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## Alarm Bells Sound Again

S.Viswam

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By-election results are seldom accurate barometers of political realities. They do not generally tend to overthrow elected or established governments. It would be imprudent if not downright unwise, therefore, to read too much political meaning into the outcome of the four by-elections in four states last week. The results do provide an opportunity to the political parties to analyse the voting patterns critically in order to update their respective databanks and to shore up their assessments of their following or lack of it in specific assembly or Lok Sabha constituencies. Team Hazare in particular needs to resist the temptation to over-evaluate the popular response on the basis of the voting trends since it will again be imprudent to conclude that the results reflect the popular mood in regard to the burning issue of corruption in the nation. Actually, for serious students of Indian elections, the outcome may not have come as a surprise because the results can be seen to reflect by and large the prevailing popular mood in the four constituencies which was largely adversarial to the ruling dispensations.

Nonetheless, it would also be imprudent for the ruling United

Progressive Alliance as a whole if not the specific ruling cliques in the four states where the by-elections were held to dismiss the results, or the implications, lightly or as of little consequence. That the Congress at least is not doing so can be inferred from Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's reaction to the setback suffered by his party in all the four constituencies. "The party's loss," he has said, "is always a sad thing. And we shall have to analyse why we have lost." Quite so. The Congress has good reason to feel that the results are saddening. For the Congress to fare so badly as to lose deposits is sad enough, but to lose even in places it has every reason to win is heart-breaking for its workers. Voters in Hissar were certainly swayed in some measure to the anti-Congress campaign of Team Hazare. In other constituencies, the Congress setback can be attributed to purely local influences, like that in Khadakwasla where the Congress and the NCP, who are partners in government chose to sabotage each other's electoral fortunes at the hustings. In Banasawada, where the Telengana issue dominated the run up to the by-poll, a Congress win would have been surprising. The

## Movement Going Astray

Kuldip Nayar

Janata Dal(United) maintained its lucky streak demonstrated in the last Assembly polls where Chief Minister Nitish Kumar crushed the Congress-RJD opposition.

Had the Congress managed to register at least one triumph, the totality of the rout suffered by it would have been less intense. But since the party has been trounced badly, the lessons it needs to learn are that much harsher. For one thing, the Congress needs to note that every single political development in the country in the last two years has left impressions adverse to it. This has been so specially after UPA II took over for its second innings. Leave alone the corruption issue, which, of course, is the common fodder for all its opponents, there are other issues that do not flatter the Congress-UPA governance record. Inflation is already casting a grim shadow over Pranab Mukerjee's pre-budget exercises. Agitations are building up over price rises. Good governance is at a discount but alarmingly the Cabinet is acting like a divided house. Ministers do not see eye to eye with one another and with the Prime Minister who, poor man, seems isolated.

Hard days are ahead of the UPA, no doubt. A word to the wise is enough, it is said. With alarm bells sounding everywhere, the Congress must be expected to set about earnestly and pronto to re-galvanise the moribund party. We have cautioned the Congress often earlier and do so again to digress from its current suicidal path and regain its cohesiveness. A word to Team Hazare is also in order. Encouraged by the Hissar poll outcome, its members have

It is always a problem for the people's movement to stay within the contours of its original purpose. Too many hands join to bask in the glory and like too many cooks, they spoil the broth. I had such an apprehension when Anna Hazare's stir against corruption, more specifically for the appointment of Lokpal (ombudsman) to eliminate it, began.

So many marches ended at the Jantar Mantar at New Delhi and so many people sat on hunger strike at the same place. But nothing happened beyond creating a ripple or two. Suddenly, Anna's call brought thousands of people on the streets. He gave a face to the general resentment which needed ventilation. The nation got a cause.

I wish the movement had stayed on course. It was a call against corruption and was apolitical. In fact, intellectuals from different backgrounds and leaders from different movements came on one platform and they had just one purpose before them: to fight against corruption. A few dissenting voices were rudely brushed aside because they were seen raising doubts expressed about the movement. The government was forced to invite Anna to discuss his suggestions to curb corruption. After nine rounds of talks, the two found that they were not on the same page. Both went their own way but promised that the end result, elimination of corruption, would be met.

The government and the ruling Congress party gave an undertaking that the Lokpal bill would be stricter

than Anna's demands. People stayed behind him because as a Gandhian he led an austere, simple life and spoke about values, an idiom which the political parties had forsaken. He did prick the nation's conscience which was appalled over the system that seethed with corruption. Even when Anna praised Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, he was forgiven because the people's eyes were fixed only on the agenda of eliminating corruption. He too realized his make and withdrew the remark. This once again underlined point that the movement was meant only for eliminating corruption.

The BJP-cum-RSS owned him and gave him all the support through its cadres and leaders. Liberals did not like it. The Congress indulged in "we-told-you-so" attitude. Still Anna's candid statement that if the BJP or the RSS supported him, it did not mean that he had asked them for support allayed most fears on his tilt towards the saffron brigade. Both the BJP and the RSS did not like this but continued their support. Yet the movement stayed on course, more or less apolitical.

I think that the biggest mistake was made when Anna and his 26-member team announced that they would oppose the Congress candidate in the Hissar by-election. I did not know till then that Arvind Kejriwal, the right hand man of Anna, was from Hissar. There would have been some kind of defence if they had said that corrupt candidates should be defeated. In fact, the call was to defeat the Congress candidate. An apolitical body began to acquire

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political colour. The complexion changed from then onward.

Where it was said that the persons from different backgrounds had come together on one platform to fight against corruption, it began a trend of thought whether most of them were pursuing their own agenda. This impression got strengthened when Prashant Bhushan made certain remarks on Kashmir. I am not commenting on their merit but I am surprised that he made them when as Anna's top man he had to be discreet.

This unnecessarily clouded the real purpose. I condemn the physical attacks on him. This only indicates how the society is increasingly taken over by lumpen elements. Yet his remarks were bound to take away attention from Anna's original purpose to fight against corruption because they were political. It was not surprising, the BJP jumping into the arena and pointing towards the L.K. Advani's rath yatra against corruption as if his was the real movement. Even former Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa was mildly criticised.

I was not surprised to find the Congress making snide remarks. The party is so corrupt from top to bottom, to use its spokesman's words against Anna that anything derisive against the movement is to its liking. I still hope that parliament's Standing Committee, going through the exercise of drafting a Lokpal bill, may ultimately come out with a bill which would aim at silencing the critics and meet Anna's aspirations.

The problem with the two main political parties, the Congress and the BJP, is that both of them are corrupt and raise dust all the time to cloud the real issue. Their dishonesty in governance and the scams during

their regimes are before the people to see. My worry is that Anna's platform which had opened a window of opportunity and hope is beginning to shake. And there are doubts about its credentials.

The two members, Rajinder Singh and P.V. Rajagopal, who have dissociated from Anna's team, are well respected. They found the original purpose of fighting against corruption without being political going awry. This is where persons like Medha Patkar and Swami Agnivesh, however critical, have to intervene to reassemble the elements which met first under the leadership of Anna to draft the Lokpal bill. At that meeting, it was enunciated many a time that the movement would not resile from its determination to stay away from politics.

People are still awaiting the dust to settle down so that the campaign to eliminate corruption has the centre-stage once again. Anna or his team cannot change the goalpost because they got the public support on that understanding. Going to UP to oppose the Congress or to even cleanse politics will be a mistake. Politics cannot be cleaned if the platform constituted to cleanse it gets politicized itself.

An alternative to the Congress and the BJP is needed. But first thing first. Anna and his team have to have parliament pass the Lokpal bill which retains most of the things demanded: accountability of the judiciary, control over the Central Bureau of investigation (CBI), Enforcement Directorate and other vigilance bodies and the supervision of staff below the under secretary. As days go by, Anna and his shriveling team may be more and more vilified. Kejeriwal has been attacked. Such instances can increase to meet the

anti-movement elements. The team has to adhere to the original purpose.

As for Anna, I draw his attention to the words recorded about Isaac Newton: "He lived the life of a solitary, and like all men who are occupied with profound meditation, he acted strangely. Sometimes, in getting out of bed, an idea would come to him, and he would sit on the edge of the bed, half dressed, for hours at a time."

*(Continued from Page 2)*

begun challenging the Congress to a duel in the coming UP elections if the party does not pass the Jan Lokpal Bill in Parliament's winter session. Are such intimidatory tactics really necessary? Anna Hazare has assurances from the government's top echelons that every attempt will be made to push through the enactment. It is not that we are opposed to the Jan Lokpal Bill or supportive of any dilatory strategies by officialdom. The draft bills are being considered by the Standing Committee relating to the legislation. Should we not wait for the process to conclude? The government is currently on test. If it fails the test, then it would deserve punishment. But Team Hazare's latest strategy, of playing politics in and with UP elections, suggests that the government has already been tried and held guilty!

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# Islam and Family Planning

**Asghar Ali Engineer**

Many people, especially women, ask me if family planning is permissible in Islam. They say the imams and ulama say Qur'an prohibits family planning and quote a verse which says, "And kill not your children for fear of poverty – We provide for them and for you. Surely the killing of them is a great wrong." (17:31). In no way this verse refers to family planning because it is talking of 'killing' and you kill one who exists. No law in the world will permit killing one who is already born and hence Qur'an rightly condemns killing of children.

Some people suggest that it refers to the practice of burying the girl child alive and when asked they would say we cannot provide for them and hence Allah says We provide for them and for you. But, as Imam Razi suggests it refers to both male and female children being kept ignorant. Thus killing mind is as bad as killing the body. The word used here is 'awlad' i.e. children which include both male as well as female - and not only female.

Imam Razi's suggestion seems to be quite reasonable and in fact large family means children cannot be properly educated by poor parents and hence parents kill them mentally by keeping them ignorant. They cannot even clothe them properly nor can provide proper space for living. In such circumstances one cannot have good quality Muslims and mere quantity does not matter much. Better quality is more desirable than mere quantity.

First of all we should understand that in those days the problem of family planning did not exist nor that of population control. It is very much modern problem which has arisen in nation states. Most of the nation states in third world do not have economic means to support large populations and when we say supporting large population it does not mean only feeding it but it also includes to educate them and also to provide proper health services. These are basic duties of modern nation states.

In fact in view of paucity of resources it has become necessary to adopt family planning. When Qur'an was being revealed there were neither any properly organized state nor education or health services being provided by any state agency. It is important to note that Qur'an which shows eight ways to spend zakat, does not include education or health which is so essential for the state to provide today. Thus what Imam Razi suggests is not only very correct and also enhances importance of family planning in the modern times as small family can support better education and health services.

It would be interesting to note that as for verse 4:3 (which is used by Muslims for justification of polygamy) Imam Shafi'I interprets it rather differently. It ends with the words *alla ta'ulu* which is generally translated as 'you may not do injustice' i.e. do not marry more than one so that you may not do injustice. But Imam Shafi'I renders it as 'so

that you do not have large family'. Qur'an has already mentioned that 'if you fear injustice then marry only one' and so there was no need to repeat it. That is why Imam Shafi'I feels it should be translated as 'so that you do not have large family'.

It can be seen that in understanding Qur'an even very eminent imams and great scholars differed from each other. One should not impose one single meaning of a verse on all Muslims. It could be interpreted differently by different people in their own context and circumstances. Family planning being a modern need one should not reject it out of hand and quote Qur'anic verses out of context.

In fact family planning does not mean killing children after they are born but to plan birth of children in a way that parents can bear all the expenses for their education, health, living space, etc. in a proper manner. Qur'an also suggests that a child be suckled at least for two years and it is well known that as long as mother suckles she would not conceive. Thus indirectly Qur'an also suggests spacing of a child.

Even in hadith literature we find that the Prophet (PBUH) permitted prevention of conceiving in certain circumstances. When a person asked Prophet for permission for 'azl' (coitus interruptus) as he was going for a long journey along with his wife and he did not want his wife to conceive while travelling the Messenger of Allah allowed him. In those days 'azl' was the

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**Memorandum on the draft National Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2011,  
submitted by the Socialist Party(India) in response to the advertisement  
by Bharatiya Sansad, Lok Sabha Sachivalaya, New Delhi :**

Socialist party welcomes the initiative taken by Shri Jairam Ramesh, Minister for Rural Development, initiating a national debate on a very vital and sensitive issue of land acquisition.

The party puts forth main points for discussion as follows -

1) In the first para of his foreword, the minister has stated, "Infrastructure across the country must expand rapidly. Industrialisation, especially based on manufacturing has also to accelerate. Urbanisation is inevitable. Land is an essential requirement for all these processes."

Our reflections on this are: (a) land has been viewed only as a requirement for 'industrialisation, and urbanisation'. Significant omissions are that the land is a requirement for agriculture, fishing (coastal land), mining and forest development. In a balanced development of the country, all these occupations must be given due importance. (b) 'Land' should not be viewed only as a topographical surface. Water, minerals and forest potential are ingredient parts of it. So while considering its use for putting up factories or other urban structures, care has to be taken that very scarce and valuable resources like water, minerals, etc. are not wasted. (c) Viewing land as just a marketable commodity is also not proper and wise. Centuries' old Commons Rights of the communities residing on or besides various pieces of land should also be honoured and protected. The community and

particularly poorer sections amongst them are very much dependent on those common rights for their livelihood and wellbeing. As it is, these sections are being deprived of so many of their natural rights. Therefore, great care and caution be exercised before allowing the powerful sections to acquire that scarce natural resource. It is not renewable. Once it is appropriated for one purpose, it gets lost forever for other desirable purposes.

2) It is to be borne in mind that the industrialization and urbanization so far has led to a very imbalanced development of our nation. While a few centres are overcrowded, causing great harm to the environment and general health and hygiene of the people residing there, large tracts of our country are left devoid of minimum infrastructure facilities required by any civil society. There is great migration from the countryside to the select urban centres, causing so many social evils and political conflicts.

3) Pattern of industrialization, which is being encouraged by our rulers today, should also be put to incisive scrutiny. The experience of the last two decades is that the industrialization that has taken place has contributed significantly to enhancing so-called growth rate in GDP, but has failed in creating employment opportunities for the teeming millions. The products are more or less such as beyond reach of the average individual or family. They cater to the demands of a handful of affluent sections of

society. Instead of aping the model of development of the few highly rich countries, we would do well to reconsider the whole development approach and reformulate development that would encourage diffused and decentralized pattern of industrialization besides giving due importance to food security, maximization of employment opportunities.

Some may feel that this is out of the purview of the present exercise. But we are drawing attention of the Standing Committee attached to the Department of Rural Development to this point as a background to our main suggestion.

4) Enacting laws to add to the armoury of the Central Government can have another undesirable fall-out. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution were heralded as bold step in strengthening the Panchayat Raj institutions so that the administration would be attuned to the needs and aspirations of the people residing in rural areas. But the experience so far is that neither the Central nor the State Governments are loosening their grip over the administration. It has been provided in Art.347 that the Gram Sabha would be entitled to take decisions regarding the use of land and other natural resources within its area. However, we find that number of decisions are taken by the Central or State governments, without consulting, and at times even by overriding the decisions of those bodies. Apart from defeating the intentions behind

those Constitutional amendments, the decisions taken at the top tend to be exploitative of the poor villagers. Therefore, it would be better not to enact laws which would give powers to the Central/State governments. Land acquisition for genuinely public purposes would certainly be welcome by the PR institutions and uncooperative owners of land would have to bow before the collective wishes of the people in the surrounding areas. Democratic functioning would certainly help find out suitable solutions. Therefore, we submit that while repealing the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894, a scheme be devised so that the PR institutions would be able to play meaningful role in that process.

5) Our main suggestion is that A National Commission to formulate a comprehensive Land Use Policy for the next century or so. It may be asked to submit its recommendations within a period of two years or so. For their benefit and guidance, there is a Water Use policy adopted by the Government of India about a decade back. Claims of agriculture, forestry, fishing and Commons rights, be given due importance along with industrialisation and urbanization.

We wish to draw attention to the plight of the nomadic tribes and such other deprived sections who have no homestead land. They have been arguing that, while authorities had accorded top priority to the rehabilitation of the oustees from Pakistan or Bangladesh, their rehabilitation is not entering into the minds of the authorities as also of other vocal sections of society. Does not equity demand that the claims of these sections, who had been deprived of basic amenities for centuries together, be given homestead lands on priority basis?

We propose that the Land Use Policy should incorporate the following priority list:

- a) Residential needs of the deprived sections be met first.
- b) Rational allocation of lands for other villagers and poorer sections in urban areas be incorporated in the development plans of all local authorities.
- c) Requirements of agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining be taken care of.
- d) Requirements of genuine public purpose. Preference must be given to infrastructure facilities required in the rural areas.
- e) Industrialisation to be located preferably in underdeveloped areas.

**Bhai Vaidya**  
President

Use of Land Acquisition Act, 1894 be put in suspended animation for the period required by the proposed National Commission on Land Use. So also all other similar laws alluded to by the honourable minister in his foreword.

6) We also suggest that in any scheme of land transfer or coercive acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement must be mandatorily made as a condition precedent to the transfer of land and implementation of the project in question.

7) We reserve our right to make suggestions about various provisions made in the said Draft Bill a little later.

**Pannalal Surana**  
Chairman, Parliamentary board

**Socialist Party (India)**

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## Demand for International Price Control on Oil

At the Paris meeting of G20 Finance Ministers on 16th October. 2011, Shri Pranab Mukherji, the Finance Minister of India, forcefully said that prices of petroleum oil must be brought under control because violent increases in it were adding fuel to inflation. The oil-producing countries of West Asia in particular are indulging in a cartel type tactics raising prices of the 'Black gold' at their whim causing discomfort to the whole world, more so to the developing countries. The cost of production could not have increased in such a short spell of time. It is putting all planning of firms and nations in great dislocation. It is their greed that is behind this

phenomenon. The inflation that is ignited by such increases is taking a heavy toll on the poor and middle classes. Shri Mukherji's demand for international control on oil prices, though made belatedly, is totally justified.

A few days back, our Prime minister, while addressing the U.N. General Assembly, had given vent to his unhappiness at violent ups and downs in international financial transactions. Developing countries like India are made to suffer for no fault of theirs. Developed countries like the US and EU should take steps to discipline their financial tycoons, he suggested. Are protagonists of the

free trade all over the world listening to these cries? It is obvious that the captains of money and finance are indulging in reckless activities to extract more and more profits for themselves. They are just not bothered about the plight of the less wealthy sections of society in the developing countries. Their leadership is not at all beneficial to the latter. Hence the need for putting some controls on oil prices as also international finance capital.

Capitalism is failing humanity. It never bothers about equity and wellbeing of the common people. Then why should the latter be thrown to vagaries of the whims of the former? Humanity in general and developing countries in particular will have to resort to rational and equitable planning of economy. It does not mean adopting 'command-and-obey' type of Soviet model. With the progress made in democratizing decision-making processes, the lacuna in it must be effectively plugged. Decision-making bodies must be made accountable to the people. Great progress achieved in Information Technology can be harnessed meaningfully for that. People will have to be more vigilant. They should rid themselves of the fear of freedom. They should demand transparency in functioning of the decision-making and implementing authorities. Eternal vigilance is the price of wellbeing and equitable development. Young people should take lead in organizing the masses, not in the anarchical manner, as is happening on the Wall Street of New York and some European countries, but on the basis of well-defined policies aimed at balanced and equitable development and management of economy.

–Pannalal Surana

## Repeal AFSPA Now!

May 22, 1958 Armed Forces Special Powers Act, a colonial legacy used against Mahatma Gandhi, was promulgated initially in the Naga areas of Assam (later divided between 4 states) and later in Mizoram, initially in parts of Manipur and later in all of Manipur. The Ordinance after a brief discussion in the Parliament was endorsed and got the status of Act on August 18, 1958, despite stiff resistance from various quarters who challenged it as a martial and draconian law. Since then it has been in force in one part or the other of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir (since 1991). Even though continuation of the 'disturbed area' status under the AFSPA in many part of the country is illegal in view of the violation of the mandatory six monthly periodic review directed by Supreme Court in its 1997 Judgement.

AFSPA continues to be the most potent repressive tool of the Indian state that empowers even a non commissioned officer of the armed forces of union to kill on mere suspicion and provide legal immunity from prosecution, thereby causing untold misery and agony among the peoples of the affected regions. The imposition of AFSPA is synonymous to heavy militarisation in these states leading to gross civil and political rights violations including enforced disappearances, extra-judicial execution, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, arbitrary arrest and detention. All this together has meant severe economic, social

and cultural cost including erosion of civil administration, lack of access to education, basic health care, destruction of properties and sources of livelihood, and environmental destruction and 'normal' functioning of democratic institutions in these areas.

The continued and selective use of AFSPA against communities who have been demanding self-determinations rights is a cause of worry in the context of the increasing militarization of the society in the sub-continent especially after 9/11 and the growing communalisation of the polity in India as a whole and suppression of people's democratic rights in the name of national security.

This law is more draconian than its predecessor ordinance used by the British to suppress the Quit India Movement. In the pretext of controlling insurgency, this Act has only intensified the insurgency in the region and legitimised thousands of gross human rights violations like rape, torture, murder and "disappearances" of innocent people in the North East and J&K. The democratic movements in the North East and J&K have consistently demanded the repeal of the Act and demilitarisation for decades.

Continuing with our efforts for establishing the democratic values in the society and in solidarity with the struggles of democratic movements of North East and J&K National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) calls upon the Government of India :

1. To repeal immediately :
  - The Armed Forces (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur,

Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) Special Powers Act, 1958 (as amended in 1972), and

- The Jammu and Kashmir Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1990
2. To refrain from inserting any part of the Acts into any other legislation granting unbridled powers to the armed forces of the union or the State police.
  3. Immediately work out and announce a phased, time-bound demilitarisation plan to withdraw the Army and other para military forces from internal security duties in NE States and J&K.

It needs to be noted that AFSPA is not only opposed by the movement groups and the rights bodies but also by the Government's own commissions and committees appointed to look into the matter. For example, the Committee to Review the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, headed by Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy in 2005, the Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Dr. Veerappan Moily in 2007 and several others have recommended damned the use of AFSPA and demanded immediate measures towards withdrawal from civil areas. Internationally, the UN bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the U N High Commissioner for Human Rights and recently the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders have consistently urged for its repeal. However, all these have gone to the deaf ears of the Government.

Along with the struggles of millions of people against the militarisation and AFSPA, the hunger fast of Irom Sharmila Chanu

has crossed 10 years. She has been force fed through her nose by the Government, arrested with charges for attempt to commit suicide, criminalised as a high security prisoner, denying her access to family, friends, supporters and the media. It is a shame that in this land of Gandhi, a non-violent protester has been subjected to such humiliation for more than ten years. Even as she continues her struggle along with many in the NE and J&K, we appeal to our comrades in human rights groups and people's movements across the country to demand for repeal of AFSPA along with other draconian laws like UAPA, MCOCA, CSPA

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#### ***(Continued from Page 4)***

only known method for planning of birth of a child. Today there are several methods available like use of condoms.

Imam Ghazzali, a very eminent theologian and philosopher allows even termination of pregnancy if mother's life is in danger and shows several methods for termination. He even allows termination of pregnancy on health grounds or if mother's beauty is in danger provided it is in consultation with her husband. Some scholars referring to

and others and resist the increasing militarization of democratic spaces.

Continuing with various initiatives NAPM along with many other organizations have launched a three month campaign from October 2 to December 10 for repeal of AFSPA. One of such activities is to collect 10 lakh signatures to be submitted to President of India on December 10th.

Sign up demanding the repeal of AFSPA now, join us !

For details contact or write to [napmindia@napm-india.org](mailto:napmindia@napm-india.org) | 9818905316

the verse 23:14 conclude that one can terminate pregnancy up to three months as Qur'an, in this verse describes stages of development of sperm planted in mother's womb and it takes three months for life to begin.

However, many ulama oppose termination of pregnancy. Whatever the case one cannot declare family planning as prohibited in Islam as it in no way amounts to killing a child already born or even termination of pregnancy but to plan birth of a child by preventing pregnancy for spacing birth of a child according to one's financial resources.

#### **Gujarat SP State Committee**

A meeting of the active workers of Socialist Party(India) in Gujarat State was held on September 12, 2011 in Ahmedabad. Jayanti Panchal and Dhirubhai Patel ( National Treasurer and National Executive Committee Member of the SPI, respectively) participated in the meeting. About 250 workers from 10 districts of Gujarat were there. The meeting elected Gujarat State Committee consisting of 10 members and five permanent invitees with the following office-bearers: 1. P. Chidambaram - President, 2. Shantilal Patel-Vice President, 3. Ravishankar R. Parmar-Vice President, 4. Sanjay G. Vaghela-General Secretary, 5. Anil N. Mehta –Treasurer, 6. Haresh J. Prajapati Secretary, 7. Rajendr B. Joshi- Secretary.



# ‘Occupy Wall Street’ - America’s Primal Scream?

Nicholas D. Kristof

It’s fascinating that many Americans intuitively understood the outrage and frustration that drove Egyptians to protest at Tahrir Square, but don’t comprehend similar resentments that drive disgruntled fellow citizens to “occupy Wall Street”.

There are differences, of course: the New York Police Department isn’t dispatching camels to run down protesters. Americans may feel disenfranchised, but we do live in a democracy, a flawed democracy — which is the best hope for Egypt’s evolution in the coming years.

Yet my interviews with protesters in Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park seemed to rhyme with my interviews in Tahrir earlier this year. There’s a parallel sense that the political/economic system is tilted against the 99 per cent. Al Gore, who supports the Wall Street protests, described them perfectly as a “primal scream of democracy.”

The frustration in America isn’t so much with inequality in the political and legal worlds, as it was in Arab countries, although those are concerns too. Here the critical issue is economic inequity. According to the CIA’s own ranking of countries by income inequality, the United States is more unequal a society than either Tunisia or Egypt.

Three factoids underscore that inequality:

The 400 wealthiest Americans have a greater combined net worth than the bottom 150 million Americans.

The top 1 per cent of Americans possess more wealth than the entire bottom 90 per cent.

In the Bush expansion from 2002 to 2007, 65 per cent of economic gains went to the richest 1 per cent.

As my *Times* colleague Catherine Rampell noted a few days ago, in 1981, the average salary in the securities industry in New York City was twice the average in other private sector jobs. At last count, in 2010, it was 5.5 times as much. (In case you want to gnash your teeth, the average is now \$361,330.) More broadly, there’s a growing sense that lopsided outcomes are a result of tycoons’ manipulating the system, lobbying for loopholes and getting away with murder. Of the 100 highest-paid chief executives in the US in 2010, 25 took home more pay than their company paid in federal corporate income taxes, according to the Institute for Policy Studies.

Living under communism in China made me a fervent enthusiast of capitalism. I believe that over the last couple of centuries banks have enormously raised living standards in the West by allocating capital to more efficient uses. But anyone who believes in markets should be outraged that banks rig the system. The banks have gotten away with privatising profits and socialising risks, and that’s just another form of bank robbery. “We have a catastrophically bad misregulation of the financial system,” said Amar Bhidé, a finance expert at the Fletcher School of Law

and Diplomacy at Tufts University. “Its consequences led to a taint of the entire system of modern enterprise.” Economists used to believe that we had to hold our noses and put up with high inequality as the price of robust growth. But more recent research suggests the opposite: inequality not only stinks, but also damages economies.

In his important new book, *The Darwin Economy*, Robert H. Frank of Cornell University cites a study showing that among 65 industrial nations, the more unequal ones experience slower growth on average. Likewise, individual countries grow more rapidly in periods when incomes are more equal, and slow down when incomes are skewed.

That’s certainly true of the United States. We enjoyed considerable equality from the 1940s through the 1970s, and growth was strong. Since then inequality has surged, and growth has slowed. One reason may be that inequality is linked to financial distress and financial crises. There is mounting evidence that inequality leads to bankruptcies and to financial panics.

I don’t know whether the Occupy Wall Street movement will survive once Zuccotti Park fills with snow and the novelty wears off. But I do hope that the protesters have lofted the issue of inequality onto our national agenda to stay — and to grapple with in the 2012 election year.

—*The New York Times*

**Yusuf Meherally Centre**

*Address by Shri K Sankaranarayanan, Governor of Maharashtra at the Golden Jubilee of the Yusuf Meherally Centre on the occasion of the Yusuf Meherally Memorial Lecture by the Hon'ble Vice President of India at the University of Mumbai's Convocation Hall, Fort Mumbai at 5 pm on Friday, 23 September 2011*

Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri Hamid Ansariji, Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikariji, Chairman, Yusuf Meherally Centre Dr G. G. Parikhji, Shri Gaurang Puthli, distinguished invitees, students, ladies and gentlemen.

I am indeed delighted to associate myself with the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Yusuf Meherally Centre.

The Yusuf Meherally Centre established 50 years ago by the friends and admirers of well known Socialist and Freedom Fighter Yusuf Meherally has rendered invaluable service to the country through its rural development initiatives.

It is gratifying to note that the Centre has been playing an important role in health care, education, empowerment of women and Adivasis, employment generation, etc. in rural areas and I would like to

congratulate all those associated with the Centre on the joyous occasion of its Golden Jubilee.

Socialism in India has a long tradition and represents a significant part of the country's historical political heritage. No one can forget the contribution of eminent Socialist leaders like Jayprakash Narayan, Rammanohar Lohia, Acharya Narendra Deva, J B Kripalani, A K Gopalan, Barrister Nath Pai, S M Joshi, Madhu Dandavate and many others both in our independence struggle and in the parliamentary democracy of India.

The late Shri Yusuf Meherally was one such leaders from the Socialist Movement who left a deep impact on public life with his multifaceted contribution.

Today, that is, September 23, happens to be the 108th birth anniversary of Yusuf Meherally, and I would like to pay my respects to the loving memory of this great

### यूसुफ मेहेरअली : एक क्रान्तिकारी व्यक्तित्व

चंद्रशेखर धर्माधिकारी, अध्यक्ष, युसुफ मेहेरअली सेंटर स्वर्ण जयंती समिती

महामहिम उप-राष्ट्रपतीजी, महामहिम राज्यपालजी, आदरणीय डॉ. जी. जी. परिखजी तथा देवियों और सज्जनों, युसुफ मेहेरअली के इस स्मृति व्याख्यान के प्रसंग पर मैं आप का युसुफ मेहेरअली सेंटर स्वर्ण जयंती समिती और युसुफ मेहेरअली सेंटर की ओर से स्वागत करता हूँ।

भारत के संविधान के उद्देशिका में यह घोषित किया गया है। कि हम भारत के लोग, समाजवादी, धर्मनिरपेक्ष (सेक्युलर) लोकतंत्र की स्थापना करना चाहते हैं। महामहिम उप-राष्ट्रपतीजी मैं युसुफ मेहेरअली को इस भावना की अनोखी मिसाल मानता हूँ।

युसुफ मेहेरअली को कुल 47 साल से भी कम आयु मिली। इन्सान कितना जीता है, इससे भी अधिक महत्वपूर्ण यह है कि वह कैसे जीता है। इन्सान कि जिन्दगी बीते हुए वर्षों से नहीं गिननी चाहिए, बल्कि मृत्यु के बाद भी कितने समय तक उसकी याद बनी रहती है और उसके कार्य की प्रेरणा लोगों के दिलों में कायम रहती है, वही जिन्दगी और आयु का असली मापदण्ड और मानदण्ड है। युसुफ मेहेरअली की यादें, उनके किये गये कामकाज आज भी जीवनदायी प्रेरणा देते हैं। हम जैसों के लिए जिन्होंने 15 साल की उम्र में 1942 के भारत छोड़ो आन्दोलन में हिस्सा लिया था उनके लिए युसुफभाई का जीवन "रोल मॉडेल है।"

युसुफभाई की संघर्ष और रचना इन दोनों क्षेत्रों में अहम् भूमिका रही है। वे जान की परवाह न करते हुए देश के लिए कार्य करनेवाले युवा कार्यकर्ताओं का केडर निर्माण करना चाहते थे। जब कभी कोई उनसे ऑटोग्राफ या सन्देश या स्वाक्षरी माँगने जाता था, तो वे सन्देश में लिखते थे, "लिव डेन्जरसली (साहस से जीयो)।" वे खुद भी ऐसे ही जीये इसलिए उनकी मृत्यु के बाद जयप्रकाश नारायण ने कहा था कि "युसुफ मेहेरअली के समर्पित जीवन का प्रकटीकरण महात्मा गांधी के बाद की सबसे अच्छी अभिव्यक्ति कही जायेगी।" उनका पूरा नाम था 'युसुफ मेहेरअली मर्चेंट', लेकिन मर्चेंट नाम उन्हें सुहाता नहीं था, क्योंकि उससे 'व्यापारी या सौदागर' होने की बू आती थी और वे तो जात-जमात, धर्म या धन्धे के लेबलों पर विश्वास ही नहीं रखते थे, बल्कि ऐसे लेबलों से नफरत करते थे।

"भारत छोड़ो आन्दोलन" में युसुफ मेहेरअली की विशेष भूमिका रही। "क्विट इण्डिया" (भारत छोड़ो) का नारा उनकी ही देन है। इस नारे को महात्मा गांधी ने भी स्वीकार किया था और उनकी सराहना की थी। अंग्रजी के 'क्यू' अक्षर जो "क्विट इण्डिया" का पहला अक्षर है, से युसुफ मेहेरअली ने टाइपिन और बिल्ले बनवाये थे, जो 6 अगस्त,

*Yusuf Meherally Centre*

patriot son of India.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today India stands at the cross road of development. On one hand, the country is poised to emerge as a Super Power that is destined to play a significant role in world affairs. But, on the other hand, we still have a large majority of our people who are have not benefited from the fruits of development.

Our national literacy rate has gone up to 74 per cent and yet we are unable to produce job opportunities for our youths.

Despite best efforts from our planners, we have 41 million educated unemployed youth registered with the Employment Exchanges in our country. Another 260 million people in the age group 15 to 50 are underemployed or unemployed but not registered.

The major challenge before the country is to provide gainful employment or self employment to this large group of people.

We cannot afford to have the jobless growth. We want job intensive growth.

This pool of nearly 300 million people can be turned

into 'demographic dividend' only by providing them skills which are relevant to our economy.

Recently, while addressing the Vice Chancellors of all universities in Maharashtra, I mooted the idea of creating a separate University for Vocational Training. The proposed university would offer short term courses in a large number of trades to our youth, both literate and illiterate. Removing the skill deficit of the country is another challenge which needs to be addressed by our public and private sector organizations.

I do feel that our banks should play an important role in encouraging enterprise and self employment among the youth.

I do hope that the Yusuf Meherally Centre will offer inputs to the planners and government on making our growth inclusive and on generating employment opportunities in rural areas.

I have great expectations from the Centre. I congratulate the Centre on this momentous occasion and wish it Godspeed in its future endeavours.

Jai Hind

1942 की सभा में बेचे गये थे और जिससे आन्दोलन को आर्थिक मदद भी मिली थी। वे कभी किनारे पर खड़े नहीं रहे, हर आन्दोलन में मैदान में उतरे। उनका सारा जीवन मैदानी था, खुली किताब था।

उन्होंने 26 जनवरी, 1929 को गवर्नमेंट लॉ कॉलेज मुम्बई से वकालत की परीक्षा भी पास की थी। लेकिन वे वकालत नहीं कर सके। उस समय के बॉम्बे हाइकोर्ट ने, आजादी के आन्दोलन में उनकी लड़ाकू भूमिका और अन्याय तथा गुलामी के खिलाफ हरेक आन्दोलन में अहम् भूमिका के कारण उन्हें वकालत की सनद नहीं दी। एक दृष्टि से यह अच्छा ही हुआ। कचहरी की चारदीवारी में वकालत से पैसा कमाने के बदले, जिन्दगीभर सामाजिक, आर्थिक, धार्मिक व राजनीतिक कारणों से अन्याय झेलनेवालों की वकालत करने का सुअवसर युसुफ मेहरअली को मिला। लाठी खायी, नौ बार जेल गये, पर अन्याय के सामने कभी झुके नहीं। फारसी में अल्लाह की प्रार्थना करते समय तीन शब्दों का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है, तुम हमारे रहीम हो, हकीम हो और वकील हो। जो रहम माने करूणा करता है वह रहीम, जो दुःख-दर्द मिटाता है वह हकीम और जो अन्याय से संरक्षण करता है वह वकील। इस दृष्टि से मेहरअली सच्चे वकील थे।

उन्होंने कहा था कि जिस शिक्षा, कला, साहित्य और संस्कृति में दूसरों को लूटने की या दूसरों का शोषण करने की ही शिक्षा दी जाती है, लाखों के भीख माँगने से कुछ थोड़े से लोगों के महल बनते हैं, वह इन्सानी संस्कृति नहीं है।

उन्होंने 'स्वदेशी' पर जोर दिया। उसके लिए बहिष्कार का पथ संगठित किया। स्वदेशी सिर्फ वस्तु नहीं, वह तो भावना है। सिर्फ राजनीतिक आजादी मिलना उसके लिए काफी नहीं था, जब तक सारी गुलामी से, वह फिर धार्मिक, सामाजिक या आर्थिक हो, इन्सान को मुक्ति नहीं मिलती तब तक आजादी अधूरी है, ऐसा वे मानते थे।

युसुफ मेहरअली की जीवनी शब्दों में सिमट नहीं सकती। वह तो उनकी ही समझ में आयेगी जिन्होंने जिन्दगी के बवण्डर और तूफान अपने सिर और शरीर पर झेले और तौले हैं और जिनके हाथों की ताकत केवल उनके दिल से उभरती है। इसलिए ही उनकी मौत के बाद उनकी यादें, उनके विचार और कार्य को अमर करने के लिए 'युसुफ मेहरअली सेण्टर' की स्थापना की गयी। यह 'सेण्टर' महाराष्ट्र के पिछड़े इलाके में और कच्छ में कार्यरत है। पंचायती राज, नशाबन्दी, जलसंसाधन, खादी, ग्रामोदयोग का उत्पादन और बिक्री, युवा

*Yusuf Meherally Centre*

## Activities of Yusuf Meherally Centre

Yusuf Meherally Centre came into being in the year 1961 to commemorate Yusuf Meherally (September 23, 1903–July 2, 1950) who was in the vanguard of India's struggle for independence and was the Mayor of Bombay in 1942. In the words of late Dr. Zakir Hussain, the then Vice-President of India, who formally inaugurated Yusuf Meherally Centre in 1966: "It was the primeval sorrow of man, for what men do to each other, knowingly or unknowingly, which moved him and not any idea of a more efficient and more utilitarian organisation of industry and economy. This sorrow could have made him a philosopher, a man of religion or a poet. Yusuf Meherally was more fortunate. It made him into friend. His gift for friendship struck all who came into contact with him and it made his concern for them something

deeply inspiring".

Yusuf Meherally Centre is a voluntary organization, which is registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860 and the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950. During the first seven years, the Centre's activities were confined to Mumbai city. Seminars and Symposia on diverse topics like education, five-year plans, urbanization and organising relief for victims of natural calamities, and cultural events were its main activities. In 1967, the focus of its activities shifted to a rural area. We are in health care, education, empowering women and Adivasis, employment generation and relief. And we have activities in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar, Uttrakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

बिरादरी और युवकों के शिविर, खेती और शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में 'सेण्टर' अहम् भूमिका निभा रहा है। मराठी माध्यमिक स्कूल ही नहीं, उर्दू स्कूल भी 'सेण्टर' चलाता है। आरोग्य के क्षेत्र में तो 'सेण्टर' की सराहना सरकार और उसके अधिकारी भी खुले दिल से करते हैं। भूकम्प के बाद 'सेण्टर' ने कच्छ में जो पुनर्वास का कार्य किया उसकी सराहना सभी ने की। वैसे ही त्सुनामी के बाद नागपट्टीणम् का कार्य। उस सेन्टर ने ईसी साल 50 साल पूरे किये हैं। और इस अवसरपर सेवाग्राम स्थित 'बापूकुटी' (म. गांधी की कुटी) का प्रतीक गांधीजी और युसुफभाई के विचारोकी याद कायम रहे इसलिये बांधी है। आपसे मेरी प्रार्थना है और गुजारिश है, आप कभी समय निशब्द वहा अवश्य भेट दे। राज्यपाल तो 'राज का पालक' होता है। उस पालकत्व का कुछ हिस्सा सेन्टर को भी नसीब हो।

अन्याय के खिलाफ संघर्ष करने की वृत्ति नहीं होगी तो विधायक या रचनात्मक कार्य अधूरा रह जायेगा। सही अर्थ में ऐसा अहिंसक और शान्तिमय संघर्ष विधायक कार्य ही है। क्रान्ति के बने बनाये नुस्खे नहीं होते, क्रान्ति का या परिवर्तन का अंकगणित नहीं होता। उसके तो बीजगणित जैसे प्रतीक होते हैं। यही युसुफ मेहेरअली का भी जीवनमूल्य था, जो 'सेण्टर' की प्रेरणा है। 'सेण्टर' उन विचारों और आचारों का केन्द्र है। राहत इन्दौर के शब्दों में युसुफ मेहेरअली के बारे में कहा जाय तो, कहना होगा-

“किसी को न हो सका

उसके कद का अंदाजा

वो आसमां था-

मगर सिर झुका के फिरता था।“

Education : At Tara and Apta, in Panvel taluka, in Raigad District of Maharashtra, we have two high schools: a Marathi medium and an Urdu medium. We have another Marathi medium high school at Shirki in Pen Taluka, a village about 25 kms from Tara. In the SSC Examination held in March, 2011, our Marathi medium High school at Tara registered a pass percentage of 77.33, Urdu Medium High school at Apta 100 percent and the Marathi medium High school at Shirki 97.05 percent. We started a junior college in Arts at Tara during the academic year 2010-2011. We have a hostel in our Tara School campus for girls from Adivasis, Dalits, Other Backward Communities, and other poor girls to facilitate their study in our school. There are 84 girls in the hostel during this academic year.

Health care: We have a 35-bed hospital with two operation theaters, a dental unit, an X-ray unit, a pathology unit and a physiotherapy unit. We hold an eye operation camp every Sunday, when about 15 patients are operated and implanted with Intra Ocular Lenses. Besides, such cataract operations are done on every Tuesday too.

Employment generation: There is a village industries complex consisting of a soap unit producing both toilet and laundry soap, an oil ghani unit, a bakery unit, a pottery unit and a carpentry unit. We

*Yusuf Meherally Centre*

have a Non-Formal Vocational Centre attached with hostel facilities for tribal youths, who are drop outs from schools, giving six months training in various skills like welding, electrical wiring, home appliance repairs and two wheelers repairs. The training is free, including boarding and lodging.

**Agricultural activities:** We have a dairy at Tara and have an experimental organic farm. The latter is called ten guntha experiment. The late Prof. S.A.Dabholkar, a mathematician-turned-agricultural expert, claimed that a family of five can live above poverty line on ten guntha (a quarter acre) if they follow certain agricultural practices. In this no tilling and digging are required and no fertilizers and pesticides are used. This is a low external input agriculture, utilizing the cow dung and urine from the dairy and biomass.

**Environmental:** We have a strong presence in environmental related activities. In its concern for protection of the environment, the Centre took up an afforestation programme on a large scale during the years 1984-1990. The Forest Department allotted to the Centre 11 acres of land for tree planting in its project area. The Centre had also involved students of nearby schools and farmers, who were given saplings free of charge. The Centre planted trees in its own lands in Tara. In all, about 8,50,000 saplings were planted during the period. As far as the Centre is concerned, the tree planting is a continuing programme inasmuch as its schools continued to plant trees on special occasions like Environment Day to make the children conscious of the need to replenish the ever decreasing tree cover. The activities of the Centre in areas of organic farming and vermiculture, fight against pollution in the Patalganga river, transfer of rural technology in collaboration with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre which are eco-friendly, Biogas plant for biodegradable solid waste that will trap methane which can be used as a fuel source and Extension of Technology developed by Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, to make diesel from oil waste are all environment related activities of the Centre.

**Urban-Rural interaction:** We have a camping facility with two dormitories, three cottages, a lecture hall and a canteen, to accommodate 150 at a time with boarding and lodging. This facilities is availed of by

about 30,000 people every years, mainly students and nature lovers, who come for picnic, rest and recreation, seminars, meetings, etc. We have also there a dhaba and sales counter to sell our products to the visitors and travelers on the Mumbai - Goa Highway. Both the campus canteen and the dhaba serve good, healthy vegetarian food, at reasonable rates.

**Relief and Rehabilitation:** The Centre has a big component of relief and rehabilitation activities. It provided relief in the early years in Orissa after a cyclone, to students in Maharashtra when there was a drought, to people in Raigad when there were flash floods in 1989 and to people in Kutch after the cyclone and the earthquake and to the refugees in J&K after the earthquake, in Nagapattinam after the Tsunami and in Bhagalpur District in Bihar after the Kosi floods of August 2008.

The rehabilitation activities are continuing in Nagapattinam, Kutch and J&K. In Kutch, the Centre constructed 322 permanent houses and handed over them to the victims of the earthquake, promoted income generating activities by imparting special skills to about 550 women in ethnic embroidery, among other things. Its programme of non-formal education of the children of fishermen and salt pan workers there, who are always on the move in search of work, covers about 2000 children. In hostels, food and accommodation too are free. In Nagapattinam (Tamilnadu), we focus on alternate sustainable livelihood for the victims of tsunami. We organized women of Self Help Groups and gave them training in various skills to engage in productive work using the locally available agro products. Many more are sought to be trained. Rehabilitation work is also going on in Jammu & Kashmir, but on a modest scale. In Bihar too, we had taken up rehabilitation after the Kosi river floods of August 2008.

In Orissa, we are concentrating on the benefits accrued under the Right To Information Act and have an excellent group of workers. The local branch of the Centre in Bhubaneshwar is active in 40 districts of the Orissa State under the RTI awareness programme and runs two schools. Thanks to what we did, about 600 Adivasis got homestead lands in Kalahandi.

**Yusuf Meherally Centre****Golden Jubilee:**

Yusuf Meherally Centre completed 50 years of its existence on May 1, 2011. To mark the occasion, there are several programmes. One of them was to build a replica of Babu Kutu at the Madhu-Pramila Dandavate Sankul, Yusuf Meherally Centre, Khairat, Karnala Panchayat, Tara. The Golden Jubilee Celebrations were launched and the Babu Kutu was inaugurated and dedicated to the people at a function held on May 01, 2011, at the Madhu Pramila Dandavate Sankul. Other important programmes for the jubilee celebration include raising of a corpus of twenty five crores to ensure survival and stability of the Centre, building of Apta (Urdu medium) and Shirki (Marathi medium) high school buildings, establishment of an office and training cum production centre for village industries at Nagrotta (J&K), Betul (MP), Dhenkanal (Orissa), Bihapur (Bihar), Bhadrashwar (Kutch) and Khandahal (Uttarakhand), etc.

**Babu Kutu:**

It is a replica of the Babu Kutu of Sewagram, Wardha, Maharashtra, where Gandhiji spent his later years of life. The purpose of making a replica of Babu Kutu is to spread certain values that were popular during freedom movement and continued to be relevant for creating a better world, namely, Satya and Ahimsa (truth & non-violence), Samata and Samyam (equality & self-control), Shrampratishta and Shramdan (dignity of labour & voluntary labour), Shanti (peace) and Ethics in Politics & Business, and in the context of global warming, Aparigriha (non-possessiveness). The Centre, as it happens, gets 50,000 visitors annually, largely from Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Panvel and New Panvel. We have decided to raise a corpus of a crore to maintain the Kutu, which is included in the twenty five crores corpus mentioned above.

**Basic thinking:**

The Centre is trying to see that rural development becomes a mainstream economic development activity. Our reasoning is simple. 70% of our population still lives in rural areas and even if the government's prediction comes true that soon 50% population will live in cities, the number of people living in villages would be around sixty crores if not more. Neglecting such a big number of our population

would have disastrous consequences in many ways.

It is our belief and our vision that reducing the rate of urbanization can be done by all concerned by deliberately deciding to invest much more than at present in rural development. Many groups and voluntary agencies are doing this. So are philanthropists and civic groups. Yusuf Meherally Centre is one such group.

In addition to the usual activities, it is concentrating on non farm employment generation and finding markets for their produce. We are appealing to all our friends to buy some khadi (hand spun hand woven cloth) every year and give preference to village manufactures. We also appeal to them to use organic foods. And we tell our friends in the corporate sector to use hand made paper on important occasions. All this will generate rural employment and that will create not only rural prosperity but also reduce exodus to cities.

Yusuf Meherally Centre is a voluntary organization, which is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950.

Donations to the Centre are tax exempt under the provisions of Sections 80G and 35 AC of the Income Tax Act.

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Yusuf Meherally Centre



# Rural India Focus

PRESENTING THE NATION WITH A REPLICABLE MODEL OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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**WEEKLY EYE CAMPS AT THE YMC HOSPITAL, TARA, PANVEL**



**RUNS THREE HIGH SCHOOLS**

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## Combating Negativism

**S.Viswam**

**At the End of Tether**  
Kuldip Nayar

**Truth of Gujarat  
Electoral Reform**  
Rajindar Sachar

**Remembering Acharyaji**  
Waryam Singh

**Gandhi and Socialism**  
R J Kochar

**R T I National Convention**  
Ravindran P M

**Asoka Mehta Centenary**  
**Save Academic Freedom**

**Formula 1 car rally**  
**Excuse me, are you the PM?**

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It has taken just two years for India to shed its erstwhile all-pervasive mood of optimism induced by the impressive performance of UPA One and embrace what the Prime Minister has appropriately described as negativism. Undoubtedly, cynicism has become all-pervasive. Optimism has morphed into pessimism and the nation seems to be losing faith in itself while in fact what it has already lost faith in is the capacity of the ruling UPA Two to deliver the goods. Seldom in the post-independence era has the national mood and temper so downcast as they are now, albeit several indicators are positive enough to persuade the citizenry that things are not as hopeless as they seem. However, even while juxtaposing the hopeful factors against the failing or failed ones, it seems difficult to sustain hope in a good future. The Prime Minister used the term “negativism” to highlight the fact that political parties in the country are adding to cynicism by only focusing on the negative factors and ignoring the positive ones. It is a noteworthy point, but it is the government that has contributed the most through non-performance and non-governance to shake the faith of the citizen in the system. Pinning hope and faith in the nation’s capacity to attain a nine

percent rate of growth during the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012 to 2017) does not go hand in hand with the prevailing mood of negativism in the country. While conceptually, India may be able to touch that higher rate (we are hoping to achieve 8.2 per cent during the ongoing 11th Plan), it cannot be without enormous hard and honest work.

The Prime Minister hinted that hopes can turn into disappointments in case the nation lost its unity and cohesiveness. In case the current global economic slowdown ceases to be what world economists hope will be a short-term phenomenon, there will be real cause for concern for developing economies like India. Leave global influences aside, the situation can be aggravated if nations lose their internal cohesiveness and common purpose. In this context, Dr. Manmohan Singh appealed to “parliamentary parties to strike a difficult balance between maintaining adversarial political positions on many issues while also cooperating to advance longer term national agenda.”

It is really the sign of the times that after six decades of parliamentary democracy the political class in India

*Between the lines***At the End of Tether****Kuldip Nayar**

has to be taught this fundamental democratic principle that all parties are enjoined by a common purpose of nation-building. The role of the opposition parties transcends the purely adversarial. In a federal set-up like ours, the Centre and the States are committed to jointly work towards national development. However, it has become the rule rather than the exception that states under the control of the so-called "opposition parties" tend to work at cross purposes with the party or coalition of parties that controls the Centre. Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that the one institution that was set up to act as a buffer between the Centre and the States, namely the National Development Council (NDC), as a monitor of national economic progress, as the supervisor of plan target implementation, and as an over-all co-ordinator ensuring co-operation between the Centre and the States has become a redundant institution. The functioning of the NDC over the years has by itself contributed to the spread of cynicism in the country.

Even at the height of its effectiveness, the NDC was not the sole determinant of economic policy. But it definitely served the purpose of a common platform where the States could articulate their grievances, demands, hopes and aspirations and exchange thoughts with those making policy at the Centre. The NDC's usefulness ceased to be felt after the Nehru era, but even more so after liberalisation in the early nineties when the term private sector ceased to be a dirty word and market economy a popular concept. Now, when there is so much talk of PPP (Public-Private-Partnership), the five-year plans have virtually lost their importance while the demand

*(Continued on Page 6)*

In the midst of L.K.Advani's rath yatra to polarize the country and the Telangana agitation to articulate local chauvinism, India is oblivious to the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement against capitalism which has given shape to what the West is today. Demonstrations are all over America and Europe against the grasping bankers, corrupt politicians and misgoverning administrations. It is a revolt against the capitalist system.

But things are no better for communism. Former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has remarked at Kolkata that communism must either 'change or perish'. He belongs to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) which has been thrown out of power from the state after its inadequate rule of nearly 35 years. He has underlined the phenomenon the world over that the communist ideology does not meet the people's needs. The main communist prop collapsed in 1990 when the Soviet Union caved in and let the West win the cold war.

China is making 'progress', not because it is following the communist ideology but because it is treading the path of capitalism which means growth by any means and at any cost, a sort of *laissez faire*. Yet the glue to keep this system together in China is the dictatorial rule by the communist party and the armed forces. No disobedience or dissent is tolerated, as was seen at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing when hundreds of protesting students were crushed under the army tanks.

Capitalism looked progressive when it replaced feudalism. But today it is stifling the common man because it is as exploitative as feudalism. Those at the top are appropriating the gains of growth and developing such technology which lessens jobs to increase the margin of profit. Without taking into consideration the public, the corporate sector and the banks are making their own institutions solid. What do the people do? They are rightly up in arms.

India should have learnt the lesson. But it is doing exactly what the West did and failed. The National Statistical Survey Organisation has reported the growth stagnant at around eight per cent, with zero per cent increase in employment. Obviously, the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. Since most of the burden falls on the countryside, there is dismal poverty in villages. Strange, the rulers have closed their eyes to the thousands of mutinies, small movements all over the country, directed against those who have dispossessed people of land, water, job or jungle.

The fact is that the two ideologies, capitalism and communism, have outlived their utility. They do not meet the aspirations of the people who want bread, without losing their right to say. True, the communists in India have joined the democratic stream and adopted the parliamentary system but it is more of a strategy. Otherwise they have remained stuck in the Marxist slogans and shibboleths. The CPI(M) politburo office at Kolkata still hangs on walls

life-size portraits of Marx, Engels, Stalin and Lenin. The communists continue to live in a make-belief world with the hope that the people would return to them some day. The collapse of the Soviet Union shook them and they swore to change. But they continued to prefer their doctrinaire approach and rigid ways.

Somnath Chatterjee was thrown out of the party because he acted independently as the Lok Sabha Speaker when the CPI(M) wanted him to be a partisan. The party has not even bothered to find out why Buddhadeb does not attend meetings of the politburo. This moribund attitude is no different from that of the communists in other countries which have been thrown into the dustbin of history. The then President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union explained his failure on the ground that he could not hold the country together. But he did not realize that the people could not be held together if they are shackled and have no freedom to choose.

I still think that the communists would, some day, self-examine themselves and round off the edges. They would have done so by this time, but unfortunately they won 60 Lok Sabha seats in 2004 and got lost in the vicarious satisfaction of enjoying power by joining the Congress-led alliance.

Karl Marx, a signal influence in the development of economic thoughts, is still relevant. Through his theory one comes to understand the historical and social changes. But that understanding is of little consequence when his philosophy ceases to be an engine for the changes. Communism is too isolated from the aspirations and sensitivities of the people and believes that a small revolutionary minority—a

communist party—knows the best.

The real problem with communism is that it has become another religion. Ideology and religion help us in our journey up to a point, but subsequently we must come to have faith in the method that our demands for employment as well as free choice will be met. This does not mean that capitalism, more specifically market economy, is better. One ugly example is that of America which has left even Roosevelt's new deal far behind.

Social democracy is the only alternative. It gives freedom and still allows the majority to prevail. There is some type of egalitarianism also. But the problem which has dogged the system is that the people are jealous about their rights but care little for their duties. And because of ever-improving technology, the employment sector goes on shrinking to the detriment of people.

Although we have a top economist as the Prime Minister, we have never faced such a financial crisis as we are facing today when inflation and deficit financing have been galloping unbridled. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has no clue how to tackle the situation except to express his concern every week over food price rise. The difficulty with him and his government is that they are still following the World Bank model which may be impressive on paper but a disaster when implemented.

We must realize that capitalism, communism or, for that matter, any other ism has failed to deliver the goods. India does not have to hanker after sterile philosophies. We have to learn from Mahatma Gandhi who was not dazzled by machines. This is not to suggest that the technology should not be used. The challenge is how to sustain the growth rate without lessening jobs.

We in India have to think of an ideology which is suited to our genius. The starting point may well be the advice by Mahatma Gandhi to cut one's needs. India cannot afford the standard of living which a few enjoy. We are at the end of the tether. There is no leeway available. We have to think of ways to curb consumerism and divert those funds to the measures to remove poverty.

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## Corruption

This is with reference to the letter of P. Chidambaram saying that corruption has to be fought at home and wherever it is to be found.

An advertisement appeared in The Hindu a few years ago saying that any one could lodge a complaint with the Chief Vigilance Officer, Room No: 54, Old Secretariat, Delhi against any department of Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Delhi Government officials. I went to lodge a complaint with the CVO armed with a written complaint.

The Chief Vigilance Officer, Pradip Hota, was sleeping in his room at 10AM. His staff did not allow me to talk to him on phone or peep into his room. I waited there for two hours but the sleeping officer did not wake up. His staff did not accept my complaint saying that only 'Sahib' will take it.

Next day I submitted my complaint with the office of Police Commissioner, Delhi.

What is the use of such officers and offices if they do the opposite of what they are supposed to do? It seemed that the officer had been asked by all the departments of the Delhi Government and MCD not to accept any complaint against any of them.

-Amrit Lal Rawal

# Truth of Gujarat • Electoral Reform

Rajindar Sachar

## I

The fasts by Modi got an excessive coverage, which defies logic. The critics have rightly projected it as self-image building by Modi to project himself as Prime Ministerial candidate and under the cover of slogan of Sadbhavna as an attempt to wash off his sinful conduct in post-Godhra period. I am clear in my mind that in the matter of governments' complicity in the gory happenings like the 1984 genocide in Delhi and the 2002 genocide in Gujarat, there can never be a question of forgiveness. There are certain crimes and human rights violations which can never be forgiven or forgotten though no doubt we must learn from them and so modulate our political and social programming, that such like events never shame us again. But that process can start only if the perpetrator of the crime is seen as genuinely contrite which alone can create confidence in those who suffered untold miseries. That has not yet happened.

One is sad and amused at the carnival response of the Congress in purporting to observe fast at the same time. I wish the Congress instead had programmed and brought out the unspeakable condition in Gujarat camps where large number of Muslims are still living in misery. Also Vaghela would have done well if he and his colleagues had chalked out a definite programme to create conducive atmosphere so that hundreds of Muslim families who are afraid to go back to their villages could go back with dignity and assured safety.

The media though somewhat critical of Modi's Sadbhavana pretensions have unfortunately swallowed the propaganda of development oriented programmes in Gujarat ignoring its perversions which have in fact led to greater pauperization of masses, possibly because those policies coincide with the neo-liberal and anti-farmer policies of the corporate sector. All this information uncomplimentary to Modi was placed in a public hearing when Anna Hazare visited Gujarat in May 2011 (in a report prepared amongst others by PUCL-Gujarat, Socialist Party and other concerned citizens of Gujarat.)

Thus 30,000 farmers walked nearly 350 km to protest against the cement plant being set up at Mahuva, which if it happens will lead to a total loss of 25,000 bigha land on which 1,25,000 people survive. The cement factory would provide direct employment to only 498 persons.

One of the biggest scandal and Human Rights violation is taking place in the much touted boast of Narmada Dam. Even at present hundreds of families are still displaced though even the award postulated complete rehabilitation of the oustees. The boast of Modi that Narmada was to supply water to the farmers is belied by the established fact that only 29 percent of the canal work has been done. As recently as 2009 Rs. 260 crore scam pertaining to National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was exposed.

As for Right to Education, a fundamental right, the Gujarat government is ironically closing 3000 primary schools on the alleged unacceptable plea of lack of attendance and the plan is in fact to lease them to private bodies.

One of the biggest scandals highlighted was the land allotment at throwaway rate to private industrialists in the capital - Gandhi Nagar, without holding public auction. The beneficiaries are big builders, construction companies and other corporate houses with not so good public acceptability. This has resulted in a loss to the Gujarat State, as per market allotment rate, of Rs. 5197, 1622, 317/- .

The labour disputes have increased by 600 percent in the last five years, but instead of 100 percent increase in the labour machinery staff, the Government has reduced the staff by 40-60 percent.

Regarding expenditure for social sector by 18 large States of India, Gujarat embarrassingly stands at 17th (Monthly Bulletin of Reserve Bank of India, February, 2007).

Gujarat stands 14th in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) for 0-1 year and 13th for 0-5 years, with 47 percent malnourishment among 0-5 years old children. About 67 percent women are anemic.

Global index on hunger reports India with 66th rank, Gujarat is ranking 69th, which is actually as low as Haiti in Africa (International

Food Policy Research Institute, 2008.

While I unreservedly accept some positive features of Gujarat, like it has 90 percent paved roads to villages, 98 percent electrified villages with 80 percent electrified homes and 18 hours of electricity everyday, 86 percent piped water supply compared to other states, but unfortunately it cannot be overlooked that amidst all this, poverty, hunger and lack of sense of security amongst minority community thrive. To give an instance: to overcome the Muslim deficit in different levels of education, the central government has launched a nationwide scholarship scheme with effect from April 1, 2008. All states have responded favorably, with the sole exception of Gujarat which has not implemented even the pre-matric scholarships for minorities. There are 55,000 scholarships allocated

to Gujarat of which 53,000 are to be given to the deserving Muslims, but Gujarat has not even cared to implement this programme.

Modi proudly proclaimed at his alleged Sadbhavana Jamboree that he did not recognize doing anything especially for the minorities but that they are to be treated only as Gujaratis. Modi apparently has not been properly coached about the Indian Constitution. Of course all residents (6 crores) living in Gujarat are Gujaratis. That is their one identity. But the people belonging to the Minority have also other identities – they are Indians and Muslims just as the people belonging to the Majority community – they are Gujaratis, Hindus and Indians. As emphasized by Noble laureate Amartya Sen, each one of us has multiple identities and each of it deserves equal recognition and protection. Somebody must tell

Modi that our Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court has loudly proclaimed that: “The purpose of law in plural societies is not the progressive assimilation of the minorities in the majoritarian milieu. This would not solve the problem; but would vainly seek to dissolve it.”

It is axiomatic that in any country the faith and the confidence of the minorities in the impartial and even functioning of the State is the acid test of being a civilized State – this is accepted wisdom, and was expressed succinctly by Lord Acton thus; “A state which is incompetent to satisfy Minorities condemns itself; a state which labours to neutralize, to absorb or to expel them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government”. Can one hope Modi to so modulate his future policies in the light of these constitutional and wise pronouncements?

## II

Anna Hazare when he gave up his fast announced that the next movement is for electoral reform and especially prioritised “Right to Reject candidate” at the elections and the right to recall a legislator earlier than the end of his term.

Central government is seeking to project itself as responsive to public opinion. Here then is an opportunity to do so. I say this because the public demand for effectuating right to reject vote or more clearly “None of the Above” (NOTA) is very easy to effectuate. The Representation of People Act.1951 and its rules provide a detailed mechanism for standing and voting at elections. Government of India has framed Conduct of Election Rules 1961 to provide the manner as to how votes

are to be cast, and the precaution to maintain the secrecy of voting which is absolutely necessary for a healthy democracy.

Prior to the introduction of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), voting was by means of ballot paper. Rule 49 M provides for maintaining of secrecy and voting procedure by EVM, whereby the voter presses the button against the name of the candidate for whom he intends to vote. Rule 49(O) further provides that if an elector decides not to record his vote, a remark will be made by presiding officer on Form 17 and signature of the voter shall also be taken. But this procedure is faulty and outdated, because it does not take into account mode of change of voting by EVM instead

of by ballot paper. This procedure is also illegal because by this the identity of the voter who decides not to vote will be disclosed thus violating the fundamental right of voting in secrecy.

Realising this anomaly and lacuna the Election Commission of India as far back as 2001 and ever since has been writing to the Central Government to make necessary modification in the rules by providing a slot of NOTA in EVM.

Finding the inaction of the Government, Peoples Union of Civil Liberties, filed a writ petition in 2004 in the Supreme Court asking for direction to the Central government to suitably amend Rule 49 (O). The

writ petition was heard by a two-judge Bench which referred it to a larger Bench in 2009 – because of the congestion in the Supreme Court, the matter has not yet come up for hearing. But notwithstanding the pendency, in law there is no prohibition to make the necessary change by amending rule 49(o) by providing “NOTA”.

I believe that by introduction of NOTA in EVM a radical change will be brought about in political arena. At present the voter is treated as dumb, driven cattle, who must choose one or the other from the candidate, even if he finds all of them to be thoroughly undesirable. A voter at present has no role in selecting the candidate, as in U.S.A. Primaries and even in Britain by constituency members. Here selection of a candidate is done by a small cabal of party leaders and in some parties even by one or two so-called super leaders. The provision of NOTA voting will make a sea change in the power equation in favour of the small voter as against the monster of a big political party. Such a provision will enable the voter to exercise his right in secrecy and to send a message of his anger at the unsuitability of contesting candidates and their political mentors.

It is not as if at present many voters will not like to record their disapprobation of the contesting candidates but they are afraid to do so because of the unholy alliance of mafia crowd with many of the contesting candidates. But NOTA being available in the voting machine, the voter will be able to speak his mind without fear and thus defeat politicalisation of criminals.

At the present, when voters feel disgusted at the nomination of undesirable candidates, they just sit

at home and sulk, but are not able to convey their resentment effectually. But in the changed position the voter will be assured of secrecy and will exercise his right which will send a strong message to the smug political bosses against their manipulation and force them to listen to the small man/woman who in fact have the power with his/her little finger on the button to decide the fate of so-called tallest of them.

Thus NOTA can be effectuated immediately by the Central Government by amending the rule, provided it is genuinely concerned with clean politics. The principles justifying NOTA are self-evident, namely: all legitimate consent requires the ability to withhold consent; would end the farce where voters are often forced to vote for the least unacceptable candidate, the all too familiar “lesser evil.”

Voters would decide the fate of the political parties’ choices, instead of the parties deciding the voters’ choices. Many voters and non-voters, who now register their disapproval of all candidates for an office by not voting, could cast a meaningful vote. It would improve checks and balances between voters and political parties.

In any election when “NOTA” will be put on EVM, the list of candidates would be followed by the button of “NOTA”. If NOTA gets more votes than any of the candidates, then no one is declared elected, instead, a follow-up by-election with new candidates, old being ineligible, would be held to fill the seat, until a candidate wins a plurality of votes over all other candidates including “NOTA”.

NOTA has many thoughtful advocates in various countries in

the world including the most well known Ralph Nader, the consumer activist. U.S.A. Australia, Norway and other countries have a very strong constituency favouring NOTA.

Of course legislation would need to be enacted to provide that if NOTA votes exceed the maximum cast for the highest vote getting candidate, the election will be countermanded and a fresh election ordered. This change will be warning to the political parties that decision about the choice of candidate is not the sole prerogative of a clique within the party. It must involve the voters at the initial stage of selection. A wrong choice will result in fresh elections.

I feel the Central Government can redeem its self-damaging conduct during Anna Hazare Fast (as even some of the Ministers have said it openly) by immediately amending Rule 49(O), as demanded by Election Commission since 2001 and by providing a slot of NOTA in the voting machine straight away for all future elections, thus recognizing the supremacy of the voters.

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***(Continued from Page 2)***

for reforms has grown more strident. Policies are being made and decided in different forums, and there is no relation between yesterday’s and today’s economic motivators. The NDC has therefore been reduced to a talking shop where chief ministers come with prepared speeches which they read out to non-listening benches and the government offers non-committal replies. No one will miss the NDC if it is wound up, even the many chief ministers who treat it as a forum only to demand more from the Centre than it is in a position to give!

# Remembering Acharyaji

Waryam Singh

The 122nd birth anniversary of Acharya Narendra Deva, the doyen of the Democratic Socialist Movement in India, falls on October 31.

It will really be difficult for the present generation to comprehend that there ever lived a man like him. He was an erudite scholar, a freedom fighter, a socialist thinker, an educationist who was respected by the youth of the country, a scholar of Buddhist philosophy and a linguist who knew Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Sanskrit, Pali besides English, German and French – he translated one of the rarest books on Buddhist Philosophy that was available only in French.

He was a great orator who could hold the audience spell-bound for hours.

The youth of the country looked to him as an ideal. It is a well known fact that he was persuaded, among others, by Jawaharlal Nehru – they were to-gether in Jail during the struggle for independence for many years – to take over as Vice Chancellor of the Lucknow University which was passing through a difficult phase as the students would often go on strike and the university would remain closed for quite some time.

After Narendra Deva took over as Vice Chancellor (and he held the office for about four and a half years) there were no strikes. Yes, the students once did threaten to go on strike – when it became known

that he was leaving the University to take over as Vice Chancellor of Benarse Hindu University! A delegation of the B. H. U. students came to Lucknow to persuade the Lucknow students not to deprive them of the opportunity to have the Acharya as their Vice Chancellor. It is said that in the history of Benarse (*Varanasi now*) no one else except Gandhiji ever got such a warm reception as Acharyaji did. It is hard to think of another name who was as adored and respected by the youth as the Acharya.

After Independence when the AICC amended the Constitution of the Indian National Congress, not allowing any political group to function under its umbrella, Narendra Deva decided to leave the Congress – earlier he was opposed to the idea. He declared at the Nasik Conference of the Socialist Party that so far he had been opposed to the idea of leaving the Congress but now he thought it was time for them to quit the parent organization as it had slammed its doors on the Socialists and it was just right and proper for them to leave. The delegates and all those present at the venue applauded the Acharya when he declared that he was opposed to the idea of quitting the Congress at Allahabad session of the Party but now he himself presented the resolution to quit the Congress. As the applause subsided the Acharya chose to apprise them of the reality of the situation by warning them in his own inimitable style : *Dekhiye, luqma aasan nahin, ho sakta hai kal koi naam*

– *leva bhi na rahe* (it is not eary; it is quite likely that we are left in wilderness). It was reported that an uneasy silence became very vocal as the delegates realized the gravity of the situation. Narendra Deva brought them back to reality by reminding them of their duty towards the people and the Party of Socialism.

History is witness to what happened afterwards.

After the 1952 general elections when the Socialist Party and Acharya Kripalani's KMP Party decided to work under the banner of the Praja Socialist Party Narendra Deva personally was opposed to the merger but as a democrat accepted the decision. The events which followed weakened the party. Narendra Deva, despite his failing health, tried – at the cost of his health – to save the Party of Socialism, with little success. In those days of bitter strife he made one last effort to salvage the situation by holding a camp of the party leaders at Jaipur. But history and cirenstances had conspired otherwise.

Narendra Deva was one of those rarest of Indians who gave all they had to the society but in return accepted very little, almost nothing.

It is hoped the new era that has begun with the emergence of the Socialist Party (India) shall be a step in the direction of realization of his dream.

## Asoka Mehta Centenary

### Bangalore

The spacious Senate hall of the Central college, Bangalore university became a historical venue once again to recollect the glorious chapter of Indian socialist movement during the freedom struggle and after the Independence. It was at this venue in 2009 that a function to mark the 75 years of the Indian socialist movement was held in which veteran socialists like the late Surendra Mohan, Mulka Govinda Reddy and others participated.

On Sunday, 23 October, 2011, the same senate hall became a witness to yet another memorable occasion. The celebration of the birth centenary of the veteran socialist leader, Asoka Mehta, was organized by the Centre for Socialist Studies. The External Affairs minister, S.M. Krishna, who had started his political career in the Praja Socialist Party, inaugurated the centenary programme.

The programme was unique in the sense that a huge portrait of Asoka Mehta was displayed on the dais and all participants including the guests sat around as part of the audience. S.M Krishna inaugurated the programme by pressing the laptop button and reeled out the audiovisual presentation on life and message of Asoka Mehta, the pioneer of the Indian democratic socialist movement. The 20-minute presentation traced the story of Indian socialist movement with special reference to Asoka's contribution in furthering the cause of democratic socialism and also his multifaceted personality as an ideologue, trade unionist, parliamentarian, an intellectual among politicians and politician among intellectuals.

Centenary editions of books written by Asoka Mehta titled Democratic Socialism and Studies in Socialism as well as a biography of Asoka and centenary souvenir were released on the occasion.

S.M Krishna in his speech went down the memory lane of his baptism in politics through PSP. He said that the socialist stalwarts were men of sterling qualities and honest to the core. Their commitment to socialism, democracy and nationalism was of the highest order. There used to be highly charged debates, discussions among themselves. Shri Krishna felt sad about ego clashes among the leaders. He described Asoka as a great leader with indomitable spirit and a socialist visionary. He recollected

### Trivandrum

The Birth Centenary of Asoka Mehta, the late Socialist stalwart and humanist, was celebrated in Trivandrum on 24 October 2011. Janata Forum, Kerala, organised a grand public function, at the Press Club Hall in Trivandrum, which was presided over by the Forum's President, and the veteran socialist leader, P. Viswambharan, Ex-M.P. Babu Heddurshetti, Prof. B. Vivekanandan, and C.K. Nanu spoke on the occasion. The commencement of the public function was preceded by the release of the Malayalam translation of a short biography of Asoka Mehta, authored by Babu Heddurshetti and the screening of two short documentary films - one on Asoka Mehta's life, and the other on the fundamentals of Democratic Socialism and their great exponents -

his association with Asoka and his unflinching commitment to democratic socialism.

The one hundredth screening of a twenty-minute AV programme introducing socialism to college students and youth was screened on the occasion. This programme has been designed by Prof. Hanumanthu and Babu Heddursetti of Centre for Socialist Studies .

An open house discussion on the life and works of Asoka Mehta was also held. A pictorial exhibition on socialist movement drew the attention of the visitors. Many veteran socialists who were closely associated with Asoka Mehta and a fairly good number of youngsters took part in the programme.

**-Khadri S Achyuthan**

produced by the Centre for Socialist Studies, Bangalore. Books of Asoka Mehta, reprinted by Centre for Socialist Studies, and a Centenary Souvenir, released in Bangalore on the previous day, were also on display. B.S. Nagaraj, from Bangalore, was also present. The function was well attended by a cross section of people from different walks of life. In his Presidential Address, P. Viswambharan recalled his association with Asoka Mehta from 1946, when the latter visited Kerala, for the first time, to address a meeting of the Students Congress in Trivandrum. He was present in the Lok Sabha in 1968 when Asoka Mehta, still a Cabinet Minister, made a historic speech in support of a resolution moved by the veteran socialist opposition leader from Orissa, Surendra Nath Dwivedy,



to condemn the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. But, since the Indira Gandhi government refused to condemn the Soviet intervention, Asoka Mehta tendered his resignation from the Cabinet, he said. He recalled many other incidents in Asoka Mehta's political life, including his highly loaded fiery speeches, the vocabulary of which often baffled even experienced translators, the commendable role he played as a front line socialist, a freedom fighter, a trade union leader, a great parliamentarian, a peasant leader and so on. He mentioned about Asoka Mehta's classic report on democratic decentralisation, during the Janata regime, which gave a big boost to Panchayati Raj institutions in the country. Delivering Asoka Mehta Centenary Lecture, Bapu Heddurshetti, President, Centre for Socialist Studies in Bangalore, gave a graphic account of Asoka Mehta's eventful life, and his endeavour to promote democratic socialist ideas and movement in India. He said that, unlike other veteran socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev, who had a stint as Marxists before they became democratic socialists, Asoka Mehta remained a staunch democratic socialist from the beginning to the end. His adoption of Gandhian methodology during the freedom struggle did not make him to deviate even a bit from his convictions as a democratic socialist. He was emphatic that if democratic socialism remains a forceful ideology in India today, it is largely due to the clarity and precision, and the vision too, which Asoka Mehta gave to it through his consistent espousal of it. Shri Heddurshetti focussed also on Asoka Mehta's role as a patriotic freedom fighter who, in response to a call given by Mahatma Gandhi to join

the non-cooperation movement, had resigned his economics lecturer's job in Bombay's Wilson College in 1931, to be followed by Gandhiji's calls for individual satyagraha movement and the Quit India movement, for joining which he was arrested every time, and was imprisoned for periods of two-and-a-half years, one-and-a-half years, and three years respectively (in all seven years), during the freedom struggle. Later, in 1953, he was again arrested for leading a peasant movement for land in Pardi village in Gujarat against a Zamindar, and was imprisoned for one-and-a-half years. In addition, he was imprisoned also during the Emergency from 1975 to 1977, he said. Shri Heddurshetti explained how Asoka Mehta, along with Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Yusuf Meherally and others, had founded the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. After the establishment of the Socialist Party and the Praja Socialist Party in the post-independent period, Asoka Mehta became their General Secretary and Chairman respectively, he said. For a brief period, from January to May 1977, he was the interim President of the Janata Party also. He said that Asoka Mehta was mainly instrumental in the adoption of democratic socialism as the basic ideology of the Socialist Party, and also of the Praja Socialist Party. He commended the poetic-prose style Asoka used in his fiery speeches and in the writing of his 70 odd books which he published on various issues during his eventful life. Shri Heddurshetti said that Asoka Mehta was moved by a conviction that larger issues like India's economic development should be kept above party politics and that on such matters leaders belonging to various political parties should cooperate across party lines. Moreover, for him planning for India's development was

a passion, which led him to accept the position of the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, under Jawaharlal Nehru, for which the Praja Socialist Party terminated his membership of the Party. Later, he became a Planning Minister too, which he resigned after two years on the issue of the Government's attitude to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Shri Heddurshetti pointed out that long before Willy Brandt, former West German Social Democratic Chancellor, conceived the North-South dialogue in his famous Brandt Commission Report in 1980, Asoka Mehta had already proposed it in his speech at the United Nations way back in 1963. That was the range of Asoka Mehta's farsightedness and vision on global changes, he said.

