



## US-INDIA DEFENCE COOPERATION; FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

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As the Indo-Pacific security scenario assumes complex dimensions, and a possible trade-war looms; the forthcoming India-US '2+2 Ministerial' meeting, between defence and diplomatic officials, presents an opportunity for charting a mutually beneficial path for bilateral strategic ties.

The disintegration of the USSR had seen India losing not only a political ally and sole purveyor of arms, but also the inhibitions that went with its commitment to 'non-alignment'. The US, with a good sense of timing, despatched a General from its Pacific Command, to engage the Indian establishment with proposals for military-to-military cooperation in 1991.

The Indian Navy, keen to shed its Cold War isolation, initiated the first Indo-US naval exercises, to be named 'Malabar', in May 1992. With its 21st edition, last July, Malabar became, much to China's discomfiture, a tripartite exercise; with units of the Indian, Japanese and US navies participating. A key question for the Indo-US parleys will be; whether to convert this 'trilateral' into a 'quadrilateral' by inviting Australia.

It would be no exaggeration to attribute warming of Indo-US relations, in fair measure, to the professional bonhomie between the two navies, generated, by a quarter century of engagement. In 2005, the George Bush administration, having decided to enlist India as a strategic partner, made an offer, which New Delhi could not refuse. The unprecedented US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which followed in 2008, accorded India the 'de facto' status of a nuclear weapon state without signing the NPT.

On the defence side, too, there were parallel overtures from the US. The 2004 agreement on

Next Steps in Strategic Partnership was followed by a Defence Framework Agreement in 2005 and the 2012 Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) envisaging the transfer of advanced technologies to India. In 2016, India was accorded the status of Major Defence Partner by a Republican Congress.

DTTI has, however, made little progress on the ground, because of divergent objectives. While India seeks technology, the US remains focused on trade. Thus, in spite of all the hoopla, India's defence capability has, so far, benefitted only from 15 billion dollars worth of hardware, purchased under the US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) scheme; comprising patrol-aircraft for the navy, transports and helicopters for the IAF, and howitzer-guns for the army.

A major impediment in the Indo-US defence relationship has been India's reluctance to sign the four 'foundational agreements' required by the US to facilitate interoperability and enhance defence ties. India's justifiable apprehensions about compromising its strategic autonomy as well as security of military information, having been assuaged, after protracted negotiations, one of them was signed in 2002 and another in 2016. Delay in signing the remaining two, has deprived India of certain high-tech equipment that would have come with recently acquired US military hardware.

While it is comforting that the Indo-US relationship has divested itself of the Cold War frostiness, we must remain wary of rhetoric and hyperbole obscuring reality in the bilateral discourse. American offers of help to 'make India a great power' and zealous declarations that India is "...not just a regional power, but a global power", should evoke scepticism in India. We know that, in the fullness of time, India will assume its rightful place in the world order; but common-sense tells us that great powers are not created with the help of others. However, such statements, apart from boosting Indian morale, also indicate the emergence of a bipartisan consensus in Washington that enlisting India as a partner in a China-hedging strategy serves US interests; given its declining influence and power

We remain a bundle of centuries—think mediocrity, act primitively and do very modern progressive research.

Jawaharlal Nehru

in the Indo-Pacific. In New Delhi, the tantalizing vision of 'Super India', offered by the promise of its growing economy, putative 'demographic dividend' and a nuclear arsenal is gradually receding in the face of harsh realities. On the other hand, China, with five times India's GDP, is surging ahead, to attain economic, military and technological parity with the US. Aiming to be the sole hegemon in Asia, China has enlisted and armed Pakistan as an effective surrogate to contain India within a South Asian 'box'.

For India to attain its full economic potential, it will need a breathing-spell and insurance against hegemony. This respite must also be used to boost its military muscle by urgently modernising the armed forces and acquiring advanced technology for its defence-industrial complex. The choices before India are few; and a partnership with the US appears a pragmatic and realist option at this juncture. In a statement issued after their meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in November, President Trump and PM Modi pledged to enhance their cooperation as major defence partners and resolved that "two of the world's great democracies should also have the world's two greatest militaries". This is where we need to separate the rhetoric from reality. India's military, in terms of size, capability and professionalism, is, no doubt, 3rd or 4th in the world pecking order. However, one would hesitate to describe it as the 'world's greatest', because of its crippling dependence on imported weaponry; 60%-70% of it from Russia.

Hardware acquisitions from US under the FMS scheme offer an expeditious (and corruption-free) route for undertaking India's long overdue military modernization. The DTTI must, however, serve to bolster India's long-term capabilities, with self-reliance as the end-goal. Instead of pursuing symbolism and arcane skills, there is need to transfer technologies that have eluded our scientists for 70 years and prevented India's defence-industry from 'taking-off'. A few prominent examples are the inability to design and produce: infantry weapons, turbo-jet engines for fighters, diesel-engines for battle-tanks, electric-

propulsion for ships and modern nuclear reactors to drive ships and submarines.

The US Congress is, no doubt, aware that, in the past three decades, the USSR and Russia have lent India two nuclear submarines on lease, sold a refurbished aircraft-carrier and transferred technology for a supersonic cruise missile. So, if the forthcoming '2+2' meeting is to deliver on tall promises, some re-thinking may be required on Capitol Hill as well as Raisina Hill..

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## Building ties with Indonesia

Cmdr. (Retd) **C. Uday Bhaskar**  
Director of the Society for Policy Studies  
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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia (May 29-31) will seek to review and infuse high-level political traction to the consensus arrived at during Indonesian President Joko Widodo's visit to Delhi in December 2016. At the time, a comprehensive joint statement identified a wide spectrum of areas for cooperation and engagement and it is understood that the current Modi visit will focus on defence ties, port infrastructure, connectivity and skill development. Summit-level visits between India and Indonesia have been few and the 2016 Jokowi visit took place after a gap of five years. This does little justice to the vast potential that this bilateral contains, both in terms of a historical linkage that goes back by a millennium and more, and to the current complementary possibilities of mutually beneficial cooperation that are often obscured.

Indonesia is the largest nation in the ten member ASEAN and the heavyweight by way of population (266 million), GDP (one trillion US \$) and has the distinction of being home to the world's largest Muslim population. Yet, Indonesia nurtures a unique template of accommodating various religions in an ethos of tolerance and accommodation and sees no contradiction in revering Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Cold War

Both good and bad are prevalent in the world. You should see to it that you take to the good path without bothering about what others are doing.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

and military rule in Jakarta constrained bilateral ties and only after democracy progressively took root in Indonesia has the relationship become more active. However, Indonesia has received only episodic attention by Delhi and to the credit of PM Modi, who has energised India's 'Look East' policy, since assuming office (all the ASEAN leaders were at the Republic Day parade in January 2018), this will be his third substantive engagement with President Jokowi in less than two years.

In the defence sector, the maritime domain is a natural choice and in the December 2016 statement, the two leaders: "highlighted the importance of the maritime domain to their respective countries, the surrounding regions, and the world. They pledged to deepen their maritime cooperation, and to this end, issued a separate 'Statement on Maritime Cooperation' (that) encompasses a broad range of fields, including: maritime security, maritime industry, maritime safety and navigation, and other areas of bilateral cooperation identified by both countries."

Both nations have a certain correspondence about maritime security and despite their contrasting geographies (Indonesia is an archipelagic nation, comprising about 18,000 islands, while India is a peninsular nation extending into the Indian Ocean) some challenges are similar. These include piracy, criminality at sea, illegal fishing and fear post Mumbai 2008 attack that every maritime nation has, namely the deep seated anxiety that terrorist groups could breach a poorly guarded coastline.

At the macro level, the regional maritime grid, and more specifically the creeping assertiveness of China, is an element of concern for both India and Indonesia, though it is differently articulated. Jakarta has voiced its reservations about the Chinese South China Sea takeover in a muted manner and will stay within the ASEAN consensus on this issue. Thus, it is unlikely that Jakarta will be inclined to join any Quad like naval grouping, though it must be added that this nascent entity has been put on the backburner by India.

Both Modi and Jokowi have given high priority to maritime domain in their domestic policies. The former advocates SAGAR (security and growth for all in the region, namely the Indian Ocean), while the latter highlights Indonesia's identity as the maritime fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific region. Preparatory to the Modi visit, Jakarta has offered the port of Sabang in north Sumatra for development to India and the proximity to the critical Malacca Strait will be noted by the professionals.

The challenge and opportunity for both leaders will be to institutionalise the cooperation in this domain in an innovative and purposeful manner, such that it has a policy continuity that goes beyond their respective electoral fortunes. India has made commendable progress in extending its MDA (maritime domain awareness) capability with its smaller island neighbours and this could be suitably scaled up and the know-how shared with Jakarta in a manner that suits its regional politics and geography.

India and Indonesia are both struggling with their indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities and in the short-term, Delhi will not be able to offer a viable option to Jakarta's traditional import options that include the UK, USA and China. Where India has an edge is in providing training and sharing best practices in the naval/coast guard skillset.

India's naval credibility has been burnished after the December 2004 tsunami that ravaged South East Asia, but the potential for initiating a comprehensive and sustained military diplomacy outreach as part of the Indian Look/Act East policy has eluded Raisina Hill. One capability of India, naval hydrography (making charts or maritime maps) is a specialised niche that is globally acknowledged and could be offered to select nations. Yet, India has not been able to astutely add this kind of professionalism to its military diplomacy basket.

