



BULLETIN

Vol.8 No.4
April 2, 2004

OF THE
CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES
(*GAYATRI VIDYA PARISHAD*)

A DANGEROUS DIVIDE

Planet earth is facing a grave threat to its security and survival. Not from other planets or such forces from outer space but from within, from its own inhabitants does the danger emanate. Divisions among the peoples and their countries are deepening and the gender, racial and class dimensions of the dangerous divide call for urgent attention and action. The annual reports released by well known international agencies on global environment and economy contain serious warnings about the deteriorating conditions in every part of the world.

The World Watch Institute's Report of 2003 warned that 'human race has only one or perhaps two generations to rescue itself'. There is increasing biological impoverishment caused by overuse of resources, pollution and destruction of natural wealth. 30% of world's forests are degraded and trees and forests are being cut down at the rate of 130,000 sq.k.m. a year. India, for instance, had a forest cover of 67% a hundred years ago which has come down to less than 15% today. 1.2 billion people, i.e. one fifth of human race live in absolute poverty and their number will register a five-fold increase by 2025. 25% of world's mammal species and 12% of birds are in danger of extinction. Some of the birds and animals like the white whale may not be seen in future.

Africa, Asia and Latin America are the worst affected with that blighted continent Africa being the conspicuous victim of chronic neglect and arrogant indifference of superpowers. Asia is poor and overcrowded. Latin America's population living below the poverty line is increasing alarmingly. There does not seem to be any respite for the crippling misery of the peoples of many African countries. Somalia, Rwanda and Haiti tell the story of the gruesome tragedy of Africa.

Gender injustice is another side of the corroded global insignnia. Women, fifty percent of human population, account for 66% of the work done on this planet. But they have a share of just 10% world's

income and they own a mere 1% of world's property. They hardly constitute 10% of the membership of world's legislatures. Every hour at least ten women die because of pregnancy related diseases. Every minute 13 children die of preventable diseases and malnutrition in the less developed countries.

The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. The income gap between the top 20% and the remaining 80% is widening. The former consume 86% of all goods and services and the latter subsist on a meagre 14%. The assets of world's top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and 600 million people together. The volume of world exports increased sixty fold during the last fifty years and 70% of FDIs during the five years were invested in the rich countries thanks to the winds of globalisation. The United States spends 8bn dollars every year on cosmetics, Europe 11 bn dollars on ice-cream and 17 billion dollars, nearly six times the budget of the United Nations, are spent in Europe and North America annually on pet foods.

The divide has hit India also very badly. The increasing prosperity of our middle class is a welcome development. But it does not augur well for the nation if more number of people are living below the poverty line. There is no evidence of any conscious effort by the government and the people who matter to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots. The celebrated American economist and friend of India J.K. Galbraith warned of 'public poverty' which means inadequate services, environmental degradation and failing public schools. In the name of privatization we cannot afford to demolish public institutions. In the midst of poverty and deaths caused by hunger there can be no room for ostentatious celebrations and vulgar display of pomp and wealth. That great man who walked in our midst on this planet six decades ago, Mahatma Gandhi, wisely exhorted us to put need above greed. That is a lesson of lasting relevance.

The Editor

"Our planet is not balanced. Too few control too much and too many have too little to hope for".
James Wolfensohn - President, World Bank

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Centre for Policy Studies along with Andhra University College of Law organized a meeting at which Shri Soli J Sorabjee, Attorney General, India on March 28, 2004 spoke on 'Good Governance'.

"SORABJEE ADVOCATES RIGHT TO INFORMATION"

It is the duty of the Government to implement Directive Principles and there can be no good governance if the State persistently defers its implementation, according to Attorney-General for India, Soli J. Sorabjee.

Delivering a talk on 'Good governance', organised by the Centre for Policy Studies and Andhra University College of Law at Kalabharathi here on Sunday, he pointed out that Article 37 of the Constitution mentioned that Directive Principles are not enforceable by any code but none-the-less fundamental in the governance of the country as they broadly incorporated the socio-economic fabric through measures such as equal pay for equal work, provision of opportunities and facilities for children, education, etc. In the absence of good governance, there was miserable non-implementation of laws such as beneficial legislation for children's health, piling up of filth and garbage due to lack of sanitation, and miserable state of public health, he said. "Non-implementation of laws is due to lack of political will. To my mind, respect for law is the essence of rule of law that anyone is subject to the equal discipline of law. However high you may be, law is above you. If a *neta* can stop a train, there is subversion of law. If there is communal hatred and communal carnage, law is broken. There is mockery of rule of law when a government faces charges of corruption. Failure to enforce law and order is non-governance," he said.