Prof. B. Vivekanandan, in his speech reminisced about his association with Asoka Mehta ever since he reached New Delhi for higher studies. That association remained intact till Asoka Mehta passed away in January 1984. He said that Asoka Mehta remained genuinely serious all the time in dealing with issues, big or small. 'Smileless devotion' is the nearest term which could be used to depict his style of functioning. He said that in the advancement of democratic socialist ideology in India, both in theory and practice, few socialists in the country can match the rich contribution which Asoka Mehta has made in this context. He mind worked invariably in a constructive manner for the betterment of the people. It has been found that he formed his ideas after deep study. This is clear from the fact that, for writing his three classics on democratic socialism - 'Democratic Socialism', 'Studies in Asian Socialism', and 'Reflections on the Socialist

Era' - Asoka Mehta had churned the ocean of the world socialist literature. There is ample evidence to it in those three books which, together, encapsulate brilliantly the global socialist movement, and the socialist movements in India and Asia. He said that, these three

classic works alone have earned Asoka a glorious position in the galaxy of great socialists of the world. Asoka Mehta's standing as a glorious legend in the Indian socialist movement will be cherished for centuries to come, he said. C.K. Nanu, MLA, said that Asoka

Mehta was a unique personality. He was a leader with rare qualities who had a clear understanding of people's problems, and stood for larger interests of the country and its people, he said. S.R. Thankaraj, Ex-MLA, proposed a vote of thanks.

—A Correspondent

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## Save Academic Freedom

The All India Forum for the Right to Education (AIFRTE) is alarmed and shocked by the recent case of an erudite, well-researched essay by A.K. Ramanujan being removed from the reading list of the con-current course offered by the History Department for undergraduate students at the prestigious Delhi University. The essay, entitled “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation”, has been withdrawn on the grounds that it has “hurt the sentiments of Hindus”. The academic merit of the essay has never been in question as it has been widely recognized by historians and other academicians. This makes it even more atrocious that it should have been removed through a resolution of the University’s Academic Council and that only nine members of the Council opposed the resolution. The abolition of the essay from the history curriculum amounts to negation of the very idea of cohesive India with diversity that emerged from our freedom struggle and was enshrined in the constitution.

The facts leading up to this shameful conclusion, however, make it clear that this is no ‘innocent’ academic affair. The issue first came up in 2008 when lumpen elements unleashed by religious fundamentalist forces affiliated to

the BJP’s student organization, the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, attacked the office of the head of the History department. The office was vandalized and the then head of the department fortunately escaped the assault. Although the history department and other members of the academic community strongly condemned the attack as being both fascist and anti-academic in nature, the BJP and the rest of the Hindutva brigade vociferously supported the action. The University authorities failed to act decisively against the attackers and to send a clear signal to those supporting them that such vigilante attacks in one of the premier institutions of higher education in the country would not be tolerated.

Unable to drum up support within the University community, the Hindutva brigade then approached the Delhi High Court with the ‘hurt sentiments’ plea. The Supreme Court took up the case and in its ruling asserted that academic issues should be settled within the University and an expert committee should go into the matter. Accordingly a four-member committee took up the matter and submitted a report to the Vice-Chancellor. Three of the four members dismissed the argument of hurting sentiments as frivolous and with no evidence to support it. In

fact they emphasized the fact that the demand for dropping the text from the reading list was contrary to academic concerns and, if acceded to, would be damaging to the University’s character and functioning as an academic institution. Only one member apparently claimed that 2nd year students would not be able ‘to cope’ with the text and teachers may have difficulty in teaching it!

This is a common, unsubstantiated opinion frequently doled out when attempts to improve, upgrade or alter syllabi, are made. The academic community and the authorities deal with such complaints in the routine course. So what made the present case so different? Why was an erudite text on the varied interpretations of the Ram katha across centuries, different regions and cultures, targeted in this fashion, and why did the members of the Academic Council buckle down before this threat? The answer is to be found in the attitude of the authorities who are constitutionally and institutionally required to protect free and frank opinion and research from being subjected to attack. We increasingly find that on the contrary these very authorities steam-roller democratic protests while at the same time they buckle down before the fascist, vigilante groups. The functioning of the

present Vice- Chancellor of Delhi University has been true to form in the manner in which the debate in the academic council was fixed by an official as relating to the “interest of the University and the V-C”. This interest was clearly served not by enlarging the space of critical enquiry as one would have expected, but by pandering to the dictates of self-styled ‘protectors of the Hindu faith’ and bowing down before the

vigilante groups who enforce these dictates in the absence of stern action on the part of the authorities.

The academic community and democratic forces across the country must urgently take up the battle against all attempts to curtail freedom of expression which threaten our democratic, plural society and seek to keep our academic enquiry within the confines of narrow conformism.

In particular, we have to stand up against the fascist brigades of the majoritarian Hindutva forces who grow more strident every time they are allowed to ‘get away with it’ and are not held accountable for violating both constitutional and democratic norms. They represent the biggest threat to the plural culture and polity of India without which no academic debate and no civilized society can possibly survive

—All India Forum for Right to Education

## Gandhi and Socialism

R J Kochar

I was very happy to read the two articles on the above topic by Babu Heddurshetti. I have always been an admirer of the intellectual acumen of the great democratic socialist of 20th century, the late Asoka Mehta. I had read and studied his classic work ‘Democratic Socialism’ when I was a college student in the year 1963-64. I must thank Shri Heddurshetti for having given me an opportunity to revise my knowledge on the subject of democratic socialism and the Gandhian philosophy which the learned author has skillfully and beautifully woven in his two articles published in *Janata* (October 2 and 9 of 2011). He has also given us comparative aspects of the other veteran socialists like Jayaprakash Narayana and other stalwarts of his times. It appears that the learned author has unfortunately, surely not inadvertently, missed to refer to a great treatise written by Dr Rammanohar Lohia, ‘Marx Gandhi and socialism’. It appears to me that the learned author has deliberately tried to avoid discussing the classic work of this great socialist of the 20th century on the theories of Marx and Gandhi in relation to socialism

in the context of the Indian society. The learned author does not even like the prefix ‘Dr’ put before the name of Rammanohar Lohia. I had read his article some months back in the columns of *Janata* condemning all those who called this great socialist by the prefix ‘Dr’ by trying to tell us that Lohia was never conferred the honor of doctorate. He appears to have raised this unwarranted controversy after almost 44 years of Lohia’s death in 1967. I wonder whether he had questioned Dr Lohia in his life time on this issue. Dr Lohia would have perhaps cleared the doubt of Shri Heddurshetti. Of course, even if there is no prefix of Dr, the height of that great socialist is not reduced even by an inch!

Such personality haters were wholly responsible for deepening the splits and cracks in the socialist movement in India. I must also say that the hollow ego and feeble sense of prestige of our leaders continued to break the socialist unity vertically and horizontally. We, the rank and file were only mute followers of such leaders. We were carried away by our subjective attachment to the

personality and not objective and intelligent decisions of our own. This is another tragedy of the socialist movement.

Instead of making merely a passing reference to Dr Lohia the author should have critically appreciated the treatise of Dr Lohia, ‘Marx Gandhi and socialism’. In that case these two articles would have been a complete and classic research paper worthy of conferring a doctorate. Let us at least at this stage and age shed our unintelligent prejudices against our stalwart, selfless and veteran socialist leaders, including Dr Rammanohar Lohia.

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## Formula 1 car rally is slap of capitalism on face of farmers

The Socialist Party held one-day protest dharna at Gandhi Samadhi, Rajghat, New Delhi on 30 October 2011 against the Formula 1 car rally at Greater Noida, U.P. In the party's view, this event is a slap of insult on the face of farmers who are struggling against acquisition of their lands in Noida and other parts of the country. It is a vulgar entertainment on the dead bodies of farmers who have committed suicide as a result of neo-liberal policies. Claims that the organisers and sponsors are making that this event has graduated India from a developing to the developed nation; India has come up strongly on the world map; the sin of corruption in Common Wealth Games has been washed away etc. only indicates their insensitive and narrow mind. The idea of having Formula 1 rally in India had entered with the entry of new economic policies two decades ago. The organisers kept trying to hold this event in different cities of like Kolkata, Hyderabad, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai. Finally, they got permission and facility in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, which has become a battle field between the land hungry corporate and the farmers. This clearly states that Mayawati, Chief Minister of U.P., who achieved her political clout in the name of dalits and their messiah Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, is in full support of capitalism along with other mainstream parties and leaders.

The Socialist Party has no strength to stop the car rally. But the party would like to convey the message from the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi that the nexus of governments, corporate houses and so-called civil society is reinforcing capitalist-consumerist ideology and system in the name of Gandhi.

This is an insult to Gandhi. The ruling elite, who has fully embraced corporate capitalism, must stop this double speak. The protest dharna was organised to make deprived sections aware against the designs of the corporate capitalism and its beneficiaries in India. Dharna was attended by SPI's General Secretary Dr. Prem Singh, Delhi unit Convener Renu Gambhir, Justice

Rajinder Sachar, senior socialist leaders Dr. Raj Kumar Jain, Shyam Gambhir, Dr. Mohammad Yunus, Ravindra Mishra, Ramgopal Sisodia, Kedarnath, Nathu Singh, DUTA Vice President Dr. Harish Khanna, Secretary of Samajwadi Shikshak Manch Dr. Bikram Singh, Secretary of Gandhi Peace Foundation Surendra Kumar and activists of Socialist Yuvjan Sabha (SYS).

—Dr. Prem Singh, General Secretary, Socialist Party

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## Excuse me, are you the PM?

“Excuse me, are you the Prime Minister?” a stunned 27-year-old Indian woman inquired from David Cameron, who chose to travel in a tube train during the rush hour. Sanyogita Mayer, who has featured in eight Bollywood films, told Cameron that politicians in her native India would never travel by public transport, the Daily Mail reported. This will not make headlines in any matured democracy. But India is too exceptional a democracy to believe such happenings.

Mahatma Gandhi, having fed up with the public nuisance created by the security people in 1916 told bluntly in Benares Hindu University, “Why this distrust? Is it not better that even Lord Hardinge should die than live a living death?” He questioned Lord Irwin in 1930 (before the Salt March) why should the Viceroy be paid a salary of Rs 700 a day when an average Indian earned two annas per day (Ratio-1:5600). Immediately after Independence, he requested Lord Mountbatten to move out of the palatial residence at Reisina Hills to a moderate residence as the

poor India could not afford to house its Governor General in a 300 acre estate. Mountbatten was ready to move out; but Jawaharlal Nehru stopped him with the bogus plea that such pomp and show were needed to maintain the prestige of the post. About 15 years later, Rammanohar Lohia stunned the nation with the news that an average Indian earned three annas a day while the country's PM spent Rs 25,000 of people's money each day to maintain himself (Ratio 1: 1,33,333). Our rulers never faced such irksome queries since the last five decades.

In this age of RTI, if someone makes a study to compare the average earning of an Indian (Rs 20 according to late Arjun Sengupta) with the money this nation spends each day to maintain its VIPs, even the 27-storey unoccupied mansion in Mumbai will become a peanut. The ratio may well be 1: Infinity! Just a sample: The obscenity made out in Bangalore for an accused Jaya to turn up at the court after eight years, that too with the blessings of the SC. Are we a democracy?

—Sankara Narayanan

# RTI National Convention

## Ravindran P M

The 6th national convention on RTI was organised by the national RTI watchdog - The Central Information Commission - at Vigyan Bhavan on 14th and 15th October, 2011. The theme of the convention was Right to Information- Expanding Horizons. But right from the moment the Prime Minister delivered the inaugural address the doubt arose whether the horizon was expanding or shrinking. Administratively well organised, the convention was, at the end of the day, devoid of any substance worth mentioning.

The security instructions received along with the invitation was in itself an irritant - forbidding the invitees from even taking their mobile phones and cameras to the venue! Though as a matter of personal choice I do not use a mobile phone myself I can vouch for the horror of those who get out of their homes and realise that they have not taken their mobile phones! But the PM being the VVIP (whatever that means in a social, democratic republic!) and his security being ensured by those over whom he himself apparently does not have any control, it was a fait accompli situation for those who had come from far and wide to hear their PM in person. But the first shock was administered by the 1st man on security duty that one confronted - he refused even the day's newspaper to be taken inside! His argument: it could be rolled and used to attack the VVIP! The second shock came later when one saw almost everybody in there having their mobiles and walking in and out of the hall whenever they had to receive or make a call!

The inaugural address of Man Mohan Singh, as was mentioned earlier, set the tone for the shrinking of horizons for right to information. His comment that the RTI Act will have to be revisited to ensure that there is a balance between public interest and burden on the public authority was shocking. But it definitely was not unexpected given the efforts by the 'government' to amend the Act to deny file notings and make the applicant provide reasons for seeking the information - a sure shot method to dump the law into the nearest garbage bin!

The Right to Information Act is definitely one law that is unique because of its simplicity, unambiguity and citizen friendly nature. But it does require amendments to remove some difficulties - for example delegation of authority to 'competent authorities' to frame rules specifying the fees, cost etc without insisting on a cap for these which under normal course would be the fees, cost etc prescribed by the central government. In fact this delegation of authority has resulted in many high courts introducing exorbitant fees, cost and even fees for 1st appeal. It needs to be reiterated that the 1st appeal is only an opportunity given to the public authority to correct any mistakes committed by its own public information officers and limit the damages that s/he may have to suffer if available and disclosable information has been denied or not provided in time. To illustrate this further, the Act mandates that the information commissioners shall impose penalty at the rate of Rs 250/- per day for every day of delay

subject to a maximum of Rs 25,000/- . Simple mathematics tells one that the penalty will keep increasing for every day of delay up to 100 days. So if the 1st appellate authority acts diligently, information can be provided within, say, 60 days. That is with a delay of just 30 days. But if the 1st appellate authority misses the bus and the matter goes to the information commissioners by the time the 2nd appeal is considered and orders issued the delay will invariably exceed 100 days and the penalty will definitely hit the roof! When this issue came up for discussion and a question was raised what is the relevance of asking if a competent authority can prescribe a fee more than what is prescribed by the government when the high courts have done it the response of the moderator - a vice chancellor of a law university - was: you are asking this because you presume that the high courts are right!

But the lack of credibility of the government was bluntly driven home by Prof Jagdeep Chhokar who said that if the government was allowed to amend the Act, in the name of the three or four amendments that are required what will be made will be a dozen amendments that are not required and which dilute the Act!

One note that was struck throughout was the burden on the public information officers but the response was also struck with equal steadfastness on the need to comply with the provisions for proactive disclosures. Needless to say a lot of time was wasted by the representatives of various public

authorities harping on this issue in spite of the simple solution inherent in the law itself.

While it is true that every public information officer is designated as such and has to perform these duties in addition to his regular duties it is equally true that this additional task is not such an overwhelming burden as they had tried to make it out to be. Particularly the claim that it is the PIO who is punished even if the custodian of the information fails to part with the available information in time was either due to the deplorable level of awareness of the law even after 6 years of its existence or an outright effort to mislead the less knowledgeable among the audience. The activists participating in the discussions were never carried away by these gimmicks.

The concern expressed by the activists was on the willful flouting of the law by the information commissioners when it came to imposing the penalties mandated for delay in providing information.

This was a factor that not only took the tooth off the law but also caused immense loss to the exchequer. While in private discussions at least one information commissioner admitted that he had imposed penalty for non-compliance with the law on proactive disclosure, most maintained that it could not be done! Again it was left to Prof Chhokar to drive home the point that all was not well with the selection process of the information commissioners themselves and this was affecting the implementation of the law and in letter and spirit and adversely affecting its effectiveness.

At least one chief information commissioner got exposed

when he made tall claims of conducting hearings in various district headquarters to facilitate participation by the public authorities and the complainants/appellants. An activist from his state confronted him and demanded to know which were the districts where the last three hearings were conducted and which are the districts where the next three are scheduled. When there was no reply the activist bluntly told him not to mislead the audience!

The issue of the Department of Personnel and Training, the nodal department for implementing the RTI Act throughout the country, trying to subvert the law also figured in the discussions. Apart from the idiotic order issued that every complaint or appeal to the central information commission should be heard by all the information commissioners together, the latest was an office memorandum directing the public authorities to provide only that information that was available with them and not to forward applications to those public authorities who would be holding them. When an information commissioner from one of the states sought clarification on the legal validity of this office memorandum, the central information commissioner on the panel rightly expressed surprise

that such a clarification was being sought at all. He rightly added that while considering complaints and appeals the only things that mattered were the Act and the relevant rules promulgated by

the competent authorities! One of the participants added fuel to the fire by stating that the OM also stated that it was being issued after consultation with the central information commission and

application to the CIC for documents related to the consultation got the reply that there were no such documents available! It is presumed that the Chief Information Commissioner of the CIC, who was present, would have taken note of this deplorable effort of the DoPT to encourage public authorities to flout the law and misusing the CIC's name for that purpose. He is expected to bring the perpetrators of the crime before the law.

But it needs to be placed on record that the credibility of the Chief Information Commissioner of the Central Information Commission is itself questionable beginning with his own appointment.

Documents accessed by activists about the spadework done by the DoPT for selection of the central information commissioners by the committee headed by the PM, indicates more of manipulation than a fair and transparent process that is warranted. It would not be out of context to suggest that the observations made by the apex court in the matter of appointment of CVC should apply equally to not only the appointment of the information commissioners but to all appointments to every quasi judicial organisation in the whole country. It is pertinent to mention here that the present CIC of the CIC was the Secretary of DoPT before his present assignment. It was probably during his tenure that the DoPT put up on its website that there was no need to disclose file notings and it continued to mislead public authorities for a long time even after the then CIC had repeatedly directed DoPT to remove it forthwith! But it was during a private conversation on the sides of the deliberations that another facet of his attitude to transparency was

revealed. This was in the context of the information sought by citizens from the BPL category. His query what will these people do with the information obtained and whether it will substitute for food proves him to be an immense misfit for his present assignment! During the very welcome speech he had cribbed about the 'problems' of the Commission not having a permanent office building for itself and working from two locations. I do not know if the burden of information provided by the information commissioner

from Maharashtra about it working from five locations really got registered with the Central CIC. It also needs to be asked why the Central Information Commission should not establish 10 benches in

different parts of the country to facilitate participation in hearings by the PIOs/FAAs and complainants/appellants. Even when public authorities are not ordered to compensate the citizens there is immense loss to the exchequer when the PIOs/FAAs are made to travel all the way from nooks and corners of the country to the national capital for hearings at the only location of the CIC!

This report would be incomplete if I fail to mention about the only new bit of information gained during the convention - that a personal member's bill has been introduced in the Parliament to amend Sec 6 and 7 of the RTI Act. If the amendments come through every applicant will have to give reasons why s/he is seeking the information and if the reason(s) is/are not given s/he can be denied information on that ground alone! It is not known if the public information officer is being given any discretion also to decide if the

reason provided is valid or not. But whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that this is a retrograde step that needs to be opposed tooth and nail!

The chief guest for the valedictory function was the very honourable Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar. He did wax, with justifiable eloquence, on the Jaankaari scheme - a model appreciated by everyone, including the Chairperson of UPA - and the newly introduced Right to Service Bill. The call centre model of obtaining information about and under the RTI Act was to be adopted even by the UPA government but seems to have made no headway in the last two years! But to prove that he was also not beyond human frailties Nitish also faltered by claiming that 65 years is no age to retire and information commissioners should be allowed

to serve longer. This author was reminded of a quip: a person who is not an idealist at 20 has no heart, s/he who is not a pragmatist at 40 has no head. We all agree that the Right to Information Act is a path breaking law. In fact it is the only law that we have till date that puts the citizen where he should be in a democracy - at the centre of things like the ring master in a circus! It would certainly have been better if we had younger blood, unpolluted with misplaced senses of loyalty and camaraderie, to enforce this new generation law, which many speakers had openly claimed during the convention itself as the most important document after the Constitution itself! To my mind a person around 30 years with enough of both heart and pragmatism in him/her would have been a better bet to enforce this law in its letter and spirit!

## For Inclusive Capitalism

Economic activity gets a boost when the income pie is evenly distributed, not in the pristine Marxist sense of from one's ability to one's needs, but in the fair sense of rewards being in proportion to what one brings to the table or workplace.

It is in this context that Infosys founder Mr Narayana Murthy's fervent appeal, a couple of years ago, from the CII pulpit to industrialists to ensure that the salary differential between the highest paid and the lowest paid employee in the same organisation should not be more than 15 times, resonates. A billion dollars in the hands of 10,000 people can propel an economy from its comatose state and keep it going.

Instead of then gloating over islands of prosperity, which we often do in India as well by drooling over dollar billionaires in this country, the accent must be on inclusive growth, because in the absence of purchasing power in the hands of the masses, goods would remain unsold and services unused.

The point is excessive cash in the hands of a few takes to speculative and non-productive activities with alacrity, whereas the same cash if dispersed creates purchasing power crucial to all round growth.

**-S Murlidharan, Hindu Business Line**



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# janata

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**November 6, 2011**

## **Welcome Nargis Yadav, but...**

**S.Viswam**

**After Manmohan Singh Who?**  
Kuldip Nayar

**Home Ministry Delayed  
Plachimada bill**  
Ankur Paliwal  
Savvy Soumya Misra

**Holding Government to  
Account**  
Wajahat Habibullah

**Our Media**  
Markandey Katju

**Land Acquisition...Act**  
NAPM

**Unravelling corruption**

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India, and the rest of the world, is bound to welcome the birth in Uttar Pradesh of the “symbolic” seven billionth person, but the welcome is also bound to be laced with a touch of deep concern for the new arrival’s future in these trouble-torn times. Along with Baby Nargis were also born half a million babies around the world helping the global population to peak at the mind-boggling figure of seven billion. All the babies are thus entitled to the privilege of being the seven billionth children. Baby Nargis will be seen to symbolise both the hopes and fears of India, just as the nations where other babies have been born will expect better times ahead for the respective new-born. What kind of a world is in store for all these babies? Just consider. The world’s six billionth inhabitant was a Bosnian child, Adnan Mevic, whose birth was greeted by the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a Sarajevo hospital on October 12, 1999. Between that day and October 31, 2011 a billion more babies have been born—one billion in twelve years! And how fares Adnan Mevic, the six billionth baby, whose 13th birthday fell just a fortnight ago? Believe it or not, the family is living in poverty, which, we are told, is the reason why United Nations did not single out a single baby for the

global spotlight this time and decided to mark as many births as take place on October 31 as equally significant.

Well, any new-born infant anywhere is equally welcome but is the occasion of the world’s population rising to seven billion a cause for celebration? Certainly not. Rather, it is an occasion for all those who control the destinies of the billions already around to introspect. Good old Malhus was a real visionary. He warned us of this day, and true to his fears, the world has become even more crowded than he was around. Also consider a few other figures. Before the century ends (2100), the global population may cross the billion mark. No standing room then! When India became free in 1947, we were only between 33 and 34 million. Now we are at 1.21 billion and threatening to overtake China (now at 1.34 billion) by 2025—not all that far off given that 51 babies are born every minute in our country! The older generation in the world still remembers the time when the global population was just 36 billion. It is still galloping ahead, unstoppable.

The problem of feeding seven billion mouths is gargantuan. The world seems to be coping. But not

*Between the lines***After Manmohan Singh Who?****Kuldip Nayar**

fully, since hunger and starvation stalk many parts of the world, particularly in vast regions of Africa where the population explosion is even more frightful than in China and India. More babies are likely to be born in Africa in the coming two decades than in any other region. Despite the world having grown smaller in the last four decades with the advent of modern technology and communication breakthroughs, poverty in many countries is making little impact on the rest of the world. But this is bound to change. Mahatma Gandhi famously said that there is enough in the world for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed. And Indian poet Subramania Bharati threatened that even if there is a single hungry soul on the face of the earth, we will burn the whole world! Both may well have spoken too soon or too hopefully. The population boom can disprove many sound theories.

Consider. The world is already short of water, land, minerals, oil, energy and forests-greenery. Global warming is a chilling reality. The ice is melting from atop glaciers. Nearer home, the Himalayan foothills are getting flooded unseasonally. Even with modern technology helping to exploit available natural resources, we are energy shy, and suffer blackouts in all the highly populated cities. There is no water to drink. Subterranean water bodies are drying up. There is lesser supply of coal to burn, of land to develop, of forests to cut and grounds to drill. In short, in the race to capture natural resources and use them for the larger good of humankind, man is losing out. A time is coming when there will be a much smaller pie to share, and that can give rise to conflicts

*(Continued on Page 3)*

After Manmohan Singh who? The political parties and the people are prying into the affairs of the ruling Congress to make a guess. It is not that Manmohan Singh is indispensable. Nor has he been out of step with the pace set by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the real power. It is merely her calculation when to anoint her son, Rahul Gandhi.

True, lately Manmohan Singh's stock has plummeted and even as an economist he has been found out of depth. But these are only aggravating factors. The real reason is Rahul Gandhi, who unfortunately has not revived the Nehru-Gandhi charisma.

One question before Smt. Gandhi is that the President of India, Pratibha Patil, retires in the middle of next year and should Manmohan Singh be elevated then? Even otherwise, Manmohan Singh will be almost 80-year old in 2014 when the new Lok Sabha is elected.

What ails the Congress is that it has very few leaders who are of Prime Ministerial timber. Names of Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister A.K. Antony and Home Minister P. Chidambaram come straight to one's mind. Yet all the three do not make the top position for one reason or the other. At least, Mukherjee and Chidambaram are not in the reckoning of Sonia Gandhi whose say is beyond doubt.

Antony may be her choice if she ever decides not to put her son

in the Prime Minister's gaddi. No doubt, Antony is honest, humble and measures his words before uttering them. But he has not yet attained the stature of an all-India leader, particularly in the Hindi-speaking states. Mukherjee is the best troubleshooter the Congress has and he has been entrusted with some thorny problems which he has sorted out. Yet he is not considered trustworthy by the dynasty which lost confidence in him when he threw his hat for the Prime Ministership after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. As for Chidambaram, it is unconceivable that Sonia Gandhi will supersede Mukherjee to put him at the top if and when the time comes for choosing Manmohan Singh's successor.

Manmohan Singh who has matured politically in the seven and a half years of Prime Ministership knows about crisscrossing and dissensions in his party. Sonia Gandhi has been his great teacher and he has learnt from her when to tick off whom. Before going abroad this time, the Prime Minister had the cabinet secretariat to issue a communiqué to make it clear that there was no No. 2 in the government. Manmohan Singh himself remained in control even when he was out of the country. However during his absence, either the Home Minister or the Finance Minister can preside over the cabinet committee on political affairs.

Apparently, their feud was in the Prime Minister's mind and

he therefore, did not nominate either of them as 'No. 2.' However, Mukherjee will preside when there is a meeting of the cabinet committee. Chidambaram gets the chance if and when Mukherjee is not available. The vagueness in the arrangement has been kept purposely so as to keep both on the best of their behaviour.

Understandably, Antony does not figure in the communiqué. I have a feeling that both Mukherjee and Chidambaram may be ignored and Antony can be the dark horse. But this depends on whether Rahul Gandhi can still make the waves. UP can be his Waterloo. If the result in the state election early next year does not favour the Congress - it wants to occupy the second position, next to Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party - Sonia Gandhi may not nominate him.

Senior most Agricultural Minister Sharad Pawar who has expressed his frustration might have been in the reckoning if he had stayed with the Congress. But he left it to protest against a foreigner, the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, becoming the party president. How can she tolerate him occupying the top position? His grouse has found expression in the remark that the present situation in the country is because of the weakness of the government which he also represents. His Nationalist Congress Party has not enough strength to rebel even if Rahul Gandhi is made the Prime Minister.

Many years ago, the Congress faced a similar problem on the selection of successor when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru fell sick a few months before his death. Yet the challenges were different at that time. There was no dearth of leaders. Lal Bahadur Shastri, Morarji Desai,

Jagjivan Ram and Nehru's own daughter, Indira Gandhi, were popular among the public. Anyone of them was eligible to be Nehru's successor.

The real challenge, which the Western media had hyped, was whether the democratic system in the country would stay after Nehru. Journalists from the UK and the US, particularly from the former, predicted that democracy would end once Nehru breathed his last. An American journalist Wells Hagen wrote a book, *After Nehru Who?*, and listed among the claimants two army officers, General K.S. Thimmaya, a popular commander, and General B.M. Kaul, close to the dynasty.

What it conveyed was that the army might take over the country after Nehru's death. The West never understood - it still does not - that the diversity in India would not allow any system other than democracy to stay. This only ensures the different communities and castes their freedom as well as identity. India is democratic, not because it is competing with China, which is communist, but because it is the only system which is suited to its genius.

The problem which faces India is trivialization of the society. Elections have refurbished the sectarian caste or even sub-caste. Even religion has begun to play some role. That Manmohan Singh has inveighed against these tendencies is not enough. Had he been politically popular he might have countered them. Nehru at one time got the columns of caste and religion in application forms to government jobs or admissions to schools deleted. Manmohan Singh's success could be in unleashing new forces like engineers, doctors, lawyers

and academicians or those who are returning from abroad without old rigidities.

The economic growth that Manmohan Singh has initiated in the country is impressive but it has not curbed parochial tendencies. His policies have yawned the distance between the haves and the have-nots. In Nehru's days, the ratio between the top and the lowest was 10:1. Now it is thousand times more. The pertinent question which needs to be posed is: What after Manmohan Singh, not after Manmohan Singh who? His wasteful policies, although populist, have had an emaciating effect on 80 per cent of people. They are hardly bothered about the debate after Manmohan Singh who? They want bread.

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*(Continued from Page 2)*

hitherto not imagined. The state of the world today marks the failure of mankind to husband the god-given natural resources constructively. It is a failure for which the coming generations will pay a heavy price indeed.

In short, a drab and dreary world is on the cusp of growing more drab and dreary. It is not a world to which we can welcome the likes of Baby Nargis with open arms. But, alas, it is the only world we have, and we have to make do with it, like it or not.

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## Land Acquisition...Act

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development started its hearing on the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement 2011 on November 2 and **NAPM and other constituents of Sangharsh made their presentation before them. The submission was made by Medha Patkar, Dr. Sunilam (Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, MP), Devram Kanera (Narmada Bachao Andolan), Dr. Rupesh Verma (Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, UP), Vimal Bhai (Matu Jan Sangathan, Uttarakhand), Vijayan M J (Sangharsh), Arun Das (Sangharsh Vahini Manch, Bihar) and Madhuresh Kumar (NAPM).** The submission lasted for an hour and half and detailed presentation on the political importance of this legislation and its impact on the millions of farmers and nature resource based communities was made.

The delegation welcomed the fact that Land Acquisition Act, 1894 was being repealed and after the struggle of social movements across the country now displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation has been included on any plan dealing with the land use change. However, the Bill in its current form is not acceptable to us which legitimises for the first time the profit making motives of the private companies in the name of public purpose. Even though it is being projected as a response to the on-going land conflicts in the country it will not provide relief and justice to the struggling people and will only further the land conflict.

Medha Patkar submitted, “Bhu Adhigrahan nahi bhu adhikar chahiye

(we want land rights and oppose land acquisitions) is not only a slogan but the philosophy and essence of the struggle of thousands of movements engaged in opposing the destruction being caused in the name of development in the country today. The whole framework of eminent domain based land acquisition need to be replaced with the legislation focussing on development planning ensuring consensus of those who are going to part with their land. There is a need to recognise them as an investor in the development process and not only as a victim and once that framework changes the justice to all those project affected people will be done. It is extremely unfortunate that the land acquisition for the private companies for their profit, not allowed in the 1894 act, is now being allowed in this Bill.”

Dr. Sunilam emphasised that till date nearly 10 crore people have been displaced in this country by various projects since independence but where is the data on what has happened to those families. Let the government come out with a white paper on the status of rehabilitation of those displaced till date. He further added that for the first time there is a recognition of the need for R&R then let this cover and provide justice to all those who are still awaiting justice. There has to be a retrospective application of the Bill to all those who have not accepted award, compensation or challenged it and where projects are on-going and the R&R has remained incomplete. He further submitted that a large amount of prime agricultural land has been diverted for the industrial purposes and if the trend continued then it would impact

the food security of the nation and hence there has to be a moratorium on any further acquisitions of any kind of agricultural land.

Dr. Rupesh Verma said that land for land has to be the basis of any land acquisition till date and there can't be any compromise on it. In the name of urbanisation if it is not possible (like in case of NCR) then let the government give 50 per cent of the developed plot back to the farmers. If the land is not used within two years then let it be returned back to the farmers and other affected people and the mandate of land reforms be fulfilled rather than it going back to the government land bank. In every project the project affected people have to be given employment so that their standard of living is better than what it was before.

Vimal Bhai added that the definition of project affected people even though is comprehensive, misses those who continue to suffer after the project has been completed, like those affected due to tunnels in the run of the river project and those living around the reservoirs in Bhakra Nangal, Tehri or Narmada who face numerous health related issues due to water logging and otherwise.

Vijayan M J added that there has to be a National Development, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Commission, a statutory body, which will address the concerns of all those displaced and also consider the grievances and challenges to the declared public purpose of the projects.

The team also submitted that minimising displacement has to be the key objective and it can be achieved by exploring alternative options to the proposals, limiting excess land and ensuring the true public development purposes. The strongly suggested that Highways has to be brought within the purview of this Bill and can't be left out of it since they are going to cause major havoc and require huge amount of land and the struggle around Ganga and Yamuna Expressway is a testimony to that.

We can no longer continue forcible acquisitions, which is completely undemocratic and any development plan has to be based on the free prior informed consent of the project affected communities and in line with the provisions contained in 243 D (rural areas) and 243 F (urban areas) which emphasise the role of Gram Sabha and Basti Sabha. The precious minerals and other resources attached to the land are being handed over to the corporations there has to be a way to compensate the communities who are the real owners.

In short, some of the key concerns on the Bill under consideration with the Parliamentary Standing Committee are:

- **The Bill should be titled as 'Development Planning, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Bill'** ensuring no forcible acquisition and protecting the rights of the communities over the land and everything attached to it including the mineral, aquatic and forest cover. Any **acquisition should be done only in accordance with the democratically developed**

*(Continued on Page 10)*

## Home Ministry Delayed Plachimada bill

Ankur Paliwal, Savvy Soumya Misra

RTI response reveals why bill meant to secure compensation from Coca-Cola has not received president's assent till now

The victims of groundwater depletion and environmental pollution in Plachimada village in Kerala's Palakkad district will have to wait longer for compensation from the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverage Company. This is because the Ministry of Home Affairs first sat on the Plachimada Coca-Cola Victims Relief and Compensation Claims Special Tribunal Bill of 2011 for nearly four months and then sent it back to the Kerala government. The bill should have been sent to the president, instead, for her assent.

The Bill, once enacted, would legitimise the constitution of a special tribunal for securing compensation of 216.25 crore from the soft drink giant.

A RTI response received by Delhi-based non profit, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), reveals that the Bill was stuck earlier between ministries and later with the state. The Ministry of Home Affairs, which was coordinating the bill at the Centre, was supposed to send the bill for feedback to concerned ministries and later forward it to the president.

The Bill was passed by the Kerala Assembly in February and was sent to the Union home ministry on April 1, which later forwarded it to other ministries—Ministry of Agriculture,

Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Water Resources in mid-April for comments. Subsequently, comments were also invited from the Central Ground Water Board under the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

### Plachimada bill's journey

February 23, 2011: The Plachimada Coca-Cola Victims Relief and Compensation Claims Special Tribunal Bill 2011 is passed

April 1, 2011: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) receives the bill

April 13, 2011: MHA sends the bill to other ministries concerned for comments, specifying a deadline of six weeks

May 4 to May 18, 2011: Ministry of Rural development, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Law and Justice (legislative department) reply, saying they have no objections

May 25, 2011: Deadline to receive comments on the Bill expires

July 8, 2011: Overlooking Cabinet guidelines, MHA chooses not to go ahead with the processing of the bill and waits for comments from remaining ministries

July 12, 2011: Ministry of Water Resources replies, saying it has no objection and gave a few suggestions

July 12, 2011: MHA sends the bill with the legal opinion of Coca Cola India Private Limited, received during July, to the state for explanations

July 29, 2011: Ministry of Food Processing Industries replies and says it has no objections

The ministries were supposed to revert to the home ministry on the constitutional validity of the bill, whether it was in conflict with any existing Central law or deviated from any existing national policy.

The documents received under RTI from the home ministry reveal that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), despite receiving several reminders from the former, had not submitted its comments as late as October 20. While MoEF is still mulling over the bill, the home ministry, too, failed to follow Cabinet guidelines.

### **Home ministry defied Cabinet guidelines**

An official memorandum the home ministry, issued to all the ministries, mentioned that the Cabinet guidelines for disposal of state Legislative Assembly matters say that the ministries should submit their observations with six weeks. It added that if the feedback was not received within the six week deadline, the bill would be processed without waiting for further comments and if there were any inconsistencies at a later stage, the concerned ministry or department would be held responsible.

Within the six weeks, the home ministry received comments only from the Ministry of Rural development, Ministry of Law and

Justice (department of justice) and Ministry of Agriculture. None of them objected to the bill.

The home ministry, instead of proceeding with the bill at the end of six weeks, kept sending reminders to ministries and in some cases waited for almost one –and-a-half months, after the end of the six week period, before sending a reminder to MoEF and Ministry of Law and Justice (legislative department), Ministry of Water Resources and Ministry of Food Processing.

The Ministry of Water Resources suggested grounds on which relief and compensation claims could be made by the Plachimada victims. It added that expenditure incurred on deepening of wells, tube wells, replacement of existing pumps by high capacity pumps for lifting the water from deeper levels and deteriorating socio-economic condition owing to the loss of revenue should be recovered from the cola company.

### **Home ministry heeded Coca-Cola's legal opinion**

On the one hand the home ministry sat on the Bill instead of processing it, on the other it acted promptly on a legal opinion sent by Coca Cola India Pvt Ltd and sent the bill back to Kerala seeking explanation. The Ministry of Home Affairs received a legal opinion on the constitutional validity of the Bill from senior advocate Fali S Nariman on behalf of the company. This was followed by another opinion by another senior advocate, K K Venugopal.

“In the presidential assent issuing process, there is no provision for the Central government to entertain the legal opinion of a private sector

company on a bill passed by a state assembly,” wrote S Faizi, member of the Plachimada High Powered Committee, which suggested that a tribunal be formed. He has raised his objections in an open letter to Union home minister P Chidambaram, challenging Coca-Cola's legal opinion in the matter.

He stated in his letter that the legal opinion filed by Coca-Cola claimed that there was no evidence of excessive extraction and pollution caused by the operation of its plant in Plachimada. The damage, however, has already been proven by several studies.

It is interesting to note here that though the ministry sent the bill back to Kerala, based on the legal opinion from the company, it refused to disclose the same in the RTI filed by CSE. Officials also refused to give information on the communication from the company. The ministry explained it couldn't part with the information since it was not the originator of the documents. The ministry had been secretive about other information as well. The information that was disclosed, that too after filing an appeal, related only to the communications between the ministries.

### **‘Green tribunal not the right forum’**

C P Ramaraja Prema Prasad, law secretary of Kerala informed that the objections in the legal opinion were primarily on legislative competence of the state to set up a tribunal when National Green Tribunal was present. Coca-Cola has objected to the Bill, earlier as well, saying that the compensation should be paid through the National Green Tribunal.

*(Continued on Page 13)*

# Holding Government to Account

**Wajahat Habibullah**

*former Chief Information Commissioner to the Government of India*

As the Right to Information Act (RTI) celebrated the sixth year of its coming, there has been much heated discussion, often emotional, of the benefits that it has brought and also the challenges with which it has confronted government. This debate came to a head with the prime minister's inaugural address to the Annual Convention of the Central Information Commission on October 14.

It is accepted in all circles that the essence of government in a democracy must be transparency with every organ of government — executive, judiciary and legislature - being answerable to the citizen. Hence the father of the nation, when describing his vision of self-governance for India, described it as follows:

“The real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when abused”

India's Right to Information Act, 2005 therefore, asserts that democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information, which are vital to its functioning and also to contain corruption and to hold governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed. This is a universal truth of particular relevance to us as a country, the government of which has, at least since the '70s, remained committed to “*garibi hatao*” . In the words of Kofi Annan, the former UN

secretary general:

“The great democratising power of information has given us all the chance to effect change and alleviate poverty in ways we cannot even imagine today. Our task, - your task - is to make that change real for those in need, wherever they may be. With information on our side, with knowledge of a potential for all, the path to poverty can be reversed.”

This thought found resonance in the prime minister's speech introducing the bill in Parliament on May 11, 2005:

“I believe that the passage of this bill will see the dawn of a new era in our processes of governance, an era of performance and efficiency, an era which will ensure that benefits of growth flow to all sections of our people, an era which will eliminate the scourge of corruption, an era which will bring the common man's concern to the heart of all processes of governance, an era which will truly fulfil the hopes of the founding fathers of our republic.”

But for whom are the benefits intended? We know that infrastructure in India is woefully inadequate despite privatisation; employment growth of 2.1 per cent in 1983 had in fact declined to 1.84 per cent in 2004; in the health sector there are regional, socio-economic, caste and gender-based disparities; Centre-state fiscal relations are a matter of concern; an institutional framework for public-private partnership is

still to be developed; access to justice is not universal despite the rise of panchayati raj. Finally, because of the demands of national security versus social security and individual freedom, the essence of democracy, which respects the sovereignty of individual liberty, is vague at best. Some of these challenges, specifically the need to address threat to whistle-blowers, were cited by Dr Manmohan Singh in his address.

In this context, it is important to dwell on the definition of “information” in the Act. Information means any material in any form including records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, advice, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and “information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force”. As the PM mentioned in his address, this will clearly bring under the Act almost the entire scope of the economic firmament, which, thanks to the heritage of our “welfare state”, is answerable to government in a wide host of sectors. Key concepts under the right to information, then, include the following:

- \* Transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority.
- \* The right of any citizen of India to request access to information

and the corresponding duty of the government to meet the request, except the exempted information.

- \* The duty of the government to proactively make available key information to all.

Clearly then, this law places a responsibility on all sections of the national fabric: citizenry, NGOs and the media. The responsibility is not that of government alone. This brings into context the PM's call, on October 14, to all participants in the process to flag the challenges that government and the citizenry face in applying the law. What must follow then is the obligation so clearly enunciated in Section 4 (1) of the Act.

“ Every public authority shall - a) maintain all its records duly catalogued and indexed in a manner and form which facilitates the right to information under this Act and ensure that all records that are appropriate to be computerised are, within a reasonable time and subject to availability of resources, computerised and connected through a network all over the country on different systems so that access to such records is facilitated”

And what then is a “public authority”? This covers any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted -

- \* by or under the Constitution;
- \* by any other law made by Parliament;
- \* by any other law made by state legislature;

- \* by notification issued or order made by the appropriate government, and includes any body owned, controlled or substantially financed; non-government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate government.

The right to information includes the right to inspect works, documents, records, take notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records, take certified samples of material, obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts. It does not extend to information not held in material form.

The following are exempt from disclosure under Section 8 of the Right to Information Act:

- \* Information, disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state, relation with foreign state or lead to incitement of an offence.
- \* Information which has been expressly forbidden to be published by any court of law or tribunal or the disclosure of which may constitute contempt of court.
- \* Information, the disclosure of which would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or the state legislature.
- \* Information including commercial confidence, trade

secrets or intellectual property, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of a third party, unless the competent authority is satisfied that larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information.

- \* Information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship, unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information.
- \* Information received in confidence from foreign governments.
- \* Information which would impede the process of investigation or apprehension or prosecution of offenders.
- \* Cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the council of ministers, secretaries and other officers.
- \* Information which relates to personal information, the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual; infringes copyright, except of the state.
- \* Where practicable, part of record can be released.
- \* Intelligence and security agencies are exempt - except cases of corruption and human rights violation.
- \* Third-party information to be released after giving notice to third party.



It needs, however, to be noted that under the proviso contained in Section 8(2), notwithstanding any of these exemptions or indeed the Official Secrets Act 1923, a public authority may still allow access to information, if public interest in disclosure is deemed to outweigh the harm to the protected interests. And most exempt information is, at any rate, to be released after 20 years, with some exceptions, although also provided that the information, which cannot be denied to Parliament or a state legislature shall not be denied to any person. Unfortunately, on this provision there has been no endeavour by government despite pronouncements of the Central Information Commission, thus making more complicated for itself government's responsibility in keeping information secret.

What is noteworthy is that this law specifically seeks universal access, especially to the poor. It is, of course, open only to citizens of India, as per Section 3, but the fee is also required to be at a reasonable level, although the quantum is specified only by rule, and there is no fee for BPL persons. Assistant public information officers are required at sub-district levels to facilitate the filing of applications and appeals. Hence, heads of post offices have been given this authority by the Central government.

There is no need to specify a reason for seeking information or to provide any other personal details. There is a provision that the PIO reduce oral requests into writing and for the PIO to provide all required assistance, including to disabled persons. Information is to be provided in local languages.

There is provision for damages.

This placed a host of responsibilities on public authorities, who were required to appoint PIOs/assistant PIOs within 100 days of the RTI enactment and to begin maintaining, cataloguing, and indexing, computerising and networking records in accordance with Section 4(1) (a).

If this has not happened to the extent required, the government, which appoints CPIOs from officers at a relatively junior level, has only itself to blame. These authorities were to publish, within 120 days of enactment, a whole set of information, and update it every year.

This was to include publishing suo moto all relevant facts while formulating important policies or announcing the decisions which affect the public, and also providing reasons for its administrative or quasi-judicial decisions to all affected persons. Authorities were made primarily responsible for raising awareness, educating and training officials and the public. Every department was expected to develop and organise educational programmes to advance the understanding of the public, particularly the disadvantaged, to exercise the right to information. Not having done so, the government can hardly blame the public for misuse.

Government was thus to encourage public authorities to participate in programmes, promote timely and effective dissemination of accurate information, train PIOs and produce relevant training materials. To achieve this, government has developed

a scheme for e-governance. It is agreed that for the success of this initiative, RTI is essential. Here there has been progress, but only at the level of the Centre.

Key to the effective functioning of the Act is the Gram Panchayat, which can be the repository for scheme information, citizen surveys, fiscal information, etc. But this will happen only with the devolution of functions, funds and functionaries.

This body can then become the service provider for over-the-counter services, certificates, taxation, billing, licences, ration cards, and a host of such services at the grassroots, working to keep the citizenry informed as a group (Gram Sabhas) and as individuals, whose concerns and questions can also be appropriately addressed by reference to the relevant authority. This would ensure better feedback and accountability.

In reviewing the enforcement of the RTI Act, it would be wise to bear in mind the remarks of Justice Mathew on behalf of the bench in *State of UP v Raj Narain* (1975), oft-quoted in judicial circles while debating the law:

“In a government of responsibility like ours, where all agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct, there can be but few secrets. The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries... to cover with a veil of secrecy the common routine business, is not in the interest of the public.”

—*Courtesy The Indian Express*

(Continued from Page 5)

plans as per the provisions of Art 243 and PESA norms by involvement of Gram Sabha and Basti Sabha.

- **Public Purpose definition should be limited to core functions of the government that are performed with the public money and in no case acquisition should be made for the private corporations** where they get benefits due to any forcible acquisition of land or any other natural wealth under this act. Any project drawing private profit can't be considered public purpose. We reiterate this and only this can deal with the unjustified inequity in the country today leading to injustice for millions.

- Given the low level playing field existing till date between different parties in the process of land acquisition, it is necessary to ensure that **even if it is market based purchase of land or other resources by the private parties, including builders, the state should be duty bound to regulate the market price of resources and ensuring availability of optimum resources of livelihoods for every family especially those belonging to vulnerable section. Thus corporations should also be made liable for the R&R provisions of this bill,** which also goes well with the principle of fair play and competitiveness.

- **Any arbitrary benchmark for the application of R&R provisions should be done away with** and every single family directly or indirectly affected by any kind of acquisition should be provided with the resettlement

and rehabilitation benefits.

- **We reject market value for the land approach** since neither market value is fully worked out nor that automatically **ensures attainment of alternative sources of livelihood** especially for the least marketised and monetised community such as Adivasis and Dalits. So, without any ifs and buts appropriate provisions for alternative livelihood or **mandatory employment** be made for project affected people.

- **The law must address the claims of those already displaced** by various projects and address the historical injustice meted to them in the name of Development.

Finally, the team submitted that the hearings by some of the social movement representatives, lawyers, researchers and others in Delhi is not enough and Committee members must hold at least regional hearings so that the affected people on the ground actually can give their feedback on such an important legislation.

—Madhuresh

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## Unravelling corruption

Even as the whole country seems gripped by Anna Hazare's crusade against corruption, one man who started it all in 1996, senior journalist Vineet Narain, is all but forgotten and the case itself has been refrigerated for good.

Vineet is still struggling with his unfinished agenda to seek justice in the hawala racket. The CBI charge-sheet is still there, but the case has virtually been closed for want of political will, though public uproar caused quite a few politicians named in the Jain diaries to resign.

In his latest book, "**Bhrastachar, Atankvad aur Hawala Karobar**", (Author: Vineet Jain; Publisher: Kalchakra Samachar Trust; Pages: 340 pages; Price: Rs.200) Narain sequences the developments before and after the biggest scam was exposed. The list of beneficiaries, from the same sources from which the terrorists were being funded, includes virtually politicians from

across the spectrum.

"The idea to publish this book was to ensure that the real faces of the politicians and the murky deeds they engage in are thoroughly exposed to cleanse the body-politic," Narain said.

Narain used the provisions of the existing legal framework to take corrupt politicians to task during his single-handed war against corruption from 1993 to 2000. The legal battle targeted dozens of central ministers, chief ministers of states, governors, opposition leaders and top honchos of big enterprises, and ensured that they were charge-sheeted and forced to resign.

His book, Narain says, would help modern-day crusaders against corruption understand the dimensions of the problem and the clout the mighty and the powerful enjoyed to scuttle any move to make society corruption-free.

(Continued on Page 13)

# Our Media

Markandey Katju\*

To understand the role which the media should be playing in India we have to first understand the historical context. India is presently passing through a transitional period in its history: a transition from a feudal agricultural society to a modern industrial society.

This is a very painful and agonising period. The old feudal society is being uprooted and torn apart; but the new, modern, industrial society has not yet been entirely established. Old values are crumbling, everything is in turmoil. Recollect Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Fair is foul and foul is fair" — what was regarded good earlier, for example the caste system, is regarded bad today (at least by the enlightened section of society), and what was regarded bad earlier, such as marriage for love, is acceptable today (at least to the modern-minded).

It is the duty of all patriotic people, including the media, to help our society get over this transition period quickly and with less pain. The media has a very important role to play in this transition period, as it deals with ideas, not commodities. So by its very nature the media cannot be like an ordinary business.

Historically, the print media emerged in Europe as an organ of the people against feudal oppression. At that time the established organs were all in the hands of despotic feudal authorities. Hence, the people had to create new organs which could represent them. That is why

the print media became known as the "fourth estate." In Europe and America it represented the voice of the future, as contrasted to the established feudal organs, which wanted to preserve the status quo. The media thus played an important role in transforming feudal Europe to modern Europe.

In my opinion the Indian media should be playing a role similar to the progressive role played by the media in Europe during its transitional period. This it can do by attacking backward, feudal ideas and practices — casteism, communalism and superstition — while promoting modern scientific and rational ideas. But is it doing so?

In my opinion, a large section of the Indian media (particularly the electronic media) does not serve the interest of the people; in fact, some of it is positively anti-people. There are three major defects in the Indian media which I would like to highlight.

First, the media often diverts the attention of the people from the real issues to non-issues.

The real issues in India are socio-economic — the terrible poverty in which 80 per cent of our people live, inflation, the lack of medical care, education and backward social practices like honour-killing, caste oppression and religious fundamentalism. Instead of devoting most of its coverage to these issues, the media focuses on non-issues — like film stars and their lives, fashion

parades, pop music, disco dancing, astrology, cricket, reality shows and so on.

There can be no objection to the media providing entertainment to the people, provided this is not overdone. But if 90 per cent of its coverage is related to entertainment, and only 10 per cent to the real issues mentioned above, then something is seriously wrong. Its sense of proportion has gone crazy. Entertainment may get as much as nine times the coverage that health, education, labour, agriculture and environment together get. Does a hungry or unemployed man want entertainment — or food and a job?

To give an example, I switched on the TV recently, and what did I see? Lady Gaga has come to India; Kareena Kapoor standing next to her statue in Madame Tussauds; a tourism award being given to a business house; Formula One racing, etc, etc. What has all this to do with the problems of the people?

Many channels show cricket day in and day out. The Roman emperors used to say: "If you cannot give the people bread, give them circuses." This is precisely the approach of the Indian establishment, duly supported by our media. Keep the people involved in cricket, so that they forget their social and economic plight. What is important is not poverty or unemployment, what is important is whether India has beaten New Zealand (or better still Pakistan), or whether Tendulkar or Yuvraj Singh have scored a century.

Recently, The Hindu published that a quarter of a million farmers committed suicide in the last 15 years. The Lakme Fashion Week was covered by 512 accredited journalists. In that fashion week, women were wearing cotton garments, while the men and women who grew that cotton were killing themselves an hour's flight from Nagpur. Nobody told that story, except one or two journalists locally.

In Europe, displaced peasants got jobs in the factories created by the Industrial Revolution. In India, on the other hand, industrial jobs are now hard to come by. Many mills have closed down and have become real estate. The job trend in manufacturing has seen a sharp decline over the last 15 years. For instance, TISCO employed 85,000 workers in 1991 in its steel plant, which then manufactured 1 million tonnes of steel. In 2005, it manufactured 5 million tonnes — but with only 44,000 workers. In the mid '90s, Bajaj was producing a million two-wheelers with 24,000 workers. By 2004, it was producing 2.4 million units, with 10,500 workers.

Where then do these millions of displaced peasants go? They go to cities — where they become domestic servants, street hawkers, or even criminals. It is estimated that there are one to two lakh adolescent girls from Jharkhand working as maids in Delhi. Prostitution is rampant in all cities, due to abject poverty.

All this is largely ignored by our media, which turns a Nelson's eye to the harsh economic realities facing up to 80 per cent of our people, instead concentrating on some glamorous Potemkin villages.

Second, the media often divides the people. Whenever a bomb blast takes place anywhere in India, within a few hours TV channels start saying an e-mail or SMS has been received from Indian Mujahideen or Jaish-e-Muhammad or Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islam claiming responsibility. The name will always be a Muslim name. Now an e-mail or SMS can be sent by any mischievous person who wants communal hatred. Why should they be shown on TV screens, and next day in print? The subtle message being sent by showing this is that all Muslims are terrorists or bomb-throwers.

About 92 to 93 per cent of the people living in India today are descendants of immigrants. Thus, there is tremendous diversity in India: so many religions, castes, languages, ethnic groups. It is absolutely essential that if we wish to keep united and prosper, there must be tolerance and equal respect to all communities. Those who sow the seeds of discord among our people, whether on religious or caste or linguistic or regional lines, are really enemies of our people.

As I have already mentioned, in this transitional age, the media should help our people move forward into the modern, scientific age. For this purpose the media should propagate rational and scientific ideas, but instead of doing so, a large section of our media propagates superstitions of various kinds.

It is true that the intellectual level of the vast majority of Indians is very low — they are steeped in casteism, communalism and superstition. The question, however, is: Should the media try to lift up the intellectual level of our people by propagating rational and scientific ideas, or

should it should go down to that low level and seek to perpetuate it?

In Europe, during the Age of Enlightenment, the media (which was only the print medium at that time) sought to uplift the mental level of the people and change their mindset by propagating ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity and rational thinking. Voltaire attacked superstition and Dickens criticised the horrible conditions in jails, schools, orphanages, courts etc. Should not our media be doing the same?

At one time, courageous people like Raja Ram Mohun Roy wrote against sati, child marriage and the purdah system in his newspapers *Miratul Akhbar* and *Sambad Kaumudi*. Nikhil Chakravartty wrote about the horrors of the Bengal Famine of 1943. Munshi Premchand and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote against feudal practices and women's oppression. Saadat Hasan Manto wrote about the horrors of Partition.

But what do we see in the media today?

Many TV channels show astrology-based programmes. Astrology is not to be confused with astronomy. While astronomy is a science, astrology is pure superstition and humbug. Even a little common sense can tell us that there is no rational connection between the movements of the stars and planets, and whether a person will die at the age of 50 or 80, or whether he will be a doctor or engineer or lawyer. No doubt most people in our country believe in astrology, but that is because their mental level is very low. The media should try to bring up that level, rather than to descend

to it and perpetuate it.

Many channels mention and show the place where a Hindu god was born, where he lived, etc. Is this is not spreading superstition?

I am not saying that there are no good journalists at all in the media. There are many excellent journalists. P. Sainath is one such, whose name should be written in letters of gold in the history of Indian journalism. Had it not been for his highlighting of farmers' suicides in certain states, the story (which was suppressed for several years) may never have been told. But such good journalists are the exceptions. The majority consists of people who do not seem to have the desire to serve the public interest.

To remedy this defect in the media, I have done two things. First, I propose to have regular meetings with the media (including the electronic media) every two months or so. These will not be regular meetings of the entire Press Council, but informal get-togethers where we will discuss issues relating to the media and try to resolve them in a democratic way, that is, by discussion, consultation and dialogue. I believe 90 per cent of the problems can be resolved in this way. Second, in extreme cases, where a section of the media proves incorrigible despite trying the democratic method mentioned above, harsher measures may be required. In this connection, I have written to the prime minister requesting him to amend the Press Council Act by bringing the electronic media also under the purview of the Press Council (which may be renamed the Media Council) and by giving it more teeth — for example, the power to suspend government advertisements or in

extreme cases, even the licence of the media houses for some time. As Goswami Tulsidas said: "Bin bhaya hot na preet." This, however, will be resorted to only in extreme cases and after the democratic method has failed.

It may be objected that this is interfering with the freedom of the media. There is no freedom which is absolute. All freedoms are subject to reasonable restrictions, and are also coupled with responsibilities. In a democracy everyone is accountable to the people, and so is the media.

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***(Continued from Page 6)***

"The issue cannot be debated in National Green Tribunal because the National Green Tribunal Act requires the petitions for compensations to be filed within a period of five years, with a grace period of six months. But the most critical damage to groundwater and toxic contamination caused by Coca-Cola company at Plachimada occurred between 2000 and 2004. It is more than five years and so the National Green Tribunal cannot be used to redress the problem," explains Faizi. Coca-Cola India Pvt Ltd could not be contacted for comments.

At present the bill is with Kerala. "We are working on the comments and are expected to send it to Union home ministry in a week. We believe we have legislative competence," says Prasad.

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***(Continued from Page 10)***

In 1993, Narain exposed the links of 115 top people with terrorist outfits and channels that regularly funded anti-national activities of various groups.

To sum up: The Indian media must now introspect and develop a sense of responsibility and maturity. That does not mean that it cannot be reformed. My belief is that 80 per cent of those who are doing the wrong thing can be made good people by patient persuasion, pointing out their errors and gently leading them to the honourable path which the print media in Europe in the Age of Enlightenment was following.

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\* Chairman of the Press Council of India

"The interesting fact was not the amount of Rs.65 crore involved, but the names of all top leaders," he says in the book.

In his first book, "Hawala ke Deshdrohi", published in 1999, Narain first gave full details of the case and the intricate judicial process that stalled followup at every stage.

This book, Narain says, is dedicated to all crusaders fighting against corruption and to free the country of the cancer of corruption.

"The details given in a chronological order, describing all the complexities and hurdles, will be an eye opener and perhaps a guide to activists," he hopes.

In his long struggle, when it appeared to him that the legal battle was not leading to any fruitful conclusion and that the judiciary itself was seen aligning with the accused, Narain turned deeply spiritual in utter desperation and shifted his base to Vrindavan and the Braj Mandal.

**—Brij Khandelwal**

## Bitter Truth

Over half of India is poor with 46 percent living on less than a dollar a day, says UNDP. Contrary to the government's claims, which put the number of poor people in India to be around 37.5 percent (as per the Tendulkar committee), the latest report by the United Nations has claimed that 41.6 percent of Indians live for less than a dollar a day.

The report - Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All - said India has the world's largest number of multi-dimensionally poor — 612 million. The UNDP calculates poverty on a multidimensional vector such as access to health services, clean water, cooking fuels, basic household goods and home construction standards. Which means over half India's population is abysmally poor.

India also slipped down in the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking announced by the UNDP. India has come down from its last year ranking of 119 (out of 169 countries) to 134 (out of 187) this year. This despite the fact that life expectancy at birth in the country has increased by 10.1 percent a year over the last two decades, and mean year of schooling increased by 3.9 years between 1980 and 2011 and expected years of schooling increased by 3.9 years.

The 2011 Global HDI ranks countries on their progress on the three key dimensions of human development - education, health and income. India's HDI value for 2011 was 0.547 positioning the country in the medium human development category.

And even though between 1980 and 2011, India's HDI value

increased from 0.344 to 0.547 — an increase of 59 percent or an average annual increase of about 1.5 percent - when adjusted for inequality, India's HDI falls to 0.392, that is, a loss of 28.3 percent due to inequality. This is slightly lower than the average for South Asia (28.4 percent).

In the Gender Inequality Index (GII), Indian women were found to lag significantly behind men in education, parliamentary representation and labour force participation. India is ranked at an unimpressive 129 out of 146 nations in the GII.

The report released in Denmark points out inequality in the distribution of human development (income, education and health) is more pronounced in India than elsewhere. This is despite the fact that the Government has been concerned about uneven distribution of the benefits of growth for couple of years. Accordingly 11th Five-Year Plan (2007-12) was based on inclusive growth. 12th Plan is also expected to focus on inequalities.

This is the second year when UNDP calculated HDI after adjusting inequalities. India, with HDI value of 0.547, falls in the category of countries with 'Medium Human Development'. It falls short of the world average, which is 0.624.

Our record is worse than Bangladesh in mean year of schooling and life expectancy at birth. The gap between rich and poor is also wider in India as compared to Bangladesh. Even Pakistani children are attending

4.9 years of school as compared to India's 4.4 years.

### Gender equality: The old story gets worse

We may celebrate the birth of a girl as the seventh billion baby, but UNDP's report 2011 finds that India needs to work hard to give its women equal share as men. We lag behind even Pakistan and Bangladesh when it comes to gender equality.

India has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.617, ranking it 129 out of 146 countries in the 2011 index. In comparison, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan are ranked at 112, 113 and 115 respectively on this index. GII is measured on three parameters - reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.

### Mass of poverty

According to UNDP, income poverty only tells part of the story. The multidimensional poverty is 12.1 percentage points higher than income poverty. This implies that individuals living above the income poverty line may still suffer deprivations in education, health and other living conditions.

As per UNDP report 2011, 53.7 percent of the population suffer multiple deprivations while an additional 16.4 per cent are vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of India is 0.283. Bangladesh and Pakistan have MPIs of 0.292 and 0.264 respectively. China has 0.056 MPI which is very less as compared to India.



# Rural India Focus

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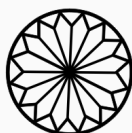
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**Vol. 66 No. 41**  
**November 13, 2011**

## Asoka Mehta

### The Life and Times of Asoka Mehta

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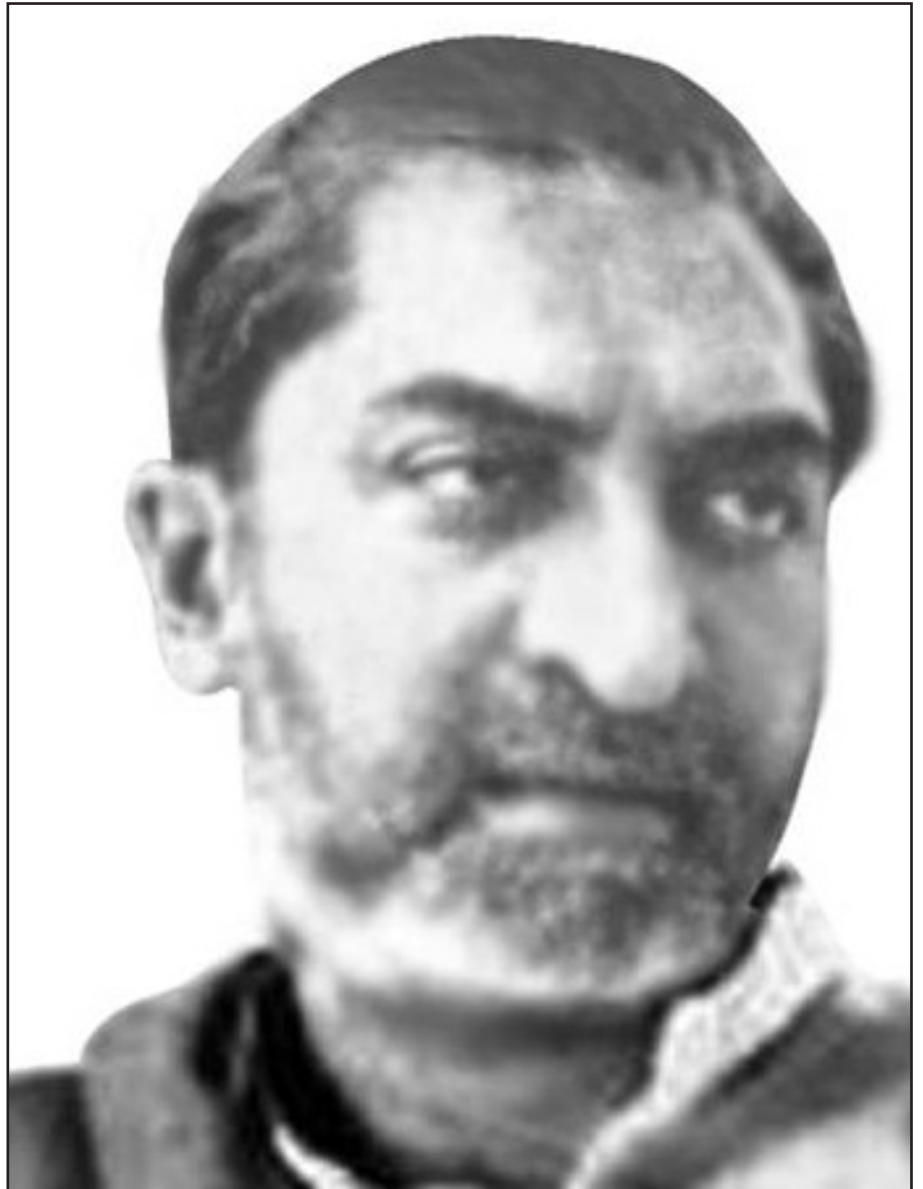
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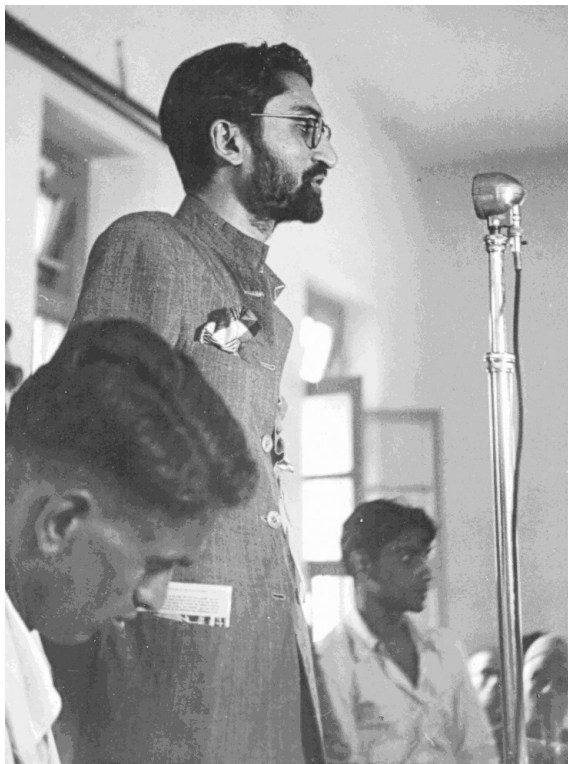
**editorial**

For Asoka Mehta, one of the founding fathers and tallest leaders of the Indian socialist movement, democratic socialism was the precept and the praxis, its normative ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, the beacon lights of his life, from its dawn to dusk. Asoka Mehta was a democratic socialist from the cells of the Nasik Jail to the cellars of the New Mehrauli, residence of his last days, from *natalis* to *mortis*. If Jayaprakash Narayan journeyed from the fountain of civil disobedience to the sea of Sarvodaya through the straits of Marxism and democratic socialism, in the pursuit of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, Asoka journeyed through the length and breadth of democratic socialism exploring its deep and dearthless dimensions, in pursuit of the very same ideals. Even Nanasahab Goray who remained in the socialist ship through the turbulent crests and troughs of the socialist movement and was neither a *prodigus* nor a *cleaver*, must plead guilty to the charge of graduating from Marxism to democratic socialism. So if consistency is the virtue of an ass, as Mahatma Gandhi once said, Asoka would rather ride it than hop trees in his denouement. He yearned for positive politics with a rare courage of conviction rather than stray into the dreary deserts of negativism.

Asoka had brain and brawn and a beating heart. While he spoke of North and South long before Willy Brandt's Report on the subject, he also led more than a thousand farmers against a Zamindar and more than two lakhs of textile workers in strike for more than two months. But while his intellectual prose and his powerful praxis hid his poetic heart, his dreamy eyes hid his intellectual insights and the prowess of his praxis. Asoka has written an ocean of prose but in its every nook, every corner, one can gleam an oyster with a poetic pearl.

Erudition was only a byproduct of his brain for which Asoka was awarded LL.D., and D.Litt. degrees, *honoris causa*, while it remains a puzzle, at least for me, as to who was more honoured. A gentle intellectual giant, his name stands tall in the history of the Indian socialist movement. Perhaps his baptism as Asoka was, after all, not an accident—but a prelude to the greatness to come.

It has been my privilege to have been invited to edit the special issue of *Janata*, the voice of democratic socialism for more than half a century, on eminence like Asoka Mehta. The task was daunting and yet pleasurable. I am grateful to Dr. S.S.Meenakshisundaram, Dr. T.N.Prakash and Dr. R.S.Deshpande for ably reflecting on Asoka's ideas in the articles that they have contributed for this special issue.



—Bapu Heddurshetti

# The Life and Times of Asoka Mehta

## Bapu Heddurshetti

The Indian socialist movement that began with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934 has thrown up many a great leader. Asoka Mehta was one of them. If there is a democratic socialist movement in India today, it is largely due to him. He was a democratic socialist *ab initio* and *par excellence*. He was an intellectual, an organiser, an ideologue, a parliamentarian and a trade unionist - all rolled into one. *A politician among intellectuals and an intellectual among politicians, equally at home in academic and professional groups* is how Prof. Verinder Grover describes him. One who reads his writings would be tempted to say that he was also a poet who wrote in prose.

Born on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1911 in Bhavnagar of Saurashtra, Asoka inherited an educated home. His grandfather was the Chief Engineer of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and his father, Ranjitram was an educationist. During his student days he came under the influence of Yusuf Meherally, who was then the leader of the socialists in Bombay. Asoka graduated from Wilson College, Mumbai, in 1931 and briefly taught in the University School of Economics. It was a good fortune of the socialist movement that Asoka Mehta, responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi, left his job and plunged into the Civil Disobedience movement of 1932, was arrested and lodged in the Nasik Jail for two and a half years.

### A leaf in the storm

Those were the days of the ferment of freedom struggle. About his involvement in the freedom movement Jayaprakash Narayan says *"Gandhiji's ... movement swept over the land as a strangely uplifting hurricane. I too, was one of the thousands of young men of those days, who, like the leaves in the storm, were swept away and momentarily lifted up to the skies. That brief experience of soaring up with the winds of a great idea left imprints on the inner being that time and much familiarity with ugliness of reality have not removed. It was then that freedom became one of the beacon lights of my life, and it has remained so ever since."* Asoka was another leaf like JP.

It was in the Nasik jail that Asoka met JP, Mino Masani, Nanasaheb Goray, M. L. Dantwala and others and planned the launching of a socialist party within the Indian National Congress. After the release of these leaders from jail, when the Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934, Asoka naturally became one of the founder members. He was chosen to edit the *Congress Socialist*, a journal that was adopted as the mouthpiece of the party. He edited the journal from 1934 to 1939. Asoka was inducted in the National Executive of the CSP in the Lahore conference held on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1938.

Perhaps Asoka had read Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Robert Owen, Saint Simon and many other socialist writers and thinkers when he was a student. His very first booklet entitled *Socialism and Gandhism* written in 1934, when Asoka was hardly 24 years old, bears the stamp of his erudition. That may be one of the reasons why Asoka, in spite of the company of Marxist stalwarts like JP in the Nasik Jail, remained a democratic socialist.

Being a democratic socialist, Asoka naturally was opposed to the communists. The Communist International had branded the social democratic parties of Europe as parties of the social fascists. Toeing the line the Indian communists branded the Indian National Congress as the movement of the national bourgeoisie and condemned the CSP as a party of social fascists. That was the reason why the CSP had decided not to admit the communists in the party. However, in 1934, the British Government banned the Communist Party of India whereupon the communists started infiltrating the CSP. Around the same time, the Communist International changed its tactics and called for forming united fronts with social democrats. JP, who was a Marxist and wanting to have unity of the progressive forces, advocated admission of the communists in the CSP. Another Marxist leader of the party, Acharya Narendra Deva opposed the move. However, the move was endorsed by the National Executive of the party. As a result many communists like E.M.S.Namboodiripad, A.K.Gopalan, Sajjad Zahir, P.Sundarayya, P.Jivananda were admitted in the CSP, and were given important positions also.

However, communists believed in what Lenin had said that they should support the united fronts like the rope supports a man hanged. Hence they tried to take over the CSP. A confidential circular issued by the CPI to the communists in the CSP to take over the party was exposed by Minoo Masani. Thereafter Minoo Masani, Asoka Mehta, Rammanohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan resigned from the national executive of the party protesting the continuation of the communists in the party. It took two more years for the CSP to realise its mistake and the party in its Ramgad conference held in 1940 decided to expel the communists.

In 1941, Mahatma Gandhi announced that instead of mass satyagraha campaign he would launch satyagraha by select individuals. He nominated Vinoba as the first Satyagrahi. Asoka was one such satyagrahi and was sentenced to undergo imprisonment for one and a half years. It is during this incarceration that Asoka wrote his book *The Communal Triangle* along with his co-prisoner Achyut Patwardhan.

