

THE RADICAL HUMANIST



ESTABLISHED : APRIL 1937

*(Formerly in the name of 'INDEPENDENT INDIA'
since April 1937 to March 1949)*

**Founder
M.N. ROY**

Vol. 79 Number 8

NOVEMBER 2015

Rs. 15 / MONTH



(17th July 1927 – 13th October 2015)

**With the death of Dr. R. M. Pal, a great scholar on M N Roy and a stalwart of the
Radical Humanist and Civil Liberties movement in India has been lost**

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THE RADICAL HUMANIST

Vol. 79 No. 8 November 2015

Monthly Journal of the Indian Renaissance Institute

Devoted to the development of the Renaissance Movement and for promotion of human rights, scientific temper, rational thinking and a humanist view of life.

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Dr. R.M. Pal is no more (17th July 1927 – 13th October 2015)

It is with deep sorrow that we report to you all the sad demise of Dr. R.M. Pal at 6.15 p.m. on 13th of October 2015 in his house at Thane in Mumbai. He had a heart attack a week ago and was on life support system. Before shifting to Mumbai, nearer to his younger daughter Sangeeta Mall, because of his partially paralytic condition, he had been teaching English in Delhi University and was also Principal of Rajdhani College here.

Dr. Pal was a stalwart of the civil liberties movement as well as of the radical humanist movement in the country. He had been associated with the PUCL for a long time and was also President of Delhi PUCL from November 2001 to September 2005. He was also Editor of the PUCL Bulletin between March 1984 and September 2010 and was on its Editorial Board till his death. He had been member of many fact-finding teams of the PUCL and his strong editorials hitting communalism, denial of human rights to the Muslims and other minorities, women and scheduled castes/tribes and in support of the right to education will continue to be a source of inspiration to members of the PUCL and other human rights activists.

He had been very close to M.N. Roy, a great freedom fighter and intellectual, who was a strong supporter of individual freedoms and founded the radical humanist movement. In his company Dr. Pal learnt the importance of democratic values for the development of full potential of human beings. He did not only preach these values, but practiced them in his life. As a humanist he gave importance to the human beings above all other considerations of caste, country, religion, region and language. As the Editor of 'The Radical Humanist' he freely expressed his views on these issues. Through his forthright views on the issues of secularism, caste etc. he earned the appreciation of a large number of intellectuals in the country and abroad. He has written and compiled many books – the last published book on 'Power to the People', a selection of the seminal writings of M.K. Gandhi, M.N. Roy and Jayaprakash Narayan with critical commentaries on them, the essentials of their intellectual development and their contribution to contemporary Indian Political Thought was a great success and is available worldwide through amazon.com.

In his demise, the civil liberties and radical humanist movement has lost a great intellectual activist leader. He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Madhuri Pal and two daughters, Ilina Nigam and Sangeeta Mall.

All of us in the PUCL and the Indian Radical Humanist Association pay our highest respects to Dr. R.M. Pal and convey our deepest condolences to the bereaved family and friends.

Mahi Pal Singh, Editor, The Radical Humanist: former National Secretary, PUCL and Editor, PUCL Bulletin.

(Mrs. Madhuri Pal can be contacted at:

7-B, Regency Park, Edenwoods, Thane (W) - 400610, Maharashtra (M) 09323991085, and Sangeeta Mall at: 09819265109 or <sangeetamall@gmail.com>)

Tributes to Dr. R.M. Pal (17th July 1927 – 13th October 2015)

Homage to Dr. R.M. Pal – The Veteran Humanist

(17th July 1927 – 13th October 2015)

Indian Renaissance Institute is deeply grieved over the sad demise of Dr. R.M. Pal who expired at 6.15 pm Tuesday, the 13th October 2015 at Mumbai at the age of 88. He had suffered a heart attack about two weeks ago and thereafter he could not survive. He took his last breath in the presence of his wife Madhuri Pal, and two daughters, i.e., Sangeeta Mall and Ilina who were attending to him along with other family members.

Around the age of 19 years he had to leave his ancestral home in 'East Bengal', now 'Bangla Desh', at the time of Partition in 1947 and the violence, sufferings and devastation which he saw made him 'atheist'. The Partition troubled him throughout his life and he never forgave those who were responsible for it. He came to Dehradun and had the rare privilege of staying with M.N. Roy and Ellen Roy at 13, Mohini Road, Dehradun during the last years of their lives. He, in his youth, imbibed the Radical Humanist philosophy direct from Roy and thereafter never deviated from it.

Dr. Pal was a dedicated radical humanist. He came to Delhi and joined teaching profession in the Delhi University and retired as Principal of Rajdhani College. He devoted himself in propagating the philosophy of the 'Radical Humanism' by his writings and lectures. When publication of the Radical Humanist was brought to Delhi in 1970, as Tarkunde had shifted to Delhi, Dr. Pal proved to be of important help. He was member of the editorial board and regularly attended its monthly meetings. He became its Managing Editor in 1980 and later on also its Editor for several years. He was a Life Trustee of the Indian Renaissance Institute (IRI) founded by M.N. Roy in 1946. He helped the

IRI in getting published a large number of books written by Roy.

He was founder member of three important organizations, i.e., the 'Indian Radical Humanist Association', - reconstituted in 1970; the 'Citizens for Democracy' - founded in April 1974 with Jayprakash Narayan as its President; and PUCL, set up during Emergency in October, 1975 as 'PUCL & DR' with Jayprakash Narayan as its President and V.M. Tarkunde as Working President. Dr. R.M. Pal was a very active and vocal member of these organizations which have made important contributions towards developing people's movements in the country – especially relating to issues of human rights, communal harmony and rights of minorities, dalits and other downtrodden, without involving in power politics. He was vehemently opposed to 'communalism' of any sort, and forcefully criticized the prevailing 'casteism' among the upper-caste Hindus. He has written extensively in this regard, especially on societal violations of human rights and has authored many books. He edited 'PUCL Bulletin' for several years (1984 to 2010).

It will be worthwhile to mention here that, in addition to 'Independent India' Roy had started a quarterly journal 'Marxian Way' in 1944 which name was later changed to 'Humanist Way' in 1949, as an 'instrument of enquiry and learning' and 'really an open forum where competing stand points would come together without clashing'. Intellectual stalwarts like Philip Spratt, Laxman Shastri Joshi, K.M. Pannikkar, Andre Brissaud, Dwight Macdonald, G.D. Parikh, Jules Monnerot, Bertram D. Wolfe, Dkashina Ranjan Shastri, Ruth Fischer, Agehanand Bharati, Amlan Dutta, besides many others, contributed to this

journal which had to be closed in the middle of 1952 due to financial reasons. However, the articles written in this journal are a rare treasure of 'humanist thought' and attempt to show a way to a richer and more meaningful future for mankind. Dr. R.M. Pal devoted himself to bring out a selection of the articles from this treasury of 'humanist thought' which were published under the name 'Selections from THE MARXIAN WAY and THE HUMANIST WAY' on behalf of the IRI. This publication is a very important contribution of Dr. R.M. Pal as the articles in it provide a deep insight into the

intellectual history of the twentieth century. The IRI is indebted to Dr. Pal for this valuable labour.

Passing away of Dr. R.M. Pal has left a big void in the humanist movement. He will always remain an inspiration for all those who are struggling for liberation of the deprived and down-trodden. The IRI conveys its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

N.D. Pancholi, Secretary, Indian Renaissance Institute and President, PUCL Delhi.

(M- 9811099532)

An Appeal to the Readers

Indian Renaissance Institute has been receiving regular requests from readers, research scholars, Rationalists and Radical Humanists for complete sets of books written by M.N. Roy. It was not possible to fulfil their demands as most of Roy's writings are out of print. IRI has now decided to publish them but will need financial assistance from friends and well-wishers as the expenses will be enormous running into lakhs. IRI being a non-profit organization will not be able to meet the entire expenses on its own. Initially, following 15 books have ordered for print: New Humanism; Beyond Communism; Politics, Power and Parties; Historical Role of Islam; India's Message; Men I Met; New Orientation; Materialism; Science & Philosophy; Revolution and Counter-revolution in China; India in Transition; Reason, Romanticism and Revolution; Russian Revolution; Selected Works – Four Volumes; Memoirs (Covers period 1915-1923).

Cheques/Bank drafts may be sent in the name of 'Indian Renaissance Institute' at: Mr. S.C. Jain, G-3/617, Shalimar Garden Extn. I, Rose Park, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad- 201005. (U.P.)

Online donations may be sent to: 'Indian Renaissance Institute' Account No. 02070100005296; FISC Code: UCBA0000207, UCO Bank, Supreme Court Branch, New Delhi (India)

We make an earnest appeal to you to please donate liberally for the cause of the spirit of renaissance and scientific thinking being promoted in the writings of M.N. Roy.

Thanking you.

IRI Executive Body;

Ramesh Awasthi
President

N.D. Pancholi
Secretary

S.C. Jain
Treasurer

Phone No. 01202648691

Dear Sangeeta,

Please accept my deep felt condolences at the demise of one my oldest friend and human Right colleague your father Dr. R.M. Pal Sahib. Please convey the same to your mother also.

I used to talk to Pal Sahib on phone while he was in Mumbai regularly and sometimes through your mother when he was unable to do so.

He was a dedicated human Right activist and more fiercely a follower of M.N. Roy under whom he had the privilege and good fortune to work. His fierce anger at injustice and discrimination against Dalits really consumed him and he wrote and talked on this for decades.

I had made it my regular practice that when he was ill but still spending sometime in Delhi to meet him and keep up our common work. Very early in 1987, we were together in PUCL when we enquired into the Meerut Killings of Muslims by the police and security forces. His analysis and deep understanding of State violence was a tremendous help in preparing the report. Those killings are at present the subject matter of appeal in the High Court and the report is a vital piece of the real facts.

He was himself a prolific writer and his books on the role of Caste in our society have had tremendous impact on Dalit movement. He was kind enough to ask me to write a chapter for his book. He was normally a relaxed person but the injustice in the society made him really angry. He was a humanist, a great Champion of civil liberties and above all a great friend. I shall will him deeply. Please convey my condolences to other members of the family also.

Yours,

Rajindar Sachar

Dated: 20/10/2015

Search for Truth

Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Say It Like It Is

Sangeeta Mall

At eighteen Raimohan Pal left his home in Komilla in East Bengal. It was always East Bengal for him, never the later abomination of East Pakistan or Bangladesh. Partition was an abomination and he never forgave those he held responsible for it. He left home but never forgot it, or the reason why he had to leave it. It was because of us, he lamented. We, the Hindus, never learnt to treat our Muslim neighbours with respect, never let go of our caste hatreds to live with them as their equals. His school headmaster favoured him over his equally brilliant Muslim friend. How could a country that lived with this prejudice day in and day out ever be happy?

He had no time for happiness. He had no time for anything except anger, anger that his beloved land could never outlive its dreadful heritage of caste and communal strife. His was a one man crusade, to end inequality and foster peace by upholding the human rights of every single individual he met. It wasn't a matter of principle so much as personal. Everything was personal. The cobbler's right to get his son into the right school, the teacher's right to be appointed to a vacant post reserved for he scheduled castes, the maid's right to obtain alimony from her absconding husband, the hospital wardboy's right to a promotion in spite of being from the minority community. They all came to him because he invited them. But mostly they came to him unbidden, knowing that they would never be turned away, not if there was anything he could do to turn a hostile system in their favour. He hated untouchability, raising its cruel legacy at every possible forum, attacking every apologist for it, uncaring of their stature.

As a youth, his anger and rebellion found

direction under the mentorship of M N Roy, and he absorbed Roy's philosophy and then used it to channelise his own ambition. He wanted to fight the system, not the bureaucratic system of red tape and blue pencils, but the infinitely more dangerous system of entrenched caste and communal conflict that was uniquely Indian. He was a proud Radical Humanist. He became a declared atheist when he saw a refugee from East Pakistan, an old, poor and infirm woman, walking towards India and praying to God. No God could sanction such oppression and therefore there was no God. Radical Humanism gave him an intellectual framework for his views and he stuck to it till the end, reading and re-reading M N Roy's works to reinforce his own view of life.

Activism was in his blood. Not for him the cool confines of lecture halls. He wanted to be out there, where all the action was. It was only natural to join the People's Union for Civil Liberties, initially to protest against the Emergency and then to fight for civil liberties, in Punjab, in Kashmir, voicing his views, even if they were unpopular, everywhere, in the Saturday Group in Delhi, in the CISF Training Academy in Mount Abu, within seminars of the Indian Renaissance Institute. And yet he was a popular man. He was proud to be as popular with the oppressed and dispossessed as with his friends, most of whom withstood his assault on their ways and customs because, in spite of everything, he stood by them when it mattered.


