

BULLETIN

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(GAYATRI VIDYA PARISHAD)

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN?

Exactly a year ago we were celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of our Independence lavishing praise on the resilience of the world's largest democracy. 'Rising India' appeared well set to emerge as a leading global role player in the new century with its polity being stable and economy buoyant. Destiny, at last, seemed to have beckoned India to take the top seat on the world stage.

Pity indeed that in less than twelve months all that euphoria has vanished into thin air. Hope has given way to gloom and despair. A stagnant economy afflicted with rising inflation and declining industrial growth is a matter for serious concern. India cannot progress if one third of her people continue to live below the poverty line. The rich and affluent middle class may have become more prosperous but the poor are getting poorer. Terrorist attacks, sponsored by forces getting increasingly stronger in neighbouring countries and backed by anti-national elements within, continue to endanger the lives of the people all over the country.

The most disheartening aspect of the situation is the steep decline of moral values in our system of governance. The manner in which parties and leaders are shifting political gears for personal advantage and political mileage raises serious doubts about the efficacy of the system of government under which we are living. It can't get any worse, is the refrain, heard everywhere. Parliament of India, the highest representative body, became the center of national attention and controversy for the manner in which a no-trust motion was tabled in the Lok Sabha against the ruling UPA Government and the methods adopted by the ruling outfit to wriggle out of the crisis to survive in power.

People seemed to have forgotten the two hundred

year old maxim that the role of the opposition was 'to oppose every thing, propose nothing and defeat the government' till the opposition parties in India came together to attempt to dislodge the coalition outfit ten months before its five year term ended. People also felt shocked to hear the charges leveled against the ruling outfit to survive in power by hook or by crook, as the saying goes. It was a no holds barred open fight between rival groups and leaders to prove their point and show their strength and in the process no actor in the sordid high voltage drama appeared straight or honest. The last straw on the camel's worn out neck was the appearance of bundles of currency in the great chamber of Indian democracy, the Lok Sabha! Yes, it was a sad day for India and a forgettable episode in the sixty one year history of Indian democracy. But then should we always leaf through the dark pages of history for some lessons to be learnt? Or at least try to rewrite the pages of history not with ink or the clicks of the mouse only but by means of a new vision and determination to pull India out of the present chaos and chart out a refreshingly new path for the future?

Such episodes and experiences do convey a message. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Amidst the dust and din, or perhaps, the heat and hype raised by the fierce and venomous and, at times even humorous oratory heard and seen live over the small screen by about a billion people (even if most of them did not understand what it was all about) there appeared a glimmer of hope. Some decent young voices were heard speaking about values, consensus and future of the country. Possibly some hope of better days in the future. Does not the darkest hour precede the dawn?

- The Editor

"Democracy requires many virtues - ability, devotion to duty, cooperation, self-discipline and self-restraint." - Jawaharlal Nehru

Excerpts from **STIRRING SPEECHES**
ON A HISTORIC OCCASION

Constituent Assembly
(August, 1947)

S. RADHAKRISHNAN

(This speech has an interesting, if little known, origin. Nehru had requested Radhakrishnan to speak after him on the night of August 14th at the Indian Constituent Assembly. With the request came a directive. Nehru told Radhakrishnan once he was called upon to speak, he should continue till midnight so that the assembly could then proceed to take the pledge. Thus Radhakrishnan was part of what his biographer called 'an oratorical time-bound relay race'. Radhakrishnan ended precisely at the appointed minute to enable Nehru to administer the pledge. The historian S. Gopal, who wrote biographies of both Nehru and Radhakrishnan, described the performance as 'an unparalleled combination of two masters, in very different ways, of the public art.') (from *Great Speeches of Modern India* by R. Mukherjee).

You, Mr. President, referred to the sadness in our hearts, to the sorrow which also clouds our rejoicings. May I say that we are in an essential sense responsible for it also though not entirely. From 1600, Englishmen have come to this country—priests and nuns, merchants and adventurers, diplomats and statesmen, missionaries and idealists. They bought and sold, marched and fought, plotted and profited, helped and healed. The greatest among them wished to modernize the country, to raise its intellectual and moral standards, its political status. They wished to regenerate the whole people. But the small among them worked with sinister objective. They tried to increase the disunion in the country, made the country poorer, weaker and more disunited. They also have had their chance now. The freedom we are attaining is the fulfillment of this dual tendency among British administrators. While India is attaining freedom, she is attaining it in a manner which does not produce joy in the hearts of people or a radiant smile of their faces. Some of those who were charged with the responsibility for the administration of this country, tried to accentuate communal consciousness and bring about the present result which is a logical outcome of the policies adopted by the lesser minds of Britain.

But I would never blame them. Were we not victims, ready victims, so to say, of the separatist tendencies foisted on us? Should we not now correct our national faults of character, our domestic despotism, our intolerance which has assumed the different forms of obscurantism of narrow-mindedness, of superstitious bigotry? Others were able to play on our weakness because we had them. I would like therefore to take this opportunity to call for self-examination, for a searching of hearts. We have gained but we have not gained in the manner we wished to gain and if we have, not done so, the responsibility is our own.

