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Acharya Narendra Deva :
The Vision of a
Socialist Society
Naveen Tewari

Anxiety and Hope
Varughese George

Devastation Caused
by
Alcohol Should Receive
Serious Attention
Bharat Dogra

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In Memory of Asma Jehangir

Kuldip Nayar

Asma Jehangir, who kicked the bucket last week, was a popular human rights lawyer and social activist of Pakistan. Although her work was confined to Pakistan, her example was followed throughout the subcontinent. The place from where she announced the foundation of Human Rights Commission, an organisation to protect individual rights, also became the venue for meetings to normalise relations between India and Pakistan.

Only a few days ago, she rang me up from Lahore to say that she would now have more time to work for normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan after marrying off her daughter. Maybe, this was her way of telling that she had miles to go to change a religious-oriented society into a secular one. She put in enormous efforts to change religion's influence on society. The bane of problems was because of the mixing of religion with politics.

Asma can have the satisfaction of having India and Pakistan on the same page even though their reluctance to come nearer to each other was apparent. Asma made Islamabad and New Delhi realise

that they had no alternative except to sit across the table and discuss the reasons why the two could not bury their hatchets. Although New Delhi had decided that it would have no talks with Pakistan until it stopped giving shelter to terrorists, Asma believed that there was still some room for a patch-up.

However, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj was unequivocal in her statement that New Delhi would have no discussion with Islamabad until it realised that terrorism and talks did not go together. Asma felt that Islamabad faced certain problems with the military which had to be sorted out before any meaningful meeting could take place. She was very positive about the possibility of such a meeting and she could somehow persuade the powers-that-be to see reason.

But my disappointment is that there was little response in India on the death of Asma even though she had dared her country's military, the sworn enemy of India. It was heartening to see her devotion to the cause of improving relations between India and Pakistan. I always supported her efforts.

I was allotted a bungalow as a member of the Rajya Sabha in Lodhi Estate where Asma would bring girls and boys from Pakistan to meet their counterparts in India. Asma named that place 'Pakistan House'. The boys and girls from Pakistan would shed tears as they would bid farewell to the boys and girls in India. Categorising them as Pakistanis would be unfair because they looked very much a part of the secular society in India. She would also take Indian youth to Pakistan to learn from a society which was tilting towards a particular religion.

Asma, a symbol of Pakistan's human rights and resistance, was also a fierce opponent of military dictators for over four decades. She was also a strong advocate of India-Pakistan peace and was part of several Track-2 delegations to India. Not only that, she also became a very prominent lawyer of Pakistan after beginning her career as an advocate at the judiciary. She was also the chief of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan which indicates her popularity.

Even today the Pakistani judiciary remembers her fight for the restoration of honour to Iftikhar Chaudhry, who was the Chief Justice of Pakistan. The lawyers' movement ultimately achieved its goal and the movement even led to the downfall of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf. That unprecedented movement which saw the lawyers marching in 2007 had given a glimmer of hope that Pakistan was indeed understanding the importance and restoration of democracy. But then every ruler in Pakistan always looked over the shoulders of the military and it is true even today.

I remember Asma taking on the

might of martial law administrator Zia-ul-Haq in the early eighties when she was in the thick of the movement to restore democracy. She was imprisoned for leading the protest movement. Asma soon became a champion activist. There were occasions when her life was on the block but undeterred she braved those threats and continued to stand up against dictators. In the process, she helped establish the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which she also chaired later. She would often say that it was the Commission's duty to defend all religious minorities. The Commission during her chairmanship also successfully tackled highly charged blasphemy accusations along with cases of honour killings.

Asma also pioneered the women's rights movement in her country at a time when human rights were not considered an issue in Pakistan. Thanks to Asma, today people, particularly women, talk about their rights and even the political parties, including religious parties, realise the importance of women's rights. The credit for this goes to Asma.

One particular issue that Asma stoutly defended was Christians charged with blasphemy. Several people from the minority community faced death penalty as blasphemy is an offence that attracted the severest punishment in Pakistan. She was also instrumental in fighting cases relating to the recovery of missing persons free of cost. A kind-hearted person that Asma was, she would not yield any kind of pressure, including threats from fanatic groups.

Asma not just fought for the people of Pakistan but also for people from all over the world,

including from the Palestine and the struggles that people faced elsewhere. No doubt, she made a lot of enemies at home because of the battles she chose but she viewed the challenges as something that cannot be ignored. That speaks volumes of Asma.

Asma, who was a popular activist around the world, won several national and international awards, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award, the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize), the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, and the UNESCO/Bilbao Prize for the Promotion of a Culture of Human Rights. But for Asma the awards hardly meant anything. Her sole aim was to restore democracy in the country because of her unwavering belief in it.

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Acharya Narendra Deva : The Vision of a Socialist Society

Naveen Tewari

Acharyaji was a unique exponent of socialism in the sense that he does not limit the ideology to a classless and economically and politically equal society. His vision was based on and for the specific context of India and the conditions prevailing in the country. The great cultural gulf between the educated upper classes and castes, and the simple uneducated masses of the deprived classes—castes cannot be filled merely with economic, political and social empowerment. He could see that in the absence of cultural upliftment, the dream of a just society would be only half-fulfilled.

It is easier to share food and shelter with people according to their needs. It is also feasible to share jobs and wealth with the underprivileged according to their needs. Free college and university education can also be made available to those who cannot afford it. Even jobs can be reserved for the deprived. But culture is a much subtler and intangible form of education and it would take generations to get transferred to those who have not been born in an advanced cultural milieu. It will require sustained efforts under a well-designed program to bring about a cultural revolution.

