



ELECTORAL WAVE AND DEMOCRATIC RECESSION
Fault lines of landslide victory

The landslide victory of the BJP led NDA alliance in the 2019 General Election to the 17th Lok Sabha has confirmed that Narendra Modi is the undisputed leader of the world’s largest democracy. The parliamentary system of government based on the Westminster model was chosen by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution after serious deliberation and discussion, in preference to the presidential type to ensure greater accountability of the government to the people. The prime minister is *primus inter pares*, first among equals under the system and is ‘the keystone of the Cabinet arch’ as Walter Bagehot famously described in his classic *The English Constitution*. Ironically enough Indian democracy has, since 2014, been functioning like the presidential system. As Ruchir Sharma wrote in *Foreign Affairs* of March -April 2019 that Narendra Modi is running ‘the most centralized administration India had seen in decades with decisions large and small funneled through the Prime Minister’s office’. Such is Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s grip on power and slide towards one-man rule, added Sharma “that many Indian liberals began drawing parallels to the slide toward one-man rule in Vladimir Putin’s Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey.”

The fault lines of the 2019 landslide victory ring alarm bells for the future of our democracy. First and foremost is the loss of credibility of the Election Commission of India. The malfunctioning of ECI was more visible and pronounced than the malfunctioning of EVMs! The 2019 election has hit the headlines with many ‘new records’ to its credit. It has registered the highest percentage of 67.11% voter turnout. It was also the costliest election with expenses, of both parties and contestants, running into hundreds of crores of rupees in every constituency. It also saw the election of the highest number of women, 78, to Lok Sabha, an increase by 26% over last time, recording the highest percentage of 14.4% of the total membership. Embarrassingly enough, neighbouring Bangladesh, has provided 21% seats for women in its Parliament. How many more decades, one wonders, will India need to reach the promised 30% representation for women in Lok Sabha? India’s rank is very low on the global gender justice scale. Another dubious distinction is that 50% of the newly elected members have a criminal record, with 55% of BJP members belonging to that category.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s assurance of providing inclusive governance based on ‘the trust of all’ is the silver lining to an otherwise dark political landscape. In the wake of public lynchings and attacks on minorities, Dalits and women in several parts of India, the Prime Minister’s message at the beginning of his second term is a welcome departure from the past. It is time the Indian state and society came together to ensure the safety and well-being of Muslims, India’s largest minority. In this context mention must also be made of the unforgivable failure of Indian democracy to adequately express its gratitude to the Parsi community. From Dadabhai Naoroji the Grand Old Man of India and Pheroze Shah Mehta to Homi Bhabha, Nani Palkhivala, Fali Nariman *et al* the Parsi stalwarts have enriched India’s culture and polity since the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885. National recognition has not equalled national renown in the case of the dwindling Parsi community. This historic blunder must be corrected sooner than later by elevating a Parsi celebrity to the nation’s highest public office.

Arbitrary arrests of persons who criticize or question the government are symptomatic of deepening democratic recession. As John Stuart Mill famously wrote “In a state in which people are unjustly imprisoned the place for the just man is also the prison”. The Prime Minister is well aware that great Indian rulers have always drawn inspiration from Ashoka and Akbar, proclaiming their faith in religious tolerance and cultural pluralism. Let’s hope that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will herald the dawn of a new era in the history of democratic India.

The Editor

Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohammedan, a Parsi, a Christian or of any sect, I am above all an Indian,
our country is India; our nationality is Indian.

Dadabhai Naoroji

WHAT REMEMBRANCE / WHY REMEMBRANCE

Prof. R.V.R.Chandrasekhara Rao

Former Vice Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad & Ex-Head of the Dept. of Politics & Public Administration, Andhra University

1. A million dead, its dead-certain
Averred the Press, Print and Sound
Those were days when nothing can be certain
How one wished such certainties uncertain.
2. A land proud of its Peace and Tolerance
Not mere vain self-praise or conceit
But a bestowal by others of enviable inheritance
Inner voices often cried beware of self-deceit.
3. Our confidence such that our bards exulted
Over our self-surrender of golden Simhasan
Came with tumult and clamour none excluded
(Purava Paschima Ase Tava Simhasana Paase)
4. Lest fiction exclude fact, our victors turned
Shedding and mixing, filling after cleansing
Weepings followed weddings, marriages after murders
A land of constant flux of after murders weeping and hoping.
5. East and West rushed into thee
Entered unhindered by land and sea
Were we groups of generous herds of cattle
Affording victors to call us good cowards to slay
6. Did we offend Humanism's ego by degrading Human
Positing an interloper divinity to afford some nourishment
The Hellenes revelled in pitting God and Man
Hubris consigned the Son of God to eternal punishment
7. A creation legend pits asunder God and Man
The two nudge and nudge, hands stretched
Fingers strive to touch, still untouched
Mystery of Earth-Heaven hiatus ungraspable and bewitched

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Should Army be kept out of politics?

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)

Former Chief of Naval Staff
Ex-Chairman, National Maritime Foundation

For the survival of democracy, it is vital to keep our military apolitical. Exploiting it for fleeting political advantage carries the real risk of creating a Praetorian monster in our midst.

‘Democracy demands that Forces be apolitical’

Egregious neglect of India's security by successive governments has been a perennial target of censure by commentators for decades. Independent India's politicians considered this matter unworthy of their time because, so far, it was not a 'vote-catching' issue for a public preoccupied with roti, kapda, makan and lately, jobs and agrarian distress. Political survival their priority, politicians were happy to leave the higher management of defence and security almost entirely to the bureaucracy and devote themselves to electioneering.

But, the past few months have seen a dramatic shift, with national security taking centre stage in election rhetoric. Since party manifestos provide little reassurance, it remains to be seen whether the show of concern for national security is genuine and enduring or merely a vote-garnering device. Having been thrust into the spotlight, the military must find itself puzzled and discomfited; given decades of political neglect and the current state of civil-military relations.

The crux of civil-military relations, universally, is to ensure that soldiers remain in their barracks and refrain from interfering or participating in domestic politics and governance. This is best achieved by implementing 'civilian control' of the forces, exercised directly by elected representatives. Unfortunately, this principle was subverted post-independence. According to American scholar George Tanham, "The role and status accorded to the military, in India, is a clear manifestation of an unbalanced civil-military equation." He traces its roots to Prime Minister

There is no evil-doer or tyrant who can be considered beyond reform.

Jawaharlal Nehru's pacifism and an anti-military attitude. Nehru also nurtured a phobia of military coups and neglected the military, downgrading its leadership vis-a-vis the police and civil servants.

This Nehruvian legacy has survived successive regimes. Regardless of the party in power, national security has stayed at the bottom of priority lists and the military leadership continues to be deliberately excluded from decision-making. Reforms have been stalled and military modernisation hindered by meagre budgets and a languid bureaucracy.

The past five years have, however, seen the emergence, of some new and seemingly contradictory phenomena. On one hand, the process of downgrading the status of the armed forces has accelerated, overturning the well-established relativities with the bureaucracy, police forces and even subordinate services, not just embarrassing the military but also hitting morale and operational effectiveness. At the same time, hints of political patronage have served to unsettle the officer corps with misgivings about quid pro quo bargains being struck.

The most serious development, however, relates to the assumption of ownership and credit for military operations and their inclusion in election campaigning by political parties.

Customarily, military operations especially those by the Special Forces—speak for themselves and are rarely publicized. While governments may legitimately take credit for ordering military operations, it is when political parties brazenly exploit them for votes and personal aggrandisement that the plot starts unravelling.

The puerile and ill-informed political and media debate about the 2016 cross-border raids and the February 2019 air strikes not only trivialised serious issues but also diluted the message of punitive-deterrence that India intended to convey. Equally damaging was the public perception that serving officers were making statements to comply with a 'party line'.

Our professional and, so far, apolitical military serves the Constitution through obedience to democratically elected civilian office-holders, without showing preference for any political party or taking partisan positions. Internalised by the Indian military, this principle is a pillar of India's democratic system and has ensured a peaceful transfer of power after each general election. A politicised military, loyal to one political party or the other, could well start participating in partisan politics. Appropriation of military achievements by politicians could trigger a reverse process, whereby ambitious generals start initiating military operations to please politicians--a frightening possibility.

As far as veterans are concerned, they have the same rights and privileges as private citizens. They may serve with think tanks, engage in public debate and even contribute military expertise to political campaigns. But, they need to remain conscious of two facts: the Constitution accords them the privilege of using military ranks in perpetuity and a strong umbilical cord connects them to serving soldiers. So, when bemedalled veterans, sporting star-studded caps, are seen saluting or genuflecting before politicians, they send a message of subservience that runs contrary to our proud martial tradition.

Similarly, political parties, eagerly enlisting veterans, without a long-enough cooling period, cannot but send negative signals to serving personnel about the benefits of acquiring political 'connections' early in one's career.

For the health and survival of the Indian democracy, it is vital to keep our fine military apolitical and non-partisan. Exploiting the military for fleeting political advantage carries the real risk of creating a Praetorian monster in our midst.

(Courtesy: Firstpost Print Edition)

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Will Modi's second term see a new governance paradigm?

Cmde. (Retd.) C.Uday Bhaskar

Director of the Society for Policy Studies and
Former Director IDSA & NMF

While Modi visibly dominated the 2019 election, the same cannot be said about governance, though the Prime Minister's Office in his first term became more powerful than ever before. Bench strength in the NDA cabinet has been modest and Modi was unable to even appoint a dedicated defence minister with a full five-year term. Senior ministers have had health constraints, further weakening the overall texture and direction of governance, writes C Uday Bhaskar for South Asia Monitor

The 2019 Indian election has resulted in an unprecedented victory for the BJP. The scale of the Modi wave, though anticipated by a few pollsters, has been an extraordinary political development. The vote was for Modi and Modi alone. The identity of the local candidate did not matter and, in 2019, the Indian parliamentary form of elections became presidential in a manner reminiscent of Indira Gandhi in the 1971 election.