Two stints as editor, first of the PUCL Bulletin and then of the Radical Humanist, gave him the much needed platform to air his views and air them he did. Whether it was the

establishment's treatment of the only Dalit president of this country, or the hypocrisy of the Hindu right wing after the Babri Masjid destruction, he was not above naming names in his editorials.

Young people flocked to him for advice. He was one of very few teachers who took his role of guru seriously. He taught English Literature in Delhi University but that didn't limit the scope of his advice. Genuine empathy and imagination powered his counselling, making it relevant for the receiver. If you had a spark, he turned it into a fire, belief in the

individual his biggest contribution. His twenty year old musician grandson was as much a beneficiary of his wisdom as his graduate students.

Of late, he had been researching more and more into the anatomy of India's partition. He had left his home seven decades ago but never forgotten it. Amongst his many unfulfilled wishes was his desire to see his birthplace once more. He knew that it, too, had become a victim of the hatred that people in the subcontinent have borne towards one another for centuries but that didn't stop him for wishing for a better, a changed world.



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The Radical Humanist on Website

February 2015 onwards 'The Radical Humanist' is available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India.

Previous issues of the magazine can be read at:

ISSUU - Radical publications 169 by The Radical Humanist

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Mahi Pal Singh

Human Rights of the most marginalised was Dr. R.M. Pal's uncompromising passion

Vidya Bhushan Rawat

It was Prof Y.P. Chhibbar, the PUCL General Secretary for years, who introduced me to Dr R.M. Pal when I visited him at ARSD College where he was teaching. 'Dr Pal is the right person for you. He is the editor of PUCL Bulletin and lives in Greater Kailash. You must meet him,' suggested Prof Chhibbar. And after that it was a relationship that grew up with every passing day. As a young aspiring boy from a nondescript town of Uttarakhand, I had come to Delhi 'incidentally' during the tumultuous years of anti-Mandal agitation where most of our 'intellectuals' had been exposed. Staying with Dr Mulk Raj Anand, pioneer of English writing in India, there was a period of great personal churning for me and Dr Pal made it clear to me to earn to learn. 'What are you doing there?' he asked. "Jee, I am looking after his work, typing his scripts and accompany him to various places where he moves," I said, "My aim is to do social work and it is a great honor to be with a man who calls himself a 'Gandhian'." For a young person like me who had so many fantasies about Gandhism as perhaps we did not have the opportunity to know and understand 'others' and it seemed the only way to fight against oppression, particularly untouchability which Gandhi had claimed to be the biggest 'sin' of Hinduism. So for me any one who had seen Gandhi or worked with him became a hero and 'Lokayat', where Dr Mulk Raj Anand stayed, became my 'Sabarmati'. Dr Pal was a no nonsense person, who could speak fearlessly without being hypocritical, in front of you and he remained unimpressed. 'Well, I can tell you Mulk Raj Anand will not help you,' he said, 'Don't live under the romance of 'Gandhian' fame as it is good to do 'social work' but you need to be independent and earn to do things,' he suggested, 'I know you came from Dehradun and may face

prejudices here because of your village background. Better you do some evening courses as you plan and earn for your living and hopefully you will be able to contribute to society as you wish.' And I can say with firm conviction that after coming to Delhi and staying here as meek and submissive person for over two and half years, Dr Pal gave me the confidence in myself and helped me become independent and rebuild myself with respect and confidence.

Over the years our interaction grew and he became fond of me. He would guide me and ask me to write in a particular way. He suggested diverse topics to me and so much was the trust that many a time he would send me on fact finding on particular issues and get direct information for him. It was not that he would just ask me to write but he would call me and discuss with me the issue in detail and point out those particular references which he would wish me to focus on. I was fortunate to have met and acquaint myself with a number of eminent Human Rights activists, Ambedkarite scholars and writers at young age and all of them respected me and appreciated my courage and enthusiasm but Dr Pal remained the one who mentored me and guided me. He would appreciate a number of my elderly friends but unlike them he would guide me and even point to me the grammatical mistakes in my writings. I knew them very well and the fact was that he being a teacher, it was like a student sitting in his class as if he was dictating and then checking our assignment. Many times, he warned me to be neutral in my criticism and asked me to be as ruthless to Muslim fanatics too who try to defame the community; but one thing was clear that he made a distinction between minority communalism and majoritarian communalism and cautioned

India of the dangers of the Hindu communalism. He was afraid of the fact that India might become victim of the majoritarian communalism and against that all the like-minded parties and people have to join hands. He would often quote that no movement would succeed unless it is preceded by a political philosophy.

I still remember how he guided me to write a paper for a seminar being organized by Indian Social Institute, Delhi, in collaboration with UGC, on Ambedkar and M N Roy's relationship and Roy's thoughts on rationalism and Buddhism. He was determined, despite my own feeling that it was a misfit for a seminar on Human Rights education issue, yet he felt only I could have done justice to this and he guided me. Yes, that paper took me to various files including that information where Dr Ambedkar had, as a minister in Viceroy's Council, sanctioned an amount of Rs 13,000 for anti war efforts of M N Roy and on the basis of this information 'inspired' Arun Shourie to write 'Worshipping the False God', a book based on hard prejudices and lies. I met Justice Tarkunde several times and got those letters where he mentioned that it was he who took the money many times on behalf of the Party (Radical Democratic Party formed by Roy), and that Roy never took the money himself. Ambedkar was in deep appreciation of MN Roy and his intellectual honesty and that is why there are lots of similarities in their thoughts and philosophy, which need further elaboration. I can say with conviction that if Dr Pal had not guided me in this regard, I would have missed the great opportunity to study the work of M N Roy related to caste, religion and fascism.

As the editor of PUCL Bulletin he was able to focus a lot on atrocities against Dalits and the issue of communalism in India. Both the issues of caste violence against Dalits and communalism were matter of great concern for him and he remained uncompromising in his condemnation

of them. At the various national and international forums he always focused on the issue that Human Rights are not just state laws and their steady implementation which of course are important, but what he spoke and emphasized was 'societal violation of human rights' which he always felt, got out of the scrutiny of the human rights defenders and the organisations working for human rights. It was his conviction that Dalits, Muslims and other marginalized people should join Radical Humanist and Human Rights Movement to raise their issues. As he became President of Delhi PUCL, he ensured that these segments are fairly represented and we know personally that many of the radical humanists and PUCL 'leaders' were not very happy with his approach on the issue of caste.

For long he listened to many youngsters claiming that 'human rights' organisations in India have no space for the Dalits. He always mentioned to me the point that PUCL is a membership based organisation and if the Dalits and Muslims wanted to lead it, they need to become members and increase their numbers. He introduced many eminent persons to the human rights movement and said that there is no point complaining if you are unable to be member of it. People's organisations are led by people and need further understanding and working of the organisations and their structure. Merely blaming the organisations for being representatives of 'upper castes' was not correct, according to him, though we know that many activists became members yet, frankly speaking, the functioning of organisations like the PUCL did not change. The dark fact is that he was not liked inside the PUCL as well as in the Radical Humanists' circle for his 'overemphasis on caste and communalism'. His unambiguity and openness made many people his enemy who would be jealous of his forthrightness. The man always enjoyed being with young activists, guiding them and providing ideas to write on particular issues. I can vouch

with my own experience having met numerous people of eminence how they just use you. The dirty secret of the 'intellectual' world is that it does not want to engage in dialogue with people but works on 'networking'.

We had lots of disagreement particularly on the issue of Gandhi and Ambedkar. He knew it well that I have no liking for Gandhian philosophy, which I called humbug and absolutely patronizing as far as Dalits are concerned. He would always say that though Gandhi made eradication of untouchability and fight against communalism pivot of his philosophy, he failed on both counts yet he felt that Gandhi's intentions were not wrong but lots of discussion and debates on the issue actually saw his opinion changing. He said any one who read 'annihilation of caste' will only find Gandhi on the wrong side and Ambedkar fighting for the rights of the people. He felt Ambedkar was wronged.

His personal association with M N Roy and later working on the human rights issues had broadened his horizon more than many of his contemporaries who remained very narrow in their personal lives. There are very few who would spare time for you and guide you in every possible way and feel good at your achievements. He loved speaking Bangla and always followed the incidents happening in East Bengal or what we call today Bangladesh. The pain of division and migration was always with him and that is why he was always warm to people like me who left home in search of a new identity and to fulfill their commitments. He would always warn me like a teacher about what to do and what not to do. There are so many things to remember where he asked me to write on and suggested to me to attend particular programmes.

The last togetherness of mine with him was at a seminar that he has been trying to organize for years in Mumbai on Dr Ram Manohar Lohia but always felt lacking supporting hands there as he

would have them in Delhi as it was the city he always missed and left after he had paralytic stroke that confined him on wheelchair and external help. Many of my friends actually spoke to me after visiting him and felt pained to see a vibrant man dependent on people for help, a man who was always active doing things on his own. But it was his strong willpower that despite being confined to bed he could do a lot of work, which is almost impossible for many of us to do. I never saw him complaining about himself whenever I spoke to him on phone as it was work, work and work. He would ask for certain book or to speak to certain person or provide the phone numbers of some friends. He complained that being in Mumbai had curtailed his freedom as he always enjoyed his friendship circle in Delhi and felt that he had got isolated in Mumbai.

The seminar on Ram Manohar Lohia in Mumbai reflected how he wanted to do things so fast. Academics saw him speaking passionately on Lohia-Ambedkar relationship where he quoted Lohia saying that he wanted Dr Ambedkar to lead the entire Indians and not confined to the leadership of the Dalits even when people like me questioned Lohia suggesting his vision ended at Gandhsim, Dr Pal remained open to new ideas which supported freethinking and secular democratic traditions in India.

There are so many fond memories of him. I can only say that he was the one on whom I could count for guidance and support. He never failed and once promised would go to any extent to finish the task. I grew up admiring him for his courage and forthrightness because whenever he spoke he was to the point and blunt. At a seminar, a leading human right academic, who happened to be a Muslim, actually supported the practice of Sati as cultural practice and therefore outside the purview of human rights laws in the name of 'personal laws' of Hindus. I got up and objected saying whether he felt that veil and

Burqa should be put beyond the limit of human rights laws. It became heated and Dr Pal came to my rescue saying that he always wanted human rights defenders and organisations to speak against societal violation of human rights as human rights in South Asia are not just violated by the state but the majority of violations happen because of cultural practices and we need to come out in open against such rigid and inhuman practices such as caste system and untouchability.

The demise of Dr R M Pal at this crucial moment is a great blow to all the right thinking secular forces as we would often go to him and seek his advice on many issues confronting us. He was the man who always believed in the idea of a secular inclusive India and spoke regularly against the Hindutva's communalism. Though he is no longer with us, his writings will always inspire us to work for a secular democratic India. We promise to carry on his legacy for our better future.

From 'Chapter VII: Practice of Fascism' by M.N. Roy

In August 1934, a Manifesto was issued to the world over the signatures of a large number of scientists, writers, and leaders in other branches of intellectual activity, calling for an international congress to combat the cultural menace of Fascism. The following are extracts from that historical document:

" We know that in the Fascist countries many highly respected scholars have been driven from the scene of their activities, or have voluntarily quitted their home, because they refused to sacrifice their learning to the violent demands of the totalitarian State. Specially the events in Germany have evoked our most profound concern for the perpetuation of the freedom of science: In that country, the exact sciences have been openly degraded to jobbing for war industries. Only such investigations are favoured, as are likely to bring about economic and technical predominance over the world. All the branches of physics which cannot be made to serve political and economical imperialism are therefore hampered and restricted. Studies which have contributed essentially to the broadening of our concepts of the physical universe, are thrust aside openly as vain and fruitless intellectualism. Verified scientific knowledge concerning heredity and race is cast aside. In its place, appear new doctrines unverified by honest research, for the annihilation of hundreds of thousands of human existences. In accordance with the National Socialist belief that it is senseless to help the weak at the expense of the biologically strong, social hygiene is shorn of all justification. Colleges are forced to establish 'chairs of natural healing'. The gates are opened to superstition and deceit. Regardless of historical truth, pre-historical and ancient times are so presented as to support the thesis of superiority of the nation concerned and the inferiority of all others. Very often, purposeful mysticism is substituted for an awkward historical truth. The suppression of free research and the violation of truth are most clearly revealed in the new jurisprudence which is designed to give a theoretical basis for the cruel and arbitrary practices founded on legal conceptions of the Middle Ages. Teaching and studying are enslaved along with pure science. Colleges suffer from intellectual terror. Through the misuse and contempt for free research, there is an imminent danger that the whole structure of scientific knowledge will be destroyed. And from the fragments a new series of pseudo-science will be erected, which will be harmful to the progress of mankind."