Referring to the vandalism incident at the prestigious Bhandarkar Institute in Pune which had invaluable treasures, Mr. Sorabjee said that the worst part was no action was taken against the law-breakers. Vandalism was not a good portent for democracy, not for good governance, he opined.

The eminent jurist also felt that there was no good governance without accountability which could be enforced by insistence of transparency in public affairs. "For that, people need information and the right to know should be ensured. Public has a right to know about every public transaction done in public. For example purchase of land by an industry and mass transfer of employees on change of Government. These are matters that affect the Government and the public should know the reason. We must break the secrecy syndrome. Secrecy is corrupt administration. Secrecy

in certain matters relating to national security and commercial intelligence is understandable. Not in the case of common public affairs," he pointed out.

He said that this was equally applicable to the private sector, industrial establishments and business houses.

Mr. Sorabjee stated that the main cause for the present state of affairs is crisis of moral leadership. Quite a sizeable number of Parliament and Assembly members had criminal record, he observed.

Stating that corruption would destroy the moral fabric of the country, he described corrupt officials as violators of human rights.

The Director of the Centre for Policy Studies, A. Prasanna Kumar, introduced Mr. Sorabjee and the Mayor, Rajana Ramani and former Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University, felicitated him. Principal of the Law College, R. Venkata Rao, proposed a vote of thanks.

(Courtesy : The Hindu, March 29, 2004)

"ACCOUNTABILITY IS THE HALLMARK OF GOOD GOVERNANCE : SORABJEE"

There cannot be a good governance if the State persistently defrauds people in the implementation of the Directive Principles of state policy in the Constitution and there cannot be good governance without respect for rule of law and accountability, Attorney General for India Soli J Sorabjee said here today.

Delivering a lecture on the theme of good governance and government, organised by the CPS and Andhra University Dr. Ambedkar College of Law, Sorabjee said accountability could be enforced only by insisting on transparency. Right from mass transfers to awarding of a contract, all aspects of governance had to be made transparent. Secrecy was bulwark of a corrupt and inefficient administration, Sorabjee said.

The failure of the executive in governance was manifested in the form of filth and garbage on the streets, lack of basic civic amenities and starvation deaths.

"When highly placed persons are preaching communal hatred and when persons involved in riots are allowed to go scot-free, then it is a breakdown of law and order," he lamented.

Criticising the attacks on the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune, he said if no action was taken against vandals who destroyed a prestigious research institute in protest against an American author's writing, denigrating a popular historic figure, then it was a clear case of absence of rule of law. Sorabjee ridiculed the

attempts of the State government to extradite American writer James Laine.

Taking a dig at the high profile wedding of the sons of an industrialist, Sorabjee said when thousands of people had been languishing below poverty line, some waste money unnecessarily.

Swiping at the recent entry of film stars into various parties, he said they were trivialising democracy and urged the people of Visakhapatnam to pledge to work for a good governance for future generation.

Centre for Policy Studies director Prasanna Kumar introduced the speaker and Law College principal Venkat Rao proposed a vote of thanks.

(Courtesy : New Indian Express, March 29, 2004)

ALIPIRI GATE AND AFTER

Sri K.V.V. Subrahmanyam, IPS
Retd. Home Secretary, Govt. of A.P

It is some months since the terrorist attack on the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh took place. Yet we seem to see no end of the tunnel. The inquiry commission must be working overtime to unravel the ramifications of the group responsible. Simultaneously experts groups and departmental investigating team must also be busy forgetting for a moment the undoubted massive contributions that would flow out of these bodies, the common citizen must be puzzled at some basics in the scenario. The occurrence took place not far or in any outlandish area but in a stone's throw from Tirupati town, not at an odd hour but in broad day light. The split second timing and pin point accuracy are indicative of the thoroughness and precision and the information backup of VVIP movements. Fault finding is easy. Escapism is easier. Finding scape goats is the easiest. Pontification, academic exercises, prescription of do's and don't will be part of the exercise. Bereft of jargon and sermonizing, the Alipiri Gate episode is symptomatic of the systemic failure. Not only in the security scenario but in the political administrative, economic over all picture, whether it is the security failure or the fake stamp scam, so on and so forth. It can be categorically averred that our political masters, the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the media have collectively abdicated their responsibilities.