India may not be able to export military inventory or hardware to its neighbours in the manner that China does, but it has a training-cum-capacity-building profile (software) that is internationally acknowledged, but alas, domestically ignored.

The Modi visit to Indonesia, and later Singapore, could be an opportunity for Delhi and the tenaciously insular Indian defence ministry to add directivity, content and traction to India's long-neglected maritime/ naval diplomacy. The Swaraj-Sitharaman combine ought to offer the PM substantive and appropriately-harmonised policy options, which can be carried forward by the next government.

(The Views expressed by the author are personal)

(Courtesy: *DNA*, May 29, 2018)

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## **Sri Lanka going! Maldives gone! India's Foreign Policy Challenges**

**Shri Amit Dasgupta,**

Former Ambassador of India to Philippines

For decades, India took her neighbourhood for granted. Her sheer size and geographical centrality dominated the smaller neighbours. Even though some openly complained of Indian hegemony, a profound sense of complacency dominated South Block's foreign policy calculus.

At the same time, open hostility between New Delhi and Islamabad crippled SAARC, reducing it to a pathetic caricature. Indeed, when the concept of SAARC was first mooted by Bangladesh, many in the Indian establishment saw it as a platform to contain India. Hindsight suggests that SAARC was doomed to failure from its very inception.

It is, nevertheless, true that India contributed significantly through its several aid and loan packages, to development in her neighbourhood. The financial outlay justifies Indian moving from an aid-receiving country to a donor nation.

Unfortunately, as present developments demonstrate, this did not build a circle of friends along the periphery, as New Delhi hoped it would. What we have, in fact, is the encirclement by China supporters. The implications can be strategically disastrous.

Prime Minister Modi's out-of-the-box thinking in inviting the leadership from the region to his swearing-in ceremony raised expectations that New Delhi would, finally, focus with greater depth, intensity and consistency on the neighbourhood. As the past four years have shown, this never happened. Consequently, the expectation and genuine goodwill that the overture generated was frittered away.

Beijing, which had looked at Prime Minister Modi, with a sense of uncertainty and even, anxiety, moved into the space New Delhi vacated. And it did so with speed and acumen. In both Maldives and Sri Lanka, China's presence is visible and domineering. More importantly, while Colombo appears uncomfortable with the China embrace, the current Maldives government has used it to publicly taunt and undermine New Delhi.

India's outstanding envoys, Taranjit Singh Sandhu and Akhilesh Mishra, in Colombo and Male respectively, have been reduced to relying heavily on public diplomacy because India has lost strategic space. It is worth recalling shared values and traditions but they are no substitute for economic prosperity and wellbeing.

A Sri Lankan recently told me, 'While we hate the Chinese, we realize that we can't do without them!' Colombo is undergoing massive transformation from roads to infrastructure. Chinese workers are everywhere and the buildings are coming up at a fast and furious pace. In a few years from now, Colombo will be a new and modern city. That is precisely what Sri Lankans want.

India has lost the Maldives. Sri Lanka is on the verge of being lost. In our strategic calculus, this is an unmitigated foreign policy failure.

Unless India starts focusing on its neighbourhood with greater intensity and urgency, it would find itself well and truly contained by Beijing.

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What I want to see in India is an end of religion and politics and the beginning of science and spirituality.

Vinoba Bhave

## THE 'MODIFIED' FOREIGN POLICY OF INDIA

**Shri K.P.Fabian, I.F.S. (Retd.)**

Former Ambassador to Finland, Qatar and Italy

In its advertisement paid for by the tax payers' money, the Modi Government claims that "in a historic first, India carried out Surgical Strikes showing a new mettle." Let us pause and examine this claim. "A tree should be judged by its fruits", the Bible tells us. What are the fruits of the much bruted about 'surgical strikes'? The 'surgical strikes' were carried out ten days after the 18th September 2016 terrorist attack on an army camp in Uri killing 19 Indian soldiers. Obviously, the idea was that with such a 'surgical strike' Pakistan would be intimidated and would not repeat such attacks and stop provoking India by firing across the line of control. Most of the main-stream English language media have avoided asking the question whether the 'surgical strikes' had the intended impact on Pakistan's behavior. We all know the reason: they have taken leave of professional ethics to please the government and get benefits such as advertisement and much more as the media are owned by corporate houses seeking favors from the incumbent government all the time. The government can also send them income tax notices if they do not behave.

Fortunately, there are a few exceptions. The Wire investigated and reported (29/07/2017) that after a year of the 'surgical strikes' there was an increase of 31% in deaths related to terrorist attacks.

Modi invited Nawaz Sharif and the rest of SAARC to his inaugural in May 2014. Nawaz Sharif came and later it was announced that the two Foreign Secretaries would meet on 18th August 2014. The Pakistani High Commissioner had invited some Hurriyat leaders to his office on the 17th. However, the Indian Foreign Secretary on orders from the highest peremptorily told the High Commissioner that if he met the Hurriyat leaders, India would call off the Foreign Secretary level meeting. True to the Modi style of diplomacy it was given to the media that the High Commissioner had been warned. He went ahead

with the meeting and the two Foreign Secretaries did not meet. The Pakistani High Commissioner had been meeting the Hurriyat leaders since Vajpayee's time. Some respect for precedent is part of diplomacy. The problem is that the PM gives orders without asking the bureaucracy for advice and background information.

In July 2015, Modi met Nawaz Sharif and a communiqué was issued announcing talks on terrorism at foreign minister level. The agenda did not mention 'Jammu and Kashmir' and a mature Indian diplomacy would have kept silent on it. Instead, a senior official phoned up the Indian media and asked them to highlight that Modi had scored an unprecedented victory by making Pakistan agree to talk on terror alone. The media happily and unthinkingly carried the story. Predictably, an embarrassed Pakistan went back, and the talks never happened.

Now let us look at Modi's policy towards Nepal. Modi likes to belittle his predecessor whenever possible and it was given out that Dr. Manmohan Singh had not bothered to visit Nepal during the ten years he was in office. The obedient media carried the story without pointing out that there was a good reason for Singh's not going to Nepal when delicate negotiations for drawing up a constitution were going on. That was Modi's first visit.

When Modi was to make his second visit to Nepal in November 2014 for the SAARC summit, he wanted to make use of the visit to gain votes in the upcoming Bihar election. He wanted to go by road to Janakpur, the birth place of Sita, and then go to Muktinah Temple near Mustang. Initially, Nepal agreed to the itinerary. More demands came from Delhi including giving away of ten thousand bicycles to Nepalese girls whose parents might be looking for bridegrooms in Bihar. Nepal stood up and Modi went by air to Kathmandu as other principals.

Modi was looking for an opportunity to hit back at Nepal. The Nepalese Parliament with an overwhelming majority adopted a constitution with a majority of Madhesi representatives voting for it. Modi was not amused. He sent his Foreign Secretary as Special Envoy to tell Nepal to postpone the declaration of the constitution. Nepal stood up again.

Modi retaliated by encouraging a month-long blockade of land-locked Nepal, adding to the misery of the people who were still recovering from the disastrous impact of an earthquake. The outcome of the Modi diplomacy, if there is no oxymoron, is that Nepal drew closer to China, ever eager to step in and replace India as the primary supplier of goods.

The story of India's helplessness in Maldives is sad indeed. What Modi did or did not do is to be contrasted with what Rajiv Gandhi did in November 1988. What happened then is not in the public domain. While the coup attempt by militants from People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was going on, US Department of State called up the Counsellor (Political) in the Indian Embassy in Washington around the midnight to tell him of what was going on and requested that Delhi be informed immediately adding that US would endorse any action India chooses to take. The Counsellor spoke to Ministry of External Affairs. A little later, the State Department rang up to thank the Counsellor for taking prompt action. Obviously, the Department would have eavesdropped the conversation.

Rajiv Gandhi, though he lacked a 56- inch chest, ordered the Operation Cactus and it was a brilliant success. UK's Prime Minister Thatcher exclaimed "Thank God for India", while President Reagan said, "This will be remembered as a valuable contribution to regional stability".

Apologists for the inaction of Modi Government have incorrectly argued that in 1988 there was a request for military assistance from the government whereas in 2018, the request was from the opposition. The fact of the matter is that this time also there was a coup carried out by the President of the day who got arrested the Supreme Court Chief Justice and others who were opposed to the totally arbitrary exercise of presidential power to finish off democracy.

The Modi government true to its style, did not get in touch with diplomats who have dealt with Maldives and the region in the past. Fear of China paralyzed their thinking. India has about 25,000 of its citizens in Maldives. India should have sent naval

vessels "to evacuate them" and one of the ships should have carried the ousted President Mohamed Nasheed who was in Colombo.

Coming to China, Modi sought and obtained an informal summit with Chinese President Xi Jin Ping. We do not know whether there was any good result. There was an agreement to have a hotline between the two militaries and the Chinese displayed, deliberately or not, their 'Middle Kingdom' approach by insisting that India's army chief can be in touch with one of their regional army commanders. The Indian side had highlighted as a great achievement the agreement to have a Sino-Indian joint venture project in Afghanistan. Days later, some Indians working on a project in Afghanistan were abducted.