The collective culture of a given society creates a milieu, an oasis of values and virtues. A social movement to educate people in the true sense of the word would result in removing the invisible barriers of class and caste and truly empower the hitherto deprived masses. It will set free the creative spirit of the society, enabling it to soar and culturally and

collectively developing the whole society. The culture clubs envisaged by Acharyaji in the universities show a conscious effort on his part to initiate a movement in that direction.

Acharyaji realized that culture is the most important ingredient of an evolving society. All other privileges and securities of life may make a person much worse in character if he is not growing inwardly. He may suffer from a false sense of empowerment and security. He may become healthier in body but weaker in mind. He may become intolerant and arrogant, may end up being less considerate towards his fellow human beings. His sense of responsibility towards his surroundings may not grow and he may destroy his health and well-being by overindulgence.

An individual would be a lesser human being if he is not exposed to the higher dimensions of life. What if he does not sacrifice the temptation of sensuous gratification, does not willingly choose a path of discipline? What if he does not channelise his energies and reach an equilibrium in mind?

If he does not develop a taste in fine arts and music, he remains only half-educated. If he doesn't grow in curiosity and quest for learning and if his scientific temper is not honed by constant observation, his growth gets stunted. If he fails to form a reasonably clear world view and a meaningful interpretation of life in its myriad forms and expressions, he fails to evolve as a harmonious human being. Such a person will not

only not be at peace with himself but will also create a discord around him. He may acquire his share in the wealth of the country, but his contribution to society and the country remains limited. He may fulfill all his material needs, but fails to find fulfillment in life.

A cultured person may enjoy life in its various forms but the joy he pursues doesn't leave him impoverished and hungry. It enriches him and makes him a healthier person in body and mind. It's a joy one can share with others and the sharing of which would enhance and accentuate happiness rather than diminish or fade it.

Acharyaji's emphasis on cultural revolution is founded on very sound reasoning. A socialist society is not only a society based on social, economical and political equality but is also anchored in an equilibrium of a common cultural ethos and shared social values. For, economic upliftment may raise the level of a plumber to that of a professor in the material sense, but bereft of cultural refinement, a plumber can not lift himself psychologically, inwardly. This would invariably result in the continuance of the class system and social differences would remain, albeit with some difference.

These differences in the ways of life and conditioning of minds would cause friction between different classes and keep the society in a state of constant unrest.

Although we cannot imagine a state of perfect equality in this

matter, but the gap between the culturally emancipated and culturally deprived should be narrowed as far as possible. Acharyaji himself argued on the basis of a more practical and pragmatic reason. In the absence of a cultural revolution, political power will be shared with hitherto unprivileged people who would form an incongruous alliance with those coming from a better background. Of course the political empowerment ushered in by a democratic system would uplift the economically and socially backward class, but that alone would not be enough to ensure a government each member of which represents a progressive and emancipated society.

Also, the leaders emerging out of unprivileged and socially backward classes may not be able to handle the sudden empowerment bestowed upon them, and the deep down insecurity and inferiority complex may lead to a reckless use of power and privilege. Acharyaji, while talking about culture in his famous 'message', takes a cue from Ravindranath Tagore and gives a very deep and meaningful definition of 'culture'. The culture he talks about is as much an essential element for the privileged class as it is for the unprivileged. The former needs it for a renewal while the latter needs it as an initiation. Mere academic progress and distribution of wealth can not lead to a homogeneous social structure. It is only by holistic

education and cultural grooming that we may bring down the walls separating classes.

Acharyaji gives utmost emphasis to education and cultural evolution of all. This is the true spirit of socialism. This is a holistic movement towards socialism. Evolution from the present state of deprivation and depravity to a higher human level is the real revolution, and that alone can bring about true fraternity in society and result in social harmony. This harmony and order can't be established by force or legislation. Nor can just political or economic revolution pave the way to this ideal state.

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Anxiety and Hope

Varughese George

On 27th December 2017 I was listening to an interview on BBC with the Nobel Prize novelist, Orhan Pamuk, about the political and cultural crisis in his country, Turkey. The state apparatus had become repressive and the pluralistic character of state and society in Turkey was on the wane, he opined. On the previous day, news came in from the central election commission of Russia that the only valid nomination for the post of presidency is of Putin and the lone rival candidate is disqualified. On Christmas day, a Member of Parliament in India suggested that the word secularism should be deleted from the Indian Constitution. President Trump a fortnight ago suggested Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel, thus repudiating the equal claim of Palestine for the holy city. The question that arises is

whether the world is returning to the period of tyrants like in the 18th century or is the present civilisation showing signs of decay. A liberal humanistic and pluralistic society was the fundamental character of global society since the French Revolution. Sartre wrote, 'As democracy tolerated all opinions, even those which aimed expressly at destroying it, republican humanism which was taught in schools made tolerance the primary virtue.' Now this character is being questioned by the white-only American days of President Trump.

The second concern is about the growing inequality in global society. The Human Development Report of the United Nations says that 20% of the world population appropriate 80% of the world's resources. The National Family Health Survey of

India, a government initiated survey, says that 40% women and children are malnourished in the country. But with the passage of time, the corporates have amassed huge wealth due to a liberalised economic regime. The annual income of some corporate houses is larger than the national income of a dozen countries together. The UN had appointed a commission to look into the causes and background of the global recession that occurred in 2007–09. This commission mainly consisted of social scientists. The theologian Francois Houtart was also nominated by the President of the General Assembly as special representative to this commission. The commission opined that the belief that the market will regulate and correct itself was a great mistake. 'The belief that economic agents are rational, that governments

are inherently less informed and less motivated by sound economic principles and their interventions are likely to distort market allocations, and that markets are efficient and stable with a strong ability to absorb shocks' affected macro economic policies. It suggested that governments should strengthen key sectors of economy by more capital investment and increased public expenditure. Inequality is growing within nations also. To make the life of the millions living in poverty dignified and decent, the state should adopt protective welfare policies and put a ceiling on the accumulation of assets.