And when this pledge says that we have to serve our country, we can best serve our country by removing these fundamental defects which have prevented us from gaining the objective of a free and united India. Now that India is divided, it is our duty not to indulge in words of anger. They lead us nowhere. We must avoid passion, and wisdom never go together. The body politic may be divided but the body historic lives on. (Hear, hear.) Political divisions, physical partitions, are external but the psychological divisions are deeper. The cultural cleavages are the more dangerous. We should not allow them to grow. What we should do is to preserve those cultural ties, those spiritual bonds which knit our peoples together into an organic whole. Patient consideration, slow process of education, adjustment to one another's needs, the discovery of points of view which are common to both the dominions in the matter of Communications, Defence, Foreign Affairs, these are the things which should be allowed to grow in the daily business of life and administration. It is by developing such attitudes that we can once again draw near and gain the lost unity of this country. That is the only way to it. Our opportunities are great but let me warn you that when power outstrips ability, we will fall on evil days. We should develop competence and ability which would help us to utilize the opportunities which are now open to us. From tomorrow morning—from midnight today — we cannot throw the blame on the Britisher. We have to assume the responsibility ourselves for what we do. A free India will be judged by the way in which it will serve the interests of the common man in the matter of food, clothing, shelter and the social services. Unless we destroy corruption in high places, root out every trace of nepotism, love of

power, profiteering and blackmarketing which have spoiled the good name of this great country in recent times, we will not be able to raise the standards of efficiency in administration as well as in the production and distribution of the necessary goods of life.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the great contribution which this country will make to the promotion of world peace and the welfare at mankind. The – chakra, the Asokan wheel, which is there in the flag embodies for us a great idea, Asoka, the greatest of our emperors, look at the words of H.G.Wells regarding him ‘Highnesses, Magnificences, Excellencies, Serenities, Majesties – among them all, he shines alone a star Asoka the greatest of all monarchs.’ He cut into rock his message for the healing of discords. If there are differences, the way in which you can solve them is by promoting concord. Concord is the only way by which we can get rid of differences. There is no other method which is open to us. We are lucky in having for our leader one who is a world citizen, who is essentially a humanist, who possesses a buoyant optimism and robust good sense in spite of the perversity of things and the hostility of human affairs. We see the way in which his Department interfered actively and in a timely manner in the Indonesian dispute. (Loud applause.) It shows that if India gains freedom, that freedom will be used not merely for the well-being of India but for Vishva Kalyana, i.e., world peace, the welfare of mankind. Our pledge tells us that this ancient land shall attain her rightful and honoured place. We take pride in the antiquity of this land for it is a land which has been nearly four or five millenniums of history. It has passed through many vicissitudes and at the moment it stands, still responding to the thrill of the same great ideal. Civilization is a thing of the spirit, it is not something external, solid and mechanical. It is the dream in the people’s hearts. It is the inward aspiration of the people’s souls. It is the imaginative interpretation of the human life and the perception of the mystery of human existence. That is what civilization actually stands for. We should bear in mind these great ideals which have been transmitted to us across the ages. In this great time of our history we should bear ourselves humbly before God, brace ourselves to this supreme task which is confronting us and conduct ourselves in a manner that is worthy of the ageless spirit of India. If we do so, I have no doubt that, the future of this land will be as great as its once glorious past.

Sarvabhutadisahamatmanam
Sarvabhutani catmani
Sampasyam atmajivai
Saarwjyam adhigachati

Swarajya is the development of that kind of tolerant attitude which sees in brother man the face Divine. Intolerance has been the greatest enemy of our progress. Tolerance of one another’s views, thoughts and beliefs is the only remedy that we can possibly adopt. Therefore I support with very great pleasure this Resolution which asks us as the representatives of the people of India to conduct ourselves in all humility in the service of our country and the word ‘Humility’ here means that we are by ourselves very Insignificant. Our efforts by themselves cannot carry us to a long distance. We should make ourselves dependent on that other than ourselves which makes for righteousness. The note of humility means the unimportance, of the individual and the supreme importance of the unfolding purpose which we are called upon to serve. So in a mood of humility, in a spirit of dedication let us take this pledge as noon as the clock strikes twelve.

B.R. AMBEDKAR

(on Freedom and Responsibility)

“ Independence is no doubt a matter of joy. But let us not forget this independence has thrown on us great responsibilities. By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame but ourselves.”

RAJENDRA PRASAD

Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, in his speech before putting the motion to pass the Constitution, paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and said “I shall only hope that all those whose good fortune it may be to work this Constitution in future, will remember that it was a unique victory which we achieved us to preserve and protect the Independence that we have won and to make it really bear fruit for the man in the street. Let us launch on this new enterprise of running our Independent Republic with confidence, with truth and non-violence and above all, with heart within and God above”. He called upon the people not to forget Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings.

WORLD DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS-3

- Prof. M.N. Sastri

*Gender Imbalance
When a son is born
Let him sleep on the bed.
Clothe him with fine clothes,
And give him jade to play....
When a daughter is born,
Let her sleep on the ground,
Wrap her in common wrappings,
And give broken tiles to play.*

Chinese "Book of Songs" (1000-700BC)

Sex ratio is the ratio of males to females to males in a population. In humans the sex ratio at birth is commonly assumed to be 105 boys to 100 girls. Gender imbalance (deviation in the sex ratio) is a demographic effect that may arise as a consequence of warfare (excess of females), large scale immigrations of male labourers unable to bring their females with them (e.g. Gulf countries) or sex selective abortions and infanticide. International efforts to mobilize the world to implement family programmes to control world population growth have been leading to disturbing imbalances in sex ratios. This imbalance is assuming dangerous proportions in the Asian countries laying bare the old bias for boys, with the girls being seen as economic and social burden. A son is seen as a deposit in the bank while daughters that leave their family home at marriage and go to live with their in-laws, are considered an investment without financial return. With the availability of modern technology such as ultrasound, amniocentesis (analysis of uterine fluid) and sex-selective abortions, the problem is becoming acute in China, the Indian sub-continent and other Asian countries. China is reported to have a girl/boy ratio of 944/1000, India 933/1000, Pakistan 938/1000, and Bangladesh 953/1000. The UN Population Fund states, "If a woman has given birth to several girls, she is more likely to abort subsequent pregnancies until she conceives a boy." Prenatal sex determination is banned in all countries but the regulation is invariably flouted in developing countries that show bias for boys. Female infanticide is also resorted to by poor families. According to a recent study there are 2.1 billion men against 1.9 billion women across Asia (i.e. 1100 men to 1000 women). By 2050 the number of men outweighing that of women in India is projected to be 33 million while the number in China is projected to be 25 million even if