A characteristic of the Modi government is to make headlines- grabbing announcements before doing any serious work for the realization of the objective. For example, from the ramparts of the Red Fort on 15th August 2016, Modi said, " For the past few days, the people of Baluchistan, people of Gilgit, people of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the way their citizens have heartily thanked me, the way they have acknowledged me, the goodwill they have shown towards me, people settled far across, the land which I have not seen, people I have not met ever, but people settled far across acknowledge the Prime Minister of India..." Two years later, has India got any 'presence' in Baluchistan? All that has happened is that Pakistan got a chance of accusing India of resorting to state-sponsored terrorism.

Coming to US and Russia, India's principal interest for them is as a big buyer of their arms. Modi did not feel confident enough to phone up Trump and ask him about his reaction to a possible military intervention in Maldives. In the time of Rajiv Gandhi, Reagan wanted India to act.

Despite his visiting as many as 54 countries as of May 2018, Modi has not established a personal rapport with most of his counterparts. Further, Modi overestimates what can be done at the summit level. He does not seem to understand the useful and irreplaceable role of diplomats. Does he think

If strategic autonomy was a defensive concept, Modi is staking claim for 'strategic influence' on the world beyond India's border.

C. Raja Mohan

that matters between countries can be arranged as they did in the 17th and 18th century Europe when sovereigns got together?

Incidentally, the bullet train project was offered to Prime Minister Abe even before he asked for it and after the Railway Board had advised the PM not to get into that bullet train.

To conclude, we cannot give more than an 'F' in foreign policy for the first four years. At the same time, let us hope and pray that the fifth year will be better, and the scholar will better his score. It is not that difficult to learn from one's own mistakes.

Let us look at the current state of India's relations with Pakistan, Nepal, and Maldives. Modi's over-personalized diplomacy of hugs and landing up uninvited at birthday party has not paid the intended results. Obviously, his style, refreshingly original, is not appropriate. In the setup, there is nobody who could have told him that he was going about it in the wrong way. However, there are indications that he has to an extent discovered the limits of 'hugplomacy'.

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## **Marx is now the world's favourite saint**

**Dr. Uday Balakrishnan**

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Liberated from the Communists, Karl Marx is now being anointed as the principal philosopher of our age.

What a turnaround for Karl Marx! In less than 30 years after the spectacular collapse of Communism in Europe, he is enjoying a wonderful and unexpected revival today. Not too long back, a BBC poll rated him the greatest philosophical thinker of all time, a view that is enthusiastically endorsed by many, most of all by China's supreme leader Xi Jinping. It is a warm 'homecoming' for Marx in the country of his birth, Germany. In Trier, the town where he was born 200 years ago in May 1818, a massive statue of the philosopher, donated by the Chinese Government,

has been unveiled. Another one, for long stored in a warehouse in Neubrandenburg, is being dusted to stand in a public space once again. The spectre of communism no longer haunts Europe or for that matter, any other part of the world. Nowhere does the ruling class tremble in fear of a proletarian revolution. With the blame for Communism's most egregious excesses no longer sticking to him, Marx is getting a second and more objective hearing.

Much of what he said — the diagnostic part of his thoughts — are as valid today as when he first expounded them, take this for instance: "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural.... Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West."

Marx's core thoughts make absolute sense to ordinary folk connecting them so easily, to others in history like Jesus, who spoke out eloquently against oppression and the inequities of the wealthy and the powerful. The big difference lay in Marx's forceful assertion, that the condition can be changed and the oppressors, mighty as they are, can be and would be annihilated.

It is the certainties built into Marx's philosophy that made it a faith that could be blindly followed. As the Communist intellectual and Tito's friend turned enemy, the late Milovan Djilas observed, "The strength of Marxist philosophy did not lie in its scientific elements but in the connections with a mass movement and most of all its emphasis on the objective of a changing society. It stated again and again that the existing world would change simply because it had to change, that it bore the seeds of its own opposition and destruction, that the working class wanted the change and would be able to effect it."

Marx lashed out against capitalism's predatory character, outed its terrific capacity to seduce the world and persuade the masses to buy snake oil.

The key to higher industrial growth is efficient investment, and this is where the government should concentrate in the future.

Bimal Jalan

He was furious with its heartless character and its exploitation of workers, making a very few, not only rich, but powerful and manipulative, and ultimately in control of the State.

Contrary to common belief, Marx acknowledged the rude efficiency and animal appetite of global capitalism. As he states, “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.” It was its excesses he inveighed against. Several felt that he had, well ahead of Thomas Piketty, identified economic inequality as a principal global concern. As Melvyn Bragg, introducing a discussion on Marx in BBC put it, “In phrase after phrase coming out and spinning down the centuries,” Marx roused the masses, hectoring them to revolt against an oppressive and exploitative order. Who can deny the simple and menacing tone of the concluding words of the Communist Manifesto: “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”

No other philosopher in history had the power to incite as much as Marx, and it is well known that he acted on his belief — none too successfully — holding that “The philosophers only interpreted the world in various ways. The point however is to change it.” The 20th century clearly was a Marxian one. Inspired by him, Russia went communist as did China and a host of smaller countries across Asia and Africa.

It is his belief that an anesthetized working class needed the crutch of a dictatorship of the proletariat that paved the way for dictators like Stalin and Mao to take over their countries and brutalise their people, imprisoning, starving and executing millions. But that in no way makes Marx accountable for Communism’s excesses. Rather, he should be credited with scaring the countries of the world enough, starting with western democracies, to clean up their act and make their people better off than ever in history.

Marx had his detractors. Keynes, was one of those who did not think much of him or his theories. Jonathan Sperber, the author of a well-received

biography of Marx, convincingly argued that he was just a man of his times, engaged with the problems of his age not ours. However, many more believe in Marx’s enduring relevance, The Economist amongst them. which agreed with him that capitalism, “by its nature is a global system,” and that “It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. That is as true today as it was in the Victorian era.”

In his brilliant biography of Marx, Isiah Berlin observed that he was “a charmless man and his behaviour was often boorish, but even his enemies were fascinated by the strength and vehemence of his personality the boldness of his views and the breadth and brilliance of the contemporary situation.” How true!

After 200 years, it is wonderful to see Marx, liberated from the Communists who swore by him, to be acknowledged for what he really is — the principal prophet of the new age, no less.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*, Business Line, May 21, 2018)

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## THE SUBLIME AND THE SILLY

### Reflections on our current treatment of mythological characters and episodes

**Prof. Manoj Das**

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

“There are four very great events in history, the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kuruksetra,” scribbled Sri Aurobindo in a notebook way back in 1913 and he continued, “The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion (for before there was only meditation and worship), Christ from his cross humanised Europe. The colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.”

That was when some intellectuals of the 20th century were in one of their periodical feats of

Not since Jesus Christ has an obscure pauper inspired such global devotion. Like a lot of great thinkers, Marx was cursed in his disciples.

Francis Wheen

materialistic denial. But their zeal, even if quixotic, could be looked upon as a line of quest. But when a lawyer-politico attempts to humour us by associating Krishna with kinky eve-teasers, when an avant-garde drama group associate the Pandavas demolishing a forest for founding their habitation with contemporary ecological misadventures, when novelists in several languages, Indian and English, find in Draupadi an opportunity to recreate her in the light of common psychology, it is time to wonder which, between our environmental and cerebral climates, had become more polluted.

### **Judging Draupadi**

A number of contemporary novels, plays and poems in different languages have attributed to Draupadi of the Mahabharata emotions and passions common to us. Her father, King Drupad, performed a sacrificial fire-rite wishing to have a son powerful enough to vanquish his enemy, Drona. Since no being short of an emanation of Shakti, the Female Divinity, could destroy the terrible evil that was Drona's camp, from the fire emerged Draupadi, already a radiant young lady, along with a son.

Hence, before we pounce upon Draupadi armed with our concepts, we must remember that she was no human being. At the end of the big battle when some of the ladies requested her to reveal her wizardry that could command allegiance of five husbands, she answered disarmingly, she could do that because she had no lust in her!

Over the millennia the two epics have inspired innumerable works of literature in every genre. They have also been retold by geniuses who have added new flavours to the original situations – Kamban in Tamil and Tulsidas in Hindi, so far as the Ramayana is concerned. They have carried the epic situations to new heights through their lofty realisations; they have not degraded them through any puny sense of social realism. We have enough of social realism as well as cocktail of that and eroticism, surrealism and existentialism. We may leave the epics rest in their own genre.

### **The Episode of Ekalavya**

Both Valmiki and Vyasa were realists. Facts are presented by them in a detached way. The princely forest-dweller Ekalavya had secretly mastered certain miraculous feats of archery taught by Drona only to select disciples. Confronted by the master, Ekalavya is ready to pay him his due. The latter demands his thumb and he readily sacrifices it. Surely, nobody can fail to sympathise with the young man and criticise Drona. Even so we should not ignore the backdrop. Ekalavya had disabled a poor dog from opening its mouth, applying a complex formula of archery that at once sealed its lips with a crisscross of seven arrows, simply because it had the audacity to bark at him. This is indication enough to make us wonder about the fate of forest-dwellers under him. There are two arguments in favour of Drona's action. A rather light argument is, some occult techniques were Drona's 'copyright'; none should 'steal' them. The second, a serious one is, a guru in those days was not concerned with a disciple's worldly success alone, but also with the consequence of his deeds. Better one was less successful than spiritually crushed by the success. It is to be noted that Ekalavya continued to be an archer. Significantly, he participated in the Kurukshetra battle on the side of the Kauravas, the camp that Drona commanded for a while.