The third concern is about technological rationalism that considers that progress in technology will automatically lead to progress in human life. But experience proves that in an unequal global order, assimilation and application of technology will also be asymmetrical. The Trade and Development Report of the UN says that India and Brazil spend only 0.8% of their GDP on R&D and there is a technological lag with other developed countries and it reflects in trade and investment of these two countries. Contemporary society is known as knowledge society. Unlike in the past, the future is in the hands of those who possess knowledge. But the digital divide is ever on the increase. Though food production has increased due to new technologies, malnutrition and poverty is also in the increase. Medical technologies are expensive because of which the poor are sidelined and destined to their fate.

The fourth problem is the violence in societies. Society has become more violent and the untold misery in Syria aided by the war machine has made international peacekeeping

difficult. War, ethnic and racist violence has created millions of refugees, and women and children are the worst affected. Reconciliation is considered a weakness. During the Indo-China and Indo-Pak war periods, Acharya K.K. Chandy used to invite citizens to Manganam Ashram in Kerala to deliberate on the idea of reconciliation. The people of these countries have no hostility against each other, the nations may have. His movement was known as Fellowship of Reconciliation. Many years later, the senior journalist Kuldeep Nayyar, taking a cue from such ideas, established the forum Indo-Pak Peoples' Friendship. Citizen representatives from both countries regularly interacted and arranged exchange visits. This helped build confidence measures among the people of both countries to initiate dialogues. After years of racist violence, when South Africa became free, the Constitution began with this proclamation, 'South Africa belongs to all, black and white.' Can we build a non-violent and reconciled society in the near future?

The final aspect is the alienation of the cultural place. Man or woman has become more individualistic and his/her alienation from society is exacerbated by new technologies. Chris Hedges calls this 'narcissistic escapist individualism' in an 'Empire of Illusion'.

Thus, politics of authoritarianism and economics of neoliberalism join hands with violence and depoliticising cultural elements to create fascism in a refashioned way. The new technology is geared to the needs of the rich who form the social base of the new subtle fascism. Dissent is no longer endured. The hope of the New Year is that amidst despondency, individual and micro-

level resistance is increasing. The group named ICAN was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace this year for their consistent campaign against nuclear arms. The land grab by the state from the farmers is being fiercely resisted in many regions of the world. When the state deserts its social responsibility, self-help groups and sharing communities are growing in large numbers so that poor are taken care of.

Let us have the courage to face the challenges ahead. Last year marked the centenary of the Champaran Struggle of farmers in Bihar. It was Mahatma Gandhi's first experiment with truth in India. His constant effort in Champaran was to purge fear from the minds of people. The people were afraid of the indigo plantation owners, the British government, the Magistracy and the police. When they rid themselves of fear, people became courageous. Derrida once wrote that the most agonising search in his life was to understand how one man can establish his authority over another.

Fr. Kappen asks to us affirm the forces of life, such as love, friendship, co-operation and the solidarity of all, and to fight the forces of death-illness, poverty, egoism, hatred, injustice, inequality and oppression. Rabindra Nath Tagore always taught us to celebrate life, not negate it.

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What Gandhi Said in Ayodhya: Violence Is a Mark of Cowardice, and the Sword Is a Coward's Weapon

Krishna Pratap Singh

Gandhi visited Ayodhya on February 10, 1921, the first of his two visits to the place associated with Rama. He had just two messages to give—on Hindu–Muslim unity and non-violence.

It would take anybody by surprise to know that Mahatma Gandhi, who was inspired to ceaselessly strive for Ram Rajya throughout his life, visited Ayodhya, the birthplace of Rama, just twice. However, through the messages he communicated on both occasions, he underlined the enormous significance of those visits.

The news of Gandhiji's first visit to Ayodhya, on February 10, 1921, sent an unparalleled wave of excitement through the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad, say those who have kept track of local history. Hours before his train arrived, huge crowds had lined the roads and terraces all the way from the railway station to the meeting ground where he was to speak. Everybody had but one desire—to be blessed by a mere glimpse of him. The historic clock-tower gracing the magnificent Faizabad chowk was resonating with the strains of shehnai. The words on everybody's lips were these: Gandhiji is coming to set us free.

The venue of the meeting was a maidan located to the west of the Jalpa nallah which lies between Ayodhya and Faizabad. In 1918, the British had celebrated their World War One victory at this maidan, and

the Congress had chosen the venue precisely for that reason—to show the British the difference between them and Gandhiji's way.

As the train trundled into the station, two local Congress leaders, Acharya Narendra Dev and Mahashay Kedarnath, holding the Congress flag aloft, made their way to Gandhiji's compartment. They were totally unprepared for the scene that met their eyes. It turned out that as soon as the train had entered Faizabad district, Gandhiji had asked for all the windows in and around his train compartment to be shuttered. Moreover, he had refused to meet or speak to anyone. He was upset about the fact that the farmers' movement in Awadh, attuned more to the battle cry of aggression than to ideals and principles, had turned violent. Those in the movement did not see much value in ahimsa. The farmers of Faizabad in particular were on the warpath—in Bidahar, events had taken a violent turn, with the farmers setting fire to and looting the houses of talukdars and zamindars.

The situation was intolerable for Gandhiji, but he eventually gave in to entreaties that he should address the meeting even if it was to make his displeasure known. He was accompanied by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and also the Khilafat leader Maulana Shaukat Ali. The latter, following the Lucknow Congress resolution of Hindu–Muslim unity as well as the coming together of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the

Khilafat Movement, had set out on a joint tour with Gandhiji.