Within two months after Hitler's accession to power, more than two hundred eminent men of learning were driven from their high academic positions. The vandalism was committed on the pretext that those men were Jews. Many of them were Jews, but their real crime was that they were free-thinkers, some were Socialists, most of them Liberals...

Tribute to R.M. Pal

With the death of Rai Mohan Pal on 13th October 2015 another great scholar on M N Roy and a stalwart of the Radical Humanist and Civil Liberties movement in India has been lost.

I had the great opportunity to be close with R M Pal when he was in Delhi as Principal of a Delhi college and in the editorial board of The Radical Humanist. After retirement he shifted to Bombay where his daughter Sangeeta lives. I used to discuss with Pal on various issues with particular emphasis on M N Roy and his first wife Evelyn Trent (Santi Devi).

A fortnight before his death R M Pal told me that he was planning to hold seminar to discuss M N Roy's ideas and their relevance to the contemporary world. He brought out his latest book on Roy which he promised to mail to me but died before he could do that. Now his book 'Power to the People' is available worldwide through amazon.com. Here is the gist of the contents of the book:

R M Pal's last compilation ~ Power to the People ~ attempts to bring out, through a selection of the seminal writings of M.K. Gandhi, M.N. Roy and Jayaprakash Narayan with critical commentaries on them, the essentials of their intellectual development and their contribution to contemporary Indian Political Thought. These writings constitute a significant part of the historical debates and contestations of ideas among the thinkers of the nationalist

and the internationalist movements of the first half of the twentieth century, Content: Vol 1 - Preface, R.M. Pal, Introduction, Meera Verma, M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, M.K. Gandhi, Traditional Influences On Gandhi by A.L. Basham, Gandhi's writings in Harijan by Bidyut Chakrabarty, Critique Of Modern Civilization by Bhiku Parekh, Gandhi's Idea of Nation in Hind Swaraj by Anthony J. Parel, Sources And Implications Of Sarvodaya in Gandhi's Philosophy by Anil Dutta Mishra, Gandhi and the Politics of Decentralization by Jayaprakash Narayan, Beyond Liberal Democracy: Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi by Thomas Pantham, Contents : 0. Problematizing Modernity: Gandhi's Decentering Impulse, Ronald J. Terchek, Bringing Gandhi Back to Independent India by T.K. Oommen, The Spinning Wheel and the Seed: Gandhi's, Legacy, Humanity's Hope by Vandana Shiva, Morality in Political Practice - Marx, Gandhi, M.N. Roy, Mr. Gandhi - An Analysis by Santi Devi (Evelyn Roy), M.N. Roy and the Mahatma by Sibnarayan Ray. Introductory Note, M.N. Roy, Original Draft of 'Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question', M.N. Roy, New Humanism: A Manifesto, M.N. Roy, Liberal Genealogy of Marxism, Marxian Theory of Revolution, A New Political Philosophy, Radical Democracy, 'Theses', Draft Constitution of India, M.N. Roy, Gandhi and Roy: The Interaction of Ideologies in India by Dennis Dalton, The Perspective on History by M. Shiviah, Prof in Political Science.

Innaiah Narisetti from USA

"The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything, that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearing." Justice K K Mathew, former Judge, Supreme Court of India, (1975)

This sad news denotes the end of the age of the Royist vanguards. I had a sweet and sour relation with all of them. I came to intellectual debate with late Justice V. M. Tarkunde, Prof. Sib Narayan Ray, Dr. Indumati Parekh, Dr. Rai Mohan Pal and other great leaders of the Radical Humanist Movement on some issues. They all smilingly accepted some of my corrections. Once late Indu Tai told me, after an IRI Board Meeting that she would pull me by my ear in such a tone as if my mother was scolding me. Such was my relation with Dr Pal & other older men. They taught me to speak out whenever I feel like speaking.

Ajit Bhattacharyya

It is sad to know that one of the icons of civil liberties and concerned citizenship Shri R. M. Pal passed away last evening at Mumbai. We have lost a moral and intellectual leader of our time. He will be missed by all of us as he was a role model for intellectuals and activists.

Dr. Anand Kumar

Swaraj Abhiyan
14.10.2015

Namaste Sangeeta,

This is Manohar Ravela. I know about your father through my father (Somayya Ravela). His commitment to the radical humanism is an inspiration to all of us. Please accept my condolences. Thank you.

Regards,

Manohar Ravela, www.lohiatoday.com

Dear Mahipal, saddened to hear of the passing away of R.M. Pal. I am reminded of the marvellous - and very level - tribute that Sangeeta Mall wrote by way of Preface to his book of essays: Human Rights Issues. If I may humbly suggest it, it would be grand to see it reprinted in the RH at this time? I have just re-read it and wish I could write like that about Pal myself! With all good wishes for the splendidly rejuvenated RH: good to read.

John [Drew]

Deeply grieved over the sad demise of Dr. R.M. Pal, a veteran radical humanist and a pillar of the radical humanist movement. We pay our homage to the deceased and express our condolence to his family and friends.

**N. Vyas, S.C. Varma,
V.P. Arya –**

Advocates (SCI)

Extremely sorry to hear of Sh. R. M. Pal's passing away. A great loss to the movement. My condolences.

Ramesh Awasthi

R.M. Pal: a few words on R.M. Pal's expiry, 13th October 2015

It was a fatal day when I was informed of R.M. Pal's demise by his daughter Sangeeta Mall of his last day on this planet. He had died the day before, 13th October 2015. More than 60 years from my first knowing him in that small valley called Dehra Dun. The association with him through my sister was when at the age of 16, I came to know the solemn side of 'Pal Saheb' - as we used to call him - in Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, the only co-educational college in town.

We were in the same area, Dalanwala, yet where he lived was at least 2 miles away. He had left his village in Bengal to be with M.N. Roy and Ellen Roy. In Dehra Dun where they came to live, he used to drive them to their varying destinations, apart from learning so much from them. But more than that he was a Radical Humanist and we used to attend meetings in the house of his friend who was a socialist. My elder brother was part of this group. My sister and I were influenced by my elder brother and followed him everywhere. Surendra Mohan was part of our group also. We cycled everywhere and because of this easy transport, attended all the debates and cultural occasions.

Years later, as Editor of The Radical Humanist, R.M. Pal accepted my write-up on Tibet. We had gone from China to Tibet, and experienced the Chinese occupation of Lhasa, the capital, for the first time. As I wrote my thoughts on the Chinese occupation of Tibet, I was advised to send it anywhere by post, though not by email. Pal's acceptance of the article was the first one. Later when we were in Delhi,

we met him at a restaurant and recounted our experiences of China. At that point Pal praised my Tibet article and advised me to send it to the Dalai Lama, which I didn't want to. Writing about China's occupation, I didn't want to take a ride on it. I wasn't in favour of being sensational in my writing – I never have been. Anyway, half of it was published in the current Radical Humanist. Then the editorship changed and Rekha Saraswat, the next editor was advised by R.M. Pal to accept the other half. After that, I became a regular reader of the magazine, also sending articles whenever appropriate occasions turned up.

I submitted quite a few articles later. One was on our attending the Communist gathering in Italy with our young friend's father, Ermes Bertani, an old Communist. When they visited us where we were holidaying in Italy, I interviewed him on his role in Italian Communism. Again I got another article by him on Berlusconi, the holes in his reputation, written especially for The Radical Humanist. To his delight it got published. And so it went on.

When Pal became unwell, he and Madhuri shifted to Bombay to be near their daughter Sangeeta Mall. When I visited my brother who lived quite close to where Pal was living, we went to see him twice. This time, in January 2015, when we were again visiting Bombay, I arranged to visit them, but somehow a get-together didn't happen. I regret that as we will not be able to visit him now. As someone who knew him for at least 60 years, I will miss not seeing him. But that's life – death is the end to all meetings, sooner or later.

Rani Drew



Lok Nayak Jayprakash Narayan

the Hero of the August Revolution of 1942
and the Second Freedom of 1977

Gautam Thaker

11th October happens to be the Birth Anniversary Day of Jayprakash Narayan. Let us fervently remember and pay homage to J.P., to whom Mahatma Gandhiji admired as the standard and proven scholar of socialism and Vinobaji identified him as the best personality of humbleness, simplicity and affection.

Jayprakash Narayan, popularly known as J.P. has engraved his name with golden letters in the history of our nation. For four decades, his name aroused a special affectionate feeling in the hearts of the people. In the independent India, he has remained as the soldier of the nation, voice of people's sense of discretion and a sentry of people's soul. He despised authority as powerless and provided the best example of self-proven representative of the people, without contesting elections, as also unparallel worship of people's policies and "politics of the people".

Comes to my memory the month of December of the year 1973. While addressing the All India Convention of Radical Humanist Association held at Kolkata, J.P. states in his inaugural speech that "It is essential to take on hand the programme to defend democratic values and for that, the youths will have to perform their role irrespective of affiliation or allegiance to any party." From there, he threw up the challenge of "Youths for Democracy". The words of that challenge

are resounding or reciting in the minds and hearts of us all who were quite young at that

time. "Students in many countries of the world have played decisive role in transforming political fortunes. In India also, time has become ripe for the youths to play a decisive role on the national level to establish people's supremacy and to emerge as conqueror over the prevalent furor - money, falsehood and bestial forces". Since that point of time and till his death, this author has had a distinguished chance of closely working with J.P. and is the best ever occasion of my life.

J.P. was interested not in power but in service. He dedicated himself for the cause of the nation. He was the idol of the dedication and service. The distinguished recognition of 'People's Hero' bestowed upon him was meaningfully befitting to him. Born on 11th October 1902 at Sitabadiyara village in Bihar, J.P. was self-reliant, hard-working and gifted with sense of endurance. While J.P. had joined in the Freedom Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1930 he was arrested by the Police and was imprisoned, but he fled away by jumping off the prison walls and, by remaining underground, he collected and banded together freedom fighters. He became hero of August 1942 revolution. After the independence, he came into contact with Saint Vinoba Bhave and J.P. got himself transformed as a worker of mass movement related to land-donation (Bhudan) and 'upliftment of all' (Sarvodaya) campaign. Instead of participating in politics, he was deeply and completely engrossed or absorbed in 'upliftment

of all' activities.

After 1973, J.P. embarked upon, with his main aim of awakening of public awareness, public spirit and mass-power. In the style of a public leader, he insisted on taking on hand four different types of tasks in the entire movement which includes canvassing, mass educational, organizational, resistive and constructivism. Right from the Bihar movement, J.P. used to state that "I have no interest on taking on hand or possessing power, but I am keen only on keeping

check over the power and that check or control, also through the people". During and after the Bihar movement, J.P. frequently recalled Gandhiji's one sentence that "Democracy does not mean good governance with votes of the people but that can become true governance only when ruler is proved as undeserving, by which time, some capability or competence would have awakened in such a way that they can dethrone the ruler from the position of power."

On looking at the ideological training of J.P., it appears that for the good governance of the regime, people's awareness and collective crusade are the must. If we wish to transform this situation then, we will have to light the flame of revolution across all the villages. For this, there will be a need of broad-based mass education. Until mindset of the people is changed, people's revolution will never become a complete revolution. People may tend to believe that the Govt. will entirely manage all that it has to, and there is no responsibility on our part. That mentality will have to be changed. The lesser the authority, the more the democracy. Gandhiji used to say, "as there is a chain pulling device in the train for the sake of safety, like-wise, there should be authority in the democracy. True democracy means that it becomes more and more self-reliant and assumes minimum dependence on the Government". In the complete and thorough

revolution, dual process of confrontation and construction or creation will have to be resorted to. All will have to realize that no formation or creation can be made without confrontation.

During the time of parliamentary elections of 1977, J.P. told that, people of this country will not barter its freedom in exchange of bits of roti. J.P.'s definition was "freedom along with roti". The meaning of roti without freedom tantamount to dictatorship. During the emergency, as a result of moral power of his sincere appeal, there was a change of guard of the regime of which, we are all well aware.

Everyone should read J.P.'s "Travel from Marx to Gandhi". I feel fortunate by recollecting the opportunity of having worked with such a great hero, from 1973 to 1979.

To-day, the rulers are talking about democracy but they entirely and thoroughly despise and disregard democratic values. It is not at all fair when the rulers who are against or opposed to the poor, farmers and the deprived, cash on in the name of J.P. Attempts of the activists to voice or vocalize the issues faced by different sections of the society are being mercilessly crushed or trampled upon. By invoking Article 144, present rulers are suppressing democratic rights of the

activists to launch their movement. While the Govt. does not hesitate in taking undemocratic and repressive steps to ban any of the programmes, then, on to-day, the birth anniversary day of J.P., concerned citizens and the people will have to again aggressively tread on the battle field, with the demand of 'Jan-tantra', otherwise let it be known that, knocks of dictatorship have already been struck at the doors.

