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**Politics without Ethics**  
*Indian democracy in turmoil*

Kautilya accorded a high place for honesty in politics. Plato emphasized the importance of virtue, declaring that ‘no virtue is so virtuous as the virtue of self-restraint.’ For Aristotle moderation was the key to political stability, social well being and individual happiness. In modern times Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated the power of non-violence and satyagraha by leading India from bondage to freedom through an unparalleled non-violent revolution. Underlying the foundations of democratic India are such civilisational values as tolerance, compassion and universal peace. These, along with lofty ideals are enshrined in the Constitution of the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India which emerged out of parturition pains and unprecedented communal riots, as a stable democracy, compelling global attention and acclaim.

Seventy years on, India presents a disheartening picture for a variety of reasons. Authoritarianism and anarchy along with corruption have become the bane of Indian democracy. Dynastic dominance, once the prerogative of Delhi durbar, has winged its way into state politics. Institutional decline has degenerated into a crisis of despair. The truncated sessions of Parliament of India and state legislatures present a pathetic picture, if and when they function. A colossal burden it is on public money thanks to the 5000 elected representatives of the people. The intensity of adversarial culture has come to be debated openly in public domain, as for instance the strained relationship between the executive and the judiciary. Recent developments have revealed a new malaise which Dr N.R. Madhava Menon superbly summed up thus : “The real threats to independence of judiciary today are from within the judiciary. One such threat is the personality of the judge himself.”

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution were hailed as ‘the most sufficient systemic transformation in the governance of the Indian polity since the Constitution entered into force.’ But as Panchayati Raj Institutions find a place in the Directive Principles of State Policy, devolution of powers is the responsibility of the state governments. PRIs, the third tier of India’s democratic government, suffer from want of funds and functionaries. Neither the state chief minister nor the MPs and MLAs have ever displayed enthusiasm for the ‘third stratum of government’ at the local level. George Mathew put it aptly that ‘decentralization is an anathema to the MPs.’

The enfeeblement of institutions is also due to the fact that parties and politicians have come to regard elections as vital for survival in politics. The battle for the ballot, the 2019 general election, has begun too early and too boisterously for the showdown that is more than a year away. Not just war of words but a 24/7 smear campaign which is a feast for the electronic media. Ominous indeed is the role of crony capitalism with the elite classes calling the shots from behind - a kind of plutocracy that is controlling the levers of power. The mega loan frauds, involving some leading nationalized banks, resulting in loss of lakhs of crores of public money bears testimony to it. The outcome of private public partnership has aptly been described as ‘privatization of profits and nationalization of losses!’

Late Rajni Kothari, the renowned political scientist, suggested in his *Memoirs* that civil society must be strengthened at the grassroots level. He asserted that civil society alone can arrest the excesses of the state. Every village, town and city must foster the growth of civil society groups to strengthen the foundations of democracy. India today is in the grip of a political turmoil mainly because of marginalization of ethical values in public life and public discourse. Still there is a ray of hope. There is always a silver lining to India’s never ending dark clouds. As Rajni Kothari wrote “ It is not until the youth itself becomes a catalyst of basic transformation and emancipation that there lies much hope.”

The Editor

True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.

Mahatma Gandhi

## ARE WE FACING AN EVOLUTIONARY CRISIS?

**Prof. Manoj Das**

(A seer among scholars, the venerable Prof. Manoj Das lives in Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

Those who had taken Einstein's warning in his *Out of My Later Years* not to trust our intellect because it had no conscience though it had muscles, need not be surprised at the thesis put forth by Dr. Gerald Crabtree of Stanford University in a recent issue of *Trends in Genetics* suggesting that the human race had begun to lose its intellectual and emotional abilities.

As expected, the scientist makes a brilliantly detached analysis of the situation in terms of genetics and mutations but leaves it to us to evaluate the socio-psychological consequences of his deduction that runs against the modern man's self-assured complacency about his mind. But the suspicion that the attributes of mind –intellect, intelligence, wit *et al* are proving to be less and less dependable for the very fundamental needs of life – peace, happiness and a certain stability of faith in the very purpose of life - have been felt for quite some time by now. We have to focus on some developments within a wider range of life to appreciate this assumption:

If two persons from the same milieu and more or less similar in everything and suffering from the same malady are treated by the same medical and psychiatric care, the signs of healing should be more or less the same. But it was observed that while one's response to the treatment was along the expected line, the other staged an inexplicably sudden recovery. The regularly monitored physical and emotional reactions of both did not lead to any clue for this phenomenon. The question several such cases raised was - could our consciousness contain an unidentified faculty that responded in a positive way in the second case?

Several experiences of this nature, after thorough discussions on them by the Executive Board

of the World Health Organisation at Geneva in 1978 as well as in its subsequent meetings, led it to pass a resolution at the 36<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly in 1983 to add to the prevailing scope and definition of health which was "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being" - the factor of spirituality. Under the auspices of the WHO the then chief of Health Services of the Government of India, Dr. D. B. Bisht and Director, NIMHANS, Dr. G.N. Reddy, convened a workshop at Bangalore, in February 1985 to assess this proposition in the Indian context. It was an unpublicised brain storming event in which forty of the country's leading medical practitioners, life-scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, jurists and a few students of the mystic lore (which included this author) participated. Although spirituality was an age-old concept, to determine its relevance to as down-to-earth a field as health was a challenging exercise.

Concrete cases were cited that could lead to the hypothesis that deep within man a hitherto ignored constituent of consciousness was demanding recognition and its suppression could lead to several problems, mental, emotional and physical. What had been for ages an experience only with Yogis and mystics, an aspect of consciousness that was its very basis and which sustained the whole structure of our being despite its other constituents like mind and emotions constantly fighting among themselves, was probably at last trying to assert itself, slowly but surely, in the life of a greater number of people.

Hence the hypothesis: if polygraph, popularly known as the lie-detection test, leaves us in little doubt that there is a part of our consciousness that shrinks from falsehood – and the fact that despite all the deviations and aberrations civilisations survive on the ideal of truth and values aligned with it – it should not appear unrealistic if the élan of evolution strove to bring to the forefront what is already involved in us – call it "Factor X" if not Soul.

In the wake of Dr. Crabtree's thesis the significant finding of a research conducted by the Notre Dame Professors of psychology, Anita Kelly and

Why must we exchange the flowering fields of poesy for the dry dust of politics?

Sarojini Naidu

## INDIA'S MISSED MARITIME OPPORTUNITIES

**Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)**

Former Chief of Naval Staff and  
Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Lijuan Yang, has come to light. It claims that those who avoid speaking lies enjoy a better quality of health. Simply through a casually developed habit we utter lies – exaggerations included - most of which were unwarranted. The well-oriented and documented research shows that those who willed and stopped the habit got rid of a lot of irritating disorders.

The research only confirms what is an inborn knowledge with us; we unconsciously respect truth and honesty. We spontaneously exclaim with appreciation, “What an honest man is he!” We do not exclaim in the same spirit, “What a dishonest man is he!”

Needless to say, truth and honesty are not the natural virtues of mind and its instrument, the intelligence. If we have to realise these goals, we have to surpass mind.

According to Sri Aurobindo, “At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.” Sri Aurobindo envisions a future when the mind could be transformed into a Supramental gnosis.

Dr. Crabtree's thesis leaves us with a choice between two attitudes: we resign to a future when technology would mould our fate, our mind growing cipher, or we cultivate a collective aspiration to release what remains involved in our consciousness. To a professor who was logically convinced of Sri Aurobindo's vision but wondered if the ugly man of today could really grow into something beautiful, a rustic school teacher told, “If a wonder like the lotus could bloom out of mud with the Sun's Grace, why can't out of our muddy mind bloom the Supramental with the Divine's Grace?”

We may replace Divine's Grace with Evolutionary thrust, if we please.

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Seven decades ago, Indian historian-diplomat, KM Panikkar presciently observed, “That China intends to embark on a policy of large scale naval expansion is clear enough... with her bases extending as far south as Hainan, China will be in an advantageous position...”

No one paid attention to Panikkar, because, just weeks before independence, India was busy with the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, where Nehru articulated his grand vision of India's role in emerging Asia – an idealistic dream, in which a ‘non-violent’ India would be an exemplar by eschewing the use of force. China's realist founders, on the other hand, had set two basic objectives for the newborn Communist nation; that China would attain ‘great power’ status via the nuclear-weapon route; and that it would brook no rival for leadership of Asia. The quarter century that elapsed between Deng Xiaoping's plea to his countrymen to; “hide your capabilities, bide your time and never take the lead”, and ‘Chairman-forever’ Xi Jinping's authoritative declaration of his ‘dream of national rejuvenation’, has seen China's economic heft and coercive military power take a quantum jump.

Panikkar's prophesy came true in 2000, when China started construction of its southern-most naval base at Yulin, on Hainan Island. Built at colossal cost, Yulin's tunnel-complexes house China's submarine nuclear-deterrent, while its piers will accommodate aircraft-carrier strike-groups. This is a maritime hub created for the PLA Navy (PLAN) to exercise sea-control and power-projection, across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, whose waters carry China's vital trade and energy sea-lanes. President Hu Jintao's ‘Malacca dilemma’ encapsulated anxiety about China's vulnerability to possible interdiction of its seaborne trade by the Indian Navy (IN). China consequently, decided to become a major player, in the Indian

There is no strength more effective than purity, no bliss more satisfying than love, no joy more restoring than devotion, and no triumph more praiseworthy than surrender. Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Ocean Region (IOR). Deftly playing its economic and diplomatic cards, China has established a chain of maritime footholds in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and acquired its first overseas military base in Djibouti last year.