However, as Gandhiji sat in the car and the procession started moving, he came face to face with a group of Khilafat supporters waiting to welcome him, naked swords in hand. He decided then and there that he was not going to mince words in reprimanding the violent farmers as well as the men with swords in their hands in his speech.

At sundown, the crowds surged to the maidan which was neither well-lit nor had an efficient public address system. His first message to them was that instead of taking to the path of violence, they should learn to bear the hardships of struggle. Then, in severe words brooking no ambiguity, he condemned the farmers' violence as well as the procession of sword-bearers, saying that violence was an attribute not of bravery but cowardice and that the sword was a coward's weapon.

It is worth noting that Gandhiji chose to deliver these two mantras to his fellow Indians in Ayodhya—the Ayodhya of King Rama, whose rajya remained an ideal for him throughout his life. His stay had been arranged in such a manner that allowed him to take rest and made it possible for an unending procession of people to file into the room for his darshan.

That night, thousands of farmers, with tears of repentance in their eyes, made a silent plea to their liberator

for forgiveness. The following morning, after bathing in the Sarayu river, Gandhiji set out for his next halt. But the pain caused by the farmers' violence, which had not only dealt a blow to the movement but was cause for shame, refused to leave him. He urged Jawaharlal Nehru to guide the farmers who had wandered off the right path.

Some days later, Nehru addressed a gathering of the rebellious farmers and got them to publicly accept collective blame for their misdeeds. So much so that many of them who admitted to their wrong-doing said they were prepared to give themselves up and serve long jail terms as well.

This episode tells us something about the force of conviction that propelled Gandhiji's advocacy of a freedom struggle based on the moral and principled yardsticks of satya and ahimsa. The manner in which he suspended the entire Non-Cooperation Movement in the wake of the Chauri Chaura incident is well known.



It is noteworthy that by the time Bapu visited Ayodhya for the first time, Tilak, the leader who gave the resounding slogan 'Freedom is our birthright', was no more. The mantle of steering the freedom struggle, giving it a new momentum, now rested on Gandhiji.

One of the aims of Gandhiji's visit to Ayodhya on February 10, 1921 was to meet the sadhus of Ayodhya and persuade them to join the freedom movement. Gandhiji's decision to meet them was significant considering that his attempt to turn the Khilafat Movement into an

opportunity to promote Hindu-Muslim unity had started bearing fruit. (The Khilafat movement was started to influence the British prime minister to refrain from abolishing the Turkish caliphate, a move seen as a threat to Islam and hence to the religious freedom of Muslims under British rule.)

At that time, Gandhiji was not only engaged in moulding the Khilafat movement in accordance with his principles, he was also trying to remove the obstacles the British were placing in the way of Hindu-Muslim unity. The biggest obstacle was the issue of cow slaughter which the British were busy giving a communal colour. It was only natural that he would want to speak frankly on this issue in Ayodhya. The way he put the British government in the dock on this issue and made Hindu-Muslim unity an imperative for cow protection, only he could have accomplished it.

It was telling that Gandhiji, who did not take his eyes off other concerns of the freedom struggle while focusing on this issue, did not take any cognizance whatsoever of the so-called Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue. No matter that this was his first visit to the birthplace and kingdom of his Rama.

Physically exhausted by the previous evening's long meeting, when Gandhiji reached the Sarayu ghat the following morning to attend a meeting of sadhus being headed by Pandit Chandiram, he found it difficult to speak standing. He began by asking the gathered sadhus to forgive him for his physical weakness which forced him to be seated as he addressed them. Then he proceeded to hold up a mirror

to them: 'It is said there are 56 lakh sadhus in India. If all 56 lakh of them are ready to sacrifice their lives, then I am confident that with the power of their tapasya and prayer they can liberate India. But they have strayed from their path. So have the maulvis. If at all the sadhus and maulvis have achieved anything, it is to make the Hindus and Muslims fight with one another. I say this to both . . . even in circumstances where you are rendered devoid of your faith, become heretics or obliterate your religion, there is no such command of god that permits you to create enmity between two individuals who have committed no wrong against one another.'

Gandhi did not stop there. He continued: 'I said to the sadhus of Haridwar that if they want to protect the cow, they should be ready to give their lives up for the Muslims. Had the British been our neighbours, I would have advised you to request them that although their religion does not prohibit them from slaughtering cows and consuming their meat, they should consider stopping the practice for our sake. . . . But they raise their hand [against us] and say they are the rulers and that their rule is like Ram Rajya for us. My appeal to the sadhus is that if you want to protect the cow, give your lives up for Khilafat. . . . Those who kill Muslims for slaughtering cows should abdicate their religion. There are no such directives given to Hindus anywhere.'

Gandhiji continued to give advice in this vein. He said: 'These days the Hindus want the municipality to put an end to cow slaughter. I call it stupidity. On this issue, some Marwari friends in Calcutta were misled by thoughtless advisors into

asking me to save 200 cows from being slaughtered by butchers. I told them point-blank I would not save a single cow until such time as the butchers were not told which other occupation to adopt because they do not do the work they do to hurt the sentiments of the Hindus. . . . What happened in Bombay? The butchers had hundreds of cows but no Hindu approached them. The members of the Khilafat committee went to them and said what they were doing was not right; they should let the cows go and buy goats instead. The butchers gave up all the cows. . . . This is called protecting the cow.'

He clarified that the object of cow protection was not animal protection: 'The concern was for the protection of the weak and the helpless—only by doing this do we get the right to pray to god for our protection. Praying to god for our own protection is a sin as long as we do not protect the weak. . . . We need to learn to love the way Rama loved Sita. As long as we do not observe our dharma conscientiously and with utmost faith and steadfastness, we shall not be able to destroy this demonic government. Neither shall we attain swaraj nor will the rule of our dharma prevail. It is beyond the power of Hindus to bring back Ram Rajya.'