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RSS-BJP kinship

Kuldip Nayar

IF there was any iota of doubt about the links between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Prime Minister Narendra Modi dispelled it. He presented his key ministers to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and asked them to provide information on the working of their ministries. That the Prime Minister had no qualms about it was evident from the way the entire presentation was aired on news channels. He has been an ardent pracharak of the RSS before joining its political wing, the BJP.

The party has been evasive on the link because of its realization that the RSS does not go down well with an average Indian. It was the same question of connection which split the Janata Party. The Jana Sangh, the earlier avatar of the BJP, promised to sever its link with the RSS when it joined the Janata Party and gave an assurance to Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan that it would cut off its relations with the RSS, provided it was allowed to stay in the Janata Party. This delinking did not, however, happen and it betrayed JP's confidence.

I recall asking JP why he allowed the Jana Sangh to merge with the Janata Party when the former had not cut off its link with the RSS. In reply he said that he had been betrayed because the Jana Sangh leaders had gone back on their words. They had given him an undertaking that once the Janata Party started attending to the organizational work, after forming the government, the Jana Sangh would have nothing to do with the RSS. "I have been personally let down," said JP.

This must be true but in the process the Jana Sangh was able to get secular credentials. The blunder committed by JP has cost the nation dear and the Jana Sangh of yesterday has emerged as the BJP of today and has been able to secure an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha.

The Congress should have gained from the situation. But its obsession with the dynasty and President Sonia Gandhi's insistence on having her son, Rahul Gandhi, as successor has dissipated the advantage. The party has lost its dependable vote-bank of Muslims. The community is now following either regional parties or even flirting with the idea of supporting Owasi, who is trying to present himself as the sole representative of Muslim leaders, as those in the Muslim League used to do before partition.

The community does not want to go back to parochial politics. Yet, it may have no option except to toy with the idea since the RSS has come out openly on the field to guide the BJP, jettisoning its role of being a pure cultural organization. That the RSS has not gone through the electoral process does not bother the organization because it knows that the BJP has to depend on the RSS cadres to win elections.

Nonetheless, it is sad to see on television channels RSS chief Bagwat making it clear who is the boss when Prime Minister Modi met him and paraded his ministerial colleagues in front of him. True, the electorate has given a majority to Modi but never did he say during his campaign that when it comes to country's governance, the RSS would be very much there.

In fact, during his campaign, Modi assured the minorities, particularly the Muslims, that whatever be the party's stance in the past the new slogan was sab ka sath, sab ka vikas. At a few meetings he went out of the way to make the Muslims believe that he would be the best custodian.

Really speaking, there is nothing discriminatory in his way of working so far. However, the fact of the RSS saffronising the educational institu-

tions and making appointments of its own men at key positions is visible. It suggests that Modi is implementing the RSS agenda slowly but relentlessly. It is evident that the Muslims have ceased to count in the affairs of governance. The central cabinet itself has just one Muslim minister and he too has been assigned an unimportant portfolio. Even otherwise, the increasing impression inside and outside the government is that a soft-type of Hindutva has begun to prevail in governance.

The target of the RSS to have a Hindu Rashtra may look distant at present. But Modi still has three and a half years to go. Both he and the RSS chief, who now often meet publicly, seem to be working according to the plan which they have devised at Nagpur, the RSS headquarters. The BJP and its students' wing Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad have no independent thinking. They just follow the script finalized at Nagpur.

This has a different manifestation. Sometimes it appears in the shape of ban on meat and sometimes the dress code and even compulsory teaching of Sanskrit in schools and specific morning prayers in assemblies. The redoing of Nehru Memorial Museum at Delhi is part of the same

thinking. The RSS, which was nowhere when the movement to oust the British was fought, is now trying to occupy all the space and parade as the real champion of freedom.

One sadly feels the absence of passion of freedom struggle and the philosophy of pluralism. Even the name of the architect of modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru, is being systematically erased. For example, the postal stamps of Nehru and Indira Gandhi are being obliterated. The havoc caused in the field of education is terrible. The history is being re-written and text books are changed to downgrade the role of leaders that were instrumental in getting us the freedom. It is no surprise that the names of Frontier Gandhi Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who stood bravely against the Muslim League, are seldom mentioned.

Understandably, the RSS and its affiliated units like the BJP and the Bhajrang Dal feel left out when freedom struggle is mentioned. But they do not have to minimize the freedom struggle itself because that will amount to a great disservice to tomorrow's generations. The important thing is the struggle for independence and the sacrifices made by innumerable people

‘Dissent in Early Indian tradition’ M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture (1979) by Prof. Romila Thapar

The 7th ‘M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture - Dissent In Early Indian tradition’ delivered by Prof. Romila Thapar in 1979, refutes the much propagated theory that ancient Indian society was a vision of harmonious social relations in the land of plenty and shows that discontent existed against oppressive social & political relations and ‘dissent’ found expression in various forms of protests like renunciation, setting up of separate religious sects/monasteries, migration of peasants to other places as mark of protest against heavy taxes thus disrupting the economy of the kingdom and creating revenue problem for the King, breaking of caste rules by joining monasteries which were open to all castes and where equality practised, etc.etc. Buddhist Jatakas literature has many references of protests by subjects against oppressive kings and throwing them out of the kingdom. ‘Mahabharata’ justifies ‘right to revolt’ if the King is oppressive and even permits his assassination.

N.D. Pancholi, Secretary, Indian Renaissance Institute

The Sangh's pedigree and its politics

Prabhakar Sinha

It is essential to know the Sangh's pedigree to understand its politics and goal. The RSS was founded in 1925 in the wake of the Hindu Muslim riots in Malabar for the limited objective of fighting the Muslims for committing atrocities against the Hindus. In fact, Hedgevar, the first Sar Sanghchalak had categorically stated that the purpose of the RSS was not to join the National Movement against the British but to oppose "the yavan-snakes (i.e., the Muslims), who, reared on the milk of non-cooperation, were provoking riots in the nation with their poisonous hissing." It was also safe not to join the National Movement which would have invited immediate repression. Maintaining a safe distance from the freedom movement guaranteed the participation of those who did not want to risk their necks. Thus, hatred for the Muslim is in the DNA of the RSS. Later, M.S. Golwarkar developed his notion of a Hindu Rashtra in which the Muslims and Christians had no place on equal footing with the Hindus. They had to subordinate themselves to the Hindus. In fact, he drew inspiration from Adolf Hitler, who hated the Jews and had sixty lakhs of them liquidated as 'a final solution of the Jewish problem.' Golwarkar had openly admired him for the solution and also for his annexation of part of Czechoslovakia. Dr Moonje who preceded him was a great admirer of the Fascist Italian leader B. Mussolini. He had gone to meet him and greatly admired him and the fascist institutions he had established. Nehru had refused to see the dictator when invited.

The RSS had not only refrained from participating in the Indian Freedom Movement, but hated it. M.S. Golwarkar considered the leaders of the Freedom Movement 'traitors' or 'mere

simpletons, misguided, ignorant fools.' Such a statement about the RSS and its icon Golwarkar makes it imperative to produce irrefutable evidence. In his book (1938) 'We or Our Nationhood Defined', he states:

"We repeat: in Hindustan, the land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation -satisfying all the five essential requirements of the scientific nation concept of the modern world. Consequently, only those movements are truly 'National as aim at rebuilding, revitalising, and emancipating from the present stupor the Hindu Nation. Those only are nationalist patriots, who with the aspiration to glorify the Hindu race and Nation next to their heart, are prompted into activity and strive to achieve that goal. All others, posing to be patriots and willfully indulging in a course of action detrimental to the Hindu Nation are traitors and enemies to the nationslist cause, or to take a more charitable view if unintentionally, and lead into such a course, a mere simpleton, misguided. ignorant fools (emphasis added).

The RSS hated the national movement, hated its leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and all others; hated and hates the minorities, a secular India and democracy. These are in its gene. A genetic change is neither easy nor quick. The changes it tries to showcase are cosmetic and tactical, calculated to deceive to multiply.

Those who love the people of India, democracy, a free and liberal society and abhor fascism must wake up and stand for the India they love by ceasing to bury their heads in the sand like an ostrich.

Prabhakar Sinha is the President, PUCL

Golwalkar- The Guru Of Hate

Ramachandra Guha

This column generally deals more — much more — in appreciation than in depreciation. However, it is obligatory on the historian to also (occasionally) notice individuals whose influence on history was malign rather than salutary. One such person was the Hindutva (A Right Wing ideology NOT to be mistaken for Hinduism the religion) ideologue M.S. Golwalkar, whose birth anniversary his followers are marking this year.

Early initiation

Born in February 1906, Golwalkar studied and then taught briefly at the Banaras Hindu University (hence the appellation “Guru”, which he carried for the rest of his life). He joined the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh as a student, attracting the attention of its founder, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar. When the elder man died in 1940, Golwalkar became the sarchangchhalak of the RSS. He headed the organisation until his death some three decades later.

Golwalkar was a man of much energy and dynamism, under whose leadership the RSS steadily grew in power and influence. His ideas are summarised in the book *Bunch of Thoughts*, which draws upon the lectures he delivered over the years (mostly in Hindi) to RSS shakhas across the country. This identifies the Hindus, and they alone, as the privileged community of India. It disparages democracy as alien to the Hindu ethos and extols the code of Manu, whom Golwalkar salutes as “the first, the greatest, and the wisest lawgiver of mankind”.

Angels and demons

The early chapters of *Bunch of Thoughts* celebrate the glories of the Motherland and its chief religion, this a prelude to the demonisation of those Indians who had the misfortune of not

being born into the Hindu fold. Golwalkar writes that the “hostile elements within the country pose a far greater menace to national security than aggressors from outside”. He identifies three major “Internal Threats: I: The Muslims; II: The Christians; III: The Communists”. A long chapter impugns the patriotism of these groups, speaking darkly of their “future aggressive designs on our country”.

On January 30, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by Nathuram Godse. Although Godse was not a member of the RSS at the time of the murder, he had been one in the past. And there were reports that in several places RSS members had celebrated his act by distributing sweets. As a precautionary measure, Golwalkar and other RSS workers were put in jail.

Secret documents that this writer has recently seen strongly suggest that even if the RSS was not directly implicated in Gandhi’s murder, its main leader was not entirely averse to such a happening. Thus, on December 6, 1947, Golwalkar convened a meeting of RSS workers in the town of Govardhan, not far from Delhi. The police report on this meeting says it discussed how to “assassinate the leading persons of the Congress in order to terrorise the public and to get their hold over them”.

Two days later, Golwalkar addressed a crowd of several thousand volunteers at the Rohtak Road Camp in Delhi. The police reporter in attendance wrote that the RSS leader said that “the Sangh will not rest content until it had finished Pakistan. If anyone stood in our way we will have to finish them too, whether it was Nehru Government or any other Government...” Referring to Muslims, he said that no power on earth could keep them in Hindustan. They

should have to quit this country... “If they were made to stay here the responsibility would be the Government’s and the Hindu community would not be responsible. Mahatma Gandhi could not mislead them any longer. We have the means whereby [our] opponents could be immediately silenced”.

Dogged commitment

Six weeks later, Gandhi was assassinated, and Golwalkar and his colleagues put in jail. Released a year later on a bond of good behaviour, they retained a dogged commitment to their ideas. Golwalkar himself argued that “in this land Hindus have been the owners, Parsis and Jews the guests, and Muslims and Christians the dacoits”. He asked, maliciously: “Then do all these have the same right over the country?”

Golwalkar saw Muslims, Christians and Communists (among others) as threats to the nation. Other Indians saw him and his ilk as a “Danger to our Secular State”. The words in quotes served as the title of an essay on Golwalkar written in 1956 by the Bombay columnist D.F. Karaka. The RSS leader, noted Karaka, “thinks in terms of Hindu India and only Hindu India”.

As one who had many criticisms to make of the Prime Minister of the day, the columnist nonetheless believed that “it is necessary for all of us whatever our differences are with Mr. Nehru to stand firm with him on this point, namely, that ours is a secular state and that whether we are Hindus, Muslims, Parsis or Christians, freedom of religion, which is guaranteed to us under our Constitution should not be allowed to be crucified at the altar of the RSS — the organisation from which came the man who murdered Mahatma Gandhi”.

Failed project

Karaka’s column was sparked by the celebration by the RSS of the 50th birthday of Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar. In this, the year of his 100th birth anniversary, all I need do is endorse Karaka’s words. For, Golwalkar was a guru of hate, whose life’s malevolent work was — as Jawaharlal Nehru so memorably put it — to make India into a “Hindu Pakistan”. That project has not succeeded yet, and may it never succeed either.