the current rate of gender imbalance declined. There is a similar trend in South Korea, Taiwan, Nepal and Vietnam also. In contrast the girl/boy ratios in the industrialized countries of Japan, US, and Russia are 1041/1000, 1029/1000, and 1140/1000 respectively.

In the early eighties China began enforcing its ambitious one-child norm to control its population growth. As a result Chinese parents often ensured that their only permitted child is a boy. Years of population engineering including sex selective abortions and virtual extermination of surplus baby girls both in poor and rich families created a nightmarish imbalance in China's male and female population. With a national average of 119 boys for 100 girls, there were 163.5 boys for every 100 girls aged up to four in the eastern city of Liyanyungang. A study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences concluded, "The imbalance is so distributed that there are 11 million men in China who will not be able to find brides." As a result, kidnappings and slave trading of women have been on the rise. The problem is so acute that slave trader gangs are active abducting women from North Vietnam to feed the demand in China. The dramatic fall in fertility combined with the surplus of boys and the looming rise in ageing population (see later article) has forced the Chinese Government to modify its controversial one-child policy. In addition to taking steps to strictly enforce the ban on prenatal sex determination and sex-selective abortions, programmes have been launched in some provinces to provide benefits such as pension to couples limiting themselves to two girls and free educational facilities to girls. The UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reports systematic gender discrimination in India too where there are 933 women for every 1000 men. The birth of a girl child signals the beginning of financial hardships for many families in the Indian society. With the easy availability, even in the villages, of ultrasound scanners and sex-selective abortions. Facilities at affordable Cost people are taking recourse to sex selective abortions. The UNICEF says the catch line is "Spend 600 rupees now and save 50,000 rupees later!" Even urbanites with higher educational background are increasingly resorting to these methods to avoid the birth of girls. The poor families also resort to female infanticide. More than 11 million Indian babies, many of them unwanted girls, live on the streets or lie abandoned in dirty children homes. Around five babies dumped every week in a well-known Delhi orphanage.

As many as fifty percent of these babies go to families in Britain, US, Spain and Denmark. British couples are being urged by the Government of help save these Indian baby girls from lives of abuse and misery through adoption (Daily Mail, London- April 9, 2007). The gender imbalance is most acute in the northern states with Chandigarh, Punjab, Haryana, New Delhi, UP and Gujarat reporting 773, 798, 861, 821, 898 and 898 respectively of adult girl population against 1000 adult boys. A recent study states that Maharashtra also is following this trend with urban areas reporting 908 and rural areas 916 girls for 1000 boys. The consequential female spousal shortages are forcing bachelors from these areas to look for brides in other states. For instance a number of Haryana bachelors have gone deep south as far as Kerala to pick up brides! The Government of India and the state governments have initiated steps to encourage the girl children through providing free education and facilities. Much more needs to be done for saving the girl child. Demographers warn that rising deficiencies of adult girls would affect the stability of the entire marriage system and lead to social unrest with men growing violent against women.

TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

- Dr. R V Vaidyanatha Ayyar

[IAS (Retd.), Former Secretary to Govt. of India]

Visiting Professor, Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

It was a brief visit, as most official visits are, just three nights in Moscow & two in St. Petersburg. Though brief the visit left a lasting impression on me. It was an encounter of sorts between Russia of the mind and Russia as it is. I stayed in the Pharonic Hotel Rossija, the next best thing to staying in the Kremlin itself. It was as if the St. Vasily Cathedral, the Spaasky Tower, the Clock Tower and the Presidential Palace were all part of my suite, separated only by a glass curtain. My morning walks were a circumambulation of the Kremlin - past the Red Square to the Kutafya tower, the visitor's entrance to the Kremlin, across the Manezhnaya Place, Marshal Zhukhov's Statue, the Memorial of the Unknown Soldier, and Sad Aleksandrovsky. As I walked before dawn, I did not run into Stalin's ghost but I could hear his hoarse laughter, amused that his prophecy has come true, though belatedly. Khrushchev had recorded that Stalin told him and other members of his inner circle that once he was gone the capitalist world would wring their necks. The play of light and shadow on the Red Square before dawn

captured the vicissitudes of history. The Lenin's tomb was closed. Now closure seems to be a normal state of the tomb as it is open only for a limited period thrice a week. The tomb was in a shade. The busts of the Greats of the Soviet era, lined up behind the Lenin's tomb and above their graves, were lost in darkness. Right opposite, across the vast square, the many many display windows of a departmental store were brightly lit, each housing the ads and products of international brands of scents, perfumes and garments. The radiant symbols of triumphant global capitalism were mocking at the fallen idols of a failed Utopia, cast away in the unlit ash-heap of history. I came to know that the departmental store was Gum, which used to be the epitome of Soviet shopping with empty stores, morose clerks and long queues. It is now transformed into a zillion-dollar shopping market with expensive boutiques and shopping malls, de rigueur for foreign tourists. One evening we were taken around a conducted tour of Kremlin; on the Red Square the guide showed us the Place of Skulls near the Cathedral of Vasily, where Ivan the Terrible put to death hundreds of boyars and where Peter the Great executed a couple of thousand of rebellious Streltsy corps who joined his sister Sophya in her bid for power. As I looked at the Place of Skulls I was reminded of the growth industry that Stalin Phenomenon is, and of one of the theories that Stalin was the Peter the Great of 20th Century. It seemed that the uniqueness of the Terror lay not so much in its violence and cruelty as in its scale, and that the dictum of Marx that after a point quantity becomes quality was vindicated.

