturing the Earth. Lancy D'Cruz, Lissy Paul and their team successfully help Adivasis to revive and preserve their indigenous medicine. Jyothi Xavier and Lucas Rayappan train thousands of school children and other youth to care and nurture the Mother Earth through camps,

seminars and environmental orientated cultural and entertainment programmes.

J M Heredero, P C Kishore and their team in collaboration with the beneficiaries have been greening the region of their engagement. Heredero and his team have liberated thousands bonded labourers in Bhaal area in Khambat taluka making their saline land into fertile land by preserving rain water with bunds all over their saline fields. Similarly P C Kishore and team involving fully the local tribal people made a deforested hillock Mariadoug green again with trees through watershed programmes. It raised the ground water level up in six villages helping the tribal farmers to cultivate Rice, Groundnut, Juvar, Sorghum and Pulses, etc.

Third, writers from all over India have contributed to the book. There is Mildred lawphonaiw from Meghalaya, S Ignacimuthu from Tamil Nadu, Margaret Molomoo from North East and Robert Athickal of Tarumitra from Patna.

SPARSH is the handiwork of Gujarati Jesuit Ecology Mission (GJEM) which, coordinated by Fr Lancy Lobo, has a mixture of highly talented and committed members with diverse background and profession. Readers will find SPARSH not only inspirational but also informative and challenging and indicating ways and means to engage themselves to care and protect Mother Earth. ©

## Indian prelate serving as Vatican ambassador in Japan dies

Apostolic Nuncio to Japan Archbishop Joseph Chennoth, an Indian, died September 7 in Tokyo following a heart attack. He was 76.

The death occurred at 1:30 pm Japan time (8 am Indian time).

The Syro-Malabar prelate from Kerala, was reportedly recuperating after a stroke some time back. His funeral details are yet to be announced.

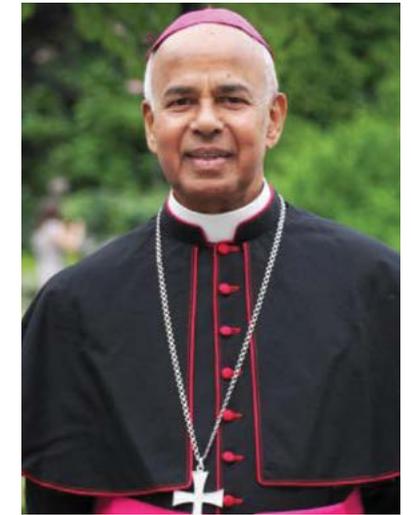
Archbishop Chennoth was the apostolic nuncio to Japan since 2011.

He was credited with teaching Pope John II Malayalam during

the pontiff's first India visit in February 1986. He had accompanied the Pope during his ten-day visit starting from New Delhi.

Chennoth first served as a Vatican diplomat in Turkey for three years and two years in the Vatican Curia before going to Belgium, Luxembourg and European Union for three years. He was made a nuncio while serving the Vatican embassy in Taiwan from 1995 to 1999. He then went to the African countries of Central African Republic, Chad and Tanzania.

(Mattersindia)



## Pope sports face mask first time in public



Pope Francis was seen on September 9 for the first time wearing a protective face mask as he attended his second traditional general audience before a limited public presence after a six-month suspension.

The pontiff — known for a fondness for close personal contact — however quickly removed the mask as he emerged from the car carrying him to the audience, which was suspended in February over the coronavirus pandemic.

But he shunned his usual practice of shaking hands and kissing babies as some 500 faithful filled a courtyard at the Apostolic Palace inside the Vatican. At his second meeting since suspending general audiences on February 26, the crowd thronged behind a barrier and some even lowered their masks to greet the leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

The pope shook hands with prelates attending the audience and, smiling, then turned to the crowd, urging them not to shake hands and to return to their seats in order to “avoid contagion”.

Francis focused on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic which he said was “without barriers”.

He advocated a society in which people should have more solidarity with their neighbours.