We shall go stage by stage. To repeat, Alipiri Gate incident took place in broad day light close to the town. Information could and should have been available to the local populace, the small man, whether it is the policeman, postman, or the pathmaker or the mere passerby. What reasons prompted any of these categories to ignore or hush up vital information of serious import to the state is difficult to understand. When we talk about systemic failures, the common

citizen is only painfully aware of the coldness and indifference that he meets with in his day to day concerns. This systemic failure means and includes the hiatus that has developed in the hierarchy. Middle and senior level officials get into a huddle, like the modern hype in test cricket. This is inspite of media programmes of dialling etc, etc. The answer to this is that officials should spend long hours and be more accessible to the common citizen. Besides they should spend more time listening to what they say. One is reminded of what Schumacher mentioned in one of his lectures about his experince in U.K. where he was Economic advisor to the U.K. Govt. This is recorded in a book entitled 'Good Work' Published by the Schumacher Society of Bristol. When he became Economic Advisor to the U.K. Govt. he went to Scotland and visited one of the interior villages to interact with the farmers. When he went to an elderly farmer and asked him how he ran the farm, he said 'you are a world famous economist and you know everything. What can I tell you?' but when Schumacher insisted, he asked him to accompany the shepherd boy and visit the undulating farm for two or three days. He then asked Schumacher what he saw. Schumacher replied on the first day he saw thirty heads of cattle and on the second day, there were only twenty seven. The farmer said that merely seeing was not enough. He should have noticed the body language of the animals. Then he would have observed which of the animals was sick or infirm and in need of medical attention, Likewise, our officials can learn a lot by spending more time with lowly officials and interacting with them with concern and earnestness. For unfortunately, these exercises are treated as time bound and mere rigmaroles. Our political masters can do a signal service to the people by allowing the officials to spend more time in their own work than with them. Similarly officials can be much better by detaching themselves from the corridors of power.

What is needed urgently to set right systemic failure is the capacity of officials at various levels to vibe, to enable closer interaction, dissemination of information and greater understanding. Spending long hours with the sappers and miners in army parlance is an essential pre-requisite. Not only that, the amount of time that the senior and middle level officials can spend in the field of work has to be much more. For this the political leadership and the higher levels of bureaucracy must squarely face the blame. It is commonly felt that officials and political leaders are not accessible to the common citizen for a good portion of time in a day. Either they are busy in meetings in their own chambers or with their bosses or they have gone out. Whether it is the traffic police or the municipal office or any other governmental body, the response time is exceedingly long and the hazzles faced by the citizens are very real.

Coming to more specifics, security has to be viewed not as a game of numbers or upgradation of technology, Modern gadgetry have their uses and limitations. The quality of information gathering can be enhanced more by increasing grass roots level awareness and inter personal communications. There are many matters which can't be communicated in writing or on cell phones, as these would require proof and fixing of onus, whereas in inter personal interaction, it is possible to air concerns, views, ideas in an informal way. These should be encouraged. This can happen only on the basis of mutual faith and trust and shared common objectives. Whether such a climate will emerge or not is in the womb of future.

More importantly systemic failures can be addressed only by reposing greater faith in the human material. If there is dead wood, certainly, it should be removed. But in a crisis situation all hands on the deck should be the slogan.

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH A Review of Recent Books

- Dr. T.V. Sairam
Chief Commissioner
Customs and Central Excise

Satisfactory use of English in the Indian milieu has always posed considerable challenge - if not a threat - for the Indian writers.

From its historical role as an imperial language, English has risen (or fallen?) to a native hybrid, borrowing words, phrases and expressions freely from the post-colonial nation, tormented by the democratic and developmental pressures.

The Indian writer, in order to be at home with the language has to dust off the theoretical cobwebs surrounding its usage in its historical or colonial settings. In the process, he cannot avoid the temptation of succumbing himself into a whirlpool of native linguistic temptations by taking cross-cultural journeys through labyrinths.

Translators

Indian writers in English have one thing in common: the formidable reputation of working like a translator. They are often expected to encapsulate their intriguing ethnic thoughts through a plan, foreign language, reputed for global application in trade and commerce. The dilemma here is "to be, or not to be", whether it is nobler to translate verbatim or provide a readable text. You go for the one at the cost of another.

The dilemma is quite pronounced in the works produced currently. For a diversity, lets take up the authors of a cook book, a children's book, a fiction and a non-fiction to examine this issue.

Between the slang and the Biblical Language :

It is interesting to note that Vickie Gill, the author of the book 'The Ten Commandments of Good Teaching' (Sage) tried to use student slang in order to sound informal; she organizes a group discussion in her class on 'why do we have to do this junk?' using phrases probably the students themselves would. In another part of the book she uses biblical language, but not very consistent: 'Thou Shall Raise Your Expectations', she affirms.

If you lose your balance, the words end up sounding odd and bizarre instead of sounding genuine. The language, for them is a handicap. That needs to be tropicalized or Indianized to suitably convey the much complex Indian mind rather than the analytical rationale.