The tiny, but strategically located archipelagic Republic of Maldives has traditionally maintained warm and friendly links with India. Alert diplomats should have picked up early signs of Maldives slipping out of India's ambit; the appearance of radical Islam via Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the warming of relations with China and the decline in India's stock. President Yameen's actions, albeit unconstitutional and arbitrary, still remain an 'internal affair' of Maldives; and China's thinly-veiled threats enable him to defy India.

New Delhi has, very sensibly, resisted the urge to invoke an 'Indian Monroe Doctrine' and attempt regime-change in Male through military action; its forbearance is bound to be rewarded. Alarmist reports about possible PLAN 'gunboat diplomacy' need to be viewed against the geographic reality that a Chinese warship would take 8-10 days to cover the 3500 miles from Yulin to Male. The flip side of this reality is; that Indian troops were in Male within 16 hours to save the nation from a coup in 1988, and it took the IN just 24 hours to come to the aid of tsunami-hit Maldivians in 2004. The Maldivian participation in the IN exercise 'Milan' is always a token one, and too much need not be read into its absence this year.

Against this backdrop, India's recent agreement with Oman, providing access, for 'military use and logistical support' in the new Port of Duqm, has raised hopes that India is, belatedly, strengthening its maritime posture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). There have been other significant developments too; like President Kovind's visit to Djibouti and its impending recognition by India; the conclusion of an Indo-Seychelles agreement for creation of air and naval facilities on Assumption Island; and the agreement with UAE for joint naval exercises. Whether they herald a renewed impetus to India's maritime outreach; or perhaps the actualization of PM Modi's 2015 'Sagar' vision, depends on whether

they are random actions, or part of a coherent Indian maritime grand-strategy.

China has been releasing defence White Papers every two years, and its 10th White Paper, issued in 2015, enunciated; "It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force, commensurate with its ... maritime rights and interests; and to protect the security of strategic sea lanes". Accordingly, Beijing has built a powerful navy that will soon overtake the US Navy in numbers, lagging only in capability. New Delhi, on the other hand, has shown no tangible signs of strategic-thinking or long-term security planning; as evident from a total absence of defence white papers or security doctrines to-date. The navy did spell out, in 2004-05, its own vision of India's maritime interests and challenges through a Maritime Doctrine and a Maritime Strategy. But, in the absence of higher strategic guidance in the form of a national-level document, they are of limited utility.

Thus, while lack of political resolve and diplomatic lassitude have been contributory factors; it is the absence of an over-arching vision which conceptualizes the IOR in a 50-75 year perspective, that have led to the neglect of maritime issues critical to India's vital interests. Examples: the Chabahar port project should have been completed long ago, notwithstanding US sanctions; the offer of Agalega Islands, from Mauritius, should have been taken up years ago; the Maldives imbroglio, should have been pre-empted; and our disregard of distant Mozambique and Madagascar, remains a huge maritime 'missed opportunity'. The IOR strategic agenda may be soon taken out of India's hands, as the Chairmanship of two important bodies, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) devolves on UAE and Iran respectively.

There is no doubt that, today, Mr Modi strides the world stage like a colossus; gaining entry for India into select international clubs and striking strategic deals in national interest. However, at home, the fixation of our political leadership with unending electioneering and political survival has resulted in egregious neglect in many spheres, including national security. If India's political leadership is to

spare mental space for national security issues of existential import, there needs to be a semblance of harmony in the political domain. This will not happen as long as India's deep internal divisions and instabilities continue to be exploited and its polity remains so bitterly divided that Parliament is rendered dysfunctional.

Let us remember that 'great power' status is not pre-ordained for India. If we do not get our political and economic acts together, India could well remain a large, over-populated and chaotic third-world nation – may be with the world's 3rd largest GDP.

(Courtesy: *The Indian Express*, e-paper, March 2, 2018)

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## China removes two-term limit for Xi Jinping

The new announcement marks the steady consolidation by the Xi Jinping cluster.

**Cmde. (Retd.) C. Uday Bhaskar**

Director of the Society for Policy Studies  
(Former Director IDSA & NMF)

The Chinese Communist Party which is at the heart of the power pyramid in Beijing paved the way for President Xi Jinping to continue in office beyond his second five-year term by altering the constitutional provision that sets a limit of two terms for the office of the President of China.

A bland statement from the official news agency Xinhua noted on Sunday: "The Communist Party of China Central Committee proposed to remove the expression that the President and Vice-President of the People's Republic of China 'shall serve no more than two consecutive terms' from the country's Constitution."

The removal of the two-term ceiling for President Xi is not unexpected and was anticipated even in October last when the party endorsed a second term for 'Emperor' Xi, along with an amendment that added his name and ideology to the constitution. This significant addition to the constitution brought

Xi Jinping on par with the party founder and the Great Helmsman Mao Zedong and his successor Deng Xiaoping.

The ideology that is associated with Xi is 'socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era' and with the latest amendment announced on Sunday, it is evident that the new era envisioned by Beijing will have a long term new helmsman in Xi Jinping.

This announcement to remove the two-term ceiling for the President and the Vice-President will have a very significant impact on the current distribution of power in China and marks the steady and determined consolidation by the Xi Jinping cluster.

The constitutional amendment comes ahead of the annual meeting of the Chinese parliament that opens on March 5, where Xi Jinping will be formally elected to his second five year term in office.

The current number two in the party hierarchy is Prime Minister Li Keqiang and the traditional division of responsibility has the PM being the economic czar and the hands-on political leader for a billion plus Chinese citizens. But all eyes in Beijing are on Wang Qishan, a close Xi confidante and the face of the anti-corruption drive that has seen many powerful heads roll over the last year.

In October 2017 at the 19th party congress, Wang, then 69 years old, had stepped down from the all powerful seven-member Standing Committee on reaching what is deemed to be the retirement age for senior Chinese political leaders. But in a move that did not go unnoticed at the time, Xi Jinping appointed Wang as a parliament delegate, thereby enabling his potential appointment as the Vice President (VP).

It is instructive to note that the Sunday amendment to the constitution refers to the two-term rule being lifted for both the President and the VP and this will lay the foundation for an extended Xi-Wang reign in current Chinese governance.

The primary inference that follows is that Xi Jinping will now combine three unfettered hats—that

Only 2.3% of the Indian workforce has had formal training in skills compared with 96% in South Korea. Less than a fifth of Indian graduates are immediately employable.

of party supremo as general secretary; President of China, with no time limit; and the undisputed military leader who has purged many top generals for graft and thereby established his authority over the PLA.

There are some muted murmurs on social media in China about why such an amendment is not desirable but in my view, they will remain effete. The arrival of the new emperor in Beijing was on the cards and all of China's principal interlocutors, including India will have to deal with this visible consolidation of political and military power by the new helmsman.

(Courtesy: *The Week*, February 25, 2018)

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## Rajiv Years

**Dr. R.V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar I.A.S. (Retd.)**

Former Secretary, HRD, Govt. of India  
& Prof. IIM, Bengaluru

In August 1980, K joined the Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals, and he was attached to that Ministry for six years. October 31, 1984 began as any other day but by afternoon rumours were afloat that Indira Gandhi was shot by her own bodyguard, and dead. With the wisdom of hindsight, the shooting should not have been a matter of surprise. For a couple of years Punjab had been an inferno; no one in Punjab, Hindu or Sikh who did not support Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers was safe. One day in his office, K heard a commotion in the corridors. He came out of his room to find the office staff gathered around a stenographer who was distributing sweets. It turned out that the stenographer had been to his village in Punjab and was celebrating his return from the killing fields of Punjab safe and sound. Come to think of, Operation Bluestar, the military operation to flush out Bhindranwale and his followers from the sacred Golden Temple, Amrtisar, was hailed by most in K's office. The few Sikhs were reticent and would not open up. It was only fifteen years later when, as Secretary, Culture, K was closely associated with the tricentenary celebrations of the founding of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh did K come to gain knowledge of Sikh history, identity and politics, and an understanding of the gaping wound that Operation

Bluestar and events in its aftermath inflicted on the collective psyche of the Sikh community; only with such an understanding can one appreciate the enormous challenge that Punjabi politicians and even foreign politicians with a strong Sikh constituency like the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau face in treading a fine line between empathy for the angst of the Sikh community and avoiding encouragement to militancy and terrorism.

Whatever, on October 31, 1984 the office was deserted soon after rumours spread that Indira Gandhi was shot dead; K too left his office rather early. Dusk was setting. As he reached his home in the Lodhi Road Complex, K noticed dark smoke rising in the horizon. On the road in front of his house, people were rushing to the nearby Lodhi Market as if in a frenzy. K was perplexed. Late that night, K was rudely woken up from his sleep by loud and unending knocks on the front door of his apartment in a government colony. K opened the door to find weird characters, who stared at him and his attire, a lungiworn in the Tamilian style and a vest; after a few moments they hailed K as Madras babu (a clerk from Madras), and demanded to know who else was at home. When informed by K in his halting Hindi that no one but his wife and daughter were there, they looked disappointed, and left cautioning K: paani math piyo. Us me jahar milava hai (Do not drink water. It has been poisoned). Next morning, K found unusually long lines for milk; after waiting for a couple of hours, he had to return without milk. While waiting in the line, he came to know that there was violence in many parts of the city, and that shops would not open for a few days. He heard those in the line reminiscing about Partition riots; only then did he understand why the previous evening, many were rushing to the Lodhi Market in a frenzy. Old residents of the city were inured by the experience of Partition riots to rush to the market at the first hint of an impending riot, and to stock up provisions at home. The newspaper boy did not turn up, nor the driver of the staff car. When K contacted his boss, B.B.Singh, Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals, he was told to stay put at home. Over the next two days news seeped in that Indira Gandhi's death was followed by carnage and mayhem. Many

Ultimately it is the rule of law which stops democracy descending into an elected dictatorship.