A triumphant Narendra Modi will assume office as prime minister for a successive second term on May 30, a few days after the 55th death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru (May 27), India's first prime minister. This juxtaposition is laden with deep import by way of the contrast in values and principles that are associated with the two leaders. Nehru and the Congress party he led are synonymous with a secular-liberal vision of India, where diversity was accepted as the USP of free India that had shed the colonial yoke. The state did not identify with or prioritize a religion which was the path Pakistan opted for.

Post Nehru, the Indian political constituency thought it expedient to flirt with religion. Both Nehru's daughter (Indira Gandhi) and grandson (Rajiv Gandhi) took some imprudent policy decisions and paid a heavy price in different ways. The aversion of the Modi camp and the more strident Hindutva brigade to the Nehru legacy is a major part of the current Indian political dynamic.

At different points on the campaign trail over the last five years, Modi has declared that his objective is to make India "free of the Congress" and, by extension, the Nehruvian legacy. Thus it was predictable that in his victory speech on May 23 Modi disparagingly asserted that "Those who wore the mask of secularism are today exposed, as people have voted us back to power for the work we did." Whether India will remain wedded to its Constitution wherein all citizens are equal in word and spirit, irrespective of religion, caste, ethnicity and language lies at the core of the anxiety about the values and principles that will define Modi 2.0.

To assuage this unease, Modi, in his address to the 353 elected representatives of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) outlined an expansive and inclusive vision of governance over the next five years. Extending a hand to all communities, Modi dwelt on the need to carry the minorities along and even those citizens who did not vote for the winning coalition. "Minorities have been kept in fear, used in elections. We have to end this cycle. We have worked for Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, (with all, development for all) now we have to strive for Sabka Vishwas (instil confidence in all)," he said.

Reiterating his belief in Mahatma Gandhi, a subtle but firm message was conveyed by Modi to those in his flock who had spoken ill of the 'Father of the nation'. The litmus test apropos values and where Modi stands in relation to Mahatma Gandhi and terrorism will be evident in the manner he deals with the election of Pragya Thakur, an extremist who was imprisoned on terror charges, to the Lok Sabha.

Censuring Thakur for her remarks about Godse, the assassin who killed Gandhi, could alienate the extreme Hindutva constituency that is deemed to be fringe but politically salient. This issue could become more complex and volatile for Modi in the run up to Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary on October 2, 2019, which Modi plans to celebrate in a big way.

Governance in Modi 2.0 will have to learn from the errors and policy inadequacies of the first term. While Modi visibly dominated the 2019 election, the same cannot be said about governance, though

A majority of Indian voters in every Indian constituency are, by international standards poor. The basics – food, clothing, shelter, roads, electricity, drinking water, jobs – dominate our politics.

the Prime Minister's Office in his first term became more powerful than ever before. Bench strength in the NDA cabinet has been modest and Modi was unable to even appoint a dedicated defence minister with a full five-year term. Senior ministers have had health constraints, further weakening the overall texture and direction of governance.

Delegating meaningful power and accountability to his cabinet and restoring institutional credibility – be it the judiciary, the Election Commission or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) – will make Modi 2.0 more effective. But whether Modi the individual is willing to accept and learn from the past remains moot. This, in effect, will determine the Modi legacy.

(Courtesy : *South Asia Monitor*, May 29, 2019)

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Civility in Political Debate

Shri C. Anjaneya Reddy I.P.S. (Retd.)

Formerly Director-General (Vigilance and Enforcement)
and Ex-Chairman, A.P. Tourism Corporation

In the years after Independence, people in public life were mostly freedom struggle stalwarts. Many of them were well-educated, cultured and therefore refined in political debate. Here are a few instances: Acharya Kripalani who 'chose' to be in opposition moved a 'no-confidence' motion against Nehru's government. He initiated the debate and when he was at his rhetorical best lambasting the government, the news came that his wife Sucheta Kripalani had just quit her husband's party to join the Congress Party whose leaders promised to make her the next Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh! This was a conspiracy hatched behind his back and timed to explode when the debate was on. The Acharya was stunned for a minute, recovered and said light-heartedly "all these days I knew Congress fellows were corrupt and incompetent; I now realize they can also run away with others' wives!" The whole house broke out in laughter! On another occasion when a minister faced with strident criticism from opposition, protested that he spent several "sleepless nights" scrutinizing the bill

he took to the House, the opposition MP, HV Kamath quietly said, judged from the final draft "the minister seems to have spent several sleepless nights and many sleepy days". There was good natured banter in which even the minister joined! On another occasion when the MP from Rajasthan, Gayathri Devi, listed among the most beautiful women of her time, entered into a long argument with Prime Minister Nehru, he conceded her point at last with the comment "I wouldn't like to bandy words with a charming lady" bringing the argument to a gracious end!

Compare these cultured exchanges with what has been happening these days. Sometime ago, Rahul called the Mody government "suit, boot circar" and the Prime Minister retorted "it is better than 'suit-case circar". BJP critics make a "pappu" of Rahul and Congressmen make a "chor" of the prime minister. Sometime ago, Sonia Gandhi called Prime Minister Mody's a "hawabaaaji government" and the PM retorted that it is better than "hawalabaji" government of hers. The political dialogue these days smacks of under-graduates' love of pun. These punch lines are also not theirs; they are obviously written for them by those wanting both in humor and civility. Isn't time our politicians realize that comments which are not in good taste are best ignored by those affected rather than dignify them with a reply?

In the two Telugu States, there is more invective than political dialogue these days. Often in an effort to score a point, baseless or grossly exaggerated allegations are made against one another. This kind of recriminations give an impression that there is no public-spirited or well-meaning person left in politics which is not true; there are quite a few often pushed to the fringe.

Compounding the problem is the tendentious reporting of news in the media living up to Mark Twain's well-known comment "if you don't read newspapers you are uninformed; if you do read them you are misinformed". The media have given up the restraint required of them and openly refer to caste affiliations and social prejudices and elevate drawing-room gossip to newsroom content. About the social media, the less said the better; half-baked handlers,

A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user.

Theodore Roosevelt

have replaced comment with abuse often brazen, even lowly and vulgar!

By reckless allegations and language of the street, politicians in their anxiety to score a point for the day are bringing down the whole political class in public esteem. Unwittingly, it gives an impression, goons and foul mouths alone can succeed in public life. This doesn't bode well for democracy! Isn't it time for people in public life to do some soul-searching and come to a common minimum level of political discourse?

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RESORTING THE SECULAR BALANCE

Dr. Uday Balakrishnan

Indian Postal Service (Retd.)

Former Member Postal Services Board and
Chairman Investment Board

The BJP's spectacular victory in the recently concluded general elections has once again raised concerns about a majoritarian agenda driving the government for the next five years. Images of anti-cow slaughter vigilantes roaming the streets of India are enduring ones, and have figured prominently in the national and international media in the recent past including one instance soon after the BJP's present electoral triumph.

There is also the fear that a marginalized Muslim community could be targeted for various forms of attacks. In this backdrop, Modi in his first address to the NDA after his electoral success has given a clear indication that antipathy towards minorities – with Muslims uppermost on his mind - must end. Although it is five years late in coming, Modi's statement is welcome and comforting.

Muslims have for long constituted the underclass in much of our country and are grossly under-represented in our public institutions be it the legislature, the bureaucracy or the judiciary. Modi must quickly follow his stated intention to reverse this trend with concrete action on the ground to recover the trust of a

community that has been alienated from the national mainstream like never before in the last five years. There is much work to be done.

In the face of a BJP, that made the recently concluded general elections, a fight between 'Ali and Bajrang Bali,' and a Congress, unconvincingly balancing Hinduism and secularism, India's Muslims cannot but help feel that they are under siege. There is a foreboding sense of being cornered with no place to go.

This feeling of helplessness that's overtaken India's Muslims needs to be addressed with speed, good sense and understanding, recognizing that Muslims are not a minority but the second largest religious formation in the country. India cannot afford to see such a large grouping, especially its 'radicalizable' young, alienated.

The ones who are most worried today are older Muslims, many of whom are parents of young men and women, unsure when their otherwise perfectly normal offspring will unpleasantly spring a surprise on them, as they so dramatically have, in Sri Lanka. There are small but disturbing signs that should worry us all.

Quiet a few from Kerala are known to have joined the ISIS. Now we have the worrisome image of 26 young men in ISIS T-shirts defiantly posing, each with a finger up, in front of a mosque in Thondi which appeared in The Hindu of 6th May. A Tirupur based imam who is allegedly behind this has been arraigned.

The worldwide attempt to radicalize Muslim youth by extremist clerics cannot be missed or ignored. Almost all those who have blown themselves up, killing large numbers or ploughing cars and trucks into crowds, are Muslims in their prime. The question to ask is "why do so many, young men and women choose to extinguish their lives so violently?" A part of the answer lies in developments through the 20th century that many Muslims view as a continuous worldwide war religious against them.

Both Al Qaida and ISIS attracted young Muslims

Pluralism of faith was for Gandhi a political choice as well as a moral obligation.

Ramachandra Guha

from across the world. These grew into formidable terrorist organizations in Islamic countries that have suffered extensive abuse at the hands of the Western countries over decades. The list is long and shameful and it is worth highlighting a few.

The overthrow of a democratic government in Iran in 1953 by the CIA and British intelligence does not easily come to mind, no more that the Iraq Iran war which saw over a million killed in nearly 8 years of brutal fighting following Ayatollah Khomeini's take over of Iran. The second Gulf War has seen the extensive devastation of West Asia by the Americans killing hundreds of thousands of Arabs. The on-going Saudi intervention in Yemen that's brought enormous human suffering is also riding on the back of American support.

In improving the lot of the Indian Muslims, Prime Minister Modi will be proofing the country against the on-going western assault on Islam in which India has never participated. He needs to address this issue head on – perhaps in a special talk to the nation soon after he starts on a new term as Prime Minister.

