

# THE RADICAL HUMANIST



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**Founder**

**M.N. ROY**

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**Migrant and casual labourers forced by joblessness and hunger resulting from Lockdown walking back hundreds of kilometres from cities to reach their villages, a large number dying due to hunger and fatigue on the way**

**602**

## **Seetharamaiah Gurijala is no more**



**Mr. Seetharamaiah Gurijala, a humanist from Tenali, Andhra Pradesh died today (29th April 2020) at Vijayawada. He was 91. He named his son as M.N. Roy. He helped the movement financially and lived a humanist's life. His daughter is Sessions Judge. Her name is Radha. His son in law C.L.N. Gandhi, who was inspired by Seetharamaiah, is a great asset to the humanist movement. On behalf of the Radical Humanists we pay our respectful tributes to Mr. Seetharamaiah Gurijala.**

**Sent by :- Dr. Narisetti Innaiah**

# THE RADICAL HUMANIST

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discuss them.

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## **Editorial :**

# **Religious rites in the time of COVID-19**

**Sumanta Banerjee**

It has now been confirmed that one of the causes of the global spread of coronavirus is the trend of religious congregations and rituals followed by the faithful all over the world, irrespective of religious denominations. The Tablighi Jamaat's reckless and irresponsible act of bringing together in Nizamuddin in Delhi, some thousands of its followers (many among whom carried the virus and spread it to others), is only the tip of an iceberg of the large mass of blind faith and superstitious beliefs that float among all religious communities. This has not only led to the spread of the pandemic, but also to the rise of religious charlatans who are sprouting forth remedies for the pandemic which are even more frightful.

One major lesson from the global experience of the pandemic is the need for governance of religious demonstrations of all communities, restriction of their religious practices to private space, and an overall assault on superstitious adherence to fake remedies (like drinking cow urine by Hindus, or kissing images of deities by Catholics).

### **World-wide prevalence of religious superstitious beliefs and customs**

To examine first, the global dimension of the religious sources of the spread of the pandemic, let us take reports from a few countries. In South Korea, till February more than 1,000 people tested positive and more than 11 died. About half of these patients were linked to a cult called the Shincheonji Church of Jesus. Some 200,000 of its followers gathered to listen to sermons by the godman Jun Kwang-hoon, defying the government's ban on large

gatherings. He led an anti-government rally in central Seoul on February 22, where he told his followers that god would cure them of the disease if they caught it ! (Re: Quartz - 'How Religion is playing a role in the spread of coronavirus in Korea' by Isabella Steger, February 26, 2020). Curiously enough, a few weeks later in Nizamuddin in Delhi, a godman of another cult Tablighi Jamaat, Maulana Saad Kandhlawi, addressing a similar gathering of thousands of his followers assured that the virus can never enter the mosque as long as they remain there. Godmen all over the world, despite their different religious masks, appear to have one common mother - the deity of superstition.

In Malaysia in late February, over 16,000 people gathered in a mosque complex on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur for a four-day meeting. Soon after, the corona virus cases increased by leaps and bounds. Of the over 790 cases till mid-March, nearly two-thirds could be traced to that meeting. In Iran, it was the holy city of Qom that was the main source. Pilgrims touch and kiss the sacred sites that are spread over the city. The first case of COVID-19 and resulting death was reported from Qom, and it soon spread to the rest of Iran.

Among the Western countries, in France a Christian Open Door gathering on February 18, attended by hundreds of devotees from around the world, sparked the spread of the pandemic. It was traced to one of the attendees who tested positive. Later, it was estimated that at least 2,500 cases out of France's total

figures, could be linked to the gathering. (Daily Mail, March 30). In the same way, in Spain it was a follower of a superstitious religious custom who inadvertently spread the disease. There is a Spanish pre-Easter tradition where Catholics flock in droves to kiss statues of Jesus and Mary. In the course of such devotion, this follower left the imprint of his lips on the statue - from which those who followed him caught the infection. It was estimated that till the first week of March, at least 365 had been infected and five died. (www.USnews.com). In convents in Christian establishments in Europe, nuns live in close contact with each other, and their religious obligations often bring them into contact with the general public. This is how in Italy's Lazio region in March, some 59 nuns belonging to two convents got infected, and were tested positive.

#### **Hindu religious demonstrations and their contribution to the spread of COVID-19 in India**

India had been the traditional homeland of those gullible people, who immersed in the dunghill of obscurantist beliefs, are fond of indulging in delirious rituals and turning pilgrimages into occasions of mass frenzy. The coronavirus has offered an excellent opportunity for the demonstration of such ritualistic frenzy. Let us take a few cases and pose some questions relating to the role of religious preachers and the ruling BJP politicians during the coronavirus outbreak.

Amidst the cacophony of panic and furore over the Tablighi Jamaat's March event, one of the best hidden secrets is the government's inaction with regard to similar gatherings held under the aegis of non-Muslim preachers and organizations at around the same time. Have investigations

been undertaken by the government to trace the possible spread of the virus to these gatherings? Have the authorities - who have been so meticulous in identifying the Muslims pilgrims of Nizamuddin - pursued with equal zeal the preachers and pilgrims in these cases?

In Punjab, a seventy year old religious preacher, Baldev Singh participated in a gathering, Hola Mohalla in Rupanagar's Anand Sahib between March 7 and 9. Soon after, he died from coronavirus. Following this, several people tested positive in the area. (Deccan Chronicle, April 2). Did the authorities follow it up by tracing those who attended the gathering and by carrying out tests to explore the possibility that they might have infected many among the 100 odd people in Punjab today who have tested positive, and the seven who have died?

In Uttar Pradesh, on March 25, the first day of the nationwide lock down called by Prime Minister Modi, his own party's leader, no less a person than Adityanath, the chief minister of the state, presided over a Ram Navami congregation in Ayodhya to place the idol of Ram at a temporary structure. Conducted at 4 a.m., it attracted nearly a hundred devotees. (Economic Times, March 26). Defending the event, a UP government official said that no norms were violated since "the shifting (of the idol) was held inside the mandir precincts." But so also, the Tablighi Jamaat event was held inside the Nizamuddin dargah. Admittedly, the latter numerically outnumbered the one held in Ayodhya. But by the common standards laid down by the government, should not the hundred attendees of the Ayodhya ceremony be subjected to the same scrutiny and tests? Should not the authorities trace them and find out whether they spread the infection



in UP, where till now more than 300 have tested positive, and four have died?

Kerala, which is one of the highest-affected states, is the home of the famous Sabarimala temple, which draws about one lakh Hindu devotees a day during the annual season of ceremony to pay obeisance to the deity. Concerns had been raised earlier about the health hazards emanating from such large gatherings. In the context of the present pandemic, it is all the more necessary to trace the pilgrims who attended the last ceremony and through tests, find out whether any of them tested positive and passed on the infection to some among the 357 who have been found to be affected, and that has led to the death of at least three till now, in Kerala. In Karnataka, in April, thousands of Hindu pilgrims violated the lockdown rules to celebrate a chariot festival in a temple. Has the BJP government there traced these pilgrims and tested them?

But it is West Bengal which takes the cake. It is COVID-19 itself which has provided its citizens with yet another opportunity for a special religious gathering. On April 2, on the occasion of Ram Navami, there were crowds of Hindu devotees who queued in front of temples in Kolkata - praying for relief from the coronavirus pandemic! (PTI, April 3) Did the authorities trace those who gathered there and test them? It is important to find out if any among them tested positive and as a result, could have spread the infection to some of the 100 and more people who have been detected so far in West Bengal.

#### **Godmen, religious charlatans and fanatical bigots**

The spread of the pandemic has come as a boon to the business of religious

quacks all over the world. In the West, the leading among them is the US televangelist Jim Bakker, who in a television broadcast on February 12, held up a blue and silver bottle containing a liquid, claiming it to be the 'silver solution' for curing coronavirus, and selling each four ounce bottle for \$ 80. Bakker was later sued by the state of Missouri. Another radio host, Alex Jones promoted a toothpaste called 'Silverblue,' urging people to buy it to cure COVID-19. He was later served legal notice. The choice of the colours, blue and silver, by the two quacks was not coincidental. Both were trying to play on a popular religious belief among Christians who think that these two colours have healing powers, as they had been assigned a special place in the Bible.

But we have to turn to India again to find how the politico-religious charlatans are having a heyday, attracting crowds and duping them, thanks to COVID-19. On March 16, in Kolkata, a BJP activist called Narayan Chatterjee organized a cow urine festival, offering mud bowls filled with the urine to people urging them to consume it as it would prevent coronavirus infection. It was only later when one man fell ill after drinking it that the police became alert and arrested Chatterjee. (PTI, March 18).

The campaign against COVID-19 is increasingly becoming Hinduized. The tone has been set by prime minister Narendra Modi himself. He chose April 5 (the 9th day of the national lock down) for congratulating the medical community on their brave efforts in fighting the pandemic. As a mark of respect, he urged citizens to switch off lights at 9 p.m. for 9 minutes, and then stand at their doors or balconies and light candles and diyas, again for 9 minutes. The choice of the number 9 is significant. Observers have pointed out that

in Hindu mythological tradition this number is regarded as auspicious. Further, the festival of Chaitra Navaratri, which goes on for nine days, had just come to an end. Explaining the significance of Modi's announcement, a former head of the Indian Medical Association, Dr. K.K. Aggarwal in a social media message said that it was based on Yoga Vasistha, Chapter Six, adding: "So we should all follow what Modiji said." (The Wire, April 3).

Following this message of Modi's, some of his admirers have begun indulging in atrocious behavior. In Pingore village in Haryana, around 35 people belonging to the Gujjar community barged into the house of a Dalit family on April 5, and ordered them to keep their lights switched off the whole night in response to Modi's call. When the family objected, they beat up the family members with iron rods and sticks, injuring eight including two women. (The Hindu, April 9).

The prime minister's admirers and his party leaders turned his call to light candles and diyas into a Diwali festival of sorts. A BJP MLA from Telengana, Raja Singh, accompanied by a large number of his followers came out in the open with lighted torches ('mashal'), and shouted "China virus go back." (The Hindu, April 6). He made a mockery of his leader's advice to keep indoors and maintain safe distance from each other.

The Indian state's attempts to Hinduize the anti-COVID-19 campaign often reach such a ridiculous extent as to invite rebuff from foreign countries. To take a recent example, on April 2, the Union Minister of State for AYUSH, Shripad Naik claimed that Ayurvedic medicine helped Prince Charles of UK to be cured of the pandemic. He was snubbed the next day by Ella Lynch, a spokesperson for Prince Charles, who

issued a statement saying: "This information is incorrect. The Prince of Wales followed the medical advice of the NHS (National Health Service) in the UK and nothing more." (The Indian Express, April 4). One hopes that our ministers stop indulging in such behaviour that makes India a butt of ridicule in world opinion.

### **Will sanity dawn on our government and ruling party?**

In his April 8 video interaction with Opposition MPs on the future scenario after the outbreak of COVID-19, Narendra Modi made an interesting observation: "Massive behavioural, social and personal changes will have to take place." It sounds a sane statement. But since charity begins at home, if Modi is serious he will have to start by bringing about these changes in his own backyard. He must see to it that his partymen and his followers change their behaviour towards the Opposition and political dissidents (who are damned as 'anti-national,' 'tukre tukre gang', etc. by them) and recognize their right to criticize the government. He should force the Hindu supremacist groups who operate under his party's patronage and protection, to change their social habit of adhering to obscure religious practices and frustrating thereby the goal of developing a scientific temperament as envisaged in our Constitution. He has to bring about a change in the personal attitudes of his followers towards Muslims and Dalits, among other suppressed sections, who are daily targets of the lynch gangs of the Hindutva brigade.

This is a tall order, that is hardly expected to be carried out by a child of the Sangh Parivar. But to give him the benefit of doubt, let us hope that sanity dawns on him.

**Sumanta Banerjee** is a Radical Humanist. 🌈

## **Corona Epidemic: Deep Foundation of Counter-revolution (1)**

**Dr. Prem Singh**

### **1**

By the end of the last decade of the twentieth century, the discussion in India on or about poverty by all mainstream political parties, forums and mediums had almost ended. There was a general consensus among the ruling classes that there is no poverty in the country. The sight of poverty is due to the poor themselves and is not directly related to the (corporate) politics of the country and the (neo-liberal) economic policies of the governments. Therefore, the cry of poverty must stop now. The country is ultimately now on the right track; Everything should be privatized as soon as possible. Almost all the people who propagate this narrative in public domain happen to be the children of those working in the public sector ranking from peons to secretaries.

In the past two decades of the twenty-first century discussion has only been about the rich. Meanwhile, the age-old tussle between poor India and rich India has lost its place in political discussions. Now there is only rich India, governments and political parties spend billions of rupees every year on the advertisement of popularizing the epithets such as shiny, smart, new, super-power, world guru etc. Leaders of the stature of presidents and prime ministers have invariably made use of terms in the past. The fight to capture and retain the power of rich India cannot be cheap - it (i.e. democracy of India) has become a game of trillions. In rich India, there are lousy feudatories of super riches, politicians, bureaucrats. Crores of rupees are spent on weddings even by the common rich families.

Due to the raging attack of corona virus, there was a sudden lock-down in the country on 24 March 2020. The poor India, which quietly carried the rich India on its back, withdrew from the cities and headed towards the villages. Bales on the heads of the women, boxes/suitcases in the hands of the men, both carrying the children in the laps and on the sides. A common sentiment resonated in all of them - there is no place to stay and eat in cities, therefore going to villages, and resorting to walking in case of no transport remained the only option. The area of my residence Anand Vihar was the center of the exodus in Delhi. Comrade Vijendra Tyagi called me almost crying, 'where will these women, while rushing in the crowds, go for public conveniences on the way, where will they spend the night?' The whole world saw the grim scene of this exodus which spread from the capital Delhi to all the cities and metros of the country. The mentors of the rich India also wondered why these people have come out on the streets and roads? Could the labourers not remain in the settlements, or whatever their hideouts were? If there was such prosperity back in their homes in villages, so why did they come here? The image of the country has been tarnished in front of the world! However, the interior was also happy that if they lived here, it would have spread disease in a more dangerous manner.

### **2**

Within four-five days of the lock-down, the truth came to the fore that the rich India is lying on the backs of about 50 crore migrant/resident working people mostly of the unorganized sector.