But Ekalavya remains great and unique for his truthfulness and courage, independent of a later-day estimate of his greatness shadowed by contemporary bias.

We are not bound to look upon our epics as a repository of spiritual truths. We can regard them as ancient creative works containing elements of history. Or we may simply disregard them. But we cannot judge a character or incident snatching it from its context and milieu.

### **Krishna the Incredible Survivor**

Krishna is abused time and again in poetry and plays including films showing him as a young man dancing in abandon with damsels of Gopa or with Radha. We forget that he was a small boy as long as he lived in Gopa. His education began only after he

If judges are to get off the backs of parliamentarians, politicians and bureaucrats – who claim the direct right to govern on the basis of adult franchise – they must come up with a much better record of performance.

Fali S. Nariman

left for Mathura, put an end to the tyrant Kamsa and, arranged by his father, proceeded to the Gurukul of Sage Sandipani at Avantipura.

Radha does not appear anywhere in the three mythological works containing Krishna's biographical information: *Bhagavatam*, *Harivamsha* and the *Mahabharata*. While his relationship with the Gopikas narrated by the *Bhagavatam* had an esoteric significance, although seen by the masses as happenings at the physical plane, Radha is nowhere in these works. She is an experience, a revelation *nonpareil* of Divine Love that dawned in the consciousness of the post-*Bhagavatam* Vaishnava mystics.

But despite all kinds of popular treatment of Krishna, some even farcical, the Indian psyche had seen nothing but the supreme liberator in him, or rather something inexplicable in that character that dazzled through a thousand layers of ignorance heaped on it through the ages.

Let us not behave ungratefully towards our heritage of mythology, and to the two epics in particular, the mighty base and succour for the growth of our literature, philosophy and all the aspects of our culture.

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## Shifting Images and Perceptions

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

Former Secretary, HRD, Govt. of India  
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The Emergency was promulgated on June 25, 1975, a week before K left Kakinada for a posting in Hyderabad. As he saw his colleagues in districts getting into action to incarcerate the political opponents of the Government under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act), K heaved a sigh of relief. His posting in the Commercial Tax Department was a haven, and he was spared the ordeal of taking actions whose propriety he was not sure. Before he left Kakinada, he saw the Emergency in action. He was walking along the Main Road in Rajahmundry; suddenly, he

heard someone shout slogans against the Emergency and Indira Gandhi. The passers-by were startled, and literally ran for cover. They did not want to be seen anywhere near the trouble-maker and get into trouble. In no time, the police arrived and led him away in a van. K was anguished: how can shouting political slogans be a crime? As a student, he himself shouted political slogans. His anguish was all the more painful as he hero-worshipped Indira Gandhi. For many of K's generation, Indira Gandhi's election as Prime Minister was to use the evocative title of K.A. Abbas's book, *The Return of the Red Rose*. For them, Indira Gandhi assuming office marked a resumption of the Nehruvian era, and an end to the interruption of that era by the brief interregnum during which Lal Bahadur Shastri was the prime minister. The little man did do well during the conflict with Pakistan, and through his bold decisions erased the charge of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit that he was a prisoner of indecision. However, the impression of many like K was that he accomplished little in the domestic arena, and worse he did not seem to do anything to carry forward Nehru's vision of a socialistic pattern of society. He seemed shy of even speaking about the socialistic pattern. K was therefore happy that he gave way to Indira Gandhi.

Little did K know then that his contemporaneous assessment of Shastri was utterly mistaken, and that like many others, he missed out trends of long lasting importance in the din and buzz of daily events so much so that what seemed to be happening was not necessarily what history adjudged to have happened. It was only much later in life, after he chanced to read books like Francine Frankel's *India's Political Economy*, Ashutosh Varshney's *Democracy, Development, and the Countryside*, and the memoir of P.N. Dhar, Indira Gandhi's Secretary, could he properly assess the contribution of Shastri as prime minister. From his extensive reading, K found that like President Truman, Shastri was an underrated leader who quietly consolidated his political power and grew to high stature in office. His achievement in domestic arena was no less impressive than in the conduct of war: he left an indelible mark on the institutional architecture for economic development,

subtly but surely altered the developmental strategy, and reordered developmental priorities. His strength was that he was no ideologue, and 'saw facts as they were in all their starkness'. Shastri's tenure coincided with a period of high inflation, and of near-famine conditions with the country living precariously 'from ship-to-mouth', perilously dependent upon PL-480 wheat supplies by the United States and written off as a hopeless basket case. He extended strong support to C. Subramaniam in bringing about a paradigmatic shift in agricultural policy. Right from Independence, agricultural policy was rooted in the belief that price incentives were not necessary for enhancing agricultural production and that productivity can be enhanced, and that structural transformation of rural life (land reforms, farm and service cooperatives, and local self-government), and application of scientific farming practices would suffice. The new policy accepted the existing institutional structure as given but sought to increase production through price incentives and technical change. Without that shift the Green Revolution would not have taken place and the country would not have acquired food self-sufficiency and eliminated its dependence on American food aid.

Shastri made pointed references to the wide chasm between the promises and performance of five-year plans, ordered a change in the priorities of the Fourth Five Year Plan which was under formulation, and a shift in investment from heavy industry to agriculture. The glaring inefficiency of the public sector made him accept a larger role for the private sector. Far more important and longer lasting was the institutional change he brought about in economic decision-making. Over years, the Planning Commission had come to be a body laying down policy for the Central and State governments, and 'had developed a rigid, almost doctrinaire outlook on economic policies'. Indicative of its stature was the fact that the cabinet secretary was secretary of the Commission. As a part of administrative reorganization, the cabinet secretary was detached from the Planning Commission which itself was transformed from a decision-making body to an advisory body with members appointed for a fixed tenure instead of for life. The locus of decision-making

was thus shifted from the Planning Commission to ministries and from the centre to the states. The Prime Minister's Office [PMO] was created to help consolidate power of the Prime Minister; it was headed by L. K. Jha, a distinguished ICS officer who was a trained economist with strong reformist proclivities. An interesting *what if* question is what Shastri would have done if he had not died prematurely and used his enormous reputation as a war leader to carry forward pragmatic economic reforms. India might have had a lead of over a decade over China in ushering economic reforms. But then one can never say what might have happened. *What if history is a free fall*; it is free of the burden of verifiability, and worse allows an unconstrained projection of one's preferences and wishes. Whatever, it is unfortunate that Shastri does not find much space in the collective memory of the nation, and that few know that it was C. Subramaniam and B. Sivaraman (Union Agricultural Secretary) who developed the policies that ushered Green Revolution. Before these policies were put into effect on large scale Shastri died and Subramaniam lost office. Indira Gandhi extended unstinted support to Sivaraman in pushing forward the implementation. Her steely resolve and patriotism were aroused by the unwillingness of the American President Lyndon Johnson not to make any long-term commitments of PL 480 food supplies but instead compel Indians to lodge repeated pleas for the supplies. In his memoirs, LBJ took credit for fathering the Green Revolution through his policy which compelled the Indian Government to implement the new agricultural policy, though less charitable are inclined to link the American policy with the President's desire to teach India a lesson for its stance on Vietnam.

K had his only glimpse of Indira Gandhi in Vizag, a little before he was selected to the IAS; her convoy slowly passed by K's house and standing in an open car and waving majestically to the people who lined the streets, she looked like a *Faerie Queene*. In the early years of his service, K was still emotionally a teenager. Her struggles with the Syndicate were his struggles, and her victories were his. Intoxicated by the columns of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, his only regret was that she was not going far and fast enough on

Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow

the socialist path. Her victory in the Bangladesh War, and cocking a snook at the imperious Nixon and his henchman Kissinger enhanced her status as Empress of the People's hearts. Atal Bihari Vajpayee only echoed the popular feeling when he called her Goddess Durga for her victory in Bangladesh War. However, the descent from sublime heights of veneration to dark, abysmal depths of infamy was rather precipitate; the *Faerie Queene*, liberator of Bangladesh and the champion of the poor was metamorphosed almost in a trice into a tyrant. In 1974 Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed was picked by Indira Gandhi for the presidency. He was widely perceived to be the Prime Minister's rubber stamp; that image was superbly represented in Cho Ramswamy's *Tuglak* which K happened to see in Secunderabad. The audience burst into laughter seeing a character playing the role of the presidential candidate resolutely practicing the act of mechanically signing whatever was put up to him for signature. K's own perceptions moved in sync with popular perceptions about her. People around her like L.N. Mishra seemed to be shady, and increasingly, she seemed guilty by association. K was baffled by the series of developments in 1974 and 1975: the *Nav Nirman Andolan* in Gujarat, and Jayaprakash Narayan's *Sampoorna Kranti* (Total Revolution) in Bihar. K could not view the agitation of students in Guajarati against price rise and corruption of the Chimanbhai Patel government as an ideological struggle like say Bank Nationalisation. K felt that the fact that a 'reactionary' like Morarji Desai supported the agitation did not alter the basic issues involved. K admired the resolute character that India Gandhi displayed in her previous struggles; in the new context K viewed the same character as hubris. The 'foreign hand' was invoked so often as to be utterly ridiculous. The frequent use of the expression fascism to describe any opposition protest seemed to be jarring. K was jolted by the judgement of the Allahabad High Court which set aside Indira Gandhi's election. The grounds on which her election was set aside seemed to K to be far too trivial, but her reaction baffled him more. The drummed up shows of support near her house elicited revulsion; the declaration by D.C. Barooah, the Congress Party President,