First Published in The Hindu, 28 November, 2006

Reader’s Comments:

Dear Editor,

In his article ‘Relevance of Rama Manohar Lohia Today’, (The Radical Humanist - May 2015) K.S. Chalam writes that “Unlike several other Indian leaders, Lohia did not go to England for his higher studies as he abhorred the Anglo-Saxons (though Germans do come under Saxons, they never claim so)”. However, in fact Lohia went to UK only for pursuing his higher studies. It is only after spending some months in UK that he went to Berlin, Germany. Indumati Kelkar who has written Lohia’s biography and Dr. Mastram Kapoor who has compiled Lohia’s collected works also confirm this. A German scholar, Joachim Osterheld, who had been asked to write about Lohia’s days in Germany, also confirms it in her article ‘Lohia as a doctoral student in Berlin’ published in the ‘Economic and Political Weekly’ dated 2-8, October 2010. It was Jayaprakash Narayan who did not go to UK but went to United States instead.

Yours Sincerely,

Bapu Heddurshetti

Shame on You, Mr. Culture Minister

Siddharth Varadarajan

“Despite being a Muslim”, APJ Abdul Kalam “was a great nationalist and humanist.” With these shocking words – uttered casually at the end of an interview to a television channel a few days ago – Union Minister of Culture Mahesh Sharma has not only insulted all Indian Muslims but also the former President of India.

The minister was asked about the controversy over the renaming of Aurangzeb Road in New Delhi. He defended the decision by noting that the Mughal ruler was not someone that people considered ideal and then added,

“Aurangzeb Road ka nam bhi badal kar ek aise mahapursh ke naam par kiya hai jo Musalman hotay hue bhi itna bada rashtravaadi aur manavtavadhi insaan tha – APJ Abdul Kalam, unke naam par kiya gaya hai.”

(The name of Aurangzeb Road has been changed to the name of a great human being who, despite being a Muslim, was such a great nationalist and humanist – APJ Abdul Kalam, we have named it after him).

Just in case Sharma claims I am distorting his words or quoting them out of context, here is the video clip from India Today TV (watch from 16’16’’):

https://youtu.be/qRBKJS8_q0Q?t=16m16s

So now that we have established that the minister actually said what he said, and that the context in which those hateful words were uttered provides him no alibi or escape route, let us consider what they tell us – about Mahesh Sharma the individual; about the Narendra Modi government in which he serves as an important minister; and about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the organisation he swears allegiance to

and which he describes as “nationalist”.

Bigotry plain and simple

The first thing we can say is that Sharma, for all his moralising, is a garden variety bigot who does not believe Indian Muslims are really Indian. If you are a BJP supporter and believe the minister said nothing offensive, substitute the words “Hindu” for “Muslim” and “Atal Behari Vajpayee” for “APJ Abdul Kalam” and then see how awful that sentence sounds.

Let us be very clear. Even Kalam – whose popularity the BJP is trying to cash in on by getting a road named after him – must suffer the ignominy of having his patriotic credentials certified in this way by the small-minded men who are running the government. In the Culture Minister’s perverted worldview, being Muslim is a handicap that the former President had to overcome in order to serve the country.

Kalam was an extraordinary man – a scientist and administrator who was open to embracing the culture and philosophy of others in a way that fewer and fewer Indians of all faiths tend to be these days. There were many handicaps he had to overcome in a life he devoted to his country, such as the poverty he was born into, and the indifference of the Indian system towards providing quality education to its poorer citizens. If at all being Muslim was a handicap, it was because of the ignorance and prejudice he must have encountered along the way from people who questioned where his loyalties lay – and not because his religion made him have any doubts on this account.

Elsewhere in the same interview, Mahesh Sharma makes a pitch for the compulsory teaching of lessons from the Ramayana, Mahabharata

and Gita in school but demurs when asked whether the Quran and Bible will be given the same status. This can't be done, he says, because only the Hindu texts reflect, the "atma" or soul of India.

There are many naïve people in India who believe their religion, caste, language or region is superior to others. Some among them might even become MPs and ministers. It is hard to say whether the minister's belief in the exclusive claims of his religion to the "soul of India" is the act of a simpleton or the product of cynical majoritarian politics. Either way, how can a person who takes his oath of office on the Constitution of India defame an entire section of citizens in the way Sharma has?

That the Culture Minister has questioned the patriotism of Indian Muslims is bad enough. But there is something else that I find even more disturbing. The reflexive manner in which he uttered his throwaway line – 'Musalman hotay hue bhi' – tells us he is not ashamed of airing his bigotry in public, not even at a time when he and his government are already under fire for trying to pursue a communal agenda. It is this unapologetic, brazen assault on the honour of 14% of the population that worries me. I see it as a sign of bad days ahead for India.

If at all there is a context to Sharma's shocking words, it is that they were made soon after he and other ministers attended a conclave organised by the RSS to assess the performance of the Modi government.

We know from Ram Madhav that the government's primary stakeholders – what he coyly calls the "ideological family" – went back to Nagpur "content with the general direction of the country under the new government."

Time to go

What that cryptic sentence really means can be judged from the charged-up manner in which the Culture Minister has emerged from this remedial class. I won't go into the other ridiculous things Sharma has been saying since the RSS conclave, including his desire to fight against "cultural pollution." That is a topic we can save for another day. But impugning the Indianness of Indian Muslims – a central part of the RSS's political agenda since the days of Hedgewar and Golwalkar – is a despicable thing for a minister to do. If Sharma wants to indulge his bigotry, he should resign from the cabinet and do so on his own time.

Dated: 17/09/2015

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VHP is compiling a ‘new Hindu scripture’ to provide religious sanction for Hindutva

Dhirendra K Jha

The nationalist organisation has set up a team to pick portions from various Hindu texts to create an 'overarching Hindu identity beyond castes and sub-castes'.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has embarked on a special project to compile a “new Hindu scripture” by culling “relevant portions” from various Hindu religious texts, with the aim of standardising religious beliefs and capturing the imagination of the average Hindu.

VHP vice president Jiveshwar Mishra said the exercise has been initiated at the behest of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat. “The new text will provide religious backing for an overarching Hindu identity beyond any castes or sub-castes and lay down, besides common rituals and beliefs, a uniform value system for all Hindus as well as scriptural explanation for ghar wapsi,” said Mishra, who is part of the VHP’s four-member team tasked with the project.

This team held its first meeting in mid-August in Delhi and prepared a list of 40 religious texts from which portions will be collated. The list includes a number of Smritis, Dharmashastras, epics and Puranas. Present at the Delhi meeting were VHP vice presidents Mishra and

Jagannath Sahi, its national secretary Dharma Narayan Sharma, and Bharat Sanskrit Parishad (a unit of the VHP) general secretary Acharya Radha Krishna Manori.

As a beginning, Mishra will study Yajnavalkya Smriti, while Sahi, Manori and Sharma have been given the responsibility to go through Parashar Smriti, Manusmriti and the Mahabharata, respec-

tively.

Rewriting history

According to a senior RSS official, the need to prepare a new Hindu scripture arose because most popular religious texts – foremost among them Manusmriti and Bhagavad Gita – are not able to further Hindu unity “so urgently required to counter the threat of Islam and Christianity”. “The new scripture will provide [the] religious foundation for Hindutva,” the RSS official explained.

For decades, the RSS has strived to create a monolithic Hindu identity by disavowing caste-based discrimination and the religious sanction behind it. So far it has sought to achieve this by trying to rewrite history. In September last year, Mohan Bhagwat released three books authored by Bharatiya Janata Party leader Vijay Sonkar Shastri titled Hindu Charmakar Jati, Hindu Khatik Jati and Hindu Valmiki Jati. These volumes attributed the genesis of Dalits to “Muslim invasion” in medieval times.

Speaking at the book launch, RSS general secretary (executive head) Bhaiyyaji Joshi claimed that “Shudras” are not considered untouchables in Hindu scriptures and that “Islamic atrocities” during medieval times resulted in the emergence of untouchables and Dalits.

Help from 'scholars'

Now, changing tack, the RSS has decided to delve into the mass of Hindu scriptures to cherry-pick portions that it feels would further its political agenda.

“I will discuss the details of this project with

sadhus at the [ongoing] Nasik Kumbha Mela,” said Mishra. “Inputs that I gather there will then be presented in our next meeting, which will be held between September 28 and October 3 at the VHP office in Delhi.”

The four-member team of the VHP expects to prepare a rough sketch of the “new scripture” in

a year. “This rough sketch will then be presented for discussion before the senior leaders of the RSS and the VHP,” said Mishra. “Once it is cleared by them, we will involve Sanskrit and religious scholars on a large scale to prepare final draft of the new scripture. This would be followed by a series of seminars and discussions to collect responses and popularise the text.”

In Modi Raj writers and artists have lesser rights as citizens

Prabhakar Sinha

In the wake of the avalanche of writers returning their awards to protest the killing of writers, for expressing opinions not liked by the Sangh and its extended Parivar, Modi's Ministers and a Governor have stated the position of the present rulers on the issue. Arun Jaitley has called it a 'manufactured paper rebellion', the Telecom Minister has said that those who returned the award hate Narendra Modi and Mahesh Sharma, the Minister for Culture and Tourism, has advised the concerned writers to stop writing. Not lagging behind, the Governor of West Bengal, Keshari Nath Tripathi, has asked for a 'check on the political affiliation of the award-returning writers'. The message conveyed through these statements to the writers of the nation is loud and clear. You have no right to hate Narendra Modi, you have no right to protest against this government, you have no right to act as per your political belief or association and you must stop writing if your views are contrary to the views of the Modi government. And above all, you have no right to protest.

The position of the Modi government is baffling, inexplicable and unacceptable. The writers are citizens of the country and have all the rights including the fundamental rights to which the other citizens are entitled. Like any other

citizen they have the right to love or hate Modi, to have political affiliation, to protest alone or in association with other like-minded writers (or even non-writers) on issues of their choice and continue writing with full freedom despite governmental hostility. The statements of Modi's Ministers show that they are in complete disagreement with this view. Their public statements suggest that the award winning writers are under some kind of obligation not to hate Modi or have political affiliation or act in association with their colleagues. In short, they are not entitled to fundamental rights to which all other citizens are entitled. This approach reveals their authoritarian mindset and sinister design - the very thing against which the writers are protesting.

The Ministers do not seem to be aware that writers and artists love and need freedom much more than the others because it is indispensable for their profession. History is replete with the examples of writers (including many Nobel Laureates) taking to guns to fight for freedom and liberty against most cruel and tyrannical dictators. To name only a few, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camu had joined the French resistance movement against Hitler's occupation of France, the famous English poet W.H. Auden and novelists

(To be Contd....on P-34)

Socialists and Royists

A Saga of Love-Hate Relationship

From amongst the leaders of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), formed in 1934, Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan and Nanasaheb Goray and many others were Marxists. Minoo Masani and Asoka Mehta and some others were democratic Socialists. But they had formed the CSP inside the Indian National Congress because they were also nationalists and patriots and wanted to participate in the freedom struggle. However, their conviction of Marxism made them long for unity of all the Socialists including the Royists and Communists, though the Democratic Socialists like Minoo Masani and Asoka Mehta in the CSP were always critical of the communists. While Jayaprakash Narayan was more eager for left unity, Acharya Narendra Deva was more careful and cautious. It is because of these leaders that the Party had accepted Marxism as its creed.

The Party had stated in its third conference at Faizpur very clearly, "In the conditions of India, the conscious leadership of the anti-imperialist movement falls on the Socialist forces. These forces are unfortunately still divided." Acharya Narendra Deva had said, "The Socialists desire to build up a powerful anti-imperialist front to achieve independence of the country and to establish a democratic regime wherein the economic life of the people would be organized on Socialist lines. The realization of these objectives demands unity in Socialist ranks. The C.S.P. has from its inception strived for unity of all Socialists."¹

After his expulsion from the Communist International in 1929 M.N. Roy had formed his own group of Marxists in India in 1931. However he was arrested on 21 July 1931 in Bombay



Bapu Heddurshetti*

on an arrest warrant issued in 1924 and on 9th January 1932 sentenced to 12 years of rigorous imprisonment. The High Court of Allahabad reduced his sentence to 6 years.

Charles Mascarenhas who was a Royist, was in Nasik Jail along with Jayaprakash Narayan and Nanasaheb Goray etc where establishment of the CSP was planned. S.M. Joshi who later became the Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party was also a Royist. During Roy's incarceration, the Royists had joined the CSP. The Royists participated in the Patna Convention in May 1934 where the Socialists decided to form the CSP and in the Bombay Conference in October 1934 where the CSP was launched.