Justice H.K. Woolf

parts of Delhi were gutted and thousands of Sikhs brutally killed. Later he came to know that squads like those which visited him on the night of the assassination went round government colonies, and that many Sikh officers had to abandon their home and seek refuge in the homes of Hindu friends. To add insult to the injury was the rationale offered by the new Prime Minister for the riots: 'When a huge banyan tree falls, the earth is bound to shake'.

Count your blessings, and not just calamities, is a famous saying of Dostoevsky. It is a testimony to the healing power of time, and the resilience and pragmatism of Sikhs that most Sikhs and Hindus now live in harmony; for that matter, most Punjabis had put behind the rancour of the tragic events associated with Partition, a fact which K personally experienced when he witnessed a play soon after he assumed charge as Secretary, Culture. The play was *Pir Sundari*, a Pakistani-Punjabi play sponsored by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) as part of cultural diplomacy. The play was remarkable for evocatively capturing the social ethos of a patriarchal society that still prevailed in remote areas of Pakistani Punjab, an ethos which treated women as cattle. What was more distinctive was the political symbolism of staging a play from Pakistan. The Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and his admirers - Fogies (Friends of Gujral) as the popular press labelled them - were present in full strength to watch the play and offer a prolonged standing ovation at the end of the play. What was being figuratively applauded was Gujral's belief that India stood to gain from an attempt to unilaterally improve relations with neighbours without insisting on reciprocity, and that people-to-people relations and cultural exchanges would over time overwhelm the deep rooted hostility that the Pak establishment nurtured towards India. What no one could miss in the predominantly Punjabi audience was Punjabi nostalgia, nostalgia for the land they left after Partition, a vanished society and a vanished way of life (Punjabiyaat -Punjab-ness) in which Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs lived together harmoniously. It was a selective memory which remembered some events and chose to forget some others, particularly the events of Partition when neighbour turned against

neighbour. But then memory has to be selective if the erstwhile animosities, be they in a family or a community or between nations, are to be overcome. There is no easier way to embitter Hindu-Muslim or Hindu-Sikh relations than by going on recounting past episodes of violent conflict - who did what to whom - , and seeking to correct past injustices .

The trauma of Indira Gandhi's death gave way soon to jubilation. Unexpectedly, spring was in the air. Rajiv Gandhi, the new Prime Minister seemed to lack guile and spoke his mind freely; his manners and what he said were charming. He reminded many of young Nehru, the hero of K's boyhood and student days. It appeared that an Indian Camelot was around, and that a period of great hope and optimism in Indian history had begun. Like millions of his countrymen, K was thrilled with the bold initiatives the new Prime Minister took to resolve the Assam, Mizoram and Punjab problems. K was delighted with his Newspeak as well as policy initiatives in the economic realm which seemed to mark a new beginning, foster economic rationality, and usher in a long-delayed era of economic liberalisation and reforms. In April 1986, along with N.D. Tewari, the Industry Minister, K had the privilege of meeting Rajiv Gandhi for a discussion on the Pharmaceutical Policy-in-the-making in whose formulation K was playing an important role; the meeting was more a one-to-one exchange between K and the Prime Minister. K was charmed by the Prime Minister, and the conversation reinforced K's impression of Rajiv Gandhi as one who did not hesitate to question conventional wisdom and received doctrine, was very inquisitive about the policies in other countries, and seemed set to clear the cobwebs of outmoded policies, and to mix the metaphor, take paths not travelled before.

Of all the Prime Ministers India had so far, Rajiv Gandhi was the only one who adopted a corporate managerial style to problems of governance ; his close associates, Arun Nehru, Arun Singh and Sam Pitroda, were corporate executives before they joined Government. Like many from corporate background, Rajiv Gandhi and his associates felt that the civil service was far too much devoted to the religion

I don't think that it's accidental that India makes software and China makes hardware. Software requires a certain kind of literacy, and I think this was in part a Sanskritic literacy.

Sheldon Pollock

of rules and regulations and too little to delivering results, and that Government would do well to be more like business with its outcome orientation. As in business it was imperative that Government should have clear objectives, policies and strategies, and that organisational structures are recast so as to be in sync with the strategies chosen. And further, as in professionally managed business organisations, in Government also it was necessary to properly remunerate the employees, and continually retool their skills through periodic in-service training and orientation so that they are highly motivated and competent to continually face the new challenges and garner the new opportunities thrown by a continually changing environment. These beliefs were quickly translated into major policy initiatives such as restructuring the Ministries, laying down new policies in different areas of governance, and enhancing the salary package and introduction of periodic in-service training for senior civil servants like IAS officers

Come 1985, K had the novel and heady experience of being in a classroom in the Institute of Economic Growth for a week; in that class the senior-most officers in IAS sat as trainees along with striplings young enough to be their sons. These programmes were conceived as a sabbatical during which officers would have an opportunity to 'open the windows to their mind' in an academic environment. By insisting that every IAS officer, however high and mighty, should undergo training once a year, and by organising high-profile training events like retreats of central ministers and secretaries to government at training institutions like the Tata Management Training Centre, Pune, Rajiv Gandhi shattered the I am Sarvajna (I am omniscient) syndrome of many officers, and their belief that they require no further training after the initial rite of passage at the IAS Academy, and that a good district officer is good for any position in government. Not all actions of the Rajiv Gandhi government were to the liking of civil servants. The off-handed dismissal and public humiliation of A.P.Venkateswaran, Foreign Secretary, gave rise to the impression that Rajiv Gandhi and some of his confidantes were rather brash babalog(yuppies), political innocents who like many company executives did not adequately appreciate

the distinctiveness of government as an organisation, the niceties of the federal system and the need to deftly manage senior civil servants. It is this innocence which explains why if eventually the high expectations which Rajiv Gandhi's ascension to office aroused did not materialise. In a couple of years, bracing spring gave way to the winter of disappointment the reformist zeal of the Rajiv Gandhi government turned out to be far too brief. Particularly after the eruption of the Bofors scandal, the government lost its élan and for political survival it went slow on its reformist and modernising agenda. K found that notwithstanding the impression he got from the meeting with Rajiv Gandhi the requisite support was not forthcoming for a new pharmaceutical policy. The Government's hesitancy to move forward with reforming the regulation is understandable in that if one thing is more difficult than pleasing God, it is regulating the pharmaceutical industry, which is beset with a plethora of dilemmas and is a vast minefield. Regulation has been troublesome in the past, in the present and in the future. Moving forward with regulatory reform required deft political management which was not the strength of the Rajiv Government. For years K seethed with indignation over the muckraking journalism that targeted the Prime Minister without concrete evidence, derailed the earnest attempts of the government to usher a new era, and destabilised the country's politics. At the same time, he was disenchanted with a government which had the largest parliamentary majority in the country's history, and yet rapidly dissipated its huge political capital, toned down its reformist discourse, and took decisions such as invalidating through legislation the judgment of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case upholding the right of divorced Muslim women to maintenance under the Criminal Procedure Code, and acquiescing in the opening of the Ayodhya temple, which along with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement launched by the BJP and Viswa Hindu Parishad gave a momentous turn to Indian politics.

For senior civil servants, apart from better pay and in-service training there are two other legacies of the Rajiv Gandhi government: computerisation,

While I am for the public sector growing, I do not understand or appreciate the condemnation of the private sector.

Jawaharlal Nehru



and the art of presentation. Rajiv Gandhi often spoke about India missing the industrial revolution; he was particular that India should not miss the information revolution. He began his tenure in office promising to take India into the 21st century; the personal computer came to be the mascot of that hallowed century. The mindless pursuit of self-reliance by the Electronic Commission was quietly abandoned, and personal computers were allowed to be imported without any hassles, and little duty. Soon electronic typewriters, personal computers, and photocopiers adorned the offices of senior officers. Cartoonists had a roaring time drawing cartoons about the young prime minister and his obsession with Computerji, while public intellectuals wrote in scholarly magazines criticizing the 'show of modernisation' which had little impact on the functioning of the government, and worse imparted a corporate touch to government offices, and facilitated industrial espionage. The critics were alluding to the scandal of a corporate spy ring exposed in 1985; it operated right in the office of P.C. Alexander, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. The conventional wisdom was that officers and staff would not take to computers, and like all conventional wisdoms it proved to be wrong. None foresaw the emergence of a strong Indian IT industry. In fact, it was an age when computerization was suspect. In an era in which even grannies merrily take to e-mails and social networks like Twitter and Facebook, corporate governance is inconceivable without extensive use of computers, and e-governance hailed as the magic bullet for better service delivery, it is difficult to remember that not so long ago, computerisation was opposed even in private companies. Thus an article in the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) in 1973 makes quant reading now, but it captures the spirit of those days. The author supported the opposition of the trade union to the introduction of electronic data processing on the ground that it would lead to retrenchment, curtailment of promotion prospects, and future recruitment. EDP might enhance efficiency and productivity but that was of no consequence to the author as in 'a concern like Voltas, increasing productivity and efficiency only mean exploiting more

fully its monopoly market position; it has nothing to do with productivity in the true sense.' While credit ought to be given to the Rajiv Government for the impetus it gave to computerisation, truth to be told, Luddite obstructionism, dogmatic opposition to the spread of the new technologies, was swept away by the creative gales of destruction which gave birth to gadgets and services like the low cost high speed laptops and tablets, mobile phones, World Wide Web and social networks. Before moving on, it should also be said that complementing the political innocence was starry-eyed optimism about the power of technology to solve all problems, a good example being the techno-fixation of the National Literacy Mission in its early days.