Only around 10 percent of them are permanent. The rest mostly dig wells daily and drink water. The sudden postponement of the role of these working people in the epidemic created a crisis of livelihood and they came out before the rich India and its government in collectivity. The incidence suddenly became a big news. The suicides of several lakh farmers in past three decades had never been such a big news. Government and voluntary efforts were started to provide ration/food to these labourers of the unorganized sector who became homeless/unemployed under the lockdown. There were frequent comments on social media about the plight of these toiling masses. Several scholars, experts and leaders presented the reality of the 50 crore labor force in their articles/statements on the basis of statistics. They delineated the subject from various angles and perspectives. Such articles have found considerable place in the mainstream newspapers and magazines. The issue has also reached the Supreme Court of the country, the United Nations and global economic institutions.

In this entire discussion and support efforts for the labourers, there is an underlying common thread. That is, about half of the country's population is not considered as citizens in the modern constitutional sense by the pioneers of the rich India. For them, they are subjects (*praja*) in the feudal sense. The Supreme Court has asked to adopt a humane attitude towards them. That is, even in the eyes of the Supreme Court, they are entitled to be recipients of the grace of the well-off, and not the possessors of constitutional rights. The Supreme Court does not see the need for any policy reason behind their plight. Rather, it finds the petitions filed in their advocacy as folly. Otherwise, the Supreme Court should have said in the first instance only that the reason for this plight of the labourers is the anti-constitutional neo-liberal economic

policies. These should be rejected and proper economic policies should be made on the basis of the central tenets of Directive Principles of the State Policy (DPSP) mentioned in the Constitution.

I would like to cite a few examples in this regard. Professor Deepak Nayyar, former vice-chancellor of Delhi University, in his article titled 'Lives and Livelihoods' (Indian Express 3 April 2020), at one place talked about the need of learning a lesson from the history. I was curious that he would probably suggest the rejection of the New Economic Policies, which has been a historical mistake even on the part of intellectuals. But it was not the case. He cited the example of the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 from which historical lessons ought to be learned. The Marxist Communist Party (CPM) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, in his letter to the Prime Minister, described the amount allocated to deal with the epidemic as inadequate. But he did not make a demand to abandon the neo-liberal economic policies dictated by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization etc. The Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D Raja, in his article titled 'Revealed by the Virus: The Pandemic Has Exposed the Limits of Capitalism' (Indian Express 11 April 2020), argued about the limits of neo-liberal capitalism. But he too did not demand from the government to abandon these very policies which convert at least 50 crore work force into cheap labour. The Congress President Sonia Gandhi has also made written suggestions to the Prime Minister in order to deal with the economic crisis created due to corona epidemic. She, in her list of demands, has not suggested to withdraw the New Economic Policies responsible for the un-measurable economic gap. These policies were initiated by the Congress. She did not even promise that the Congress would reconsider these pro-

corporate policies when and if it comes into power again.

In this episode, while showing concern about the plight of laborers, someone has stated that they are being treated like second class citizens. Guarantees of certain civil rights and human dignity are associated with a citizen, even if he/she of secondary status. Can a second-rate citizen tolerate the behavior that is being meted out to the people stranded on roads and trapped in labour settlements during the lock-down? Can a second-class citizen-family not eat food respectfully for a week even on the strength of its own financial status? Can second-class women citizens stand in line for hours to withdraw Rs 500 bailout put in the Jan Dhan Yojana? The truth is plain and simple - the people included in this huge labour force are not citizens on any scale - neither in the eyes of the ruling classes, nor in their own eyes. How can a person having a little sense of civility be ready to live on the pieces thrown by the power in crisis? He/she will definitely claim his/her rights at least for the cost of his/her hard work.

This is to say that the political (read constitutional) view point is missing in the present discussion presently centered on the migrant or other labourers. The lives of this vast working population of India are like a double-edged sword: (a) Neo-liberal economic policies have excluded them forever from the economy of rich India; (B) In the excluded state they have to do construction-work and service-work of various kinds in remote areas by selling their cheap labour in the market of rich India. It may be noted that the number of workers in India, estimated to be 50 crore, is more than the total population of the countries included in the European Union or the total population of the US-Russia together. This is an altogether another India within India itself, which Dr. Lohia used to call poor India. But no political leader, scholar, institution, magazine

or citizen used political terminology like poor India in the discussion. No one has said that the plight of the toiling masses is an inevitable result of the New Economic Policies implemented in 1991; that it was a mistake; that these policies should be rescinded after 30 years have passed; that a country cannot be called civilized or powerful if 50 crore of its people are kept in pathetic conditions.

### 3

The Directive Principles of State Policy provided in the Constitution are not justiciable and binding in the same way as the Fundamental Rights of citizens. But they have been described as fundamental to the governance of the legislature and the executive. They keep alive the pledge of the Constitution to create an egalitarian society at all levels with economic and social equality. Regarding the Directive Principles of State Policy, Dr. Ambedkar, while addressing the Constituent Assembly on 19 November 1948, said, "It is the intention of this Assembly that in future both the legislature and the executive should not merely pay lip service to these principles enacted in this part, but that they should be made the basis of all executive and legislative action that may be taken hereafter in the matter of the governance of the country." In the light of these policy-making instructions, Ambedkar had suggested that the goal of the Constitution is to establish a socialist system. In 1991 this goal of the Constitution was betrayed. Hence this plight of the labour force we are witnessing!

Socialist leader and thinker Kishan Patnaik was the first person who identified the threat of counter-revolution against the Constitution. He said in early 1994 that with the advent of the globalization, the counter-revolution has started in India. After passing of nearly three decades, one can say that a deep foundation of counter-revolution has been laid in the country.

( To be Contd....on Page - 26 )

# Draconian Measures

*Locking down a nation of 1.3 billion which had less than four hours to prepare for it has resulted in a humongous human crisis. Other methods could have secured better results*

**M.G. Devasahayam**

The clangs and claps of the March 22 Janata Curfew had hardly died down than Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared on national TV at 8 pm on March 24 to declare a nationwide “sarkari curfew” of 21 days with effect from midnight. By then, about 21 states had already announced lockdowns of different durations and were enforcing them in various degrees. The prime minister’s draconian declaration is intriguing because only the previous day the cabinet secretary and principal secretary to the PM had in consultation with state chief secretaries announced measures to contain the corona pandemic. This included complete shutdown of 78 districts/cities across the country, identified as hotspots of Covid-19 and where only essential services were allowed to operate. State governments were allowed to expand the list depending on their assessment of the situation. In the meantime, all interstate bus services were to be suspended till March 31.

This is called risk-based management which is in line with the advice given by leading experts on the subject. They advocate “cocooning” for countries like India with high population density, where mass-scale quarantine and a nationwide lockdown are near impossible to implement. Cocooning is a measure to protect those over 70 years or those medically vulnerable by minimising interaction between them and others. This means that these people should not leave their homes. Even within their homes, they should minimise all non-essential contact with other members of their household. This is to protect those who are at high risk of severe illness from coming into contact with the virus.

The other variation of cocooning is to identify

city/district/region-wise hotspots with these measures being practised by all sections of people. Such a strategy could have been effectively implemented and scaled up if need be with the help of our highly competent armed forces. India was probably moving in this direction when Modi jumped the gun and clamped the curfew throughout the country at one go. He finished his speech at 8.30 pm and a nation of 1.3 billion—rich, poor, old, infirm, disabled, women, youth, children and infants—constituting one-sixth of the human race had just over three hours to shut down everything, provide for their livelihood and move to a place of safety to spend the next 21 days in “solitary confinement”.

As if in response, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, D-G of WHO, took to the media and said: “Asking people to stay at home and shutting down population movement is buying time...But on their own, these measures will not extinguish epidemics.” Then he went on to suggest six measures to combat the deadly virus:

- first, expand, train and deploy your healthcare and public health workforce
- implement a system to find every suspected case at the community level
- ramp up the production, capacity and availability of testing
- identify, adapt and equip facilities you will use to treat and isolate patients
- fifth, develop a clear plan and process to quarantine contacts
- lastly, refocus on suppressing and controlling Covid-19.

According to him, aggressive measures to “Track, Trace, Test, and Treat” (T4) is the best

way to prevent and contain the pandemic.

None of these measures found mention in Modi's speech which *ad nauseum* repeated "social distancing" as the only panacea. As per industry experts, the complete 21-day shutdown would cause a severe, disruptive impact on both demand and supply across sectors. They estimate the cost of the lockdown at around \$120 billion (Rs 9 lakh crore) or 4 percent of the GDP. Further, with 94 percent of India's workforce employed in the unorganised sector, this lockdown would effectively put over 45 million migrants out of work. India's economy, already on dialysis because of demonetisation and other economic excesses, could go into coma. With standing crops awaiting harvesting, farming has already gone into a tailspin.

Rendered jobless and wageless overnight, millions of migrant labour became paupers. With all forms of transportation suspended and police resorting to brutality, the heart-rending scenes that followed and the pathetic exodus from major cities are to be seen to be believed. The horrendous part of it happened six days down the line.

On an executive fiat issued by the home ministry, these *les misérables* inching their way home were halted in UP, crowded together and sprayed with "disinfectant chemicals" as if they were the corona virus itself. In neighbouring Haryana, migrant labour was ordered to be herded together and locked inside "indoor stadiums" converted into "temporary jails". These humans were deprived of their last vestiges of dignity. And an individual sans dignity is nothing but "meat-on-feet". This is reminiscent of Nazi Germany's Holocaust days.

It is pertinent to note here that the prime minister of New Zealand which has a population of less than 50 lakh gave 48 hours' notice and South Africa with less than six crore gave 72 hours' notice for lockdowns. But India with 1.3 billion people had less than four hours. Such was the rank unpreparedness of the government.

In the event, even after a week, with masses of jobless, homeless and cashless people moving like herds, the very fundamentals of "social distancing" stood abandoned. Yet, tongue-in-cheek, the government described this response to Covid-19 as "pre-emptive, pro-active and graded". Such perversion is not without reason. As Covid-19 was spreading worldwide, India had adequate advance notice. (See box)

Such dismal planning and preparedness was due to the political leadership being busy elsewhere. Instead of expanding and strengthening the healthcare infrastructure and testing facilities, it was engaged with the venomous Delhi state election campaign and the Rs 20,000 crore Central Vista, a fancy real estate project. As Covid-19 was spreading, the BJP national leadership was busy with "Namaste Trump" and purchasing MLAs to form a government in MP. There was little response to the expert's call to adopt the T4 solution to deal with the virus.

Over the weeks preceding the national lockdown, four central laws—the Epidemic Diseases Act, CrPC, Disaster Management Act and Essential Services Act—were invoked with stringent clauses. All these laws, except the CrPC, are meant to facilitate planning, preparing and managing natural and man-made disasters in a systematic manner without panic and causing least inconvenience to the public. But in the case of coronavirus, though there was enough warning, the centre and some state governments miserably failed in this critical aspect of management. To cover this unpardonable failure of governance, the centre resorted to the lockdown, thereby unleashing pandemonium to contain a pandemic.

A lockdown, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means confining prisoners to their cells, typically in order to gain control during a riot. As a corollary, restrictions under Section 144, CrPC are imposed whenever there is an imminent threat to human life due to rioting,


communal clashes or disturbance to public order. But the lockdown was imposed under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, on the ground of containing a suspected outbreak of epidemic. In the present case, neither a riot nor “unlawful assembly” are involved. Yet Section 144 was imposed, subjecting individuals going about to procure essential supplies or medicines, and migrant labourers on their arduous walk to reach their villages, to indignity and police brutality. As of now, as many as 22 migrant workers have died in their attempt to return home.

Locking down 1.3 billion with the resultant mayhem, chaos and congestion is the worst way to contain the contagion. By adopting the T4 methodology, Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have

successfully contained the spread of the virus. This meant the government taking responsibility instead of burdening the people with it. Practising this approach would have gone a long way in coping with Covid-19. A humongous human crisis has been dealt with in the most inhuman manner.

Now experts are advising extension of curfew due to contagion dangers caused by the migrant exodus. But the cabinet secretary has said no to it. Extended or not, with such dismal governance, India’s future appears bleak.

— *The writer is a former Army & IAS officer. He has served as SDM and DM in Haryana and Chandigarh.*

Courtesy **India Legal**, April 3, 2020 

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## Constitution, Conscience and The Citizen

Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas

*I am writing this on the eve of our first “Janata Curfew” – as requested by the Prime Minister. In response to the Covid-19 Pandemic sweeping across the world, Indians in a-typical fashion, will lock ourselves in for 14 hours tomorrow and will mobilise the full force of our numbers to say “Go Carona Go!”. In keeping with local tradition, the panchayat bodies made announcements from the usual Cycle rickshaws and two wheelers with loud hailers reminding everyone that the event will start at 7am and end at 9pm. At 5pm every Indian, in city, town and village has been asked to come out of our homes and clap hands, beat thalis, sing and shout out our recognition of the yeoman work put in by so many – medical, nursing, other essential services and all of those who have worked hard for us the people. Temporarily it is almost as if the fragmented nation have been brought together to fight a common enemy. And for once that Enemy is not the one across our Western Border! So to return to my narrative :*

### A Personal Preamble

I am a citizen of India. I have lived for the past 26 years in a small village Bhaimala in Raigad Dist, Maharashtra, after having served in the Indian Navy from January 1949 to September 1993. I was born in Bombay on Sept

5 1933, However, I do not have a Birth Certificate! Neither do I have the birth certificates of either my father or mother. In fact I have no idea where they were born nor when! My father migrated from then Madras to Matunga, Bombay. So although I call myself



a citizen and have lived nearly 87 years in India, according to the new norms and regulations of the NPR and NRC I might well be counted among those marked D or Doubtful and D for Detention Camp!

We moved to Delhi when I was 6 years old. I lived and studied there until I left home in January 1949 to join the Inter Services Wing of the newly created Armed Forces Academy in Dehra Dun. General Rodrigues, Air Chief Marshal Suri and I were cadets together, and eventually ended up heading our respective services as Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force between 1990 and 1992.

The decade in Delhi was one packed with historic events – at the national and global levels – events which conditioned my own thinking and shaped the destinies of millions, in fundamental ways.