Over-ornamentation

Ornamentation, chinoiserie, repetitions are all no doubt, parts of Indian culture. We have such things a plenty in J.N. Dixit's Across Borders (Picus Books), whose prose, apart from repetitions runs to 'ponderous periphrasis' as one of his reviewer would put it. An example: We are subject to a rising curve of ethno-linguistic and religious fissiparous and secessionist tendencies'. He reaches for jargons like 'infrastructural capability' 'instrumentalities', and 'criticality' at the drop of his hat.

Incongruity

Propah word or Slang: The Dilemma

Very often we find the author picking up staid, propah British English as for example, a sixteen year old teenager is found using phrases like "We cannot ponder to everyone's whims." (Maya Chandrasekaran, Summer Job, Scholastic India)

English word or Indian? : The Dilemma

It sounds much more natural for Shilpi (a character in Deepa Agarwal's book 'The Hilltop Mystery', Madhuban) to say, 'Please give me some alu' rather than 'Pass the potatoes please.' Hindi words, at the same time has certain drawbacks. It may, in excess, end up alienating the non-Hindi speaking reader despite an elaborate Glossary of Hindi terms provided at the tail end of the book.

Talking of cookbooks, one finds that Ummi Abdulla, the author of 'The Epicure Cookbook' (Disha, Orient Longman) uses the term 'boiled rice' - a term which is familiar only in a South Indian household and not elsewhere. What she means is uncooked, par-boiled rice. And what a catastrophe if a non-south Indian attempts a dish without understanding the real meaning of such words!.

Sometimes the whole effort seems untenable and

totally outlandish. While describing a South Indian background the words such as bushels, dulcet, parasol, tuffeta etc recall an English countryside rather than a South Indian milieu. (Kaveri Nambisaan, Mango-coloured Fish, Penguin) Similarly, the expressions such as 'cut it out', 'knackered', 'noway' and 'me, neither' do not create a much-needed South Indian ambience.

For example, the expressions such as "Why, oh, why..." or 'Dear oh, dear' are totally outlandish to the young South Indian girls immediate expressions.

Ingenuity

When the author describes someone's toes as shrivelled groundnuts, no doubt there is a local flavour. (Kaveri Nambisaan, MCF)

Conclusion

Indian English could be an international language of communication and within India there is an orientation towards a native-English hybrid. According to some linguists, ever since Independence, English has been functioning as a module and never as a language. This kind of moduling of English, besides exemplifying the resilience of the Indian culture, could very well give us a theoretical model for conceptualizing development through change. In Mahesh Dattani, the playwright's words 'Should the play be read in class-rooms, I sincerely wish that English teachers and staunch Wren & Martinites will not dismiss my syntax as bad English, or worse still as incorrect.'

Nothing can describe more vividly the plight of the Indian writer in English.

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GRAMSABHA : An Instrument To Sensitize The Rural People About Human Rights

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Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chairperson of the United Nations Human Rights Commission observed in 1946, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory or farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning any where. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them, close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world". The message Mrs. Roosevelt gave to mankind

is that enshrining human rights in a charter or making pronouncements at the global level are not enough. Concerted action at the local level is crucial to uphold and promote human rights. In the light of this observation, I would like to discuss the role of a grassroot institution i.e. Gram Sabha as an instrument to sensitize the rural people about Human Rights and also to what extent it would be able to safeguard, promote and guarantee human rights.

The institution of Gram Sabha, as an integral part of Panchayati Raj institutions has been in vogue in many states in India for long. Despite the absence of any explicit constitutional imperative, inspired by the Gandhian philosophy of 'Village Swaraj' many state governments like Andhra Pradesh included the institution of the Gram Sabha in Panchayati Raj legislation even before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1993. But their functioning was not found satisfactory. It was only with the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act that Gram Sabha has become an important and integral part of Panchayati Raj Institutions in all the states of India.'

Gram Sabha and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993 :

The constitutional and legislative empowerment of Gram Sabha through 73rd Constitutional Amendment is an important land mark in the Political Development of India. It has accorded recognition to Gram Sabha as central to the success of self-governance. It made the Gram Sabha not only the foundation of the entire Panchayati Raj system but also provided strength and legitimacy to the principles of grassroots level democracy. In Article 243 (b) Gram Sabha has been defined as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level. It is on the forefront of the modern political institutions which seek to place political power directly in the hands of the people without the mediation of elected representatives. Thus it represents participative democracy or people's democracy.