India's evolution as a secular state gave little reason for India's Muslims to radicalize. Sadly after the BJP came to power in 2014, anti-Muslim nationalism has been on the march, trivializing most things Islamic, not even sparing the Taj Mahal. All through Modi's last term as Prime Minister the country has witnessed reckless efforts to humiliate and marginalize them, daring a response. India's Muslims- as much as India itself - deserve better.

The worst thing to have happened to India in the last five years is neither demonetization nor the GST but its drift away from secularism. In an effort to halt this drift, a much more self-assured Modi's assertion that he wants to develop an inclusive society is welcome. It's a remarkable change for a man seen as a Hindu hardliner. Now, let's wait and see how much of what he said he really means.

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A SEASON OF BIOPICS : ARTIST AS LEADER - II

Dr.R.V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar, I.A.S.(Retd)
Former Secretary, HRD, Govt of India &
Prof. IIM, Bengaluru

Truth to be told, it was only after I moved to Hyderabad that I had my full exposure to NTR and his style of work. As long as NTR was the Chief Minister, the day often began with the suprabhathaseva (an early morning audience) of NTR in his house at Abids. 4-6 AM was prime time when the most important meetings were held. As education was dear to NTR's heart, most of my meetings with NTR were held before dawn. Many of my colleagues were greatly inconvenienced by the pre-dawn durbar of the Chief Minister; however, as I was a lark and not an owl, and invariably got up by 4 AM, the timing of the durbar posed no difficulty. However, NTR's prime time was also my personal prime time which I valued dearly. That was when I indulged in my desultory reading, listened to music over hot cuppas of freshly brewed coffee, and in the company of my wife, and my dear dogs Naomi and Pinku took a brisk walk from Xanadu, my home, to hillocks nearby which I used to call, Naomi Hill and Pinku Hill. Road No. 12 Banjara Hills on which my house stood was desolate those days with vast open stretches. Naomi Hill offered a magnificent view of the undulating landscape below stretching all the way to the Golconda Fort. Pinku Hill offered an equally magnificent overview of a lake in the densely wooded Chiran Palace; on a cloudy day in the monsoon, a hazy glimpse of peacocks fluttering their tails along the lake was really a sight really out-of-this world. Kala (Time the Destroyer) destroyed everything but hazy memories. Xanadu no longer exists; nor do Naomi and Pinku. Road Number 12, Banjara Hills is a congested lane choked with vehicles. The dilapidated Kimti Palace near my house had vanished without leaving any traces. Naomi and Pinku Hills are now buried under urban sprawl; Chiran Palace had been transmuted into KasuBrahmananda Reddy Park. To come back to the story, I was generally apprehensive of the meetings with the mercurial NTR but I was

We have to live up to our immemorial culture and try to win over those who are opposed to us. To complete with each other in hatred and barbarity is to sink below the human level and tarnish the name of our country and our people.

Jawaharlal Nehru

7

more afraid of the tiffin which he served at 4AM. Pesarattu and upma, 'utterlybutterly delicious' but deadly to cholesterol levels, were the main fare. NTR would take offense at anyone who declined to eat that heavy food he offered so early in the morning. Only Rajaguru(King's preceptor) S.Santhanam (a senior IAS colleague) was exempt.

When NTR came to power in 1982, neither he nor his close associates had much idea of governance. They keenly sought out officers of repute who were working in the Central Government as well as those who were known to be capable of offering advice on improving governance. While in the Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, I called on Nirmal K. Mukarji, the last of the ICS, and conveyed the State Government's invitation to him to visit the State for studying the State administration and to offer his recommendations for improving the administration. He was surprised at the invitation and observed that as a former Cabinet Secretary he knew that the IAS cadre in the State had many competent officers, and that his study would be redundant. Whatever he visited the State, and nothing came of it, perhaps because his views were out of synch with that of the ethos of NTR's Government. By then, Mukarji had come to the view that the 'IAS shop' should be closed, Collector Raj abolished, and a democratically elected district government should be set up. His views on democratic decentralisation were, to the say the least, odd for a Government in which all powers were centralised in the person of the Chief Minister. Yet another invitee was the management consultancy firm M.K.Rustomji & Associates. What came out from the study was a report written in a chatty style and replete with management clichés, jokes and anecdotes. It made good bedside reading; however, as a guide to reform it had little value as the consultants had little idea of the distinctiveness of government as an organisation, and often substituted anecdote for reasoning. Thus, the justification that the consultants offered for relieving the District Collector of development work and appointing an IAS officer as Chief Executive officer of the Zilla Parishad was that the Collectors being overworked could not enjoy their work, and that therefore Mao Zedong's injunction

that 'all students be given an additional hour of sleep' should be applied to Collectors. I am yet to come across a District Collector who does not relish the vast remit of his job, and would be not be unhappy if his functions were curtailed.

The willingness to accept any idea contributed to a few landmark decisions, the most important of which were the decision to reserve thirty percent of seats in colleges and universities for women, and to amend the Hindu Succession Act and vest daughters with rights equal to sons in regard to ancestral property of a joint family governed by Mitakshara law. During the nine years I was in the Andhra University (1957-66), there were just two girl students in the Department of Chemistry. When I revisited the Department in 2008, I was pleasantly surprised to find that nearly half the student body consisted of women. As early as 1945, the idea of making a daughter in a joint Hindu family a coparcener in her own right in the same manner as a son was advocated in written statements submitted to the Hindu Law Committee by a number of individuals and groups; and again in 1956, when the Hindu Succession Bill was being finally debated, an amendment was moved to make a daughter and her children members of the Hindu coparcenary in the same way as a son or his children. But this progressive idea was rejected. It was Kerala which pioneered the amendment to the Hindu Succession Act by abolishing the very idea of coparcenary. Andhra Pradesh, though the second State to amend the Hindu Succession Act, pioneered a new model by retaining the idea of coparcenary and vesting daughters with coparcenary rights on par with sons. The national legislation which was enacted in 2005 was a synthesis of the Kerala and Andhra models.

To come back to NTR, fascination with new ideas, however, had a flip side. For effective functioning, a machine needs a little bit of grit as much as grease, a principle underlying the celebrated Tobin tax. James Tobins, a Nobel laureate in economics, considered that international capital markets were functioning far too smoothly for the good of global and national economies, and that those markets needed a little

The greatest enemy of India today is not Pakistan or China, but Indians themselves. Indians lack discipline and a sense of national dedication.

grit by way of a tax on capital movements across national borders. If an individual has a closed mind, and refuses to entertain any new idea, he stagnates; conversely, if he embraces every new-fangled idea and a passing fashion, he gets disoriented. An organisation is no different. Therefore, it is imperative that every organisation has a braking mechanism, so that a new idea is rigorously scrutinised before it is tried out preferably on a small scale, and then adopted on a large scale if the pilot trial is successful. A good civil service is expected to be a repository of experience, and serve as a sounding board; strange but true, it is also expected, if need be, to even serve as an effective brake. There was little opportunity for civil servants to function as a sounding board, much less as a brake as NTR often made up his mind after discussion with his confidants without any discussion with the officials concerned and giving them an opportunity to present an alternate opinion or the feasibility and consequences of implementing an idea that was sold to him. An IAS officer joked that what NTR wanted was not IAS secretaries but stenographers, and that one got to know the latest policy decision of the Government from a report or an advertisement in Enadu. Like all witticism, it had an element of truth. An obsequious Yes Man is more dangerous than an obstructionist No Man. It is never easy to speak truth to authority; truth to be told, it was particularly difficult in NTR's Government. Once he embraced an idea, it was very difficult to argue with him, all the more so as he had little patience for details. So much so, many unbaked ideas were adopted without any regard for their administrative feasibility. Given NTR's openness to new ideas, policy entrepreneurs had a field day; so, did hucksters. One day, as I was waiting for a meeting with the Chief Minister for a meeting on the D.N.R.College, Bhimavaram, I found T.S.R.Prasad, Planning Secretary who rose to be the Cabinet Secretary rushing into the Chief Minister's room armed with the Chamber's Dictionary on Science and Technology. I came to know that he was going for a meeting on an idea floated by an entrepreneur that mica could be converted into steel if it is fused with an undisclosed material; the meeting went on

for a good one hour even though that idea would be pooh-poohed by anyone with rudimentary knowledge of Chemistry and is in the league of wild goose chases like the pursuit for the mythical Golden Fleece. It was said of Ronald Reagan, the first professional actor to become the President of the United States that he was a man of imagination with a propensity to be more interested in theatrical truth than empirical truth; times were good if you thought they were good. NTR was very similar; the litmus test which he implicitly applied for accepting an idea was its audacity rather than its administrative feasibility. If in addition, implementing that idea gave the public the impression that the Government was tough, the appeal of the idea was enhanced. NTR's style of governance giving rise to the limerick:

*Kompamunchinadule
Telgunatakollaloyi
Rojukokativelikitheeya
Chepparanithippaloi*

(The land of the Telugu people {an allusion to NTR's Telugu Desam Party} is replete with deadly ideas; a new deadly idea is adopted every day, and people are subject to endless travails).

Another trait he shared with Reagan was that 'He treats us all the same, as hired help'. Throughout the cinematic careers of Reagan as well as NTR, the people around them were more or less interchangeable, whether they were cameramen or other actors. This attitude soured NTR's relations with senior officers as well as government employees. A classic example of the consequences that follow from such a mindset is the sudden reduction in the age of superannuation of government employees from 58 to 55 with little regard for the disruption, if not the devastation, that decision would cause to thousands of employees and their families. The reason underlying the reduction of retirement age was providing jobs to the unemployed; however, to buck the universal trend of enhancing the age of retirement, and to abruptly do away with the services of thousands of employees was no way of generating employment. The curt treatment of senior IAS officers, and their frequent transfer hurt their self-

In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope?