**1939** – World War II declared. For a six year old the true impact of the Hitler era and the genocide of millions of Jewish people registered much later.

**1945** – The War ends. But not before the first use of the Atomic Bomb by the USA against the Japanese people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945. This profoundly influenced my position about nuclear weapons in later years.

**1947** – India wins Independence – but the terrible memories of Partition remain indelibly etched in one's mind. Some images stand out: a brutal knifing of a hapless Muslim before my eyes an angry mob outside our home in Bengali Market, Delhi, threatening my father with violence if he did not send out his friend Ghulam Mohammed who had sought shelter with us; and seeing Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, disregarding his personal safety, jumping out of his Landmaster and using his lathi disperse a mob who were all set to ransack the landmark Connaught Place bookstore – S. Riazuddin & Sons.

**1948 – Jan 30** - The cold blooded killing of

Mahatma Gandhi – the most traumatic event of them all. For this 14 year old, Gandhi was the moral force behind the Freedom struggle. Intuitively I knew even then, that this was not just an act of physical elimination. It was an attack on all the ideals and values of the new India.

It was an outrageous act by religious bigots who were also the proponents of the two nation theory which basically argues that Hindus and Muslims were essentially two different nations who could never live together. In many ways this sowed the seeds of future communal violence.

### **INDEPENDENT INDIA AND THE ARMED FORCES**

I joined the Armed Forces of the newly independent India, fired with the idea that it was our generation, the youth, who would be in the fore front of the march to uphold and implement the recently adopted Constitution with its courageous vision as outlined in the Preamble.

Several hundred of the best minds in India were members of the Constituent Assembly which prepared the vision document for the fledgling nation under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar. It was this body that firmly endorsed the decision to keep India both secular and democratic. Pakistan eventually became a theocratic [Islamic] state. *Millions of Muslims chose to remain in India believing that in a secular state, they could expect equal treatment, justice and fair play.*

The members of the Indian Armed Forces, are drawn from all communities, from all states and are expected to be a-political and to respect civil control of the military. The President of the country was also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. We cadets were taught the Preamble, and were grounded in the basic tenets of the Constitution. We believed that it was our sacred duty and responsibility to defend those values. Symbols and religious insignia were never on public display. Our only Holy Book

was the Constitution of India. It was to this we adhered, from this that we derived our value base, and to this that we owed our allegiance. It was an article of faith that *“country and people came first, and self, last.”*

## **DEMOCRACY AND ITS CHALLENGES**

So why am I, a former head of service, labouring this point today, having served in uniform for 45 years.

We have experienced several challenges, both internal and external, in the course of these 73 years of post colonial existence. Kashmir, the North East, Maoist/Naxal rebellions, language riots and inter state water issues to name just a few. The wars with Pakistan, creation of Bangla Desh, India-China conflict, the Nuclear tests and sanctions, are some among the major external ones.

In my view, the far more serious threats to our progress and security are continuing mass poverty, widespread agrarian distress, and our inability to meet the basic needs of our people. These continue till today. The growing disparities of wealth and poverty have created conditions of both economic and socio-political dystopia – which is like a tinder box ready to erupt at the slightest provocation, and often does.

We in the Armed Forces, continued to guard the borders and provided the necessary support in peace time, to civil power during natural and other calamities. The guiding principles of the Constitution continued to be the spirit that ensured that we functioned as a non communal and secular force despite fissiparous tendencies.

However things began to change, and like a creeping virus, we began to see the visible alteration in the attitude and behaviour of those tasked with maintaining Law and Order - primarily the police and the paramilitary units. These were also the forces who interacted both with the public and more crucially, with political leaders. But, civil society and the military alike, we averted our gaze away from the steady

communalisation of these two important arms of state power.

It might be worth retracing some of the factors that have gone into weakening the democratic fabric and destabilising the institutions. Inevitably these have impacted on the Military and other institutions.

**1975 – DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY** – India faced one of the **biggest threats to democracy**. And yet the people fought back – and we pledged never to allow an Emergency like situation in the country again. Today we seem to be facing the equivalent of an undeclared Emergency.

. **AFSPA** – Of particular relevance to those of us serving in the Armed Forces, was the continued imposition of the draconian **Armed Forces Special Powers Act [AFSPA]**, in the North East and Kashmir. Repeated efforts to repeal this have been unsuccessful and has in turn served to alienate those in uniform from the people.

**THE MILITARY AND AID TO CIVIL POWER** - The primary role of the Armed Forces is to defend our borders. They are called in to assist civil power only when there is a total break down of law and order. The roles of civil and military are well demarcated. When political parties are unable to find solutions to the increasing challenges on the ground, they have resorted to the use of authoritarian measures, with the police all too often acting as willing handmaidens of politicians. This also led to the gradual proliferation of para military formations such as the BSF, CRPF, CISF, RAF, who also reported to the Home Ministry.

## **THE EVENTS OF 1984, 1991, 1992/3, 2002 AND 2020**

Between 1984 and 2004 there was a steady deterioration in the overall situation with respect to many of the internal contradictions. Congress was weakening. Two assassinations, of a serving and a former Prime Minister – Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The

cumulative failures of the Congress and the omissions and commissions of the frequent succession of Prime Ministers provided the ideal conditions for the Right Wing to come to power. With increasing contradictions on the ground, and a strongly Hindutva based, ultra Nationalist agenda, the NDA I relied on Nuclear Nationalism – the Pokhran tests of 1998, and fell back on the tried and tested strategy of Divide and Rule. Between the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the rise of the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement in 1992, and the Gujarat Carnage against Muslims in 2002, a deep and vicious polarisation on religious lines was taking place. Sadly, it appeared that neither civil society nor the ‘secular’ parties appreciated the damage that was being wreaked by this divisive, communal and hate filled agenda, disseminated across the country by the huge army of hard core, well trained and disciplined RSS workers.

#### **RECLAIMING THE REPUBLIC**

Returning to my concern as a Former Naval Person, some questions still remain as to how we should reclaim the Republic. And in this context it is important to recall that even the present Government has sworn allegiance and is bound to uphold the Constitution.

So where did we go wrong and drift away from the core values of the Constitution . How did the scale and nature of the communal indoctrination taking place in the security forces, escape the radar scanners ?

Why did civilian/ political authority, time and again, delay the deployment of the armed forces to take charge and stop the orgy of violence against communities which were allowed to continue unabated for days on end?

I refer here to four specific instances - namely Delhi 1984 and the brutal targeting of over 3000 Sikhs in the carnage following the assassination of Smt Indira Gandhi. This was followed in 1992 by the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the violent repercussions. Ten years

later the country witnessed the pogrom against the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. And now in 2020 the capital city has witnessed horrific violence, most likely instigated and targeted mainly against Muslims.

#### **The Growth of Communal Politics**

An acceleration of communal politics was seen in the run up to elections in Uttar Pradesh. There was a deliberate build up of anti Muslim sentiments and the large scale mobilisation of Hindus around the demand for a Ram Mandir. The recruitment and training of Kar Sevaks in the run up to the demolition of the Babri Masjid was an open secret. And yet we the citizens of India, with a few honourable exceptions, kept silent and even applauded . This set of actions was clearly undertaken with the sinister aim to capture political power and was no spontaneous eruption of religious frenzy. That a democratic, secular India could witness such a spectacle under the ‘benevolent gaze’ of politician and citizen was shocking. It was a watershed moment that brought together reactionary political and social forces who were collectively responsible for inciting and fanning the flames of communal frenzy.

Despite efforts to alert the political establishment of the imminent destruction of the Babri Masjid, we the three Service Chiefs and Scientific Advisor, [the late] Dr Abdul Kalam, could not convince the powers that be to take action to prevent this catastrophe.

In each of the above instances, there is enough evidence to establish that despite Army Units being available and present, the civilian authority – both administrative and political – did not call in the army in time to prevent the violence against targeted minorities.

. Clearly the police failed to carry out their mandate to protect the lives and property of innocent citizens. Most Inquiry Commissions have left the crucial question untouched or unanswered – namely the reasons underlying this abject dereliction of duty by the police force

and the failure of leadership to foresee and counter the communal mindsets. The logical follow up question concerns the role, extent to which politicisation / communalisation of paramilitary and the Armed Forces, all of whom serve under the same Constitution and its secular values.

#### **THE SAINIK AND THE NAGRIK**

During all the decades we spent in the Service, we were subject to the Army, Navy or Air Force Acts respectively and therefore were not at liberty to make any comments or offer any opinion in the public domain, on matters which touched on security and governance. In retrospect, one can question the reluctance of those of us in uniform to take stands in certain situations – brought up as we were under very strict norms of what we could or could not express when in uniform. The advice we tendered to Government especially in situations like that of the Babri Masjid being one such instance. Against this it is also appropriate here to quote the classic example of a General, a bold Army Chief, who refused to follow orders to go to war in 1971, unless it was at a time militarily appropriate – which would be his to determine. In this case the Government of the day concurred with his professional advice. There is a thin dividing line between what is political and what is not!

However, every service person, in uniform, be he or she in the police, the military or para military, is also a citizen who has the duty and the right to cast his or her vote. The act of casting a vote is clearly mandated by our Constitution. This logically implies that the person casting a vote has evaluated the capabilities and qualities of the candidate, the party and has made an informed choice which is then expressed via secret ballot in the polling booth. This is a clearly a political choice. The right to exercise our franchise is one of the fundamental and defining features of the democratic system opted for by India when we fought for and won

our Independence.

It was only after my retirement and being catapulted from the peak of privilege as Head of the Navy, to becoming plain old “Nagrik” Ramdas of Gaon Bhaimala, in Maharashtra, that my own Education to Reality began – at the age of 60+! I felt I was a sixteen year old, back in my early years in the Academy, having to do the kind of work that I might not have done in years.

At sixty, I was lifting heavy bags of cement off of trucks; tramping around the hot sun in tall grasses and anxiously praying that we strike water; standing in line to pay electricity and phone bills; and applying for a loan from the bank to help build my first and my only home. All of these actions earned me the respect of my fellow villagers and the local officials - primarily because they saw a retired Fauji – that too a former Nao Sena Adhyaksh – actually working shoulder to shoulder with local folk with no demands or sense of entitlement. As my understanding of rural life and tough realities grew, so too did my realisation that our priorities as Indian citizens had to be radically reviewed and redefined. I found myself seriously looking at the issues of National Security versus Human Security. So it was that this veteran began to work in fields which were hitherto unknown, sometimes ‘forbidden’ territory. Human Rights violations – understanding the scale and why it was imperative to address these – especially as former military person – AFSPA is a case in point.

People to People contact with Pakistan – as Chair of Pak Indian Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy [PIPPFD] 1995 onwards ; Kashmir - visits to Pakistan and to Kashmir as a part of ongoing efforts to keep dialogue open and building bridges of peace and avenues for interaction. My active involvement in the wars with Pakistan, and winning a gallantry award in 1971, convinced me that there could never be a

military solution. Dialogue and Peace had to be the way. This took me on several interesting missions!

1998 - opposing the nuclearization of South Asia after Pokhran and Chhagai through the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace [CNDP]; Demilitarisation in South Asia, through IPSI – Indian Pakistani Soldiers Initiative for Peace;

2002 Representation to Prime Minister Vajpayee, Inter faith delegation, dialogue and peace efforts after Godhra and Gujarat pogrom;

2004-2007 - Leading a struggle against land Mafia takeover of over 22 villages here in our area of Raigad Dist ; 2004 - awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace - jointly with Dr I A Rehman of Pakistan .

Throughout this time, I have continued to write letters - addressed to both the Presidents , and the Prime Ministers of the day, on a range of different issues - from growing intolerance, to Indo Pak dialogue, to Kashmir, to the communal killings of 2002, and more recently to the Election Commission on the Politicisation of the Military and to the Chief Justice of India the Judge Loya case. The ‘concerned Citizen’ in me, also agreed to take on the responsibility of being Lokpal (Ombudsman) to the newly formed Aam Aadmi Party -2012 to 2015 . I was never a member of the Party.

#### ***Making Democracy Work –***

The essence of keeping alive a functioning, healthy democracy is a massive, and challenging task , and can only be successful when there is a continuing citizen engagement at every level. This means that the elected representatives, from Gram Sabha and Panchayat level, right up to the Prime Minister, demonstrate the humility to engage with the Praja, listen to the people, and together develop an understanding of the process of dialogue and ‘aadaan pradaan’ – sharing of views and ideas. A genuine respect for the Constitution of the country, summed up in the Preamble,

must be central to this process. And the core value repeated throughout is that the fundamental purpose is to secure Justice, Liberty, and Equality to ALL citizens, and to promote Fraternity amongst the People.

Over the past six years we have been witnessing a vicious and totally unconstitutional campaign targeting the largest ethnic minority in the country – namely the Muslims. Electoral campaigns have shamelessly exploited the Armed Forces too . *In the run up to the 2019 general elections, the military were used with impunity as part of the election campaign, especially by the incumbent party in power. So much so, that this prompted about 450 veterans to append their names onto an open letter to their Supreme Commander, the President of India, to urge the EC and the leaders not to politicise the Armed Forces through their Election Campaign.*

The avoidable introduction of the CAA, NPR and NRC in December of last year, was like the last straw which fanned the flames of deep anxiety and insecurity among large sections of our people.

In the run up to the Delhi elections in January 2020, the impunity evident in the inflammatory and hate messages have reached a level never before envisaged or witnessed. We appear to have lost sight of the age old tradition of ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakkam’ – the world is a family. The all pervasive emotion is one of fear, fear of repression, fear of being persecuted and then prosecuted and ‘disappeared’. And so, many who should be speaking up and speaking out – especially the media, the corporate sector, public intellectuals, writers, actors, academics and others, have remained silent.