According to some, the central role of Gram Sabha is to perform the responsibility of a "watch dog". In other words, it is entrusted with the responsibility to supervise and monitor the functioning of the village Panchayat and government functionaries on the one hand, and to approve plans and select schemes, beneficiaries and locations for effective implementation of government schemes on the other. This central idea of the Gram Sabha has been integral to the Gandhian conception of Panchayati Raj. Gandhiji himself, for instance, held that "True democracy could not be worked by some men sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village."

"No man is good enough to rule over another man. If he were good enough, he would not want to do it." - Abraham Lincoln 5

Functioning of Gram Sabha: Some experiences

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act for the first time created a statutory imperative for the establishment of legally empowered Gram Sabha or village assemblies in India. Almost all the state governments, including Andhra Pradesh have provided for the Gram Sabha since 1994, but its functions and authority have not been spelt out in detail. Consequently, these institutions by and large, continue to function ineffectively. More often, there is a tendency to conduct the meetings in a formal manner and finalizing the proceedings in haste. Most of the people who attend the Gram Sabha remain as spectators. They come to the Gram Sabha motivated by considerations of being selected as beneficiaries of different schemes of government. The leaders representing sectional interests take active part in the Gram Sabha. As their support is essential for the survival of the Panchayat leadership, their prominence is always recognized. The implementing agencies of the Mandal/Gram Panchayat have been concentrating on marginal and small farmers rather than agricultural labourers as the former two categories of people are in a better position when compared to the latter. This means that the Gram Sabha has become a place for protecting the interests of the upper layers of the poor, to the extent that the poorest of the poor continue to be by passed. Further, it is also observed that the resolutions of the Gram Sabha are always influenced by political pressures. A lack of interest on the part of the officials in conducting proceedings of the Gram Sabha, has also been noticed, often. The absence of women folk in the meetings of Gram Sabha has become a common feature. The participation of people belonging to weaker sections is also minimal. Besides, a number of studies conducted on the functioning of Gram Sabha have shown that there is a gradual decrease in people's participation in the Gram Sabha meetings. These studies have attributed the ineffective functioning of Gram Sabha to

1. Lack of awareness among rural people about the functioning of Gram Sabha.
2. Dominance of Sarpanches and Government officials.
3. Absence of proper understanding between the members of Village Panchayat and Gram Sabha.
4. Interference by the politicians

Thus the entire exercise to empower Gram Sabha becomes formal and incapable of yielding the expected results.

How to strengthen the 'Gram Sabha' :

Despite the various above mentioned limitations, the enactment has opened new vistas for the exercise of direct democracy by rural people. Therefore in order

to revitalize grassroots democracy the Gram Sabha was to be

1. Recognized as the heart and soul of Panchayati Raj system.
2. Developed as an institution where common people can get an opportunity to participate, plan and implement their basic needs.
3. Encouraged to exercise its authority for taking up any development programme at the village level.
4. Allowed to evoke its own procedures within the legal limits for conducting its business.
5. Motivated to absorb the philosophy of grassroots democracy.
6. Enlightened as to its role and responsibility to improve awareness among its members about its functioning and relationship with the Gram Panchayat and officials with whom it had to interact.
7. Participation of Women, SC and ST members in the Gram Sabha should be made mandatory with suitable provision for their presence in the quorum of Gram Sabha meetings.
8. Requisite information about programmes and people's rights, powers and responsibilities to the village community should be provided to the Gram Sabha. The people should be encouraged to attend and participate in the meetings.

These measures are suggestive. The government can make its functioning effective by using its extensive public relations machinery. To enhance awareness among the rural people about the method, functioning and the central role of Gram Sabha in local planning, the services of NGOs, Philanthropic agencies, Educational institutions, Research organizations have to be made use of as a supplementary approach to the public relations machinery and publicity techniques of the government. Then only the legislative imperative becomes a reality. Otherwise the ideas of real democracy remain on paper and will be confined merely to academic discussion.

Gram Sabha and Human Rights

In the contemporary international scene, the nation-state system, through its welfare and developmental activities made the government, an institution terrorizing people and making people enslaved to the government. Hence people are in search of an appropriate organization to safeguard themselves from the tyranny of the state and to resist the aggression of the state over the people. Moreover, the market forces along with Global Financial Institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO are exerting their pressure

over the State to regulate the governmental institutions to the advantage of the market and Global economy. As a result, the society has been compelled to behave and perform as per the directions of the government and market forces. In view of this, the democratic institutions in India are severely crippled in protecting the rights and liberties of the people. Against this context, the grassroot institution i.e. Gram Sabha has acquired importance in the orbit of governance, with the recognition of the Constitution. The new institution has an objective of deepening of democracy by involving people in the development process of the society. That people can directly participate is one of the major strengths of these institutions. A genuine diffusion of powers to these institutions can automatically provide a built-in-check to the tyrannical power of the state. Lack of serious efforts to strengthen these institutions, will only indicate that the experiment lacks democratic commitment. A vibrant Gram Sabha can not only fortify democratic culture but promote human rights and provide a fuller content to their meaning and also practice. In the structure of Panchayati Raj system, Gram Sabha is at the lowest rung of the ladder but it has got much scope for controlling over the entire polity, as it is a body of all responsible citizens, whose names are in the voters list.