In the corporate world, the ability to communicate crisply the challenges, goals and solutions is highly prized and is a vital ladder to career advancement, deservedly so as clarity in presentation is predicated upon clarity in thinking without which better performance is inconceivable. Rajiv Gandhi introduced the modern art of presentation in government through a rude jolt. Disappointed with the presentation style of two Secretaries to Government of India, D. Bandhopadhyay and C S Sastry, he summarily ordered them to be reverted to their states; after a while he was persuaded by his confidantes to relent, and the two Secretaries were purportedly advised to pick up the art of presentation from Pitroda who headed the six prestigious technology missions (telecommunication, dairy production, drinking water, oil seeds, literacy, immunisation). Shock therapy acted as a wonderful stimulus for the acquisition of presentation skills by senior IAS officers in Delhi. As Pitroda and his entourage of missionaries visited State after State, the Enlightenment spread among the provincials of the IAS also. Learning is not without pain; the tale narrated below brings out the angst which officers felt when they had to make presentation on technology missions to Pitroda. Back in March 1989, PowerPoint was in its infancy, and preparation of slides required the services of software professionals well versed in software like Coral graphics. Civil servants, past masters in writing abstruse prose, were strangers

to the art of communicating through crisp, bullet points. As 1990s rolled on, new technological gadgets appeared one after another to embellish presentations: PowerPoint, video films, and video-conferencing. Creative display of images and thereby manufacturing an artificial reality and projecting an illusion of achievement came to be widely practiced art forms. With the large-scale influx into the IAS of recruits with engineering, and management degrees from late 1980s, there are many now in the IAS whose presentational skills are as good as those of corporate executives and advertisement gurus who sell dreams.

However, truth to be told, the impact of all the initiatives of the Rajiv Gandhi years should not be overestimated. It has been said of the British Civil Service that '[It] is a great rock on the tide-line. The political wave, Labour or Conservative, rolls in, washes over it and ebbs. The rock is exposed again to the air usually virtually unchanged. But Mrs Thatcher has been applying sticks of dynamism to that rock'. Civil Service anywhere in the world is no different. It is an apt commentary on the system that in no time, training of IAS officers was routinised, and most training institutions saw training as a milch cow, and did little to relate what they taught to the training needs of the trainees.

Tale of a High Glitz Show :

K also had an occasion to attend in Delhi a meeting of the newly constituted National Literacy Mission (NLM), one of the six missions set up by Rajiv Gandhi and led by the messianic Sam Pitroda. That meeting was a surrealistic bazaar of technical gadgets: roll-able plastic blackboards, solar lamps, a TV-cum-VCP with a politically evocative label Indira Priyadarshini ( the maiden name of Indira Gandhi) and so on. According to the chief of the public sector which manufactured Priyadarshini, what all had to be done to achieve literacy nirvana was to provide each village with a Priyadarshini and a few audio-visual lessons. The sight of alphabets being animated on a TV monitor was impressive. However, K was then grappling heroically with the logistics of implementing NTR's favourite 10,000 TV-VCP programme: equipping ten thousand schools, each with a TV and a Video-

cassette Player, and a set of videocassette lessons. The project was designed to serve two purposes: offset the poor quality of teaching in schools, and break the monopoly of Central Government over the electronic media. NTR commissioned Mullanpudi Venkataramana and Bapu, a celebrated writer-artist/ film director duo, to video-record lessons for Classes I to VII. The eminence of the artists notwithstanding, the video-lessons substituted a 'virtual' teacher for a teacher in the classroom, and did no more; they were no more than recordings of lessons taught in a class not necessarily by the best teachers, did not provide any additional information, and did not harness the immense power and distinctiveness of TV as a medium. The second purpose of the project was political and strategic. In that pre-cable/satellite TV age, only the Central Government owned the radio and TV; Central Government's monopoly gave tremendous advantage to the Ruling Party at the Centre. Truth to be told, the implicit principle which governed reporting of political news was that enunciated by Goebbles: 'We make no bones about it: the radio belongs to us, to no one else! And we will place the radio at the service of our idea, and no other idea shall be expressed through it!' No wonder that Dooradarshan used to be called Indira Darshan and later Rajiv Darshan. A case in point was the refusal of the All India Radio to permit NTR to address the people of his State, and explain the Government's position on the NGO's strike, even though it had reported Indira Gandhi's criticism of the State Government's decision to reduce the age of retirement of Government employees from 58 to 55. The ten thousand TV-VCP sets were expected to serve as a network through which the messages of the State Government could be disseminated and countervailing media power created. Implementing NTR's pet project was a logistic nightmare, all the more so as uprooting corruption was one of the core beliefs of NTR, and he tended to accept as truth any sly slander and malicious gossip, little realising that a senior civil servant even if 'as chaste as ice, as pure as snow' cannot escape calumny, and believed that every officer against whom allegations were levied should go an Agnipariksha (ordeal of fire), very much like Seetha in Ramayana. Because of NTR's

The biggest fortunes today are with the pioneers of Facebook, Google and Microsoft. Amazon has changed our shopping habits.

Meghnad Desai

impatience with the pace of implementation of his pet scheme, none of the three education secretaries before K assumed charge had a tenure of more than six months

Given the logistical challenges he was facing in procuring TVs and VCPs K was sceptical of the Priyadarshini TV sale pitch. K recalled the saying that arm chair generals dabble in grand strategy while real generals wrestle with logistics. As he gained experience in educational administration and as he interacted with educational experts from all over the world, K learnt that at the school stage the claims for educational technology including computer assisted learning were often exaggerated. Whatever, K came away with a poor impression of the missionaries who fervently believed that technology was the magic bullet that could cure all of India's problems, and that the best way to fire that bullet was the mission mode. As months rolled, NLM retreated from its blind alley of technological fixation. A new model of total literacy campaign (TLC) emerged in Kerala's Ernakulum district, wherein in a little over ten months (December 15 1988 to October 31 1989) illiteracy was claimed to have been eradicated. It is to the credit of the Union Education Secretary Anil Bordia that he nudged NLM to move away from its techno-fixation towards educational issues, social mobilization, and the campaign mode of imparting literacy.

A couple of months after K returned from the NLM meeting in Delhi Sam Pitroda decided to descend on Hyderabad to take stock of the progress of the technology missions in Andhra Pradesh. The imminent visitation of Sam Pitroda and his missionaries caused as much stir in the Hyderabad babudom as Chekhov's Inspector General. As with a performance, the meeting with Pitroda was preceded by quite a few rehearsals rigorously supervised by the no-nonsense Finance Secretary K. Subramanyam. With his customary thoroughness, he paid attention to every minute detail: settings (where the screens should be located, where the prima donnas, NTR and Pitroda, should be seated), as well as the script (content of presentations). No show is free of mix-up; at the full-dress rehearsal at the Jubilee Hall, K's

deputies did not arrive in time with the floppy disc containing his slides, giving K a few anxious moments. Subramanyam peremptorily issued a direction that at the première every Secretary making the presentation should carry with him the presentation material.

The first act of the première was the inaugural session. With the superb theatrical skills that ran in his blood, NTR strode majestically to the stage followed by the Chief Secretary and Pitroda. Like vassals offering the feudal lord tributes, the Secretaries offered the dignitaries on the dais glossy brochures containing the presentation transcripts and action plans of their missions. NTR delivered a set oratorical piece declaring Pitroda to be a friend of Andhra, elaborating the programmes of his Government, and dilating at length on the iniquities of the Central Government. States ruled by non-Congress parties were egregiously discriminated against, and were treated as vassals by the Central Government. When the State Government wanted a piece of land with only shrubs and no trees to be declared as non-forest land, the Central Government wanted trivial details such as the girth of the shrubs and the number of leaves. He concluded with a peroration seeking Pitroda's help in securing from the Central Government equitable treatment in the release of central funds. Pitroda scrolled through his cue cards as he delivered his speech. In his speech, he regretted his inability to reciprocate the warm hospitality of the State Government; earlier in the day, like every visiting dignitary, he had his pre-dawn audience with NTR followed by the customary utterly buttelry breakfast.. He appreciated the fact that Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan were the only States to prepare an action plan for literacy. He highlighted the fact that this was not a customary press meet but a media dialogue. The media could play an important role by conducting social audit; Pitroda exhorted the journalists to go to villages, see for themselves and report rather than write from Hyderabad based on reports of people who did not know grassroot realities. Instead of being critical all the time, they should give a pat on the back of functionaries who did a good job. NTR made a dramatic exit after the inaugural session leaving the stage entirely for Pitroda.

Hinduism accepts all paths as equally valid; in a world of rapid transformation and accelerating change, Hinduism is adaptable and flexible, which is why it has survived for nearly 4000 years.