***As a military veteran and a proud member of the Indian Armed Forces, I wish to state with all the emphasis at my command, that this communalisation of***



***India is totally unacceptable and unconstitutional. Our Armed Forces, as indeed the police and other security forces, represent a microcosm of India who have members of all communities in our military. It is time for us to stand up and be counted as faithful foot soldiers of the Constitution which we will defend.***

***This is the India that boasted of a Havildar Shaheed Abdul Hamid, son of a darzi from Ghazipur in UP, awarded Param Vir Chakra [posthumously] for action during 1965 ; Lance Naik Albert Ekka from Jharkhand, in the 1971 war, also posthumously awarded the PVC; and Lt Col Tarapore of the Pune Horse who was also awarded the Param Vir Chakra – the highest gallantry award, to name only a few among the many who laid down their lives defending the country. We have had professional leaders of integrity and courage, from every one of our minorities , who have held the highest post in our Forces – including the late Field Marshal ‘Sam’ Manekshaw, Air Chief Marshal Idris Latif, Marshal of the Air Force – Arjan Singh, Air Chief Marshal Engineer, and men like Admiral Ronnie Pereira and Oscar Stanley Dawson. How can we forget them and betray our basic values and the Constitution to which we swore allegiance?***

***Remaining true to that ‘Holy Book’ must also mean that we no longer remain silent when we hear and see the brazen attacks on our fellow Muslim citizens and on Islam. We must call out those who bad mouth any sect, faith or community – be it from a politician from the top downwards, or from our own band of veterans, some of whom seem to have joined the chorus of anti Islamist propaganda.***

To quote from a recent article by one of the few armed forces veterans who has chosen to speak up


***:”the lawlessness of the UP government of Ajay Singh Bisht, the open expressions of Hate in the name of religion all over the country, the venom spewed daily by BJP spokesman and leaders, all keep the communal pot boiling. When sane voices express dissent at such poison, they are branded anti nationals and told to go to Pakistan. As a result, India’s delicate social fabric is being torn and its International image has taken a beating. It doesn’t help that our important institutions have been compromised, and the Highest Courts in the land have become timid.”***

It is this lethal combination of those who dream of a religious state or Hindu Rashtra in India and who have aggressively promoted Hindutva, that has emerged as one of the real threats to our democracy and its very foundational ethos.

Recent events have been deeply disturbing and I felt I needed to share my thoughts with a wider audience. By calling for us to Reclaim our Republic, I speak as a loyal, patriotic and proud Indian – and refuse to be dismissed or arraigned as an anti-National or indeed, to be hauled up for Sedition.

I also call upon every veteran – be he or she from the regular Military or from the Police and paramilitary – to return to that original inclusive framework which our founding fathers and mothers articulated with such clarity, humanity and the greatest spirit of inclusiveness. We need to reclaim and proclaim that this is the true spirit of a secular India and rebuild our country and our Armed Forces to live this vision and prevent the destruction of the idea of India and its Constitution.

***Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM, ADC served as Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy,***

***Courtesy The Citizen, 23 March 2020.*** 

# An Apology for Democracy, Freedom and Secularism

*The urgency of these bleak times demands all people to go back to the fundamentals of the Constitution, and correctly exercising their electoral right is the beginning of this.*

**Basharat Shameem**

These are very heady times in India, as the minorities, especially Muslims, find themselves under attack by the Right-wing fascists. It is known that whenever fascist forces emerge in any society, like in the current day India, dissent, pluralism and tolerance are its first casualties. This should matter more to us in Kashmir since we are the ones who are on the path of dissent as we struggle for our democratic rights. Having been bred and brought up under the constant shadows of the gun, one will inevitably be perplexed at what freedom and democracy means under such circumstances?

People in Kashmir have undoubtedly lost faith in such ideas, but if at all we are talking about any solution, its path lies only through a democratic way in the form of people's will. And fascism is its stark antithesis. The electoral success of fascist forces in India again will inevitably mean more suppression of our rights and thereby further rescinding any possibility of a democratic solution. For a consensus on the fulfillment of legitimate Kashmiri aspirations, fascist consciousness has to be defeated in India. The people of India need to be reminded about this big time. As a Kashmiri, who strives for democracy, freedom and secularism, one can only appeal to the Indian public who are in the midst of the electoral process to choose their next government to remind them about their constitutional obligations in these crucial times.

The Constitution is, after all, a guarantor of the various freedoms like the freedom of living, expression, socio-political affiliation, economic opportunity, and dissent. But since these freedoms are facing assaults currently, the responsibility falls much more upon all Indian citizens to affirm and defend constitutional

values. These values are the ones on which the foundations of any democracy are based. A democracy without freedom is farce. As radical humanist M N Roy once posited: "Quest for freedom and search for truth constitute the basic urge of human progress... Freedom is the progressive disappearance of all restrictions on the unfolding of the potentialities of individuals, as human beings, and not as cogs in the wheels of a mechanized social organism. The position of the individual, therefore, is the measure of the progressive and liberating significance of any collective effort or social organization." What this implies is that the struggle for existence is the struggle for the freedom to exist and from forces threatening it. In other words, it forms the essence of human living.

The Constitution, the laws, the governments are there to preserve and safeguard freedoms, not to subvert them. So the fundamental spirit of democracy implies freedom. Corruption, exploitation, attacks on minority communities, restraints on freedom of expression, human rights violations, gender inequality cannot define democracy and freedom. Political freedom cannot also be realised on the social and economic norms which exist in this country, like the rigid and polarising religious, caste, and gender norms. Democracy, freedom and equality are simply unrealisable till these structures are transformed.

There is an urgency to retrieve Indian nationhood and identity from falling into the hands of the Sangh Parivar whose only purpose is to vertically disseminate the hyperbolic definition of nationalism, one, in which, there are no dissidents and critics. It is influenced by fascism and contains only overtures of brute

majoritarianism of a particular ideology which is exclusively saffron. We have seen how citizens' fundamental rights, like the right to eat, dress, expression, choose partners, practice free thought, protest, dissent, and demand for democratic rights, as in Kashmir, all have come under attack in India.

We have seen how rationalists and journalists have been murdered. We have seen the spate of lynchings and we have seen how the Union ministers go to garland the accused in these cases. We have seen the distress of farmers. We continue to see the unabated rape violence against women, and more shockingly, how elected leaders of the ruling party (as in Kathua) start rallies in favour of the accused. We have seen the killing and blinding of protestors in Kashmir. We have seen how a voter was tied to a military jeep (in Budgam) and used as a human shield. We have seen the brazen assaults on the autonomy of educational institutes, judicial institutions and other state institutions.

Democracy cannot be leveraged by the ruling class for simply its own benefits while risking the fundamental rights of the citizens. The test of any democracy is the condition of the minorities even if democracy means 'majority rule.' Maltreatment of the minorities is not democracy but a clear case of tyranny. All freedoms are under assault even though no emergency has been declared. People are being killed for following specific sets of belief, people are being jailed for holding critical views and are being branded 'anti-national.' The assault on the freedom and equality of citizens seems to have no parallel in the recent history. And if this is not tyranny, then what is?

The urgency of these bleak times demands all people to go back to the fundamentals of the Constitution, and correctly exercising their electoral right is the beginning of this. In the current scenario in India, where assaults are ever increasing on the people's differential way

of living, there is no other alternative, but to fight for safeguarding the fundamental democratic rights. This comes with building solidarity, support and strength for the truly secular and progressive forces which are the real bulwark against the fascist forces. The other like minded political forces who believe in constitutionalism and the essential secular, plural and tolerant values of Indian republicanism, as the urgency of the times demands, must also come together. The fight for true democracy and freedom is long, of course, and does not end at the ballot necessarily.

It is important to talk about Kashmir in this context, because it is in Kashmir that the ideas of freedom and democracy have come under severe tests in the past three decades. We have seen how fascistic principles are being violently asserted in the most malevolent manner in Kashmir. It was done because in today's India, the ruling Right-wing dispensation tried to link fascism and jingoism increasingly to the idea of the Republic. This naturally impinged on all the essential democratic and republican values all over India, but in the Sangh Parivar's project, there is no better fertile site to bring all this into full force than the troubled valley of Kashmir.

In the exceptional circumstances of 1947, it was the secular and democratic foundation which brought Kashmir closer to India while it rejected the two-nation theory. The idea of a secular democracy found natural coherence with the idea of Kashmiriyat, which is based on the universal ethos of secularism and pluralism. As great Kashmiri poet and saint, Sheikul Alam or Nund Rishi, as he is popularly known, had said in the 15th century by giving a call for pluralism:

We bear no ill will to each other,

Should our love bind us all alike, Hindu and Muslim,

Then surely God is pleased with us...

This is the pluralist ethos which has historically defined the idea of Kashmir and

Kashmiriyat. But unfortunately, we have had to pay a heavy price because of the conflict and political unrest. Both politically and socially, our rights and plural fabric took a terrible toll. However, it has often been said that the democratic ideals are best appreciated in those arenas where they are under severe attack. Their true value is realised in their absence and this is what Kashmiris like this writer have been tragically made to feel in their lives so far.

It is time for the Indian people to uphold and fight for the great democratic ideals which their national founding fathers bestowed upon them in the form of a secular Constitution. Ultimately, any solution to the Kashmiris' genuine

aspirations lies within the spirit of democracy and secularism. And it is imperative that both in Kashmir and mainland India, such supreme ideals survive. It is certainly not any imposed or borrowed method or concept, but something which is at the very heart of Kashmir's historical identity—the idea of pluralism and secularism which can certainly complement the democratic struggle. At the same time, resolving Kashmir's protracted political problem may yet be the greatest triumph of the secular, democratic and federal nature of the Indian Republic.

*The writer is a blogger and youth activist based in Kulgam, Jammu & Kashmir. The views are personal.*

Courtesy [NewsClick.in](https://www.newsclick.in), 27 Apr 2019 

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## Under Modi, India's Press Is Not So Free Anymore

*India's government has pressured advertisers and even shut down channels to shape the information that 1.3 billion Indians receive. It's part of a wider assault on dissent.*

Vindu Goel, Jeffrey Gettleman

Photographs by Saumya Khandelwal

NEW DELHI — The Media One anchorman Vinesh Kunhiraman went on air as usual on March 6, ready to tell the station's five million viewers in India's Kerala State about the death anniversary of a beloved comedian and the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic.

Just a few minutes into the broadcast, he saw the managing editor rush to the studio floor, gesturing wildly. "I realized something was not right," Mr. Kunhiraman recalled.

The station's uplink suddenly went dead. Mr. Kunhiraman's image dissolved into a blue screen. A bland message told viewers there was no signal. "We regret the inconvenience," it said.

But this was no technical difficulty. The station had been cut off by an order from India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The government decided to block the channel for 48 hours because it had covered February's

biggest news story — the mob attacks on Muslims in New Delhi that flared into broader unrest — in a way that seemed "critical toward Delhi Police and R.S.S.," the order said.

The R.S.S. is a Hindu-nationalist social movement with close ties to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party.

"It was shocking the central government took such a decision," said R. Subhash, an editor at Media One. "It was an attack on the freedom of the press."

India's free press has played a crucial role in protecting this country's democracy since its independence from Britain in 1947. But journalists here now feel under attack.

Since Mr. Modi came to power in 2014, they say, his government has tried to control the country's news media, especially the airwaves,

like no other prime minister in decades. Mr. Modi has shrewdly cultivated the media to build a cult of personality that portrays him as the nation's selfless savior.

At the same time, senior government officials have pressed news outlets — berating editors, cutting off advertising, ordering tax investigations — to ignore the uglier side of his party's campaign to transform India from a tolerant, religiously diverse country into an assertively Hindu one.

With the coronavirus pandemic, Mr. Modi has gotten more blatant in his attempt to control coverage and, as with other difficult stories, some Indian news executives seem willing to go along.

Right before he announced the world's largest coronavirus lockdown, on 1.3 billion people, Mr. Modi met with top news executives and urged them to publish “inspiring and positive stories” about the government's efforts. Then, after the lockdown stranded half a million migrant workers, with some dying along the highways, his lawyers persuaded the Supreme Court this week to order all media to “publish the official version” of coronavirus developments, although outlets are still allowed to carry independent reporting.

An association of leading broadcasters was quick to praise the court decision, which many intellectuals said was yet another attack on India's constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech.

Through an aide, India's information and broadcasting minister, Prakash Javadekar, initially agreed to discuss the government's media policies. But in the two weeks since then, Mr. Javadekar has declined to answer any questions, including a written list emailed to him. His aide cited the demands of the coronavirus crisis.

India's media universe is vast, perhaps the biggest in the world: More than 17,000 newspapers, 100,000 magazines, 178 television

news channels and countless websites in dozens of languages. Thousands of Facebook pages call themselves news publishers, and YouTube is filled with local bulletins on everything from real estate trends to police raids.

But Mr. Modi's ministers have leaned on business leaders to cut off support to independent media, slowly strangling their operations. His government has pressured media owners to fire journalists who have criticized the prime minister and told them to stop running features like hate-crime trackers that have embarrassed Mr. Modi's party.

Mr. Modi is backed up by an army of online allies who discredit and harass independent journalists; female journalists, in particular, have been besieged with abuse and rape threats. And the police say Hindu nationalists were behind the 2017 murder of Gauri Lankesh, a female newspaper editor hailed as one of India's most crusading journalists.

Like other populist leaders, Mr. Modi and his ministers bristle at any public criticism, whether from business executives, foreign leaders, or even schoolchildren.

And for the most part, Indian news outlets have knuckled under, concluding that since much of the public supports the prime minister, they should, too. Even skeptical journalists censor themselves, afraid to be branded anti-national by a government that equates patriotism with support for Mr. Modi.

His government has also imposed the strictest restrictions on foreign journalists in decades, suddenly and without explanation. Visas have been tightened, and foreign journalists have been banned from hotbeds of unrest such as northeast India and Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim-majority area that was stripped of its statehood in August and put under a severe crackdown.

The Kashmir story was seismic, but many Indian journalists, looking back on it, feel that they toed the government line and overlooked



grave human rights abuses.

“We didn’t do justice to the big story,” said Rajdeep Sardesai, one of the country’s leading news anchors. “We should have gone out there and reported the situation from the ground aggressively and independently.”

There were security restrictions on where Indian reporters could go, Mr. Sardesai said, but he admitted it was more than that.

“A large section of the Indian media,” he said, “has become a lap dog, not a watchdog.”

The business model in India doesn’t help. Well before Mr. Modi first became prime minister in 2014, newspapers and television stations have relied on government advertising, allowing politicians to reward friendly outlets and punish critics.

And media owners often run other businesses for which they need the government’s favor, making them reluctant to take on those in power.

With the coronavirus pandemic dampening advertising and restricting newspaper circulation, news organizations are now sliding into crisis. One of the most independent, The Indian Express, just decided to cut salaries.