Further, Gram Sabha is also helpful in bringing the economic activities to the grassroots level for development and administering social justice. As Kofi Annan, the present Secretary-General of the United Nations aptly felt "Poverty is the mother of all human rights violations". According to him poverty is incompatible with human dignity. Illiteracy, backwardness and exploitation of women and children are among the grave challenges before human kind in the 21st century. It is therefore necessary to devise adequate and appropriate mechanisms at the local level to ameliorate the masses from their economic backwardness and to promote awareness of human rights through Gram Sabha.

It is now being increasingly realized that NGO's, Civil Society Institutions, mass media and educational institutions will have to play a major role in educating the masses on Human Rights and Human Development. Thus Gram Sabha could be utilized as a forum where the intelligentsia, NGOs and the teachers can enlighten or sensitize the people about human rights.

Conclusion

As Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the American Constitution observed. "A local government is slow to move but once in motion, its momentum becomes irresistible." Thus if Gram Sabhas

are also activated through all these efforts, their momentum also becomes irresistible by any tyrannical force in instilling human rights culture in the Indian society.

SOCRATES

- Sri C. Sivasankaram

East and West are of equal importance to the Sun. He is praised and cited as the symbol of equality and an example of universal Love and Care. The stupid man blindly draws lines of demarcation between one Country and another. A spiritual dispassionate survey of the World reveals before us a single one World fundamentally coherent in spirit and taste : different and disparate in appearance.

The philosopher is wisdom's synonym endowed with hoary head associated with perfect sense that humanity as a whole belongs to a single parentage. Philosopher acquires irrevocable faith that in the creation of God there exists harmony, unity, common anchorage and common mooring. The need of the philosopher and his teachings arises when anarchy, animal instincts and Asuric Rivalries raise their ugly head. Philosopher's watchwords are : Patience, tolerance and acceptance.

We are dealing with a World famous subject known as Socrates. He was the lively component of all the ingredients said to be belonging to an accomplished philosopher. Socrates was an Athenian who flourished between 470 and 399 B.C; at about the age of 70 he was condemned to death.

The Delphic oracle had once told Socrates that he was the wisest man in Greece. Socrates was essentially a man of religion with mystic feelings. It was his inalienable habit to pay visit to the temple of Goddess Bendis, the Thracian Artemis. Days were when he was an advocate of reason; reason that stood the scrutiny of his innervoice. Mahatma Gandhi was known to have heeded the dictates of his innervoice. It might be, perhaps, the innervoice or the whisper of a ripened over-mind transcending earthly limits, living in the calm of its own formless World surrounded by none but the atmosphere divinised by solemn and sublime unclassified thought-current anchored to impersonal God - Aniketan that guided him. Reason has reason to be aesthetic, to be poetic lest life should become one dawnless weary darkness. Man's destiny leads to the romantic lands where higher truths and values romance in unison to bring forth the reality that the ultimate end of life is absorption in Brahman. Religion wins where reason fails. Because it has within it all that make man not

dissimilar to God. It is competent enough to quench the thirst of man to lead life of Bliss infinite. The Bliss then is impersonal, total and undefinable. To Such an end man yearned, longed, suffered from dateless ages.

Swami Vivekananda says, I remember a story told by Prof. Max Miller in one of his books, an old Greek story, of how a Brahmin visited Socrates in Athens. The Brahmin asked - 'What is the highest knowledge?' And Socrates answered, "To know man is the end and aim of the knowledge". "But how can you know man without knowing God" replied the Brahmin. Herein lies the crux of human misery endlessly corroding the paths of peace, blocking the roads of reasonable living, allowing no waves of joy and breeze of unadulterated complacency. Man is not inferior to God. He has all that God possesses as he is His son, His friend, His playmate. God himself incarnates off and on as man, vexed as he was with the monotony of pleasure-filled life in Vaikunta. The Western Socrates, wise as he was to the extent the occasion required accepted man as the object of knowledge.