He concluded his address by saying this: 'I do not want to say too much. I see students of Sanskrit here. I urge them to sacrifice their lives for Muslim brothers. . . . Every student who is desirous of obtaining knowledge for a livelihood should realise that acquiring knowledge from the British is akin to drinking from a poisoned cup. Do not drink from the poisoned cup. Come back to the right path. . . . There is an

idol here, which receives offerings of foreign cloth. If you do not want foreign cloth for yourself, then you must end this practice. Adopt swadeshi. Use the thread spun by your brothers and sisters. I am hoping that the sadhus will give me a part of what they have. . . . Sadhus are considered to be pious; let them give within their means. It will come in useful in the struggle for swaraj.'

The English translation of this speech is preserved in the Uttar Pradesh state archives in Lucknow. It was placed in the category of confidential documents at the time. The previous evening too, after throwing light on his South Africa satyagraha, he had given a call to the people to engage in peaceful non-cooperation against the British government, boycott government-aided schools, give up wearing foreign cloth and spin yarn on the charkha instead. He refrained from giving the same call in his Ayodhya meeting saying he did not want to merely repeat what he had said the previous evening.



In 1929, Gandhiji came to his Rama's capital Ayodhya for the second time to seek contributions for his Harijan Fund. In a meeting held in Faizabad's Motibagh locality he was given a silver ring for the fund. He decided to auction it there and then.

To provide an incentive for high bids, he announced that he would personally put the ring on the finger of the individual who bid the highest. One gentleman bid fifty rupees and the auction ended with him. Gandhiji kept his word and put the ring on his finger. The gentleman had a hundred

rupee note with him. Offering it, he stood there to get fifty rupees back. Gandhiji left him speechless with a comment that he was a baniya after all; a baniya never parted with the money that came his way—all the more so if it was a donation. The gathering burst into laughter and the gentleman made his way back in a happy frame of mind.

During this visit, Gandhiji visited the first Gandhi ashram in the country, which had been established in Akbarpur by Dharendra bhai Majumdar. It was on that occasion that he delivered his famous message 'Hate the sin and not the sinner', exemplifying his statement by staying in the house of an English priest called Sweetman. In the ashram meeting, he urged the people gathered there to get organised, give up wearing foreign cloth, spin the charkha, confront the oppression of zamindars with non-violent resistance, dedicate themselves to the cause of liquor prohibition and boycott government schools.

Thereafter, even Awadh's rebellious farmers gave up the path of violence. Not just that, by facing police atrocities and excesses resolutely, they no longer provided an excuse for the British government to unleash its army's oppressive force on them on the grounds that it was justified.

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Is it Possible for Gandhians and Ambedkarites to Engage in a Dialogue?

Yogesh S.

The third national convention of Dakshinayan Abhiyan, called Samas, took place on 29 and 30 January 2018. On the opening day, Ganesh Devy, the founder of Dakshinayan Abhiyan, explained the relevance of the chosen name, '[Samas means to] connect units of meaning to produce new meaning; and, since [this] Nagpur convention is [about] bringing [various] thoughts together, it is called Samas.'

Prakash Yashwant Ambedkar, grandson of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, and Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, addressed the convention in Gandhi's Sewagram Ashram in Wardha and in Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur respectively. The convention was a coming together of writers, activists and artists from across the country, all of them united under the banner 'Where the Mind is without Fear', taken from the poem Chitto Jetha Bhoyshunno (Where the Mind is without Fear) by Rabindranath Tagore.

Both the historical figures, Ambedkar and Gandhi, are being appropriated by the current BJP government. As Ali Khan Mahudabad says, 'Political icons are easily appropriated . . . For some time now, and over the last two years in particular, a noticeable feature of the BJP's political rhetoric has been its appropriation of political figures whose views would sit uncomfortably with those of its own.' The ideologies and works of both these figures are a vehement critique of the anti-secular, anti-

constitutional and violent ideology of the BJP and RSS. The government, which has been cracking down on the spaces of dissent in universities has to go back in history to look at the role of Sangh Parivar in the freedom struggle and their contribution (or the lack of it) in building a democratic India. Those who opposed Ambedkar's Constitution and those who celebrated the death of Gandhi are now ruling the state, openly attacking constitutional rights and killing the democratic and secular spirit of this country.

Caught up in the debates and differences between them, we often forget to notice that despite their differences, Gandhi and Ambedkar continued to engage in a dialogue with each other and did not resort to violence. It is extremely crucial for us to remember this legacy of dialogue between differing opinions that existed in this country. It is crucial because it helps us be more reflective about the systematic attack on this legacy of dialogue today.

Gandhi's and Ambedkar's approach to fighting the oppression of the caste system, both politically and socially, was different. Gandhi opposed Ambedkar's proposal—provision for a separate electorate for Dalits—and he declared that he would go on an indefinite hunger strike to protest against a separate electorate. This resulted in the Poona Pact, which was signed by Ambedkar and Gandhi on 24 September 1932 in Poona (now Pune). The Pact denied a separate electorate but guaranteed reservation of seats for Dalits in the

legislature. The differences between the two, along with the hunger strike that led to the signing of the Poona Pact, is widely cited to highlight the differences and disagreements between the two.

Debates around caste based discrimination today seem to begin and end on the question of the provision of reservation of seats for certain sections, as if caste only extends to reservation policy and the resulting job opportunities. Prakash Ambedkar said that even if Gandhi had agreed to Ambedkar's terms, the VHP would have opposed it vehemently. In agreement with this statement, Rajmohan Gandhi said, 'With the guidance of the leadership of both Gandhi and Ambedkar, the Constitution of India took a shape . . . the Constitution that guarantees freedom of speech and expression is under threat today because of this dispensation whose ideologues were active in the 1920s and 1930s.'