Even as Mr. Modi constantly touts India as the world’s largest democracy, its ranking on the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index is 140 out of 180.

“In the past six years, the Indian media has deteriorated,” said Shakuntala Banaji, a media professor at the London School of Economics. “There is no semblance of truth or responsibility left in the vast majority of media reports.”

#### **Pressuring the advertisers**

The apologetic calls from advertisers have become so common that NDTV executives are no longer surprised.

One corporate boss begged the station to take his company’s logo off the screen, saying the government was squeezing him too hard. Another executive broke down in tears as he canceled a large advertising contract.

No TV channel has come under more pressure from Mr. Modi’s government than NDTV, an influential network that airs in English and Hindi. Mr. Modi’s grudge goes back to 2002, when he was chief minister of Gujarat State, and NDTV journalists reported that his government stood by while hundreds of Muslims were massacred in religiously driven violence.

When Mr. Modi became prime minister, his administration began a full-scale assault on NDTV. The government accused it of laundering money through a deal with NBC, the American TV network. The accusations have dragged on for years, and NDTV denies any wrongdoing.

“The thing in India is, you can file a case, and win it 10 years later,” said Prannoy Roy, one of NDTV’s founders. “The process is the punishment.”

The effort to brand NDTV as unpatriotic has been devastatingly effective. In one November 2016 email, the luxury automaker Daimler told NDTV that it would not proceed with a marketing campaign because “there are people associated with the channel that are linked to anti-India stuff, by the public at large.”

A Daimler spokeswoman said Friday that the email did not reflect the company’s views and that the campaign had been rejected for economic reasons.

As money dried up, the station laid off hundreds of journalists. NDTV now gets much of its advertising from state governments, many of which are controlled by opposition parties.

#### **‘Stay firmly with the national government’**

Many within India’s news firmament have embraced Mr. Modi, sensing how much the popular mood has swung away from India’s founding secularism and toward Mr. Modi’s brand of strident Hindu nationalism. Right-wing TV anchors, led by Arnab Goswami of Republic TV, compete to outdo one another as the loudest Modi supporters.

As the government announced the crackdown in Kashmir, M.K. Anand, the managing director of Times Network, sent his editors a directive.

“We are India’s leading news broadcasters,” he wrote in a WhatsApp message, seen by The New York Times. “It is important that we stay firmly with the national government at this juncture instead of focusing on finding faults.”

The Modi government has been particularly concerned about broadcast media, which reach into every corner of the country. It has approved very few new TV channels, and even Bloomberg, the American media giant, has been unable to get a license, despite investing millions of dollars with its Indian partner.

In this environment, sharp criticism of Mr. Modi can end careers. After a host at the Hindi news channel ABP questioned the results of one of the prime minister’s initiatives to help poor farmers, the satellite transmission of the show was interrupted every time it was broadcast, said several people who worked at the station. The channel’s owners pressured the host, Punya Prasun Bajpai, to resign, and as soon as he left, the transmission interruptions stopped, the former employees said.

And after another ABP anchor, Abhisar Sharma, criticized Mr. Modi on live television about public safety, he was pulled off the air the same day. He, too, said he was pressured to quit.

Mr. Sharma then took to YouTube to broadcast his commentary, but pro-Modi trolls followed him into cyberspace. Every time he uploaded a video — and some drew millions of views — YouTube would receive thousands of complaints that he had made inappropriate remarks, Mr. Sharma said. The site’s algorithm

then blocked any advertising revenue he would have made.

“You can’t escape them,” he said



Pawan Kumar Jaiswal, a part-time journalist who was persecuted for exposing a school lunch scandal, reporting from a village in northern India in February

### **Attacking the messenger**

Small-town journalists have come under government attack, as well.

Last August, Pawan Kumar Jaiswal, a part-time journalist who also ran a tiny mobile phone accessories shop, broke a story revealing how poor children in a school near Varanasi, Mr. Modi’s parliamentary constituency, were being fed only flatbread and salt for lunch — a clear violation of government nutrition rules.

After his short video went viral, a state education officer filed a criminal complaint against Mr. Jaiswal, accusing him of conspiracy, false evidence and cheating, a crime that can draw up to seven years in jail.

His source at the school was promptly arrested. Fearing he was next, Mr. Jaiswal fled to New Delhi, where he hid for several weeks.

“Sometimes I felt like committing suicide,” he said.

Even though an investigation eventually vindicated his reporting and the police dropped the charges against him, Mr. Jaiswal continues

to be stalked by people connected to the school, he said.

He has reason to be afraid. Several Indian journalists have been killed in recent years, from a Kashmiri newspaper editor shot outside his office to a young journalist in Chhattisgarh found tied up in a forest.

"This is the life of a local reporter," Mr. Jaiswal said.



The government of India has been particularly sensitive about news coverage of the violence against Muslims that permeated New Delhi.

#### **'Responsible Freedom'**

The shutdown of Media One and another Kerala television station, Asianet News, in

March was a new twist. Both stations broadcast in Malayalam, a local language spoken by less than 3 percent of Indians. And both channels had aired witness accounts that echoed what many other outlets aired during the violence in Delhi: that the police had done little to stop Hindu mobs as they rampaged against Muslims.

But the broadcast ministry claimed that what these two stations reported "could enhance the communal disharmony across the country." After many complaints about the shutdown, the broadcasting minister, Mr. Javadekar, reversed the orders the next morning.

"Press freedom is absolutely essential in a democratic setup and that is the commitment of the Modi government," Mr. Javadekar said at a news conference, implying that the orders had been issued without his consent.

"But let me also say," he concluded, "that everybody accepts that it has to be a responsible freedom."

Sameer Yasir, Shalini Venugopal and Hari Kumar contributed reporting.

Courtesy **The New York Times**, April 2, 2020 🌈

## **Corona Epidemic: Deep Foundation of...**

**Contd. from page.... 10**

This has not been made possible only by the ruling-class directly supporting as well as benefitting from globalization. It cannot also be attributed, in annoyance, to the toiling masses excluded from the rich India. Capitalism moves ahead by creating not only its intellectuals and leaders, but also its followers in the homes of the general public and outside on streets-roads-squares etc. Living on the leftover of rich India, the public has accepted capitalist system as its destiny. Actually, the section called progressive which belong to India's ruling classes is responsible for this counter-revolution. It relishes capitalist model of development in its very nature. It has always believed that the path of development passes only through capitalism. It never accepted the Indian socialist idea of prosperity with equality through constitutional parliamentary democracy. It is undoubtedly a heartening thing that many people and institutions across the country are working to help the labour families in this crisis. It should be hoped that some of them will definitely consider this problem in a political manner. It would be understood by them that even though the corona epidemic attack on humanity could be that of a sudden and invisible force, the food insecurity of such large sections of the country's population is not due to sudden and invisible reasons.

*(The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University)*

# Sorry picture

*Allahabad HC was right to condemn naming and shaming of protesters. By not upholding it, apex court disappoints.*

The court deservedly reprimanded the Adityanath government for “undemocratic functioning”, for violating the individual’s fundamental right to privacy and the assurance of Article 21.

The Allahabad High Court had, suo motu, taken cognisance of the UP government’s vindictive move to put up roadside posters naming and shaming and giving photos and details of individuals accused of damaging public property during the anti-CAA protests in Lucknow in December 2019. The court deservedly reprimanded the Adityanath government for “undemocratic functioning”, for violating the individual’s fundamental right to privacy and the assurance of Article 21, that no person shall be deprived of life and personal liberty except by procedure established by law. It directed the government to take down the posters “forthwith” and set a date for it to submit a compliance report to the court. When the UP government appealed the decision of the Allahabad HC, however, the Supreme Court merely remarked that the state’s action was not “covered in law” and referred the case to a bigger bench. This is disappointing. Surely, it should not require a larger bench to see the obvious: That the UP government’s move is an attempt to intimidate and hound the protester, that it is guilty of trying to undermine the presumption of innocence until proven guilty by due process of law — a cardinal principle of

criminal jurisprudence.

Taking its cue from the apex court, the UP cabinet has cleared the draft Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damage to Public and Private Property Ordinance 2020 — it proposes to legalise its invasion of the privacy of citizens and its invitation to mob justice in a state that has seen frequent episodes of vigilante violence. In a sense, the UP government’s moves, first to name and shame protesters and then to provide legal cover for it, are only in keeping with its conduct so far, ever since the eruption of protests against the new citizenship law. The brutality of the police crackdown in December 2019, the indiscriminate slapping of grievous charges against protesters, and the death toll, are all an indictment of a rampaging state trying to look strong by using force to crush basic liberties. But the apex court’s ostensible reprieve to the UP government is a let-down.

The Supreme Court has shown a disturbing lack of urgency in habeas corpus cases relating to Kashmir recently, and in matters of hate speech and sedition, yet it remains the citizen’s best hope for protection of individual liberties against state trespass and transgression. It must be hoped that the larger bench which will hear the UP government’s challenge of the Allahabad HC ruling in this week, will make amends for the impression of delay and miscarriage of justice in the case so far.

Editorial, **Indian Express**, March 16, 2020

## **The Radical Humanist on Website**

‘The Radical Humanist’ is now 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.

**Mahi Pal Singh**



# Making a Mockery of Sardar Patel and the RTI Act

S.N. Shukla

Speaking on the need for creation of IAS and IPS at the Premiers' Conference in October 1946, the then Union Home Minister Sardar Patel had emphasized that, "*there should be good guarantee of security*". Again at the time of the creation of the All India Services (AIS) he told the Constituent Assembly that, "*The Civil Services must be above party*." However, over the years this sage advice has been completely forgotten by the present day powers that be, even though the need to provide security of tenure to AIS officers has been repeatedly emphasized by various apex bodies and the Supreme Court in several cases.

At long last, in pursuance of the directions of the Apex Court in the judgments in the writ petitions relating to police reforms by Prakash Singh former DGP UP and for civil service reforms by former Cabinet Secretary late TSR Subramanian and 81 others, Rule 7 of the IAS/IPS/IFoS (Cadre) Rules was amended to provide for *normal minimum tenure of two years* to All India Services officers. However, in the contempt petition (C) No. 235 of 2014 filed by Shri Prakash Singh for non compliance of the directions in the judgment in his WP (C) No. 310 of 1996 for Police Reforms, the Id. Solicitor General of India informed the Apex Court that the Union of India is considering the question of amending the Rule 7 to bring it in conformity with the judgment. Whereupon vide order on 6.5.2014 the Court stayed *the entire Rule 7 of the IPS (Cadre) Rules and directed that the Central and state governments will not to take any proceedings in pursuance of the said rule*. As a result, the protection provided to IPS officers against premature transfer before completing normal tenure of 2 years was taken away giving state governments a free hand in

transferring IPS officers *at their will*.

Thereupon, Lok Prahari filed an intervention application in the said contempt petition along with an application for vacation of the aforesaid stay order pointing out that Rule 7 was actually in conformity with the direction in para 31 of the judgment in Prakash Singh's case. However, the stay vacation application has remained unheard for the last 5 years despite repeated requests. Meanwhile, taking advantage of the stay order, the state governments have been making indiscriminate repeated premature transfers of IPS officers. As per a news paper report, *on an average one IPS officer was transferred every day in UP by the erstwhile SP Government*.

Vide representations dated 6.8.2018 and 15.10.2018 the Union Home Secretary, was also requested to take immediate steps for vacation of the stay order. Copies of these representations were also sent to the Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) which deals with the matters relating to All India Services Act and Rules. Sadly, both the Home Ministry and the DoPT have been loath to act in this matter of great public importance relating not only to the morale of IPS officers but also safety of 'We the People', even though vide letter dated 9.3.2019 the then Additional Principal Secretary to PM was requested to look into the matter for early effective action and also to bring this undesirable situation to the kind notice of the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

Since there was no response to the aforesaid representations, RTI application dated 9.3.2019 seeking information about action taken on the aforesaid representations was also filed. *After three and a half months*, it was first transferred on 4.7.2019 by the CPIO of Home Ministry to the Election Commission for no rhyme or reason. Upon being pointed out that the



Commission had nothing to do with it, it was again transferred on 2.8.2019 to the CPIO of the Ministry of Law & Justice (without even specifying the Department) who transferred it to the CPIO Department of Justice *even though the requisite information related squarely to the Home Ministry itself*.

Upon being pointed out again that the information sought in the RTI application dated 9.3.2019 directly pertained to the Home Ministry itself as decision on the representations dated 6.8.2018 and 15.10.2018 to the Home Secretary has to be taken by the Ministry, the CPIO of the Ministry, upon '**looking into**' the matter after 6 months this time '*traced*' the subject matter of the RTI application to the DoPT and transferred the same to its CPIO asking the applicant to contact him. Quite understandably, the CPIO DoPT retransferred it back to Under Secretary (IP-II) & CPIO MHA saying that the requisite information pertains to the said Division of MHA.

To cap it all, not to be outdone, Director ((Police) & CPIO MHA vide his letter dated 25.9.2019 again retransferred the application to Deputy Secretary (Services) and CPIO DoPT on the specious plea that the contempt petition filed by Mr. Prakash Singh is being dealt with in the DoPT, blissfully ignoring fact that a view on the representations dated 6.8.2018 and 15.10.2018 has to be taken by the MHA itself (which is directly concerned with the implementation of IPS Cadre Rules) so that DoPT may inform the Court accordingly. Obviously, information about decision/action taken on the said representations will be available only in the concerned file of MHA and not with the other public authorities to whom the application was repeatedly unnecessarily tossed around. Apparently, either the concerned officers did not even bother to read and understand the representations and the application or they purposely mischievously did so to hide the deliberate inaction on the aforesaid

representations for which they can have no answer. Since it is unbelievable that officers of this level can be so incompetent as not to comprehend a simple application, the second possibility appears to be more likely. One wonders if they could display such audacity without blessings from their higher ups, especially in the context of the ruling party at the Centre being in power in majority of states and pliable officers being preferred in place of conscientious ones who have the courage to give independent and frank, even though unpalatable, advice which Sardar Patel always *insisted* upon from secretaries to government. Incidentally, the Home Secretary in 2018 is presently the Cabinet Secretary.