The Brahmin, times without number sings that man is the temple of God. His soul is Sanatana. The temple sheds the light of the inner dweller. Both are one in separate 'appearances'. God recognised man as his own, eligible for a seat besides His. Sparta or Athens was for a few centuries the city of Destiny the ideal of man, it was the cynosure of all eyes interested in philosophy. The learned Brahmin of the East was by birth and nature unsatiated learner and student induced to visit Athens.

Socrates, though considered the greatest of Greece of his times left behind no writing or a doctrine. There was Socratic way of life. There exists no authentic biography of the philosopher. He is the principal character in the Republic of Plato. It was Socrates as the hero of the Republic who proposed that; until philosophers are kings, or the princes of the World have the spirit and power of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, cities will never have rest from their evils.

Socrates was the father of Quiz. He corresponded with Jaimini, the author of Bharatam. He used the art of debate very fruitfully for the purpose of eliciting truth. His way of quest and investigation had no precedent. He had undisputed right to claim as the precursor of the age pregnant with a new age of perennial philosophy. The sum total of Socrates' unwearied emphasis on philosophy as the spring-board to kingdom of God could evoke reciprocative prayer for the elimination of crude sectarian attitude in men of thinking all over the World. Socrates believed in the existence

of a city of God wherein his soul seeks refuge at the time of its escape from the body. While alive and still on the earth he lived cozily, confidently in the bosom of the Being. The body failed to hold sway over him as his ever vigilant inner-voice kept cautioning him that he was soul but not body. Duality of the World, multitudinous of the material dream-World gradually shrivelled and left Socrates as Dwandwateeta and Vimatsara of the Gita. Socrates was brutally frank in speech that they relished like out-bursts. He said, in politics the honest politician could not progress long and the honest politician failed to thrive in the field bids good-bye to politics. He was advised by his friends to resort to means like bringing his family including wife and children to crave for mercy of the Jury that it might commute the death sentence. He refused to follow the odd advice on the grounds that it would paint him and the city court ridiculous. His aim had been to convince the court that it transgressed the path of justice and prudence but not to seek mercy of the court. Death was dreamless deep sleep only or the soul must take to another world, where he could get the opportunity of exchanging views dearer to his with those who had already occupied the other World. The time for execution of the death sentence was nearing : he said serenely with utter mastery over senses "I am going to Death you are remaining".

Socrates rarely drank, if drank he drank too much. Even then there were no symptoms of drunkenness. He dressed in shabby old dresses like the Shirdi Sai Baba. No footwear. Dressed inadequately, feet without footwear he remained intact for over 24 hours in the hills of Greece while in Army service. Regarding his attitude towards woman : In the presence of women he remained unaffected. Rama Krishna Paramahansa was his nineteenth century counterpart. He was yogi to the core. He was perfectly platonic in love. He said the idea that emanated from within in the moment of mind merged with self was noble. He said the soul that lost in self leaves the body and mind and remains in its own state of inaction.

Socrates was a middle class man of meagre means. He spent much of his time in disputation and questioning those deemed knowledgeable in season and out of reason. If no answer was to be forthcoming from the questioned or the person to whom the question was put Socrates himself gave answers. Socrates according to one of his greatest disciples xenophon was eminently pious and had a thoroughly wholesome effect upon men who came under his direct influence. Plato the 2nd of the two pupils of Socrates was the greatest gift that Socrates gave the World. Socrates taught freely unlike the sophists. In rebutting the charges against him and

BOOK REVIEW

FIFTY YEARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA : The Role of the University Grants Commission DR. AMRIK SINGH Sage Publications 2004 pp 257 Price : 560

At a time when the future of higher education appears uncertain with both the union and state governments adopting a lackadaisical approach towards college and university education, the arrival of the book on higher education with special focus on the UGC by one of India's renowned scholars and an outstanding authority should be welcomed as timely and relevant. Few scholars have written and spoken with such profundity and clarity on the subject for so many years as Dr. Amrik Singh. He is profound without being pedantic. His style of writing is simple and elegant and command over the subject masterly. That is why his latest book on higher education is eminently readable and highly useful to the policy makers and educational administrators (if they have time for such good things) and to those engaged in teaching and research in colleges and universities.

Quite appropriately the author dedicates the book to the memory of UGC's first chairman Dr C.D. Deshmukh who launched the UGC "with an exceptional sense of values and commitment." The origin and growth of the UGC and other professional bodies in independent India and the status accorded to higher education in the Constitution and in policy making are dealt with in the early chapters. The problems afflicting the UGC and the field of higher education are lucidly discussed in the chapters that follow. Whether it is the government or the professional body or the teacher there is no mincing of words and Dr. Amrik Singh not only exposes the flaws and anomalies but also offers meaningful suggestions for their rectification. "Under-performance in the government," he writes, "can be lived with. But underperformance in the field of education ends up destroying or almost so, the future of coming generations. Other kinds of dangers can be rectified within a year or two. In the case of education the damage is virtually permanent and what is more, slow-acting and invidious in character." Writing on the AICTE he points out how "it has not been able to develop a stable tradition of autonomous functioning."