Once NTR left, the venue acquired the gay ambiance of a jatra (country fair). A couple of lady socialite-consultants from Delhi flitted about with an air of self-importance; a bevy of girl volunteers with baseball caps with the logo 'each one , teach five' rushed to Pitroda for a photo-op. Though labelled media dialogue, the question and answer session that followed the presentations was no different from the usual interaction with the press. How could the oilseed mission succeed, a journalist demanded to know when the output was vulnerable to the vagaries of monsoon. Pitroda deflected the question to the Vice Chancellor, Agricultural University saying he was only an electronic engineer, prompting the snide remark why then he was the Mission Chief. Another reporter flourished a pack of immunisation needles saying that the needles gifted by UNICEF were being sold in open market, and demanded to know what Sam Pitroda was doing about it. Pitroda replied saying that he could not solve all the problems of the system. Then followed a long litany of complaints about the literacy mission. One journalist demanded that all night schools run by Government should be handed over to voluntary agencies; another contradicted him saying that voluntary agencies misappropriated funds given by Government. Another dubbed the functional literacy which the NLM wanted to impart as fictional literacy. Another pontificated that expenditure on literacy programmes was a waste, and better spent on schools. Another opined that only 'condemned people' were appointed to the Adult Literacy Department. Pitroda turned to K to reply to the observations on literacy. In his elaborate explanation, K stressed the point that an either-or approach was undesirable; the challenge of achieving universal literacy is so gargantuan that every type of organisation should be enlisted. Night centres were operated by fellow Indians whose performance was conditioned by the social milieu. We could no longer blame the British for all our problems. Everyone, particularly educated persons like journalists should ponder over the reasons for the sub-optimal functioning of social programmes, and help the Government with cogent solutions. Everyone was looking forward eagerly to the end of the interactive session, and once it ended made a beeline to the buffet dinner. With the exception

of The Hindu , every other newspaper relegated the event to an obscure page, and reported mostly the Chief Minister's speech. The Hindu, as was its wont, elaborately covered the event, and magisterially declared that going by the long-winded questioning and answers, the media dialogue was no different from official press meets.

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## AUROVILLE FIFTY

**Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar**

Mirra Richard (1878-1975) was inclined towards mysticism from her childhood. She sorrowed for people who were wracked with pain and poverty, and hoped for the day when people would live together in amity and prosperity. Daughter of a wealthy banker, she was a painter and mother. India attracted her deeply and she read the Bhagavad Gita and Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga with deep interest. When she came to Pondicherry with her husband Paul Richard in 1914 to meet Sri Aurobindo, they had already corresponded on the world situation, occultism, yoga and spirituality. They met at a time when war shadows were spreading thick across the world. After they met, the three decided to counter the threat to world peace with the weapon of culture and spirituality. They launched a monthly, Arya, as a defiant gesture against the war-mongers of the world. Though the exigencies of war took away the Richards back to France and then to Japan, Arya continued its tremendous work of teaching the world the way to spiritual brotherhood and human unity. When Mirra decided to return to Pondicherry for good in 1920, the die was cast. Before long, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram came into being. Sri Aurobindo's yoga attained new heights and the Mother's ability to work at several levels -- physical, intellectual, spiritual -- gave a local habitation to Sri Aurobindo's achievements. Though he attained Mahasamadhi in 1950, the Mother saw to it that many of his ideals -- education, karma yoga, selfless service to the Divine -- came true before long. From the very first, she had appreciated deeply Sri Aurobindo's writings on human unity and in her ninetieth year, she launched Auroville as a role-model

India has always existed for humanity and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.

Sri Aurobindo

for the future. This was her charter for the emerging future:

“1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.”

In the opening ceremony fifty years ago, young boys and girls representing 124 nations and 23 Indian States deposited earth from these different locations into the urn in the symbolic shape of a lotus bud. Indeed a magnificent dream of human unity. This time, to mark the golden jubilee, water from over 150 water bodies of the world was brought and poured into a golden disc in front of the urn, sanctifying the earth of Auroville. For me it was indeed a memorable moment when I followed Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Governing Board to pour water from the River Cauvery marking the celebration of one of the five elements, water, and blessing and thanking the Aurovillians who have worked (and are working) hard to usher in human unity, literally and metaphorically. For it is an education to meet so many people from different countries giving us a lesson in the joy of togetherness.

On the day of inauguration half a century ago, the All India Radio in its broadcast reporting the celebration aptly quoted the vision of Aswapati in Sri Aurobindo's epic, Savitri:

“I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers  
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;  
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,  
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,

The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,  
Voices that communed still with the thoughts  
of God,  
Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,  
Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,  
Their tread one day shall change the suffering  
earth  
And justify the light on Nature's face.”

(Book III, canto iv)

That was a Rishi seeing the future with crystalline clarity. Indeed, in 1968, young men and women from several countries set to work almost immediately. Slowly but surely the place was getting a shape and the Aurovillians poured their physical strength and soul's aspiration. Soon the trees grew, maximum power was drawn from the Sun to help the growth below.

Today it is a bee-hive of purposeful activity in various spheres without disturbing nature unduly. And, though it has taken all of fifty years, the Matrimandir, “the soul of Auroville” has risen as a golden dome of eternity. The gardens planned around Mantrimandir are also coming up. It may be mentioned here that no governmental help was sought and the massive structure has been made possible through offerings from all over the world. Give then a chance to humanity and it will prove its togetherness gloriously!

Was it always a smooth-sailing for this daring venture? Ah, there were many teething troubles and we who were engaged in carrying on with our lives elsewhere, could only hold on to faith in the Mother to help the sincere Aurovillians. The Central Government's intervention became inevitable at one point of time, and the carefully thought-out Auroville Foundation Act was passed in 1988. Accordingly the Foundation is managed by a Governing Board with its Secretary appointed by the Central Government working under the direction of the Chairman of the Board. With the presence of a Working committee, a Residents Assembly and the Auroville International

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.

Advisory Council, Auroville is no more just an experiment but is fast becoming a definite “beacon to the world” as the Prime Minister said, while delivering his Golden Jubilee address at Bharat Nivas, Auroville.

Enthusiastic Aurovillians, with solid work to show on hand, have been launching new projects too, to mark the golden jubilee. For instance, YouthLink that keeps the integration of Auroville youth to aspire, plan and achieve, inaugurated its Hive and Joy of Impermanence projects to mark the Golden Jubilee. Auroville’s continued fight against waste has been very impressive. During this Jubilee foundation was laid for a Re-Centre which represents “a momentous opportunity for Auroville to experiment innovate and share solution for one of humanity’s most dirty problems - garbage!” (Muktha Martes).

There are then the villages around Auroville which have contributed a great deal for the project; they have also benefitted in the region of education, business and the like. In a frank interview for the monthly, *Auroville Today*, about his experiences as an Aurovillian for almost half a century, Sri Varadarajan remains the same calm person I had met almost twenty-five years ago. Yes, it has been a difficult journey but the Mother’s grace has been his guardian-amulet throughout. As always, he is very optimistic about Auroville’s future:

“...the Tamil culture is one of the oldest in the world and I believe it has a unique role to play in Auroville in the achievement of a true human unity. As it is part of their heritage - there is a Tamil saying, “the whole world is my village and all folks are my kinsmen.” - I am certain that the Tamil people will do all they can to realise human unity.”

There can be no better tribute to Sri Aurobindo than the success of Auroville in the future, as the Mahayogi stands as a divine sentinel in Auroville’s Savitri Bhavan, looking into the future:

“An artistry of glad outwardness of self, A treasure-house of lasting images Where sense can build a world of pure delight: The home of a perpetual happiness.”

(Savitri, III,iii)

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## COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF ANDHRA PRADESH in 8 Volumes

**Prof. C.Somasundara Rao**

Retd. Prof. and Head of the Dept.  
History, Andhra University

Former President, Epigraphical Society of India

The eight-volume project on Andhra History and Culture, conceived in 1998 by the Andhra Pradesh History Congress and brought to fruition in 2016, is an epoch-making event in the first two decades of the 21st century, as no other region in India can claim to have published such deeply-researched volumes, covering such a vast period of time. Of course, some states like Odisha, Rajasthan and Bihar, among others, did publish their histories, but they are confined to a volume or two. If at all a parallel can be drawn, it can be only with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, which brought out an entire series of volumes on Indian History. But then, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan had support, both administratively and establishment-wise. Against this backdrop, the current venture garners more significance inasmuch as it was achieved with limited funds, and without the support of a permanent office during the entire timespan of almost two decades. The resilience shown by the backbone of this publication, Prof. V. Ramakrishna, to surmount all obstacles and bring out the volumes in print and maintain a high standard, is highly commendable. One more noteworthy feature of this monumental work is that all the volumes have been translated into Telugu as well.

The writing of Andhra history and culture had its start with Sri. Chilukuri Veerabhadra Rao, who brought out five volumes during 1910-1939. With the material that was available at this period, he was able to attempt a sketch of Andhra history. Then came Dr. G. Yazdani’s edited volumes on the **Early History of the Deccan** (2 volumes, 1960), which included some aspects of the history of the Andhras, like that of the Satavahanas, Chalukyas of Vengi and the Kakatiyas of

Warangal. Besides these, one saw many monographs being written on the royal families and their histories. Individual scholars wrote on various aspects of the history of Andhra, but a detailed history of Andhradesa (inclusive of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) was a far cry.

The eight volumes cover the whole gamut of the history of Andhras from Pre-historic period (C.5000 B.C) to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. To present such a history with the variegated aspects of Andhra Culture is extremely difficult and no individual scholar can achieve this, much less attempt it. The Andhra Pradesh History Congress (established in 1976) realized the importance of the work which could be brought out with the assistance of many scholars in the field and members of the Congress whose participation in the annual sessions enriched the subject.

The volumes present the political history of the times, giving importance to the famous royal families such as the Satavahanas, Chalukyas, Kakatiyas, Reddis and the Rayas of Vijayanagara, and to minor families like the Cholas of Renadu, Banas, Vaidumbas, etc. The material presented is well-documented, with particular reference to epigraphs. Many chapters are devoted to conventional topics like society, economy, religion, literature and art. The matter on art and architecture is profusely illustrated. Chapters which never formed part of history for a long period, like urbanization, popular culture, etc., are introduced in the volumes. Coming to the contemporary period, there is a plethora of material on Feminist, Dalit literature and various developments in Theatre, Cinema, etc., and their impact on the people. There are separate chapters on music, dance and other performing arts.