(Courtesy: NDTV)

## Pak Christian sentenced to death for 'blasphemous texts'

A court in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore has sentenced a Christian man to death for having committed "blasphemy," his lawyer says, in the latest case of Pakistan's strict religious laws being applied against minorities.

Asif Pervaiz, 37, has been in custody since 2013 when he was accused of having sent "blasphemous" text messages to a former supervisor at work, lawyer Saif-ul-Malook told Al Jazeera.

The court rejected his testimony wherein he denied the charges and sentenced him to death on September 7.

"The complainant was a supervisor in a hosiery factory where Asif was working under him," said Malook.

"He denied the allegations and said that this man was trying to get him to convert to Islam."

Speaking in his own defense in court earlier in the trial, Pervaiz claimed the supervisor confronted



him after he quit work at the factory, and when he refused to convert he was accused of having sent blasphemous text messages to the man.

Blasphemy laws Muhammad Saeed Khokher, the complainant in the case, denies wanting to convert Parvaiz, according to his lawyer, Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry.

"He has taken this defense after the fact, because he had no other clear defense," Chaudhry told Al Jazeera. "That's why he accused him of trying to convert him."

Chaudhry said there were other Christian employees at the factory, but none have accused Khokher of proselytizing.

Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws prescribe a mandatory death penalty for the crime of insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad, and strict penalties for other infractions such as insulting Islam, the holy Quran or certain holy people.

There are currently at least 80 people in prison in Pakistan for the crime of "blasphemy", with at least half of them facing life sentences or the death penalty, according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Those accused under the laws are mainly Muslim, in a country where 98 percent of the population follows Islam, but the laws disproportionately target members of minorities such as Christians and Hindus.

(Source: Al Jazeera News)



## Government suspends FCRA clearance of four Christian groups

Home Ministry has suspended this year the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licenses of six NGOs, four of them Christians.

An FCRA license is mandatory for a non-profit organization to receive funds from overseas.

At least two U.S.-based Christian donors are also under the ministry's scanner for funding NGOs and groups in India, a senior government official told The Hindu newspaper.

"Concerns have been raised regarding the impact of US-based evangelical donors including Seventh Day Adventist Church and Baptist Church in regard to Indian associations; a probe is on," the official said.



The four Christian groups whose FCRA was suspended are Ecreosoculis North Western Gossner Evangelical in Jharkhand, the Evangelical Churches Association (ECA) in Manipur, Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jharkhand and New Life Fellowship Association (NLFA) in Mumbai. The reasons for the suspension or violation were not specified.

(Source: The Hindu)

## Bhadravathi vicar general dies after recovering from Covid-19

The vicar general of Bhadravathi diocese in Karnataka state died of heart attack, four days after he was tested negative for Covid-19. He was 54.

Father Kuriakose (Shaji) Mundaplackal, a priest of Telli-cherry archdiocese, was admitted in Muller Medical College Hospital Mangaluru on August 17 after being tested Covid 19 positive on the same day.

The funeral service took place at 5 pm on September 11 at St. Mary's Church, Konnakkad in the Telli-cherry Archdiocese, Kerala.

Father Mundaplackal and four others from Bhadravathi pastoral center were tested positive for Covid 19. While others have recovered and are ready to get back to their work, noted Bishop Joseph Arumachadathu at the funeral introduction. Father Mundaplackal had recovered from



all complications but his lungs were affected by the infection, said Bishop Arumachadathu. The prelate spent 45 minutes with Father Mundaplackal on September 4 in the hospital and heard his confession.

"He was completely prepared for his eternal journey," the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament prelate said

during the introductory speech for the funeral. A message from Father Thomas Thengumpally, chancellor of Telli-cherry archdiocese, urged people not to attend the funeral at the parish cemetery due to safety reason, but to arrange memorial Mass in institutions and parishes where Father Mundaplackal had served.

"Father Mundaplackal was a very warm-hearted person, keeping a relationship with everyone with whom once connected. He was a simple and humble person with a smile always on the face," Carmelite Father Mathew Chandrankunnel, director of Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bengaluru, told Matters India.