"For a considerable period of time, many members of the Roy group took a prominent part in the activities of the Party and held leading positions in it. In the course of time every known member of the group, with rare exceptions, was absorbed into the Party. Thus the Party was able to fulfil a substantial part of its task of bringing about Socialist unity in the country."²

Roy had great influence on many Indian leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. Jayaprakash Narayan also developed an admiration for Roy and his ideas. He said that "in my own progress towards Socialism, Mr. Roy's contribution was next only to that of the Marxian classics."³

"Some time before the Meerut Conference,

(held from 19th to 20th January 1936) an alleged Royist Circular was discovered in which members of the group were exhorted to attempt to liquidate the CSP. This circular was subsequently repudiated by the chief spokesmen of the group who assured the Party that it was a spurious document and did not represent the policy of the group, which was definitely to develop and strengthen the CSP. Members of that group assured the Party, of their loyalty and their readiness to tow its line.”⁴

After Roy’s release from the prison on 20th November 1936, Nehru invited him to take rest in Anand Bhavan in Allahabad where Jayaprakash Narayan met him in November 1936. After meeting Roy at Allahabad Jayaprakash Narayan came out with the impression that Roy had ‘friendliest feelings for the CSP and will be glad to lend it his cooperation’.⁵ Later Jayaprakash Narayan said that M.N. Roy had even expressed a desire to join the CSP.

Royists also influenced the CSP in many ways. When the third Conference of the CSP met at Faizpur from 23rd to 24th November 1936, and elaborated its policy, the Royists unanimously voted for the resolutions passed in the Conference. Though Roy did not participate in the Conference, he was present in Faizpur when the Conference was going on and was in constant touch with what was going on. It is with the implicit concurrence of Roy that the Royists had voted for the resolutions.

Roy had advocated the convening of a Constituent Assembly for framing Independent India’s Constitution in juxtaposition with the demand of the Communists for forming Soviets. Royists wanted the CSP to include the demand for Constituent Assembly in their program. Socialists also were in favour of the same. The task of the Party as mentioned in ‘The Plan of Action’ “was to secure the acceptance by the Congress of the ‘object and program of the

Party’. Leading members of the Party soon realized the need for a change on this point. Royist criticism played a part in strengthening this view. Accordingly the National Executive adopted a thesis in which it made clear that the task of the party was not to convert the Congress into a Socialist body but into a more consistent and real anti-imperialist organization.”⁶

After his stay in Allahabad, Roy returned to Bombay. “After Mr. Roy went to Bombay he issued certain statements and made certain remarks in his speeches which appeared as veiled attacks on the CSP. But when the General Secretary (Jayaprakash Narayan) saw him at Bombay and drew his attention to the misunderstanding created by his remarks, he said that he stood by every word he had said at Allahabad. When questioned specifically about the conduct of the Royist members of the Party, he gave a definite assurance that they would loyally carry out the Party’s policies”.⁷

In an interview to the Press which was published in the Bombay Chronicle dated 23rd February 1937, Jayaprakash Narayan said, “There are differences between our Party and M.N. Roy, but in spite of these differences, there is a keen desire on both sides to work together and co-operate fully in furtherance of the anti-imperialist movement. As to the differences, it is difficult to say what will ultimately happen. But I hope they would be gradually resolved and we may be able to work as if we belonged to the same organization or one party. On my part there would be a constant attempt to minimize differences and to keep the points of agreement in the forefront.”⁸

However, there were sharp differences between the Socialists and Roy. Acharya Narendra Deva summarized the differences between the Socialists and Roy: “Their main difference with Comrade Roy and his followers consists in their approach towards and Congress and the ques-

tion of the leadership of the national movement.”⁹

According to the Socialists, Roy felt that Gandhian technique is defective and incomplete; that the present leadership of the Congress is incapable of waging a relentless struggle for freedom and that unless the leadership is changed nothing can be done; that we should not start an immediate struggle but try to change the Congress leadership as a preparation for turning the Congress into a fit instrument of revolutionary struggle. Socialists were totally opposed to each of these formulations. They also did not take kindly to Roy’s suggestion that the Congress Ministries should not withdraw from provincial administrations as the resultant suspension of the Constitution¹⁰ will lead to the curtailment of civil liberties. They were also critical of Roy’s stand to support the British against the Germans in the Second World War provided they agreed to enlarge the powers of the provincial Governments, grant adult franchise and full rights of citizenship for the people of the princely States.

Roy did not want the CSP to be within the Congress, as he felt that ‘Socialism was not the issue at the moment; that the label of Socialism will stand in the way of radicalizing the Congress; that by remaining in the Congress a Socialist Party will suffer a great deal on account of the discipline of the larger body’.¹¹ Roy also said that an open Party ran the risk of becoming a reformist party. However the Socialists did not agree with any of these formulations also.

Socialists said that “In fact Mr. Roy says that Socialist propaganda is essential. If that is so, can it not be done better by an openly functioning Socialist Party? The work of the Socialist Party has produced a universal impression today that Socialism is synonymous with freedom from exploitation and hunger. The Socialist label, far from being offensive, has become syn-

onymous with ‘friend of the poor and downtrodden’. In India the condition of the masses is such and the conditions of Imperialist exploitation are such that they do not leave much room for reformism. No political party in touch with the masses and with their struggle for freedom can thrive on reformism. The CSP is an independent political party and has no connection as such with the Congress. All its members, however, are Congressmen and are bound by its discipline. This is the only limitation the Party suffers from and in the present situation it is an inescapable and even desirable limitation.’¹²

In July 1938 there were press reports that Roy had suggested the liquidation of the CSP. Replying to the reports Acharya Narendra Deva said in a statement published in *The Leader* dated 20th July 1938, “The press message to the effect that some leaders of the CSP are seriously thinking of liquidating the party has no foundation in fact. There has never been any such intention on our part, nor any left-winger outside the CSP including Comrade Roy, approached us in the recent past with such request. No memorandum has been prepared by Jayaprakash Narayan, Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya or myself which has been circulated among Congress Socialists for eliciting their opinion on the question.”¹³

These differences gave rise to serious recriminations and bitterness. Socialists had similar and bitter experience with the Communists. It made Jayaprakash Narayan say, “I don’t have any faith in the so-called Left Unity. I don’t want to experiment with it again.”¹⁴

In spite of these differences, the Royists continued in the Party till Roy finally advised them to quit the Party. Thereafter the Royists, at the time of the National Convention of the CSP at Delhi “decided upon mass resignations. These mass resignations were soon carried out.”¹⁵ Thereafter Royists formed their own ‘Radical

Democratic Party’.

However, Jayaprakash Narayan never mixed his politics with personal relations. For example, he was critical of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru but was equally friendly with him and always referred to him as ‘Bhai’ – ‘brother’. When Roy died in 1954, Jayaprakash Narayan issued a statement and said, “In the death of M.N. Roy, India has lost one of her great sons. In the international Communist movement he had held the highest position in the oriental section, and was the closest Asian associate of the great Lenin. When that movement began to degenerate into imperialistic expansionism Mr.

Roy had the rare courage, at the risk of his brilliant career and even his life, to expose it at the highest levels. Not only India, but the world society needed his intellectual leadership at this moment.”¹⁶

Roy’s wife Ellen wrote a very emotional reply in response to Jayaprakash Narayan’s statement. She said, “It had been one of his last joys that you came to see him. He had been looking forward to the talks you were going to have, the very prospect of which was a confirmation to him of his vision that fruitful social change in our time must result from the penetration and movement of ideas....”¹⁷

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The Truth about The Gita

By Late V R Narla*



V.R. Narla

(On 30th August 2015 Prof. M.M. Kalbrgi, a renowned rationalist scholar and former Vice-Chancellor of Hampi University, Karnataka was shot dead at his residence. Co-Convenor of the Bajrang Dal's Bantwal cell, Bhuvith Shetty, welcomed the assassination of M.M. Kalburgi. Earlier a leading rationalist and anti-superstition activist Dr. Narendra Dabholkar was murdered in Pune on 20th August 2013 and another left leader and outspoken critic of Hindutva, Govind Pansare was murdered in Kolhapur on 20th February 2015. All these had the courage to speak the unsavoury truth based on their research without fear of consequences. All of them are suspected to have been killed by right wing religious extremists. With the BJP government at the Centre providing tacit support, right wing Hindutva elements are emboldened and are increasingly coming out openly against persons who are merely critical of Hinduism.)

Human rights activists have strongly condemned the killing of Kalburgi and earlier those of Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare. As a mark of respect to these scholars and rational thinkers, and our commitment to rationalist thinking and also upholding the cause of freedom of speech and expression as granted by the Indian Constitution, we are publishing some chapters from the book 'The Truth about the Gita' written by late V.R. Narla, also a great scholar and rationalist, beginning with the September issue of The Radical Humanist. – Editor)

False Signposts

There is only one firm date in the history of ancient India and that is the year of Alexander's invasion (327 - 326 B.C.). The reason for it is quite simple. The Indian time is cyclical. Prabhava, Vibhava, etc., come round once every sixty years. No year in that cycle of sixty can, therefore, be pinpointed on the scale of linear time.

To be sure, there is a Vikrama Era. There is also a Salivahana or Saka Era. But none can be too sure about the starting point of either. The Vikrama Era, for instance, is said to have begun in 58-57 B.C. Who is this Vikrama after whom the Era is named?

What is the great deed, the historic event, which it commemorates? There is no clear an-

swer to these questions. He cannot be the Vikramaditya who won a mighty victory over the Hunas in A.D., the fifth century. For the era starts almost six hundred years prior to that victory. He cannot be Pushyamitra, who assassinated the last Mauryan Emperor and founded the Sunga dynasty. For the date of that assassination falls in the last quarter of the second century B.C. He cannot be Kanishka, the most famous emperor of the Kushana dynasty, the reason for it being that he flourished, not during the middle of the first century B.C., but about a century later. Nor can he be Goutamiputra Satakarni of the Satavahana dynasty. He did, no doubt, crush the Sakas in a heroic battle, but that battle took place in or around A.D. 124 - 125. Furthermore, the inscriptions, brimful of his

panegyrics, do not mention "Vikramaditya" as one of his titles. So, when each of these to whom the credit of starting the Vikrama Era is given by one historian or the other is ruled out, there remains Azes the Parthian who established a large and prosperous kingdom in the Punjab and Sind by about 60 B.C. And he did initiate an era. But he name it after himself, the most sensible thing to do. In Prakrit his era is called the Aya or Aja Era; in no language, be it Prakrit or Sanskrit or Palhavi, is it called the Vikrama Era.

In their desperate bid to solve the unsolvable riddle of the Vikrama Era some of our historians maintain that originally it was known as the Krita Era or the Malva Era in honour of some Malva king or general who defeated the Sakas somewhere, sometime, somehow. At this point I may record the reaction of D.D. Kosambi to this futile debate. Referring to the Vikrama Volume,' published from Ujjain to commemorate the completion of the first two millennia of the Vikram Era.Hhe wrote:

*The 2000th anniversary of Vikram was celebrated with due pomp in 1943, though neither the press agents nor the luminaries publicized were able to shed any light on the problem. The memorial Volumes [in English and Hindi] issued on the occasion prove only the futility of such research. None of the mutually contradictory essays in such volumes proves anything beyond the will to be-lieve.*²

Regarding the other, that is, the Salivahana or Saka Era which, it is said, starts in A.D. 78, there is an equally unresolved controversy. When the chronology of ancient India is so uncertain, so hazy, even when we come down to historical times, is it not useless to try to fix a period for the persons and events mentioned in our two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the thirty-six Puranas, major and minor ? Though called epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata

are, in fact,Puranas only. It is not only useless but, if I may be pardoned a strong expression, utterly idiotic. And yet, that very thing is done in all seriousness.

Whoever started the farce — yes, it is nothing else — it was given a fillip by F.E. Pargiter. He was a British I.C.S. Officer who rose to be a judge of the Calcutta High Court. Having mastered Sanskrit, he first translated the Markandeya Purana into English. Next he collected the more important of the dynastic lists carried by the Puranas, rendered them into English and published them in book form with a long introduction. The title of his book is also rather long and it reads: The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age.' A little later he set down the results of his study of these lists in a book entitled Ancient Indian Historical Tradition.` All the history, dependable history as different from conjectural history, which he could extract from the Puranas is just about a thimbleful. Small wonder, despite their claim to be Itihasas (current histories) the Puranas are myths and mythologies. They begin with the creation of the cosmos, its dissolution and its renewal; next they talk of Manu, the Hindu Adam, and his wives and his progeny. Then they give the lists of the kings of different dynasties, past, present and future. In between these things they emphasize the virtues of the principle of inequality between man and man, the principle institutionalized in the caste system. They expatiate on the risk of the world going to pieces unless the primacy and the privileges of the priest class are fully protected by the king. And they end up by laying down stringent rules which should govern a man's life from birth to death, and even beyond death, for they tell him how to find his way to heaven, and once there, how to make a beeline for the gorgeous bedroom of a gorgeous Rambha or a Menaka ora Tilottama or a Varudhini or— well, he has a wide choice.