These volumes are followed by one book on the sources of Andhra history, covering pre-historic, epigraphic, numismatic and art materials, besides indigenous and foreign literature and the archival material. The Chapters in this volume are mainly based on the volumes published earlier e.g., Vol.I

figures as Chapter I in this volume. The source material that is useful for that particular period is dealt with, and the published works and articles are listed out very elaborately, so that one can gather the total bibliography for that subject. Besides these materials, there are many appendices, which give the lists of research topics chosen by scholars for their Ph.D/M.Phil degrees relating to Andhra history in the Universities in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. The institutions one has to visit for collection of material like the Department of Archaeology and Museums, State Archives at Hyderabad and Chennai, National Archives at Delhi and famous Societies and Libraries are listed out. In addition, the articles presented at the sessions of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress from 1976 to 2016, ranging from Pre-historic period to the Modern period, have been listed out. Hence this volume is very useful for every research scholar to assess the material that is published on a given subject and to proceed further in the collection of the basic and secondary sources.

Though lacking in administrative support, it must be noted that the Andhra Pradesh History Congress received assistance from several quarters – Dravidian University, Kuppam; Potti Sriramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad; Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, and a number of donors who gave monetary contributions for the publication of these volumes.

The eight volumes on Andhra history and the volume on the sources of Andhra history published during 2003-2017 form a substantial contribution of scholars to Andhra history and culture. The planning of the chapters and their writing are to the credit of Professor Vakulabharanam Ramakrishna, the Chief Editor of all the eight volumes and the editor of the sources volume. His sustained efforts in coordinating the work of the writers and the editors of different volumes are remarkable, and have, no wonder, yielded rich dividends.

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The night is black as a black stone. Let not the hours pass by in the dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

Rabindranath Tagore (*Gitanjali*)

## FFC Grants to Local Governments- A Path Breaking Approach

**Prof. R.Sudarsana Rao**

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### Introduction

The efforts initiated in the late eighties by the former Prime minister late Rajiv Gandhi to realise the dream 'Gram Swaraj' of Mahatma by making the establishment of Local Self-Governments was successfully carried forward by Prime Minister late P V Narasimha Rao in the early nineties by the passage of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Acts. These twin Acts came into effect since 24<sup>th</sup> April 1993. Subsequently, the conformity Acts were made by all the States adopting these Acts facilitating the establishment of a third tier statutorily in the Indian federal structure. This was considered to be an important milestone in the history of Indian federalism. These Acts made India achieving a distinction of the largest democratic federal structure in the world with 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats besides other Ruaral and Urban Local Bodies. But the objective of democratic decentralised governance could not be achieved due to the non-devolution of Functions, Functionaries and Finances(3Fs) to the Local Bodies as mandated by the twin Acts. Though the Conformity Acts were made by the States, the resource position of the Local Governments (LGs) did not improve much to enable them to discharge their enhanced functions. Realising the need for supplementing financial resources of the local governments, the Tenth Finance Commission, the Union Finance Commission constituted immediately after the enactment of these Acts, was asked to suggest measures needed to supplement their resources by the respective States. But the Tenth Finance Commission for the first time recommended grants-in-aid to local governments under Article 275 of the Constitution, though its Terms of Reference didn't specify to do so recommended Rs. 5381 crs for the period 1995-2000. Since then all the successive Finance Commissions, until the Fourteenth Finance Commission headed by Dr. Y.V. Reddy recommended grants to supplement the financial resources of LGs.

### Quantum of Grant-in-Aid

The FFC was mandated like its immediate predecessors, to recommend "the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of States to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State, on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State". Though it has not been much benefitted by the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions(SFCs) for various reasons, the Commission has generously recommended a large amount of Rs. 2,87,436 crs to Local Governments for the five year period 2015-20, which is almost thrice the amount recommended by the THFC. In fact in the case of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), it is as much as five times compared to the THFC grants. The Commission arrived at the required quantum of grant taking Rs.488 Per Capita Per Annum to supplement the resources of the Local Governments (LGs) to provide the basic services at the bench mark level. Surprisingly, FFC considered a uniform per capita while working out the total grant deviating from its predecessors which had taken differential per capita for RLBs and ULBs in view of the cost differences of provision of public services.

Of the total amount of grant, Rs.2,00,292 crs. were awarded to be spent directly by the Gram Panchayats. This is a remarkable departure from its predecessors against the general belief that funds are misappropriated by the local governments in the absence of State's controls. The Commission felt that since the gram panchayats are responsible for providing basic services, it recommended grants directly to the gram panchayats ignoring the upper layers of Panchayat Raj Institutions ( PRIs) - Block Panchayats and District Panchayats for the first time. An amount of Rs.12290 crores as grants-in-aid to the successor State of Andhra Pradesh out of which Rs. 8654 crores and Rs.3636 crores were awarded to Gram Panchayats and ULBs respectively for the period 2015-20

### Basic and Performance grants

The Commission adopted a very easy and simple criteria of population of 2011 and area for inter se distribution across States by giving a weightage of



90 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. FFC has recommended that the amount given to a State will be divided between Gram Panchayats and Municipal bodies in the ratio of rural and urban population of 2011 Census. It may be observed that no Finance Commission has ever given such undue weightage to population factor as far as distribution of grants for local governments are concerned. Further, FFC has recommended the grants like its predecessor, in two parts- (i) Basic Grants and (ii) Performance Grants. With regard to Rural Local Bodies the ratio of these two types of grants is 90:10 while it is 80:20 with regard to Urban Local Bodies. FFC prescribed two conditions for availing the performance grants by Gram Panchayats- (i) making available reliable data on receipts and expenditure through audited accounts of revenue and (ii) improvement in own revenues. In addition to these two conditions, the FFC prescribed that the ULBs should measure and publish service level benchmarks for basic services. The 'Trust-based Approach' followed by the FFC in directly channelling the funds to Gram Panchayats and Municipal governments is really appreciable. It shows that FFC not only made an attempt to give more financial autonomy to the States but also to the sub-State Governments in India for the first time.

### **Performance Rewarded**

Another important aspect of freedom given to States in this regard is to develop an 'operational Criteria' including the quantum of incentive with regard to release of the performance grant. FFC made a flexibility mechanism with regard to undisbursed performance grant that it should be distributed on an equal basis among all the eligible gram panchayats. A similar framework has been suggested for ULB performance grants. Such a flexible arrangement will help in the full utilisation by the local bodies and encourages better accounting and fiscal performance of the local governments at the grass root level.

### **Services Identified**

After elaborate discussions with the representatives of Union and State governments and the heads of the concerned departments delivering the basic services, the Commission thought that

there is a need to strengthen the delivery of basic services both in the rural and urban areas. It is of the considered opinion that improvement in quality of services would enhance the willingness of the people to pay for the services. In order to avoid the possible diversion of funds by the LGs, the Commission stipulated that the grant amount shall be spent on the identified basic services – water supply, sanitation including septage management, sewerage, storm water drainage and solid waste management, street lighting, local body roads and footpaths, parks, playgrounds, burial and cremation grounds. The Commission identified these services with a larger and future perspective giving autonomy to the local bodies in the delivery of these services with their own priorities. However, this objective of the Commission is defeated as some State governments insisted the LGs to spend the grants on some services chosen by the State government uniformly.

### **No Grants to Block and District Panchayats**

The Commission surprisingly, kept the District and Block Panchayats out of the ambit of Grants-in-aid for the first time resulting in severe resource crunch at the District and Block Panchayats. It thought that the Gram Panchayat is responsible for delivering the basic services to the people so they should be given the grants directly. But in several States these two upper layers are maintaining certain common facilities like drinking water supply, roads and buildings necessitating financial resources as they are not empowered to collect any taxes. For instance, there are about 483 Community Protected Water Supply (CPWS) and about 2 lakh bore well hand pumps being maintained by the Zilla Parishads and Mandal Parishads respectively supplying drinking water to the villages in Andhra Pradesh. Under the new arrangement, these PRI bodies do not find enough resources to maintain the water supply systems and other common assets like link roads, panchayat and block panchayat buildings. Though these public services are meant for the people in the Gram Panchayats (GPs), GPs are not willing to share the FFC funds to finance these services in the domain of District panchayats and Block Panchayats. The

same situation is being experienced by, more or less , all the States including. It is the responsibility of the State Finance Commissions or the State government to make an adjustment to see that the provision of essential services are not badly affected due to this arrangement made by FFC.

### **Conditionalities**

FFC has not stipulated any conditions for the Basic Grants while it put relatively less number of conditions to operationalize the Performance Grants compared to the THFC. This may be due to more than one reason. Firstly, it advocated a trust-based approach wherein the local governments- Gram Panchayats and Urban Local Governments- will be given more fiscal autonomy. Secondly, several States could not avail and utilise the grants allocated by the THFC due to non-compliance of large number of conditions stipulated by the THFC and/ or by the Union government. The THFC has imposed six conditions to be fulfilled by Rural Local Bodies and nine conditions for Urban Local Bodies to be eligible to utilise the Performance Grant. Due to the severity of the conditions several local governments could not comply with the conditions and have not utilised the earmarked grant amount. For instance, overall 6 per cent of the basic grant and 25 per cent of Performance grant of both RLBs and ULBs was not allocated to the States during 2010-15. The shortfall is more in the case of ULBs with regard to both the types of grants mostly due to the stringent nature of condition.