Barack Obama

image as mandarins entitled to respect, if not deference, for their experience and knowledge of the machinery of government. In fairness to NTR, however, Channa Reddy was no less self-willed, mercurial and brusque in his manners; however, given his political background as well as long ministerial experience, Channa Reddy had a clear sense of what was administratively feasible and what was not. Further, he was very well served during his first stint as Chief Minister (1978-80) by his secretaries, S.R.Ramamurthy and Santhanam, who intermediated between the Chief Minister and senior officials, attempting to put across to the Chief Minister the legitimate administrative concerns of the officials, and in turn conveying to the officials the political compulsions of the Chief Minister, and easing the tensions intrinsic to the Minister-Civil Servant relationship. Though I did not have personal knowledge, U.B.Raghavendra Rao was widely believed to have played a similar role as Secretary to NTR but after his untimely death, his successor was anything but a bridge between the Chief Minister and the officials. He obfuscated issues under consideration, fed rather than softened the Chief Minister's mistrust, and often pursued agendas of his own.

Though NTR and Reagan shared a couple of similar traits, their approach to governance differed in many other respects; these differences cumulatively aggravated the tension intrinsic to the relationship between senior civil servants and the Head of the Government. Like NTR, Reagan was 'more than its (his Presidency's) star performer... he was its producer, setting the tone and direction of his administration's policies'. But then, Reagan understood that a President can deal with only a relatively small number of issues at a time, and that therefore he should focus only on his principal tasks: public leadership, communication of his core beliefs to the public, and developing a working relationship with Congress. He delegated to the point that he was innocent of much that went on in his own presidency, and adopted a distinctly off-hand manner to his administration's internal working. These traits along with his beliefs led to historic achievements that earned for Reagan recognition as one of the greatest presidents of the 20th century. In contrast, NTR

wanted every major decision to bear his imprimatur; he trusted no one, not even G.V.Ramakrishna, an outstanding IAS officer of his generation whom he courted and brought over from the Central Government as his Chief Secretary. He was upset that on the direction of Ramakrishna, K.M.Ahmed, Chairman and Managing Director, Singareni Collieries, settled with the striking miners, without waiting for NTR to return from Bombay, and approve the settlement. He was not satisfied with Ramakrishna's explanation that time was of the essence, and that the settlement would have been missed if the management waited for him to arrive and clear the terms of settlement. In frustration, Ramakrishna applied for leave and returned to the Central Government. No wonder senior civil servants felt insecure; the insecurity was aggravated by his propensity to accept as truth any sly slander and malicious gossip, little realising that a senior civil servant even if 'as chaste as ice, as pure as snow', 'shalt not escape calumny'. This propensity along with an impatience for results resulted in a high turnover of senior officers, particularly in some departments like education in which he took personal interest. This propensity also vitiated his anti-corruption drive; he was not well served by the officer whom he selected for an office which he christened as Dharmamahamatra, under the mistaken impression that Dharmamahamatrawas an official who administered rough and ready justice, and inflicted swift punishment on the corrupt while he was actually a high official appointed by Emperor Ashoka whose duty was to propagate the compassionate teachings of Buddha, to ensure that there was no abuse of justice, and to temper justice with mercy by helping the families of those imprisoned, and to release from prison those who stayed far too long and were in frail health. The officer chosen by NTR was unbalanced, the very antithesis of a Dharmamahamatra, and proceeded from the premise that all Government employees were *dongalu* (thieves), and that an allegation should be treated as guilt even if disproved in a thorough investigation. NTR himself was prone to believe that every officer against whom allegations were levied should go an Agnipariksha (ordeal of

Just as an aquatic bird, like the pelican, dives into water without the water wetting its plumage,
so the perfect man lives in the world, but the world does not touch him. Sri Ramakrishna

fire), very much like Seetha in Ramayana. No wonder officials felt highly insecure, and feared that any moment they might be subjected to a witch hunt. The raids of officers' houses by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) proved Justice Robert Jackson's maxim that 'the interests of justice are always at risk when a prosecutor is told who to investigate, rather than what offenses to pursue. The natural, and perhaps inevitable, result is a determination to fit a crime to the suspect, rather than find a suspect to fit the crime'. The consequent miscarriage of justice unnerved and de-motivated civil servants, earned a NTR bad name, and gave rise to malicious rumours that he took a sadistic delight at the grief of the wives and children of officers whose houses were raided by the ACB.

I found from experience that if I could base his argument on the Chief Minister's core beliefs, he might succeed in weaning the Chief Minister away from an idea he had adopted. Thus, one day, NTR suddenly declared in the Cabinet that the quality of education in schools had deteriorated after Government abolished detention of students in lower classes, and students lost the fear of being detained for poor performance in the final examinations; he wanted detention system to be introduced straightaway. One Minister after another spoke in support of his decision. I sought his permission to speak which he readily granted. I said that while students should be motivated to learn better, eminent educationists were of the view that fear of examinations was not the best way to motivate students. Performance in a final examination does not always properly reflect learning achievement. Based on sound advice of educationists, the Government of Andhra Pradesh had decided that Classes I-VII, Classes VIII-X, and Classes XI-XII should be treated as ungraded units, that there should be public examinations only at the end of Class VII, X and XIII, and that detention should be done away in classes which have no public examination. The idea underlying this decision was that children from different background could learn at their own pace; instead of a final examination, the performance of students should be continuously evaluated so that students could have an

idea of how they were progressing, and teachers could guide them to learn better. NTR was not convinced, and demanded to know: 'why should we be guided by the views of others? We should trust our own judgement'. I switched to a new line of reasoning. Learning achievement does not depend only on what is learnt in the classroom. It also depends on home environment. Poor children do not have a home environment conducive to learning. Therefore, most of the children detained would be poor children, first generation learners; once they are compelled to repeat a class they would drop out, and begin to tend cattle. Was it fair? I asked. NTR was again not convinced, and said with a trace of irritation: 'You want a boy who failed in an examination to be promoted just because he is from a poor family? Should not poor children also learn?' I then opted for a new line of reasoning that built on NTR's detestation of corruption. 'Sir', I told him, 'my family was poor and my father used to move from town to town in search of livelihood. Once he moved from Tuni to Anakapalli in January, and my sister was admitted to a school in Anakapalli. Those days each school chose its own textbooks. Hence she had to study entirely new text books and cover all the lessons in just two months before final examinations. She did a pretty good job and passed in all subjects, except Hindi. The headmaster called for my father and threatened to detain her unless he paid a hefty bribe, which my father could not pay. She was detained and lost a year. However, as her luck would have it, a new stream of secondary education was introduced in the next academic year, and seats were reserved in M.B.B.S for students who passed out in the new stream. Not all are lucky like her'. NTR immediately caught the point, and declared, 'Brother, you are right. Detention gives teachers an opportunity to collect bribes. Let us not change the system'. On another occasion, he declared in the Cabinet that a residential school and a Navodaya school would be set up side by side near Hindupur, his constituency. I was not happy with this decision. I asked permission to speak, which was granted. I said, 'Sir, the State Government is short of resources while the Central Government has so much money. The Central Government invests

My name should not be made prominent. It is my ideas that I want to be realized.

Swami Vivekananda

in Navodaya schools twenty times what we invest in residential schools. As the Navodaya and residential school would be side by side, people would compare NTR's school with Rajiv Gandhi's, and NTR's image would fare badly'. Immediate he replied, 'Brother, let us not have them side by side'.

Reasoning did not always help. Few departments were as much involved in litigation as the Education Department; handling thousands of cases in the High Court and Supreme Court was challenging enough. Compounding the challenge was the frequent use of contempt proceedings to browbeat the Department and its functionaries. An incident is fresh in my memory. There were hundreds of cases in which I was hauled for contempt for not releasing grant-in-aid to private schools and colleges. I consulted Manohar, the Advocate General and a confidant of NTR. The liability for paying grant-in-aid arose because of loopholes in government orders; I and Manohar agreed that the best way to prevent the haemorrhage of state finances was to issue an ordinance plugging the loopholes with retrospective effect, and declaring the State Government's intention not to provide grant-in-aid to private colleges set up after September 1985 and to private schools set up after March 1985. I and Manohar went with trepidation to the suprathaseva of NTR. Over breakfast, we explained why issue of an ordinance was desirable. After all legal and administrative reasons failed to move him, I struck a personal note: 'Sir, if you do not agree, I'd have to go to jail'. Pat came the reply, 'Brother! Don't Worry. It is good to go to jail for the sake of people. I'd send you tiffin daily'. In such situations, I had to rely on the good offices of those in NTR's inner circle to subtly work on him, and induce him to give up an idea which I thought was not feasible or desirable. Daggupati Venkateswara Rao, N. Chandrababu Naidu, D. Chakrapani, Hemchandra Prasad (NTR's chief security officer), and Ramakrishna (NTR's Additional Secretary) were generally helpful, and I am indebted to them. Above all, I was fortunate in that Santhanam, who was Rajaguru for most of the period that I was Education Secretary in NTR's Government, my

guardian angel. All in all, it was my luck more than my pluck which ensured that he could maintain a good relationship with such an exceptional Chief Minister. Not all senior officers were so lucky.

(to be concluded)

Andhra History (300-600 A.D.): Opportunities for Further Research

Dr. C. Somasundara Rao

Former Professor of History & Archaeology

Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

President, South Indian History Congress

Introduction

It is common knowledge that the history of the Andhras starts really from the Satavahana period, if the brief space of the Mauryan rule under Asoka in the 3rd century B.C. were to be consciously ignored. The rule of the Satavahanas and their immediate successors, the Ikshvakus shines with the pinnacle of Buddhist glory at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda respectively. It was this period, 1st century B.C. – 3rd century A.D., that witnessed the erection of the *stupas*, *viharas* and *chaitya*- halls at different places in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. After the three century Satavahana-Ikshvaku period, the general interest lies in the Chalukya rule in Vengi from about 624 A.D., as these rulers played a very important role in Andhra history for more than four centuries.

The history of the intervening period, featuring the small ruling families such as the Brihatpalayanas, Salankayanas, Anandas, Vishnukundis and that of the Early Pallavas (of Prakrit and Sanskrit charters) is considered as non-significant. The Pallava history, from the Great Pallavas onwards assumes more importance in South Indian history. But the early part relates to Andhra history, though the Pallavas ruled from Kanchi.