Even after the aforesaid position was bought to the notice of the present Home Secretary vide letter dated 4.10.2019, a copy of which was also endorsed to the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and the Private Secretary to the Union Home Minister, the CPIO of the MHA did not provide information in respect of representation dated 6.8.2018 and supplied photocopies of notes and orders in the concerned file in respect of representation dated 15.10.2018 only upto 6.12.2018 wherein it was suggested that it may be sent to the DoPT, but nothing came out of it. Thereupon, vide letter dated 21.10.2019 the CPIO MHA was again requested to provide at the earliest complete and correct up to date information as sought in the application dated 9.3.2019. A copy of the said letter was endorsed to the First Appellate Authority (FAA) also to direct the CPIO to supply the requisite information. However, the Joint Secretary (Police-I) and the FAA disposed of the appeal after more than 3 months holding that the reply to the application dated **9.3.2019** (admittedly received by Deputy Secretary (A) & CPIO before 25.3.2019) given 7 months later '*was within the stipulated time frame*' and the '*information provided is in order*'.

( To be Contd....on Page - 43 )

# As religion re-emerges as the faultline of Indian society, could Bhagat Singh's ideas of atheism be a way forward?

Karthik Venkatesh

In Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*, the unnamed narrator's grandmother whom he addresses as 'Tha'mma' talks of how as a student in Dhaka, she wanted to join the revolutionary movement that was active in Bengal in the first decade of the 20th century. She talks of revolutionary societies like Jugantar and Anushilan and how a quiet, retiring classmate of hers turned out to be a member of one of them. These societies which were part of the first wave of the revolutionary movement propagated a programme of violent resistance to British rule by assassinating prominent British officials in their bid to state the case for India's freedom. Highly motivated, secretive and daring, for a time, they caught the imagination of the public. Eventually, the British came down hard on them, sending several to the gallows.

But what remains unsaid is that while these societies were popular and patriotic, they were also characterised by a strong Hindu element in ideology and practice. They drew on the literature of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda for inspiration, swore oaths on the *Bhagavad Gita* and often worshipped arms in the presence of an idol of Goddess Durga. It appears that non-Hindus found virtually no place in the movement.

By contrast, the second wave of the revolutionary movement that grabbed the centre stage from the early 1920s and formed an important part of the anti-colonial movement during that entire decade till the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on March 23, 1931, was distinctly non-religious. While some individual members did observe their faith privately, religion formed no part of the rituals

and conduct of the organisation itself. Arguably, in large part, this was on account of the convictions of Bhagat Singh.

In a long essay, *Why I am an Atheist*, written and completed in 1931, a few days before his hanging, Bhagat Singh laid bare the nature of his lack of faith. In a nuanced and well-argued stance, he traces how his atheism



Bhagat Singh. Image via Wikimedia Commons

came to be. Clearly, atheism wasn't part of his childhood. His grandfather was an orthodox Arya Samajist and as a boarder at the DAV School, Lahore, the teenaged Bhagat Singh was in fact given to reciting the *Gayatri Mantra* several times a day. This habit lapsed in time, but not his faith in God. His close compatriot in revolutionary activities, Sachindra Nath Sanyal, was a fervent believer as well as were some of his other fellow-travellers in the revolutionary movement.

But in spite of keeping such company, by 1926, Bhagat Singh's faith had lapsed. In his own words, 'Realism became our cult.' Atheism seemed to be the outcome of the extensive programme of the reading of revolutionary literature that Bhagat Singh had embarked on in the years prior to his final lapse of faith. And it was atheism that did not waver till his dying day.

"Belief softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In God man can find very strong consolation and support," Bhagat Singh states

in the essay. But, given that many trials and tribulations lay ahead of him, what is perhaps of interest is how faith did not make a comeback to Bhagat Singh's life. By his own telling, his first arrest in May 1927 over suspected complicity in the Kakori Case did not send him scurrying to faith. In fact, the police officers who arrested him actually encouraged him to pray, perhaps as a veiled threat of sorts since they probably intended to apply third-degree methods to him. But it didn't make a dent.

Later, even when his execution was imminent, religious belief remained conspicuous by its absence. Clearly, faith had completely left him leaving no traces behind. Bhagat Singh's objection to faith and God seemed to be both philosophical as well as springing from the severe religious unrest that he observed around him which marred regular life in 1920s India. This was a matter that Bhagat Singh had also written on prior to 1931.

In an article entitled *Religion and National Politics* published in the journal *Kirti*, in May 1928, Bhagat Singh talks of how religion is proving to be a barrier to national unity and preventing people from moving forward in their quest for independence. The practices of social distancing mandated by religious leaders were proving to be a huge obstacle. Equally, religion's habit of demanding complete submission was in Bhagat Singh's opinion, weakening individuals, and not helping to build their self-confidence.

Similarly, in another article, *Communal Problem and Its Solution*, published in the same journal the following month, Bhagat Singh comments darkly on the recent Lahore communal riots. These riots were prompted by the publication of a controversial book called *Rangila Rasul* by an individual with Arya Samaji persuasions which the Muslim community found offensive. On the other hand, cow slaughter was a sore point with the Hindu community. These differences were then sought to be resolved with


daggers and fists. The article castigates the members of all three religious communities (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) for their inability to keep a cool head in the face of provocation and the political leadership for their inability to play a constructive role. Interestingly, the article also takes to task the press and journalists for instigating communal tension through mischievous headlines and reports. The economic question, Bhagat Singh believes, is at the root of much of the tension and to attempt to solve that problem is to strike at the heart of the matter.

The impression that one gathers when re-reading these articles is that little has changed in close to a hundred years. On the one hand, it is tempting to say that religion has re-emerged as the faultline of Indian society in the last decade. But it appears that a heightened awareness of religious (and caste) differences was never very far away from the surface all along. Hence the inability of people to band together to demand more from elected representatives and the bureaucratic machinery. The nation has meandered along for seven decades riding on the back of some noteworthy achievements, but with most urgent tasks to do with economic matters left undone.

How then can we hope to plot our way forward?

In a country like India, while atheism is bound to have limited appeal, could we hope to make realism our cult? Could the sobering fact of widespread poverty, poor educational accomplishments and our lackadaisical health-care system not to mention the doddering economy and the agricultural crisis force us to look away from our religious and caste differences and concentrate on more compelling matters instead? The distractions that media and political leadership throw at us are not going to go away. It is up to us to look away.

That would perhaps be the greatest tribute to Bhagat Singh.

Courtesy **Firstpost**, 26 March 2020. 

# Preface to 'Evolution of Philosophy in India'

by Prof. K. Satchidananda Murthy

M. N. Roy



Prof. K. Satchidananda Murthy

*[During 1950 Prof. Kotha Satchidananda Murthy requested Mr. Abburi Ramakrishna Rao (librarian of Andhra Pradesh University and former state organiser of Radical Democratic Party, Andhra Pradesh) to ask Mr. M.N. Roy for introduction to his book on Evolution of Indian Philosophy. Accordingly Mr. Ramakrishna Rao sent the script to Roy in Dehra Dun. After going through the script Roy felt satisfied with the matter and wrote the preface. Mr. Murthy proudly published the matter and the book was quite successful. Very soon Roy died and Mr. Murthy became the Head of the Department of Philosophy. I met Mr. Murthy in Andhra Pradesh University and he was my teacher in the Philosophy Department. We continued our relationship throughout his life. Mr. Murthy became a celebrity, became the Chairman of UGC, toured the world and received the Padma Bhushan award. This rare script is placed before the readers.]*

*Now all the writings of Mr. Murthy have been reprinted. – Dr. Narisetti Innaiah]*

I am not sure that this statement will be taken by all at its face value; but I cannot but admire the courage of the man, who makes this statement not in any dogmatic fashion but with arguments called from Anthropology and Sociology, Psychology and Philosophy. The book is not likely to be popular with people who mistake words for arguments and patriotism for truth. That is why I am inclined to echo wholeheartedly the famous words of Voltaire, "I disagree with every word you say; but I shall

fight to death for your right to say it." Mr. Murthy has had this say, and it would do a lot of good especially to people, who disagree with him if at least they are honest enough not merely to repeat all worn out texts against him, but to resubmit their own thinking to clear-cut logic. They may then discover that Mr. Murthy has considerable justification for departing from the old shibboleths and beginning his study of Indian Philosophy with a new approach. My congratulations to him, and his patrons like the

Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University (then Dr. V.S. Krishna) for helping him. I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it; found in it so much that I have said myself on several occasions, and I have learnt much from it that the least I can do is to accede gracefully to his request for a foreword from my humble pen. The book is sure to be welcomed by all, who love truth and a freshness of approach. I welcome it as a very valuable contribution to the development of India Philosophy.

— Prof. A.R. Wadia, (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, M.S. University, Baroda, & later Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay), Chairman, Executive Committee, Indian Philosophical Congress Foreword to *Evolution of Philosophy in India*, April 20, 1952.

## 2

This book is a substantial contribution to the attempts to write a history of Indian philosophy. In a short compilation the author has covered certain aspects of the subject ignored in other more imposing works. The earlier chapters outline the sociological, anthropological, ethnological and psychological approaches to the problems of historical research. Though the treatment may not always be quite convincing, these chapters are of great importance methodologically, and as such constitute the more valuable part of a commendable work of scholarship. While the “effects of geographical environment on thought” are undeniable, “race mind” is an assumption which not only lacks empirical basis, but is fraught with dangerous cultural tendencies. However, in this respect the author’s conclusions seem to be tentative. On the whole his approach is rationalist and critical, which is sure to guide the seeker of truth in the right direction. The author’s realization that an agreed definition of philosophy is the precondition for any fruitful inquiry into the history of philosophy, introduces a freshness in his treatment of the subject. A courageous

rejection of the conformist, conventional and patriotic view in favor of the objective, scholarly and critical has enabled the author to discover that Indian philosophy was never differentiated from Theology. It may be added that, owing to the peculiar features of what is generally known as Indian philosophy, even modern philosophers tend to be rather believers than thinkers.

But in ancient India, philosophy revolted against religion. The philosophical heritage of India has still to be discovered and properly evaluated. A philosophical reaction is the outstanding feature of the intellectual life of India, which is dominated by religious revivalism – a vain attempt to rationalize the irrational.

By her own effort, India never emerged from the intellectual twilight of her Middle Ages which followed the down-fall of Buddhism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, individual religious reformers preached devotionism which would dispense with the priestly intermediary between God and his devotees. But their influence was local and transitory. India experienced neither a Renaissance nor a Reformation. The intellectual stagnation lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a faint echo of the modern rationalist and liberal thought reached India, to disturb it partially. During the latter half of the century, the intellectual life of the country was influenced by a number of men who preached revolt against religious orthodoxy, intellectual parochialism and social injustice. There was no great philosopher amongst them. They were social reformers. None of them thought of going behind the twilight of the Middle Ages in search of India’s philosophical heritage. The attitude of the more advanced amongst those forerunners of an Indian Renaissance towards her past was negative. They drew inspiration from the West and held that India as a whole must do the same in order to emerge from medievalism.

Unfortunately, the impact of modern western thought came in the wake of the British



conquest. It made some headway until discontent and then hatred against the foreign political rule became the predominating passion of the educated classes. Then all western influence was decried as denationalizing materialism to be opposed and rejected in favor of the spiritual genius of Indian culture. Speculative thought of any kind had been for centuries eclipsed by priestly bigotry, superstitious ritualism and practice of social injustice, such as the caste system, untouchability, etc., which passed as religion. In that atmosphere, the democratic simplicity of Christianity had a strong appeal not only for the victims of social injustice, but also for many liberal intellectuals.

A movement of religious reform and of revival of the spiritualist philosophy of India were the reaction to that process of the disintegration of an intellectually stagnant society. Return to the pristine purity of Vedic ritualism was the religious reform advocated. The orthodoxy of the reformers was more bigoted than the current variety. Such a reactionary movement being incapable of meeting the situation, it was reinforced by the modern prophets of India's spiritual mission, who sought to provide a philosophical sanction for a religious revivalism. It was discovered in the post-Buddhist scholastic theology, which had expounded Vedanta as the quintessence of the philosophical thought of ancient India.

To have found the unity in diversity, is claimed as the greatest merit of orthodox Hindu philosophy. But, as a matter of fact, the unity was not found. It was simply assumed or imagined. It is an ideal conception which brushes aside the problems to be solved. Since the rise of the material world out of the assumed immaterial root-cause is not logically possible, dualism persists, defying all metaphysical verbal jugglery. From the Upanishadic *Rishis* down to Sankaracharya, no orthodox Hindu speculative thinker was able to prove how the diversities of

nature could arise from a common cause. The sheer impossibility of the task ultimately drove Indian speculation to the monumental absurdity of the *Mayaveda*. Vitiated by the baffling, but obstinate problem of dualism, the speculation about the origin of the world must necessarily come back again and again to the good old conception of an anthropomorphic god, whose venerable appearance casts a sinister shadow on the sublime light of philosophy. Sankaracharya's laboriously constructed *Advaitavada* solved the problem of the world by the simple contrivance of declaring it to be a dream. Nevertheless, it could not get rid of a personal god. And a personal god is utterly incompatible with the philosophical conception of unity in diversity.

The various currents of philosophical, as distinct from religious, thought of ancient India eventually contributed to the rise of Buddhism. Because it grew out of a background of the subordination of the faith in the supernatural to human reason, Buddhism, though counted as one of the Great Religions of the world, was not a religion in the strictest sense. Therefore, it could not fill up the spiritual vacuum created by the disintegration of the early Vedic natural religion. On the one hand, it flourished as an intellectual movement (the Hinayana school) with a limited scope; and on the other, it compromised with the vulgarities of the decayed natural religion. In this latter form, it could not hold its own against the rationalized religious revival buttressed upon Sankaracharya's scholasticism.

The downfall of Buddhism buried its philosophical foundation in the ruins of time. The triumphant Brahmanical reaction not only falsified ancient philosophical thought, which had dared deny the authority of the Vedas and even the existence of God, so as to combat it conveniently; but the blasphemous works of atheists, materialists and nihilists were mostly destroyed. India entered her Middle Ages, during which theology, scholastic as well as

anthropomorphic, dominated thought. What has come down as orthodox Hindu philosophy as elaborated in that period of intellectual reaction. Being primarily concerned with the nature of God, which conception was taken for granted, of the soul and how the latter could return to its transcendental home, it was not philosophy but theology.