It is interesting that while JP, who was later converted to Gandhi's Sarvodaya, had opposed the individual satyagraha movement and Asoka Mehta, who was not attracted to Gandhism, offered individual satyagraha on Gandhi's call. Asoka also participated in the 1942 Quit India movement and was again incarcerated for three years.

In 1947 the Indian National Congress adopted a rule that its members could not be members of any other political party. Socialists, who had formed the CSP within the Congress, were presented with the choice of either dissolving the CSP and remaining in the Congress or leaving the Congress and retaining the CSP. While Acharya Narendra Deva, Rammanohar Lohia and some others were in favour of remaining in the Congress, Asoka favoured leaving the Congress and forming a separate party. The party met in conference from 28<sup>th</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> March 1947 at Kanpur and took two historical decisions. The party decided to drop the word 'Congress' from its name thereby leaving the Congress and becoming an independent party and declared that socialism was not possible without democracy thereby jettisoning Marxism and accepting democratic socialism as its creed. Asoka had won on both counts.

### Ascendant Asoka

Asoka was an incisive writer. One of his early pamphlets was *Who Owns India*, which he started

writing before Independence and completed in 1950. In the pamphlet he demonstrated that it was not the ownership that mattered but the control. He said that "*Indian capitalism without having materially expanded production or improved the standard of life of the people, has reached the same degree of concentration as is seen in say, Canada. ...India on a lower level of economic development has reached the same high degree of concentration. ...The crux of an economy, it is now realised, resides in control rather than ownership. Whatever be the situation as regards ownership of industrial enterprise, control is securely gathered in a few hands*". The pamphlet made such an impression that within the year of its publication, *The New Internationalist*, a journal published in the United States, reprinted it with a commendation.

About the book Asoka later wrote "*I have tried there to describe the details of concentration of capital and concentration of control. These are two different things, because with the development of Joint Stock Company, it is possible to have control without ownership. Capitalism has discovered a method whereby control has been divorced from ownership. You may own a share, but you don't control the factory. You may control a mill but you need not own all the shares. The divorce between control and ownership is, you might say, one of the magical achievements of capitalism. And, as a matter of fact, it was the development of the joint stock companies that led Bernstein and others to indulge in their revisionist dreams....Such a divorce is the essence of modern capitalism and it also becomes the **raison d'etre** of socialism.*"

When the Socialist Party accepted democratic socialism as its creed, many of the party cadre, who were used to Marxism, started asking what democratic socialism was. It was once again for Asoka Mehta, the democratic socialist of the party, to explain the ideology. He gave a series of lectures on democratic socialism which were later published as a book entitled **Democratic Socialism**, the first in the trilogy on socialism that he wrote. In this book of about 180 pages, which is a standing proof of his erudition, Asoka refers to the ideas of 112 thinkers and refers to 70 books. About the book, JP wrote "*...the democratic socialist movement not only in India, but also abroad, would be indebted to Asoka Mehta for these lectures into which he has packed so much fundamental thinking seasoned with such conspicuous scholarship. As I read through these*

*lectures I wondered how Asoka Mehta, so busy as a leader and organiser, could find the time for such wide reading and quiet thinking.*” True to JP’s words, the book did evoke much interest in the socialist circles all over the world. Asoka himself acknowledged it when he wrote in the preface to the third edition “*book ... has evoked wide interest in many countries of the world. Not only in the Socialist circles but among nationalist leaders in various countries, e.g., Egypt, Iraq, the book has received considerable attention*”.

Asoka then felt that “*For countries of Asia there is both need and opportunity to think afresh and articulate our socialist future in terms of a comprehensive understanding of socialism and the specific conditions of our countries. While socialism has to be a universal philosophy, its reinterpretation in the light of Asian conditions entitles us to speak in a general way of Asian Socialism*”. And hence he rounded off his study of socialism by writing a sequel to the book Democratic Socialism, entitled ***Studies in Asian Socialism***, the second of the socialist trilogy, wherein he examined the contours of socialism as applicable to Asian conditions. The two books together give a comprehensive picture of democratic socialism.

Socialists had, along with other Congressmen, nurtured the All India Trade Union Congress. After leaving the Congress, Asoka felt the need to establish a trade union centre that was committed to the ideology of democratic socialism but was not controlled by any political party including the SP. He along with stalwarts like Basawan Sinha, R.S.Ruikar, Maniben Kara, Shibnath Banerjee, V.S.Mathur founded the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) at Howrah, Calcutta, on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1948. R.S.Ruikar was elected the President and Asoka, the General Secretary of HMS. Later Asoka led the strike of 2,20,000 Textile Workers in Mumbai for two months.

Socialist Party held its eighth conference at Madras from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> July 1950, presided over by Asoka. Even while criticizing the content of his Presidential address, Acharya J.B.Kripalani, a Congress leader then, said, “*...the style superbly ornate is almost Tagorean in its conceits. Nothing of this nature has been heard for many years from the political platform in India or elsewhere*”. Till now the party had only a General Secretary and no Chairman. The Madras convention elected Acharya Narendra Deva as the Chairman and Asoka as the General Secretary of the party.

When the General Elections were announced for the first time in independent India, Asoka was the General Secretary of the SP. He analysed the trends in public opinion as revealed by the bye-elections held before the General Elections, in an article which he called “*Straws in the Wind*”, and showed in which direction the wind of public opinion was blowing. Asoka very cautiously analysed the results and came to the conclusion that the SP was the second biggest and the principal opposition party in India, that it enjoyed more support than all other opposition parties put together, that it was the only organized nation-wide alternative to the Congress party. He also concluded that the adult franchise favoured the SP, but if only other opposition parties could leave 2000 seats to the SP and contest in the remaining constituencies, the Congress was likely to be defeated. While the SP heeded his advice, other opposition parties would not heed his analysis.

Asoka wrote to the party activists that if the Party worked as a team, it could emerge as an alternative to the Congress. He said that unless the party contested a large number of seats, it could not impress on the electorate that it could emerge as an alternative to the Congress. He also said that the single member constituencies buttressed the emergence of a two party system and recapitulated how in England in the 1945 elections some parties like the Commonwealth Party were defeated and later merged into the Labour Party thereby strengthening the two-party system. The party also tried to have electoral alliance with the Scheduled Castes Federation led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, but then it could not be done in time for the elections. Asoka Mehta put his heart and soul in the campaign. As a result of his efforts, the party contested 254 out of 489 Lok Sabha seats i.e., 52 per cent of seats and 1799 out of 3283 seats in the legislative assemblies of various states i.e. 55 per cent of the seats.

Most of the leaders of the party like Acharya Narendra Deva, JP. Lohia and others decided not to contest in the elections but help the party win more seats. But the essence of democratic socialism is to contest in the elections, win a majority, form a government and use the State power to bring in the socialist transformation of the society. Hence, Asoka, who already had a stint as a member of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, and who was a democratic socialist, contested from Bombay North and polled 1,39,741 votes, i.e., 16,165 votes more than Dr. B.R.Ambedkar of the Scheduled Castes Federation

and 42,986 more votes than Shripad Amrit Dange of the Communist Party of India, but lost to the Congress by a narrow margin of 9,397 votes i.e., only 1.33 per cent of votes polled.

While Asoka missed victory narrowly, the Socialist Party missed it widely. The party's performance was dismal. It could secure only 12 seats in the Lok Sabha though it got 10.59 per cent of the votes polled whereas the Congress contested 479 seats and secured 364 seats and polled 44.99 per cent of the votes. In the elections to the State Assemblies, the party could secure just 122 seats and only 9.7 per cent of the votes polled. Obviously the voters did not retain the pattern of voting which they had established in the bye-elections prior to the general elections.

The defeat of the party and its failure to emerge as an alternative to the Congress set in motion the process of rethinking on the part of the party leaders about its future. Talks were held with the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party of Acharya J.B.Kripalani with a view to merge the two parties and build a larger opposition party. While Acharya Narendra Deva was against the merger of the two parties, JP, Asoka Mehta and Rammanohar Lohia were in favour. Ultimately the two parties merged on 25-27 September 1952 at Bombay to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Later on the Forward Bloc of Subhash Chandra Bose also merged with the PSP. Acharya Kripalani was named the Chairman and Asoka Mehta, the General Secretary of the new party.

Thereafter, Asoka contested in a bye-election from Bhandara in Madhya Pradesh, a double member constituency, as a candidate of the PSP while Dr. B.R.Ambedkar contested as a candidate of the Schedule Castes Federation. Asoka Mehta polled 1,49,636 votes and got elected and entered the first Lok Sabha,

Though the Socialists had parted with the Congress, they had said in the Nasik conference held from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> March 1948 that the SP hoped that because of the common political ideals, commitments and experiences, the Congress would partner with the SP and will remain a progressive organisation. So when Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister and had distinctly socialist views, became the President of the Congress in 1951, Asoka thought that the Congress and the PSP could cooperate in building a socialist India. He wrote an article in *Janata*, the

weekly mouthpiece of the PSP, in which he spoke of the political compulsions of a backward economy and the need to search for areas of agreement with the ruling party.

### The Congress Controversy

In the meanwhile, when JP met Nehru during the first week of February 1953, Nehru suggested that the Congress and the PSP should cooperate with each other at the party and the government levels. After discussion with other party leaders JP suggested a 14-point programme to Nehru which would form the basis of co-operation. However, Nehru did not want to be bound by such definite programmes and was more particular about identity of views. Hence the talks of co-operation failed.

However, the Nehru-JP talks generated so much controversy in the party that, a special convention of the party had to be convened at Betul, in Madhya Pradesh, from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1953. Asoka Mehta as the General Secretary of the party presented a report to the convention, in which he again spoke of the political compulsions of backward economy and the need for searching areas of agreement. Asoka wanted only what Alexander Hopkins McDonald calls "discriminating cooperation" with the Congress. But the Nehru-JP talks coupled with Asoka's thesis created a lot of controversy in the conference between those who wanted to cooperate with the Congress and those who wanted to oppose the Congress.

In view of the controversy Asoka Mehta resigned as the General Secretary of the party. Even while resigning he said that his resignation does not mean that he will not work for the party. Nanasahab Goray was appointed General Secretary in his place. In the Panchamadhi Conference of the PSP, when Lohia became the General Secretary, Asoka's commitment to the party made him accept the position of a Joint Secretary.

However, when elections were held to the then Travancore-Cochin assembly in 1954, the PSP entered into electoral adjustments with the Communists with a view to defeat the Congress. However, when no party could secure a clear majority in the assembly, Madhu Limaye, who was one of the Joint Secretaries of the party, wrote to the communists, that either the communists should form a minority government or the socialists and the other should support the

government from outside. The communists did not respond. Then the Congress came forward to support a minority PSP government. Thus the first-ever PSP government came into existence with Pattom Thanu Pillai as the Chief Minister.

This looked like a triumph of Asoka's views of co-operation with the Congress. Lohia, who had by then become very anti-Nehru and anti-Congress, perhaps felt that if the PSP government continued, it would widen the areas of agreement between the Congress and the PSP. So when the police opened fire on a restive crowd in Travancore-Cochin and four people died, Lohia sent a telegram to the Chief Minister asking him to resign. Asoka resented this unilateral act of Lohia. He said that only the National Executive Committee of the party could seek the Chief Minister's resignation. A party convention was called in Nagpur to decide the issue. The party rejected Lohia's stand by a majority and endorsed Asoka's stand.

Very soon another controversy arose in the party. In its Avadi session, the Congress resolved to advance towards a socialistic pattern of society through planning aimed at social ownership of the basic means of production and equitable distribution of national wealth. Asoka wrote an article in the party mouthpiece *Janata* that the Avadi resolution had expanded the area of agreement between the Congress and the PSP. However Madhu Limaye issued a press note that the Avadi Resolution was a fraud on the people of the country. This led to a controversy which ultimately led to the suspension of Madhu Limaye from the party. When Lohia incited the party units to invite Madhu Limaye to speak in party functions despite his suspension, party had to suspend Lohia also.

After Lohia launched his own Socialist Party at Hyderabad, the PSP met at Gaya from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1955. Acharya Narendra Deva who was the Chairman could not attend the conference as he was not well. However he had written a draft of the policy statement of the party which was read out in the conference. The statement admitted that armed insurrection was neither possible nor advisable and hence the socialists should use democratic and peaceful means to usher in socialism. In an obvious reference to Asoka's stand, the statement further said that the party will not let itself to be deluded by the calls for national unity and will not waste its time in useless talks of need for cooperation. Though the

reiteration of the rejection of Marxist methods and acceptance of democratic socialism was a triumph for Asoka's views, he and Purushottam Tricumdas opposed the draft for its rejection of Asoka's thesis of search for areas of agreement.

The conference decided to bar electoral adjustments with the Congress, the Communist and the communalist parties. However, an amendment was moved to delete the reference to the communist and communalist parties restricting the bar only to the Congress. It was defeated by 189 votes in favour and 260 votes against it. Though the defeat of the amendment was a triumph for Asoka, the policy on adjustments itself was against his views. Democrat that Asoka was, he accepted the decision gracefully.

However, in 1956 JP issued a statement calling for the opposition parties to have electoral adjustments between themselves with a view to reduce the majority of the Congress. He opined that though he believed in party-less democracy he wanted parliamentary democracy to survive because in its absence one party rule will become inevitable. However he explained that he wanted only electoral adjustments and not alliances. Asoka reacted by writing an article which was published in *The Hindu* of 26<sup>th</sup> September 1956. He argued that though the recipe may help the opposition parties to increase their strength in the Parliament, it may not benefit the PSP.

In the second general elections held in 1957, Asoka contested once again from Bhandara, which was a double member constituency, but this time he lost. He polled 1,05,613 votes and his party colleague Sakhare polled 1,04,954 votes as against the 2,27,373 and 1,98,202 votes polled by the two candidates of the Congress. But he once again bounced back in a bye-election held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1957 from Muzaffarpur in Bihar and became a member of the second Lok Sabha. He polled 50,783 votes as against 36,341 votes polled by the communist candidate.

He contested the third general elections held in 1962 from Deoria in Uttar Pradesh but lost. He polled 60,954 votes as against the successful Congress candidate's 80,195 votes.

### **Asoka chooses the Congress**

Failure of the socialists to emerge as a viable alternative to the Congress, or at least as an effective



opposition party, disheartened Asoka. He came to the conclusion that the PSP could not become an effective opposition party. He expressed his views in a meeting of the leaders of the PSP held in Patna in April 1962. Asoka said that if the socialists had to play an effective role in Indian politics, they had only two alternatives: one, that they should join the Congress and strengthen the socialist tendencies developing in that party or two, they should form a united front of all opposition parties in order to defeat the Congress. It was quite natural for Asoka to choose the first alternative because he was a democratic socialist and the Congress party was at least speaking about socialism, but not the second alternative because according to him, communists did not believe in democracy and the communalists, who were becoming strong, did not believe in either democracy or socialism. While Asoka took the first alternative, Lohia and his party took the second alternative in their Calcutta conference held in 1963 and tried to bring together all opposition parties to defeat the Congress. But the PSP conference held at Bhopal between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1963, over which Asoka, himself presided, rejected his theses. The party still elected him its Chairman.

At one time Nehru had asked Achyut Patwardhan to be a member of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations. However, Achyut had declined the offer. Thereafter, Nehru had chosen Purushottam Tricumdas as a member, and he had accepted the offer and had represented India in the United Nation's General Assembly. Nehru now chose Asoka Mehta as the Deputy Leader of the Indian delegation to the United Nation's General Assembly which held its session in September–December 1963. Asoka accepted the assignment. Asoka addressed the General Assembly on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1963 on 'The Challenge of the Development Decade' in which he spoke of the '*stubborn differences between the affluent North and the poverty-ridden South*'.

Interestingly, a decade later, in 1977, Willy Brandt, the former (Social Democrat) Chancellor of West Germany was appointed as the chairman of the Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues which produced a Report known as "North South Dialogue" which spoke of the need to reduce the differences between the rich North and the poor South.

Planning was Asoka's passion. According to Asoka, the concept of centrally planned economy,

of a planning commission taking over the functions of the market, is one of the concrete contributions made by socialist thinkers to economic science and that the planned economy, was the solution evolved by socialists for achieving rapid economic development. Asoka was invited to discuss the First Five Year Plan with the Planning Commission. About his discussions Asoka writes "*The First Plan was not a well thought out plan. We were new to the technique of planning, statistical material was limited. I remember that when I was called to discuss the draft plan with the Planning Commission, and I had the good fortune to do that for two whole days. I had drawn the attention of the Commission to the absence of employment aspect in the Plan. Hastily a chapter was put together and it was tagged on to the Plan at the end. What should have been integral was made an adjunct and no one felt the difference.*" In 1966, he was asked to write a Graduate Program of Planning for the University of Puerto Rico.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1963 Nehru appointed Asoka as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. Asoka accepted the position. This was viewed as his attempt to force the party on the path of cooperation with the Congress. When the National Executive of the PSP debated whether Asoka's acceptance of the Deputy Chairmanship was against the policies of the party, Nath Pai, Farid Ansari, Ishwarlal Desai and Mulka Govinda Reddy supported Asoka's stand. When it was proposed at the National Executive to seek Asoka's resignation from the party, Nath Pai, Farid Ansari, Ishwarlal Desai and Genda Singh opposed the move while Ganga Sharan Sinha, Nanasahab Goray, Surendranath Dwivedi, H.V.Kamath, Niranjan Singh and Sanat Mehta chose to be neutral. In order to avoid the controversy, S.M.Joshi, requested Asoka not to renew his membership of the party. Asoka did not oblige and the party took the historical decision of suspending its Chairman from the membership of the party.

Thereafter, Asoka joined the Congress with his followers including, Triloki Singh, Genda Singh, Narayan Dutt Tiwari, Vasant Sathe, Chandra Shekhar and M.S.Gurupadaswamy. He was appointed Union Minister of Planning in January, 1966, even though he was not a Member of Parliament, and took over additional portfolio of the Department of Social Welfare in February, 1966. He was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Maharashtra as a Congress candidate and was a member of the Rajya Sabha from 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1966 to 26<sup>th</sup> February 1967. In the general

elections held in 1967 he again won from Bhandara in Maharashtra by securing 1,52,206 votes, i.e., 44.41 per cent of votes polled.

He was once again appointed as a Cabinet Minister in the Union Government by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, his stint as a Minister was to end soon. On 21<sup>st</sup> August 1968 Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. USSR occupied the country. Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev enunciated his doctrine of limited sovereignty of Socialist States and said that intervention in Czechoslovakia was vital to the preservation of the Soviet Socialist system and that he would intervene in any state that sought to replace Communism with Capitalism.

Asoka had always been a staunch anti-communist. He had once earlier resigned from the National Executive of the CSP in protest against admission of Communists in the party. During the Cold War years, when the USSR sponsored front organisations to promote its interests around the world, an international organisation called the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was set up with its headquarters in Paris to counter the Communist propaganda. In India Asoka Mehta with JP, Mino Masani and others established the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom with the objective of defending intellectual liberty and to cultivate the spirit of free enquiry, and got it affiliated to the CCF. It was a non-political organisation consisting of scholars, writers, scientists, etc.

Hence in 1968, Asoka wanted the Government and the Congress party to condemn the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Both did not oblige him. Asoka spoke in favour of the resolution tabled by PSP leader in the Lok Sabha, Surendranath Dwivedi, condemning the aggression and did not hesitate to resign from the Cabinet on the issue. When he had accepted the Deputy Chairmanship of the Planning Commission he had been accused by some of being power hungry. His resignation proved that he had a strong commitment to the democratic socialist ideology and opposition to the Communists and that he was certainly not power hungry.

Asoka had said in 1951 that “Socialists, even when in a minority, might agree to participate in a non-socialist government, nay—they might do so in their individual capacity. In France, Millerand, who was one of the leaders of the French Socialist party,

*in 1899 joined in that fashion the Waldeck-Rousseau Cabinet. Such step can have no sanction of the socialist movement. Participation in a non-socialist government not at the instance of the party or the movement but on one’s own would be a betrayal of socialism.”*

Was Asoka an Indian version of Millerand? Did Asoka betray socialism by joining the Congress government? Having searched and found areas of agreement with the Congress, Asoka did not believe that the Congress was a non-socialist party and hence felt that his joining the Congress Government was not a betrayal of socialism. His fight against totalitarian attempt in India during the emergency once again proved his commitment to the ideal of democratic socialism.

### **In defence of democracy**

In 1969 Indira Gandhi split the Congress party. Her faction came to be called Congress (R) and the other faction Congress (O). Indira Gandhi was becoming authoritarian. How could a democratic socialist like Asoka Mehta be with an authoritarian person like Indira Gandhi? It was an irony of fate that Asoka joined the Congress (O) whose top leaders were generally perceived as conservatives, if not capitalists, and opposed Indira Gandhi who initiated some progressive measures like the nationalisation of banks and abolition of privy purses. Asoka contested the 1971 elections again from Bhandara as a Congress (O) candidate but polled only 16.88 per cent of votes cast and lost to Indira Gandhi’s Congress candidate who polled 76.58 per cent of votes.

Soon Indira Gandhi’s authoritarian storm overwhelmed the Indian polity. Indira Gandhi became more and more authoritarian. In an editorial of *Janata* weekly, of 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1973 Nanasaheb Goray wrote “*The difference between a dictator of admittedly totalitarian country and the head of a democratic federal union, whose federating units have ceased to function, can be only notional. In fact when major States like Andhra Pradesh and U.P. have come under President’s rule and so many other States are rapidly qualifying for it, is not Smt. Indira Gandhi already functioning like a dictator? ... one fine morning the Indian people will wake up to learn that they are under a dictatorship*”. Asoka said that Smt. Gandhi was not well disposed to the process of decentralisation, her predilection was in favour of sucking up power to the apex, both in the

government and the party.

Corruption became rampant. JP responded by launching the campaign for “Total Revolution”. Asoka and his party, the Congress (O) and the Socialists joined forces with JP. True to Nanasaheb’s prophesy, on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> June 1974 people of India woke up to learn that they were under a dictatorship. Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency and jailed thousands of leaders and imposed censorship on the media. Asoka was also arrested and jailed.

Asoka took his incarceration as a blessing in disguise. In the confines of the Rohtak Jail, Asoka penned his master piece in socialist literature, the third of his socialist trilogy, *Reflections on Socialist Era*. In the *apologia* to the book he wrote: “*Writing it (the book) helped to fill the empty hours with purposeful activity. I must thank the Prime Minister for inadvertently providing me with an opportunity to make a modest contribution to the prison literature of our time*”.

After his release from the prison Asoka, as the President of the Congress (O) party, got busy with JP in bringing the various opposition parties together to defeat the Congress which was now the torch bearer of totalitarianism. Asoka took the second alternative that he had suggested in the Patna meeting of the PSP held in April 1962 but under very different circumstances. He was not, like Lohia, trying to bring together all opposition parties to defeat the Congress party, but was trying to bring together all political forces to defeat the totalitarian threat to the Indian polity and to restore democracy. When Indira Gandhi announced elections to the Lok Sabha, Janata Party was formed and it romped home with victory in the elections and the first ever non-Congress Government at the Centre came into existence. However, it is a pity that Asoka, who had contested in all the general elections held till then, did not contest the elections in 1977.

It was most appropriate that in December 1977, the Janata Government appointed him as the Chairman of a committee to recommend rejuvenation of the Panchayat Raj institutions in the country. The Committee submitted its report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations to revive and strengthen the Panchayat Raj System. It recommended among other things, a two tier system with Mandal Panchayats at the bottom acting as *growth centres*, and all tiers with powers of taxation and participation

of political parties. The West Bengal and the Karnataka Governments enacted new Panchayat Raj Acts implementing the recommendations. However, it is a pity that the subsequent Congress government once again opted for a three tier system.

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Asoka’s concern for the farmers made him lead the agitation of farmers of Pardi in Gujarat in the 1950s. The agitation was unique in the sense that while other agitations of farmers were for ameliorating their woes and even land grab movements were directed against the land owned by the Government, this agitation was aimed at structural changes in the pattern of land holdings by occupying the land owned by a Zamindar. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1953 he led 1054 members of the Pardi Kisan Panchayat, of whom 97 were women in ploughing and digging in the 1000 acres of land owned by the local Zamindar of Piari village near Pardi and on a complaint by the Zamindar, Asoka, Amul Desai, and Bombay Municipal Corporator Vasanti Shroff and many other socialists were taken into custody by the police. Later Asoka was sentenced to undergo imprisonment for one year and lodged in Yerawada Jail, from where he wrote an acknowledgement for his book *Democratic Socialism*. He later wrote his book *Indian Peasants*.

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Along with Jayaprakash Narayan, he led the Indian delegation to the first Asian Socialist Conference held at Rangoon between 6<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1953 and the second conference held in Mumbai in November 1956. He also addressed the Council Meeting of the Socialist International held at Haifa, Israel on ‘The tasks of Social Democracy in Asia’.

### The ideology of Asoka

Asoka’s first tryst with ideology was with Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Freedom Movement. Freedom struggle filled the air then. A young man of 21, Asoka plunged in the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. *Freedom* hence was the first beacon light that beckoned young Asoka. And it remained a beacon light that guided him in his political life throughout.

Though Asoka participated in the movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi and courted arrest and was jailed, unlike all other socialists of the time, he

was a sympathetic critic of Gandhi's ideas. His very first publication, which was as early as in 1934, was, ***Socialism and Gandhism*** in which he characterised Gandhism as a reactionary strain of romanticism. However, after a better understanding of Gandhi, Asoka had the intellectual honesty to admit that such characterisation was a mistake. He later characterised Gandhism as conservative classicism. He admits that it took twenty years for him to unlearn his mistake. He came to consider Gandhi as the greatest Indian utopian and said that in Gandhi, utopianism was epitomised at its highest and the best. In Gandhi and Vinoba, Asoka saw the utopian socialist thought in India reaching its highest watermark. But then Asoka counted Gandhi in the Proudhon-Kropotkin tradition of anarchism while he considered Nehru as having opted for social democracy.

Asoka's second tryst with ideology was in the Nasik Jail. There he met Marxists like JP, Nanasaheb Goray and others. All these men were fired with Marxism and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. It is interesting that in spite of spending two and a half years with them in the Nasik Jail, Asoka emerged from the prison a democratic socialist who was not enamoured of Marxism but of democracy and socialism which made him a thorough democratic socialist. Thus ***Equality*** became his second guiding beacon light. This conviction in, and commitment to, the ideology of democratic socialism also remained with him throughout his political life.

It was the love for freedom of staunch Marxists like JP and Acharya Narendra Deva and the democratic spirit of Asoka which made him work in harmony with them in the CSP in spite of ideological differences. His harmonious relations with Marxists in the CSP and his staunch opposition to the communists, was the realisation in him of the third normative ideal of democratic socialism, ***Fraternity***. Soon, Minoo Masani who had connections with the Communist Party and was also in the Nasik jail joined Asoka's ideology of democratic socialism. That the CSP, which called itself a Marxist party in 1934, abandoned Marxism and accepted democratic socialism as its creed in a span of about a decade is a tribute to Asoka Mehta.

Though he worked with Marxists inside the Congress Socialist Party, he was very critical of Marxism and the Communists. He blamed them for the split in the socialist movement. He said "*The fond belief that a group of men has a patent in revolution,*

*that a group of men understands the march of history better than the people themselves, this belief in a totalitarian philosophy is responsible for the splitting up of the socialist movement. The little Marxes that strut about the world, in their megalomania, fritter away the strength of socialism*".

For Asoka, democracy was the very heart of socialism. He said "*We cannot conceive of socialism outside the framework of democracy. Democracy and Socialism together, and only as two together, make that ideal that we all seek to realise. The two cannot be divorced.*" Then he went on to say that "*economic equality is the necessary link that joins socialism with democracy*". "*Socialism*", he said, "*was the culmination of political equality that democracy prescribed... Hence, till 1914, the socialists prided on calling themselves social democrats thereby viewing socialism as the crowning attribute of democracy.... It was only after the World War 1... that adherents of social democracy hastened to rechristen their movement democratic socialism, thereby making democracy an attribute of socialism, rather than the other way about under social democracy*"

For Asoka, democracy was not merely a parliament elected once in five years. Here he borrowed a leaf from the anarchists. His vision of democracy was one of decentralisation. For him decentralisation was also a precondition of liberty. His concept of decentralisation was not limited to geographical decentralisation like some other socialist leaders sought to advocate. He said "*There may be the Parliament at the centre, but below it there must be State Assemblies, District Boards, Village Panchayats, Co-operatives, Ward Committees, and Community Centres. Their respective powers have to be allotted and satisfactorily dovetailed. Such is the pulsating fabric of a democratic state*". Thus Asoka's concept of decentralisation had both vertical and horizontal dimensions. It was multi-dimensional.

He dovetailed this decentralised democracy with development. He conceived panchayats not only as decentralised units of governance but also as catalysts of growth and development. He conceived 'mandal panchayats' as the rural growth centres. According to him "*A nucleus of villages with the central village emerging as the focal point, to which surrounding villages respond and react and from which modern facilities would radiate, would provide a better model for development and growth*".

### Political compulsions of a backward economy

Soon after attaining independence, Asoka realized that the task of uplifting India was a stupendous one. He said that developing a backward economy required mobilisation of resources through augmenting of savings at a high rate. Asoka gave the example of taxation to prove his point. He said *“Taxation in India absorbs between seven to eight per cent of the national income. For adequate expansion of development and welfare activities, it has been calculated that 35 per cent of the gross national income has to be in the hands of the government. Would any government dare to raise, in its tenure of power, taxation four to five fold?”*

The opposition parties, to strengthen themselves, tend to oppose the moves by government. Afraid of the opposition and for want of commitment, the ruling party hesitates to take bold steps. The existence of communists and communalists in the form of parliamentary and political opposition compels the people to believe that the only choice is between conservatism and chaos which endangers the very concept of social change through democratic processes. Then people start believing that only a dictatorship can bring about social changes in a backward economy.

Asoka's solution to this dilemma was: by pushing the opposition to the fringes the base of the government should be widened so that it could move forward and strengthen the pluralist forces in the government. We should ensure that, even if not by law, at least by convention, a government lasts longer. Criticism should be confined to the normal democratic methods and opposition different from criticism would be confined to the few who are opposed to the very fundamental principles of the state.

Hence Asoka said: we cannot co-operate with the communists and communalists, only because they are also in the opposition like us. If so, the logic demands that we should co-operate with a party which is nearer to us in ideology, even if that party were to be in power and the socialists in the opposition. Hence Asoka's insistence on searching for areas of agreement with the Congress party. These, he said, were the political compulsions of a backward economy.

However, though this equation was based on ideology and not on power, a section of the socialists whose political equation was based on power were very critical of Asoka's views. They argued that the *parties in opposition* ought to get together and defeat the *party in power* whatever the respective ideologies. This logic gave birth to the anti-Congressism of Lohia in which the Socialists were called upon to join forces with the communists, communalists and the capitalists who were in the opposition ranks, to oust the Congress from power. Thus while Asoka's political beliefs led him to the Congress party, the political beliefs of his opponents among socialists led them into the lap of the communalist forces and resulted in strengthening of such forces and their coming to power with Lohia's followers as the dumb spectators on the fringe..

### Development oriented democratic decentralisation

Asoka had said *“because economics of socialism tends to be centralising, its politics must be democratic and decentralised and culture liberating, if the tensions between freedom and organisation are to achieve a vital equipoise.”* But then could not the economics of socialism also tend to be decentralised. Asoka set about the task of decentralising the economics of socialism.

If India lived in villages, the rural development assumed urgent importance. But which was the agency to bring about rural development? Gram Panchayats with participation of the people in the developmental process were the obvious choice. But then they were weak administratively and financially.

The total receipts of Gram Panchayats in India even in 1976-77 were of the order of about Rs. 113 crores – on an average Rs. 5000 per panchayat. The average however is a deceptive figure hiding wide disparities. The average for Kerala was over Rs. 1,10,000 while that for Uttar Pradesh was Rs. 640. The income of all panchayats from all sources works out to 61 paise per capita per annum in Uttar Pradesh. The 5300 block centres were too few and far and the 2,40,000 panchayats were totally uneconomic and impractical. The appropriate level would be somewhere in between.

This thinking gave birth to the concept of

Mandal Panchayats which would not only be viable institutions but will also act as rural growth centres. A nucleus of villages with the central village emerging as the focal point, to which surrounding villages respond and react and from which modern facilities would radiate, would provide a better model for development and growth. And to strengthen these institutions Asoka wanted them to have powers of taxation to mobilise their own resources.

People's participation required that the Panchayat Raj Institutions should be democratic, that they should be elected by the people. Hence Asoka wanted elections to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. He said *"Elections constitute a process of social churning. They help to break down, in some measure, the hold of traditional decision makers. They progressively enable the poor to make use of their numbers to exert influence on developmental process. Some people are fond of fostering unanimous choices. It is fondly assumed that such unanimity would strengthen community spirit in the village and help developmental work. Unanimity circumscribes the power of the poor that resides in their number; unfettered elections are likely to enable the poor to come into their own"*.

He said *"More the number of persons that find themselves in positions of responsibility, less irresponsible will politics become. Political workers would find places where they can earn their spurs and make a mark in constructive as distinct from agitational politics. By democratising local government we would be strengthening the roots of democracy in the country also"*.

### **The Poet who wrote in prose**

In addition to having the brain of a theoretician Asoka also had the heart of a poet - a rare combination. His prose writings had glimmers of poetry. Referring to Asoka's presidential address to the Socialist Party's annual conference held at Madras, Acharya Kripalani, wrote: *"Sri Asoka Mehta's presidential address makes delightful reading. The style, superbly ornate, is almost Tagorean in its conceits. It is full of unusual similes and metaphors. In the use of alliteration it is oriental. It has plenty of, to borrow its own language, 'mirrors in cadenced prose'... Here are some beautiful gems: 'I have laboured ....in the vineyard of Socialism and I would like*



*to twine some of my significant impressions into a wreath', 'though long was the night of slavery, and arduous the twilight of the struggle', 'cultural discontinuity converted social rhythms into jerks and cut circles into segments', 'cut lanes of lucidity into the labyrinthine corridors of customs and habits', 'turn the single tomed beads of irritation into a rosary of despair', 'fluidity in the meaning of words creates a crisis in communication', 'the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow', 'life's lotus is many layered and every petal is precious', 'the connoisseurs of misery exploit cynically the hungers and frustrations in men and adorn reason with cap and bells'. This poetic prose induced Acharya himself to write poetically: "These are but a few fragrant flowers we have ventured to cull from a garden full of them". What better tribute could one expect than that from a person of the stature of Acharya Kripalani. Perhaps in Asoka, what the socialist movement gained, the literary field lost.*

Asoka contested the general elections held in 1980 from Surat constituency but could not win. Calling it a day, Asoka retired from active politics. He was conferred the degrees of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) and Doctor of Literature (D.Litt.), (*honoris causa*) for his erudition and scholarship by many Universities.

Carrying a fragile body afflicted with asthma, but a fecund mind, all his life, Asoka Mehta silently disappeared from the Indian socialist firmament on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1985.

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# The Politics of Poverty

Asoka Mehta

It is not often that the words of the poor, emerging out of the bowels of their poverty, are captured in their glowing authenticity. Recently, however, I came across a book, *Child of the Dark*, written by a slum-dweller in Sao Paulo. In that opulent city, the articulate outcaste cries out in her despair:

“Brazil needs to be led by a person who has known hunger. Hunger is also a teacher . . . . Those who govern our country are those who have money, who do not know what hunger is, or pain or poverty.”

This searing prayer of Carolina Maria de Jesus has been answered in our country: we have as Prime Minister a person who has known hunger and poverty, who has had them as his teachers. We may therefore, talk with some confidence about the politics of poverty.

In fact, concern with poverty has been at the heart of our politics ever since the days of Dadabhai Naoroji. A principal justification of our national liberation movement had been the aggravation of poverty that foreign rule brought about by the drain of our resources and its inability to remove the squalor and want of centuries.

Our poverty, however, is not merely of the body. It is at once a poverty of spirit, body and mind, having its roots in our social system, our economic apparatus and our culture. Our situation borders on desperation because these three different roots of poverty have interacted and reinforced one another.

The poor have rarely found entry in the corridors of power. In the Old World, the poor, for countless centuries, were totally excluded from the processes of power. In the New World, the expanding frontier was the one escape available to the energetic among the poor. The vast mass of the people in any country, before industrial transformation is brought about, are the rural poor. They naturally hunger for land and have often turned against the landlords; they have yearned for expanding credit and distrust bankers and merchants. The money changers, throughout

history, have fattened on the misery of the poor. The poor have only one vested interest; it is the vested interest in change.

The Jeffersonian vision of a rural democracy, of self-sufficient agriculturists, owning their homesteads, has often inspired national leaders. But such a society implies a vast expanse of arable land capable of taking care of not just the existing population, but also of its future growth. Where land is limited, diminutive farms, even if they could be carved out, would not open up any dimension of change. Growth potential has to be coaxed out of the economy, if social transformation is to be ensured.

The thrusts of technological change cannot be held back; even in Jefferson's America, arcadian life faded before it bloomed. Where the pressure of population on land was heavy and kept growing, and technological possibilities leading to economic diversification had not yet opened, ideal communities were thought of in terms of the immense out-pouring of moral energy of men. Today, it seems possible to work out social and economic transformation without demanding abiding presence of moral incandescence in every person.

Karl Marx saw the emancipation of man at the end of the road travelled by industrial growth and economic change. Where these changes had already occurred, he demanded socio-political changes, and where they were yet to occur, he sought political upheavals that would sponsor the missing economic growth. In the former case, it could be a dictatorship of the proletariat involving the dominance of the many over the few; in the latter case, it has invariably proved to be the tutelage of the many by the few.

## Reweaving the fabric of existence

When the poor are given democratic powers, will they end up with the accent on distributive justice and acquiescence in economic stagnation? Or will they trigger growth with the other changes that they seek?

If politics of poverty has any potency it would seek to narrow the gulf between the rich and the poor - always wider in underdeveloped countries than in the developed countries. Will it also strive for the accumulation of capital (always painful) to initiate and push through structural changes in the processes of production themselves? Are the poor solely concerned with the *relations* of production, or, also, and even more, with the *forces* of production, whose suppression in the world of today is a greater crime against the poor than the embedded inequalities?

Very few nations are willing to face these elemental challenges. Ours is among the select and the most exposed. Through our action and our understanding we are weaving new patterns in the tapestry of history.

There is no escaping for any country from the stress and thrust of transformation. That requires conscious and determined leadership, whether the process is democratic or otherwise. The main task is to correct the *imbalances* - for example, between population and resources, between educated men and the jobs available to them - and that requires the assertion of *will* and *capacity* in the society. It further demands activation and energisation of the people. Where the process is democratic - if it is not another name for apathy - the leadership will have to evince deeper dedication and the people greater understanding, in brief, profounder commitment.

Nation after nation has faced the task of transformation with varying degrees of awareness and purpose. As years have gone, what could have been attempted through *incremental* changes, that is accelerated changes, but along the same lines, have given place to *structural* or fundamental changes - where the known dimensions themselves have to be altered. We have now reached a further stage, where *constant changes* have to be accepted and absorbed. The whole concept of stability is thus revolutionised. *That society alone is stable that develops capacity to live with change.*

### **Bread and other things too**

It might be argued that politics of the poor is simple - theirs is the quest for bread. In our conditions, the ineluctable fact is that either we do not get bread at all, or we get bread and other things too. Bread, to use a convenient symbol, is plentiful only when agriculture is bountiful. Within the traditional confines of agricultural production, the possibilities of growth are limited, and a considerable part of them

we have already exhausted. These possibilities leap forth only when the traditional bounds are overcome, that is when new tools and techniques, new skills and scientific understanding, are brought to agriculture. It means constantly altering and improving the human element in agriculture, as also improving and altering the material bases provided by land, water and other inputs in agriculture.

Every Indian cannot be assured the simple bread and rough cloth that he seeks to appease his hunger and cover his nakedness with, unless we strive to bring to him a modicum of education, a deepening of industrialisation and a host of associated changes in transport, credit, marketing and other institutions. If it is foolish to juxtapose bread against freedom, it is equally futile to counterpose a basket of bread against a basket of wider achievements .

### **Twin requirements**

Even where politics of the poor focuses on food alone, it will be still necessary to produce enough food grains - there is a great deal of unsatisfied hunger in our land - and to provide employment and earnings to the hungry to enable them to secure their share of food. These twin requirements demand a great amount of development efforts and transfer of resources from the better off to the under-privileged and needy, which is complicated social engineering.

Even granting that there are many routes to economic welfare, certain critical tasks remain constant. These challenges - or dilemmas, if you prefer that word - can be reduced to four inter-related problems: First, the people must somehow accumulate capital, saved from the rigours of subsistence economy; a surplus that needs to be invested to energise productive activities. Secondly, agriculture has to be revolutionised. Without that neither man nor materials needed for further growth can come nor can the basic needs of the many millions be met. Thirdly, the nation has to encourage alterations in men and institutions; in cultural mores and the folkways. Fourthly, these changes have to be channelled into the process of industrialisation because that way alone new tools and techniques emerge to augment and diversify production, that is, improve productivity and thus, lift levels of living.

There is an inescapable relationship between improvement in life and augmentation in investment in the economy. Professor Colin Clark has offered a workable rule of thumb:

“It is only insofar as the rate of investment exceeds the rate of population increase multiplied by four that anything will be left for industrialisation or for raising standards of real income.”

In India, today, our population increases at almost 2.5 percent per year. The rate of saving in our economy, today, is 10.5 per cent. This means that we are still hovering at the edge of stagnation. We have to lower our birth rate - shall we attempt to halve it in a little over a decade? On the other side, we have to step up our savings and investment to 20 per cent in a decade or so. Such a two-pronged attack would open up possibilities wherein the people would experience the glow of change, and improvement in their living conditions. Politics of poverty that overlooks these basic efforts are, in reality, ineffective, shadow politics.

Food for all involves, if not for production, certainly for the possibilities of consumption, universal employment. These simple objectives demand far-reaching developmental efforts and social changes. A recent survey has confirmed that the pattern of distribution of income in the rural households is such that the bottom 30 per cent of them have an income (10.58 per cent) which is almost that of the top *one* per cent (8.87 per cent). Half the rural households have an income (22.48 per cent) that is almost the same as that accruing to the top 5 per cent (19.50 per cent). Even when agricultural production goes up, the marketable surpluses are apt to accrue to the larger holders of land. If these surpluses are to be made available to the poorer sections of the villages, they must be assured of earnings. Those earnings - arising from investments - have to be balanced by savings if inflation is to be avoided. Our rural sector is large, almost half of our national income comes from it, and experience the world over shows that economic transformation does involve imposts on the rural people, hence the outlays will have to be balanced by savings from the top layers of agricultural households. Half the agricultural income flows to 20 per cent of the rural households. Surely the rest, 80 per cent, cannot experience change unless the burdens are adjusted - whether in terms of a grain tax or other forms of imposts upon the better placed.

In the urban industrial sector inequalities are sharper. Again, the managerial elite insists upon having standards comparable to those in the West. At the stage of development where we are today, in no country were these comforts provided. Unless

we accept austere standards for the elite, our consumption claims will eat into savings, abridge and erode investments and multiply the miseries of the poor. There is nothing more unsettling for the submerged people as they seek openings of progress than the “demonstration effect” of ostentatious living. Non-basic consumption, which embraces in our country today not just the luxuries and frivolities of the rich but the comforts and convenience of the middle classes, has not just an unsettling effect on the poor, but also weakens the surge of growth and slackens the efficiency of those whom we want to draw into more productive pursuits. Politics of the poor, from any rational point of view, cannot seek a flat sharing of poverty but has to work for the priority of investment over non-basic consumption which eats into the possibilities of employment, together with the provision of basic consumption to the millions. Men who wish to avoid becoming victims of uncontrolled social change must consciously organise the change themselves.

### **The ultimate solvent**

Economic growth is the ultimate solvent of our poverty, want, and gross misery. The growth, in our conditions, remains impeded without the widening social changes. Welfare of the people, I would like to emphasise, is the end result of growth and change and not a substitute for either of the two. Shall we deny education to our young people, shall we evade provision of productive skills to them, because we resent imposts to finance those activities? Should provision of drinking water for the people be put off to permit us our comforts? Can India of our dreams emerge where each one seeks an island of security in the whirling sea of deepening want? Can the islands remain safe against the irresistible waves of change?

We have been depending on external assistance for reaching a 13 per cent rate of investment in our economy even when our savings account for only 10.5 per cent of the national income. I believe that as the poor have a claim over the resources of the rich, so also poor nations can seek aid from rich nations, if the concept of world community has any meaning and world peace is to abide. There is another reason also, which we may not emphasise but that we should not ignore. The reason is crisply stated by William McCord in his book, *The Springtime of Freedom*:

“In essence, the developing nation of today subsidised Europe as it began its economic advance (through the Colonial Drain); surely,

this fact alone indicates that Western aid today should be regarded not as a sentimental gift, but a just return on investment.”

As international peace cannot survive if rich nations ignore the needs of poor nations: ultimately, they would have to spend far more of their resources in money and men in combating wars and disturbances than is needed for fostering economic change; so also within our country, if the upper sections of the society resent the demands of development on their earnings, the resources they will ultimately have to find to maintain civil peace will be perhaps more. Tragically, the resources diverted to peace-keeping, international or social, add little to the progress of man. By resisting the worthwhile, often one is driven to succumb to the worthless.

It is the logic of development that those that have tend to get more. The rich nations will be able to use constantly new technology and augment their resources faster than poorer countries. In the developing countries, regions that have moved forward will progress faster than the sluggish and the stagnant. The existing industrial corporate concerns in our country, for instance, will have about Rs.1,050 crores of depreciation funds and Rs.900 crores of retained profits, etc., during the Fourth Plan period. They will thus expand and proliferate. It is this characteristic of growth that validates the principle of redistribution, of transfer of resources from the better placed to the badly set. This is the *raison de'etre* of welfare economics everywhere. In a country like India, just the elementary needs of the people - food and work - require stringent transfers of resources. Even when one reduces the content of welfare to the bare minimum and consciously links it with growth activities, the need for transfers remains massive, because the humanity to be reclaimed from utter morass of want is staggering in its numbers.

### **Accent on social change**

Elsewhere it was possible to choose between economic growth and social change. It was also possible to arrange them in some sequential relationship. In India, if growth is pursued by itself, it will never gather strength. Its ambit will remain narrow and precarious. For a short while *enclaves* of development and prosperity will emerge, but they, lacking spread-effect, will remain insecure. The modern sector of the economy will reach limits of expansion if the traditional sectors do not grow, that is, expand and modernise. If economic growth

is to achieve sustained momentum, it will have to be stoked by social change. It is not ideology that leads us to lay accent on social change - that is, hewing down of economic inequalities and of social privileges - but the demographic and sociological facts that are stubborn and intractable.

In some countries economic growth opens up a margin of welfare and so permits muffing or delaying of social change. In India, the growth itself is a function of the change - the latter enables and triggers the former. Our conditions, compared to the general run of things the world over, are far from normal. They are in fact critical, because we have no margin of tolerance. We are, because of our abject poverty and massive numbers, the world's ultimate proletariat.

This then is my answer to a nagging question in you - whether I plead for national politics or class politics. For me the two are one. We need community consciousness and community solidarity to salvage ourselves. It is not enough to have an open society that we claim to build, it is necessary to have communitarian attitude and approach. A century of experience has made obsolete the controversy between national politics and class politics even in the wider world. Each has to inform the other. Even if we opt for class politics, a ruling stratum will emerge. That stratum will get panoplied in privileges unless it retains its sense of purpose and dedication. Only that leadership will be able to lift our grinding poverty that has luminous purpose and dedication. The objective constraints that operate on us will permit escape to none. Subjective response that has come cannot be confined to politics alone; it has to be a product of the *ethos* as a whole.

In no country did new forces stir and burgeoning follow until there was intellectual unrest and cultural efflorescence. To challenge the old and articulate the new, is the essential intellectual prerequisite of economic and social growth. In our inherited culture there are many elements that enrich us and must abide. But to seek the fruits of science and technology one has to adjust oneself to the structure of modernity. These cultural stirrings have to reach out to the poor if they are to become active agents, and not passive objects of history. It is necessary to impart freshness and fecundity to their cultural awareness. To paraphrase Marx, it is not necessary for the culture of the poor to suffer from poverty of culture!

## Penumbra of politics

You are by now, I know, probably thoroughly outraged. What has this hocus-pocus of planning to do with politics, whose substance we know is drawn from caste and community, from local grievances and regional peculiarities, from personal frustrations and group antipathies? I plead guilty to the charge - but only partially. Politics always operates in its peculiar penumbra. Intransigence and intractability of limited loyalties are among the operational media of political action. That is so not just in India but the world over. Again, it is not a bane of politics alone, it is inherent, instinct, in all group life: Lord Buddha had to expel a close disciple from his nascent Sangh, Jesus Christ was betrayed with a kiss to the Roman legions by his immediate associate. Socrates was given hemlock by his fellow citizens.

Group affiliations and aspirations will always operate politics. But they have to be suffused with understanding, endowed with purpose and direction. That is the real essence of politics. A voter votes on myriad differing considerations, but when the votes are counted a certain pattern of opinion is revealed. It is that pattern of opinion and understanding one has to influence and shape, though none can organise the wayward impulses behind every vote. India's politics is "of scarcity," as Myron Weiner has aptly described it. Politics of scarcity can easily degenerate into politics of scramble. Such politics can only damage the poor; scramble would aggravate the difficulties and it is the weak and the vulnerable who would suffer the backlash. The poor have a greater need for planning than the privileged because without such efforts economic growth, to the extent there is, will tend to be beneficial to the latter. When scarcity rules the lives of the people, the need for a clear focus, deeper understanding and collective discipline is inescapable.

Politics of poverty implies a deeper understanding and specific orientation. It requires involvement in social change by closest association with those whom Gurudev Tagore called, "the lowliest and the lost." It is the return to the worship of God as poor as Gandhiji envisioned it. Any lesser politics is shadow boxing on the brink of a precipice. The poor, just because of their poverty, will not automatically discover the path to transformation. Pandering to their prejudices, even those emanating from injustice and raw wants, will not release the dynamism required for effective deliverance. The effort needed is not brief and dramatic but sustained and purposive. The poor, in

India, have a long row to hoe, before the dead crust of centuries is transformed into soil that laughs with golden harvest. Given the key role of leadership in economic growth process, political change itself becomes an area of conscious action. Development that would enable poverty to be overcome requires interaction among political, cultural and economic factors. Even the narrow question of mobilising additional capital for economic growth is made possible only by a *determined* leadership. It is clear that what development needs is not only consensus, nor pure coercion, but a *consensus-coercion-continuum*: a widespread consensus that does not hesitate to coerce the intransigent when necessary.

The poor have to continuously precipitate the crisis - of conscience and of politics. Once Gandhiji made it impossible for us to acquiesce in subjection. Likewise, the meaningful politics of today has to make it impossible to acquiesce in mass poverty and gross inequalities. As those who sought to escape from the crisis that Gandhiji precipitated lost significance in the land, so must those who escape to their islands of security forfeit the confidence of the people. It took nearly thirty years of determination and dedication to achieve political freedom; given the same determination, it should not take more than twenty years to ensure for us economic freedom.

## The lever of development

Those who accept these insights and understanding as crucial and vital for the nation will turn their energies to institutional innovations and constructive politics that would give the needed direction and dimension to the poor man's unfolding understanding and efforts. Politics will then mean not playing musical chairs in stagnation, but activating the escalator of development and change. Austerity and Equality will be viewed not as irksome burdens but as expressions of community solidarity and adjuncts of development. We shall be then not lost in weaving the cocoon of frustration around us, but in discovering in shared efforts the satisfaction of creative transformation. Politics of poverty can mean merely messing about in the morass of stagnation, it can also mean occasional explosions of mass anger. But we can, if we only will, make it the decisive hammer of history that can shape for our people the destiny that we dream of. A nation cannot be built on unproductive toil, parochial loyalties, and misery that has come to be realised as remediable injustice. The leaders that have left us have given us the vision. It is for us to enshrine it in our life.



# Rural India Focus

## PRESENTING THE NATION WITH A REPLICABLE MODEL OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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GIRLS  
HOSTEL  
AT TARA,  
PANVEL**



**WEEKLY EYE  
CAMPS AT  
THE YMC  
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TARA, PANVEL**



**RUNS THREE  
HIGH  
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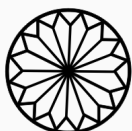
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# Indian Agriculture and Asoka Mehta

T.N. Prakash Kammardi

## Indian Growth -Paradigms and Contradictions

As its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has crossed Rupees 45 lakh crores, India has joined the startling club of trillion dollar economies that comprise a few countries such as USA, China and Japan. With a comfortable annual growth rate of around 8-9 percent in GDP, it is being described as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. While the developed world is caught up deeply with the woes of financial meltdown and recession, India is not only sustaining its growth momentum, but also helping the world economy to recover from its present crisis. Even in terms of plain economic indicators such as number of High Net-worth Individuals, billionaires to concrete macro economic parameters such as the growth of share market, inflow of FDI to export earnings, India's achievement is equally striking.

But, let us get into the agriculture to know what is happening to the core component of the economy in India. No dearth of facts to prove how backward is our agriculture. Productivity of our major crops is abysmally low compared not only with that of developed countries but also with the comparable neighbor like China. In spite of continued policy supports and recurrent program initiatives, the so-called four percent growth in the agriculture is as elusive as anything. Government reports in recent years have admitted, without any hesitation, that agriculture in a state like Karnataka is not at all remunerative. This has not only exacerbated the perennial problem of urban migration but has also given rise to peculiar social problems in the countryside. As the men folk migrate to the cities, the responsibility of cultivating the land falls on women. This gave rise to a curious situation, which noted agriculture and food policy analyst, Dr. Devender Sharma describes as '*feminization of agriculture*' in India. The socio-economic status of the agriculture community has so regressed that the youth from rural background find it difficult even to get suitable

brides for their marriage alliance !

It is not in terms of mere socio-economic parameters that our agriculture is lagging behind, but as a sector it is facing severe crisis. The agrarian crisis in India is so deep that the peasantry, unable to bear with it, have been resorting to most unfortunate and tragic decision of ending their precious lives. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, around two lakhs of Indian farmers have ended their lives since 1997, or *roughly 46 Indian farmers kill themselves every day* or one suicide almost every 30 minutes! What is equally sad is the occurrence of more suicides in the case of farmers who are socio-culturally forward, market oriented and growing commercial crops with assured irrigation rather than by the traditional farmers in the dry regions growing food crops. For instance, in Karnataka more suicides occurred in districts such as Coorg, Shimoga, Chickamagalore and Hassan which are ranked very high in terms of health, education and human development indices. And hence these districts are included under Prime Minister's Vidharbha package assistance to mitigate the problems of farmers' suicides during 2006. It may be a *mismatch between socio-cultural forwardness and economic backwardness*, in terms of low crop productivity, low income and indebtedness that might have pushed the farmers in to the deep crises and compelled them to take this unfortunate decision.

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*Our intelligentsia is so handicapped that it is unable even to comprehend this paradox of phenomenal growth in the economy and the pathetic situation in agriculture, let alone find a way out of this situation.*

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## Overloaded Considerations and Obligations

There is a still larger mismatch which is fundamental and needs to be understood critically here. The so-called growth in the industry and service sectors, predominately belonging to private segment and corporate bodies is totally 'market led'

rather than government sponsored. The motivating factor behind the market led growth is the economic efficiency, with the sole aim of profit maximization and higher return. The growth in agriculture, on the other hand is being pursued under the mercy of the State that too with *overriding equity considerations and social obligations*.

The agricultural land, the basic means of production, is under the 'ceiling limit', and hence distribution of land is governed by the broader rules of Land Reforms in India. Secondly, the prices of the majority of agricultural commodities are 'administered' in the forms of Minimum Support Price, Issue Price, Procurement Price and so on, in order to 'control' their violent fluctuations and to safeguard the larger interests of the consumers. And hence, the so-called profit or 'surplus', unlike in other sectors, has to pass through the rigorous scrutiny of these considerations and obligations, constraining severely the magnitude of farm income in a country like India. Equity considerations like MRTP to urban land ceiling that were prevalent earlier in other sectors have been either diluted considerably or removed totally in order to facilitate unfettered growth of these sectors.

It is not the case that the market led growth didn't enter Indian agriculture. In fact it has entered in a somewhat perverse form. Take the case of the commodity market, that rests on the wicked speculative trading, registered a massive growth in value of around 14.56 lakh crore Rupees in 2010-11 in India ! On the other hand, the share of the poor Indian farmer in the booming economy is so minimal that he could not even keep his body and soul together. Here again is the operation of another form of cruel dichotomy.

Another peculiar feature of the market, though desirable in the larger context, turns into a deterrent when the interest of the farmer is concerned. Theoretically, the market for agricultural products operates under more or less 'perfectly competitive' situation. Under such a condition, the price is determined by none other than the free operation of demand and supply forces. And hence, in a perfectly competitive market the actual producer is relegated to the position of *absolute 'price taker'* for the produce he or she produces. And again, from the point of view of society as a whole, this is a good

situation, as the price of a produce, at best, could reflect its cost of production and a normal margin, if at all possible. And the *consumer, being sovereign*, enjoys the benefit of cheapest possible price for that product. Though farm population forms major chunk of the consumers in a country like India, peasantry as a whole is disadvantaged on two counts. Firstly, their benefit of getting cheap product is netted out by being the producers of the same products that receive the lowest possible price. Secondly, and more importantly, the markets for all products other than agricultural products, operate under '*imperfect situation*'. Under such a situation, the producers can exercise more power in pricing of the products and derive maximum possible profit. In such a peculiar and dichotomous market structure, an industrialist, a businessman, a barber and a cobbler, all are capable of 'making' the prices of the product or service they provide, whereas *the farmer is downgraded to the hopeless situation of absolute 'price taker'*. It is precisely for this reason, that those interventions by the governments, from administered pricing to centralized distribution of agricultural products, however ill conceived and faulty may be, are designed to safeguard the interests of the farmers!

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*Hence, the mismatch is more serious that highlights the market led growth in secondary and tertiary sectors at a phenomenal geometric proportion vis a vis the government sponsored growth in agriculture that is happening at a limping arithmetic proportion in India - the analogy that Prof. Malthus once used to describe the growth in population vis a vis sluggish food production, long ago.*

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To make the situation worse, an additional 'obligation', to supply not only cheaper food but also healthy food through organic/natural method of farming has been imposed on our peasantry, irrespective of whether it is profitable or not. Recently, for instance, the farmers in Karnataka were asked to pledge that they would not pollute the food and ecosystem, in front of none other than Dr. Abdul J Kalam, former President of India, in a mammoth gathering at Bangalore, a couple of years ago. Surprisingly, such impositions have come more from the civil society groups, communities and the movements representing the farmers themselves in the name of *conservation* (of soil, biodiversity and ecosystem) rather than from the government or the markets ! Hence, the organic farming is, in a way,



a self-imposed compulsion for the cause of ‘others’ who live not only in the present but also in the future - who are not yet born ! The people’s movements and civil society agents are so deeply obsessed with the objective of long run sustainability, that they tend to pursue it even at the cost of immediate social equity and the very survivability of the majority of farmers, let alone giving adequate focus on their economic well being.

It is not the purpose of this article to cast doubt on the equity considerations and social obligations that are inflicted on agriculture, nor to support such an unfettered growth of industry and service sectors in a country like India. Rather, it is intended to evolve a heuristic framework wherein the market led growth occurs in agriculture too without diluting the equity considerations and social obligations. Such a system should also take care in the long run of the environmental sustainability objective. It is also equally important to visualize the ways and means to make agriculture to imbibe the cherished values of socialism; *freedom, equality and fraternity, by amicably balancing their trade off with the economic goals and the development objectives.* An interplay and interactions of the *government and market*, the two most powerful institutions of modern democratic society, buttressed by strongly emerging *civil society movements* that represent the groups and the communities, are very much required here. A fresh approach, not swayed by either protagonist of free market economy or ideological fundamentalism of left and socialists, is essential to break the deadlock of the contradictions and mismatches discussed above. This epistle is a modest attempt to address these issues by reflecting upon the thinking of the veteran socialist ideologue, Asoka Mehta with renewed focus on *co-operation and state planning*, that were ardently advocated by him.

### Refreshing Thoughts

Though Asoka Mehta did not deal in detail on agrarian issues, the way in which he had focused on agriculture vis a vis industry is noteworthy here. He clearly asserts, under the banner of ‘culture of soil’, that *“for wholesome life man defiantly needs contact of soil”*. By quoting eloquently the writings of Charles Fourier, he expresses his aversion to large scale industry and sees happiness that *“inextricably mixed with the soil of agriculture and woven in to*

*the texture of simple life in agriculture”*. He strongly subscribes to the belief that *‘work is for life’* rather than to the inverted belief of *‘life is for work’*.

Surprisingly, Mehta advocates that people should move from occupation to occupation rather than confining to a single occupation. According to him, *“satisfying work, variety of occupation, simple wants amply met and deep friendship made through community of work, would be obvious results of associative life”*. To assert this, he quotes a typical traditional farmer of a country none other than United States of America! *“The American farmer of today is altogether a different sort of man from his ancestor of fifty or hundred years ago. A great many men and women now living remember when farmers were largely manufacturers; that is to say, they made great many implements for their own use. Every farmer had an assortment of tools with which he made wooden implements, as forks and rakes, handles for his hoes and ploughs, spokes for his wagon, and various other implements made wholly out of wood. Then the farmer produces flax and hemp and wool and cotton. These fibers were prepared upon the farm; they were spun into yarn, woven into cloth, made into garments, and worn at home. Every farm had upon it a little shop for wood and iron work, and in the dwelling were cards and looms; carpets were woven, bed-clothing of different sort was prepared; upon every farm geese were kept, their feathers used for supplying the home-demand with beds and pillows, the surplus being disposed of at the nearest market town. During the winter season wheat and flour and corn meal were carried in large wagons drawn by teams of six to eight horses a hundred or two hundred miles to market, and traded for farm supplies for the next year - groceries and dry goods. When winter approached, the butchering season was at hand; meat for family use during the next year was prepared and preserved in the smoke house. Wheat was threshed, a little at a time, just enough to supply the needs of the family for ready money and not enough to make it necessary to waste one stalk of straw. Everything was saved and put to use. All these things were done among the farmers, and a large part of the expenses was paid with products of the farm to others whose assistance were sought. One of the results of that sort of economy was that comparatively a very small amount of money was required to conduct the business of farming. A hundred dollars average probably was as much as the largest farmers of that day needed in*

*the way of cash to meet the demands of their farm work, paying for hired help, repair of tools, and all other incidental expenses*" (Mehta, 1964). Mehta ascertains that "not only a family should be engaged in multiple productive activities, but the entire village community must provide a whole complex of services needed to peasant households".

Though it appears that he has advocated *self sufficient village communities*, Mehta never hesitates to acknowledge that "the picture drawn above is 'idealized' which never existed except, for a fortunate few". He also admits that such a self-sufficient village system would face the *hardship of isolation*. Elsewhere, as a pragmatic politician and policy maker, he also admits the imperative of a village to produce more (surplus) for the market, in order to thwart a crisis that can confront the urban people. This has been highlighted in a recent article by Heddurshetti (2011), while contrasting Gandhi's stand on self-sufficient village vis a vis that of Asoka Mehta. Such a discussion centers around the core of vital truth, that the "*life of a peasant unites various activities together*". Nevertheless, such an insight into the traditional agriculture of a country like USA would definitely provide useful hints to understand, if not to resolve, the crisis that has crept deeply into the Indian agriculture. Such an assessment can also provide much needed moral boost to the desperate farming community to seek a *true agricultural way of life* not only in India but also elsewhere in the world. As Minister of Planning, while initiating the debate on the Third Five Year Plan, Mehta also speaks of the challenges of achieving the development *without disrupting the continuity of the 5000 year old culture!* At the end, he asserts that, in addition to modernization of productive forces, *productivisation of traditional elements* is also essential to achieve a genuine development of a country like India.

### **The Crusader of Co-operation**

Asoka Mehta was a well read, genuine socialist scholar with vast knowledge of the history of socialist movements and struggles across the world. In spite, he confined himself mainly as a thinker and analyst rather than an advocate of socialist philosophy either through preaching or writing. Though he has not written much, his writings, like that of Lohia, never lacked passion, rigor and romanticism. For him, socialism was not a dry mass of ideology but

*"the most elaborate and exquisite pattern that is being woven into the fabric of life stretched on the loom of time"* (Mehta, 1951) He gives a call, in his small but sweet book; 'Studies in Socialism'. that the "*students of socialism can be fertile only if they renew themselves continuously*", that "*they have to be constantly enriched by fresh understandings*". He continues with an emphatic reminder that the "*fruitful source of analysis is to be found in studying the saga of socialism in terms of certain impulses, their challenges and responses*".

Mehta, taking sufficient clues from both Robert Owen and Fourier, constructs his thesis forcibly on *co-operative farming* not only as a means of emancipation of rural life but also to find the very meaning and purpose of life by engaging in such an associative agriculture. Mehta, like other democratic socialists emphasized on *associative life against rugged individualism, on co-operation against competitive struggle* among men for the means of living. He goes to the extent of *abandonment of unregulated competition*. His advocacy on co-operative association was empirically drawn rather than speculatively formulated. He states that "*socially healthy and psychologically satisfying life can be developed in 'associative' agricultural community that is neither so small as to restrict the range of occupation nor so large as to exceed man's power of associative work*". He fixes the size at about 1600 persons cultivating 5000 acres of land under his scheme of an ideal co-operative farming association. However, Mehta was extremely careful of forcible 'collectivization' of agricultural lands as was done in erstwhile USSR. He clearly sees that the small ownership (of land) is a source of satisfaction and pride. To disrupt the umbilical cord that unites a peasant with his land is to invite social tension. Through appropriate incentives and consensus, he believes that a genuine participative co-operative association in agriculture can be established. And finally, Mehta, by looking at Israel-model of collective farming, visualizes a new entrepreneurial type; called 'institutional entrepreneur' to maximize societal welfare by manipulating the market possibilities on the one hand and by drawing sufficient governmental support on the other, so as to build a strong co-operative agrarian system in a country like India.

In addition to co-operative, Mehta strongly advocated autonomous and self-sufficient villages

not only as basic units of administration to foster the development but also as building blocks at the grassroots to revive the much needed community spirit and solidarity, so as to usher the face-to-face, genuine democracy. According to him, “*the village and craft must become the smallest social organisms in which a person begins to learn the liberating lessons of society without oppressive weight of custom or cadres*”. Mehta strongly asserts that restructuring of village community alone can generate co-operation and the spirit of obligation and consensus that would eventually help traditional elements to get productivised.

With these ideological deliberations and discourses, Asoka Mehta has demonstrated an amazing capacity to delve deep into the human aspirations and the very purpose for which we all tend to live. For him “*man is not an ill made machine to be set right by an engineer, but a person with vagrant desire, who in a well organized society can be the means of both wealth and weal*”. And then, he aptly recapitulates that “*the innovating impulse in man represented by the passion cabaliste, the desire for intrigue and contriving, and the passion papillone, the love for change is balanced by the passion composite, the desire for union*” (with soil and society).

Nothing can provide a better preamble than churning over the thoughts of Asoka Mehta not only to find the way out for the present agrarian crisis but also to seek a means for happy and prosperous agricultural way of life, in line with the socialist ideology.

### **Co-operation in Agriculture - A Pragmatic Approach**

In trying to resolve several basic problems confronted by many developing countries including India, the form of ‘institutional arrangement’ in agriculture is brought into forefront (Peter Dorned and Don Kenel 1977). The approach of land reforms, introduced with much expectation in this regard, though demolished the evil of feudalism in agriculture, could not take the reform forward to resolve the problems like rural unemployment and poverty effectively in India (Dandekar and Rath 1971). The progress of green revolution too was limited by the inadequate focus on the ‘institutional

arrangement’. The majority of poor peasantry whose holding-size is very small and uneconomical, and who lack irrigation and adequate resources could not participate in the green revolution individually. So a break through not only to enhance the agricultural production but also to garner the legitimate share in the market led economic growth, requires a strategy for creating an effective ‘institutional reforms’ in continuation of the ‘Land Reforms’. The desired *structural change* can be achieved through ‘co-operativisation of existing individual holdings’ in line with what has been advocated by Asoka Mehta.

In the Indian context, the term co-operative farming evokes the idea of broadly four different types, namely, the *Tenant Farming*, the *Better Farming*, the *Joint Farming* and the *Collective Farming* societies. But from the Second Plan onwards, the term cooperative farming was officially used to include only the latter two types. A joint farming society is one which involves pooling and joint allocation of land, labour and other resources of the members, though they are entitled to retain their individual ‘property right’. The gains from such a co-operative are distributed mostly in proportion to the share of resources - land and labor, of the members. A ‘collective farming society’ is one which either ‘leases-in’ land for joint cultivation or pools the land holdings of its members where their individual land ownership titles are surrendered to the society. Such a farm may also be initiated on government waste land or vested or surplus land distributed by the government. Members of collective farm are entitled to product shares as ‘wage earners’.

From the analysis of a few sporadic attempts on co-operative farming societies since independence, it is evident that the performance of co-operative societies with more or less ‘homogeneous’ membership; in terms of class, caste, creed, religion etc, was better than those with relatively heterogeneous groups. (Sarkar 1986). However no serious attempts were made to study the progress of Land Reforms in terms of strengthening the collective bargaining capacity in the market arena, let alone to focus on the scope of enhancement of social cohesiveness and community solidarity within the co-operative organization.

Collective farming arrangements, with an element of compulsion, by providing economic incentives and educating the members about the virtues of

associative values may be useful not only for the poor land owning members but also for the landless members within the lowest stratum. This will be possible if the members are convinced that *their family incomes from the collective will be greater than the income under the individualistic set up*. They may have even larger benefit by joining collective farming, in the form of reduction in risks and uncertainties in production as well as income. It can also promise to open up future prospects of increasing employment and income throughout the year. This expected income at collective farming is dependent upon expected wage rate and expected employment at the proposed collective farming. The stipulation regarding wage and employment have to be based on a tentative calculation of the production and employment potentials of the collective under specific numerical assumptions relating to land area and labour force commanded by the collective, the productivity of the land and techniques of cultivation. Such evaluation of the possible collective farming organisation may be undertaken effectively by a Planning Authority, provided that the process is sufficiently decentralized by involving the farmers, laborers, women and all others concerned.

For middle and big farmers, cooperative joint farming may be much more desirable alternative, even though some amount of compulsion may be necessary. From the equity point of view, this may be temporary arrangement, since inequality still persists between the collective farming societies of the poor and the joint farming societies of the middle and big farmers. Economic incentives and policy supports such as credits, higher prices for the produces and other incentives should be given liberally to the collective farming societies of the poor to make them profitable. At the same time, by putting a ceiling limit on individual holdings and giving other 'disincentives' to the joint farming societies of the middle and big farmers, the inequality can be narrowed down gradually. If the agricultural labourers are also included under the collective farming systems, this may limit the supply of labour to the big farmers. All these would indirectly encourage the 'big holdings' to break and join the co-operative system.

The continued existence of large private farms creates the danger of development based on capital intensive inappropriate technologies which may pose

ecological problems also in the long run. But, with cooperative farming, farm worker and village poor gain greater control over the type of technology that will be used and they are more likely to preserve and enhance the employment opportunities as well as environmental sustainability for the benefit of community as a whole.

A co-operative farming system can provide wide spread opportunity for the development of entrepreneurial talents and can have important positive consequences for the future economic development of the country as a whole. Hence, it may become the instrument of developing what Shri Mehta described as '*social entrepreneurship*'. Where there is true and wide spread participation, in such process, many individuals will gain experience and be able to test and develop their managerial capacity. In fact such experience may be of a broader and more significant nature than that developed in a family farm system, in that it provides opportunities for dealing both with resource use and allocation questions as well as with human and social organizational issues. It will be easier for a government to provide support services of all kinds, credit, inputs, extension, marketing etc - to a small number of large units under cooperation, with centralized management, especially once the government has all the appropriate machinery in place. Moreover large units are frequently capable, either alone or in combination with other units, of mobilizing capital, technology and required labour force for establishing *handicraft, cottage and rural agro-industries* which is next to impossible for an uncoordinated group of small farmers. These are great pluses for Government like ours. One has to study thoroughly the case of AMUL, the most successful co-operative experimentation at the macro level and Koppa Transport Co-operative, at the micro level and seriously ponder over the issue of establishing the genuine co-operative farming system through out India. This is possible only for those who are capable of thinking beyond the obvious by shedding their rhetoric and negativism.

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*And, then, this provides ample scope not only for agri-economists to envisage ways and means to garner the emerging market opportunities but also for committed socialists to inculcate the cherished values of socialism within such associative farming organizations.*

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## Pro-active State Interventions

Intervention by the Governments, from production and pricing to distribution, is a must for agriculture as it faces several inherent peculiarities and weaknesses mentioned above that make the farmers vulnerable in the free market transactions. In fact no country; rich or poor, is free from such interventions by the State on matters related to agricultural pricing and marketing. The rich, developed countries give huge supports, subsidies and various forms of incentives to make agriculture remunerative so as to keep farmers in farming. Planning can be the most effective means of intervention by the State in the matter related to agriculture not only to address those peculiarities and 'inherent obstacles' that hinder the progress of agriculture but also to infuse the ethos of socialism within it. Here again, getting an overview of the thinking of Asoka Mehta on State Planning, that emerged from him not only from being a true socialist ideologue but also from being an able administrator, during his brief tenure as the Planning Minister of free India, is immensely useful here.

Though co-operative association of the people and the planning by the State appear to have an element of contradiction and inconsistency, the credit must go to Asoka Mehta for not only resolving them but also for providing an avenue to establish cohesiveness between the two. In the context of erstwhile USSR, the planning was always equated with a system of over-centralization of decision making power with the State leading to a *totalitarian regime*. This obviously curbs the emergence of genuine, autonomous, co-operative associations, which naturally take away their share of power from the State. According to Asoka Mehta, the planning under a democratic set up presupposes a constant effort of learning and it demands not only territorial (administration) decentralization but also a 'functional decentralization'. He strongly vouches that the co-operation can be the key stone of the arch of planning in India. In a democratic set up, he strongly urges that the Government should not be asked to do every thing, there has to be the involvement of the largest number people in the processes of planning and development.

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*Mehta asserts emphatically that co-operation and the decentralization are the essential ingredients of the planned economic development under the system of democratic socialism that suits the situation of India well.*

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The contribution of Asoka Mehta, in not only conceptualizing but also in attempting to make such a system an operational reality is huge. To delve further deep in this regard, one can think about the following strategies seriously:

**I. State Interventions on Market led Growth:** As explained earlier, equity considerations and environmental concerns are all inflicted on agriculture, allowing the industry and service sectors to grow unabated. This will not only thwart any genuine process of installing a just, equitable and socialist society but also hinder the very progress of agriculture toward such an end. Hence, such obligations and concerns need to be imposed on industry and service sectors also without impinging upon their market led economic growth. Rigorous monetary and fiscal measures to redistribute the profit, *preferential treatments* for disadvantaged sections not only in employment but also in investment and ownership, promotion of *share holders' democracy* and so on are needed to augment the equity obligations and social concerns within the corporate set up in India today.

**II. Agriculture to Capture Emerging Markets:** It is imperative to envisage ways and means to capture the booming market so as to pass its legitimate share to our peasantry. Associative agriculture through co-operative farming or any other means is beneficial for farmers to undertake cultivation and to produce commodities in efficient ways. However, to negotiate in the market, farmers need much stronger means. Interventions such as the *complete nationalization of procurement and trade of essential agricultural commodities* and the establishment of massive decentralized distribution network involving the rural youth in line with the distribution of petroleum products, promotion of *commodity specific co-operatives* like AMUL to *famers' corporations (!)* would go a long way in this regard.

**III. Ideological Orientation to Civil Society and Mass Movements:** As mentioned earlier, between the government and the market, the mass movements and civil society representing the people and communities at the grass roots, have been actively involved in shaping the modern democratic states like India. Unlike in the earlier days of independence, these mass movements and civil society are not led by the people with background of left and socialist

ideologies. Hence their ideological position is very ambiguous, or at best liberal, in a few cases. They, not only derive their source of support but also inspiration and direction from the West. A thorough orientation in line with the social democratic ideology is very much needed today.