Before taking up various issues in the subject, it is necessary to highlight the dominant features of this period (300-600 A. D.).

(i) Issue of copper-plate inscriptions is the most significant feature of this period. But for them, these royal families would have remained largely unknown

Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.

Rabindranath Tagore

to us. The stone inscriptions registering gifts to Buddhist/Brahmanical institutions are few and far between.

The purpose of the copper-plate grants was to register the gifts of villages/lands to Brahmana scholars as *agraharas/brahmadeyas* to scholars in Vedas, Vedangas, Itihasa, Purana, Sastras, etc. The YajnavalkyaSmriti of 2nd – 3rd century A.D. says that a copper-plate grant should be given to Brahmana scholars in order to encourage learning and provide Vedic ritualists for officiating in sacrifices. This is in contrast to Buddhist patronage of the preceding period. The villages were gifted with exemptions from payment of taxes, tribute and other obligations. These require a detailed study.

(ii) It is to be noted that the kings of different dynasties claim the performance of the *asvamedha* sacrifice. The founders of the ruling families/great rulers of families mention this achievement. Devavarman, Sivaskandavarman of the Pallavas and Madhavavarman II of the Vishnukundis are described as performers of *asvamedha*.

2. The Early Pallavas describe the king invariably as a performer of *asvamedha*, though the rulers concerned did not separately claim that epithet; the Vishnukundi ruler Madhavavarman II performed eleven *asvamedhas* and one thousand *kratus*.

While referring to the qualifications of the donees, certain terms such as *asiti*, *sahasra* and *tri-sahasra* occur whose significance is to be brought out.

(iii) The records of the times show that, not only the Vedic rituals, but the Puranic deities such as Siva and Vishnu also received attention. Some ruling families have *aprasasti*, wherein their tutelary deity is presented. E.g. The Salankayana inscriptions state that they were the worshippers of the Chitrarathasvami (Surya); the Vishnukundis were devoted to Sriparvatasvami; and the Eastern Gangas were worshippers of Gokarnasvami established on the Mahendra mountain. Besides these, inscriptions record gifts to Siva, Vishnu and Ganapati. The Sriparvatasvami of the Vishnukundi records is identified differently by scholars.

a) Taxes And Exemptions:

3. I have pointed out that copper-plate grants appear, for the first time during this period and that they happen to be the only sources of information for some royal families. In this connection, I may state that in the Deccan, if not in the whole country, copper-plate grants appear first in Andhra-Karnataka region.

The significance of these records, particularly the Prakrit grants of the Salankayanas and Early Pallavas is the drafting of the Charters, which have become a model to the composers of later copper-plate inscriptions. The name of the ruler who was the donor of the grant, with the details of the names and achievements of his father, grandfather and occasionally great grandfather; the genealogy of the three generations of the donee along with their scholarship; the details relating to the division in which the gift land lay- all form part of a copper-plate record. Sometimes the allotment of shares among the donees in the concerned village is also mentioned. This has formed the main theme which was amplified in later grants which spoke of mythical genealogies and allotment of shares to more donees which increased both the number and size of the copper-plates.

Generally inscriptions do not mention the share of the state from the cultivators. Though legal texts state that one-sixth of the total produce was to be collected, it is not known whether this was collected in cash or kind or both.

(i) Payment of Taxes:

We have one rare instance of a list of taxes paid by the people to the king in the Vilavatti grant of Pallava Simhavarman II:

1. Metal-workers
2. Leather-workers
3. Shopkeeping cloth-dealers
4. Licensed spies
5. Jugglers
6. Shops in general
7. Jain mendicants
8. Barbarians
9. Masked actors
10. Water diviners
11. Weavers
12. Gamblers

The truly religious person is not concerned with reform. He is seeking what is true, and that very search has a transforming effect on society.

J.Krishnamurti

13. Marriage Ceremony

14. Barbers

To this list can be added the classes of people who find mention in the medieval inscriptions namely, *kumbhakara* (potter), *tailakara* (oil-monger), *takshaka* (carpenter), *gollakara* (shepherd) and *talari* (policeman). These eighteen may definitely be considered as professional groups, though we cannot justify the inclusion of *Ajivikas*.

(ii) Exemption from Royal Control:

Besides exempting the gift- village from taxes and tribute (*Kara*), the village was permitted to have an independent authority of its own, devoid of State control. The administration of the village was entrusted to the donees themselves, who had now become masters of the land. The people in the village were expected to pay taxes and to obey the commands of their new masters, just as it was customary for them to do so for the State earlier. The king, from his side, respected the authority of the donees by renouncing his claims over the village. A number of terms indicative of non-interference by the king and his staff are referred to in the grants. Some of them are specified:

- (1) Non-entry of royal troops;
- (2) Non-interference in the village affairs;
- (3) No digging for salt;
- (4) No offer of unpaid labour (*vishti* or *vetti*) from the villagers; Again, the villagers had to attend on touring officers of the king usually.

These services were waived by reference to some of them:

- (1) Not to supply boiled rice, pots, cots and provide accommodation;
- (2) Not to supply bullocks to touring officials;
- (3) Not to supply grass, leaves, vegetables, flowers, fruits, curds, milk, ghee, butter-milk;

The above account relates how so many remissions were granted to a village, which would mean that other villages were subject to all these impositions. The masters of *agrahara/devadana* villages thus became intermediaries between the king and cultivators,

though the gift-villages granted by the king are a few, compared to the vast areas held by him.

(iii) Thirty-six Exemptions:

It has already been stated that the villages/lands were given tax-free, along with immunities. In this context, some inscriptions refer to *sarva-pida-vivarjitam* or *sarva-badha-vivarjitam*, which show that there were troubles and obstacles which were removed by the State. It is possible that people felt a heavy burden, when these impositions were made. Now, some Gajapati and Vijayanagara inscriptions refer to a term *avedana*, which means 'worry'. This may be the same as *badha* or *pida* of the early inscriptions. For instance, one copper-plate grant of Kapilesvara Gajapati dated 1458 A.D. states that the King had renounced the thirty-six *avedanas*. The Oriya part of the inscription mentions *Chatisi* *avedana*. Thus, the *avedanas* number thirty-six which is *Chatisi* (*Chhatis=36*). These could be no different from the *pariharas* (exemptions) mentioned in the early grants of the Salankyanas and Early Pallavas.

From the fact that inscriptions in Andhra of 15th and 16th centuries mention *avedanas* as numbering thirty-six, one may be tempted to identify them with the same number, which occurs in the inscriptions of Early Kalinga of 4th-5th century A.D. In these grants, we have the phrase *Shat-trimsad = agrahara-samanyam*, which is taken by some scholars to refer to 36-*agraharas*. Since the number of taxes and enjoyment of privileges of the State are said to be thirty-six in the late inscriptions, it can safely be interpreted that the taxes and enjoyments numbering thirty-six were now to be enjoyed by the donees receiving the *agrahara*.

It may be observed from the above, that the State enjoyed thirty-six privileges inclusive of imposing taxes on and demanding services of the people in the village. The donees, whether Brahmanas who obtained *agraharas* or the temple authorities who received the villages, seem to have obtained these privileges from the State and were entitled to receive the taxes in cash and kind and to get the services from the people on various counts from about 4th-5th century A.D. onwards.

A newspaper is not just for reporting the news as it is, but to make people angry enough to do something about it.

Mark Twain

(b) Qualifications of the Donees:

An interesting feature that does not figure in the inscriptions outside Andhra is the reference to some qualifications of the scholars or their forefathers with the numerical terms, *asiti*, *sahasra* and *tri-sahasra* (Eg. *Asiti-tarkaka*, *grithita-sahasra* and *tri-sahasra vidya*). What these numbers indicate is not made clear.

Inscriptions make clear that *asiti* (eighty) refers to *tarka*. It is pointed out that it probably relates to *nyaya*, which deals with sixteen categories, which were subdivided into 45 by Gautama and to *vaisesika* in which the categories were divided into 35 by Kanada. The combination would come to eighty.

Again, with reference to *sahasra* (one thousand), some take it to be a reference to Sama Veda, which is said to contain one thousand branches. But, the problem is that it is mentioned in addition to the scholarship in two Vedas. The donee could as well have been described as an expert in three Vedas, instead of two Vedas and *Sahasra*. Another explanation is that they could relate to 893 *adhikaranas* in Sabarasvamin's commentary on *Purva-mimamsa*, in addition to 27 categories of *yoga* and 80 of *nyaya* and *vaisesika*, which add up to one thousand. In the's *Panditaradhya-Charita*, Palkuriki Somanatha makes a reference toying the thousand *nyayas* authored by Bhatta (*Bhatta-krita-sahasra-nyaya-vidhulu*). This Bhatta could be none other than Kumarila-bhatta, the proponent of *Purva-mimamsa*. It is possible that *tri-sahasra* refers to the study of some of the systems of Hindu philosophy.

(c) Identification of Sriparvatasvami:

I have stated that during this period, reference is made in some inscriptions to the tutelary deity of the family to which the kings belonged. Among them the Vishnukundi records speak of Sriparvatasvami as the God whom they worshipped. For a long time the God was identified with Mallikarjuna Siva of Srisailam. The availability of the records of the Vishnukundis in relation to their patronage of Buddhism have led some scholars to doubt the view that the tutelary deity was Siva Mallikarjuna. They question the identity of Sriparvata with Srisailam.

It is argued that this Sriparvata could be the Nagarjunakonda area which was ruled by the

Ikshvakus; and the junior Andhras, who were vassals of the main Andhra family, were called as Sriparvatiyas in the Puranas (*Andhrah Sriparvatiyascha*). We know that the Ikshvakus ruled as the successors of the Satavahanas in Andhra with Vijayapuri-Sriparvata region as the centre. If this identity is accepted, then who was the tutelary deity of the Vishnukundis in this Sriparvata? This area is not known to be a great Saivaite centre but as a Buddhist centre. The Nagarjunakonda excavations have not yielded any habitation after the Ikshvakus.