Prakash Ambedkar, in his opening address, said that Gandhi was not against reservation; he was against separate electorate for Dalits that had been proposed by Ambedkar. He also acknowledged that they held differing views on the manner in which reservations must be implemented. But he went on to point out that this difference between the two—Gandhi and Ambedkar—is increasingly being used to place the politics governed by their respective ideologies in opposition to each other.

He admitted that it is true that Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi

represented the views of different sections of the Indian populace. Ambedkar was a strong voice against the structural violence ingrained in Hindu society in the form of its Varna Ashram, and the associated discriminatory caste practices. He led the fight against the inhumane practice of untouchability. Then there was Gandhi, a leader of the freedom struggle in India, who, based on the principles of nonviolence, led a powerful mass movement against the British colonial rule in the country. Both were important leaders with a mass following; but they were standing on very different planes. They had differing world views and politics.

Prakash Ambedkar said, while addressing the gathering in Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram on 30 January, the death anniversary of Gandhi, 'Ambedkar was from a downtrodden and the exploited caste. Mobilising people for a movement against the caste was possible.' Ambedkar also highlighted Gandhi and Ambedkar's differing opinions on the Hindu religion. The latter called on all Dalits to reject Hinduism all together, and converted himself, along with lakhs of Dalits, to Buddhism. Having highlighted these differences, Prakash Ambedkar then made an important observation about the two leaders' relationship with each other. 'Both Ambedkar and Gandhi were not in agreement with each other. They were on very different planes. But they never let their differences stop the conversation between their ideas.' It was this dialogue that has enabled us today to observe, understand, analyse and fight forms of oppressions.

Rajmohan Gandhi, in his turn, also talked about the debates and differences of opinions between Ambedkar and Gandhi, but also

mentioned the things that they agreed on. He said, 'Freedom of speech, freedom to believe, freedom to be an atheist, to believe in non-violence; these were certain things that both of them would not compromise.' Reflecting on the increase in violence today in the country, Rajmohan Gandhi pointed out that Ambedkar always spoke about asserting oneself through struggle, debate, and fighting, and not through the 'use of lathis and guns, but through nonviolent modes.'

Applauding the success of Samas in bringing together people with different ideas and opinions under one roof, he said, 'Wherever the spirits of Gandhi and Ambedkar are, they must be celebrating today.' He added that such events, which bring together people with diverse ideas, are very crucial, especially in the current political scenario where people are being attacked and killed for differing views.

Samas, by having both Ambedkarite and Gandhian figures addressing the gathering from the same platform, succeeded in reminding us of India's rich history of respecting differences in opinions and ideas, the legacy of nurturing the diversity in our country.

Dakshinayan Abhiyan was founded by Ganesh Devy, a linguist scholar and an activist, in the wake of the killings of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar, activist Govind Pansare, and scholar M.M. Kalburgi. All three of them, through their scholarship and activism, opposed the communal and sectarian politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and its think tanks, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Sangh Parivar.

Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi's murders have been strongly

condemned by writers, activists, scholars and artists from across the country. They have joined together to resist these attacks on the freedom of speech and expression. Even as these protests have been going on, Gauri Lankesh, an activist-journalist in Karnataka—she was actively involved in organising protests against these political murders, and the failure of the police in nabbing the perpetrators in all the three cases—was assassinated on 5 September 2017. Gauri's murder added to the sense of urgency among citizens, who saw these killings as a threat to democracy and the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. Protesting the killings, a number of protest marches and events are being organised across the country.

These political murders are not merely the killings of people who dared to oppose and question the ideology of the ruling government. They are also an attack on the constitutional values, secular ideology and the democratic fabric of this country that Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Gauri represented and strove to protect. They nurtured the democratic belief system which stood directly in opposition to that of the Sangh Parivar. They did not believe in uniformity but in diversity, they struggled to provoke and enable the oppressed to think and question. And it is this, the ability to think, to question and dissent, that is perceived as a threat by the fundamentalist right wing advocates.

Samas, in bringing the Ambedkarite and Gandhian politics in dialogue with each other, has given birth to a space for dialogue at a time when such spaces are becoming increasingly scarce, making it all the more significant. The question that we should be asking now is, how do we create more such spaces?

Onus is on CPI(M) to Put an End to Competitive Political Violence in Kerala

Apoorvanand

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) needs to answer the charge of its involvement in the murder of S.P. Shuaib, a 30-year-old man, also a youth leader of the Congress party in Kannur. Merely condemning it and claiming that it had nothing to do with the killing does not wash. It will have to face the question raised by Shuaib's father, Muhammad, 'Why did they kill my son over a destroyed flag in a school? What crime did my son do to die with 37 wounds on his legs?'

Who is this 'they' Muhammad is talking about? Is it true that a band of CPI(M) workers faced resistance from Shuaib and his party colleagues when the office of the Congress was raided by it? Is the media lying when it reports that following the scuffle, CPI(M) workers took out a violent procession predicting death for Shuaib? Is it only a coincidence that after this open threat, Shuaib was attacked and hacked to death?

The CPI(M) knows that what it is saying now is simply not true. Kannur has been a battlefield in Kerala with a unique history of inter-party rivalry, fought with all kinds of weapons. Crude bombs, swords, machetes and guns are freely used. The idea is not merely to kill, but to prolong the death of the enemy and make it painful.

In Kannur, political organisations have practised and mastered the art of murder. They make a spectacle of it. Each act of murder is carried out in a manner so as to ensure

that it remains etched in collective memory, and recalled by succeeding generations. The aim is to show how brutal the killing can be and why the killer needs to be feared. Probably, the idea is to unleash brutality to establish supremacy. But history shows that instead of acting as a deterrent, brutality has produced the same level of brutality from the other side. Killings have been responded to by killings and this has become an endless saga.