The mass movements and civil society engaged in the rural reconstruction and agrarian development have a strong adherence to the *environmental sustainability objective*. They are seriously involved in the conservation of soil, water, forest, biodiversity, eco-system and so on and hence subscribe strongly to the emerging *ideology of environmentalism*. Surprisingly, behind the modern day's environmentalism, there exists a strong *equity concern towards future unborn generations and non-human beings* inter alia plants, animals, bees, birds and so on.

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*Hence, the environmentalism comprehends the socialist ideology in a most dynamic and comprehensive way.*

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The Environmentalism is dynamic in the sense, it is capable of taking the equity concerns across generations, it is comprehensive in the sense it is capable of breaking the *anthropocentric* (human centric) approach of the current progressive ideologies including democratic socialism, as they are concerned mostly with the welfare of the present generation. However, as mentioned earlier, in their anxiety to over-emphasise the objective of conservation, the present day civil society agents and the mass movements give scanty attention towards the day to day needs and hence welfare of the current generation, especially the peasantry. Hence, a thorough engagement, by focusing the ideological semblance with them is a 'win win' situation for the Democratic Socialists that needs to be undertaken with utmost priority for the larger purpose of development of agriculture and transformation of rural India.

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# The Challenge of the Development Decade

Asoka Mehta

Year after year we have been accustomed to meet under the shadow of some crisis or other. We have been living with occasional clashes of arm and constant clashes of might and power. The last year, this time, the world was aquiver with disaster. My own country had to face an unprovoked and sudden aggression on its far-flung Himalayan frontiers, while the world watched with dismay the rocket-rattlings in the Carribean Sea. While my country still labours under the heavy burden that countering of the aggression has thrown on us, the wider world, happily, breaths a new atmosphere of emerging understanding between great powers.

The partial test-ban treaty is being welcomed not just on its own account, significant as it is to the health, well-being and the future of mankind, but also because it heralds the coming of spring, ending the long, excruciatingly long, winter of the cold war. The sky catches the first radiance of peace and the dark night of terror and fear is behind us.

The coming of peace, like the bestowal of freedom, helps to turn their thoughts and energies to development. Decolonisation has already unfolded itself into development, *détente* will, or should likewise, help that process further. If the assertion of freedom led to the quest for bread, the emergence of peace must lead to the search for a richer and fuller life. The task of development, at last, achieves its primacy among men's purposes. We do not know when the 190 billion dollars spent every year on the weapons and *material* of war, with their curse of over-rapid obsolescence, will be diverted to irrigate the channels of peace, but we can now think and plan about it without being dismissed as utopians!

## East-West conflict

The conflict between the West and the East eases. But even as confrontation yields place to dialogues of increasing meaningfulness between them, the basic, stubborn differences between the affluent North and the poverty-ridden South in the world are unveiling themselves. As the world's political

climate changes, the points of the compass move towards development. Wisdom and foresight demand that no new polarization takes place, that there is no confrontation but only co-operation between these points of the compass.

If the world is not to be destroyed by nuclear weapons, it has also to be preserved from the explosions that hunger can cause. The fission of hunger and privations, in conjunction with the fusion of two billion persons suffering from them in the world, can throw up clouds no less menacing than the mushroom clouds that we seem to have bottled at last. We have, today, the means, if we can evoke the wisdom, to master the storms of hunger too.

We all know that two-thirds of the world's population has only 17 per cent of the world's annual income. But among the two-thirds, there are many millions, in my country and in my region in Asia, who are poorer still; there the ultimate cesspool of poverty lies, the last un-emancipated proletariat of the world reside. It is not an accident that the claimant calls for class war and the barricades are emerging in those very areas. It is the understanding and amelioration of the teeming millions of Asia that will provide the keystone to the arch of peace.

We are all familiar with the relevant statistics and I shall not tire you with more of them. Behind these faceless figures, there is human misery, blood that has started boiling, flesh that will not countenance shriveling. Half the world's population, living in the region of Asia, has just a quarter of the world's food supplies. More than 70 per cent of the people in India would avidly consume more and more food if only their income could rise. It is, therefore, not just the pressure of population, but the pressure of raw, unappeased hunger itself that we have to face and satisfy.

Between 1891 and 1921, India's population increased by just 5 per cent. That is to say, in thirty years, in undivided India, including areas that now constitute Pakistan, the population growth was just

5 per cent! Famines and epidemics mowed down the natural growth in population. Since 1921, some health measures have been taken, but as the economy remained neglected, a serious backlog of food shortage survives. Since independence, we, as other countries in our region, have labored hard, but we cannot overcome quickly the neglect of the long years of colonial rule.

### Foreign economic aid

We are not unaware, nor unappreciative, of the valuable assistance that the developed countries have been giving, in recent years, to the poor countries. We, however, cannot overlook the fact that in a recent year, 1961 for instance, while the commercial flow of international finance amounted to \$ 4,367 million, for the same year, the reverse flow in the payment of interest, profit and dividends from the underdeveloped countries to the rich countries totaled up to \$ 3,393 million. While the rich countries may not heed the Biblical advice to give the cloak when a coat is asked for, is it really necessary for them to scrupulously adhere to the injunction of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing?

The poor countries undoubtedly need external assistance. We are told that in seeking aid we should not seek to reduce the highest standards of living in the world. We have never sought that. The economy of the United States, even when it grows sluggishly, *increases* annually its *per capita* income by the *total*, (repeat) total, *per capita* income of the Indian. In less than ten weeks, the United States invests more than what India plans to do in its entire third Five Year Plan, and reaps also an equivalent harvest in the same ten weeks. If we seek a small fraction from the absolutely significant amount of growth in the rich countries, is it an importunity?

In the United States the poorest ten per cent of the people are undoubtedly in difficulties and rightly evoke considerable interest in sympathy for their plight. It, however, needs to be realized that the share of the United States' national income accruing to that last ten per cent of its population is almost the same as the total national income of India, and that there are 21 times more numerous Indians. In order to provide the poorest 20 per cent of the people in India – and they will number some 100 million – with a per head income of just *one dollar per week*, even by 1975, our economy as a whole must achieve

and maintain an annual growth rate of 7 per cent, which means a 20 per cent rate of investment. Can we, can anyone, attempt this unaided? The grapes of wrath will not always wilt in the vineyards of Asia, and it is on that assurance that the present masters of Peking operate. It is not just the armed thrust of Communist China that my country repulses, it is this deeper thrust that we are engaged in checking with constructive approaches and efforts.

Every nation increasingly realizes that it needs a policy for the growth of national income. Is it then too much to ask that at the margin of such a policy, in penumbral way, some definite policy of outflow of income from the rich to the poor countries be decided upon? There has been a considerable amount of discussion on the need to transfer one per cent of income for that purpose. The delegate of my country had pointed out in 1960, the urgent necessity for the Secretary General to prepare annually estimates of the gross national product, the net national income, the gross outflow of funds from the rich countries during the year, divided into public and private outflows, itemizing each kind of flow, the gross inflow of funds, whether in cash or in kind, from the poor countries, the net outflow of funds, a deduction from this net outflow for that portion of the funds which does not provide resources for economic development, a net figure for the net outflow of funds provided for this purpose, and the percentage which this last figure bears to the gross national product and the net national income of the rich country concerned. Only when such a statistical clarity is introduced in the annual report will we know whether the self-imposed burden of “one per cent” is in fact being borne by the rich countries. Even though the “tax” is wholly voluntary it is necessary to plug the loopholes.

We are not unaware of the strain and the difficulty experienced by the rich countries in giving away one per cent or more, and it will have to be more of their national incomes every year, to the poor countries. All the arguments about “good business” or about the solidarity of the “human family” cannot snuff out disagreeableness from having to give foreign aid. But we would like it to be noted that for the poor country, it is no less irksome to seek aid. The commercial morality that sanctifies loans has yet to become the folkways of our people. The tree of growth, we would love to dig round and dig in with our own sweat and tears. From our own pitiful



incomes we scrape and save and invest and grow. It is only because we find that development demands essential imports that cannot obtain for us, that we think of economic aid. If the wit of man could devise a means of realizing economic development without the import of goods from rich countries, we from the poor countries would thank Allah and adjure all aid, except of knowledge and knowhow. Unfortunately, in the early stages of growth and industrialization, as one mounts the escalator of development, the critical need for imports grows, and it is not easy to meet these needs with exports, because there are few surpluses for export and there are also difficult barriers to overcome in stepping up exports to the developed countries. In this phase of development, foreign economic aid alone can overcome the lag in savings inevitable in poor countries in a state of gross under-development. The bread that we ask to be scattered on water will surely multiply manifold. With the Pharisees shall we deny the possibility of that certain, assured miracle of growth?

### Domestic savings

The poor countries are constantly advised to cajole private investments. These investors, we are told, seek profit, and it is for the poor countries to create a climate of profitability. There is no other climate that we would like to create more. The difficulty, however, is that we have simultaneously to raise large resources internally, to step up quickly the rate of savings from 5 to 20 per cent or more of the national income annually, involving a far greater draft on the marginal increments of income in the early years of growth. But a sharp stepping up in the rate of savings and investments inevitably erodes the margin of profitability. We would like to lower taxes, but until the tax base adequately expands, such a lowering would mean abridging our development. These, as we know well, are the cruel horns of the dilemma of development. When everyone tightens the belt in hungry lands, is it too much to ask of the men of capital to modify, for a while, their familiar ways?

I do not want to be misunderstood. My country has a system of mixed economy. We have given a variety of incentives and facilities to the private sector to make a significant contribution to the growth of the economy. But when the nation has to step up the rate of savings, can it be done by the public sector alone, which accounts for only a small fraction

of the national income? The private sector has to make the major contribution to the savings effort, and experience shows that such contribution is not inimical to its own long-term interests.

In the poor countries socialism has an instinctive appeal. It is not because we want to load the dice in favour or against anyone in the game of ideological co-existence. The reasons for its appeal are: one, the poorer a people, the greater is the need for philosophy, and, two, the poorer a country, the sharper are the inequalities, and greater the need to approximate towards some equality. Socialist ideas play a functional role in the early processes of development.

### International trade

We are told that we cannot expect the people of the rich countries, free and prosperous as they are, to change their habits and attitudes. We cannot be unsympathetic to this traditionalist outlook of the modernists. But do they realize how great a strain the developing countries have to bear in the process of transformation? In the course of a generation the habits of centuries have to be completely changed. The psychological and social strain involved has to be imagined. Conventional wisdom warns us that "no man puts the new wine into old wine-skins; else the new wine will burst the skins, and be spilled, and the skins shall perish." But what does the record of the developing countries show? Has not the new, heady wine of science and technology been slowly poured into the old skins of traditional society, and the wine has not spilled, the old skins are changing, not bursting? The social *tour de force* is not easy to accomplish. Let us look back for a moment at the early period of development of the highly industrialized countries. Did they not, even though their time span of development was much longer, and even though the emergence and assimilation of the fruits of science and technology were much slower than today, pay the price of transformation in slums and terror, in reeking corruption and in periodical *coups d'état*? When we seek a far-reaching and rapid social transformation, while honouring the rights of man, are we not entitled to claim a little fraternity in the task of bearing the strains of transformation? When the developing countries ask for favourable opportunities for the export of manufactured goods, of simply processed articles, the highly industrialized countries object, even though all that we seek is to supply just one

per cent of their expanding production of goods. We are told that, when already technological changes require an adjustment of three per cent every year, how can they add on an additional burden of one per cent to it? Unfortunately, no one has similarly quantified the rate of social transformation in the developing countries. Is it too much to ask for a fraternal sharing of strains through easier terms of trade or through economic aid, but please, not in the ways of Penelope, taking out the knots in the night, that have been woven in the day ?

Now that science and technology need no longer remain harnessed to the chariot of war, has not the time come to attach them to the coach of development, so that technology may be trained to balance the sociological needs of the developing countries, where the ratio of manpower to resources is often so different from those of the affluent societies? As peace dawns and wider horizons become visible, we are invited to embark on new voyages of thought and discovery.

May I be permitted to address a few words to the countries with centrally planned economics, and particularly to the foremost among them? We in the developing countries admire at once the liberal political institutions of the West and the austere economic discipline of the East. It is that discipline that we seek to make our own. In that task many of us have received from the Socialist countries the kind of help and co-operation that we greatly value. We rejoice at the rapid growth of the socialist economies, indeed of all economies. We are not unaware of the emerging and welcome pressures inside these countries, of the implications and consequences of the dismantling of the system associated with the "cult of personality". These very pressures demand that the centrally planned economy countries review their plans of development with a view to providing an even larger scope for imports from developing countries; they demand that the prices at which production from the developing countries can be sold in the internal market be adjusted with a view to stimulating the demand for those goods and commodities. Socialist countries should also include in their forward planning significant projects of those developing countries that are nearing the critical stage of the "take-off."

It would be a tragedy if at this fate-laden hour these centrally planned economies were to fall victim

to the heresy of seeking the dynamism of growth through internal markets, of sustaining high growth rates through the affluence of the mass consumption alone.

However, trite the observation might appear, the fact remains that the full blossoming of the economy, the fullest lifting of even the highest standards of living, as also the unfolding of culture and human spirit in the rich countries, whether of the West or the East, will not be possible unless the quickening impulse is provided to the poor countries, through adequate terms of trade and facilities for increased trade, financial aid, technical assistance and sharing the strains of transformation. For this gathering of the partisans of peace a new programme is already waiting!

While many millions in the poor countries labour to forge a new future for themselves, to deny them essential aid while unused capacity of production remain in some of the highly industrialized countries is a reversal of reason and humanity. In the war against hunger and raw wants, we in the poor countries are now fully engaged. Here, as on an earlier famous occasion, we ask for tools, and we promise to do the job. The rich nations, whether from the West or the East, are invited to join the peaceful competition to become the great arsenals of development. It is not aid, or even trade, that encompasses our vision, it is the quickening of mutual aid and co-operation. Poor as my country is, our contribution to the U.N. Special Fund is the seventh largest. Not India alone, but every developing country is anxious to contribute to the common pool as they are to benefit from it. But this requires the blasting of the inhibiting influences in the rich countries that prompt them to view political boundaries as of equal significance in economic life too. Here at least the truth is that we grow only by sharing.

I am not unaware of the many shortcomings in the developing countries; that is our responsibility to overcome. The developing countries cannot afford to be sensitive towards well-meant and sympathetic comments in this regard from all quarters.

#### **U.N. trade conference**

It is towards a rationalization, maximizing welfare and happiness in the rich as well as the poor countries, of economic policies, and of economic

theories if need be, that, in our view, the forthcoming U.N. Conference on Trade and Development must principally address itself. When confrontation between the West and the East changes into an encounter, leading to journeying together, when the thesis and anti-thesis of the cold war resolve into an emerging synthesis, a creative leap forward in thought and endeavour is obviously indicated. In this Decade of Development we can, if only we will, witness, once again, “the whole earth (being) of one language and one speech” – the language of growth, the speech of welfare.

Meaningful discussions will not proceed if sincere efforts at reviewing the many problems of trade and development by the developing countries are construed by some of the highly developed countries as attempts to “externalise” our problems.

Every industrialised country charted its development through protective aids to its industries. Even the *doyen* of all the industrialised nations, the United Kingdom, had ultimately to surrender the virtue of free trade. The arguments that applied to infant industries then are equally relevant to infant economies today. They too need protection and aid. If the highly industrialised countries tie their loans with the export of their manufactures, are the developing countries wholly wide off the mark when they raise the question of the possibility of tying up repayment of their loans with the exports of their agricultural, mineral, and industrial output? The highly developed skills, capital-intensive methods, and constantly rising labour costs in the more developed countries require that they move out of the simple, less sophisticated, processes of manufacture and enable the developing countries to produce and trade in such products.

Every developing country can bring up glowing pages from its recent records which would show the remarkable implications of international co-operation. My own country, India, set up three steel plants with the help of friendly countries. We now hope to fabricate or establish new mills with, to a considerable extent, our own resources, material as well as technical. We are just now engaged in setting up, as a part of the national electrification plan, three nuclear power plants. Our know-how and capacity will enable us to design and construct future plants with our own resources. This self-sustaining growth

will enable India to assist other developing countries too.

### **New organisational initiatives**

The various Specialised Agencies and other organizations of the U.N. have been rendering valuable assistance to the developing countries, some of them, in fact, have been doing pioneering work in social and economic engineering. The one common handicap from which all suffer is the inadequacy of resources. The member-nations, particularly from the developing world, rightly desired to diversify and expand the agencies and organizations and thereby augment multilateral and institutional assistance in the complex task of economic and social transformation. It is, however, important to balance such expansion with adequacy of resources made available for their varied tasks. The complex of majestic mills satisfy only when there is all the corn needed to grind in them. The poor in many lands are concerned with what flows out of the mills, and not so much with their rationalization and expansion. In our search for ample institutional foliage, we cannot afford to lose sight of the overarching significance of the adequacy or otherwise of finances available.

The institutional approaches are important but far more important is a sense of urgency, overpowering urgency. In the work of development, the scarcest resource today is Time. Capital can be loaned to us, or supplied otherwise, but who can arrest the inexorable flow of Time? The awakening of millions in the depressed regions of the world is a phenomenon heavy with history. This awakening, if quickly responded to and thereby harnessed, can carry the world to expanding paths of peace and progress, but if it remains ignored it is capable of overturning the whole fabric of civilization. The choice before us is clear and insistent: either we dynamise our economies or we get dynamited. The United Nations, we are aware, is dedicated to the task of urgent transformation. What we jointly acknowledge, it is necessary for each member-nation to individually accept. Here it is obvious that the strength of our determination depends on the strength of the weakest resolve amongst us. Let us solemnly affirm that none of us gathered here will be that weak link. That and that alone can be our pledge to the Decade of Development.

# Asoka Mehta's Vision on Democratic Decentralization

**S.S. Meenakshisundaram**

When I joined the Government of Karnataka as the Secretary in charge of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj department during the summer of 1986, Ramakrishna Hegde, the then Chief Minister told me that my main responsibility would be to facilitate the process of democratic decentralization in the State. While entrusting to me the daunting task of establishing the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) on ground and assigning to them resources, functions and personnel, he also told me that I must fall back on the Asoka Mehta Committee report on decentralization whenever I needed any guidance. As the ruling party in the State had by then taken a decision to introduce a two-tier system of panchayats as recommended by the Asoka Mehta Committee, I had no other option but to start my assignment with a thorough study of the report. That is how I got to know of Asoka Mehta. I have known him more through his lectures, reports and writings rather than through direct interaction. I regret even now that I could not get the opportunity of personally meeting him and knowing his views on decentralization across the table, as he had passed away by then.

The Asoka Mehta Committee Report and the print outs of the several lectures delivered by him more than reveal the man, his clarity of thoughts and vision. This paper looking at his contribution to democratic decentralization consists of three parts, the first, a quick recapitulation of the events that preceded the constitution of the Asoka Mehta Committee; the second, Asoka Mehta's views on democratic decentralization and the third, the relevance of his thoughts and vision in the present context.

Village communities common to most agrarian economies have been in existence in India for over centuries. They were represented by "Panchayats" - councils of five persons, one in every village. Jawaharlal Nehru points out in 'The Discovery of India' that, in olden days "the Village Panchayat or elected council had large powers both executive and judicial and its members were treated with the greatest of respect by the King's officers. Lands were

distributed by this Panchayat which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government's share on behalf of the village. Over a number of these village councils there was a larger Panchayat or council to supervise and interfere if necessary". Sir Charles Metcalfe, a British Governor in India during the 19th century, called them the "little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts".

Under the British rule in India the autonomy of the Panchayats gradually disappeared owing to the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, revenue and police organisations, the increase in communications, the growth of individualism and operation of the individual Ryotwari (landholder-wise) System. The British, however, attempted to establish an alternative system of local self-government in India. Lord Ripon, a British Viceroy, took the policy initiative in 1882 of establishing popularly elected institutions, at local levels, presided over by non-official chairmen to look after specified functions delegated to them by the provincial governments in their areas. The idea was to provide opportunities at Self-governance to peoples' representatives at the local level as the British Administration found it difficult to operate at that level effectively. Thereafter, village panchayats, district boards, town municipalities and city corporations came into existence in different parts of the country. These institutions, however, lacked resources as well as autonomy. In addition, the caste-ridden feudal structure had an overriding influence on these local bodies.

During the freedom movement, Gandhiji propounded the concept of village swaraj under which the village would be "a complete republic independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. The government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers,

male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, the Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government.”

Unfortunately, these views of the Father of the Nation had not been shared by many, most notably by Dr. Ambedkar - the legal luminary whose contribution to the drafting of the Indian Constitution has been the most significant - who in the Constituent Assembly said, “what is the village, but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?”. He believed that these village republics have been the ruination of India. The condition of the caste-ridden Indian village at that time was such that one can easily understand why Dr. Ambedkar thought this way. His strong opposition to the concept of village as the basic unit of administration had resulted in the Panchayats not even finding a mention in the first draft of independent India’s Constitution. While Gandhiji considered it as “an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the people’s voice”, some others felt that “Dr. Ambedkar’s attitude was typical of the urban high-brow” and that “without the foundation stone of village Panchayats in our country how would it be possible for our masses to play their rightful part in our democracy?”

These criticisms persuaded the President of the Constituent Assembly Dr. Rajendra Prasad to write to the constitutional adviser, asking him whether the whole thing could be re-examined and the Constitution re-drafted from that point of view. But, it was then too late in the process of constitution making to re-draft the whole Constitution having the Panchayats as its base. It was, therefore, thought better to incorporate the Panchayats in the Directive Principles of State Policy and retain the framework of parliamentary government based on direct popular elections both at the Centre and in the States of the Indian Union. The compromise arrived at in the form of Article 40 of the Constitution merely states that “the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”. This left little obligation to implement Panchayati Raj in independent India.

The advent of national planning during the fifties broadened the scope of rural extension. The First Five Year Plan visualized Panchayats at the village level, mainly as agencies for development, public welfare and land reforms. It wished that the Panchayats at the village level were so organized as to enable them to assume the agency functions of the higher authorities. “The Second Five-Year Plan went a step further and specifically recommended a network of active Panchayats for securing (a) comprehensive village planning; (b) a more just and integrated social structure in rural areas; (c) development of a new type of leadership in order to facilitate the process of rapid transition of the rural society; and (d) a complete pattern of development administration in the districts envisaged in the programmes of community development and national extension services”.

Alongside these recommendations, the elected governments in independent India also realized the urgency to have a comprehensive programme of rural development even to improve agricultural production which was the first desperate need of the people. For instance, expansion of educational and health facilities and rural roads and communications have to be integrated not only to facilitate better agricultural production but also to meet the basic social needs of the people. To foster such wider socio-production programme, the community development programme came to be launched. In pursuance of that movement, community development blocks were carved out all over the country covering a rural population of 60,000 to 1,00,000. At the block level various social and service facilities were sought to be provided by appointing the required staff.

### **Balwantrai Mehta Committee**

With the inauguration of the community development programme in October 1952, the blocks (consisting of about 150 to 200 villages on an average) had become units of development administration within the existing districts. Shortly thereafter, those at the helm of affairs realized that without an agency at the village level, which could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing development programmes, real progress in rural development could not come about. This led to the appointment of a team for the study of Community Projects and National Extension Services headed by Balwantrai

G. Mehta in January 1957.

The team was expected to review the economy and efficiency of community development projects and national extension services and assess the extent to which the movement had succeeded in utilizing local initiative and creating institutions to ensure continuity in the process of improving economic and social conditions in rural areas.

The study team came to the conclusion that: “Admittedly one of the least successful aspects of community development and national extension service work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative. So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development”. Therefore, it recommended the establishment of a three-tier Panchayati Raj, the middle tier, namely, the Panchayat Samiti at the block level playing the pivotal role in the scheme of decentralization. The Samiti’s jurisdiction was to be coterminous with that of the community development block, the members being directly elected. The recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta study team ignited Panchayati Raj in independent India.

The elected chairmen of the Panchayat Samitis together with the members of the State Legislature and of the Parliament representing a part or whole of the district and key officers of the development departments at the district level, the Committee suggested, would constitute the Zilla Parishad (ZP) for the district with the District Collector/Deputy Commissioner as the Chairman. The ZP was visualized essentially as an advisory body. The village or Gram Panchayat would constitute the lowest level in the three-tier hierarchy. Each level of this structure would have the power to require the lower level to function as its agent. The budget of the Village Panchayat was to be approved by the Panchayat Samiti and that of the Samiti by the ZP. By 1959, all the States had passed their Panchayati Raj Acts and by the mid-1960s Panchayats had reached all parts of the country.

Though there were variations from State to State, broadly the functions entrusted to the Panchayats

included village roads, community wells, maintenance of public parks, tanks, irrigation works, public hygiene, drainage, and other civic services. In some States the ZPs were made responsible for primary education and were entrusted with functions relating to rural industries, primary health care, medical relief, women and child welfare, maintenance of common grazing grounds and other community lands and properties and provision of inputs for agricultural production. The extent and tempo of the involvement of PRIs in the basic planning and implementation of development projects was also subject to wide variations from State to State and even within the States.

### **The Decline of PRIs**

With the passing away of the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the commitment to democratic values weakened. The flow of funds for block development slowed down to a trickle, after the closure of the intensive stages of the Community Development Programme. Where the party in power apprehended that their performance in the polls to the PRIs may not be good, the tendency was to postpone elections indefinitely. The decline was conspicuous in every State except Maharashtra and Gujarat, where the primacy was with the top tier, namely the ZPs, which had considerable administrative powers. Even in these States, Ministers and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) felt threatened by the rising political power and influence of the ZP presidents and there was a kind of backlash. The Government of Maharashtra, for instance, set up separate district planning committees with the State minister in charge of that district as chairman: the planning responsibility which was one of the major functions of the ZP was taken over by this committee and the stature of the ZP was deliberately curtailed. The same situation occurred in Gujarat also almost simultaneously.

Several causes contributed to the decline of the PRIs. Firstly, the bureaucracy, local vested interests and the elected representatives in the State Legislature and in the Parliament did not take kindly to the PRIs, whose ascendancy they feared. In 1966-67 the Ministry of Community Development was reduced to the status of a department and brought under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In 1971 the very name “Community Development” was dropped and replaced by “Rural Development”.

Secondly, the political leadership, planners and bureaucracy considered the PRIs mostly as agencies of development and not as little republics. This was a serious conceptual flaw. While the rationale for the creation of the PRIs was that “development cannot progress without responsibility and power”, the thrust in the five-year plans had been to establish statutory Panchayats more as vehicles for National Extension and Community Development projects than as units of self-government, with the result, the PRIs had no autonomy and were under the mercy of the State Governments and their bureaucracy.

Thirdly, there was a strong tendency in India, as in many other parts of the world, to concentrate power at the centre to an excessive degree and hand over “the levers of power in the hands of an elite which manages private industry and trade through giant commercial companies, runs nationalized industries through public corporation and public administration through a civil service working in the shadow of the ministers whose powers they exercise”. Even the Ford Foundation team of experts, while enquiring into India’s acute food shortage came to the conclusion that local autonomy would be a luxury in India’s case and recommended for a single line of command and obedience. The net result of all this was the creation of parallel agencies to execute special development programmes such as the Small Farmers Development Agency, Drought Prone Area Programme, Intensive Tribal Development Project, etc., which were kept outside the purview of the PRIs, which in turn resulted in further weakening of these nascent institutions.

Fourthly, most of the State Governments would not hold elections to the PRIs for years together, under one pretext or the other. Elected chairmen were suspended or removed in many cases; and some PRIs were superseded on flimsy political considerations. There was also the phenomenon of the tapering-off of resources to these bodies, both by the Central and State Governments. This lack of political will hastened the decline of the PRIs.

Fifthly, there was also a feeling that the PRIs are dominated by economically or socially privileged sections of society and have as such facilitated the emergence of oligarchic forces yielding no benefits to weaker sections. Even though the PRIs cannot be singled out in this connection, a number of research studies have in fact indicated that development

benefits through these institutions had gone largely to the economically well-off, socially high-ups in stratification, and politically advantaged sections of the rural communities; and the weaker sections were either deprived in the process or marginally benefited.

And, finally, notwithstanding the unwillingness of the State-level politicians to part with their power, even the people themselves were not sufficiently educated to understand the political implications of the PRIs. If the challenge from the grass-roots was effective, probably the PRIs would have put up a better show.

### **Asoka Mehta Committee**

This was the scenario when Asoka Mehta was invited by the Janatha Government which came to power at the national level in 1977 to take a fresh look at decentralization. He was made the Chairman of a Committee with twelve other eminent personalities including E.M.S Nambudripad, Karpoori Thakur, M.G. Ramachandran, Prof. Iqbal Narain and S.K. Dey. The Cabinet resolution constituting the committee read: *“The Government accords the highest priority to rural development, so as to increase agricultural production, create employment, eradicate poverty and bring about an all round improvement in the rural economy. The Government considers that the maximum degree of decentralization, both in planning and in implementation, is necessary for the attainment of these objectives. It has accordingly been decided, in consultation with the State Governments and Union Territories, to set up a Committee to inquire into the working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, and to suggest measures to strengthen them, so as to enable a decentralized system of planning and development to be effective”*.

This Committee re-emphasized the importance of Panchayati Raj, but recommended a two-tier structure - ZP at the district level and Mandal Panchayat (MP) for a group of villages, with a population of 15,000-20,000 (i.e. below the block level), the key level being the ZP. It also recommended that the district should be the first point of decentralization under popular supervision below the State level and favoured the official recognition of the participation of political parties at all levels of Panchayat elections. As an interim measure, the Committee suggested

that “the block level panchayat samitis where they exist now, would be converted into non-statutory executive committees of Zilla Parishads and when the Mandal Panchayats become active, most of their functions would be taken up by the Mandal Panchayats. As a transitional structure, the Block can, therefore, continue as per the convenience of the States keeping in view their requirements and the stage of development”. The process through which the Committee and Asoka Mehta in particular arrived at the recommendations made in this report clearly reveals the wisdom and foresight of the people involved in the exercise.

### **Asoka Mehta’s Views**

Asoka Mehta firmly believed that decentralization of political power is inherent in a democracy. The question therefore was how to decentralize and what kind of a structure would suit India. He was very clear in his mind that the development opportunities that have emerged in India are largely due to the contributions made by science and technology in farming, animal husbandry, etc. While upgrading of research must, therefore, receive high priority in the Universities and laboratories, the findings of research have to be brought to the farms through well trained extension workers. The extension network has to be thicker and better qualified. That means, the subject matter specialists at the district level working in close touch with the research scientists will have to be of a high caliber. Their subordinates must be frequently refreshed with new knowledge and capacities to throw up field problems for solutions to the scientists. For that, the latter would have to be brought closer to the farmers, at a level lower than the Block. The cluster of specialists, service organizations and marketing facilities will have to be made available within farmers’ reach. Just 5300 block centres would be too few. But utilizing 2,40,000 gram panchayats for this purpose would be totally uneconomical and impractical. The appropriate level will have to be somewhere in between. Restructuring of rural administration will therefore be necessary to cope with these emerging factors.

Asoka Mehta also realized that administrative changes will not by themselves carry the developmental thrust to the disadvantaged sections who, will have to be nursed through careful micro-planning so as to benefit from the increasing cash

flows. Crop planning will have to be undertaken to get the best value out of land. That led him to a few key questions: who will undertake this stupendous task? Can the existing panchayats be entrusted with these responsibilities? Can this task be done without popular supervisions at different levels of administration? Can the intricate and minute planning needed, be carried out without effective participation of the people?

While the State Government can provide the framework, offer guidelines and high level support, he realized that, the work has to be executed at a level above the gram panchayat but below the block level. A nucleus of villages, with the central village emerging as the focal point, to which surrounding villages respond and react and from which modern facilities radiate would provide a better model for growth. While these base level developments will take time to come into their own, reform at the district level can brook no delay. Historically the district has been the pivot of local administration and hence the popular supervision should start at this level. It was this thinking that led Asoka Mehta to recommend a two-tier system of panchayats – one called the Zilla Parishad at the District Level and the other called Mandal Panchayat for a cluster of villages.

What is amazing is the clarity with which Asoka Mehta approached certain intricate problems in designing rural administration with popular supervision in the context of the institutions that were already in existence in the development sector. In his view, cooperatives form a distinct democratic structure by themselves. While there will be links between the panchayats and the cooperatives, neither can be subordinated to the other. To mount an assault on rural poverty the PRIs and the cooperatives will have to work in close harmony; but, the two structures must remain independent of each other. The role envisaged by him for the State Government was equally clear. The State Government will have to divest itself of executing micro-level programmes of production and employment and devote its attention to bigger tasks such as improving the level of research, refining technology and developing a methodology of planning whereby the disadvantaged sections are enabled to participate as co-sharers in the development programmes. The State Government should profitably transfer to the district much of the work connected with rural development.



In his view, the district council and the mandal panchayat will have to be elected bodies. To transact business effectively their size must be small, but not so small as not to be representative. A district council, depending upon the size of the district, may have a membership between 40 and 60 and a Mandal panchayat about one third of it. Each of them would elect its President from among its members who would preside over the meeting, conduct its deliberations and be its spokesperson. The Principal administrative officer at the appropriate level would be the Chief Officer of the district or the mandal and all other government personnel working in that unit would be under his/her control. While the administrative control would reside with the chief officer, the overall political control would reside with the elected president. That would insulate day-to-day work from political interference and yet keep the administration under democratic control.

Asoka Mehta's views on elections are also clear and emphatic. He was not in favour of fostering unanimous choices. He felt that unanimity circumscribed the power of the poor which resides in their numbers and only unfettered elections can enable the poor to come into their own. In his opinion, elections cannot be kept free of participation by political parties. In a democratic polity, it would be futile to expect to keep political parties out of such areas of power and influence. Secondly it is better to let the panchayat elections be fought by political parties overtly rather than covertly. Thirdly, open participation by political parties will make them accountable and more penetrable by the poor. Finally, more the number of persons that find themselves in positions of responsibilities, less irresponsible will politics become. Political workers would find places where they can earn some spurs and still make a mark in constructive as distinct from agitational politics. By democratizing local governance, we would be strengthening the roots of democracy in the country.

Recognizing the fear expressed by some that with political parties contesting the elections, village communities would get divided and fragmented, he recommended provisions to get them united once the elections are over. He suggested that different activities like agriculture, education, health, etc. would be handled in the district council/mandal panchayat not by any individual member who would belong to the majority party but by a committee elected on the basis of proportional representation

from the council or panchayat. The work of the Committees would be subject to the overall decision of the district council/mandal panchayat as a whole. Such an arrangement, he thought, would give the benefit of participation by the political parties without fracturing the rural community.

Asoka Mehta also had a specific plan for the district collector who was always the key functionary in district administration even prior to independence. He recommended that the collector should be relieved of his/her developmental responsibilities which would now go over to the district council and its officers. Since the collector would be left with only regulatory functions mainly preservation of law and order, Asoka Mehta felt that he/she should be given the responsibility of organizing the social audit, as he/she will be outside the decentralized structure of administration but still functioning as "eyes and ears" of the State Government. His/her reports would enable the State Government to assess the development work in the district in depth and issue directives where necessary, to see that the claims of the poor do not get overlooked. Asoka Mehta apparently had in mind, the observations made by Dr. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly. He was not very sure whether the PRIs would by themselves be able to protect the interests of the poor and the down-trodden. He therefore preferred the State Government to function as the 'institutionalized conscience' of these communities.

State Government freed from the responsibility of day-to-day administration in rural development would be able to advise not only the PRIs but also the cooperatives, banks etc., to give adequate attention to the needs of the weaker sections. Besides that, the State authorities can devote attention to strengthening the infrastructure for rural development such as provisions of more power, better irrigation facilities, more sophisticated agricultural research, better marketing facilities for inputs and outputs of agriculture, refining of the tools and techniques of planning, sharpening the skills of the administrative staff and of elected personnel by providing adequately high training facilities, pooling experiences from different districts and disseminating valuable lessons that might emerge, above all acting as the watch dog of the interests of the weaker sections.

Regarding the finances of the local bodies, Asoka Mehta felt that while the local bodies must

be encouraged to raise their own finances and build up remunerative assets, the bulk of resources needed for rural development will have to come from the State, initially tied to various schemes transferred to ZP and later progressively as block grants, as the ZP gathers experience in purposeful planning of development activities. Recognizing the nexus that had persisted between provision of finance and elaborate official control, he recommended the snapping off of the umbilical cord between provision of finance and minute scrutiny by accepting democratic decentralization in its true sense. He would prefer social watch by the people as against rigid supervision by the bureaucracy.

On the dispensation of justice at the local rural levels, Asoka Mehta acknowledged the merits of Nyaya Panchayats administering justice on a decentralized basis. However, he was of the view that Nyaya Panchayats should be kept as separate bodies and should not be mixed with the people elected for development panchayats. The members of development panchayats wield executive powers and there are chances that justice may suffer if the two functions are combined. He therefore preferred a qualified judge to preside over a bench of separately elected Nyaya Panchas. The elected Nyaya Panchas will not be entitled to seek re-election; they should serve in an area other than that from which they have been elected. This still remains in debate and no concrete view could emerge on Nyaya Panchayats even at the time of the enactment of the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

### **The Karnataka Experience**

A discerning reader would appreciate the depth and clarity exhibited in the Asoka Mehta Committee Report. The recommendations were precise and to the point, meeting all the issues referred to the Committee. The report deserved a faithful implementation, at least for a period of time, to fine tune the recommendations, if felt necessary. But this could not happen. The Morarji Desai Government at the centre went out of office before any action could be considered on the Asoka Mehta Committee recommendations. However, three States – West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh attempted to put into practice at least some recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee with changes and modifications suited to their tradition and context. Karnataka adopted the two-tier model in letter and

spirit. The panchayats that came into existence in 1987 under this pattern completed a full five-year term, though at the end of which they came to be replaced, albeit a short break, by the universal three tier system enforced through the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

The performance of the PRIs in Karnataka during this five year period has been well evaluated. Some evaluation reports mention significant achievements during this short period, such as “attendance of school teachers, medical officers, paramedical staff in rural institutions improved remarkably; revenues from assets transferred to these bodies, such as auction of finishing rights in tanks have jumped up; financial improprieties by Mandal Panchayat office-bearers have been exposed in Gram Sabhas and culprits have made good the losses caused or gains wrongfully obtained”. Some others felt that the process of election on party basis had deepened the polarizations already existing within the village community endangering peace in some cases. There was also a feeling that the social and political consequences of decentralization could be to strengthen vested interests in rural areas, promote exploitation of the weaker sections and further enhance corruption at the local level.

On the positive side, one could notice that public awareness of the developmental programmes created by these institutions was phenomenal. A geographical area consisting of about 2000 households have elected 25 members who constituted the Mandal Panchayat of that area. Since the selection of beneficiaries in respect of self-employment schemes and the location of the infrastructural facilities were decided finally by the Mandal Panchayat, all its member per force were well conversant with the different developmental activities of the State that are going on within their Mandal. The operation of schools and health facilities had vastly improved, as the panchayats took a personal interest in those areas. Performance in the fields of inland fisheries, horticulture, forests and distribution of house-sites for the needy was also significant. The management of the assets transferred to the PRIs was much better than what it use to be under the State Departments. There were several instances of a quantum jump in the revenues through increased output of fish in the small tanks, horticulture and forest produce etc. Generally development works were being executed more speedily and there was better control over the field staff. The people generally felt that the

Chairman of the Mandal Panchayat and the members of the ZP were available to them more frequently and there was no constraint of time which they used to feel when they had to meet government functionaries for redressal of their grievances.

One grey area however had been the lack of interest noticed among the citizens in attending the gram sabhas. Since the resources available to the Mandal Panchayats were extremely poor when compared to the functions entrusted to them, the tendency appeared to be to treat only the ZP as the effective local government that can deliver the goods. This was to be set right over time, by suitably allocating funds and functionaries among different tiers of the system.

### **Developments in the Government of India**

The success of implementation of the pattern of decentralization in Karnataka as suggested by the Asoka Mehta Committee, clearly underscores the deep thought and wisdom that went behind the recommendations. This caught the eye of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who made up his mind to introduce this system throughout the country. The recommendation made by the Singhvi Committee seeking Constitutional recognition for the local government institutions came in handy. While the Constitution 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1989 proposed a three tier system for local governance (as proposed by Balwantraji Mehta Committee), the composite bill covering both the Panchayats and Municipalities moved by the successor V.P. Singh Government in 1990 had left the pattern of decentralization to the State Governments thereby giving them an option to choose between three-tier model proposed by the Balwantraji Mehta Committee and the two-tier model of Asoka Mehta. Though both these amendments fell through for different reasons, most of the political parties in India had by then agreed in principle to the establishment of viable PRIs all over India despite their differences over details and procedures.

Even though the Constitution Amendment Bill moved by the Narasimha Rao Government in 1991 had also left the pattern of decentralization to the discretion of the States, the Joint Select Committee of the Parliament to which the bill was referred took a firm stand in favour of an uniform three-tier system of rural governance in all the States of India, which

have a population exceeding two million. This was accepted by the Parliament and the three tier system has become part of the Constitution. Elected local governments are now in position throughout India. The structure is well set even though many States have started questioning the need for a three-tier system of elected rural local bodies. While some States like Kerala would like to dispense with the intermediate tier, Tamil Nadu would prefer not to have the district tier at all. Some experts also raise a basic question as to why should a multi-tier system be prescribed for rural governance in countries which always have a single tier of governance in urban areas.

### **Asoka Mehta in the current context**

As rightly felt by Asoka Mehta, the institutional design for decentralization should take into account not only the developmental thrusts built upon the capabilities at the local levels but also the need to ensure local participation in decision-making. The dynamics of development necessitates that the technical expertise of a high order be made available at levels below the Province to sustain the momentum of development which, in many cases, has been already administratively decentralized at the district level. Undoubtedly the district has to be the first point of decentralization, under popular supervision, below the provincial level.

The problem of striking a balance between technological requirements and possibilities for meaningful participation by the people in development management recurs at levels below the district. The question of adequate area for a unit of administration is quite complicated in any State, owing to unevenness in terms of economic resources, communication facilities, population density, level of social integration, civic commitment, etc. It would, therefore, seem appropriate to leave the exact pattern of local government below the district level to the States. The Central Government could at best lay down the general criteria for their guidance.

More recently two criteria have been suggested for determining the size of a local government unit. These are access and service. If service is taken as the prime determinant of size, an important consideration has to be the population, because the cost of the service is a function of the population requiring that service, although at some point, when the population reaches a certain level, the

unit cost of the service would reduce. It means, therefore, a minimum and a maximum population can be established — a minimum to guarantee that the service is not too expensive and consequently inaccessible to the people and a maximum to ensure quality and promptness in service.

Access to government in terms of influencing public policy decisions and enhancing both responsible and responsive administration is a prime requirement for any democratic government. If access is an important prerequisite of size, then, in addition to population, one has to look at the communication network, level of political awareness, and also the area. While the service criteria will take care of the economic viability and administrative efficiency, the access criteria should serve the political and democratic needs of the people. Should the application of these criteria lead to divergent views, one has to raise the basic query, whether the functions of local government can be or should be performed for profit.

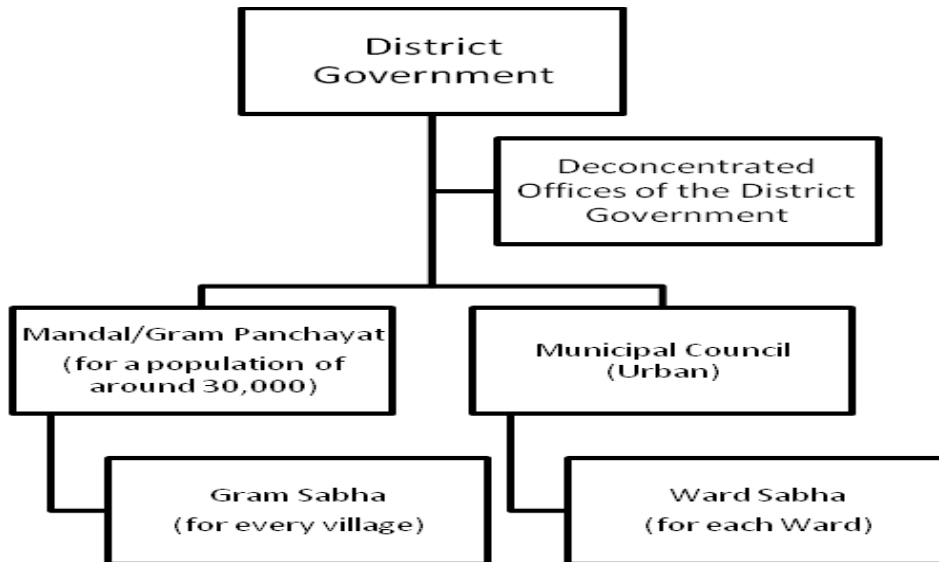
Insisting on viability for local government and not for other levels of government would amount to an obvious discrimination against local government since the local government provides an instrument for democracy or at least provides an extra avenue for democratic participation. The 'access' criteria should therefore precede the 'service' criteria in determining the structure of PRIs in any State.

It must, however, be added that the lowest tier should not be so small in size as to make it insignificant or incapable of discharging its legitimate duties as a local government. For instance, the Village Panchayats in most parts of India, covering a population of about 2,500 cannot perform any functions on their own and hence do not command the respect a local government deserves. The Mandal Panchayats proposed by Asoka Mehta appear to satisfy both the access and service criteria and have the potential of becoming the growth centres which can discharge the duties of a local government, closer to the people, fairly effectively. Since the average population of a village in Kerala is around 30,000, the Gram Panchayat can as well be the lowest tier in that State. In other States, neighbouring villages can be grouped to form a Mandal, satisfying this population criterion. If the lowest tier can satisfactorily meet the criteria of access and service, there may not be any need for an intermediate tier at all between the district and the village. If the

physical distance between the district head quarters and the panchayat is substantial, establishment of de-concentrated offices of the district government under public supervision at convenient locations can bridge this gap and bring the district government nearer to the people. It was unfortunate that this view could not get the acceptance of the JPC when they finalized their recommendations to the Parliament on the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, possibly on political considerations overlooking the logical approach adopted by the Asoka Mehta Committee.

A closely related question is whether there should be separate urban and rural local governments as is the practice in India. The rationale for parallel systems of urban and rural local self-governments could be that the character of the two communities being different, the problems to be managed by these local government institutions are altogether different. The rural areas depend on primary production activities whereas the urban areas thrive on secondary and tertiary activities. Asoka Mehta committee could not deal with this question as it was outside the mandate given to them by the Government of India. Still the Committee did make a reference to it while dealing with urban-rural issues. Recognising the need to prepare comprehensive and integrated development plans reflecting the potentials and requirements of the rural and urban areas, the committee felt that for administrative convenience the district should be treated as the regional unit for planning and development and rural and urban areas falling within it should be treated as integral parts of the area for the purpose of over all planning and implementation of development projects. Asoka Mehta had strongly felt that the district plan must encompass the developmental aspects of urban areas and the civil aspects of rural areas.

As of now, a single local government at the district level may perhaps be better suited to look after the needs of its urban and rural components, if necessary with a set of safeguards built in, to ensure just development of the entire area. Such a district government can also plan for the entire district as suggested by Asoka Mehta, obviating the need to have a separate district planning committee to coordinate action by various implementing agencies at the district level, including the ZPs and city/town municipalities. This view propounded by the second Administrative Reforms Commission appears to be a logical consequence of Asoka Mehta's views on



urban rural relationships. An ideal structure of local governance in the current Indian context appears to be what is shown in the figure below.

The country has passed through a quarter of a century since the demise of Asoka Mehta. Several changes have taken place during this period carrying forward his ideas on democratic decentralization. The panchayats have now become constitutionally recognized basic tier of our federal system of governance. As a process, democratic decentralization right down to the village level has come to stay and future governments can at best make only cosmetic changes to the structure. Can we say that Asoka Mehta's dreams have now been realized? Unfortunately, no. What has been provided is only the skeleton. Life has not been injected into this skeleton in several States even today. Implementing the vision of Asoka Mehta not only in letter but also in its true spirit can only result in genuine democratic decentralization in our country. As Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had rightly felt, if the Constitution can be amended for the 74<sup>th</sup> time to bring some form of decentralization, it can as well be amended for the 150<sup>th</sup> time to bring in a better form of decentralization. Let us hope for the best.

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# Democratic Socialism in a Developing Society

Asoka Mehta

The annals of India are scattered with records of varying attempts at people's participation in administration. Our history can boast of republics and democratic experiments. In the same way, our people over the centuries have refined many ethical concepts; the pantheistic and monistic philosophies that we have evolved undoubtedly carry undertones of equality. Fellowship and community-consciousness cannot be unfamiliar to a civilization that has survived the many vicissitudes and challenges over countless centuries. We can draw sustenance from the past for our vision of democratic socialism; we can trace the roots deep of the fruits and foliage that we seek.

It would be wrong, however, to equate the early achievements of our forefathers with our own precise and contemporaneous aspirations. In our long history, many centuries were aglow with freedom, and only a few centuries were darkened by subjection. But when we struggled to free ourselves from British rule, we defined independence afresh. We drew strength from our rich past, but future we sought was more in keeping with modern trends. In judging the value of the changes that both preceded and followed our political independence in 1947, we used the touchstone of democratic institutions, as shaped not in ancient Bihar but in modern Britain. By democracy we mean the Rule of Law, the independence and supremacy of the judiciary, civil liberties and fundamental freedoms, periodical elections and representative government. The content of democracy is modern, largely shaped by the experiences of the West. It is such an institutional structure that we have enshrined in our Constitution, though in seeking to enlarge democratic functioning, we may seek strength from the past, as in the resuscitation of the panchayat, and also turn to unfamiliar yet attractive achievements in foreign countries, like the setting up of an Ombudsman.

In understanding and delineating socialism a similar logic applies; essentially, its concepts and content are derived from the experiences of the West of over a century. When we speak of socialism, it is that framework of productive relationships and

distributive justice, of profound technological transformation and cultural change that we seek to establish. To that framework we shall of course add many things that are distinctive to us and also selectively draw upon the experiences of others, particularly the Communist countries. The basic framework in socialism, as in democracy, however, remains limited by the recent experiences of the West.

In articulating democracy or socialism there is little room for chauvinism. The talk of Hindu socialism or Dravidian socialism is to stultify the concepts and negate the content. Both the ideas implicit in democracy and socialism and more so their achievements, are modernist; they denote a world-wide fraternity of the future, not some exclusive groupings of the past.

In Western countries, democracy did not flower till the economy had considerably diversified and modernized itself. Socialism with its cry for social justice and democracy with its political pressures to that end gained effectiveness, more or less, at the same time. In less developed countries where the Communists, emerged at the top, they concentrated on diversification and modernization of the economy - often through social revolution - before advancing towards democratic liberties. In India, the diversification and modernization of the economy have to be brought about under the press and pull of democratic functioning. It is this juxtaposition, at once critical and creative, that makes the Indian experiment unique in many ways.

The meaning and relevance of democratic socialism have to unfold themselves through economic development and social change.

Economic development entails both accretion and differentiation. At any given point of time there may be said to exist a population inclusive of a labour force, together with a stock of man-made equipment, a natural environment that has been more or less modified by man's past activities, a set of ideas,

concepts and aspirations and a variety of institutions that determine what use is made of the combination of equipment, environment and ideas.

In the past when the pressure of people on natural resources was low, man experienced both the benevolence and the brutality of Nature. In a sparsely settled world there was a certain freedom of movement, but Nature also exposed its red tooth and claws. Anyway, the demographic data from 1891 to 1921 show that in India a precarious balance between natural resources and population had emerged and it was being maintained by constant ravages of famines and pestilence. From the twenties onwards, when the national movement leapt forth with new intensity, it also had to accept the responsibility of achieving a dynamic balance between the material and human factors in the country.

To achieve that new balance the labour force has to be acted upon, that is, it has to be energized and educated, the stock of man-made equipment has to be vastly enriched, and the natural environment quickly acted upon. All these sudden and decisive changes depend upon the imparting of development-affecting dynamism to current ideas, concepts and aspirations. To conquer poverty, to provide varied opportunities to the people - this task has to begin with a revolution in thought, in culture.

It has been said that the processes underlying economic development are ultimately reducible to two: the selection of ends or objectives that entail or are associated with development, and the transformation of inputs into outputs in such ways as to materialize these objectives.

It is obvious that the process will be furthered to the extent the dynamising ideas and impulses are widely shared. Development can be democratically organized if the urge to growth and change is widespread. If those seeking change constitute only a small group, either the desired transformation will not emerge, or the minority will seek to dominate, that is, short-circuit the democratic process. Many countries of Asia and Africa testify to such a *denouement*.

A stationary society reproduces more or less what it consumes. Its inputs and outgoings broadly balance and there is limited differentiation. If in India for many centuries millions remained socially outcast and economically depressed, it was because the social structure was stationary, perhaps stagnant.

When population increases and aspirations grow, when the needs of defence or other national interests assert themselves, simple reproduction becomes an integument that has burst asunder.

That change spells a process involving *input transformation*. Stated simply, at any point of time there are available quantities of disposable inputs (labour, capital, equipment, land, etc.) which may be transformed into products for current use or which may simply be allowed to remain idle. Inevitably, some of these inputs will remain idle and 80 to 99 per cent of these will be transformed into consumable goods and services. These are essential to existence, but they contribute little to the subsequent flow of inputs and the possibility of lifting the per capita income. The balance (1 to 20 per cent of the inputs), will be transformed into income-generating or future-oriented goods and services, that is, into goods and services that make for increase of total output. Whether or not there will be economic growth and development turns on whether an adequate part of the available inputs are transformed into income-producing goods and services.

In any economy of stationary reproduction there is no possibility of accommodating increase in population, as our experience from 1891 to 1921 showed. Secondly, there is little chance of responding to the emerging aspirations of the depressed sections of the people, because the reproduction of wealth does not expand. Thirdly, in the stationary conditions, established inequalities cannot be easily altered. In an expanding economy there are both economic surpluses and an atmosphere of easy optimism that facilitates modifications. Societies with stationary reproduction confronted by new pressures, including those of democracy, will experience mounting tensions resulting in social explosions and political upheavals.

Democratic Socialism averts such consequences by seeking to dynamise the economy, that is, by constantly augmenting the reproduction of wealth through channeling fractions of national income, not for immediate consumption but for income-generating efforts.

It is often argued that primacy, nay, immediacy, be accorded to the urgent needs of the people; food, clothing and shelter. Diversion of income-generating inputs to consumption can improve the immediate

position, but the short-term gains would be obtained by greatly upsetting the future position. It means an invitation to increasing misery.

It is, perhaps, paradoxical but true that the mass of men will be assured of food, clothing and shelter in the prevailing conditions only when they are also deprived of many other things, may be steel mills and power stations. The latter, as it were, become not the destroyer but the guarantor of the former. Must events brand this truth on our consciousness?

Let us try and resolve the paradox: our soil, yielding harvest year after year, is considerably exhausted and eroded. Unless varied nutrients are given to it, its sound texture restored and maintained and better agricultural practices developed, our land cannot yield the food our people need nor produce the raw material to clothe them. The restructuring of the soil requires many modern, industry-based inputs, such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Even water cannot irrigate large areas or achieve intensive dosage of application unless electricity is wedded to agriculture. We must realize that where population keeps increasing and popular expectations grow there is no stable balance between production and requirements. The demands keep growing and changing - in food, for instance, there will be a shift from millets, from inferior to superior varieties of grain. These demands on agriculture can be met only by constantly raising modern, industry-based inputs. For just food alone, in the dynamic conditions of today, we get caught in the technological toils.

Not just in food, but for meeting almost every elementary need, development in the wider context has to be considered. The objective of any effort at development is obviously to lift the levels of living of the depressed sections of our people, that is, to meet their basic needs and open to them, through education and employment, avenues of advancement. Meaningful employment has to be found for millions of our people who are today workless, overtly or in a disguised manner. These simple changes involve a considerable transformation of the economy, that is, accretions and differentiations in the process of production. A high rate of growth is needed to achieve the desired social goals. The growth rates have a certain inescapable relationship to organization of inputs in the economy in terms of techno-economic considerations. Food, clothing and shelter cannot be provided to our vast and growing population

with stationary reproduction. It requires expanded reproduction, and that will bring in involvement in technological changes. The technological factor is the element, but it is a creative element.

The tools of planning are sufficiently sophisticated to tell us how much of technology developed activities will be needed to ensure minimum living standards and assurance of reasonable employment to our people. With the help of modern aids, like the computers, it is possible to work out, with a fair degree of approximation, the needs of various sectors of the economy. It will be found that many investments not directly concerned with the basic needs of the common people are necessary. If they are not made, either economic growth will slump down or demands for imports will shoot up. Imports have to be paid for by exports. Exports from an economy engaged in simple reproduction must result in shortages that hurt.

Development means substituting expanded reproduction for stationary reproduction that means a deployment of resources or inputs in a manner different from past experience as well as immediate needs. It means operating on a time horizon. Needless to add that the greater the attention paid to simple reproduction, the easier will it be to find the resources for attempting expanded reproduction. Our ability to embark on income-generating projects depends upon how well we are doing in our normal economic work. That is what is meant when it is said that long-maturing projects have to be balanced by quickly yielding schemes.

What is particularly socialistic about the process of transformation sketched above? What are its implications for democracy?

The transformation we have discussed was first attempted and accomplished by capitalists in Western countries. It was the ravages of that transformation that evoked socialist reaction. In the developing countries today the socialists have an opportunity not just to react to happenings, but to shape the course of action itself. Herein lies the main difference.

Other differences can be broadly listed.

The process of transformation involves changes, tensions, conflicts. There is the danger of either a nihilist or an aggressive attitude emerging in such a context. In fact, the greater the flux, the greater is the



need to adhere to social values and ethical norms. Socialism as a political creed that induces a person to think of the social good as distinct from individual gain is apt to foster such an adherence.

The mainspring of capitalism is pursuit of profit. Profit provides both the indication for and vindication of economic activities. Profit has its place in economic life, but if it is made the cardinal element in development many difficulties arise. During a generation or two needed to get the economy diversified and differentiated, the polarization between the rich and the poor would become extreme. Why should the mass of the people accept social discipline in such a situation? The recognition of equality, economic as well as social, as a keenly desired objective facilitates the emergence and acceptance of the needed social discipline. If inputs are to be diverted from current consumption to investments whose ultimate output must take time, an ethic of austerity is needed. Such an ethic will come easier with objective-oriented socialists than with incentive-obsessed capitalists.

Economic development involves and results in significant social changes. Here again, socialists with their loyalty and source of strength firmly planted in the working people are likely to understand and organize the varied forces in the bowels of society better than those who operate on the crest of social life.

The social discipline needed in development, the strength to adhere to its objectives against the ebbs and flows in the economy, the recognition of the value to the community of building the sinews of growth in the economy - all these and much more depend upon an informed and responsive public opinion. That is the value of democracy in development. If the necessary involvement in development can be brought about, democracy can provide direction and dynamism to it. If democratic forces remain isolated or, worse still, estranged from the purposes and processes of development, one or the other must lose out.

It is time to sum up the discussion.

Democratic Socialism in a developed, affluent society cannot be the same as in a developing society. There, possibilities of social security, of varied amenities, can engage immediate attention. With us the main tasks are of initiating and furthering

the developmental process. That involves, as we have indicated, economic, social and cultural transformation. To attempt it democratically requires considerable political effort also. These multiple changes have to be kept within a well-defined focus of development. The clarity of understanding and moral fervor that have to infuse the community's efforts have to emanate from the socialists. Their dedication and intellectual insight will determine the nature of the community's output and understanding. A number of social forces have to be drawn towards development, particularly those who stand to benefit from it. That means turning the social soil that has remained unchanged for generations. Without considerable upturn of that top soil, the harvest of development cannot be reaped. Socialists are better equipped for these "ploughing operations" than others.

If this great change, often elemental, occasionally cataclysmic, is to be brought about in a decade or so the socialists have to function unitedly and in an inspired way. Our success in shaping the future we seek depends upon the sense of unity and the spirit of dedication that move us, or can be evoked in us. To think in lesser terms than of granite unity and incandescence of will is to be unworthy of the historic responsibility that beckons and challenges our generation.

FOR CONTINUOUS PROSPERITY OF OUR MOTHERLAND BHARAT, we should destroy laziness from our lives. I give you an example of laziness prevailing in Government Departments. One Government official issued a certain order to us on 24/08/2011. We have been waiting for this order. However we received a true copy of this order after 32 days on 26/09/2011. Mumbai to Mumbai Time taken is 32 days. My dear fellow Indians, our Computer, Internet, etc will give no benefit to us if we do not remove laziness from the lives of our people. Please remember that laziness plus liquor can lead a person to poverty

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# Asoka Mehta: Legendary Economic Visionary

R S Deshpande

India owes its development to many of those visionaries who have given their original thinking and led to build modern India. Often these unsung contributions are masked in the current day's debates due to our engagement in different issues. At times we do ponder over some of their ideas and then increasingly one gets an uneasy feeling that our policy makers failed to enliven some of the important ideals. List of these visionaries is quite long but I would like to mention a few. There was a lot of similarity between three such legends namely, Sir M Visvesvaraya, J C Kumarappa and Asoka Mehta. It was Sir Visvesvaraya who gave the initial ideas for planning and something that he wrote in 1938 still stands to be one of our needs in planning. He wrote his book on Reconstructing India way back in 1920s and had some of the visionary thinking incorporated therein. He discussed federal organisation and relationship between Central and Provincial Governments and their financial relationship. Economic reconstruction and shaping the future of India are also discussed and one gets a lot to learn for the current phase. He wanted planning from below and partnered by the villages and that would bring meaning to the word. His conviction was similar to Gandhian village Swarjya and he wished that the development has to be built from villages upwards. The Village was considered as a basic unit of development and planning. Similarly the writings of another legendary writer J C Kumarappa also need to be considered. Kumarappa wrote a volume on Economy of Permanence, where he argued the primacy of sustainability and illustrates economy of Gregation and economy of service. Asoka Mehta lived through the years of the formation of Independent India and his ideas were shaped during those turbulent years, initially with the focus on independence and later in shaping and correcting every sphere of the country's political movements and economic policy. His participation in the movement of independence was a clear indication of his process of thinking, which shaped after he was elected as the President of the Socialist Party during its annual meet in 1950.

## Ideological Debates

Asoka Mehta was a committed Socialist and throughout his life remained attached to the Socialistic principles. In his address delivered at Madras in 1964 he elaborated his views about the need of democratic Socialism in a developing nation. He emphasised that socialism is that framework of production relations and distributive justice along with a profound technological transformation. Democratic Socialism in an affluent society is to be viewed differently and therefore he was arguing for socialism suitable to our needs and situations. Arguing for a new thinking in socialism in India he said "That means turning the social soil that has remained unchanged for generations. Without considerable upturn of that top soil, the harvest cannot be reaped. Socialists are better equipped for these ploughing operations than others." He reviewed different experiences of socialism world over and especially what he wrote about Chinese expansionary policy is worth looking at from his visionary words.

His ideas on Socialism and the concepts he illustrated are really new and make us to think further. He writes "In countries like ours, socialism has varied tasks; its alpha and omega cannot be redistribution of income. It has to reorient the generation of income. The structure of production cannot remain as it is, because then we have only stagnation. It must not change under the stress of development towards greater lopsidedness and aggravation of disparities. Development efforts must help a better distribution of incomes." Writing on the process of industrialisation of independent India he separated the concept of "creating an industrial power' versus "Creating Commercial power'. He illustrates the point by bringing many references to the industrial houses and their increasing commercial power and wealth as against the contributions to the national economy by many of them. He was influenced by the writings of the Polish economist Morris Dobb with an eye on long term investment that yield sustainable results. Those were the days of dependence on foreign and the international politics

and aid was very much in play. Asoka Mehta in no uncertain words denounced the dependence on aid as a tool of development but at the same time he was not opposed to technological transformation. He was committed to socialistic principles throughout his life and never negotiated with what he believed.

### **Economic Development**

During the wee years of independence the political leadership were confronted with the then existing development models. On one side we had a choice of the socialistic pattern of development model spearheaded by the USSR and China with their own variants, and on the other side we had the industrial development model of the west. Asoka Mehta was aware of major weaknesses of capitalist as well as centralized models of development. He argued that these methods often fail to serve development aspirations of large number people as juggernaut of capitalism works like chariot of Jagannath, and centralized dictatorship lay down many curtains to prevent people either from knowing what is happening or at least from openly coming forward and criticizing or opposing it. He strongly believed in economic development with political democracy, where aspirations of large number of people could be served more effectively. He had commented extensively on the approach and issues before the third five year plan of India. Creation of employment and labour intensive industrialisation was the strategy he preferred for the plan and at that time it was the most appropriate strategy. While commenting on the third plan and planning as a process he touches the most important failures of planning that dog the Plans even now. He was a democrat and wanted the planning process to be democratically decided and not so much in favour of a sector. He brought forth the relative neglect of agriculture in the investment planning. In those days mobilisation of resources for plan was an essential debating point while many argued in favour of borrowing from international market, Mehta stood his grounds firm to raise resources from the surplus generated in the economy, an important point that draws parallel between Sir Visveswaraya, Kumarappa and Mehta.

### **Industrialization of India**

As a committed socialist he had emphasized employment creating industrial strategy and criticized commercial oriented industrialization. He also brought forth the hold of a few giant industrialists

on the industrial economy of the country. What was needed according to him was the industrialisation of the small kind where many could participate and that would put the rural areas on the industrial map. He brought forth a point that a small but powerful group of finance capitalists and the trusts controlled India's expanding industrial sector. In his design of industrialisation the big industries should be managed by the state whereas small scale sector could be handed over to the small industrialists. He believed that industries cannot be left to the unchecked control of private citizens, but will have to be democratically organised and socially controlled to serve interest of people. Apart from these, he also warned against growing industrial oligarchs. He cautioned the Government that the financial support provided by the state to the private sector must not help expanding monopolistic position of a few business houses but, must ensure to what extent the support is serving the growth of new entrepreneurship, making industrial scenario more democratic and removing regional disparities. Asoka Mehta's views on the development of industrialisation in the country may not be easily palatable today, but one needs to visualise the situation prevailing then in the country where even the availability of capital was scarce, abundant unemployment and the economy depended largely on agriculture.

### **Agriculture and Peasantry**

Agricultural sector was a prime mover of the economy during those days and even today despite its share in the GDP has touched down to about 17 per cent, still if the sector fails to perform GDP growth takes a dip due to the strong spill over effects. The policy issues, growth and development of agriculture and peasantry in India were of much interest to Mehta. He argued that investment decisions of the state must not only be restricted to large scale industrialisation but encompass agriculture and infrastructural facilities supporting agriculture. While highlighting policy decisions of the state needed towards increasing marketable surplus from agriculture, he pointed out that efforts towards increasing food production from incremental yield must not be at the cost of peasantry, paying them lower price for their hard work. Along with this, he also raised serious question on the neglect of development of transportation sector and its role in bringing agricultural surplus to the markets. He strongly favoured developmental efforts that involved interest of peasantry. In his writings, issues

like introduction of new technologies in agriculture, decentralization of administration in rural areas, and investment in deepening tanks, strengthening wells, building lands, cutting channels and afforesting eroded areas figured quite often.

One of the important areas that is common to both J C Kumarappa and Asoka Mehta is land reforms. Both recognized the importance of land and land concentration in the hands of a small group. Largely the peasants were at receiving end. He discussed the issues confronted in the process of implementation and in his presidential address to the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics at Vallabh Vidyanagar in 1964 (well before the setting of the Green Revolution), he emphasised “(a) the development of a package of improved agricultural practices for each important crop based on the latest research findings, and (b) assistance to cultivators to develop farm production plans.” He further stated that “the agricultural revolution which we conceive today will depend for its success in our ability to adapt ourselves to the different techniques best suited for different regions and different crops.” The major problem that we confronted in the second generation problems of the technological change of mid sixties is the selective application of the technology and consequent ill effects. Here he stood as a visionary who pleaded for a uniformity and local applicability of the technology.

Asoka Mehta’s thinking on land reforms was significantly parallel to that of J C Kumarappa and there too he was ahead of time. Being one of the members of the Panel constituted for Land Reforms by Government of India, he recognized the importance of proper implementation of land reforms for increasing food production and reducing income inequalities in the Indian society. He was aware of lop-sided distribution of land in India and therefore suggested measures like enforcement of ceiling on holdings and pooling of surplus lands from larger owners. But he was not in favour of distributing small pieces of lands to landless labourers and petty cultivators as he did not believe that the strategy will serve the purpose of land reforms. Instead he suggested effective measure of pooling surplus lands into cooperatives where these resource-poor groups come together, develop strategic resources and avail assistance from the government.

### **Planning Process**

Asoka Mehta considered economic planning as an elaborative growth strategy, devising and directing

the development process towards the quickest realization of the objectives postulated. It is constant process of looking forward for improving and maturing ideas about the dimensions, dynamics and interdependence of factors of growth. He believed that plans of development must have a certain periodicity and these can be drawn up for different durations as well as, different, yet inter-related purposes. The planning process must be structured on the cycle of maturation of different kinds of the activities. The activities which mature quickly must be treated as short-term plans and medium-term plans for those taking longer periods to show results. Moreover, he also believed that a medium term plan should be able to strike a proper balance between short-term maturing schemes and programmes with a longer gestation period. To pull backward regions into full focus of development, he advocated the need for a long-term plan, which in character will be a perspective plan for 15 to 20 years.

In his book on Politics and Planning he stressed on the responsibility of the political parties to create consensus in favour of change and to devise a proper code of conduct to strive and reach the pre-decided goals. His concept of planning went beyond economics and the purpose of politics included activism towards change in the livelihood of the poor. He was of the opinion that India’s “Five Year Plan’ always overemphasized the medium-term aspects of planning and grossly underrated the short-term plans and efforts. Moreover, he viewed that perspective plan also gives recognition to the felt needs, but it is rarely taken seriously. He aggrieved at the negligence of the Planning Commission towards perspective plan. Even after 60 years of planning experience, his critics on planning hold true as the entire process of perspective planning failed to get thrust on structural transformation and its unfolding of logic, which Asoka Mehta considered are the essence and implications of fundamentally altering the occupational and production structure of the economy.

### **Poverty**

Throughout his speeches and interventions in the Parliament as well as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, he had always argued for creating respectful livelihood system for the poor. Asoka Mehta had a better understanding of the existing dimensions of poverty and without emphasising on modern theories, he argued for a practical and down to earth solution. According to him, the nature of

poverty in India exists not merely in the form of body, but also in spirit and mind. He identified their roots in India's social system, economic apparatus and its culture. More importantly, he also brought to notice how these different roots of poverty interact and reinforce one another.

### **Panchayat Raj**

Grass root democracy was one of Asoka Mehta's most cherished dreams. He believed that if development has to take place the participation in planning and implementation must begin from the bottom and villages have to participate in this entire process. Centralised Planning will not meet the aspirations of the masses as these are varied and need differential treatment. His report on the implementation of Panchayat Raj system in India is a historical milestone and an excellent treatise on development. He was fully convinced that district should be the first point for decentralisation under popular supervision below the state level and Zilla Parishad should be the executive body and made responsible for planning at the district level. The Panchayat Raj institutions should have compulsory powers of taxation to mobilise their own financial resources. There should be a regular social audit by a district level agency and by a committee of legislators to check whether the funds allotted for the vulnerable social and economic groups are actually spent on them. A dream that received attention only in 1993 through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments and the implementation is still tardy.

Asoka Mehta's scheme of Panchayat Raj had some important and unique features such as the requirement that the state government should not supersede the Panchayat Raj institutions. In case of an imperative supersession, elections should be held within 6 months from the date of supersession. This is one of the necessary conditions for democratisation of the grass roots and empowerment of the village institutions. He also argued for establishing Nyaya Panchayats as separate bodies from that of development Panchayats and recommended that these should be presided over by a qualified judge. He believed that if the development functions are transferred to the district level and all development staff works under the control and supervision of the District level elected institution, then the delivery of development initiatives could be ensured. He also recognised the role of voluntary agencies in the process of grass root development and also social responsibility by providing representation to the

deprived sections of the society.

### **Corruption and Governance**

Corruption during fifties, sixties and till probably early seventies was not as blatant as it surfaced in the later years. Even then the hood of the evil was visible and Asoka Mehta in no uncertain words warned the country of this evil. He writes "Even more frustrating is the stink of corruption from which it seems no nook and corner is free." Large share of development expenditure percolates to the corrupt hands and goes into the shady black economy. He wanted some competent authority would conscientiously assess the incidence of corruption and take steps to arrest that. Something which we are talking today and the neglect of the words of warning given by these visionaries cost the nation billions worth foreign exchange (that got stacked in Swiss Banks) and number of rags to riches stories that evacuated the country's treasury systematically. One finds parallels in writings of Sir Visvesvaraya as well as J C Kumarappa.

### **Conclusions**

Remembering Asoka Mehta during these turbulent years in the country seems to me a natural outcome. There were these few leaders who visualised the problems of the nation beyond their lifetime. They not only expounded the issues surfaced during their life time but also provided quite a few solutions. In that context we find the writings and views expressed by the visionary Asoka Mehta quite aptly picked the nerve. He expressed what he expected from the common Indian for the country. He writes "To give one's best and to seek the least in return, is the definition of dedication (to the nation). History testifies that beleaguered nations storming to victory against adverse forces have sought their real sword and shield in this spirit of dedication. Can we sustain this spirit for some years? Then we would move to the sunlit plateau of rewarding endeavours; we will escape the dark valleys of despair.

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# Towards Equality of Opportunity

Asoka Mehta

The cardinal feature of our new State, that distinguishes it from its predecessors, either in the immediate or in the remote past, is its demand for the political involvement of the citizen in the affairs of the State. Adult franchise, which confers on him this privilege, implies dispersion in the exercise of power, and the pace of our economic development will determine its gravitation away from its traditional focus to a multiplicity of new foci in society. Another equally profound decision which we took, as a logical extension of our adoption of adult franchise, was to commit the State, constitutionally, to provide equal opportunity to its citizens to aspire for the highest reaches of society. This has enlarged the horizons of the individual's aspirations.

These are the new features of our polity that set the mould of our future social development. They assume a change in our traditional social order which with its unique correlation between birth, wealth, status and rank resulted in a social milieu of 'cumulative inequalities'. Such a milieu, as an American political sociologist has pointed out, implied that inequality in one sphere determined *ipso facto*, inequalities in others. The alternative poised by our political infrastructure is one with a built-in feed-back mechanism, as it were, to enable society to reinforce itself with the creative faculty which the State is expected to foster in every citizen, irrespective of caste, creed, rank or privilege.

Let me review the nature of authority vested in the State to stimulate change in this direction. The Directive Principles of State Policy, as you know, define a series of principles to promote 'the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life' (Article 38). The application of this principle is, however, subject to the observance of justiciable fundamental rights, which, *inter alia*, prohibit discrimination but permit 'special provision for the advancement

of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. (Article 15(4)). The Constitution also provides for reservation of appointments for backward classes, although it guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment and prohibits discrimination (Article 16(4)). The extent and nature of State initiative in promoting change is, therefore, defined by these considerations.

The social import of these provisions in the context of our traditional social order reveals itself in the judgments of a number of cases that came up before the Supreme Court. There is, for instance, the decision in the case of *The State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan*, wherein an order of the Madras Government fixing admission to educational institutions on a communal basis was declared void because of its discriminatory nature. It was as a consequence of this decision that the Constitution was amended and Clause 4 was inserted in Article 15 permitting special provision being made for the advancement of 'socially and educationally backward classes'. Subsequently, the issue of defining the category of citizens who could attract the provisions of this clause came up before the Supreme Court. In this case, *M.R. Balaji and others v. The State of Mysore*, the Court held that special provisions under Clause 4, Article 15, explicitly pertained to those classes who were 'socially and educationally' backward and laid down that both these factors together were relevant in considering the validity of provisions. The judgement also dealt with the attributes of social backwardness and adjudged that caste was not its sole determinant.