The chapter on the role of the teacher is both interesting and instructive. Dr. Singh wants teacher leadership style to change 'both its mode of thinking and its style of functioning.' There are eight million witnesses (students) to their functioning, he warns. The sage (appropriately SAGE is the publisher) of higher education pleads for a healthy public discourse involving the teachers, students, and educational administrators, instead of allowing matters to be decided by outsiders. Amrik Singh's book must be read and discussed by teachers and students and the sooner it is done the better it will be for all of us.

- A. Prasanna Kumar

the death penalty pronounced on him by the City Court Socrates said the eloquence of which he was capable was that of truth. Once Socrates went to a poet to explain certain Stanzas in his poems, but he was unable to do so. "Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration". Socrates said "O men, he is the wisest, who like Socrates, knows that his wisdom was in truth worth nothing". He said that no honest man in politics lives long. It is remarkable and worth remembering of what Socrates said to the Jury. "If you think that by killing men you can prevent some-one from censuring your evil lives you are mistaken"; That is the way of escape which is either possible or honourable. "The easiest and noblest way is not to be disabling others, but to be improving yourselves". To the court he dispassionally said, "The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways - I to death and you to live - which is better, God alone knows !" Socrates was not unoften liable to Cataleptic trances. Sri Ramakrishna was well-known for trance-Samadhi. One morning Socrates was thinking about something which he could not resolve; There he stood deep down in thought until the dawn of the next day; and with the return of the light he offered up prayers to the sun and went his way. He was indifferent to heat and cold, hunger and thirst. This amazed every one. His endurance was simply marvellous, his fortitude in enduring cold was also surprising. His mastery over all bodily passions was a thing of bewilderment. He was the perfect orphic saint; in the dualism of heavenly soul and earthly body, he had convincing proof of achievement of mastery of soul over the body. He was not an orthodox orphic; he did not accept superstition, ceremonies of purification. Socrates gave the western man the assurance that he has a soul something which is the seat of normal waking intelligence and moral character and that it is the most important thing about-man and he must make most of it.

Socrates maintains that no man sins wittingly and therefore only knowledge is needed to make all men perfectly virtuous. The close connection between virtue and knowledge was characteristic of Socrates. The Delphic oracle had once told Socrates that he was the wisest man in Greece. Dialectic form of approach began with him. His broad-religiosity and profound insight and intuitivity are exemplary, neither time nor man's incongruous lack of due respect for past could mar the memory of Socrates and his lasting way of life. Jesus Christ, Christian friars and above all Mahatma Gandhi remain as the ageless holy Ghosts of Socrates perpetually felt by men of philosophical triat and ascetical disposition all over the World.

HOMAGE TO THE MEMORY OF VEERESALINGAM AND AMBEDKAR

In April we celebrate the birth anniversaries of two great emancipators of modern times, Kandukuri Veeresalingam and B.R. Ambedkar. They fought social injustice and exploitation with extraordinary courage and unflagging commitment in the midst of most adverse conditions. The noble movement they started remains unfinished despite decades of selfless work and long struggle by their followers everywhere. The best tribute to their memory is to pursue the goals set by them for India's social reconstruction.

- The Editor

"I say that whenever there has been a conflict between my personal interests and the interests of the country as a whole, I have always placed the claims of the country above my personal claims". - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

"I am convinced that given time and circumstances, nothing in the world will prevent this country from becoming one, and with all our castes and creeds I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we shall in some form be a united people" - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

"According to Dr. Ambedkar, social stability and progress depended on 'equity' and 'fluidity' among the various strata of the society. To him, stability was needed but not at the cost of change which was imperative, adjustment is required, but not at the sacrifice of social justice".

- Dr. C. Rangarajan, Former Governor of Andhra Pradesh

"I have come to believe firmly in the maxim that without spiritual reform, it would be impossible to make a success of social reform, or any other reform for that matter" - Veeresalingam

"Veeresalingam's three objects to be realised for the city of Rajahmundry if not by him, by his friends were : (1) The establishment in Rajahmundry of a well-equipped library in the name of the classical Telugu poet, Nannaya Bhattu; (2) The completion of his work on the lives of the poets; and (3) The preparation of a comprehensive grammar of the Telugu language."

Dr. D. Anjaneyulu
in "KANDUKURI VEERESALINGAM", publications
division, New Delhi, 1976.

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