that 'Indira was India and India Indira' sickening. The imposition of the Emergency startled him; the events thereafter were shocking. Even the censored newspapers conveyed enough of the unseemly events such as the demolitions in Turkman Gate, Delhi. A brief visit to Delhi was a queer experience. The city was plastered with the images of Indira and Sanjay, and with the new commandments of Indian polity, the Twenty Point and Four Point Programmes. As he moved round in Delhi, he conjured visions of Moscow during Great Terror and of the ubiquitous Big Brother in Orwell's 1984. Mercifully, as later events brought out, the administration in Andhra Pradesh was hardly affected by the Emergency though a new breed of rough and tough leaders who sought to imitate their mentor Sanjay Gandhi appeared on the political scene. Sanjay visited Hyderabad once, and the city was decked as if an Emperor were visiting with state public sector undertakings vying with one another to put up welcome arches.

K heaved a sigh of relief when elections were announced, and all the imprisoned leaders were released. The defection of Jagjivan Ram thrilled K. He recalled with delight the episode in Vishakhadatta's Sanskrit play *Mudrārākṣasa* in which the tribal chief Parvataka offers timely help to Chandragupta to overthrow the hated Nandas. During the election campaign, Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan addressed a rally at the Exhibition Grounds just opposite K's office. As if they were conspirators committing *lèse majesté*, K and his friend and Government Pleader D.V. Sastry slipped away from the office and walked over to attend the election meeting. JP looked pale and sick and had to be physically carried to the stage. To K, he appeared to be the Saviour of Indian Democracy; through his suffering, he appeared to redeem the nation from the curse of dictatorship. On the day when the votes were counted, K was shattered when Indira Gandhi carried the State winning all but one seat; his gloom gave way to euphoria as the results from North India began to pour in, and Indira and Sanjay themselves were defeated. Around midnight, Sastry came over K's house to celebrate the victory of good over evil.

Whether or not the world is getting worse, the nature of the media will make us think that it is.

Steven Pinker

K had high expectations from the new Janata Government. He believed like millions of others that the struggle against Emergency was a Second Freedom Struggle, and that a New Republic was born as a result of that struggle. K can still recall the reaction of his service colleagues when the All India Radio beamed the news of the Acting President B.D. Jatti giving in to the demand of the Janata government and dissolving nine state assemblies. There was a get together of the officers on the lawns of the Lake View Guest house, and the moment the news was broadcast they greeted it with childlike glee and thunderous applause. Newspapers were full of lurid reports about Emergency excesses, and the market was flooded with quickie exposé books debunking Emergency and Indira. They made pleasant reading. And then, as if it were just a short dream, the Janata Government fell, and Indira Gandhi came back to power backed by a massive mandate. K felt like the Puritans at the Restoration of the Stuarts. The Second Republic proved to be a false dawn, and the country seemed set for another spell of personal rule. He could not help recall the saying of Marx that great historic facts and personages recur twice, once as tragedy, and again as a farce. Freedom struggle in 1947 culminated in the great tragedy of Partition while the struggle while the Second Freedom Struggle culminated in the farce that the Janata Government turned out to be. That was how events appeared to K as they occurred; looking back, they now appear differently.

Very soon after its publication in 2000, K read P.N. Dhar's book, *Indira Gandhi, the 'Emergency', and Indian Democracy*. The scales fell from his eyes as K read the book. Dhar was Indira Gandhi's Secretary from 1973 to 1977 and witnessed from his privileged position the tumultuous events that culminated the Emergency and the happenings during the Emergency. Unlike some other confidants of Indira Gandhi, he was not an unabashed supporter of her and everything she did. Dhar had high regard for Jayaprakash Narayan and tried to negotiate a truce between him and Indira Gandhi. His account of that period was objective to a degree that is rare for memoirs of persons who held

high office. After reading Dhar's account, K was aghast at his naivety in his reaction to the events of 1970s. A series of thoughts crossed his mind. How could he condone the attempts in a democracy to force elected legislators to resign? How could he condone Jayaprakash Narayan's call to the police and army to disobey 'immoral' orders? One can understand illegal orders. But what are immoral orders? Who is to define what is morality? Is the army, or civil service for that matter, a voluntary association whose members are free to determine their own terms and conditions of work, and free to decide which orders of the government are moral and need to be implemented? Was there anything concrete that Jayaprakash Narayan had to offer in place of the existing polity? To attempt to dismantle an existing structure without having something concrete to replace it is anarchism. Can an infant democracy like India afford anarchism? As he mulled over these questions, K realised that Indira Gandhi alone could not be held solely responsible for the Emergency. The Emergency indeed is, as Ramachandra Guha famously put it a few years later, 'a script created jointly by JP and Mrs. Gandhi'. Indulging in a little bit of 'what if' history, K believes that Emergency would have been avoided if only Justice Krishna Iyer had either outrightly refused stay or granted a full stay of the order appealed against. While admitting Indira Gandhi's appeal against the judgement of the Allahabad High Court, he allowed Indira Gandhi to continue without having the right to vote in Parliament. Had he refused the request for stay altogether, she would have ceased to be Prime Minister and been in no position to impose Emergency. Had he stayed in full the High Court order, the battle would have shifted to the judicial arena obviating the need for imposing Emergency. The rather clever-by half order left no option for Indira Gandhi but to employ apparently constitutional means to put down extra-constitutional attempts to depose her. Once her continuance as Prime Minister was approved by the highest judicial forum, agitation for her resignation was improper. Perceptions are black and white, but the 'reality' is grey. Governance and judgement, legal or historical, necessitates dabbling with various shades of grey.

The whole question of G.D.P. growth is a red herring. What matters is what we do more with what we have.

Julian Baggini (*Guardian Weekly*, 18-8-2017)

Around the time K read Dhar's book, as Secretary, Culture, Government of India, K was organising the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Indian Republic, and he also came across the prescient statement of Dr. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly in November 1949, wherein he conveyed his views as to how politics should be conducted in the Indian Republic that was in the offing:

If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and *satyagraha*. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.

The second thing we must do is observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not 'to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions'. There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness... For in India, *Bhakti* or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude, by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. *Bhakti* in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, *Bhakti* or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship. (emphasis added)

Ambedkar's wise words set K thinking. He had no difficulty with Ambedkar's caution about *Bhakti* in politics. What is worrisome is that with passage of time the hold of *Bhakti* in politics has increased instead of decreasing, and many political parties have

come to be bands of feudal retainers desperately vying with one another to demonstrate their fealty to their Supreme Leader whom they regard to be omniscient and infallible.

At the same time, K is not sure that every extra-parliamentary method of political action can be deemed unconstitutional and has no role in a democracy. A distinction should be drawn between political action outside the legislature that seeks to bring an issue or a policy preference to the notice of the government or mobilise public opinion, and action that disrupts the functioning of the government and day-to-day life. That apart, extra-parliamentary political action might be legitimate on occasions when a party wins a landslide victory in elections, and the legislative space is too narrow for the opposition to assert. And in these days of social media and trolling, it is easy to create impression among millions in a trice that fair is foul, and foul is fair, and that black is white and white black, and demonise critics of government. A week, it is, said, is too long in politics. Without extra-parliamentary action, the opposition parties might altogether fade away from public mind, the next elections might as well be a meaningless charade with the ruling party using the power of incumbency and trolling, and democracy extinguished. There could also be occasions when a ruling party has enough majority in the legislature to last the full term of its office, and yet be impervious to the opinion of significant sections of the populace or let matters drift and have no concern other than holding on to power. On such occasions, civil disobedience, non-cooperation and *satyagraha* cannot be deemed constitutionally immoral; they are legitimate methods of democratic protest. K is sure that had Ambedkar lived longer he would have revised his views on civil disobedience and *satyagraha*. Caste, for example, cannot be annihilated solely through legislative action and enforcement of laws. To generalise, morality depends upon context; in antiquity, be it India or Greece or Rome, values and rules were context sensitive. What is appropriate for *agruhastha* (householder) is not appropriate for a *sanyasi* (ascetic). Ethical dilemmas arise because the practice of ethics cannot be divorced from context.

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The struggle against corruption needs to be waged in parallel with a larger democratic and progressive political struggle.

N. Ram

## AUROVILLE AT FIFTY An Anniversary to Remember

**Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty**

Vice-Chancellor  
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Anniversaries are sacred occasions in the lives of individuals and institutions. Celebration of birth anniversaries seems to be a trans-cultural phenomenon. No one knows when and where such a practice began, how it found acceptance and how it gained currency historically in so many societies and cultures. Yet the practice is worthy of our attention. It is not so much the question of cutting a cake or blowing out a candle in the presence of near and dear, or a romantically inclined companion that is the true significance of a birth anniversary. Candles, festoons, festivities and a ceremonial dinner may be part of a birthday protocol, especially one that has come to us from the West, but it is not its real significance.