The judgement is significant for more than one reason. It determines the attitude of the State to one of the major factors of stratified inequality in our society and, in as much as the Supreme Court has recognised transient variables contributing to inequality, it has broken the traditions of the land. The State in the remote past, ideologically upheld

an unequal social structure; in the recent past, it remained, by and large, indifferent to it; today, to the extent it has recognised the other causative factors of backwardness, it is emerging as a positive force for the dissolution of the inequality ordained by social tradition.

The judgement of the Supreme Court is significant in yet another respect. In ruling that the clause in dispute was not exclusive in character and could not be used in a manner which denied the rest of the citizens their right to opportunity, the Supreme Court has in effect laid a limitation on political privilege. In other words, if the Constitution contains a special provision to prevent privileged sections of society from perpetuating inherited advantages, it also provides for checks on an unjust application of political resources.

There is no doubt that a wide consensus in society accepts not only the role that we assigned to the State to shape our society, but also the contours along which it has to be fashioned. The emergence of this consensus is, however, the culmination of a process that began at the turn of the century when a few highly placed Indians agitated for their rights of appointment to the Indian Civil Service. The Indian Administrative Service today draws into its fold elements from the diverse strata of society. A study, for instance, has revealed that while in the ICS, over 75 per cent came from the top income groups in the case of the IAS less than a third belonged to this group, the rest being drawn from categories of families with incomes of less than Rs. 800 a month. Again, in 1961, the Scheduled Castes formed 18 per cent of the total number of candidates appointed to the IAS on the results of the competitive examination. The issues for the assertion of equality of opportunity are thus obviously different in the present stage of our social development.

In judging policies appropriate to foster egalitarian trends, emphasis is necessary on two of its main determinants, viz., growth of net national product and change in the structure of its distribution. The impact of planning over the last decade has largely projected itself in increase in the net national product. A more rapid rate of growth in the net national product alone would not necessarily secure progressively greater equality; it would be necessary to influence its flow and devise a mechanism by which it is

channeled to various strata of society. It is, however, incontrovertible that changes in the flow of the fruits of labour would be of limited value unless there was substantial increase in the quantum of the product to be distributed and attention was also given to the process of generation of income.

The process of income generation, which is essentially one of the absorption of material inputs for the exploitation of the natural endowments available to the community, brings on the agenda of planning a whole gamut of human factors. Implementation of plans, in this sense, is an exercise in substituting custom-blessed skills with science-tempered technology. Since acquisition of skills is a function of motivation, one comes up against the problem of stimulating, in fate-obsessed attitudes, initiative for the acquisition of skills and accomplishments which determine, or would determine, a man's station in the life of a modern community. Efforts in this direction, consequently, imply not only a radical change in the stereotype of a man's role and of his status in society, as conditioned by centuries of tradition, but also an actual change in social relationship on a basis consistent with those assumed by our Constitution. Let me, in this context, draw attention to some of the factors that are emerging in the country to help this process of change and pose some of the problems involved in shaping the instruments of change.

The impact of change is perhaps at its optimum in metropolitan cities and, consequently, intelligible in rather a dramatic manner. In fact some of us who have had the privilege of a close acquaintance with the city of Bombay over the period of a generation will readily recognise from personal experience the new social *mores* that have begun to replace those current in earlier decades. We find a new social ethos, free of old inhibitions but with its own unique scale of social distances, emerging to accommodate the demands of industrial development and urban growth. A little reflection will reveal, however, the distinct difference between the social landscape that obtains in the city of Bombay and that which obtains in the heartlands of the country.

One would notice, for instance, a more intimate contact, laterally, between class-groups of caste categories which is only extremely functional and perfunctory in rural areas. Again industry, with its inexorable propensity to convert human beings

into economic units, determines a set of variables for the identification of individuals which are on a plane very different from those that obtain in the agriculture-dominated countryside. The nexus of social relationships that sets the pattern of society is, to be sure, not entirely outside the pale of influences dominant in the country as a whole, but the trend is noticeable towards the development of a new social milieu. This milieu permits, relatively, a much greater opportunity for the recognition of status which does not depend entirely on the individual's wisdom in the choice of his parents' caste.

Bombay is no index of change for the country as a whole, but the forces that confer a new social significance to the individual and provide him with motivation for change are in operation with lesser intensity in other industry-based cities or are in an embryonic stage of growth in some of the larger towns. It should be obvious too that this change in status does not abridge social distances but the index of change is that it does not altogether place a taboo on such an abridgement. Matrimony is not perhaps the best illustration and is also somewhat a banal one, but let me cite public reaction to any deviation from the normal. An inter-caste marriage causes no more than, perhaps, a comment in a small, close circle in this city today, but in rural areas it still can be a major scandal, involving the entire village community and affecting the fate and fortune of the involved parties, as it did here a couple of decades ago.

Slums dramatise the leeway we have to make up before equality of opportunity becomes a reality in urban life. Although our rate of urbanization is relatively modest, it is more than evident that our urban resources have yet to be mobilized adequately and utilized wisely before the city begins to exercise a wholesome influence and before it can communicate to the rest of society some of the more desirable social values of which it is the matrix. Migration from rural areas is a major cause of urbanization, as a result of which sizable sectors of the rural population are exposed to urban influences which are relatively better equality-oriented. The linkage between urban and rural cultures, which this migrant population effects, is one of the important leavening agents to hasten the process of change in rural areas. Perhaps an even greater influence, both in extent and degree, is one that is exerted by the industrial complexes that are being developed in the heartlands of the country.

Organized effort is necessary for the conversion of this potential of change and this is the new dimension that is imparted to the role of trade unions in shaping our society. Fortunately, some of the undesirable pressures of a stratified society have not affected our trade union movement in a marked manner and, unlike in some other countries, it is relatively free of elements which distort its inherent social and economic perspectives. The awareness of a creative social role will enable trade unions not only to protect the immigrant rural labour force, unaware of the nature of social and economic forces operating in urban areas, but also help it to acquire, not entirely without tears, the discipline of urban culture. Leadership in this direction will also engender a better appreciation of some of the healthier aspects of urban social values and equality of opportunity would be certainly more meaningful in this context.

The relevance of this element of change is perhaps most significant to the depressed sections of our society. Some 10.7 per cent of the total population of scheduled castes lives in urban areas. There are wide regional variations from this all India average. For instance, 79.7 per cent, 24.4 per cent and 21.2 per cent of the scheduled caste populations of Delhi, Gujarat and Maharashtra respectively live in urban centres. These sizable proportions of scheduled caste populations are open to the experiences of a non-discriminatory nature of social contacts at various points in urban communal life, although they continue to be distinct social islands.

The influence of urbanization has its obvious limitations in the process of transforming our society and, for a long time to come urban-rural differentials will continue to be disparate. The focus of our effort will have to rest on rural India where institutional compulsions continue to bear their weight against any meaningful re-fashioning of the pattern of society. The correlation between privilege, status and influence appears to remain unchanged, welfare and reform legislation make no more than a dent in the hard crust of what Bagehot once called the 'cake of custom'. Efforts to induce change in this background either run into direct opposition or run dry in the face of mass apathy. It is evident also that, until solvents are applied to overcome social-cultural resistances that impede change, no socio-economic development of any meaningful magnitude will occur.



In following up to its logical conclusion the type of society envisaged in our Constitution and creating a rural base consistent with its ethos, our success rests today on the leadership available at the grass roots. This leadership can and has to emerge from the intellectually perceptive elements which are widespread. A National Sample Survey conducted in 1958 has estimated that about 30 per cent of our villages are at a distance of less than ten miles from high schools. These schools can and should become cultural centres radiating influence to initiate a renaissance in the rural areas. A similar but a greater degree of responsibility lies on the small-town colleges, now numbering hundreds, which dot different parts of the countryside.

I have only touched the mere fringes of a few of the problems that arise inevitably from our efforts to

assert a scale of egalitarian values in stratified society. Inasmuch as it is a unique experience in the history of our society, its consequences ripple through each and every aspect of social existence. In fact a new creed, with its own ethic, has to emerge. There are few precedents to help us shape this creed because the cultural soil in which it is emerging is uniquely its own. Only a deliberate effort to understand its nature will enable us to build this creed as our modest contribution to the heritage of this land.

More than a century ago the nation's Grand Old Man, Dadabhai Naoroji, went about the streets of this great city, lantern in hand, to spread literacy. That lantern is now in our hands. Let us protect it against the storm which change generates and use it to ignite the lamps all around.

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## Division of Big States

S. Viswam

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's proposal to divide the sprawling state into four "parts" may well pose a new challenge to the UPA government at the Centre ahead of the assembly elections in early 2012. A division of the large UP into some economically and politically viable smaller states has been mooted often enough in the past. The erstwhile NDA government of Atal Behari Vajpayee did bite the bullet a decade ago and boldly managed the creation of Jharkhand (out of Bihar), Uttaranchal, ie. Uttarakhand (out of UP) and Chhatisgarh (out of Madhya Pradesh). However, that government missed the opportunity to tackle the entire controversial issue of reorganisation of states in one go. It left the task half undone. Splitting large states into smaller states has the potential of bringing political dividends for whichever party or group of parties that opts for a division. While the BJP benefited to some extent initially by the creation of the three new states, it is gaining no special political advantage out of its boldness now. Mayawati now proposes to divide UP into four "parts". The news report from Lucknow is rather vague on this aspect of her proposal. Does she want to go in for an administrative division of the state by realigning the states or does she want new states to be carved out of UP? Whatever her options, even administrative division is bound to lead eventually to the conversion of the "part" into a state.

The Chief Minister's idea is not entirely without merit. UP

comprises 75 districts presently. The state is a behemoth, with the second largest land mass among all states (surprisingly it is Madhya Pradesh which is the largest state area-wise), and it is difficult to administer. Before parting with Uttarakhand it used to send 85 members to the Lok Sabha, not a mean advantage if you calculate the nexus between numbers of MPs and their impact on national politics. Even without Uttarakhand, it sends a substantial number. Mayawati would like to allot 32 districts in eastern UP to a "part" called Poorvanchal, 22 districts in western region to Harit Pradesh (Green State), seven districts to Bundelkhand and the remaining 14 to Central UP. Thus, the outrageously large, unmanageable and complicated state will divide itself into four smaller states, which may be easier to administer. Even so, not all the new states will be of the same size in terms of both area and population. It seems rather odd that a state evolved out of seven administrative districts will co-exist with another which had had as many as 32 districts. But, then, the objective is to make the vast UP more manageable, easier to govern, and less complicate to develop economically

It is not clear why Mayawati finds the idea of dividing UP appealing. Once the state is divided into four new parts, Mayawati will cease to be as powerful and important as she is now, heading as she does 75 districts and in a position to exploit the politics and economics of each district to

her own political advantage. This leads one to suspect that the idea of dividing Uttar Pradesh is a kite that she has flown to test the waters before the coming assembly polls. She may want to play electoral politics with the proposal before and during the polls, and abandon the thought after the polls if she does not succeed in selling the idea to the nation at large and her Dalit constituency in particular.

However, these are early days yet, and the UP is yet to go into the poll mode in the real sense of the term. The fever will set in soon though, and with Rahul Gandhi on the warpath in the whole state rather than confining his campaign only to Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabh constituencies, the battle will be joined soon enough. When it does, what role will a proposal for dividing the state into four new states play? How will UP's political class react as a whole? The Samajwadi Party has thrown cold water on the idea already, but the BJP may have to be more cautious, partly because it championed the cause of division all these years and has supported the Telengana movement. The BJP can hardly afford to criticise Mayawati for hunting for political dividends.

The Congress may be more interested in checking Mayawati's influence than in encouraging any of her fads, although in the long run four smaller states in place of a huge single state will offer both opportunities and challenges to the Congress.

The Telengana movement has left the Congress at the state and

national levels much bruised. It is now caught in an awkward situation where it can go neither forward nor back nor afford to maintain the status quo. It has to blame itself largely for its predicament. It did not take the campaign seriously to begin with, and played one group against

the other for too long a time to retain credibility. Hence, it may be wise for it to heed the warning implicit in Mayawati's proposal. The best way of tackling the idea of states' reorganisation is to face the challenge boldly and settle the controversies once and for all. There are many political groups

clamouring for separate states here, there and everywhere. The sooner the Centre sets up another States Reorganisation Commission and deals with all the demands in one go, disputes will linger and fester in local levels. The time to act is now.

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**Manmohan's Successor**  
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## A Long-awaited Breakthrough

**Kuldip Nayar**

We are back full circle to a proposal long familiar to the people in India and Pakistan: keep business separate from Kashmir. There was a time when Pakistan would refuse to have any trade with India until Kashmir was solved. New Delhi would say that it was not opposed to a solution of Kashmir, but the starting point should be business.

The meeting between Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Yousuf Reza Gilani broke the deadlock and Pakistan did not underline Kashmir as the core problem. As Pakistan foreign minister Hina Rabbani Kher said after returning from Maldives that Pakistan would "bend backwards" to be friendly with India.

This is a welcome development, not only for the two countries but also for the South Asia. Nothing in the region would move because the estrangement between India and Pakistan cast its shadow on any joint step forward. Islamabad should be complemented because it went away from its old beaten path.

Whatever Pakistan's compulsions—the army is on board—it is a bold step which can lead to the

normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's decision not to link trade with the sentence to the terrorists, who are being tried in Pakistan for the attack on Mumbai three years ago, is courageous at a time when his own stock is not high.

The Indian media is mostly critical and the hawks are even abusive. But they represent a minority which sees everything in Pakistan negative. They do not want Pakistan to fall apart but they continue talking about punishing Islamabad. Their outlook tallies with India's main opposition party, the BJP. And left to both, the criticism of any breakthrough with Pakistan will be considered anti-national.

The Pakistan media may be a shade better. But it too does not rise from the parochial angle it has followed for decades. Nor are of any help the books still preaching that Hindus are enemies or incidents like the killing of four Hindu doctors in Sindh. Civil society there appears to have given up even the semblance of resistance. The murder of former Punjab governor Salman Taseer at the hands of fanatics has silenced even the boldest liberals, not realizing that they are a target.

The bureaucracy and the intelligence agencies on both sides do not see the development at Maldives as an opportunity to shed the baggage of history of last six decades and start from clean slate. I concede that all will not change at one sweep. Relations between India and Pakistan have to be evolved and tended carefully. The path the two governments have taken will have to scale the mountains before they hit a sunny valley. It requires patience and perseverance.

India's grievance of Pakistan not yet punishing the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks is genuine. No explanation by Islamabad is convincing. Yet it has a point when it says that the evidence which India has provided is too weak to get favourable verdict in court. Now that Pakistan's judicial committee is coming to India, it should be collecting as much evidence as it wants. The case must move forward. Once it happens, doubts on this end would be assuaged to a large extent. And Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is quite right when he says that another Mumbai may lead to unforeseen consequences. New Delhi will expect that Islamabad does not allow cross-border terrorism from its soil.

Yet I do not think that the case is the only hitch. Both countries do not have trust in each other and refuse to rely on the facts even when placed on the table. They are prey to a mindset and see to it that they stall the people's desire to live as good neighbours. So long as terrorism is there no argument against mistrust will work. Joint mechanism to eliminate terrorism was supposed to be set up a few months ago. But the proposal remains on paper. The mechanism when established should

also visit the sites where terrorists are reportedly trained and armed.

When it comes to trade, New Delhi will have to ensure that there is a level playing field for Pakistan. The balance of trade will be one indication. If Pakistan's exports are too small compared to Indian exports, doubts may surface about New Delhi's bona fides. True, the list of items would be prepared. But India can ask Pakistan which goods it can conveniently export to India so that there is no room for grievance or discrimination. Maybe, some of the tariff concession New Delhi has offered to Dhaka can be extended to Islamabad.

India's aim should be how to develop Pakistan economically so that it is not dependent on America or Saudi Arabia for assistance. This will ultimately stop foreign interference in the affairs concerning the region. Pakistan, on its part, should open the country to India's investors. If they can buy large concerns in the UK or the US, they should be able to do so in Pakistan as well. There may be joint ventures between India and Pakistan. Economic ties in due course will become the sinews for friendship and then the gun will become superfluous.

It is understandable that the Pakistan government is under great pressure not to keep Kashmir apart. But there is no doubt that trade between the two countries will generate so much goodwill that a solution of Kashmir may become easy. After all, the governments on both sides did arrive at some understanding on Kashmir.

Once when Nawaz Sharif was the Prime Minister in Pakistan, the coup by General Pervez Musharraf

stalled the solution. The remark by the then Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was: "We were almost there." The second time when Musharraf brokered a solution and was on the verge of inviting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for signing the agreement on Kashmir, the lawyers' agitation changed the scenario.

I realize that it is difficult for both sides to rub off the history. But there is no alternative to peace. They cannot change their geography and have to accept each other as they are, not as they want them to be. If Germany and France could become friends after years of war why can't India and Pakistan?

My advice to civil society in Pakistan is that it should speak out in public. At present its criticism is confined to drawing rooms and it remains pathetically quiet even when it sees the truth being attacked. I have not seen a single voice of concern for the judge who sentenced the killer of late Punjab governor Salman Taseer. The judge had to disappear after doing his duty because he knew that neither civil society nor the government would come to his rescue.

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# Manmohan's Successor

S.Viswam

Rahul Gandhi, the heir-apparent and Prince Charming, has hitherto been, like his father, a reluctant politician. After avoiding the limelight for some years, he recently came into the open and began cultivating political connections and constituencies even while proclaiming often that he was not yet ready for politics. With each year after the installation of UPA II in power, Rahul has been nearing the political mainstream, with focus on UP politics. Involvement in his own Amethi and his mother Sonia Gandhi's Rae Bareilly constituencies gave him the excuse to break out in confrontation against UP Chief Minister Mayawati. Now, with just a few months left for assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, the prince is not ashamed of eyeing the state throne with clear hints that he will be eyeing the Big Throne in New Delhi in direct succession to Manmohan Singh in 2014 parliamentary elections. Another scene in the race for power at the Centre 2014 onwards now unfolds with the spotlight turned on the Prince.

The reluctant politician is no more so. He has declared that (a) he is ready to involve himself deeper in the March 2012 assembly polls (2) he will head the campaign (3) he is ready to become UP's chief minister if the voters want him to (4) he intends not only to improve the Congress' fortunes in the coming polls but, if he can help, make it the largest single party in order to have a stake in power in the largest state of the country. The Congress is currently the fourth party in the state which it once ruled, after the ruling

Bahujan Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Rahul may well dream of outclassing all the three rival parties in one go and convert the Congress into the ruling party with a majority if his magic works. It is unlikely to, but then dreams are par for the course in the dynasty-afflicted Congress Party.

The Congress did not do all that badly in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls. It bagged 21 seats (out of 80) at a time when it was expected not to win even a single seat. Rahul is entitled to a great part of the credit for this impressive achievement. History can repeat itself in the assembly round with even a more remarkable performance if all those dalits, Muslims, kisans and upper middle classes voters Rahul has been cultivating for the last five years deliver. Mayawati has demonstrated her capacity to convert goodwill into votes and none in the country has excelled her in this art so far. Rahul has possibly done enough to push the Samajwadi Party-BJP opposition to the background and to treat only Mayawati and the Bahujan Samaj Party as the main targets of the Congress. That Mayawati has been somewhat rattled by both Rahul's strategy and challenge is fully reflected in her decision to recommend the division of the sprawling Uttar Pradesh into four new and smaller states.

This is a shrewd political move ahead of the assembly polls. It is based on the belief that the proposal for the new states will help divert the attention of the political as well as the voting class

from the more controversial issues that have brought considerable vulnerability to Mayawati's politics and performance. In the name of development, Mayawati has squandered state funds into unproductive channels. She has made political corruption a fine art, and virtually institutionalised caste politics. Indeed, under Mayawati, UP politics has amassed casteist and communal overtones and undertones. However, the proposal for dividing the state deserves to be fully debated, but in the atmosphere in which it has been unraveled, it is unlikely to receive the attention it deserves. The Congress will fight shy of supporting it one hundred per cent since it has the Telengana albatross around its neck. It cannot go hammer and tong against Mayawati's corruption since it itself is vulnerable to Anna Hazare-inspired campaigns on central government scams.

But all this is not to say that Rahul's battle is lost even before it has begun. There is a long way to go before UP gets divided. Rahul as a chief minister-aspirant is definitely a new factor in UP politics and polls. So, much depends on how that factor works in the voters' minds. After all, the state rejected much stronger parties in successive assembly polls to give a chance to the BSP. The BSP's record is not remarkable enough to distort the voters' perspective firmly against the Congress. On the other hand, the idea of Rahul as chief minister who is a potential contender in the prime ministerial race in 2014 may work wonders. Indian elections always throw up surprises.

## About Lohia

This has reference to the article 'Gandhi and Socialism' by R.J.Kochar (*Janata*, October 30, 2011). He says that I am trying to tell that Lohia was not conferred the doctorate, that the controversy is "unwarranted", and "after Lohia's death" and that Lohia could have clarified the doubt in his lifetime. I had only raised a doubt as to how Lohia could do his doctorate, in my letter published in *Janata* dated September 5, 2010. My doubt that Lohia was not conferred doctorate has been confirmed by a German Scholar Joachim Oesterheld in her article published in the October 2-8, 2010 issue of the *Economic and Political Weekly* which contained a special issue on Lohia edited by Yogendra Yadav. Does Shri Kochar insist that even though Lohia was not conferred Doctorate he should be addressed as Doctor? Does Shri Kochar mean that after some one's death his actions and views should not be subjected to analysis but should be accepted at face value? Who has "unintelligent prejudice"?

When Shri Kochar speaks of "personality haters", is he referring to me or to Lohia? I have not called names to Lohia as he did to his colleagues in the Socialist movement. Lohia had called Acharya Narendra Deva, Acharya Kripalani and Jayaprakash Narayan not to mention lesser leaders as partisans of "paralysed socialism", called Gandhians like Acharya Kripalani, as "decoits", and "Saras bird", Jayaprakash Narayan as a "madari" and an "Agent" of Nehru. He called parliament members "impotent".

About Lohia's understanding of Marx, I have wondered at his

statement that Marx did not know anything about the caste system in India and that Marx advocated equality of opportunity. As for Gandhi, I have wondered why he did not mention to Gandhi that he was not conferred Doctorate? Why he did not refute when he was introduced to the American people as having served Gandhi as his private secretary? Was he ever the private secretary to Gandhi? It is time Lohia followers decide whether they belong to, to use Yogendra Yadav's words, "*the dwindling band of Lohia's blind admirers who are still too dazzled to see anything beyond 'doctor sahib'*".

—Bapu Heddurshetti

## Karya Karta

Rashtra Seva Dal Karya Karta Puraskar, an award to honour best performing worker of Rashtra Seva Dalat at the national level has been instituted by the family of Bhai Vaidya, a veteran socialist leader and a former president of the RSD. The award consists of Rs 10,000/-, a certificate and a memento. The first award was presented to George Jacob of Kerala for his outstanding contributions to the organisation and to the socialist movement in general.

George Jacob has been working with the RSD since 2002 and has been instrumental in starting the organisational activities in Kerala which have spread to many districts of the state. He has also started RSD work in some parts of Karnataka and Andhra, as the National General Secretary of the Seva Dal.

The award was presented on October 15th in a special function organised at Barrister Nath Pai auditorium in Sane Guruji Smarak of

## Bapu Kaldate

Veteran socialist leader Bapu Kaldate expired at 12.10 am on November 17, 2011. Bapu had been a relentless crusader against injustice and inequality in his long political career. He was elected a Member of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly from Latur constituency. Later on he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Aurangabad and thereafter to the Rajya Sabha.

Hailing from a small village in Marathwada region, Bapu reached on/the zenith of national politics. His upbringing in 'warkari' tradition and grooming in Rashtra Seva Dal made him a special kind of doyen of Indian socialist movement. His transparent integrity and oratory held large audiences spellbound and earned him respect from various shades of political spectrum all over India. He sent an inspiring message on the formation of the Socialist Party at Hyderabad in May this year.

His demise is a great loss for Gandhian socialist movement in India. Strengthening socialist movement and Rashtra Seva Dal will be a befitting tribute to the memory of Bapu Kaldate.

— Pannalal Surana,  
Chairman, Parliamentary  
Board, Socialist Party (India)

Pune. In the well attended meeting Dr Abhijit Vaidya, Chief of Arogya Sena and Trustee of Rashtra Seva Dal, presented the award and Sudhatai Varde, senior trustee of Seva Dal, honoured his family

(Continued on Page 8)



# Good Governance and the Welfare State System

## B. Vivekanandan

In a broad sense, the term good governance is used to measure how public institutions and their functionaries conduct public affairs, and how truthfully and fairly they discharge their responsibilities toward the people and the society. Transparency of the decision-making process, honesty, efficiency and accountability of the decision-makers and implementors of decisions, their responsibility and responsiveness, the rule of law, democratic methods, etc., are all integral parts of it. Efficient service provision, a guaranteed system of distributive justice, provision of gainful employment, elimination of poverty, deterrence against corruption and criminalisation of politics and administration, are also components of good governance. The presence of an active civil society, a free press, and an independent judiciary, composed of persons of high integrity, are also integral parts of it. Cumulatively, the main objective is to establish and preserve a good, democratic society, based on equity, justice and peace. The Right to Information would give a robust support for good governance.

However, we must understand that it is not enough to pass legislations regarding good governance. For making good governance meaningful in the lives of people, it is also essential to create and sustain a general environment favourable to it.

It is in this context that the construction of a welfare state system becomes imperative. This is mainly because the welfare state system would engender the needed stimuli and psyche among all functionaries in the public domain for ensuring good governance. Therefore, it is my conviction that establishment of a welfare state system in India is essential for ensuring sustainable good governance in our country.

When we talk about the welfare state system, it is important to understand: what does it mean? A welfare state system implies that a benign democratic state would assume the main responsibility of the welfare of the whole population, through appropriate, public funded, institutionalised mechanisms. In effect, the government would assume the direct responsibility for the provision of social security, health care, medical care, education, housing, social services, unemployment allowances, family allowances, child allowances, pensions, and so on, for everyone in the state. And all these provisions would be funded largely from state revenues.

A welfare state system accepts the role of the state as a regulator as well as a provider. It concedes that a judicious and benign intervention of a democratic state in the economy and social life is necessary, since the system entails a huge transfer of funds from the government to local

authorities, for channelling the welfare state benefits to the people. Adoption of a welfare system is also a recognition of the social rights of every person in the state to get a fair share of the fruits of growth in society, and is also a stimulus for promotion of a mentality among the people, to share a part of their earnings with fellow human beings, without heartburn, in a spirit of solidarity. Indeed, it is also a civilised democratic solution to the problem of inequality prevalent in today's world.

Today, a highly advanced welfare state system exists in Scandinavian countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. I am more familiar with their system since I had many opportunities to visit them repeatedly during the last three decades and stayed in them for long periods to study their system. The welfare state system in Scandinavia is anchored in a full-employment policy, complemented by a steeply progressive Income-tax system. They sustain the welfare state system there without any problem.

If we look at the texture of the Scandinavian welfare state system, its most outstanding feature is what is popularly known as "from cradle-to-the-grave" welfare state system. In fact, calling it "from cradle-to-the-grave" welfare state system is an understatement, because a person begins to get the welfare state's protection when he/she is in the womb of his/her mother. Under

the system, a pregnant woman, after 14 weeks of pregnancy, begins to get a special allowance from the government to take extra-nutritional food for feeding the foetus. From then onwards, the state's responsibility for the child's wellbeing remains unabated all through its life. When a child is born, the mother receives a box instantly from the government, stamped with government's official seal, containing baby clothes and other newborn baby items for the child. After the child's birth, the parents begin to get a child allowance for the upkeep of the child, till it reaches 17 years old. Every child gets free education. After education, the state is responsible for the provision of gainful job for the person, failing which, till such time, it has to provide an unemployment allowance for him/her. When the person becomes a wage-earner, he becomes a taxpayer, and thus becomes a regular financier of the welfare state till his retirement. When a person retires he/she gets two-thirds of his/her salary as pension, which is adequate to maintain a good quality of life after retirement, in addition to free medical care. And, finally, when a person dies, his/her burial expenditure is also met by the state. That is how the "cradle-to-the-grave" welfare state system operates in all Scandinavian countries.

Social security in Scandinavia encompasses the right to work, right to education, a decent place to live, and so on. Under the scheme, the entire population is insured against illness. Everyone gets equal educational opportunities. The scheme protects all employees from work related accidents and sickness. All employees are entitled

to compensation for industrial injury. All mothers receive maternity grants. Under a family law, either the mother or father is entitled to seven months maternity or paternity leave, with full pay, after the birth of a child, to take care of the newborn. Every housewife is entitled to an annual vacation, anywhere in the country, at the governmental expenditure.

Similarly, the welfare state system has established a highly developed pension scheme in Scandinavia. Under an old-age pension scheme, all old people are entitled to a pension. Similarly, all disabled people, after the age of 16, are entitled to a disability pension. If a person is fully disabled, he would get full disability pension, which is equal to old-age pension. Similarly, parents are entitled to child care allowances, if they themselves nurse their disabled children at home.

In Sweden, medical care is free, except a nominal prescription fee. Under the sickness benefit insurance system, those who suffer from income loss due to illness, injury or disability, are entitled to compensation. The quantum of sickness benefit is 90 percent of the person's salary prior to his illness, injury or disability. The cost of health insurance is shared between the state, employers, and self-employed people.

The welfare state system in Scandinavia is attuned to promote equality and solidarity in society. A steeply progressive income-tax system, and the solidarity wage structuring have radically curtailed the income disparity between the take-home pays of the low-paid and high-paid employees in the country.

I went to Stockholm in 1985 to study the changes the welfare state system has brought about in Sweden. At that time, the then Prime Minister Olof Palme's Economic Adviser, Dr Klaus Eklund, a Ph.D from the famous Stockholm School of Economics, showed me some charts which he prepared for the Prime Minister. First, he showed me a chart which showed the gross salary levels of the lowest paid and the highest paid employees in Sweden. I found the disparity between the two quite big. Then he showed me another chart, which showed the take-home pays of all those wage-earners in Sweden, after applying the steeply progressive income-tax. That chart showed that after the deduction of the income-tax, the income ratio between the lowest paid and the highest paid employees in Sweden came down to 1:4. Then he showed me a third chart, showing the comparative position of family incomes in Sweden. The income difference between families in Sweden was found to be astonishingly low. The income ratio between the low-income and high-income families was only 1:2. We must note that no other country, no other system in the world, has achieved such a high level of income equality which has been achieved in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. This has been achieved democratically through the means of Parliamentary reforms. It blurred the class distinctions in Scandinavia. Now, due to the negative impact of globalisation, and of the activities of the multi-national companies, there are some changes in these ratios in recent years, but not any big change.

Though the initial objective of the construction of welfare state

was alleviation of poverty, the Scandinavian Welfare States have gone for beyond that agenda, and infused in it larger objectives like reduction of inequality, and promotion of social justice, which means distributive justice, and human solidarity. The agenda of social justice, or distributive justice, has been pursued both vertically and horizontally. Vertically from the rich to the poor, through a steeply progressive taxation system. And horizontally, through the establishment of a cradle-to-the-grave welfare state system for the entire population, without exception. As a result, in the global Human Development Index, all these countries – Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland – occupy top positions.

Since matters affecting the vital interests of the people, like education, health, employment, social security etc, are taken care of by the welfare state system, popular support for it remains strong in all these countries. Governmental changes in these countries have not brought about any significant change in the welfare state system which the social democratic parties have systematically established during the last 75 years.

What are the effects of the welfare state system from the point of view of good governance in these countries? We have to recognise that the welfare state system has brought about a remarkable change in the psyche and attitudes of the people in all these Scandinavian countries. The preventive policies pursued by the welfare state system have forestalled many potential social problems, and influenced the development of healthy, stress-free societies in Scandinavia. It

has virtually freed people, from worrying about their own security, or about the future security of their children and grandchildren, as they are sure that the welfare state system would take care of all of them when time comes. As a result, the people in Scandinavia are generally free from stress-based diseases, which are increasingly becoming a phenomenon in most of the non-welfare state societies. Another notable point is that the system has made all these societies totally free from corruption. Indeed, people in these countries have no incentive, nor any compulsion, to become dishonest or corrupt. Their solidarity approach has radically changed their general psyche. It has enhanced people's respect for each other, which is demonstrated in their day-to-day conduct. No one would venture to look down upon a colleague or a neighbour with derision. Good governance has become a natural corollary of the welfare state system of all these countries. People and public functionaries are provided with a healthy transparent environment, to enable them to overcome the traits of pettiness, greed and acquisitiveness, which breed craftiness, corruption, and dishonesty in persons.

In India, if we really want to ensure good governance, we have to build up a welfare state system which should engender good human qualities which would promote good governance. Infusion of fear in the minds of potential offenders – whether they are in policies or in administration – alone cannot ensure good governance in our society, unless it is backed by a strong welfare state system.

The Indian Constitution contains many provisions in Chapters on

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, for transforming India into a welfare state. Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 45, and so on, are all pertinent provisions, aimed to construct a welfare state system to India. But, despite these provisions made in the constitution, the progress India has made in the direction of building a welfare state in the country remains negligible. The lack of will and the absence of a political party, like Social Democratic Party, fully committed to build up a welfare state system in India are the main reasons. An index of where India stands in this context could be seen in our annual budgets. While a country like Sweden spends about 37 percent of its national budget for public welfare, India spends just about four percent of its budget for the purpose. That speaks volumes about our track record in this context during the last 60 years. This dismal record of India calls for radical change. However, this is not the occasion to go into details of all these matters. I hope, some of you will pay attention to this aspect, in your studies and research.

However, I would like to make one more pertinent point. A week ago, my good friend Prof. Arun Kumar, a famous economist of Jawaharlal Nehru University, has published an article in *The Hindu*, which has revealed that the black economy in India accounts for 50 percent of the country's GDP. Needless to say how serious is this problem for good governance in India. It is well-known that this black economy is controlled by a small number of corrupting wizards of private enterprises, spanning greedy businessmen and traders, and unscrupulous contractors and

commission agents. Equally well-known is their unlimited capacity to throw all kinds of temptations around our decisions – whether they are politicians of administrators. The evidence which has surfaced in the 2-G Spectrum Scandal is only a tip of the ice-berg. Therefore, since the black economy, and its accompaniments too, pose serious challenge to good governance, they should also receive simultaneous attention of the Indian leadership.

In conclusion, I would say that legislations and administrative fiats alone cannot ensure a stable system of good governance in India. It is my conviction that in order to establish a sustainable good governance system in India, it is imperative for us to move fast in the direction of transforming the country into a welfare state, and build a stable overall environment to stabilise it. Otherwise, good governance in India will present the picture of an arena of perpetual cat and mouse game. The Scandinavian experience of the welfare state system, which I have explained to you, gives us that clear message. India should take benefit of that great experience in Scandinavia.

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members. Prin. Aravind Kapole , National President of RSD presided over the function. Prof Subhash Ware, Managing Trustee, Adv Dilawar Khan and Vinay Sawant General Secretaries of RSD. also spoke in the meeting about about Shri Jacob's contributions and members of Samajwadi Adhyapak Sabha, Samajwadi Mahila Sabha, Socialist Yuvajan Sabha, Arogya Sena and socialist movements, apart from the RSD, participated in the function.

## Maulana Azad

### Asghar Ali Engineer

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a unique Islamic personality of great Islamic scholarship, patriotism and passion for communal harmony. However, it is highly regrettable that his services to the country have almost been forgotten. From among the new generation, school or even college going students, I doubt even one percent would know him and his achievements. I, therefore, heartily welcomed when in a recent meeting of General body of Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla whose chairman is currently Prof. Mungekar, also a Rajya Sabha member, suggested that like Ambedkar a summer school be held for Maulana Azad also for college teachers so that they may be acquainted with Maulana's personality and achievements. In fact such summer schools for leaders like Maulana Azad, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and others are overdue, particularly about Maulana Azad whose sacrifices for the country and its freedom are second to none.

Eleventh November 2011 was the Maulana's birthday and this year Government of India also remembered him and schools were asked to celebrate Maulana's birthday as it was also education day. However, due to Diwali vacations students had not returned from their native places and hence response was rather poor.

Maulana was the son of Maulana Khairuddin of Calcutta (now Kolkatta) who was highly respected alim and had thousands of disciples. He had married an Arab woman

from Mecca and Maulana was born there during Maulana Khairuddins stay there. Thus in a way Arabic was his mother tongue and Maulana had great command over it. He was brought up in orthodox Islamic tradition and his father wanted him to succeed him. If he had accepted this offer he also would have had large number of disciples and would have been highly influential like his father.

But the Maulana came under the influence of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and read his writings avidly. However, he was highly independent-minded and soon distanced himself from Sir Syed's emphasis on loyalty to the British Empire though he accepted his views on modernity and modern education. Maulana was passionately committed to India's freedom and tried to join the underground movement in Bengal but unfortunately those underground leaders thought a Muslim was not fit for joining it.

For Maulana patriotism was an Islamic duty as the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that love of one's country is part of one's faith (iman). And this love of country demanded its freedom from foreign slavery and thus he considered it his duty to free his country from the British slavery. Thus he plunged into freedom movement from the very young age. He became Congress President at a very young age. Perhaps he was the youngest president of the Congress.

He, like Gandhiji, knew Hindu-Muslim unity was very necessary

for freedom of India. Thus when he became President of the Indian National Congress in Ramgarh session of the Congress, he concluded his presidential address by saying that “even if an angel descends from heaven with a gift of freedom for India from Allah I would not accept it until there is Hindu-Muslim unity as loss of India’s freedom is loss of India but loss of Hindu-Muslim unity is loss of entire humanity”.

These are very profound words and for Maulana this was not mere rhetoric but was his deep commitment on the basis of his understanding of the Quran. Maulana’s tafsir (commentary) of the Qur’an, which he wrote in the early ninetwenties during his Ranchi incarceration, is considered as great contribution to tafsir literature from the Indian subcontinent.

He has devoted the first volume of his tafsir (he could not complete it due to his highly busy political schedule and he had to write it all over again as the British police destroyed his earlier manuscript) to what he calls wahdat-e-din i.e. unity of religion. Maulana had deep conviction, as we find from his tafsir about unity of all religions and he has shown achievements of his scholarship on expanding this concept in his tafsir and that is why his pronouncement about Hindu-Muslim unity was not mere political rhetoric, much less opportunism, but a deep religious conviction.

Maulana was a great statesman and though he was great supporter of the Khilafat movement he was the first to discard it when Kamal Pasha staged a coup in Turkey and removed the khalifa from power and

declared the institution of khilafat as an outdated one. He also welcomed modern reforms of Ataturk and advised Muslims to give up efforts for protecting institution of khilafat which Turkish leaders themselves had disowned.

Maulana also opposed Jinnah’s demand for one-third representation for Muslims in parliament when the Nehru Committee Report came for discussion before the Congress Session of 1928. He argued that in democracy no community can be given over-representation and as for minority rights, Constitution can take care of them through special provisions - as the Indian Constitution did by providing for Articles 25 to 30. Maulana always took long term vision and never fell for cheap popularity.

Azad did not agree with Jawaharlal Nehru on denying two cabinet seats to Muslim League in 1937 in U.P. as Muslim League had lost in that election very badly. Maulana Azad advised Nehru to take two ministers nominated by Muslim League as refusal to take them would have long term adverse fall out; and the Maulana proved right. Jinnah became furious and began to denounce the Congress government as the ‘Hindu’ Government which would never give justice to Muslims.

If Nehru had accepted Maulana’s advice perhaps country could have been saved from the partition though Nehru had his own reasons to deny two cabinet seats to Muslim League as he wanted to give the Congress Muslims more representation. But Maulana thought otherwise on the basis of practical politics. Maulana always thought of future implications and not mere immediate consequences.

Nehru and Azad were not merely good friends but had deep respect for each other. Nehru has paid glorious tributes to Maulana for his scholarship and mastery over several languages. Maulana’s knowledge of other religions was also very deep and profound. His commitment to women’s rights was as if he lived today. It is well known that Muslim theologians generally do not support gender equality and want women to be confined to home. Maulana was one of the exceptions.

He translated the book published in Arabic in Egypt *Al-Mir’at al-Muslimah* i.e. *The Muslim Woman* which stands for gender equality and summarises the debate which was taking place in Egypt on women’s rights and Azad chose to translate this book as he was in favour of gender equality. It is important to note that he commented on the verse 2:228 that “this is revolutionary declaration of gender equality more than 1300 years ago” (Maulana was writing in 1920s).

The only two other noted theologians who stood for gender equality from Indian sub-continent were Maulavi Mumtaz Ali Khan who was a colleague of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Umar Ahmed Usmani who died recently in Karachi. Both were eminent theologians and were uncompromising in upholding gender equality. Maulavi Mumtaz Ali Khan wrote a book *Huquq al-Niswan* (Rights of women) and Maulana Umar Ahmed Usmani wrote *Fiqh al-Qur’an* (Qur’anic Jurisprudence) in 8 volumes elaborately arguing for gender equality in Qur’an.

Maulana also had clearly predicted about what is happening today in Pakistan. First, it is important to

note that like his conviction about Hindu-Muslim unity, it was also Maulana's strong conviction that it would be wrong to divide India on religious ground. One who loves one's country can never divide it. Also, he knew that when democracy begins functional it has to take care of rights of minorities and Muslims were no mean minority. They were more than 25 per cent before partition and today, if the country would not have been divided, they would have been more than 33 per cent.

Maulana had predicted that "today if Muslims think Hindus are their enemy tomorrow when Pakistan comes into existence, and there will be no Hindus they would fight among themselves along regional, ethnic and sectarian lines". He had clearly told this to some members of Muslim League who came to meet him before leaving for Pakistan.

This is what is happening today in Pakistan. Not only sectarianism has grown, religious extremism is at its apex. Killing has become common and everyday affair. When religion is associated with politics, history of all religions show, power becomes far more important than religion and religious values. Power becomes goal and religion a mere instrument. Maulana knew this very well and that is why he was far more inclined towards a secular democratic polity than religious one.

However, Maulana could not prevail and save the country from partition as powerful vested interests like feudal lords from U.P. and Bihar and Muslim middle classes (afraid that they may not get services or quick promotions) on one hand, and, the British imperial interests, on the other, were bent upon dividing the country.

## Indian Musharaffs and Kayanis

Sankara Narayanan

The Army as well as the Defence ministry has opposed Omar Abdullah's demand for the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from four districts of J&K. The Army chief has stated that it will be impossible for the Army to operate without the cover of the Act as the force will get bogged down in legal battles. CG's DGP Viswaranjan also grumbled that his SP in Dantewada was always dragged to civil courts upsetting the anti-Naxal operations. AFSPA was enacted in 1958 as a 'short-term measure' to allow deployment of the Army against separatists. It has been enforced in J&K since 1990. Section 6 of the Act gives the armed forces immunity from prosecution and other legal proceedings without 'the consent of the central government'.

Human rights activists and civil society groups contend that the Act has been grossly misused. Human Rights Watch, an internationally recognized NGO, has said that "abuses facilitated by the AFSPA have led to anger and disillusionment against the Indian State. Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee, which examined the provisions of the Act after ascertaining the views of various stakeholders, observed that the Act should be repealed. It held that the Act "has become an object and instrument of discrimination and high-handedness". The committee also said that while providing protection against civil or criminal proceedings in respect of the acts or deeds done by such forces while carrying out the duties entrusted to them, "it is equally

necessary to ensure that where they knowingly abuse or misuse their powers they must be held accountable and must be dealt with the law applicable to them". The Second Administrative Reforms Commission also recommended that the Act should be repealed. In April 2007 a working group in Jammu and Kashmir appointed by the Prime Minister suggested that the Act be revoked. Jeevan Reddy Committee also recommended the creation of grievance cells.

However, the Union cabinet did not act on these recommendations in the face of objections from the armed forces. Since 2002, Sharmila an activist in Manipur has been on hunger-strike demanding repeal of the Act. There have been many cases of disappearance of those picked up without warrants. There are indeed serious human rights violations in the enforcement of the Act but these are often justified as necessary.

Omar Abdullah's demand may or may not be politically motivated, but the issue raised by him calls for consideration. The decision regarding withdrawal has to be a political one. Crucial is the stand of the army and the Defence ministry, but the government has to take its own decision and if necessary overrule the objections of the army.

The Army's top commander in J&K has said the country could be compelled to grant the State independence by 2016 if government plans to lift the controversial AFSPA from some areas go ahead. The

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# An Independent Judiciary

Ruma Pal

The usual platitudes are inadequate to describe the honour conferred on me today by asking me to deliver a talk in memory of such an outstanding and multi-faceted personality as Justice V.M. Tarkunde. Unfortunately I never knew him personally but by all accounts his life reflected his deep commitment to ethical values: a commitment which he brought into every role he played in his life including those of a judge and a lawyer. In keeping with his strong principles, in 1981 he fought for the independence of the judiciary (as a petitioner before the Supreme Court on behalf of three Additional Judges of the Delhi High Court. Incidentally one of those judges, Justice S.B. Wad, was my professor when I read for a law degree at Nagpur. This however is not the reason for my choosing to speak on an Independent Judiciary and what it means today. I chose the topic for several reasons: the issue is one which was close to Mr. Tarkunde's heart, it is of topical interest and it is also a subject which has bothered me greatly both during my career as a lawyer and as a judge. So I welcome this opportunity to speak my mind on the subject from the safe haven of retirement.

## Independence

In writing of India's chances of ascending the international rankings in the coming years, Edward Luce in his book 'In spite of the Gods' says: "India also possesses institutional advantages that have convinced some people that the Indian tortoise will eventually overtake the Chinese

hare. As India's economy develops, these 'soft' advantages, such as an independent judiciary and a free media, are likely to generate ever-greater returns. But is the judiciary in India really independent? A complete answer to the question warrants a doctoral thesis and a short discourse like of today is necessarily selective and therefore incomplete. I have tried to maintain a balance between legalistic and lay approaches while making it clear which side of the fence I stand.

Any attempt at an answer must be prefaced with two questions both of which I seek to briefly answer: The first question is: Who do we include within the term "judiciary"? Is it limited to Constitutional Courts or does it also include those tribunals which decide rights and have the trappings of a court? Second: What does 'independent' mean? I will answer the second question first.

Different dictionaries have given as many as 12 different meanings to the word 'independent'. Of the twelve I have chosen three - 'freedom from outside control'; 'not influenced or affected by others'; 'impartial' and 'capable' of thinking or acting for oneself. Independence in all these senses must be complete, unimpaired and uncorrupted and that means first - that independence is antithetical to corruption and second - that it is ensured by accountability. The Chief Justice of India has recently spoken of "institutional integrity"<sup>3</sup> and he drew a distinction between personal

and institutional integrity. I would like to borrow that phrase and draw a distinction between the institutional independence of the judiciary and the independence of a judge.

## Institutional Independence

The independence of the judiciary which, to use the language of the Supreme Court, the Constitution so 'copiously', protects, is institutional independence with institutional immunity, insulation and autonomy [primarily from the Executive] guaranteed under the Constitution. It is a facet of the separation of powers which underlies the Constitution and is a part of its basic structure. To ensure freedom from Executive and Legislative control, the pay and pension due to judges in the superior courts are charged on the Consolidated Funds of the States in the case of High Court judges and the Consolidated Fund of India in the case of Supreme Court judges and are not subject to the vote of the Legislative Assembly in the case of the former or Parliament in the latter case<sup>10</sup>. Salaries are specified in the Second Schedule to the Constitution and cannot be varied without an amendment of the Constitution. No discussion can take place in the legislature of a State with respect to the conduct of any Judge of a High Court in the discharge of his duties. Nevertheless the Constitution apparently allowed a serious inroad into this freedom by virtually giving the Executive the final say in the appointment, transfer and promotion of a judge as the Chief Justice of a State High Court or as the Chief

Justice of India. All that is required of the Executive is to exercise the power in consultation with the Chief Justice and such judges of the Supreme Court or High Courts as the President thinks necessary. In practice the opinion of the Chief Justice of India on the suitability for appointment was given weight but not finality. Political considerations would on occasion trump merit. For the first 25 years after Independence apart from some aberrations the Executive left the judiciary alone in the matter of appointments to the judiciary. Again although there is no Constitutional provision prescribing the mode of appointment of the Chief Justice either of a High Court or of the Supreme Court there was a convention that the senior most would become the Chief Justice. This state of affairs continued till the seventies when the Executive began a sustained campaign to weaken the judiciary because judgments delivered by the judges did not suit the party then in power at the Centre and because of the growing perception of the Executive that the Judiciary was an 'impediment' to its political functioning.

It has been said of Britain by a British Judge that "the reputation of the judiciary for independence and impartiality is a national asset of such richness that one government after another tries to plunder it. The same could be said of the Indian Judiciary. The first assault as far as the Supreme Court was concerned, was the supersession of senior judges and the 'rewarding' of the dissenter with the high office of the Chief Justice of India. The superseded judges resigned in protest. In 1975 Emergency was declared when the powers of judicial review were severely curtailed. In 1976, 16 High Court judges were

transferred to other High Courts by the Executive ostensibly with a view to strengthening national integration. The reason was rejected by the Supreme Court saying: "It is indeed strange that the Government of India should have selected for transfer, by and large, those High Court Judges who had decided cases against the Government during the emergency". In 1977 the Executive again used the 'punishment' of supersession to bypass the then senior-most judge in the Supreme Court, Justice H.R. Khanna, a politically 'inconvenient' judge, for appointment as the Chief Justice of India. Justice Khanna resigned.

The year 1976 also saw the Executive deliver what they must have perceived as the coup de grace against a stubbornly independent judiciary, by the enactment of the 42nd Constitutional Amendment which introduced Articles 323-A and 323-B. Article 323-A authorizes Parliament and Article 323-B the State Legislatures to create tribunals to which the power of adjudication of disputes on various subjects can be transferred while excluding the jurisdiction of the courts in respect of those subjects. The power of adjudication so transferred included the power of judicial review which allows judges of the higher courts to determine the legality of executive action and the validity of legislation passed by the legislature. These two Articles were intended to allow and in fact did allow the Executive to take over the powers of adjudication from the courts because an independent judiciary was perceived as a thorn in the flesh of political parties in power. Both Parliament and several States have been prompt in enacting legislation setting up Tribunals manned by members of the Executive to deal with a variety of subjects

normally within the jurisdiction of the High Courts. Incidentally before the Amendment was carried out Justice Tarkunde formed the People's Union for Civil Liberties to stem the political onslaughts on the judiciary and 'to strive for the restoration and strengthening of civil liberties and democratic rights which the 42nd Amendment sought to affect. Unfortunately like King Canute he was not successful in stopping the political tide then. Fortunes changed after there was a change in government and the Emergency was lifted. Many of the changes brought about by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment including the restrictions on the jurisdictions of the judiciary were done away with. However Articles 323A and B were retained. With a second change of Government coercive steps to curb the judiciary were again resorted to in the matter of the transfer of newly appointed judges.

Small wonder then that after this, a battered judiciary (after an initial regrettable hiccup in the form of the decision in S.P. Gupta's case<sup>18</sup>) picked itself up and with all the interpretative tools at its command - termed by many as an unacceptable feat of judicial activism - by a composite judgment in several public interest litigations virtually wrested the powers of appointment, confirmation and transfer of judges from the Executive. Their reason for doing so was to secure the independence of the judiciary from Executive control or interference. Procedural norms were judicially prescribed for transfer and appointment of judges. At present every proposal for appointment or transfer of a judge can only be initiated by a collegium of senior judges together with the



Chief Justice of the High Court or Supreme Court as the case may be. From being a mere consultant, the Chief Justice of India and the Supreme Court collegium now have the final word. As the Supreme Court put it “No appointment of any Judge to the Supreme Court or any High Court can be made, unless it is in conformity with the opinion of the Chief Justice of India” and “The opinion of the Chief Justice of India has not mere primacy, but is determinative in the matter of transfers of High Court Judges/Chief Justices.”

The insulation of the judiciary from executive interference in the matter of appointment and transfer of judges is now almost complete. But the question remains, has this almost complete insulation achieved the object for which the constitutional interpretation was strained to an extent never witnessed before or after? In my opinion it has not. It has just changed the actors without any change either in the roles or the method of acting. One of the criticisms of the earlier law, to quote the Supreme Court was:

“The mystique of this process (of appointments) is kept secret and confidential between just a few individuals, not more than two or four as the case may be, and the possibility cannot therefore be ruled out that howsoever highly placed may be these individuals, the process may on occasions (sic) result in making of wrong appointments and transfers and may also at times, though fortunately very rare, lend itself to nepotism, political as well as personal and even trade-off”.

The same criticism may be made with equal justification of the present procedure for appointments and

transfer of judges. As I have said elsewhere ‘the process by which a judge is appointed to a superior court is one of the best kept secrets in this country’. The very secrecy of the process leads to an inadequate input of information as to the abilities and suitability of a possible candidate for appointment as a judge. A chance remark, a rumour or even third-hand information may be sufficient to damn a judge’s prospects. Contrariwise a personal friendship or unspoken obligation may colour a recommendation. Consensus within the collegium is sometimes resolved through a trade-off resulting in dubious appointments with disastrous consequences for the litigants and the credibility of the judicial system. Besides, institutional independence has also been compromised by growing sycophancy and ‘lobbying’ within the system.

The solution as I see it lies not in a reversal to a status quo ante but in the setting up of a judicial commission with all the powers now vested with the Chief Justice of India and the collegium of Supreme Court judges. This is at present the subject matter of intense public debate but the suggestion is not new. In 1981 the Supreme Court itself after noting the setting up of judicial Commissions by Australia and New Zealand to consider all judicial appointments including appointments of High Court Judges said: “This is a matter which may well receive serious attention of the Government of India.” In 1987 the Law Commission in its 121st Report suggested the setting up of a National Judicial Commission and suggested its composition. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution in its Report submitted in 2002 was

also of the opinion that a National Judicial Commission should be set up for recommending appointments of all judges of High Courts and the Supreme Court with a composition different from that proposed by the Law Commission. Others including retired judges have expressed the need for such a Commission but have differed as to its composition. Whatever the composition, unless there are non-partisan members, well-defined objective criteria, with the possibility of choosing judges from a wider source than at present and that proceedings are open or at least recorded - the likelihood of not getting the best as judges and of arbitrariness in making judicial appointments will remain.

And now to answer the first question posed by me at the outset as to who composes the “judiciary”. Historically and semantically all bodies form part of the judiciary which are vested (a) with the power of resolving disputes between litigants, (b) empowered to oversee the application and implementation of the law by the Executive and (c) empowered to determine whether executive and legislative actions are constitutionally valid. This definition includes in particular those tribunals who have, post-the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, been vested with the jurisdiction earlier exercised by courts.

Although the Supreme Court intrepidly asserted the independence of the judiciary to justify virtually excluding the Executive from having any real say in the appointment of judges, it was timorous in defending the same independence when it was most needed namely in answering the question whether the powers of adjudication can be shared with the Executive. Under the Constitutional

scheme in keeping with the separation of powers judicial functions are to be performed by the judiciary alone and not by the Executive. The Supreme Court declared that "The competence of Parliament to make a law creating tribunals to deal with disputes arising under or relating to a particular statute or statutes cannot be disputed".<sup>25</sup> If the Tribunals are manned by judicial officers one could have no quarrel with the declaration. In my view, the curtailment and transfer of judicial powers of a particular court by Parliament or a State legislature can only be to another judicial forum whether called a Tribunal or by any other name. This was the situation prior to the 42nd Amendment. There were Rent Tribunals, Labour Courts, Motor Claims Tribunals which were all manned by judges or former judges. It was for the first time post-1976 that the jurisdiction of the judiciary was sought to be curtailed by transferring the powers of court to the Executive.

*(To be concluded)*

*(Continued from Page 10)*

assertion was made on 9th November in an over hour-long presentation to the unified Headquarters, the State's top coordination body for security, by Lieutenant-General Syed Ata Hasnain, who commands the Srinagar-based XV Corps. The presentation also included a slide, which asserted that while the State people were seeking bijli, sadak, paani (electricity, roads, water), calls for lifting the AFSPA were coming from four categories: Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, terrorists and secessionists". CM Omar Abdullah, who chairs the Unified Headquarters, interjected to ask Lt. Gen. Hasnain to leave a

copy of the slide behind, so that he could "see where I fit in."

Justice Jeevan Reddy and members of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission called for 'repeal' of AFSPA. Will Lieutenant-General Hasnain include these people in the august company of "Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, terrorists and secessionists"?

As a matter of fact, calls for never lifting the AFSPA were coming from six categories: Pakistan, the ISI, terrorists, secessionists, RSS Inc. and the Indian Army.

Will the Musharaffs and Kayanis in the Indian army understand that India is not a military dictatorship so that the army officers can dictate terms with the democratically elected governments at the state and the centre?

## RTI Route

### Ravindran P M

The case relates to an RTI application filed by one Kailash Kanwar of Bhilwara in Rajasthan who sought to know about the foreign visits undertaken by the UPA and National Advisory Council Chairperson during the last two years.

He had also sought information about recent visit of Sonia Gandhi for her reported treatment in the United States of America through the application under the transparency law.

The application sent to External Affairs Ministry was transferred to Parliamentary Affairs Ministry and Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation under the provisions of RTI Act.

While transferring, the Ministry said, "The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the concerned department for providing information on foreign visits undertaken by Smt Sonia Gandhi as Member of Parliament.

"Regarding foreign visits undertaken by Smt Sonia Gandhi as Chairperson of National Advisory Council, the Ministry of Statistics

and Programme Implementation is the concerned Ministry. Therefore Point 3 and 4 of the RTI application (related with the visits) is transferred to them under section 6(3)(ii) of the RTI Act for necessary action."

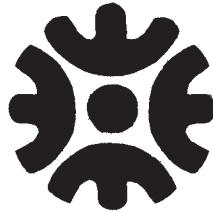
Ministry of Statistics forwarded the application to National Advisory Council with remarks that it is "not involved in any matter related to tour or trips taken by the members of the NAC or by Smt Sonia Gandhi as UPA Chairperson at any point of time."

The NAC said it has "no information on the said matter" and forwarded it to Prime Minister's Office "~~since the PMO is the~~ custodian of information relating to all the expenditure incurred in the functioning of the NAC."

The Prime Minister's Office in its reply dated October 20 said, "No information is held with the records held by the office."

The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to which MEA has transferred the application has said as per its records it has "zero information" about the foreign tours undertaken by Sonia Gandhi.

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## Hasten slowly

**S. Viswam**

**Home Ministry Stalling  
Plachimada Compensation Bill**  
P. Viswambharan

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**Once upon a time water...**  
V.N.Sharma

**Unending Agenda**  
Harsh Mander

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Unsurprisingly, and possibly much to the disappointment of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati, her proposal for the division of the state into four smaller states has not attracted the kind of controversial, animated and heated debate that she had obviously banked upon. The idea has not yet converted itself into an election issue. It has had no takers so far among the political parties barring the ruling Bahujan Samaj Party. Thanks to its massive majority in the state assembly, the party could bamboozle the House into adopting an enabling resolution for the division of the state by a voice vote. That a motion of such importance for the state's politics, economics and social (caste-community) environment was thought good enough to be adopted only by a voice vote speaks of the haste the chief minister has been displaying on the issue. Mayawati now claims long and dedicated commitment to the state's division in the interest of good (better) governance. However, the declaration of such a commitment in public for the first time came as much as a surprise as her recommendation for the division. She intended to upstage her political rivals on the eve of the polls and she wanted the focus

shifted away from her misgovernance and fiscal profligacy. It is doubtful if the second intention will be fulfilled but the political rivals were certainly caught off guard.

Again unsurprisingly, the reaction to the proposal within the state, has been predictable. All the main political players have dismissed it as an election gimmick. Even the BJP, which in principle has always been in favour of smaller states, has poured cold waters on it. The Samajwadi Party is opposed to the division as it feels that a large and united Uttar Pradesh reflects the cultural traditions of the state more authentically. The Congress, caught as it is by its ambivalence and its pathetic record of flip-flops on Telengana, is hoping that the issue of UP's division will just go away. As for the public at large in UP, the idea has evoked neither sympathy nor opposition, probably because the people believe that Mayawati is playing yet another one of her political games. Also, there is a fair amount of cynicism where issues of Centre-State relations come up in Uttar Pradesh. The people quite likely, and possibly quite rightly, feel that the division idea will eventually prove a non-starter.

# Home Ministry Stalling Plachimada Compensation Bill

**P. Viswambharan**

They may well have a case because the very manner in which the division proposal has been mooted evokes more cynicism than enthusiasm. Even if the proposal proves a non-starter after if not during and before the elections, the seed once sown is bound to germinate some time or the other. Leave aside Telengana. There are many other demands which now lie dormant because its sponsors think the time to agitate over them is not yet come. But these demands are no secret. They will keep surfacing from time to time depending on which party or politician seeks political benefit out of raising it and demanding its or his pound of flesh.

If only for this reason, the Centre needs to proceed ahead in speed with the constitution of a second states reorganisation commission. BJP leader Advani's point is well taken that dividing bigger states into smaller ones must be preceded by careful consideration of all related issues with special reference to the concerned state's future. The first commission (SRC) dealt the issue from the linguistic motivation. The second commission may not find language to be the sole motivation behind the demand for separation. The global situation demands a shift of accent from politics and language to economics. The more viable a state is economically, the greater its potential to benefit its people. There are other arguments as well. Overall economic development aimed at delivery of maximum public welfare and with a size conducive for an effective administrative management may be preferable objectives today with an emotive content as strong as language was once upon a time.

*(Continued on Page 8)*

Remember Plachimada, the remote village in Palakkad district of Kerala state whose valiant fighters have forced the multinational giant Cocoa-Cola Company to close down their factory in their village? The non-violent agitation of the villagers, mostly belonging to the tribal communities, entered the tenth year on April 22, 2011. The factory which was producing soft drinks and bottled water ceased to function in 2004. But, it has not been formally declared closed and the Company occasionally threatens that it would resume work at any moment. Since the beginning of the people's struggle, production in the factory steadily decreased and the complete stoppage of work happened in 2004 when the Perumatti Gram Panchayat, within whose jurisdiction lies Plachimada village, terminated the license issued to the factory invoking provisions of the Panchayati Raj Act. The Gram Panchayat led by the Janata Dal(S) has been supporting the agitation from the very beginning facing severe opposition from the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) government and adverse directions from the Kerala High Court. Now, it is actually fighting two appeal cases in the Supreme Court. The first case is an appeal filed by the Panchayat itself against the judgement of a division bench of the High Court directing the Panchayat to issue license to Coca-cola factory if the Company fulfilled the statutory conditions under the other relevant enactments like the Factories Act, Pollution Control

Act. etc. It may be remembered that a single bench of the High Court had earlier upheld the Panchayat's decision to terminate the license. It was on the Company's appeal against this single bench verdict that the division bench passed the above mentioned order. But, the Panchayat while filing an appeal before the Apex Court stuck to its guns and refused to renew the license on the ground that the Company had not fulfilled the conditions stipulated by the division bench.

The other appeal in the Supreme Court is the one filed by the Kerala Government (LDF) against another judgement of the High Court striking down a Government Order prohibiting production and sale of Cocoa-cola soft drink in the Plachimada factory under certain provisions of the Pollution Control Act. The Gram Panchayat has got impleaded as an interested party in this case. These cases are now pending in the Supreme Court.

In the meanwhile responding to the demand of the Plachimada Anti Cocoa-cola Agitation Committee seeking adequate compensation to the local people for the damages caused by the factory, the state Government (LDF) appointed a High Powered Committee headed by K. Jayakumar, Additional Chief Secretary to Government to assess the damages and suggest ways to make available the compensation. The Committee came to the conclusion that the total damages amounted to Rs.216.5 Crore and

suggested constitution of a tribunal with statutory support to realise this compensation from the Company and distribute the same to the deserving villagers. Accepting the High Power Committees recommendations, Irrigation Minister in the LDF Government, N.K. Premchandran (RSP) piloted a bill in the Assembly called the Plachimada Cocoa-cola Victims Relief and Compensation Claims Special Tribunal Bill, 2011. This Bill was unanimously passed in the last session of the previous Assembly. The Kerala Governor to whom this Bill was submitted for assent forwarded it to the President of India on March 30. The Bill reached the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the first week of April. On April 13, MHA sent the Bill to the other concerned ministries such as Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Law and Justice, etc for their comments specifying a deadline of six weeks. Within this six week time ending with May 25, the Ministries of Rural Development, Agriculture and Law replied saying they had no objection to the Bill . Subsequently in July the Ministries of Rural Development and Food processing Industries also sent their no-objection comments. The Cabinet guidelines for disposal of State Legislative matters say that the ministries should submit their observations within six weeks and if they fail to send the feedback within this period the Bill would be processed without waiting for further comments. Strangely, defying this Cabinet guideline the Home Ministry sat on the Bill for six weeks more and then on July 12 sent back the Bill with the legal opinions received from Cocoa-cola India Private Limited to the Kerala Government asking for their explanation. This is a very strange step. The Central Government has

its own machinery to examine state legislative matters and the Law Ministry is the most competent authority for this. In this case Law Ministry has already scrutinized the Bill and has given its clearance. And, no Ministry in the Government of India has raised any objection. In these circumstances, one is at a loss to understand why MHA gave such credence to a private company's legal opinion, and that too the opposite party's views ignoring the opinion of the Law Ministry . It may also be noted that all the above mentioned facts were kept a guarded secret until MPs from Kerala belonging to the Left parties met Rastrapathi towards the end of the last session of Parliament when they were told that the Bill had not reached her and until some diligent NGOs succeeded in securing the information with the help of the Right to Information Act .

On the other side, the present UDF Government headed by Oomman

Chandy who claims to be always on the fast track has not yet replied to the Central Home Ministry's letter even though four months have passed since it was received, in spite of the fact that he as the then Leader of the Opposition and the UDF legislators supported the Bill in the Assembly.

The latest development is that the Plachimada Anti Cocoa-Cola Struggle Committee led by the former Sarvodaya activist Vilayode Venugopal, having got fed up with knocking at the doors of the Government authorities, courts, and political parties, has announced an aggressive form of agitation viz. taking possession of the land owned by the Cocoa-Cola Company at Plachimada if the Governments both at the state and the Centre further delayed constitution of the Compensation Tribunal. They have given notice to this effect to the state Government .

#### *Letter to the Editor*

Thanks for publishing my comment on the letter of P.Chidmabaram. on the issue of corruption. I went to the office of the MCD, Raghubir Nagar, Delhi to obtain a death certificate for the death of our maid servant. She had spent 900 rupees to get it but could not. My wife asked me to get her one because the maid had to lay her claim to her husband's property in Bihar. The Panchayat of her village had asked her to produce the death certificate of her husband if she wanted to claim it. She had also to get the PF of her late husband from a factory in Nepal where he worked. So it was very important for her to get it.

When I went to the office I was asked to get a token from the window which would tell me when my turn would come. I was given token No: 59. But the man standing just ahead of me was given token No: 3. I asked him how come he had been given token No. 3 while I was given token No: 59. The man offered to sell his token to me for Rs.100. He said that my turn would come early if I bought it. I refused and waited for my turn.

This explains why our maid servant had been fooled to shell out Rs.900 for a death certificate which is available for Rs.10/- per copy. This happened in July-August, 2011 when Anna Movement was in full swing.

– Amrit Lal Rawal

*Between the lines*

## Hasina, India in bind

Kuldip Nayar

Popularity is a rare quality which begins to elude the rulers, when they need it the most. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is in a similar situation. Her stock has shrunk at a time when she requires it badly. People had returned her with a sweeping majority. Yet they increasingly feel, three years after her being in power, that her non-governance, if not mis-governance, has only made their life miserable.

After staying in Bangladesh for five days I find that she has not only lost her sheen but also the trust she enjoyed once. People expected her to deliver but there is nothing they can recognize as her achievement. For example, she promised electricity and substantially supplied it at great cost by borrowing from overstretched banks. But people wanted to see large power stations to come up since their demand is ever rising. What India promised is yet nowhere in the horizon.

Alleviating poverty with limited resources is always a challenge, but she does not appear to be even trying to meet it. She looks content with whatever she has done and runs down the critics. "Cut electricity of those who complain about its shortage sitting in their air-conditioned rooms," she said when newspapers and television networks pointed out about the shortage.

No doubt, Hasina has contained terrorism and there is a sense of relief that the nation is not at the mercy of fundamentalists like Bangla Bhai.

Secularism is her commitment and she pursues it relentlessly. She has retrieved the ground her opponent, Khalida Zia, president of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had lost, knowingly and purposely. The credit also goes to Hasina that anti-India sentiment which the BNP fostered has more or less disappeared. And she has taken unilateral steps like transit which gives quick access to India to its northeastern states. But has New Delhi reciprocated to the extent she has gone worries even the pro-India elements? The loan offered is all tied with Indian imports and technical know-how. The border between the countries has not been demarcated and there is no move to transfer the enclaves when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to do during his visit to Dhaka a few weeks ago. (Assam is already up in arms on the enclaves).

The biggest disappointment against India is the denial of sharing of Teesta river water. They feel they lost it because of political wrangling between New Delhi and Kolkata. (West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who was on board on the formula of sharing the water changed her mind at the eleventh hour and appointed a River Commission to look into the matter). Some quarters believe that the Teesta water would eventually come just as the flow from the Farakka barrage did through the enlightened approach of the then West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu. Again it depends on Mamata because the Manmohan Singh government is

too dependent on her Lok Sabha members for survival to put pressure on the Teesta issue.

The blow was somewhat losing its impact when the reported signing by India of a contract for building the Tipaimukh dam on the Barak river in Manipur, a northeastern state, came to light. It was a BBC story which lacked confirmation first but was later supported by other sources. The contract was signed by Delhi and the Manipur government on October 23, one month after Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka. What has hurt Bangladesh is the violation of understanding given by Delhi not to do anything that would affect Dhaka.

The explanation given by New Delhi after 72 hours is that the dam is meant to check flood and will not divert water. This has not assuaged the feeling of Bangladeshis. The very signing of contract without telling was a breach of confidence. That the dam may destroy the environment is a separate point of complaint. As many as 52 rivers from India flow into Bangladesh. I think that on the major ones New Delhi should give a clear understanding to Dhaka that they will not be in any way touched without consulting it.

The beleaguered Hasina has further lost in prestige. Her efforts to befriend India have got rebuffed. There is no doubt that the Teesta water and Tipaimukh will cut into her votes when Bangladesh goes to polls two years later. The fallout will benefit Khalida Zia who is sitting



pretty and not issuing statement after statement as she did in the past. But are the Bangladeshis a shuttlecock to be tossed from one side to another—from Hasina to Khalida?

This has happened to them more or less from the time when they freed themselves from distant Pakistan, 40 years ago. They feel exasperated and helpless. They openly talk about the military takeover. It too is far from happy by the capricious postings and transfers by the Hasina government. But the chances of any coup are very few. The military support to the caretaker government more than three years ago was of no avail. The armed forces could neither clean up the administration nor build up an alternative to the two begums.

Friendship with India was a straw to which the people in Bangladesh have clung. Today they wonder if they have any future with India. China which is trying its best to woo the country is not to their liking because Beijing is neither democratic nor pluralistic, the two principles to which they have stuck since the founding of Bangladesh by Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman. They would want to build their country according to their own genius. Do they have time? And would they be allowed to do so?

Bangladesh, like India, is also reeking with corruption. And there too the nation has been appalled to find the top, the creamy layer, hobnobbing with the rulers for more concessions and more concealment of their misdeeds. Even the World Bank has threatened to withdraw its assistance for constructing the Padma Bridge fearing corruption. Things may yet sort out now that the Prime Minister's office has taken the matter in its own hand. But this only

**(Continued on Page 15)**

## An Independent Judiciary - II

**Ruma Pal**

In a Kalidas-like action of cutting the branch of the Constitutional tree on which the judiciary is sitting and what in less picturesque language one can describe as a judicial sell-out to the Executive, the Supreme Court has upheld the legislations establishing tribunals in a number of decisions subject to certain 'adjustments' in the law which are more in the nature of sops to the concept of judicial independence rather than an assertion of it.

To maintain the 'independence' of the judicial process needed to be followed by these tribunals to reach a decision, the Supreme Court has insisted on the appointment of 'judicial officers' such as former judges to head the tribunals. Judicial independence has also been the reason for excluding executive power in the matter of the appointment of even former judges as heads of tribunals. The exclusion of the High Courts' powers of judicial review has also been held to be unconstitutional and decisions of Tribunals have been made subject to "scrutiny by the High Courts". Decisions taken by the Executive Members in Tribunals are required to be taken 'in a judicial manner' or like a judge i.e. impartially. All this is not enough. To borrow the language of the United States Supreme Court: "the legitimacy of the judicial branch depends on its reputation for impartiality and non-partisanship. That reputation may not be borrowed by the political branches to cloak their work in the neutral colours of

judicial action". Nevertheless these Tribunals continue to have members of the Executive discharging judicial functions and all members including the judicial members remain subject to the administrative and financial control of the Executive.

A recent judgment of the Supreme Court says "The constitutional trade-off for independence is that judges must restrain themselves from the areas reserved to the other separate branches". That being so then why or indeed how, having regard to the principle of separation of powers, can the power of adjudication be shared with or be transferred to or be subject to the control of the Executive which is what tribunalisation has come to mean in this country?

Besides it would be too much to expect a Government Official who has represented and been and in some cases continues to be part of the Executive machinery and who has been committed to give effect to the policies framed by his/her political masters throughout his/her career (as every good Government official is expected to do), to suddenly be asked to discharge judicial functions which often requires a decision to be taken against the Government.

Why is this at all necessary? Delay, arrears of cases, specialized knowledge etc. have been usually cited as reasons for the creation of such tribunals. If the work of the judiciary is being hampered because of the litigation explosion,

the Constitution envisages more judges being appointed and courts set up which can function with all the safeguards of insulation, independence and autonomy as part of the judicial system. The Constitution also allows the appointment of additional and acting judges to deal with an increase in the business or the arrears of work of the High Courts and the Supreme Court. It was not envisaged under the Constitution as originally framed that the lacunae, if any, in the functioning of the judiciary at whichever level, would be filled by the Executive. As Chief Justice Subba Rao speaking for a Bench of five judges said in 1966: "It is unreasonable to attribute to the makers of the Constitution) who had so carefully provided for the independence of the judiciary) an intention to destroy the same by an indirect method. What can be more deleterious to the good name of the judiciary than to permit at the level of district Judges (and now at the level of High Court judges), recruitment from the executive departments?"

But according to a recent pronouncement of the Supreme Court "The presence of a technical member ensures the availability of expertise and experience related to the field of adjudication for which the special Tribunal is created, thereby improving the quality of adjudication and decision making". By that token all courts should have technical members to improve the 'quality of decision making'. Traditionally if technical expertise is required it is open to courts to seek the opinion of an expert as a witness but not as a colleague on the Bench. To have technical members (meaning officers of the Executive) on a Tribunal is as repugnant to the independence of the judiciary as,

for example, having the Secretary of the Ministry of Finance sitting on a Bench of the Supreme Court or High Court to decide income-tax matters. A more serious in-road into institutional judicial independence would be hard to find.

Besides the 'tribunalisation' of justice has not worked in India. In 1997 the Supreme Court acknowledged "Tribunals have been functioning inefficiently ... The situation at present is that different tribunals constituted under different enactments are administered by different administrative departments of the Central and the State Governments. The problem is compounded by the fact that some tribunals have been created pursuant to the Central legislations and some others have been created by State legislations." More than a decade later, if one is to go by the Report of the Chairperson of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board submitted to the Madras High Court recently, the situation has not improved.

The litigant, in whose apparent interest tribunalisation has and is taking place has been the worst sufferer. When most of the rights are claimed by citizens against the Government how can people have faith in a body if even one member is perceived as being part of the Government? The credibility of the judicial process "comes from the office of the judge and his or her individual and institutional reputation for independence".

Additionally every decision of a tribunal is subject either to appeal before the High Court or Supreme Court and subject to judicial review. This has only meant further delay and expense for a litigant because of additional rounds of litigation.

Several brave High Court judges have tried with faultless reasoning to set right this Constitutional anomaly in their decisions but have unfortunately failed to convince the Supreme Court up till now.

There is another seemingly minor exception to judicial independence contained in the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976. Apart from other restrictions, the Act initially forbade, except with the permission of the Central Government, the acceptance of foreign hospitality by members of Legislatures, office bearers of political parties and employees of corporations.