As per the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, only 10 states obtained full allocation of the rural basic grant every year and out of the 18 States which got less than full allocation, 8 States got zero allocation at least in one year. With regard to urban basic grant, 20 States out of 28 States didn't get full allocation and out of 20 States 12 States got zero allocation in one year or more. It implies that the very purpose of grants to local governments is lost because of imposing too many conditions either with reference to the eligibility or for their utilisation. May be that is the reason why the FFC has not insisted any conditions for the Basic Grant. FFC has not only liberalised the conditionalities but also

recommended that the undisbursed Performance Grant be distributed among those local governments which perform well. It has given more operational flexibility to the States in fixing the quantum of incentive to the States. For instance, FFC states that "The operational criteria, including the quantum of incentive to be given, is left to the discretion of the State Governments"(FFC Report,P.123). Also, it recommended for the first time, that either the Centre or the States should not put any additional conditions for the release or the utilisation of the grant amount. FFC categorically stated, may be in view of past experience, that 'no further conditions or directions other than those indicated by us should be imposed either by the Union or the State governments for the release of funds' (FFC Report, P.115). All these recommendations along with fixing the schedule for the release of the grant in two instalments a year really empower the local governments as such a stipulation reduces the discretion of the state governments in the release of funds. It is upto the GPs and ULBs to utilise the funds properly upholding the trust reposed in them by the FFC and the State government to put in place necessary administrative and accounting systems to absorb the funds productively.

### **Augmenting of Revenues**

Another important recommendation is that the State Finance Commissions need to be further strengthened so that the letter and spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Act (CAA) will be achieved. It strongly advocated to strengthen the State Finance Commissions in all the states, by 'timely constitution, proper administrative support and adequate resources for smooth functioning and timely placement of SFC report before State legislatures with Action Taken Report(ATR)'. Regarding augmenting of fiscal resources, it is of the opinion that States need to take fiscal and administrative measures to further augment the resources at the State and local bodies' level so that their fiscal dependence will be reduced resulting in more fiscal autonomy. Rightly recognising that there exists a wide gap between revenue potential and the actual collection at the local governments, it has suggested measures relating to Property Tax, land based instruments like Vacant

Ethical behavior is meant for unification to push man forward and forward.

## MAN AND RELIGION

**Shri Ramakrishna Vithal Kunduri**

The word Religion is said to have been derived from the Latin word 'Religare', meaning, 'Being bound to', Bound to one's source, viz., God. Thus, the word Religion means to bind back man with God. It is a bond, which guides man back to God. It represents truths, which people have experienced all over the world and through centuries. Religion gives man an added stature in terms of selflessness, compassion, humility and moral strength. Religion signifies faith in absolute values and a way of life to realise them.

When we examine the world's great Religions, we find that all of them have the same idea of God—Head, though He is called by different names. All of them accept God's Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Omnipresence. The sacred Texts viz., the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, and the Granth - all represent the same Creation. All arose from the whisper of God. The scriptures of different creeds appear different but their aim is the same—to establish 'The Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God'. The spiritual radiance of Hinduism, the faithful obedience of Judaism, the noble compassion of Buddhism, the vision of divine love of Christianity and the spirit of resignation to the Sovereign Lord of Islam, all of them basically advocate the Supremacy of God and man's duty towards Him and his fellow human beings.

All Religions teach one basic discipline, the removal of the blemish of egoism from the mind and of running after trivial joys. Every Religion teaches man to fill his being with the glory of God and evict the pettiness of conceit. It trains him in methods of detachment and discrimination, so that he may aim high and attain liberation; believe that all hearts are motivated by the one God; that all faiths glorify Him alone; that all names in all languages and all forms, denote the one Supreme Being.

The basis of all Religions is faith. The central truth of all Religions is that God is the perfect embodiment of Love, Grace and Compassion. He is the Father of all Creation.

Land Tax(VLT), Land Conversion Charges, Betterment Tax, Entertainment Tax, Taxes on Professions, Trades, Callings and Employments. Besides these taxes ,it also suggested that the non-tax revenue base of local governments need to be improved relating to tolls, fees and user charges of local productive assets and services respectively, Royalty on minor minerals, service Charges on government properties etc. The FFC has given wide-ranging suggestions covering (i) bringing in reforms and increasing the tax rates in the existing taxes, (ii) imposing new taxes and (iii) to provide enabling rules and framework by the States to augment the resources at the State and Local Governments level. For instance, it has suggested to bring reforms in the domain of Property Tax which is one of the most important taxes of the local bodies in almost all the states. States which are not imposing important taxes are suggested to impose them and where the taxes are imposed have been advised to increase the tax rates and/or tax bases. For example, surprisingly, Odisha is not imposing an elastic taxes like Profession Tax and several States are not exploiting their full potential of both taxes and non-tax sources which were appropriately illustrated by the FFC. Importantly, its recommendation that the Profession Tax be increased from the existing maximum level of Rs.2500 to Rs.12000 will bring lot of resources to the States/Local governments if implemented through a Constitutional amendment

### Conclusion

Fourteenth Finance Commission not only recommended large amount of grants to the LGs but also provided lot of operational freedom in the delivery of basic services both in the rural and urban areas. With regard to awarding grants directly to the Gram Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), it has set a new trend following a Trust-Based Approach. It is up to the LGs to respond positively and pro-actively to the confidence reposed in them by the Commission. Then only the cherished goal of democratic decentralised governance will become a reality and helps in maximising the welfare of the people.

\* \* \*

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.

Aristotle.

All Religions proclaim the Oneness of Divinity and call for the cultivation of universal love. The foundation of all Religions is morality, which is equated with selfless love. All Religions exhort mankind to lead moral and ethical lives, restrain our passions, purify and refine our impulses and direct our faculty of reasoning on the God-ward path.

The founders of various Religions had always in view the unity of all life and the progressive march of man from mere humanness to the heights of Divinity. They were all persons filled with love and wisdom. Their goal and purpose was the same. None had the design to divide, disturb, or destroy. They sought to train the passions and the emotions, to educate the impulses and instincts and direct the faculty of reason to paths beneficial to the individual and society. Religions were thus instituted to foster the welfare of society through the promotion of love for all beings. All religions advocate their votaries to seek eternal peace within oneself. No religion approves the use of violence. Every religion recommends the cultivation of tolerance and respect for other Religions, thus paving the way for non-violence.

Every religion seeks to present this basic truth about God, Nature and Man. Every creed is, in essence, highlighting this fact and the path of love as the means of merger. So, one must respect all creeds and faiths. But the situation in the world today is the contrary.

Each one of us has our own interpretation of these religions, each claiming superiority over the others. In fact, it is this lack or limited knowledge of ours that has been, in a way, the cause of all the trouble in the world and the main reason for all the mess we have created for ourselves. In spite of the Scientific and technological advancements, we find economic exploitation, racial discrimination, cultural stagnation, and political subordination, across Nations. Religious animosity is aflame even today in many parts of the world. The world is torn by misunderstandings, bitterness and strife. Religious wars and conflicts are borne out of ignorance and avarice.

The growth in technology and generation of wealth, instead of alleviating the poverty across the

globe, has only contributed to the mad race for the development of weapons of mass destruction, the escalation of war and has encouraged terrorism, turning the human being into a dreadful species and the atmosphere all around is charged with suspicion, uncertainty and much fear for the future.

India has been teaching since ages the message of the spirit and the means to gain and ensure equanimity. She has stood forth as the preceptor of the world for centuries. The prayer that she has taught her people is:

*Lokah Samasthah Sukhino Bhavanthu*

(May All People Everywhere Be Happy)

*This is the consummation of Vedic thought since time immemorial.*

The votaries of each Religion must cultivate faith in its own excellence and realize their validity by their own intense practice. That is the meaning of a true Religion, the Religion that feeds and fosters all Religions and emphasises their common Greatness. No Religion should be criticised or reviled. One should imbibe the sweet essence in all Religions. One should also not give up Religion, but get rid of differences based on Religion. One should adhere to one's own faith and tradition and the cord of love, which is the unifier, the motivator and the harbinger of joy to all.

Many Saints, Philosophers, Poets and men of wisdom had spoken and written and emphasized this aspect over the ages and advocated the underlying message. Jonathan Swift (1667 to 1745AD), the Irish Author and Satirist stated that "There is enough religion to hate, not enough to love", which is so true even in this century. Swami Vivekananda had said that while everyone should practise his or her own Religion sincerely, each must assimilate the spirit of the others. 'The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions', said Mahatma Gandhi.

Dr.Radhakrishnan said that 'The recognition of a Transcendent Supreme, the freedom of the human individual as a manifestation of the Supreme and

Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship.

Gautama Buddha

the unity of mankind as the goal of history are the foundations of the major religions. The religion of spirit reasserts these fundamental truths'. He says that the object of religion should be to bring people together, make them love each other, and raise standards of life.

The goal, the purpose or the essence of all creeds, faiths, and Religions is the sublimation of the mind, so that it can guarantee liberation for the individual and happiness for the society. Thus, the holy duty of man, irrespective of his caste or creed and race or religion is to be ever aware of the Divine spirit that is installed in every living being. This will make him conscious of the kinship he has with all, which is the basis of the Brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God.

In the words of Sri Sathya Sai Baba,

'There Is Only One Religion, the Religion of Love;

There Is Only One Language, the Language of the Heart;

There Is Only One Caste, the Caste of Humanity'

There Is Only One God, He Is Omnipresent'.

\* \* \*

## Sunil Khilnani on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

(from *INCARNATIONS - INDIA IN 50 LIVES* (2016))

Like the reunion achieved by the American Civil War, the Constitution Ambedkar helped to draft marked not the end of a story, but the beginning of a history - involving the pursuit of a still out of reach democratic equality. In May 2015, a young man visiting a small town in Maharashtra was beaten to death on receiving a call on his mobile. Other villagers set upon him when they heard his ringtone: a song praising Ambedkar. Thousands of stories of such violence fill the decades between 1950 and the present.