According to the Mother, birth anniversaries are worth remembering and observing since this is the day the soul decides to take birth in order to continue its journey in its path of transmigration and completion of experience, towards a more integral perfection and self-realization. The more conscious the soul, the more conscious the birth, and yes, even the death. In the final analysis, birth cannot be delinked from death. While both remain mysterious and inexplicable, it is the first that is welcomed and celebrated widely, while death is universally mourned. Even in the Christian context, resurrection after death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, does not conceal the fact of sorrow or grief after death.

Like the birth of human beings, the anniversary of institutions too seems to be seemingly accidental; the outcome of a chosen set of circumstances, a matter of convenience from the organizational point of view: a decision perhaps made by an institutional Head, a Priest or an official decision maker. Seldom is the day or a date of an anniversary viewed as the result of a collective aspiration or prayer.

In the context of the working of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, years and dates have not been

arbitrary or accidental; 1926, 1956 and 1968 are notable events in the Aurobindonean context. The founding of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926 and the descent of the Super Mind in 1956 are as significant as 1914 and 1968. While Auroville was born and inaugurated on 28th February 1968, its antecedents go back in time. In a sense, the vision and idealism of the founders are intimately connected with the birth of the Prophets and the Avatars. It is no different in the case of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In the evolutionary scheme of things, Auroville had to happen: it was divinely ordained.

While spiritual institutions may have had a divine origin, much of the outcome depends on the response of the participants of a given movement. That is why we speak of the Circle of a Jesus, a Ramakrishna, a Ramana Maharshi or that of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We misread the divine purpose by the mere act of surrender. For, the Mother constantly asks of us as to whether we are ready for divine work, Her Mission on earth. The choice indeed is between Truth or Abyss. A mechanical surrender while we pander to our ego, our desire and self-centered behavior will never bring about the cherished goals.

It is perhaps for this reason that many institutions that have enjoyed divine blessing have been marred by ordeals and obstacles in the path of progress and growth. Setbacks happen because of complacency, self-deception and ego-centric, divisive behavior.

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Auroville, we know, was preceded by decades of careful planning and organizational effort. Right from the dream, the vision, the choices of the location, the blue print, the architectural planning and design, the precise message, the number of invitees, the flag bearers, the lotus shaped urn, the amphitheater, the exact message in the invitation card, all were meticulously planned by the Mother, and carefully executed by a group of faithful devotees and followers. The ancient banyan tree and the balloon in the blue empyrean were the symbolic sentinels that kept vigil over the sacred event in 1968.

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The information revolution is likely to be even more disruptive than the Industrial Revolution was, and to make matters worse, it is unfolding in an unstable world awash in nuclear weapons.

Walter Russell Mead (*Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2018)

The 50th anniversary of Auroville has rightly generated a mood of joy and celebration. The panel discussions in New Delhi's, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the UNESCO, as well as exhibitions of the many activities of Auroville in different cities in India and abroad, have created the right atmosphere to welcome the event. The proposed activities leading up to the visit of India's Prime Minister in Auroville in February 2018 will be the grande-finale beckoning us to the journey ahead.

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There are lessons that we must quickly learn regarding the setbacks Auroville suffered after the passing away of the Mother in the 70's of the last century. The disputes between the major stake holders, the prolonged court cases, etc. are all symptomatic of a lack of resolve and sincerity. We must resolve all differences and make rapid progress based on harmony and understanding. The Mother's ideals of national and international living through the pavilion models, the growth of the international township following the model of city planning she has left behind, need to be followed if Auroville were to move towards the creation of a vibrant international township.

The latest resolutions in the UNESO augur well for the events to follow. Let us hope that by joining hands collectively, we can take the cherished dream of the Mother forward.

The present achievements of Auroville are noteworthy by any standard. A multilingual and multinational community that is at the forefront of globally accepted innovative practices in ecology, urban planning, sustainable development, forestation, not to mention the expansion of the Matrimandir project, are all pointers to a progressive destiny.

On this auspicious occasion we need to salute the vision of the Founder, the Mother, and those pioneers who worked tirelessly and faced ordeals and hardship to bring Auroville till the present moment.

Congratulations Auroville! Welcome to your 50th anniversary!!

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## Climate change – science and societal impacts

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Is "climate change" a fact or fiction, had been baffling the public amidst conflicting information from different scientific groups. Observations indicated anomalous increase of temperatures all over the globe during 1970s, and scientists called it global warming and started analysing its consequences on changing weather patterns on time scales of decades referring it as climate change. For this reason, use of climate change and global warming became synonymous in current times. Although some scientists were skeptical of global warming due to the occurrence of several warming epochs earlier in climate history, consistent increase of global average temperatures and its rate of increase convinced all scientists beyond doubt not only of the onset of global warming climate change but also of its consequential societal impacts.

In these days, "climate change" has become synonymous with any weather aberration for the laymen and learned alike. Extensive information through periodicals, journals and public media has created a general apprehension that climate change would induce unprecedented societal impacts. While climate change of recent times is an accepted phenomenon, there is need for its understanding for better societal awareness, community preparedness and improving resilience. This small article aims to provide a basic insight into the science of climate change and to bring out important societal impacts.

Climate change refers to variations in the climate variables over considerable period of time. In recent years, warming of climate due to anthropogenic causes (caused by human activity) is referred to as climate change due to global warming. Why this climate change, over long time periods of decades, is of concern is due to changes in weather over short time periods that has severe societal impacts. For brevity, weather refers to atmospheric state (temperature, humidity, precipitation, cloudiness, visibility, and wind) over short time periods of hours

The world being produced by management graduates is not pleasant. It's a utopia for the wealthy and powerful.

Martin Walker

to days whereas climate means average weather over long time periods of at least 30 years.

Atmosphere is a medium of gases and changes its state continuously as driven by radiation energy from Sun. This energy, emitted at shorter wavelengths (due to very high temperature of Sun disc), as it passes through the earth's atmosphere is subject to absorption, scattering and reflection processes and the finally incident radiation at the earth surface is partly reflected and the remaining is absorbed. Radiation energy (at longer wavelengths) is emitted from earth surface towards space and a major part of it is absorbed by the constituent gases of the atmosphere. These gases which absorb the radiation at longer wavelengths are called "greenhouse gases", as they contribute to warming of the atmosphere. Atmosphere at different levels or layers also emit radiation towards the earth surface and upward layers of the atmosphere. Thus the temperature at the earth surface and at various layers of the atmosphere results from a balance between the received and emitted energy. The greenhouse gases act as an envelope to trap the radiation emitted from the earth surface towards space. The earth temperature would have been near 0°C without the presence of greenhouse gases as compared to the present 15°C. The current global warming trend has been identified as due to the increase of CO<sup>2</sup> (Carbon dioxide) first noticed in the middle of 19th century.

Weather would be evolving continuously, so also the climate, due to internal and external forcing mechanisms and the response to these forcing could start abruptly and may take centuries or longer before a full response is realised. The internal forcing results from natural processes (such as large scale ocean circulation arising due to temperature and density variations in the oceans) as the oceans and atmosphere interact leading to climate variability at the time scale of few years to decades. The external forcing could arise due to natural (e.g., changes in solar output, the earth's orbit, volcano eruptions) or anthropogenic (e.g. increased emissions of greenhouse gases and dust) causes.

The geographical relationship of the Sun and Earth is known to cause day and night and the

seasonal changes on earth. Any change in the energy from Sun, occurring at large time scales of few thousands to millions of years are related to variations in eccentricity (earth's near elliptical shape); obliquity (tilt of earth axis) and orbital precession (time of the two equinoxes). These climate variations are noted to be Milankovitch cycles which were the causes for the ice ages of the palaeoclimate. Volcanic eruptions, another form of external forcing, release abundant (~100,000 tons) aerosols (sulphate particles) that strongly absorb and scatter the incoming solar radiation leading to cooling of the atmosphere for a time span of a few years. Plate tectonics, (i.e.) the movement of tectonic plates in earth crust due to convection currents in earth's mantle, lead to reformulation of land and ocean areas and topography and these variations that occur on the time scale of millions of years lead to climate variations due to land-ocean-atmosphere interactions. In the present context of climate change due to global warming, external forcing due to anthropogenic causes is of prime concern.

Observations show that the earth's average surface temperature increased by ~1.2°C as compared to later half of 19th century, which are attributed to the increase of greenhouse gases, especially of CO<sup>2</sup> in the atmosphere due to industrialisation. The atmospheric levels of CO<sup>2</sup> were ~290 ppm (parts per million) and the mean air temperature was ~13.7°C in the 19th century. The first industrial revolution, in the first half of 19th century during which burning of coal, construction activity and land clearing had taken place, contributed to the increase of CO<sup>2</sup>, and the earliest model studies in 1896 related this anthropogenic increase of CO<sup>2</sup> to warming of the atmosphere. Similarly, the use of fertilisers, chemicals and electricity during the second industrial revolution in 1870-1910 increased the release of CO<sup>2</sup> and global warming. Observations of CO<sup>2</sup> clearly brought out that the levels of CO<sup>2</sup> were less than 300 ppm till 1950s and suddenly shot up beyond 300 ppm reaching around 410 ppm in 2013. Modelling studies in the latter half of 20th century have quantified and confirmed the relation between the increase of CO<sup>2</sup> and global warming. In the latter half of 20th century,

Cricket has been perverted by false prophets and, indeed, false profits.

scientists have observed that methane gas emissions from biogenic sources (paddy fields, wetlands etc) are increasing at the rate of 25 teragrams per year since the beginning of this century which also intensified global warming through greenhouse process. Of all the greenhouse gases, CO<sup>2</sup> and methane account for 81% and 10% respectively showing the importance of these two gases in global warming. Apart from the atmosphere, the top layers (up to 700 meters) of the oceans had an increase of temperature by 0.17°C during the latter half of 20th century and this increase of atmosphere and oceans have been the reason for the consequences of current global warming.