Another aspect of the Czarist tradition is belief in the creed that Big is Better and here also Stalin abided by the tradition of Russian rulers. The Seven Stalin Gothics, like the Czarist cathedrals and palaces, are a standing testimony to the will to power, the will to grandeur. I was informed that one of the Seven, a hotel now, was an architectural aberration. Two designs were put up to Stalin for approval and he approved both. Afraid to ask him which one he approved the architect built both cheek by jowl. But the cheek does not fit the jowl. The legacy of Big is Better survives Stalin. On our way to Sergeyev Posad, we drove past the monument to Soviet space flight, a 100-meter high titanium obelisk crowned by a rocket. It is the largest piece of titanium ever fabricated, a metallurgical marvel of which I first heard from Sri B.K. Rao, a senior colleague who after

retirement was associated with titanium fabrication. Or to take another example, the statue of Peter the Great, which we passed by again and again during our stay in Moscow. It is a recent creation by the architect Zarul Tsenetelli and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Like it or not, this 60 meter statue looms over the Moskva river. I was told that eager to leave their mark on Moscow the duo has many more enormous projects in mind. In Russia one cannot help come across the Matrushka doll, the most popular souvenir item. At a souvenir shop at Pushkin, formerly Tsarskoye Selo, near St. Petersburg, one Matrushka doll struck me by its novelty. Putin's image was painted on that. To heighten my interest the shopkeeper began to open the doll and show me the dolls within. Within the Putin doll was a Yeltsin doll within which was a Gorbachev doll within which was a Brezhnev doll and within which was the last doll, the Stalin doll. Had there been a larger Putin doll I might have noticed a Peter doll within the Stalin doll and within that an Ivan doll. There was a Clinton doll nearby. However, I did not wish to be distracted from my Russian musings and did not explore the innards of this doll. Putin himself seems to be an incarnation of the archetypal Russian ruler. In spite of the Kursk incident, Putin seems to enjoy a high popularity rating, as he is perceived to be a strong ruler desirous of restoring order and believing in Russia and its bright future. He has created history of sorts by entering Kremlin through the Spaasky Tower – the last one to do so was Stalin. Putin though, has not yet taken to living in the Kremlin like Stalin. For all the yearning for order, at least the young seem to have no nostalgia for the old order. I had an interesting conversation with Bairav, the young interpreter of our Consulate in St. Petersburg, who speaks English with an American accent. His face with a thin, sparse goatee was that of an idealistic intellectual. His father is from Buratiya, the region adjoining Lake Baikal in Siberia. In St. Petersburg his father meets his future wife, a Russian. Though Bairav's father is a shamanist Bairav was baptized in the Orthodox Church. I asked him whether because of the troubled decade of 1990s he was nostalgic. Not at all, was his reply; there is more choice and freedom now, which he would not give up. Bairav has every reason to be bitter with Stalin, for three of his grandfathers, disappeared during the Terror, for no particular reason except that in the backward region of Buratiya they were rather well educated. Nor does Natasha, a young Russian, who works at the Jawaharlal Nehru Culture Center, Moscow,

have any nostalgia. May be there is a generation gap which perhaps explains why there are so communist deputies in the Parliament. The sex ratio of 1128 women for thousand men should have delighted feminists of the world. But the reality is different. After the Fall, mortality rates have increased and Death prefers men. It is said jocularly that going by the trend of increased mortality rate, the State need no longer pay pensions to men.

The hammer and sickle looms large in the gilded panel at the top of the façade of the Bolshoi and in the two panels near the special boxes on either side of the stage. A plaque commemorates the CCCP near the main entrance. The huge curtain on the stage is a collage of hammers and sickles. Spartacus is still performed; a repeat of the 1958 production revised in the 1960s. Since it is a Soviet-era production I presume it conforms to the strict canons of socialist realism. Spartacus was typical of the Soviet period art, a morality play depicting the struggle between the good and the evil. The slaves lose not in a fair and just struggle but due to the machinations of courtesans in the pay of the slave-owners. The play ended with a surfeit of pathos. But even in the midst of tragedy hope is not lost. Triumph of the Cause is inevitable. All Soviet science, art and literature are didactic. Nothing can be an exception, not even a science textbook or a tourist guidebook. As a student, four decades ago, I used to buy low-priced Soviet textbooks on Science. Good value for money but two recurring themes used to puzzle me. First, the attribution of discoveries, famous as well as not-so-famous, to unheard-of Russians. Secondly, at places one least expected, one stumbled upon Marxist philosophical pronouncements. Now to turn to a tourist guide of the Soviet period, In St. Petersburg I ran into into an old acquaintance, Revathi Narayanan. Her guide in Moscow presented her an old Soviet period guidebook on Leningrad. In the section on Dostoevsky's house the narrative harped on his poverty. How else to claim the writer for the proletariat? A diplomat had a snide comment to make on that portrayal of Dostoevsky. In spite of his much-vaunted poverty he travelled to the best places in Europe and his impecuniosity was more due to his inveterate gambling than to objective conditions.