I have discussed some problems that confront us in the study of the Andhra history with reference to the period 300 A.D-600 A.D. and offered solutions but more in-depth studies are required for throwing light on the various aspects of the period.

(This is an abridged version of the Presidential Address delivered at the 39th session of the South Indian History Congress held in Hyderabad during 8-10 February, 2019).

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Gandhi and Journalism - III

Prof. D.V.R. Murthy

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Dr. Y.D. Ramdas

Assistant Professor,
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Dr. Ambedkar University, Srikakulam

Though Gandhi viewed that the duty of the newspapers was only to serve the people, he used Young India to resist the Britishers boldly in not compromising with any aspect related to the freedom of India, and also the freedom of the press. In the face of mounting hostility against the British administration, the government brought in the Press Act of 1910, which imposed heavy security deposit to open a printing press, and thereby muzzle the freedom of the press (Murthy, 2010). However, Gandhi stood firmly for the freedom of the press, and two cases reported below illustrate how Mahatma argued his cases related to contempt of court, and sedition which he accepted eventually to go to jail.

We do not get good laws to restrain bad people. We get good people to restrain bad laws.

G.K. Chesterton

Contempt of court

As a journalist, Gandhi never shirked from the responsibility of carrying the burden of proof, and he favoured objectivity in the news reports, and also exhorted the newspapers to abide by objectivity instead of favouring other methods to escape the law. He boldly published a letter against the judge to express the truth. He stood by his conviction in questioning the judge's attitude. He was prepared to face the consequences of violating the rule, and in the face of tough stance of the judge, he firmly argued his case to resist contempt of court. In the two issues of Young India, he published articles which attracted the law of contempt. On March 10, 1920, in Young India, contempt of case proceedings were reported with a heading, 'Was it contempt of court? Proceedings against Mr Gandhi and Mr Mahadeo H Desai'. Two judges Marten, and Hayward Kajiji were hearing the contempt case against Editor Gandhi and Publisher Desai of Young India for publication of a letter addressed by Kennedy, District Judge of Ahmedabad, to the Registrar of the High Court, complaining of the conduct of certain Satyagrahi lawyers of Ahmedabad. In April 1919, Judge Kennedy found that certain lawyers in Ahmedabad had signed the Satyagraha pledge, and he asked them to explain why their Sanads should not be cancelled for their having signed the pledge. He did not consider their explanation satisfactory, and hence, addressed a letter to the Registrar of the High Court on April 22, 1919. In consequence, two notices were issued by the High Court to the lawyers concerned. A copy of Mr. Kennedy's letter was given by the Registrar to Divetia, pleader for one of the lawyers, who handed the same to Mr Kalidas J Jhaveri, one of the Satyagrahi lawyers, who in turn handed it to Mr. Gandhi. On August 6, 1919, the letter was published in Young India with a heading "O'Dwyerism in Ahmedabad" along with an article commenting on the letter with a heading "Shaking Civil Resisters". As soon as the proceedings were completed, the Registrar addressed a letter to Mr. Gandhi directing him to appear before the Chief Justice's Chamber, to give an explanation as regards the publication of the letter. Mr. Gandhi replied through a telegram explaining his inability to attend on the appointed date as he was going to the

Punjab. The Registrar replied saying that the Chief Justice did not wish to interfere with Mr. Gandhi's appointment and that a written explanation would do. Gandhi was asked to publish an apology in the paper, which was refused by Gandhi. Following his refusal, the judge declared the publication of the letter would come under the contempt of court. On the judgment of the High Court, Gandhi stood firmly on the ground saying that he would honour the independence of the journalist and would go to any extent to undergo punishment. The article appeared on March 24, 1920 in Young India with a heading, contempt of court as follows:

The long-expected hearing of the case against the editor and the publisher of Young India in connection with the publication of a letter of the district Judge of Ahmedabad regarding Satyagrahi Lawyers and my comments thereon have been heard and judgment has been pronounced. Both the editor and the publisher have been severely reprimanded. But the court did not see its way to pass any sentence upon either of us. If I dwell upon the judgment it is only because I am anxious as a satyagrahi to draw a moral from it. I wish to assure those friends who out of pure friendliness advised us to tender the required apology, that I refused to accept their advice not out of obstinacy but because there was a great principle at stake. I had to conserve a journalist's independence and yet respect the law. My own reading of the law was that there was no contempt committed by me. But my defence rested more upon the fact that I could not offer an apology if I was not prepared not to repeat the offence on similar occasion. Because I hold that an apology tendered to a court to be true has to be as sincere as a private apology. At the same time I owed a duty to the court. It was no light thing for me to refuse to accept the advice of the Chief Justice especially when Chief Justice was so very considerate in the correspondence with me. I was on the horns of a dilemma. I therefore decided not to offer any defence but simply to make a statement frankly and fully defining my position, leaving it to the court to pass any sentence it thought fit in the event of an adverse decision. In order to show that I meant no disrespect of the court and that I did not desire to advertise the case I took extraordinary precautions to prevent publicity and I venture to think

that I succeeded eminently in convincing the court that behind my disobedience - if it was disobedience, there was no defiance but perfect resignation, there was no anger or ill-will but perfect restraint and respect: that if I did not apologize, I did not because an insincere apology would have been contrary to my conscience. I hold that it was about as perfect an instance of civil disobedience as it ever has been my privilege to offer. And I feel that the court reciprocated in a most handsome manner and recognized the spirit of civility that lay behind my so called disobedience. The luminous judgment of Justice Marten lays down the law, and decides against me. But I feel thankful that it does not question the propriety of my action. Justice Hayward's judgment recognizes it as an instance of passive. i.e. civil resistance and practically makes it the reason for not awarding any sentence. Here then we have an almost complete vindication of civil disobedience. Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, and never defiant, must be based upon some well understood principle, must not be capricious and above all must have no ill-will or hatred behind it. I submit that the disobedience offered by Mr. Desai and myself contained all these ingredients.

Sedition case

Gandhi published three articles in Young India dated September 29, 1921, with a heading 'Tampering with Loyalty', another article on December 15, 1921, with a heading "the puzzle and solution", and the third article on February 23, 1923, with a heading 'Shaking the Manes'. In these articles, he severely criticized the British administration, and asked the people to rebel against the government, and in particular the Indian sepyo to rebel against the government. For instance, December 15, 1921 contained the following passage.

"A puzzle and its solution"

Lord Reading is puzzled and perplexed. Speaking in reply to the addresses from the British Indian Association and the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce at Calcutta, His Excellency said, "I confess that when I contemplate the activities of a section of the community, I find myself still, notwithstanding persistent study ever since I have been in India, puzzled and perplexed. I ask myself what purpose

is served by flagrant breaches of the law for the purpose of challenging the Government and in order to compel arrest." The answer was partly given by Pandit Motilal Nehru when he said on being arrested that he was being taken to the house of freedom. We ask arrest because the so called freedom is slavery. We are challenging the might of this government because we consider its activity to be wholly evil. We want to overthrow the government. We want to compel its submission to the people's will. We desire to show that the government exists to serve the people, not the people, the government. Free life under the government has become intolerable, for the price exacted for the retention of freedom is unconsciously great. Whether we are one or many, we must refuse to purchase freedom at the cost of our self-respect or our cherished convictions. I have known even little children become unbending when an attempt has been made to cross their declared purpose, be it ever so flimsy in the estimation of their parents. Lord Reading must clearly understand the non-cooperators are at war with the government.

Because of these writings, a case of sedition was registered against the editor, M K Gandhi and the publisher, Shankarlal Ghelabai Banker on March 18, 1922, in the district and sessions court, Ahmedabad. The charges were "bringing or attempting to excite disaffection towards his Majesty's Government established by law in British India, and thereby committing offences punishable under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code". When the charges were read out in the court, the judge, C N Broomfield called upon the accused to plead to the charges. He asked Gandhi whether he pleaded guilty or claimed to be tried. Gandhi pleaded guilty to the charges and Banker too pleaded guilty to the charges. The judge wished to give his verdict immediately, but the advocate-general, J T Strangaman insisted that the due process of law must be followed. The advocate-general requested the judge to take into account "the occurrences in Bombay, Malabar and Chauri Chauri, leading to rioting and murder". In respect of Banker, the advocate-general said that the second accused, the offence was lesser as he published them, and did not write them. Therefore, the advocate-general asked for a substantial fine in addition to imprisonment as might be possible. However, the judge asked Gandhi

that “would he like to make a statement”. Gandhi agreed to give a statement, and the judge asked for a written statement to be recorded. Gandhi made an oral statement, which was followed by a written statement. Gandhi said:

Before I read this statement I would like to state that I entirely endorse the learned advocate-general’s remarks in connection with my humble self. I think that he was entirely fair to me in all the statements that he has made, because it is very true and I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me, and the advocate-general is entirely right when he says that my preaching of disaffection did not commence with my connection with *Young India* but it commenced much earlier, and in the statement that I am about to read, it will be my painful duty to admit before this court that it commenced much earlier than the period stated by advocate-general. It is impossible for me to disassociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura or the mad outrages of Bombay...I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of the citizen. The only course open to you, the judge, is, as I am going to say in my statement, either to resign your post, or inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and law you are assisting to administer are good for the people...

Further, Louis Fischer (1994: 259-260) who authored, *The Life of Mahatma* recorded as follows:

When Gandhi sat down, Mr Justice Broomfield bowed to the prisoner, and pronounced sentence ‘The determination of a just sentence,’ the judge declared, ‘is perhaps as difficult a proposition as a judge in this country could have to face. The law is no respecter of persons. Nevertheless, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever heard or am likely to have to try. I would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your country men, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and even saintly life.’”

The judge then announced that Gandhi must undergo imprisonment for six years, and added that if the government later saw fit to reduce the term ‘no one would be better pleased than I’. Mr Banker received one year jail and fine of one thousand rupees.