What if the global average temperature increases by 1°C.? Why has the climate change due to global warming become an alarming issue for governments to bother about to find means to cut the increase of greenhouse gases to arrest or reduce the increasing trend of temperature? Here are some important facts of the climate change impacts that would emphasize better understanding of the global warming issue.

Increasing temperatures would lead to increase of extreme weather events (such as heat waves, severe local storms yielding intense rainfall, droughts due to lesser number of rainy days, stronger tropical cyclones etc.).

Increasing temperatures will reduce crop yields due to increase of crop pests, crop diseases and decrease of soil fertility and soil water-holding capacity. Agriculture production patterns are set to change, as the climate shifts to resulting higher temperatures and precipitation extremes affecting farmers. Small farmers in developing countries may lose their agricultural income and consequentially hurt the dependent agricultural labour and vendors. The impact on small farmers would deprecate food security and destabilise food prices, which further worsen the problem of malnutrition and under-nutrition in developing countries.

Climate change causes water shortages and water stress leading to the decline in food production, health, industry, biodiversity and ecosystems, which would create internal and external social conflicts.

Melting of glaciers is a conspicuous signal of climate change that has serious impact on water availability. Reliable estimates have indicated that the loss of mass and volume of glaciers is about 20% in the last 30 years. Glaciers are an important water resource as they store snow in winter and yield snow melt water in summer, and so diminishing glacier extents is of concern affecting water availability. Due to this impact, more than a billion people in the Asian region are expected to face shortage of fresh water.

Sea level rose ~20 cm in the last century due to glacier melting affecting coastal habitation and infrastructure.

Climate change would affect the health of human beings, directly through changing weather and indirectly through changes in water, air, food, ecosystems, livelihoods and infrastructure, which will increase the vulnerability and reduce the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt to climate change. Rural and urban poor (~1 billion in 2015) would be severely affected due to extremes of floods and droughts resulting from climate change. People living in slums with poor living conditions will be more prone to heat-induced health diseases as higher temperatures favour transmission of air and water-borne diseases (such as Dengue). The global warming leads to prolonged higher temperatures making the poor people subject to higher risk and vulnerability. Heat wave conditions induce stress and increase risk of cardiovascular, respiratory and renal diseases. Global statistics indicate that about 22.5 million people get displaced due to climate related weather-disasters and human mobility would imply socio-economic impacts of physical and mental health.

Adaptation to climate change is another concern for developing and under-developed countries as they lack necessary infrastructure and facilities to cope with the socio-economic problems that would be exacerbated with climate change. These countries would also need to spend more of their financial resources on increased irrigation, development of sea walls for sea level rise and storm water systems often at the cost of improving education, health and infrastructure.

Climate change is also impacting sports, although not as much as of life threatening extreme weather events or economic disaster due to droughts. Due to increase of temperatures, United States of America and Russia had to spend billions of US dollars to make and preserve skiing arenas through supplementing with thousands of cubic meters of artificial snow for winter sports events. As of warm weather, humans can be physically active up to 40°C in dry conditions but only 30°C under humid conditions as it would be harder for the human body to cool through sweating and evaporation. Warming weather had affected different sports in different ways – deaths in high school football sport tripled during 1994-2009 as compared to the previous 15-year period; fishing in extra-tropics had reduced by 74% for a change of 1°C; higher temperatures and drought made many of the Golf courses unplayable; higher temperatures increased the marathon times by 2 minutes for a 5°C rise (e.g., Los Angeles marathon, which is traditionally held in March had been shifted to February in 2016); Australia had brought up a heat policy in 2015 setting a temperature threshold for tennis play, after the extreme temperatures of 42°C noted in 2014.

As such, global warming-climate change of the current times had been impacting humanity in several ways, affecting food security, health, industry, recreation and sports. As the climate change concerns were felt all over the globe, all nations started action for alleviation and curbing the impacts. The United Nations formed the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change to provide the science basis, impacts, vulnerability and risk assessment of climate change and to guide the international community. The Kyoto Agreement of 1997 and the Paris Agreement of 2015 for control of greenhouse gas emissions are to restrict the temperatures below 2°C of the pre-industrial era and all signatory nations are legally bound to it since November 4, 2016. Addressing climate change concerns need a holistic approach involving synergy of different disciplines and public-private sectors as the problem encompasses humans and the environment. There is urgency for increased public awareness of the community preparedness and participation to face the consequences of climate

change. All countries are working towards reducing the societal impacts through improving sustainability and resilience of communities.

\* \* \*

## **Maha Saraswati's Relevance to our Times**

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

“Who is this?” I asked my mother who was selecting clay dolls for Navaratri.

“You like her?”

“Sure. such a nice peacock near her and she is playing the veena standing!”

My mother smiled at me fondly and bought the clay doll for me. Then she said something which I have never forgotten.

“You will come first in the class if you pray to her daily and read your lessons without fail.”

Immediately the doll ceased to be a piece of clay that cost six annas and became a living person. She has presided over my work-table for the last seven decades and more. Even now, as I type this article she is there, filling this tiny room with the anaahata naada (the unheard melody) from her veena. Today, at my advanced age, I repeatedly think of those memorable words of my mother and when I do, my palms come together in reverence for the unknown hawker whose art had made the divine descend into clay for me as an inspiration for all my life.

As the years have gone by in their own inexorable rhythm, I have gathered a good deal of information about this fascinating phenomenon. I have thus entered a magic world of symbols, art, literature and perennial wisdom. While reading the Sabha Parva in the Mahabharata I found her as a river who nurtured a tremendous civilisation. For, Balarama dissociated himself from the Kurukshetra War and went on a tirth-yatra along the bank of the Saraswati river. Apparently, thousands of years ago the Saraswati river banks were home to hundreds of Ashramas and was a tremendously rich area.

The facts of history never come to us pure, since they do not and cannot exist in pure form; they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder.

E.H. Carr

No wonder the Vedas have several hymns on Saraswati as a great power, a goddess who is also known as Ila and Mahi. And yet, Mahasaraswati is not contained in the Vedic stream alone. The younger generation of our times who have become practically world citizens thanks to the Internet, would be happy to know that Mahasaraswati pervades all religions. Temples to Shiva, Vishnu and of course, Brahma, have reverential spaces for her icon and worship, while the Saraswati temple at Koothanur in Tamil Nadu is justly famous. The Jain and Buddhist temples have breathtaking icons of Saraswati. And all these religions, Vedic or non-Vedic have their own Agamas giving details on making and proper installation of the icon of Mahasaraswati.

But, almost always, Mahasaraswati is equated with knowledge. Knowledge on the move, as the flow of a river. Not merely textual knowledge but of applied knowledge. For instance, the Devi Mahatmyam describes the destruction of Asuras by Mahasaraswati as the skill of the warrior-goddess that keeps us in thrall and assures us that evil is worsted at the proper moment by the forces of knowledge and action. Knowledge by itself is static. Only when it is applied with skill, it becomes a dynamic force. Hence, Mahasaraswati who thrums the veena softly is also the Mahasaraswati who quaffs from the goblet of wine as she speeds to the battlefield. All these images have been meditated upon and transformed into revelatory knowledge from immemorial times in India. The results have been formatted to suit all times and all ages be the person a child, a young aspirant eager to achieve or researcher or one grown grey in the buffetings of worldly existence. For all of them, the divine image is the life-line to hold on to and arrive at the shores of knowledge.

For, we cannot immerse our gods and goddesses in the sapless waters of secularism and lose our meaningful heritage.. Even for everyday life, the idea of a divine personality helps with amazing results. More than a hundred years ago Sister Nivedita was travelling to Kedarnath. It was a harsh pilgrimage but the Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda was getting answers for several queries that had been besieging her since her coming to India. One was the manner in

which Indians named all their rivers, both small and big, after goddesses Brahma-putra being an exception, perhaps) and performed elaborate worship. Then the revelation came in a flash. Ah, Indians had solved the problem of pollution of these rivers by making them sacred goddesses! Of course, during the last several decades, a certain secularish turning away from such worship has played havoc with Indian water sources.

Back to Mahasaraswati. She is a familiar figure and has hymns sung to her by great seers like Vasishtha, Medathithi Kanva and Viswamitra glorifying her powers. Analysing the riks of Viswamitra in the Rig Veda, Sri Aurobindo says that she is seen as the Power of Truth. Jamadagni's hymn (for Parasurama) inviting Saraswati as three goddesses, tisro devir: "May Bharati come speeding to our sacrifice, and Ila hither awakening our consciousness (or knowledge or perception) in human wise, and Saraswati -- three goddesses sit on this blissful seat, doing well the work."