But like ancient Greece, India also had known naturalist, secular and rationalist currents of philosophical thought. Jacques Maritain may still believe that theology is the queen of sciences; but more than two thousand years ago the founder of the Sankhya system of philosophy, Kapila, denied the existence of God because there was no evidence. And Kapila's agnostic naturalism was preceded by the materialist (atomist) rationalism of the Nyaya-Vaisheshika system expounded by Kanada and Gautama.

As against the ancient system of truly philosophical thought, which had resulted from the metaphysical speculations fragmentarily recorded in the Upanishads, Sankaracharya picked up the pantheistic theology of the Vedanta to oppose Buddhism, which had inherited the rationalist and atheist traditions of the ancient Indian thought. As the same suggests, the Vedanta system is conventionally believed to be the quintessence of the Vedas; and therefore, since Sankaracharya's time, it has been regarded as *the* Hindu philosophy. But criticism must doubt the philosophical validity of a system which draws authority from the scriptures. Although traditionally Vedanta is counted among the six systems of the philosophy of ancient India, there is ground for doubt about its authenticity as such. The alternative theory that it was formulated on the basis of older religious beliefs to combat Buddhism, and that Sankaracharya himself was the author appears to be quite plausible. The *Vedanta Sutras* are open to any kind of interpretation. They provided the authority also

for qualified monist and out-and-out dualist theologies. The Gita is believed to contain the most authoritative (because it was preached by God Incarnate) elucidation of the Vedanta philosophy. It is a part of the epic Mahabharata, which evidently is a compilation of often contradictory pieces written at different times. The Gita must have been a very late, most probably post-Buddhist, interpolation.

In any case, the six systems of philosophy, whether they belonged to the same period or not fall into two distinct categories, both resulting from the metaphysical and the logical speculations quickened by the decay of the Vedic natural religion. The earlier three – Vaisheshika, Nyaya and Sankhya – record the development of naturalist and rationalist thought, which disputed the divine authority of the Vedas, rejected the belief in creation and therefore the idea of God and preached rebellion against the priesthood. The other three – Yoga, Uttara Mimamsa and Purva Mimamsa – did not break away from the Vedic tradition, relied on the scriptural authority and constructed a partly anthropomorphic, partly impersonal, monotheistic religion superimposed upon the earlier polytheism. The last three systems, one of which deals with Vedic ritualism, collectively came to be subsequently called the Vedanta. The suggestion was that the earlier three did not flow from the Vedas, and therefore were not recognized as part of Indian intellectual heritage. Yet, they constitute India's contribution to philosophical thought, as distinct from religious doctrines and theological speculations.

Whatever record exists about the various schools of philosophical thought in ancient India, bears testimony to the fact that dissatisfaction with the Vedic natural religion gave rise to speculations about the origin of the world, which inevitably developed tendencies to explain the world in physical terms. In India also, physics preceded metaphysics. Much of

the really philosophical thought of ancient India has unfortunately been lost. But from the fragmentary evidence on record, that forgotten chapter of the spiritual history can be reconstructed. As everywhere, originally, in India also, philosophy was Materialism. The materialistic outcome of the speculations of the rebels against the Vedic natural religion, contained in the three systems of philosophy proper namely, Vaisheshika, Sankhya and Nyaya, provided the inspiration for the greatest event in the history of ancient India – Buddhist Revolution. The spiritual development of India during nearly a thousand years, beginning from the seventh century B.C., was very largely dominated by materialist and rationalist tendencies. It is highly doubtful if the Vedanta system was formulated before the end of that Golden age of Indian history. Internal evidence tends to prove the opposite case. The main purpose with which Vedantist pantheism was developed was to combat the materialist systems of Kanada and Kapila as well as the revolutionary doctrines of Buddhism and the unsettling logic of the Jains.

Sankaracharya constructed his rigidly logical, but philosophically ambiguous, system of monism for combating Buddhist Idealism. But the real enemy he has to contend with was the materialist traditions of the pre-Buddhist philosophy. Sankaracharya was the ideologist of the Brahmanical reaction and patriarchal society which were re-established on the ruins of the Buddhist Revolution. But his effort for liquidating the traditions of the really philosophical thought of ancient India was a failure. It is obvious from a critical study of Sankaracharya's work that he failed to meet the materialists on their ground. He could not refute their arguments. He had to fall back on the authority of the scriptures, the repudiation of which had been the starting point of all philosophical thought in ancient India. Of all the great ancient rationalists, Kapila alone had

admitted scriptural testimony as evidence. But that was only a formal concession. While admitting that the existence of God could not be proved, because there was no evidence, Kapila does not take scriptural testimony into account. Even the Vedanta Sutras themselves do not accept the scriptures as answering all the questions raised by those dissatisfied with the dogmas of natural religion.

So highly developed and powerful were the materialist and naturalist schools combated by Sankaracharya that, whenever he tried to refute their arguments logically, he was driven to take up an essentially materialist position. His pantheistic monism is inverted Materialism. The *Mayavada* is a shameface recognition of the reality of the external world. The unreality of the phenomenal world is the fundamental dogma of the Vedanta system. But in order to refute the idealistic schools of Buddhism, Sankaracharya himself rejected the very dogma. Therefore, his more orthodox opponents called him a *Pracchanna Bauddha* (camouflaged Buddhist).

Dissatisfaction with the Vedic natural religion gave rise to the speculation about the origin of the world. The Upanishads contain fragmentary records of the early spirit of enquiry. Indeed, out and out atheism and materialism can be found in some of them. Naturalist heretical thought seems to have developed even earlier in the Vedic age. There are hymns which invoke the wrath of the gods against unbelievers. The Swabhavavadins (naturalists), mentioned in the earlier Upanishads and the Vedas, must have been the pioneers of Indian philosophy. They not only disputed the existence of gods and scoffed at the pretensions of the priests but they were empiricists holding that perception was the only source of knowledge. Therefore, they were called "Darssniks"; subsequently, the term came to mean philosophers. The Lokayatavada expounded by those early

fathers of Indian philosophy held that perception was the only reality: fire and air were the primordial elements; there was no other world; enjoyment was the only purpose of human existence.

The authorship of the Lokayatavada was traditionally attributed to Brihaspati – the legendary preceptor of the gods. The tradition suggests that the forerunner of Indian philosophy were held in high esteem. So much so that the authorship of the out and out materialist Charvaka system was also attributed to the preceptor of the gods. This proves that for more than a thousand years, until the fall of Buddhism, Indian philosophical thought was skeptical, naturalist, empirical, materialist.

Although the fundamental principles of ancient Indian Materialism were started originally in the Vaisheshika system, the dominating position in the intellectual life of that period came to be occupied by the Sankhya system of Kapila. The latter deviated largely from the strictly materialist ground, and developed rather as a rational – naturalist system of metaphysics. Nevertheless, the physical principles of Materialism were elaborated philosophically by Kapila. He is known as an atheist who maintained that the existence of God could not be proved by logical evidence. But the real merit of his philosophy is the recognition of the objective reality of the physical world. The Sankhya system decidedly rejects the doctrine that the external world has no objective existence and that nothing exists but thought.


The long process of the development of naturalist rationalist, sceptic, agnostic and materialist thought in ancient India found culmination in the Charvaka system, which can be compared with Greek Epicureanism, and as such is to be appreciated as the positive outcome of the intellectual culture of ancient India.

The Charvaks laughed at the notion that the

Vedas were divinely revealed truth; they held that truth could never be known except through the senses; therefore, the idea of soul was a delusion. Anticipating modern ultra empiricism, they held that even reason was not to be trusted, because every inference depended for its validity not only on accurate observation and correct reasoning, but also upon the assumption that the future would behave like the past, and of this there was no certainty. But the Charvaks were not mere nihilists, agnostics and skeptics. They developed an elaborate system of positive philosophical thought, which can be summarized as follows:

All phenomena are natural. Neither in experience nor in history do we find any interposition of supernatural forces. Matter is the only reality; the mind is Matter thinking. The hypothesis of a creator is useless for explaining or understanding the world. Men think religion necessary only because being accustomed to it, they feel a sense of loss and an uncomfortable void when the growth of knowledge destroys faith. Morality is natural; it is a social convention and convenience, not a divine command. There is no need to control instincts and emotions: they are commands of nature. The purpose of life is to live; and the only wisdom is happiness.

The author of this book seems to have drawn his inspiration from the boldness of the philosophical thinkers of ancient India. Let his scholarship and critical attitude inspire the younger generation to cultivate the spirit of inquiry, which is rewarded with ever increasing knowledge; and the empirical content of knowledge is the only truth within human reach. Anything supposed to be beyond that has no bearing on human existence; it is a mere figment of imagination which only deludes one into the dreamland of hallucination.

**From M.N. Roy, Introduction to *Evolution of Philosophy in India*, Dehradun, April 30th 1952.** 

## **Radical Reports :**

# **Humanist-Rationalist Activities in Gujarat**

**Bipin Shroff**

These two activities have very long history in the state of Gujarat.

Humanist Activities—our state was in the strong influence of Gandhian thoughts and practice since 1920. It is the home state of key national leaders like M.K. Gandhi, ( Mahatama Gandhi), Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel & his elder brother Vithhalbhai Patel and many others. Non-cooperation movement of 1920 then Salt satyagraha of Dandi in 1930 had magnetic effects in the mind of educated and semi- educated Gujarati youths. Sabarmati Ashram of Ahmadabad was by and large the nucleus from where all programmes of Indian National Congress related to Independence and National Reconstruction were carried out. The city of Ahmadabad was also the Manchester of India where most of the nation's Cotton Mills were established. The owners of this city Cotton mills & their employed industrial workers had among them natural antagonistic economic interests with each other.

We know well as the students of Indian ( Radical) Humanist History that the year 1936 had very special importance in the Indian Humanist Movement. Its founder Manbendra Nath Roy (M. N. Roy) was released from the Dehradun Jail (after passing 6 years in jail) on 20th November 1936.

### **Genesis of Humanist Movement in Gujarat-**

6 to 7 young men had close informal get to gather late in evening in the backyard of Gujarat College in the last month in 1936 in Ahmadabad. C.T. Daru, Dashrathlal Thakar and some others were there. Taiyab Shaikh, who was the very close associate of M.N. Roy was key person under his instruction this meeting took place. They

were the torch bearers who spread the humanist movement in Gujarat. Gujarat Humanist group( As the Radical Democratic party) initially worked among Ahmadabad Mill workers under experienced leadership & the guidance of Taiyab Sheikh.

### **RDP — Second world war & Gujarat.**

Leaders of Indian National congress including Gandhijee failed to judge the international political and military forces operating during the war in Europe. He thought, judged and so acted as if the war was the God given opportunity to snatch Indian Independence from British rulers. The British rulers asked to support its war efforts by keeping the wheels of Indian Industries moving. Gandhi gave the call for Quit India movement and boycott British clothes etc. The Indian National congress tried to create war hysteria & succeeded in creating anti—British and pro- German war psychosis among the Indian masses.

The Radical democratic party under the visionary and matured leadership of M.N.Roy viewed the war as the save democracy from the Nazi and fascist forces of Hitler of Germany and Mussolini of Italy. His party concluded that if Nazi forces won the war then India has to forget about its freedom. Because how can these fascist forces deliver freedom to the country like India when these forces have made other nations slaves? So Radical Democratic Party and its state units resolved to support Indian British government and its war efforts. It was against industrial strikes, lockout. So its leaders of trade union branches and their industrial workers supported the British war efforts in our country.

The Gujarat unit of Radical Democratic Party decided to support British war efforts. It means



virtually working and carrying out activities against the Indian congress and its programme of Quit India Movement. The RDP & its leaders decided to sail its boat against the terrible currents of National Jingoism. The party has its trade union units in various industries like Electricity, Cotton textiles, Railway, Post, etc in Ahmadabad. It organised regular workers meeting in their residential areas. The purpose was to educate them for war efforts.

During the war period, there were acute shortages of foods & other essential commodities at the large scale in the country. Strict rationing of essential things introduced in the country. Our RDP friends of Gujarat unit, established about eight co-operative consumer stores to cater basic needs of industrial workers in Ahmadabad. Secondly this Gujarat unit of RDP started to publish daily news paper namely “Swantra Bharat”. The purpose of this daily news paper was to provide authentic information on WAR NEWS. The other & very important purpose was to cultivate public opinion in relation to Nazism-Fascism-Nationalism-Humanism etc. It's editorial had special importance for its readers in war times. It's daily editorial was prepared after hearing late night news of BBC UK by C.T.Daru.

M.N. Roy had first hand Political and other information of European countries. He saw the rise of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy in inter-war period. He actively participated in Post 1917 Russian Revolution development. So he analysed in details about Axis (Fascist) and Allied (Democratic) forces of war in Luknow RDP annual conference in 1942 .He predicted the victory of Allied forces and defeat of Axis nations in this conference. He also logically derived the conclusion that the Britain would be also economically devastated nation after the war. She would be unable to maintain its colonies. So there would be liquidation of British Empire as the result of the war.

The Gujarat unit of RDP participated with more than its 25 members in this Lucknow 1942

conference at that time. There was one important difference of opinion cropped up about the working and day to day functioning of the Gujarat unit of RDP under the leadership of Taiyab Shaikh. The central leadership of RDP was not happy to run its Gujarat unit under the leadership of Taiyab Shaikh. There was much heated discussion. The Gujarat unit was not happy with the observations of central leadership. It opposed by tooth and nail the decision of suspending T. Shaikh and took over the physical possession of the Gujarat unit.

Three members namely G.V. Karlekar, V.G.Karnik and Mehta from Gujarat unit supported the central party decision; while remaining about 22 members of Gujarat unit opposed that resolution related to T. Shaikh. Majority members of Gujarat RDP also made it clear that its unit would not give possession of the party office. But if the central RDP would send its men to take over the possession of G – RDP office there would be problem of law and order. The Central RDP sent its team twice lastly with its secretary V.M. Tarkunde. But they failed miserably in taking the possession of Gujarat unit under the leadership of the secretary Dashrathlal Thakar with the cooperation and Daru, Raojibhai Patel, Champaklall, Vinubhai Patel (from Nadiad) Mansuri, and many others. T. Shaikh was reinstated in the party after one year or so. He started working normally in the party with the same spirit and zeal. The central leadership of the party nominated T. Shaikh to represent party's view & strategy on Indian Labour Problem after the war in UK. Again T. Shaikh represented party's view about the international labour conditions for post war industrial reconstruction in Geneva head office of ILO. Taiyab Shaikh published a book in English on M.N. Roy during his underground period (stay) in Gujarat. Its name was “M.N. Roy, The man who looked ahead”. This book was also translated in Gujarati language by C. T. Daru.