On hearing the sentence, the Mahatma rose and said that the sentence ‘is as mild as any judge could inflict on me, and so far as the entire proceedings are concerned, I must say that I could not have expected greater courtesy’.

The two cases reported above illustrate that Mahatma Gandhi never compromised on the principles he enunciated throughout his life. Gandhi considered journalism as a by-product of his activities, and newspaper was a vehicle for him to propagate his views. He firmly asserted that he was writing these articles only to awaken the Indians and to rouse desirable sentiments in them against the British rule while engaging more number of people with nationalism.

(Concluded)

RETURNING TO INDIA: SRI AUROBINDO, THE MOTHER

Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar

(Talk delivered at Matagiri, Woodstock, U.S.A., on 23rd April, 2006 to celebrate Darshan day of 24th April.)

Strictly speaking, the title is a misnomer. There can never be a ‘return to India’ as one is never away from India. In the universal consciousness there are no departures and arrivals. If we speak of Sri Aurobindo’s return to India or the Mother’s return to India, it is more to get the Aurobindonian Movement focused to our limited understanding and vision. Since we cannot hold entire oceans in our hand for observation, we get to do so by taking up a handful of sea water, limiting the Supreme Truth by the rims of the cup we hold in our hands. It is in this sense that we speak of Sri Aurobindo’s life on earth as limited by dates: 1872-1950; Of the Mother’s as 1878-1973. Of their sojourns on the earth, of their arrivals and departures.

Neglect of an effective birth control policy is a never-failing source of poverty which, in turn, is the parent of revolution and crime. Aristotle

But even to our limited vision, it is astonishing what a spread of significance is indicated by these dates. In the context of the Darshan day of 24th April, let us meditate for a little while about three 'returns' to India in these divine lives. 1893 when Sri Aurobindo returned to India from England after a stay of fourteen years; 1914 when the Mother returned to India from France – returned because she belonged to India which she considered her 'mother country' and 1920 when she returned to India from Japan. It is interesting that though these two spiritual beacons did not live their lives on the surface, we can yet detect amazing patterns, each of them meant for raising man's consciousness further, and widening his perception of his goal to larger horizons.

We could begin with Sri Aurobindo's return to India in 1893. Born in 1872 at Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo was brought up in an entirely colonial atmosphere that reveled in imitating the west in such a way as to reject the glory and good of India's past. Sri Aurobindo had a brilliant academic career in England. He could have entered the Steel Frame but he rejected the Indian Civil Service and returned to India to work in a private capacity in the kingdom of Baroda. 1893 is an interesting year for global spirituality. It was in this year that Swami Vivekananda came to the United States and made spiritual history with his address to the Convention of the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. Thanks to the ochre-robed Swami, the west began to think of wider parameters for their religious beliefs and spiritual searchings, and it was never the same again for humanity. In the same way, Sri Aurobindo's coming made Indians think again about what constituted heroism and patriotism and how these concepts create a land and its people.

Sri Aurobindo returned to India, and was not only engaged in teaching students in Baroda but was also intensely learning about Indian culture. He mastered Sanskrit and presently recognized what is it that had made Indians love their geographical area so deeply, a love that had survived centuries of foreign attacks and heartless colonization. Indian culture had taught its people a universal outlook, with the repeated chant – *lokaah samsthaah sukhino bhavantu* – and at the same time instilled in them an undying love for the land that

lay between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin – 'aa Sethu Himachala', is a familiar phrase for Indians. This was the life-giving mother, an idea that had been crystallized for the modern mind by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya in his poem, "Bande Mataram". So Sri Aurobindo came to recognize India as not a mere sub-continent but a loving Mother Goddess. One hundred years ago, on 30th August 1905, he wrote a letter to his wife, Mrinalini Devi in which he spoke of his three madnnesses. The first was a firm belief that all his accomplishments, genius and higher education and wealth were given by God. Hence, he would spend only what he needed for the barest essentials of life and render the rest to God's work, use the money for helping the lesser privileged of his countrymen. The second madness was that he wished to see God face to face. And then he wrote:

"My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter - a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers - I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with sword or gun, - but the strength of knowledge."

One hundred years ago, India lay defeated, lost, spiritless. Yet at that very pitch-dark moment Sri Aurobindo dared to hope and decided to help Indians journey towards light, which makes his return very significant indeed. But it was not merely a political awakening that was Sri Aurobindo's aim. His aim was to see the Divine and help others also in this adventure. Of course, it was not to be taken as a mechanical anabasis. Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"Religion these days means repeating the name of God at any odd hour, praying in public, showing off how pious one is. I want nothing of this. If God exists, there must be some way to experience His existence, to meet Him face to face. However arduous this path is, I have made up my mind to follow it. The Hindu religion declares that the way lies in one's own body,

The earth has a skin and that skin has diseases; one of its diseases is called man.

Friedrich Nietzsche

in one's own mind. It has laid down the rules for following the way, and I have begun to observe them. Within a month I have realised that what the Hindu religion says is not false. I am experiencing in myself the signs of which it speaks."

So there we have the significance of Sri Aurobindo's return to India in 1893 which led finally to the cave of tapasya in Pondicherry. The new adventure in consciousness for humanity had begun. Now came 1914 which brought the Mother to India. This too was a return for the Mother for us is the *Vedic Stambha*, the White Pillar that holds up the roof of the universe. How to describe this momentous coming of the Mother to Pondicherry? The Mother herself had a concise and perfect way of conveying information. When giving a message to a Chandernagore paper in 1920, the Mother said:

"In the year 1910 my husband came alone to Pondicherry where, under very interesting and peculiar circumstances, he made the acquaintance of Sri Aurobindo. Since then we both strongly wished to return to India – the country which I had always cherished as my true mother-country. And in 1914 this joy was granted to us."

This child of eternal India had been born as Mirra Alfassa in 1873 in Paris and turned to art and spirituality from early days. Her spiritual diary – Prayers and Meditations – helps us have a distant view of the early years of her spiritual strivings. She was never one to give into depressions and had no patience in allowing any dark night to veil the soul. Her dictionary contained only words like Hope, Victory, Conquest, Triumph and the rest! Among the earliest entries for the year 1914 is one on 5th January:

"I do not struggle ; and like a child in its mother's arms, like a fervent disciple at the feet of his master, I trust myself to Thee and surrender to Thy guidance, sure of Thy victory."

This vision of herself took a physical shape in the month of March. The Mother came to India on 29th of that month and the same day she and Paul Richard met Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon. It was the coming together of two spiritual powers and personalities pitching the camp of God in human time. The Mother herself seems to have been silent during the meeting.

It was enough for her to be a child, a disciple: "I trust myself to Thee and surrender to Thy guidance, sure of Thy victory.' On Sri Aurobindo's part, we have Nolinida's report:

"The first time Sri Aurobindo happened to describe her qualities, he said he had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved. He had added a comment that perhaps it was only women who were capable of giving themselves so entirely and with such sovereign ease."

Nolinida has also mentioned that the Mother was indeed like a new born babe surrendering completely to its mother, "with the candid simplicity of a child." And the Mother? One may read or recite the diary-entry for 30th March a million times, yet one remains absorbed in sheer wonderment:

"Gradually the horizon becomes distinct, the path grows clear, and we move towards a greater and greater certitude. It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on the earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day shall come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it; and my hope has no bounds.

My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent."

If the result of Sri Aurobindo's return to his motherland in 1893 led to a reawakening of Indians to their culture and heritage and his own taking up the ancient yoga for creating a trustworthy instrument to usher in the New Future for man, the tangible result of the Mother's return to her mother-country was the publication of *Arya*. The Aurobindonian vision was tuned to the next step in evolution and for this humanity had to be prepared for active participation. This meant educating people in their received traditions which had already garnered significant spiritual illuminations. The *Arya* was inaugurated by Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Paul Richard with a specific agenda:

The artist is a cut above the critic, for the artist is writing something which will move the critic.
The critic is writing something which will move everybody but the artist. William Faulkner

- “1. A systematic study of the highest problems of existence.
2. The formation of a vast Synthesis of knowledge, harmonizing the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental. Its method will that be of a realism, at once rational and transcendental, -- a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific discipline with those of intuitive experience.”

Launching the magazine on 15th August 1914 was also an act of defiance hurled against the forces of darkness, ranged then in an increasingly dire formation to snuff out unity, sanity, goodness and the light of democracy. Today we are awestruck at what seems to be a tapasya of mere print, yet that is what it was in the issues printed between 1914 and 1921, that kept the engines of the Divine working full blast to deny victory to the forces of evil that had unleashed the First World War.

But the exigencies of the war necessitated Paul Richard and the Mother to return to France in 1915. The following year they left for Japan and it was in Tokyo and Kyoto that they lived for four years before the Mother's final return to India. The spiritual flame never wavered and the Japanese experience gave her children those beautiful classes on Dhammapada, the art of communing with the Divine through flowers and the elegant and orderliness of Japanese culture. The Mother always had a word of praise for Japan. “I had everything to learn in Japan ... For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder.” All the same it was India that remained her mother-country. Even the faultily faultless perfection of Japan had something lacking for the Mother: “I ought to say, to complete my picture, that the four years I was there I found a dearth of spirituality as entire as it could.” It was a world of the mental and physical. There was no rising beyond these planes.

For the Mother it was ‘destination India’. When her boat reached the shores of Pondicherry on 24th April 1920 – yes, exactly eighty-six years ago – she had an experience that glowed with promise:

“I was on the boat, at sea, not expecting anything

(I was of course busy with the inner life, but I was living physically on the boat), when all of a sudden, abruptly, about two nautical miles from Pondicherry, the quality, I may even say the physical quality of the atmosphere, of the air, changed so much that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo. It was a physical experience.”

After returning to India, the Mother remained in the physical in her mother-country for fifty-three years and marvelous was each day of this residence. The times began with her taking up yoga and becoming Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator. The Ashram began to take shape. There was the Siddhi on the 24th of November, 1926, and Sri Aurobindo's retiring into seclusion thereafter. The publication of books, the steady growth in numbers of Ashramites; the important work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to defeat the children of Wotan in the Second World War; Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal; the launching of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education; and Auroville.