St. Petersburg was as different from Moscow, as cheese from chalk. It is a seaport, cosmopolitan and not

heartland as Moscow is. My staying in Hotel Grand Europa made quite a difference. The hotel could have been anywhere in the world, New York, Paris or Bangkok. It did not have the unique flavor of Hotel Rossija. The guests at the reception held by the Consul General were very different from those in Moscow. They would have been at home anywhere in Europe. The director of Hermitage, Professor Mikhail Piotrovski, for example, was dressed like men of his class in say Paris, and spoke English with a clipped British accent. The guests in Moscow were mostly professional Indophiles ruing the changes that have taken place in Russia and India, regretting that their studies no longer receive the patronage they used to in the Soviet period, and also regretting that their old collaborators in India were no longer patronized by the Indian establishment. The buildings in St. Petersburg have a European flavor and with a coat of paint could have been on the Seine. Like Calcutta, the city grudges that it is no longer the capital and that it does not receive the attention it was used to or deserves. The Hermitage is Louvre located on the Gulf of Finland. The grand palaces at Pushkin and Peterhof remind one of Versailles. The lavish use of gold foil to embellish the massive halls of the palace is a testimony of the yearning of the Czars and Czarinas to surpass their compeers in Europe through barbaric splendor. As in the West Faith in St. Petersburg seems to be subdued. The Church of our Savior on the Blood and the St. Isaac's Cathedral are still museums as in the Soviet era with the difference that service is now held occasionally. As in a cosmopolitan city one comes across a multitude of religions. I was told that there was a smattering of Russian Prajapati Brahmakumaris and followers of Shirdi Sai Baba and Bhagvan Ramana Maharishi. Most of the tourists to India from St. Petersburg are these spiritual pilgrims. There have been attempts by the Orthodox Church to rein in the Brahmakumaris by getting the registration of their faith cancelled. I asked Mr. Bairev why should Russians turn to Protestant faith. His answer was that some do not like the blind belief and ritual of the Orthodox Church. The Great Patriotic War still lives in St. Petersburg. Catherine's palace and Peterhof are being painstakingly restored to their original glory. The restoration is not yet complete. But the guides there wax eloquent on fascist barbarities and the heroic attempts on the onset of the war to move as much of the collection as possible beyond the grasp of the marauding invaders. They showed with unconcealed pride the results

of the magnificent restoration that is still under way.

With the ascendance of the native son, Putin, a former Deputy Mayor there is great expectation in St. Petersburg. In fact, with the spurt in oil prices there is overall buoyancy in the spirit throughout Russia. However, memories of the troubled transition linger and nadezha (hope) is tempered by realnosti (get real). The expression realism figured frequently in the meeting of the Joint Working Group on culture. In the Consul General's office in St. Petersburg I was shown the room where as a relatively unknown deputy Mayor of St. Petersburg Putin attended a function for the release of an embassy magazine. The photographs of Putin at that function are now a prized possession. It so happened that ten days prior to my visit to Russia I was in Turkmenistan. A new national identity is being forged, among others, through new buildings that are designed to overawe. The changing cityscape of the capital captures the march of history. I picked up a Soviet period guide book in our embassy. That book claimed that the Karl Marx Turkmen State Library is the symbol of high culture and architecture in Turkmenia, and that the Library is to Askabad what the Admiralty Spire is to Leningrad, or Eiffel Tower to Paris or the Kremlin to Moscow. But the Library no longer figures in the itinerary of distinguished visitors. What is now mandatory is a visit to the new symbols of a new nation state such as the Presidential Palace, the Hall of Renaissance, the Earthquake Memorial and the Arc of Neutrality. These symbols as well as the Library are situated on, what the guidebook described as Askabad's most beautiful square, "The main square named in honor of the founder of scientific communism, Karl Marx". But that Square no longer bears that name. The guide evocatively describes the erection of a Lenin statue, which was opened up, on the 10th anniversary of the Revolution. The statue still exists rather forgotten and forlorn. Demonstrative visits to the statue are frowned upon. The Soviet guide speaks of the speaks of the czarist troops landing in Krasnovodsk in 1869, and twelve years later at the foot of the Kopetdag mountains and founding Askabad. It also speaks of Turkmenian tribes, one after another voluntarily opting for Russian rule to escape from constant invasions and internecine strife. Not a word about the battle of Gök-Tepe in 1881, forty-five kilometers northwest of Askabad. Curzon was present at this battle, a carnage in which thousands were killed. The Battle of Gök-Tepe is now the national day of

remembrance and a massive memorial mosque, “a gift of President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi” stands on the battle site. Is rewriting of history unique to contemporary India?