It is a fact that members of both the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as well as the CPI(M) have been murdered. Other parties are also involved in this game of death. The CPI(M) has demanded a ban on the Popular Front of India (PFI), blaming it for violence. But statistics show that it is mainly a battle of supremacy between the RSS and the CPI(M). Both are ruthlessly causing the death of their members to fulfil the ambitions of their party bosses.

All organisations—starting with the CPI(M) and the RSS—must first acknowledge that they have been involved in this competitive violence. This was recognised indirectly when a peace meeting was called by none other than Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The collector of Kannur also held a peace meeting where all parties promised to eschew violence. Where was the need to take such a pledge if the CPI(M) has never taken recourse to murderous violence?

A report by Firstpost says:

The CPM activists, who traditionally nurse hostility against workers of rival parties, have been trying to settle scores every time the party comes to power. Political analysts say this is because they are confident that the party-led governments will protect them. An analysis of the official statistics related to the incidents of political violence since 1991 obtained from the Kannur district police headquarters show an increase in the reported cases of political violence during every term of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government led by the CPM compared to that of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

For example, the number of political murders went up from a mere eight, during the 1991–96 term of the UDF government, to 28 during the 1996–2001 when LDF was in power. The number of murders came down to six during the subsequent term of the UDF government from 2001 to 2006. This shot up to 27 during the 2006–11 LDF term and came down to 11 during the last UDF government term.

Will the CPI(M) face these facts?

It has also been noted that political parties, CPI(M) included, hire professional criminals to settle scores with rivals. They can then claim that it was a criminal act and the party had no involvement in it. This is clever but cowardly. The RSS has also been found indulging in the same practice.

There was a time when the CPI(M) looked invincible in West Bengal. It practised and cultivated a political culture of violence, not only to intimidate its rivals like the Trinamool Congress but also its partners. I remember my conversation with the late A.B Bardhan, then the general secretary of the Communist Party of India, after the CPI(M) and state government sponsored violence in Singur and Nandigram. We were pleading with him to listen to his state unit and come out of the Left Front to oppose this violence. He agreed that the CPI(M) was behind it and added that his party workers had also braved violence from their 'big brother,' but he refused to talk about it publicly. The question of criticising it openly did not arise, he said.

We also remember the then

CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat's statement. Justifying the violence, he said that such had been the political culture of the state that he and his party were helpless and had no option but to use it to maintain their hold on the state. We also recall the infamous call of another CPI(M) leader, Brinda Karat, who said that the opponents have to be given *dam dam dawai*. This was an open call to beat up party rivals.

This arrogance could not save the CPI(M) in West Bengal, where power had become a second name for the party. The TMC and the Bharatiya Janata Party picked this up from CPI(M) very fast and both are now masters of the game. The CPI(M) seems to have fallen into an abyss and is finding it difficult to emerge from it.

Fortunately, Kerala has been

different, even for the CPI(M). By voting out parties from power at regular intervals, the people of the state have not allowed them to be arrogant. There is a lot that CPI(M) can be praised for in the state, but for its desire to dominate all aspects of life and taking recourse to violence.

The CPI(M) must understand—as should other organisations—that violence legitimises violence. You cannot criticise the violence of your rival if you yourself practise it. By eliminating its opponents in Kannur, by murdering them, the CPI(M) can no longer claim political superiority. It is not using party ideology but mastery of weapons to ensure the loyalty of the people. These are the same weapons that its rivals are using. So, where is its politics?

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Devastation Caused by Alcohol Should Receive Serious Attention

Bharat Dogra

The many-sided devastation of health and social relations as well as the huge number of injuries and violent episodes caused by alcohol consumption and addiction, as also the huge economic and ecological costs associated with this have been well documented at the world level. In developing countries like India there are three factors that accentuate this loss. Firstly, many of the families affected are already so poor or economically stressed that the recurring expenditure on liquor simply ruins them. Secondly, the poor availability of medical and de-addiction facilities means that the

way out of this morass is available to only a few who need this desperately. Thirdly, the gender equation is such that despite very low levels of liquor consumption by women, it is women and children who end up bearing the heaviest burden of increasing liquor consumption in terms of denial of basic needs and increasing domestic and sexual violence.

It is in this context that the demands for curbs on increasing liquor sale and consumption have been raised by several anti-liquor movements in various parts of India, particularly rural India. These

include social movements with a larger agenda which have also felt the need for fighting liquor related problems and also very specific anti-liquor movements focusing mainly or only on this issue. Women have played the most important role in most of these movements and have brought a strong sense of urgency and passion into these movements. One important specific demand of several of these movements has been to remove the liquor vend or shop from their village so that easy availability of liquor very near to the village can be checked.

While most governments have paid lip sympathy to anti-liquor sentiments, in reality most governments have been happy to collect their massive earnings from sale of liquor. In addition, several politicians have close links with liquor mafias and some of them have themselves entered liquor production and trade. Despite all this, several governments have been forced to respond to growing public sentiments against liquor, particularly in the context of women voters. They have responded to the anti-liquor sentiments of people, particularly women, in various ways. Prohibition has been in existence in Gujarat for a very long time and was more recently introduced in Bihar. Tamil Nadu and Kerala are likely to move towards phased prohibition. Other state governments have agreed at times to removing liquor vends in specific areas if certain conditions such as opposition by more than 50 percent local population are satisfied and proved. Others have withdrawn specific vends following opposition.

On the whole, however, these official responses have been inadequate and the massive, many-sided damage caused by alcohol has been increasing. The time has now come to give much more serious attention to this issue. On the one hand, well planned government policies keeping in view local conditions are needed, and on the other hand there is even greater need for sustained public campaigns against liquor on a continuing basis involving respected community leaders, with women playing a leading role.