In 1985, when the Law Ministry was headed by an eminent lawyer, the Act was amended to include judges (thus proving my theory that sometimes the worst enemies of Judges are those lawyers who while being members of the Bar also serve in the capacity of politicians). At present no judge, whether of the Supreme Court or the High Courts can accept any invitation from any foreign person or organization or indeed even visit a foreign country out of his/her personal funds, unless an application is made to the State and Central Governments with the approval of the Chief Justice two months ahead of the date of departure and the application is vetted by different Ministries and ultimately allowed or disallowed by an executive order which may or may not be received before the date fixed for leaving! Even if permission is granted by the Government to accept an invitation it is subject to the air-fare being agreed to be paid by the Government. Clearly the Government considers that being accommodated, wined and dined by a foreigner do not come within the word 'hospitality'! It also overlooks

the fact that a judge would be obliged to various Joint Secretaries of the Government for exercising their discretion in favour of the judge not only in granting permission but also agreeing to bear the air-fare -- a dangerous situation since the largest litigant before any court is the Government. Besides if the Chief Justice as the administrative head of the judiciary in each High Court and the Chief Justice of India in the Supreme Court approve, to subject the judge to Executive control does, in my opinion, interfere with the institutional independence of the judiciary. To complete the insulation of the judiciary the mischief created in 1985 must be undone.

### **An Independent Judge**

The independence of the judiciary and of the judicial system of course ultimately depends on the personal integrity of each judge. It goes without saying and I do not intend to dwell on the fact that judges have to be above corruption in the monetary sense. But it needs restating just as it needed stating in 1988 when judges of 37 countries gathered in Bangalore and formulated what have come to be known as the Bangalore Principles. The principles are intended to establish standards for the ethical conduct of judges. Detailed guidelines have been classified under six heads termed: values: Independence, Integrity, Impartiality, Propriety, Equality, Competence and Diligence. In fact all six values are facets of the first and cardinal one of 'independence'. Judges are fierce in using the word as a sword to take action in contempt against critics. But the word is also used as a shield to cover a multitude of sins some venal and others not so venal. Any lawyer practising before a court will I am sure have a rather

long list of these. I have chosen seven.

The first is the sin of "brushing under the carpet" or turning a Nelsonian eye. Many judges are aware of injudicious conduct of a colleague but have either ignored it or refused to confront the judge concerned and suppressed any public discussion on the issue often through the great silencer - The Law of Contempt.

The second sin is that of "hypocrisy". A favourite rather pompous phrase in judgments is "Be you ever so high, the law is above you" or words to similar effect. And yet judges who enforce the law for others often break that law with impunity. This includes traffic regulations and any other regulation to which the "ordinary" citizens are subject. Some in fact get offended if their cars are held up by the police at all while controlling the flow of traffic - the feeling of offence sometimes being translated into action by issuance of a rule of contempt against the hapless police constable all in the name of judicial independence.

The third sin is that of secrecy. The normal response of Courts to any enquiry as to its functioning is to temporize, stonewall and prevaricate. As I have said elsewhere that the process by which a judge is appointed to the High Court or elevated to the Supreme Court is one of the best-kept secrets in the country. The issue whether the records relating to appointments of judges to the Supreme Court can be directed to be produced under the Right to Information Act is now pending decision before the Supreme Court after which perhaps we will come to learn of the

logical connection between judicial independence and secrecy.

If 'independence' is taken to mean 'capable of thinking for oneself' then the fourth sin is plagiarism and prolixity. I club the two together because the root cause is often the same namely the prolific and often unnecessary use of passages from text-books and decisions of other judges - without acknowledgment in the first case and with acknowledgment in the latter. Many judgments are in fact mere compendia or digests of decisions on a particular issue with very little original reasoning in support of the conclusion.

Often judges misconstrue judicial independence as judicial and administrative indiscipline. Both of these in fact stem from judicial arrogance as to one's intellectual ability and status. A judge's status like other holders of public posts is derived from the office or the chair. One has to merely occupy that chair during one's tenure with dignity and remember that each time a lawyer bows and says "Deeply obliged" - the bow is addressed to the office and not to the person. The Supreme Court has laid down standards of judicial behaviour for the sub-ordinate judiciary such as "He should be conscientious, studious, thorough, courteous, patient, punctual, just, impartial, and fearless of public clamour, regardless of public praise but sadly some members of the higher judiciary exempt themselves from the need to comply with these standards.

Intellectual arrogance or what some may call intellectual dishonesty is manifest when judges decide without being bound by principles of stare decisis or precedent.

Independence no doubt connotes freedom to decide but the freedom is not absolute. It is bound to be in accordance with law. Otherwise we have lawyers and the sub-ordinate judiciary baffled while “mastering the lawless science of our law” faced with “that codeless myriad of precedent, that wilderness of single instances.” Independence implies discipline to decide objectively and with intellectual integrity and as the judicial oath of office requires, without fear, favour, affection or ill will. Most importantly judges must be perceived as so deciding or to use Lord Hewart’s classic dicta that “Justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done,” because the belief of corruption is as damaging to the credibility in the independence of the judiciary as the act of corruption.

This brings me to the seventh and final sin of nepotism or what the oath of office calls ‘favour’ and ‘affection’. What is required of a judge is a degree of aloofness and reclusiveness not only vis a vis litigants but also vis a vis lawyers. Litigants include the Executive. Injudicious conduct includes known examples such as judges using a guesthouse of a Private Company or a Public Sector Undertaking for a holiday or accepting benefits like the allocation of land from the discretionary quota of a Chief Minister.

I can only emphasise again that nothing destroys a judge’s credibility more than a perception that he/she decides according to closeness to one of the parties to the litigation or what has come to be described in the corridors of courts as ‘face value’. As the Bangalore Principles succinctly puts it: “A judge shall not ...convey or permit others to convey the

impression that anyone is in a special position improperly to influence the judge in the performance of judicial duties”.

And here I would like to pay tribute to the great majority of judges who are, to quote N.A. Palkhiwala, men (and women) of integrity, combining character with calibre who are holding the fort against ‘enemies’ both within and outside the system by discharging their duties with courage and independence.

I will conclude with the most important facet of judicial independence. Judicial independence cannot exist without accountability. At present the only disciplinary power over judges is vested in Parliament which provides for the extreme punishment of removal for acts of proven misbehaviour by or incapacity of a judge. Disciplinary methods include the Chief Justice advising a dishonest judge to resign or recommending a judge’s name to the Chief Justice of India for transfer to another High Court.

Deprivation of jurisdiction or the non-allocation of work to a dishonest judge was resorted to by Chief Justice Sabyasachi Mukharji - when the impeachment of Justice

*(Continued from Page 2)*

For all these reasons, the idea of dividing states ought not to be abandoned if it does not take off in UP. The states certainly need to be reorganized, and once and for all the times. Redrawing boundaries does not call for haste, true, but it is not prudence either to leave the issue of larger states yielding to smaller states fester and exercise its nuisance value off and on. So, better hasten, but hasten slowly so that the issue will receive the fullest consideration possible.

V. Ramaswamy failed for political reasons. Sometimes Chief Justices control a recalcitrant judge by ensuring that the judge concerned sits with the Chief Justice or with a ‘strong’ judge until he or she retires.

The situation becomes more difficult if the allegations are against the Chief Justice. Solutions evolved have proved inadequate and ad hoc. There is a need for an effective mechanism for enforcing judicial accountability<sup>50</sup>. The Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill 2010 now under consideration before Parliament provides for a mechanism for enforcing judicial discipline under a National Judicial Oversight Committee. But I would add a Caveat using the language of a Resource Document for the establishment of judicial accountability mechanisms in South Africa<sup>51</sup>: that “accountability mechanisms” [must be] “embedded in the judiciary and satisfy the appropriate standards for judicial autonomy, respect the separation of powers framework, and are transparent and publicly known”. This would be in keeping with that “independence” which as I said at the outset the Constitution so ‘copiously’ protects.

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# What is Inclusive Growth ?

D.K.Giri

*This article draws from the speech made by Hakan Juholt, the leader of the Social Democratic party, Sweden, in the Constitution club, New Delhi on 3rd November”.*

India's economic growth is stable with around 8 percent promising to touch the double digit. That is impressive and encouraging seen against 3 percent in the 1970s and early 1980s, which the eminent economist Professor Raj Krishna had termed “Hindu rate of growth”. India is producing many billionaires being listed in Forbes magazine that announces the rich men's club from time to time.

The new economic growth is the story of many countries in the world, mainly in Asia though. Many are well-off in material terms. People have flat screen TVs on the wall, can draw money instantly from the ATM, have iPads and iPhones in their hands, and can travel around the world. But there are many who are worried about what happens if they fall ill, or lose their jobs. In India, there are many, whichever way one counts, ‘who are below the poverty line’. Why is this dichotomy or contradiction? Why is not everyone benefitting from the growth? There are at least two opinions on this: one is that if growth has to happen, some people will be marginalised and left behind, and the other is growth and distribution or social justice can go together. Although both the positions are contested by economists, pragmatism requires that growth addresses the issues of social justice.

Never before in human history, has the material progress been so fast. But everyone should be able to benefit from the growth. The fruits of development should touch everyone. That is why perhaps, our government is talking about “inclusive growth”. But what does inclusive growth mean in practical terms?

## Education

Children do not choose their parents. No single child should suffer because he or she is born to poor parents or in a backward place. There is no second chance to experience childhood. No country can be called progressive, if it does not take care of its young generation. There are so many children out of school who are all actually child labour, whether working at home to help their parents, or working for wages. There are many children who cannot complete their schools; there are many young people who have no employment, no home of their own, and no opportunities for self-fulfilment. There are many parts of the country where young people have no faith in their future and are drawn into violence, and extremism. The economic growth as it is today is increasing this alienation. This needs to be corrected. Child labour and child poverty are unacceptable and unworthy of any growing economy or a modern society.

## The Public Sector

With the economic growth, the tilt towards privatisation is also growing. Public sector institutions remain neglected, ignored or undermined.

But public sector is where people are looked after and cared for, people who cannot afford to buy care or services at their own cost. Public sector which is the main instrument for building and maintaining a welfare state, must be modernised and made more effective. The working conditions of those in the public sector organisations must be improved. What one could do for those who look after others? The public sector should provide for the poor, and needy, give the best care possible for the ones that could not care for themselves. The public sector must be efficient in service-providing and attractive as employer and accountable as institutions.

## Security vs Competition

In the context of economic growth, there is more talk about competition and incentives than of social security and solidarity. There is a strong body of literature that suggest that security and solidarity are the best drivers for improved competitiveness. Everyone in his or her way contributes to the growth and development; likewise, everyone can disturb the process of progress. Also in an inclusive society, there is room for everyone to live peacefully. Solidarity benefits everyone and even those who are well-off. But some politicians, decision-makers do not believe that equality or solidarity is a necessary condition for growth. Market should follow its own logic of growth unhindered by ideational politics. But then market divides the people with the support of politicians according to their spending power, label people

as productive or unproductive, profitable or unprofitable. This leads to division and disruption in the society. Majority of the people are left out of the modern market system. Social investments are neglected, ignoring education, skill building and health. This inevitably leads to poor economic growth for everyone. Equality and solidarity are not only for a good society, to be sure, they are essential for long term sustainable growth. One must examine the blind faith that market will automatically solve everything. People's right to a secure and decent life is more important than the profit of the private enterprise. Any "good governance" has to put profit before the people. The good of the society has to override the demand for continued deregulation and focus on the market.

### **Capitalism and market economy**

While reiterating the need for economic growth for a country like India, it is in order that we touch upon the common confusion between the capitalism and market economy. To quote a few lines from the Swedish Social Democratic Party programme, "The market is needed for the efficient production that creates and recreates resources for the welfare system. Capitalism and the market should be regarded as two different things. The market economy is distribution system in which goods and services change owners with money as the currency of exchanges. Capitalism is a power system with return on capital as the overriding norm".

One view of the recent world financial crisis is that return on capital became the overriding norm causing cracks in the global economy. Cheap and easy credits were given to the poor economic

American households based on huge risks and large profits for the banks. This attempt heavily backfired. So while market economy is appreciated and embraced for the growth and development, capitalism with profit-anyhow should be no-go. In that sense, one must accept that financial sector needs better regulation.

### **The way forward**

To end, I would like to quote August Palm the man who brought Social Democracy to Sweden 130 years ago. He wanted to abolish unearned income. No one could make money on profit out of work of others, either through interest payment or profit.

This is not unrealistic today. But this idea has been made contemporary by stipulating that certain things could be done without financial gain as the primary motivation. Society should decide for what is good for its entire people.

Some things are done not because someone must gain from it. We are all human beings, and together we constitute the society. Some things cannot be measured in economic terms allocated as per the spending power; they should be integral parts of common rights in a modern society. In a speech on 5 February 1986, the former social Democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme expressed this approach to economic and society most elegantly:

"What we want is a society with secure people, who are able to share good things with each other. The tough, egotistical society that is the answer to the right-wins parties' questions creates insecure people who turn their claws on each other

in their lonely fear of being one of the many losers in the winner's paradise. We are drawn to the light and the good. Time and energy are freed in order to discover other people, to build up a positive depend only on each other in the form of comradeship, care and co-operation. Secure and free from the paralysis of fear and worry, we can allow our lust for life to grow and spread within us and form person to person".

It is the essence of social Democracy that can promote inclusive growth and build an inclusive society. Social Democracy is both social and democratic, which are prerequisite for a strong economy and a viable society. Without building the values and principles into economic and social structures, we cannot a build an inclusive society. Only an Inclusive society based on care, compassion, and above all solidarity can ensure inclusive growth.

Inclusive growth has become a slogan, rhetoric like many governmental strategies. In order to actualise it, we need to plan an inclusive society, not a divided one. Let us remember that the values like solidarity are not patronising by the rich for the poor, or the by the strong for weak, it is in common interest of all. Given the rise or consciousness in the civil society, people are aware of their rights and that inequality is not preordained, it is wo(man) made. So there is and will be resistance in various forms to persisting inequalities in opportunities if not is possessions. It is prudent for any planner to take into account these emerging social forces and co-opt them into the mainstream or else, no growth is inclusive or sustainable.

# Once upon a time water...

V.N.Sharma

Water is called the elixir of life on this Planet. But this resource is dwindling very fast due to variety of reasons which include accelerated pace of industrialisation causing immense damage to the ecology and environment leading to Climate Change and overpopulation causing ever increasing load on water resources and agriculture. But a closer look at the water issue indicates additional causes like mismanagement of this resource, rather lack of intention for its harvesting where it drops, conservation and control on its misuse.

Until recently 'water water everywhere, not a drop to drink' remained only as a forecast for the coming times. Many never believed that this would ever happen. But the water crisis world over is to the fore and has come sooner than later is The most important impact of non-availability of this resource increasing food insecurity.

## Genesis

With the onset of the 20th century variety of changes the world over began - entry of communism, growing tension between powerful European nations and emergence of the US and USSR as big global players. By mid-century the two world wars were fought and European nations, especially the British, were forced to withdraw from their never-sunsetting empire and allow new powers to share the booty. The US and the USSR got to play major role with world bodies like the UN and its subordinate organisations. For the spread of capitalism and subjugating the newly

freed countries various UN agencies, the World Bank, the IMF etc. were given physical shape to play greater role in shaping the emerging world based on overexploitation of natural resources and converting the then existing monarchies and empires to corporate monarchies via a defective democracy route. All this led to the acceptance of 'Development through Industrialisation mode' world over. Though there were basic differences between capitalist and communist systems of governance, yet this mode of development was accepted and retained by both as panacea for all the ills of their people. The same became true of those who were known as non-aligned nations. However, by the turn of the last century even communism lost its grip in many countries and the world got definite tilt to capitalism. The field was left open for the only world power, the US of A, to make the rules of the game unilaterally and play as per its wishes.

Development through Industrialisation resulted in setting up of high capital and high energy intensive industries all around. However, this gave desired output - mass production of consumer and non-consumer goods, availability of more jobs in industry, growth of towns and cities, good roads, population transfer from rural to newly created urban and industrial centers and improved quality of life for a small part of the population. As expected this also created more destitutes, have-nots and downtroddens all around. Burning of fossil fuel and felling of trees coupled with dam building activities gave way to the thermal and hydro power

generation respectively. As an effect industrialisation created a side show of environmental issues - damages to all aspects of life on this planet through massive air, water and noise pollution, increased consumerism causing enormous domestic and industrial waste generation. Various reports talked about in different fora indicate that water bankruptcy is going to be worse than the financial meltdown now destabilising the global economy, and there will be no way of bailing the earth out of water scarcity.

Studies revealed that the world has not been as warm as it is now for a millennium or more. The three warmest years on record have all occurred since 1998; 19 of the warmest 20 since 1980. And the earth has probably never warmed as fast as in the past 30 years - a period when natural influences on global temperatures, such as solar cycles and volcanoes should have cooled us down. By mid-nineteen-eighties Global Warming followed by Climate Change took the front seat and IPCC got created to suggest ways and means to counter the fear of these two evils. Like the other world bodies, IPCC also had the same objective - transfer of 'clean technologies' from developed to developing nations and money flow in the reverse direction. This enriched the already rich ones - domestic as well as the foreign variety.

Increased population, on the other hand, caused increase in the input of chemical dose in agricultural sector increasing, in turn, water pollution. By 1970 the US came

up with National Environment Protection Act and the UN created a body under its arm known as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This was followed by most of the countries making laws for protection of the environment. But many, including the protestors in the on-going worldwide Occupy Movement, have identified the 1 percent as the real source of environmental destruction which includes water also in the ultimate analysis, not the 7 billion.

### Scenario in India

Many academic and field studies attempted to develop alternative routes of development to counter industrialisation as the only mode to better the life of the people. They simply got rebuffed by the money power of the money makers. India already had its nature worshipping scriptures with low consumption of resources and less waste generation themes. Mahatma Gandhi added to the same. But none of this could influence the Indian political leaders sufficiently to follow the traditional route of living without massive industrialisation.

Looking at the seriousness of the issue water was chosen as the first major resource for protection. India had its first water Act in 1974 which was revised and improved with the passage of time. But none of these showed a turn around. Water issue took global shape and rich people took the first step to make money out of the crisis through bottled water schemes, and energy and chemical intensive water treatment and recycling route. All the sources of water including municipal supplies for domestic uses were declared unsafe. To provide impetus to this business the members of the elite group who were responsible for making drinking water available to the populace were shown in TV

shows and print media with bottled water in front of them on the dais. Such pictures spoke more than millions of words - that water was a scarce resource and it would be available to a limited few, that too for a payment. Water distribution in India has the pattern : Irrigation - 69 percent, Industry - 23 percent, Domestic/Municipal - 8 percent. The government has failed to provide drinking water to about 20 percent urban and about 50 percent rural population. Attitude of high profit making by money-makers through increased consumerist culture leads to overexploitation, pollution of water and depletion of other resources. Polluted water from industries, automobiles, chemical uses in agriculture and 80 per cent of urban waste water discharged daily into the country's rivers leads to disability of large part of the population due to health reasons ending in loss of man/woman-days in work place, loss of life of more than 2.2 million people per year which is more than the number of people killed from all forms of violence, including wars, making most water bodies unfit for human use. All this culminates into an additional expenditure in Health care which is helping in wealth generation for very few.

It is claimed that population has gone up also because of improved health delivery system leading to increase in longevity and decrease in infant mortality rate. Whatever be the reason the population increase in last 60 years is reported to be 850 million whereas the figure for 150 years from 1801 AD was 150 million only. Change in irrigation pattern needing 500 km<sup>3</sup> water in 1900 AD to 2000 km<sup>3</sup> in 2000 AD - an increase of four times in a hundred years. Quite natural that it led to exponential increase in food and water demand. On the other hand

system administrators could not match their planning and execution steps with these demands of times.

Conversion of traditional water sources - ponds, lakes etc - in the urban areas for raising multi-storied buildings and concreting the open space in the cities are causing low rate of ground water recharging. Overexploitation of water leads to further lowering of ground water tables and salinisation in both urban and rural areas. Silting of natural and artificial lakes, dams and reservoirs are causing less water availability especially in lean seasons.

Water is considered a Government responsibility but lack of will and planning, financial allocation and engineering intervention reveal

- Lack of interest/awareness towards conservation and retention of rain water where it falls, Govt. inaction and negative attitude
- Government at the Centre and most of the States/UTs failed to take wake up calls provided by low rainfalls in recent years and initiate corrective steps/ action
- Lack of vision for utilizing collective wisdom of all sections of the stakeholders and mobilizing them.

It is wrongly assumed that more investments in water treatment, ignoring the existing traditional water sources and creation of dams or newer schemes with profit motives will solve the problem. Interlinking of rivers in India is wrongly proposed as a solution to water problem. In fact it is a proposal for privatisation of water resources ending with money making for a few.

### Suggestions

In addition to the improvement in surface water management like



desilting and periodical maintenance of rivers, dams, ponds, lakes etc. and building new reservoirs and check dams extensive awareness programmes like communicating the water agenda in the right perspective to the people added by community-driven or community-owned/people's participation approach has better chance to succeed. Using more local wisdom (succeeds) rather than technology oriented programmes (invariably fail) has already been established as better result giving approach to solve the problem.

Post-Gandhi Indian political leaders must be reminded of nature worshipping scriptures and tradition of low consumption of resources, less waste generation themes and Mahatma Gandhi's teachings of low cost, more distributed employment generating village industries with better wealth distribution strategies.

"Catch where it (rain) falls" strategy is expected to increase in extensive rain-water harvesting in both rural and urban areas by extensive ground water recharging. A simple calculation says that half of average annual rainfall of 1170 mm captured on 1.12 ha of land in each of 5,87,226 villages, 6.57 million litres of rain water in each village will meet the cooking and drinking needs of 1200 people. So far no approach has been made to tap 135 million ha meter (mham) of available precipitation

Watershed management schemes must include socio-economic development, economic benefits of local population as well as people/life downstream, crop planning/rotation, livestock and animal husbandry, weather modification, coastal water management and aggressive yet positive to all round water management.

## Conclusion

Water has been considered thus far a free and unlimited resource - this is not true anymore. The situation is tending towards 'water water everywhere, not a drop to drink'. Therefore, if policy makers, administrators and social activists do not honour the wake-up call provided by nature in the last few years and take immediate steps to rectify the situation it may lead to disastrous consequences for humanity and

other lives on the planet. By the turn of the century academic curricula and Granny's fiction stories may include "once upon a time water used to be available for free in open wells, tanks, ponds and rivers flowing near each and every village and city with no private ownership, no control by the governments or their appointed private agents, no water bottling plants and no price to be paid for its use in whatever manner".

## SP(I) Committee formed in West Bengal

"The nation is faced with three challenges - unemployment and economic inequality caused by the implementation of Corporate-led globalization policies, communalism and rampant corruption from top to bottom. Neither the ruling Congress nor the main opposition, BJP, nor the Communist parties are poised to take up these challenges and lead the nation to just and egalitarian order. So more than six hundred socialist activists from seventeen states assembled at Hyderabad on 28th May, 2011 decided to revive the Socialist Party of JP and Lohia. We are pleased to witness such a large gathering of West Bengal socialists assembled here to elect their State office-bearers and executive committee. We are sure you will build strong Socialist Party in this part of the country" stated Bhai Vaidya, President of the Socialist Party(India).

Senior socialist leader and champion of the civil liberties, Justice Rajinder Sachar, while addressing the gathering, observed that "socialists spread all over the country seem to be determined to pull up the nation from the rot and usher in an era of liberty, equality and fraternity in this old and great nation of ours".

Tributes were paid to the memory of late Dr. Bapu Kaldate.

Prof. Dwijesh Dutta Majumdar was in the chair. Other national office-bearers like Pannalal Surana, Onkar Singh, Nurul Ameen and Jaya Vidhiyala also addressed the State Convention. The following ad hoc State Committee was unanimously elected:

- President- Prof. Dwijesh Dutta Majumdar ; Working President- Tilok Ganguly ; Vice-President- Benod Debnath; General Secretaries- Bhupen Paul Roy and Samir Bhathrjee; Secretaries-1- Sikha Mitra 2- Sagarika Banerjee 3-Sumit Dhar Chowdhary; Treasurer- Ashif Basu; Chirman State Parliamentary Board- M.P. Singh.

- State Committee Members : 1- Dr. Sanmathanath Ghosh 2- Nirmal Ghoshal 3-Sujit Kumar Das 4- Gautam Chand Chandra 5- Laltha Prasad Asthana 6- Dilip Das 7- Samarjit Banarjee 8- Tarun Banarjee 9- Chittas Day 10- Sushant Banarjee 11- Govind Das 12- Sowpan Sinha Roy 13- Uma Shankar Singh 14- Viduyut Das 15- S.M. Das 16- Subrata Karmakar 17- Chandi Dey 18-Chandradip Giri 19- Awani Kumar Singh 20- Amal bhowamik 21- Dilip Hui 22- Tapas Mama

# Unending Agenda

## Harsh Mander

Millions of our children still labour today, in factories, farms, kilns, mines, homes and city waste dumps, when they should be in school or in a playground. We profoundly fail these children, collectively depriving them of education, play, rest, healthy growth and childhood. Despite democracy and glittering economic growth, it is unconscionable that we continue to tolerate child work, socially and legally.

The law in India treats much of child labour as legally permissible. For children up to 14 years, only a small set of vocations designated 'hazardous' are prohibited. Only in 2006 was employing children as domestic help declared illegal, and just five years earlier, rag-picking was prohibited among children. There are weak penalties and few prosecutions, barely a few thousand in the whole country every year. There is no prohibition of any kind of work for children who cross the age of 14 years.

Latest official estimates report around five million children economically active in the labour market, which is two per cent of the total child population of India in the age group 5–14 years. Child rights activists, however, argue that the actual numbers of child workers are much larger, because children not in school are hidden child workers, rearing younger siblings, tending the home, or helping parents earn in the fields, home-based work or vending. Their numbers are four times as many as enumerated child workers.

There are encouraging reports of growing numbers of children in school, and declining child workers during the last decade. But we need to view these figures with caution, because there is growing evidence of the informalisation of the work force with rapid economic growth. Work is often sub-contracted to home-based workers by big companies to evade labour protection regulations and responsibilities, and work is transferred also to the children working from home; as a consequence, children may be inducted into labour sometimes as early as five or six years of age. Such child labour is often invisible to the census enumerator.

Legislation has been unsuccessful in stopping child labour, even in hazardous industries. A third of all acknowledged child workers are found to be in hazardous occupations. About 53 per cent of the total number of children working in hazardous occupations is employed in the pan, bidi, and cigarette industry, in construction, and as domestic help. Seventy-two per cent recorded child workers are in agriculture and constitute almost nine per cent of all agricultural workers. These children work long hours on farms and face the harmful effects of inhaling pesticides and other chemicals. Many girls are subject to hazards of physical and sexual abuse even at a young age of 10 or 12 years at work.

The official tolerance of child labour is grounded in the belief that child labour is an inevitable product of poverty. An official committee in

1981, headed by Gurupadaswamy, declared that 'as long as poverty continued, it would be difficult to totally eliminate child labour and hence, any attempt to abolish it through legal recourse would not be a practical proposition'. This 'pragmatism' continues to dominate government's stand on working children.

There remains a live and important debate about whether poverty causes child labour, or is it also the other way round. Many poverty experts argue that for poor families, sending children out to work is the only way they can survive. Many children are also engaged in unpaid household work and as a result cannot go to school: on farms, taking care of cattle, cleaning and cooking, fetching water and fuel and caring for their younger siblings. Just providing full day child-care would result in the majority of older siblings entering school for the first time. Children also drop out and work instead because schools in many states are in bad shape. Children feel demoralised and learn little in these schools, and over time refuse to attend school. If laws guaranteeing minimum wages are enforced, with greater employment security for parents, child labour would decline and cease.

Many child rights activists, on the other hand, maintain that the only chance for a child to escape the poverty of her parents is to go to school. This alone opens new avenues for a child to advance economically and socially when she grows to adulthood. Child

labour causes significant life-long and irreversible psychological and physiological damage. Since children's bodies, minds and judgment are still developing, even up to their late teens, entering the world of work at a young age causes early ageing, low energy, stunted and wasted growth, occupational diseases, the crushing of spirit, and the permanent loss of the joys of carefree childhood.

All contemporary experience has shown that when children are withdrawn from work and sent to schools, wages for adults, both male and female work goes up substantially', Shantha Sinha, who successfully led a movement to pull 50,000 child labourers out of work and into regular school, passionately argues. 'One of the reasons for low adult wages is because child labour is rampant, especially in the informal sector. Child labour depresses adult wages. In most countries, early child-care got strengthened and institutionalised when girls were no longer available for domestic work. In a child rights perspective, children's rights must come first, and every right attained for children has profound economic, social and even cultural impacts on the larger economy and society'.

It is true that children work because of a variety of State failures — such as to combat poverty, to implement the rights of unorganised workers, to provide social protection, to provide day child-care services, and to provide quality and relevant education in schools. But this does not justify the legalisation of child work. The State would need to take a holistic approach in eliminating child labour: enforcing legal prohibitions are imperative but admittedly not enough. Governments would need to ensure quality, relevant and non-

discriminatory education, enforce labour laws, provide child-care services and social protection, and above all, battle poverty in the household to which the child belongs.

Some government officials justify child labour because this gives the country a comparative advantage in trade and exports, because of the lower prices and alleged efficiencies of employing children (the 'nimble fingers' theory). Even these alleged economic advantages are contested. But even if there are growth dividends, there can be no ethical justification to argue that we will continue to engage children in work which damages them physically, psychologically and deprives them of their future prospects of breaking out of poverty through mainstream education, for the sake of boosting economic growth.

Existing penalties for employing prohibited child labour is not deterrent: imprisonment for three months to two years and a fine between 10 and 20,000 rupees is a mere rap on the knuckles. These offences should be cognisable and non-bailable, with much more stringent punishments. But it is wrong to penalise or criminalise parents in any way for dealing with their difficult situations and sending their children to work. The penal provisions of the law should target only employers, and impose legal duties on governments.

Much greater sensitivity is also required in planning the rehabilitation of released child workers. Governments need to do more by way of creating mass awareness and influencing consumers. There could be campaigns to discourage people from buying products that use child labour, for instance, through certified

declarations and labels. School children themselves would be most effective in a campaign against child labour, including as domestic help and in eateries.

The debate on child labour should have been settled with the Constitutional amendment recognising the right to education as a fundamental right of all children. If the law demands that a child must be in a mainstream school, she cannot simultaneously be at work. There need be no bar on children helping their families after school hours and in vacations, in fields, home-based work, forest gathering and vending, but none of this can be at the expense of schooling and the protection of the child.

Today, despite the legal right to education, many children who are the most vulnerable remain unreached by State efforts. These include children of migrant labour, children subjected to bondage and trafficking, and street children and child workers. To ensure their right to education and childhood remains a paramount unfinished agenda for freedom.

—Aman Biradari

*(Continued from Page 5)*

underlines the general impression that some ministers are more than equal.

Hasina bothers little because the heady wine of popularity has not yet awakened her to the reality. She believes that a few newspapers are tarnishing her good name. She does not realize that the papers' circulation is in proportion to their credibility. They could not be leading papers if they had reported or interpreted the situation wrongly. But then, like the communists, she forgives the renegades but not critics.



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**Pradip Bose**  
(1928-2011)

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## Better drop it

S. Viswam

Much has been said and is being written in favour of opening up the retail trade sector to foreign direct investment. Much has been said and is being written, and done, against the FDI. Indeed, while the critics of the entry of foreign trade giants in Indian retail had formerly opposed the foreign investors holding a large equity, now the mood is to oppose the very concept of FDI in retail trade. Why the government chose this particular time and hour, especially while it is facing pressure simultaneously from various sources, is not easy to understand. It could certainly have waited for a more opportune moment to unleash the retail FDI cat among the Indian pigeons. Whatever the government had thought and felt a week ago inducing it to get the Cabinet to approve of a 51 per cent cap in the FDI, its eyes must have opened to the ground realities by now. Parliament is under siege and for a week now, no business has been transacted. The FDI issue has added fuel to the fire. Indian political class is known for its flip-flops. Looking at the furore all the opposition parties, barring the Congress, the NCP and the National Conference have raised against the FDI proposal, it would seem that

the idea of a FDI in retail was never contemplated and was always a No-no. But such an impression would be wrong. Political parties have toyed with the idea not so deep in the recent past of a 100 per cent equity holding to a 26 per cent holding. The objection this time is not to the size of the equity, it is to the very idea of opening up the retail sector. The government, and the supporters of the measure, including experts in trade matters, veteran economists, researchers and serious students of the Indian economy and the corporates are being dubbed as anti-national, anti-people, anti-progress. Those opposing the measure, including partners of the UPA coalition, members of the ruling Congress, and the range of anti-Congress opposition, including those who have not understood the implications of opening the sector to foreign investment are against the measure. So much so, the debate has been well and truly joined, and it would seem, by any objective reckoning, the anti-government, the anti-FDI and the anti-Congress groups are winning. The UPA is losing the battle even before it was joined. It is now faced with a hard option: persist with the measure and bring all political activity to a stop, or abandon

the idea for the moment, and pursue it at a more opportune time. The second seems to be an easy way out, an all-too easy way out, but it is the government itself that has pushed itself into a corner. Now, there is no point in offering concessions, diluting the measure, and winning friends thereby. The truth is that the FDI has become suspect, and it will be counter-productive for the UPA dispensation to persist with it. Few government-inspired measures in India have evoked such massive opposition as this FDI deal. Only a handful of chief ministers support it. Most states, among them those under Congress control, are also against it.

As we said in the beginning, there are as many opposing the FDI as there are supporting it and wanting it. Both the sides have advanced eminently logical and fairly cogent arguments sustaining their respective cases. The truth perhaps lies somewhere in between the two positions. The wise course would be for the measure to be subjected to a more comprehensive and intense debate, and the points for and against it thrashed out keeping the interests of the producers, traders and customers on the one side and the foreign investors on the other. But the opportunity and the ideal setting for such a debate was before the proposal went to the Cabinet and came out with a green signal. Now tempers are on the boil, and the rights and wrongs of the legislation are not high priority issues. The high priority issue is, from the government's point of view, to ram it down the throat of the country on the strength of the belief that it is good for the country. The high priority issue, from the opposition's point of view, is to embarrass the government as much as possible, and ensure that

*(Continued on Page 9)*

## **Pradip Bose** (1928-2011)

Socialist thinker, writer and activist, Pradip Bose passed away on 30th November, 2011 in New Delhi at the age of 83. He was born at Cuttack (Orissa) in 1928. His father was in the Indian Civil Service. The influence of his uncle, Subhas Chandra Bose, appears to have been tremendous on Pradip Bose and he plunged in the freedom struggle at an early age. He helped the INA whenever he could and participated in the demonstrations. He was educated in Calcutta and was a journalist and author by profession.

Pradip Bose first met Acharya Narendra Deva in 1954 and joined the Socialist movement by enrolling in the Praja Socialist Party. He was General Secretary, all-India Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha and Assistant Secretary, International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). He was also General Secretary of the Indian Center for Democratic Socialism. He has written more than fifteen books relating to Communism and Socialism.

His book 'Communism and Communist Systems: Some reflections', is a collection of articles and essays contributed by him to a number of journals. The volume is organized into four parts: Ideological: European Communism: Asian Communism: Indian Communism. Pradip Bose visited a number of East European countries and also the Soviet Union.

His another book 'Growing up in India', is a story of man's search for the truth about himself and the world around him and thereby to evolve a philosophy of life

He has written some other interesting books - An Outline of Democratic Socialism; The Indian Communist Movement and Euro-communism: a study in revolutionary rhetoric, revisionist doctrine and reformist practice; Social Democracy in Practice: Socialist International, 1951-2001.

Pradip Bose, He was at the IUSY headquarters in Vienna in the early 1960s. He represented the IUSY on the Socialist International's (SI) Subcommittee for Developing Areas, beginning his interaction with the SI. In the 1980s he founded the Indian Centre for Democratic Socialism (ICDS) in New Delhi, with which SI developed friendly relations in the 1990s. Pradip Bose represented the ICDS at the meetings of the Council of the SI in Tokyo and served on the SI Committee for Asia and the Pacific Region in Kathmandu. He also attended its Congress in Berlin. The absence of any comprehensive book on the SI in English persuaded him to write the book Socialist International. Being an Indian, his book has been written from a Third World perspective.

- Qurban Ali

# Non-functioning Parliament

**Kuldip Nayar**

India is the only country in South Asia where democracy has survived in its classical form. It has got disfigured in Pakistan because the military, not the elected government, has the last word. In Bangladesh, the perpetual boycott by the opposition, this time by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, has lessened parliament's credibility and, in Sri Lanka, the confused opposition has affected its representative character. Nepal is yet to settle down to face the basic norms of parliamentary democracy.

Unfortunately, the political parties in India have come to believe that stalling parliament is the best way of expressing their opposition to a government legislation or action. The Congress party did it in the late 90s and early 2000 when the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was in power. The BJP has adopted the same methods today. The Congress is repenting over what it did then as the BJP would do if and when it comes to power. Not allowing parliament to function has somehow become part of their political lexicon.

Since the proceedings of both houses are watched throughout the country, the non-functioning of parliament is having its effect, which is generally negative. Many wonder the utility of parliament and some suggest the Presidential form of government prevailing in the US and France. The worst fallout is the mood of uncertainty that is sweeping the country.

I do not want to make politicians a whipping boy for India going

downhill. They may be more to blame than others like the judiciary, the government and the media. All are naked in the bath. The point to find out is why a nation which has largely followed democratic methods, since 1950 when the constitution was adopted, is turning violent in its action and the language that people use.

A slap on the face of Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar remains as unacceptable as was the shoe thrown at Home Minister P. Chidambaram. Both are violent expressions which neither the constitution nor the country's ethos allow. The 'Shining India' suddenly appears to be receding into shadows. The economy continues to register a slowdown and the governance is practically non-existent.

No official wants to take any decision, much less quickly. HRD Minister Kapil Sibal rationalizes that officials are afraid because they would be taken to task if the decision turned out to be wrong. Officials would have to get over such an apprehension because they are not to blame if the decision is not motivated. All this does not help much about the country's health. So much so, it looks as if it is coming apart from the seams.

If I were to point out one lapse, I would say that politics or, for that matter, every segment of the society has shed morality. The realization that some things are not done or that wrong methods are not employed is not there anymore. Therefore, no political party has any compunction

in doing anything to get what it wants, through peaceful methods if possible or the use of violence, if necessary. The Lakshman rekha does not exist anymore and the tendency to hit below the belt is not only common but considered permissible.

Had the rot been confined only to the politicians the nation might have saved its equilibrium. Every activity has been affected. The media, puffed up by a sense of self-righteousness, has deteriorated to the extent that you can publish anything on any page in the news columns by giving a price (paid news). But this does not call for any control over the media. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said: "I would have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or a regulated press."

The judiciary, thumping its back for independence, can be generally "managed" according to eminent lawyers and former judges. It is an open secret that the clients know which judge has what type of predilection and the price involved. Cases are accordingly preferred before a particular bench. Some judgments astound you and they suggest that there is something that does not meet the eye. No one criticizes the judges fearing the contempt laws. Thus the veneer of respectability stays.

The bureaucracy which runs the administration is so divided hierarchically that the right hand does not know what the left is doing. Joint secretaries and above cannot

## Poverty of Leadership in Odisha!

D.K. Giri

be touched without the permission of ministers who are mostly corrupt. The Supreme Court gave a judgment to stop the practice, called single directive, but parliament restored it. An appeal against the new law is awaiting the court's verdict. All parties know from their experience how handy these joint secretaries and secretaries are.

Take the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail. Ministers and bureaucrats decided on the step, worked out on the details and announced its introduction to India without consulting anyone outside the government. The pronouncement was made when parliament was in session, not in any house, but through a press statement. Rightly, all parties, including the Congress's ruling allies, were up in arms.

The Prime Minister consented to have an all-party meeting to explain the FDI in retail but this was like adding insult to the injury. Nothing came out of it. Why couldn't the meeting be convened earlier even if the government was determined not to brook any opposition? And how does the government's prestige suffer if the FDI takes precedence over discussion on price rise or the black money? What havoc the FDI in retail would cause is another story.

A senior Congress minister's remark that "Where is India going?" is pertinent. But his party is more responsible than the opposition because it is ruling the country. The minister, used by the party to sort out knotty problems, will concede that a consensus is the only way to govern. The ruling Congress has to lessen the distance from the opposition. When the rightist BJP and the leftist Communists are on the

After the unopposed election of Sonia Gandhi to the office of the Congress President, the feverish race for state presidents of the Congress party had begun all over the country. Oscar Fernandez, the cool and composed General Secretary of the Congress party had put the election schedule in place. So accordingly, the state of Odisha should have got a new president on 17th September 2010. But this was not to be. Given the Congress' disgusting tradition of nomination by the High Command, a surprise candidate was nominated as the president of the party. In my article in Janata in September last year, I had discussed Sonia's presidentship of the Congress in the context of dynasty and democracy in Indian politics. In this essay, the Odisha Congress leadership is discussed in the context of leadership, governance and development of Odisha. In fact, Odisha is a test case for such a debate.

Why is this so important for the state? One does not have to labour for an answer. Odisha remains the poorest state in the country in terms of number of BPL families which are 50 percent of its population. Odisha is richer than many other states in natural and social capital. Again, this begs the question: why there is this contradiction in the development of the state? And a sure answer is that it is because of the weak and unimaginative leadership across the political parties. There can be no denying the fact that the development in our country is leadership driven, if we have a

strong and entrepreneurial leader there is scope for development. Although I hold no brief for their politics, Nitish Kumar in Bihar, Chandra Babu Naidu in Andhra, Narendra Modi in Gujarat and to some extent Manmohan Singh in the Centre are examples of such leadership. The Prime Minister although perceived to be weak and under the shadow of Sonia Gandhi, has remained uncorrupt, free of any scandal, and has the tallest intellectual personality, even if one may not agree with him. No wonder, he was voted the most educated and informed Prime Minister of the world, by the popular media. The Prime Minister seems to have equivocated on political issues, but on matters of development, he has stood firm. He has, from his days as the Finance Minister, pushed the economic reforms resulting in a steady economic growth of our country, which in turn, is drawing world attention and is providing the country with a platform to solve may chronic developmental issues. His focus on building the skills of the Indians to make it "the skill capital of the world" gives India a competitive edge. Let us not forget his firm position on the nuclear deal, on which the Communists withdrew their support from the government, of course at their own political peril.

Coming back to Odisha, the leadership in the state leaves a lot to desire. Out of 64 years of Odisha's post-independence politics, more than half, nearly 40 years, the leadership has been with the Pattanaik family, Janaki

*(Continued on Page 9)*



Pattanaik, Biju Pattanaik and now his son, Nabin Pattanaik. Again, I have nothing against the Pattanaiks as a community, but the fact remains these two families have heavily influenced the fate of Odisha state, and the results are for everyone to see. Janaki regime was tainted with corruption and scandals; Naveen's rule is marked by inefficiency and now industrial corruption and manipulation. Here I am referring to several mining scams, for example, Vedanta Alumina which violated most guidelines, environmental and legal, quietly usurped tribal and forest land, sought to grab thousands of acres of land in the name of an international standard university, which Odisha does not need. Naveen Pattanaik's government went all out to support the Company - even the Chief Minister went personally to meet the Prime Minister to bail Vedanta out. But Naveen Babu retains the clean image and is seen to be pro-poor, pro-growth and pro-development. That is why he has been voted to power for three consecutive terms, no one can dispute his democratic legitimacy and I do not wish to join issue with that. But, one is free to argue that Naveen Babu has a greater image than the Congress leadership and he has reaped huge benefit from the negative image of the Congress party. Also, there is no doubt that Congress leadership of the state is weak, divided, factionalized and has no credible standing even with their High Command in Delhi. That is why, in the last UPA government, Odisha had one Minister of State. For a year Odisha had no Minister in the Centre in UPA-II, the High Command has put a veteran like Srikant Jena, twice a Union Minister and four times a Parliamentarian, as a Minister of State under a first-timer Azagiri, whose only qualification is

that he is Karunanidhi's son.

Let us deal with a few concerns. One, why is one worried about the Congress party, when Oriyas seem to be happy with their present government? Second, who should lead the Congress party? One is concerned that in Odisha state or in any democracy, we need a viable and credible opposition, and at the moment we do not have one. Third, one has become very uncomfortable with Naveen Babu's excessive support for a corrupt company like Vedanta. Fourth, who should be the leader of the party to put up a credible and formidable opposition to the ruling party? Clearly, the Congress needs a serious and a new brand of politics in Odisha if ever they wish to come back to power, or else they will have to wait for the "law of average" to work against Naveen Pattnaik which means, Naveen Babu has to loose the 4th term or wait for a wave created by Rahul Gandhi as most Congressmen hope.

The new brand of politics will be good for Congress as well as the state. It has to consist of a serious image change-over for the party, and 'the politics of development' not of power, privilege and patronage, so the Congress needs a leader who has a clean and uncorrupt image and who could draw a development path for the state. Also politically speaking, the leader should have the ability to reach out to the rank and file of BJD and outgrow Naveen Babu's personality and politics. There are such leaders in the party. The Congress has to do a thorough check on these qualities and take a judicious decision in their own collective interest in Odisha.

Need we focus on political

leadership alone? There are other two sectors - business and larger civil society - which could throw up strong and imaginative leadership. Much vaunted Biju Pattanaik was also a businessman who cleverly mixed business with politics. Is there no scope for the civil society to produce a leader who could draw national or international attention and influence the leadership of the state, or even the bureaucracy that draws brilliant students into civil service to give the lead? Of course, one such bureaucrat is supposed to run the affairs of BJD and another who took voluntary retirement from Indian civil service from the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh to build a prosperous Odisha ( Samrudha Odisha ), the name of his political party, is yet to make a dent in the politics of the state. He is making very desirable promises in his manifesto, such as removing poverty from Odisha in five years of his election to the government. It is one thing to intellectually articulate a proposition, but it is quite another to be able to politically mobilize the people behind it. A successful political leadership is based on twin pillars of "power of ideas" and the "capacity for mobilization" behind that idea. Civil society is caught in its own logic of operation. Most civil society organizations (CSOs) are fully engaged in small development projects sponsored by foreign donors, or in limited campaigns against denial of human rights and social justice, mainly for "the displaced" in the mining projects. No CSO is worried about the overall development of the state - its institutions, processes, growth, employment, equality and so on.

Big Businesses, even the indigenous ones, are focused on the "returns on their investment" and in

their area of operation. To illustrate, I was speaking to the managers of Tata Steel in Kalinganagar on a possible way out of the logjam they are caught in. When they wanted my opinion as their potential consultant, among other things, I suggested that they should shift the discussion even thematically from Kalinganagar to Bhubaneswar. I suggested them to initiate a dialogue with the people of Odisha through various instruments on “how industrialization as it is being legislated and carried out will bring development for all in the state. I thought that it would not cost them much to launch such an information and sensitization campaign. But, they shied away from taking such an initiative.

So we are back to political leadership. In a representative democracy like India’s, the political leadership is the front-runner whereas leaders from other sectors act like pressure groups, catalysts, innovators, even partners and so on - the onus is always on the political leader. In that sense, the choice of the Congress leadership to provide an alternative platform for the Oriyas to rally around is pretty dismal. The Congress High Command has fallen back on JB Pattanaik’s group for expediency or compromise is not clear. For the High Command to shunt JB Pattanaik out of the state to Assam as its Governor, and then to appoint the elder brother of his son-in-law is quite inexplicable.

At any rate, Odisha continues to suffer from the poverty of leadership. It is time that a leader, Odisha so desperately needs, with a clean image and strong developmental perspective emerges to take the state out of the governance crisis it is mired in.

## Project of Hope

**Asghar Ali Engineer**

I was invited to visit Austria from 16-20th November 2011 to deliver a few lectures to schools students and citizens, activists and politicians as Right Livelihood Awardee – the award is also known as Alternate Nobel - by sponsors of an interesting project called “Projects of Hope” along with two other awardees Alyn Ware, an anti-nuclear activist and member of New Zealand Parliament, and Tony Clarke from Ottawa, Canada, who had received this Right Livelihood Award for his work for environment. I had received this award for my work for inter-religious peace and communal harmony and also my contribution for human rights, along with Swami Agnivesh. This programme was held in Bregenz, a beautiful city in the valley and surrounded by Alps Mountains.

The main organizers of this programme are Marrielle Manhal, Christian Hore and Sanjya, all three deeply committed to social causes and they have started this project which is very interesting. They invite every year three Laureates (Right Livelihood recipients) to narrate their life story – what motivated them to work for the cause and what odds they faced and how they overcame these odds and sustained their work.

The main idea is to give hope to young students and motivate them to work for a better, cleaner and peaceful society along with social activists, citizens and politicians. It will be interesting to say a few words for Right Livelihood Award for those who do not know about it.

Unfortunately in English speaking world only Nobel Prize is rated very high and even Magsaysay award is more known than Right Livelihood award.

Actually Nobel Prize is given either to pro-establishment activists (even Obama got this award for his empty rhetoric and for not being able to stop Iraq or Afghanistan war and rushing to intervene in Libya like Bush would have done). But Alternate Nobel is given in Swedish Parliament for those activists who are pronouncedly anti-establishment and for challenging powerful people.

When I went to Sweden to receive this award a member of Socialist Party who taught political science in the Stockholm University invited me for tea and congratulated me for receiving this award saying this award was a ‘good kick on the back of Nobel Prize’. Also, Nobel Prize is financed by the profit earned Alfred Nobel by selling arms and that is why Jean Paul Sartre, the famous French writer, refused to accept it saying it was money earned by selling of arms. Whereas as Right Livelihood is financed by money Jakob Von Uexkull received by auctioning his old stamp collection.

Now Coming back to the Projects of Hope and its activities. This is extremely interesting project being run by deeply committed people who want a healthy society which makes it possible to spiritual and right kind of livelihood and not corrupt and materialist one. The over-consuming, globalized and capitalist society has distorted all

the values and over-armed certain countries and over-consumption has not only polluted our environment but also is fast exhausting our limited resources.

I told the audience in this regard about how Gandhiji viewed this situation. Gandhiji used to say that there is enough on this earth for the need of entire humanity but there is not enough for the greed of one person. The modern technology has increased our consumption no end and our greed has made us blind to all healthy values. Gandhiji's saying was greatly appreciated by my audience.

Tony Clarke narrated a story which demonstrates how blind modern, advanced countries have become for satisfying their greed. Canada has lots of oil deposits. The sedimented rocks containing these deposits can be blasted easily using nuclear weapons. Such proposal would send shock down the spines of Canada. How harmful is nuclear radiation even a school student knows. Yet, the US Government made such suggestion blinded by their greed for over-consumption.

What was most interesting for me was our lectures before young students of high school level. It is much easier, as all of us know, to influence the young students. Their education system, we came to know through discussions, is mainly, like India, career oriented and have nothing to draw inspiration from. In fact the young students are our hope and this project is mainly targeted at them. The students heard us with rapt attention and raised many questions during the discussion. It showed their curiosity to know more. Austria is also diverse society though its diversity is rather limited compared to India. In Bregenze

there are about 10 per cent Muslims who are more unemployed and less educated.

I was told by Marrialle that there is a lot of tension between Muslims and Christians as Turks are treated as aliens, of different race and violent, being Muslims. Like any other country Muslims are considered as violent and jihad is the main problem. These students also raised the question on Jihad. As far as I could make out from his question, there was perhaps only one Turkish student out of around 60-70 who were taking part in the discussion.

I told them that in Qur'an and in Arabic language jihad does not mean war. The word jihad and its derivatives occur 41 times in Qur'an but not even once for war. For war Qur'an uses the word qital and clearly says that fight only those in the way of Allah who fight against you and do not commit excesses as Allah does not love those who are aggressors. This clearly shows that Qur'an only permits war of defence, not war of aggression

In the western countries too education system has become a powerful tool to spread misinformation and prejudices. Thus I indeed admire these ladies Marialle, Sonja and Christine Hore who have taken such good initiative to inspire the young generation and give them hope. The name - Projects of Hope - itself is very important. I addressed students and teachers in two schools – one public school and one privately run Catholic School. Austria is mainly Catholic with 90 percent Catholics but only 11 percent are believers with the remaining indifferent to religion. Thus the school is run by Catholic Church but all students are not necessarily believers.

Someone asked me, when I was emphasizing truth as a value, as to what was the difference between fact and value. It was very good question and many eyebrows were raised. I said fact is mere conformity with empirical reality and that is what science deals with. Science deals with empirical reality whereas truth is more than empirical reality. It is facts plus values and truth is much more than mere empirical reality though it cannot contradict reality. Thus truth is as much spiritual as material.

What religions emphasize is truth which includes values while being in conformity with empirical reality. Thus there cannot be any confrontation between science and religion. While both can be of immense use for humanity both can be massively misused by vested interests as instruments. A teacher of philosophy liked my definition very much and said that he was often confused when students asked him the difference and thanked me for removing his confusion.

I also told the students and teachers: today we have problems with religion as our priesthood equates religion only with some routine rituals and totally sidelines values. Thus religion becomes meaningless for today's educated people as they do not find any meaning in these rituals. All religions emphasize certain values which we never practice. There are seven values which are common more or less to all religions i.e. truth, equality, compassion, non-violence, love, human dignity and freedom.

Truth is emphasized by all religions so much so that in most of the religious traditions God's name is truth and Gandhiji gave so much importance to truth that he said

“truth is God”. How can there be God where there is no truth. Today we are so absorbed in materialism and consumerism that we have forgotten these values and we no longer respect God’s creation i.e. our universe. We are recklessly violating God’s creation to fulfill our greed for consumerism.

There would have been no problem with earth’s environment if we can contain our greed. It is real jihad for all of us. We can do this jihad together – Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains and there will be marvelous peace on earth. Kingdom of God or paradise will be here on earth, here and now. But we have made our earth a virtual hell by our greed. It is America’s greed which has inflicted violence on so many countries, killing millions of people. Greed is more dangerous than terrorism which can be contained but not greed.

Tony Clarke and Alyn Ware, the two other awardees also spoke excellently well and drew great applause from the audience on environmental and nuclear threat. Both of them were great human beings.

## The Colour of Arab Spring is Pink

**Kausar Fatima**

For almost half a century, the Arab pride was in deep slumber. It was awakened by a woman’s slap in a small Tunisian town of Sidi Buziz. A woman’s slap in fact ignited a revolution which we call today the Arab spring. No wonder then, if a woman from Yemen, Tawwakul Kirman, was honored with a Nobel prize; for the Arab spring is essentially a movement in which the Arab women have played a leading role.

Woman has always been good for revolution. In the Arab world women have a history of fighting along with their male counterparts against colonial rulers. That is why when Benghazi fell to the revolutionaries, the people discovered that an underground women’s organization, Mukhtar’s nieces, sprang to give logistic and organizational support to the revolution. The more deeply we dig and try to understand the phenomenon we find that those who led and commanded the movement in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain were women activists who had a natural talent and skill to social media tools. For example, take the case of Tunis. Buazizi’s death might have gone unnoticed had there been no Lina Mhenni, the blogger whose efforts brought some five thousand men and women to the funeral procession of Buazizi. Soon the unrest spread to other cities and Bin Ali had to leave. The same happened in Egypt when a young woman Asma Mahfooz uploaded a short video on YouTube and face book invoking the Arab man’s sleeping pride. She announced, “Whoever says women shouldn’t go to protests because they will

get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th.” Mahfooz appealed the Egyptians to honor four young men who, following the example of Mohammad Buazizi, had set themselves afire. The video proved to be a wakeup call bringing tens of thousands of people to Tahrir Square on January 25th, thus causing a popular revolution. In Libya, things went out of hand and the unrest turned into a revolution only when a woman protestor Iman al-Ubaidi broke into a government press conference in Tripoli to charge that Ghaddafi’s troops had detained her at the check point and then raped her. The incident provoked popular anger causing an unending protest till the regime fell. In Yemen, we all know well that the first protest against the regime in which some 2,500 people participated was led by Tawwakul Kirman, a woman journalist. It was she who invented the popular chant “Ali! Ali! Join your friend Bin Ali”. In Bahrain, women were literally on the forefront receiving bullets in Pearl Square. In the early days of revolution when men were afraid of the regime it were women in black chador and abaya who thronged to the Pearl Square with make-shift tents. In the process Zainab al Khawaja became an icon of resistance. Imagine, in the early two months of revolution over 100 women were arrested and some of them even disappeared. This is a huge number in the tiny kingdom of Bahrain.

Dear friends! Now let me tell you a secret. If the Arab spring is a success and is still a phenomenon to

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reckon with, it is because of women. How? Let me explain. The woman brought with her some space for revolution and revolutionaries. The presence of women demanded that some space be created for them to lie down, take rest, and more so, to have a functional command centre. This space was instrumental in bringing the regime to fall. It was symbolic, as well as crucial, for the revolution to survive. Later, when the Arab spring inspired victims of capitalism in America and a movement called 'Occupy the Wall Street' started in New York, it realized the symbolic and pragmatic significance of the tent. The system too, realized how dangerous it was to have women and the tents in any demonstration. Eventually, the park was vacated by force.

In the Arab world, as elsewhere, the enemies of revolution are trying hard to get the women and tent out, because a woman is perceived as the agent of change and tent as the natural command centre, and to some extent, also the space for survival and comfort for the revolutionaries. The rulers in the Arab-world know it well that once women are off to kitchen, the revolution will lose its vigor. Ali Abdullah Saleh, never known for his Islamic credentials, asked the Yemeni people that they should not let their women intermingle with men in public demonstrations. This is against our values, he retorted. In Egypt, to weaken the revolution the military regime brought a bunch of salafis, who turned the main revolutionary slogan into an anti-woman campaign. This is a dangerous move. When oppressive rulers had their day, they gave us the impression that they were working for women's liberation. Now, this time, it is the same issue of woman-honor and its protection that are being raised by the regime. As long as men and women work together,

as enshrined in the Quran, the Arab spring will thrive, but, if women are forced to go back to kitchen, God

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***(Continued from Page 2)***

Parliament gets no chance to review the proposal and decide on it purely on the basis of merits. No chance now or in the near future.

Well, the government seems to be weakening a bit. It has already agreed to the opposition proposal to restrict the supply of manufactured or processed products to the level of 30 only to the domestic small and medium enterprises. The original proposal was to allow producers from all over the world to offer supplies and enter the competition. There are a handful of other points on which the government may climb down and water down the proposal, and even reduce the 51 per cent to 26 per cent. But the question of allowing the proposal as put forward by the government originally seems to have become irrelevant. The opposition does not want changes or amendments or softening. It wants the proposal killed and buried six fathoms deep.

Often, it is more prudent to give in than insist on fighting a losing

forbidding, I'm afraid, it would turn into an Arab winter.

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battle. Our advice to the government would be to abandon the proposal for now, and turn its thoughts to equally pressing and equally contentious issues, in order to make up with the opposition. The government has already lost face. Let it not lose credibility also.

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***(Continued from Page 4)***

same page, there is something wrong in Manmohan Singh's policies. Assembly elections in five states may have influenced the government and the opposition not to have a meeting point. Surely, India is more important than that.

The stalled parliament is not a good precedent for the neighbouring countries where the democratic system is already under sufferance. New Delhi feels good when the countries in South Asia applaud it for certain steps. How would the common man on the streets of Lahore, Dhaka, Colombo and Kathmandu be feeling when he sees that parliament in the largest democracy in the world does not function day after day?

## **Daughters are not for Slaughter**

We need to counter those who believe that it is better to kill a female foetus than to give birth to an unwanted female child. Their logic eliminates the victim of male chauvinism, does not empower her. The techno-docs don't challenge anti-women practices such as dowry, instead display an advertisement, 'Better Rs.5000 now than Rs.5 lakhs later' i.e. better spend Rs.5,000 for female foeticide than Rs. 5 lakhs as dowry for a grown up daughter. By this logic, it is better to kill poor people or third world masses rather than let them suffer in poverty and deprivation. This logic also presumes that social evils like dowry are God-given and that we cannot do anything about them. Hence victimize the victim. Investing in daughter's education, health and dignified life to make her self-dependent are far more humane and realistic ways than brutalizing pregnant mother and her would be daughter.

**–Vibhuti Patel**

# Journey to Imphal

**Pannalal Surana**

We had purchased a bus ticket from Guwahati to Imphal. On it was the instruction: reporting time—2.30 p.m. Wading through the traffic which was as undisciplined as is found in any major city, we reached the booking counter at 2.25 p.m. We were directed to another place where the departure time was displayed—5 p.m. The small bus started actually at 6 p.m. and took us to the Assam Road Transport station by 7 p.m. The bus proper was brought to the platform, which was more than two feet above the step of the bus. After loading our bags in the dicky, we occupied our seats. The bus started at 8.15 p.m. Around 10 p.m. there was a bang. The bus came to a halt. One inside tyre had got punctured. All male passengers got down. Some of us volunteered to help the driver to fix the stepney. Fortunately, the cold was tolerable. Mothers had succeeded in putting the babies to sleep after serving nourishment. The bus again came to a sudden halt at about 4 a.m. It was the boundary of one State and beginning of Nagaland. There was checking of goods. The bus resumed journey and after passing through the zigzag turns of Kohima, the capital city. It is a vast conglomeration of small and big hills on which were built houses of various size and material. “How can the water supply arrangement be made for such scattered and uneven habitation?”, wondered Jagdish. “Well, there is no limit to human ingenuity”, I muttered. At 10 a.m., the next morning, we got something to eat. At about 12 o’clock, our

bus was halted by a group of volunteers. Their blockade was in force. Vehicles were allowed to run after 2 p.m. Then, after about an hour, two ladies, after signalling the bus to stop, climbed up and checked our bags to see if some merchandise was being taken to Imphal for sale. That was not to be permitted - to ensure the success of the blockade. Finally, we reached the destination at around 6 p.m.

We were told that the people of Sadar, a part of Senapati district, had observed blockade for more than 80 days and had got assurance from the State Government that Sadar would be accorded status of a district. Now, the Naga people who did not like the decision were forcing the traffic to observe blockade. And the government personnel were standing aside as mute spectators.

At two villages and a town nearby, we were told that there was acute shortage of many essential goods like diesel, petrol, salt, potato, etc. The prices had soared sky high. Petrol was sold at Rs. 200 or 250. Two to three Km. long queues were seen at every pump.

“The authorities were allowing all this because this Government is of the contractors by the contractors and for the contractors. Their henchmen are minting money which would be suitably shared”, observed one fellow. “So much smuggling is taking place on the borders of Myanmar and China”, quipped another. Third person

informed that a huge rally was organized two days back by the Congress party for which meat worth more than two lakhs of rupees was purchased.

**Sharmila**

We tried to meet Irom Sharmila, who has stopped eating anything for the last eleven years to press the demand to scrap the AFSPA (as recommended by Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission four years back) or at least to withdraw it from the North Eastern States. P. Chidambaram, Union Home Minister, who had visited Manipur a few days earlier, had publicly declared that the Government had, in principle, decided to do so. But the Army is not agreeing to it. It must be for the first time that the Army is openly defying the decision of civil authorities. This is a very bad omen for the largest democracy in the world.

About permission to visit Sharmila, we were told that the Chief Minister had assumed all powers and was not allowing any person to see her. This amounts to solitary confinement, the worst form of punishment. And what is the offence committed by her? Actually, she is an undertrial prisoner, arrested and detained in a hospital where doctors are forcibly feeding her through nose. She is doing it all in the most peaceful manner. And yet the authorities are inflicting such torture on her. What a shame.



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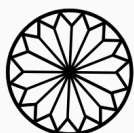
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# When God's doors were thrown open to all

**A. Srivathsan**

November 12, 2011, marks the 75th anniversary of the momentous Temple Entry Proclamation in Travancore that enabled Dalits to enter temples in the State. On this day 75 years ago, on November 12, 1936, the Maharajah of Travancore signed the historic Temple Entry Proclamation, and “in one bold stroke, the age long injustice of barring lower castes from entering temple was removed.” And, a “tidal wave of joy and rejoicing passed through every nook and corner” of Travancore. The action attracted attention and admiration from the whole country.

Travancore may not have been the first State, nor its Maharaja the first person, to throw open temples for Dalits. The northern and western parts of India had made a small beginning earlier. But, as the Manchester Guardian observed then, such a concession had never been made on such a large scale before. Today marks the 75th anniversary of this key moment in the struggle for the rights of the socially marginalised.

The impact of the Temple Entry Proclamation was immediate and far-reaching. Not only were temples under the control of the Travancore Maharaja thrown open, but even private temples heeded the call for change. Outside of Travancore, temples in Malabar and the rest of the Madras Presidency felt the cascading effects.

Such an ‘epoch making’ event was the culmination of two decades

of struggle. In 1919, T.K. Madhavan, a prominent social reformer and the Editor of *Deshabhimani*, the Malayalam newspaper, took up the issue of temple entry with the Travancore government. So did Kunju Panicker in 1920, and again Madhavan in 1921. But none of this had any effect on the government.

Gandhiji, who was anguished by the ‘very feeble response’ of south Indian temples to reform efforts, agreed with Madhavan, during a meeting in 1921, that Kerala was ripe for a temple entry agitation. He insisted on peaceful protest and found there is “no swifter remedy than a real satyagraha properly handled.”

## **Precursors**

Before Trivandrum became the epicentre of the temple entry campaign, protests had begun in Vaikom, in the northern part of Travancore, in 1924. Though this struggle did not succeed in lifting the bar to avarnas, or lower castes, entering the Mahadeva Temple in the town, it managed to open the roads around the temple for their use. The temple entry movement gained momentum after this.

The action then shifted to Trivandrum. The temple entry agitation was formally launched in the city on April 3, 1926. However, before the campaign could move on to the next stage, the Guruvayur Satyagraha started.

On November 1, 1931, a large number of Dalits and upper caste

Hindus assembled in Guruvayur to demand that the avarnas be allowed inside the temple. The 10-month-long protest, and fasting by K. Kelappan, popularly known as ‘Kerala Gandhi’ (which he dropped on Gandhiji’s advice on October 2, 1932), drew national attention to the temple entry movement. The call to open temples for Dalits grew louder.

Shortly afterwards, in November 1932, the Travancore Government appointed a Temple Entry Enquiry Committee. The committee, which submitted its report after a year, did not recommend the opening of temples, but suggested roads and tanks could be opened for all. The reformers rejected the report as it “did not meet the present need.” They insisted that appropriate action alone would meet ‘the test of the hour.’

On May 9, 1936, an All Kerala Temple Entry conference was held in New Theatre Hall near the Trivandrum Central Railway Station, and it resolved to step up the agitation. Speakers at the conference pointed out that of the nearly 30 lakh Hindus living in the State, as many as about 20 lakh were being prevented from entering temples. They decided to convert “all the passive good-will in the State” into an “irresistible demand,” and simultaneously appointed a committee to take up the issue with the Maharaja.

The people of Travancore did not have to wait much longer for the historic change. Five months

after the conference was held, on November 12, 1936, a 'Gazette Extraordinary' was published. In it, "profoundly convinced of the truth," the Maharaja proclaimed that the temples under his administration would be opened to all Hindus and that no restrictions would be placed on those who wanted to worship at the temple.

*Two months after the Temple Entry Proclamation, Mahatma Gandhi arrived in Trivandrum on January 12, 1937, to participate in celebrations over an event for which he had exerted much moral pressure. He had come "as a humble pilgrim to offer congratulations to the Maharaja," Gandhiji told a large, cheering crowd that had gathered at the Thampanoor Maidan, facing the railway station, to receive him. The welcome address was presented to him. The next day, he addressed a public meeting at the Military Parade ground.*

In the words of M. Govindan of the All-Kerala Ezhawa Temple-Entry Celebration Committee, the proclamation was received with feelings of "inexpressible delight, unbounded joy and jubilation." The roles of Sree Narayana Guru and K. Madhavan, the key people who had initiated the movement, were duly remembered on that momentous day.

Predictably, perhaps, there was some resistance. For instance, the trustees of the Koodalmanickam temple at Irinjalakuda were agitated at the prospect of the temple being used by everyone.

The Travancore Proclamation, as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar cautioned, was "not the be-all and end-all of social reforms." Nor did things

dramatically change for the better for Dalits immediately after 1936. But there is no doubt that the Proclamation indeed was a big

step in establishing the rights of the lower castes in Kerala, and indeed the nation as a whole. (Courtesy The Hindu)

**-The Hindu, November 12, 2011**

## Divisions of UP

**Brij Khandelwal**

With the Uttar Pradesh assembly passing a resolution amid bedlam, Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati has crossed the first hurdle on the path to splitting the country's most populous state into four smaller states.

Political parties opposed to the move have been stumped by the sudden turn of events. Looking at the encouraging response to the legislative decision, the coming assembly elections are sure to focus on the issue of Uttar Pradesh's division, say political pundits.

Meetings and conferences have been held here supporting her action and to demand that Agra be made the capital of the new proposed state of Western Uttar Pradesh (Pashchim Pradesh). Mayawati has put both Ajit Singh and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) on the backfoot.

These two parties have in the past supported the demand for a division of Uttar Pradesh but are now opposing Mayawati along with the Samajwadi Party and the Congress.

BSP leaders at the local level see political opportunities and a broad-basing of the party organisation because of the decision to break up Uttar Pradesh into Awadh Pradesh, Pashchim Pradesh, Bundelkhand

and Purvanchal.

"From just one now, the BSP can rule four states in future," said BSP activist Pushkar Arvind.

It was B.R. Ambedkar who in 1954 advocated splitting bigger states into smaller units. The theme was taken up by socialists like Rammanohar Lohia and Acharya Kripalani.

But Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first prime minister, supported the recommendation of reorganizing states on a linguistic basis.

Choudhary Charan Singh, who was also India's prime minister for a short while, also favoured smaller states. Later, his son and Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Ajit Singh launched a movement for Harit Pradesh, comprising 22 districts of Western Uttar Pradesh.

K.M. Pannikar, who headed the States Reorganisation Commission, had favoured a state of Western Uttar Pradesh. For years, socialist leader Hukum Singh Parihar had campaigned for a Braj Pradesh, with Agra as its capital.

In the 1975-77 Emergency period, the late Sanjay Gandhi almost succeeded in carving out a new state of Western UP with Agra as its

capital. The new state was to include parts of Haryana too.

The issue came into sharper focus when Agra lawyers in the early 1980s launched a movement seeking a bench of the Allahabad High Court at Agra, home to the Taj Mahal, India's best tourist draw.

The central government set up Jaswant Singh Commission Vibhuti Patel supported the idea.

Most political parties have at one point or the other supported the restructuring of the federal polity on a more scientific line, taking into account the area and population, says political analyst Rajeev Saxena.

"Size does make a difference. For political reasons, the Congress has been averse to splitting bigger states into smaller ones and pointlessly dragging feet on such demands as is happening in Andhra Pradesh." Saxena told IANS.

Added social scientist Paras Nath Choudhary, formerly of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University: "The time has come to carry out a comprehensive exercise to redraw the political map of India."

People in the Taj city are excited and look forward to a whole lot of new opportunities if a separate state of Western Uttar Pradesh takes shape.

"With the unwieldy size of Uttar Pradesh, the Agra region has always got a raw deal, with funds and tax revenues siphoned off to eastern districts. A new state of Western Uttar Pradesh, whatever its name, will definitely spur growth and inculcate a sense of pride and identity," said K.C. Jain, chief of a grouping of real estate developers.

## Displaced Adivasis cultivate Government land at Jobat

The Madhya Pradesh Government and the district administration of Alirajpur watched mutely as the displaced adivasis of the Sardar Sarovar and Jobat Dam Projects went another step ahead in their Zameen Haq Satyagraha and actually cultivated the government land at Jobat with their own bullocks, which they have occupied. The oustees began cultivation of the land under the Jobat Agricultural and Seed Production Farm since yesterday and have started the first task of sowing the maize crop.

The cultivation began yesterday morning in the traditional adivasi style, with the elderly members of the community and long-time strugglers, Bava Mahariya of village Jalsindhi and Mangliya Daya of village Bhadal worshipping the 'deve daani', Mother Nature and Mother Earth. The oustees are determined and state that they will continue with the Satyagraha until they actually receive their share of cultivable, irrigable and suitable land from the Narmada Valley Development Authority. The nature-loving women and men have also resolved to nourish the maize crop throughout the coming season and reap the harvest as their rightful share.

Although the farm authorities have complained to the local police against the oustees for 'illegally encroaching' on the government land, no 'action' has come forth thus far. Evidently, the authorities cannot easily brush aside the fact that the

oustees are actually asserting their long-standing legal rights within a democratic framework. Further the authorities are also aware that as per the High Court's Orders, the State had to 'compensate' the oustees for violation of their fundamental rights, when they had lathi-charged them way back in 2007.

It is notable that there are hundreds of adivasi families affected by both the projects in Alirajpur district and Badwani district (SSP), but none of them have been rehabilitated till date with cultivable and irrigable land as per legal and judicial stipulations. After 15 years of dialogue with and agitation before the state and central authorities and utter non-compliance with binding Tribunal Award and Judgements of the Supreme Court, the SSP oustees have resorted to this satyagraha, as a last resort. The oustees have also given a call and challenge to the Chief Minister of the State, Mr. Shivraj Singh Chauhan to immediately intervene and prove his commitment to the adivasis, who he claims are his 'brethren'. All the project-affected families realize that the act of cultivation on the government land is only the beginning of another long-drawn struggle with the State, which has deprived them of their basic constitutional and human rights for more than a decade and a half. They, however, continue to battle peacefully with the same grit and hope.

– **Jamnibai, Nahadriya,  
Kamla Yadav, Tersing**



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## Timely Retreat

S. Viswam

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Kuldip Nayar

**The Balance sheet of Partition :**  
**Pakistan**  
Syed Shahabuddin

**FDI and Farmers**  
Pannalal Surana

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**Once land acquisition picks up...**

**Rajya Sabha Members**

**Manohar Kotwal**

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So, the Government has dropped the FDI retail proposal for the time being—suggesting that it can be revived if a consensus builds up in its favour in the interregnum. The government must be commended for opting to withdraw rather than force an acrimonious contention inside and out of Parliament. The Opposition can pat itself on the back for forcing the government to surrender. However, predictably, the suspension of the FDI idea has had, and will continue to have a mixed reaction in the country. The proposal need not have attracted the kind of controversy and opposition it did had the government devoted some thought to the mechanics of having its way on the floor of the House before taking it to the Cabinet. There were two options available to it. First, to consult with its own allies and convince those among them who had reservations on the very concept of opening the retail sector to foreign investors. It could then, on the strength of the feedback from its allies, have placed the idea before an all-party meeting. There is of course no guarantee that these two options would have worked, but in the light of the stand the various stake-holders have taken during the

heated debate on the proposal, one ventures to say that the resistance of the anti-FDI could have been broken if the government had displayed some adroitness in planning its strategy.

Who is the ultimate gainer from the government's decision to suspend the FDI retail. Indeed, we had suggested in these columns last week that there was no purchase in hanging on to a proposal that had evoked across-the-board (barring the corporate sector) resistance. Prudence demanded that the government retreat, and the government has wisely heeded the voice of prudence. The first gainer from the government's retreat is democracy, in the sense that the government enabled the resumption of parliamentary proceedings after a ten-day deadlock. The days lost in contention and conflict represent a setback to democratic processes, and both the government must share the blame for the non-functioning of parliament. The second gainer is the government which can now push through its legislative programme. A number of important measures await Parliament's attention and imprimatur. Among them is the Lokpal Bill, which by and in itself, is a source of major contention and

controversy. We must watch the progress on this measure carefully since even if it is good and welcome as the first attempt by the government to institutionalize the fight against corruption the measure may fall short of expectations. Anna Hazare and his team members, who have adopted the “all or nothing” stand on the issue are unlikely to yield any concessions to the government or even accept that it (the government) is capable of demonstrating good faith. The stage is being set for taking up the anti-government anti-corruption agitation from where it was left off two months ago. The third gainer is the Opposition which can pride itself on its resolute stand against the process of democratic debate and dialogue in deciding on national issues. However, if one analyses deeply and objectively, stalling proceedings and bringing parliament to a standstill is not an achievement that any political party or group can be proud of. On the other hand, obstructing parliamentary proceedings is a form of violence that hits at the very roots of democratic norm and temper.