In the changing landscape of Askabad – now Ashgabat – the one constant fixture seems to be the memorial to the fallen of the World War II. I found it more evocative than the memorial built in Moscow to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Victory, and even that in St. Petersburg whose heroic defense is legendary. A massive stone sculpture of a woman, the very personification of pathos, with arms stretched towards the sky, perhaps imploring for peace and tranquility, dominates the memorial. On either side of the woman is a huge granite statue of a soldier; one bears a rifle and another a standard on the other. All these are adjacent to an enormous, stylized tulip, a monument to the Turkmenian soldiers who fell in the battle. I was told that proportionately more Turkmenians died than in any other republic of Soviet Union. A massive carpet woven in 1941, one of the largest in the world adorns the Carpet Museum. But history has not left the location of the memorial untouched. A Turkey esplanade has sprung up adjacent to the memorial. With the collapse of the Russian Empire, Turkmenistan has renewed its historical bonds with Turkey. It is the homeland of Turks who migrated from Turkmenistan during Mongol invasion. Perhaps the Turkmeni language is to Turkish what Middle English is to English. The historic bondage comes in handy for fostering bilateral ties. Turkish presence is most visible. Kemal Ataturk is a role model; his statue dominates the esplanade. The policy of separation of the State and religion, which Turkmenistan steadfastly follows and the adoption of the Roman script are examples of the Ataturk influence. In the Soviet period Islam was suppressed in Central Asia but now in independent Turkmenistan religion is resurgent. Mosques are rising all over as churches in Russia. But partly as a legacy of Kemal Ataturk and partly as a compulsion arising from geo-political factors secularism is a cornerstone of the Turkmen State. Conscious efforts are being made by the Government to ensure that religious fundamentalism does not rear its head and that the State and Church inhabit their distinctive spheres. To sum up, change is inexorable but the more it changes, the more it is the same again. (plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose). The Russia of today is not Soviet Union or the

Russia of the Czars but it is Russia all the same, more so as it has shed the Baltic States and the Central Asian Republics. In trying to explain why production relations do not immediately transform social relations, Schumpeter came up with the vivid analogy of social structures, types and altitudes being coins that do not really melt. Once they are formed they persist, possibly for centuries. Memes, the unity of Culture, are more durable than social structure. It is this dialectic of continuity and change, which makes Russia, what was famously described, as an enigma, wrapped in a riddle. Or to mix a metaphor Russia is a Matrushka doll, a doll within a doll, within a doll and so on ad infinitum. Wonder whether the onion domes that litter the Russian landscape have layers within, like onions? Hope Isha liked the Noddy books and the Maths workbook, and Sneha the sticker books. I hope Medha is helping them.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA-I

- Prof. V. Balamohandas

Former Vice-Chancellor, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur
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The term ‘education’ derived from Latin Word ‘Educare’ means bringing up a child both physically and mentally. When man is born, he is a skeleton animal. He has immense potential for development. Swamy Vivekananda said ‘Man is a combination of animality humanity and divinity. Task of education is to help him to take a plunge from the animal to the divine state, Economic growth and development depend on Human, Physical and Financial resources of any nation. The contemporary view of education is that it can create, develop, modernize and strengthen any civilization. It is a significant tool for ultimate development. The educational well-being of society ensures a moral and social commitment to it. Learning is a universal source of refinement and every human being needs learning to make the world a comfortable homely place. Proper knowledge leads to proper action, proper action leads to progress, prosperity, peace and pleasure. Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba, stated “Education is for life and merely not for living. Education must endow humans with a mindset and behaviour pattern which is conducive to a happy, constructive, and purposeful life, which helps them to achieve the final aim and goal of human birth. Hence, value education is the need of the hour in order to ensure human beings must come out of qualities like lust, anger, greed, hatred and violence and develop a moral character.

Thus, end of “education is character and the end of the culture is perfection.” The Quality of a Nation depends upon the Quality of its Citizens. The Quality of Citizens depends upon the Quality of their Education. The Quality of Education depends upon many things important of them being quality of teachers, students, administrators, infrastructure, parents and academic environment. Education is one of the crucial services in any economy. Features of the service sector that apply to education are: 1. Education is intangible; 2. Precise standardization of education is not possible; 3. Education service cannot be patented; 4. Education cannot be stored; 5. Though the service is exchanged, the ownership rests with the provider; 6. Production and consumption of the service are simultaneous; 7. Customers are involved in production of the service; 8. Education service is at one and the same time personal, professional and institutional; 9. It is a high contact service, it requires a continuous and close interaction between service provider and customer; 10. Demand for educational service has been outpacing the supply; 11. In the context of globalization education now is the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values and ideas across borders. The present paper concerns only with Higher Education in India. However, the quality of higher education always depends upon the quality of primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary education. The educational statistics reveal a phenomenal development in literacy, number of educational institutions, enrolment of students and number of teachers. The crude literacy rate over the years has increased from 5.35 in 1901 to 55.30 in 2001 census. The literacy rate in the post independent India increased from 18.33 in 1951 to 65.38 in 2001, though it varied among males and females and rural and urban areas. In terms of recognized institutions the number of primary education institutions increased from 2,09,671 in 1951 to 7,50,000 in 2006; the number of upper primary schools increased from 13,506 in 1951 to 2,50,000 in 2006; the number of higher secondary/inter/pre/Jr. colleges increased from 7,416 in 1951 to 1,50,000 in 2006. In the higher education sector the number of colleges for general education increased from 370 in 1951 to 16,000 in 2006; the number of professional colleges consisting of engineering / technology / architecture / medical / education increased from 208 in 1951 to about 3000 in 2006. The number of universities/deemed to be universities/institutions of national importance increased from 27 in 1951 to 360 in 2006. The students enrolment which was 2,51,000 in 1951 increased to more than 120

lakhs in 2007, constituting 9% in that age group. The number of teachers which was only 2,400 in 1951 increased to 4,72,000 in 2007. The financial outlay for higher education has increased by 10 times to what it was in 1951, however, continues to be less than 1% of the GDP. Today Higher Education in India is the third largest in the world after China and USA. The composition of Higher Education consists of a variety of institutions. They include Central Universities, State Universities (some of them Discipline oriented- Technology, Medical, Language, Law, Veda, etc.), National Institutes of Technology/ Management/Sciences, Deemed Universities, Open Universities, General Under Graduate Colleges (some with P.G. Courses), Exclusive P.G. Colleges, Professional Colleges, Polytechnics, AICTE sponsored institutions, Franchises of Foreign Universities, Distance Education Centres and Private Universities. Education is on the concurrent list providing for a complementary role of both Central and State Governments. An overview of higher education in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is attempted in the following few pages: *(to be continued)*.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION: NEW POLITICAL CULTURE NEEDED