He taught moral theology at Good Shepherd Major Seminary of the Syro-Malabar Church, Kunnoth, Iritty in Kerala's Kannur district. (Mattersindia)



## Bihar man carves out 3-km canal in 30 years

A man has carved out a three-kilometre canal to take rainwater from nearby hills to fields of his village, Kothilawa in Lahthua area of Gaya in Bihar.

"It took me 30 years to dig this canal which takes the water to a pond in the village," said Laungi Bhuiyan who has dug out the canal single-handedly.

"For the last 30 years, I would go to the nearby jungle to tend my cattle and dig out the canal. No one joined me in this endeavor... Villagers are going to cities to earn a livelihood but I decided to

stay back," he added. Kothilwa village is surrounded by dense forest and mountains, about 80 km away from Gaya district headquarters. This village is marked as a refuge for Maoists.

During the rainy season, the water falling from the mountains used to flow into the river which used to bother Bhuiyan following which he thought of carving out a canal. "He has been carving out the canal for the last 30 years that too single-handedly. This will benefit a large number of animals and to irrigate the fields as well.



He is not doing it for his own benefit but for the entire area," said Patti Manjhi, a local. Ram Vilas Singh, a teacher who resides in Gaya praised Bhuiyan for benefiting the villagers and their fields. "A lot of people will benefit here. People are now getting to know him because of his work," he added. (Courtesy: NDTV)



# Bollywood on a Bloodied Chessboard..!

There's a giant chessboard set up in the city of Mumbai, with only two pawns, both Bollywood actresses scrambling all over it's surface, even as the two players, one a Central Giant and the other a State Tiger play their moves! Over a billion spectators, tired of listening to only Covid news, or the ranting and raving of nearly insane TV anchors, watch with unconcealed joy as two rook pawns, are moved not smoothly and deftly, like refined chess players would do, but roughly, sometimes cruelly and brutishly on the now bloodied chessboard!

A closer look at the two pawns, shows a great deal of similarity; both, beautifully carved and structured beauties, attractive pieces, quite often applying makeup on themselves, and having a great amount of class. They are certainly not pawns from some second rate store, but pieces that have the distinction of being made from the best cultural background such pieces could ever be got from.

Looking even closer, one realizes they are not lifeless, but strong, independent pawns, which begs the question; why ever have they allowed themselves to become such on a chessboard?

Is it because they love the applause, the encores, bravos and curtain calls that frenzied specta-



tors give, whistling and catcalls, approval and admiration, the virus has stopped them hearing on a stage or filmset, and being addicted to such have chosen the chessboard?

Whatever be the reason, they stalk and stride, creep and crawl, hunt and hound each other, and spew venom not on the other, but on the opponent puppeteer player who grits his teeth and makes his next move through his own pawn.

The spectators rise in anticipation watching a home of one demolished or a jail becoming a home for the other.

What rules do these players follow? None!

But who is there to question them? What we, the public, the spectators want is entertainment, and entertainment we receive, not from reel, but real!

Who will win this game?

No one!

But who will lose?

We the spectators will! Because



if one looks closely at the board the game's being played on, one will notice it was once called 'Democracy' But slowly and surely the chessboard of democracy is being converted into an ancient bloodthirsty Roman arena. An arena, where hungry lean, ferocious lions face powerless, defenseless people: No, not the two pawn gladiators in the arena, but leap and jump into the stands, mauling, biting, maiming you and me, as both giant players watch gleefully.

The game you watch on the giant chessboard is just a warning of times ahead where you and I could be victims of authoritarian and autocratic power, with 'no questions' asked!

Stop being a cheering spectator! STOP the game: Because it's your board, yes your country the game is being played on..! ©

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT CLEMENTS is an author and newspaper columnist

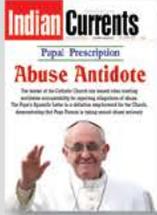


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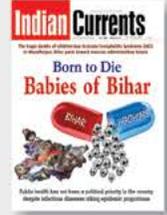
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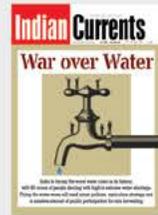
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