India’s private and corporate sectors are bound to be extraordinarily disappointed with the government’s retreat. Some sections of public opinion may concede that forcing the government to withdraw by holding up parliament work is one form of upholding democratic values, as Sushma Swaraj has argued. That, however, will be a short-sighted view. The proper way for both the government and the opposition would have been to subject the FDI proposal to rigorous scrutiny, arrive at an impartial decision as to its usefulness or otherwise to the weaker sections of the society, and

*(Continued on Page 3)*

### *Between the lines*

## Is Army in Pakistan a solution?

**Kuldip Nayar**

Had President Barack Obama expressed regret over the killing of 24 soldiers within Pakistan immediately, Islamabad’s fears might have been assuaged. And probably Pakistan would have attended the meeting on Afghanistan at Bonn. It is no use shedding tears over the spilt milk. However, many in India wonder why Islamabad did not accept ‘regret’. The regret is not exactly an apology but it comes to that. It does mean a feeling of sorrow for wrong-doing. Probably, Islamabad would have accepted regret if there had not been a history of deliberate violations by the US and the NATO forces despite Pakistan’s protests. The fact is that America and its allies care too hoots for Pakistan’s sovereignty or sentiments of its people. Right from the 9/11 attack on New York, Pakistan has been treated as a country which is at the beck and call of the US. At that time, Secretary of State Colin Powell rang up the then Islamabad’s Foreign Secretary Abdul Sattar to inform his government that they would begin carpet bombing from Pakistan instead of Afghanistan if Islamabad was not on their side.

Pakistan could not dare to say ‘no’ then. How can it resist the pressure now even when the rank and file of the army has been permitted to retaliate without awaiting orders from the command? It may sound harsh but the Pakistani soldiers have got used to the bullying of US soldiers after having participated in joint operations which are still continuing. True, Pakistan has

played tough after the killing of soldiers and has even got the American drone base vacated. But it is bowing to the enraged public opinion in Pakistan. I am still not sure how long Pakistan Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kyani would stay intractable. The armed forces in Pakistan over the years have become so inured to America’s arms as well as aid that a U-turn does not look plausible. Some rationalization has already started taking place. A limited cooperation is visible on the ground. A NATO commander has said the tragic incident has not disrupted their operation or their cooperation with Pakistan. America’s annoyance does not suit Islamabad in anyway because China cannot fill the vacuum, nor can India help because relations between the two are nowhere at the stage where New Delhi would assist.

Despite the regret over the killings, I do not see Washington behaving differently. It is fighting a war against Taliban who have their headquarters in Pakistan and the US or the NATO forces will continue to chastise them, with Islamabad’s cooperation if possible or without it if necessary. I do not see the Drone attacks stopping or the supply line to American and NATO forces snapping because the two may use the Afghanistan territory for drones and the old Soviet republics for supply. The target is Taliban, the fundamentalists, who America sees mixed up with certain sections of the army. Nonetheless, both sides realize that they face a situation which they

cannot handle singly but cannot go back to the equation which existed before the killing of soldiers. Still both America and Pakistan may go to the brink—they have done so many a times before—but will not jump. Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has already said that Pakistan wants to reconstruct its relations with the US which in turn has welcomed the statement.

The problem that confronts the world is the withdrawal of 130,000 troops of America and those of NATO in 2014. The Conference at Bonn for a long term international commitment to Afghanistan should have been more categorical. The absence of Pakistan has been like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. No commitment adds up to much if Islamabad is not a signatory. In fact, it may well be negotiating with Taliban more seriously than before. It does not mind if they reoccupy Afghanistan because when they temporarily did, Islamabad was quick to

recognize their government. This is when the absence of normalcy between India and Pakistan is felt all the more. Both could have asked foreign troops to withdraw as quickly as possible because they have only aggravated the situation. But then the problem is that Pakistan does not want India in Afghanistan and considers its presence injurious to its interests.

On the other hand, New Delhi has signed an agreement to be a 'strategic partner' of Kabul. It cannot leave Afghanistan alone, unaided, if and when Taliban begin to move into the country after America's withdrawal. Both Delhi and Islamabad can be on the same page if Pakistan accepts the sovereignty and independence

of Afghanistan without seeking a strategic depth. Therefore, the American interference even after 2014 cannot be ruled out. Willy-nilly, the Pakistan army, already overstretched, has to find a common ground with India to eliminate at least such Taliban, the terrorists, who are making the life in the region hell.

The Pakistan army is already having a hard time in sorting out what is called, the Memogate. President Asif Zardari, Army Chief Kyani and ISI head Lt. General Ahmed Shuja Pasha have been named respondents in a petition filed by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The petition is based on an unsigned memo by the then Pakistan's envoy to the US, Hussain Haqqani, to the American military command to rescue the Zardari government from the army and the ISI responsible for dealing with Taliban. The army saw to it that Haqqani would resign and he did.

The problem is bigger than Haqqani's exit. It is how to make Washington repose its faith once again in the Zardari government which America sees completely under the Pakistan army. Pakistan Foreign Minister has herself admitted in public that the Army is stronger than the elected government. I have no doubt that Haqqani's successor, Sherry Rehman, has the ability and finesse to reestablish the rapport with Washington and also convince it that the elected government cannot be pushed away by the army. She is also Islamabad's trump card for good relations with India where she is trusted.

In fact, this is the time when the Zardari government should take the initiative to spread goodwill in the

region. Bangladesh is celebrating its 40th independence anniversary. Although it means the liberation from West Pakistan it also means that Dhaka has not allowed itself to be pawn in the region's chessboard.

The Zardari government can go down in history if it helps the subcontinent to shed hatred and work for the betterment of the poor who are concentrated in the region. But first thing first: Islamabad should offer apology to Bangladesh and start a chapter of friendship.

By doing so, the Zardari government will be strengthening itself against any interference from the army.

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*(Continued from Page 2)*

reject it if it was found to be anti-people. As it is, those sections of public opinion as have supported the measure have every right to feel that their interests have not been adequately reflected or safeguarded in the debate on the rights and wrongs of the FDI retail.

A precedent has been set by the government's retreat. The government brought no glory to itself by trying to make the FDR retail a fait accompli in the hope that the UPA coalition would see the measure through by virtue of its majority in parliament. Two coalition partners, the DMK, and the Trinamool Congress let the Congress party down by refusing co-operation. The Congress tried to persuade them to fall in line but the move did not work. The government had to beat a retreat. One may be tempted to say that coalition politics turned into blackmail politics. Not a happy development for any party or group of parties that hold power at the Centre.

# The Balance sheet of Partition after 60 Years : Pakistan

Syed Shahabuddin

Though Iqbal had limited his concept of a Muslim homeland in the Sub-continent to the NW only, Partition was conceived in 1940 for the benefit of the Muslim majority living in the northwest as well as the east of the Sub-continent. The Pakistan Resolution, adopted by the Muslim league in March 1940, spoke in terms of 'Muslim majority areas' in these two regions and the creation of Muslim League states therein. The Resolution conceived that the religious minorities living on the two sides of the border, under a reciprocal arrangement, shall be able to safeguard the interest, of Muslims in multi-community India. But Pakistan Movement did receive enthusiastic support from the Muslims living in the Muslim minority provinces of British India, particularly, in the north. It is generally conceded that it was the near unanimous support of the Muslims in Muslim minority provinces in the election of 1945-46 which created the base for the Muslim League to claim the 'sole' leadership of all the Muslims of India to negotiate on equal terms with the British government as well as the Indian National Congress for determining the future set-up.

The prevalent view in Pakistan is that the Muslims of the minority provinces were expected to sacrifice themselves for benefit of the Muslims in Pakistan and for the glory of Islam, as they in fact did.

The problem is why did the Muslims of minority provinces sign a blank cheque in favour of

Pakistan, shouted slogans and voted enthusiastically in its favour but never questioned the leadership of the Muslim League and the Pakistan Movement on their status after the country was divided. They behaved like dumb, driven cattle.

They never asked any question and never received any answer. In retrospect, this lack of thinking appears to be not only short sighted but almost suicidal. Immediately after Partition, there was almost total migration of non-Muslims from West Pakistan to India, even from East Pakistan, although Hindus continue to form some 15 percent of the population in the then East Pakistan. The theory of reciprocity thus proved to be hollow and ineffective and useless before it could be put to a test, in protecting the interests of the Muslims of India, even if the rulers of Pakistan so wanted. In any case, India and Pakistan had emerged as independent sovereign nations and under international law and as members of the UNO they were both expected to respect human rights of the minorities but they were precluded from interference in the internal affairs of the other state. This explains why the Liaquat Ali Khan-Jawahar Nehru pact of 1950 which was signed in the wake of communal disturbances in East Pakistan remained a dead letter. Indeed, the successor state, namely Bangladesh, has never invoked it in relation to the Muslims of India.

Before Partition there were some hints on exchange of population but

this was an absolutely impracticable proposition considering the lack of balance between the huge number of Muslims in India and the relatively small population of non-Muslims in Pakistan. No doubt after the barbaric exchanges in the west, for some time there was relative freedom of movement between the two countries and over the next 10 years saw a few hundred thousand Muslims crossing the border, largely into East Pakistan.

Neither the Muslim League nor the Congress had ever formally proposed any exchange of population as a concomitant of the Partition. All India leadership, including Nehru and Patel, were opposed to it as India was ideologically committed to build a secular state, and the Muslims Pakistan never raised the issue because it was not in a position to absorb them and would have simply collapsed had India physically forced the Muslims out in Pakistan.

There is a view that by proposing to partition Punjab and then Bengal and Assam on the basis of religion and contiguity, the Congress leadership directly contributed to the partition of community.

Another Muslim theory stipulated that Muslim concentration areas in the north, in Punjab, UP or Bihar could form a corridor between East and West Pakistan. It was further extended to include the Hyderabad state which was ruled by Nizam who aspired to independence. All these were illusions. A look at the map will



show that the few pockets of Muslim concentration in the north namely Mewat or Rohilkhand or Purnea were far apart from each other and could not bridge the geographical gap between and there was no reason for India to be generous. Also anyone with a sense of history should have known that the Nizam could not rule for ever, in the age of democracy, on his people who were 90 percent non-Muslims.

Partition was thus ill-conceived and became a bad bargain for the Muslims in the Muslim minority provinces of British India. It turned out to be a tragedy. It also continues to cast an ominous shadow over their future because the anti-Muslim forces in India without any rhyme or reason, continue to consider Muslims as responsible for the creation of Pakistan and look upon them as Pakistanis or Pakistani sympathizers and in any situation of conflict between the two states, they are suspected.

In his negotiations with the Congress leadership or the British Government, Jinnah used the terms 'Muslim India' and 'homeland of the Muslims of India'. Particularly, after the Resolution adopted by the Muslim League National Council at its last meeting held in Delhi in 1946 which gave final touch to Pakistan Resolution since 1940. Jinnah spoke of Muslim people as distinct from the Hindus and other non-Muslims living in the Sub-continent but he deliberately ignored the wide variation of language, culture and race as well as social organization and economic status among Muslims living in various parts of the Sub-continent. He loudly proclaimed the concept of Muslim India but no one asked him to define the term Muslim India and the concept of homeland and clarify as to whether it meant

the Muslims living in the majority provinces or included also those who lived in the minority provinces. In a global sense, he was totally out of touch with reality. After the birth of the Pakistan, by virtue of numbers Pakistan aspired to lead the Muslim world. The pretension by the Pakistan leadership was rejected forthrightly and out of hand by all important Muslim countries, including Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Muslims who live across international frontiers do not constitute one nation in the political sense. The only achievement of the Pakistan Movement was to carve another territorial state with a Muslim majority out of the Sub-continent. International law totally debunks and contradicts the so-called 'ideology' of Pakistan. The ideological foundations for Pakistan were so weak that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad predicted its break up between east and west within 25 years of its formation.

In some statements after Pakistan was born Jinnah went on to describe Muslims in India as 'our minorities' but he never envisaged publicly that the Muslims who would continue to live in India after Partition would be in any legal sense Pakistan citizens living in India with as much right of citizenship over Pakistan as the Pakistan-born and living there. Realistically Jinnah even if he were to acknowledge the role of Muslim India in the making of Pakistan, he could not open the doors of Pakistan, except to the selected segments of the Pakistan Movement.

In the final analysis, as conceived by Iqbal, Pakistan was to be a political laboratory for experimenting with an Islamic polity in the modern world or the evolution of Muslim jurisprudence to come to term with modern life.

It is not surprising that after 60 years Pakistan has not been able to develop a sense of common nationhood, fragmented as it is among five or six different ethnic groups neither did Pakistan even achieve an Islamic personality because of sectarian violence or build up a viable system of Islamic laws. Even in the Malakand Division of FATA including the Swat, the enforcement of Shariat is based on the British concession in the 1930s to the tribals - the civil and criminal laws that operated in the Sub-continent did not apply to the tribal region.

In Pakistan itself most of the laws now in force are the same as those in India. Not only from the legal point of view but even culturally and, to the extent that Urdu is the language of the elite in Pakistan, linguistically Pakistan is much closer to India than to any part of the Muslim world.

What is most important, if 150 million Muslims continue to be equal citizens of India, occasional violence and endemic discrimination notwithstanding the question is beginning to be asked in Pakistan about the rationale for the division of the Sub-continent.

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## Surendra Mohan Remembered

The renowned socialist leader, writer and thinker, the Late Surendra Mohan was fondly remembered on the occasion of his 86th birth anniversary at a meeting in New Delhi December 4. Surendra Mohan had passed away last year on December 17th in his sleep. He was the editor of Janata Weekly, and founder-national convener of the Socialist Front. A true Gandhian in practice, he was dedicated to the cause of common man.

The meeting was organized by Surendra Mohan Memorial Socialist Foundation and presided over by the senior socialist leader, Prof. Vinod Prasad Singh. A large number of his colleagues, friends and a group of youths representing Yusuf Meherally Yuva Biradari from 17 states attended the function. Notable among them were Justice Rajinder Sachar, Doctor Mastram Kapoor, Manju Mohan, Human rights activist N D Pancholi, Com. Radheyshyam, Prof. Shyamdudd Paliwal Ex-MLA from UP, Prof. Rajkumar Jain, Prof. Harish Khanna, Prof. Ajeet Jha, Prof. Prem Singh of Delhi University and General Secretary of the Socialist Party, Doctor Sunilam and Guddi of Yusuf Meherally Yuva Biradari.

Speakers after speakers paid rich tributes to Surendra Mohan and hailed him a true socialist. Justice Rajinder Sachar, while remembering Surendra Mohan said that it was more than a sixty years of friendship with him. Both of them had worked together in Punjab Socialist Party soon after the formation of Socialist Party in 1948. Justice Sachar said that Surendra Mohan was an 'encyclopedia' of socialist movement and his greatest contribution was to help the human rights movement and trade union

Surendra Mohan was a member of the Rajya Sabha from 1978 to 1984. He was also the Chairman of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission 1990-91. As a colleague remembered him, "In this day and age of scams, he stood out like a shining beacon."

Surendra Mohan was imprisoned during the Emergency in 1975. When the Morarji Desai-led Janata Party came to power soon after, he declined the office of a union minister, even though he played a key role behind-the-scenes and was the spokesperson of the party in 1977.

Born in Ambala, Surendra Mohan had been a school teacher, a college lecturer, a trade union leader, an environmental activist, a political columnist, human rights and civil liberty activist, and a political functionary. He lent himself to several movements, including the one in recent times against mega dams. Apart from being the editor of Janata, he was a regular contributor to Mainstream and other publications.

Surendra Mohan was the president of the Rammanohar Lohia Birth Centenary Programme Committee, 2009-2010. His associates used to describe him as a "directory of socialists" in India as well as abroad. He had close links with socialists in Nepal and other countries, and shared a personal rapport with Gandhians, the Left parties, civil society movements and intellectuals. Till the end, he struggled for the deprived and the downtrodden. He made it a point to participate in all programmes, big and small, for the causes he believed in.

movement. He appealed to all those who believed in socialist movement to unite against the current challenges facing the country. He also called socialists to launch a movement against foreign direct investment in retail.

Dr Mastram Kapoor remembered Surendra Mohan as a true socialist in spirit and action and a living history of socialist movement. He said that today Indian politics had become by-polar led by either the Congress party or by the BJP. He appealed all the socialists of the country to unite and establish a new alternative of progressive forces to establish socialism in the real sense.

Prof. Rajkumar Jain said that Surendra Mohan was the modern link to the old socialist movement. His thoughts and writings were a great influence on the new generation. Not only in words, he was a socialist in action and deed. He created no personal wealth and lived a simple life full of sacrifices. He looked like a common man, but when he rose to speak, he stood out as an extraordinary person.

Dr Prem Singh said that Surendra Mohan was a perfect example for simple living and high thinking and was very unassuming and close to grassroot workers. He suggested that Surendra Mohan's writings should be published in book form and a lecture should be organised in his memory annually.

The main organizer of the function Dr Sunilam, while thanking the guests, endorsed the suggestion to organize a Surendra Mohan Memorial lecture annually and urged the friends of Surendra Mohan to establish a trust in his memory to

help fulfill his dreams and to work towards establishing a just society.

Delivering the presidential speech

Prof Vinod Prasad Singh described Surendra Mohan a guardian of socialist fraternity who was always eager to help everybody be it

politically, socially or at personal level.

–Qurban Ali

## FDI and Farmers

Shri Deepak Parekh, Chairman, HDFC, in a statement on 3rd December, labeled the opposition to FDI in retail as false drama and exhorted fellow enterprisers to come out in support of that proposal of the Central Government. What is interesting, or rather puzzling, is his claim that FDI in retail will be beneficial to farmers and small and medium manufacturers. It is stated that the former would offer attractive prices to the agricultural produce and would also lift the merchandise from farm sites after making full payments to farmers.

It is difficult to take this assurance at its face value because the experience of the last two centuries tells a different story. Wholesale traders and manufacturers had done their best to lower the prices of cotton, jute, groundnut, etc. at the time of the harvest right from the middle of 19th century till today. It was because of this sad experience that Socialist Party and other progressive elements in the country had to demand state intervention. Since sixth decade of the 20th century, the Central and some of the State Governments started declaring minimum support prices (MSP) for main crops and step in the market to make purchases at those prices because the traders were offering prices lower than those MSPs. Monopoly purchase of cotton by the cooperative marketing federation and purchases of sugarcane by farmers' cooperative sugar mills have gone a long way in enabling the farmers to get better prices and regular payment of bills. It has been the experience of many farmers in

A.P., Maharashtra, U.P. etc., that the traders, who had made purchases at high prices had defaulted in making payment to farmers. How can the farmers believe that the FDI shops would behave decently? Would their motive be philanthropy and not maximization of profits?

I wonder whether Shri Parekh has learnt that though it is stipulated that the FDI shops will have to make at

least 30 percent of their purchases from medium and small industries, not only in India, but from anywhere in the world because that is the stipulation of WTO.

Enterprisers in India may come out in support of FDI in retail but should not make false claims and deceive the people. They should also explain whether the existing retail outlets in large cities are not able to cater to the needs and demands of the customers.

–Pannalal Surana

## Manohar Kotwal

The veteran trade union leader Bhai Manohar Kotwal expired on 29th November, 2011 at 3.30 a.m. at a Hospital at Juhu, Mumbai. At the time of his death he was 96 years old.

Bhai Kotwal, as a student, joined the freedom struggle and formed 'Loksena', of which he was the Secretary. In Dharavi, the biggest slum in Asia, he organized workers who were engaged in taking out the skin of the dead animals and started his trade union career. Thereafter he organized Mithagar workers and BPT Railwaymen's Union of which he was General Secretary. He came into contact with leaders of port and dock workers. Following the advice given by N.M. Joshi, he joined the Transport and Dock Workers Union as full time office-bearer and remained one of its leaders till his death.

Shri Kotwal organized Mathadi workers and contract workers all over Maharashtra. He was one of the founders of Hind Mazdoor Sabha in 1948, which is truly independent and free trade union movement in the country and was the General Secretary of the HMS for more than seven years.

Shri Yashwantrao Chavan, the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra consulted Shri Manohar Kotwal for enactment of Mathadi Workers Act and it will not be exaggeration to say that he was the father of the concept of Mathadi Workers Act and Schemes therein. He was also Member of First National Labour Commission and Second National Labour Commission.

Shri Kotwal was the Chairman of Dockers Section, Asia/Pacific Region of International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), London. At the time of his death Manohar Kotwal was the Senior Vice-President of Transport & Dock Workers' Union, Mumbai.

–T & D W Union

## People's Struggle in Koodankulam

- The people of 32 villages surrounding Koodankulam under the name of People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) are protesting the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) and started their agitation on August 16, 2011 and have been sitting on relay fasting since September 11, 2011.
  - This struggle is a collective of the communities of the districts of Thirunelveli, Kanyakumari and Tuticorin; this is supported by the people of Tamilnadu. The various peoples' movements of Tamilnadu have been showing their solidarity by different agitations and demonstrations.
  - In the wake of growing resentment and anger of the people of Tamilnadu against the proposed nuclear plant, the State Government passed a resolution on September 23, 2011 to halt the works of Koodankulam nuclear plant in support of the united voices of the Fishing community, the Nadar community, the Dalit community, the Muslim community and all other communities of the southern half of Tamil Nadu. The Struggle Committee met the Honorable Prime Minister to submit their demands.
  - Former President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam claims KKNPP is 100% safe, but nuclear accident liability does not cover the responsibility of 100%. Further no one on earth can ever guarantee that there would never be any human or mechanical failure or natural calamity like earthquake, tsunami leading to disastrous consequences relating to nuclear plants.
  - The Expert Committee of 15 members appointed by government did not answer the crucial questions of people on Environmental Assessment Report, Seismology Reports, Earth and Soil Report, Plants construction Quality, Equipments and Machinery Quality, Nuclear Waste Management.
  - The Department of Atomic Energy and the KKNPP project have not stopped their work but announced the scheduled date of commercial operation of first plant in March, 2012 the second plant in December, 2012. These announcements, ignoring the concern and voice of the people, have further angered them and added momentum to their struggle.
  - The struggle of people is not an emotional one or not based on any unscientific fears but the culmination of well established facts supplied by the Pro-life scientists, environmentalists and International awareness about Nuclear Plants.
  - The Nuclear Energy is not merely an issue of economy and development but a threat to the human existence and environment. Studies have shown that even nuclear reactors functioning in normal course are associated with higher risks of cancer and unexplained deaths. Fukushima disaster of Japan has shown that risks of nuclear power far outweigh any benefits claimed by pro-nuclear lobby. The struggle of the people of Koodankulam is not an isolated issue of a remote corner of India but a burning issue of our nation which needs immediate attention and concern.
  - The police have registered 85 false cases against the leaders of this movement and village people under various penal laws. There is disturbing news published in the 'Express' dated 22nd Nov, 2011 that Police has registered cases against 3015 fishermen, including the leader Sp. Udaykumar, under section 121 i.e. for 'Waging of War against the State' and section 124-A i.e. 'Sedition' under Indian Penal Code besides under other penal laws for organizing their peaceful protests with black flags hoisted on their boats on the sea near the plant on 21st November, 2011 which in fact is 'World Fisheries Day' and fishermen decided to observe the same as Black Day as nuclear plant constitutes serious threat to marine wealth.
  - Dr. Pugazhenth, a gold medalist medical doctor, who has experience as a researcher into the medical effects of radiation and who has been educating and treating people around Kalpakkam area against such health hazards, was called by the local police on 1st December, 2011 and threatened that if he did not stop his work, he might be booked under the National Security Act or might be done away in a police encounter.
- Koodankulam Nuclear Plant is a Violation of Human Rights

- There are many genuine and scientific reasons to oppose the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant but the foremost reason for the people's struggle is that Koodankulam Nuclear Project is a bundle of gross violations of the rules and regulation set by AERB (Atomic Energy Regulatory Board).
- The opinion of people should be assessed before planning of any nuclear plants but in Koodankulam there was no any Public Hearing conducted by the government.
- There is a norm to share the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Site Evaluation Study and Safety Analysis Report with the people, but these reports were not shared with the people of Koodankulam since the commencement of the project.
- The site selected for the nuclear project should not be located in the earth quake prone area but there happened 3 minor tremors in Koodankulam area since 2003.
- The consequences of any Nuclear Plants should not create any damage to the resources of people's life but the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant will damage the coastal ecosystem and destroy the species of fishes and marine organisms by its radioactive water waste. It will destroy the life source of the fisher folk of this area. Atomic Scientists of India do not have alternative to this destructive process. And the emission of radioactive particles of iodine and cesium will create cancer and deformations of body by genetic mutation to the people of this area.
- The regulation says that there should not be any habitations within the radius of 1.6 km around plant but in Koodankulam the habitation begins within the radius of .5 km. The norm says that the population of the area within the radius of 3 km should not exceed 5000 but the population around Koodankulam is above 33,000.
- The rule says that to facilitate the evacuation process during nuclear accidents the population within the radius of 30 km around the plant should be lesser than 1, 00,000 but the population of the area around Koodankulam is above 30, 00,000. According to the AERB the plant should not be located near any city or tourist places but very near to Koodankulam there are the town named Nagarcoil and a place of religious pilgrimage named Kanyakumari and the world famous Vivekananda Kendra.
- The government of India had announced the construction of 2 plants in the initial stage of the project but there is one more announcement about the construction of 4 more plants with US technology. The Ministry of Environment did not issue the approval to these new plants under norms of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ); hence it is evident that the 2 ongoing plants are also being constructed in violation of CRZ. The new Nuclear Liability Bill exempts the nuclear energy corporate and the operators from the liability of nuclear plant accidents which proves that the lives and livelihood of people are completely ignored by the Government of India in the name of development.

We are alarmed by the aforesaid undemocratic attitude and repressive mood of the State authorities in dealing with peaceful protests of the people who are genuinely concerned about their future, livelihood and environment. We appeal to the people of India to show their solidarity and support to this struggle and mobilize the democratic forces to pressure our state to deal this issue with humane approach and protect the life, livelihood and environment.

#### **Demands :**

- Central Government should immediately shut down the KKNPP and save life and livelihood of people.
- State should immediately withdraw all false cases against struggle organizers and village people lodged under various penal laws.
- Governments should plan to utilize the natural resources like sun, air and water of India to generate energy

(Statement issued in the Press Conference at Press Club, New Delhi on 5th December, 2011 and addressed by Justice Rajinder Sachhar (Retd.), former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, Mr. Vaiko, General Secretary, M.D.M.K. and Mr. R. Sreedhar, Chairperson, Mines, Minerals & People and formerly employed in the Dept. of Atomic Energy, Govt. of India.)

– **N.D.Pancholi, Convener,**  
**Malathi Maithri, Secretary**  
**Radhika Krishnan, Secretary**  
**Friends of Koodankulam**  
**Anti-Nuclear Movement**

# Worlds Apart

**Harsh Mander**

A red brick wall encloses the sprawling, shaded campus of India's finest business school, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. On the pavement just on the other side of this wall live a large cluster of homeless families — rag-pickers, construction workers and beggars. One of my students, Manish Verma, remarks on the irony that 'a mere 100 metres separate the lives of those who wage a battle with hunger each day, and those who wage a battle for securing a high-paying job out of the best business school in India'. The chasm that separates life on the two sides of this brick wall seems the distance between two planets, separated by light years.

I accepted an invitation three years ago to teach a semester course every year on poverty and governance to the MBA students in this business school. The challenge of speaking about hunger, homelessness, want and discrimination to a classroom of some of the brightest achievers in the country — who, within months of my course, would be recruited to jobs which would easily place them in the top one per cent income bracket in the country — was daunting. But I found my students intelligent, engaged and caring, as young people anywhere are.

Instead of an examination at the end of the course, I asked my students every year to each find one impoverished person, in Ahmedabad or elsewhere, and try to learn about their lives, write their stories, and share these with their classmates. Their first reaction was usually one of understandable panic: how could

they cross distances imposed by history, class, power, language and so much else; they were convinced that these were insurmountable. I assured them that what was required was no more than one human being reaching out to another, and if they could approach them with true respect and empathy, the people they were trying to learn from would, in all probability, reciprocate.

For each hesitant young woman and man in my classroom, this became a personal adventure of reaching out and beyond, into places of the heart and mind they had never explored. Each came back to recount the wonder of unsuspected lives, of the struggles, dreams, triumphs and the spirit behind every humble, begrimed face. The words of student Pooja Jayaraman, after her moving encounter with Jyoti, a single, widowed construction worker on the new IIM campus, echoed in many student accounts: 'As I walked away that day I asked myself if I had been in the same situation, would I have shown as much courage as she did?' They learnt not pity but respect. Many also were astonished by how hospitable and welcoming these dispossessed persons were to the students who visited them.

At the time the students entered my classroom, they had spent nearly two years living in the IIM campus. On the pavements outside the campus, interspersed between the homeless residents — what one student aptly called homeless homes — are innumerable stalls selling street food, cigarettes, DVDs, magazines, newspapers. It is here that the students gather long hours

most evenings, to 'chill and hang out'. They would have passed their homeless neighbours literally several hundred times these two years. But they never before thought of them as people with worthy stories.

A homeless rag-picker Anand Bhai lives with his family on the pavement adjacent to the walls of IIM Ahmedabad. He shows Manish Verma his part of the footpath, which houses about 50 such families of rag-pickers, and says, 'Whatever you see within the enclosure of this part of the footpath is mine'. Manish describes what he sees on those 10 feet of pavement, which 'houses his family, a wooden cart used for collecting scrap, four steel utensils, a couple of jute bags stitched together and a small tent. That is all Anand Bhai can claim to own under the sun'.

A typical day in his life 'consists of waking up every morning at 6 a.m. and leaving with his fellow rag pickers for a day of work that includes picking up bits of paper, plastic bags, empty mineral water bottles and pretty much anything that can be exchanged for money'. His children are uneducated and beg for money during the day, typically collecting about Rs. 10 or 20 each after a day's hard work. Describing the uncertainty of what the family can eat at the end of each day, Manish uses a metaphor for hunger which only a business student could: 'The food itself is as unpredictable as the movements of the BSE Sensex. If the day goes well and Anand Bhai is able to pocket a hundred rupee note, he comes to the part of the footpath he calls home with a piece

of chicken, a few tomatoes, onions and coriander to relish what he calls a grand feast. On gloomy days when the earnings are restricted to about fifty rupees, the dinner consists of boiled potatoes and onions with chappatis'.

Before parting, his unusual visitor asks him one last question: 'What are your ambitions for your children; what do you want them to be when they grow up?' He replies: 'They are the children of a rag picker and will become rag pickers'.

A similar matter-of-fact absence of hope marks the life of another homeless rag-picker, Abhishek Gopal and Sougata Basu discover that he was born on the streets of Ahmedabad, and lived all 30 years of his life on the same stretch of road. Sanjay Bhai's family consists of his mother, his wife and two children, a boy and a girl. He sets out with his entire family early every morning with a hired wooden cart to collect rags, separating them into different categories like iron, bottles, glass and so on, and selling them to a nearby dealer in exchange for money. He too believes that nothing will change in their lives, and his son will grow up to be a rag-picker like him.

Megha Jain evocatively describes the 'home' of another homeless rag-picker. 'On the pavement, Kanti has carved out a small space that he calls home. They have a thin cotton mattress and a couple of old blankets. Some utensils and a large shiny radio-cum-cassette player make up the rest of his movable possessions. The home is defined by a tiny earthen chullah on the edge of the road and a string hung along the wall with some clothes on it. In the mornings they defecate in the open

*(Continued on Page 15)*

## Once land acquisition picks up...

*P. V. Rajagopal is coordinator of Ekta Parishad which features a nationwide network of people's movements - including Gandhian struggles for protecting the land and livelihoods of the rural poor. After leading peaceful padyatras of tribal and rural marginalized groups, Rajagopal was recently invited by the government to join discussions on land reforms. Rajagopal spoke with **Bharat Dogra** about the rural landless becoming uprooted - and social activists raising concerns feeling threatened:*

*What is your position on the new land acquisition and rehabilitation legislation being formulated by the government?*

This policy should be fair and just to farmers, but in addition, we want to bring in the perspective of the landless poor people which has been neglected for far too long. The government had earlier accepted a policy of distribution of farmlands to the landless poor wherever feasible. But once land acquisition picks up and influential outsiders come in, the claims of the landless poor may be forgotten.

So we feel strongly that in this entire debate, the viewpoint of the poorest landless people should be brought in and their interests protected.

*How do you propose to achieve this?*

One specific proposal we have is for a minimum holding law being enacted. This means that all landless people of a village should receive not just homestead land but, in addition, a small plot of additional land as a base for sustainable livelihoods.

The size can vary depending on the location and availability of land...but the basic issue is some form of a livelihood base should be available to them in villages. This will ensure some economic security

and social dignity to the poorest households.

The need for such a minimum landholding law was always there, but this has increased even more now as otherwise the rural landless will be uprooted very badly.

*What has been your experience with the Forest Rights Act?*

There are several problems which need to be sorted out, but even within the existing limitations in our work area, several thousand families have clearly benefited. Whenever the potential beneficiaries are well-organized and articulate their concerns, the results are better...

But again, there is growing concern that social activists committed to peaceful forms of resistance are being victimized and jailed. Some time ago, Sunilam, a social activist and former MLA, was attacked brutally in Madhya Pradesh.

Then Ramesh Aggarwal, a peaceful campaigner for Adivasi rights and environmental protection in Chhattisgarh, was jailed along with another activist, Harihar Patel. Even Ekta Parishad feels increasingly threatened in a state like Chhattisgarh where there is a massive onslaught on the natural resource base of the Adivasis.

*(Continued on Page 12)*

## Rajya Sabha Members

The Register of Interest was mandated for all Rajya Sabha MPs by the ethics committee in 2005 and has been made available for the first time as a result of RTI.

1. Based on the declarations of Register of Member's Interest made by 232 MPs of Rajya Sabha, 140 MPs have declared on the form that they have no business/financial interest whatsoever in any of the mentioned heads and 92 MPs have declared that they have financial interest in the mentioned heads.

### 2. Remunerative Directorship

28 MPs have declared that they have some financial interest in the form of Remunerative Directorship of a company and 204 MPs have declared that they have no financial interest under this head.

The highest amount received from Remunerative Directorship has been declared by Vijay Mallya (IND, Karnataka)(Rs 39.45 crore) followed by Naresh Gujral (SAD, Punjab) (Rs. 4.54 crore) and Vijay Darda (INC, Maharashtra)(Rs. 4.54 crore).

The maximum number of directorships have been declared by Vijay Mallya (IND, Karnataka) (19) followed by Y.P. Trivedi (NCP, Maharashtra)(11) and Naresh Gujral (SAD, Punjab)(4).

### 3. Shareholding of controlling nature

33 MPs have declared that they have financial interest in the form of Shareholding of controlling nature and 199 MPs have declared that they have no financial interest under this head.

The highest number of shareholdings in companies

have been declared by Anil Lad (INC, Karnataka)(27 companies) followed by Vijay Darda (INC, Maharashtra)(21 companies) and Vijay Mallya (IND, Karnataka)(12 companies).

### 4. Regular Remunerated Activity

28 MPs have declared that they have financial interest in the form of Regular Remunerated Activity and 204 MPs have no declared financial interest under this head.

The highest amount received from Regular Remunerated Activity has been declared by Shobhana Bhartia (Nominated)(Rs 2.67 crore) followed by Vijay Mallya (IND, Karnataka)(Rs 1.85 crore) and Satyanarayana Chowdry (TDP, AP) (Rs 1.68 crore).

### 5. Paid Consultancy

7 MPs have declared that they have financial interest in the form of Paid Consultancy and 224 MPs have no declared financial interest under this head.

The highest amount received from Paid Consultancy has been declared by Parimal Nathwani (Rs 1.29 crore) followed by Amar Singh (Rs 54 lac) and Ravi Shankar Prasad (Rs 37.73 lac).

### 6. Professional Engagement

43 MPs have declared that they have financial interest in the form of Paid Consultancy and 189 MPs have no declared financial interest under this head.

The highest amount received from Professional Engagements has been declared by Abhishek Manu Singhvi (INC, Rajasthan)(Rs 50 crore) followed by Arun Jaitley (BJP, Gujarat) (Rs 10 crore) and Ram

Jethmalani (BJP, Rajasthan)(Rs 8.41 crore).

### 7. No declaration of pecuniary interest

A total of 140 MPs out of the total 232 MPs have declared that they have no pecuniary interest.

The top 3 MPs who have high assets with no declaration of pecuniary interest are Subbarami Reddy (INC, AP)(Rs 258.25 crore) followed by Karan Singh (INC, Delhi)(Rs 57.89 crore) and Rajkumar Dhoot (SS, Maharashtra) (Rs 29.53 crore).

–ADR

*(Continued from Page 11)*

*What's been your experience of a lifetime of peaceful struggles for the rights of the poor?*

I feel strongly that the government needs to be more committed to the rights of the poor, and ensuring that peaceful activists are able to fulfill their important democratic role of mobilizing the poor and landless.

The government should take a close and honest look at how many of its own laws for the poor remain unimplemented or poorly implemented - for example, how poorly Panchayat Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas has been implemented. How many government promises on land reforms have been fulfilled? My earnest appeal to the government - don't forget the poorest and the landless.

Also, fertile farmland and forests are to be protected as the base of sustainable livelihoods – and the democratic rights of those struggling for such objectives should be respected.



# Why the Nuclear Liability Rules need to be modified

**A.Gopalakrishnan**

Both the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, and the associated Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Rules, 2011, have been gazetted. The provisions of the Act came into force on November 11, 2011, but the rules can still be contested in Parliament within 30 days of their introduction.

During the final discussions on the India-US Nuclear Deal, the prime minister wanted to assure the governments of the US, France and Russia, as well as their nuclear corporate lobbies, that India shall provide a liability-free regime for them to do nuclear commerce with India. It was for this reason that the PM agreed in 2008 itself to their demand that India shall take steps to adhere to the Convention on Supplementary Compensation, which will make it mandatory for India to enact a national nuclear liability law that will channel liability for damages from a nuclear accident completely to the operator, namely, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited. This is the backdrop in which the government prepared and introduced the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill in Parliament in mid-2010.

## **Nuclear Liability Act**

Accordingly, the Bill that the government introduced in Parliament capped the liability on the Indian operator at a very low level, and did not include any provision for channeling even part of the damage liability to the suppliers. After some of us gave extensive testimonies to the parliamentary committee examining the Bill and after the opposition had heated debates on

the floor of the House, a final Act was passed with a slightly higher operator liability of Rs1,500 crore for nuclear power reactors and, more importantly, included clauses 17(b) and 46 that could enable the seeking of damage compensation from the suppliers.

To claim recourse under 17(b), the operator has to prove that the incident occurred because the supplied equipment or material had 'patent or latent defects or the services provided were sub-standard.' But, under Section 46, a victim of a nuclear accident could bring a liability claim against the operator in courts under Tort Law and include the supplier also as co-defendant. In this case, the plaintiffs have to merely prove that the product or service caused the harm, but do not have to prove exactly how the product or service was deficient or that the supplier was negligent. The damages to be awarded in such cases are not specifically capped under law, and these will be decided by the court, based on circumstances.

## **Attempt to Dilute the Act**

Soon after the Nuclear Liability Act was passed, the western governments and the nuclear business lobbies made it clear that India has failed to deliver the kind of liability regime the PM promised. To partially assuage these feelings, the PM hastened to have India sign the CSC as promised to the US government in September 2008 and, in his recent meeting with President Barack Obama in Bali, confirmed that India will soon ratify the CSC as well. But, even after ratification of the CSC, India's eventual entry

into the CSC will be held up because our National Liability Law does not conform to the mandatory stipulations in the CSC Annex, since it contains Clauses 17(b) and 46.

Having failed to enact a Liability Act that could please the foreign governments and their corporate lobbies, the PM and the government are under great pressure to amend the Act. However, the government knows it is impossible to approach the Parliament for an amendment of the Liability Act in the prevailing atmosphere of scams and mismanagement by the government and its low credibility. Under the circumstances, as a last resort, the government is attempting to dilute Parliament's legislative intent in enacting this Act, by cleverly manipulating the rules under this Act. At first glance, the rules appear to be consistent with the Act, in that the Clauses 17(b) and 46, which were offensive to foreign governments and suppliers, have not been directly tampered with in any way. But the government's sleight of hand can be seen if one carefully analyses the contents of Chapter V of the rules, which explains the operator's Right of Recourse under Clause 17(a) of the Act.

## **Amount of Supplier's Liability**

First, Rule 24(1) states: 'A contract referred to in clause (a) of Section 17 of the Act shall include a provision for right of recourse for not less than the extent of the operator's liability under Section 6(2) of the Act, or the value of the contract itself, whichever is less.' Further, it is clarified, under Explanation-2, that an operator's claim under this rule

shall in no case exceed the actual amount of compensation paid by him up to the date of filing such claim.

The above rule bounds the amount of compensation which the operator can seek from the supplier through right of recourse under Clause 17(a) of the Act. Since the maximum liability of the operator is Rs1,500 crore as per the Act, Rule 24(1) states that the right of recourse from the supplier in no case can be more than that amount, whatever be the contract value. But, if the contract value is lower than that, the right of recourse from the supplier will be capped at the contract value. In any case, certainly Rule 24(1) appears to preclude the operator from seeking any 'consequential damages' from the supplier, under Section 17(a) of the Act, to compensate for the larger damage the supplies could have caused to the public and the environment.

In comparing norms across various high risk industries, I find that the amount of compensation due under the right for recourse, where a contract exists, cannot exceed the operator's own liability or the value of the contract, whichever is less. To this extent, one cannot fault Rule 24(1) as stated in Chapter V of the Rules. This, unfortunately, is the consequence of Parliament limiting the operator's liability for nuclear reactor accidents at Rs1,500 crore in Section 6(2) of the Liability Act, against the repeated pleas at that time to substantially increase that cap. In my view, the only option now left is to argue for higher compensation, including consequential damages, under Section 46, relying on Tort Laws.

### **Validity Period for Supplier's Liability**

Next, let us look at the duration for which the supplier's liability

will be valid under Clause 17(a). If we bring in the definition given in Rule 24(2)(a) for 'product liability period' into the body of Rule 24(2), it will read as follows: 'The provision for right of recourse referred to in sub-rule 24(1) shall be for the duration of initial licence issued under the Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Rules, 2004, or 'the period for which the supplier has undertaken liability for patent or latent defects or sub-standard service under a contract', whichever is longer.

The duration of initial licence is a stipulation of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, and it is purely a time limit to periodically stop and review the overall operational & safety management of a facility by the operator. It has been set at five years for a long time now, and it has no direct connection with the supplier or his supplies. The licensing period is illogically brought into Rule 24(2), just to enable an 'either-or' provision, with one end-point as low as five years.

The legal intent of the Act was to provide three separate and stand-alone sub-clauses, viz 17(a), 17(b), and 17(c). In formulating the Liability Rules, government was careful not to interfere with the controversial Clause 17(b) of the Act, fearing the wrath of Parliament. As per the Act, 17(b) reads, 'The operator... shall have the right of recourse where the nuclear incident has resulted as 'a consequence of an act of the supplier or his employee, which includes supply of equipment or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services.' But, if we now compare this with Clause 17(a), as elaborated through Rules 24(2) and 24(2)(a), it can be seen that both Sections 17(a) and 17(b) now deal with the identical shortcoming of 'supply of equipment

or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services.' Except that, under 17(a) and the associated contract between the operator and supplier, the quantum and time validity of the supplier's liability to the operator under right of recourse is well-defined and bounded, whereas for the same default of the supplier, Section 17(b) of the Act allows recourse without specifying limits on time period or amount!

If an accident occurs within the applicable time limit as per the contract mentioned in Section 17(a), the operator can argue for recourse under Section 17(a), for the quantum of compensation as per that contract. But, if an accident occurs, as a result of the supply, beyond the period of validity mutually agreed in the contract, Section 17(a) will not help in seeking right of recourse, because it will be time-barred through the limitation in the contract. Unfortunately, then Section 17(b) can also not be resorted to, because the supplier will argue that, for the very same deficiency or default, he has a contract with the operator whose time validity has already expired. In effect, one finds that through a clever Rule manipulation under 17(a), the government has succeeded in linking Clauses 17(a) and 17(b) of the Act, in contravention of the legal intent of the Parliament that they should be independent of each other, and applicable separately. The serious consequence of this linkage is that the provisions for recourse from the supplier given in the contract under Section 17(a) and its rules will prevail at all times, thus nullifying the provisions of Clause 17(b).

### **Correct the Liability Rules**

It is evident from the above analysis that the modification needed in the Rules presently before the

Parliament is to delink the artificial coupling that the government has introduced between Clauses 17(a) and 17(b) of the Act through these Rules. This can be achieved by retaining Clause 17(b) as it is, and changing Rules 24(2) and 24(2)(a) to remove any mention of 'liability for patent or latent defects or sub-standard services' from these Rules, since such defects and sub-standard services are already independently covered under Clause 17(b).

In normal product or service liability contracts, the supplier guarantees a safe and assured life for his product or service delivered to the operator, a period during which the supplier confirms it will function as per the mutually agreed performance specifications. It shall be the onus of the operator to ensure that the guarantee period he is agreeing with the supplier is adequately high for such supplies and it should be consistent with the product lifetime and/or failure probability used in the Probabilistic Risk Analysis for the system which he has submitted to the safety regulatory agency and got approved. Clause 17(a) then needs to rely on this product guarantee period as the time validity for the operator's right of recourse, instead of surreptitiously bringing in the licensing period which has no relevance in this context.

To translate the above arguments into a Rule change, Parliament may kindly consider replacing the current Rule 24(2) and its Explanation-I (a) in Chapter V of the Rules with the following revised wording of Rule 24(2), followed by a revised Explanation-I consisting of parts (a) through (d), as given below. The current version of Rule 24(2) (b) and Explanation 2 may please be retained.

24(2): The provision for right

of recourse referred to in sub-rule (1) shall be for the duration of 'the product guarantee period.' This rule is to be read and implemented in conjunction with parts (a) through (d) of Explanation -I, given below.

Explanation- I :

a) For the purpose of this rule, the expression 'product guarantee period' means the safe and assured life for the product or service delivered to the operator during which period the supplier confirms it will function as per the mutually agreed performance specifications, provided the operator diligently follows all the stipulations of the supplier regarding erection, commissioning, and operation & maintenance, including the regular upkeep, inspection, and repairs during the guarantee period as mutually agreed and detailed in the contract at the outset.

b) In case of a confirmed failure of the product or the service provided, within such a product guarantee period, the onus on the operator will be merely to establish that he has diligently followed all the stipulations spelt out by the supplier as part of the contract.

c) Such guarantee period shall be adequately high in the context of the prevailing worldwide nuclear industry norms for such products and services, and consistent with the life expectancy and failure rate for that product or service which the operator has used in the Probabilistic Risk Analysis for the system and approved by the nuclear safety regulatory agency.

d) If the failure occurs during the product guarantee period due to no fault of the operator and if the operator has evidence to establish that he has faithfully followed all

stipulations as per contract, the supplier shall be strictly liable to pay the mutually agreed compensation as per Clause 17(a) of the Act, read with Rule 24(1). In such a case, there shall be no onus on the operator to prove what specific deficiency or negligence on the part of the supplier has caused the failure or damage of the supplied product or service.

*[Dr. A Gopalkrishnan is a former chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of the Indian government]*

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**(Continued from Page 11)**

field about 300 metres away. When they leave for work, they roll up all their possessions and dump them behind a wall or some bushes. They aren't really worth stealing, so they have no fear'.

Marly Diallo, an overseas Exchange Student, writes about Sabina, a young mother about 30, who recently gave birth to her fourth boy. She 'lives on a pavement, in front of a road that I take almost every day, without really asking myself how these people live there. Sabina has been living just behind the walls of IIMA for years'. She adds, 'Sabina keeps their belongings on a ground protected by a fence; all the families can keep their valuables in plastic bags stocked in this area. Otherwise, she keeps her stuff on the pavement. At night or when it rains, the family gathers under a thin plastic tarpaulin, just like everybody does in this street'. She adds, 'We asked them if they benefited from the presence of IIMA in terms of security or help? The answer was clear and sad... there is no interaction with IIMA, just as if these two worlds co-existed without seeing each other'.

– Aman Biradari



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## State of the Nation

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**Surendra Mohan**

**universalisation of free and  
compulsory education**

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The state of the nation causes concern. A despondent mood of cynicism and frustration seems to have overtaken the country. Unfortunately, that mood seems to be all-pervasive and not selective. The government is in the grip of a crisis of confidence with its credibility touching a new low. The economy is in the doldrums. There is an all-round slowdown in evidence, the latest sector to drag its feet being industry. Productivity in the manufacturing sector has suddenly dropped. Economic growth has shrunk from 7.7 per cent in the first quarter of this fiscal to 6.9 per cent. Economists warn that it may go down progressively and rest at 6 per cent or even below that figure. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee tells Parliament that there is no policy paralysis in the government, that the economic slowdown is a passing phase and that recovery will take place sooner than the country expects. Somehow these assurances fail to carry conviction. The nation is willing to believe the worst, and does not seem ready to expect improvement. The morale, we need not add, is quite low.

True, Parliament is back in business, but there is not much purposefulness in evidence there. The opposition has ganged up against the Congress which has been isolated and is seen to be functioning in isolation. It would seem that the opposition parties are interested only in keeping the Congress perpetually on the defensive. By joining Anna Hazare's token protest fast rally at Jantar Mantar, the opposition has signalled the nation that it means to take the campaign against the UPA government to its logical conclusion. The logical conclusion is a mid-term poll, but the opposition wants to give the impression that it is as much against snap elections as is the Congress. The Congress justified its withdrawal of the proposal to open up retail trade to foreign investors by stating that it did not want mid-term elections. The implication was that the UPA could have persisted with the FDI in retail only at the cost of risking its survival in office. The message that went out to the country was that things are no more under the government's control and that the ruling coalition, having overnight attracted a crisis of confidence, is in death throes.

The noteworthy development is that the Prime Minister seems to be fighting a losing battle, whether it was in regard to FDI retail or in regard to the Lokpal logjam. Sonia Gandhi has not come to Dr. Manmohan's Singh's support, leave

## Indo-Pak War 1971 – Some Not So Public Facts

**Rajindar Sachar**

alone rescue. She is allowing, with a cynical element of deliberateness, the Prime Minister to deal with all the government's critics, although she, by virtue of her political stature and presidentship of the Congress, has to carry an equal load of responsibility for the rights and wrongs of the government. If things go wrong, Sonia Gandhi's cheerleaders will blame Dr. Singh. If things turn right, the credit will go to her. This is a game that the Congress leadership has been playing for many years now. The people see through this game and are not deceived. They are no more gullible. They would have surely noticed that while all the blame is being heaped on poor Dr. Manmohan Singh, Soniaji is staying away from the spotlight.

Dr. Manmohan Singh is being fielded single-handedly to deal with the new threat from Team Anna. Dr. Singh has convened an all-party meeting, but its outcome seems foregone. Team Anna has now gained some extra clout by enticing the opposition into its camp. How far this achievement will help Anna Hazare achieve his objective when Parliament begins debating the Lokpal Bill remains to be seen. Whatever the opposition leaders may have said in Jantar Mantar, they will be expected to don their true colours—*influenced by larger party interests—*on the floor of the House. However, the opposition is as interested as Anna Hazare himself, in cornering the Congress and forcing it to yield ground on certain vital issues of relevance to the Lokpal legislation. Any stick is good to beat the Congress.

The government can meet the situation half way by shedding its rigidity on some, if not all these

*(Continued on Page 13)*

The recently declassified documents of 1971 war between India and Pakistan have without any doubt established the fact of absolute tilt of the USA President Nixon and Kissinger against India.

This hostile, aggressive stand taken by Nixon was sought to be justified by the false premise that Indira Gandhi was right from the beginning determined to attack East Bengal. This however was a lie and Nixon, above all the people, knew that, on the other hand she tried her best to avoid confrontation with Pakistan. As a matter of fact Indira Gandhi tried her best to persuade Nixon to intervene at an early stage to help her do so.

In July 1971 Kissinger had a stop-over in India on his secret visit to China. At that time mass fleeing from East Pakistan and terror by Pakistan army were creating havoc in West Bengal and rest of the country. Smt. Gandhi, was obviously under a big strain. She therefore invited Kissinger for a private breakfast to be able to discuss the matter urgently.

However on the evening before, Indira Gandhi telephoned General Manekshaw, the then our Army Chief and told him that she would like him to come and meet her at breakfast next morning. She did not disclose as to who her other guests were. She further told the General that when he comes for break fast, he should come in the Army uniform. Naturally, the General felt surprised and asked whether he had heard

rightly that she wanted him to come in the uniform at the break fast because it was naturally a very strange suggestion. Smt. Gandhi was straight forward and told him "yes". So, General Manekshaw went for break fast in full uniform and soon they were joined by Kissinger.

At that meeting Indira Gandhi was persistent in asking Kissinger to plead with Nixon that he should try to restrain Pakistan for what was being done in East Pakistan because the conditions there were becoming intolerable and it was almost becoming impossible for India to remain silent. Kissinger however, went on prevaricating and would not really give a straight answer. Rather he tried to underplay the situation. Smt. Gandhi, however, still insisted, but to no avail. Kissinger would not give any assurance that Nixon would do something about it.

Obviously rattled, Smt. Gandhi said if that was the position she may have to do something herself which she was reluctant to do. At this Kissinger again expressed his inability on his and Nixon's behalf to do anything and asked her rather ironically as to what she intended to do. At that time she stood up and pointing towards the General (who was in full military uniform) told Kissinger that if the USA Government-USA President cannot control the situation then "I am going to ask him (meaning the General) to do the same."

There was stunning silence for a minute as the sharp message was

conveyed to Kissinger in a very stark manner. As a matter of fact, the General was himself surprised and suddenly understood the purpose as to why he had been asked to come in uniform rather than in civilian clothes at apparently, a harmless function of break fast. Obviously, Nixon and Kissinger had their egos deflated and were not going to forgive Smt. Gandhi for such an attitude.

Smt. Gandhi had no other course but to create world opinion in favor of India. She requested J.P., the legendary socialist hero of our freedom struggle, to go on world tour to explain India's case, which the patriot that he was, he willingly undertook. But still the matters were getting worse, and India could not directly intervene. Refugees were continuing to pour in from East Pakistan. Sidharath Shankar Ray was in charge of borders. On one of the usual visits by Smt. Gandhi to the border where a public meeting was being held to reassure the people that the matter was being looked after properly. On this visit to West Bengal she told Ray that after the meeting she would go back to Delhi, and Ray should stay for some days in Calcutta and come to Delhi later.

At the public meeting while Smt. Gandhi was addressing, one of her aides handed her a small paper, she read it, put it in her pocket and continued with her speech. After the meeting while going to the airport she told Ray that he should come along with her to Delhi. Ray was a little surprised at this sudden change of his programme. But her followers did not ask questions of Indira Gandhi – there was implicit compliance. After about 15 minutes of flight onward to Delhi Smt. Gandhi leaned back in her

*(Continued on Page 6)*

## Coalitions - Indian Style

**D. K. Giri**

Just before the UP Assembly elections, Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lokdal (RLD) joined UPA. The alliance primarily aims to boost UPA's (Congress) prospects in UP, and marginally improves UPA majority in the Parliament from 272 to 277. RLD is the first party to join the UPA coalition after the 2009 General Elections. The negotiations between the Congress and RLD were underway for quite some time, stalled for a while, and got firmed up when the UPA found a Cabinet berth for Ajit Singh.

It is interesting to recall that Ajit Singh has been a member of the Congress Government in the past, when Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister. He was the Industry Minister in the Janata Dal Government led by V.P Singh in 1989-90, and the Minister for Agriculture in the NDA Government from 2001 to 2003. So Ajit Singh has been a Minister in all the three major coalitions in recent times, these were three clearly different ideological groups. Not long ago, RLD was in alliance with Samajwadi Party (SP) in UP. When Ajith Singh snapped the alliance with the SP, Mulayam Singh, the Chief of SP, had commented, "RLD Chief Ajit Singh has changed more parties and broken more alliances than even he would care to remember". He added that Ajit Singh's withdrawal from SP with an eye on a cabinet position in UPA Government carried no surprise.

It is not only Ajit Singh, there are other 'prominent' leaders who are known for party-hopping. Ram Vilas

Paswan readily comes to mind. Arun Shourie, in his book, "The Parliamentary System," refers to Ram Vilas Paswan as an "ever-in-office" politician. There is a clear trend. Some politicians like Ajit Singh and Ram Vilas Paswan have a secure and sizeable vote base in the RLD, and Dalit Sena respectively and could switch over to any party or coalition with their vote bank and secure for themselves a cabinet berth. Ideology, principles and policies are thrown out of window in the name of pragmatism. No one now, politicians, commentators or critics find it abnormal or an aberration in Indian democratic politics.

Democratic politics, although a universal aspiration now, is practiced differently in different countries. Likewise, Indian democracy has certain unique features. The Austrian author, Anton Pelika wrote about this in his book called "Democracy Indian Style", which was translated from German to English by Renee Shell". Indian Politics, given its diversities and pluralism, has created a new practice called 'coalition politics', which has become an established practice now for the last two decades. Even other countries, including those who have viable two-party system like Britain are into coalition politics. Most other countries having Parliamentary democracies are embracing coalitions to cobble up majority in Parliaments. Again, for instance, Sweden which has been dominated by the Social Democratic Party for long has gone for coalitions.

It is important that one understands Indian party coalitions and Indian exceptionalism, which is arguably the trend-setter in coalition politics. How has the coalition politics come about? How Indian coalitions are so fragile and accommodative at the same time. Arend Lijphart writes in “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy; a Consociational Interpretation” about the specific characteristics of Indian Democracy, “Due to the very heterogeneity of Indian Society, which contradicts the sort of nation-state thinking common in Europe, Indian democracy cannot build upon the notion of competition that we find in a competitive democracy”. Indian democracy celebrates and draws upon its diversities, and functions by building alliances between them. Like Britain and USA, Indian democracy also privileges the winner, deriving from the principle, “winner takes all”. In India too, winner calls the shots, but only when someone is able to form a majority in a carefully constructed coalition of interests and who can share the power with other coalition partner when the election is won. As referred to earlier, coalition politics is practiced in other democracies as well, but the manner in which they are formed in complexities of Indian politics is uniquely Indian, that may not be duplicated elsewhere”.

Indian coalitions are made up on the basis of religion, ethnicity, caste, region and so on. Interestingly, they are based not so much on ideology, which is worrying. Parties come together in coalition under a curious Common Minimum Program (CMP) which is a queer mix of the manifestoes of the parties. Why is ideology not so important in coalition building? Given the situation of inadequate development in the country, and more important, the

social and regional disparities, the political parties seek to represent groups, communities, and regions. The parties like BSP and TDP are such examples of politics of communities and regions. Even the bigger, national parties do not build their platform around an ideology which cuts across the communities and regions. We may also note that there are no ideological specificities that mark the parties from one another. By way of interpretation of the actions and policies, there are three broad ideological streams in Indian politics today. One, the centre-Left, led by the Congress, the other, the Left of the Communist version, which is currently badly marginalized, and the third one is Centre-right led by the BJP. The most popular and acceptable ideological stream ‘Social Democracy’ which, unfortunately, has no strong party political manifestation, is missing from the equation. Why it is so is beyond the scope of this article. Janata Party, which came closest to be a Social Democratic Party in 1970s disintegrated for various reasons. The remnants of the party are led by Social Democrats but they do not present any formidable challenge at national level. However, on ideological allegiance, there are politicians who straddle the entire ideological spectrum like Ajith Singh, for example. As the Prime Minister once said, when asked why he did not restrain A.Raja when the latter was not auctioning the spectrums, one has to make some compromise as a part of compulsions of coalition politics. But if fundamentals of a party or politics are compromised too often, then even politics loses its sanctity and legitimacy, which shifts to civil society leaders like Anna Hazare.

The light at the end of the tunnel of politics of egos, personal interests, and electoral arithmetic, that characterize our current coalitions is that the major political parties are becoming more accommodative and comradely with other parties. BJP, one of the two major parties in India was known to be ideologically inflexible when it came to the use of Hindi as national language or belief in Hindutva as the basis of nation building, stopped insisting on either as it reached out for partners in non-Hindi speaking states in the South and in the East of India. Likewise, the Congress party which was uneasy in sharing power with others has entered into big coalitions. The present UPA consists of 15 partners including RLD.

At least two more points need to be considered to complete the story of Ajith Singh and coalition politics in India. Every political party is supposed to be a coalition of interests, groups and individuals, and is expected to function by giving everyone space as a part of internal democracy in the party. That is what the Congress party in its early days was: a broad-church, catch-all. During the freedom movement, Indian National Congress was an all-class coalition to fight British imperialism. The nature of composition of Congress support, and its cosmopolitanism continued for three decades until Indira Gandhi got politically corrupted by absolute power and began to chip away the Congress support base. Also, most parties in India are dynasty or personality driven, so any single party is not structured to give space to many leaders or several view points. In reality, individual political parties at the leadership level are no longer a coalition. Hence, in order to gain majority in the Lok Sabha,



the parties have to enter in coalition.

The second is the perception of majority and minority in Indian politics. It is believed that India is Hindustan where majority Hindus should dominate the democratic politics. The BJP sought to mobilize Hindus into a political majority and failed. BJP's construct that everyone living in India is Hindu did not resonate with the people. Hinduism is structurally and scripturally plural, so it is not easy to homogenize

Hinduism. A political commentator once successfully argued in a seminar that everyone in India is in minority depending on the context. So we have a queer case of majority in the Parliament ruling, but that majority is made up of minorities of all kinds, like 5 MPs of RLD. Ajit Singh gets a Cabinet position with just 5 MPs out of 543 in Lok Sabha. Both minority and majority take on layers of meaning in different contexts. In fact, in India, contexts are many. Thus Indian democracy is sharing of power between

minorities of all kinds, who form a political majority through inter-party negotiations. Indian democracy therefore is naturally coalitional, some call it consociational. In the coalition building, there will be several entries into and exits from coalitions by leaders like Ajit Singh. One hope that time may come sooner when the coalitions are made around causes not caucuses. Admittedly, coalition politics has become a practice, but it will be better, healthier if it were to be based on norms, ideals and ideologies.

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## An Independent Judiciary – a few more reflections

**Bapu Heddurshetti**

Justice Ruma Pal (An Independent Judiciary (Janata-November 20-27, 2011) has done well in discussing the independence of judiciary in its two aspects: institutional independence and the independence of individual judges. She has described in detail the inroads made by the executive in the judicial field, including what she calls 'tribunalisation', in violation of the doctrine of separation of powers which has adversely affected the institutional independence, and has come to the conclusion that the Indian judiciary does not have institutional independence.

I must confess that being an advocate myself and having also forayed into politics, I also reinforce Justice Ruma Pal's theory that sometimes the worst enemies of judges are those lawyers who while being members of the Bar also serve in the capacity of politicians, with the only substitution of the word 'judiciary' for the word 'judges'.

However, I must say that her plea that the judges should be free to accept invitations from foreign institutions without being vetted by the various departments of the Government of India inheres the forebodings of the creation of the 'new class' of super citizens who are as she herself says elsewhere guilty of 'hypocrisy', the second sin. Karnataka has innumerable examples of the 'second sinners' since it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a 'clean' judge who can become a 'Lok Ayukta' as the three judges whose names were proposed had the distinction of having more than one residential site in violation of several provisions of several laws, apart from the ethics involved. While she says that the judges who enforce the law for others often break that law with impunity, it is surprising that she herself pleads for such impunity for the judges under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976.

The transgression of the judicial field by the executive or the legislature is not the only violation of the doctrine of separation of powers. The judiciary has had its own share of such transgressions in the fields of the executive and the legislature. If the legislature has hit the judiciary with what she calls 'tribunalisation', the judiciary has, by giving a go bye to the doctrine of locus standi and entertaining what it calls 'public interest litigation', forayed into the executive field. Its transgression of the legislative field was climactic when the Allahabad High Court ordered that the 'flag code shall stand amended' by a judicial verdict when it included the judges in the list of persons who are entitled to use the national flag on their cars. Its direction that the proceedings of a state legislature should be video-graphed was an unpardonable transgression of the sanctity of the legislature itself.

The power to appoint and transfer

judges wrested by the judiciary from the executive, by what she herself calls “with all the interpretative tools at its command - termed by many as an unacceptable feat of judicial activism” has resulted in some form of endogamy in the judiciary leading to a genre of judges who, even when dozens of them are superseded by the collegiums of the Supreme Court, not one of them resigns in protest, whereas there are many illustrious examples of judges who had resigned when superseded by the executive.

However, it would have been better if Justice Pal had also referred to, and discussed, the judgment by the Supreme Court which upheld the imposition of Emergency and the suspension of the fundamental rights. The judiciary failed the people of this country when they needed it most.

Justice Pal should have also dealt with the phenomenon of ‘independence’ of judiciary from what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the United States’ Supreme Court calls ‘class prejudices’. The very first amendment to the Constitution was necessitated by the obstacles created by the judiciary in bringing about institutional changes in the land holding structure in India by abolition of Zamindari and Land Reforms Legislations, which was, according to my humble understanding, a case of class prejudice. I had been issued a contempt notice by the High Court of Karnataka for stating that though the Karnataka Rent Control Act was enacted to ‘protect’ the tenants from arbitrary eviction, an overwhelming number of petitions by the land lords seeking eviction

were allowed by the judiciary, which again in my humble opinion was another case of class prejudice. It is also within the realm of our knowledge and experience that the ‘land tribunals’ created in Karnataka for conferring occupancy rights on the tenants without any ‘judicial’ member on the tribunal, could within a span of 10 years implement the policy of ‘land to the tiller’ which would not have been possible with a ‘judicial’ member on the tribunal, let alone as a head of the tribunal. What is needed to make the judiciary overcome this class prejudice, Justice Pal was competent and capable to elucidate which unfortunately she has not.

Montesquieu had said in his treatise ‘Spirit of Laws’ that “When

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*(Continued from Page 3)*

seat, a bit relaxed, took out the paper given to her at the public meeting and told Ray who was sitting next to her, here is the information “Pakistan has attacked”. At first blush it would seem strange that Smt. Gandhi should seem relaxed on knowing about Pak attack. But there was obvious logic – India was reeling under refugees’ influx and yet it dared not attack East Pakistan, because then the world opinion would call it the aggressor. An excuse was necessary and Pakistan had now conveniently provided it. Of course, let us be objective war on East Pakistan front was all weighed in favor of India – as General Arora told me, though to start with some hard knocks were taken it was smooth march – the whole population of East Bengal was against Pakistan.

The movements of Pak army were conveyed in detail by Mukti

the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty... Again, there is no liberty if the judicial power be not separated from the legislative and executive”. However, there appears to be a continuous tinkering with the doctrine of separation of powers by all the three wings. But at the same time it is also true that when warned, each of the wings has tried to retreat into its legitimate sphere of activity. Whether this process of continuous tinkering and retreating would, lead to a newer and a better or a worse equilibrium between the three wings, giving rise to a new ethos of governance rendering the doctrine of separation of powers obsolete and demanding the exposition of a new theory, only time can tell.

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Bahini and their volunteers to Indian army whose task was made less difficult (though no doubt India lost quite a few thousand of soldiers). To make matters still easier Indian air force had no opposition and bombarded General Niazi’s official Bangalaw. As one of the Air Chiefs told me “you can’t imagine the panic, the utter helplessness at being bombarded from above by enemy planes, knowing full well that you can’t even send one plane to stop them. It was inevitable that Niazi surrendered without much delay.

We, both Pakistan and India, have to put, and fortunately have already put, those sad memories behind us and are determined to march together on a common course of mutual confidence and benefit and faith in each other to build a bright future for both our countries. The past should not control the future of our two countries.

## universalisation of free and compulsory education

***Resolution of the National Council of All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) held at Yusuf Meherally Centre, Vill. Tara, Distt. Raigad, Maharashtra on 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2011***

India has a long and ancient history of a deeply-rooted exclusionary and discriminatory socio-religious structure. The oppressive hierarchy and violence of the caste system has dominated all aspects of life and deprived the vast majority of the Indian people from access to the benefits of their own labour and the fruits of the rich resources of the land. This framework facilitated other forms of oppression – class, communal, gender, disability, and dispossession of tribes and other marginalized communities. The long struggle against the brutal exploitation of

British colonialism eventually resulted in the spread of a -wide-ranging freedom movement. Demands of all sections of the people were raised in the course of the struggle leading to the overthrow of British rule and the establishment of a constitutional republic which enshrined values of equality and non-discriminatory rights and opportunities as a goal before the country in its future development.

The role of education was conceived as an essential component for realizing this goal and hence universalization of free and

compulsory education, to be achieved by 1960, was included in the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But today, despite sustained protest and critique, we find that a stunted, multi-track and discriminatory scheme of education, which denies the right of all children to get education of quality, has been legitimized by ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009’. Embedded in the limiting framework of the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 2002, which denied rights of children

*(Continued on Page 14)*

The meeting of the National Council of **AIF-RTE** was attended by delegates of students’, teachers’ and educational activist organizations and intellectuals, especially educationists, drawn from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The National Council decided to undertake the following programmes during the next one year:

- ✓ organizing a National Protest Day during the Budget Session in February 2012 to seek withdrawal of all the six Higher Education Bills pending in the Parliament designed to fulfill the WTO-GATS agenda of making Indian education a saleable commodity in the global market;
- ✓ organizing conferences and *satyagrah* at District Headquarters throughout the country on April 1, 2012, the second anniversary of the anti-child, anti-education and anti-Constitutional so-called Right to Education Act, 2009 in order to seek its replacement by a new Act founded in the framework of Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools;
- ✓ holding a National Conference on Common School System at Chennai in June 2012 under the joint auspices of the State Platform for Common School System, Tamilnadu and All India Forum for Right to Education; and
- ✓ constituting units in all states/UTs of the country in order to build a nation-wide movement for Right to a democratic, egalitarian, secular, just and enlightened education system that guarantees free education from “KG to PG” to all children and youth, in accordance with the Constitution of India.

**Anil Sadgopal, Bhopal**  
**Madhu Prasad**

**Ramesh Patnaik**  
**Surjit Thokchom**

**Simantini Dhuru**  
**Guddi**

## Last letter from Surendra Mohan

*Surendra Mohan wrote a letter to one of his close friends, Raj Kanwar - they studied together at Dehradun- Raj Kanwar sent the letter to Archis, Surendra Mohan's son, along with a covering note on December 23, 2010 saying "I have received a letter by post from Surendra Mohan dated 15-12-2010 two days before he unexpectedly passed away. This must be his last letter. I had advised Surendra to give up politics which, I consider, a thankless job under the circumstances. I also pointed out his health and the frequent and long travels that he had had to undertake...His letter is perhaps to justify his continuing in politics and contains in the sum total of all his political activities during the past 30 years. His memory is remarkably sharp, which is evident from the various dates that he gave to many events..." The letter is reproduced below.*

–Editor

Date **15.12.2010**

**Dear Raj,**

As an M.P., I had found more time for class or section based organization of socialists like the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, the Agricultural Workers' Federation, Indian Federation of Building and Woodworkers and Nikhil Bharat Banobasi Panchayat. I was also active in the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties. After I ceased to be M.P., I continued with that work. Additionally, I got involved in the Bandhua Mukti Morcha led by Swami Agnivesh and briefly with Sharad Joshi's Shramik Sangathana.

Then, in 1986, the All India Railwaymen's Federation, the HMS and the Citizens for Democracy led by Justice V.M. Tarkunde launched the National Campaign for Right to work as a fundamental right. I became its National Convener. We organised several seminars etc, which culminated in a big rally of about 2 lakh persons before Parliament on 25 March, 1988. On the same afternoon, Shri Prem Bhasin was publicly felicitated and a purse of two lakh rupees was presented to him. The sum was used for helping in the treatment of socialist colleagues and encouraging publication of socialist books.

I started to work as a political columnist, writing a syndicated fortnightly column, since June 1984, which I continued till 2005. Owing to ill health, I could not maintain its regularity and it was stopped. Thereafter, I have been writing exclusive articles, mainly in Hindi.

I got involved in the Modinagar Textile workers' struggle in early 1980's and had to resort to five days' hunger strike in 1984, in Lakhnow. I was also part of the organisational unity and the agitations of coal workers in M.P., Maharashtra and West Bengal.

In 1988, I became active in helping in the unification of the Janata Party, Lok Dal and V.P. Singh's Jan Morcha which led to the formation of Janata Dal. I was appointed National Convener of the Election Manifesto Drafting Committee and the Publicity Committee of the Janata Dal and the National Front. Additionally, it fell to me to enlist the support of the Muslim community despite the National Front's electoral adjustment with the BJP.

I have been a supporter of reservation for backward castes,

that is Mandal, and shouldered some responsibility in getting the Government to accept the Mandal commission's recommendations. This was also the time when I refused to accept membership of Rajya Sabha, arguing that the principle of social justice should be applied in selecting candidates for it. I was a member of the Jammu & Kashmir Advisory Committee appointed by the Central Government in 1990. I was appointed Chairman of the Land Reforms Sub Committee of Dr. Ambedkar Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee in 1990 which continued till 1992.

From 1991 to 1995, I worked as Chairperson of Northern India unit of the Rashtra Sewa Dal. I remained active in the Janata Dal as well. As a strong critic of the New Economic Reforms introduced by the Government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao, I joined the Azadi bachao Andolan and later the anti-WTO.

In 1991 and again in 1996, I was appointed as National convener of the Election Manifesto Drafting Committee of Janata Dal and National Front (1991) and United Front (1996). The United Front

comprised of the Left Parties also. The Front came to power in 1996. I was appointed Chairman of the KVIC in November 1996, but gave up after the Government fell down in early 1998.

In 1998, I gave full support to a kisan agitation in Multai in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh where 25 kisans were shot dead by the police. In the end of that year, Dr. Sunilam, leader of the agitation, became independent MLA.

In 2000, I became actively involved with the National Alliance of the people's Movements led by Medha Patkar and also with Aruna Roy's campaign for the People's Right to Information, a little later.

In 2002, I initiated the founding of the Socialist Front and acted as its National convener till 2004, but continue my association with it as with the HMS, PUCL, NAPM and etc.

In 2003, I led the Indian Trade Union delegation to the South Asia Labour Conference held in Karachi, Pakistan.

On 4.12.2004, I was publicly felicitated owing to the efforts of Prof. Madhu Dandavate who collected 17.61 lakh rupees as the purse given me which as per the consensus of colleagues was given to the Yusuf Meherally Centre. However, I got a vehicle, Indica, on that occasion. A large number of socialist colleagues joined it. Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterji presided over the function. Chandrashekhar, V.P. Singh, Deve Gowda, Sharad Pawar, Jaipal Reddy, D. Raja of the CPI, Medha Patkar, Aruna Roy and some prominent labour leaders joined it.

In 2006, I and other socialist colleagues broke with Deve Gowda on his decision to allow the

Karnataka unit to join a coalition with the BJP in order to elevate his son to Chief Minister's office. Then, in February 2009, we launched the Socialist Janata Party. Currently, we are part of the efforts to unify smaller principled socialist groups.

I am Director of Acharya Narendra Deva Samajwadi Sansthan a Trustee of S.M. Joshi Socialist Foundation, Vice Chairman of the Yusuf Meherally Centre (since 2006) and National Convener of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee (since 2009). I am also a Trustee of Human Rights and Civil Liberties Trust founded by the PUCL. After the sad demise of Dr. Y.P. Chhibbar, I have been shouldering the responsibility of chairing SNEHA Trust, founded for the education of the Chakma tribe. Another educational institution in which I am interested is Balika Kanya Vidyalaya in Kol tribal belt in Mau, near Chitrakoot where Mrs. Manju Mohan is chairperson of the Trust.

I visited Pakistan twice (once with Manju) as a member of the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy and once for a preparatory meeting of the people's SAARC. Manju and I visited Nepal to join in the pro-democracy movement in 2005 and to attend a meeting of the Bureau of the Asia Pacific Region of the Socialist International in 2007. Recently in September, she and I went to Katmandu on the invitation of the Nepali Congress Party to address its National Conference.