(Tr. Sri Aurobindo)

Thus Saraswati is the name of the main image of inspiration though there are other names that relate to her directly, as for instance, Vak. Altogether a world of vibgyor significances await us when we wander in the realms of the Vedas.

The non-Vedic religions are equally breathtaking in their invocation of this Goddess. She is referred to as Naavin Kizhatthi (old Tamil for Goddess of Speech) in Jain scriptures. Vajrayana Buddhism of later medieval age drew from the Tantra choice images. One of them was Saraswati as the Goddess of Wisdom. Tibetan Buddhism was a tremendous inspiration for iconising values to help the aspirants in conducting worship, and achieving perfection in their undertakings. Rahulabhadra's Hymn to Perfection was often used as the invocation hymn for the texts of Prajna Paramita:

"Homage to Thee, Perfect Wisdom,  
Boundless and transcending Thought,  
All thy limbs are without blemish,  
Faultless those who Thee discern ..."

(Tr. Edward Conze)

The ancient Tamil epic, Manimekalai, records the existence of a temple to Chinta Devi (Saraswati, Goddess of Inspiration) in Madurai city. A young man, Aaputhran, feels unhappy that he is not able to bring succour to the starving people of the place. Chinta Devi appears before him, gives him the Amuda Surabhi which can produce an endless amount of food. Aaputhran accepts it gratefully and begins his mission of charity. Such a personification of compassion in Saraswati is in keeping with the ideal of the Bodhisattwa. Seen in this light, the goddess ceases to be an icon in a temple. She is now an inspiration for the youth generation, for, Manimekalai, the young Buddhist nun would be following Aaputhran's footsteps.

The words uttered by Aaputhran reveal his humility, faith and determination to embark upon his service under the aegis of Chinta Devi.

"Goddess of Wisdom! The light eternal  
Of the temple of art! Divine Knowledge!  
Leader of gods! First among earth's people!  
Remove the sufferings of these men!"

Even the well-known Tamil communist leader, K.T.K. Thangamani did not reject the miracle and has said:

"The Amuda Surabhi granted by Chinta Devi (Saraswati) is like our Arts, a shoreless fulfilment. If we make use of our capabilities (arts), there will be prosperity in the land. Food will be plentiful. There will be no famine. The gross national product should be used with a renunciate heart."

(Manimekalai Patri, (1958), p. 45)

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar sees the virtue of Trusteeship underlined in the Chinta Devi -Aaputhran episode (Sati Saphthakam: Saga of Seven Mothers, 1991). All this makes it clear that Mahasaraswati (Chinta Devi, Tara, Vagvadini, Bharati ...) cannot be bounded by a single religion or region for she pervades the very atmosphere in which we live.

So how come an icon has such power over the religious and spiritual consciousness in man? The Tamil poet seems to draw close to the secret of the Mahasaraswati icon in his poem, "Vellai Tamarai'.

Where do you find the goddess? In a temple? In a painting? In a clay image? Ah, she is very, very close to you, if you take the effort to activate her presence.

"She is in the white lotus,  
She is in the sounds of the lute."

Just exert yourself and build a pond and put in some roots. The day the white lotus rises above the water and blooms with the touch of sub's raqys, you can see her for you are overwhelmed by an inexplicable ananda pervading the atmosphere. The veena is not Saraswati. It is when the instrument is activated by tunefully twanging the strings, Saraswati is heard. It is always a two-way traffic between the deity and the devotee. When they come together as inspiration and action, there is the joy of New Creation followed by a sense of fulfilment, that Aaputhran gained by feeding the hungry.

As you widen the parameters of Mahasaraswati in action in this manner, one realises how she presides over each moment of our life. There is happiness in contemplating upon her figure that thrills to the sound of music produced by the veena in her hand, there is order, spotless cleanliness and right action for that pleases her indicated by the white lotus, there is the promise of prosperity crowning our efforts signified by the colourful prakriti-soundarya of the peacock which also indicates copious rains which form the very basis of civilised life.

Taking all this in, Sri Aurobindo has drawn a brilliant portrait of Mahasaraswati to help the aspirant in his sadhana. The Mahasaraswati yoga is not easy, for she demands nothing less than "perfect perfection" in her devotee. This is not achieved in one life-time. One must needs pile up good samaskaras down many births to come. But she is also the tireless, ever-present guide during all our existences on earth. Such is the promise given to us by the Mahayogi:

"A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the

Tax havens undermine the rule of law, abet organized crime, corrupt market economies, and sap people's faith in democracy. Nicholas Shaxson, (*Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2018)

eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives her towards the integrality of the higher nature. All the work of the other Powers leans on her for its completeness; for she assures the material foundation, elaborates the stuff of detail and erects and rivets the armour of the structure."

(The Mother, chapter VI)

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## MORALITY IN SOCIETY

**Shri Ramakrishna Vithal Kunduri**

The transformation of the world is related to the transformation of the individual and when the individual changes society also becomes good. The relationship between individual goodness and social wellbeing was emphasized in classical works of ancient times in India and other great civilizations. Man must realize his responsibilities as a citizen, maintain his dignity and must be conscious of his obligations to society.

The wealth one possesses, the scientific skills one acquires, and the knowledge one obtains, are all secured from society. Since man has gained his wealth, knowledge and expertise from society, he has to discharge his debt to society by doing some good in return. 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. Today, uncontrolled living habits and unrestrained social behaviour are extolled as signs of freedom. The ideal of high standard of life, instead of high level of thinking, is playing havoc with human society.

Man is a bundle of impulses and intentions. The impulses are the fuel and the intentions are the fire. Only laying aside the fuel of impulses can man put out the fire. The dying down of the fire is the attainment of peace. Man has to make right use of 'the head, heart and hand'. The growth in technology and generation of money, 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 encouraged terrorism, turning the human being into a dreadful species. Terrorism has been destabilizing governments, undermining civil society, jeopardizing peace and security and impeding threatening social and economic development.

The root cause of these evils is the lack of human values such as truthfulness, righteousness, love, peace and non-violence. Man has to guard himself against the various sins he commits, like speaking falsehood, speaking ill of others, backbiting, blackmailing, atrocities on women, adultery, theft, excessive drinking and getting addicted to drugs etc. The saddest part of the story is that man, though he sees and hears, suffers and falls, does not get quite convinced that sin is a dangerous experiment that brings on its harvest of tears. Desire, anger and greed are the traits which foster the demon in man. What is needed today is a mental, moral, intellectual and spiritual awakening and a yearning for higher pursuits of life. Man needs to renovate, reconstruct and reform himself so that he becomes useful and serviceable for society.

The nation is facing a many-sided challenge, political, economical, social and cultural. We are living in a world of fear, frustration and fixation. We are caught in the midst of diseases like crime and violence on one side corruption, exploitation and excessivism on the other side. Mindless violence, fundamentalist bigotry, rampant corruption, shameless greed and degrading human values have almost brought the human society to the verge of destruction.

'Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have for long explained this beautiful planet earth. They have filled it with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now', said Swami Vivekananda in his speech at the Parliament of Religions 125 years ago. How tragic, these tendencies are still raising their ugly heads even today!

In Dr. Radhakrishnan's words, we must strive to

Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that is two-thirds water.

Martin Luther King

become democratic not merely in the political sense of the term but also in the social and economic sense. He said that so long as the principles are merely clauses in the Constitution, and not functioning realities, in the daily life of the people, we are far from the ideals which we have set before ourselves.

The greatest asset of a nation is the spirit of its people. If we break the spirit of a people, we imperil their future. It is love, not hatred, freedom, not fear and faith, not doubt that heal wounds that afflict societies and nations. Lasting results are achieved only by peaceful methods. We must not cut the knots with the sword, but we must have the patience to untie them. We must rid the society of man-made inequalities and injustices and provide, for all, equality of opportunity for personal well-being and development and ensure peace and progress and arrest the forces that impede it.

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### **Call to play constructive role in creating a vibrant society**

**‘It will help in safeguarding rights of the poor’**

(Newspaper report on the panel discussion on ‘Elections and Civic Responsibility’ on May 15, 2018 jointly organized by Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library)

Every person, irrespective of age and position he or she holds, can play a constructive role in creating a vibrant civil society that can help in safeguarding the rights and interests of the poor and disadvantaged sections of society. Empowering them is as important as keeping a constant vigil over the acts of omission and commission of those occupying seats of power and authority, said E.A.S. Sarma, former bureaucrat and founder convener of Forum for Better Visakha, here on Wednesday speaking at the panel discussion on ‘Elections and Civic Responsibility’, jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Studies and the Visakhapatnam Public Library.

S. Vijayakumar, President of Visakhapatnam Public Library, presided. A. Prasanna Kumar, President of Centre for Policy Studies spoke.

Mr. Sarma commended such a discussion in view of the forthcoming GVMC elections as timely and essential. Prof. KC Reddy, former Chairman of APSCHE, emphasised the importance of economic equality and social development in strengthening democracy in India. Prof. V.Balamohan Das, former Vice-Chancellor, Acharya Nagarjuna University pointed out how more than one fourth of the elected representatives face criminal charges.

(Courtesy: ‘The Hindu’, May 17, 2018)

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