- Sri E.V. Rama Subrahmanyam

Swami Vivekananda's visit's to the West during end of 19th century, meant a lot to our motherland, “India that is Bharat” in particular, indirectly teaching patriotism and national Integration. Swamiji taught the world and our nation too about our great epics and scriptures- Vedas, Upanishads & Geetha, describing our spiritual culture, heritage that bring out the quintessence of all human nature. Scholars and yogis define “Bha” in our country's name, as a divine feeling (Bhavana) of effulgence, endowed with great power (Shakthi) and “Ra” as Raga or tune – sweet, and “tha” as Thala or Rhythm – all together connoting a land blessed with rhythmic and healthy human activity of love, service to humanity and all beings in mother nature too. Hence we shall be proud of being Bharateeyas or Indians following Sanathana Dharma or popularly known as “Hinduism” - a hospitable mansion where there is a room for people of every faith, as it is a way of life, as rightly defined by Prof. D. S. Sarma, the first Principal of Vivekananda College, Chennai. This assertion is amply proved by our ancients voluntarily inviting with open arms all refugees fleeing to our country in the past, due to inter religious conflicts,

involving huge bloodshed. Hence we can dare say that “Sanathana Dharma” with its religious impartiality and comprehensive understanding of all religions, contributes to our national unity and national integration. It is bound to play a great role, in due course, through a happy and healthy synthesis of our heart/ spiritual culture and western material and scientific culture or outlook as predicted by Swamiji. Gandhiji dreamt of such a consummation in our country, again, as perhaps “Ramrajya”. Dr. S.Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher statesman says “The religious impartiality of the Indian State should not be confused with the material secularism of the West or atheism either”. What a great warning to the rulers of free India from 15th Aug, 1947 till this day and perhaps to future leaders too. Unfortunately this confusion apprehended by this wise soul, holds the field in free India’s politics now to its brim to the utter disadvantage of our nation; as the the State/ Legislature has wrongly or negatively defined ‘Secularism’ and all the ills of free India, arise clearly from this great fault.

Swamy Ranganadhananda of R.K. Math, a spiritual giant positively defines ‘Secularism’ as equal respect to all religious and not irreligion. Swamy Vivekananda declared to the world, long ago, that there is no better ‘Secularism’ in the world than ‘Hindu Vedanta’ and further warned :- “Take off all religion from humanity, what remains is a forest of brutes”. Swami Ranganadhanand further teaches our citizens (politicians too) “Our democracy honouring inter religious tolerance, is a gift of our vedanta”. Unfortunately some of the politically minded citizens professing other religions (semetic) in our land treat the above said virtue as a weakness and go on making all sorts of unreasonable and unhealthy demands that threaten our national unity and integration. Hence it is time Vivekananda’s mandatory message for our nation, “Spiritualise, Spiritualise all walks of life starting with education..... including the last but not the least, politics”. Again as Swamiji advised “politics” should be a healthy instrument of selfless service in India and not a profession or business as in the West, to enable especially youth in India, apart from the common citizens to cultivate a healthy social and national minded religious outlook and welfare feeling of oneness, irrespective of the so called religious practices at home or shrine in various religions. Study of Geetha by all teachers, students, as it is a universal scripture, open to all humanity irrespective of religion, will perhaps lead to spiritualization of politics too when the group wise, caste wise and religion wise politics will cease, all working

for immediate welfare, upliftment of all the poor and the uneducated, and thus work for the upliftment of the entire nation..... Perhaps it is time for the youth who received spiritualised education from R.K. Math and such other various Missions and Math schools, colleges, universities (endowed with character, will and tremendous energy coupled with selflessness, tyaga buddhi) , to enter politics and cleanse the field, for the good of the nation as a whole. They will educate the voters about the unseen power in their vote, so that they strive to elect a good natured, educated and selfless leader to power, walking in the foot steps of our great freedom fighters, so far as our composite national culture, heritage is concerned. Though the Fundamental Duties list of our Constitution took birth only in 1976, they speak of this aspect, which the ideal youth entering politics, will teach the voters to assist integral democracy. If the present state of affairs is allowed to continue, well, our nation may slide into slavery again or face further-vivisection at the behest of some other countries, ill disposed to or envious of our nation.

SRI KRISHNA CHAITANYA (1486-1533) - I

- Sri Challa Siva Sankaram

“The brightest of all prophets of comparatively modern times in the north was Chaitanya. He was one of the greatest teachers of Bhakti the world has ever known”. Swami Vivekananda (Vol. III).