It's worth taking the comparison with America a bit further. In the United States, slavery was a 300-year-old institution. After abolition, it took another century of struggle for equality to secure full civil rights for black Americans. A half-century

later, the struggle is hardly over. In India, caste has, over several millennia, woven itself into the fabric of society, infused itself as a climate of mind. Was it ever conceivable that one remarkable individual, a bracing, brave Constitution, and a few dozen free elections would blow it away?

Ambedkar lived only six years beyond the promulgation of the Constitution in January 1950. He was under no illusion that Indian equality was closing in. He took no great satisfaction in having helped to forge the Constitution or in its final form. It had to be worked by men, through politics, in a society shaped by power. His own experience of that kept him restless. Nehru had made him the Minister of Law in India's first cabinet- an 'empty soapbox', he said. In 1951, he resigned in protest at the failure of a bill, in his view the 'greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the legislature of the country', to reform Hindu marriage laws to give women rights, including those of inheritance and divorce. It was defeated by conservative Hindus. He said in parting, 'To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of society, untouched, and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap.'

In his final year, he created another political party- the Republican Party- and converted to Buddhism with his followers, in a last effort to conceive of individuals apart from caste. But it wouldn't have escaped his sense of irony that reservations, and the politics around it, have entrenched the very thing that he wanted to annihilate. 'We are going to enter into a life of contradictions,' Ambedkar famously said, closing the debates of the Constituent Assembly in December 1949: 'How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation?' Alone of all India's founders, he recognized the importance of fraternity, the ability to treat each other with dignity, as fundamental to the creation of a political community. Without fraternity, Ambedkar reminded his fellow Indians, 'equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint'.

\* \* \*

The best and the most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched- they must be felt with the heart.

Helen Keller

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**Book Review:**

## **Jesus in Asia?**

**- R.S. Sugirtharajah**

(Published by Harvard University Press - Cambridge - Massachusetts 2018, Pg.306, Price \$29.95)

While posted in Mysore in the 1980s, I would occasionally meet my friend, the late Father Amalorpavadass, a Catholic priest in Anjali Ashram, a retreat he founded for interfaith dialogue. It was a great place to freely discuss contentious issues like acculturation and argue whether one had to be a Christian to believe in Jesus.

To Father Amalorpavadass, Christianity had to necessarily adapt to strong local cultures to make sense to its followers. He also was emphatic that Jesus and his teachings transcended faiths.

Famously tolerant and forgiving, Jesus always appealed to Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, in India and Asia. It is perhaps the fact that these faiths were absorptive, that Christianity, never became a dominant religion in the continent.

Jesus however is revered in Asia, with followers and philosophers developing their own understandings of the man and his message over centuries. We are introduced to some of them in 'Jesus in Asia,' a book by RS Sugirtharajah, Emeritus Professor of Biblical Hermeneutics at Birmingham University.

The book regrettably lacks the depth of other Harvard publications like Robert Crew's 'For Prophet and Tsar.' It ignores the extraordinary proselytizing efforts of Catholic priests like Matteo Ricci and Saint Francis Xavier in China and the rest of Asia and has almost nothing on how Jesus was understood in the continent's most populous Christian country, Philippines.

Then the book has some factual errors. The search for the historical Jesus did not, as Sugirtharajah contends, begin with Albert Schweitzer's 1906 book

'The quest for the Historical Jesus.' Another scholar, Ernest Renan, had published his very popular 'Life of Jesus,' forty-three years before that.

Sugirtharajah professes to move 'the quest for the historical Jesus beyond the narrow confines of the Western world.' Here he fails. Except for an account of the 'Jesus Sutras,' prepared between the 5th and 11th centuries and discovered hundreds of years later in a cave by a Chinese monk in 1910, much of what is there on Jesus in Sugirtharajah's book is reactive to western stimuli. In one instance, a life of Jesus,' called 'Mirror of Holiness,' was commissioned by the Moghul Emperor, Akbar, and written by Jerome Xavier, a European, hardly qualifying as an Asian original!

Over half of Sugirtharajah's book- and its most contentious portion - is devoted to his region, South Asia. A poorly argued chapter on two 'Jesus-deniers', Chandra Verma, and Dhirenranath Chowduri is followed by one on the Sri Lankan scholar and convert to Christianity, Francis Kingsbury whose Jesus, Sugirtharajah considers dull 'distant and detached from any ideological cause.'

Sugirtharajah finds the Jain scholar Manilal Parekh who later became a Christian, incapable of 'rising above the habitual anti-Semitism entrenched in the writings of Hindu reformers,' and considers his portrayal of Jesus lacklustre. The Sri Lankan jurist and scholar, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who wrote extensively on Christianity and Jesus is criticized for making the faith look like a variant of Hinduism.

The person most in Sugirtharajah's crosshairs is the philosopher and former Indian President, S. Radhakrishnan. He accuses Radhakrishnan of being a 'lobbyist for the Hindu cause,' and criticizes him for casting Jesus as 'the perfect embodiment of Upanishadic ideals.' These are unfair charges against a person with a grand catholic mind who saw, as many others do, several commonalities between Hinduism and Christianity.

Even as Sugirtharajah's real focus is South Asia, he misses out on the rest of India, especially Kerala,

with the largest Christian population in the country and where, thanks to an ongoing international effort, hitherto unknown documents and artefacts have been unearthed throwing new light on our historical appreciation of Christianity and Jesus in the state. The evidence is there, for all to see, in the stunning Archdiocesan Archive in Ernakulam.

The best chapters in Sugirtharajah's book are on perceptions of Jesus in China, Korea and Japan. His account of the Taiping rebellion in China, led by Hong Xiuquan who considered himself to be Jesus' younger brother, is insightful as is his chapter on the pro-poor Minjung movement in Korea and its principal pioneer, Professor Ahn Byung Mu.

Sugirtharajah has a fine chapter on the Japanese writer, Shusaku Endo and his work 'A life of Jesus,' written for a non-Christian, Japanese audience portraying, Jesus in warm, protective, maternal terms. If a book deserves to be bought for a chapter, it ought to be for this one.

As a scholarly work, 'Jesus in Asia,' disappoints. With a spectacular theme, spanning an entire continent over two millenniums, Sugirtharajah clearly comes short. That indeed is a great pity!

**Dr. Uday Balakrishnan,**

Visiting faculty, Centre for Contemporary Studies,  
Indian Institute of Science Bangalore.

The above was published in *The Hindu* in an abridged form. (The views are personal)

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### **'Student-teacher ratio very poor'**

**Allocation of 0.63% of GDP for higher education inadequate: Amit Dasgupta**

(Newspaper report on the lecture delivered by Shri Amit Dasgupta, former Ambassador and Diplomat, on February 6, 2018 at a meeting jointly organised by Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library)

"India's biggest challenge in the field of higher education is to anticipate the future demands and

prepare an architecture to enable the younger generation for reaping the benefits of demographic dividend," said Amit Dasgupta, former ambassador and diplomat and presently working as Inaugural India director, New South Wales University, Australia at a lecture meeting jointly organised by Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library, here on Tuesday.

Describing India's higher education as a sea of mediocrity with a few islands of excellence, he cautioned the policy makers and the government at large against the possibility of demographic dividend becoming demographic drawback, if not a disaster. Mr. Dasgupta said the student enrolment of 24 % was low as against 45% in China and 60% in Israel. To educate the large number of youths India needs 40,000 new colleges, 1000 new universities and 14 million schools, he said.

He said allocation of 0.63% of GDP for higher education is inadequate. The student-teacher ratio is poor in comparison with universities like Harvard where it is 1:10. In India it is 1:50. Revealing that 62% of Indian engineering graduates are unemployable, he said India needs to spend more on research, faculty recruitment and teacher training.

A. Prasanna Kumar of Centre for Policy Studies presided.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*, February 7, 2018)

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### **'State's tax efforts should get weightage in devolution of funds'**

(Newspaper report on the lecture delivered by Prof. R.Sudarsana Rao Former Member, 4th State Finance Commission, A.P. on March 21, 2018 at a meeting jointly organised by Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library)

Because of the demographic changes used in the Fourteenth Finance Commission, Andhra Pradesh headed by Dr. Y.V. Reddy got 0.951% less which amounted to thousands of crores. It would not

What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside you.

R.W. Emerson (23)

have been so if tax efforts and fiscal management performance were given more weightage as Andhra Pradesh's performance was much better than other States, Member of the Fourth State Finance Commission R. Sudarsana Rao said on Wednesday.

Though separate terms of reference were given with regard to Andhra Pradesh keeping bifurcation in view they could not be taken advantage of, he said at a lecture on the "Finance Commission and allocation of resources".

The lecture was organised by the Centre for Policy Studies and the Visakhapatnam Public Library.

Changes introduced in the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) taking into consideration demographic changes and reducing weightage to population criteria gave advantage to some southern States. Population weightage was reduced to 15% and 10% weightage given to indicators like maternal and infant mortality rate. . It benefited Kerala and Tamil Nadu more than Andhra Pradesh which had pressed for 30% weightage for population as it would have benefited even after bifurcation, Prof. Rao, a former Head of the Department of Economics of the Andhra University, said.

The Fourteenth Finance Commission used the 1971 census but depended on the 2011 census for

calculating the demographic changes, he said.

Even when population was taken as basis, compared to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan had lost though it was backward because it had less population, he pointed out.

Giving 47% weightage to per capita income would benefit States with less per capita income than the national average and would bring horizontal fiscal balance as it was a good index of backwardness, he said. It was very difficult to satisfy States with diverse criteria, Prof. Rao opined on the conflicting claims of the States.

He hoped the Fifteenth Finance Commission would further address the issue of horizontal fiscal balance.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*, March 22, 2018)



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