I was in Bangkok in a small group to help the Government and the Naga rebels to resume dialogue in 2000, in Kota Kinablu, Malaysia in 2001 to attend a meeting of

indigenous people and Manila in 2002 to attend the Asia-Pacific Bureau meeting of the Socialist International. Earlier, on the invitation of the International Union Socialist Youth, Manju and I visited Germany in 1995. We were in Ghana, Lome and Berkina Faso (as Chairman of the KVIC) in 1997.

Three collections of my articles have been published in Hindi. They are: i. Samajwad, Dharm Nirapekshata aur Samajik Nyay, ii. Vikalp Ka Rasta and iii. Vartaman Rajneeti ki jwalant samasyayen. Two booklets published are Acharya Narendra Deva aur Unka Yug and Dr. Ram Marohar Lohia ki Neetiyan. In English, booklets 'Gandhiji's Time and Ours' and 'Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan' have been published.

When Madhu Dandavate, then Editor of *Janata* was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission in August 1996, I had to accept its editorship along with Dr. GG Parikh. But, since last year, I have been the sole editor because of the insistence of the Registrar of Newspapers who wanted only one editor.

Since after the wedding of our daughter Anagha in November, 2004 in particular, Manju has accompanied me in all travels and meetings etc. This has been of tremendous help.

I feel sorry that this very detailed account of my work during the last 30 years or so has taken much of your valuable time. I hope it meets your expectation.

With regards to Amber Ji and you

—Surenra

**Surendra Mohan**  
(1926-2010)

## Steadfast Socialist

**Yogendra Yadav**

To remember Surendra Mohan is to recall the finest human virtues and political values that the socialist movement in India contributed to the country's public life. He began his political life as a socialist and remained so through his more than six decades of multifarious involvement in public life.

Surendra Mohan will be remembered across the political spectrum for upholding the tradition of personal honesty and political integrity established by the first generation of leaders of the socialist movement. Within what remains of the socialist movement, he will be remembered as a conscience keeper, someone who rose above petty factional disputes, who tried his utmost to keep the movement and its core political values alive in the face of its political disintegration. In the wider world of progressive social movements in the country, he will be remembered as a trustworthy friend, a bridge between politics and social movements and an intellectual guide. Each facet of his personality showcased the best in the socialist movement.

Born in 1926 in Ambala, Haryana (in Punjab until 1967), Surendra Mohan was attracted to the socialist movement during the popular rebellion of 1942. This was a glorious moment in the history of the socialist movement. Socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) and Ram Manohar Lohia led the popular resistance during the Quit India movement since much of the

Congress leadership was behind bars and the communists were supporting the British war effort. Surendra Mohan was one of the thousands of young people who were attracted to the then Congress Socialist Party (CSP).

Surendra Mohan's first contact with the socialist movement, with the Punjab unit of the CSP, reminds us of a forgotten chapter in the history of this movement. Munshi Ahmed Din, a senior CSP leader, visited DAV College, Jullundar, where Surendra Mohan was a final year BSc student and a general secretary of the district unit of the Punjab Student Congress. Soon after, in May 1946, a CSP unit was formed in Ambala, and Surendra Mohan was elected its district secretary. After Partition, the CSP came out of the Congress and became the Socialist Party. In June 1950, his participation in a satyagraha at Karehra village near Yamunanagar against the eviction of agricultural workers earned him two and a half years of rigorous imprisonment. Intervention by JP and Tilak Raj Chaddha led to his release after seven months.

The first general election (1951-52) was a big setback to the Socialist Party, as the electoral performance fell far below its expectations. This was followed by a period of disorientation and finally a split in 1955 when Lohia's followers left to revive their own Socialist Party. Much of the Punjab unit of the party remained with the parent organisation, then the Praja Socialist Party (PSP).

During this period Surendra Mohan completed his master's degree from Dehradun and taught sociology at Kashi Vidyapeeth for two years. He also started writing for the party's weekly organ, *Janata*, an association that was to persist for half a century as he and G.G. Parekh, the two co-editors, kept the journal alive.

In June 1958, he quit his job and became a party whole-timer at the request of Prem Bhasin, the then joint secretary of the PSP. He chose low-profile organisational work at the central office of the party and worked with the Samajwadi Yuvajan Sabha (SYS), the youth wing of the party. Through the 1960s, he remained a key organisation person for the PSP, which briefly became the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), and was its joint secretary from 1965 to 1971. He was the general secretary of the Socialist Party, reunited with the merger of most of the streams, from 1972 to 1977, when the party merged into the Janata Party.

### A simple life

His life as a full-time political worker symbolised the virtue of aparigraha. He led a frugal life, remaining a bachelor until he was nearly 50. He suffered a heart attack while in prison during the Emergency but refused to seek parole on principle. He was fortunate in finding a political comrade in his wife, Manju Mohan. Unlike the lifestyle associated with the politically high

and mighty these days, they led a very simple life. He earned his livelihood by writing for newspapers. Friends and admirers contributed to ensuring that the couple had a modest flat of their own in Delhi. Despite obvious financial difficulties, he donated to public causes the purse that was collected to honour him a few years ago.

He carried the spirit of detachment to political power as well. Despite playing a key role in the formation of the Janata government, he refused to partake of any fruits of power. He was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1978 and made no compromise to seek another term. He was a confidant of V.P. Singh when the latter was Prime Minister but declined the offer of the Rajya Sabha ticket and insisted that it be given to someone from the backward communities. H.D. Deve Gowda persuaded him to accept the post of Chairman of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission in 1996, but he resigned on his own as soon as the Janata Dal government fell in 1998. He thus carried forward the highest tradition of the socialist movement.

One of the principal architects of the Janata Party, Surendra Mohan upheld the political values of the socialist movement through the long history of the splits and unities of the Janata family. Once the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) parted ways with the Janata Party in 1980, Surendra Mohan consistently opposed any collaboration with communal forces.

He remained with the Janata Party through the 1980s, led then by Chandra Shekhar, which then merged into the Janata Dal. As the disintegration of the Janata Dal began after the fall of the

government, Surendra Mohan stayed with the mainstream Janata Dal and then the Janata Dal (Secular), until Deve Gowda formed a coalition with the BJP in Karnataka.

Until the end of his life, he was engaged in an attempt to bring together all those socialists who had stayed true to the values of the movement. As president of the recently formed Socialist Janata Party, he was working for its foundation conference in May 2011 when his journey came to an end.

A political leader who believed in the power of ideas, Surendra Mohan was a voracious reader and a prolific columnist both in Hindi and English. He was a walking encyclopaedia on the history of the socialist movement. His writings displayed a subtle grasp of issues in different parts of the country and an ability to connect everyday political developments with the larger developments in history.

He possessed a rare ability in contemporary political life: he exercised political judgment. Four collections of his essays in Hindi were published, besides three books authored by him. His writings connected India to the larger international context. One of the few Indian socialists to keep alive his connection with the Socialist International, Surendra Mohan was active in the Nepalese struggle for democracy and was a source of support for Burmese and Tibetan activists in exile.

Surendra Mohan was true to the tradition of the socialist movement, and his life was not confined to the party political domain. In the last three decades of his life, he spent much of his energy on the youth, social movements and people's

organisations. He was associated with the People's Union for Civil Liberties ever since it was founded and was very active in promoting human rights. As a member of a political party, he could not have accepted any office in the PUCL, but those who worked with it fondly remembered his contribution to the organisation.

Following the legacy of JP, he was a source of support and inspiration to movements ranging from the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Right to Information to the struggle for human rights in Nagaland and Kashmir. He was one of the few leaders that activists from a vast range of ideological backgrounds, from naxalites to Gandhians, could relate to. He was associated with the National Alliance for People's Movements, the Socialist Front and the Rashtra Seva Dal.

Surendra Mohan's passing away snaps our bond with a glorious chapter in our national history. (He died in his sleep on December 17, 2010 in New Delhi after a cardiac arrest.)

*-in Frontline*

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# The socialist extraordinary

**Kuldip Nayyar**

For some years, Surendra Mohan and the socialist movement in the country have been synonymous. He would travel by train through the length and breadth of India to string together a trade union here and a left-inclined group there to revive the Socialist Party, which was alive and kicking till 1977 when the Janata Party was formed. The party's founder, Jayaprakash Narayan, was himself the leader of the Socialist Party when it parted company with the Congress in 1948 and wanted the people to recognise its separate identity.

The Socialist Party has gone through many splits and reunions leading to the formation of many parties. These included the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, Praja Socialist Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party. Jayaprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Ashok Mehta, Acharya Narendra Dev, Ram Manohar Lohia and S.M. Joshi were among the leaders of the Socialist parties. Many existing parties, like the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal (United) and the Janata Dal (Secular) trace their origin to the Socialist Party.

Surendra Mohan had wanted the groups swearing by the name of socialism to come on the same platform. That he could not do so before his death does not minimise the cause. In fact, his death should strengthen the determination to make his dream come true. Not many socialists have suffered and sacrificed as much as Surendra Mohan did. He considered no work stupendous enough to put his heart and soul in it. He worked to revive the party till his last breath.

Surendra Mohan was known to Congress leaders because he had been working in the field from the age of 17. Sixty-eight years are too long a period spent at the grassroots to know who is who and prove one's mettle. He could have been a minister in the Morarji Desai government, which was led by the Janata Party. But an unassuming Surendra Mohan preferred to work in the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and sent instead George Fernandes, a tried trade unionist to the government. It is another story that Surendra Mohan was annoyed with his old friend Fernandes when the latter joined the BJP-led government. It shows how uncompromising Surendra Mohan was when it came to joining hands with communal forces.

That he stayed distant from the Congress indicates his incisiveness in spotting the parties that called themselves secular and played the minority card for the sake of votes. Surendra Mohan was known to Congress leaders because he had been working in the field from the age of 17. Sixty-eight years are too long a period spent at the grassroots to know who is who and prove one's mettle, which he did. Yet, he did not go near the Congress despite the overtures by the party, because he had before him the example of JP who felt cheated by Jawaharlal Nehru. Surendra Mohan was as far left as his leader Dr Ram Manohar Lohia — who stood for an alternative to the Congress — was. But being a socialist, Surendra Mohan was firm in his belief in democracy, which has a different connotation for the Communists. Dictatorship of the proletariat did not

go well with a freely elected Parliament. He was a Rajya Sabha member and saw from close quarters how the Communists had an understanding with the Congress, not for ideological reasons, but for the vicarious satisfaction of enjoying power. Surendra Mohan's experience with the Communist Party of India during Emergency was shattering. He was detained without trial like other Opposition leaders for two and a half years. He became the Janata Party's spokesman, but minced no words when he found it quarrelling. It is a tragedy that he died when he is needed the most. After holding conclaves in some cities like Mumbai to provide the country an alternative in the shape of the Socialist Party, he had fixed 27 May to launch the party on the day when 62 years ago JP founded it.

—in *Sunday Guardian*

## Books by Surendra Mohan

1. **Vikas Ka Rasta: Nai Arthik Neetiyon ka vishleshan..** Price 600 rupees.
2. **Samajwad, Dharma Nirapekshata aur Samajik Nyaya** Reissued as second edition; Price 500 rupees
- Published by Rajkamal Prakashan, 2a Netaji Subhash Road, New Delhi 11002
3. **Vartaman Rajneeti ki Jwalant Chunautiyan.** Price 400 rupees.
4. **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia ki Neetiyan:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

Published by Anamika Publishers and Distributors. Ansari Road, New Delhi 110002



## End of an Era

**Qurban Ali**

Surendra Mohan was known for his intellectual honesty, moral uprightness and personal sacrifices. He was one of the founding General Secretaries of the Janata Party in 1977 and played a vital role in its historic victory. He was also spokesman of the Janata Party during 1977, general elections and played a crucial role during the elections and in the formation of the first non-congress government at the centre.

His associates and friends describe him as a “directory of Socialists” in India as well as as the ‘encyclopedia of socialist movement’. He had good connections with socialists in other countries and had personal rapport with Gandhians, civil society movements and intellectuals. He was an ideal socialist.

Surendra Mohan was born in Ambala (united Punjab) on December 4, 1926. His romance with socialist movement started in 1942 during the Quit India Movement when he was a student of eleventh standard at Banaras Hindu University when he heard the names of Jayaprakash Narayan and Dr Ramanohar Lohia and their historic role during Quit India Movement. But his first contact with the leaders of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was in early 1946 when senior CSP leader Munshi Ahmed Din visited the DAV College Jullundar where he was a final year student of B.Sc and was working as General Secretary of the district unit of the Punjab Student Congress. In May 1946, Sardar Gurbaksh Singh, an organizer of Punjab CSP visited Ambala and a CSP unit was formed there and

Surendra Mohan was elected its district secretary.

After the formation of Socialist Party in 1948, he became whole timer of the party Ambala and later became the district General Secretary of the party. In June 1950 he participated in a Satyagrah at Karehra village near Yamunangar against evictions of agricultural workers and was arrested and awarded two and half years of rigorous imprisonment. After the intervention by Jayaprakash Narayan and Prof. Tilak Raj Chaddha and meeting with the then Punjab Chief Minister Gopi Chand Bhargava, he was released after seven months’ imprisonment by the end of January 1951. In July 1952 he was the Chairman of the reception committee of the State conference of the Punjab Socialist Party held at Ropar (now Roop Nagar) and inaugurated by Dr Rammanohar Lohia.

For higher education he went to Dehradun in October 1952, from where he obtained Master’s degree in sociology. In 1955 he joined Kashi Vidyapeeth as a lecturer of Sociology for two years and started writing for the Janata. In June 1958, Prem Bhasin, the then joint Secretary of Praja Socialist Party (PSP), requested him to join Central office of the party. Surendra Mohan resigned from Kashi Vidyapeeth, and after attending the PSP’s National Conference at Pune in 1958 he joined the PSP’s central office in New Delhi. He proved his mettle in the Praja Socialist Party, Samyukta Socialist Party and Socialist Party and rose to become first its Joint Secretary, 1965-71 and later the General Secretary of the Socialist Party from 1972-77.

A political leader who believed in the power of ideas, Surendra Mohan

was a prolific writer and regular columnist in many Hindi and English newspapers. Four collections of his essays in Hindi were published besides three books authored by him. He was associated with Peoples Union for Civil Liberties ever since its foundation and was very active in promoting human rights. During the last three decades of his life, he spent much of his energy with youth, social movements and people’s organizations like the National Alliance for Peoples Movements, Socialist Front, Rashtra Seva Dal. An internationalist at heart, he was active with Socialist International and supported Nepal’s democratic struggle.

*—in the Other Side*

*(Continued from Page 2)*

issues. For instance, it can yield ground on the issue of bringing the Prime Minister and the lower bureaucracy within the Lokpal’s gambit. Secondly, it can extricate itself from the CBI contention by agreeing to make that organisation an autonomous body under nobody’s control, like many other autonomous bodies are functioning in the country. Above all, what will matter most in the coming days and weeks will be a positive response from the government on the Lokpal deadlock to offer its cooperation in ending it. The government needs to recognise that public opinion has built up solidly around the concept of an effective Lokpal who would not bend easily but move forcefully against the corrupt. As for Team Anna, the nation would expect the same measure of understanding and flexibility on its part as it expects from the government and the Congress party. Co-operation is a two-way process, and dictatorial stances will be of no avail in carrying objectives forward.

(Continued from Page 7)

under six years to early childhood care and pre-primary education, and made education the only fundamental right to be exercised as “the State may, by law, determine”, the RTE Act 2009, has given legitimacy to the neo-liberal multi-track and non-formal reform schemes already initiated since the 1990’s under World Bank-IMF’s Structural Adjustment conditionalities. Motivated by the desire to promote a market in education and dismantling government institutions which could be the basis of quality education for all, this approach led to rapid deterioration of the approximately 12 lakh government schools, except the special central and model schools, and paved the way for a mushrooming growth of private schools and growing commercialization of education.

Freeing private schools from state regulation, the 2009 Act has pushed up fees alarmingly and allowed for transfer of public funds to them through development grants and so-called ‘re-imburement’ for admitting 25 percent EWS pupils. This scheme, due to almost exclusive media attention, has shifted the focus completely from the State’s abdication of its Constitutional obligation to provide free and compulsory education of equitable quality for all. The Act has dealt a severe blow to the existing government school system making it totally dysfunctional and it is even being dismantled.

Therefore we demand that the Union government,

1. Repeal RTE Act and hold public hearings at district levels to draft a new Bill on the egalitarian principles of the Common Neighbourhood School System which draws in all children including the disabled;
2. Amend the Constitution to undo the negative impact of 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment to ensure free and compulsory education to all from Early Childhood Care and pre-primary stage to Class XII;
3. Impose a complete ban on child labour;
4. Provide constitutionally for adequate funding, and ban privatization and commercialization of education, including all forms of Private Public Partnership (PPP).

Until these steps are taken, we further demand that

1. No closure or merger of government schools should be permitted.
2. School faculty and auxiliary staff of all government schools should be adequately enhanced and teacher education and curricular reform should be undertaken to strengthen the system.
3. Necessary steps to adequately train para-teachers and other teaching personnel be immediately undertaken to allow for their regularization;
4. The trend of diverting public funds to private managements must be stopped forthwith.
5. Land and other physical assets of private managements that

close educational institutions should be entirely accessed by the public system of education.

### Higher Education

Neo-liberal ‘reforms’ are being extended over the entire education system right up to higher education. Over the past decade successive governments have promoted policies that treat higher education as a ‘private good’ and a tradable commodity although the Constitution envisioned it as the primary vehicle for achieving social justice and equal opportunity. The NDA government in 2000 put higher education on the WTO agenda by offering it up for regulation under the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) regime. Since 2004 the UPA governments have failed to withdraw the offer even though completion of the DOHA Round trade negotiations would bring it under GATS *in perpetuity*, affecting both the character of higher education and national sovereignty. In fact the Bills already brought before Parliament by the present government, and those still on the anvil, are designed only to create a highly lucrative market, estimated to reach fifty billion dollars by 2015, in education for foreign and domestic capital. Instead of reforming the 500 universities and over 25,000 colleges in dire need of improvement, the lakhs of students enrolled in them will be sacrificed to the aggressive drive towards privatization and commercialization to benefit foreign and domestic investors.

The bills are undemocratic in content and restrict the freedoms of both students and faculty.

Motivated by the need to promote and secure investment in the sector rather than enriching learning and research, they provide 'single-window' entry points for 'education providers' even as they homogenize education by imposing highly centralized governing mechanisms. The privately borne high costs of education will lead to a decline in areas of fundamental research and social critique but market-driven courses will be at a premium. Further, widespread disparities among different sections and regions will be aggravated by the sharp decline in public funding.

The critical, transformational role of higher education plays a central role in strengthening civil society and democratic processes of governance. If it comes under the control of market forces and WTO strictures, the very idea of higher education as a social good will be severely undermined. But if this radical reversal in policy perspective is being adopted, why has no national debate preceded the offer to the WTO and the formulation and presentation of the current Bills?

### **Threat to Democratic Freedoms**

An equally grave threat facing the system of education in particular and democratic freedoms in society in general is from the rise of right-wing vigilante-groups and reactionary fundamentalist, communal and fascist forces. These violent, anti-democratic forces are not only exploited by market forces but they are also succeeding in instilling fear psychosis in democratic institutions (whether elected governments, administration, media, and even the judiciary), groups and individuals. Their actions are leading to a shrinking of that necessary

democratic space for dissent, negotiation and consensus without which society can neither advance its knowledge systems, nor can it further the growth of transparent, participative and democratic forms of governance. The democratic movement must resist and counter these forces and expose their anti-people designs. We must also demand that the state and authorities at all levels perform their necessary function in acting swiftly and firmly against such forces. We must strongly condemn any failure to do so or any attempt to 'accommodate' the actions of such forces for narrow so-called political or social 'gains'.

The need to uphold the banner of radical, democratic demands in the struggle for an egalitarian system of

quality education which can only be realized through state-funded common neighbourhood schools that ensure access for every single child to a diverse and pluralist learning environment right up to university level, requires to be highlighted by the AIF-RTE. The crisis of neo-liberalism is already emerging all over the world and protests are erupting everywhere. In India too, although some sections of the population are still under the illusion of benefits accruing from neo-liberal developmental strategies, the people's anger is beginning to find expression and will only grow and spread. Alternative pro-people strategies and democratic ideals must be formulated and promoted to inform the inevitable wave of protest which will come.

### **Pradip Bose**

I had met Pradip Bose the day before he was taken into ICU of Holy Family hospital. His death is a personal loss to me. I knew him over 30 years as we were both founding members of Association for Democratic Socialism (ADS). He was my ideological mentor. The best of way learning, he used to tell me, was meeting people with ideas and drawing them out with love, respect and comradeship. That is how I learnt from him and from many people we met together in India and abroad. He was a great listener and a passionate conversationalist. I remember we spent twelve continuous hours in 1997 in a pub near Victoria station in London, talking about Socialism and its various forms. I will miss him.

**–D.K. Giri**

I had the opportunity to meet Pradip Bose in Delhi in March earlier this year. He actively participated at our IUSY Asia Pacific Meeting and the meeting of the IUSY Presidium and inspired all of us. I was impressed of his clear analyses and strong ideological approach. Pradip Bose contributed to the development of Social Democratic ideas, within IUSY, SI and in India as the leading thinker and writer. His work brought ideas from Europe and Asia together and developed the global agenda of Social Democracy. Pradip Bose will stay on in our movement through the effects and results of his work, in the same way that he will stay in the loving memory of his family and friends.

**–Johan Hassel  
Secretary General, International Union of Socialist Youth**



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# janata

**Vol. 66 No. 47**  
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**The Relentless Fighter**  
 Prem Singh

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No one wishes to be a prophet of doom and gloom. Even so, it seems, as the nation prepares to bid farewell to 2011 and welcome 2012, the new year is likely to be as frustrating as the one we will ring out. All the signs point to an unattractive future on both the political and economic fronts. The Indian economy, like the economies of all countries, is closely linked with the global economic climate, and as long as global recession lasts, the current slowdown in the Indian economy will persist. It seems highly venturesome at the moment to predict an upturn in the Indian condition, even though those in charge of the nation's finance and commerce tend to paint an encouraging picture. The important question is whether the year 2012 will create the conditions conducive to a higher rate of growth than the obtaining 6.6 per cent. An answer in either direction may be premature at this time, but there seems to be greater cynicism than hope among policy-makers as well as thinkers and analysts. However, it is possible to argue with a greater measure of certainty on the likely political scenario we may expect to be confronted with all through the new year. Signs are not wanting that the political turbulence that marked the second half of 2011 will last well into the new year and perhaps even gather greater force and volume.

The year is ending on a rather sombre note. Anna Hazare is to fast for three days in the last week of the year's last month. The fast is to be followed by a jail bhara movement. There are strong doubts on whether Parliament will be enabled to pass the new Lokpal and Lokayukta bill in the current winter session, which has already been extended by three days. Whatever the government, and its allies, and the parties which were represented in the Lokpal Bill Standing Committee may contend, the fact is that the new legislation has been found unacceptable to Anna Hazare and his Team. It seems unlikely that the bill in the present form will pass muster even regardless of Team Anna's adverse reaction. This is because the opposition too is a house divided on the provisions of the bill. What is acceptable to one opposition party is unacceptable to another, and the ruling coalition is also not a united house, the leading partner Congress itself has internal differences and conflicts. All this makes one fear that the bill will not get the green signal this year, and circumstances may well be created for reconsideration in the next session, a prospect which can send Team Anna into a frenzy of protest.

*(Continued on Page 16)*

*Between the lines*

## Fresh Poll Needed

**Kuldip Nayar**

There is not a shred of doubt that the Manmohan Singh government would have fallen if it had persisted in going ahead with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail. The opposition came together and the government was reduced to 206 in the 545-member house. A similar fate can confront the government if it does not improve upon the diluted bill to set up the institution of Ombudsman (Lokpal) to deal with corruption. Once they span their differences, the government can face the same situation as it did on FDI. Behind-the-scenes efforts have not stopped to bring down the government. Permutations and combinations are being worked out and it looks difficult that the government can last the full term up to May, 2014. The threat has already affected the functioning of the government. Decisions are taking long and there is a paralysis in the administration. It looks as if it is the momentum which is keeping it going. Most political parties, particularly the BJP, have taken the advantage of Gandhain Anna Hazare's movement on the Lokpal bill which brought once again thousands from civil society on the streets. Except the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of Maharashtra (9), the Trinamul Congress of West Bengal (19) and the DMK of Tamil Nadu, (16) almost all political parties from left to right commanding the strength of 201 joined Hazare on the same platform. The Congress-led government has 248 in tow, missing

the half way mark of 272. Therefore, the government cannot take bold decision which the situation demands. The Congress is justified in alleging that the Hazare's movement has got politicized. The party has also a point when it says that such pressures tell upon the democratic method of achieving the end. However, I do not accept the charge that Hazare has political gains in view. The more the Congress trumps up such allegations the less will be its credibility. Yet the Congress has itself to blame for the development because the Lokpal bill it has brought before Parliament is neither fish nor fowl. It goes against the assurances the Congress gave to Anna Hazare (Prime Minister endorsed those through a letter). The 'sense of the house' as Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee spelled out in a resolution to enable Hazare to break his fast was: (i) Citizen's Charter including his right to have water and electricity, (ii) the lower bureaucracy under Lokpal and (iii) establishment of Lokayuktas in the states. The bill has conceded only one point that is the appointment of State Ombudsman (Lokayukta). Now that the bill is being amended, the Congress should introspect why it could not read the mood of political parties and the public. The party has lost its face by first insisting to keep the lower staff as well as PM out of ambit of Lokpal and then surrendering within 48 hours. (Former Prime Minister Inder Gujral is opposed to having PM under Lokpal. He says that the PM has so

much information accumulating at his table that he cannot afford to share anything with anyone, including Lokpal because by doing so he may harm national interest). It seems that Parliamentary Standing Committee which gave bones to the bill had provided for keeping the lower staff and the PM under Lokpal. But the last minute intervention by Rahul Gandhi, son of the Congress President Sonia Gandhi deleted both the points. Belatedly, the Congress has denied this but only after Hazare's repeated charge that Rahul had diluted the Lokpal bill. The contradiction has no validity until Rahul himself replies to the charge. Yet the sticking point is the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). This is an instrument which every government has used against opponents at the Centre and in the States. CBI is under the Personnel department of Central government that means the ruling party. Rulers have misused CBI to sustain its majority in the Lok Sabha or the state legislatures. Even the governments of different colours have been destabilized through CBI. Sharad Yadav, a leader of Other Backward Classes (OBC) has been honest enough to say on the floor of the house that they too misused CBI when they were in power. In fact, it is time that all political parties realize that the destabilization of elected governments does not augur well for them or the country. On the other hand, Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee has warned that without

*(Continued on Page 15)*

# No Walmart Please

**Rajindar Sachar**

If the combined opposition had sat down for weeks so as to find an issue to embarrass the UPA Government and make it a laughing stock before the whole country, they could not have thought of a better issue than the free gift presented to it initially by the UPA Government by insisting that it had decided irrevocably to allow the entry of multi-brand retail leader super stores like Walmart, USA and then within a few days, with a whimper withdrawing the proposal.

As it is even initially this decision defied logic in view of the Punjab and UP elections and further known strong views against it of BJP/left and many states who had all the time opposed the entry of Walmart which would affect the lives of millions in the country.

Retail business in India is estimated to be a 400 billion dollars but the share of the corporate sector is only 5 percent. There are 50 million retailers in India including hawkers and pavement sellers. This comes to one retailer serving eight Indians. In China it is 1 for 100 Chinese. Food is 63 percent of the retail trade, according to the information given out even by FICCI.

The claim by the Government that Walmart intrusion will not result in the closure of small retailers is a deliberate mis-statement. Iowa State University study in USA has shown that in the first decade after Walmart arrived in Iowa, the state lost 555 grocery stores, 298 hardware stores, 293 building supply stores, 161

variety stores, 158 women apparels stores and 153 shoe stores, 116 drug stores and 111 men and boys apparels stores. Why would it be different in India with lesser capacity for resilience by the small traders.

The fact is that since Walmart entered the market, 31 super market chains sought bankruptcy in 15 years. Of the 1.6 million employees of Walmart only 1.2 percent make a living above the poverty level. The Bureau of Labour Statistics, USA is on record with its conclusion that Walmart's prices are not lower than anyone else when compared to a typical family's weekly purchases.

In Thailand supermarkets led to 14 percent reduction in the share of 'mom and pop' stores within four years of FDI permission. In India, 33-60 percent of the traditional fruit and vegetable retailers reported 15-30 percent decline in footfalls, 10-30 percent decline in sales and 20-30 percent decline in incomes across cities of Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Chandigarh - the largest impact being in Bangalore, which is one of the most supermarket-penetrated cities in India.

The average size of the Walmart stores in the United States is about 10,800 sq. feet employing only 225 people. In that view, is not the Government's claim of increase in employment a canard?

Governments attempt to soften the blow by emphasizing that Walmart is being allowed only 51 percent in investment upto US\$ 100

million. Prima facie the argument may seem attractive. But is

Walmart management so stupid that when its present turn-over of retails is 400 billion Dollars it would settle for such small gain? No. Obviously, Walmart is proceeding on a maxim of the camel being allowed to put its head inside a tent and the occupant finding thereafter that he is being driven out of it by the camel occupying the whole of the tent space. One may substitute Walmart for the camel in order to understand the danger to our millions of retailers.

The tongue-in-the cheek argument by the Government that allowing Walmart to set up its business in India would lead to fall in prices and increase in employment is unproven. A 2004 Report of a committee of US House of Representatives concluded that "Walmart's success has meant downward pressures on wages and benefits, rampant violations of basic workers' rights and threats to the standard of living in communities across the country." By what logic does the Government say that in India the effect will be the opposite. The only explanation could be that it is a deliberate mis-statement to help the multinationals.

Similar anti-consumer effects have happened by the working of another Super Market enterprise namely Tesco of Britain.

A study carried out by Sunday Times shows that Tesco has almost total control of the food market of

108 of Britain's coastal areas i.e. 7.4 percent of the country. The Super Markets like Walmart and Tesco have a compulsion to move from the territory of England and USA because their markets are saturated and they are looking for countries with larger population and low super market presence according to David Hogues, Professor of Agri-Business at the Centre for Food Chain Research at Imperial Collage, London, because they have got nowhere else to go and their home markets are already full. Similarly a professor of Michigan State University has pointed out that retail revolution causes serious risks for developing country farmers who traditionally supply to the local street market.

In Thailand, Tesco the foreign-owned super market controls more than half the Thai market. Though Tesco when it moved into Thailand promised to employ local people but it is being accused openly of unfair trading practices and conflict with local businesses. As for the claim that these super market dealers will buy local products is belied because in a case filed against Tesco in July 2002 the Court found them charging slotting fees to carry manufacturers' products, charging entry fee to suppliers. In Bangkok, grocery stores' sales declined by more than half within four years of Tesco opening a store.

In Malaysia seeing the damage done by the super market Tesco since January 2004 a freeze on the building of any new super markets was imposed in three major cities and this when Tesco had gone to Malaysia only in 2002.

It is worth noting that 92 percent  
(Continued on Page 12)

## Rebellion in China

D. K. Giri

After the collapse of the "Soviet Empire" many predicted that China would follow suit. Journalist, political analyst and veteran Social Democrat, Pradip Bose who recently passed away was one among those, who consistently maintained that fall of Chinese Communist dictatorship was inevitable, just a question of time. The recent mass uprising in the Wukan village, in Southern province of Guangdong has prompted the Nobel laureate commentator, Paul Krugman to remark, "will China break away?" or "Is the China bubble bursting?" China has several rural unrests, around 90,000 a year, but the mass incident in Wukan unrest appears much bigger and more persistent than other outbreaks. This has shaken the Communist Party and has woken up the rest of the world to the economic and political consequence of Chinese collapse.

Let us take a quick look at the number and extent of the rural riots in China. It is of course, hard to get any accurate data as the Chinese media is fully censored. Unlike Tiananmen Square uprising, which was seen in television screens across the world, many such protests are not reported. However, from limited available sources, it is reported that in September this year there were three days of continuous rioting in Wukan leading to a stand-off for three months till 14 December, when a villager died suspiciously in the police custody. In the first week of December, police shot dead number of protesters in Guangdong. In March this year, around 20,000 rural

workers clashed with police in Hunan, and in April, some 20,000 peasants drove off more than 1000 riot police in Zhejiang. On 4 November, it is reported in the Western press that Chinese paramilitary troops put down an uprising of about 100,000 farmers in Sichuan Province. These unrests are alarming for the stability of Chinese politics and economics, and the powerful western world, both Europe and North America, have a great stake in the sustainability of Chinese economy and rest on its politics.

Before one discusses the riots and their repercussions, a quick look again at the growth and strength of the Chinese economy today perhaps will help us understand the gravity of the situation in rural China. In fact, China has grown for approximately at 10 per cent per annum for the last two decades since it opened up its economy in 1980s, China has accumulated foreign reserves up to 2000 billion USD. To know the gigantic size of its economy, one could compare it to the second largest foreign reserve holder, Japan, which has less than half of that of China. Our Chief Economic Advisor to the Ministry of Finance, Kaushik Basu compared the Chinese growth to Jim Corbett's gun. It is relevant to relate it here as the story has tremendous parallel to China and the world. Basu recollects the story he had heard as a child, "Jim Corbett was out in the hills of Kumaon in search of a dangerous man-eater.... He certainly had his gun, cocked in the direction from where he heard a sound, when he suddenly realized



that the tiger was glaring at him from a different direction and dangerously close. If he tried to quickly turn his gun, the tiger would jump at him before he could pull the trigger. So Corbett froze in order to lull the cat into believing that nothing was happening, and then began to turn his gun slowly, imperceptibly so. The tiger, thinking nothing was happening, stayed still in his crouch. After an interminable 15 minutes, Corbett's muzzle was pointing straight at the tiger and its game was up". It is not difficult to link it to China. Basu pointed out, "China perfected the art of Corbett's gun. It strengthened its economy and bust global credit with doggedness and over a long stretch of time. The process was on from the time of Nixon, through the Reagan years, Clinton and the Bushes." Now the "most powerful country" in the world, the only super power finds the gun pointed at itself.

So much has been said on Chinese economic strength which it is using to bully the big and small powers. Internally though, this reminds us of Lord Acton's maxim that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". This is the crux of the problem in rural China. The all-powerful Communist Party has become corrupt. The protesters in China say in a chorus that Party officials have become corrupt, and are engaged in illegal land grabbing in collusion with builders, in the name of development. The residents of Wukan village are protesting against the officials who are taking their farmland without compensation. The protest has spread to the nearby villages, for example, to Haiwen, a town not far from Wukan where opposition has begun to the land grab for a power plant. Protests in Wukan escalated as the protest organiser

Xue Jinbo died in the police custody. Although the police called it a natural death due to cardiac arrest, the villagers refused to trust the police and hundreds of them are locked on a stand-off with security forces. The local authorities in Shanwe having the jurisdiction of Wukan village had promised to return 404 acres (165 hectares) land as compensation to the villagers, but it did not quell the rebellion. The discontent and distrust have sunk so deep that the villagers have vowed to protect their own interests. Although the intensity of the rebellion is limited to one village, the incident has attracted widespread attention and has given a rebuff to the ruling Communist Party which prides in "Chinese political stability". Another significant point to note is that the protests in Guangdong province are high profile as the factories in the province turn out one-third of China's exports.

There are two possible interpretations or consequences of the protests in Guangdong - economic and political. From the economic angle, the popular reading of the situation is that with a booming economy, the demand of land for factories and housing complexes will soar causing more and more land disputes. Conflicts around Guangdong have become intense as it is among China's most economically developed regions. But on a deeper analysis, taking a cue from Krugman who wonders in a recent article, "Is China breaking away?", although, admittedly, such perceptions could be too early and alarmist, he says China is certainly emerging as another danger spot in the world economy. The thesis is that China's recent growth has relied on a huge construction boom fuelled by surging real estate prices and exhibiting all classic signs of a bubble

which is now bursting. Krugman explains that consumer spending in China over the past decade is not commensurate with overall growth. It is about 35 per cent of the GDP, half the level in the United States. The Chinese products are consumed in US and Europe and other parts of the world. China relies heavily on trade surpluses to keep the manufacturing going. But the real story is the growth in investment spending which is half of the Chinese GDP. With consumer spending low, what motivates the investment? Obviously, it is fuelled by a real estate bubble. The real estate spending has increased to more than half of the Chinese GDP and the rest of the growth is from the companies expanding to feed the growing construction industries. The credit comes from the underground banking system, similar to USA where the credit was from unsupervised and unprotected shadow banks. The consequences are similar. It is alarming as the crack-ups seen in recent times had similar causes, certainly the ones in Japan in 1980s and in USA in 2007. Some commentators believe that Chinese leaders can tackle it as they can do what they want without worrying about democratic processes and niceties.

The second consequence of these protests is indeed the scope of democracy in China and the fall of Communist dictatorship. Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister writes in his autobiography, *My Journey* in relation the New Labour, when people secure the basic necessities for life, they aspire for other things in life, career, comfort, choice and so on. But in order to be able to aspire, one needs freedom, which is not there in China - the freedom of thought and action.

Communist dictatorship denies human freedoms, but for how long! So long as China was poor and developing, people did not bother about political freedoms. Now with a strong economy, the demands for freedom will grow. When tanks were

rolling in Tiananmen square to suppress the student uprising, one young Chinese lady asked the then British Prime Minister in a public discussion organised by BBC, "if a bird is caged, it flaps its wings to be free, we are human beings, how long

can the Communists in China hold us down, with the rest of the world watching silently?" The signs of "cry for freedom" are evident in Guangdong. It is a question of time - the Chinese Communist dictatorship falls.

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## Youth Manifesto

*Adopted at the national convention of the Socialist Yuvjan Sabha held on December 18, 2011 in Pune, Maharashtra*

Socialist Yuvjan Sabha(SYS) is a national youth organization which firmly believes in the ideology of democratic socialism, economic equality, social justice and secularism. SYS's aim is to create a socialist society. SYS believes that socialist society can only be created through Total Revolution i.e. Sampurna Kranti. SYS is abided to bring political change in our country based on socialism. Socialist India only can become a real super power or Balashali Bharat and only youth can achieve this dream. So to achieve the dream of Balashali Bharat SYS declares this Youth manifesto for Indian youth:

### 1) Oppose Globalization and environmental destruction

Economic policy of globalization has led to liberalization and uncontrolled privatization. Due to these policies our economy has become market and profit driven and has lost morality and human face. It has nurtured corporate greed, consumerism, and environmental destruction. Millions of Indian youths have become '21<sup>st</sup> century slaves' and also become victims of consumerism. These policies have led to concentration of wealth with handful, phenomenal rise in poverty, unemployment, collapse of all social welfare policies and public organizations. So members of SYS pledge to fight these policies in whatever way possible. SYS believes in sustainable development and opposes environmental destruction enhanced by globalization.

### 2) Free, equal, and quality education for all

Education has become a most profitable industry and monopoly of rich and wealthy. Millions of children are deprived of primary education.

Millions of youngsters are deprived of higher education. This is bound to create '21<sup>st</sup> century caste system'. Education is the basic constitutional right. No country can dream to become a superpower depriving its large population from this basic right. So SYS will fight for 'KG to PG free, equal and quality based education for all'. SYS will also fight against corruption in the education field, mainly admission process and examination system. At the same time SYS opposes the new bill which allows foreign universities to capture our educational field. SYS will raise a nationwide agitation against this bill.

### 3) Unemployment

Rise in unemployment rate in our country is a matter of grave concern. Even good education or skill can not guarantee jobs then what about those who can not get education or can not acquire skills? We believe that it is the duty of state to provide full employment. SYS demands that all should be guaranteed jobs and all those who choose to be self-employed should be assured small capital without

hurdles. For this government have to abandon the policies of encouraging big corporate houses and foreign investments.

### 4) Support farmers, unorganized laborers and abolish child labor

Farmers are the backbone of Indian economy. Around 70 percent of our population is dependant on agriculture. But today situation is such that next generation of farmers desperately wants to quit farming and new youths do not dare to choose this field as their occupation. For this government must support small and dry farmers in various ways. Young farmers should be supported from very young age through farming schools, agricultural collages and financial institutions. Million of unorganized laborers in our country have no security of pension neither have they any health coverage. Large section of these unorganized laborers is below 40 years of age. SYS demands implementation of security for unorganized laborers at the earliest. At the same time SYS demands

*(Continued on Page 15)*

# Remembering Pradip Bos

**B. Vivekanandan**

An outstanding, internationally renowned, Indian socialist ideologue and a nephew of the Indian legend Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Pradip Bose is no more. He passed away at noon on 30 November 2011, after a week-long hospitalisation in the Holy Family Hospital in New Delhi. He was 82. His beloved wife, Joyce Bose, was on the bedside when the end came. His mortal remains were consigned to flames at an electric crematorium in New Delhi.

## Early Years

Born on 13 December 1928 to the Suresh Chandra and Arunprabha Bose in Calcutta, Pradip Bose had his education in the prestigious Scottish Missionary School and Scottish Church College in Calcutta. As he was born and brought up in an era of great fermentation of India's freedom struggle, and since his uncle (father's younger brother) Subhas Chandra Bose was playing a pivotal role in it, Pradip grew up in a family atmosphere of intense political activities, especially after his uncle became the President of the Indian National Congress in 1938. In his autobiography, *Growing up in India* published in 1972, Pradip Bose has narrated how as a young child, he curiously watched the visits of innumerable top national leaders like Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Abdul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Khan Abdul Gafar Khan, J.B. Kripalani, Sarojini Naidu, and so on, to his family house in Elgin Road to meet his uncle, and how he "crept softly on the veranda and

peeping through the doors" to have a glimpse of those illustrious visitors. However, as one who had grown under the stirrings of the freedom struggle, of which his family itself was a springboard of activities, his mind was naturally drawn into national politics at a very young age. The main inspiration obviously was his uncle, Subhas Bose. In due course, it got bloomed and he got deeply involved in socialist youth movement.

## Socialist Politics

Pradip Bose was a staunch democratic socialist with deep conviction. In *Growing Up In India*, he wrote: "I discovered that the ideas of democratic socialism were the most fruitful guide in the resolving of so many demands apparently in conflict with each other – between the individual and society, between national interest and internationalism, between tradition and progress, between democracy and rapid development, between 'East' and 'West' ". He wrote further: "The ideals of democratic socialism satisfy me both emotionally and intellectually; they provide a sense of direction in my life, instilling it with meaning and purpose. Socialism is the true expression of humanism in our time. It does not exclude anyone. It gives opportunities to those who want to, and can go ahead, but does not create barriers between them, a Pradip Bose and those who cannot. It seeks to create a human family, not with fanaticism and avoidable cruelties but with the power of

understanding and love and self-sacrifice of its followers."

He started his socialist politics as a youth activist of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). He was the General Secretary of All India Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha, the organisation of the socialist youth. He was Joint Secretary of the West Bengal unit of the PSP, and was a member of PSP's International Affairs Committee. For some years in 1960s he was Assistant Secretary of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) at its headquarters in Vienna (Austria), which hitched him firmly to the international socialist movement. His active involvement in the national socialist politics enabled him to establish and maintain close contact with top Indian socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta, Prem Bhasin, Achyut Patwardhan, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Nath Pai, Madhu Dandavate, Samar Guha, Surendra Mohan, G.G. Parikh and innumerable others from all over the country.

His becoming the Assistant Secretary of the IUSY and his long stay in Europe enabled him to establish and maintain close contacts with a large number of wellknown European socialists like Willy Brandt, Bruno Kreisky, Francois Mitterand, Pierre Mauroy, Niel Kinnock, Michel Foot, Antonio Guterres, Mario Soares, Felipe Gonzales, Heinz Fisher, Bernt Carlsson, Pentti Vaananen, Luis Ayala, Hans Janitschek, Eberhard Dingels, Axel Queval, Thomas

Meyer, and many others. I had many occasions, during my many visits to Europe, to realise the esteem and affection he enjoyed among them when I met many of them with his introduction. Moreover, his long stay in Europe had deepened his understanding of the European socialist movement. It was during one of his visits to England that he met Joyce “who closely resembled my ideal”, to quote Pradip Bose. Joyce was an outstanding teacher of English, and one of the finest human beings, hailing from Derby in England. They got married in 1963. As husband and wife, they were an extra-ordinary couple, mutually caring and loving till end.

### **Emergency and After**

The beginning of my close interaction with Pradip Bose was during the dark days of Indira Gandhi's Emergency in 1975-77. I saw him in the company of my another socialist friend G.S. Bhargava, wellknown journalist, sometime in 1976, when they were trying together to circulate an anonymous pamphlet, entitled “What is to be done?” among the political circles in Delhi. The pamphlet indirectly called for the withdrawal of Emergency and restoration of democracy in India forthwith. That was also the time when the Socialist International was paying more attention to developments in India, particularly after the arrest and detention of the Chairman of the Indian Socialist Party, George Fernandes, in Calcutta on 10 June 1976, on criminal charges, which provoked top European Socialist leaders like Willy Brandt, Bruno Kreisky and Olof Palme to shoot out a joint telegram to Indira Gandhi, demanding the release of George

Fernandes and withdrawal of the Emergency. From then onwards, throughout the Emergency, Pradip Bose and I maintained close contacts and met regularly at different points in New Delhi for sharing information and exchanging views and assessments of the situation.

After Indira Gandhi announced her decision in January 1977 to hold Parliamentary elections in March 1977, followed by the release of many opposition leaders like Morarji Desai, Asoka Mehta, Madhu Dandavate, Charan Singh, Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, and so on (but not George Fernandes), they met together and decided to establish Janata Party after merging their parties like the Congress(0), Socialist Party, Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) and Congress for Democracy. That signalled the end of the Socialist Party as a distinct ideological entity in the Indian political scene. Though socialists like Pradip Bose and me had serious reservations regarding the wisdom of the dissolution of the Socialist Party to constitute a nebulous formation like Janata Party, when Jayaprakash Narayan, the founder of the Indian Socialist Party, insisted on it as a pre-condition to his joining active campaign in the forthcoming elections to defeat Indira Gandhi's dictatorship, dissenters like us had to give in. Form January 1977 we started working in the Janata Party Central Office at 7 Jantar Mantar Road. Incidentally, it was there that Pradip Bose introduced me to his close friend Hans Janitschek, Secretary General of the Socialist International, when he came to see Pradip Bose there. In the elections Indira Gandhi and her Congress party were squarely defeated, and a Janata Party Government, with

Morarji Desai as Prime Minister and Charan Singh, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Madhu Dandavate, George Fernandes, L.K. Advani, Ravindra Varma, and so on, as Ministers, assumed power.

### **Founding of ICDS**

Certain developments after the victory of Janata Party in the 1977 elections, and the formation of the Janata Party Government in the Centre, had caused disquiet among many socialists like Pradip Bose and me. We had noticed that in the Janata Party, some leaders like Charan Singh from the erstwhile BKD started expressing resentment and intolerance to the very sound of the term ‘democratic socialism’. Taking into account the sensitivity of such leaders, many of our socialist friends in the Janata Party and Government were found refraining from directly using the term ‘democratic socialism’ in the presence of persons like Charan Singh at various meetings. We learnt that the situation was not different in the official meetings as well. As a result, the term ‘socialism’ was used less and less in public expressions of even Janata Party functionaries who had joined it from the Socialist Party. They too started using diluted substitutes or hazy expressions in place of socialism.

We must note that among the constituents of the Janata Party, Socialist Party was the only party which had a distinct political ideology and a vision of a new society based on the fundamental principles of equality, freedom, justice, democracy and solidarity. And, therefore, in ideological terms, socialists were potentially the main losers of this merger, unless democratic socialism or social

democracy was adopted as the basic ideology of the new Janata Party. The socialist friends in the Janata Party who were responsible for organisational matters, like Surendra Mohan for example, gave an initial impression that soon the party would launch an ideological educational and training programme to inculcate principles and values of democratic socialism at all levels of the party organisation to enable the party to adopt democratic socialism as its basic ideology. But those castles in the air came to nothing as most of those leaders were also got sucked in the running of the government. Little attention was paid to organisational matters, especially in the domain of ideological education and training. After the election of Chandrasekhar as the first President of the Janata Party, at the party's national convention held on 1 May 1977 at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi (prior to that Asoka Mehta was the interim President), the Janata Party's functioning was found infected by the Congress style. He started running it like another Congress party, which he had admitted publicly in an interview with the *India Today* magazine. As a result, instead of striving to make democratic socialism as the basic ideology of the Janata Party, the party leadership dithered and drifted and the process was the other way – de-ideologisation of the party at all levels. Once in government, the attention of many party functionaries was also got centered on the nitty-gritty of running the government, sharing the spoils, and the like – the usual Congress style!

After watching those disturbing developments in the Janata Party for some time, one day Pradip Bose

came to see me at Jawaharlal Nehru University to discuss the situation in which the term 'democratic socialism' got virtually dropped out of the vocabulary of Indian politics, and its wider implications, and stressed the need of doing something to remedy it. We decided that we should not allow the term 'democratic socialism', or discussions of public policies and programmes from a socialist angle, to be sidelined, and that we would keep public debates on issues and policies, from a socialist point of view, active, and would not allow anyone in Janata Party to ignore it. For doing that task effectively, we decided to establish a new socialist organisation in New Delhi on the lines of Fabian Society in London.

That decision was followed up by extensive consultations with a large number of like minded socialists in Delhi, who also had similar concerns. Pradip Bose shouldered the brunt of that exercise. He reached out to a large number faculty members and students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Jamia Milla Islamia, and IIT in Delhi, besides to a large number of socialist-minded professionals, politicians and trade union leaders. It was a commendable exercise Pradip Bose had patiently undertaken to stimulate socialist discourse in Indian politics, at a critical time of the history of the Indian Socialist movement. As a result, we could bring together the cream of the socialist intelligentsia from all walks of life in Delhi to establish the Indian Centre for Democratic Socialism (ICDS), as an organisation to discuss and debate national and international questions from a democratic socialist perspective. Pradip Bose was made

its President and K.K. Panda its Secretary. Subrata Mukherjee, Ruddar Dutt, T.K. Oommen, Vinod Choudhuri, Brij Mohan Toofan, Kishan Kant, Raj Kumar Jain, Samarendra Kundu, Balbir Jain, Abu Baker, G.S. Bhargava, Susheela Ramaswamy, Nirmala Joshi, and innumerable others were active associates of it. We had organised ICDS meetings every week in the precincts of the Sardar Patel Memorial Library, to discuss vital issues. Hardly a contemporary social, political or economic issue had escaped an expert scrutiny at ICDS meetings. It became a very popular high profile programme in New Delhi.

Apart from a large number of national leaders, many eminent socialist leaders from abroad also had addressed ICDS meetings. Among them were : Willy Brandt, Bruno Kreisky, Ralph Miliband and Neil Kinnock. ICDS had a branch in Calcutta also to do similar activities there. The Socialist International had accepted ICDS as an observer in its fold and Pradip Bose attended several meetings of the Socialist International as the representative of the ICDS.

The founding of the ICDS in late 1970s to stimulate discussion and debate on public policies from a socialist angle in India, at a time when many other socialists in official positions in Janata Party were showing reticence to use the socialist vocabulary and ideology in political debates, was a salutary contribution of Pradip Bose to the Indian Socialist movement, for which he will be remembered for long. His passionate involvement in the ICDS remains fresh and green in my mind. He wanted re-establishment of a united all-India Socialist Party as a

credible alternative to the Congress politics.

### Salutary Quality

A salutary quality of Pradip Bose was that, unlike many of our petty-minded leaders, who would not easily introduce a friend or colleague to a top political brass of his own country or abroad, whom they may know intimately, Pradip Bose was generous and large-hearted in introducing his colleagues in the socialist movement to his closest friends in India and abroad. For instance, on one occasion, in order to write a book on European Social Democrats, I had to visit fifteen countries of Europe—from Greece to Portugal and from Finland to Italy. When Pradip Bose knew that I was going to all those European countries to make a study of the socialist parties and governments and their policies, he prepared a list of all his close personal friends in those countries and gave it to me before I left for Europe. The list included sitting and former Chancellors (Prime Ministers), ministers and ex-ministers, important socialist party functionaries, including their international secretaries, key functionaries of the Socialist International and of the IUSY, prominent socialist ideologues and trade union leaders. They were all valuable contacts for me during my many visits to Europe. In my meetings with them, I found all of them very respectful to Pradip Bose. Once he introduced me to Anita Bose, daughter of his uncle Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who was a Professor of Economics in Germany. My book, *International Concerns of European Social Democrats*, published simultaneously in London and New York, by Macmillan Press and St. Martin's Press, was the

outcome of that visit.

Pradip Bose gave enthusiastic encouragement to undertake studies on democratic socialists. When I went to Scandinavian countries, like Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, to write a book on the system the Social Democratic Parties of those countries have built up for the people, Pradip Bose contacted his close socialist friends like Bernt Carlsson in Sweden, and Pentti Vaananen in Finland (former Secretary Generals of the Socialist International) and requested them to give me all possible assistance during my visit to Scandinavia. They did what was requested for by Pradip Bose. My book, *Pathfinders : Social Democrats of Scandinavia* was the result of that study. Pradip Bose so pleased with my book—the first book by an Indian on Social democracy in Scandinavia—that he wrote a scintillating review of that book in *Socialist Affairs*, published from London, and gave wide publicity to the book among the socialists world over.

### Socialist International

Pradip Bose had a strong relationship with the Socialist International (SI).

Its official journal, *Socialist Affairs*, regularly carried his reports on political developments in India. He was instrumental in establishing a linkage between the SI and the Janata Party. It was largely due to his initiative that a meeting of the SI Council was held in New Delhi in November 1977 under the Presidentship of Pierre Mauroy, former Prime Minister of France, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and attended by Indian socialist leaders like Madhu

Dandavate and Surendra Mohan.

Pradip Bose had close relationship with the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party. Their International Secretaries Nick Zigler and Axel Queval, on Pradip Bose's advice, supported my endeavour to hold two major international seminars – one on “Social Democracy and the Emerging Global Order” and, the other on “Welfare State Systems: Development and Challenges” – at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 1997 and 2001 respectively. These, path-breaking seminars were attended by many eminent personalities from Asia, Africa and Europe, including Mr. Kalevi Sorsa, former Prime Minister of Finland and Mrs. Gun-Britt Anderson, Social Affairs Minister of Sweden.

### Tiff With E.M.S. Naboodiripad

As a political analyst who had a short-lived fascination for communism in his younger days, Pradip Bose was a keen observer of communist politics in India and the world. After the publication of his significant book on the subject, *Communism and Communist Systems: Some Reflections*, there was an open clash of arguments between Pradip Bose and E.M.S. Naboodiripad. The well grounded analysis and arguments of Pradip Bose in the book pricked E.M.S. Naboodiripad to an extent that he thought it necessary to respond to Pradip Bose's solid critical evaluation of communist politics, through a series of his own articles. That was the power of Pradip Bose's writings.

Pradip Bose was among the earliest to detect the systematic drift of CPI(M) politics in West Bengal from the 'Left' to the 'Right', supportive of rich capitalists, contrary

to the party's professed pro-poor approach. He discerned in it a brewing ideological crisis in the State CPI(M), which became more open under the Chief Ministership of Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Singur and Nandigram epitomised that new 'Right' turn of the CPI(M). He pointed out the futility of the CPI(M) strategy of combining revolutionary rhetoric with reformist practice, which kept the CPI(M) in a limbo that the party became neither a revolutionary party nor a reformist party, as it continued to eulogise Joseph V. Stalin as a role model for the party leadership. He was of the view that the collapse of the Soviet communism and its Stalinist structures had so bewildered the communists that they were groping in the dark to find a credible role for them. To end their bewilderment, he had pointed a way for them when he wrote: "In the world today there are only two clear cut ideological alternatives: 1) the neo-liberal market fundamentalist approach, which asks to leave all societal problems to the market to solve; and 2) the social democratic approach, which wishes to combine the efforts of the state, market and civil society in harmonious manner to bring about greater justice, equality, and solidarity in order to create a more humane society." According to him, in the present context the logical step for the communists in India would be to move towards social democracy, the path chosen by almost all communist parties of Europe in recent years. In Russia, Mikhail Gorbachev was leading a social democratic movement, he had pointed out.

### A Prolific Writer

Pradip Bose was a regular contributor to the socialist publications like *Janata* (Mumbai),

and *Socialist Affairs* (London). Apart from his autobiography, *Growing up in India*, and *Communism and Communist Systems: Some Reflections*, about which references have already been made, Pradip Bose published two classics after doing enormous research, lasting many years, for writing them – viz., *Subhas Bose and India Today: A New Tryst With Destiny*, published in 1999, and *Social Democracy in Practice: Socialist International (1951-2001)*, published in 2005. Indeed, it is my considered view that Pradip Bose deserved a D. Litt (h.c.) from any top university in the world, for writing those two classics. First one is a scholarly in-depth analysis of his uncle Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, unravelling his enigmatic ways, his politics and vision, and the unresolved mystery surrounding his disappearance attached to a concocted story of a plane crash on 18 August 1945, which, on investigation, was found, a total fabrication. It is also a treatise on what India would have been if free India had followed the path shown by Subhas Bose, instead of the one shown by Jawaharlal Nehru. It is a thoughtful work studded with comparisons and contrasts between the stalwarts of India's freedom struggle. In it Pradip Bose has raised a fundamental question which will continue to ring in the ears of every Indian for a long time: "Why does India, potentially one of the richest countries in the world, continue to remain one of the poorest, most malnourished and most illiterate regions of the world, after fifty years of independence? Why have the problems of casteism, communalism and gender-insensitivity shown no signs of being solved?" These are stirring words of Pradip Bose which will continue to reverberate in Indian

politics. He was sensitive to the problems of the downtrodden. The second book is an authentic analysis of the 50 years' history of the activities of the Socialist International between 1951 and 2001. The book testifies beyond doubt that apart from having a political mind of a democratic socialist, Pradip Bose had an analytical mind of an accomplished researcher. It is a unique book, which narrates the story of the widening and deepening of the activities of the Socialist International during the second half of the 20th century. Besides, it is a mine of information on the SI organisation and gives a superb analysis of its working in the post-war period. It has analysed the significance of the SI, and the role it played in the growth and development of international socialist movement, by expanding its membership to the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, Australia, North America and Latin America.

### Accomplished Speaker

Pradip Bose seldom went to make a public speech without making a thorough homework. In 1997 I invited him, on behalf of the Jayaprakash Foundation, to deliver the prestigious Jayaprakash Narayan Memorial Lecture at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. In the Lecture, he lauded JP as one of the finest men of the twentieth century who had left behind a legacy of honest thinking and action and a spirit of self-sacrifice, which would be remembered forever in the history of India and would inspire future generations. The subject of his lecture that day was: "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Man and His Vision". After explaining

the role played by Subhas Bose and Jayaprakash Narayan during the freedom struggle, Pradip Bose told the audience that it was unfortunate that Jayaprakash Narayan, “a leader of such outstanding ability could not combine his efforts with another legendary figure of Indian history - Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Looking back it seems that if they had acted together, then perhaps Indian history could have been written in a different and better way”. That lecture, presided over by the JNU Vice Chancellor Prof. Asis Datta, and attended by a large number of JNU faculty and students and important public men, was a hallmark of his erudition, scholarship and analytical mind. Throughout the lecture, he kept the audience spellbound, by reeling out episodes after episodes of the daring activities and sacrifices of Subhas Bose for India’s freedom from the British.

In India, Pradip Bose maintained an exceptionally warm relationship with Asoka Mehta, whom he regularly used to meet. I remember my going with him, off and on to meet Asoka Mehta in his underground farm house in Chhatharpur village near Qutab Minar in Delhi.

### **A Good Human Being**

Pradip Bose was a pleasant charming personality, a vibrant conversationalist, a thinker and a man of aesthetics. He was a graceful gentleman, highly cultured, and trustworthy to whom one could turn for advice during critical situations. He was hard working, sincere, helpful without expecting reciprocity and strongly attached to the values and principles of democratic socialism. Indeed, Pradip Bose was an embodiment of what is good in a

human being. Throughout his life, Pradip Bose wielded the torch of democratic socialism with utmost devotion. He was a comrade-in-arms of many outstanding, internationally reputed, democratic socialist statesmen.

Pradip Bose was an optimist. Apparent failures never stopped him from making fresh efforts. Seldom, I saw him losing his temper even under provocations. He was so gentle that he could absorb any criticism with a smile. For him, the socialist fraternity was a large extended family, bound by the spirit of solidarity. He was free from all kinds of narrow loyalties, whether based on caste, religion, region or nationality. He was absolutely honest and led a simple life.

Pradip Bose had no doubt about India’s great future. He said: “I am convinced that there is enormous potentiality in the Indian people and that in spite of the complexity of her problems, India with right leadership and organisation could forge ahead to take her place among the leading nations of the world.” For achieving it, he had a vision which said: “I want India to be a land of synthesis in which all the contradictory elements are reconciled in our political, economic and cultural life. At this stage of human evolution this will be the greatest challenge, not only in India but all over the world. All countries faced with conflict between religious communities, between black and white, between rich and poor, between the old ways and the new have to work for their reconciliation or face disaster. If India could achieve such a synthesis she will have something to give to the world.”

### **My Last Meeting**

My last meeting with Pradip Bose was in June this year in New Delhi while I was on my way back to Trivandrum from Finland after receiving an Honorary Doctorate from the Helsinki University. Pradip Bose was delighted over my receiving that great honour from that top European University. We had a brief chat. I found him hail and hearty, though a little weak and fragile. So was Joyce Bose. I wished them well and returned. Our subsequent telephonic conversations never gave any incling that the end was so near.

No doubt, socialists will remember him for long for his exemplary qualities as a great enlightened socialist who had devoted his life to promote the cause of socialism. For giving him whole-hearted support in this regard all through his life, his beloved British wife, Joyce Bose, whose unfailing courtesy and hospitality befitting a highly cultured woman, which I can never forget, will also be remembered by socialists in India. .

For me, Pradip Bose’s death is an irreparable personal loss. For the socialist movement the void which his death has created is difficult to fill.

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of everything Walmart sells comes from Chinese-owned companies. Indian market is already flooded with Chinese goods which are capturing the Indian market with cheap goods and traders are already crying foul because of the deplorable labour practices adopted by China. Can in all fairness, Indian Government still persist in keeping retail market open to foreign enterprises and thus endangering the earnings and occupation of millions of our countrymen and women?



# The Relentless Fighter

**Prem Singh**

When he left the world at the age of 84, Surendra Mohan was busy, absolutely engrossed in his work. During the last few years he had fought his indifferent health having even fainted on the dais at a public function in Delhi some years ago. Manju Mohan tried her utmost to make him realize his physical frailty and be mindful of his health issues but he was not the one to listen to her protestations. He did have to be hospitalized a few times, to draw his attention to his treatment and medication but Surendra Mohan's strong zest for life always pulled him back to active public life. Nothing – bad roads distances, inclement weather - could hold him back from his commitments.

When he was hospitalized on the night of 11th December 2010 before the next-day vital meeting in Mumbai regarding the formation of the Socialist Party, no one was really surprised to see him reach the meeting venue on time at 10 in the morning. He dismissed Manjuji's concerns about his health. His age and health could neither temper the energy he directed to his meetings nor dilute his hunger for reading, information and thought. He was always present at social, cultural and educational events despite his political engagements and struggles. Very few amongst his generation and also young contemporaries matched his active lifestyle. No wonder he was one of the most sought after presence in public programmes and meetings.

People often start pondering about the last phase of their life after a certain age. Few actually bid adieu

to the world in the manner they would really like to. Surendra Mohan never considered death as a hindrance to ongoing peoples' movements. This was the secret why he did not worry too much about health matters. He wanted to die working in the political arena and that is exactly how it happened. On 16th December he participated in a sit-in dharna at Jantar Mantar against judicial corruption and breathed his last the next day early morning. Earlier, he had gone on a whirlwind tour of various states. Had he lived to see the day of 17<sup>th</sup> December, he would have been busy attending some programme or the other or meeting visitors and discussing issues with them at home. This is the closest example one gets of a person embracing death on one's own terms.

Those who do not bother about death and focus instead on their commitments in the here and now, are more anxious about how their efforts will be remembered and taken forward. A person who had spent a life time for the poor and downtrodden is concerned how his endeavors will go on when he is no more. One realizes, through experience, how an individual's contribution is either dissipated or drastically morphed after his death. Every thinker and activist has a different perspective of his own contribution when he or she will be no more, and is concerned about it in one way or another. Surendra Mohan lived such a life that he will always be remembered as one who fought relentlessly for the cause of the poor and unheard masses and against neo-liberalism and was one of its greatest

opponents.

Surendra Mohan had thus become synonymous with the movement against neo-liberalism in a positive and realistic manner in the country. Even the neighboring countries were influenced by his efforts and concerned citizens respected his cause. The loud and clear message of his life is that all the forces and groups that stand in opposition to neo-liberalism, should not be viewed as competitors but as associates and colleagues. They should come together, in cooperation and work as associates in a similar goal. His comrades included Gandhians on one hand to extreme left leaning activists on the other. He was a constant figure at every platform that espoused the cause of marginalized groups – Dalits, women, tribals, minorities, peasants. In his all-encompassing efforts, he virtually expanded and intensified the scope of the socialist idea.

The media did write about his passing away but the reports were usually confined to his achievements in the mainstream political domain. Surendra Mohan's relevance and significance lies in his efforts towards the expansion and intensification of the struggle against neo-liberalism, not in the fact that he played a role in the Janata Party or his role in the times of V P Singh and Deve Gowda. The time he spent in his crusade against liberalization is viewed in many journalistic circles as a period of his marginalization in politics, solely because it is not 'newsworthy'. Politicians who succeed in the power game of politics

come a dime a dozen. It is sad that the media concentrates on only those who have succeeded or are elbowing their way to seats of power. Why is it that the passing away of Surendra Mohan is not newsworthy to the media for the efforts he was making without seeking political 'success' and limelight?

The greatest achievement of the JP movement was the rescue and re-establishment of democracy in India. But that could, nonetheless, have been possible by the coming together of all opposition parties against the regime of Indira Gandhi. JP himself realized very soon that Janata Party was an experiment to save democracy. It was not meant to benefit the cause of socialism in any way and it did not. Had the socialist leaders of the times dug in their feet on this point, JP might have had to retract his 'dictate' of merging the Socialist Party in the newly formed Janata Party. In this context I would like to underline the fact that the entire politics of social justice espoused by various fragments of 'Janata Parivar' is only incidental and remote in its connection to the revolutionary content of the socialist philosophy and transformative politics of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.

Despite the fact that Surendra Mohan often enumerated the positive fallout of the Janata Party and the resultant politics of social justice in its wake the fact cannot be brushed aside that the merger of Socialist Party with Janata Party rang in the demise of the socialist movement in the country. The ease with which the country sashayed into the arms of neo-liberalism is due to the absence of the Socialist Party on the political landscape. The damage could have been controlled

to some extent if the founders of Samajwadi Jan Parishad (SJP) like Kishan Patnaik, Bhai Vaidya, Pannalal Surana and Vinod Prasad Singh along with the leader of Samajwadi Janata Party, Chandra Shekhar and leader of Janta Dal (Secular), Surendra Mohan had come together in some sort of an understanding. Surendra Mohan did encourage new political workers to join the Samajwadi Jan Parishad after its formation in 1995 to strengthen the socialist movement, but unfortunately no real efforts for understanding or co-operation could emerge between the leading lights of the day.

Surendra Mohan would say that he and some others tried to revive the Socialist Party in 1979, but it didn't find many takers. In the last 2 or 3 decades there has been talk of rebuilding unity amongst the socialists but it has not come to pass in reality. It leaves serious doubts, therefore, that the revival and reorganization of the Socialist Party of 1948 in Hyderabad on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 would have succeeded where earlier attempts had failed. The revival of the Socialist Party, which is often mentioned as the culmination of Surendra Mohan's dream, is a challenging and difficult aim. Surendra Mohan knew this and was not in a hurry to step on the gas. Just as it is not possible to strengthen the socialist movement by the 'socialists' who hobnob with neo-liberal and communalist forces, the formation of one more outfit in the presence of several, will not result in any forward movement. The best way,

Initially, would be to simply learn to work and co-operate together for some time.

It is necessary to mention that Surendra Mohan's significance attains different hues for certain people. The so-called socialists who sided with or joined BJP and Congress and helped promote neo-liberalism as well as communalism and several NGOites find a good camouflage in Surendra Mohan's association, even if by remote connections of history. They are happy to live in the reflected glory of his association, howsoever distant. They will, in all probability, continue to reap this benefit even after his death. Surendra Mohan never rejected their advances. His belief in the goodness of man and possibilities of change was inexhaustible. Hopefully such people will not break his faith when he is no more.

Surendra Mohan was a prolific writer and wrote extensively in both Hindi and English newspapers and magazines. Two of his recent books are – *'Vartman Rajniti Ki Jwalant Chunnotiyan'* (Burning Challenges of Contemporary Politics) and *'Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Ki Neetiyan'* (Policies of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia). He was the editor of the English weekly *'Janata'*. His editorials in this journal, launched in 1946 by socialist stalwarts, have immense archival value. He excelled in editorial work and his knowledge was immense with a sharp memory to match it. He was a busy political activist, but his involvement did not prevent him from extensive reading. On his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, the committee formed to organize the celebrations had planned to release his articles in a book form. Two days before the function, he called me up to enquire if it was at all possible for a booklet to be produced for the program, given the short notice. My colleague

Harimohan Mishra and I spent two nights at the press, gathered together his articles and brought out a booklet titled 'Samajwad: Ateet, Vartmaan Aur Bhavishya' (Socialism : Past, Present and Future). Sometime later I planned two other books of his writings - 'Samajwad Dharmnirpekshita Aur Samajik Nyay' (Socialism Secularism and

Social Justice) and 'Vikas Ka Rasta' (Path of Development). Surendra Mohan was an open minded person. Ever since I started working with him, I have not known him to be adverse to criticism or difference of opinion. It was a pleasure to work with him and we often shared many a humorous moments. Surendra ji is no more - it is going to hurt for

some time. However, his inspiration will nudge us on and things will go on, hopefully in the way he would have wanted them to. It is the responsibility of all those who knew and respected him to pledge to work in this direction and ensure that the torch of his life's mission continues to burn and show us a lighted path.

—Gandhi Marg, July-September 2011

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political stability, the economic stability is not possible. One can see that. The country is going down the hill as far as the economy is concerned. Industrial growth rate has slipped to 5.1 per cent, the lowest in the last two years. The growth of GDP is just above 7 per cent which is the minimum if the nation does not want to see the lay offs and dire unemployment. India is no more considered a good place for investment. The licking that the rupee is getting shows that. The Manmohan Singh government will have to make many compromises to stay in power. This may entail the economic packages to Trinamul Congress, the DMK or smaller parties. This is not good for the country's health, economically or politically. The Congress is right when it blames the opposition for stalling parliament and not letting the key bills to be passed. Indeed, the opposition's role is negative when the nation faces a difficult hour. But then the opposition is interested in coming to power by hook or by crook, not in pushing the economy. In the process, people are suffering and missing pace and progress in development. On the chessboard of politics, the different parties are busy playing the game in such a way that they sustain their strength and project their own interest even if it means stagnation for

thenation. No doubt, they do not want to face election because of uncertainty of the outcome. But there does seem to be any other way to get out from the mess, which the non-governance of rulers and non-cooperation of the opposition has brought about. The electorate has no faith in what the government claims and no confidence in what the political parties promise. People want a change (*parivartan*). Hazare's

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complete abolition of child labor.

### 5) Secularism

Religious fanaticism and intolerance is rising dangerously not only in India but all over the world. True Indian culture is a fusion of many religions, faiths and languages. All the religions are nurturing superstitions using newer technologies and science. SYS wants to create truly secular society where ultimate faith of every citizen will be nationalism and humanity. SYS wants to create a society based on rationalism and science.

### 6) Abolition of castes

Case system is a curse to Indian Society. It is the caste system which has deprived majority of our people of their basic human rights, divided our society and halted the progress of our country for centuries together. SYS pledges to create a 'Casteless Society'. For this SYS will encourage and

agitation has awakened them to the misdeeds of those in power or those who are outside it. Fresh election may throw up new faces, new parties and new combinations. There may well be *amanthan* (churning). Some dirt is bound to come out. This is good for the nation. Ultimately things will settle down to usher in a new chapter, new environment and new vigour. There is no alternative to new elections.

support inter-caste marriages, will discourage caste based institutions, organizations and politics.

### 7) Eradication of Corruption

Corruption is another curse to our society. It has eroded every walk of life and has today become the way of life. Corruption has many faces and many hands. Corruption needs complete eradication and the process has to start from every citizen. Members of SYS will take oath that they will not take or give bribe; they will not evade taxes and will not accumulate unaccounted money.

### 8) Women equality

Women are discriminated and are victims of atrocities. SYS believes in women equality, women empowerment and dignity. SYS members will not accept dowry in any form and SYS will put all its strength against atrocities.

### 9) Non-violence

SYS strongly condemns all kinds of

of violence. SYS believes in non-violence and respects Indian democracy and constitution. SYS appeals to all its members to use various non-violent ways to bring socialist political change.

### 10) Constructive work

Sanghatan, Sangharsha, Rajneeti must be supplanted with Rachanatmak Karya i.e. constructive work. Present politics is deviated from constructive work. Members of SYS will take up constructive work in various walks of life.

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The “all or nothing” stand that Team Anna has adopted on the legislation strengthens fears that any bill which does not conform one hundred per cent with the Jana Lokpal Bill approved by Anna Hazare and his associates is apt to be rejected. The track record shows that both Hazare and his colleagues are of one mind on this. Their attitude has led to apprehensions, voiced in particular by Congress leader Digvijay Singh, that Hazare and his team will want to have the final say irrespective of the concessions the government makes. Since there is no flexibility on Team Hazare’s part, chances of confrontation look brighter than chances of reconciliation and consensus. This, in turn, reinforces the sentiment that nothing is likely to change on the political front in the New Year.

We would dearly like to be proved wrong. And with that hope, we pass on to our dear readers the compliments of the season. May there be better times ahead for all of us. Jai Hind!

Durban and the search for climate justice The COP17/CMP7 summit in Durban which concluded on 11 December reached decisions that can move us towards a legally binding agreement to halt and reverse the path we are currently taking towards catastrophic climate change, but the hopes for a substantial deal on emissions reductions have not been realised. The international community must find an accord with the ambition to limit the global temperature rise to a maximum of 2°C or 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, which remains the only possible solution to the dangers faced by the world.

In establishing the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, the conference rightly concluded that any future agreement on climate change must be legally binding, referred to officially as “an agreed outcome with legal force”. It is now more vital than ever that negotiations continue without delay and in a spirit of compromise and understanding in order to make these goals a reality, as the cost of postponing such an agreement grows with every passing year. With Durban, the framework is also now in place for the operation of the Green Climate Fund with the approval of its Governing Instrument, although long-term sources of financing for the Fund have yet to be finalised. The decision launching the Fund addresses the need to balance the allocation of resources between adaptation and mitigation activities, which is in line with the Socialist International’s call in Johannesburg at the end of October this year. A positive step is also the commitment that a mechanism for technology transfer will be fully operational by 2012 to “promote and enhance the research, development, and deployment and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries”. We congratulate the South African hosts for showing the leadership and perseverance to obtain these and other agreements, but we are under no illusions that there is much hard work ahead of us all. It must be acknowledged at the same time that some of the commitments we were hoping to see in Durban on deepening and formalising pledged cuts in emissions, as outlined in the declaration of the Socialist International made in Johannesburg, have not been achieved. Equally, much progress needs to be made on policies for the protection of forests, developing renewable technologies and establishing systems for measurement, reporting and verification, and the decisions reached lack the necessary urgency to effectively address the case of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The international community must persevere within the framework of the UNFCCC to come together in a common search for solutions to the greatest threat that currently faces the planet. Multilateralism continues to be the only way forward, with the vast majority of the nations on the planet wishing to see political will match the scientific requirements and no longer willing to accept ‘pledge and review’, with the direct involvement of political leaders in the process crucial to deliver the responses needed. The Socialist International will continue to place the issue of climate change at the heart of its agenda, starting with the forthcoming Council meeting to take place in San José, Costa Rica in January 2012 and continuing with the work and activities of its Commission for a Sustainable World Society as we head towards Rio+20, COP18 and beyond.

**George Papandreou,**  
*President*

**Luis Ayala**  
*Secretary General*

**Socialist International**