It may be said with some assurance that Sri Aurobindo's yoga gained a new spring of action with the final return of the Mother to Pondicherry on 24th April, 1920. They must have discussed and meditated upon the future course of action as is revealed by Sri Aurobindo's letter to Motilal Roy written on 2nd September, 1920:

“Our first business is to establish our communal system on a firm, spiritual, secondly on a firm economical foundation, and to spread it wide, but the complete social change can only come as a result of the other two. It must first come in spirit, afterwards in form. If a man enters into the commune by spiritual unity, if he gives to it his life and labour and considers all he has as belonging to all, the first necessity is secured. The next thing is to make the movement economiocially self-sufficient ... these two things are, the one a constant, the other an immediate necessity.”

The Mother's coming definitely freed Sri Aurobindo to concentrate on the spiritual side of their yoga and we have the tremendous context of what is now known as the Siddhi day that came six years after the Mother's second coming. The Mother revealed to

Even love must be reduced to matrimony if it is to be stable. In India nobody will share patronage with another, whatever else he may share. I am informed by Vyasa that even the Pandavas who shared a wife refused to share patronage with each other.

others (and this included the sadhaks Nolini, Moni, Amrita and others who had already been with him for more than a decade) the personality of Sri Aurobindo as the Master and Lord of Yoga and they must have felt like Arjuna when he had had a vision of the cosmic form:

“Considering You merely as a friend, not knowing Your greatness, I have inadvertently addressed You as O Krishna, O Yadava, O friend; merely out of affection or carelessness.

In whatever way I may have insulted You in jokes; while playing, reposing in bed, sitting, or at meals; when alone, or in front of others; O Krishna, I implore You for forgiveness.”

Even before the Siddhi Day, the Mother had been acknowledged as the power that was necessary to fulfil this yoga. As Sri Aurobindo pointed out in a letter to Daulat Ram Sharma “The work of the two together alone brings down the supramental Truth into the physical plane.” This is a point we repeatedly encounter in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri, indeed upto the end. Yes, even in the penultimate Book, in the canto ‘The Eternal Day’ we have the magnificent dialogue between the Supreme and Savitri and she never yields the fact that it is the Two who will usher in the Next Future:

“O thou who soundst the trumpet in the lists,
Part not the handle from the untried steel,
Take not the warrior with his blow unstruck.
Are there not still a million fights to wage?
O king-smith, clang on still thy toil begun,
Weld us to one in thy strong smithy of life.
Thy fine-curved jewelled hilt call Savitri,
Thy blade’s exultant smile name Satyavan.
Fashion to beauty, point us through the world.
Break not the lyre before the song is found;
Are there not still unnumbered chants to weave?
The unfailing blade of the Supreme, Satyavan;
the million-hued jeweled hilt, Savitri. The Golden
Purusha and the Inspiring Prakriti.

”My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born,
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,

To change the earthly life to life divine.”

It is a continuing experience for all of us as well who recognize the Mother’s Action in Sri Aurobindo’s Action. This is a mystic union that can be best described by the Sanskrit word, *yoga drsya*. This yogic meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was certainly not in vain! Concluding his tremendous epic-biography of the Mother, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, my father wrote:

“We have only to call, and the Grace responds at once ... We have constantly to invoke her living Force and install her puissant Presence within our innermost consciousness so that she may take complete control over the movement and direction of our lives. The coming of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was thus not in vain, and their Presence and Power of Action are manifest still.”

And I believe him.

* * *

Book Review

DEMOCRACY ON THE ROAD A 25-Year Journey through India

RUCHIR SHARMA

(Published by the Imprint of Penguin Randum House, pp.389, 2019, Rs.699)

This is a delightful political travelogue by Ruchir Sharma on his ‘25 Year Journey through India’ studying Indian politics which he describes as ‘a deadly serious business’. In a book of nearly 400 pages, divided into 40 chapters, Ruchir Sharma, the globe-trotting writer, intellectual and investor, discusses the volatile and complex nature of Indian politics dominated by ‘the forces of family, caste and community, economics and developments, money and corruption, Bollywood and Godmen.’ Ruchir Sharma’s portraiture of Indian democracy at work is insightful and objective. Stating that ‘the future is uncertain’, the author recalls what Dr.Y.V.Reddy, former Governor, Reserve Bank of India once told him that “in India, the past is uncertain since official data are revised so often”.

The title of each chapter encapsulates the essence of the theme taken up for analysis and explanation.

In the wrong situation, A.I. systems go from supersmart to superdumb in an instant .

Paul Scharre

The contrasting styles and the idiosyncrasies of political leaders, at both state and national levels, are interestingly presented with amusing anecdotes and mild sarcasm. If the astute statesman- Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said in his election campaign: “You have given the Congress 50 years in power; all I ask for is five,” the bachelor Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a master sloganeer, has made ‘uncorrupted singlehood a center piece of his political persona.’ In between figures the gentleman Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh who said to the author: “Ruchir, please pray for me, on assuming the high office with ‘a deadpan’ humility”. To Ruchir Sharma the Congress looked like ‘a dynastic anachronism, increasingly outdated and out of touch with the fast growing India’. Referring to the Congress culture of sycophancy the author writes how Sonia Gandhi was ‘surrounded as usual by the spectacle of big time Congress politicians hovering around her like so many school boys desperate to impress the teacher. Priyanka saw herself as a manager, Rahul as a thinker, the one with the political ideas’.

Paradoxical Chief Ministers Mamata Benerjee, Mayawati and Jayalalitha compels attention with their contrasting styles of functioning and idiosyncrasies. Mamata Benerjee, the ascetic West Bengal Chief Minister with ‘no taste for diamonds’ and largely impervious to the corruption charges that so often topple Indian governments, helped her secure the second term, the author says. In contrast, Jayalalitha was an increasingly cloistered and authoritarian leader who had a sway over the people. The contrast, writes Sharma, was like day and night. Though Jayalalitha possessed the highest number of footwear pairs among the political leaders, not many know that she was a voracious reader with a private library of more than ten thousand books while the fiery Mamata Banerjee was a prolific Bengali poet and author. The joke in Calcutta is “there is only one post in TMC and Mamata holds it, everyone else is a lamppost”. Alluding to Mayawati’s chief ministership, the author narrates how she encouraged an unparalleled personality cult – building towering statues of herself and sandstone

elephant, the party symbol, all over the state capital. The Election Commission’s orders that the statues of sandstone elephants must also be covered, it turned out to be a wildly amusing spectacle of elephants covered in pink plastic! The solution became worse than the problem. ‘The Laptop Chief Minister’ of Andhra Pradesh N.Chandrababu Naidu who was acclaimed for his focus on development rather than caste and welfare populism ‘a reformer inside his high-tech van’ turned populist more ‘starkly’ in the later period of his chief ministership. His rival Dr.Y.S.Rajasekhara Reddy known for his generosity enjoyed the support of both urban and rural poor. He offered free electricity for farmers, health insurance for the rural poor and ambulance service across the State became very popular.”

Exploring the intricacies of Indian election process, the author makes quite a few important observations: Why in India, he asks, candidates with a criminal record are three times more likely to win Parliamentary elections than those with a clean record? Sharma recalls the comment of a writer that while the US is known for its Presidential Democracy and Britain for its Parliamentary Democracy, India is known for its ‘Dynastic Democracy’.

Narendra Modi, in Sharma’s words, is not a transformational leader like Ronald Reagan. A top American diplomat described Modi as a ‘performer’ not a ‘reformer’, a micro manager who as Gujarat CEO relied ‘on his own intimidatingly clean reputation to make State companies run more honestly and efficiently. Against the background of series of elections setbacks in the last eighteen months, Ruchir Sharma observes that Modi ‘had lowered his chances of victory in 2019 from near certain to 50:50’. Narendra Modi, however bounced back through ‘surgical strikes’ and Balakot aerial strikes in February, just two months before the general election. One of the most important lessons the author has learned ‘on the road is that ideas-particularly economic ideas-do not play the same role in India that they do elsewhere.’ Ruchir Sharma who published a slightly altered version of

the last chapter of his book in *Foreign Affairs* of March-April 2019 strikes an optimistic note at the end saying that in an era when democracy is said to be in retreat worldwide, it is thriving in India. But at what cost? one is tempted to ask.

A.Prasanna Kumar

* * *

“Poll panel has failed in its duty”

(Newspaper report on a lecture-meeting on ‘The Importance of Model Code of Conduct in ensuring free and fair elections’ delivered by Dr.E.A.S.Sarma, I.A.S.(Retd.), Former Union Energy Secretary and Founder Convener, Forum for Better Visakha on May 16, 2019 organised by Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library)

Free and fair election is the oxygen to democracy and ensuring them is the responsibility of not only the Election Commission of India (ECI) but that of every citizen, former bureaucrat and founder-convener of Forum for Better Visakha EAS Sarma said here on Thursday.

Model Code

Addressing a meeting on ‘the importance of Model Code of Conduct in ensuring free and fair elections,’ jointly organized by the Centre for Policy Studies and Visakhapatnam Public Library, Mr.Sarma alleged that the ECI had failed to provide a level playing held to all political parties.

Recalling that Election Commissioners such as T.N.Seshan and J.M.Lyngdoh could take strong measures to check electoral malpractice, he alleged that the ECI now was acting as per diktat of the Modi Government.

Lamenting the misuse of State and Central intelligence agencies by both the Union and State governments, Mr.Sarma pointed out how a young lady IAS officer in-charge of Ladakh poll stood up to the BJP government’s pressure.

A. Prasanna Kumar President of Centre, traced the evolution of Model Code of Conduct from the first general election in India held during 1951-52. Visakhapatnam Public Library President Dr S.Vijayakumar presided and Secretary D.S.Varma welcomed the gathering.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*, May 17, 2019)

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Dwarakamayi, 50-52-19, T.P.T. Colony, Seethammadhara, Visakhapatnam - 530013.

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