After much discussion among party workers

M.N. Roy decided to dissolve Radical Democratic Party in the year 1948. Then he formed the Radical Humanist Association of India in the same year.

After the dissolution of party at the national level the Gujarat unit of RDP started humanist and rationalist activities in Gujarat. Party workers were carried out various humanist activities in the field of workers problem and education field. The Gujarat unit of humanists concentrated their activities under the mentorship of late Chandrakant Daru in Ahmedabad & Prof Raojibhai Patel in Baroda.

#### **Ahmadabad Humanist Unit- (1946-1974)-**

The Radical Democratic Party was dissolved in the year 1948. It was really an unparallel and historical decision in the political history. The RDP was dissolved by the people who gave its birth, nourished and developed it. Why? The founders of the RDP created it as an instrument of individual & social change. But the parliamentary form of government degenerated in to the mere naked and demagogic struggle for political power. People (voters) are used for getting power in the name of caste, religion, region etc by and large by all political parties. The Indian humanists under the leadership of M.N. ROY prepared the "Humanist Manifesto". It has 22 theses. It explains the philosophy and practice of humanism.

For the sake of brevity, now let us divide Gujarat Humanist activities in two parts, namely Ahmadabad and Baroda units respectively after the dissolution of RDP. Ahmadabad unit nurtured in the broader sense under the leadership of Advocate C.T. Daru and Baroda unit developed under the leadership of Prof. Raojibhai Patel. Kindly, do not consider these divisions of activities in any watertight compartment. It is simply geographical otherwise their emotional and intellectual bonds are inseparable.

The Ahmadabad unit has started its humanist activities among three sections of society. (1) Industrial workers, (2) Gujarat University

Teachers and students and publication of Roy's English works in Gujarati. (3) Its role in National emergency in the year 1975.

#### **(1) Activities among Industrial workers-**

The Ahmadabad Mill Mazdoor Association had about 25000 members. The whole movement was run just by the membership and self donation of its members. Daru and Dashrathlal Thaker tried to provide all legal aids to its workers under the Bombay Industrial Dispute Act. This duo never tried to exploit emotions of its members for political purposes as well as against their masters. They tried to educate the members of the union on different social, political and economical issues which were by and large related to workers' life. They also tried to eradicate superstitions and blind faith which were prevailing largely among workers. Workers were not the cog in the machine. The spirit of self reliant was inculcated among the workers by these leaders. C.T. Daru explained the importance of democratic way of life in running the trade union. He also taught the importance of freedom in one's personal life. The whole movement of Ahmadabad Mill Mazdoor Association was geared centrally to achieve the dignity of its members not only in their economic interest but in each and every aspects of the human life. C.T. Daru as the general secretary, explained all these objectives and how to achieve them in the 14th annual meeting of the union on 29th August 1954. This trade union also co operated and fight jointly on many industrial disputes with Majoor Mahajan Association founded by Gandhiji and run by his men in Ahmadabad.

#### **(2) Gujarat University Teachers and students-**

Many university teachers like Prof. K.D. Desai, Prof Jayanti Patel, Dinesh Shukla, Hemant Shah and many others became lifelong active members of our humanist movements. Many academic and humanist values orientated seminars, essay competitions etc were organised with their cooperation. Following books of M.N.

Roy were translated and published in Gujarati. (a) New Humanism by Prof. Dinesh Shukla, (b) Essence of Royism by Dinesh Shukla and Jayanti Patel, (c) The Radical Humanism by Dinesh Shukla, (d) Power, Politics and Parties by Prof. Hemant Shah, (e) Autobiography of Cat by Prof. Mahendra Chotalia, (f) From Communism to New Humanism by Arun Divetia. After 'Swatantra Bharat' daily few Gujarati monthlies like Chetan, Manav Samaj and Vaishvik Manavvad regularly published in local language to spread humanist values in the state of Gujarat.. The last one V. M was published for almost 30 years. C.T. Daru, Prof Jayanti Patel and Bipin Shroff were editors of these monthlies. Financial help were provided by C. T. Daru Memorial trust well organised by Late advocate H.B. Shah as the president and Gautam Thaker as the secretary and Prakash Shah (Editor of NIRIKHAKH Gujarati Fortnightly) M.B. Shah, Prof J.K. Patel as trustees for almost more than 30 years. Many seminars and research projects were carried out under the banners of Citizen for Democracy and Peoples Union Civil Liberties by late Gautam Thaker ( The son of late Dashrathlal Thaker who was one of the founder member of this movement).

### **(3) Role of Gujarat Humanist unit before, during and after emergency of 1975-**

We as the Royist-cum Humanists came to know very well regarding the working of the congress party under the leadership of Mrs Indira Gandhi. We saw the continuous erosion of democratic values under her rule. So Citizen's for Democracy was formed in the year 1974 to save our democracy. Jayaprakash Narayan was elected as the founder and V.M.Tarkunde as the founder president of it.

Allahabad High Court gave verdict against Mrs Gandhi and her membership of Lok Sabha was set aside on 12th June 1975. Instead of abiding to the rule of law Mrs. Gandhi declared national emergency and all human rights were abrogated.

*The government of Gujarat was governed by non- congress party that is Janta Party run by the able Chief Ministership of Babubhai J. Patel. It does not act with the tune of Mrs. Gandhi. So there is full freedom of expression, no ban on peaceful gathering. The Radical Humanist Association of Gujarat unit organised three conferences in Ahmadabad. (1) All India conference of RHA on 25th December 1975, (2) Save the constitution conference on 1st of January 1976. (3) All India Civil Liberty conference in 1976. Many well-known stalwarts of legal profession like Justice M.C. Chagla, Soli Soarbjee, Justice J.C. Shah, V. M. Tarkunde, Advocate Shanti Bhushan, Ram Jethmalani and many others participated in these seminars.*

*The speech of Justice M.C. Chagla was translated by Prof. Dinesh Shukla and published in two Gujarati fortnightly 'Bhoomi Putra and Sadhana'. This was done under the instructions and legal advice of Advocate C.T. Daru. It was the brazen violation of Pre-Censorship order of the Indira Gandhi Government. Daru fought this legal case with his best efforts and won also. The Pre-Censorship was declared unlawful and set-aside by Gujarat High Court. Daru fought these cases as if his freedom of speech and expression were jeopardised. He did not charge a single rupee as his legal fee.*

*When the Gujarat government was dismissed by the Mrs Gandhi's central rule, the emergency was immediately imposed in the state of Gujarat. All political leaders of opposite parties including the Chief Minister of the state Babubhai. J. Patel put under MISA in different jails of Gujarat. Members of J.P. 's state level executive committee who decided to violate her Pre- Censorship order were also put behind bars under MISA. C.T. Daru was also arrested and remained in different jails of Gujarat for about 8 months.*

*Daru wrote a book on the Indian constitution in relations to human rights in the jail in English. He was released from the jail with other MISA detainees after 8 months.*

*Daru has been detected the Cancer in the one side of the lung by Tata Cancer Hospital in Bombay. The disease was wide spread in his lung. He went to USA to take further treatment at his son's residence. But he never came back to India and passed away there in May 1979 at the age of 63 years.*

*The Radical Humanist organisation of Gujarat unit formed " Chandrakant Daru Memorial Trust " after the sad demise of C.T. Daru. Its chairman was Advocate H.B. Shah, Secretary Gautam Thaker, and Prakash Shah, Akhilesh Dave, Bipin Shroff, Jayanti Patel etc were its trustees. The trust has carried out lot of activities to achieve basic ideals of Radical Humanism from its inception to till today. We lost H. B. Shah and Gautam Thaker in last few years. The trust lost its new financial sources to carry out its activities after passing of its two founders.*

#### **Baroda Unit of Radical Humanism**

*Prof. Raojibhai Patel joined M.S. University of Baroda as the lecturer in Mathematics in the year 1951. He gradually created his own group of people here. But he continued his emotional and intellectual bonds with C.T. Daru and Radical Humanist group of Ahmadabad up to 1975.*

*He organised an informal group here which was known as the Baroda Renaissance Club. Prof. Patel's home (to whom we called him Mota, (Elderly and respectful Person) became its head quarter. I remained its member since 1961 to 1966 in my student life of Baroda University. We used to meet every Friday evening regularly. It was totally informal group, no constitution, no membership, no funds, no hierarchy of posts. Lord Bhiku Parekh wrote in the forward of Prof Raojibhai's Collected works about Mota that*

*" Like Socrates, to whom he bore considerable physical resemblance, Raojibhai was a passionate thinker, constantly probing large philosophical questions, challenging fashionable dogmas and bringing his powerful intellectual to the analysis of contemporary political and ideological issues. It was therefore hardly surprising that his house in Baroda became an alternative university."*

Students and teachers of various academic faculties gravitated towards him. They met for hours, sometimes if need arises two or three times a week, discussing John Locke, David Hume, Karl Marx, B. Russell, M.N. Roy, Karl Popper, Buddhism, Hinduism, Gandhi, Nehru, and of course Indian politics. Our Friday meeting was generally attended by a regular group of about five or six people. Again Bhiku Parekh wrote in the forward of the same book regarding Renaissance Club that "I vividly remember spending days discussing Marx's German Ideology, Popper's Open society & its Enemies and the concepts of equality and freedom. A year in this environment opened up a whole new world of one for life. Rajani Kothari, myself, (Bhiku Parekh) Dhirubhai Sheth, Dhawal Mehta, Prakash Desai, Narhari Parikh were all early product of this Mota's School. As a small token of our deepest gratitude Rajani Kothari dedicated his book 'Politics in India' and I (Bhiku Parekh) my 'Gandhi's Political Philosophy, to Professor Raojibhai Patel..... Socrates had only one Plato; Raojibhai can claim at least half a dozen..... Although Prof Raojibhai was a great admirer of Roy yet he felt that Roy's thought lacked coherence and genuine commitment to socialism. So his movement for Cultural Renaissance without an active political struggle was doomed to be failure."


Members of this group also participated in the summer study camp organised by Indian Renaissance Institute, Delhi. Prof. Raojibhai played very important role in forming Baroda



University Teachers Association and Gujarat University Association. Prof Raojibhai died in 2002.

Now we worked under the name of Gujarat Mumbai Rationalist Association. Many rationalist humanist friends work to gather and carrying out these activities in different parts of Gujarat. Prof. Jayanti Patel (Ahmedabad), myself (Mehmadabad), Ashvin Karia (Palanpur), Kiran Trivedi (Ahmedabad), Advocate Piyush Jadugar (Chandkheda), Lankesh Chakravarti (Roopal), N.K. Indrayan and Dr. Anil Patel (Gandhinagar), Manishi Jani (Ahmedabad), Kiran Nanavati (Ahmedabad), Ramesh Savani (Retired IPS, Ahmedabad), Dr. Sujat Vali (Godhra), B.A. Parikh, Shidhharth Degami, Sooryakant Shah, Prem Sumesara, Vallabh Italia (all are from Surat), Prof. Bakulaben Ghaswala (Valsad) Advocate Pratibhaben Thakkar (Bhavnagar), Dr.

Sarupben Dhruv (Ahmedabad) Mahashevata Jani (Ahmedabad), Dr. Svati Joshi (Ahmedabad) Dr. Pravin Ghadvi (Gandhinagar) Girish Shudhiya (Palanpur) and many others are of new generations. They come from different social back grounds. These friends work in many fields of Humanism and Rationalism. Now our tools to spread ideas of Humanism- Rationalism are Facebook, Whatsapp, U-Tube and preparing small documentaries for the eradication of blind faith and superstitions. Our institutions organise many orientations and study camps throughout the year in different parts of Gujarat. It has many local centres of activities in different parts of Gujarat. We nourish them by all means. We have published more than fifty books on different aspects of Humanism-Rationalism.

Mr. Bipin Shr off is a senior Radical Humanist. 

## Making a Mockery of Sardar Patel and...

Contd. from page.... 29

Thus, despite persistent follow up not only the MHA has not taken any steps to get the blanket stay order vacated in the last 6 years, but it has also been stonewalling efforts to obtain information about action taken in this regard. If this is the response to a retired IAS officer of 1967 batch one can imagine the plight of other citizens seeking information inconvenient to the government.

The Right to Information Act was enacted in 2005 by the Parliament to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. The Preamble of the Act reads as follows-

*“Whereas the Constitution of India has established democratic Republic,*

*And whereas democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information which are vital in its functioning and also to contain corruption and to hold Governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed,” etc.*

This Act mandates a time limit of 30 days for providing information by the PIO/CPIO and a maximum period of 45 days for disposal of appeal by the First Appellate Authority. This case is a glaring example of how, taking advantage of the delay in court proceedings, the concerned officers of the MHA have been making a mockery of the RTI Act and nullifying the amendment to Rule 7 of the IPS Cadre Rules for the last 6 years presumably to suit the convenience of their political masters. *So much for the good governance at the highest level*, and especially the seriousness of the Home Ministry and DoPT for the implementation of the much touted RTI Act and the respect the Central Government really has for what Sardar Patel, the maker of the united India, had said, and for whom it has installed the tallest statue in the world.

S.N. Shukla is I.A.S. (retd.), Advocate; General Secretary, Lok Prahari 



## ***Nizam College Venue Picture, 1975***



### **Names in the picture :-**

- First line :** Justice V M Tarkunde, Justice Gopalarao Ekbote, Justice Avula Sambasivarao.
- Second line :** A H V Subbarao, journalist Andhra Jyothi, P.V Rajagopal Principal, Nizam College, Mr Abburi Ramakrishnarao, Mr A L Narasimharao, journalist.
- Third line :** black coat Prof Alam Khundmire from Osmania University, Dr G R Darlvi, Director in Administrative Staff College.
- Fourth line :** A S Wadwalker, Advocate, N.K Acharya, Editor, Indian Rationalist and Advocate.
- Fifth line last :** Innaiah Narisetti.
- Last line :** Mr Sulapani Jasti, Mr Kosarajaju, Sambasivarao, Royist