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Press Release

It's Not the Question of EVMs Alone But Democracy Is at Stake : Unanimous Call for #Back2Ballot

New Delhi, February 19: 'Today it is no more the question of going back to ballot papers in elections, but it's a must that 2019 elections be conducted through the ballot papers. EVM machines are destroying the trust between the voter and the democratic system. Democracy is too precious to be left to machines. To ensure the democratic nature of the country, the 2019 election should be done through the ballot system', said Manish Tiwari, spokesperson, Indian National Congress. He was speaking at a meeting organised by Anhad, CPA, Delhi Solidarity Group, National Alliance of People's Movements, Peace and Sabka Bharat on the question of EVMs in elections, held at the Constitution Club of India. Other prominent political leaders and intellectuals who were present and who spoke at the meeting included Ali Anwar (MP, Rajya Sabha), Amarjeet Kaur (CPI), D.P. Tripathi (NCP), Dr. Sunilam (Ex-MLA, National Convener, NAPM), Gauhar Raza (scientist), Kavita Krishnan [CPI(ML)], Kunwar Danish Ali (JDS), Naval Kishore Yadav (RJD), Nikhil Dey (MKSS), Nilotpal Basu (CPM), Ravi Verma (SP), S. Srinath (expert), Saurabh Bhardwaj (AAP), Uvesh Mallik (Advocate) and Seema Mustafa (senior journalist).

'JD(S) will not contest the Karnataka Assembly elections later this year, if VVPAT are not counted 100% and that's a decision we have made', stated Danish Ali, the

spokesperson of JD(S). He further added that there is an atmosphere being created through television studios that one nation and one election should be brought in because multiple elections hamper development work. This completely unfounded view is being promoted by an organised lobby and its aim is to pave way for one party and one leader rule, a dangerous trend for the nation.

The process of elections should be something the citizens of a country have complete faith in. EVM machines have been found to be faulty innumerable times; the democratic nature of the country is challenged every time an EVM machine fails. Given the fact that powerful democracies across the country have chosen to stay with the ballot system, India should rid itself of the many complications of the EVM system and simplify its procedures. 'The electoral process should be so simple that anyone and everyone is able to vote and is also aware of the entire process of elections. The process of voting should be simplified to the bare minimum. In a democracy, every vote should be accounted for and there should be no talks of average numbers and/or rounding off of votes,' said Kavita Krishnan of CPI-ML. Mr Nilotpal Basu (CPM) reiterated the need to use the VVPAT system and make the entire process as transparent as possible, keeping in mind the satisfaction of the voter.

It is important to continue the debate in India because if EVMs are not tamper-proof, it makes the vote valueless, endangering Indian democracy. Furthermore, it is important to take this issue ahead from the stage of a debate; it is the responsibility of all political parties, civil bodies and the public to carry it forward and turn it into a movement to demand the return of the ballot system. Gauhar Raza, the well-known scientist and film maker, also made an impassioned plea for the ballot system: 'The constitution gave us the right to vote and it gave that right to every single citizen. That is commendable because other countries had to fight to achieve it, our country adopted universal suffrage right at the start. The tampering of EVM machines is an attack on our right to choose and our right to vote. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has stated 6 technical ways which prevent it from being tampered with, but there is no machine in this world that is impenetrable. That is the driving factor in the universal rejection of EVM machines.'

What is even more important is to demand that the ECI dive head first into electoral reforms. The Commission is losing its credibility as it continues to deny that EVM machines can be tampered with. In the wards where the EVM machines had been tampered with, the ECI made no outright moves to penalise those who manipulated the system. Ankit Lal of Aam Aadmi Party added that EVM machines are produced by companies like the ECIL and the BEL, and these companies are incapable of maintaining the machines on their own; therein lies the problem because they have to hire external technicians, train them and outsource the task of maintaining the

machines to them. In the countless number of technicians they hire locally, what is the guarantee that they are free from being politically manipulated?

The need for the ballot system stems from the fact that voters can physically witness their vote being submitted; the chance of the votes being tampered with are minimum as the entire process is very simple and there can be no glitches. The only concern here, as Mr Sunilam (Ex MLA and National Convener, NAPM) pointed out, will be that the election process will have to be extended by a few more days. For clean and transparent elections, surely this minor delay can be undertaken and managed.

S. Srinath from Karnataka and Yogesh Malik from Gujarat both presented detailed accounts of tampering and of voting fraud, and also of their efforts to complain to the Election Commission and judiciary and seek justice, but unfortunately in the name of the sanctity of the election process they couldn't make any headway. ECI is not sacrosanct and influence proof from those in power.

Amarjeet Kaur of CPI and Nikhil Dey of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan said that unless every single voter is confident about their vote and its destination in the counting process, democracy will have failed. To ensure the same, we have to go back to the ballot system. Political parties should have raised commotion about electoral reforms in 2014 itself, no one did so, and thereby they failed in their duty to change the system for the better. To make sure that the country doesn't veer towards fascism, people have to be convinced that the electoral

process is foolproof and that their voices matter. That faith has to be rebuilt and enabled, and for that the ballot system is the most appropriate.

In the light of the presentations made and similar opinions and concerns expressed by all the leaders of political parties and eminent members of civil society present at the meeting, all those unanimously agreed that it's high time the ECI took urgent action to restore faith in the election process. This can't be left to machines; the only way it can be done is by ensuring that the 2019 elections and for that matter every election in this country from the local self-government elections to the national election be held on ballots. For this, a citizens' movement is needed today, and this can only be achieved if everyone joins in.

Anhad, CPA, Delhi Solidarity Group, National Alliance of People's Movements, Peace, Sabka Bharat

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