From out of this piffle how much history can be gathered ? Nothing or practically nothing. What is worse, it has a highly deleterious effect on our moral fibre. If this is taken to be a reckless, almost a rabid indictment, my submission is that it is late by 2500 years. What Valmiki and Vyasa are to us, Homer and Hesiod are to the Greeks. Both of them came under heavy attack by Plato, or more correctly, Plato speaking through Socrates. When your gods and heroes are gamblers and drunkards, when they lie and boast, when they are lustful and indulge in fornication, when they are mean, cowardly and vengeful, in short, when they are given to every weakness and vice, will they not, asked Plato, encourage everybody to find excuses for his own weaknesses and vices? Unless one is familiar with the writings of Homer and Hesiod, what all Plato said in condemnation of Greek myths and mythologies cannot be properly appreciated; hence direct quotations from him are cannot be properly appreciated; hence direct quotations from him are being avoided. Those who are interested can turn to the third book of Plato's Republic. The best translation I know of is by Jewett.⁵

Now, in some respects, Xenophanes was more caustic than Plato in his condemnation of Homer and Hesiod. An out and out rationalist and materialist, he poured vitriol on mythological gods and condemned anthropomorphism without any reservation.' Euripides, the play-wright, also attacked the myths and mythologies in his own original, subtle and effective way. And yet, here in India we have poets, playwrights and philosophers who go into ecstasies over the Rarnayana, the Mahabharata and the thirty-six Puranas and the stuff and nonsense they purvey. However, it is not always an act of foolishness. For hidden behind it, there is a well-planned motive, a long-range plan. It is to arrest the growing forces of freedom, democracy and equality and to continue in a camouflaged form the old order of

society based on "The gradations and degradations" of the caste system. It is significant that C. Rajagopalachari, K.M. Munshi and other highly astute politicians turned into active protagonists of the Hindu epics and Puranas in post-Independence India

Though all myths and mythologies, to whichever nation they may belong, are intrinsically nasty, ours are easily the worst from amoral point of view. Furthermore, they are most undependable as sources of history. On this last point, I may quote the eminent Indologist and historian, A.L. Basham. He wrote:

The names of many of the heroes of the Mahabharata may genuinely be those of contemporary chieftains, but we must regretfully record that the story is of less use to the historian than the Iliad, or most of the Norse and Irish saga literature... It is futile to try to reconstruct the political and social history of India in the 10th century B.C. from the Mahabharata as it would be to write the history of Britain immediately after the evacuation of the Romans from Malory's 'Morte d' Arthur.'

Our Pargiters and Pradhans cannot dismiss out of hand the point made by Basham. And so, we see that, Sita Nath Pradhan himself had to admit the very many difficulties posed by the Puranas as sources of history. He bemoaned:

The Puranas profess to give us the ancient history of Aryan India ... In this ... business, the Puranas sometimes naturally conflict; sometimes the same Purana makes, though rarely, different statements in different places; very often they corrupt the names of persons; sometimes one dynasty is merged or inter-woven into or tacked on to another owing to the corrupt reading that have (sic) crept in, the result being a preposterously long line of kings; sometimes collateral succes-

sions are described as lineal; sometimes the orders of succession reversed; sometimes the dynasties are lengthened owing to various kinds of corrupt readings; even a synchro-nism has been found misplaced owing to a similarity of names; divergent synchronisms have been recorded.'

This did not, however, deter Pradhan from using the Puranas to frame a chronology for the history of ancient India. He was a brave man indeed!

Pargiter himself was no less aware how exasperating could be the problems posed by the Puranas to a historian. Without boring you or myself by giving a lengthy quotation, like the one I gave from Pradhan, I will point out that Pargiter had to tackle eighty Janamejayas, a hundred Nagas, Haihayas, Dhritarashtras and Brahmadataas, two hundred Bhimas and Bhishmas and one thousand Sasabindus! And this is only a partial list.⁹

This mad confusion would surely make every Pargiter to swear under his breath. After wrestling with the Puranas and their dynastic lists for a lifetime, out of sheer irritation, if not desperation, Pargiter himself once exploded violently and said that the Brahmins who wrote the Puranas could see "No valid distinction between

history and mythology and naturally there was a tendency to confuse the two, to mythologize history and to give mythology an historical garb. We can thus see why there was a total lack of historical sense among the brahmans who composed the brahmanical literature".¹⁰

Well, I have, I hope, said enough to convince any open-minded man that the Puranas are false signposts for ancient Indian history. Yet, those very Puranas are followed to decide when the Kurukshetra War took place. How the thing is done will be sketched briefly in my next chapter.

***Late V R Narla**, humanist, editor of Two Telugu dailies, twice Rajya Sabha member, dedicated his books to V M Tarkunde, Premnath Bazaz, M N Roy etc

V.R. Narla's THE TRUTH ABOUT THE GITA has been published in the US and continents. Prometheus Books in Amherst, New York has brought out this critical writing of Narla Venkateswararao as a part of the Center for Inquiry India project about a critique of Hinduism. V R Narla wrote this book in the last days of his life (1980's). He died before it saw the light of the day. Dr N. Innaiah brought it out in Hyderabad, India.

In modi Raj writers and artists....

Contd. from page 26 ...

Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell had gone to Spain to join the armed struggle against the dictatorship of General Franco. Boris Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn had risked their life and liberty by writing and publishing Dr. Zhivago and Gulag Archipelago respectively defying the communist rulers of the erstwhile USSR. They are only a few out of a large number who defied the tyrannical rulers of their respective nations to assert their freedom and liberty. The writers, who have returned their awards have defiantly raised their voice against the tyranny of the Sangh Parivar being perpetrated under the patronage of the Modi government. They have fired the first salvo against the policy of the present rulers to stifle the voice of dissent by resorting to murder and intimidation. All freedom loving people should stand by them in their battle to end the oppressive atmosphere created under the patronage of the Modi government.

Prabhakar Sinha is the President, PUCL

From the Writings of M.N. Roy:

Politics without Party¹

M.N. Roy

(M.N. Roy, a great visionary as he was, had visualised even before the country attained Independence the shape of things to come so far as the functioning of parliamentary democracy was going to take place in the country after Independence. He visualised how there was going to be mad scramble for power by politicians winning elections using money and muscle power, and how they were going to neglect the people who would vote for them; how the party leaders were going to be dictatorial in their approach and how elected representatives of the people were going to be more responsible and accountable to their respective political parties and not to their electors; how delegation of the sovereignty, which rightfully belongs to them, by the people to their parliamentarians was going to make them completely powerless and helpless, being denuded of their democratic freedoms and rights, before the so-called 'servants of the people' who were going to become their rulers and how democracy, 'the government of the people and by the people', was going to become 'the government for the people' run by modern Maharajas and their family members for their own benefits. Roy not only visualised the problem but also suggested the remedy of bringing in 'power to the people' or direct democracy, as defined by some political scientists, empowering the people at the grassroots: exercise of the people's sovereignty by themselves through 'People's Committees', putting up their own candidates for election and not voting for the candidates put up by various political parties.

In 'Politics, Power and Parties' Roy has given a realistic view of our politics and parties today. During the last 68 years of our independence, morality and idealism has completely disappeared from our politics, parties and our political leaders. Given the condition of our politics today, and for the betterment of our political life and democracy in our country Roy's views are insightful and worth considering. Therefore, in order to present a complete view of Roy's thoughts on all these issues facing our country, we have started the publication of his lectures/articles compiled in the book for the benefit of our readers. – Editor)

Having come to the conclusion, empirically as well as theoretically, that the system of several parties engaged in the struggle for power, to be captured either constitutionally or through armed insurrection, had debased democracy to demagoguery, Radical Democrats and Humanists could no longer function as a political party. They were guided by the time-honoured dictum that charity begins at home, or that example is better than precept, and consequently dissolved their party in so far as it had been organised with the object of participating in the fight for power.

But they never accepted either the anarchist view that politics is an evil, nor the Marxist Utopia of a stateless society. They had defined politics as the theory and practice of public administration, and the State as the political organisation of society. The corollary to the definition is that membership of civil society implies the responsibility of doing whatever is necessary to guarantee an orderly, equitable and just administration of public affairs; only the recluse can disown the responsibility. By resolving to dissolve their party, the Radical Democrats did not propose to retire into reclusories. The resolution simply was no

longer to participate in a pattern of political practice which has done more harm than good, has soiled the fair name of democracy. It was to initiate other forms of public activities which would raise politics on a higher level.

One of the many bad features of the party system is that it restricts the number of citizens participating in political activity. The membership even of the largest mass party cannot embrace more than a small fraction of the people. The restriction logically results from the very term party. Indian terms, such as Congress, Sangh, Sabha or Dal, do not alter the situation, because of the identity of purpose, namely, to capture political power. No matter whatever may be the name, a political party is formed with the sole object of capturing control of the State, sooner or later. The object is justified with the argument that only in office a party can put its programme into practice. Therefore, by adopting one of the Indian terms for its name, a political organisation does not cease to be a party, that is to say, only a part of the people or the class or the community it claims to represent. Otherwise, there would be no sense in the idea of representation. Since by its very nature a party is bound to be exclusive, a minority organisation, party-politics cannot be democratic politics in the true sense of the term. Political practice is monopolised by a minority of professional politicians; and the bulk of the community are given no place in the practice; they are to follow one party or the other. Democracy therefore can never be practised through the intermediary of party-politics which, by its very nature, reduces the demos to the status of camp-followers.

Obviously, the rejection of party-politics means a resolution to practise politics on a much wider-field, so that the entire people may actively participate in it. Under the party system, the people can do no more than vote for this or that candidate who is nominated by respective parties. Political practice cannot be truly democratised unless the people can nominate as well as vote for a candidate. It is easy to see that parties will have no place in the latter form of political practice, which provides for sustained actual participation of the entire community. While not compelling them to do so, it allows all citizens to play an active and significant role in the State. It goes without saying that this change-over cannot take place from today to tomorrow; nor will an entire country discard the old practice and adopt the new one all at once. It will be a process, and the process itself will be uneven. **The change-over from party-politics to democratic politics will be brought about gradually by raising the intellectual level of the people, by quickening their sense of self-respect and self-reliance. Therefore, democracy is not possible without education.**

Those who will apply themselves to the initial task of laying down the foundation of a democratic social order, cannot in the meantime be indifferent to the political conditions in which they will have to operate for quite a long time. These conditions may influence their work, for better or worse. In the transition period, parliamentary democracy, with all its manifest failures and inadequacies, will be obviously preferable to a dictatorship. Civil liberties will have a greater chance of survival so long as several parties alternate in power or contend for power, than under one-party rule.

The control of the State by one party claiming to be the sole custodian of popular interest is antagonistic to democracy. Paternalism, even with the very best of motives, kills self-reliance in the people and fosters in them an authoritarian mentality, a predisposition to accept authority as the natural order of things. In backward countries, an undemocratic one-party rule is fortified by the traditional credulity and lack of self-confidence on the part of the people, political backwardness and general ignorance. It will be reinforced by the illiteracy of an overwhelming majority of the enlarged electorate under the new Constitutions. Therefore, no realistic democrat can entertain the illusion that in India, for instance, the Congress could be dislodged from power in the near future. The object should be to encourage the maximum possible resistance to its totalitarian ambitions, so that at least a semblance of parliamentary democracy and a modicum of civil liberties may be preserved while sustained efforts will be made to build up a democratic order from below.

For these realistic considerations, Radical Democrats should have no objection to supporting parties which would challenge the system of one-party rule and the totalitarian claim of the Congress. This attitude will be consistent with the rejection of party-politics and scramble for power, because of the difference between voting and soliciting votes. Radicals should support, and ask others also to support, the most promising opposition party, 'not with the illusion that the situation would materially change if it replaced the Congress in power, but only to shake the foundation of one-party rule, and provided that the opposition candidates are better even of proved integrity. The sincerity of the resolution to

stand outside party-politics will be demonstrated by refusing to be members of any party or to become their candidates for election.