The name Hindu is Persian being ostensibly described as sprung from Sanskrit *Sindh*. For one I believe that the proper and legitimate name for India is Bharat. Her largese, her infinite religious flexibility are duly reflected in the name Bharat. She is famed for ages as the eternal land hospitable equally to both the pillaging marauder and the saintly seeker of Truth, like Jesus of Nazareth, to avid Muslim Fakir and proselyting catholic tribes. Catholicity and passion for purity and piety stand Bharat as the priceless jewel in the diadem of world community. She is Annapurna, Mahakali, Mahasaraswati and Mahalakshmi. She epitomizes the sublime Mother principle extending olive branch to all. Her breast milk has been imbibed by all in the form of her eternal scriptures. Into such a llegendary land there was born a boy as the tenth issue of the affluent pandit Jagannatha Misra and Sachi on the blessed February 4th, 1486, a lunar eclipse day at Mayapur in the township of

Navadweep. Presumably Brahmanas as they were they were meticulously orthodox and fairly spiritual. Pandit Jagannatha Mishra was an unflinching follower of Smarta tenets. Sachi was an ardent practitioner of varna Achara whatever might be the price. Eight daughters and a son preceded the birth of Chaitanya. All the eight daughters met with premature death and the ninth male issue Christened by Pandit Jagannath Mishra as Visweswara deserted the home in his early 'teens itself. He chose to adopt the painstaking and precarious Ashrama of an itinerant monk lingering abegging food from door to door to still hunger. His Ashrama's guiding principles was glean the overt and covert sins of the family man that took refuge in the meal the householder drops into the bare hand of the monk. So the ninth issue though alive was as good as dead to the fond, frustrated parents. The tenth issue was quite ceremonially and in full agreement with the horoscope of the lad christened by his father as Viswambhara one of the innumerable epithets of Mahavishnu.

Despaired and utterly heartrent as the mother of Viswambhara had been she gave the lad the unsavoury name of 'Nimali' the name means 'short lived' the leaves of the Neem Tree (Azadirachta Indica) are short lived and evanescent and the taste of the fruit is unpalatable. This bitter instance of naming the boy so bespeaks the intensity of despondency the heart broken mother was suffering from. The fabulous beauty of the boy prompted the people that turned up to fondle and caress him. His complexion from top to toe appeared like the radiance and lustre of molten gold. The people were heard to

observe that the water falling down his body while bathing dazzled like unalloyed rays of effulgent sun. This rarefied feature of alluring charm earned him the typical name of Gauranga. This name was expressive of the characteristics and complexion of the named. It was later solemnised on the occasion of Upanayanam the 'must sacrament' of a twice born. Now the boy Gaurang aged about eight years having attained full Brahmanahood by the Vaidik Sacrament began to open his account as one born with a mission and a message to deliver from pulpits. His mode of teaching and rare behaviour had an unusual flavour. The wide world at large captivated by his honorific form and radiant personality saw in him the presumptive god man destined to make an unerasable mark on the sands of Time, to better and transform the world, to make it seriously engaged in Godward Journey. He had not yet outgrown from the sheath of wilful boyhood. Once upon a festival day some elderly men committed to a philosophy of life took to fast and penance. They prepared to eat a light diet. As custom goes before they eat it, it has got as to be tasted by God. Then it becomes bereft of impiety and ready for partaking. Gaurang the boy a religious radical insisted on being served (offered) to him before it was duly offered to God. Impatient as he became Gaurang uttered aloud, 'I am Sri Krishna the personality of God head'. Lo, and behold, the fasting elders to their utter dismay saw Sri Krishna in the luminous frame of Gaurang. This and many of the ilk displayed by the young Gaurang compelled the villagers to recall the childhood and boyhood sports of Lord Sri Krishna in Gokulam. *(to be continued)*

Thyagaraja's krithi "was an integrative cultural form which popularised classical music and classicised popular music." - William L.Jackson 11

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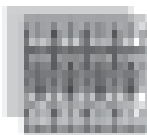
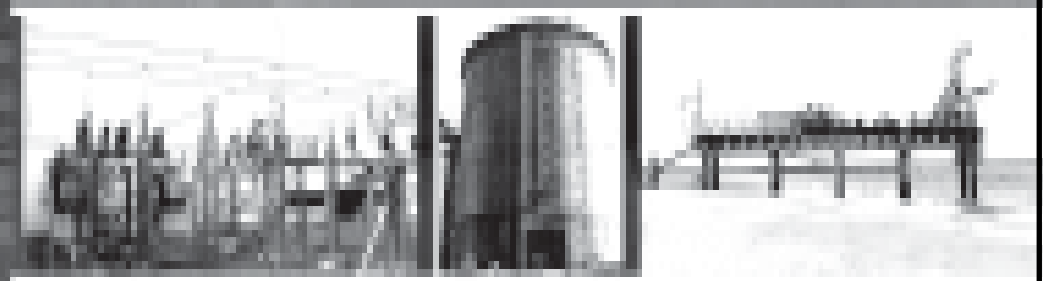
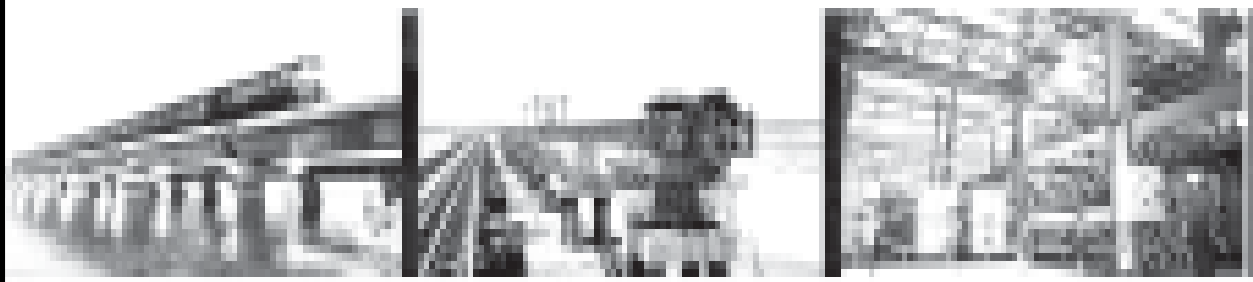
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