Co-operation with opposition parties at the time of election, however, does not exhaust the possibilities of the political practice of Radical Democracy. **The most fundamental task is to educate the people. Election campaigns can be utilised for this task. Democracy will not be successful so long as the masses can be swayed by demagoguery or appeal to emotions. On the eve of an election, when various parties will make big promises to catch votes, the electorate should be advised and helped to examine the promises and vote intelligently. That will mean political education. On the same occasion, the people should be told that they are not obliged to vote for this or that party; that they can just as well vote for a locally nominated candidate who will be their man, known to them, and therefore can be controlled more easily. The initial propaganda for the nomination of local candidates, instead of partymen, will lead to the formation of People's Committees. The people will replace the party, and a long step towards real democracy will be taken.** That will be political activity of fundamental importance, and active participation in the current politics of the country without engaging in the scramble for power. There are many other forms of non-party political activity designed to spread a spirit of independence and self-help in all day-to-day public affairs of a community.

Those who conceived the idea of organised democracy must now put it into practice. People's Committees are to be the basic units of an organised democracy; and it is easily imagined how the rise of People's Committees will mean the beginning of the end of party-

politics. The experience of individuals working accordingly to this plan in selected places should be a source of general inspiration.

Even existing Village Panchayats set up in some parts of the country can be built up as units of organised democracy, defying party control, even of the party in power. To transform the growing dissatisfaction into an informed and constructively directed opposition to one-party rule can become an integral part in a larger scheme of political activity which will transcend the narrow limits of interested party-politics. In the prevailing authoritarian atmosphere, one-party rule is generally taken for granted.

This is a dangerous tendency which must be combatted. Otherwise, a dictatorship with “democratic” sanction may destroy all hopes of political freedom and social liberation. The cultural tradition of backward countries being the breeding ground of the danger, it must be, in the first place, fought on the cultural front. Enlightenment, civic education and spread of knowledge are the weapons. Experience also has a great educative value. Elections are part of that and they will show that in an atmosphere of political illiteracy of the bulk of the electorate and authoritarian mentality of the middle class, even formal parliamentary democracy is not possible. Many even in the ranks of the parties, today, deluded with the hope of coming to power at some time or other, may be expected to learn from the experience the lesson that democracy must be built up from below and, abandoning party-politics, will turn to democratic politics. Meanwhile, the pioneers must show that politics without party is possible.

The last Conference of the Radical Democratic Party marked the opening of a new chapter in contemporary political history with the decision to transform a political party into

a broad and comprehensive social movement for the spread of education for democracy and the promotion of the ideal of freedom.² The decision is probably unprecedented in the history of political institutions. Instances of political organisations having atrophied, decayed or decomposed may not be wanting, nor cases of organisations having dissolved their separate entity with a view to merging into another. But several hundred delegates possessed of political conviction and enthusiasm deciding after prolonged deliberations to transform a political organisation of their own creation, is perhaps unique. It amounts at once to an assertion of man’s sovereignty and creativity.

The decision of the Conference at Calcutta was a logical deduction from the philosophy of New Humanism formulated by the Radical Democrats two years earlier. As a result, the Radical Democratic Party had already been engaged in developing a comprehensive social movement. Having abjured the aim of power, it had placed itself outside the scramble for it, the only sense in which politics seems to be understood in our times. The activities carried on by the Party could not lend themselves to be measured by the standards generally applied to a traditional political party. A certain anomalous position had thus arisen between those activities and the designation of a party, which on occasions created confusion even in the minds of those who otherwise sympathised with and supported the cause of Radical Democracy. The Calcutta decision ends that anomaly and thus removes what constituted, in a way, a limitation on those activities.

The Radical Democratic Party had the tradition of freedom and rationality in its own ranks. That enabled the Party to take such a decision. Throughout the period of its existence, it functioned as a school for the education of its members to develop

into better human beings, and never as a collectivity with a transcendental significance, demanding the sacrifice of their individuality from its constituents. It had no existence of its own, over and above and independent of its constituents which could enchain its creators and reduce them to a position of subordination. It was an expression of the co-operative activity of Radical Democrats, inspired by a common ideal. As such, it was free from the organisational characteristics of political parties, many of which are necessary corollaries of their being engaged in coming to power. The discipline in its ranks was an expression of organisational ethics and never meant to be a code of conduct enforced with a whip. Responsibilities were voluntarily accepted, and authority had mostly suggestive and directive significance.

Built up in this manner, the Party never claimed a strong mechanical apparatus with huge mass membership which could be no more than a blind following in the prevailing atmosphere of cultural backwardness. But it did surpass any other group in the country in respect of its intellectual integrity and spiritual strength. These were often proved beyond doubt during the short period of its existence, when the Party had to struggle against overwhelming odds, and were recognised even by those who disagreed with it. In the successive waves of nationalist mass hysteria, Radical Democrats alone stood firm, reminding the people that so long as politics was based on emotion and prejudice, it could not bring them freedom. They went against the popular current because intellectual and moral integrity always counted for more than immediate and temporary success.

Though the Radical Democratic Party was a comparatively small political party, its traditions and functioning gave it a cohesion rarely seen in political groups. The decision of the Radical

Democrats to cease functioning as a political party is an expression of that spirit struggling to expand beyond the limits of a closed group. Inspired by a democratic ideal and aiming at the construction of a political apparatus in which power would be effectively vested in the people as a whole, it could not and did not endeavour to function as an intermediary between the people and the state. The task it had formulated for itself was diffusion of power, and meant to remove the gulf between the rulers and the ruled, which has so often proved to be destructive of democracy, even within the framework of formal representative institutions. The party could not therefore achieve its task through the capture of power, not even by the aid of the ballot box, much less through insurrectionary means. It was thus neither a constitutional nor a revolutionary party in the traditional sense. Sharing a common ideal, the Radical Democrats were united in an organisation which worked for the diffusion of knowledge as the essential precondition for the diffusion of power and the building up of the institutions of a free and democratic society. Given this nature of their task and the activity which followed from it, it was difficult to see why they should remain a political party. The decision to cease doing so simply signifies a recognition of that difficulty and an endeavour to remove it.

This difficulty was not one of their creation, but one which Radical Democrats had to face in the process of the development of their activities. Having abjured the aim of power and thus placed themselves by their own choice outside the game of power politics, there is no reason why they should have exposed their co-operative effort to be judged by rules and standards relevant to that game. Having been an entirely different kind of political party, there is no reason why they should have tied themselves to, a name identified with a form

of organisation which they rejected as undemocratic. Engaged in activities calculated to promote the freedom and well-being of all, they were stultified by an organisational form which by its very nature is sectarian, and erects barriers against non-members. After all, the term “party” has a meaning; it signifies a part of the people, sharing a particular ideal, and engaged in activities with the purpose of achieving it, which invariably imply its dominating the whole as an indispensable stage.

Education of the citizens and gradual building up of a new political structure from below are the only guarantees against these dangers of the party system. Education will make people consistently self-reliant, rational, discriminating and hence capable of protecting themselves from being easy victims to mass hypnosis of one kind or the other, and only from among such people can a new institutional framework crystallise which will provide the guarantee against an individual or group of individuals dominating and exploiting them. The institutional framework of parliamentary democracy with its inherent concentration of power in the hands of few though the political parties can hardly be expected to fulfil this need. It is not in the nature of political parties to function in this role. Leaving aside the obviously monolithic parties frankly aiming at the establishment of a dictatorial rule, **even a constitutional party seeking to obtain the support of a majority through the ballot box in order to control the political state apparatus cannot make it its primary task to educate the people. Being involved in the game of power, it has to play it according to the rules, and objective political education of the people might be a means to defeat the end of coming to power. That a party comes to power backed by a majority is no proof and guarantee that it is democratic. And**

education of the people may also militate against its next objective of remaining in power.

To have discarded the organisational form of a party does not in any way, even remotely imply that Radical Democrats will eschew politics. Those who cannot conceive of politics without the incentive of power, and therefore without a party, are not the best doctors for the maladies of our time. They themselves need to be cured. Political parties have been instruments devised mainly for the smooth functioning of the political apparatus of parliamentary democracy, which seldom went further than paying lip service to the sovereignty of the human being. In the contemporary context it does not guarantee even the continuation of that formality. **The problem of democracy can therefore no longer be solved by political parties. It is a deeper and more comprehensive problem than one of institutional adjustments. It can be solved only by a comprehensive social movement, developed on the basis of the realisation of the ultimate identity of political, economic and moral problems, and inspired by a philosophy capable of suggesting solutions of them all. “New Humanism”, of which Radical Democracy is the political expression, is such a philosophy.** Guided by this philosophy, Radical Democrats will now endeavour to develop a Radical Humanist Movement, and in consequence discard a form of organisations which had become irrelevant to their task. *(Emphasis in bold added.)*

¹Article published in *Radical Humanist*, 25th September, 1949.

²The Radical Democratic Party was formed in December 1940 and dissolved in December- 1948.

Human Rights Section:

(Jawahar Lal Nehru's birthday, 14th November, is celebrated in the country as "Children's Day" every year but even after 68 years of independence children continue to suffer from hunger, acute mal-nutrition, lack of health facilities and education. Have all governments not been guilty of criminal negligence towards these hapless children? Is it not time to remind the rulers of their responsibilities towards these non-voters? – Editor)

Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)



INDIA: Woeful child malnutrition persists amidst wonderful schemes

A social justice bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising justices Madan B. Lokur and U.U. Lalit recently lambasted the government yet again for its failure in implementing welfare schemes for children belonging to the lower strata of society. The Court stressed the "mismatch" between the "wonderful schemes" the government creates and the ground realities that remain unchanged.

Hauling up the union government, particularly over the serious underperformance of the 2010-11 introduced Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), also known as 'Sabla', the Bench told the Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Tushar Mehta that "All the ideas you have seems OK. Government of India has wonderful laws, ideas and schemes but the things are different on the ground."

The Court is not off the mark. The recently released findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) - 3, 2005-06, show that Sabla is

just one of the plethora of union and state welfare schemes that have failed to make much difference on the ground.

Consider this gem from the Survey summary:

"Among children under age six years in areas covered by an anganwadi centre, one in four (26 percent) received supplementary food from an AWC, one in five received an immunization from an AWC, and one in six went to an AWC for a health check-up in the 12 months preceding the survey."

In other words, only 26% children under 6 years, in the areas covered by an anganwadi centre, received supplementary food, while immunization coverage was even worse at 20%.

Put the two failures together – one which makes children chronically vulnerable to diseases and the other that denies them protection from a few life threatening ones – and the recipe for disaster is complete. It is in this context that

the NFHS-3 finding of 43% of Indian children being underweight comes as no surprise.

Sadly, the authorities not made a serious attempt to snatch children out of the malnutrition-stunting cycle despite being aware of the gravity of the situation for long. One may recall how Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, had referred to almost half of Indian children being malnourished as a national shame and how incumbent President Pranab Mukherjee had, in his acceptance speech, called hunger the biggest humiliation.

What did they do after recognising the problem? Virtually nothing is the answer that a study the last government commissioned to the UNICEF states bold and clear. This study corroborates the findings of NFHS-3.

Called the Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC), this study was conducted in 2013 and 2014 with the aim of getting interim workable figures prior to the results of the ongoing NFHS-4. Despite the limitation of having a sample size much smaller than that of the NFHS, the RSOC gives a broad idea of which way the wind is blowing for India's underprivileged children. And, it has done so, but with a caveat.

The Bharatiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance government of India withheld the RSOC report from publication for a long time as it exposed the hollowness of its claims and that of the last government led by Indian National Congress, a rival political party. The government released the report only after it got leaked and media groups got access.

The report raises serious questions about both the implementation of the schemes earmarked for snatching children out of the jaws of hunger and starvation and the further assault on the same by the incumbent government. While noticing a

significant decline in overall malnutrition among children from 42.5% to 29.4%, the report also underscores phenomenal failures on other indicators. As many as 15% of Indian children remain wasted, while a whopping 38.7% are stunted. The RSOC data also shows that while stunting is much higher in rural areas (41.7%), urban India is not faring much better (32.1%).

This brings us back to the basics. There is no dearth of schemes. But, they are worth nothing without financing and implementation on the ground. For instance, instead of salvaging the National Nutrition Mission, a multi-sectoral programme earmarked for 200 high-burdendistricts, the government is reported to have decided to scrap it altogether. Any such move by the government, which has already slashed the budget for the all important Integrated Child Development Scheme by almost half, would add considerably to the malnutrition woes of the

country and jeopardize many schemes aimed at saving children.

Why do governments not implement such schemes with all the seriousness they deserve? Child malnutrition never gets the political will it requires, despite being acknowledged as a national shame. Is it because it affects the poor who cannot drag governments to courts? Or is it because, despite being a national problem, it affects individual families/communities in such a way that they cannot seek redress together?

It is in this context that the Supreme Court of India must also realise that asking uncomfortable questions on malnutrition is welcome but itself not enough. The Executive has failed these children once too many a time, and the Judiciary must stand up for them now, as it has in various corruption cases in recent times.

September 21, 2015



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